



February 2021

Volume 52, No. 1

President's Chat

2021 has been eagerly welcomed, without big celebrations but with fervent wishes of peace, prosperity, an end to the pandemic, and many new birds.

As of today (January 18), it looks like we are doing best on the bird front. Just in time for the new year, a male Painted Bunting showed up at Great Falls on December 30. The splendid little bird has achieved notoriety with articles in the *Washington Post* and the *Washingtonian*. There are over 50 eBird reports daily. One eBirder commented: "Large crowd. Dr. Fauci would not be amused." I hope that bird and birders come out unharmed. There is a Black-capped Chickadee at Sycamore Landing (thanks, Nathan Tea) and a European Goldfinch in Columbia, MD, outside our county but close. I was not aware that these appealing birds have colonies outside Europe. They gained literary fame after the fast-paced book *The Goldfinch* won the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for its writer Donna Tartt. However, the bird in the book is not alive; it is a famous 17th-century Dutch painting presently in the Mauritshuis in The Hague, Netherlands. In the meantime, there has been an interesting discussion on the origin of the U.S. European Goldfinches on the MDBirding listserv (January 5-7).

Our Club has done well. We have met regularly on Zoom, with more participants than at our usual meetings, and have restarted the field trips, including the Christmas Bird Counts. The mask-related fog on the glasses is annoying, but it could be worse. Thanks so much to all the trip and count leaders and to Linda Friedland, trip coordinator. The terrifically organized Breeding Bird Atlas (thank you Gabriel Foley, Emily Huang, and Karen Cyr) also provided a welcome diversion: observing the



birds building their nests and raising their family was truly exciting. The Club has grown as well: 37 new members over the year! Sadly, we lost our membership chair, Helen Patton. If you did not know Helen, read on page 2 some of the wonderful tributes that will keep her alive for us. And I am delighted to announce that Moira Davenport has volunteered as the new membership chair. Moira looks forward to welcoming new members by mail and in person when we "reopen," hopefully in the fall.

I have a request: please go to page 4 and learn about the amendments to our Constitution that we will vote on at the February 17 meeting. Thanks to Jim Nelson for help with the legal language.

I hope that for my next *Chat* I will also find good news about peace, prosperity, and the end of the pandemic. In the meantime, please remain careful.

– Evelyn Ralston

CONTENTS	
Helen Patton Through Her Friends.....	2
Birds of Note.....	3
MBC Constitution Amendments.....	4-5
COVID-19 Restrictions.....	5
Looking Back at 2020.....	6-7
Winter/Spring Meetings.....	8
Winter/Spring Field Trips.....	9-11
Trip Reports.....	12-13
Christmas Bird Count Reports.....	14-15
New Members.....	15

Helen Patton Through Her Friends

I will miss her. Such an interesting “full of life” person. Fond memories from my first go-around as an MBC board member and going to her house for council meetings. I often had to drag my 3- to 4-year-old daughter with me, and Helen was so nice and welcoming to her. Clare loved all the cats!—*Andy Martin*

She was such a good person. She encouraged me through knee replacement, was in my reading group, and told me about the company that got me through the conservation landscapes added to our yard. I will miss her, as will many others.—*Cecily Nabors*

Helen Patton was one of a kind—smart, funny, dedicated—always ready to learn more about the natural world, and a wonderful companion “in the field.” My late wife and I went on many field trips with her in the U.S. and around the world, all of them filled with wonder, delight, and rich memories of discovery.—*DMHB*

I met Helen when I attended a Club meeting, and didn't know hardly anyone, yet she strode up and gave me a warm greeting, welcoming me to the Club. Over the years, I made it a point to go over to her table and say “hello” and chat. She would describe some of her birding trips around the world. I was in awe. Helen had an incredible bird book library and was always generous when one would read her books. She was such a kind lady, and it is a great loss for the birding community. Safe travels, Helen.—*Diane Ford*

Helen had a lifelong thirst for knowledge, which was evidenced in part by her extensive travel around the world and taking Master Naturalist courses in her later years; loved birds, cats, and other animals, as evidenced in part by her life list of over 5,000 bird species and her ownership of cats; was a dedicated volunteer for the birding community, as evidenced by her various roles at the Montgomery Bird Club and her many years as one of the “voices” for the weekly Voice of the Naturalist rare bird report; and also was a dedicated weekly volunteer for the benefit of cats at a local animal welfare organization. But most importantly, Helen was a nice, kind, happy person who was liked by all and a treasured friend who will be greatly missed. Forever loved and remembered.—*Gerry Hawkins*

Helen was my fantastic roomie on trips to Brazil and Kenya. She was also the one who got me into county listing. I last spoke to her on the phone about 2 months ago, checking in on her during quarantine. This is shocking, tragic news.—*Kathy Calvert*

Helen was a force that just kept going. One memory I have of her is when she took a tumble on a steep, rocky path birding in the wilds of Ecuador. The group, concerned because of her age, offered help, but she brushed it off, got up slowly, and, with her trademark big smile, walked on. Helen was always a fun companion on the many near and far-flung trips we in the birding community enjoyed with her. We were always delighted in her can-do attitude and her uninhibited enjoyment, whether it was over a life bird or a life meal. We will miss and fondly remember her.—*Linda Friedland*

Helen was amazing—so much energy and such a brave and fun person; always fantastic to talk to. The world is a little less bright without her in it.—*Lisa Shannon*

She was one of a kind, and we will indeed miss her.—*Mark England*



Clockwise from bottom right: Helen Patton, Susan Hunt, Linda Friedland, Moira Davenport, Jennifer Kavar, Simon Calle, Martha Morris, Chris Wright. Photo by Evelyn Ralston.



