

The newsletter of the Montgomery County Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

February 2009

Volume 40, No. 1

President's Chat

As I write this in early January, we have just finished another successful Christmas Bird Count season. The weather gods generally favored our local counts this year. Thanks to all our members who participated in one or more counts, particularly sector leaders. It was good to see you out there. And special thanks to members who do the hard work of compiling: Mark England for the Seneca Count, Jay and Diane Jones for the Triadelphia Count, and Janet Millenson (with Helen Horrocks, Frederick Chapter) for Sugarloaf.

As you receive this *Chat*, the Nominating Committee will be hard at work. Each year at this time, the Committee recruits candidates for Club offices. We depend on members who volunteer to help make MBC work for all our members. Please consider serving as a State or Chapter Director or for any other office if you are approached by the Committee.

I hope you have already purchased your copy of the new, second edition of "A Birder's Guide to Montgomery County, Maryland." We appreciate the dedicated group who worked to update the successful 2001 edition. As President last year, Helen Patton kicked off this work and stayed involved through the writing and editing process. Stephanie Lovell served as Editor-in-Chief and Howard Lefkowitz served as Managing Editor. Michael O'Brien provided handsome illustrations. Gemma Radko designed and laid out the guide. Rob Gibbs provided the maps. Mike Bowen, Cindy Loeper, Gemma Radko, and Rick Sussman served as members of the site guide board (and as writers/editors). Along with those already mentioned, the following folks reviewed and updated information from 2001 or contributed information about new sites: John Bjerke, Mark England, Linda Friedland, Denise Gibbs, Jim Green, Gail Mackiernan, Tom Marko, Andy Martin, Don Messersmith, Paul O'Brien, Dave Powell, Lydia Schindler, Anna Urciolo, and Paul Woodward. The new guide has been well received.

In late December, our Club nominated five sites for inclusion in the upcoming Maryland/DC birding trail: Black Hill Regional Park, Blue Mash Nature Trail, the C&O towpath from Pennyfield to Riley's Lock, Hughes Hollow, and Little Bennett Regional Park. Thanks to Brad Beukema

for spearheading this effort for us and to Brad, Mark England, Jim Green, Dave Powell, and Gemma Radko for writing up the nominations.

I have written before about the MOS Youth Birding Committee's innovative program to encourage young birders by having each MOS chapter give a budding young birder a backpack with binoculars, bird books, and other gear. Anna Urciolo has volunteered to lead this effort for our Club and is looking for a few volunteers to join her on a small committee to identify worthy recipients.

At the Council's request, we are developing business cards to share with folks who may be interested in joining MBC.

It's never too soon to be thinking about the 2009 MOS Conference, this year May 15-17, and hosted by the Frederick Bird Club. The workshop this year will feature Jim Rising, an expert on sparrows.

On the back of this *Chat* is the form to sign up to attend the Social on Friday, March 13, at Woodend in Chevy Chase. I encourage you to sign up early since space is limited. Please contact Steve Pretl if you would like to help with the Social.

I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming meetings, the Social, and our fine field trips. Enjoy finding those "first of year" birds. Spring migration will be here before we know it!

—Jim Nelson

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Winter/Spring Calendar

Great Backyard Bird Count

This year's count will take place on February 13-16, Friday through Monday. Anyone can take part by counting birds for as little as 15 minutes on one or more days and reporting the sightings online at: www.birdcount.org. Additional online resources include tips to help identify birds, a photo gallery, and special materials for educators. ♪

February 18 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. "Going Postal: The Wonderful World of Bird Stamps." Former club secretary Bill Young will explore the world of birds as depicted on postage stamps from countries throughout the world. The avian images on stamps range from beautiful to artistic to puzzling to ornithologically inaccurate.

March 7 (Saturday), MOS Board Meeting. Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, Howard County. For information, contact Janet Shields, MOS Secretary, at janetbill@prodigy.net.

March 13 (Friday), 6:30 p.m. Annual Montgomery Bird Club Social. Woodend, Chevy Chase. (See reservation form on last page.)

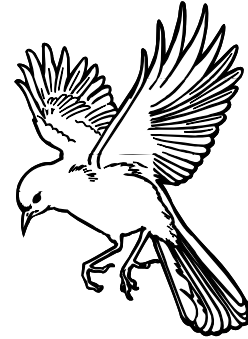
April 15 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. "Shorebird Identification." John Bjerke and Cyndie Loeper will present a streamlined version of their well-received workshop from the 2008 MOS Conference. They will help to refresh our memories and sharpen our skills as we enter the shorebird season.

May 9 (Saturday), 26th Annual World Series of Birding.

