



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

February 2017

Volume 48, No. 1

President's Chat

Happy New Year! 2017 has already started well with some great birds in the county, including Northern Shrike. I hope many of you had a chance to join in and support at least one of the Christmas Counts which took place in our area. As well as a chance to get out birding it's also a chance to contribute to a long-running citizen science project which provides important information about the distribution and occurrence of birds across the continent.

You may not have been getting a paper copy of the *Chat* recently. We've decided to send this copy of the *Chat* to all of our current members, as well as those of you who were members until recently but haven't rejoined this year, to make sure you know what we are doing and to remind you of what joining the club can mean. You may have seen that we are now on Facebook (www.facebook.com/MontgomeryBirdClub/) and I'm sure you are also hearing from us regularly. But we know that sometimes there is nothing like having a paper copy in your hands, so consider this as a New Year present from us, if you don't already get the *Chat*.

For those of you reading this who have not yet rejoined, it would be a great New Year's present for Maryland's birds if you were to fill out the membership renewal form in the *Chat* and send it in. As you might know, the bulk of your membership goes to support the Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS), with a minor share paying for the activities the Montgomery Bird Club does such as hiring meeting space and paying for printing and mailing of the *Chat*! MOS does a lot of important conservation



work in the state, maintains sanctuaries which can provide some great birding opportunities, and also does a lot of outreach to the wider community to educate them about birding and bird conservation. If you don't rejoin we will of course stop sending the *Chat*.

We have a great set of field trips coming up led by knowledgeable and dedicated leaders – see our website or connect with us on Facebook. We will also be having our Annual Social at the ANS headquarters at Woodend on Friday, March 10th.

As always, I hope to see you out in the field, or at one of our forthcoming events.

Good birding! ♪

—Clive Harris



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Montgomery Bird Club



Winter/Spring Calendar

February 15 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. Janet Millenson on Three Centuries of Birds—Artists and Writers before Audubon. Join us to learn more about the art and writing in early bird books (mostly mid-1500s to mid-1800s).

March 10 (Friday), 7 p.m. Annual Montgomery Bird Club Social, Audubon Naturalist Society, Woodend, Chevy Chase. Registration information is at the end of the *Chat*.

April 19 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. The Azores and Madeira with Phil Davis. In 2016, Phil and Barbara led a group of birders on a 17-day grand tour of the Azores and Madeira Islands. The tour took them to seven different islands where they targeted 12 endemic bird species and 24 endemic subspecies. A key tour objective was to observe the endemic subspecies and put them “into the bank” since genetic analysis continues to dominate avian taxonomy and endemic island subspecies have high potential for future splits.

May 17 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. Kurt Schwartz on Cape May. Kurt will share his latest photos from his frequent trips to Cape May especially during the migration season.

Meetings take place at the Potomac Presbyterian Church, 10301 River Road, Potomac. From the Beltway, take Exit 39 (River Road/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 are 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 Clive Harris at 301-320-9769 or clivegharris@yahoo.com

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Visit our homepage at www.montgomerybirdclub.org

Deadline for submissions is the 5th of the preceding month.
Send items to Patrick Newcombe, 12005 Smoketree Road, Potomac, MD 20854. Phone: 301-424-3259, e-mail: stonecroft5@verizon.net.



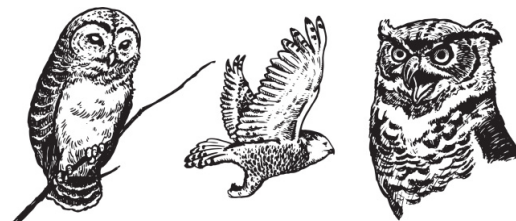
Hoo has seen an Owl?

Barred, Eastern Screech, and Great Horned are the three owls most commonly found in Montgomery County, but are by no means the only owls around in the frigid winter months. Long-eared, Northern Saw-whet, and even Snowy Owls can sometimes be found in winter.

Montgomery Bird Club members can sometimes get great views of Short-eared Owls during a trip to the closed Oaks Landfill (see opposite page for an upcoming trip here on 2/5).

Unfortunately, many other owls have become much harder to see due to habitat loss. The now-defunct Gude's Nursery often hosted Barn, Long-eared, and Northern Saw-whet Owls, but since the nursery's removal the owls have become rare.

The locations of sensitive owl species should not be widely distributed, especially on listserves or eBird. The well-being of the owl should override birder's interest, and flushing an owl for a better view or photograph is never appropriate. ♪




Welcome New Members!

Simon Calle
Alice Jacobsohn
Joseph and Phyllis Meltzer
Kristen Sterbenz
Mimi Zucker
Jesse Joad
Ann Bonham
Laura Strombotne



February 2017

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.).



