

# President’s Chat

It’s too bad some of the 66 inches of rain we had over 2018 couldn’t be sent out West. They certainly needed it! 2018 goes into the record books here as the wettest year since they’ve been keeping records. This year’s Christmas Bird Count was certainly soggy, but intrepid members went out anyway. Thanks for keeping up the tradition!

January and February are difficult months for birders. Everything is mostly gray and brown, but ducks are here, and so are loons and woodpeckers so there’s always a reason to get out and see what’s here. March will soon come along with its intimations of Spring and migration and of course our Annual Social. Be sure to sign up; the form is on the last page of this issue of the *Chat*.

One of the most interesting books I’ve read lately is *Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter* by Ben Goldfarb. Beavers and wolves are keystone species. When they are in the neighborhood, they restore the ecology of the area they inhabit. A prime example is what has happened in Yellowstone Park. Willows along Crystal Creek were bare and uprooted by ungulates. The stream was becoming incised into the ground. With the introduction of wolves and then beaver, the willows started to recover and birds, such as the Wilson’s Warbler, returned to their preferred habitat.

The history of the beaver is a long one, beginning with heavy trapping and killing all over the country. From the pilgrims to John Jacob Astor, trappers nearly extirpated all beaver. Few western areas were left with any, and every area suffered because of it. There are now many scientists, ranchers, and passionate citizens called Beaver Believers who go around the country trying to make people understand the value of the beaver. Beaver can slow down floods, filter out pollution, and capture more water for agriculture. They slow down erosion and help fish survive the early years by hiding in the water marshes the beavers create, especially salmon before they go out to sea. Beaver create dams that slow down the water flow of a stream, depositing their sediment loads and allowing streambeds to rebuild themselves. They create marshes and replenish the water tables.

Ben Goldfarb has written one of the only books devoted to the history of the beaver and why beavers are so important to the land and water ecology. He interviewed and visited many areas of





the country where people were relocating beaver and helping them to thrive. Many ranchers and homeowners think beavers are “varmints” and will kill them. But slowly people are being converted as the Beaver Believers relocate them and the rivers and streams recover and flourish. Unfortunately, the beaver is a tasty morsel for a wolf or a mountain lion so not all have prospered in the relocation effort. There are even efforts in Scotland and England to reintroduce the beaver, long absent from the Highlands, to mixed

results.

When we think of the awful summer fires that the West Coast had last year, mostly because of the tinder-dry landscape, something needs to be done. Reintroducing beaver all up and down the West Coast may not be a quick and easy answer, but it would be a start. They need more water out there, and we need to learn how to harmoniously coexist on our one and only planet.

Stephanie Lovell

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# Calendar

**February 20, 2019 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. Bruce M. Beehler, *North on the Wing: Travels with the Songbird Migration of Spring*.** Come and get ready for Spring migration with author, blogger, naturalist, and ornithologist Bruce M. Beehler. In 2015 he followed songbird migration from Texas to Northern Ontario with the goal of observing all 37 wood warblers on their prime birding habitat. He recounted his trip in a wonderful book, *North on the Wing: Travels with the Songbird Migration of Spring*, which he will sign after his presentation. Besides *North on the Wing*, Beehler has published a dozen books or monographs, many on birds and birding in New Guinea, and more than 85 scholarly papers. He currently serves on the Scientific Advisory Board of the Rainforest Trust and is a research associate of the American Bird Conservancy.

**March 8, 2019 (Friday), 6:30 p.m. Montgomery Bird Club Annual Social.** The announcement of the Member of the Year, the projection of photographs by Club members, and a delicious dinner are highlights of our annual get-together at Woodend. Please look for the signup form on the last page of this issue of the *Chat*.

**April 24, 2019 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. Gail Mackiernan, *Mongolia: Birding in the Footsteps of Genghis Khan*.**

**May 15, 2019 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m.** More information to come.

**June 8 (Saturday), 5–8 p.m. Montgomery Bird Club Picnic.** Please join us for the Montgomery Bird Club picnic at Black Hill Regional Park. Bring a dish to share—we will eat and then go birding in the early evening. Please remember that no alcoholic drinks are allowed in the park—please bring sodas, water, and iced tea. Families are most welcome

## The Sky Dances of the American Woodcock

An early sign of spring is the displaying and peenting of the American Woodcock. The Montgomery Bird Club is fortunate to have Jim Green who generously leads three early evening walks every March, ending in a search for American Woodcocks. After checking out Riley's Lock and Hughes Hollow for waterfowl, trip participants drive to Sycamore Landing Road. It is still daylight, and the woodcocks, with their light brown, buff, black, and gray tones, are camouflaged with the ground. As twilight approaches, an American Woodcock may venture from the forest edges into the open fields.

