

President's Chat

Oh, the weather outside is frightful...and still finding its way through my home's cracks and crevices, despite my best efforts at plugging the leaks. Of course it's only 5 degrees outside as I write this, but the winter birds are begging us to come and look at them, and there have been plenty. Greater White-fronted Goose, Western Tanager, Western Kingbird, and let's not forget our Snowy Owls. I will proudly say that I gaped at that Snowy Owl perched on a red "X" sign on the Bay Bridge. Afterwards, I went to the local post office and told all who were in line about my adventure. And then I encouraged them to go to Hemingway's Restaurant where they were sure to find a birder with a spotting scope, ready to have them see an unusual visitor to our fair state.

We all have our ways of reaching out to folks who don't know what they're missing, haven't we?

Many of you have participated in the cold and in the rain in recent CBCs. Congratulations to all of you who tallied birds on those counts. Now we can all join in the Great Backyard Bird Count that begins on Friday, February 14 and continues through Monday, February 17. President's weekend never looked like so much fun! This is a great chance to talk up birds with neighbors and colleagues. Have them check out Cornell's GBBC website: <http://birdssource.org/gbbc>. Who can resist a story about a Snowy Owl or seeing the interactive map on Cornell's site suddenly flaring when a report has been sent online?

With that in mind, I'd like to thank everyone who has joined in any of these activities. More thanks are due to all of our field trip leaders who contribute their time and patience and knowledge, no matter what the weather.

Save these dates for the 2014 MOS Conference: May 16-18 at Solomon's Island. Our buddies, **Bill Hubick** and **Jim Brighton**, will be the guest speakers. The

registration form is now available online at the MOS website: mdbirds.org.

And let's not forget our own party! On the back of this *Chat* is the registration form for our Club Social, which will be held on Friday, March 21, 2014, at the ANS Woodend mansion. Our honored guest will be **Gail Mackiernan**. This is a great chance for all of us to get together, chat over delicious food, and be amazed at the wonderful photos presented by our members. I encourage you to sign up early since space is limited. Please contact **Ed Patten** (epatten1022@verizon.net) if you would like to help with the Social or can bring appetizers.

Because of space limitations in the *Chat*, some reports and articles have been condensed. For the full field trip and Christmas Bird Count reports, and for the complete version of **Don Messersmith's** Big Birding Trip report, please visit our website at montgomerybirdclub.org.

Good birding! ♪

—Anna Urciolo

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Winter/Spring Calendar

Have You Seen Your Snowy Yet?

The winter of 2013-2014 has seen a historic Snowy Owl irruption, with birds spotted as far south as Jacksonville, Florida and even in Bermuda. Snowies are birds of the high Arctic, and although some spend the winter in the northern U.S. and there are occasional irruptions further south, this year has seen unprecedented numbers of these beautiful birds.

There were two Snowies at Reagan National Airport (seen from Gravelly Point) in mid-January as well as reports from Ocean City, Assateague, and many locations in Pennsylvania. Most recently one showed up in downtown D.C.

Project SNOWstorm (SNOW is the four-letter banding code for the Snowy Owl) is a collaborative research effort by Project OwlNet, the Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art, and many independent researchers, agencies, and organizational partners. Researchers are tagging owls with GPS transmitters to try to track their movements. Transmitters are expensive, and Project SNOWstorm is accepting online donations at www.indiegogo.com/projects/project-snowstorm.

The irruption is thought to be the result of a banner nesting season, and the majority of the owls being banded are healthy. ♪



The "Washington Post" Snowy Owl on 1/24/14. A Snowy Owl (perhaps the same bird) was found injured in D.C. on 1/30 and is being rehabbed at the National Zoo in hopes that she can be released. Photo by Evelyn Ralston

February 19 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. *Ron Gutberlet*. "A Wild Curlew Chase: Two Birders in Alaska" is based on a trip Ron and his wife Carol took to Alaska in the summer of 2008.

March 21 (Friday), 6:30 p.m. **Annual Montgomery Bird Club Social, Woodend, Chevy Chase.** Social hour followed by dinner and presentation to this year's Guest of Honor, Gail Mackiernan. The evening will conclude with the traditional member slide show. See the back page of this issue of the *Chat* for the sign-up form and information about submitting photos for the slide show.

April 16 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. *Bill Young*. "Singing and Dancing Through Ecuador and the Galapagos" describes his 2013 trip to these two areas.

May 21 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. *Gail Mackiernan*. Gail will talk about a trip she and Barry took to Ethiopia last year.