February 5 (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 for distant birds. We have special permission to enter this "closed to the public" landfill so reservations are essential. Limit 20. Meet at 3:30 pm. on landfill entrance drive at 6001 Rt. 108, Laytonsville, Md. Contact the leader for reservations and more information. LEADER: Mark England 240-375-4500 (cell) or markengland@canamcontractors.com



FEBRUARY 26 (Sunday) McKee-Beshers WMA (Hughes Hollow and Sycamore Landing Road). Join us to explore McKee-Beshers WMA in search of wintering birds and for the possibility of a seven-woodpecker day. Swamp Sparrow, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and other wintering songbirds likely. Meet at 8 a.m. at the Hughes Hollow parking lot on Hunting Quarter Road at the entrance to the impoundments. Limit 12. For more information and reservations contact the LEADERS: Patrick Newcombe (stonecroft5@verizon.net) and Kevin Ebert (kev.ebert@gmail.com).



March 8 (Wednesday); March 14 (Tuesday); March 16 (Thursday) INFORMAL LATE AFTERNOON WALKS until dusk. Joint trip with Audubon Naturalist Society. Meet promptly at 4 p.m. at the end of Seneca Road at Riley's Lock, on the bridge. We will be checking out the river and the leader will not leave Riley's for Hughes Hollow until 5:30 p.m. Highlights here will include waterfowl flying in to roost. We will try for displaying woodcock if they are in the vicinity. Bring scope, flashlight and wear "muddy conditions" footwear. Reservations not required. For more information, call the LEADER: Jim Green 301-742-0036 (cell).

MARCH 11 (Saturday) PATUXENT RIVER PARK, Jug Bay Natural Area, Prince Georges Co., Half-day. Joint trip with Audubon Naturalist Society. Waterfowl, Wilson's Snipe, winter and early spring songbirds, Ospreys displaying. Meet at 8 am at the parking by the park headquarters. Wear muddy conditions footgear. Reservation required. Limit 15. LEADER: John Bjerke johnbjerke1@mac.com

APRIL 9 (Sunday) HUGHES HOLLOW AND VICINITY. Half day. We will explore the wetlands of Hughes Hollow and Sycamore Landing. Species to be expected include Red-headed Woodpeckers, Wood Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, and many other marsh dwellers. A chance for several warblers including Prothonotary. Meet at Hughes Hollow parking lot in the McKee-Beshers WMA at 7 a.m. Reservations are not required. For more information, contact the LEADER: Jim Nelson kingfishers2@verizon.net or 240 515-4517 (cell)



APRIL 22 (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. Call leader for reservations and directions. Trip is limited to 8-10 participants. LEADER: Mark England 240-207-3132, 240-375-4500 (cell) or markengland@canamcontractors.com



April 23 (Sunday) HUGH MAHANES PRESIDENTS' WALK AT HUGHES: HUGHES HOLLOW. Half day. Participation of all former Chapter 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. 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 7:00 a.m. at the Hughes Hollow parking lot. Reservations required. For more information, directions, and reservations, contact the LEADER: Clive Harris clivegharris@yahoo.com

APRIL 30 (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, Virginia. 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. LEADERS: Mike Bowen, 301-530-5764 or dhmbowen@yahoo.com, and Gerry Hawkins, 571-277-8406 or maineusa@comcast.net.

MAY 2 (Tuesday) and MAY 6 (Saturday) - ROCK CREEK PARK, DC. One-third day. Early migrant warblers, vireos, etc. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Picnic Area #18, one-half mile below the Nature Center on Ridge Road. Reservations required. Call the leader for more information or specific directions. LEADER: Wallace Kornack (202) 338-7859

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Field Trips

MAY 5 (Friday) BIRDING BY EAR AT HUGHES HOLLOW. Tune up your ears as we listen for and learn to identify the songs and calls of migrant and local breeding birds. The trip will be geared to new birders but all are welcome. Meet at 7 am at the parking lot at Hughes Hollow. Limit 10. Reservations required. For more information, email the LEADER: Paul Woodward at grackling@ATT.NET

May 7 (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 or gradko@yahoo.com

MAY 7 (Sunday) IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE, BETHESDA-CHEVY CHASE CHAPTER, CONSERVATION FARM. Half day. Once again, the B-CC Chapter is generously providing us access to this large private property south of Poolesville. Woods, hedgerows, streams, fields, and ponds provide a wide range of bird habitats, and migration should be well underway. Trip will start at 7 a.m. at the League's Chapterhouse. Reservations required, limit 12. Driving directions will be provided to those who make reservations. For reservations and more information, contact the LEADER: Jim Nelson kingfishers2@verizon.net or 240-515-4517.

