



The Whoosletter

Back to School Issue

A Quarterly Publication of the Carroll County Bird Club

*This is the Back to School issue. It is a little shorter than some of the previous **Whoosletters**, however, it was important to publish the schedule of activities in a timely manner. Hopefully, you will find a lot of lectures and field trips that interest you. Learning about birds is a lifelong process. Over the summer, it's easy to forget things.*

One of our members cannot be accused of taking a long summer vacation however. At our planning meeting in May, I asked if anyone knew anything about developing a webpage or a Facebook page. Nancy Bittler volunteered and has been working on this project on and off ever since. Marginally assisted by CJ, Amy, and myself, Nancy managed to produce both.

*We invite you to check out <https://carrollcountybirdclub.com>. Hopefully, this will be a great source of information for members and for others interested in Carroll County birds. There are many of the features usually found in **The Whoosletter**, including species profiles, book reviews, field trip reports, birding hot spots, etc. There is also a members only section where we plan on publishing a directory in case you want to get in touch with any of your fellow birders.*

If you are so inclined, our Facebook page may be accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1832508113740076/>. Members will receive an "invite" soon.

*Many thanks to Nancy for using her special talents to bring this to fruition. Eventually, the webpage will replace **The Whoosletter** with articles appearing directly online. In the meantime, please enjoy this issue. Cori Brown provides us with an interesting report on her experiences in South Africa. Craig Storti reviews a book on the biggest year yet. The May Count results are summarized and the Black-billed Cuckoo is profiled.*

Into Africa

Text and Photos by Cori Brown

Sometimes you have to go far away to get what you wish for. In my case, it was South Africa. My wish was an accidental one but one that I will always cherish.

I long to find and photograph owls close to home. I hear them occasionally in the yard. I've even seen and photographed a few from the old days of film. Recently a Barred Owl appeared in a tree next to the house but it was so dark that I barely got its silhouette with my digital camera. My luck runs more towards the evidence left behind, namely pellets. It's not unlike Charlie Brown at Halloween when he gets rocks instead of candy for trick or treat! I get owl pellets instead of owls!

Mind you, the pellets never disappoint me. I've found quite a few over the years and dissected almost every one. It's amazing what's in the pellets from numerous skulls to chunks of fluffy gray fur. It's obvious the owls around here are very well fed. I learned a lot from these dissections, including the fact that shrews have red teeth from iron deposits. Who knew (I sure didn't)?

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So back to the owls and my so far unfulfilled dream of photographing them here at home. A few years ago, Jim (my better half) and I went on safari in South Africa. Jim used to work for the airlines and knows great places to go for wildlife watching.

We self-drove Kruger National Park and saw the famous big five animals: elephant, lion, Cape buffalo, rhino and leopard. (The leopard was tough to spot but we did it.) I was petrified of the elephants (way too big for me) not to mention that I was way more interested in the birds.

From the time we touched down to the day we left, I filled my time looking at as many birds as possible. Even the ordinary birds, like starlings, looked extraordinary to me. All total, I saw over 30 species of birds. I was pretty pleased considering that birds shared the stage with lots of other animals and lots of wine (South Africa has many wineries, all of them good).

For me, several birds stood out from the rest. At the top of the list was Verreaux's Eagle-Owl. We found this incredible owl while on a guided bush walk. (The guides were armed with rifles in case hippos charged us.) Not long into the walk we found one roosting in a tree not far from the water. Finally I got to photograph an owl and a huge one at that (it's the largest owl in the region, standing at 26 inches tall). Anyone who has seen this owl can't miss its most distinctive feature: pink eyelids! It's as if it just came from the beauty parlor! It looked sleepy and bored by our presence. I can't say the same for me. I was thrilled and snapped away while it posed for us.



Verreaux's Eagle-Owl

Next on the list was the Secretary Bird. What an extraordinary looking bird. Those long legs (It looked like it had on capri pants.), bright red-orange face, and spiky head feathers made it look like a rock star. The

long powerful legs are used to stomp and kill prey so I can only imagine how strong they are. I would not want to be stomped by this bird!



Secretary Bird

Finally, I fell in love with the bee-eaters and rollers. Though I only saw a few of the species, their colors were so brilliant and beautiful that they took my breath away. Who could not love these birds?



Lilac-breasted Roller



White-fronted Bee-eater



Little Bee-eater

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I felt privileged to see all these beautiful birds that call South Africa home. I hope the next time we go, they will all still be there. Many of them, including even homely vultures, face some of the same dangers as ours do here at home: loss of habitat, climate change and poaching to name a few. How small our world and how diminished humanity would be without them.