Birds of Note (mid-October to early January 2021)

Astoundingly, Montgomery County was graced by not just one but two male **Painted Buntings** during the month of December. And one of these birds was still continuing as of January 10. The first **Painted Bunting** showed up at a Gaithersburg area backyard feeder on December 25, and although it turned out to be only a “one-day wonder,” the bird was photographed and well documented by Barry Merritt. The second **Painted Bunting** (also a beautifully colored male) proved to be much more cooperative for local birders. Initially found along the C&O Canal just downstream of the Great Falls Visitor Center on December 30 by Christopher Coleman, it has continued in the same area for almost 10 days straight and has been seen by scads of birders. A rough estimate garnered from Cornell University’s eBird Project estimates that almost 300 birders have seen the **Painted Bunting**. The bird has proven so popular it was even featured in an article in the *Washington Post* (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/01/03/painted-bunting-great-falls-bird-watchers/>).

A few days after Christmas, Steven Silverman noted an amazing 50 to 60 **Sandhill Cranes** flying over his location at Black Hill RP. And 3 **Sandhill Cranes** have returned to their annual winter roost in the vicinity of Algonkian RP, VA. Observed with some regularity as they fly across the river each morning to feed in Montgomery County, the cranes were found by Jim Ivett near the entrance to the Poolesville Golf Course off Willard Rd on December 17. In subsequent days, Dave Powell, Mike Bowen, and Anne Cianni all reported **Sandhill Cranes** from the same area.

Remnants of a summer sunflower field within McKee-Beshers WMA near the C&O Canal at Sycamore Landing Rd produced some great sightings in December and early January. David Blockstein and Keith Rutter were among a group of birders counting birds in the area for the Seneca Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on December 20 and noted 20 **Common Redpolls** along both the adjacent canal towpath and in the fields. Over the next week, additional **Common Redpolls** were reported by Scott Young and Woody and Rae Dubois. Joshua Heiser found an **Orange-crowned Warbler** among the sunflowers on December 28. Nathan and Stella Tea reported a **Black-capped Chickadee** there on January 2. Numerous reports of **Pine Siskins** were also noted.

Evening Grosbeaks, reported irrupting into the county from points north in last issue’s “Birds of Note,” continue to be seen—most consistently from the C&O Canal, just upstream of Riley’s Lock. Karen Cyr and Emily Huang noted 10 **Evening Grosbeaks** there during the Seneca CBC on December 20. **Evening Grosbeaks** were still being seen (although not as consistently) in the same area as of January 11.

A mid-December snow and ice storm produced great conditions to chase down open country birds. In days following the storm, both **Horned Larks** and **American Pipits** were reported in abundance from the polo fields along Hughes Rd. In addition, at least 2 **Lapland Longspurs** were found by Dave Czaplak on December 18. Jordan Rutter and Gabriel Foley found another **Lapland Longspur** among a flock of **Horned Larks** in the corn stubble fields along Willard Rd adjacent to the Poolesville Golf Course on December 19.

A **Ross’s Goose** was a notable find by Stephen Davies at the Wheaton Branch ponds on November 19. Scott Young noted a **Ross’s Goose** in flight with a flock of Canada Geese near Homestead Farm off Sugarland Rd on December 20. A **Ross’s Goose** was also seen by Dave Czaplak in fields off Budd Rd near Poolesville on December 23. Two **Cackling Geese** were noted near Poolesville by Clive Harris on December 24.

Speaking of Clive Harris, he observed an out-of-season **Northern Parula** in his Bethesda area yard on December 28. Scott Young’s feeders in North Potomac continue to host a wintering **Pine Warbler**. And a few **Baltimore Orioles** continue to linger into the winter around the county, with recent reports coming from Laura Tierney’s Gaithersburg neighborhood as of January 9.

A great find by Anne Mytych and Nathan and Stella Tea during the Sugarloaf CBC on January 3 was a **Clay-colored Sparrow** at the Little Bennett Golf Course near Clarksburg.

In 2020, 255 species were seen in Montgomery County. CJ DeMarco finished the year with an outstanding 224 species, followed by David Roberts (217), Nathan Tea (216), MaryAnn Todd (214), and Rae and Woody Dubois (209). Montgomery birders in the 200+ species club for the year include Scott Young, Robin Skinner, Ed Vigezzi, Anne Mytych, and Clive Harris. Well done!

– Andy Martin



Notice of Proposed Amendments to the Constitution of the Montgomery Bird Club

In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to switch from in-person to virtual Club meetings. For the elections of Club officers at the May meeting, we resorted to electronic voting following the precedent set by MOS, our parent organization. However our Club Constitution did not mention the possibility of virtual elections. In order to fill in this gap, we are proposing Amendments to the Club Constitution to deal with this. We will hold a vote on these Amendments at the **February 17** Club meeting. According to Article XIII Sec. 2 — AMENDMENTS, “notice setting forth the amendment shall have been given to the members not less than ten days prior to the meeting.” This constitutes that notice. Only Articles and Sections with proposed modifications are shown. Proposed additions are in bold; proposed deletions are marked with a strikethrough.

As amended at the Chapter meeting of September 18, 2019

As originally approved at the Chapter meeting of January 13, 2011

Amending the Bylaws as approved at the Chapter meeting of May 21, 2003

CONSTITUTION OF THE MONTGOMERY BIRD CLUB, A CHAPTER OF THE MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY INC.

ARTICLE IV – OFFICERS

Sec. 1 The Officers of the Chapter shall be a President, a Vice President, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. Officers shall be elected by a majority vote at the Annual Meeting ~~by ballot or voice vote, as the meeting determines~~ **in accordance with the procedures in Article V, Section 2.** Officers shall assume their duties immediately upon election and shall hold office for a term of one year or until their successors are chosen, or unless they are removed from office as provided in Sec. 3.

ARTICLE V – ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Sec. 1 A Nominating Committee of at least three members shall be chosen by the Council and their names announced to the membership at least two months prior to the Annual Meeting. The Nominating Committee shall present the names of candidates for offices at the Chapter meeting that precedes the Annual Meeting, as provided in Article VI, Section 2, of the Manual. Additional nominations may be made ~~from the floor~~ **by any Chapter member** at this meeting, and with such nominations, if any, the nominations shall be closed. No nomination may be made without the prior consent of the nominee.

