

President's Corner
Ask Birdie
by Janet Millenson

Non-birders have some urgent questions...

Dear Birdie,

Can I catch avian flu from the birds at my feeder?— *Worried*

Dear Worried,

Not unless you clean your feeders by licking them. Anyway, there have been no reports of avian flu in North America yet, so I suggest you focus your worries on West Nile Virus and Lyme Disease instead.

Dear Birdie,

There's an amazing bird in my yard! What kind is it?— *Entranced*

Dear Entranced,

I bet it's either a male goldfinch in breeding plumage or a Northern Flicker.

Dear Birdie,

Oh, but it's huge! I think it's an eagle!
— *Entranced*

Dear Entranced,

In that case, it's a Red-tailed Hawk.

Dear Birdie,

Me again. I went walking in the woods and heard this whistling that went up and down, well maybe I should call it a trill, though there was also sort of a squawky sound. It was kind of far away. Do you know what's making these noises?— *Entranced*

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The Maryland Yellowthroat

Newsletter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

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CONFERENCE 2006

JUNE 9-11 • ROCKY GAP LODGE, ALLEGANY COUNTY

The annual MOS Conference is slated to take place June 9-11 at Rocky Gap Lodge, a conference center (and golf resort) located in scenic Rocky Gap State Park, Allegany County. Hosted jointly by the Atlas Committee and the Conference Committee, the weekend will include all of our familiar and favorite features, including lots of field trips, Wine and Cheese Social, and Annual Banquet.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: We are extremely fortunate to have **Tim Gallagher**, one of the first three people to actually see the Ivory-billed Woodpecker and the author of *The Grail Bird: The Search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker*. I have been told that Tim gives a dynamic talk. He will be autographing copies of his book after his presentation.

FIELD TRIPS: **Walter Ellison** will be assisted by **Nancy Martin** in arranging the field trips to locations in Allegany, Garrett, and Washington Counties. We will also get to some areas in Pennsylvania. Walter is recruiting field trip leaders; if you can help, please contact him at 410-778-9568 or rossgull@broadband.net.

RESEARCH POSTER SESSION: Research reports on Maryland birds, in poster format, will be on display during the Wine and Cheese Social Saturday evening, and the researchers will be on hand to discuss their projects and answer your questions. Persons interested in presenting

posters should contact **Gwen Brewer**, 301-843-3524 or glbrewer@comcast.net.

ARTISTS' EXHIBIT: Dale Johnson always welcomes leads on good local talent. You can get in touch with her at 410-867-7743 or ckadj@juno.com.

RAFFLE AND SILENT AUCTION: This year's proceeds will benefit our atlas project. To arrange donations for the Raffle, contact **Maryanne Dolan** at 202-483-8188 or abtrowbridge@msn.com. To get the lowdown on how the silent auction works, read Maryanne's article on page 3.

VOLUNTEERING: Both **Dale Johnson** and **Maryanne Dolan** need volunteers to help set up and monitor the displays. Please contact them if you can help. Remember that as a thank you, all volunteers, field trip leaders included, will be able to sign up in advance for the field trips of their choice.

BIRDING SUPPLIES: The Wild Bird Center in Gaithersburg will stock the official conference "store," and owner **Steven Maier** will be at Rocky Gap with many interesting and unusual items. You will also be able to order Tim Gallagher's book, *The Grail Bird*, ahead of time, then pick it up from Steven at the conference and have it available for Tim's autograph. Ordering information will be in your registration brochure.

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CONFERENCE 2006 (continued from page 1)

WARBLER WORKSHOP: Mike Bowen, our Statewide Education Activities chair, will be conducting a workshop on the warblers of Maryland on Friday afternoon. For details, see Mike's article on page 5.

I hope you will be able to join us for what promises to be an outstanding conference. Be on the lookout for your conference registration packet.

—Janet Shields
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DNR Reports... by Glenn Therres

Wildlife in Maryland and throughout most of the eastern United States depend on private property for much of their habitat needs. Though DNR owns several thousand acres of land in our state, we alone cannot support all of Maryland's wildlife. National Wildlife Refuges, National Park Service lands, military lands, and other federal land holdings provide good habitat for many wildlife species, but again, they cannot support all of our wildlife. Thus, private landowners are extremely important to the well-being of our birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, insects, etc.

Many landowners enjoy wildlife on their properties. Some actively manage for certain types of animals. Those who hunt on their properties may provide food and cover for the game animals they pursue. Many people have placed shallow ponds on their properties to attract waterfowl for hunting purposes; these wetlands are also utilized by many other wildlife species. Quail hunters and grouse hunters also manage habitat for these game species, but they can benefit many other early successional species—such as Prairie Warbler or Field Sparrow—in the process. Other private landowners manage habitats, either actively or passively, for a host of species.

Habitat enhancement can be very costly. Some landowners can afford such costs and do so willingly. Many others are interested in managing for wildlife on their properties, but they don't have the wherewithal to do so. With a little financial help, these landowners can be recruited to help our wildlife. The government sponsors a number of cost-sharing programs that are available to private landowners. For example, federal farm programs provide millions of dollars that benefit wildlife on agricultural lands.

A new cost-share program that directly benefits wildlife on private lands is the **Landowner Incentive Program (LIP)**. LIP is a competitive grant program funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and administered in Maryland through the Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife and Heritage Service. It provides funding to private landowners to enhance and restore habitats that are important to rare, threatened, and endangered species.

Habitats that may be eligible for restoration under this program include ridge and valley or coastal plain stream systems, Delmarva bays, bog turtle wetlands, mountain or coastal plain mature forest, cypress swamps, caves, shale barrens and glades, xeric sand ridges, or cliffs and sandstone outcrops. Eligible conservation practices include reforestation, establishing grassland buffers, controlling invasive species, managing vegetation, and livestock fencing. DNR will pay up to 75% of the costs of projects that are accepted into the program. The 25% required match can be in the form of in-kind services, equipment, or funds from partner organizations.

The LIP website (<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/lip.asp>) contains information about the program and how to apply. Landowners can download and fill out a simple application describing the habitats on their property and current land uses. DNR ranks each application according to a scoring system that takes into account the rare species and habitats present on the property, the surrounding landscape, and existing threats to the habitat or species. Applicants who are chosen will receive technical assistance from DNR in developing a restoration project for their property. Projects may include grassland and forested buffers on streams, wetland and forest restoration, warm-season grasslands, invasive species control, or early successional vegetation management, and other practices.

We received our first LIP applications in December 2004. Though on-the-ground habitat enhancements have not yet started, we have received \$705,000 from USFWS to disperse to eligible private landowners over the next few years. The second round of applications, received by December 2005, are now being evaluated. If you are a private landowner interested in promoting wildlife habitat on your property or know of a private landowner who may be interested, check our website to see if you may be eligible for an LIP award.

Word-of-mouth is a good way to promote LIP. Please help.

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Anyone is welcome to contribute articles or ideas that would be of interest to other birders. Copy may be mailed or e-mailed to Lydia Schindler by January 18, 2006 for the March/April 2006 issue.

Illustrations on pages 1, 6, and 7; photographs page 8 © M. Suzanne Probst
Photographs page 5 © George Jett

DEMYSTIFYING THE SILENT AUCTION

Ever ask yourself how the Silent Auction works? Well, the brief answer is through the dedication of volunteers and the generosity of MOS members. But there are some “do’s” and “don’ts.”

Friday, when the conference opens, is a hectic day, descending into near chaos within the first few hours of registration when fully 90 percent of all donations arrive. So it’s important for the donor (that’s you!) to fill out one of the forms located on a table close to the entrance. It’s a short form, requesting only your name and a suggested price. And while we’re on the subject of pricing: It’s better to start low and let the bidding process take over. Often folks get caught up in the excitement of the chase, and the item fetches more than if it had been priced out of reach in the beginning.

Each new bid must exceed the prior bid by 10 percent. Any item not receiving a bid by Saturday morning gets marked down or placed on the clearance tables. Great bargains can be had by sifting through those tables. It can be disappointing to see an item you’ve donated going for less than the declared value, but remember...it will likely show up at a future auction. We often see items recycled year after year.

So who decides what gets put into the Auction and what hits the Raffle? Well, that would be *moi*. Several factors come into play: Is the item “birdy”? Likely to have widespread appeal? Unique? I try to limit the raffle to no more than ten items. Some years we exceed that limit; other years the pickings are slim.

What about the hours? There never seems to be enough time to visit and revisit the Auction. It’s true. MOS conferences are *very* tightly scheduled. The auction runs until dinnertime Friday evening, and we reopen after dinner for an hour or so. We’re there all day Saturday, but the Auction **MUST** close on Saturday at 5:30 p.m. And winning bidders **MUST** pay for and remove newly acquired treasures then.