In the near dark, the male's courtship display begins with loud and buzzy "peents" followed by a sky dance—flying up to 300 feet in the air and then steeply diving with a distinct vibrating, twittering sound made by modified wing feathers. Upon landing, he may "dance" for any females in the near darkness.

The brief glimpses of the male's sky dance and his loud nasal peents are a memorable first sign of spring. Once again this year, Jim is leading evening walks on March 6, 12, and 14. While an American Woodcock sighting is not guaranteed, Jim's wealth of knowledge, good humor, and friendly warmth make for a fun evening.

## American Woodcock Fun Facts

- \* Woodcocks' eyes are set far back in their head so they can see 360 degrees.
- \* They rock back and forth as they forage along the ground probing the soil with their long bills.
- \* Their flexible bill is specialized to extract earthworms (90% of their diet) and other invertebrates from soft soil.
- \* Woodcocks are crepuscular—primarily active during twilight (periods of dawn and dusk).
- \* The male woodcocks do not defend the nest or raise the chicks.
- \* Woodcocks turn their bodies between "peents," so, while it often sounds like they are moving further away, chances are they are still in the same place.

## Club News

Happy Birthday to Don Messersmith! The Montgomery Bird Club extends its warm wishes to Don Messersmith on the occasion of his 90th birthday in December. Don has taught ornithology to many generations of birders and continues to watch birds and teach others about them.

Do you know a young birder? Please let them know about the Youth Maryland Ornithological Society. Check it out at <https://mdbirds.org/young-birders>.



# Field Trips

*Please note: Registration for joint MBC/ANS trips is now being done online at [ANShome.org/adults](http://ANShome.org/adults).*

**FEBRUARY 2 (Saturday) OAKS LANDFILL, LAYTONSVILLE.** TRIP IS FULL. CONTACT LEADER TO BE PUT ON WAITLIST. 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 they are 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 p.m. on landfill entrance drive at 6001 Rt. 108, Laytonsville, Md. Contact the leader for reservations and more information. LEADER: Mark England at [markengland@canamcontractors.com](mailto:markengland@canamcontractors.com) or 240-375-4500 (cell).

**FEBRUARY 6 (Wednesday) BLUE MASH.** A midweek morning walk geared to new birders. We'll look for the expected winter birds: cardinals, towhees, and sparrows as well as raptors (Northern Harrier a possibility) and ducks. 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 9 a.m. Reservations not necessary. For directions or more information, call or email the LEADER: Stephanie Lovell at [ctlovell1@yahoo.com](mailto:ctlovell1@yahoo.com) or 240-242 3235.

**MARCH 6 (Wednesday), MARCH 12 (Tuesday), and MARCH 14 (Thursday) INFORMAL LATE AFTERNOON BIRD WALKS** until dusk. Joint trips with Audubon Naturalist Society. Meet promptly at 4:30 p.m. at the end of Seneca Road at Riley's Lock "on the bridge." We'll be checking out the Potomac River for waterfowl, gulls, terns, etc. Next stop will be Hughes Hollow (part of McKee-Beshers WMA). Potential highlights here include early Tree Swallows, calling Pied-billed Grebes, and Wood Ducks and other waterfowl flying into roost. We'll finish with American Woodcock display if they are in the vicinity. Bring scope, flashlight, and wear "muddy conditions" footwear. Reservations are not required—all are welcome. For more information, call the LEADER: Jim Green at 301-742-0036.

**MARCH 9 (Saturday) PATUXENT RIVER PARK, Jug Bay Natural Area, Prince George's County.** 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 the parking area by park headquarters. Wear muddy conditions footwear. Registration required; register online at [www.anshome.org/adults](http://www.anshome.org/adults). Limit: 15. For more information, contact the LEADER: Clive Harris at [clivegharris@yahoo.com](mailto:clivegharris@yahoo.com).

**APRIL 7 (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, but please contact the leader if you are planning to come so he can provide additional information before the trip. Contact the LEADER: Jim Nelson at [kingfishers2@verizon.net](mailto:kingfishers2@verizon.net) or 240-515-4517 (cell).

**APRIL 14 (Sunday) WHEATON REGIONAL PARK TRASH CLEANUP.** Wheaton Regional Park hosts amazing birds during migration and a nice assortment of resident birds most of the year, not to mention the occasional otter at Pine Lake. It's also a popular place for picnics, children's birthday parties, and fishing. The flip side of the park's popularity is a steady increase in trash: cans, plastic bags, bottles, etc. For the first time last year we did a cleanup, and we were all surprised by the amount of stuff we collected. Let's repeat and make the place better for the birds, birders, and all visitors. Meet at the Shorefield parking lot near the carousel at 7:30 a.m. for a pre-cleanup bird walk or at 9 a.m. for the cleanup. Bags, gloves, and grabbers will be provided. Rubber boots recommended. We'll finish before noon. Number of participants unlimited, the more the better, but please sign up by emailing the organizer, Evelyn Ralston, at [evelynralston@icloud.com](mailto:evelynralston@icloud.com).

