

May 2020

Volume 51, No. 2

President's Chat

It's that time of year when we are more than ready to embrace spring's sweet green smell. We are bidding farewell to our winter waterfowl and eagerly awaiting the presence of our migrating warblers and their buddies. However, these are the times that try men's and women's souls. COVID-19 has spread throughout the country, and most of our complaints might seem a bit insignificant. Cancellations of Bird Club meetings and activities are a constant theme nowadays, but this has just helped us try new venues. We held our first club Zoom meeting on April 15, and it was a resounding success. There were faces that I haven't seen in a while as it's so easy to join in from home. I have always realized that our Bird Club is like a lovely and lively family, and it was time for that family dinner once again.

We have had a year full of wonderful speakers and field trips. There have been interesting bird sightings, and there will be more next year when we can get out more easily. We did have to postpone our Social, but that will resume next March as usual at ANS's Woodend where we can honor Janet Millenson in style.

I have been proud to serve as President of the club and am delighted with the slate of officers that have been lined up by our Nominating Committee, consisting of Clive Harris (chair), Anne Cianni, and Andy Martin. Special thanks go to our field trip leaders (you know who you are!), folks who have brought in refreshments for meetings, and folks who have helped set up chairs and put them back. Thanks to Linda Friedland for finding these leaders for our bird trips and to Helen Patton who keeps our membership rolls in order. Thanks to all of this year's officers and to Gail Mackiernan who will be leaving the Council. Gail has ably served as Chapter Director off and on for many years, and we appreciate her service and ideas.





I also present a round of appreciation to the club members who have agreed to join the Council: John Houghton and Dave Powell. And thanks to Scott Young who will be transitioning from State Director to Vice-President. I can't leave this section without praising Evelyn Ralston. There "oughta" be a song for her! Evelyn smoothly picked up many extra duties as Vice-President and made my entry that much easier. I hope you realize that she wrote all of those Mailchimps and is coordinating and designing the Chat as well. Thank you, Evelyn!

A quick preview of coming attractions: Since our May meeting will be online, I will be handing out some awards at our September meeting (as Past-President).

Thank you and I wish you and your family the best for the coming months.

—Anna Urciolo

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Spring Calendar



May 20 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m., Last Meeting of the Year, on Zoom

For the second time this year, we will meet not in Potomac, MD, but on Zoom. We will start promptly at 7:30 p.m. with a full meeting. You will receive an invitation.

Business: The results of the election will be announced (for the list of candidates and voting procedures, please see the article on page 3). The traditional bestowing of awards will be postponed to our first in-person meeting, hopefully in September.

Slideshow: Since the trial Zoom member slideshow at the April meeting went well, with only minor glitches (the host needs to advance the slides!), we will give others their turn to present the photos they had submitted for the Social.

Presentation: “Sparrows, Simplified” by Mike Moore, who recently retired as Biology professor at the University of Delaware where he researched and published on behavior and hormones of birds and reptiles. Now he will help us tackle sparrow identification and save us from “spuhs” on eBird checklists! Blending the Peterson system of field marks and the Cape May school of GISS, Mike will give us tips on how to identify each of the 18 species of regularly occurring sparrows in this area and will take our sparrow identification to the next level.

May 9 & 10 (Saturday & Sunday), May Count, modified

MOS is organizing a carbon-free (walking or biking), COVID-19-free (6 ft distance) May Count on May 9 and 10. Details are not yet available and will be communicated in a Mailchimp.

Oaks Landfill Agreement

In early December last year, I received the unexpected and disappointing news that the Montgomery County government would be requiring a signed legal agreement with the MBC (and ANS) before allowing any more birdwalks at the Oaks Landfill in Laytonsville, Md. This moratorium was placed on all landfill birdwalks (and the Triadelphia CBC), despite the fact that we had conducted them for about 11 years with no incidents of any kind. During that time, the County Department of Environmental Protection (D.E.P.) had generously welcomed both MBC and ANS birdwalks, where we were regularly able to see some county-uncommon species, including overwintering Short-eared Owls and Northern Harriers, frequent American Kestrels and Merlins, nesting Dickcissels, Blue Grosbeaks, and Grasshopper Sparrows, and even a juvenile LeConte’s Sparrow in October 2018. When pond water levels were good, a wide variety of shorebirds and waders could be found as well, especially in fall migration.

The draft agreement ran a few pages, and there were some legal issues involved that needed to be reviewed, so all MBC and ANS birdwalks at Oaks Landfill in January and February this year had to be cancelled. In March however, we received some good news in the form of a simplified “Right of Entry Agreement.” The county has relaxed some previous requirements after determining that birdwatching is a “passive activity” and that our birdwalks would not require liability insurance, for example. A meeting with the D.E.P. was suggested to discuss and hopefully sign a one-year (renewable) agreement, but then COVID-19 arose, and nothing has been finalized at this time. However, along with the help of the incoming MBC Council, I hope to get this resolved in the near future, after which we will have access as before for scheduled birdwalks throughout the year.

