



The newsletter of the Montgomery Bird Club of the Maryland Ornithological Society

November 2014

Volume 45, No. 4

President's Chat

As you read this we are well into the fall season, with many good migrants already gone through the area. Soon everyone will be looking forward to the potential of good winter birds. We will know soon enough if the promise of winter finches holds true.

Every year we receive a youth backpack from MOS to give to a promising young birder. At our October meeting we gave the backpack to **Patrick Newcombe**. Patrick is an enthusiastic birder and has gone on several MBC field trips. Patrick's essay on "My Favorite Bird: The Red Knot" will appear in the February issue.

We are currently looking for someone who would be willing to help distribute the *Chat*. **Jane Farber** and **Jeanne Lacerte** have done this for several years (thanks Jane and Jeanne!), but have decided to pass this task on to others. This is not very time-consuming—the *Chat* comes out four times a year, and only about 100 people receive it by mail. A description of the distribution task appears on page 2 of this issue. If you are interested, please contact me.

Just a reminder that we have many good field trips on the schedule. Check the calendar and get out there. It will soon be time for the Christmas Bird Counts, and I know many of you have participated in them. These counts are open to all levels of birders. Everyone is invited and encouraged to participate. There is no longer a



\$5 fee to participate so the more counters, the merrier! The dates and contact information for the CBCs are listed in the field trip calendar in this issue.

The November meeting will be November 19, and the topic will be "Hummingbirds in the Mid-Atlantic"

presented by Bruce Peterjohn from the

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center with an emphasis on wintering species. I hope to see you there!

Good birding! ♪

— Ed Patten



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Montgomery Bird Club

Winter Calendar

November 19 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. "Hummingbirds in the Mid-Atlantic." Local birders are well aware of the increase in recent years of wintering hummingbirds. **Bruce Peterjohn** from the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center will summarize our current knowledge of the status of hummingbirds across the mid-Atlantic region with an emphasis on wintering species.

December 17 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. "Northwest Atlantic Seabird Surveys." Well-known to many birders through the photo quiz in the ABA's *Birding* magazine, **Tom Johnson** has been working for the last two years as a seabird biologist aboard NOAA ships, where he conducted bird surveys in the ocean. Tom will talk about the birds that are found far offshore in Maryland waters.

January 21 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. "Project Snowstorm." The massive irruption of Snowy Owls in the winter of 2013-2014, the biggest in decades, will long be remembered by Maryland birders. The irruption provided an opportunity for scientists to learn about the lifestyle and biology of this fascinating species. **David Brinker** is a regional wildlife ecologist working for Maryland's Department of Natural Resources.

February 11 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. (Note: Meeting date is on the *second Wednesday to avoid conflict with Ash Wednesday*.) "Quiz Night." Back by popular demand! Test your bird ID skills in a photo quiz of mid-Atlantic birds, presented by **Clive Harris**, MBC Vice President. If you're interested in submitting photos of birds to be in the quiz, please contact Clive at cliveharris@yahoo.com.

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 Road (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 Ed Patten at 301-948-5648 or epatten1022@verizon.net.

The Chat is published in February, May, August, and November by the Montgomery Bird Club, a chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society.

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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.



Congratulations to Top County Listers!

Top Montgomery County listers so far this year: Mary Ann Todd at 219, Dave Czaplak at 211, Linda Friedland at 200, "Team Dubois" (Woody and Rae) at 195, and Lydia Schindler at 192. ♪

Volunteer Opportunity

Got time on your hands? Here's an opportunity to volunteer for the Montgomery Bird Club and you don't even have to get up early—help circulate the *Chat*! The *Chat* comes out four times a year. Here's what you would need to do.

MBC Membership Secretary Helen Patton sends you the labels to put on the *Chat*, which is printed at Allegra Print and Imaging in Rockville. The printer calls you when the *Chat* is ready to be picked up. You buy the first-class stamps and let MBC Treasurer Sally Wechsler know the amount, and she will send you a check. The printer folds the *Chats*, but you will need to seal them with piece of scotch tape and apply the name labels and stamps. Then you take them to the post office for mailing.