Sec. 2 Election at the Annual Meeting may be by voice vote if only one candidate is nominated **for an office.** If more than one candidate is nominated **for an office,** the vote shall be taken by ballot. **If the Annual Meeting is held using virtual means as provided in Article X, Section 5, rather than in person, the vote may be taken by show of raised hands or other similar means. If more than one candidate is nominated for an office, a vote by electronic ballot shall be held between the meeting at which the nominations are made and the Annual Meeting with only the ballots returned to the Secretary by 7 days before the Annual Meeting being counted. The Secretary shall announce the results of the electronic vote at the Annual Meeting.**

Sec. 3 Eligibility to vote at the Annual Meeting shall be limited to active members as determined by the Membership Chairman.



ARTICLE VI – ELECTION OF DIRECTORS OF THE
MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Sec. 2 The Nominating Committee of the Chapter **described in Article V** shall present names of candidates to fill one or more additional Directorships of the Maryland Ornithological Society, Inc., which the Chapter is entitled to under the Bylaws of the Society. Concurrently with their annual term on the Board of Directors of the Maryland Ornithological Society, Inc., these Directors shall also serve as members of the Chapter Council, with full voting privileges.

ARTICLE VIII – COUNCIL

Sec. 5 Any vacancy occurring on the Chapter Council shall be filled in the following manner:

- (a) The President: the Vice President shall automatically assume the office of the President;
- (b) Any other vacancy on the Chapter Council shall be filled by a special election at the next regular meeting of the Chapter. The Nominating Committee **described in Article V** shall present nominations for such vacancies, and **additional** nominations ~~from the floor~~ **may be made by any Chapter member at the meeting. Voting shall be in accordance with the procedures in Article V, Section 2** will be accepted.

ARTICLE IX – COMMITTEES

Sec. 1 Unless a committee Chairman is also a Council member...

Sec. 2 Standing Committees include those listed in Article VI of the Chapter's Manual of Operations. Chairmen of these committees,

ARTICLE X – MEETINGS OF THE CHAPTER

Sec. 5 **If special circumstances preclude holding any Chapter meeting in person, such as inclement weather or a public health or safety emergency, the Council may authorize holding the meeting by virtual means that are explained to the Chapter members in the notice of the meeting.**

COVID-19 Restrictions

To allow more members to enjoy our trips without making social distancing impossible, some trips have a co-leader who will separately lead up to 6 participants. To find out specific information about a trip, please contact the trip leader(s).

Please observe these rules for every field trip:

- Wear a mask.
- Keep at least 2 arms-lengths (6 ft) apart from others.
- Do not share binoculars, spotting scopes, or phones except with members of your household.
- *Cancel your participation*, even at the last minute, if you are presenting any symptoms of COVID-19.

We also recommended avoiding carpooling unless it is with a member of your household.

A special note of thanks to our intrepid trip leaders for continuing—in spite of restrictions—to take us to new places (and old favorites!) and to share their love of birds with us.

– Linda Friedland, Field Trip Coordinator



Looking Back at 2020

In preparation for this issue of the *Chat*, I reached out to new members who joined the Club last year and asked them to tell us about their birding experience in 2020. Several members responded enthusiastically. These witness statements remind us that birds with their magical power continue to enthrall and delight us in surprising ways while conservation efforts—local or national—continue in earnest despite the pandemic. To a better 2021 and beyond!

– Stella Tea, Editor

Becky Cromwell: Birding by Ear

I spent much of late April and May birding in lots of different places. It was a great escape from the stress of pandemic restrictions. My friend Bette is not a birder, but she had been hearing the spring chorus every day and became curious about the identity of these birds. She invited me and another friend, Rosemary, to meet with her on the deck in front of her home on Tuesdays in May.

On our first day, staying at a distance, we sat in meditative silence and listened to the birds for a few minutes. Then we opened our eyes and began to compare notes. The Carolina Wren was the loudest and easiest to identify. We went through a series of common birds, including American Robin, Downy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, and American Goldfinch. We met for several weeks and got better at identifying various birds.

One particularly lovely day in late May, we heard a bird song that I couldn't quite place. I knew I had heard it before but could not remember the bird. I called my mentor Don Messersmith and described the sound, which I recalled being described as a robin with a sore throat. As soon as he heard me say this, he exclaimed, "Scarlet Tanager!" "Yes of course!" We spent the next 15 minutes looking for this bird. Finally we returned to the deck. I said words to the effect that sometimes you have to give up trying to see a bird and just let it come to you. (I'm not sure where that came from, but it made me sound wise.)

A few minutes later, I heard the bird again, and this time it was directly behind me in a small tree. This gorgeous male tanager was sitting on a branch and singing. Bette and Rosemary both got good looks and were excited to see such a beautiful bird. I'd like to say that they have become avid birders: not yet, but on their way. Rosemary received binoculars for her birthday and installed bird feeders on her deck. Bette says that she has a new awareness of bird sounds, even when others are talking. And I continue to go birding every chance I get.

Sarah Lister: The Migratory Bird Treaty Act—What Happens Next?

For more than 100 years, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) has protected U.S. native birds (whether migratory or not) by making any unauthorized "take" or killing of these birds a criminal act. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) regulations define "take" as an action or attempt "to pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect" protected birds, a list that is interpreted broadly to include habitat disruption. FWS and the courts have generally considered prohibited takes to be of three types—(1) direct and intentional (such as poisoning an eagle); (2) direct and unintentional (such as keeping a protected bird as a pet due to lack of awareness of the law); and (3) indirect and unintentional, or "incidental" (such as entanglement in fishing gear, where fishing is the primary activity and the take is unintentional). Under long-standing policy, FWS considered incidental takes as violations of the MBTA. FWS issues permits for certain activities when intentional takes are sustainable (wildlife rehabilitation, scientific studies, taxidermy, and falconry, for example) or when activities are considered essential and incidental takes cannot be prevented entirely (certain military activities, for example).