That’s a lot of “musts,” but we have to clear the decks for the fire sale that takes place after the business meeting Saturday evening. And boy, is that a popular event! **Everything** must go. No exceptions. Unsold items are marked down to a few cents until finally, by evening’s end, anything left is free. Yes, free. The only things I take home to my small apartment are memories of a fun event.

So, now that you, too, are in the know, stop by the Silent Auction at the June conference—and bid, bid, bid.

—Maryanne Dolan
Chair, Silent Auction and Raffle

President’s Corner (continued from page 1)

Dear Entranced,

Tufted Titmouse, frog, or squirrel. Now get out of here and go refill your feeders.

Dear Birdie,

Why do you special-interest extremist environmental elitists get so aggravated about bulldozers and chainsaws?— *Destructo Dan*

Dear Destructo Dan,

Because the birds pay us huge sums of money to represent their interests. Also, they’ve threatened to release embarrassing photos of us hugging the trees if we slack off.

Dear Birdie,

What a bunch of nitwits you are, standing around at the crack of dawn in every kind of weather trying to catch a glimpse of little brown birds that all look the same!— *Couch Queen*

Dear Couch Queen,

That’s unfair and inaccurate. Little brown birds have plenty of distinguishing features. It’s the grayish-and-yellowish ones that all look alike.

Dear Birdie,

I’m new to this hobby, and I’ve just equipped myself with armored zoom binoculars, spotting scope, carbon-fiber tripod, digital camera, sound recorder, weatherproof notebook, four field guides, three bird club memberships, two regional checklists, and a subscription to *American Birds*. Have I forgotten anything essential?— *Gear Glutton*

Dear Glutton,

No serious birder would be caught dead without distinctive headgear. Your best choices are to wear either a canvas bucket hat festooned with enamel pins or a colorful baseball cap embroidered with the logo of a remote lodge in an exotic location. (Note: Actually visiting the remote lodge is optional.)

Dear Birdie,

How can I stop a @!#\$%* woodpecker from drumming on my house?! The noise is driving me crazy, and the little [expletive deleted] is causing serious damage!!— *Sleepless in Severna Park*

Dear Sleepless,

I recommend you have him neutered. You could also try draping your house with icicle-style Christmas lights year-round.

Dear Birdie,

Having done well materially in my life, I now seek to do well spiritually by giving money to worthy organizations. Do you have any suggestions?— *Gill Bates*

Dear Gill,

There’s a terrific bird club in Maryland that lets you make donations using PayPal. Go to www.mdbirds.org and scroll down. I’m sure that you of all people, Mr. Bates, will enjoy the convenience of online giving.

Dear Birdie,

Um, hello? I forgot to mention that I’m pretty sure I saw an Ivory-billed Woodpecker in my yard this morning! It looked just like the pictures!! You’d better hurry over right away!!!— *Entranced*



YEAR FOUR ATLAS SNAPSHOT: THE PICTURE DEVELOPS

BY WALTER ELLISON

This is it, folks. We have one more year afield to complete our atlas maps for Maryland and D.C.'s nesting birds. After four years, the snapshot of our breeding avifauna at the start of the 21st century has developed to the point where I can make some reasonably strong statements about the conservation status of our summer birdlife.

The broadest summary of our atlas results is provided by the grand species total for the 1,261 blocks for which we have data: 201 species are likely to have bred over the last four years. (This total could increase if we choose to count reports of possible nesting by a number of once and future nesters, such as Purple Gallinule and Mississippi Kite.) More firmly, we have records of confirmed breeding for 185 species. Corresponding numbers from the first statewide atlas project from 1983 to 1987 were 201 and 194.

Given an often gloomy assessment of the bird conservation situation, it might surprise some readers that the numbers from the two atlases are so similar. When one examines the details, the conservation status of many of our birds is not rosy, but neither is it disastrous. Many species are in dire straits indeed, and they continue to hold on here in very small numbers; these include Blue-winged Teal, Black Rail, Common Moorhen, Piping Plover, Upland Sandpiper, Loggerhead Shrike, Sedge Wren, and Nashville and Swainson's warblers.

Maryland has also apparently lost four nesting species, unless something miraculous happens and they are relocated in our final field season. These are Wilson's Plover, Laughing Gull, Gull-billed Tern, and Bewick's Wren. Save for the Laughing Gull, all of these species were rare and at the edge of their ranges during the last atlas. The loss of the plover, gull, and tern indicate that all is not right with the waterbirds of Assateague Island, in spite of land preservation by the National Park Service.

Seven species have been confirmed as nesters this time around that were not confirmed during the 1980s atlas. Only one of these is a completely new species for the state and District—Common Merganser (recorded in seven blocks, confirmed in three). All of the others are species added as breeders over the last two decades or historical nesters: Ruddy Duck, Double-crested Cormorant, Royal Tern, Long-eared Owl (no published record in the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center database, *vide* M. Iliff, *et al.*), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*vide* F. Pope), Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Pine Siskin.

Analyzing increases and declines in breeding ranges from breeding bird atlas data has some pitfalls. Increases can be tallied straightforwardly: either a bird has been found in more blocks or it hasn't. Declines are trickier to posit, because one must assume that observers know what

to look for and expend the necessary effort to find all bird species. Even an apparent decline can be announced only at the end of a project. At this point, four years into the five-year project, if a bird occurs in far fewer blocks than it did in the 1983-1987 atlas, it seems likely that it has declined significantly. Night birds provide an exception to this statement, in that I am reasonably sure observers have not put in the sort of effort that was made in the 1980s to locate woodcock, owls, and nightjars. I hope local bird clubs and county coordinators make a major effort to rectify this situation next year, such that we can feel more assured that the apparent declines we see for nocturnal birds are in fact genuine.

I feel fairly safe in reporting the following preliminary figures on status changes. Forty-four bird species have increased their nesting ranges in Maryland, whereas 73 species have notably smaller ranges. Some habitats appear to show declines in many of their characteristic birds; these include successional shrublands, grasslands, and wetlands. Forest bird trends are more complex, with many residents and short-distance migrants actually showing increases, but many, if not most, Neotropical migrants showing declines.

Declining shrubland birds include Northern Bobwhite, American Woodcock, White-eyed Vireo, Blue-winged, Golden-winged, and Prairie Warblers, and Yellow-breasted Chat. Examples of declining grassland birds are American Kestrel, Killdeer, Vesper Sparrow, and Eastern Meadowlark. Other grassland birds appear to be holding on, or even increasing, including Henslow's (+5 blocks) and Savannah sparrows (+4), Dickcissel (+25), and Bobolink (-3).

Several resident and short-distance migrant northerners have increased, apparently a compensatory response, via the occupation of newly opened habitat left by declining competitors—Red-breasted Nuthatch (+16), Golden-crowned Kinglet (+10), Hermit Thrush (+13), Yellow-rumped Warbler (+11), and Dark-eyed Junco (+5). Other increasing forest residents include Pileated Woodpecker (+83), and Brown-headed (+32) and White-breasted Nuthatches (+150). Another example of apparent compensation between residents and a Neotropical migrant pits the greatly diminished range of the Broad-winged Hawk (-223) against the slightly increased range of the Red-shouldered Hawk (+16) and the notably increased range of the Red-tailed Hawk (+45). Many warblers that nest in hardwood forest interiors have greatly declined, including American Redstart and Cerulean, Black-and-white, Kentucky, and Hooded Warblers. The sole warbler that has reversed this trend, for unknown reasons, is the Northern Parula, which has been found in 25 more blocks than 20 years ago.

Many increasing birds have proven tolerant to humans or have benefited from human activities, some indirectly,



Birds of Note

- A handsome BARNACLE GOOSE visited Great Oak Pond in western Kent Co in mid-October.
- A BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER was briefly glimpsed at Little Bennett RP, Montgomery Co, on Oct 15.
- A GRAY KINGBIRD—just the sixth state record—drew flocks of birders to Worcester Co in October. It was found Oct 19 near the end of George's Island Landing Rd, where it could still be seen, perching on the wires and diving into tangles, on Oct 24.
- The next big excitement erupted when a NEOTROPIC CORMORANT showed up on the Potomac River in Montgomery Co in late October. Dave Czaplak had noted a "small" cormorant in August, but it was only when the bird reappeared, and was photographed and scrutinized, that its ID was confirmed.
- A wayward HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER, discovered in northern Baltimore Co Nov 23 by Hank Kaestner, made it a very special Thanksgiving weekend, and beyond, for many Maryland birders. Only after a few days of scrutiny and photography was the ID of this wing- and tail-flicking *Empidonax* nailed down. The only previous state record dated to 1987, when a skin collected (by Chan Robbins) some 24 years earlier was correctly identified.



Photos of Gray Kingbird (top) and Hammond's Flycatcher (bottom) courtesy of George Jett.