MOS Annual Conference, May 16-18

This year the Annual Conference will be held in Solomons at the Holiday Inn Solomons Conference Center. Bill Hubick and Jim Brighton are currently setting up biodiversity field trips, and as always, Bob Ringler will lead a butterfly field trip. There will also be night trips. Bill Hubick is working on a blacklighting session for people who would like to see and photograph moths. If you want to go on a night trip, you will need to sign up in advance, and participants will be selected through a computer lottery system. And don't forget the Silent Auction and Raffle. This year's recipient will be the Mattawoman Watershed Society. Volunteer help is always needed. Please contact Barbara Johnson (barbarajohnson222@gmail.com) if you would like to help with the auction. Donations are always welcome. This year Sean McCandless will do a raptor ID workshop on Friday afternoon. Attendance is limited. Sign up in advance for the workshop when you fill out your registration form. Questions? Contact Conference Chair Janet Shields, 410-901-1039 or janetbill@prodigy.net.

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 a quarter-mile to Gary Road on the right. Turn right on Gary Road, 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: Club meetings are canceled if Montgomery County schools have been closed. If you have questions, contact Anna Urciolo at 301-251-9452 or urcioloa@sidwell.edu.

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Deadline for submissions is the 5th of the preceding month.
Send items to Susan Hunt, 10705 Tenbrook Drive, Silver Spring, Maryland 20901. Phone: 301-530-2807, e-mail: shunt820@yahoo.com.



Field Trips

New Club members, new birders, and guests are cordially welcome on every 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 linnet1@verizon.net or 301-983-2136 (before 9 p.m.).



FEBRUARY 2 (Sunday) WINTER WATERFOWL ON THE POTOMAC. Half day. We'll check the river for wintering ducks in a portion of the Urban Zone (a no-firearms-discharge area) between the mouth of Watt's Branch and Great Falls. Expect some winter passerines along the C&O Canal as well. Meet at 8 a.m. in the Swain's Lock parking lot at end of Swain's Lock Road. Bring a scope if you have one. Trip will be canceled if icy conditions along canal towpath make walking treacherous. Reservations required. For reservations and more info, contact the LEADER: Andy Martin at martinap2@verizon.net or 301-529-2066.

FEBRUARY 9 (Sunday) OAKS LANDFILL, LAYTONSVILLE. Bundle up to explore this now-closed landfill adjacent to the Blue Mash Nature Trail. Mostly open terrain with some ponds. Probable wintering sparrows and raptors and possible waterfowl. Leader will have scope for distant birds. We have special permission to enter this closed-to-the-public landfill so reservations are essential. Limit: 16. Meet at 8 a.m. For reservations and more information, contact the LEADER: Mark England at markengland@canamcontractors.com, 240-207-3132 (home), or 240-375-4500 (cell).



MARCH 4 (Tuesday); MARCH 6 (Thursday); MARCH 11 (Tuesday); MARCH 18 (Tuesday) INFORMAL LATE AFTERNOON WALKS UNTIL DUSK. Joint trip with ANS. Meet promptly at 5 p.m. at the end of Seneca Road at Riley's Lock on the bridge. After checking the river, we will proceed to Hughes Hollow. Highlights here 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—all are welcome. For more info, call the LEADER: Jim Green at 301-742-0036 (cell).

MARCH 8 (Saturday) PATUXENT RIVER PARK, Jug Bay Natural Area, Prince George's County. Half day. Joint trip with ANS. Waterfowl, Wilson's Snipe, winter and early spring songbirds, Ospreys displaying. Meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot by park hqtrs. Wear muddy conditions footwear. Reservations required. Limit: 15. Contact the LEADER: John Bjerke at 240-401-1643 or johnbjerke1@mac.com.

APRIL 12 (Saturday) HUGHES HOLLOW AND VICINITY. Half day. Joint trip with Frederick Bird Club. We'll explore the wetlands of Hughes Hollow and Sycamore Landing. Expected species include Red-headed Woodpeckers, Wood Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, and many other marsh dwellers. A good chance for several warblers, including Prothonotary. Meet at Hughes Hollow parking lot in the McKee-Beshers WMA at 7 a.m. For more information, contact the LEADERS: Tom Humphrey (Frederick) at 301-696-8540 (home), 240-793-2508 (cell), or humphrey96@comcast.net or Jim Nelson (Montgomery) at 301-530-6574 or kingfishers2@verizon.net.