A consolation (of sorts): there were no Short-eared Owls at the Oaks Landfill this winter!

—Mark England



ELECTIONS: How to Vote by Email or U.S. Mail

As you probably know by now, we have adopted the notion that even business related to the yearly election of Club officers and Chapter and State Directors would take place online, the “new normal.” The nomination of candidates for Club officers and Chapter and State Directors for the coming year took place on April 15 during the Club meeting held on Zoom. The Nominating Committee presented its slate of candidates, no additional nominations were made, and the nominations were formally closed. The number of Club members “present” at the meeting was comfortably above the required 20% of the active membership for a quorum.

For the formal election, the MBC Council, meeting before we became familiar with Zoom, concerned about technical issues, and wanting to ensure maximum participation by the Club membership, decided that **voting will take place by email, or by U.S. mail** for those who may not have access to the internet. A motion was made by Jim Nelson on April 15 and approved by the members to endorse the Council’s email and U.S mail election procedure and to hold a single vote for or against all the candidates at once, as a slate.

To cast your vote for or against the slate of nominated candidates, **your vote must be received by the Club Secretary, Alice Jacobsohn, by May 15 at the latest.** Her email address is alicej5251@gmail.com. Everyone who has provided their email address will receive an email communication (Mailchimp) with a link to Alice’s address. Alice’s street address, is 4400 East West Highway, Apt 819, Bethesda, MD 20814. If you do use regular mail, please take into account that the USPS is slower than usual, so **vote as soon as possible.**

Your vote (regardless of form) needs to state: I vote in favor of the slate/I vote against the slate. Your email vote must include your full name. Your vote by U.S. Mail must be signed.

Here is the slate of candidates:

Officers (1-year term)

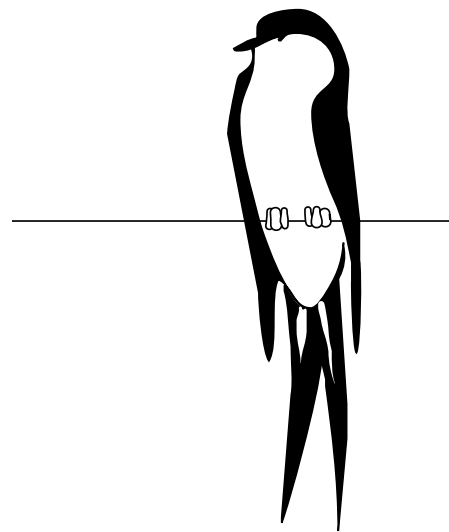
President: Evelyn Ralston
Vice-President: Scott Young
Secretary: Alice Jacobsohn
Treasurer: Chris Wright

Chapter Directors (2-year term)*

John Houghton
Moirra Davenport
Cheryl Hogue

State Directors (1-year term)

Dave Powell
Ed Vigezzi
Woody Dubois



* One Chapter Director, Anne Mytych, has one year left in her current term and does not need to be re-elected.

Birds of Note (mid-January to mid-April 2020)

One of the most exciting finds over the past few months has been the discovery of a successfully breeding pair of **Great Horned Owls** at Redgate Park in Rockville. A Great Horned Owl was first seen and photographed in the park by Anne Mytych on January 20, and a few days later both Vickie Baily and Patti Armistead located the Great Horned Owl “on nest” in a patch of woods on the east side of the park. Mike Bowen noted the first owlet on the nest on March 3, and David Moulton reported two owlets visible by March 8. However, only one owlet was seen by others from that day on. The owls attracted a large number of the expected birders and photographers but also of families, teens, and older folks simply curious and excited to see their first owl. Below, owlet and mother, 03/14.

Gabriel Foley and Jordan Rutter reported a male **Eurasian Wigeon** at Poplar Springs Animal Sanctuary (private) on January 20. The bird was seen again during a Montgomery Bird Club (MBC) field trip there on January 26. This is the fourth winter in a row this same bird (we assume) has commingled with a larger flock of American Wigeon at the sanctuary.

Dave Czaplak found a **Cave Swallow** (and got a confirming photo) at Violette’s Lock on the morning of April 20. The bird landed on a mid-river snag for just a few moments before departing to destinations unknown. The last time Cave Swallows were reported in the county was November of 2004.