May 20 (Wednesday), 7:30p.m. "The Galapagos: Marvel of Evolution." Forty-two percent of all the birds in the Galapagos are found nowhere else in the world. Join MBC member Richard Schubert as he discusses and shows photos of Blue-footed Boobies, Red-footed Boobies, finches and more finches, and plenty of other remarkable birds (and a few tortoises, too), from his recent trip to this marvel of evolution.

May 15-17 (Friday-Sunday). 62nd Annual MOS Conference, Frederick.

Meetings take place at the Potomac Presbyterian Church, 10301 River Road, Potomac. From the Beltway, take Exit 39 (River Rd/Rte 190) toward Potomac. After crossing Falls Rd (Rte 189), continue 1/4 mile to Gary Rd on the right. Turn right on Gary Rd, then take an immediate left into the church parking area. (OK to park in the adjacent elementary school lot as well.) Meetings take place in the Fellowship Hall, ground level. Doors open at 7 p.m. Cancellation policy: Chapter meetings are canceled if Montgomery County schools have been closed. If you have questions, contact Jim Nelson at 301-588-5418 or kingfishers2@verizon.net.



Nominating Committee

Lou DeMouy, Chair: 301-656-3146
Janet Millenson: 301-983-9337
Dave Winer: 301-229-8963



May Count

Wherever you're birding in Montgomery County this May 9, bring along a copy of the May Count Checklist and keep track of the variety and numbers of birds you see. (The checklist can be downloaded from the MOS web site at <http://www.mdbirds.org>) Submit completed checklist forms to Andy Martin, 3 Thorburn Road, Gaithersburg, MD 20878 or fax to 301-294-4805 by June 15. For more information, contact Andy at 301-294-4805 (h), 301-529-2066 (m), by e-mail at apmartin2@comcast.net, or visit the MOS web page. ♪

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Deadline for submissions is the 5th of the preceding month.
Send items to Lydia Schindler, 13621 Esworthy Road,
Darnestown, MD 20874. Phone: 301-977-5252; e-mail: lydiaschindler@verizon.net



Field Trips

New Chapter members, new birders, and guests are cordially welcome on every chapter field trip. Because some trips offer an easier learning environment, we have marked them with an . If in doubt, don't hesitate to contact field trip coordinator Linda Friedland at linnetl@verizon.net or 301-983-2136 (before 9 p.m.)

FEBRUARY 15 (Sunday) LILYPONS/NEW DESIGN ROAD. Half day. We will be targeting wintering field birds, including Lapland Longspur, as well as sparrows such as American Tree and White-crowned. Chance of lingering wetland birds such as rails if ponds are ice-free. For reservations (required) and more info, contact LEADER: Gail Mackiernan, 301-989-1828.

FEBRUARY 22 (Sunday) LOISY. GREEN CONSERVATION PARK. Half day. Explore the varied habitats of this new 204-acre Montgomery County park. Wintering songbirds/sparrows, woodpeckers, raptors, and waterfowl possible. Meet 7:30 a.m. at parking lot on Snouffer School Road, Gaithersburg. Reservations required. For detailed directions and reservations call LEADER: Mark England, 240-252-4218 (home) or 240-375-4500 (cell).

FEBRUARY 28 (Saturday) CHARLES COUNTY. Half-day trip with Gwen Brewer and George Jett. Locations to be determined based on the waterfowl or winter bird concentrations. Some walking may be required. Dress for the weather and bring food and drinks. Scopes useful. Limit 12. For reservation and directions, e-mail CO-LEADERS: George Jett and Gwen Brewer, gmjett@comcast.net.

MARCH 1 (Sunday) MONTGOMERY WATERFOWL TOUR. Full day. Gas is a bit cheaper, so let's do an unofficial waterbird survey of the county. Meet 8 a.m. at Violette's Lock to start on the Potomac River. From there we will check Seneca, Hughes Hollow, and Edward's and White's Ferries before heading over to Black Hill RP, Zion Road Pond, Triadelphia, Lake Needwood, and back to Violette's. Leader can take five people. If someone else volunteers to drive, we'll take more! Reservations required. (Maybe switch to landbirding if everything still frozen.) LEADER: Andy Martin at apmartin2@comcast.net, 301-294-4805 or 301-529-2066 (cell).

MARCH 7 (Saturday) JUG BAY, PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY. Half day. Joint trip with ANS. Possible Rusty Blackbirds, migrating Wilson's Snipe, and courtship display of Osprey. Meet 8 a.m. Call leader for details and driving instructions. Check ANS News for more info. Reservations required. LEADER: John Bjerke, 240-401-1643.