APRIL 26 (Saturday) BLUE MASH NATURE TRAIL/OAKS LANDFILL. Half day. Interesting walk at these adjacent and surprisingly birdy sites in Montgomery County. Waterproof boots helpful at Blue Mash but not needed at the landfill. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Zion Road parking lot. Reservations required. Limit: 10. For reservations and directions, call the LEADER: Mark England at markengland@canamcontractors.com, 240-207-3132 (home), or 240-375-4500 (cell).



APRIL 27 (Sunday) HUGH MAHANES PRESIDENTS' WALK AT HUGHES HOLLOW. Half day. Participation of all former Club presidents is encouraged, and everyone is welcome. This is a wonderful chance for newer birders to be in the field with "old hands" who enjoy sharing what they know. With a variety of habitats, Hughes Hollow is always interesting in spring. We will look for water birds on the move and early songbird migrants. Possible birds include Purple Finches, Blue-winged Teal, swallows, and maybe even an American Bittern. Meet at 7 a.m. in the Hughes Hollow parking lot. Reservations required. For more information, directions, and reservations, contact the LEADER: Anna Urciolo at urcioloa@sidwell.edu.

MAY 4 (Sunday) OCCOQUAN BAY NWR. Half day. Explore the diverse habitats in this one-square-mile refuge at the confluence of the Potomac and Occoquan Rivers in Woodbridge, VA. A variety of raptors and migratory warblers, vireos, thrushes, and flycatchers should be present, and rails and bitterns are possibilities. Meet at the parking lot in the center of the refuge at 7:30 a.m. Reservations required. Limit: 25. For reservations, contact the LEADERS: Mike Bowen at 301-530-5764 or dhmbowen@yahoo.com or Gerry Hawkins at 571-277-8406 or maineusa@comcast.net.



MAY 4 (Sunday) LITTLE BENNETT RP. Half day. Near peak migration for warblers and vireos, including those breeding in this varied habitat. Reservations required. For time and directions, contact the LEADER: Gemma Radko at 301-514-2894.

Trip Reports

For the full reports on field trips and the Christmas Bird Counts, please see our website at www.montgomerybirdclub.org.

Oaks Landfill, Sunday, October 27. Leaders: Mark England and Ed Patten. Participants: 12. Weather: Sunny, with no wind. Species: 35. This bird walk proved to be excellent for sparrows and raptors, not unusual for walks at this closed landfill. Eight sparrow species were seen (plus Eastern Towhee and Dark-eyed Junco), including a fabulous look at a Lincoln's Sparrow perched close atop a bush, one juvenile White-crowned, seven Field Sparrows, ten Savannah Sparrows, three Swamp Sparrows, one Chipping Sparrow, and lots of White-throated and Song Sparrows (120 estimated). Both male and female kestrels were seen early on, as well as one Northern Harrier, two Red-shouldered Hawks, and one Red-tailed Hawk. There were no waterfowl of note in the landfill pond or settling basins, only a large group of Canada Geese and three Mallards.

Blackwater NWR, November 3. Leader: Andy Martin. Participants: 13. We tried to scope the Choptank, but really brisk north winds had the river roiled up, and all we had was a couple of Common Loons and flyby Caspian and Forester's Terns in addition to the usual—Laughing, Ring-billed, Herring, and Great Black-backed Gulls and a few Bald Eagles. On the way to Blackwater, we found Eastern Meadowlark, Horned Lark, and American Pipits, Cooper's and Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers, and Bald Eagles, but not many sparrows.

At the temporary Visitors Center, we had a decent variety but not huge numbers of ducks in Pool 1: American Wigeons, Northern Shovelers, mallards, Ring-necked Ducks, Northern Pintails, Rudy Ducks, Gadwalls, Black Ducks, a single Redhead, scaup sp., a few American Coots, and a Pied-billed Grebe. The Marsh Trail was pretty good for the usual suspects: Brown-headed Nuthatches, both kinglets, Yellow-rumps, and a Pine Warbler plus two Hermit Thrushes. We heard a couple of Clapper Rail in the marsh near the observation platform and had some Snow Geese flying very high overhead. The rest of Wildlife Drive was fairly quiet. We had a few Greater Yellowlegs on the saltwater side but could not find the American White Pelicans reported from the week before. A Merlin flew past our cars near Pools 5a and b.

We finished the day with a marsh watch along Elliot Island Rd near Pokata Creek bridge. The wind had subsided,

but it was not particularly birdy. There were lots of Tree Swallows and Red-winged Blackbirds prior to sunset. We also had a single Great Egret, a few Bald Eagles, and Great Blue Herons. No Short-eared Owls and, astonishingly, no Northern Harriers over the marsh and not even any distant flocks of Canada Geese.