Book Review

Lost Among the Birds

Accidentally Finding Myself in One Very Big Year

by Neil Hayward

Reviewed by Craig Storti

This is a terrific book, whether you're a birder or not. And that's saying something; most books about birding, try as they might, just can't manage a strong story line, something other than we found this bird and then we found that one. A book needs a story, any book, and sorry, but birds by themselves just aren't a story. That's why **The Big Year** was such a breakthrough birding book (and was even made into a movie, for heaven's sake) because it was written by a regular guy (i.e., not a birder) and it had a story.

And **Lost Among the Birds** has at least three stories: Will Neil decide to do a big year or not? If he does, will he decide to go for the record? And what happens to his relationship with his girlfriend if he commits to a big year? And then there's the added drama of deciding so late and whether he'll be able to make up for considerable lost time.

Even then, story-rich as this book may be, you still have to care enough about this guy to stick around for the answers to these questions. And Hayward makes sure you do, with just enough personal information (but not too much; he is British after all, although he lives in Boston), typical English self-deprecation, and a way of not taking himself too seriously. Plus, he's a very good birder, and you just have to admire his skill.

For some readers, there may be a bit too much here about his fear of commitment, but not to worry: he gets back to birds very quickly. And there are lots of them and lots of great stories. My favorite is the lengths Hayward went to to get the Five-striped Sparrow, down

the very bad, very remote, and not very safe Ruby Road in far southeastern Arizona. (I was there myself in June and decided to not even start down that road.)

And because he starts so late to go for the record (748, previously held by Sandy Komito of **The Big Year** fame, the guy played by Owen Wilson if you saw the movie)—he commits so late, you can't imagine how he can pull this off. The tension really does build.

His biggest challenge is Alaska. It used to be you could head out to Attu, one of the most western islands in the Aleutian chain, and pick up all manner of exotics. **The Big Year** is full of Attu incidents—Sandy Komito spent four weeks there—but getting to Attu is now severely restricted since the Coast Guard closed down its station there in 2010. So there's no usable landing strip, no water, and no electricity.

Wikipedia takes up the story from there: "In a 2010 interview on the subject, Al Levantin (one of Komito's competitors during the 1998 season) singled out the inaccessibility of Attu as the factor that would make it nearly impossible to break Komito's record."

Impossible? Did Neil pull it off? You'll have to read the book to find out.

Species Profile

Black-billed Cuckoo

Coccyzus erythrophthalmus



When describing the Black-billed Cuckoo, most authors cannot resist the temptation to combine this species with the very similar Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Both birds are about the same size. Both are reclusive and frequently difficult to see, in spite of the fact that

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they may be calling nearby. Both favor shrubby edge habitats, although the Black-billed species tends to prefer drier thickets. The list of similarities goes on and on.

So, if you happen to see a cuckoo sitting on a branch, how do you tell to which species it belongs? First, they don't call them yellow-billed and black-billed for nothing. The bill of the former is mostly yellow while that of the latter is obviously black. Suppose you cannot see the bill that well, however. Your next best bet would be to check out the bird's tail. The Yellow-billed Cuckoo has large white spots, while those on the tail of the Black-billed Cuckoo are smaller.

Chances are, however, that you are going to hear a cuckoo before you see one. (if you ever do see one!) So, it would be best to learn to distinguish between their calls. Unfortunately, neither sounds like a clock. That would be the European species. The Yellow-billed Cuckoo's call has been described as "ka ka ka...kowp kowp kowp". The Black-billed goes "cu cu cu". Short, sweet and all in one pitch. Supposedly, cuckoos sing more just before a rain shower. For that reason, they were referred to at one time as rain crows.

Black-billed Cuckoos spend the winter in South America and the summer in the Northeastern United States and Southeastern Canada. Although arriving back on their breeding grounds in late April to mid-May, nesting may not begin at once. In fact, there is a wide variation in nesting dates from year to year. This may be due to the abundance (or paucity) of the insects that the birds feed to their young.

Once the urge finally hits them and the mostly monogamous pairs form, both sexes participate in nest building. These nests are frequently described as being unkempt and flimsy platforms lined with soft plant material. They can frequently be sited anywhere from two to eight feet off the ground.

Egg-laying follows. There are usually two or three of these, however, in times when caterpillars are in particular abundance, clutches as large as eight have been recorded. On the other hand, if the insect food source suddenly crashes or the cuckoo's own nest is destroyed (or falls apart) before some eggs are laid, the Black-billed Cuckoo may be inclined to dump them in the nests of other birds at hand. These have

included Yellow Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Eastern Wood-Pee-wee, Northern Cardinal, Cedar Waxwing Gray Catbird, Wood Thrush, American Robin, or even Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

The Black-billed Cuckoo should not be compared to the Brown-headed Cowbird, however. It generally raises its own young in its own nest. Unlike most bird species, when the young hatch, the Black-billed Cuckoo makes no effort to remove the egg shells from the nest.