MaryAnn Todd observed a flock of **Snow Geese** passing over the Hughes Rd Polo grounds on February 2. Pam Oves noted a single Snow Goose at Black Hill RP on February 12. Ben Plumes found a **Ross’s Goose** in a small farm pond off Partnership Rd on February 3. Another Ross’s Goose was reported from Kentlands Lakes (formerly the Darnestown Rd Ponds eBird hotspot) by Greg Slader on March 10.

Matt Von Hendy spotted a **White-winged Scoter** on Little Seneca Lake near the Rte. 121 bridge on February 20. CJ DeMarco noted two female **Black Scoters** on the Potomac River near Swain’s Lock on February 12. Oliver Patrick completed the MontCo scoter trifecta with a report of four **Surf Scoters** on the Potomac River near Violette’s Lock on April 26.

A **Red-throated Loon** (or possibly a different individual of same species) was seen with some consistency on the Potomac from both Violette’s and Riley’s Locks between March 28 and April 15.

Jim Green reported an “early for the year” **Pectoral Sandpiper** at the Hughes Rd Polo grounds on March 3. CJ DeMarco and Dave Roberts noted a single **Dunlin** on a mid-river rock in the rapids below Violette’s Lock on April 27.

Dave Czaplak noted a single **Little Gull** mixed in with a flock of Bonaparte’s Gulls flying upriver along the Potomac adjacent to Violette’s Lock on March 23. Another Little Gull (again mixed in with Bonaparte’s Gulls) was seen in same vicinity on April 21. Carolyn Guthrie found a **Great Black-backed Gull** on the Potomac near Dickerson Conservation Park on February 23.

Two **Cattle Egrets** were seen in a wet area of Patton Turf Farm near White’s Ferry on April 13.

Anna Wilson noted a **Short-eared Owl** at Violette’s Lock on February 22.

Some good “out-of-season” passerines over the past few months include a **Least Flycatcher** along the C&O Canal on January 29, found by Derek Richardson and Jim Speicher; a **White-eyed Vireo** at Patuxent River SP near Howard Chapel Rd on February 3 seen by Dave Powell and Joe Hanfman; and a **Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher** near Riley’s Lock on February 26.

Dave Roberts and Oliver Patrick both reported a **Marsh Wren** from Dierssen WMA upstream of Pennyfield Lock on April 15. Clive Harris also noted a Marsh Wren along Sycamore Landing Rd on April 26.

Red-breasted Nuthatches have been fairly uncommon in the county this past winter. CJ DeMarco found one at Gunner’s Lake on January 3. Brent Reyner noted a Red-breasted Nuthatch in his yard on January 15 and reported it again a few times in both March and April. Benjamin Plume heard one in his Silver Spring yard on January 16.

—Andy Martin



E. Ralston



How would you like to edit the Chat? Or design it?

Our quarterly newsletter, The Chat, has been published since 1985 under a series of editors, designers, and proofreaders. The designer who gave The Chat its current look is Gemma Radko, a talented professional designer who occupied the position for nearly 20 years; she created the iconic masthead (page 1) and came up with the many whimsical illustrations that enliven every issue. Gemma “retired” in 2017, and when her successor left after a short time, Stephanie Lovell, Club President, took it upon herself to put together (i.e., design) The Chat. After Stephanie’s untimely death last June, I took over.

The most recent editor, Patrick Newcombe, began working with Gemma in 2016. But early this year, pressed for time by the demands of his senior high school year, Patrick needed to step down. For the last issues and foreseeably the coming ones, I have been doing the editing and designing. Making my task easier, all regular contributors to The Chat are wonderfully dedicated and do not need much reminding. Furthermore, Susan Hunt has been steadfastly proofreading each issue, returning copy faster than I can send it to her, and Helen Patton, as membership secretary, makes sure the publisher has the most updated membership list before each issue. Nevertheless, it is time to inject new blood into The Chat. We’re ready for some fresh ideas and creative input. What would YOU like to see in our newsletter?

Here are the tasks of Editor and Designer:

The **Editor**, for each issue,

- gathers the regular contributions (President’s Chat, trip announcements, trip reports, Birds of Note, Calendar) into an MS Word file or any other formatted text;
- seeks one-time contributions (interviews of members in the news, topics of interest);
- looks for photographs to illustrate the articles;
- sends all articles to the proofreader and sends the corrected version to the designer.

The editor needs to be well-organized. Ideally, the editor knows the membership well, knows what articles may be of greatest interest and who could best contribute, and can report on human stories; we love birds but we are a group of humans with our joys and sorrows....

The **Designer**, for each issue,

- converts the content from text form to a printing-ready form, incorporating photos and illustrations, using good-quality software such as Adobe InDesign. (Templates are available.) The designer should enjoy working with text and images and organizing them to create a visually pleasant layout.
- contacts the printer in a timely fashion; if possible meets with some of the designers at the printer’s, proofreads the draft, and approves the publication.