Remembering Lou, Walk at Blue Mash, November 9.

Twenty-one friends and family members gathered together at the Blue Mash Nature Trail to honor the memory of former president Lou DeMouy who passed away at this time last year. We started this walk at 7:30 with blue skies but with temperatures hovering below freezing. Birding was slow at first, but as it warmed up, the birds became more active. Lou's grandchildren enjoyed scope views of sparrows provided by Mike Bowen and Mark England. During the morning, many of us recalled our walks with Lou—his interest in all of nature, his wit and wisdom. We ended up with 34 species. Highlights: Among the White-throated, multiple Song, and several Swamp sparrows, at least five Fox Sparrows, some singing lightly; the ponds held Greater/Lesser Yellowlegs and Green-winged Teal; no luck with the Northern Harrier, but a single Sharp-shinned Hawk made the list.

Sparrow Walk at Blue Mash, November 11. Leader: Lydia Schindler. Participants: 8. Species: 31. Weather pleasant, mostly 40s and wind-free. The day was only moderately birdy. We found five species of sparrow: Song, White-throated, Swamp, and a couple of Field, as well as junco and towhee. The highlight was undoubtedly half a dozen Fox Sparrows sprinkled along the route; we had some excellent looks, and some of the birds were singing. There were also Downy, Red-bellied, and Pileated Woodpeckers and Flickers; Red-tailed and Cooper's Hawks; Bluebirds and Cedar Waxwings. A very companionable group!

Occoquan Bay NWR, Sunday, December 1. Leaders: Gerry Hawkins and Mike Bowen. Participants: 12. Weather: Cold to start, but then mostly sunny and warming to over 40 degrees with a very light wind. Species count: 56. Highlights: Most waterfowl were a long way off, possibly due to the recent start of the duck-hunting season, but there was a "mess" of Coots and Lesser Scaup and a distant pair of Tundra Swan. Some Ruddy Ducks and a single Ring-necked





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Duck were very close; we added two Hooded and one Red-breasted Merganser and a few Bufflehead and Pied-billed Grebe. Our photographers had a field day; the many Eastern Bluebirds perched obligingly, and an adult Bald Eagle posed in full view. We did well in the sparrow department, with great scope views of Fox and Savannah and the usual large numbers of Song and White-throated, with a smaller complement of Swamp and Field. There were lots of blackbirds, with at least six Rusty Blackbirds seen very well. Golden-crowned outnumbered Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and three Brown Creepers were a nice surprise. Two Yellow-rumped Warblers, usually much more common, were all we saw all morning. But who cares? Bird of the day was a Sedge Wren viewed by all at point-blank range; it had been spotted earlier in the day by Gerry and another Virginia birder and was a lifer for several participants.



Earliest Bird Trip to DC Sites, Georgetown Reservoir and D.C. Hotspots, Wednesday, January 1. Leader: Mike Bowen. Participants: 23. Weather: Temps up to the 40s, mostly sunny and quite comfortable; wind brisk from the south by trip's end. Species count: 49. Highlights: All three merganser species, with Common at Georgetown Reservoir, Red-breasted on the Tidal Basin, and Hooded several places. An adult Bald Eagle was flying, and an adult accompanied by a second-year bird were perched near Roaches Run, which also had Pied-billed Grebes. The Constitution Gardens pond was completely open and gave us Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, a single Ruddy Duck, and a few Coot. At least one Cooper's Hawk cruised over and scattered Mourning Doves past our heads. Black-crowned Night-Herons were on their usual roost trees at the head of the Washington Channel, and we were fortunate to spot a Peregrine perched on the 14th Street railroad bridge. We spotted the previously reported "Blue" Snow Goose (which might have been a hybrid) just above Memorial Bridge and picked out a Cackling Goose from a large flock of Canadas at the Columbia Island Marina. The Marina also had a Hooded Merganser and a weirdly plumaged female Wood Duck. Lots of American Robins and a single Cedar Waxwing were eating holly berries near the FDR Memorial, where there were also several kinglets of both species. Due to lack of time we didn't bird the LBJ Grove and so might have missed some passerines that we normally find on this trip. Possibly the bird of the day was a Horned Grebe seen at close range just north of Hains Point. The species is not often found in DC.