MARCH 11 (Wednesday); MARCH 17 (Tuesday); MARCH 18 (Wednesday) INFORMAL LATE AFTER-NOON WALKS until dusk. Joint MBC/ANS trips. Meet at the end of Seneca Road at Riley's Lock "on the bridge" at 5 pm. After checking out the river, we will proceed to Hughes Hollow, where highlights will include waterfowl flying into roost. We will try for displaying woodcock if they are in the vicinity. Bring scope and flashlight and wear "muddy conditions" footwear. Reservations not required. For more info, call LEADER: Jim Green, 301-208-2393.

APRIL 18 (Saturday) DELAWARE COASTAL AREAS. Joint ANS/MBC trip. Full day. Waterbirds, late waterfowl, early shorebirds, raptors, and songbirds. Meet 8 a.m. at Bombay Hook NWR, DE, Visitor Center. Make reservations with and get directions from LEADER: John Bjerke at 240-401-1643.

APRIL 19 (Sunday) HUGHES HOLLOW AND VICINITY. Half day. With its variety of habitats, Hughes Hollow is always interesting in spring. Depending on recent sightings, we may also visit nearby areas. Possible birds include Purple Finches, Blue-winged Teal, swallows, and maybe even an American Bittern. Meet 7 a.m. at the Hughes Hollow parking lot in the McKee-Beshers WMA. Reservations required. For more info, directions, and reservations contact LEADER: Jim Nelson, 301-530-6574 or kingfishers2@verizon.net.

APRIL 25 (Saturday) BLUE MASH NATURE TRAIL. Half day. A relatively new and surprisingly birdy site. Waterproof boots helpful. Meet 7:30 a.m. at Zion Road parking lot. Call leader for reservations and directions. Limit: 8-10 participants. LEADER: Mark England, 240-252-4218 (home) or 240-375-4500 (cell).

APRIL 29 (Wednesday) ROCK CREEK PARK, DC. One-third day. Early migrant warblers, vireos, etc. Meet 7 a.m. at Picnic Area #18, one-half mile below the Nature Center on Ridge Road. Call the leader for more info and for specific directions. Reservations required. LEADER: Wallace Kornack, 202-338-7859.

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Field Trips



MAY 3 (Sunday) LITTLE BENNETT RP. Half day. Near peak migration for warblers and vireos, including those breeding in this varied habitat. Contact the leader for time and directions. Reservations required. LEADER: Gemma Radko, 301-514-2894.

MAY 6 (Wednesday) EXPLORING CALVERT COUNTY. Three-quarters day. Sue Hamilton will guide us to some of the birding hotspots of Calvert County. Meet 7 a.m. at the road leading into Flag Ponds. We'll start the morning at Battle Creek Cypress Swamp and move on to other sites before we stop for lunch on the beach. Reservations required. Limit: 10. Call the coordinators for detailed directions and more info. LEADER: Sue Hamilton. COORDINATORS: Lydia Schindler, 301-977-5252, and Linda Friedland, 301-983-2136.

MAY 7 (Thursday) PATUXENT RIVER PARK, PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY. Half day. Peak migration time for songbirds, some marsh and waterbirds. Joint trip with ANS. Meet Greg Kearns, park naturalist, at 6:30 a.m. at park entrance gate. Drift-boat trip followed by hiking on trails and through marshes. Make reservations with Liz Jones at ANS, 301-652-9188, x30.



MAY 8 (Friday) PENNYFIELD LOCK: BIRDING BY EAR. The emphasis is on listening, so tune up your ears for this half-day canal walk. Migrant and nesting landbirds. Meet 7 a.m. at the end of Pennyfield Lock Road. Reservations required. For more info and reservations call LEADERS: Cyndie Loeper, 301-530- 8226, and Ann Lucy, 301-229-8810.

MAY 9 (Saturday) UPPER WATTS BRANCH, ROCKVILLE. Half day. Migrant warblers, vireos, and thrushes and assorted woodland residents, including possible Red-shouldered Hawk. Meet 7:30 a.m. at corner of Princeton Place and Fordham Street. Limit: 12. Reservations required. LEADER: Paul O'Brien, 301-424-6491.

MAY 12 (Tuesday) ROCK CREEK PARK, DC. One-third day. Active time for migrant warblers, vireos, etc. Meet 7 a.m. at Picnic Area #18, one-half mile below the Nature Center on Ridge Road. Call the leader for more info or specific directions. Reservations required. LEADER: Wallace Kornack, 202-338-7859.