The prohibition on incidental takes, in particular, has been controversial. Many commercial interests, including energy extraction and generation (e.g., windmills), water resources management, and land development, disrupt or destroy habitats and may harm or kill individual birds as well. Courts have made a range of interpretations on specific activities, noting, for instance, whether a take (such as destruction of breeding habitat) could reasonably have been predicted and mitigated.



In 2017, the Department of Interior (where FWS resides) issued a revised policy, stating that the MBTA did not prohibit incidental takes and began to amend FWS regulations. On January 7, 2021, FWS issued a final regulation stating that “MBTA’s prohibitions on pursuing, hunting, taking, capturing, killing, or attempting to do the same only criminalize actions that are specifically directed at migratory birds, their nests, or their eggs.” Hence, incidental takes, including habitat destruction, will no longer be considered criminal acts under the MBTA.

It is reported that the incoming Biden Administration intends to undo this regulatory rollback. It would have to do so through formal rulemaking, however, which takes time. With the White House and both chambers of Congress under Democratic leadership on January 20, 2021, Congress may be able to overturn the January 7 rule using the Congressional Review Act, which requires only a simple majority in each chamber. This congressional action must be taken within a certain time frame, sometime in spring 2021, the date dependent on specifics of legislative schedules.

Wayne Breslyn: MoCo Birders Help Keep RedGate a Park

After the tireless efforts of MoCo birders (Michael Bowen, Vickie Baily, Anne Mytych, and others), as well as folks from around the county, Rockville City officially named the 144-acre former RedGate Golf Course a park. The enthusiasm of local birders, along with the documentation of bird species present, was an essential part of the campaign to keep the land a park.

As a recently designated eBird hotspot, to date 157 species of birds have been identified at RedGate Park. In early February 2020, a Great Horned Owl nested at RedGate and was the subject of much interest, including articles in the *Washington Post* and other local news outlets.

The former golf course, now park, is rapidly reverting to a more natural state. This spring Rockville City will be accepting public input on whether to keep the park as is or add more amenities. For more information and bird pictures, see www.RedGatePark.org.



Great Horned Owl and Owlet by Michael Conner



Sunrise at RedGate Park by Stella Tea

Winter/Spring Meetings

Given the slow pace of COVID-19 vaccinations and the continuing high rate of infection in the county, we anticipate meeting virtually until the end of May. As a result, an in-person Social in early March does not seem possible. However, we have reserved Woodend in Chevy Chase for Wednesday, September 29 (thank you ANS!) for a delayed Social and to celebrate the beginning of what we hope will be a normal new year. Another bit of good news is that we will continue to have field trips, as long as the necessary precautions highlighted on page 5 are followed.

February 17 (Wednesday) 7:30 PM Montgomery County Birders, Birds, and Birding Over the Years

Michael Bowen, a past president of MBC, will host a panel discussion on Montgomery County birders, birds, and birding over the years. Whether you are a lifelong MoCo birder, brand-new to the county, or somewhere in between, this meeting will offer you a wide range of perspectives and experiences from our host and panelists.

- *Don Messersmith*, MOS historian, will discuss the development of birding in MoCo and of the Montgomery County Chapter of MOS (now the Montgomery Bird Club). Don wrote a lead chapter on this subject for the chapter's *A Birder's Guide to Montgomery County, Maryland* (both the first and second editions).
- *Linda Friedland*, past president of MBC, will discuss the rise in number and breadth of the chapter's field trips over the years. Linda has been responsible for the expansion of both the numbers of trips and the birding areas visited.
- *Frank Witebsky*, past president of MBC, will discuss the changes in bird habitat and publicly accessible birding places in the county, which have been substantial. Frank has been helped in his research by input from Marcia Watson of the parent MOS, guru of the MOS online birding area website.
- *Janet Millenson* will discuss the MOS and its relationships with MoCo and other chapters in the state. Janet was a state director from our chapter as well as president of MOS.
- *Jim Nelson*, past president of MBC, will discuss changes in the county's bird life over the years as reflected in the results of each year's Seneca Christmas Bird Count. Jim has a keen interest in how CBC counts have changed over time and is the current Seneca CBC compiler.

March 17 (Wednesday) 7:30 PM Topic to be announced

Stay tuned and look for additional information on the Montgomery Bird Club website.

April 21 (Wednesday) 7:30 PM Songs of Female Birds Speaker: Karan Odom

Dr. Odom is interested in how animals evolved the diversity of elaborate traits that we see in the natural world. Karan is especially interested in complex bird song and the selection pressures responsible for elaborate song in female and male songbirds. To study this, she uses phylogenetic comparative methods and recordings available in biological collections to investigate how complex bird song has changed in females and males over evolutionary time. She has also developed a citizen science project—the Female Bird Song Project—to increase awareness and documentation of female bird songs for sound archives. Visit www.femalebirdsong.org to learn more.

May 19 (Wednesday) 7:30 PM South African Birds Speaker: Josh Engel

Josh is the founder and chief guide for Red Hill Birding. He grew up birding in the suburbs of Chicago and knew from a young age that birding and travel would factor heavily in his future. After spending a semester studying abroad in Ecuador as an undergrad, he knew he needed to get back there after graduation. He soon found a job guiding in Ecuador for a large international birding tour company; he then moved to South Africa where he spent nearly four years as a full-time guide, leading trips throughout southern Africa, Madagascar, Asia, and beyond. He has guided trips on four continents and conducted bird research around the world. Prior to starting Red Hill Birding, Josh was an ornithologist at The Field Museum in Chicago. Based in Chicago, he appears regularly in the [local media](#), served on the board of the Illinois Ornithological Society, and helped run the Illinois Young Birders group.