Atlas (continued from page 4)

others through protection or active encouragement. Species receiving active or indirect human aid include Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Wild Turkey, Tree Swallow, and Eastern Bluebird (+28). Many fish-eating birds have increased as well, for varying reasons. These include Hooded Mergansers (+26 blocks, +18 confirmations), Common Mergansers, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron (+15 colonies), Osprey, and Bald Eagle.

Next year will be our last chance to document the changes that have occurred over the last two decades. After the 2002-2006 Maryland and D.C. breeding bird atlas has been completed next year, we will need to take careful stock of the changes we find and turn to pinpointing the causes of those changes.

WARBLER WORKSHOP

Registrants at the Rocky Gap Conference are invited to attend a workshop on "Warblers of Maryland" planned for the afternoon of Friday, June 9.

Designed by the MOS Statewide Education Activities Committee, the workshop will feature photos, illustrations, habitat preferences, songs, and calls of all of the wonderful North American wood warblers that breed in Maryland or can be expected in the state during migration. A number of field trips at the conference will offer opportunities to look for these beautiful birds.

Information on registration for the workshop will be given in the conference information package. Persons who want to attend will be asked to sign up after they have arrived at the conference.

In the meantime, anyone who wants further information is invited to contact me at 301-530-5764 or at dhmbowen@yahoo.com.

Photographers who have pictures (slides or digital images) of Maryland's warblers and who might be willing to have some of them appear as part of the workshop presentation are also invited to get in touch with me.

—Mike Bowen
Chair, SEA Committee

The Birder's Vest

by Rick Sussman



High-tech NEOTEC Tripod

Just after the Northern Lapwing disappeared, I decided it was time to replace my old and never trustworthy Celestron C-90 with something more modern. My wife and I opted for my dream scope, the Swarovski 80mm angled scope. We dug a little deeper and decided to invest in a new tripod and head as well; a great scope deserves a stable platform.

My old tripod was a Bogen model 3205 with a Bogen Quick-Release Micro Fluid head model 3130. This tripod has three-section legs utilizing screw-locks to adjust each segment. I found these screw-locks difficult to loosen and tighten, especially with gloves on, and occasionally a leg would slip because the screw-lock was not tight enough. In the field the legs are rather slow to set up and typically require some fine-tuning after the scope is erected. When you carry the scope over your shoulder, you have to take care so the screw-locks don't dig into your neck or get caught in any branches along the way.

Just about the time we decided to get the new scope, I saw an ad for a new tripod with no visible (or external) adjustment knobs, the Manfrotto NEOTEC model 458B. I had to check it out. A trip to Penn Camera in Rockville convinced me that this was the tripod I was looking for (suggested retail \$446, Penn Camera \$314). We also chose a new version of the same fluid head (Manfrotto#3130), bringing the price to just under \$400.

This tripod, besides being simple and elegant in design, is fast and easy to set up. You simply pull the legs out to any length and they automatically

stay locked right where they are; no further adjustment is needed. If you want the leg longer, pull again until it is fully extended. To retract the legs, just push a silver button at the top of each leg and the internal leg-locks release, and in the legs go. To collapse the whole unit, draw the legs together, push all three buttons at once and push the tripod to the ground, and it is ready to go. On hilly terrain, an individual leg can be adjusted with the push of a single button. If the tripod is fully extended and someone shorter than yourself wants a look through the scope, each leg can be collapsed to any height by, again, a push of its button. So eminently simple!

Beyond these features, the NEOTEC does everything my old tripod did and more—it has the same three set leg-angle positions as well as a two-position center column (horizontal and vertical, mostly for camera work), a built-in level, and a carrying strap/handle that can be used to support a counterweight for extra stability. The bottom leg section is sealed, making it waterproof up to 18 inches.

Compared to my old tripod, the NEOTEC is heavier (5.3 lbs. vs 4.2 lbs.) and longer (29 inches vs 26 inches measured to top of head with legs collapsed) but much more stable in windy conditions. Since my new scope is lighter than my old one, the combination is lighter than my old "package."

In the field, carrying a scope/tripod with the legs extended saves precious minutes in setup. To make a tripod gentler on the shoulder, many birders pad the upper sections with "leg wraps." Because the NEOTEC's larger section of leg is the lower section, leg wraps are impractical. Instead I chose a TRIPACK tripod carrier (available through American Birding Association and Big Pockets). This triangle-shaped backpack mounts to two legs of the tripod, so you can carry your scope as you would a regular backpack. It is an inexpensive (\$45) and practical way to carry your scope comfortably, and it leaves both hands free for binoculars. It is fully adjustable to fit any

size; the straps long enough for even the largest person. The shoulder straps are padded, though more padding at the lower end would make for a better, more comfortable fit. A zippered pocket in the middle section of the pack lets me pack a waterproof windbreaker—which also adds an extra layer of padding against my back. I've heard from others that when attached to your tripod, the TRIPACK can act like a sail in heavy winds, knocking your scope over, though I have not experienced this. I really like the TRIPACK, as it makes carrying the 10-plus pounds of my scope and tripod easy and comfortable enough for half-day trips. With the TRIPACK I carry my scope much more often than I did before, enjoying great looks at many more birds, everything from hawks to warblers and sparrows.

For a very well written and (mostly) up-to-date review of tripods, see the May/June 2005 issue of *Birding* (ABA) for an article by Frank Gallo (peeplo@aol.com), "The Quest for the Perfect Tripod."

Telling Tales

It had been an excruciatingly frustrating morning. Prime time, beautiful weather, but the conference trip leader was not a birder, and he had insisted that the group stand immobile, first in one beautiful bird-free spot and then another. Bounding up the stairs to the lunch cafeteria, Linda Friedland sang out, "Quick! Three beers!"

—Lydia Schindler





BBC in the News

The Baltimore Bird Club (BBC) got some great publicity in the October 2005 issue of *Urbanite Magazine*, a free monthly magazine distributed in the metropolitan Baltimore area. Author Marianne Amoss opened the piece with her experience in Chimney Swift-watching with Carol Schreter, Joan Cwi, and Alice Greely-Nelson. The article went on to explain what bird-watching was all about. (A very nice explanation: the next time you venture out on the streets with binoculars, take a copy. Homeland Security might like to read it, too.) The author also mentioned some Baltimore birding hotspots, and suggested that the best way to learn about birds was to attend BBC events. You can read (and print) the article at <http://www.urbanitebaltimore.com/octobermagazine/observed.htm>.

A Working Vacation in Paraguay

Sally Wechsler of the Montgomery Bird Club wrote in to rave about her 3-week adventure in Paraguay last October. She volunteered for a mist-netting project that traps birds to take measurements and photos for research. "The birding was wonderful!" she said. "We only went to three sites and I got 60 lifers." Sally also made an interesting observation about a common neotropical migrant that we often hear more than we see: "The Red-eyed Vireos there look like ours, but their call has more 'trill' in it—but they keep it up, just like ours do." Anyone interested in volunteering for this project should contact Paul Smith at paraguaybirds@yahoo.com.ar.

Six Years of Fort McHenry Bird Counts

For the past 6 years, bird surveys have been conducted at the wetlands and grounds of Fort McHenry in Baltimore City. An overview of results to date was published in the fall issue of *News from the Fort McHenry Field Station*. Some highlights: on average, 167 bird species were seen annually, with a high of 187. However, for each species the number of individuals observed was generally low. Neotropical migrants, in particular, fared the worst, with

12 or fewer individuals seen each year for each species. During the survey period, an average of 58,686 birds used the wetlands and Fort grounds each year. These included about 30 year-long residents and about 30 to 35 breeders, as well as 29 wintering waterfowl species in the wetlands and surrounding waters. Interestingly, females significantly outnumbered males, especially among the neotropical migrants. This surprising finding will be the subject of study in the years to come.

Helen Ford, 1922-2005

It is a sad duty indeed to announce the death of a friend. Helen Ford, age 83, died November 11 after a long illness.

Helen was a long-time resident of Annapolis. For many years a member of the Maryland Ornithological Society and the Annapolis Bird Club, Helen served as Secretary of MOS (for 18 years!) and as President of the Annapolis Club. I met Helen and her husband John in 1993, when I took over editorship of *The Maryland Yellowthroat*. Five times each year Helen and John would gather volunteers from the Annapolis Club to put address labels on the newsletters, sort them into zip-code order, and then haul the ten or so very heavy cartons down to the local post office.

Five times each year I would call Helen to let her know the newsletter was on its way, and then we would chat about children, grandchildren, birds seen, birds missed, MOS gossip, and anything else that happened to be on her mind that month. Sometimes our chats would go on for over an hour. I grew to enjoy those phone calls enormously, and I think she did as well. Near the end of my tenure as editor we decided to have the *Yellowthroat* mailed directly from Hagerstown. I think she and John were relieved, because the burden had been getting heavier. I continued to call her and chat from time to time, but without the excuse of the *Yellowthroat*, I admit that I didn't keep up with her as much as I should have. For that I'm sorry because I will miss her.