MAY 23 (Saturday) HOT SPOTS FOR RED KNOTS. Full day. Joint trip with Howard Co. We will start at 8:30 a.m. at the Prime Hook NWR Visitor Center and work our way north along the Delaware Bay. Also on the itinerary will be the DuPont Nature Center at Mispillion Lighthouse, which offers great views of Red Knots and other shorebirds. We will go until dark or exhaustion, whichever comes first. Bring binoculars, lunch and snacks, water, sunscreen, and plenty of insect repellent. Bring scopes if you got 'em. Trip is limited to 12 persons/3 vehicles per chapter. Reservations required. For reservations and info contact CO-LEADER Cyndie Loeper, cyndieloeper@comcast.net or 301-535-8584. Kurt Schwarz, krschwal@comcast.net or 410-461-1643, will co-lead for Howard County.

From the field—

Just returned from a trip to Florida where I visited Stormwater Treatment Plant #5, near Clewiston. It is open to birders just once a month in the winter. A most amazing place, chock full of egrets, pelicans, ducks, and osprey. We spotted at least 30 Kestrels on the telephone wires in the area. Then on to the Everglades, a first for me—besides the birds, full of alligators. Again lots of wintering waders plus many Palm and Black- and-white Warblers, Roseate Spoonbills, Little Blue Heron, and Snowy Egrets. Best of all, a flock of 17 Sandhill Cranes at the Celery Fields in Sarasota. ♪

—Stephanie Lovell

Welcome, New Members



William Butler	Barbara Hussey
Mary Hama	Carole Miller
Susan Hunt	The Redmond Family
James Moore	Anne Steinecke
Diane Seward	



Trip Reports

Sparrows at Blue Mash, November 1. Leader: Lydia Schindler. Participants: 8. Species: 37. The group was congenial, the foliage outstanding, the weather beautiful—only the birds were missing. With the exception of Song Sparrows, Northern Mockingbirds, and Blue Jays, few individuals were in evidence. We saw a White-crowned Sparrow or two, a couple of Yellow-rumps, a couple of Ruby-crowned Kinglets. The day was saved by the occasional raptor (Sharp-shin, Red-tail, Red-shoulder) and the gorgeously autumn-plumaged trees.



Blue Mash, November 9. Leader: Ed Patten. It was a beautiful day to be out birding, but not very birdy. Participants: 4. Species: 38. The highlights included six sparrow species, with the best being a well-seen Fox Sparrow. Hairy Woodpecker was another highlight for the day. Other birds of interest include Ruddy Duck, Purple Finch, and Red-shouldered Hawk. Everything else fits the category of “usual suspects” for Blue Mash. Again, the weather was one of the highlights, which made for pleasant November day to be out birding with a fine group of people.



Occoquan Bay NWR, Prince William County, VA, November 16. Leader: Mike Bowen. Participants: 10. Species: 49. Weather: Upper 40s to 50 F, but strong NW winds made it seem much colder. Highlights: Some good water birds, including a Common Loon, three Horned Grebes, masses of Pied-billed Grebes, and a female Common Goldeneye and female Ring-necked Duck in with Buffleheads. Ruddy Ducks were in isolated groups. Five gull species were seen: a small group of Laughing Gulls and two sizeable flocks of Bonaparte's showed up, in addition to the usual three locally wintering species. The harsh winds kept most of the sparrows hunkered down out of view, but we did have a brief sighting of a Savannah and lingering looks at a handsome Swamp Sparrow. Best small bird was a very late Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. In the air we had six Bald Eagles, one perched and photographed, two Red-tailed and one Red-shouldered Hawks, and a female Northern Harrier just before we quit for the day.

Earliest Bird Trip to DC, January 1, 2009. Leader: Mike Bowen. Participants: 14. Species: 42. Weather: Clear and very cold, below freezing all morning, but at least the howling winds of New Year's Eve had abated; hot chocolate at the Hains Point golf club eased the pain. Highlights: Georgetown Reservoir disappointed again this year, with not a single duck and very few gulls when we gathered at 8 a.m. The pond at Constitution Gardens was, however, quite rewarding, with an unexpected drake Red-breasted Merganser in with Ring-necked Ducks and a male Wood Duck snoozing with Mallards. A perched Red-tailed Hawk near the Tidal Basin gave some excellent digiscoping opportunities. Apart from a friendly but noisy group of sports car drivers, Hains Point was pretty quiet, but it did give us a close view of 3 and a distant view of hundreds of Lesser Scaup, and of a sub-adult Bald Eagle overhead. There were a dozen Black-crowned Night-Herons at the roost in the Washington Channel, more than in recent years. Our next port of call, the LBJ Memorial Grove on the D.C. side of the Boundary Channel by the Pentagon, once again gave us some excellent birds, including a male Pine Warbler, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Winter Wren, Brown Creeper, Hermit Thrush, and numerous Golden-crowned Kinglets. The trip ended with a stop at Roaches Run near National Airport, where for the second year in a row we found a nice flock, some 40 in all, of Hooded Mergansers.



