June 2022 Volume 53, No. 2

TONTGOMERY BIRD

## President's Chat

Way back at the end of January of 2020, while on a Maryland Ornithological Society birding trip to Minnesota, then MBC vicepresident Evelyn Ralston and some other members persuaded me to become the candidate that year for the vice-president of our Club. I remember walking through the airports on the trip, realizing that the SARS-CoV-2 virus

had escaped China and wondering if any of my fellow passengers had it yet. Little did I imagine that over the next two years, tragically, over a million people in the U.S. and another five million worldwide would succumb to the disease directly with countless others indirectly.

However, the Club quickly adapted. We immediately canceled the 2020 March Social Dinner and postponed Gail Mackiernan's April talk until later. Evelyn's steady hand enabled us to resume our regular monthly meetings using the relatively new technique of Zoom. The virtual meetings also enabled our Council meetings to continue on schedule. We did miss various other social events in 2020 and 2021, but we just had a delightful Social Dinner that was pushed to May to take advantage of the fresh air.

Evelyn also oversaw the creation of our new website that I hope everyone is visiting. She envisioned a dynamic site with interesting and up-to-date information for our members and casual visitors as well. Please consider this an invitation to suggest to me or other Council members ways to improve the website and keep it vital. The same goes for other MBC activities as well.

I think we can take pride in that we managed to keep our field trips going with suitable

ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY to the efforts of Linda Friedland who coordinated with the trip leaders. We managed to swell our membership to an all-time high, perhaps an unintended consequence of pandemic-necessitated teleworking, leading people to realize that there are lots of different kinds of birds outside their windows. And I hope we will all work earnestly to involve our new members

COVID-19 precautions, thanks in large part

in birding activities and conservation efforts.

I would like to thank Emily Huang for volunteering to be the Club's vice-president. I know very well the trepidations of taking over that role. Emily has been the county cocoordinator for the Maryland & DC Breeding Bird Atlas 3. She is trained in neuroscience, having earned her PhD in the discipline. I'm very much looking forward to working with her as we navigate the Club through the still uncertain COVID-19 waters. And thanks to the

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#### President's Chat

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other Maryland Breeding Bird Atlas co-coordinator, Karen Cyr, for volunteering to be our new secretary after Alice Jacobsohn's excellent service. (For a complete list of the Club's new officers, please see our website at <a href="mailto:montgomerybirdclub.org/">montgomerybirdclub.org/</a>.)

As mentioned above, we finally held our Social Dinner at the Audubon Naturalist Society's (ANS) Woodend Nature Sanctuary in Chevy Chase this May. The weather was wonderful and the setting under the tent allowed us to view the surrounding landscape while maintaining an open-air environment. The tables were spaced well so members were not crowded as they mingled and enjoyed a return to relative normality. Smokey Glen Farm provided their usual excellent buffet and many members brought their delicious appetizers. Pam Oves, the Woodend Sanctuary Office Manager and MBC *Chat* designer, was tremendously helpful in planning and executing the dinner. Andy Martin was our usual excellent bartender. And the Club generated some revenue by selling and auctioning books owned by the late Helen Patton, a former MBC president. Thanks to Ed Vigezzi, Dave Powell, and Anna Urciolo for their dedication to this fundraiser—and to all the members who made it a special night.



Janet Millenson at the May Social. Photo by Cheryl Hogue

Finally, we had the pleasure of presenting to Janet Millenson a beautiful painting of crows by Diane Ford. As Evelyn wrote in a recent email to our members, Janet "has loved birds and the outdoors as far back as she can remember, has served MOS and MBC in many roles since 1990. She was Editor of the *Chat* for six years and edited the MOS *Yellowthroat* as well. She was president of MOS from 2004-2006, chaired the Communications Committee, and was a member of the 2nd Breeding Bird Atlas Committee." We are so glad to have recognized her at the dinner and to learn that she will continue to serve in the Club as a State Director.

-Scott Young

### Editor's Corner

Besides birding, I love to read books, watch movies, and, since the past year, find and photograph insects with a special interest in moths. How many of you share one or more of these passions? My guess is quite many! I am thrilled to present to you this new issue of the *Chat* and hope that you will find the following pages interesting and enjoyable. When Evelyn Ralston told me that author Susan Fox Rogers wanted to send us her latest book, *Learning the Birds: A Midlife Adventure*, and have us review it, I knew just the Club member who would love to take this on. Some time ago Becky Cromwell had expressed interest in writing book reviews for the newsletter, and I am so glad that we finally got to do this! I can't wait to read Susan's book plus those that Nathan bought for me at the Social.