Helen and John were also noted for their winter forays through the Annapolis neighborhoods abutting the Chesapeake Bay, searching for wintering waterfowl and culminating in hot soup back at their house. They hadn't led the trips for the past few years, but the tradition lives on, and Fran and I were glad we were able to come along on the last few trips they did lead.

Helen's interests were wide. In addition to birding, she was an avid reader and a member of many local book clubs, of the International Club, and of the Annapolis Symphony Orchestra association. She did the Sunday *New York Times* crossword faithfully (probably in ink!), and she and John traveled extensively. I was never able to tell her about a locale Fran and I had visited to bird that she hadn't already been to at least once.

Helen is survived by her husband John, three sons, three daughters, and seven grandchildren.

—Norm Saunders

RAFFLING SOME FEATHERS: SAW-WHET OWLS

As high bidder for a silent auction special at the 2005 conference, I, along with my husband Phill and my mom Connie, enjoyed a wonderful November evening with Kevin Dodge, his daughter Rhiannon, and his “owl-banding” volunteers in Garrett County.

After dinner at the Penn Alps restaurant in Grantsville, we arrived at Kevin’s banding station at 6 p.m. Volunteers Mikey, Bonnie, Scott, and Sean had already unfurled the mist nets in a nearby stand of hemlocks. We stepped out of our vehicle into total darkness and to the sound of an “audio lure” playing in the distance.

Following a brief visit to the banding shed, we set out on a short hike to the mist nets. Along the way, the banding volunteers checked wind direction and speed, air temperature, cloud cover, and also the brightness of the sky. While we walked, Kevin explained that playing the mating call of the Northern Saw-whet Owl draws the migrating owls into the almost invisible nets. A bright moon reduces the chances of catching owls, because it illuminates the nets well enough for the owls to see them. On this particular evening, the moon was five days away from being full, and the sky was clear. This could pose a problem, he said, but we still had high hopes that we would get to meet one of the little owls face-to-face.



Volunteers Scott and Mikey carefully take measurements and record the data.



We accompanied the volunteers as they checked the nets at 90-minute intervals. The third round was the charm: we were thrilled to see that the nets held two Northern Saw-whet Owls. The volunteers worked gingerly to release the ensnared owls, then placed them in small “lingerie” bags, which we carried back to the banding shed. There, Kevin carefully removed each owl for “processing.” He recorded each bird’s weight and various wing and tail measurements, and also which of the station’s six nets the owl had been plucked from. Additionally, the volunteers noted the color of the beak (black or “horn bill,” a yellowish-beige) and checked the eye color against a special little color chart containing four different yellow swatches.

Next, one of the volunteers carefully pulled one of the owl’s wings open, while another turned out the lights in the shed. By holding an ultraviolet light beneath the wing, Kevin can determine which feathers are new, because they show up as pink. The first owl had many pink feathers, indicating that it was a young bird, this year’s hatchling. With the lights back on, Kevin affixed a band to the owl’s leg. The band contains a unique number, which was noted and sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

While the second owl was being processed, we each had a chance to hold the first owl. Kevin showed us how to secure its legs between our middle fingers so that the bird could

not escape. When it was my turn, the little owl sat quietly on my hand, and we had a chance to study each other.

Examining the second owl, Kevin and his team made an exciting discovery: This bird had already been banded at another station. “Foreign re-traps are gold!” were Kevin’s exact words. The team carefully read the band number and noted it in the log. Kevin would send the number to USFWS, along with the location of the recapture. This information will help to fill in the picture of the Northern Saw-whet Owl’s migratory habits.

Finally, it was time to release our feathered subjects to the wild. Connie and Phill each carried an owl back down the path toward the hemlocks. Kevin then perched the owls on their fingers, so that the bird was free to take off when it was ready. Since the nearly-full moon made the evening relatively bright, the owls did not need much time to readjust their vision. Each one took off quickly and flew silently—almost ghostlike—up into the hemlocks. The two owls then disappeared into the darkness, but not from our memories.

Special thanks to Kevin, his daughter Rhiannon, and his volunteers for an evening that his three visitors will never forget!

—Suzanne Probst



Kevin and Rhiannon share a quiet moment with a saw-whet.

THE ARKANSAS TRAVELLER AND THE IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER

When a work assignment took Bill Ellis to Arkansas last July—his fifth extended trip to Pine Bluff in two years—he didn't expect to see an Ivory-billed Woodpecker at a local park. Just a month and a half earlier, he had taken a day to travel the 50 or so miles to the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge. "At that time, no specific locations had been revealed, but mention had been made of sightings near the White River in the Cache River NWR, which is a relatively narrowly defined area," he says. "No luck that trip." He was planning to revisit the White River area the coming weekend.

As usual during his stays in Pine Bluff, Bill birded whenever possible, including after work and on weekends. (A past president of the Carroll County chapter of MOS, Bill birded seriously in the 1980s; after a hiatus of several years, he took up birding again in 2002. Though most of the Arkansas birds were familiar Maryland species, he had, over the months, seen American White Pelicans and, once, a Rufous-crowned Sparrow.

When he left the office on Thursday, July 28, Bill took his binoculars and headed to the Delta Rivers Regional Park. This small but birdy area is not far from his hotel, and he had been there once before. That July evening the sky was clear

and the sun was more than two hours short of setting.

As Bill strolled along a boardwalk edging a lake, he spotted a large bird. It was flying 75 to 100 feet up, over trees about 50 feet in front of him. His first impression, based on the bird's shape and its level flight, was "cormorant." When he raised his binoculars, though, he could see the bird was a woodpecker. A Pileated Woodpecker, he thought. But, focusing on the underwing as the bird flew away, he could clearly see white trailing wing feathers.

A quick check of his Sibley East guide confirmed that white trailing wing feathers are not a field mark of the Pileated. "I had a copy of the Sibley supplement page for Ivory-billed Woodpecker at my hotel room," Bill says. "I rushed back to check it. It matched what I had seen."

He hurried back to the park: No more woodpecker, no surprise. But Bill did find a number of tree stumps 20 to 30 feet tall and 6 to 12 inches in diameter, the legacy of a severe ice storm a few years earlier. "I have been told," he says, "that the Ivory-bill frequents areas where natural disasters have damaged or killed trees, leaving them prey to infestation by the beetle larvae that Ivory-bills love."

Furthermore, the top 2 to 3 feet of these stumps had been stripped of their bark; could this be a sign of

Ivory-billed foraging? "It is not clear to what extent Pileated Woodpeckers also do this," he says, adding, "but I've never seen the like in Maryland." Two of the stripped-down trees had large holes in the middle of the stripped area.

Bill shelved his weekend plans to go to the White River area. Instead, over the next few days, he returned repeatedly to the Delta Rivers park, trying unsuccessfully for another look at an Ivory-billed Woodpecker. He continued to see the topped and stripped trees, possible signs that an Ivory-billed Woodpecker had been in the area, and recently. He points out that he has heard of two recent Ivory-bill sightings other than the Cornell reports, including one by a birder in Pine Bluff.

Although Arkansas has an active birding community, it appears to be small, Bill says, and he has rarely encountered birders in the field. He believes that fears that the area would be overrun with IBWO seekers are unfounded—in part because the chances of seeing the bird are so low, even around the White River/Cache River. On the contrary, in late November the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service website posted information on access to the Big Woods, encouraging people to join the search:
<http://Arkansas-ES.fws.gov.BigWoodBirding>.

—Lydia Schindler

Wanted: Blockbusters

MOS will be hiring field workers for the Maryland-District of Columbia Breeding Bird Atlas Project 2006 field season. Their job will be to investigate blocks with little or no previous coverage (blockbusting) and to conduct 15-stop relative abundance surveys in selected atlas blocks. Applicants must be skilled at identifying birds of the Mid-Atlantic region by both sound and sight and have a good intuitive feel for the habitat preferences of the region's birdlife. Blockbusters will be paid by the block. Each 10-square-mile block should receive a minimum of 5.5 hours of field work. Field workers will also be assigned to do several 15-stop roadside relative abundance surveys. The expected period of employment will be from May 15 to August 15, although shorter periods may be negotiated. The application deadline is March 31. Payment will be contingent upon receipt of data, hours, and travel mileage.

Please send a resumé and names of three references to Walter Ellison, MD-DC Breeding Bird Atlas Coordinator, 23460 Clarissa Rd, Chestertown, MD 21620. Electronic submissions may be sent to rossgull@baybroadband.net.



MOS Calendar

January-February 2006

Sunday, January 1

CHRISTMAS COUNT. **Patuxent River.**
Compilers: Doug Lister (St. Mary's), 301-757-0003 (W) or 301-994-3222 (H), and Andy Brown (Calvert), 410-535-5327 or brownaj@co.cal.md.us.