Contact Ed Patten if you are interested. ♪


Lost Brazil Book

I cannot find my (annotated) copy of *The Birds of Brazil: The Pantanal and Cerrado of Central Brazil*. I may have loaned it to someone, or I may have left it at the Club meeting last spring. Did anybody happen to run across it? Please let me know at lydiaschindler@verizon.net. Thank you. ♪

—Lydia Schindler



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 linnetl@verizon.net or 301-983-2136 (before 9 p.m.).

NOVEMBER 2 (Sunday) OAKS LANDFILL. Explore this now-closed landfill adjacent to the Blue Mash Nature Trail. Mostly open terrain on a gravel road, including two pond views and one hill climb of moderate difficulty. Possible sparrows, raptors, and 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 one of the CO-LEADERS: Mark England at 240-375-4500 (cell) or markengland@canamcontractors.com or Ed Patten at 301-948-5648.



NOVEMBER 9 (Sunday) LOIS Y. GREEN PARK: REMEMBERING LOU. The second annual walk in honor of former MBC president and all-round naturalist Lou DeMouy who passed away in November 2012. The trip will be led by current MBC President Ed Patten. Meet at 7:30 a.m. Reservations required. For more information and reservations, contact the LEADER: Ed Patten at 301-948-5648.



NOVEMBER 11 (Tuesday) LBJs at BLUE MASH NATURE TRAIL. Half day. Blue Mash is a good place to work on the basics of sparrow ID. In addition to the common species, like Song and Field and Chipping, we'll keep an eye out for less-likely White-crowned and Swamp. This trip is primarily for beginners, but all are welcome. For reservations, time, and directions, contact the LEADER: Lydia Schindler at lydiaschindler@verizon.net.

NOVEMBER 15 (Saturday) BLACKWATER NWR. Full day (to dusk). Early waterfowl and lingering migrants plus late afternoon marsh watch. Brown-headed Nuthatch possible. Bring lunch and drinks. Reservations required. Limit: 12. For meeting place and time, contact one of the CO-LEADERS: Mark England at 240-375-4500 (cell) or markengland@canamcontractors.com or Ed Patton at 301-948-5648.

NOVEMBER 23 (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 migratory ducks and boreal migrants should be present. Meet at the parking lot in the center of the refuge at 8 a.m. Reservations are necessary. Limit: 20. For reservations and more info, contact one of the CO-LEADERS: Mike Bowen at 301-530-5764 or dhmbowen@yahoo.com or Gerry Hawkins at 571-277-8406 or maineusa@comcast.net. **Directions:** From Maryland, take Rt. 495 south to I-95 south to Woodbridge, Exit 161 (left exit); follow Rt. 1 south, cross the Occoquan River, turn left at the light onto Dawson Beach Road, and follow this road to the end.

DECEMBER 7 (Sunday) LILYPONS/NEW DESIGN ROAD. Half day. Wintering field birds, targeting Fox and Tree Sparrows, possibly Virginia Rail and American Bittern. For reservations (required) and more info, contact the LEADER: Clive Harris at clivegharris@yahoo.com.

DECEMBER 14 (Sunday) SENECA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT (Montgomery County, MD and Loudoun/Fairfax Counties, VA). For information, contact COMPILER: Jim Nelson at kingfishers2@verizon.net (preferred) or 301-530-6574.

DECEMBER 20 (Saturday) TRIADELPHIA RESERVOIR CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT (includes Montgomery, Howard, and small portion of Prince George's Counties, MD). For information, contact COMPILER: David Holmes at musicbndr@gmail.com (preferred) or 410-730-7083.

DECEMBER 20 (Saturday) WASHINGTON, DC, CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT (includes portions of Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, MD; the District of Columbia; and Arlington and Alexandria, VA). COMPILER: Larry Cartwright. For information, contact Carol Hayes, Audubon Naturalist Society, at carol.hayes@anshome.org or 301-652-9188, ext 10.