Winter/Spring Field Trips

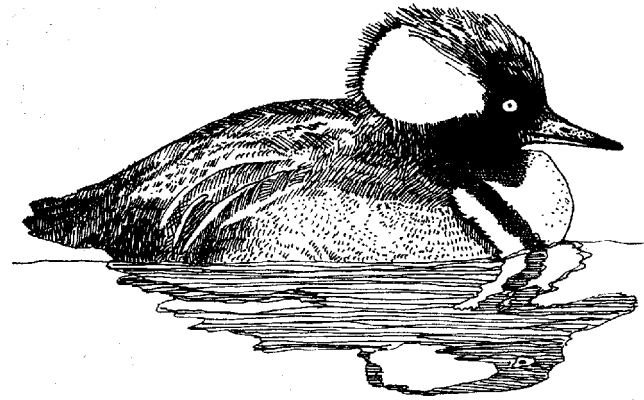
FEBRUARY 7 (Sunday)

HUGHES HOLLOW

Join us for a morning of winter marsh and woodland birding. Targets are sparrows, irruption finches, and possibly ducks. We will meet at the parking lot. Dress for the weather, and bring water and a snack if you like. We will not be too far away from the parking lot if anyone needs to leave early or get something from the car. Beginners and young birders are encouraged to join. Limit: 6. For reservations (required) and meeting time, contact the CO-LEADERS: Nathan Tea at snowmie700@gmail.com or Stella Tea at stazandgazer@gmail.com.

FEBRUARY 10 (Wednesday)

GUNNERS LAKE, GERMANTOWN



This little body of water has established a deserved reputation over the years for a nice variety of wintering waterfowl and rather close views of the birds. If the lake is frozen over at the time of the trip, we will switch to a nearby larger body of water. Participants are invited to bring telescopes, since the leader will probably not be at liberty to share his because of pandemic restrictions. Walking will be along a level, paved path. Meet at 8 a.m. along the north side of Wisteria Drive, where there is ample parking. Specific maps giving directions will be sent to participants. Limit: 6. For reservations (required) and directions, contact the LEADER: Mike Bowen at 202-236-0510 or dhmbowen@yahoo.com.

FEBRUARY 20 (Saturday)

LOIS Y. GREEN CONSERVATION PARK

Morning walk through the varied habitats of this excellent 250-acre park, including two ponds, fields, deciduous and coniferous woods. We'll be looking for overwintering songbirds, waterfowl, and raptors. Meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot at 8711 Snouffer School Road, Gaithersburg, MD. Limit: 6. For reservations (required), contact the LEADER: Mark England at englandmark@comcast.net or 240-308-4114.

FEBRUARY 25 (Thursday)

BLUE MASH

Bundle up and join us for a morning as we search for winter birds in the fields and wood edges of Blue Mash. There is also the possibility of waterfowl on the ponds. Trip will be postponed if the conditions are icy. For reservations (required), meeting time, and directions, contact the CO-LEADERS: Woody and Rae Dubois at denguel@verizon.net.

MARCH 6 (Saturday)

ROCK CREEK'S NORTH BRANCH STREAM VALLEY

Discover upper Rock Creek's watershed with a variety of habitats. We'll start along open fields and marshy areas next to Bowie Mill Park with the opportunity to see sparrows, hawks, and early migrants. Turkeys and a woodcock have been spotted in this area. For those wanting a longer foray, a 4-mile loop that includes the stream valley will be possible and likely we'll see woodpeckers and other resident woodland species. The path at this point along Rock Creek is meandering and narrow with some steep sections. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Bowie Mill Park (<https://www.montgomeryparks.org/parks-and-trails/bowie-mill-local-park/>) next to Sequoyah Elementary School with the option to do the shorter paved walk or the longer loop. Limit: 12 in two groups of six each. For reservations (required) and more information, contact the CO-LEADERS: Josephine Cox at jobirder11@gmail.com or 240-506-1723 or Anne Mytych at amytych@yahoo.com or 240-506-0236.

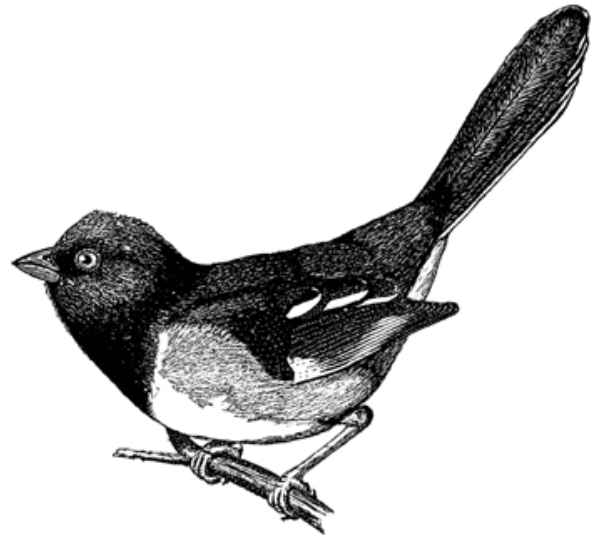


Winter/Spring Field Trips

MARCH 12 (Friday)

WHEATON REGIONAL PARK FOR BEGINNERS

Mid-March is still early for spring migration but who knows? Wheaton RP always surprises us. Ducks, woodpeckers, flycatchers, raptors (sometimes a Merlin!), bluebirds, towhees are all possible, and if you don't already know WRP you will enjoy the variety of terrain and landscape. Limit: 12 in two groups of six each. For reservations (required) and meeting information, please contact the CO-LEADERS: Evelyn Ralston at evelynralston@icloud.com or 240-505-0699 or Susan Hunt at shunt820@yahoo.com or 240-426-4407.



MARCH 27 (Saturday)

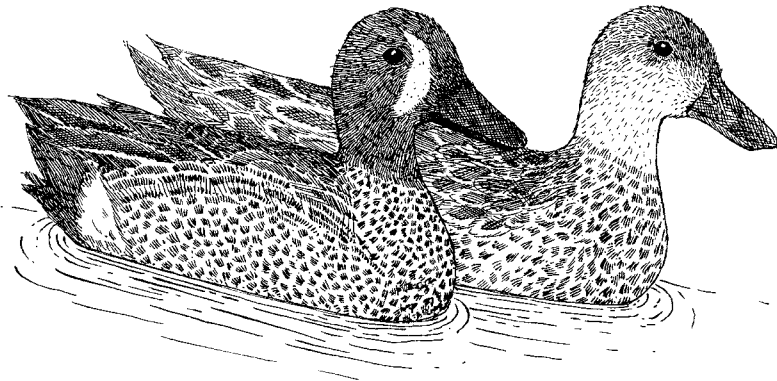
CABIN JOHN REGIONAL PARK

Explore the scrub habitat below the power lines cutting through Cabin John Regional Park. Spend the morning studying multiple sparrow species with the potential for an American Kestrel that overwintered here in 2019. We will be walking the dirt road with a few moderate inclines. Limit: 6. For reservations (required) and more info, email the LEADER: Max Wilson at mercretas@hotmail.com.