Black-billed Cuckoos are primarily insect eaters. They consume large quantities of caterpillars, cicadas, grasshoppers, tree crickets, etc. They have also been known to eat tree frogs. Fruits may be added to the diet in the summer and fall months. These include elderberry, mulberry, and wild grape.

What cuckoos are most famous and appreciated for, however, is the fact that they specialize in eating hairy caterpillars. Many of these are injurious ones. Gypsy Moth, Forest Tent Caterpillar, and Canker Worm are all on the menu.

What happens to all the hairs? The cuckoos do not digest them. Rather, the hairs accumulate over time, building up little masses in their stomachs. At some point, this gets to be a bit much and the birds shed their whole stomach linings and grow new ones. (Yuck!) How often this occurs is a matter for some graduate student in Ornithology to figure out some day.

Black-billed Cuckoos usually only nest once in a season. After the nestlings fledge, the adults fall silent. Migration takes place at night in September and October, the ultimate destination being South America.

Both cuckoo species are masters of what is called counter-shading. This is a sort of camouflage where the bird is dark on top and white underneath. It tends to obscure its outline, making it less visible to predators.

Cuckoos are probably more abundant here now than in the past. (That's nice for a change.) This is no doubt due to the increase in edge habitats facilitated by human settlers. Land and forestry practices may have also encouraged caterpillar irruptions.

A group of cuckoos (Not that you are probably ever going to see one) is called a "cooch" or an "asylum" As far as can be determined, Audubon never ate one.

CCBC May Count 2017

On May 13, 2017, the Carroll County Bird Club participated in the statewide May Count. Attached are the results that were sent to the MOS compiler.

A summary is included below.

19 observers in 12 parties participated in this year's May count. All in all, they covered 27 miles on foot and 311 miles in vehicles to record 6,067 individuals belonging to 125 separate species.

While the species total was less than the 2014 (127) and 2016 (130) counts, it exceeded those of 2013 (98) and 2015 (107). A good day's birding was had in spite of the less than ideal weather with fog and drizzle at various times during the day.

23 warbler species were recorded, including a Lawrence's hybrid that Maureen and Dave were fortunate enough to come across.

Out in the grasslands, Bob and others spotted Dickcissel, Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, and Horned Lark. Bob also located a nesting Yellow-crowned Night-Heron.

No Swamp or Savannah Sparrows appeared, however, there were still 40 White-throated Sparrows hanging about. Sharon and Cori turned up a White-crowned Sparrow on their count territory.

As usual, there were lots of House Finches. This year though, we also had three Purple Finches that evidently weren't quite ready to move on. That may also have been the case with the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker that Penny and Allan had at their feeder. Other than this surprise, all the expected woodpecker species were recorded.

Black Vultures again outnumbered Turkey Vultures. This appears to be a continuing trend.

It was nice to see all of the five expected swallow species represented. These included Tree, Northern Rough-winged, Barn, Cliff, and Bank. Purple Martins also made the list and there were good numbers of Chimney Swifts recorded across the county.

Now for the top twenty species in terms of numbers:

European Starling	445
Canada Goose	387
Gray Catbird	321
Barn Swallow	304
Tree Swallow	294
American Robin	271
Northern Cardinal	250
American Goldfinch	234
Mourning Dove and Red-winged Blackbird	184
American Crow	167
Blue Jay	138
House Finch	120
Chipping Sparrow	116
Common Grackle	113
House Sparrow	104
Eastern Bluebird	101
Common Yellowthroat	93
Tufted Titmouse and Song Sparrow	92

Thanks to everyone who counted. Special thanks to Susan and Barb who hosted the tally rally. The next count will be on Saturday, September 16th.



Cedar Waxwings

Carroll County Bird Club 2017-2018 Schedule

Saturday, September 2 - 8:00 am, half-day trip

Morgan Run South – Meet at the parking lot at the end of Ben Rose Lane. Moderate hike. We'll look for early migrants. Contact Bill Ellis at 443-520-8809.

Wednesday, September 6 - 7:00 pm, speaker program

The Maryland Bird Conservation Initiative by Chris Eberly at Carroll Nonprofit Center in Westminster. Contact Don Jewell at jewelldg@gmail.com.

Saturday, September 16, up to all day

Carroll County Fall Bird Count - Parties of counters will set their own schedules in their pre-arranged areas to count resident and late migrant bird species throughout the County. Contact Don Jewell to verify your bird counting area (jewelldg@gmail.com or 410-259-4716). There will be no Tally Rally.