Ocean City, MD, to Broadkill Beach, DE, January 10. Leader: Mike Bowen. Participants: 12. Species: 60. Weather: In the 30s, but the forecast rain magically held off until dusk, cloudy skies turned sunny, and the wind was gentle—delightful conditions for a winter field trip. Highlights: Three grebe species—a few Horned, a Pied-billed, and a rare Eared Grebe off 33rd St. in Ocean City. Common and Red-throated Loons gave us very good looks. Seven Great Cormorants were at Indian River Inlet (highest number the leader has ever seen there), and we had terrific, close views of soaring and diving adult Northern Gannets at the O.C. Inlet. Our 20 species of waterfowl included mind-blowing views of a huge and noisy Snow Goose flock at Fenwick Island (at least 5,000

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Trip Reports

birds), a mass of Canvasbacks at the West O.C. Pond, and about a dozen Redheads in with other puddle ducks at the Bayside Development Pond, a new site for most of us. Long-tailed Ducks were easily seen several places. Winter is not generally a great season for shorebirds, but we clocked eight species, the least expected being three (Western) Willets at the Eagles Nest Campground; the most roundly applauded were the more than 20 gorgeous American Oystercatchers just off Hooper's Restaurant by the Route 50 bridge. Purple Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstones were amazingly tame and approachable at the O.C. Inlet. Bonaparte's Gulls showed well at several locations and we had a single Forster's Tern. This trip is not designed to garner lots of land birds, but some sharp-eyed participants spied a nice Brown Creeper at the Eagles Nest Golf Club, and a Pileated Woodpecker was a most unexpected flyover near the bridge to Assateague Island. The day ended with a slight disappointment when we missed Short-eared Owl in the rain at Broadkill Beach Road; we had to be content with two Wilson's Snipe instead.



Blackwater and surrounding areas. January 31. Leader: Jim Green. Participants: 15. Species: 67. We met along the Cambridge waterfront at the end of High Street. The first thing everybody did was put three extra layers on once they were out of their cars. The temperature was barely 30 degrees and was accompanied with 15-20 mile winds throughout the day. One knew right away that land birds would be far and few between.

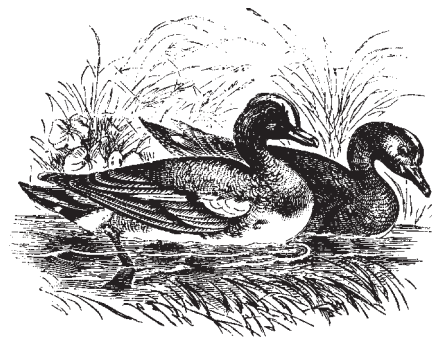
We signed in so that we could walk out on the marina docks and catwalks. Shortly after we headed out on the docks we found the male Tufted Duck. It was very cooperative and allowed great scope views by all. Most of the time it was in the vicinity of Lesser Scaup which made for some nice comparisons. Shortly after that we also found the female Barrow's Goldeneye; she was less patient with us, but most people in the group had good views before the bird disappeared under the docks and out of sight. We visited several other locations along the waterfront. Other waterfowl species we saw included American Wigeon (but no Eurasian), Canvasback, Surf Scoter, Common Goldeneye, Long-tailed Duck, and Bufflehead.

After a quick vote we decided to backtrack into the town of Oxford and search for a Snowy Owl that had been reported there. Our attempt was futile and after close views of a Long-tailed Duck, we headed towards Blackwater NWR. There was a flock of 15-20 Chipping Sparrows at the intersection of Egypt Road and Key Wallace Drive.

At the Visitor Center, we found two White-crowned Sparrows under a feeder and our only Eastern Meadowlark. The beginning of the wildlife loop is still closed due to construction. Birds of note along the wildlife loop included 12 American White Pelicans, a pair of Northern Pintail, and a very distant flock of Snow Geese on the Blackwater River.

We then drove down to Hooper's Island. Near the causeway we found Sanderlings along a sandy-edged area. We saw a Horned Grebe and several very distant Common Loons. We pulled over onto Creighton Lane and found a raft of ducks, made up mostly of Redheads; we made a conservative estimate of 900 Redheads. Mixed in the flock were small numbers of Canvasback, American Wigeon, and Gadwall. We also saw a huge number of Tundra Swans—approximately 500.

Our last stop of the day was Cedar Creek Road. The woodland areas remained quiet. A few people heard a Brown-headed Nuthatch, and a single Yellow-rumped Warbler flew over. At the end of the road, we saw three American Bittern (and had seen a fourth bittern earlier before reaching Cedar Creek Road). Two Short-eared Owls exploded up from a ground roost near the bittern and put on a delightful but very quick show before dropping back into the grass. This would be our only view of the owls; we waited until just past dusk for them to reappear and begin hunting, but we never saw them again.