DECEMBER 27 (Saturday) CENTRAL LOUDOUN CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT (includes Loudoun County, VA, and 5 miles along the C&O Canal in Montgomery County, MD). For information, contact COMPILER: Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or joecoleman@rstartmail.com.

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Field Trips

DECEMBER 28 (Sunday) SUGARLOAF CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT (Montgomery and Frederick Counties, MD). For information, contact COMPILER: Janet Millenson at 301-983-9337 or janet@twocrows.com.

JANUARY 1 (Thursday) EARLIEST BIRD WALK: GEORGETOWN RESERVOIR AND DC

HOTSPOTS. Half day. Start the New Year right! Meet at 8 a.m. at Georgetown Reservoir, DC, by the gate leading to the dike between the pools. Reservations required. Strict limit: 20 participants. Contact the LEADER: Mike Bowen at 301-530-5764 or dhmbowen@yahoo.com.

JANUARY 15 (Thursday) BLUE MASH. A mid-week walk to this popular site seeking winter birds: the expected cardinals, towhees, and mockingbirds as well as raptors (Northern Harrier a possibility) and sparrows. We'll check for ducks on the pond. Expect to walk (waterproof boots suggested!) about a mile on level trails. The trip will be cancelled or postponed in case of sleet, ice, or rain. Start at 8 a.m. Reservations not necessary. For directions or more information, contact the LEADER: Stephanie Lovell at ctlovel1@yahoo.com or 240-242-3235.



JANUARY 18 (Sunday) BLACK HILL REGIONAL PARK. All birders, but especially new birders, are welcome on this half-day trip, which will focus on the identification of ducks at this premiere county spot for winter waterfowl. Meet at 8 a.m. at the Visitors Center in Black Hill Regional Park, and bring a spotting scope if you have one. For reservations (required) and more information, contact the LEADER: Gerry Hawkins at maineusa@comcast.net or 571-277-8406 (cell).

FEBRUARY 1 (Sunday) WINTER WATERFOWL ON THE POTOMAC. Half day. We'll plan to check the river for wintering ducks in a portion of the Urban Zone (a no-firearms-discharge area) between the mouth of Watts 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 8 (Sunday) OAKS LANDFILL, LAYTONSVILLE. Bundle up for a LATE AFTERNOON search for wintering sparrows and raptors, including possible Northern Harriers and Short-eared Owls, at this now-closed landfill adjacent to the Blue Mash Nature Trail. Mostly open terrain with some ponds, which we will check if not frozen over. Leader will have scope. We have special permission to enter this "closed to the public" landfill so *reservations are essential*. Limit: 16. Meet at 3:30 p.m. on landfill entrance drive at 6001 Rt. 108, Laytonsville, Md. For reservations and information, contact the LEADER: Mark England at 240-375-4500 (cell) or markengland@canamcontractors.com.

MARCH 3 (Tuesday), MARCH 10 (Tuesday), MARCH 12 (Thursday), MARCH 17 (Tuesday) INFORMAL LATE AFTERNOON WALKS until dusk. Joint trips with ANS. Meet promptly at 5 p.m. at the end of Seneca Rd at Riley's Lock "on the bridge." After checking out 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 14 (Saturday) Patuxent River Park, Jug Bay Natural Area, Prince George's Co, MD. Half day. Joint trip with Audubon Naturalist Society. Waterfowl, Wilson's Snipe, winter and early spring songbirds. Ospreys displaying. Meet at 8 a.m. at parking by park headquarters. Wear mud-conditions footwear. Make reservation (15-person limit) with LEADER: John Bjerke at 240-401-1643 or johnbjerke1@mac.com.



Welcome New Members!