Blue Mash, Thursday, January 16. Leader: Stephanie Lovell. Chilly and cloudy but the sun broke through at the end. Three birders joined me for a morning walk to see what we could see. Our path to the left through "sparrow alley" yielded a number of White-throated Sparrows and surprisingly, about 21 Cedar Waxwings decorating the tops of the trees. As we walked we flushed a Northern Harrier who flew off toward the landfill. A Northern Cardinal pair and a sharp looking Towhee were also on the path, and Carolina Wrens voiced their opinion. The first pond was slightly frozen on the edges and not a duck to be seen, but a Fox Sparrow sat on a low branch long enough for all to get a good look. At the entrance of the office road, there were Starlings and two Flickers and four Bluebirds in the trees. Along the fence line there were several of the resident mockingbirds and more White-throats. A pair of Downy Woodpeckers worked the pines along the path. The second pond was more productive: four Mallards, two Black Ducks, and one female Canvasback.

Taking the upper trail we bushwhacked into the center to see what the crows were going on about. We didn't see it clearly, but a large accipiter flew out, possibly a Cooper's. The way back through the woods was very quiet, but as we came out to the back side of the large pond, there were new additions: four Bufflehead were diving in the cold waters. Four more Bluebirds on the trail back to the parking lot made for at least dozen or so seen. Total species, 20.

Christmas Bird Counts

Washington, DC, December 14. The 2013 District of Columbia Christmas Bird Count was conducted on the opening day of the CBC season. Despite the persistent threat of rain, most sector and team leaders were pleased with the results. Teams in Alexandria and Arlington in an area stretching from Dyke Marsh to Roosevelt Island reported high species diversity and good numbers of individuals. Volunteers documented Peregrine Falcons and Merlins from several areas, and one observer boasted a three-falcon day, a good thing too since American Kestrels have become increasingly scarce in the count circle over the last decade. Black Vultures are becoming more numerous, and one Maryland counter stated that they frequently outnumber Turkey Vultures during the winter. The common resident woodpeckers are doing quite well, but this year several counters also had a delightful surprise. Red-headed Woodpeckers

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Trip Reports

were found at both Maryland and Virginia locations. This was the first time this species was seen in the count circle since 2007. Several observers noted that the number of small passerines in their count areas exceeded expectations compared with previous counts. Finally, two Least Sandpipers at the mud flats at Hunting Creek south of Alexandria and a blue morph Snow Goose near the Tidal Basin qualify as the most notable rarities.

—Larry Cartwright

Triadelphia Reservoir, December 14. Oh my! Do we even remember back that far? The morning was undistinguished; cloudy, temperature in the low 30s, and winds less than 10 mph. The snow didn't start until shortly after noon and because by then the temperature was above freezing, it didn't stick a lot. By tally rally time, it had turned to sleet. So we had a party for six with lots of food!

Our effort was a bit less than last year in every way, slightly fewer participants, slightly fewer party hours, nearly the same distances covered. The species count was spot on average for the last 10 years—at 87—and for some reason, we counted more birds. The unproofed total of individuals came in at 33,380 compared to last year's 30,204. High counts appeared for Bald Eagles and Common Mergansers although some between-group number checking is yet to be finished. Meadowlarks, at 12, were the highest since 1999, and Cooper's Hawks, also at 12, tied their all-time high count. Ravens are increasing but Mourning Doves and Mockingbirds are continuing their long slow declines.

Montgomery County specialties included a wonderful number of Savannah Sparrows (92); one, perhaps two, Short-eared Owls seen at "The Oaks" (the old Laytonsville Landfill); and the 10th Barn Owl in our 66 years of counting.

We are still working to fill some coverage holes in Montgomery County so would welcome your interest. Meanwhile, we had a good time and generated useful data. Life is all positive!! Thanks to those of you who helped us and we'll look forward to meeting more of you next year!

—David Holmes

Seneca CBC, December 15. Reports of Snowy Owl, Snow Bunting, and Lapland Longspur tantalizingly close to our circle before count day had us salivating, but none

of them ventured into our circle. Our 100 counters in Montgomery, Fairfax, and Loudoun counties found 101 species with two additional count week species. This 103 is the highest count since 105 in 2004, and the 32,095 individual birds is the highest since 2007. We did not have 2012's influx of northern land birds, but we beat our 2012 total of 98 even while missing 10 species tallied last year, and we set new record high counts for nine species! Twelve species were represented by sightings of only a single bird, and six more species were seen only in one count sector. Six species were found only in Virginia sectors and 18 species only in Maryland.