Birds of Note: mid-October 2008 to early January 2009



A very cooperative **Greater White-fronted Goose** and an influx of **Pine Siskins** highlight this issue's *Birds of Note* column. On 12/3, Mike Ostrowski was quite surprised to find a **Greater White-fronted Goose** mixed in a flock of Canada Geese at a stormwater management pond at corner of Tuckerman Lane and Brewer House Road in North Bethesda. Mike subsequently ascertained that when the geese were not at the pond, they could be found on the nearby Georgetown Prep School grounds. Many Montgomery birders got to enjoy this bird, which was last reported on 12/11.

The other avian event of note was a huge influx of **Pine Siskins**. There are 20 at my backyard feeder as I finish this column on 1/13, and many folks have reported **Pine Siskins** either at their backyard feeders or in the field over the past few months. **Pine Siskins** were also noted on the Seneca CBC at the Poolesville Public Golf Course.

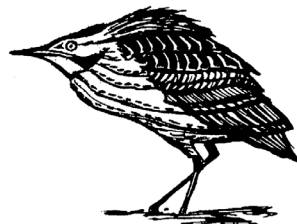
On 12/6, Matt Von Hendy reported eight **Tundra Swans** at Black Hill RP. David Gersten and his 5-year-old son Michael observed a flock of 60 **Snow Geese** over their house near Layhill Park on 12/7. Kurt Schwarz and a group of Howard County birders found six **Cackling Geese** at Triadelphia on 11/15.

Other waterfowl of note include a late pair **Blue-winged Teal** found 12/27 by Paul Woodward at Hughes Hollow. Flocks of **Long-tailed Ducks** were reported at Triadelphia on 11/10 by Bill Hill and also on 11/17 by Joe Hanfman. Ed Patten found a single female **Long-tailed Duck** at Lake Placid in Gaithersburg on 12/14; the bird was still around as of 1/12. Five **Surf Scoters** were observed by Dave Czaplak on the Potomac at Violette's Lock on 11/30.

Single **Red-throated Loons** were found 12/7 at Triadelphia Reservoir by Joe Hanfman and on 12/11 at Black Hill RP by Dave Czaplak.

Paul Woodward reported an **American Bittern** at Hughes Hollow on 11/3.

Rob Hilton observed **Peregrine Falcons** in Bethesda near his work and at the Bethesda metro stop in November and December. Clive Harris reported that a pair of **Peregrine Falcons** were still hanging out in the vicinity of the American Legion Bridge as of 1/1.



Paul O'Brien picked up yard bird #164! On 10/19, an immature **Golden Eagle** passed west at high altitude over his Rockville home. Another **Golden Eagle** was reported by Kurt Schwarz at Triadelphia on 11/15.

Dave Czaplak found four adult **Laughing Gulls** loafing on the rocks on the Potomac at Violette's Lock on 11/3. Six late **Caspian Terns** were seen at Blue Mash on 11/28 by David Gersten.

Red-headed Woodpeckers have been observed at Hughes Hollow throughout the fall and early winter. On 11/3, Paul Woodward counted an amazing total of 14 birds. Another **Red-headed Woodpecker** was heard but not seen during the 10/13 "Big Sit" along the dike at Black Hill RP.

Common Ravens continue to be seen with some frequency in the NW part of the county. David Gersten reported two **Common Ravens** at Hughes Hollow on 11/3. Anna Urciolo and Jim Nelson found two ravens while searching the Montgomery County portion of the Central Loudoun CBC on 12/28.

Layhill Park produced a **Sedge Wren** for Gail Mackiernan and Barry Cooper on 10/23.

Mike Bowen enjoyed watching three active and vocal **Red-breasted Nuthatches** at Lake Clopper in Seneca Creek State Park on 11/3.

Mike Bowen also found a male **Wilson's Warbler** on 10/7 at Green Farm while scouting for an upcoming Montgomery Bird Club field trip. During the field trip the following day Jim Green spotted the same bird (presumably) for the whole group to enjoy.

David Gersten reported **Lincoln's Sparrow** at both Layhill Park on 10/13 and Blue Mash on 11/4.

Fifteen **Rusty Blackbirds** were seen high in the bare branches of a tree in a swampy area west of the main impoundment at Hughes Hollow by Phil Brody on 11/1.

Purple Finches were reported by Diane Ford on 10/20 in the Bethesda portion of Rock Creek; Noah Kahn on 11/1 at his backyard feeders in Silver Spring; David Gersten on 11/3 at Hughes Hollow; Bob Mumford on 11/10 at his yard feeders in Darnestown; and Jim Nelson and Anna Urciolo on 12/28 at the Patton Turf Farm.