Maryanne Dolan

Maureen and Bill Edwards

Nancy Horn

Donald Jensen

Marv and Kathy Reitz

Carolyn Smith

Katherine Thorington

Paul and Susan Van Nice

Scott and Alice Young



Trip Reports

Bombay Hook NWR, Saturday, August 23. Leaders: John Bjerke and Cyndie Loeper. Participants: 15. Species: at least 58. Cloudy, breezy weather greeted the annual late August shorebird trip by ANS and MBC. The trip continues a tradition of many decades, most memorably helmed by Claudia Wilds. This year's trip spent the entire day at Bombay Hook; we found 16 species of shorebirds, including one Hudsonian Godwit, two Marbled Godwits, at least two White-rumped Sandpipers, and a few Long-billed Dowitchers. The highlight of the day was the presence of a Peregrine Falcon in the morning and two Peregrines in the afternoon. In the morning, we watched as the Peregrine repeatedly put thousands of peep, yellowlegs, dowitchers, and plovers into acrobatic flight. At one point, it successfully cut a peep out of the flock, and we were sure that lunch was at hand. But the peep was saved at the last moment when it dove into the large flock of Avocets that had huddled together and stood their ground against the falcon.

The highlights of the afternoon were a flock of about 100 Bobolinks in a field near the Allee House and a Sedge Wren in the same field, making trips clearing fecal sacs from a nest. The power lines there were a fine place to study swallows.



Patuxent River Park, Jug Bay Natural Area, Saturday, September 6. Leaders: Greg Kearns, Paul Baicich, and John Bjerke. Participants: 14. Species: at least 45. This annual trip, sponsored by ANS and MBC, uses the park boat and senior park naturalist Greg Kearns to explore marsh and creek edges. As always in September, we were in hopes of finding Sora. Despite an earlier start in the month and a shortened window of favorable tide, we spotted a record 23 Soras and heard two others. Birders had lengthy studies of some of the birds and learned to separate adult and juvenile birds and in a few cases separate the adults by sex. We also had great views of Bald Eagle, Wood Ducks, herons, and hundreds of Red-winged Blackbirds that had molted and not yet replaced their tail feathers. Far up Western Branch, we encountered an unusually cooperative Yellow-billed Cuckoo that perched in the open for quite a long time. Once again Greg gave us an outstanding overview of the status of the marsh and bay and their birds and plants.

A short late-morning walk also found some nice birds despite heat that reached the low 90s. Most interesting was a Scarlet Tanager far along in molt, with just a bright red belly set off by yellow underparts and black wings. It was pursued by a begging young tanager. We had brief glimpses of a thrush species and a probable Ovenbird. There were better looks at Black-and-White Warbler and Solitary Sandpiper. A Yellow-throated Vireo and several Pewees and White-eyed Vireos provided songs in the background.



A pair of Soras, two of an amazing 23 seen on the Patuxent River Park trip on September 6. Photo by Evelyn Ralston

Rock Creek Park, Tuesday, September 9. Leader: Wallace Kornack. Participants: 3. After a brief tour of the ridge with hardly a bird in sight, we left for the maintenance yard. There, despite the dark, cloudy skies and a hint of rain, warblers were on the move, and by the end of the morning 13 species were seen. The most interesting ones were the Tennessee, Blackburnian, Blackpoll, Black-throated Blue, FOS Prairie and Cape May. Other interesting birds included Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Great Crested Flycatcher. Numerous Chimney Swifts swooped close to the ground in a wonderful frenzied display and chased birds that had insects in their bills; subsequently, they were joined by a Common Nighthawk. The highlights of the morning included a Philadelphia Vireo and a Tennessee Warbler that were exploring a nearby devil's walking stick with its ripening berries, and also a FOS Yellow-throated Vireo. Overall, the yard yielded 44 species.

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Trip Reports

Rock Creek Park, Saturday, September 13. Leader:

Wallace Kornack. Participants: six. With the experience of the last several weeks, there was an impulse to go directly to the maintenance yard. But because all the participants were new to the park, it was important to begin the tour in a traditional way by exploring first the equitation field and the ridge. With little bird activity at those locations and a hint of rain, we hastened to the yard. There the warblers were active. Soon Cape May and Magnolia Warblers were sighted. In the background, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak was heard and then seen. This was followed by nice view of a Nashville Warbler high in a tree. The yard's ravine yielded an Ovenbird and several Common Yellowthroats. Black-and-White Warbler and American Redstarts were easily spotted. Near the end of the visit to the yard, we had an excellent view of two Black-throated Blue Warblers wending their way up dry tangled vines. When the yard grew quiet, we left for the Nature Center without any expectation of finding more birds; rather, it was to show the participants one more example of the range of sites for their future birding at the park.