Meet a Trip Leader: Mike Bowen

Mike Bowen has been an integral part of the Montgomery Bird Club and the Maryland Ornithological Society for many years. We thank him for all the time and effort he has put into the club, and would like to provide members with the opportunity to learn more and be inspired by his interest in birding and the Montgomery Bird Club.

Year joined Montgomery Bird Club: 1967—the year I moved to Washington DC from Wilmington, Del. Ran into a Montgomery field trip on Kent Island and was overwhelmed by how friendly and helpful everyone was. Moved to the county in 1969. Club met at the Perpetual Building (no longer there) in Bethesda in those days. Known as the “Montgomery County Chapter” back then.

Volunteer positions with MBC: Vice-President in the mid-’70s, but could not take on Presidency due to work commitments. Chapter Director 1992-94; Vice-President 1998-2000; President 2000-02; State Director 2005-09

Year began leading bird walks: Sometime in the mid-1970’s. Led walks for ANS, too. Was always nervous about leading, as so many better birders came on the trips!

Favorite bird: Very difficult to select, but in Montgomery County, my probable favorite is Louisiana Waterthrush – I listen hopefully for its song every year, when it’s usually the first warbler to show up in spring.

Favorite bird book: The Collins “Birds of Britain and Europe” is perhaps the best field guide ever published for any part of the world. It is packed with excellent plates and



exceptional text (although the type size is getting a mite small for my eyes!)

Favorite Montgomery County birding spot: Little Falls Parkway, Bethesda. Close to home and seldom birded by anyone else, but on a drizzly day in May it can be packed with goodies.

How did you start birding: In the U.K., by tagging along on fishing trips with my Dad; in the USA, on an April 1966 visit to Waynesboro, VA, when I first came face to face with North American Wood Warblers. Hooked me for all time...

Significant birding accomplishment: When I first got to 700 on my ABA list. At the time I thought it was significant, anyway, but my interest in listing has abated since then, without completely going away.


Memorable birding experience: Getting to see and photograph a Diademed Sandpiper-plover in Chile after a lung-bursting climb up an extremely steep hill at an elevation of 4000 ft.

Something that inspires you about birding: How its appeal never fades, and how it can raise your spirits even when you’ve seen the birds a thousand times before. ♪



Trip Reports

BLACKWATER REFUGE, October 29 Leader: Mark England. Participants: 8 including leader. Weather: Couldn't be better—sunny, 70's, no wind! Species: 47. We convened about 9 a.m. at the Dorchester County Visitor Center at Sailwinds Park in Cambridge, Md. We saw only a few songbirds, including Yellow-rumped Warblers there, and little on the Choptank, so we headed to other spots along the river hoping for some early waterfowl, but were disappointed to see nary a migrant duck, only cormorants and four species of gulls in various plumages. We did see three Royal Terns on the marina pier however. After a mini-mart stop on Rt. 16, we headed down Egypt Road, and saw some nice birds, including Savannah and Swamp Sparrows, Eastern Meadowlarks, several low-coursing Northern Harriers, Red-tailed Hawks, the first of many Bald Eagles, and a few American Kestrels, usually distant or in bad light, but one male did perch nicely for scope views. No Horned Larks or American Pipits this trip, however. Marta Wagner saw a Sharp-shinned Hawk while the rest of us were in the refuge visitor center. At Blackwater, we had extended views of a probable family group of juvenile and adult Red-headed Woodpeckers, a few high-up Brown-headed Nuthatches, and the usual Forster's Terns. There were no pelicans around, but we did have some good scope views of some shorebirds, included 3 Pectoral Sandpipers, a few Dunlin and Greater Yellowlegs, and a single Semipalmated Sandpiper and Black-bellied Plover. As on the Choptank, there were no ducks at all except two American Black Ducks, probably due to the warm weather further north. A few of us went over to Shorters' Wharf Road to view the vast saltmarsh, but seeing only a few more eagles and another harrier, we headed for home before sundown.


OAKS LANDFILL, November 5. Leader: Mark England. Participants: 15 including leader. Weather: Clear and sunny, temps. 38-50 degrees. Species: 26. As usual at this spot, we had good diversity of raptors and sparrows. We started off about 8:15 a.m. by walking the gravel ring road with the sun behind us, and soon found cooperative sparrows sitting up on branches for lengthy views, including Chipping, White-crowned (juvenile), Field, Savannah, and Song. We had less good looks at two Swamp Sparrows

and only a few White-throated, surprisingly. We also had some juncos, for an eight-sparrow day. As it got warmer, we started seeing some raptors, including N. Harrier, and Cooper's, Red-shouldered, and Red-tailed Hawks, though there were no kestrels this day, a fairly common species at the landfill. The big pond was dried-up from the lack of rain, but at the ponds we did find a lone migrant Ruddy Duck. It was a nice day to be out!