Saturday, September 23 - 8:00 am, until ?

Birds and Booze – What better combination could there be? Join us for birding on the trails of the The Galloping Goose Vineyard at 4326 Maple Grove Road in Hampstead (<https://www.gallopinggoosevineyards.com/contact1.shtml>) followed by wine tasting at around 11:30am. (There is an \$8.00 charge for the tasting.) Bill Ellis will lead. Contact him at 443-520-8809 if you have any questions.

Wednesday, October 4 - 7:00 pm, speaker program

A Birder's Guide to Trees by Jim Bauch at Carroll Nonprofit Center in Westminster. Contact Don Jewell at jewelldg@gmail.com.

Saturday, October 7 - 8:00 am, half-day trip

Piney Run Park - As a follow-up to the talk on trees, Jim Bauch will help us put our new knowledge to use. Moderate walking. Meet at the parking lot outside the gate to Piney Run Park on Martz Road off of White Rock Road. Contact Jim at 410-596-4426.

Saturday, October 14 - 8:00 am, half-day trip

Cromwell Valley Park - Meet at the parking lot at the intersection of Routes 32 and 97 to form carpools. Cromwell Valley is a great place to see migrants. Contact Bob Ringler at 410-303-2792.

Wednesday, November 1 - 7:00 pm, speaker program

Birding Colorado – What the Leck! by Dave Harvey at Carroll Nonprofit Center in Westminster. Contact Don Jewell at jewelldg@gmail.com.

Saturday, November 4 – 8:00 am, half-day trip

Hashawha - Concentrating on Sparrows. Meet in the parking lot at Bear Branch Nature Center. For more information, contact Tom Miller at 410-627-4384.

Saturday, December 2 - 8:00 am, half-day trip

Piney Run Park - Moderate walking around the lake. Meet at the parking lot outside the gate to Piney Run Park on Martz Road off of White Rock Road. Dave and Maureen Harvey will be leading this trip. Contact them at 410-795-3117.

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Wednesday, December 6 - 7:00 pm, speaker program

Rice is Nice – Lessons for Bird Conservation by Paul Baicich at Carroll Nonprofit Center in Westminster. Contact Don Jewell at jewelldg@gmail.com.

Saturday, January 6 - 7:30 pm until ?

Annual Holiday Party at the Yinglings - Meet at the Yinglings' home at 70 Ridge Road in Westminster. Talk birds, eat, drink, and have fun with fellow birders. Sue and Splinter Yingling, hostess/host. Please coordinate with the Yinglings to bring a dish at syngling@mac.com or 410-857-0902.

Saturday, January 13 – definitely all day.

Ocean City Day Trip – Gluttons for punishment will enjoy this one. We will also probably see a lot of really good birds. Meet at the Park and Ride on Route 32 just south of Route 26 in Eldersburg. Contact Bob Ringler at 410-303-2792.

Saturday, January 20 - up to all day

Carroll County Mid-Winter Bird Count - Parties of counters will set their own schedules in their pre-arranged areas to count winter bird species throughout the County. Contact Don Jewell to verify your bird counting area (jewelldg@gmail.com or 410-259-4716) Tally Rally will be hosted by Amy Hoffman at her home. If you will be attending the Tally, please RSVP to Amy (410-549-3598) no later than Wednesday, January 17 and plan on bringing a food item or cash donation (\$5).

Friday, February 2 – Sunday, February 4

Maryland Ornithological Society Conference in Ocean City. Great birding. Great fun. Details to follow.

Wednesday, February 7 - 7:00 pm, speaker program

Mom's Big Year by Nancy McAllister at Carroll Nonprofit Center in Westminster. Contact Don Jewell at jewelldg@gmail.com.

Saturday, February 24 – 8:00 am, half-day trip.

Black Hills Regional Park in Montgomery County. Join Bob Ringler to scope out the waterfowl here. Meet at the Park and Ride on Route 32 just south of Route 26 in Eldersburg. Contact Bob at 410-303-2792.

Wednesday, March 7 - 7:00 pm, speaker program

Audubon's Salt Marsh Bird Conservation Initiative by David Curson at Carroll Nonprofit Center in Westminster. Contact Don Jewell at jewelldg@gmail.com.

Saturday, March 10 - 6:00 pm until sometime after dark

Woodcock Walk at Morgan Run - Come strain your eyes and ears to appreciate these curious birds as they perform their annual courting ritual. Meet at the parking lot at the end of Ben Rose Lane. Contact Allan McQuarrie at 410-552-1278 if you plan to attend.