Looking for a field guide? Young Club member Ryan Carr will share his favorite one with you. One of our newer Club members, Cintia Cabib, will delight you with a sneak peak at her current documentary film project about RedGate Park, which many of us have grown to love and want to preserve. To learn more about Cintia's other projects, check out cintiacabib.com/.

Finally, Lisa Wilcox Deyo hopes to start an informative series of articles about creating and maintaining bird habitats in your garden. And, in time, you may see this effort blossom into a whole new section on the Club website. Stay tuned! I may just need to invite myself to Lisa's house to get some insect lifers! I wish you a great summer, and, like Scott, I encourage you to share your ideas and suggestions for the *Chat*.

-Stella Tea



### Club News

#### Special Thanks to the Audubon Naturalist Society!

The MBC Council, meeting in May, decided to make a donation to the Audubon Naturalist Society in thanks for making Woodend, the beautiful home of ANS in Chevy Chase, available for our Club Social year after year since 2001. We are aware of what a privilege this is. We decided to make a donation using in part the proceeds from our sale of Helen Patton's bird books. Helen was always active at the Social and was a staunch friend and supporter of ANS. She would be happy to see her books help both the Club and ANS. Shortly after the Social, a check for \$1,000 was delivered to ANS by treasurer Chris Wright. Thank you so much, ANS!

-Evelyn Ralston

#### Field Trips Will Return

The Club has had a successful late winter and spring season with over a dozen trips all fully attended, and some with long waiting lists. Check out the trip reports on our website at <a href="mailto:montgomerybirdclub.org/trip-reports/">montgomerybirdclub.org/trip-reports/</a>!

Here is another big thank you to our trip leaders of the past year:

Mike Bowen and Anne Cianni	Emily Huang	<b>Evelyn Ralston</b>
Josephine Cox	Andy Martin	Dave Roberts
Woody and Rae Dubois	Martha Morris	Lydia Schindler
Mark England	Anne Mytych	Nathan Tea
Clive Harris	Jim Nelson	Max Wilson
Gerry Hawkins	Dave Powell	Paul Woodward
Cheryl Hogue	Gemma Radko	Scott Young

We typically don't schedule trips when the Club's program closes down for the summer, but we will start up with a bang in the fall. We already have trip leaders lined up for 15 bird walks beginning in September and through December 2022. It will be another exciting season!

If you are new to MBC or want to improve your birding skills, consider signing up when the trips are announced in the *Chat* and on the website at montgomerybirdclub.org/calendar/. This is a great way to gain new skills from our knowledgeable, experienced leaders and a good way to meet members of our local birding community. Watch for Club emails later this summer for more information.

—Linda Friedland, Field Trip Coordinator

### Welcome New Members

Paul and Denise Allocca
George Borden
John Christy and Sonia Friedman
Sara and Jordan Crosman with Calvin and Cam
Lyn Hardy
Susan Hebert
Amy Heller
Chris Lewis

Sue Lisk
Lynne and Ray Liu
Angela and Ruel Michelin with Moya and Ruel Jr.
Dawn and Kevin Patti with Ella
Donna Rathbone
Carol Rose
Peggy Tevis



## Birds of Note (Late February to Mid-May)

Dave Roberts and Dave Czaplak were able to pick out a **Cave Swallow** perched on a mid-river snag in the Potomac adjacent to Violette's Lock on April 3. The only previous record of this species in Montgomery is from way back in November of 2004. Over the Thanksgiving holiday weekend that year, two **Cave Swallows** were found near the Rte 121 bridge at Black Hill Regional Park.

A **Northern Saw-whet Owl** was a cool find by John Sojda in the "wee" hours (5:43 a.m.) of the morning on February 19 near the Hughes Rd polo fields. This was a "heard only" bird, but John was able to get a recording to accompany his submission to eBird, Cornell's online database.

Serrin Gantt spotted a **Snow Goose** at Lake Placid near Kentlands in Gaithersburg on March 23. The vagrant **Mottled Duck** reported throughout this past winter was last seen at Carderock Recreation Area by Justin Golden on March 7. A beautiful male **Surf Scoter** was seen on the Potomac upstream of Violette's Lock on March 16 by Dave Czaplak.