**APRIL 20 (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. Limit: 8–10. LEADER: Mark England at [markengland@canamcontractors.com](mailto:markengland@canamcontractors.com) or 240-375-4500 (cell).

**APRIL 28 (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

# Field Trips

the refuge at 7:30 a.m. Reservations required. Limit: 25. LEADERS: Mike Bowen at 301-530-5764 or [dhmbowen@yahoo.com](mailto:dhmbowen@yahoo.com), and Gerry Hawkins at 571-277-8406 or [maineusa@comcast.net](mailto:maineusa@comcast.net). **Directions:** From Maryland, take Rt. 495 south to I-95 south; take LEFT Exit 161 (Woodbridge) and follow Rt. 1 south; cross the Occoquan River, turn left at the light onto Dawson Beach Rd., and follow this road to the end.

**MAY 3 (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 a.m. at the parking lot at Hughes Hollow. Limit: 10. Reservations required. For reservations and more information, email the LEADER: Paul Woodward at [grackling@ATT.NET](mailto:grackling@ATT.NET).

**MAY 5 (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 at [kingfishers2@verizon.net](mailto:kingfishers2@verizon.net) or 240-515-4517.

**MAY 11 (Saturday) LITTLE BENNETT RP.** Half day. We will be looking for warblers and other migrants on the Wilson Mill and Kingsley Trails. Possible Kentucky Warbler. Limit: 10. Reservations required. LEADERS: Woody and Rae Dubois. Contact them for time and directions at [dengue1@verizon.net](mailto:dengue1@verizon.net).

**MAY 12 (Sunday) ROCK CREEK PARK, DC.** Near peak time for migrant warblers, vireos, etc. Meet at 6:30 a.m. at the Nature Center parking lot. Reservations required. For more information or specific directions, contact the LEADER: Gerry Hawkins at [maineusa@comcast.net](mailto:maineusa@comcast.net) or 571-277-8406 (cell).



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 Patrick Newcombe, [stonecroft5@verizon.net](mailto:stonecroft5@verizon.net)



## Welcome New Members :

Mary Conway

Cailean Fandino

Edwin Gould

Sarah Kirchen

Jessica Klotz

Sarah Lister

Ronald Outen

Mark, Linda, and Matthew Ross

Sharon Scott





# Trip Reports

**Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens and Kenilworth Park, October 7.** Co-leaders: Mike Bowen and Gerry Hawkins. Participants: 15 including leaders. Highlights at the Gardens included a late Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Swainson's Thrush, Wilson's Snipe in nearby flight, several Yellow-rumped Warblers, and several Eastern Phoebes. Here we also encountered Swamp Sparrows, Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, and Wood Ducks in flight among other expected birds. After the Gardens, we visited nearby Kenilworth Park. Although the Loggerhead Shrike seen at Kenilworth Park during the prior two days apparently had moved on and we decided not to wade through dense shrub vegetation to look for a continuing Nelson's Sparrow, we enjoyed watching several Eastern Meadowlarks, Savannah Sparrows, Palm Warblers, and Eastern Bluebirds as well as a single Tree Swallow and more Wood Ducks in flight. All things considered, a very enjoyable addition to the MBC field trip calendar.

**Lois Green Park, October 10.** Leader: Mike Bowen. No other participants. Weather: Unseasonably warm and humid, in the mid to upper 70s with a light southerly breeze. Species count: 34. Highlights: Double-crested Cormorant, Pied-billed Grebe, a pair of Northern Pintails, 3 Killdeer, a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, a House Wren, and 5 Eastern Towhees, one a young male just growing his black head feathers. Surprise absences: no Palm Warblers (or any other warbler) and only 2 Song Sparrows. This little park will be full of several sparrow species after the next big cold front comes through. In fact, MBC members are strongly encouraged to bird here this winter and next spring; this park is very "under-birded." There is easy parking and a good range of habitats, including two ponds, a large overgrown field with scattered trees, and multiple hedgerows. The eBird checklist for this trip, with a number of embedded photos, is here: <https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S49097111>.