—Andy Martin

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS



Seneca, December 14. December 14 was the first official day of the Christmas count period. Unlike last year, the weather was excellent, which helped bring out 105 counters, a very good number. An unofficial total of 94 species were seen, 5 lower than last year, when rarities like Sandhill Crane, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Red-necked Grebe were seen. Best birds this year were a Rough-legged Hawk over Selden Island in the Potomac, a Lapland Longspur in a Poolesville sector, and a White-winged Crossbill well seen from 20 feet away at the Adventure banding station. Misses included Killdeer, Gray Catbird, and American Pipit, all usually seen. Encouragingly, several sectors reported Pine Siskins, ravens, Bald Eagles, and Great Horned Owls. Thanks to all who counted, particularly to the sector leaders, some of whom stayed through the tally rally at O'Brien's even though there was no beer due to a liquor license problem. The compiler promises beer will be available next year! ♪

—Mark England

Triadelphia, December 20. The 109th annual Triadelphia Count was held on Saturday, December 20. Cloudy skies predominated, but no precipitation fell. Temperatures ranged from 31 to 40+ degrees. Forty-four counters put in 138 count hours, compiling 86 species and almost 34,000 individuals. Birds recorded this year that were not seen in recent years included Tundra Swan, American Wigeon, American Coot, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Rusty Blackbird, Merlin, Northern Shoveler, and Cackling Goose. "Count week" contributions were Pine Siskin, Horned Grebe, Redhead, Eastern Meadowlark, Great Horned Owl, and American Kestrel. Jay Jones announced that this year's count is his last as Triadelphia Compiler. He reports that the job is a virtual goldmine and he's going to sell it to the highest bidder! Bidders may contact him at jayrjones@juno.com or 240-620-8794. ♪

—Jay Jones

Washington, DC, December 20. When I took over as compiler of this count, several species of small passerines, including Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, and White-breasted Nuthatch, were in a state of decline, presumably because of the effects of West Nile Virus. Within two years, the populations of these species began to increase, and in 2007, White-breasted Nuthatches were slightly above their historical norms. My speculation is that we have witnessed a recovery of these birds to the point that they have reached their carrying capacities. Although all the data are not yet in, I speculate that we should see a

leveling off of at least nuthatches to their normal numbers, indicating that the recovery from West Nile is complete. We had a few interesting rarities this year, including late migrants (Blue-gray Gnatcatcher along the George Washington Parkway, a Blue-headed Vireo at the National Arboretum, and a Yellow Warbler along the C&O towpath), "winter" birds rarely observed on the DC count (White-winged Scoter at Hains Point and Iceland [Kumlien's] Gull at Poplar Point on the Anacostia), and a Lesser Black-backed Gull (now practically a yearly occurrence on the count). ♪

—Larry Cartwright

Central Loudoun, December 28. Since the Loudoun CBC circle crosses over the Potomac River, four of us helped count the birds in the Montgomery County stretch from White's Ferry down to about one mile north of Edward's Ferry. Ed Patten, John Williamson, and I walked down the towpath while Jim Nelson tackled Old River Road. Jim spied quite a few birds in his open landscape that we did not find amidst the swaying trees. Did I mention the wind? Some of his highlights were Common Ravens, Horned Larks, Purple Finches, and a family group of one immature and two adult Bald Eagles that were just resting in the field. In another field were more than 500 Ring-billed Gulls. The towpath yielded the usual suspects: Winter and Carolina Wrens, Brown Creepers, and lots of woodpeckers. The open cut-through area gave us Field, Swamp, White-throated, and Song Sparrows. The only birds on the river were some Mallards, Black Ducks, Great Blue Herons, and one flyover Bald Eagle. In all, 46 species were seen. The weather was quite warm by 12:30 p.m. and despite the forecast for rain, none fell. ♪

—Anna Urciolo

Sugarloaf, January 4. More than 60 birders participated in the 24th annual Sugarloaf Mountain CBC, tallying a very gratifying 96 species in chilly but pleasant weather which belied the predicted rain. Details aren't yet available on new highs or lows, but waterfowl numbers will likely be down because most ponds were frozen. The good news is that Common Ravens and Bald Eagles were once again sighted in many sectors, both Merlin and Peregrine Falcon were seen, and all seven of Maryland's woodpeckers were reported. The best find was a Common Redpoll—new to the count—which Mike Bowen photographed eating sunflower seed on a deck in Frederick County. The Tally Rally held at Black Hill Regional Park afterwards was an enjoyable ending to a rewarding day. Thanks to everyone who participated! We hope to see you again for next year's count on January 3, 2010. ♪

—Janet Millenson





Remembering Naomi Ulmer

On Friday, November 14, 2008, shortly after her 91st birthday, Naomi Ulmer died of pancreatic cancer at a nursing home in Evanston, Illinois. From the time she joined MBC in the late 1970s until she left the area in 2004, Naomi was a driving force in our club, always vocal, energetic, and willing to take on multiple tasks. She served on the board, participated in Christmas counts, and often acted as a spokesman on environmental issues. Many will remember Naomi arriving at bird walks in her corduroy knickers, jaunty blue cap, and chic little silk scarf. Naomi always made a statement.