Roy Howard and James Fleming reported an **Anhinga** at Hughes Hollow on the morning of April 9. They also spoke with a nearby photographer who had seen this same bird the previous morning (April 8). About 10 days later, an **Anhinga** was found by Steve Brynes in Rockville at the Mansion Ponds at Lake Needwood. On April 24, Donna Rathbone again reported an Anhinga at Hughes Hollow, and it was still being seen there as of May 15. Same bird? Different birds? Who knows? Notably, however, this is the third year in a row that this species has shown up in the county and four years out of the last five in which one has been seen. (The first **Anhinga** reported in many years was seen by Jim Ivett at Kentlands in 2018, but it didn't stick around.) The 2020 Anhinga had a fish hook stuck in its beak, so it was easy to determine that this was the same bird that jumped (flew, technically) around different spots in Gaithersburg that summer. The recent **Anhinga(s)** fortunately bear no such distinguishing characteristic, so we have no way to know for sure.

Howard Youth found an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** at Rachel Carson Conservation Park on May 7, and Gabriel Foley reported one along the C&O Canal at

Pennyfield Lock on May 8. Jim Ivett picked out and identified the distinctive call of an **Alder Flycatcher** near Sycamore Landing Rd on May 8.

As of this writing, at least one **Mississippi Kite** has returned to the vicinity of last year's Welsh Park nesting site in Rockville near Beall Elementary School. It was initially reported on May 11 by Bob Augustine. Fingers crossed that an additional bird will show up, and the pair will successfully breed again at this location! Todd Hitchcock noted a first of the season (FOS) **Osprey** flying over Hughes Hollow on February 20.

Jared Fisher reported an **Upland Sandpiper** at the Hughes Rd polo fields on April 16. Stella and Nathan Tea found a **Black Tern** on the Potomac adjacent to Violette's Lock on May 8. Jared Fisher was the first to find a **Red-necked Phalarope** on the Potomac near Violette's Lock the morning of May 14.

Although migrating **Sora** have again shown up at their customary Montgomery location this spring at Hughes Hollow, a few other county wetland areas/ ponds have coaxed this species to drop in for a rest on their way north. Cory Kampf heard a **Sora** in the Hildegard area at Upper Paint Branch Stream Valley Park on April 15. Adeline Louie took some excellent photos of a **Sora** in the pond along the Bethesda Trolley Trail near Woodmont Ave on May 14. A Virginia Rail was reported in the early morning hours at Hughes Hollow by Jared Fisher on April 23. Jared and John Sojda were at Hughes Hollow the following morning on April 24 and heard a **Sora**. Mark Ross, Brooke Levey, and Evelyn Ralston spotted a FOS Common Gallinule at Hughes Hollow on March 25.

Jared Fisher reported a **Marsh Wren** at Hughes Hollow on April 26.

Carla Morris heard an **Eastern Whip-poor-will** in the Potomac area on April 24.

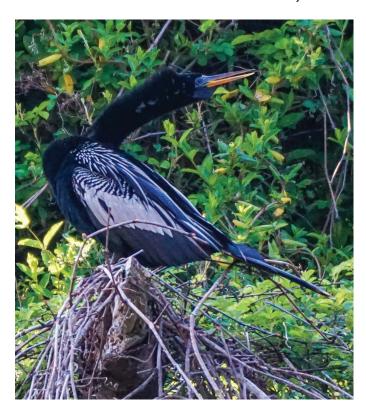
Woody and Rae Dubois noted a **Glossy Ibis** at Hughes Hollow on April 12, and John Sojda found a **Least Bittern** there as well on April 30.

Bob Augustine found a "quite rare" for spring Claycolored Sparrow along the Gude Trail off East Gude Dr in Rockville on April 11. On May 6, while birding along the C&O Canal, Lawrence Rubey found a **Golden-winged Warbler**. And the days and years seem long past when **Cerulean Warblers** were suspected to still breed in the county along the C&O Canal near Sycamore Landing Rd. However, a few still trickle through the county during migration on their way to other breeding spots. Hartmut Doebel noted a **Cerulean Warbler** at Violette's Lock on May 1, and the following day (May 2), Anne Mytych and Brooke Levey documented one at Lake Frank. Bilcha Ahmad reported a **Cerulean Warbler** along the Northwest Branch Burnt Mills Trail on May 3.

A **Sandhill Crane** was spotted in flight over Sharpshin Island on the Potomac River by Dave Czaplak on March 17—no way to tell whether this was one of the three birds that wintered in the vicinity of Lowes Island, VA, and foraged daily in the Poolesville area.