New all-time highs for the count: 58 Gadwall, 75 American Wigeon, 293 Bufflehead, 131 Hooded Merganser, 52 Common Merganser, 30 Wild Turkey, 387 Black Vulture, 698 Fish Crow, and 372 Golden-crowned Kinglet.

Jim Nelson took over from Mark England as compiler for this year's count. Jim extends his thanks to everyone who came out to count this year and especially to the sector leaders for their hard work before, during, and after the count.

—Jim Nelson

Sugarloaf Mountain, December 29. Fifty damp but determined people braved a drenching downpour to count birds in upper Montgomery and lower Frederick counties. We can now confidently assert that torrential rain is not actually "good weather for ducks"! Despite a deficit of birds, birders, and time in the field, we managed to tally a very respectable 79 species (plus three more during Count Week). Several of these have been seen on the Sugarloaf CBC only a handful of times over the count's 29 years: Red-breasted Merganser, Double-crested Cormorant, House Wren, and Common Yellowthroat. Sharp-shinned Hawk, although a Count Week bird, was missed on count day for the first time ever. Many other raptors were scarce, as were vultures and woodpeckers. Final numbers aren't in yet, but quite a few species will be at record low levels due to the weather.

Thanks to everyone who participated—you did a terrific job. The next Sugarloaf CBC will probably be held on December 28, 2014. I'll do everything I can to arrange for it to be sunny and pleasant then!

—Janet Millenson



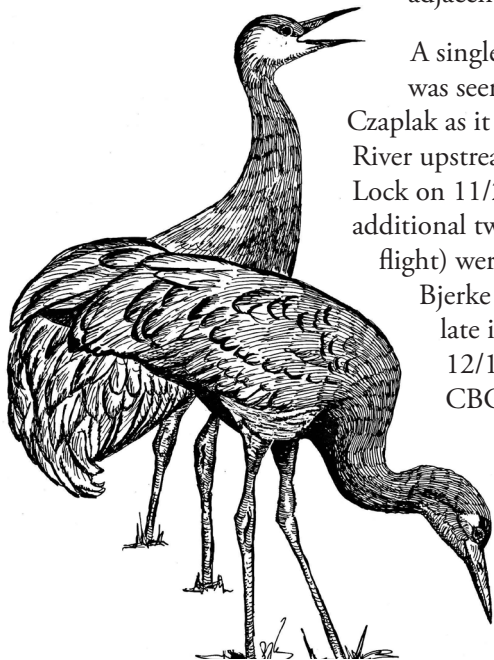
Birds of Note (late October 2012 to early January 2013)

Snowy Owls take the headlines for this *Birds of Note* column. The whole of Maryland and many other states are experiencing a winter irruption of **Snowy Owls** well south of their normal range. As of this writing, **Snowy Owls** have been reported from many MD counties including Baltimore, Harford, Worcester, Queen Anne's, Garrett, and Frederick. Montgomery County seems to have had only one brief visit from a **Snowy Owl**. The following link (http://instagram.com/p/iCJCLUIf_M/#McDonald's) shows a video of a Snowy Owl that landed on a light post at the McDonald's Restaurant at 18273 Flower Hill Way in Gaithersburg on 12/16. This McDonald's is not far from the intersection of Rte 124 and Muncaster Mill Road. Efforts were made in subsequent days to relocate the bird in nearby suitable habitat such as Lois Green CP and the Montgomery County Airpark, but all failed. Let's hope a more "chasable" bird shows up somewhere in the county before this winter is over.

Three separate sightings of **Golden Eagles** were reported over the last few months of 2013. John Newman spotted one in flight over the NIH Animal Research Facility near Poolesville on 10/18. Chuck Stirrat found a **Golden Eagle** at Triadelphia Reservoir on 11/1, and David Gersten noted one over his yard in the vicinity of Layhill Park on 12/5. A great yard bird for David!

Dave Czaplak reported and photographed a **Short-eared Owl** in flight near the intersection of Hughes and River Rds on 10/19. Additional **Short-eared Owls** were reported during the Triadelphia Reservoir CBC on 12/15 from atop the old Laytonsville Landfill adjacent to Blue Mash.

A single **Sandhill Crane** was seen in flight by Dave Czaplak as it crossed the Potomac River upstream of Violette's Lock on 11/23 and 11/29. An additional two cranes (also in flight) were spotted by John Bjerke over Hughes Hollow late in the afternoon on 12/15 during the Seneca CBC.