CHRISTMAS COUNT. **Fort Belvoir.**
Compiler: Carol Ghebelian, Maryland Coordinator, 301-753-6754 or gheb@bellatlantic.net.

CHRISTMAS COUNT. **Annapolis/Gibson Island.**
Compilers: Sue Ricciardi, 410-647-9513 or susier@starpower.net and Hal Wierenga/Lynn Davidson, 410-647-7439 or hal.lynn@erols.com.

Baltimore. Loch Raven Reservoir. Meet 8:30 AM. Varied habitats including woods, fields, and reservoir. Likely birds are Red-breasted Nuthatch, Bald Eagle, sparrows, thrushes, and waterfowl. From Baltimore Beltway north of the city, take exit 27, Dulaney Valley Rd, north several miles, cross large bridge over reservoir, and immediately bear right. Continue to first left, Stone Hill Rd. Go about 100 yards, turn around and park on the right. All cars need to park on the same side of the road. Leader: Kevin Graff, 410-557-2456 or ocean_city2001@yahoo.com.

Montgomery. Earliest Bird Walk—Georgetown Reservoir and DC Hot Spots. Half day. Start the New Year right. Everyone welcome. Meet 8 AM at Georgetown Reservoir, DC, by the gate leading to the dike between the pools. Reservations not required. Leader: Mike Bowen, 301-530-5764.

Howard. Start Your 2006 List. Half day. Carpool to different locations to find as many species as possible. The one day of the year

where every bird is new! Meet 8 AM at boat ramp of Centennial Lake. Expect moderate walking. Possibility of lunch stop, depending on the weather. Facilities at some spots. Leader: Bonnie Ott, 410-461-3361.

Monday, January 2

CHRISTMAS COUNT. **Sugarloaf.**
Compilers: Janet Millenson (Montgomery), 301-983-9337 or janet@twocrows.com, and Helen Horrocks (Frederick), 301-831-6315 or hlh_37@yahoo.com.

CHRISTMAS COUNT. **Bowie.**
Compiler: Fred Fallon (Bowie), 301-249-1518 or fwfallon@earthlink.net.

Thursday, January 5

MEETING. **Frederick.** *Bob Balestri* will report on our 2005 club trip to Panama. 7 PM. Community Rm, C. Burr Artz Library, Frederick. Contact Marcia Balestri, 301-473-5098, for additional info.

Thursday and Saturday, January 5 and 7

Montgomery. Gull Workshop. Meet Jan 5, 7:30 PM at Cyndie Loeper's house for light fare and a gull slide presentation by *Clive Harris*. Then, join Mike Bowen for the associated local field trip on Jan 7. All are welcome for either or both sessions. For directions, field trip details, and required reservations, call Coordinator: Cyndie Loeper, 301-530-8226.

Friday, January 6

MEETING. **Anne Arundel.** "Rails, Waterbirds, and Other Birds of Jug Bay" by *Chris Swarth*. 8 PM. Arlington Echo Outdoor Education Center, 975 Indian Landing Rd, Millersville. Info: Dotty Mumford, 410-849-8336.

Saturday, January 7

MID-WINTER COUNT. **Frederick.**
Audrey Carroll. Meet 6:30 AM at the Sanctuary. Dress warmly with waterproof boots. Contact: David Smith, 410-549-7082.

ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY. **Carroll.**
Once again hosted by Splinter and Sue Yingling. If you've never attended, now's the time to start. Everyone has a good time. 7:30 PM until ? For more info and to coordinate your potluck dish, contact Sue Yingling at 410-876-8211.

Anne Arundel. Downs Park. Half day. This park, located on the Chesapeake Bay, offers opportunities to see both wintering waterfowl and land birds. Depart 8 AM from the Jones Station P&R. There may be a \$5 fee per car to enter the park. Leader: Pat Tate, 410-266-5669.

Kent. Eastern Neck NWR. Kick off your birding year with a half day for waterfowl and winter land birds. Meet 8 AM at Dollar General parking lot (the old A&P, off Philosopher's Terrace), Chestertown. Leaders: Walter Ellison and Nancy Martin, 410-778-9568 or rossgull@baybroadband.net, and Peter Mann, 410-648-5205 or pmann@epl-inc.com.

Cecil. Eastern Neck NWR and Chesapeake Farms. Meet 7 AM at Big Elk Mall, Elkton. Leader: Parke John, parke@del.net.

Patuxent. Fran Uhler NA. Meet 7:30 AM at the end of Lemon Bridge Rd off MD 197, just north of Bowie State University and the MARC line. No reservations required.

Montgomery. Blue Mash. Half day. Interesting walk at a very birdy site in Montgomery Co. Waterproof footwear essential. Meet 7:30 AM at Zion Rd parking lot. Trip limited to 8-10 participants. For reservations and directions, call Leader: Rick Sussman, 301-774-1185.

H Indicates Field Trip

Sunday, January 8

COVERED DISH DINNER. **Baltimore.** Bykota Center, Towson. 5 PM. *Hank Kaestner*, world traveler and bird-watcher extraordinaire, will present the "2005 Edition of Birdwatching Adventures around the World." Reservations/directions/food dish coordination: Shirley Geddes, 410-377-6583.

H Tri-County. MD and DE Coasts. Search for winter specialties and perhaps a rarity from recent CBCs. Bring a lunch. Meet 7:30 AM at Asbury United Methodist Church (east parking lot adjacent to Wesley Dr), Salisbury. Leader: Sam Dyke, 410-742-5497.

Tuesday, January 10

MEETING. **Allegany.** Speaker: None. Come watch the new *Watching Sparrows* DVD. The video contains good footage of several species of sparrows that occur in North America. 7 PM. Main Library, 31 Washington St, Cumberland.

MEETING. **Patuxent.** "Birding on the Falkland Islands and Antarctica" with *Phil Davis*. 7:30 PM at College Park Airport Annex. Info: Fred Shaffer, 410-721-1744.

Thursday, January 12

MEETING. **Howard.** "More Adventures of an Intrepid Birder," by *Hank Kaestner*. Hank's travels in 2005 included trips to the Middle East, Brazil, and Granada. Hospitality and club bookstore 7:30 PM; meeting/program 8 PM at Howard Co Rec and Parks, 7210 Oakland Mills Rd, Columbia. Info: Jeff Friedhoffer, 410-997-5336.

H Washington. Winter birding by car. Contact: Bob Keedy, 301-733-7708.

Friday, January 13

MEETING. **Harford.** *Hank Kaestner*, back by popular demand, will present his "2005 Birdwatcher's Odyssey." 7 PM at the Churchville Presbyterian Church, MD 22 and MD 136. Light refreshments will be

served. Info: Rick Cheicante, 410-803-2712.

Friday-Monday, January 13-16

H Montgomery. Outer Banks of North Carolina. 4 days. Wintering ducks, geese, swans, shorebirds, loons, and gannets. Search also for less common gulls and a variety of wintering landbirds. Call leader for motel and trip info. Reservations required. Tentative limit: 12. Leaders: Frank Witebsky, 301-871-7990, and Cyndie Loeper, 301-530-8226.

Saturday, January 14

MID-WINTER COUNT. **Carroll.** Count birds in your backyard, in your neighborhood, or at your favorite birding spot in Carroll Co. All input welcome and important to the bird club. Please coordinate locations with Bill Ellis at 410-781-7113. Join the Tally Rally at the home of Bill and Pat Ellis at 5 PM. RSVP to the Ellises at 410-781-7113. Food or \$ donation, please.

H Harford. 15th Annual Harford Feeder Tour. Who can resist good food, good company, and a chance to check out what the Joneses are really getting at their bird feeder? This trip will survey (from inside each house) feeder birds at three homes in west-central Harford Co. Space is limited, so please contact Les Eastman at 410-734-6969 to reserve a spot and get meeting location.

H Cecil. Ocean City. Meet 6 AM Big Elk Mall, Elkton. Leader: Sean McCandless, seanmccandless1@comcast.net.

Sunday, January 15

MID-WINTER COUNT. **Frederick.** Fred Archibald. Meet 6:30 AM at the Sanctuary. Dress warmly with water-proof boots. Contact: Bob Schaefer, 301-831-5660 or rjs30@erols.com.

Wednesday, January 18

MEETING. **Montgomery.** "Birding in Wales." Past-President *Mike Bowen* will take us on an overview tour of the outstanding natural areas of his native Wales and briefly review the

nearly 200 birds know to occur in one of Britain's most scenic regions. 7:30 PM, Potomac Presbyterian Church, 10301 River Rd, Potomac.

H Patuxent. Blackwater NWR. Meet 7 AM at the Bowie P&R. For reservations, call Fred Fallon, 301-249-1518.