MARCH 31 (Wednesday)

PENNYFIELD LOCK

We'll be looking for early warblers and lingering waterfowl as we head upstream for a several hour walk. Easy walking on level ground. Meet at the Pennyfield parking lot at 7 a.m. Limit: 6. For reservations (required) and more info, contact the LEADER: Dave Powell at seneca.ranger@gmail.com.



APRIL 11 (Sunday)

HUGHES HOLLOW

Half day. We will meet at Hughes Hollow parking lot in the McKee-Beshers WMA at 7 a.m. We will explore the wetlands and fields of Hughes Hollow. 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. Limit: 6. For reservations (required) and additional information, contact the LEADER: Jim Nelson at kingfishers2@verizon.net or 240-515-4517 (cell).

APRIL 24 (Saturday)

CROYDON CREEK NATURE CENTER

Come discover this lovely park during spring migration. Lots of migrants pass through, including many warblers. Meet in the parking lot at 7:30 a.m. Limit: 6. For reservations (required) and more information, contact the CO-LEADERS: Anne Mytych at amytych@yahoo.com or 240-506-0236 or Emily Huang at EPHuang@verizon.net.



Winter/Spring Field Trips

APRIL 25 (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. Limit: 12 in two groups of 6 each. For reservations (required), contact the CO-LEADERS: Mike Bowen at 202-236-0510 or dhmbowen@yahoo.com or Gerry Hawkins at 571-277-8406 or maineusa@comcast.net. Directions: From Maryland, take I-495 south to I-95 south, LEFT Exit 161 (Woodbridge), 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 2 (Sunday)

IZAACK 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. Limit: 6. For reservations (required) and driving directions, contact the LEADER: Jim Nelson at kingfishers2@verizon.net or 240-515-4517.

MAY 7 (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: 6. For more information and reservations (required), email the LEADER: Paul Woodward at grackling@att.net.

MAY 8 (Saturday)

LITTLE BENNETT R.P.

Half day. We will be looking for warblers and other migrants on the Wilson Mill and Kingsley Trails. Possible Kentucky Warbler. Limit 6. For reservations (required) and more information, contact the LEADERS: Woody and Rae Dubois at dengue1@verizon.net.

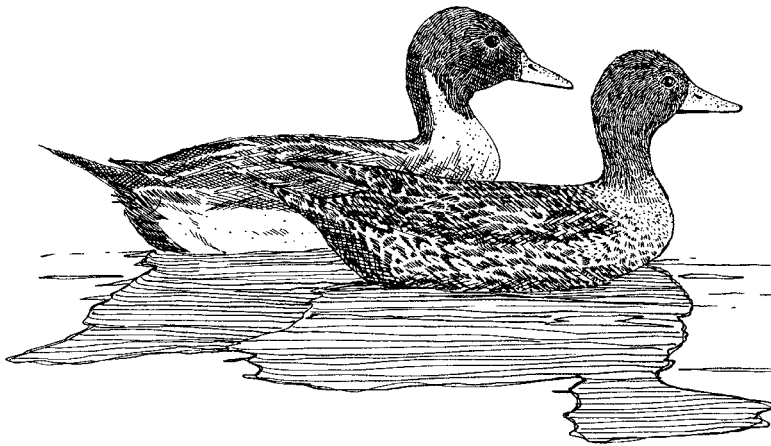
MAY 9 (Sunday)

ROCK CREEK PARK, DC

Near peak time for migrant warblers, vireos, etc. Meet at 7 a.m. at the Nature Center parking lot. Limit: 6. For reservations (required) and more information or specific directions, contact the LEADER: Gerry Hawkins at maineusa@comcast.net or 571-277-8406 (cell).



Trip Reports



Saturday, October 24, 2020, MBC Presidents' Walk at Blue Mash

Leader: Andy Martin. Club members enjoyed a great outing to Blue Mash Nature Trail on October 24 for the Annual Presidents' Walk—a trip to see some good birds and honor past and current presidents of the Montgomery Bird Club. Current President Evelyn Ralston and 2 past presidents, Linda Friedland and Lydia Schindler, were in attendance along with 4 other members of the club. Weather was great, sunny with temperatures heading toward the low 60s. We netted 41 species for the day. Highlights included 4 Northern Pintails and 25

Green-winged Teals in the “big pond.” We checked a flock of shorebirds on the pond’s mudflats but could only come up with 40 or so Killdeer. A late Common Yellowthroat was nice plus 5 Palm Warblers and some great close-up looks at an Eastern Phoebe and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