Born in Brooklyn N.Y., Naomi met her husband Melville at a poetry class at Columbia University. After moving to the Washington area in the 1940s, she taught science and math for more than 30 years, first in District schools and later, from 1950 to 1978, at the Congressional Page School; when she retired, former students planted a tree on the Capitol grounds in her honor. She played a leading role in many volunteer groups: Friends of the [Potomac] Library; the Potomac Garden Club; the American Cancer Society. In 1996, she was named Potomac Citizen of the Year. Naomi was instrumental in having the confusingly named Maryland G.W. Parkway changed to the Clara Barton Parkway.

For Naomi life was always something to be lived to the full—and full speed ahead. She considered herself a “culture vulture” and I would often bump into her at art exhibits and chamber music concerts. Her interests included movies, literature, politics, and the natural sciences. An

avid botanist, she loved to go on spring walks and was often the first to identify newly emerging wildflowers. She loved word games and crossword puzzles and read non-stop. She thought nothing of driving to Baltimore and back to attend an opera. A world traveler, Naomi continued to seek out new adventures into her 80s.

Naomi had a strong set of opinions and at times could be almost brutally frank. (She never failed to let you know exactly what she thought.) But she had a kind heart and was always generous. Naomi once said that she would invite people to dinner every night of the week if she could. Those who were fortunate enough to spend time at her cottage in Kezar Falls, Maine, were treated to lobster dinners upon arrival: “Order two—one to eat now and one for later.” She never forgot anyone’s birthday and was the first to call in a crisis.

Wherever she went, Naomi impressed and delighted her companions not only with her depth of knowledge but also her wicked sense of humor. Residents and staff in her nursing home remarked that she could answer any question posed to her. Nearing the end of her life, heavily sedated, this life-long political junkie managed to smile broadly when she learned of Barack Obama’s victory.

Naomi insisted on sprinkling her food with drops of spicy Tabasco sauce. She claimed this was to compensate for the bland food she was forced to eat growing up. Maybe it contributed to her longevity. In any case, we will miss her and the spice she added to our lives. ♣

—Linda Friedland



Naomi was known for her ability to come up with pithy and often hilarious comments. A sampler:

While peeling off multiple layers of winter gear at the Ocean City Inlet rest room, she set off gales of laughter by contending, “This is true penis envy.”

On a late afternoon outing to the Lilypons/Oland Road area, Naomi asked the trip leader: “So where do you Dickcissel?”

During a May trip to Crane Creek, Ohio, some MBC birders gathered for an evening glass of wine. When one fellow dubbed Naomi “The Little Chickadee,” without missing a beat she retaliated with “The Man with Cerulean Eyes”.

Novice birders trying to nail some ID basics were advised by Naomi to “remember that the female Belted Kingfisher wears a red bra.”

On a bird trip in the Dakotas she looked at her dinner plate and declared, “I think this is a Life Potato.”

For many years Naomi volunteered at the Potomac Library’s book sale. After being rudely bumped by a bargain hunter, she remarked, “I don’t believe that was in my job description.”



ANNUAL MBC SOCIAL

Friday, March 13, 2009

Guest of Honor: Howard Lefkowitz

Our social will take place at Woodend, headquarters of the Audubon Naturalist Society, 8940 Jones Mill Road, Chevy Chase. The evening begins with a social hour at 6:30, followed by dinner at 7:30. The dinner will be catered again this year by Smokey Glen Farm of Gaithersburg.

The evening will feature the traditional members' slide show. Please limit your presentation to your 10 favorite slides or digital photos.

Because space is limited, places will go to the first 90 persons to reserve and pay. **Sign-up deadline is March 4.**

Send this form (or a copy) and your check (\$20 per person), payable to Montgomery Bird Club, to Steve Pretl, 6827 4th Street NW, #123, Washington, DC 20012. Steve's e-mail is stevep@takomavillage.org.

Name(s) to appear on tags: _____

Phone #: _____

_____ Please check here if you would like a vegetarian meal. Vegetarian lasagna will be available.

_____ reservations at \$20 per person

\$ _____ enclosed



The Chat
MBC/MOS
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