Both positions will remain open until suitable candidates are found. Please contact me if you are interested (evelyn-ralston@icloud.com).

—*Evelyn Ralston*





Chapter Chatter

Minnesota in January

At the end of this past January, just after the first confirmed case of COVID-19 arrived in the United States, five Marylanders and one Floridian traveled to Minnesota for a great birding trip. Arranged by Maryanne Dolan for the Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS), we were superbly guided by Josh Engel of Red Hill Birding of Chicago. Our lodging was on Lake Superior, and we were treated to unusually mild weather. Over the course of four and a half days, we birded primarily in St. Louis County but also in Lake County and briefly in Douglas County, Wisconsin. We visited parts of the renowned Sax-Zim Bog and Superior National Forest. We were delighted to find Spruce, Ruffed, and Sharp-tailed Grouse; Black-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers; a Northern Goshawk; Black-billed Magpies; Boreal Chickadees; Evening Grosbeaks; and white-winged crossbills. The most extraordinary stretch of birding occurred over just a few hours when we found five different owls: Boreal (at 11:52 a.m.), Snowy (2:26 p.m.), Northern Hawk (2:40 p.m.), Barred (3:02 p.m.), and Great Gray (4:16 p.m.)! The Boreal Owl was a welcome surprise, as was the Great Gray Owl that was visiting downtown Duluth. This adventure prompted me to design a tee-shirt for the participants to remember our good times. I'm certainly looking forward to joining Red Hill Birding and other MOS members on future birding trips.

—Scott Young



After seeing the 5th owl: from left to right: Josh Engel, trip leader, David, Evelyn, Ben, Maryanne, Scott & Ken. On the right, the T-shirt.

YMOS News: Birdathon

With all the recent cancellations, there was a serious risk that the YMOS Birdathon (March 21-22) would go the way of the Social, of our April Bird Club meeting, etc. But no! The YMOS Birdathon took place at the time planned but with a new, creative format. Instead of birding as a group on the Eastern Shore, every participant birded locally and responsibly. It was different but fun, and the group of 24 youth birders and their families, including our own Joshua Heiser and Nathan Tea, did fairly well! We are looking forward to George Radcliffe sharing the results with MOS soon. Stay tuned!

The YMOS also replaced the April trips with a friendly BIG SIT competition. On April 4-5, youth birders across the state and beyond tallied all the birds they could see or hear from their homes on Saturday or Sunday. Everyone could move around as long as they stayed on their own property. This was no ordinary competition! The size of the property and the age of the birder were factored into the winning formula. In the end, 27 youth birders and their families participated, including MBC's Joshua Heiser, Nathan Tea and Patrick Newcombe. The highest species count was 91.

—Stella Tea



Iceland Encounters

In our fourth trip to Iceland, my wife Julia and I visited places off the beaten tourist track such as the barren ash deserts of the central highlands, where thousands of Pink-footed Geese breed in the wetland oases. Another place we visited was the island of Hrisey in Eyjafjörður, North Iceland. Hrisey is a quarantine island for cattle, and no sheep or horses are allowed and no dogs or cats either! Hunting is also prohibited. As a result of this, Ptarmigans flourish on Hrisey. They are everywhere, like pigeons or chickens, in people's gardens, in the farmfields, and on the village green. Their only predators are the Gyrfalcons that come over from the mainland to feast on the plump Ptarmigans. To be honest, we were also hoping to see a Gyrfalcons (the national bird of Iceland) but we drew a blank....

We also wanted to cross the Arctic Circle (AC), but the only land in Iceland the AC crosses is the island of Grimsey 25 miles north of the mainland, so we had to endure a nauseating 45-mile ferry voyage out into the Greenland Sea to get to Grimsey. Julia's other wish was to fly a kite at the AC. So we had the kite up and who should come by to check it out but this stunning dark-phase Gyrfalcons! Truly a beast of a bird and our first in four visits to Iceland. Gyrfalcons do not live on Grimsey but instead fly the 30-50 miles out from Eyjafjörður and back in a day to predate on Atlantic Puffins and other seabirds, so we were really lucky to see it.

—Michael Redmond



Ptarmigan (left) and Gyrfalcons (right) photographed by M. Redmond

Welcome, New Members!

Dana Best

David Clark

Igor Taimassov

Aparna Tangirala

Vijaya Venkataramani

Jeffrey Bingenheimer

Charles Dickison

Anjana Tangirala

Subrahmaniam Tangirala

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Membership: Helen Patton, helen@dataprompt.com

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