**Oaks Landfill, November 4.** Leader: Mark England. Participants: 17 plus leader. Weather: Could not have been better—clear, sunny, little wind. Species: 39. Despite some grouching about not getting an extra hour of sleep as daylight savings time had ended during the night, we formed carpools with walkie-talkies and spent a nice morning at the landfill. Birding was a little slow at first due to the 39-degree temperature, but activity picked up after a while. We had a Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Sharp-shinned Hawk early on, and later added an adult Merlin flying close overhead, two Red-tails, two American Kestrels, a Cooper's Hawk seen by some, and at least two Northern Harriers. The harriers were never that close and usually backlit, but those who stayed to the end were excited to see a circling male and female close overhead against the pure blue sky. In addition to the eight raptor species, we saw eight sparrow species plus junco. Sparrows included several Savannah, Song, White-throated, Chipping, Field, Swamp, two juvenile White-crowned at the end, and a rather grayish Vesper

Sparrow, with its very prominent eyeing. There were no waterfowl in the pond visible from Blue Mash, but we found six Bufflehead and four Ruddy Ducks in one of the leachate ponds.

**Lilypons and Surrounding Areas, November 25.** Leader: Clive Harris. Participants: 10. We saw a total of 44 species here, including two flyover Tundra Swans, three Great Egrets, and two Rusty Blackbirds. Sparrow diversity was not as high as it can be, but we saw at least 15 White-crowned Sparrows, mostly in the hedges along Lilypons road. We then made a short stop at the junction of Route 85 and Oland Road where we saw a few flocks of Horned Lark that were flushed a few times by a cruising Northern Harrier. After the end of the trip, the leader found two Lapland Longspurs. These were subsequently re-found by several other birders.

**Cambridge Waterfront and Blackwater Refuge, December 9.** Leader: Mark England. Participants: 15 plus leader. Weather: Cold and very overcast—a mid-afternoon mini-blizzard at Blackwater cut the trip short. Species: About 56. We met at 9 a.m. at the Sailwinds Visitor Center on the Choptank River in Cambridge and scoped out the waterfowl, which included Long-tailed Duck, Bufflehead, Surf Scoter, Ruddy Duck, a single Common Loon, and close-in American Wigeon and Lesser Scaup. At the end of Oakley Street, we saw many Canvasbacks from only feet away, and a drake Redhead mixed in as well. At Great Marsh Park, we found a small group of Goldeneye well out in the river. After a stop at the Goose Creek store at Rt. 16, we made several stops along Egypt Road and found birds like American Kestrel; Red-shouldered, Red-tailed, and Cooper's Hawks, Pileated Woodpecker; Killdeer; and a few Black-bellied Plovers (seen only by some). We had no luck finding meadowlarks or pipits this trip. We ate our lunch inside the Blackwater Visitor Center, which was a nice favor extended by the staff, and then headed upstairs to the excellent museum and observation area. Here we saw a White-crowned Sparrow at the feeder, Northern Harriers, about 150 Tundra Swans, and dabbling ducks including American Black Duck, Ring-billed Duck, Mallard, and Northern Pintail. At this point, around 2 p.m., we started seeing snowflakes, which quickly got heavier. We checked the Cambridge weather forecast, and it called for a "wintry mix" till 8 p.m., which sounded ominous. Despite that, we wanted to try to get in some of the Wildlife Drive at the refuge. Our best find was a group of several Fox Sparrows flitting about in the understory of the Marsh Edge Trail pine woods. We added Hooded Mergansers and Northern Shovelers to our excellent day-list of waterfowl, and of course there were numerous Bald Eagles seen during the trip. We had planned to go later to the Bestpitch Ferry Road marsh to look for Short-eared Owls, but with the snow getting more intense, we left Blackwater about 3 p.m. As it turned out, the refuge fell just inside the northern edge of the snowstorm, and once we were a few miles north of Cambridge, there was no snow at all.

# Trip Reports

**“Earliest” Bird Trip: Georgetown Reservoir and DC/VA Hotspots, January 1, 2019.** Leader: Mike Bowen. Participants: 15, including two children under 10 and several others who were also on their very first MBC field trip. We loved having them along. Weather: Cloudy but almost balmy—in the 40s, with light winds—compared to 2018’s trip, when it was subfreezing all day. Species count: 34. Highlights: Right off the get-go we had Cackling Goose, Common Merganser, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, and Pied-billed Grebe at Georgetown Reservoir. No unusual gulls there beyond the usual three species, despite reports earlier in the week of an Iceland Gull. A male Kingfisher flew by and perched for great scope views. Constitution Gardens pond was alive with birds once again this year—our photographers delighted in taking point-blank shots of Gadwall, Shoveler, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, a couple of Ruddy Ducks, and an almost somnolent Great Blue Heron. Our next stop was at the Tidal Basin, which was almost empty of water birds but where we ran into an extremely cooperative Brown Creeper, lots of Robins, and a few Brown-headed Cowbirds. Hains Point was not open to vehicles this year because of the government shutdown, but we still were able to visit the Hains Point Golf Club which, thankfully, offered the only public restrooms in the federal parks area. The leader feared that the Black-crowned Night-Herons at the head of the Washington Channel might not show this year (they were totally absent the day before), but happily there were 9 there when we came by. Just where these birds hang out otherwise is a mystery. Nearby, in the hedges by the (locked-up) NPS headquarters, we were able to find a nice flock of wintering passerines—White-throated Sparrow, House Finch, American Goldfinch, Junco, Cardinal, and Mockingbird. The eBird checklists for the trip, containing embedded photos taken by our ace photographers Evelyn Ralston and Anne Mytych, can be found here:

<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S51158968>; <https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S51153112>;

<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S51170528>; and <https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S51174780>

**Ocean City and Environs, January 11–12.** Co-leaders: Stephanie Lovell and Cheryl Hogue. Species seen: 71. With two brand-new MBC members in tow, six of us left on a beautiful chilly Friday morning: destination Eastern Shore and whatever birds might be there! Our first stop was to pick up a scrumptious lunch over the bridge in Stephenville and head for the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center to look for Brown-headed Nuthatches. We did indeed find the nuthatches and a bonus of great views of a Brown Creeper, gleaning upside down very close to us. We were then permitted to use the CBEC gift shop as our lunch stop, and we enjoyed a bird feeder right outside the window as customers came and went.

Our next stop was Oakley Street in Cambridge for its guaranteed scrum of ducks. We were not disappointed. Photographers come there and throw corn out to attract ducks to an easy meal. A local



birder told of a Goldeneye seen not too far away, so we moved over to Great Marsh Park and found it!

Our major job for the day was to go around the Wildlife Drive at Blackwater NWR. At the first pull-out, we had a pair of Bald Eagles sitting on an Osprey platform. I guess they were taking a break from nest building. The drive around was very satisfying, lots of Tundra Swan, Snow Geese, Shovelers, Pintails, and Great Blue Herons at every pull-out. All told, we saw 16 Bald Eagles, adults and young.

We arrived at our motel in Ocean City about 5:30 and received good advice for a dinner place. The group had decided to make this a one-night stay because of the impending snowstorm.

Saturday was cloudy, but no snow forecast until much later, so after a generous breakfast we headed for the inlet. We were all bundled up against the cold and wind and got some good sightings of Brandt, Eider, one lone female Harlequin, Ruddy Turnstone, lots of loons, and a rarity—a Glaucous Gull.

Our last stops were not as productive except for Bayside Development pond, where we had a number of ducks including Gadwall, which we had not seen elsewhere. A run down to Assateague was quiet; a lot of the inlets were frozen over.

By this time, there were little tiny flakes of snow in air, so we headed back, very pleased with our productive days.





# Flight Paths

**Cheryl Hogue** writes, “Business travel took me to a conference in Sacramento, California, in early November. I took advantage of the field trip the conference offered to Cosumnes River Preserve, south of the city.

There, we had sunny views of wintering Sandhill Cranes as well as waterfowl, raptors, and garden birds including California Scrub-Jay. I nabbed a lifer, a Golden-Crowned Sparrow that provided me with a long, unobstructed view while it methodically gobbled seeds off a stalk. Later, one of my new birding pals at the conference pulled me aside and told me about the Yellow-Billed Magpies nearby.



During a break in the meeting, I grabbed binoculars, camera, and an Uber to Discovery Park. The place was virtually deserted when we pulled up. “What’s here?” my driver asked. “Birds!” I replied. And there they were -- noisy, handsome magpies foraging under oak trees. As a bonus, I spotted a red-shafted Northern Flicker. And I managed to get back to the conference before the break ended! “

**Mike Bowen** and **Anne Cianni** report they spent the first week of November in Costa Rica with a “Relaxed and Easy” birding tour led by VENT’s ace Venezuelan Leader, David Ascanio. “The tour started at the beautiful Hotel Bougainvillea in the northern suburbs of San Jose, where the gardens provided almost 40 species, and went on to the Cerro de la Muerte area southeast of San Jose for two nights, based at the comfortable Savegre Lodge 8000 ft. up in the mountains. Highlights of the stay there included three Resplendent Quetzals – a male and two females – in a wild avocado tree that a local farmer had wisely decided not to cut down and a Volcano Junco seen close at hand in a chilly mist above tree line at 12,000 ft. Next port of call was in the Puerto Viejo/La

Selva area in the Caribbean lowlands northwest of San Jose. The group’s base there was the La Quinta de Sarapiquí Country Inn, where the well-stocked feeders afforded great views of the local tanagers, honeycreepers and saltators. A short drive into the famous La Selva Biological Station took a while, because there were 25 species *along the entrance road*, including a well seen Black-faced Grosbeak. A ride in an aerial gondola near Braulio Cabrillo National Park afforded a close view of the seldom spotted Black-necked Umbrellabird, while a boat trip on the Sarapiquí River gave the group great views of a close Sunbittern and Bare-faced Tiger-heron. And let’s not forget the 27 species of Hummingbird!! 227 species in a week? No problem if you’re in the birding paradise of Costa Rica.”