Leo Dilling reported a **Summer Tanager** at Wheaton Regional Park on April 30, and Jim Ivett noted the return of a **Summer Tanager** to their traditional county breeding spot in the woods across from the Summit Hall Turf Farm along River Rd on May 5.

—Andy Martin



Anhinga from Lake Needwood. Photo by Ryan Carr

# Documentary to Feature RedGate Park



As a documentary filmmaker, I have produced films that focus on Washington, DC area people, places, and history. So when Vickie Baily, an avid birder, photographer, and Montgomery Bird Club (MBC) member,

excitedly told me about the many species of birds she and her fellow birdwatchers had discovered at the former RedGate Golf Course in Rockville, Maryland, I sensed that a new documentary was about to take flight.

Club member Anne Mytych was the first person to bird at RedGate after the golf course's closure in December 2018. It soon became a popular destination for birdwatchers and an eBird hotspot. In the meantime, Rockville's elected officials had to decide on the fate of the city-owned 131-acre site. A coalition of local residents who opposed development on the land advocated that it be transformed into a public park. Individuals made their case at public hearings and through letters to the City of Rockville Mayor and Council. In 2020, the Mayor and Council unanimously decided that the former RedGate Golf Course would become RedGate Park. This year, they solicited community feedback on the amenities the public would like to see at RedGate, including an arboretum, a community garden, a nature playground, and an amphitheater.

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#### **Book Reviews**

#### Discovering Birds at Midlife

A review by Becky Cromwell

Learning the Birds: A Midlife Adventure

by Susan Fox Rogers Three Hills (2022) 320 pages, hardcover

"When looking at a bird, nothing else matters; there's no past, no future, only the perfect present. It's much like being in the presence of a great love, nothing but being there, together, matters."

Susan Fox Rogers, who is Writer in Residence at Bard College, is very good at capturing the unique experience of birding. In this memoir, *Learning the Birds: A Midlife Adventure*, she draws us into her midlife adventure of becoming a birder, which she describes as a conversion experience. She begins a relationship with Peter, an

experienced birder who spends most of his time looking for birds in Ulster County in upstate New York. This relationship is an important element in the story, which details the birding adventures they have near their home in Woodstock and in far-flung places like Alaska and Arizona.

Rogers' "spark bird" is the Veery. She describes being in the middle of teaching a class and hearing a song floating through the window that sounds like "golden spirals." This chance occurrence leads her on a hunt to identify the bird and then actually see it. In the process she begins studying field guides and going on field trips, which is how she meets Peter, who becomes her partner and mentor in all aspects of birding.

It is easy to relate to the author's excitement as she sees a string of lifers. Of course, the early days of birding are full of new birds and discoveries. But she makes the case that these feelings continue, even as she gains more experience. At the same time, her powers of observation, patience, and

recognition of bird songs increase. Soon she joins Peter for a Christmas Bird Count (CBC). At first she is intimidated about a day spent counting birds rather than birding. "I anticipated my first Christmas Bird Count as if it might be my induction into the holy world of birding." But during a long day in which she encounters lots of birds, including Saw-whet Owls, Snow Buntings, and Broad-winged

Hawks, she is fully committed.
After the final compiling of birds she has this insight, which may sum up the entire book: "It made me realize that learning birds doesn't happen overnight, can't be taken in during a semester, isn't a discrete skill that you perfect, but a lifelong process."

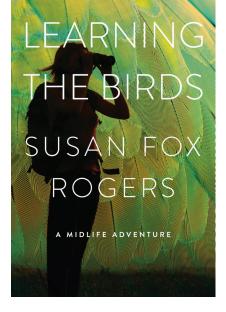
Rogers weaves these stories of birding with short portraits of some noteworthy ornithologists, like Alexander Wilson and John Burroughs. She notes that women ornithologists were underappreciated during their careers, and makes a point of highlighting the contributions of Olive Miller and Florence Bailey.

These passages enrich the narrative without losing the flow.

I have a few quibbles with the book. It does not have an index, which would have been helpful for locating her mention of a specific bird or historic figure. Instead she has endnotes, which are grouped by chapter title, and they are helpful, though not as good as an index would have been.

My other disappointment is that while she mentions John James Audubon and gives some biographical information, she says nothing about the discoveries of his slaveholding and his racism. I want to note this omission, while acknowledging that this information may have come out after she was involved in research for the book. Rogers seems like the kind of writer and essayist who would mention this issue.