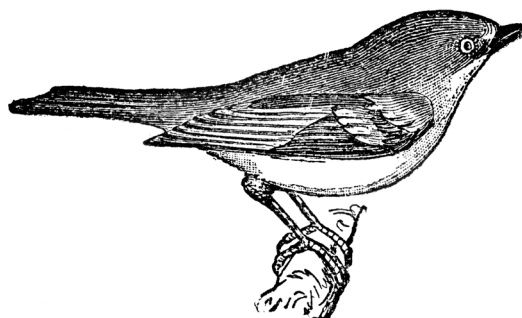
Little Bennett Regional Park, Sunday, September 14.

Leader: Claire Wolfe. It was a beautiful fall-preview day when 10 of us set out from Wilson's Mill parking lot in quest of migrants. The birds, however, must have been enjoying the day elsewhere. We had a fairly quiet day with a few bursts of activity, including one large flock that kept us busy as we tried to sort out the super-active birds. We ended the trip with eight species of warblers (Common Yellowthroat, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Chestnut-sided, Northern Parula, Magnolia, American Redstart, and Black-and-White), and two species of vireo (Red-eyed, White-eyed). A Broad-winged Hawk soaring with some vultures was also a highlight. Many thanks to the enthusiastic participants who joined me and made for an enjoyable morning!



Slicker's Gap, VA, Saturday, September 20. Leaders:

Joan Boudreau and Bob Abrams. The weather was mostly clear, sunny, hazy, with mild temperatures, and a southeast breeze of 5-10 mph. Participants: six. There was another field trip from a West Virginia club so there was lots of company. We saw a total of 808 birds at the hawk watch,



most of which (701) were Broad-winged Hawks. We also saw 48 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 16 Ospreys, 9 Northern Harriers, 9 American Kestrels, 9 Red-tailed Hawks, 7 Bald Eagles, 6 Cooper's Hawks, 2 Merlins, and 1 unidentified buteo. Our first bird was seen at 7:45 a.m. and our last at 4:01 p.m. There were lots of Monarch butterflies and what appears to be the now standard onslaught of Stink Bugs that come out to the open area in the heat. The passerines weren't good this year up the Appalachian Trail, offshoot from the parking lot. We did have occasional flocks of Cedar Waxwings, American Crows, as well as Common Ravens, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, etc.

One major concern on this trip is that it's very hard to see many of the birds from the Snickers vantage point. Scopes are extremely helpful.



Pennyfield to Violette's "Bird Stalk," Sunday, September 21.

Leader: Jim Nelson. Participants: 17, including leader. Weather: Sunny, temps rising from 50s to 70s. Total species: 41. This walk is designed for folks who prefer a later start. We met at Violette's Lock at nine, carpooled down to Pennyfield Lock, and then walked upstream along the C&O Canal towpath back to Violette's, ending at noon. The total species count was good in spite of the disappointing lack of warblers (only American Redstart), vireos (only Red-eyed), and other passerine migrants (only Scarlet Tanager). Fortunately, other good birds gave us interesting looks. Everyone had great views of Green Herons, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpipers, Least Sandpipers, and Semipalmated Sandpipers in the shallow, rapidly drying second impoundment above Pennyfield. Ten Great Egrets graced a tree by that water. Wood Ducks posed on logs in the canal for the group.



Trip Reports

Catoctin Mountains, Sunday, September 28. Leaders: Jim Brighton and Tom Feild. Participants: 4 plus leaders. We had a fabulous day with many great bird sightings. Most of our day was spent on Gambrill Park Road. Birds were everywhere all day long with 16 species of warblers observed (Ovenbird; Black-and-White, Tennessee, Nashville, Cape May, Magnolia, Bay-breasted, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Blackpoll, Chestnut-sided, and Pine Warblers; Parula; Common Yellowthroat; and American Redstart). The Black-throated Green was the most numerous by far. Also seen were Warbling Vireo and Red-eyed Vireo. Blue Jays were constantly overhead flying south. Eastern Phoebe also seemed to be on the move and very numerous.