Thursday, January 19

MEETING. **Caroline.** "Bay-wise Landscaping." *Margaret Carter* will cover everything from riparian buffers to lawn fertilization, IPM, and native plants. 7:30 PM, Caroline Co Public Library, 100 Market St, Denton.

Saturday, January 21

MID-WINTER COUNT. **C&O Canal.** Make-up date will be Jan 22 if the weather is bad. To participate, contact Peter Vankevich, 202-397-5593 or pvank@netacc.net.

MID-WINTER COUNT. **Allegany.** C&O Canal (Allegany portion). Again this year, the C&O Canal Count will replace our mid-winter bird count. Each mile of the canal is counted separately. Contact Peter Vankevich, 202-397-5593 or pvank@netacc.net for a stretch of the canal to cover.

MID-WINTER COUNT. **Baltimore.** To participate in your choice of location, contact Pete Webb, 410-486-1217 or pete_webb@juno.com.

H Harford. Top of the Bay Waterfowl. Join co-leaders Randy Robertson and Tom Congersky for a tour of the scattered waterside parks of the Susquehanna Flats and Furnace Bay. Sporting roadside vantages and paved walkways, these parks offer some of the best and most leisurely waterfowl viewing opportunities in the area. Meet at Tydings Park (on Commerce St in Havre de Grace) at 8 AM. Info: Randy Robertson, 410-273-9029.

H Baltimore. Saturday Monitoring Walks at Ft. McHenry. A continuing survey of bird activity at the Fort.

MOS Calendar (continued from page 11)

Meet 8 AM at the Visitor Center. Cancelled in bad weather (high winds, fog, rain, snow). Directions: from Baltimore Beltway southwest of the city, take exit 11, I-95, north towards the city. Get off at exit 55, Hanover St. Turn east (right) on McComas St, left (north) on Key Hwy. First left at Lawrence St and left onto Fort Ave. Continue through gateway into the park. Leader: Jim Peters, 410-429-0966.

H Cecil. Winter Season at Fair Hill. Half day. Meet 7 AM at the Fair Hill Nature Center parking lot. Leader: Richard Donham, donhamr@zoom-internet.net.

H Kent. Ocean City and Worcester County. Full day. Winter specialties include sea ducks, alcids, gulls, Purple Sandpipers, and wintering passerines. Bring lunch and warm beverages. Meet 8 AM at the Dollar General parking lot (the old A&P, off Philosopher's Terrace), Chestertown. Leaders: Walter Ellison and Nancy Martin, 410-778-9568 or rossgull@baybroadband.net, and Peter Mann, 410-648-5205 or pmann@epl-inc.com.

H Patuxent. Governor Bridge Park. Meet 7:30 AM at the parking lot for Governor Bridge Park. No reservations required. Park is located on Governor Bridge Rd, approximately 1 mile east of MD 301.

H Howard. How to Find Owls. Half day. Join owl expert Jay Sheppard to learn tips and techniques for finding wintering owls. This half-day trip will involve some difficult walking and possible interaction with sticker bushes and dense undergrowth. Please wear warm, heavy clothing. Jay is likely to stay until pitch dark, but people can leave earlier. Last year's highlight were perched Saw-whet Owls. Possible Long-Eared, Barred, Great-Horned, and Screech Owls. Meet 12:30 PM at the Patuxent River SP lot off Rte 97 (Montgomery side of bridge). Snow date will be the following Sat. Info: 301-725-5559. No facilities.

Sunday, January 22

H Anne Arundel. Annapolis Neck and Thomas Point. A traditional winter social event not to be missed. Search for geese, swans, and duck species in the bay and inlets. Then we will meet at the Winegrad's for a hot soup social. Leader and host: Gerald Winegrad, 410-280-8956. RSVP to Gerald by Jan 18 if you plan to stay for soup. Meet 12 noon at the Bay Ridge Shopping Center parking lot, across the street from the entrance to Quiet Waters Park.

H Montgomery. Occoquan Bay NWR, VA. Full day. The 644-acre refuge, previously a military research site, includes a mix of wetlands, forest, and native grasslands. Bring lunch and warm drinks. Meet 9 AM at refuge entrance. Located in Woodbridge, VA, 20 miles south of Washington, DC. From the north, take I-95 south to (left) exit 161 (Woodbridge), follow Rte 1 South across the Occoquan River and turn left at light into Dawson Beach Rd. Follow road to end at entrance to refuge. Leader: Mike Bowen, 301-530-5764.

Monday, January 23

MEETING. **Tri-County.** "Identifying Important Bird Areas" by *David Curson*. 7 PM. Asbury United Methodist Church (Fox Rm, south entrance), Camden Ave, Salisbury.

Tuesday, January 24

MEETING. **Washington.** Pot Luck Dinner starts at 6:15 PM. Brings your own place setting and drink, and a dish to share. Meeting at 7:30 PM. Come watch *March of the Penguins*. Mt. Aetna Nature Center. Call 301-797-8454 for info and directions.

Saturday, January 28

H Cecil. Cecil Gulls. Meet 8 AM at the North East Plaza. Leader: Gene Scarpulla, ejscarp@comcast.net.

H Montgomery. Ocean City to Broadkill Marsh. Full day. Wintering waterfowl, gulls, terns, and shorebirds. Meet 8 AM at Ocean City

Inlet parking lot. Reservations required. Leaders: Cyndie Loeper, 301-530-8226, and Gemma Radko, 301-607-4374.

Sunday, January 29

MID-WINTER COUNT. **Frederick.** Call David Smith, 410-549-7082, to sign up. Tally Rally at Dave and Carol's house.

Wednesday, February 1

MEETING. **Carroll.** *Bob Ringler* will present "Surprise, Surprise...a Birding Surprise." 7:30 PM at the Senior Center, Stoner Ave, Westminster. For info, contact Laura Tarbell, 410-857-1109.

Thursday, February 2

MEETING. **Frederick.** *Richard Koogle* from Lilypons will present "Water Gardening for Wildlife—How to Create a Natural Pond." 7 PM. Community Rm, C. Burr Artz Library, Frederick. Contact Marcia Balestri, 301-473-5098, for additional info.

Friday, February 3

MEETING. **Anne Arundel.** "Maryland's Next Bird Species" by *Phil Davis*. 8 PM. Arlington Echo Outdoor Education Center, 975 Indian Landing Rd, Millersville. Info: Dotty Mumford, 410-849-8336.

Saturday, February 4

MID-WINTER COUNT. **Anne Arundel.** Take the day off from your usual chores and spend the time at your favorite birding spot, hunting down and counting all the birds you can find. Coordinator/Compiler: Tom Bradford, 410-987-0674.

MID-WINTER COUNT. **Howard.** Coordinators: Jo Solem and Joe Byrnes, 410-730-5329.

H Harford. Bradenbaugh Flats. AM trip consists mostly of drive-and-stop birding, followed by a wrap-up at the Kirkwood's house featuring (delicious!) homemade soup and breads. Ring-necked Duck, Horned Lark, and White-crowned and Savannah Sparrows expected. American Pipit, Snow Bunting, and Lapland Longspur

are distinct possibilities. Meet 8 AM at Jarrettsville Elementary School. Info: Dennis Kirkwood, 410-692-5905.

H Baltimore. Draw-in at Cylburn Arboretum. 10 AM-2 PM. Cylburn's natural science collection will be on display for you to draw, sketch, and paint. For artists 10 years and up. Bring your own art supplies and lunch. Artists and naturalists on hand for instruction. Fee \$2. Cylburn Arboretum, 4915 Greenspring Ave. To register, call 410-367-2217.

H Frederick. MD Hotline Trip. Gary Smyle will lead us around MD to look for winter rarities reported on the hotline. Emphasis will be on Frederick Co birds, but we may wander farther, depending on what's out there. Meet 8:30 AM at Baker Park. Call Gary Smyle, 301-663-0055, for info.

H Montgomery. Blue Mash. Half day. Relatively new (and very birdy) site in Montgomery Co. Waterproof footwear essential. Meet 7:30 AM at Zion Rd parking lot. Trip limited to 8-10 participants. For reservations and directions, call Leader: Rick Sussman, 301-774-1185.

H Patuxent. Fran Uhler NA. Meet 7:30 AM at the end of Lemon Bridge Rd off MD 197, just north of Bowie State U and MARC line. No reservations required.

Sunday, February 5

MID-WINTER COUNT. **Kent.** Join the field crew or count in your neighborhood or anywhere in Kent Co. Contact Walter Ellison and Nancy Martin, 410-778-9568 or rossgull@baybroadband.net, and Peter Mann, 410-648-5205 or pmann@epl-inc.com, for more info.

Tuesday, February 7

MEETING. **Baltimore.** "Natural History of Australia" by *Dr. Don Messersmith*. 7:30 PM. Cylburn Arboretum, 4915 Greenspring Ave. Info: Pete Webb, 410-486-1217 or pete_webb@juno.com.