The Patton Turf Farm off River Road in the northwestern portion of Montgomery County held a fairly large **Horned Lark** flock for 5 or 6 days around mid-December. Jim Green was able to pick out a few **Lapland Longspur** and a single **Snow Bunting** mixed in among the larks on 12/13.

Dave Czaplak was able to add a few additional shorebird species to this year's county list. On 10/11, Dave spotted two **Baird's Sandpipers** among a mixed flock of **American Golden-Plover**, **Pectoral Sandpiper**, and **Killdeer**, while scanning flooded fields on the Summit Turf Farm from across the C&O Canal near milepost 29. On 11/4, Dave noted three **Dunlin** near Violette's Lock.

Some **Black Scoters** made a brief stopover in the county during the first week of November. Dave Czaplak noted birds at both Little Seneca Reservoir and the Potomac River adjacent to Violette's/Riley's Locks on 11/3. Other waterfowl of note include a **Cackling Goose** found by Lisa Norwalk in the Rio Pond off Washingtonian Blvd. in Gaithersburg on 11/3. **Cackling Geese** were also noted from Little Seneca Lake and Lake Churchill within Black Hill RP on 11/30 and 12/14, respectively, and from the Potomac River near Violette's Lock on 12/19. Benjamin Martin reported two **Snow Geese** on 12/28 mixed in with a flock of **Canada Geese** at the Lake Needwood Golf Course.

In "twitching" news, according to eBird (<http://ebird.org/content/ebird/>), we stand at 250 species in Montgomery for the entire year—seven species short of last year's impressive total of 257. Top five listers per eBird include Dave Czaplak (232), Mary Ann Todd (207), Linda Friedland (200), Woody and Rae Dubois (189), and Lydia Schindler (181). Congrats to Linda for reaching the 200 bird mark by finding a **Merlin** at the Patton Turf Farm on 12/17. ♪

— Andy Martin



Don Messersmith's Big Birding Trip, 2013

After my wife, Sherry, died unexpectedly on Thanksgiving Day 2012, I found that the memories in our apartment were such that I needed a change for a while. Gradually an idea evolved in my mind to take a trip and look for birds I had never seen. In discussions with my four daughters who encouraged me to do this, I decided on a cross-country, four-month-long trip (it ended up five months and nine days) to visit family and friends I seldom see and to look for birds along the way. I made a list of about 60 “target” species I had never seen (I saw 10 life birds) and wrote to people in 15 states that I would like to visit them. I expected to travel in about 36 states (it ended up being 30 states and four western Canadian Provinces) and return in mid-September (I returned October 18). With no set itinerary or timetable, I drove 21,733 miles and saw four of the Great Lakes in the North, the Pacific Ocean in the West, the Gulf of Mexico in the South, and the Atlantic Ocean in the East.

Although I traveled alone most of the time, I was happy to have my daughter Betsy join me for a week in eastern North Dakota including Father's Day. Later Heidi joined me in California, Mary in Texas, Betsy again from Mississippi to North Carolina, and Donna from North Carolina to Maryland. For 12 days Bill Murphy, a former student and now long-time friend, joined me in Montana, traveling 36 hours by train from his home in Indianapolis. He was a great help with the mountain driving in Glacier and Waterton Lakes National Parks, and with his sharp eyes and good hearing he located many birds I might have missed, including two of my life birds and a couple of others for himself.

I kept a journal and periodically sent portions of it to a selected group of family and friends. The journal is now about 150 single-spaced pages.

This was not a “Big Year” endeavor, nor did I do a blog. However, I took many photographs, which I am using in my “Birds of North America” class at ANS.

On May 9, I was ready to leave. It took me 10 trips

from my apartment to load the Toyota Sienna van. I tried to think of everything I would need, so I had one suitcase with clothes for cold weather, one for warm weather, and one for overnight use. I had two boxes of food, two of books, one of miscellaneous equipment, two coolers, a sleeping bag and mattress, some tools and medicines, spotting scope, camera, laptop, iPad, and my new iPhone. I left the Riderwood parking lot at 3:47 p.m. and headed toward Burlington, West Virginia. Here I visited Paula Piehl who is the daughter of the man who was my Bird Study Merit Badge Counselor in the Boy Scouts and got me started in birding. (If only he could have known where this would lead me!) I have known Paula since 1962 when I met her at the University of Michigan Field Station.

