

The Osprey



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Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

2007 SCIENCE FAIR AWARDS

by Millie Kreimelmeyer, Education Committee

Congratulations to the 2007 winners of school science fair awards from the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. Each winner received \$50 and membership for one year in National Audubon Society and Southern Maryland Audubon Society.

The Calvert County schools, Junior Division awards went to: Elizabeth Spiegel, 8th Grade, Northern Middle School. Project title: "Location, Location, Location! Acidic, Neutral or Basic?" Also to Kassidy Kennedy, 7th Grade, Plum Point Middle School. Project title: "Correlation Between Biodiversity and Human Activity in the Littoral Zone in Calvert County"

The Charles County Schools, Senior Division award went to Brittany Libert, 10th Grade, La Plata High School. Project title: "Swimming with Bacteria." The Junior Division award winner is Kristina Milman, Mattawoman Middle School. Project title: "Chesapeake Bay Water Quality." The Elementary Division award went to Caitlin Olejnik, Grace Lutheran Elementary School. Project title: "Water Pollution."

For St. Mary's County Schools, the Senior Division award winner is Travis Mattingly, Leonardtown High School. Project title: "Survivor: Smith Island." The Junior Division award winner is Kallie Jahn, Spring Ridge Middle School. Project title: "What on Earth is Good Quality Bedding?"

Thank you to the judges: in Calvert County, Leslie Bridgett and Susan Noble; in Charles County, Millie Kriemelmeyer and Art Krueger; in St. Mary's County, Beverly & Warren Walker.

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

St. Mary's Chase, Feb 10, 2007 by Tyler Bell

Five hardy souls showed up for the St. Mary's County Chase trip. When I woke up, the temperature at our house was 10°F. It had warmed up to 15°F by the time everyone had assembled at 8 AM.

Our first stop was at the Town Creek pier just to the north of the bridge to Solomons. The wind was right in our faces and it was a challenge to want to study the various ducks near the shore. However, we had nice looks at both Scaup and Common Goldeneyes and a pair of Hooded Mergansers, among others.

After turning into popsicles, we headed north in the warmth of our cars to Sandgates, the former home of Shrimpy the

Kelp Gull. Though Shrimpy hasn't been seen for almost two years now, we did get to check out the loafing Great Black-backed, Herring and Ring-billed Gulls in the wind shadow of the Tiki Bar at the Seabreeze Restaurant.

The temperatures were rising into the 20s as we drove through Leonardtown to the Beauvue ponds. As the temperatures had been below freezing for more than a week, there was very little open water. There was a small area, perhaps about an acre, that was crammed full of ducks. There were often four or five species visible in one field of view with a total of 10 species including ten Redheads. There were also several Eastern Meadowlarks here and an American Kestrel perched on the power line.

It's a long drive from Leonardtown to Pt. Lookout but Sigrid Stiles kindly offered a stopover at her house on St. Jerome's Creek to look for the Canvasbacks that she had seen earlier. It was even windier there but we managed to find the Canvasbacks before retiring to the warmth of the house to make a pit stop. We stopped along the road out from her house to look for a screech-owl that was a no-show. We did find an Eastern Phoebe that was catching bugs in the grass. Usually they like to perch on fence posts but due to the cold and wind, it was mostly perching on grass tufts.

Usually, Pt. Lookout supports a large raft of mixed scoters. This time, there were very few, mostly Black Scoters with a few Surf Scoters. At least they were close to the causeway so we could get decent scope views of them. We stopped near the camp store to look for some sparrows that Marty Cribb had reported but none could be found. We heard a Brown-headed Nuthatch but it flew off without a sighting. Sigrid spotted a Northern Gannet out on the Chesapeake side of the point but it disappeared in the howling winds.

Despite the frigid temperature and the strong winds, the whole group stuck it out until about 3:00 PM. We ended up with a decent species count of 62. Had it not been so windy, I'm sure we would have found plenty more but there was a definite trade-off of comfort versus birding effort!

Thick-billed Murre at Ocean City, 24 February 2007 by George Jett

Below is an image of the Thick-billed Murre (*Uria lomvia*) I photographed on February 24, 2007 in Ocean City (O.C.), Maryland. There are fewer than ten records of Thick-billed Murre for Maryland. This species is usually 40 or more miles at sea, rarely winters this far south in the Atlantic, and seldom comes so close to shore except to breed on Arctic sea cliffs. Generally if you find a pelagic bird such as this one near or on shore it is ailing. However, this bird seemed healthy, as we observed it feeding, swimming, and flying.

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This murre appears to be a young one (less than seven months old), since the white line of the adult's bill is not yet fully developed. Also, the back is not completely dark as in adult birds. The bird was still being reported as of 28 February. It had been around nearly two weeks.

This sighting was a special treat since the bird was hanging around the O.C. inlet. We did not have to get seasick to find it. Gwen was especially pleased since she is prone to seasickness



To view this image in color, see this issue of *The Osprey* posted at www.geocities.com/smdaudubon.

NAS Patuxent River Birding Trip, 3 March 2007, by Dean Newman,

Let's face it. In the world of Southern Maryland's great birders I'm somewhat of a "plugger". If you stack me up beside some of the true legends in SMAS my limitations become obvious when it comes to identifying female waterfowl, age grouping immature gulls or even sorting out sparrows. But every once in a great while, the right people representing the perfect mix of personalities, fabulous weather and cooperative birds coincide to make even me look good. Such was the case on Saturday, March 3, when approximately a dozen hardy souls showed for our excursion around the Patuxent River Naval Air Station.