In addition to this warbler bonanza, we also looked at wildflowers, trees, insects, and mosses. The vast area of knowledge of both leaders contributed to a wonderful learning experience for the participants. An enjoyable day!



Little Bennett Regional Park, Sunday, October 5. Leader: Gemma Radko, with nine participants. We had a beautiful fall morning, starting with frost on the ground. Things warmed up quickly, and we had some nice birds. Highlights included at least eight Blue-headed Vireos, Swainson's Thrush, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, both kinglets, two "brownie" Purple Finches, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and many Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Thank-you to Nitin Agarwal for submitting an eBird checklist! We ended with 38 species for the day.



Montgomery County Sparrow Search (Huntmaster Road Wetlands), Wednesday, October 8. Leader: Dave Powell. Three people joined me for a very foggy morning. While the fog prevented us from seeing the birds early on, when it cleared it produced a Fog Bow. What is a Fog Bow you ask? It looks like a rainbow in the sky but is white and has none of the spectrum colors usually seen. Very cool! Sparrows were mostly Song and Swamp, but a cooperative Lincoln's perched for a minute. Solitary Sandpiper was seen on a mud flat. Overhead was a late Chimney Swift and Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks.



Big Sit 2014, Black Hill RP, Saturday, October 11. Leader: Chuck Parker with one participant (Joette Borzik). We started around 7 a.m. and birded till approximately 2:30 p.m. The morning was rainy and in the low 50s, the afternoon was cloudy and 49. Total species: 53. Birds of interest were White-eyed Vireo, Ruddy Ducks (11), Blue-headed Vireo, Purple Finch, and Northern Shoveler. There were also great views of 65 Wood Ducks. I think the very small turnout was attributable to the weather. However, if people prefer a Sunday time, please contact me at chparker@k12.wv.us or 240-446-8423 (cell), and I will move next year's date to Sunday.



Wheaton Regional Park, Monday, October 13. Leaders: Woody and Rae Dubois. Participants: 7 plus leaders. Our autumn walk at Wheaton Regional Park started at 7:40 a.m. The sky was heavily overcast, and midway through the walk, a light rain started to fall. Temperature was about 63 degrees. We started by birding on the edges of the Shorefield Road parking lot while one of the resident Red-shouldered Hawks sat on an electrical pole immediately above us; we then made our way slowly to Pine Lake and back. By mid-morning we had 35 species in spite of the damp weather. Highlights were the perched Red-shouldered Hawk and his mate, which we glimpsed flying nearby, nine Wood Ducks on Pine Lake, the males in their breeding plumage, and both species of kinglet. There were three species of warbler: Common Yellowthroat, Black-and-White, and a beautiful male Redstart. We heard numerous White-throated Sparrows in the tall grass by the spring though only two were actually seen; Chipping and Song sparrows were also seen but only in very small numbers.

On the Trail of the Himalayan Snowcock

Many of my better adventures start with an email from Melody Kehl, a bird guide who lives in Tucson, Arizona. Despite my first reaction of “I can’t really do that stuff anymore,” Melody, who rarely takes no for an answer, has convincing reasons why I *can* do that stuff again. This time it was an excursion into the Ruby Mountains of Nevada to see the Himalayan Snowcock.

Nevada, feeling that it was not properly endowed with game birds, imported many species, including the Himalayan Snowcock. Although the snowcock was introduced in several western states, they only thrived in Nevada’s Ruby Mountains. After this introduction, sentiment for introducing exotic species into wilderness areas turned negative, and the snowcock was the last such species introduced into the United States.