My next stop was in Pennsylvania where I had hoped to visit the Powdermill Nature Center, but I didn't get there until 6 p.m., and it was raining. The next day I headed for Ohio and the famous Magee Marsh. Magee Marsh is a remnant of the once extensive Black Swamp that covered northwestern Ohio, and so the migrants bunch up there before crossing Lake Erie. I had two wonderful days of birding there, viewing warblers, vireos, thrushes, and more, often at eye level. My best bird was a Mourning Warbler. I was also happy to run into some members of the Montgomery Bird Club and ANS. I stayed with my niece and nephew, Kathy and David Bartley, in Oregon, Ohio, for two days. Kathy is the daughter of Sherry's sister.

From there I drove to visit Bill Murphy and April in Indianapolis. Bill took me to the Blatchley Nature Center where he is a board member. Blatchley was a famous entomologist and all-round naturalist, and he collected many interesting artifacts—from American Indian articles to an Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Although we did not succeed in seeing our goal bird (Connecticut Warbler), in our two days there we recorded 66 species, including 11 warbler species. ♪

— Don Messersmith

For Don's full report on his big birding trip, please visit our website: montgomerybirdclub.org.





A Visit to Brazil

Stephanie Lovell visited Brasilia last October. Two birding highlights from her trip are pictured here. On the Foz de Iguaçu, which is on the border with Argentina, the Blue-naped Chlorophonia flew into a tree just as she was starting the walk on top of the falls (above). Visits to nearby parks in Brasilia were very productive with Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Horneos with their round mud nests, lots and lots of Southern Lapwings, Rufus-bellied Thrush, Saffron Finch, and the wonderful Guira Cuckoo with its punk hairdo (below). Read more about Stephanie's trip in "Chapter Chatter" in the January/February issue of the *Maryland Yellowthroat* (online at www.mdbirds.org/publications/yellowthroat/pdf/yt3401.pdf). ♪



Patricia Ann Tonkin (1943–2013)

Pat Tonkin was born and raised in Baltimore and majored in Library Science at the University of Maryland. She worked in a number of different Montgomery County Libraries until her retirement in 2006. She was also active in the Wesley Foundation, a Methodist-related student association. It was here she met her future husband, Joe. The group of students who were active in the Wesley Foundation during those college years became her and Joe's friends the rest of their lives. Pat and Joe had a cabin near Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, where friends were often invited to enjoy the nearby forest and stream that ran through the property.

Pat and Joe both served on the board of directors of the World Nature Association, which became the Crowder-Messersmith Fund under the aegis of the Audubon Naturalist Society in 1999. Joe, a certified tax accountant, served as treasurer, and Pat served as secretary for a time. Pat lived her life in helping others, and one example of that commitment was her work in providing micro-grants for environmental education projects in developing countries through the Crowder-Messersmith Fund.

Pat and Joe went on several trips with groups organized by Sherry and me with our World Nature Tour Company. Joe died in 2009, but Pat continued to travel, taking trips with us to the Virgin Islands, Utah, Wyoming, and Australia.

Pat was an active naturalist and birder. She took some of my bird and insect classes and was a member of the first Master Naturalist Class at the Audubon Naturalist Society. She was active in the Montgomery Bird Club, serving as club librarian for a number of years. She and Joe were active members of Marvin Memorial United Methodist Church where Pat served as chair of Education and co-chair of the Trustees Committee.

Less than a year before her death Pat moved to the Riderwood Retirement Village with her dog, Timber. She died on July 4 and is survived by three sons and nine grandchildren. ♪

—Don Messersmith

As the *Chat* was going to press we learned of the passing of Harvey Mudd on January 21. Our condolences to Harvey's wife Marion and his family. A remembrance will be included in the May issue of the *Chat*.



Welcome New Members!

Marti Eisentraut	Anne Looker
Linda Keenan	Donna Rathbone
David Kidwell	Richard Reise
Barbara Kreiley	Peggy Tevis

ANNUAL MBC SOCIAL

Friday, March 21, 2014

Guest of Honor: Gail Mackiernan

Join us for our annual social 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. Smokey Glen Farm of Gaithersburg will once again cater this delicious dinner.

The evening will feature the traditional members' slide show. Please limit your presentation to your 10 favorite digital photos and send them to the compiler (TBA) in digital form (either on a CD or a thumb drive) in the order you want them to be shown, **no later than March 14.**

Because space is limited, places will go to the first 90 persons to reserve and pay. Send this form (or a copy) and your check (\$20 per person), payable to Montgomery Bird Club, to Ed Patten, 7 Midsummer Court, Gaithersburg, MD 20878. Ed's email is epatten1022@verizon.net.

Name(s) to appear on tags:

Phone #: _____

Signup deadline is Wednesday, March 14.

_____ 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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