**Gail Mackiernan** and **Barry Cooper** wrote they spent 9 days in September in southeast Maine, visiting friends, shopping, eating lobster and doing a lot of birding! “They made several visits to the noted migratory hotspot of Cousins Island, (near Portland) where over four days they tallied hundreds of migrants. These included an estimated 300+ warblers of 18 species, plus other desirable migrants such as Philadelphia Vireo, Alder and Olive-sided Flycatchers. A whale-watching trip was less productive, however, as this year the whales were found within sight of land – great for everyone except those looking for seabirds! Pine Point and Scarborough Marsh once again proved great for shorebirds, best being American Golden Plover and a number of White-rumped Sandpipers, but we dipped on the Little Egret that had been seen there earlier in the week. Most interesting “bird” at the Rachel Carson NWR’s Timber Point Trail was a Porcupine, but always nice to see the resident Common Eiders and Black Guillemots offshore. All in all, a great escape from Maryland’s torrid summer!”

Our one-time trip leader and then expat birder **Tom Marko** writes that he has now returned to the states after 10 years of living overseas to include Japan, Germany and Italy. Tom and his wife Joanne recently purchased a retirement home on Hilton Head Island in South Carolina. He exclaims that the “Low Country” of coastal South Carolina and Georgia is a birdwatcher’s paradise with several national wildlife refuges and coastal beaches just a short drive away. Tom is now a member of Hilton Head Audubon and will participate in their Christmas Bird Count in December.

# Montgomery County Birds of Note

## (July to December 2018)

Probably the best bird to show up in Montgomery County over the past six months was an immature **Roseate Spoonbill** at Dierssen Wildlife Management Area (WMA), about 0.7 miles up the C&O Canal from Pennyfield Lock. This bird, a first for Montgomery County, was part of a wave of spoonbill sightings ranging far north of their normal range this summer. The bird was first noted by Frank Miller via the Audubon Naturalist Society's "Voice of the Naturalist" service and seen by Montgomery County birders on both August 14 and 15.

An **Evening Grosbeak** was also a great find in December. A species not seen in the county with any regularity since the 20th century and last reported from the Boyds and Gaithersburg areas in 2012. However, it is great to report that Bruce and Toni Evan's yard feeder in Brookeville was visited by a beautiful male **Evening Grosbeak** on December 18.

A drake **Eurasian Wigeon** has returned to the Poplar Springs Animal Sanctuary (private) for the third winter in a row. It was first reported on October 20 by Mark Abdy and also found December 16 during the Seneca Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Other great waterfowl finds include Dave Czaplak's three **Surf Scoters** on the Potomac River at Violette's Lock on November 3 and a single **White-winged Scoter** in the same location on November 21. A **Red-throated Loon** passed through the same area on November 5 and 6.

Dave Powell spotted a **Mississippi Kite** in flight being harassed by a flock (a murder?) of crows over Rte. 118 in Germantown on July 4. Perusing eBird data for last six months, it's exciting to note that **Peregrine Falcons** were reported from at least 15 different locations around the county.

Michael Bowen and Anne Cianni found three **Sandhill Cranes** in a soybean field in the vicinity of the Patton (now renamed Battlefield) Turf Farm in the northwest portion of the county on September 14. More recently, Clive Harris reported a pair of **Sandhill Cranes** foraging in the field area across from entrance of the Poolesville Public Golf Course on December 16. This pair has since become quite regular in the area, being seen almost daily and as recently as January 7.

A **Barn Owl** crossed through the path of Shawn Pfautsch's car headlights near Brookeville on July 19.

Some good shorebirds were seen in the county over the past six months. Two **Stilt Sandpipers** and a single **Short-billed Dowitcher** were found by Dave Czaplak at the Summit Hall Turf Farm on July 25. A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was found by Dave Roberts at the Hughes Rd Polo Grounds on September 2. A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** (the same bird, or possibly a differ-

ent individual) was seen at the Polo Grounds through September 10. Jordan and Keith Rutter found 4 **American Golden-plover** at Blue Mash on September 3. The Polo Grounds were a source of additional **American Golden-plover** sightings between September 8 and 22. Dave Czaplak and Max Wilson noted a **Red-necked Phalarope** on the Potomac at Violette's Lock on September 18. A **Sanderling** was spotted on a rock mid-stream in the Potomac at Violette's Lock on September 16. Jeff Shenot found three **Baird's Sandpipers** at the Polo Grounds on September 20.