SPARROW WALK AT BLUE MASH, November

11. Leaders: Linda Friedland and Lydia Schindler. Participants: 9. Weather: Sunny and mild but breezy. Species: 30. A very congenial group and a pleasant fall morning but a little light on the birds. The most numerous sparrows were the White-throated. We had good looks at Song and Field, as well as juncos and towhees. Just a couple of us glimpsed a Fox Sparrow, which refused to reappear. Flickers were in evidence as were Red-bellied and Pileated Woodpeckers. Other sightings included Eastern Phoebe, both kinglets, numerous bluebirds, and a small flock of waxwings.

LILYPONS/NEW DESIGN ROAD, November 27.

Leader: Clive Harris. A dozen birders gathered early at the gate to Lilypons for this perennially popular walk. We enjoyed decent weather conditions throughout the morning. We found 44 species on the property. This included two American Tree Sparrows that popped up in a mixed sparrow flock. Unfortunately not everybody got on these birds. Another nice sighting was of 3 Rusty Blackbirds who showed well in trees next to the large impoundment near the house. Other than that we did not find anything unusual or out of season but did come across most of the expected birds at this time of year, including American Kestrel, both kinglets, and a total of 8 sparrow species. The latter included a small flock of White-crowned Sparrows seen next to the leader's car as we were concluding our trip. As always we are appreciative of the owners for continuing to allow birders access to this property. After finishing our tour of Lilypons we did a

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Trip Reports

quick inspection of the fields at the corner of Oland Road and Route 85. We saw a flock of 16 Horned Lark in flight over the fields. However, at that time the large flocks of Lark had not yet arrived and so we were out of luck in our quest for Lapland Longspur. After the end of the trip the leader made a dash up to Harford County for a successful twitch of the Black-throated Gray Warbler while a couple of participants went back to Lilypons and added two species for the day, Killdeer and Palm Warbler, bringing us to 48 species for the day.



EARLIEST BIRD WALK- GEORGETOWN RESERVOIR AND D.C. HOTSPOTS, JANUARY 1.

Leader: Mike Bowen. Participants: 12. Weather: Amazingly balmy, with temps. rising to over 50 degrees, and no wind. Species count: 39. Highlights: Georgetown Reservoir was pretty quiet, but it did give us a hen Common Merganser and a single Pied-billed Grebe; the edges held several passerines. Constitution Gardens pond was as always extremely productive; with a large (55) group of Ring-necked Ducks, 7 Gadwalls, two Buffleheads, and an astounding 29 Northern Shovelers. We also saw two perched Red-tailed Hawks. A group of six Black-crowned Night-herons greeted us at the head of the Washington Channel, together with two Pied-billed Grebes. The trees around the FDR Memorial were empty of small birds, probably because of a perched Cooper's Hawk, which allowed great scope and photo views.

Due to a road closure, our time near Hains Point was quite limited; just a few Lesser Scaup were visible among large numbers of Canada Geese, although the leader knew that hundreds of scaup were probably sitting, out of sight, just a little farther downriver.

Off then to the LBJ Grove and Columbia Marina, but with little time to spare. We saw close-in Hooded Mergansers right away, first of the year for all, plus Brown Creeper, juncos and White-throated Sparrows. Two vehicles stopped off briefly at Roaches Run before looping back to Georgetown Reservoir by way of National Airport. There we had our only Belted Kingfisher of the day. A comfortable morning, weather-wise, but perhaps a little

lacking in the bird department. But there's always New Year's Day 2018!



BLUE MASH, January 11. Leader: Stephanie Lovell. Participants: 5. Species: 20. After a few days of 19°, we lucked out with a beginning temperature of 47 going up to 57 by the time we ended our walk. Five people joined me on the sunny beginning up the road to the smaller pond. Big surprise! All the brush has been cut down and there was a clear view of the frozen pond. Nothing on it of course, but we were happy to see clearly into the space, only a couple of deer on the far hill observed us.

The area up to the pond was flattened down from recent storms and there was not a sparrow to be seen. Only where we crossed the road and started walking along the fence line did we see and hear bird life, all the way off in the trees against the sun. We heard more than we saw a distant towhee. A few skeins of Canada Geese went overhead, and a mockingbird watched our progress. A good view of a posing Savannah Sparrow in the brush was had by all. We even bushwhacked into the center of trees at one point where I've found lots of activity in the past, but nothing.