Wednesday, November 11, 2020, RedGate Park: Basics of Sparrow ID

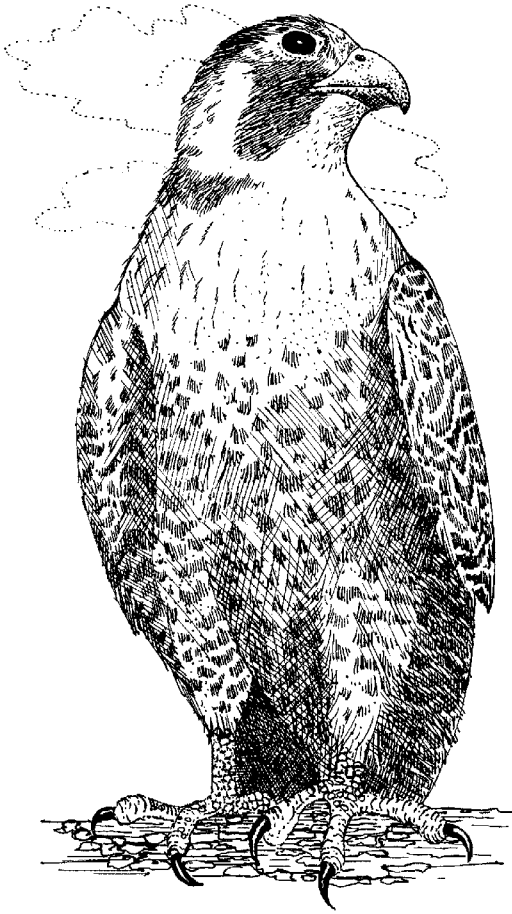
Eight participants and two leaders: Lydia Schindler and Linda Friedland. Overcast skies and unseasonably warm temperatures with the forecast of rain holding off until noon. We began our annual Veterans Day sparrow search at 7:30, heading down the path to the “sparrow pit,” a meadow that had recently provided birders with a trove of sparrows. But this morning the sparrows were keeping quiet and low. At the pit, a flurry of activity in the bushes and brambles quickly gave way to rain, a drizzle at first and then coming down in earnest that made ID-ing difficult. Even with fogged optics, one or another of our group managed to get glimpses of some 20 species of birds, including Fox, Song, White-throated, Swamp, and Chipping Sparrows, plus juncos and towhees.



Sunday, November 29, 2020, Lilypons Water Gardens, Frederick County

Leaders: Clive Harris and Dave Powell. Participants: 12 including leaders. This is always a popular trip so we had 2 leaders leading two separate groups cover the property. Weather: An excellent morning, calm and dry. Total species between the two groups: 54. We had a good morning for sparrows, including good looks at multiple Fox and White-crowned Sparrows and an eventually cooperative American Tree Sparrow, which we found in a small dried-up pond near the main buildings and which everyone got on. A late, lingering Great Egret tripped the eBird rarity filter, and in the same area we had a good assortment of ducks including Gadwall, American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Bufflehead, and Hooded Merganser. We encountered the usual assortment of winter birds, although Rusty Blackbirds provided only poor views, and we had just one each of Pine Siskin and Purple Finch, good for most years but low for an irruption year. As well as the 3 sparrows mentioned above, we had many Song, Swamp, and White-throated Sparrows, and we had a chance to distinguish their call notes. Other highlights included flyover American Pipits and Eastern Meadowlarks and 6 species of woodpeckers. Checklists: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76859480> and <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76852956>.

Trip Reports



Sunday, December 6, 2020, Cambridge and Blackwater NWR

Leader: Mark England. Participants: 6 including leader. Weather: An excellent sunny day, though very windy and cold early on. Total species: 46. We started at 9 a.m. as usual at the Dorchester County (Sailwinds) Visitor Center on the Choptank River in Cambridge, where we fought bitter cold winds but saw expected Surf Scoters and Bufflehead. At the Cambridge Marina, we had the resident three gull species, a female White-winged Scoter, and superb close looks at Long-tailed Ducks swimming within the boat piers near the lighthouse. Oakley Street was lacking the usual assortment of ducks, but we saw several close species from the next street over, including American Wigeon, Canvasback, Redhead, and Lesser Scaup. We added Laughing Gull, Ruddy Duck, and domestic Muscovy Ducks farther down the waterfront, before heading out of Cambridge and stopping at the Goose Creek Store. From there we did the long, slow drive down Egypt Road, which was slower than usual, though we did see one meadowlark, one kestrel, and a well-seen buffy-colored juvenile Peregrine Falcon. While we were watching the Peregrine, a very dark and puzzling eagle soared into view. We debated its identity for some time before agreeing that it soared entirely on flat wings (no dihedral at all) and was likely a young Bald Eagle and not a Golden. At the Blackwater refuge, we stopped in the Visitor Center, ate a quick lunch in our cars while watching a harrier or two, and then did the Wildlife Drive. Dabbling ducks were MIA this day, and we saw only two Northern Shovelers, two American Black Ducks, and a few Hooded Mergansers. We did find two high-up Brown-headed Nuthatches and too many Tundra Swans

to count, though we did not see any of the usual shorebirds or American White Pelicans. After some folks headed back, the leader and two others drove over to Bestpitch Ferry Road and enjoyed mostly distant views of four Northern Harriers and at least three Short-eared Owls. Thanks to Ed Vigezzi for tracking our sightings at the numerous stops during the day!

Youth Birding

Young birders across Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, and Washington, DC, from the YMOS continue to make the best out of the pandemic. Over the weekend of December 12, students collectively photographed an amazing 136 bird species for the YMOS Photo Big Day fundraiser with the donations going directly to Lights Out Baltimore. Highlights include a Brown Booby, Western Grebe, Rufous Hummingbird, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Red Crossbill, Orange-crowned Warbler, and a Western Flycatcher. The group also meets virtually on a regular basis and has begun planning for winter/spring field trips. YMOS is a subgroup of the Maryland Ornithological Society and runs birding trips for youth throughout the year. For more information, visit the Youth Maryland Ornithological Society page on Facebook, the Young Birders page on the MOS website (<https://mdbirds.org/young-birders/>), or contact George Radcliffe at radclifg@gmail.com.

– Stella Tea



Christmas Bird Count Reports

Triadelphia Reservoir CBC, December 19, 2020

Wow! It worked! After 3 years out of the past 4 with medium-to-serious weather issues, this count was a joy! And the results confirmed that exuberance.

Weather conditions included winds under 5 mph, light clouds, cool temperatures (16 to 40 degrees F), and not wet although a 1- to 4-inch snow-ice cover kept some counters off trails but didn't interfere seriously with "bushwhacking." But the weather was nearly perfect for a super count and the birds cooperated.