And in the "not sure what I was doing Sunday, September 9 but clearly I missed a big shorebird "fallout" day at the Hughes Rd Polo Grounds category....," an astounding 58 **Pectoral Sandpipers** were reported by Cheryl Hogue and Paul Orsinger, and 21 **White-rumped Sandpipers** were reported by Clive Harris, in addition to other shorebird species such as **American Golden-plovers**, **Killdeer**, **Least Sandpiper**, and **Buff-breasted and Semipalmated Sandpipers**.

Dave Czaplak and Max Wilson found two **Franklin's Gull** in the vicinity of Violette's Lock on November 3. Two flocks of **Laughing Gulls** reported by Dave Czaplak passed downstream along the Potomac River on September 16 and 17. Dave theorized that these birds (along with 37 **Common Terns**) might constitute a minor "fallout" of birds from the circulation of Hurricane Florence. Jose Martin had five **Great Black-backed Gulls** at Violette's Lock on October 13.

Dave Czaplak reported an astounding eight **Common Ravens** at Violette's Lock on December 22.

Gail MacKiernan found a **Marsh Wren** in the cattail pond in the Sherwood Forest area of Northwest Branch Park on October 7.

A **Connecticut Warbler** was reported on September 29 at Rickman/Woodstock Equestrian Park by Dave Czaplak. Dave Roberts found an **Orange-crowned Warbler** along the Bethesda Trolley Trail on October 26.

A **Clay-colored Sparrow** turned out to be a great yard bird for Jim Nelson in Bethesda on October 9. A few **Dickcissels** continued at the Oaks Landfill adjacent to Blue Mash Nature Trail through July 13.

Montgomery County birders reported a total of 259 different species in the county to eBird for 2018. This is the most I can find for a yearly total, besting 2012's total of 258.

*Andy Martin*



## Birding in Hong Kong

I had the opportunity to visit Hong Kong for 12 days. The focus was not birding, and my travel companion was not fond of birds at all! On October 21, armed with Ray Tipper's *A Naturalist's Guide to the Birds of Hong Kong* and minimal research on hotspots, I boarded the 15-hour nonstop flight from Dulles Airport and hoped for the best. We arrived at the Hong Kong International Airport the next day near sunrise.

On the airport express train to Hong Kong Island where we would be staying, I saw my first bird of Hong Kong, a Black Kite, circling in the air. I felt a rush of excitement and said to myself: I'VE GOT TO DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO SEE SOME BIRDS! BIRDS OF MY BIRTHPLACE!! Everywhere I went, I carried my bird guide, binoculars, and notebook. I was seeing new birds but not at a great rate. While my travel companion often tolerated my distractions, it was only fair to both of us that I would go at it alone. In the end, I took three solo trips during my stay.

First, I joined volunteers from the Hong Kong Birdwatching Society on their weekly bird walk in Hong Kong Park. I was delighted with Yellow-crested Cockatoo, Red-billed Blue Magpie, Common Tailorbird, Japanese White-eye, Fork-tailed Sunbird, and Masked Laughingthrush.

Second, I signed up for a mangrove boardwalk tour at the famous Mai Po Nature Reserve. Although it was not a birding tour, we managed to identify more than 40 species of birds including the beloved Black-faced Spoonbill, Asian Koel, Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Greater Painted-snipe, Eurasian Curlew, Common Sandpiper, Common Kingfisher, Black Drongo, Azure-winged Magpie, Daurian Redstart, White Wagtail, and Chinese Pond Heron.



Hong Kong Wetland Park



Spotted Dove and Black Collared Starling

Third, on my last full day in Hong Kong, I visited the must-see Hong Kong Wetland Park and met some wonderful birders and photographers. Some notable lifers included Siberian Stonechat, White-rumped Munia, Chinese Bulbul, Collared Crow, White-throated Kingfisher, Pied Kingfisher, Crested Myna, Garganey, and Marsh Sandpiper. I wish I could tell you that I saw the White-breasted Waterhen, one of my target birds, but I didn't and only missed it by a minute.

On the flight back home, secured in my carry-on was *The Birds of Hong Kong and South China* by Clive Viney, Karen Phillipps, and Lam Chiu Ying. Everyone I met recommended this book, and I gave it to my young birder son, so one day he and I could return to Hong Kong and have a proper, epic birding trip.

—Stella Tea

## **Christmas Bird Count Reports**

### **Triadelphia Reservoir CBC, December 15, 2018.**

We got almost 60 observers in the field for the Triadelphia Christmas Bird Count, but they stayed out fewer hours than normal. We seem to have 76 species, which is not quite our lowest in the last 20 years, and a count week Pine Warbler, which is probably the most unusual sighting. Species count is predictably low. Numbers will probably be abysmal! The rain report for count day from just about the center of the count circle was 3.65 inches! Need I say more?