Only when we got to the corner of the turn did we finally find a large group of White-throated Sparrows tucked into the vines. The second fence line provided titmice, lots of cardinals and Blue Jays, Song Sparrows and more White-throats. A few robins flew by at the end. Couldn't find any woodpeckers, we did see a Red-shouldered Hawk sunning itself on a post. All in all a very quiet day with only 20 species total. It was a lovely day to be out though.



Trip Reports

BLACK HILL REGIONAL PARK, January 15. Leader: Gerry Hawkins. Participants: 11. Weather: Mild and sunny. Species count: 39. Highlights: Ten people joined the leader for a waterfowl-focused field trip. We started the field trip at the Visitors Center and then visited the boat ramp area in Black Hill RP and stopped at the nearby Route 121 bridge over Little Seneca Lake. During the trip we saw ten species of waterfowl, with highlights including six Canvasbacks, five Common Goldeneyes, three Gadwall, two American Black Ducks, four Ring-necked Ducks, 15 Buffleheads and large numbers of Common and Hooded Mergansers and Ruddy Ducks.

In addition, we saw several Pied-billed Grebes, American Coots and Great Blue Herons, and a single Double-crested Cormorant, which was classified as rare for this location by eBird. Other birding highlights included two Brown Creepers and an adult Bald Eagle perched and in flight. Overall we saw 39 total species with an excellent diversity of waterfowl, which we thought was terrific for a mild, sunny winter day.



Christmas Bird Count Results

Triadelphia Reservoir CBC, December 17. Compiler: David

Holmes. We almost couldn't have picked a worse day! We awoke to freezing rain. The weather forecast for the previous two days had said "above freezing by 10:00 and in the 40's by 1:00. But, someone forgot to tell the air how to behave. By dark, the temperature had risen to between 34 and 35 degrees.

The rain started at 4:30 A.M.—just as our first owling party arrived on site. They were smart! They went to their nearest participant's house and napped. The rain stopped before noon. Needless to say, our participant total was about half the recent average. Many of our people couldn't get out of their driveways. So, our total party hours was less than half of normal and the number of participants was just over half of normal. We did have more feeder watchers than usual though.

Our total of individual birds, 9,490, was between one-quarter and one-third of normal. However, our species count surprised me. Eighty-three species is an almost average number. The most amazing birds were the flock of 20 Sandhill Cranes that took off from Triadelphia Reservoir about 3:00 P.M. and flew basically west. We have pictures. Our other "write-ins" were all waterfowl.

Three Ross's Geese were the next most unusual but our three Redheads appeared for only the third time since 1999. There were NO lingering small birds. We even missed Yellow-rumped Warbler. But, by then, waterfowl had been pushed off the small farm ponds onto the reservoir and saved the species count.

Great thanks to all who did get out, and my condolences to those who couldn't! We look forward to the 2017 count. ♪

Seneca CBC, December 18. Compiler: Jim Nelson. Count day began unusually warm (60's in the morning) with intermittent light rain, then turned blustery and colder in the afternoon (low 40's). On this 58th Seneca CBC, our intrepid counters found 100 species on count day, well ahead of the last two years and well above the 96 average for the previous 10 years. Five additional species were found during "count week" (the period starting three days before and ending 3 days after the count day) for a grand total of 105 species, our highest since 2000. In spite of the warm fall and early winter we had good waterfowl diversity and many with higher numbers than usual (except American Black Duck, third lowest count ever). We had most of the expected winter visitors (except Pine Siskin). The fall weather may have helped give us some unusual species. Most notable are three species, Eurasian Wigeon, Le Conte's Sparrow, and Blue Grosbeak, which, if accepted, will be the first ever for our count.

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Christmas Counts, *continued from previous page*

In addition, counters found an Osprey (fifth ever), two Sandhill Cranes (seventh ever), a Spotted Sandpiper (fifth ever), and a Baltimore Oriole (third ever). More regular in recent years, but still unusual, are Red-breasted Merganser, Horned Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, and Peregrine Falcon. A few other notable results include a new high with 38 Wild Turkey, highest count for Canada Goose since 2002, and highest count for Savannah Sparrow since 1983.

On the other end of the spectrum were the low counts, which included Northern Flicker, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and White-throated and Swamp Sparrows.