Our adventure started in Salt Lake City, Utah, where we gathered and spent our first afternoon in the Wasatch Mountain Range, starting our acclimatization to the higher altitudes. The next day, we headed for Elko, Nevada, with a stop at Antelope Island State Park outside Salt Lake City. And what a park—with Bison, Pronghorn, Black-tailed Jackrabbit, Mule Deer, Coyote, Chukar, Loggerhead Shrike, White-faced Ibis, Western Meadowlark, and Ring-necked Pheasant, to name a few. The causeway to the park had a huge flock of Wilson’s Phalarope plus Franklin’s and California Gulls, Long-billed Curlew, American Avocet, and Marbled Godwit.

The drive to Elko went past the Bonneville Salt Flats, and we arrived in the late afternoon. We visited the U.S. Wildlife Service station to see a stuffed snowcock and to ask the ranger about any new information he might have heard. His advice was that while there had not been a lot of reports, Island Lake was the best bet, and to be there at daybreak.

We were up early the next day to do our next acclimatization trek, this time in the Ruby Mountains, but not the trail we would take for the Snowcock. The Lamoille Lake trail hike was intended to be a few hours, but the day was so nice that we ended up hiking to Lamoille Lake, a two-mile hike up to 9700+ feet, almost a duplicate of the real trek that we would do the next day. We saw some birds, including Clark’s Nutcracker, and were delighted by the myriad of wildflowers along the trail.



Himalayan Snowcock finally appeared atop this ridge in the Ruby Mountains, seen here from Island Lake. Photo by Helen Patton.

The next day, we met in the motel lobby at 2:00 a.m. We were at the trailhead at 3:00 a.m., and we started up the Island Lake Trail with headlamps. The bulk of the group made it to the top (10,200 feet) in a little under two hours, and I followed at two and a half hours. When I arrived, there had been no snowcock activity, seen or heard, so we settled down to wait. A few more folks joined us including a party of three with a young man named Diego. After a while, a Golden Eagle came to patrol the cliffs, but nothing moved in reaction to this threat, which was a little discouraging. We were going to wait at least another hour.

Then, at almost 10:00 a.m., Diego saw three snowcocks fly over the ridge line away from us. After that, we heard some bugling and chuckling, so we knew that the birds were there, we just had to find them. Easier said than done, but they were finally spotted on the very top of the ridge line. The whole party probably saw nine birds; I saw at least five. On our way back down, we also spotted two American Dippers. Having been successful, the trip back down was a piece of cake. We had our celebratory lunch at one of the picnic areas, joined by a Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel.

Before leaving Elko, we visited South Fork State Park where we were greeted by flying Common Nighthawks plus a great array of waterfowl. We drove to Lamoille Canyon in the evening to find the Lewis’s Woodpecker, and we also saw a Ruffed Grouse and a Striped Skunk. Then, the next day, it was back to Salt Lake City and home. ♪

— Helen Patton



Birds of Note (late July to early October 2014)

Neotropic Cormorant tops the list for this issue's "Birds of Note" column. The bird was initially found by Dave Czaplak on 7/22 roosting with its Double-crested cousins on a midstream log in the Potomac River about a half mile upstream of Violette's Lock. The **Neotropic Cormorant** proved to be very cooperative for state listers, sticking around until 8/25.

Post-breeding dispersal mid- to late summer is often the best time of the year to find some of the rarer waders in Montgomery. Noah Kahn found a juvenile **White Ibis** at Hughes Hollow on 7/26. Another **White Ibis** was seen on 8/9 by Ryan Webb at Lake Churchill in Germantown. Will Knowland picked out a **Snowy Egret** among a group of **Great Egrets** at Lake Churchill on 8/8. **Little Blue Herons** were seen along the Potomac River and also at Lake Churchill in late July through early August.

Some terrific shorebirds were seen in the county between July and October. Kurt Schwarz found a **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Hughes Hollow on 7/31. Dave Czaplak noted four **Stilt Sandpipers** at the Summit Hall Turf Farm on 8/12. Dave also reported three **Sanderlings** flying past Violette's Lock on 8/23. Only a few reports came in this year of **American Golden-Plover** during return migration. Tim Carney was able to spot one on the Summit Hall Turf Farm on 8/9. Two good shorebird finds for Mike Ostrowski on 9/1 included a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** at Lois Green CP and a **Short-billed Dowitcher** in the "big pond" at Blue Mash.