Thursday, February 9

MEETING. **Howard.** "Contrasting Breeding Strategies of Two Species of Orioles: First Documentation of Double-Breeding in Orchard Orioles," by *Spring Ligi*. Hospitality and club bookstore 7:30 PM; meeting/program 8 PM at Howard Co Rec and Parks, 7210 Oakland Mills Rd, Columbia. Info: Jeff Freidhoffer, 410-997-5336.

Saturday, February 11

MID-WINTER COUNT. **Cecil.** Coordinator: Sean McCandless, seanmccandless1@comcast.net.

H Anne Arundel. Feeder Watch. Half day. Travel to three AABC members' homes to view the wintering birds that visit their various backyard feeders. This is an opportunity to find out which feeders and bird seed attract the most birds and to compare binoculars. Meet 8 AM at Jones Station P&R. Leader: Lynn Kenny, 301-464-8371.

H Baltimore. Henlopen to Ocean City. Scan water for loons, gannets, sea ducks, Great Cormorants, Purple Sandpipers, and possibly Razorbill. Red-breasted and Brown-headed Nuthatches seen last year at the Henlopen Visitor Center. Bundle up; this trip is usually brutally cold and windy. Meet 7:30 AM at Nursery Rd P&R, Beltway exit 8. Alternatively, meet between 9 and 9:30 AM at the Lewes-Cape May Ferry passenger lot. Bring lunch. Leader: Pete Webb, 410-486-1217 or pete_webb@juno.com.

H Tri-County. South Dorchester County. Rough-legged Hawk, Golden Eagle, and Short-eared Owl possible. Bring lunch or snack. Meet 7:30 AM at Asbury United Methodist Church (east parking lot adjacent to Wesley Dr), Salisbury. Leader: Mike Walsh, 410-546-8425.

Sunday, February 12

H Baltimore. Marshy Point Nature Center. Half day. For waterfowl, raptors, and passerines. Half-mile trail leads to point overlooking Dundee Creek. Boots advisable, scopes useful. Meet 9 AM at nature center parking lot. Leaders: Debbie Terry, 410-252-8771 or gt5s@bcpl.net, and Mary Byers, 410-686-7924.

H Montgomery. Black Hill RP. Half day. Waterfowl and land birds. Meet 8 AM at Visitor Center. Bring scope and snacks. Reservations not required. Leader: Andy Martin, 301-294-4805 or apmartin2@comcast.net.

Tuesday, February 14

MEETING. **Allegany.** 7 PM. *Jo Anna Leachman* will present "Nocturnal Songbird Migration in Western MD: A Study Using Acoustic and Radar Sampling." Allegany Co Main Library, 31 Washington St, Cumberland (across from the Board of Education Bldg). Info: J.B. Churchill, 301-697-1223 or jchurchi@atlanticbb.net.

MEETING. **Patuxent.** "Woodcock, Wild Turkeys, and Birdfeeding" by *Dr. Al Geis*. 7:30 PM at College Park Airport Annex. Info: Fred Shaffer, 410-721-1744.

Wednesday, February 15

MEETING. **Montgomery.** *Daphne Gemmill* will present "Birding Beautiful Bhutan." A globe-trotting birder, Daphne will describe and show slides from her recent trip to Bhutan. 7:30 PM, Potomac Presbyterian Church, 10301 River Rd, Potomac.

Thursday, February 16

MEETING. **Caroline.** Movie: *March of the Penguins*. 7:30 PM, Caroline Co Public Library, 100 Market St, Denton.

February 17-20, Friday-Monday

H Montgomery. Presidents' Day Weekend, Cecil to Delmarva to Dorchester. Includes Ocean City and Chincoteague NWR. 4 days. Joint

H Indicates Field Trip

(MOS Calendar continues on page 14)

MOS Calendar (continued from page 13)

trip with ANS. Winter waterfowl, song birds, possible white-winged gulls, eiders, Harlequin Ducks, and Great Cormorants. Call leader for further details, and/or check *ANS Naturalist News*. Reservations required. Leader: Paul DuMont, 703-931-8994.

Saturday, February 18

H Cecil. Hard-core Owling. Meet 4 AM at the Big Elk Mall, Elkton. Leader: Sean McCandless, seanmccandless1@comcast.net.

H Washington. Conowingo Dam. Meet 7:30 AM at the Rte 66 P&R. Call 301-797-8454.

H Kent. Rarity Hunt. Seasonal conditions and area rare bird alerts will determine our destinations. Meet 8 AM at the Dollar General parking lot (the old A&P, off Philosopher's Terrace), Chestertown. Leaders: Walter Ellison and Nancy Martin, 410-778-9568 or rossgull@baybroadband.net, and Peter Mann, 410-648-5205 or pmann@epl-inc.com.

H Patuxent. Governor Bridge Park. Meet 7:30 AM at the parking lot. No reservations required. (Park is located on Governor Bridge Rd, approximately 1 mile east of MD 301.)

Saturday-Monday, February 18-20

H Carroll. Presidents' Day Weekend at the beach. Annual trek for fun, good company, and birds! Come for all or part of the weekend. Contact trip leader Mark Hoffman at 410-549-3598 for details and meeting place and time.

H Frederick. Presidents' Day Weekend Trip to the Eastern Shore. Meet 6 AM at Urbana P&R. Contact Mike Welch, 301-874-5828, to reserve a spot.

H Anne Arundel. Annual Winter Weekend. 3-day trip to Bombay Hook, NJ coast, Brigantine, and other locations. A variety of ducks, geese, shorebirds, gulls, and wintering

land birds will be seen. Leader: Peter Hanan, 410-672-5672. RSVP to Peter by Feb 4.

Saturday, February 25

H Baltimore. Saturday Monitoring Walks at Ft. McHenry. See Jan 21 listing for info and directions.

H Frederick. Timberdoodles at Audrey Carroll. Doug Parker will lead us on a search for American Woodcocks. Meet 5:30 PM at the Rte 75 P&R just south of I-70. Bring a flashlight. For info, call Doug, 301-663-1909.

H Patuxent. Ocean City Inlet and Assateague Island. This late-winter trip will include a stop at the Ocean City Inlet to look for sea ducks, gulls, and shorebirds. The group will then visit Assateague Island in hopes of seeing winter sparrows, Snow Buntings, and other rarities. Meet 6:30 AM at the Bowie P&R. Call Fred Shaffer for reservations at 410-721-1744.

Monday, February 27

MEETING. **Tri-County.** Program TBA. 7 PM. Asbury United Methodist Church, (Fox Rm, south entrance), Camden Ave, Salisbury.

Tuesday, February 28

MEETING. **Washington.** *Don Cooper*, retired National Geographic photographer, will present "Birds of the Antietam Battlefield." 7:30 PM, Mt. Aetna Nature Center. Call 301-797-8454 for details.

Wednesday, March 1

MEETING. **Carroll.** *Mike Braun* will present "Evolving Species and Species Concepts (or Why the AOU Just Won't Leave Your Life List Alone)." 7:30 PM at the Senior Center, Stoner Ave, Westminster. For info, contact Tammy Schwaab, 410-857-4913.

Thursday, March 2

MEETING. **Frederick.** *Dave Brinker* will review "Maryland's Colonial Nesting Waterbirds: Who's Up and Who's Down." 7 PM. Community

Rm, C. Burr Artz Library, Frederick. Contact Marcia Balestri, 301-473-5098 for additional info.

MEETING. **Anne Arundel.** Richard E. Heisse, Jr., Annual Wildlife Lecture. "The Rediscovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker" by *Kenneth V. Rosenberg*. 8 PM. Quiet Waters Park. 600 Quiet Waters Park Rd, Annapolis. Host: Paul Speyser, 410-266-5669.

Friday, March 3

MEETING. **Harford.** Speaker TBA. Dinner at 6:15 PM followed by meeting and presentation at 7 PM. Churchville Presbyterian Church, MD 22 and MD 136. Info and dinner reservations: Rick Cheicante, 410-803-2712.

Saturday, March 4

H Baltimore. Horsehead Wetlands Center/Terrapin Nature Park. Meet 7:30 AM at Nursery Road P&R or alternatively 8:30 AM at Horsehead. Varied habitats for passerines and waterfowl. Entrance fee waived for card-carrying MOS and BBC members. Leader: Kevin Graff, ocean_city2001@yahoo.com. Coordinator: Pete Webb, 410-486-1217 or pete_webb@juno.com.

H Cecil. Horsehead Wetlands Center. Meet 7 AM at Big Elk Mall, Elkton. Leader: Richard Donham, donhamr@zoominternet.net.

H Frederick. Waterfowl Wander. Waterfowl, late winter birds, and early spring migrants. Meet 7:30 AM at Baker Park. Call Mike Welch, 301-874-5828 for info.