Wednesday, April 4 - 7:00 pm, speaker program

Butterflies and Gardening Strategy by Debbie Maeder at Carroll Nonprofit Center in Westminster. Contact Don Jewell at jewelldg@gmail.com.

Saturday, April 28 - 8:00 am, half-day trip

McKeldin Area of Patapsco Valley State Park – Watch Bob work his magic. Meet at the Park and Ride on Route 32 just south of Route 26 in Eldersburg. For more details, contact Bob Ringler at 410-303-2792.

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Wednesday, May 2 - 7:00 pm

Your MOS Sanctuaries by Marcia Watson at Carroll Nonprofit Center in Westminster. Contact Don Jewell at jewell-dg@gmail.com.

Saturday, May 12 - up to all day

Carroll County May Count - Parties of counters will set their own schedules in their pre-arranged areas to count resident and migrant bird species throughout the County. Contact Don Jewell to verify your bird counting area (jewell-dg@gmail.com or 410-259-4716). The Tally Rally will be hosted by Susan Bollinger and Barbara Olsh at their home. If you will be attending the tally rally, please RSVP to Susan (410-848-2050) no later than Wednesday, May 9th. Plan on bringing a food item or a cash donation (\$5).

Saturday, May 26 - 8:00 am, half-day trip

Birding and Botanizing Along Saw Mill Road - Contact Bob Ringler for directions and more information at 410-303-2792.

Saturday, June 2 - 8:00 am, half-day trip

Upper Gunpowder River at River Valley Ranch for nesting warblers and other neotropical species. Meet at the parking lot in front of the North Carroll Senior Center at 2328 Hanover Pike (between Hampstead and Manchester). Parking at birding site is limited so we will carpool. Contact Henry Leskinen for more information at 443-259-6572.

Saturday, June 16 - 8:00 am, half-day trip

North Tract of the Patuxent Research Refuge - This is a great place to bird. Be sure to bring a photo ID. Everyone must sign in separately. Meet at the Park and Ride on Route 32 just south of Route 26 in Eldersburg. Contact Bob Ringler at 410-303-2792.

Saturday, June 23 - 1:00 pm - until ?

Summer Picnic at Amy's House - Amy Hoffman will again be hosting this annual event. Enjoy good food and good company. Bring your bathing suit if you are so inclined. Amy has a great pool. Contact her (410-549-3598) if you plan on attending and tell her what food item you will be bringing.

All meetings of the Carroll County Bird Club will be held at the Carroll Nonprofit Center at 255 Clifton Boulevard in Westminster. Directions to the Center may be found online at <http://carrollnonprofitcenter.org/directions.html>.

Meetings begin at 7:00 pm with a brief period for socializing, followed by the guest lecturer. Afterwards, there will be a short business meeting.

The doors of the Carroll Nonprofit Center are set on a timer to automatically lock at 7:15 pm. CCBC members arriving after the doors lock may call Don Jewell at 410-259-4716 for entry. (An effort will also be made to check the doors from time to time for late arrivals.)



The Last Laugh

Driving into Westminster from home, I had just turned onto Old Hanover Road and was approaching Route 97 when I spotted a Box Turtle in the road. Ugh! There was traffic coming in all directions, including one man in a truck who slowed momentarily, glanced at the ground, and drove on.

I quickly pulled over and, wondering whether my life insurance premium was paid up, jumped out of the car. Using one hand to stop the traffic, I scooped up the somewhat reluctant reptile in the other and ran onto the shoulder.

I think it was naturalist Edwin Way Teale who wrote about always making sure to take turtles to the side of the road in the direction to which they are heading. Otherwise, they just turn around and try to cross again. I had just finished following Teale's advice when I noticed that the fellow in the truck who paused to look at the turtle earlier had turned around and was pulling up next to me.

I was touched by the fact he could be so concerned about the turtle that he came to check on its welfare. "You got it huh?" he asked. "Yes" I replied, "Just a wayward Box Turtle." To which the man responded, "Oh, I thought it was a wallet."

A wallet? Aside from being amazed that someone could confuse a turtle with a wallet and still pass the driving test, I had to wonder about his intentions. Would he have turned around if he thought it was a "just a turtle". Probably not. People run over turtles all the time. Although, I must admit that I have noticed an increasing number of Good Samaritans stopping to save them.

To give the man in the truck the benefit of the doubt though, he probably wasn't programmed to look for turtles in the road. His relationship with Nature may not have been that close. Now that I think of it, if there had been a wallet in the road, I probably wouldn't have noticed that either.

The Whoosletter

*A Publication of the
Carroll County Bird Club*

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