On a final positive note, we added an Eared Grebe during count week, another species new to the Seneca CBC, leaving us with an incredible four new species, bringing the cumulative species list for the Seneca CBC to 167 count day species and 171 combined count day and count-week-only species! Thanks to everyone who came out to count this year in spite of the predicted rainy day and especially to the sector leaders for their hard work before, during, and after the count. I will post a more detailed report on the Club's website. ♪

Sugarloaf Mountain CBC, January 2. Compiler: Janet Millenson. The weather for the 32nd Sugarloaf Mountain Christmas Bird Count on January 2 was dim, drizzly, and dreary. Most birds looked gray in the chilly mist. However, our total count for the day was 86 species — the same as last year, when it was beautifully sunny and mild! Many species tallies were below average, but we hit a record high for Hooded Merganser and added a new bird to our cumulative list (Greater Scaup) thanks to Gemma Radko and Claire Wolfe. Chipping Sparrow numbers were near their record high, and a majority of sectors reported ravens. Evelyn Ralston's team found a Horned Grebe on the Potomac, a species last seen on this count 10 years ago, and Jim Nelson's group spotted a Common Loon at Black Hill, a bird not seen for 8 years. The only record low tally was for Yellow-rumped Warbler, although Red-tailed Hawk came close to its low. There were six impressive Count Week sightings, too: Greater White-fronted Goose, Ross's Goose, Northern Pintail, Double-crested Cormorant, Gray Catbird, and Lincoln's Sparrow. I'm deeply grateful to the damp but dedicated crew of volunteers who made this count possible. And extra thanks go to the Friends of Ten Mile Creek & Little Seneca Reservoir (www.tenmilecreek.org), who greeted us with hot and tasty appetizers when we convened for a Tally Rally at Bennigan's in Clarksburg. The next Sugarloaf CBC will be held on Sunday, December 31, 2017. See you then! ♪

Book Review – A Field Guide to Birds you will never, ever, see

A Field Guide to Mesozoic Birds and other Winged Dinosaurs, Matthew P. Martyniuk

Yes, this is a real book. I didn't know it existed until Amazon suggested it to me when I was browsing for presents for Christmas. I have quite a few field guides and family identification guides in my collection now, but when I saw it I knew I had to add it to my collection.

So what does a field guide to long-extinct fauna cover? It has some introductory chapters covering the very definition of what a bird is—which the author notes is more of a vernacular than a scientific term—and the evolution of birds.

There is a fascinating timeline which charts the acquisition of avian characteristics within the *Dinosauria*, ending with the development of a strongly keeled breastbone and,

in *Aves*, the loss of teeth. The first feathered fossils have, according to this guide, been dated to around 161-155 million years ago. The earliest fossil evidence of a true bird is around 85 million years ago, although the author notes molecular evidence suggests that they originated perhaps as much as 130 million years ago.

Members of some modern bird groups including the *Charadriiformes* (shorebirds), *Anseriformes* (waterfowl), *Galliformes* (game birds), ratites and allies, and *Pelecaniformes* (including cormorants) were present before the major extinction event that occurred 66 million years ago and wiped the dinosaurs, and many other species, from the earth.

The bulk of the guide is devoted to species accounts, as with any normal field guide. There is an illustration of each species along with text that indicates roughly when the species occurred, estimated size, where the fossil(s) have been found, and conjectures on habits including

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Birds of Note (late September 2016 to early January 2017)

An excellent way to end 2016 was a **Eurasian Wigeon** found on 12/18 during the Seneca Christmas Bird count. Andy Martin, Jack Devine, Maryellen and Justin Culotta, and Bob Cantilli were covering the Poplar Spring Animal Sanctuary when Bob first noticed the wigeon. Recognizing the rarity of the bird and lacking a camera, the group took Jim Nelson to the bird where he closely photographed the wigeon for documentation. Thanks to the cooperative sanctuary, many birders were able to go onto this private property and see this gorgeous third county record (according to eBird.) And as an exciting start to 2017, Kathy Colston found a **Northern Shrike** on Triadelphia Lake Road on the very first day of the new year. Many birders were able to enjoy this northern vagrant despite the snow and cold.

On 12/16, Jay Sheppard located three **Ross's Geese** and a **Snow Goose** at Waredaca Farm. Jeff Scepora also had a few Snow Geese, with 112 flying over Browns Bridge Road on 12/7. That is nearly twice the previous county high count of 60. On 12/31, Kevin Ebert found a **Greater White-fronted Goose** at Black Hill Regional Park.

Michael Bowen found an **Eared Grebe** at Riley's Lock on 12/21. Many people saw this grebe before it wandered upstream and disappeared. Dave Czaplak had three **Surf Scoters** at Violette's Lock on 11/22. On 12/9, Dave Czaplak also had two **Black Scoters** at Violette's Lock. He also had two **Red-throated Loons** at Violette's Lock, one on 11/29 and a different bird on 12/1.

Joe Sedransk had a fantastic 20 **Sandhill Cranes**, another county high count, foraging in the fields along Damascus Road on 12/18. Dave Czaplak glimpsed two Sandhill Cranes flying up from the Lowes Golf Course from Violette's Lock on 12/15 and 1/4.