H Washington. Black Hill RP. Meet 9 AM at the Rte 66 P&R. Leader: Shirley Ford, 301-241-3020.

Sunday, March 5

H Harford. Loch Raven. Join veteran leaders Dave Larkin and Don Soubie to explore one of Baltimore's most scenic waterscapes. Just 6 miles north of downtown Towson, this reservoir and its surrounding forest are a magnet for pine-loving songbirds

and waterfowl. Ring-necked Duck, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Fox Sparrow are likely. Meet 7:30 AM at the MD 152/MD 147 P&R. Info: Dave Larkin, 410-569-8319.

H Baltimore. Loch Raven. Waterfowl and land birds. Possible Bald Eagles and Eastern Bluebirds. Scopes useful. Two-mile level walk. Beginning birders welcome. Meet 8 AM at Stone Hill Rd. See Jan 1 trip listing for directions. Leader: Debbie Terry, 410-252-8771 or gt5s@bcpl.net.

H Carroll. Blackwater NWR. All-day trip during start of waterfowl migration. Bring a lunch. Meet 7:30 AM at the I-70/Rte 32 P&R. Leader: Dave Harvey, 410-795-3117.

H Howard. Centennial Park. 2-3 hours. Easy walking on paved path around Centennial Lake. Woodlands, fields, and water host a wide variety of species. Great view of the sky for flyovers. Meet 8 AM at west end parking lot. Leaders: TBA. Facilities available. Info: Bonnie Ott, 410-461-3361.

Tuesday, March 7

MEETING. Baltimore. "The Longest Pelagic—24 Days in the Southern Hemisphere" by *Gail Mackiernan*. 7:30 PM, Cylburn Arboretum, 4915 Greenspring Ave. Info: Pete Webb, 410-486-1217 or pete_webb@juno.com.

Wednesday, March 8

H Harford. Timberdoodle Watch. The first of two early-evening trips for American Woodcock. Dress warmly and meet co-leaders John Gallo and Colleen Webster 6 PM at the corner of the Aberdeen Wal-Mart parking lot adjacent to Rte 7. Info: John Gallo, 410-459-0548.

Saturday, March 11

H Tri-County. Chase Trip. A Saturday trip in search of unusual birds in the region. Meet 7:30 AM at Asbury United Methodist Church (east parking lot adjacent to Wesley Dr), Salisbury. Leader TBA.

H Cecil. Blackwater NWR and Ocean City. Meet 6 AM Big Elk Mall, Elkton. Leader: Sean McCandless, seanmccandless1@comcast.net.

H Frederick. Piney Run. Late winter waterfowl and maybe really early spring migrants. Meet 7:30 AM at Baker Park. For info contact Linda Keller, 301-834-7312.

H Kent. Leaders' Choice. Late-winter birding destination to be determined by the leaders and the weather. Meet 7 AM at the Dollar General parking lot (the old A&P, off Philosopher's Terrace), Chestertown. Leaders: Walter Ellison and Nancy Martin, 410-778-9568 or rossgull@baybroadband.net, and Peter Mann, 410-648-5205 or pmann@epl-inc.com.

H Howard. Howard Waterfowl Search. Half day. Visit Columbia area lakes and other Howard Co waters, including Triadelphia Reservoir, to search for gulls, ducks, grebes, loons, and other waterfowl. Easy walking. Plan to carpool. Bring lunch and drinks. Scopes helpful. Meet 8 AM at Broken Land Parkway lot at Lake Elkhorn. Facilities available at certain locations. Leader: Stan Arnold, 410-768-0155.

H Anne Arundel. Wye Island NRMA. Full day. 2,800-acre site managed by DNR for agriculture, waterfowl, and other wildlife. Waterfowl, shorebirds, and land birds. Meet 7:30 AM at the Bay 50 Shopping Center parking lot. Bring a lunch. Leader: Bobbi Reichwein, 410-451-2671.

Sunday, March 12

H Howard. Centennial Park. 2-3 hours. Easy walking on paved path around Centennial Lake. Woodlands, fields, and water host a wide variety of species. Great view of the sky for flyovers. Meet 8 AM at west end parking lot. Leaders: TBA. Facilities available. Info: Bonnie Ott, 410-461-3361.

H Baltimore. Middle Creek WMA. All-day trip (bring lunch) to visit this major gathering place north of Lancaster, PA for Snow Geese and other waterfowl. There is also an excellent display of mounted birds at the Visitor Center. Note: Trip may go elsewhere if Middle Creek is frozen over. Meet 8 AM at Timonium P&R on Greenspring Dr/Deereco Rd off Timonium Rd just east of I-83. Leader: Steve Sanford, 410-922-5103 or scartan@verizon.net.

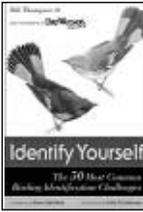
It's Who You Know?

On the morning of Nov 25, some five or six people had been looking for the HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER, unsuccessfully, for 2-1/2 hours. Rob Hilton and Paul Pisano arrived, whereupon the bird showed up. "It could be that the cold kept insect activity to nil until the sun heated things up," Paul O'Brien wrote on *MDOsprey*. "I can't comment on the effects of the arrival of Rob and Paul on the bird's activities."

A little while later, it was Joel Martin's turn. "When I arrived around noon, . . . things were pretty quiet. The flycatcher made an appearance of a few seconds . . . That was it until about 1:50, when only Jeff Culler and I were left. Then who should come down the trail, walking dogs and with no bins in hand, but Hank Kaestner, who of course spotted the bird immediately. For the next 10-15 minutes we had several extended views, including scope views. What can I say, some got it and the rest of us . . ."

BOOK REVIEW

Identify Yourself: The 50 Most Common Birding Identification Challenges



Bill Thompson III; Julie Zickefoose (Illustrator),
Kenn Kaufman (Foreword), and the editors of
Bird Watcher's Digest. Houghton Mifflin, 2005.
416 pages. \$19.95.

The appearance of Black-capped Chickadees in Maryland this fall sent many of us back to our field guides. But the terse descriptions in most field guides aren't always helpful in distinguishing Chickadees or other look-alike birds. Many sparrows, fall warblers, and other "little brown guys" can be frustrating to ID, not to mention swallows and small terns and gulls (oh my!).

Fortunately, the editors of *Bird Watcher's Digest* take pity on birders like me by writing a column called "Identify Yourself," where they discuss the finer points of separating similar birds. This year, many of the columns were compiled into the book *Identify Yourself: The 50 Most Common Birding Identification Challenges*. Not a field guide but a companion to field guides, *Identify Yourself* is written with clarity and a touch of humor that makes it not only very useful but also fun to read.

The book has three preliminary chapters before it gets into the nitty-gritty of identification: a brief introduction; a chapter of 20 tips, such as, learn the bird's anatomy (#7), sounds (#8), and habitat (#9); and the standard diagram of bird parts. The identification chapters are organized taxonomically, from waterfowl to finches, and seem to be aimed

at beginning-to-intermediate birders. For example, while the shorebird section covers yellowlegs, plovers, and "medium probing shorebirds," it does not go any smaller. As the editor explains in the Introduction: "Rather than cover all of the small confusing shorebirds, or "peeps," we cover the basics of shorebird identification and the confusing shorebirds you'll encounter *before* you're ready to tackle the peeps." In other words, he can't tell them apart, either!

So while expert birders may not find much help here, those of us with life lists below 400 will find much help indeed. Precisely because this book is not a field guide, the editors can go into great detail about distinguishing Cooper's Hawk from Sharp-shinned, or adult Blue-headed Vireo from immature White-eyed. Each chapter is from five to eight pages long, with at least one full page of color artwork, and often additional detail art, as in the chapter on tanagers that shows "male tanager heads at a glance." Each chapter covers not only size, shape, voice, and field marks, but also habitat preferences and behaviors. The level of detail is especially helpful in the chapters about "little brown jobs"—I plan to make good use of the five chapters on sparrows come spring.

The book concludes with a list of helpful print and electronic resources, a glossary, and a listing of common and scientific names of all birds mentioned in the book. At just under \$20, and available on-line for less, it's a good value for almost any birder's bookshelf.

—Pat Valdata, Cecil County

POSTMASTER: TIME-DATED MATERIAL—PLEASE EXPEDITE!

LAST CALL

- .. for entries in the **Pin Design Contest**, deadline January 16. Check the MOS web site and/or contact John Malcolm, 301-977-5788 or smudgie@comcast.net.
- .. for **Annual Bird List** submissions, deadline January 20. Check the web site and/or contact Norm Saunders, 301-989-9035 or marshhawk@att.net
- .. for **Scholarship** applications, deadline January 31. Check the web site and/or contact Tom Strikwerda, 301-942-2841 or tom.strikwerda@verizon.net

MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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