Dave Czaplak happened to be in the "right" place at the "right" time and probably more importantly possessed the "right" knowledge to correctly identify Montgomery County's first record of a **Gull-billed Tern**. Dave was standing on the banks of the Potomac upstream of Violette's Lock on 7/31 when he noted a tern flying downriver. Skilled enough to differentiate flight styles between terns, he was able to determine it was neither a Forster's nor a Royal, and he snapped a few photos to confirm the bird's identity as a **Gull-billed Tern**.

A surprise visitor to Sue Smith's backyard on 9/16 was a **Rufous Hummingbird**. The bird was a juvenile male, and Sue got some great confirming photos for her submission to eBird.

There were a few reports of **Red-breasted Nuthatch** from Wheaton RP in September. **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were found at the park on both 9/14 and 9/23. **Olive-**

sided and **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** were also seen at Wheaton RP. Woody and Rae Dubois found an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** there on 9/3 and, along with Gail Mackiernan and Barry Cooper, found another one on 9/22. Gail and Barry had an additional **Olive-sided Flycatcher** at Wheaton RP on 9/9. Dave Czaplak noted an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** at Hughes Hollow on 8/22. **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** were reported from Wheaton RP from 9/2 to 9/7. Mike Bowen and Gerry Hawkins identified an **Alder Flycatcher** by its song at Hughes Hollow on 8/11. Mary Ann Todd and Dave Czaplak were able to find the same bird the following day on 8/12.

Warblers of note over the past few months, include a **Golden-winged Warbler** found by David Gersten near Pine Lake within Wheaton RP on 8/31. The following day, Evelyn Ralston reported a **Lawrence's Warbler (Blue-winged x Golden-winged hybrid)** from Wheaton RP. Jim Nelson observed a **Mourning Warbler** at Hughes Hollow on 9/29. A **Connecticut Warbler** found by Daniel Kraushaar at Blue Mash on 10/5 was also seen by Maryellen and Justin Culotta. Another **Connecticut Warbler** was well seen at Hughes Hollow the same day by Linda Friedland, Lydia Schindler, Evelyn Ralston, and Adam Parr.

Jim Felley reported a **Henslow's Sparrow** at Hughes Hollow on 9/19. Karl Krueger observed a **Mute Swan** mixed in with a flock of Canada Geese on the Potomac River near Pennyfield Lock on 8/12. On 8/6, while walking through a parking lot at NIH in Bethesda, Evelyn Ralston heard an unknown bird call. Tracking the call to the bird that was making it, Evelyn was surprised to find a **Monk Parakeet**. Not known however, was whether the bird was feral or someone's escaped pet.

A total of 244 bird species have been reported in the county this year, excluding Jim Felley's **Henslow's Sparrow** and Evelyn Ralston's **Monk Parakeet**, which were not counted by eBird. This is short of 2012's 257, but there are still two months left to go. The top five listers in the county so far this year include Mary Ann Todd at 219, Dave Czaplak at 211, Linda Friedland at 200, "Team Dubois" (Woody and Rae) at 195, and Lydia Schindler at 192. ♪

—Andy Martin



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL



I/we wish to join the Montgomery Bird Club, a chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society, for the year beginning September 2014 and enclose dues for:

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☐ Sustaining—\$70 (\$20 Chapter/\$50 State)
☐ Household—\$40 (\$15 Chapter/\$25 State)
☐ Life—\$1200 (\$200 Chapter/ \$1000 State)
☐ Junior—\$6 (\$1 Chapter/\$5 State)
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☐ Check if you **DO NOT** want your email address listed on the members-only section of our website.

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☐ Check if you would like to read *The Chat* on the Internet instead of receiving it by mail. You will receive an email message when *The Chat* is posted on the club website.

☐ Check if you would like to receive *The Maryland Yellowthroat* on the Internet instead of receiving it by mail.

☐ Check if you would like to work on a committee.

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