Way back in the fall, there were a few notable sandpipers that came through the county on the tail end of shorebird migration. On 9/29, Dave Czaplak had a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** at the polo fields on Hughes Road. On 10/1, Brenton Reyner and Thomas Doebel found a **White-rumped Sandpiper** foraging with Killdeer also at the Hughes Road polo fields.



At Violette's Lock, Dave Czaplak found a **Laughing Gull** and **Lesser Black-backed Gull** back on 9/29. The Lesser Black-backed Gull was a quite a bit early, being the only September record in eBird. On 10/6, TC Brown flushed a **Barn Owl** from the C&O canal near Sycamore Landing.

On 10/30, Mark Johnson had an **Orange-crowned Warbler** at Blue Mash Nature Trail. Just a couple days later on 11/1, Brenton Reyner had a different bird at Hughes Hollow. Tom Kimbis found an extremely late **Black-and-white Warbler** on 1/6 at the fields along Sycamore Landing Road.

At Little Bennett Regional Park, William Adams, Woody Dubois, and Rae Dubois came across a **Clay-colored Sparrow** on 10/9. On 10/1, Clive Harris was alert enough to pick out a **Dickcissel** sans binoculars at the Captain's Market in Cabin John.

In "twitching news", a total of 255 bird species were reported in Montgomery County this year. The top five eBird listers in the county include Dave Czaplak with 237, MaryAnn Todd with 216, Thomas Doebel with 215, "Team Dubois" at 207, and Robin Skinner at 206. ♪

—Kevin Ebert

Montgomery County's Red-headed Woodpeckers

Walking through the woods behind Hughes Hollow or along Sycamore Landing Road, birders often are lucky to spot this striking bird. The only North American woodpecker with an entirely red head, the Red-headed Woodpecker can be distinguished from the Red-bellied Woodpecker, which has much more restricted red on the head with extensive black and white barring on the back. Comparatively, the Red-headed Woodpecker shows a black back and primaries with a large white patch near the wing tips and a white front of the body. The Pileated Woodpecker is a much larger bird with a red crest, as opposed to a round head. While immatures are far less striking, they still show the same white patch on the wing as adults.

Given the bright colors on Red-headed Woodpeckers, one would expect them to be quite easy to find. However, this is often not the case. Red-headed Woodpeckers are often heard before they are seen, so listen for their distinctive “quaar” or rattling alternative call. These woodpeckers often perch at the tops of dead branches, guarding their territories, which can make them hard to spot when unmoving. However, because they guard their territories so fiercely, Red-headed Woodpeckers can often be located chasing other birds, including other Red-headed Woodpeckers and even small songbirds such as the Tufted Titmouse.

Their aggressive nature likely stems from their propensity to store insects and seeds, including acorns, in wood or bark. While four North American woodpecker species do this, Red-headed Woodpeckers will uniquely cover their prizes, sometimes still alive, in bark to hide them from other birds. This competitiveness has manifested itself in culture, the woodpecker being used as a Cherokee war symbol. Red-headed Woodpeckers have been known to remove eggs and destroy the nests of other birds, even entering Wood Duck boxes to puncture the eggs inside.

Red-headed Woodpeckers are not new to North American forests, and 2-million-year-old fossils of the woodpecker from the Pleistocene age have been found. Unfortunately, however, their calls are becoming less frequent. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology reports a population decline of two percent each year since 1966, making for an

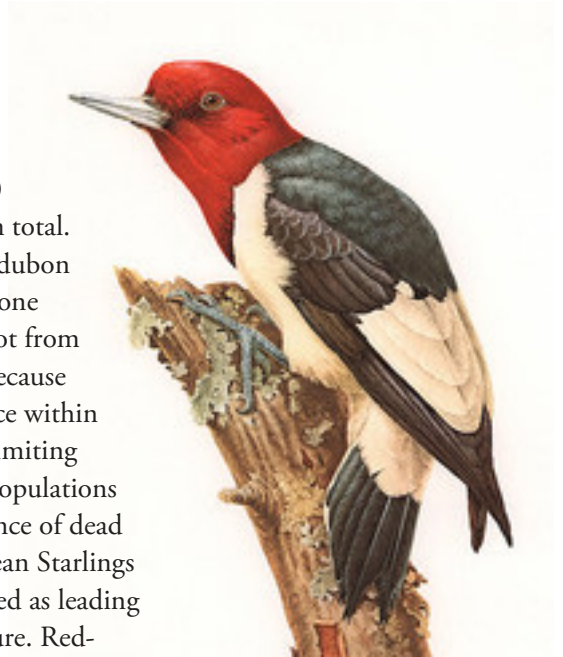
approximately 70 percent decline in total.