However, these are small things that don't detract from the overall quality of this book. I enjoyed it tremendously, and it would make a good gift for any birder—or someone you are trying to convert.



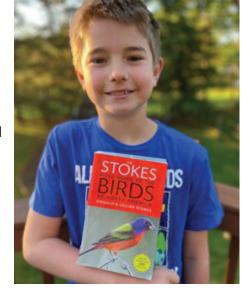
### Field Guide for All Ages

A review by Ryan Carr (Age 10)

The Stokes Field Guide to the Birds of North America by Donald & Lillian Stokes Little, Brown and Company (2010) 816 pages, paperback

When I'm studying birds at home I like to have a variety of books and field guides on hand to get different information and points of view (the library is a great place!). However, when I'm in the field, my goto guide is *The Stokes Field Guide to the Birds of North America*.

I prefer this guide because of the photographs. I find the photographs more helpful than drawings because they show more detail, and I find it easier to identify birds by referencing the photographs vs. the drawings. Most species have photographs from different angles and times of year, which is important. In the corner of every photograph, there is a code that shows the location and



month the photograph was taken, so you can quickly identify different plumages throughout the year.

Next to every bird name, there is the ABA birding code which is helpful for determining how common a bird is. I also like how they list common hybrids for some species. Additionally, I like that it comes with a disk of bird songs and a list you can reference while listening to the audio. The list also shows which page the bird is found on in the book.

I think this is a great field guide and you should try it out!

## Documentary to Feature RedGate Park

(continued from page 5)

Although I did some filming at RedGate in 2020, production on my documentary *Bird Walk* began in earnest in fall 2021. I interviewed and shot footage of six birders—many of whom are MBC members—as well as community residents who are working to ensure that the park's ecosystem remains favorable for the survival of bird species. I did not consider myself a birder before beginning work on the film, but in my quest to film as many bird species as possible at RedGate, I have embraced birdwatching. I have become much more attuned to birds, their habitats, their movements, and their calls and songs.

In my documentary *Bird Walk*, birders talk about how and why they became interested in birds, the joys and challenges of identifying and photographing birds, why they are drawn to RedGate Park, and the conditions that make the park an ideal habitat for a variety of birds. The film will also document the citizen campaign that lobbied for the conversion of the golf course into a public park.

The goal of my film is for viewers to discover the beauty of RedGate Park, the incredible number of bird species that have been identified there, the importance of community-based conservation efforts that preserve wildlife habitats and bird species, and the tools and benefits of birding. The documentary's expected completion date is spring 2023. For news and updates about the film, visit <a href="facebook.com/RedGateBirds">facebook.com/RedGateBirds</a>.

—Cintia Cabib



## Gardening for Birds

#### Summer: Native Plants That Attract Insects

This spring while searching for warblers in the American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*) outside my office window, I became mesmerized by the Carolina Chickadees hanging upside down by clinging to the leaves with their toes. From this position they craned their heads up to pluck mouthfuls of aphids from the catkin flowers. Many acrobatic warblers feast in the hornbeam tree in spring, but the chickadee is the only one I have seen that feeds from such a hazardous position. It would have been much easier for these birds to snatch hulled sunflower seeds from our nearby tray feeder. Yet the chickadees continuously showed preference for the aphids and rarely visited the feeder.

Insects are an unusually high source of energy for birds. According to entomologist and ecologist Dr. Doug Tallamy, insects contain more protein pound for pound than hamburger meat. Nearly all North American terrestrial birds raise their young on insects, not seeds or berries. Tens of thousands of species of insects feast on native plants, since it generally takes a long time evolutionarily to adapt to ornamental (nonnative) species. For example, while birds may shelter in the invasive (non-native) vines on trees in our local parks, they won't find a diversity of insects there. A study by Dr. Tallamy compared the insect biomass and density of four common woody natives in his Pennsylvania yard (black oak, black cherry, black walnut, and fox grape) with those of the five most common alien plants (autumn olive, mile-a-minute weed, oriental bittersweet, multiflora rose, and Japanese honeysuckle). His diversity sampling found that native plants harbored over 4 times more insect mass and 3.2 times more species.