*—David Holmes, Compiler*

### **Seneca Maryland/Virginia Christmas Bird Count, December 16, 2018.**

We had challenging weather and physical conditions for count day. Because of heavy rain the day before the count and rain on count day itself, a number of areas we would usually survey were under water or otherwise inaccessible to our teams. The rain during the morning made it harder to find and identify birds, and the above-average fall temperatures meant a lot of expected winter visitors had not arrived. On this 60th Seneca CBC, our 131 intrepid field counters braving the weather and physical challenges, along with 17 feeder watchers (the highest number of participants since 1995), found 90 species on count day, the lowest count day total since 2003 and well below the 96 average for the previous 10 years. Three additional species, eluding our counters on the count day, were found only during “count week” (the period starting three days before and ending three days after the count day) for a grand total of 93 species, the lowest total since 2009 (the year a major snow-storm delayed the count) and well below the 10-year average of 99. The 21,148 individual birds counted are the lowest total since 2009 and well below the average of 28,332 for the previous 10 years.

In spite of the adverse conditions that affected the overall count, a team in Virginia found a first-ever Ross’s Goose for the Seneca CBC bringing the cumulative count day species total to 168. For a third year, counters logged a male Eurasian Wigeon in the same location as on the last two counts and two Sandhill Cranes that are probably the same two birds as the last two years. As of preparing this report, I have not had time to compare individual species totals with prior years for the 90 species, but in general many counts fall below the totals of recent years. One stand-out low total is zero Common Grackles, the first shutout on this species since 1961! On the other hand, one very notable total is an all-time high of 2,456 Fish Crows, most counted as massive numbers were flying to an evening roost. Other species with good numbers in comparison with recent years (noted from a quick look at the data): Northern Pintail, Common Merganser, Wild Turkey, Killdeer, Bald Eagle, Red-headed Woodpecker, American Kestrel, Merlin, Blue Jay (highest in several years), Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Pine Siskin, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, and House Sparrow.

Thanks to everyone who came out to count this year under very daunting conditions 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.

*—Jim Nelson, Compiler*

## Thank You to Smokey Glen Farm!

For the past two years, Smokey Glen Farm contributed the dinner for our annual social. Below is the thank you letter to Jim Sweet from Stephanie Lovell and Chris Wright on behalf of the Montgomery Bird Club.

13 January 2019

Mr. Jim Sweet, President  
Smokey Glen Farm  
16407 Riffleford Road  
Gaithersburg, MD 20878



Dear Jim,

First, we want to thank you again for so generously donating the food for the past two annual social dinners of the Montgomery Bird Club at Woodend Sanctuary. This has meant the club could use the money members paid for the dinner to do good works for birds in the county. We thought you would be interested to know how we've spent this money.

This year we are contributing \$500 to the Owl Moon Raptor Center in Boyds and \$500 to the Maryland Biodiversity Project. As you may know, Owl Moon is an all-volunteer raptor rehabilitation center that rescues injured hawks and owls found throughout the county. The Biodiversity Project is an effort led by two professional naturalists, Bill Hubick and Jim Brighton, to catalog every living thing in Maryland. Their argument is that you can't save something if you don't know it's there.

Last year we put aside \$900 to pay for future improvements in the way we communicate with our members over the web. We haven't spent this money yet because we want to coordinate our web development with the website being developed by the Maryland Ornithological Society, our parent organization.

None of this would be possible without your generosity. We hope you'll think we've put your donation to good purpose.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Lovell, President

Chris Wright, Treasurer

For the Montgomery Bird Club Council



The Chat  
MBC/Maryland Ornithological Society  
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# Annual MBC Social March 8, 2019

## Guest of Honor Linda Friedland

Join us for our annual social at the Woodend headquarters of the Audubon Naturalist Society, 8940 Jones Mill Road, Chevy Chase. The evening begins with a social hour at 6:30, with dinner at 7:30.

Smokey Glen Farm of Gaithersburg will once again cater this delicious dinner. Bring appetizers to share.

The evening will feature our traditional recognition of the Member of the Year, an exceptional award presentation by the American Birding Association, and the favorite: the members' slide show.

Please limit your presentation to 8 digital photos; send them to Evelyn Ralston at [evelynralston@icloud.com](mailto:evelynralston@icloud.com) in .tif or .jpeg format. To avoid confusion, please have each filename include your name preceded by the order in which the photo should be shown (01-Scott Young, e.g.).

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 Evelyn Ralston, 5918 Anniston Rd, Bethesda MD 20817.

**We need to receive both photo submissions and participation form with check no later than February 23.**

Name(s) to appear on tags:

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Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_ reservations at \$20 per person

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ enclosed