In the 1800s, Audubon reported that, in one day, 100 were shot from one cherry tree because of their abundance within orchards. Now, limiting factors on their populations may be the presence of dead trees, and European Starlings have been recorded as leading cause of nest failure. Red-headed Woodpeckers therefore remind us of the dangers of invasive species, as well as the importance of leaving dead trees for the life they support.

The habitat along Sycamore Landing Road is illustrious of the need to conserve dead trees. Thanks to environmentally aware people, many dead trees are left standing in the area. Dead wood is alive with insects, and Red-headed Woodpeckers can frequently be seen foraging on dead limbs. These limbs also command clear views of the surrounding area for sentinel Red-headed Woodpeckers to watch for intruders. Dead limbs are essential not only to Red-headed Woodpeckers, but provide nesting sites to birds such as Northern Flickers and Eastern Bluebirds.

Due to their uncommon status, Red-headed Woodpeckers are much sought-after birds in Montgomery County. They are often seen in the trees along Sycamore Landing Road, especially in the forest opening across from the first large parking area after turning onto the road. At Hughes Hollow, the Red-headed Woodpeckers are most often seen in the woods behind the impoundments. In these two locations, seven woodpecker days can be incredibly satisfying and a rewarding way to spend a cold, winter morning. ♪

—Patrick Newcombe



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL 2017

I/we wish to join the Montgomery Bird Club, a chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society, for the year beginning September 2016 and enclose dues for:

☐ Individual—\$30 (\$10 Chapter/\$20 State)
☐ Sustaining—\$70 (\$20 Chapter/\$50 State)
☐ Household—\$40 (\$15 Chapter/\$25 State)
☐ Life—\$1200 (\$200 Chapter/ \$1000 State)
☐ Junior—\$6 (\$1 Chapter/\$5 State)
☐ Associate*—\$8

*member of MOS through another chapter

\$ _____ **Dues**
 \$ _____ **Donation to Claudia Wilds Fund**
 \$ _____ **Additional Donation to MOS**
 \$ _____ **Total enclosed**

☐ New Membership ☐ Renewal

Total number of Club members _____
 (Household, Sustaining, or Life memberships)

Please make check payable to MBC/MOS and mail to
 Helen Patton, 429 Hamilton Avenue, Silver Spring, MD
 20901

NAME(S) _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

TELEPHONE _____

E-MAIL _____

☐ Check if you **DO NOT** want your email address listed on the members-only section of our website.

List your cellphone here if you **DO** want it listed on the members-only section of our website. _____

☐ Check if you would like to receive the *Chat* by mail. Otherwise, you will be notified 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.

BOOK REVIEW *continued from page 8*

what it ate. You can't help but be impressed by the skill of paleontologist in identifying small bits of bone and from there building up a picture of what the animal looked like. Of course, the colors depicted are conjecture. The author does argue however that ancient birds and feathered creatures would not likely have had bright yellow, orange, red or green feathers as these can only be generated by an ability to transfer carotenoids into feathers. This is not present in many older bird orders, such as ducks, geese and ratites and probably is a recent evolution.

The species are arranged in an order following the evolution into true birds. It starts therefore with flightless bipedal species of varying sizes. This includes the enormous Erlian Gigantic Raptor (*Gigantoraptor erlianensis*), which was around 23 feet long and about 2 times the height of a person. It lived in Mongolia around 70 million years ago. Most species were much smaller though, many not much bigger than modern-day chickens.

My favorites are the plates which cover species most similar to present day birds. This includes such fabulously named birds as Gregory's Polar Bird (*Polarornis gregorii*), depicted as being very similar to present-day loons and likely part of this lineage; and the IAA Vega Bird (*Vegavis iaa*), which is shown as being quite similar to some "primitive" waterfowl, such as Magpie Goose, based also on likely relations to the *Anseriformes*.

This book is likely to appeal to those who have an interest in paleontology. But you don't have to be a dinosaur buff to enjoy this book—it will appeal to anyone with some curiosity about early birds.

—Clive Harris





The Chat
MBC/Maryland Ornithological Society
429 Hamilton Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20901

ANNUAL MBC SOCIAL

Friday, March 10, 2017

Guest of Honor: Anna Urciolo

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. Bring appetizers to share.

There will be a Silent Auction of a selection of Claudia Wild's books.

The evening will feature the traditional members' slide show. Please limit your presentation to your 10 favorite digital photos; send them to Stephanie Lovell in digital form (on a thumb drive) in the order you want them to be shown, no later than March 6.

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:

Stephanie Lovell, 15320 Pine Orchard Drive, 3K
Silver Spring, MD 20906

Stephanie's email is ctlovell1@yahoo.com

Name(s) to appear on tags:

Phone #: _____

Signup deadline is March 4.

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

_____ reservations at \$20 per person

\$_____ enclosed