Carolina Chickadee with a mouthful of aphids. Photo by Lisa Wilcox Deyo



Northern Parula feeding in a hornbeam tree. Photo by Lisa Wilcox Deyo

Native perennials that attract pollinating butterflies and bees also help birds. Goldenrod (*Solidago rugosa*), black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida*), and swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) attract copious amounts of insects that birds eat. These native plants are widely available and easy to add to a sunny corner of your garden. Mountain mint species (*Pycnanthemum muticum*, *P. tenuifolium*) are two of my favorite beautiful insect magnets. They will flower in part shade, and the deer don't eat them as they are in the mint family. Late-blooming native asters such as New England aster (*Aster novae-angliae*) or white wood aster (*Aster divaricatus*) feed pollinating bees and flies in the autumn, which helps fuel birds for their migrations.

Native shrubs and trees—oaks, maples, and river birches—are hosts for hundreds of insect species that warblers and other bird species rely on to feed their young. In July in the mountains of western Maryland, we observed a Black-throated Green Warbler family and a Scarlet Tanager hunting caterpillars in a black oak. In a nearby burn area, a Common Yellowthroat carried a juicy caterpillar almost the size of its head.

The leaves of the massive oak canopy seemed to all be shot full of holes. It looked bad for the trees, but this insect damage is actually the sign of a healthy ecosystem.

Native suburban trees like the river birch and black cherry are also subject to caterpillar infestations. In turn, native birds such as the Yellow-billed Cuckoo rely on these caterpillars for food in summer. The tent caterpillar nests look unsightly, but they don't usually kill mature trees. The black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) also has berries that Scarlet Tanagers and Cedar Waxwings eat in early spring. Attractive native shrubs and trees that work in the average suburban garden to attract insects include buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), and southern arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*).

Not every plant in the garden needs to be native, but adding native plant species helps increase ecological diversity, which is essential for healthy populations of insects and birds. The pressures of development, invasive species, and deer are reducing the ecological diversity of our public lands and birding hotspots. It is increasingly evident that suburban gardens are important in creating sanctuaries for our native birds. In my small garden, it's entertaining to watch the upside-down feeding of birds in the hornbeam and satisfying to know that the tree is helping them survive.



My home garden with a diversity of plants and shrubs. Photo by Melissa Clark

Some resources for native plant gardening include:

- Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants by Douglas W. Tallamy
- The Living Landscape: Designing for Beauty and Biodiversity in the Home Garden by Rick Darke and Douglas W. Tallamy
- Armitage's Native Plants for North American Gardens by Allan M. Armitage
- Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

—Lisa Wilcox Deyo



## Youth Birding

The YMOS (Youth Maryland Ornithological Society) sent five teams to Cape May to compete in the 39th Annual New Jersey Audubon's World Series of Birding. Funding was provided by the proceeds of a very successful March Birdathon (138 species found at the conclusion of the two-day event and only 2 species missed from the 100 Must-See species list!). A big thank you to all MBC members who contributed to this one and only YMOS fundraiser for the year.

Congratulations to all five teams who excelled on the Big Day on May 14! A special shoutout to MBC member Ryan Carr and his team, the YMOS Fantastic Fledglings, for placing first in Division A for Grades 1-5 in the Level 3: Zeiss Youth Challenge. Ryan and his teammates logged an impressive 118 species birding non-stop for 15 hours, not to mention the hours spent scouting ahead of time. Perhaps Ryan will share his adventure with the Club in a future issue of the *Chat*. For final team standings, visit worldseriesofbirding.org/.

The YMOS runs birding trips for youth throughout the year. For more information, visit the Young Birders page on the MOS website (mdbirds.org/young-birders/), the MBC website (montgomerybirdclub.org/young-birders/), the Youth Maryland Ornithological Society page on Facebook, or contact George Radcliffe at radclifg@gmail.com.

-Stella Tea

## May 2022 Social Photos



President Evelyn Ralston (right) presents a painting to our Guest of Honor, Janet Millenson. Photo by Cheryl Hoque





The arrangement at Woodend allowed for comfortable mingling of the members. Photo by Scott Young



President Evelyn Ralston emceeing the Social Dinner. Photo by Cheryl Hogue



Past President Anna Urciolo helped with the book sale fundraiser. Photo by Scott Young

The Chat MBC/MOS 7101 Ridgewood Ave Chevy Chase, MD 20815



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Editor: Stella Tea

**Designer:** Pam Oves

Art: Gemma Radko
President: Scott Young

Membership: Moira Davenport

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Contact: montgomerybirdclub@mdbirds.org