Our species total was 98 with 3 additional birds seen within the 3-day period before and after the actual count (Count Week). This is the highest number since 2010 when I started compiling. We are having a northern irruption year, and the waterfowl arrived at the same time. On the list of the 88 "regularly occurring" species (those that appeared on at least 4 of the previous 10 counts), we saw or heard all but 2: Doubled-crested Cormorant was a Count Week bird, and House Wren just didn't appear. Pine Warbler and American Tree Sparrow were the other Count Week birds. Our most infrequent bird was a single flyover Common Redpoll, seen in only 3 previous years since our first count in 1948. Northern irruption accounts for the Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, and Red-breasted Nuthatches appearing at some of our feeders this winter. The cone crop up North was dreadful, and this is part of a normal but irregular cycle.

Even nicer news was the 11-year high individual species counts (16) and 5 second highs. Notable were numbers of Horned Larks (159), Hermit Thrushes (80), Merlins (6), Common Ravens (16), Dark-eyed Juncos (3,659), and White-throated Sparrows (4,070). Most of these are nearly double previous high counts. But the real bird of the day was the American Pipit. Ten parties plus more in area 6 (Montgomery County) had pipits ranging from singles to flocks of perhaps 100 for a total of 359. Since 2010, we counted 10 in 2013 and 1 in 2017. Large flocks of blackbirds or robins were not seen this year so our total of individuals (around 30,000—I'm still working with double-counted waterfowl on Triadelphia Reservoir) comes off as fairly average.

Our number of observers, 73 with 6 additional feeder watchers (thanks to one of our feeder watchers in Olney for the male Baltimore Oriole) was a second high total, but the hours spent on foot (162.30) was yet another high count since 2010 and has to account at least in part for the great totals.

In Montgomery County, the area south of Rt. 108 and the Patuxent River between Rt. 29 and Georgia Ave. had the most complete coverage since 2010, while the circle west of Georgia Ave, could have used at least one more party, and the Meadowside Nature Center people only fielded one volunteer. I limited counters a bit by keeping all groups to no more than 2 households because of COVID-19, so I had to turn down some new birders who wanted to join us. I trust we will not have that issue next year!

So, thanks to all counters and especially to Gail Mackiernan, Jay Sheppard, and Kathy Reitz for organizing in their areas! Do mark Saturday, December 18, on your calendar for our 2021 count! See you then—happy birding, and all best wishes for a "Happier New Year"!

– David Holmes, Compiler

Seneca Maryland/Virginia CBC, December 20, 2020

As of this writing, I am still crunching the data and verifying some species, so this summary is based on initial reports.

We had good weather for the 62nd Seneca CBC. Even with the limitations imposed by the pandemic, 132 enthusiastic field counters and a new high of 23 feeder watchers worked the count circle and reported 107 species on count day, well above the 96 median for the previous 10 years. As of now, we have at least one additional species—the very unusual Lapland Longspur—that was found only during Count Week for a grand total of 108 species, well above the previous 10-year median of 100. The 35,747 individual birds counted is well above the previous 10-year median of 27,164.

This year a number of unusual birds were reported on count day (still subject to confirmation and acceptance): our second ever Ross's Goose, Cackling Goose in two sectors (third time for the count), a Ring-necked Pheasant (probably a released bird), Sandhill Cranes (becoming more regular), an American Woodcock, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher



(second since 2004), Evening Grosbeaks (first since 2004), Common Redpolls (fourth time ever), and a Snow Bunting (first since 1985). The biggest news for this year's CBC are reports of a Golden-crowned Sparrow and a Black-throated Green Warbler both of which, if accepted, would be firsts for the Seneca CBC and would bring the cumulative total of count day species for the Seneca CBC to 170.

As of preparing this report, I have not yet compared all the individual species totals with prior years, but a few are notable: 244 Horned Larks (highest since 1970), a new high 426 American Pipits, 970 American Goldfinches (highest since 1991), and 68 Eastern Meadowlarks (highest since 1986). Thanks to everyone who came out to count this year under the very daunting conditions of the pandemic 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*

Sugarloaf Mountain CBC, January 3, 2021

The 36th Sugarloaf Mountain CBC took place under a cloud—literally. Luckily, the pre-dawn downpour paused for several hours, enabling most of the 64 field counters and 10 feeder watchers to have a dry, better-than-expected morning before the rain returned. Our final species tally was 88, slightly above average. This was especially impressive because we spent many fewer hours than usual in the field due to the weather and the logistical hardships posed by Audubon's ban

on carpooling. There's also been a scarcity of northern avian visitors in the count area.

Despite these challenges, we still managed to rack up new high counts for a few species: Carolina Wren, White-throated Sparrow (45% above the previous record), and Savannah Sparrow. Cooper's Hawk tied its previous high. Unfortunately, other species fell to record lows: Rock Pigeon, both American Crow and "crow sp.," and Horned Lark.

Five species not on the usual tally sheet were seen and, in several cases, photographed: Greater Scaup, Black-capped Chickadee (last tallied in 2012-2013), Brown Thrasher, Pine Warbler, and Clay-colored Sparrow (last tallied in 2011-2012).

We ended the day with a Zoom tally rally that gave us a chance to see old friends and meet some of our fellow birders for the first time, with no travel required. The consensus was that it had been a good day after all.

Great work, everyone! This count took place in difficult circumstances, yet you showed up enthusiastically as always. Mark your calendars—the next Sugarloaf CBC will take place on Sunday, January 2, 2022. I look forward to seeing you then.

– *Janet Millenson, Compiler*

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Rosalind Bennett

Debby Berlyne

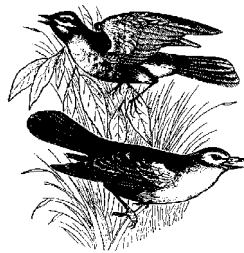
James Fleming

Linda Green

Carolyn Guthrie

Marcy Harrison

Doro Koch



Daniel Obrzut

Mark Ross

Michael Seidman

Whitney Sikes

Dave Snapp

Monte Tarbox

Matt Testa



The Chat
MBC/MOS
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