If you're a trip leader with "limitations" and George Harrington and Marty Cribb show up in your group, you can breathe a long sigh of relief. All I had to do was get us in the front gate; I knew they would carry me the rest of the way. To improve things, Marty brought along a ringer, Luci Adams, who appears to have forgotten more about birding than what I know. For the rest of the morning, Marty's interesting reminiscences about colloquial names of ducks, George's quick sighting and Luci's tenacious searching made this trip one of the best I've ever attended.

At our first stop, the beach on the far west side of the base, I confidently called Surf Scoters, Buffleheads and Common Goldeneyes when George tactfully confirmed Ernie Willoughby's remark that several of those "surfs" sure look "Black". Oops! No one says you have to be perfect to be a trip leader and I spent a good portion of the rest of that morning confirming that axiom.

As I was trying to recover from that first faux pas of the day, Luci found a Red-throated Loon so far down the river I had

to crank my Swarovski scope up to 60X, and still had to use a lot of imagination to make it out. She had one of those new Carl Zeiss scopes that really did the job. Incidentally, I strongly recommend going with the 45 degree eyepiece instead of a straight one on whatever scope you decide to buy. The slanted eyepiece makes it much easier to accommodate different human statures when birding in a group. We were able to confirm her sighting by moving a quarter of a mile up the beach to get closer. How she found that bird, by itself, in the haze at a long distance, I'll never know.

Just as I'd declared, "We've seen all there is to see here," Lou Armistead found a Bald Eagle perched across the cove in plain enough view that any decent trip leader should have seen it first. As I was congratulating Lou for passing my "test", a Red-shouldered Hawk flew over low and slow enough for several in the group to point out diagnostic field marks to the rest of us.

At the next stop, I was pointing out Long-tailed Ducks that were at least a half mile away when Judy Filner, who drove all the way from Rockville to join us, pointed out a pair no more than 50 yards behind me that I hadn't seen. Another oops! At any rate, thanks to her, we had great looks at these beautiful ducks. All I could say was, "Time to find another spot," to cover my oversight.

Enroute to a comfort station for the group, I make a detour to check a favorite sea wall when George confidently called out, "Red-throated Loon". Sure enough, where the last one had literally been in a different zip code, this one was about a hundred yards out and, for the first time in my birding life, I could see the beautiful spotted back of this bird the field guides discuss so confidently. Typically there are so few of them around our area and they are so wary, the best we can do is discern head angle and bill shape. Not this one. It was close and gorgeous.

While there, Marty—a true wealth of natural-history knowledge—pointed out a group of feeding Greater Scaups. By watching them in the scope, we could see them feeding on razor clams as they dived and brought them up from the bottom. I was amazed they could swallow the large bivalves without injuring their gullets.

Finally—according to several in the group who thought we'd never get there—we reached the comfort station. While there we had a brief appearance by a raptor that was so pale it had all of us scratching our heads and going for the field guides. I tried to make a pitch for an early Broad-winged Hawk but Ernie pointed out way too many holes in my identification logic. He correctly called it, as later appearances would confirm, a very pale Red-tailed Hawk. As we moved down the path into Goose Creek Campground, we again saw the hawk with another very typical Red-tail as they performed pair-bonding flight maneuvers. At one point, the smaller male buteo folded his wings at high altitude and executed a breath-taking

stoop that lasted several seconds and ended in a perfect flare to alight on an antenna tower. I can't speak for the female hawk but it certainly impressed me.

Further around the corner I discovered that my pre-scouting finds of Canvasbacks and Tundra Swans had disappeared since the previous afternoon. At least that's my story and I'm sticking to it. We did have plenty of Ruddy Ducks with George pointing out one that was beginning to attain its alternate (breeding) plumage. It was clear from that one why they're called "ruddy". After a quick fly by of a pair of wood ducks and a second Bald Eagle (which someone pointed out to me), we moved on.

The final stop, in search of Ring-necked Ducks I had spotted the night before, revealed an even better surprise. Once again it was George Harrington who called, "Hooded Mergansers", before I had even stopped the car. Once we had scopes set up we were treated to views of no less than 4 males and 3 females. At first they were very skittish, but as we settled down, so did they and great looks were had by all. I've seen them thousands of times and still think they edge out Wood Ducks in overall beauty.

I wish every future bird trip I lead could be as perfect as this one was. Although we did see a lot of species—many more than mentioned here—the makeup of the group made conversation easy and the jokes plentiful. I'd like to thank all of you who attended and please remember, "same time next year".

CALLING VOLUNTEERS FOR ANNUAL POTOMAC RIVER CLEANUP

It is again time for the Potomac River Cleanup. This year's cleanup will be on Saturday, March 31 from 9:00 AM to 12:00 noon, rain or shine. The site at Marshall Hall Park is again being sponsored by our Southern Maryland Audubon Society. SMAS will furnish drinks and snacks. Representatives will be at the sign-in table and through the park to help with what ever is needed.

Gloves and trash bags are furnished through the Alice Ferguson Foundation and Charles County Public Works.

In previous years, many volunteers participated in the cleanup including students working on their community service requirements, scout troops, church groups, and businesses, as well as residents of all ages interested in the environment in which we live. Every year after the volunteers are done there is such a great difference in the appearance, safety, and usefulness of the shoreline. SMAS hopes that concerned residents will again show up to help heal the Potomac.

If you want further information please contact Site Coordinator, Bob Lukinic
Telephone: 301-283-6317, e-mail: rlukinic@peoplepc.com

FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED



Southern Maryland Audubon Society sponsors the banding of nestling birds of prey, or raptors, with serially numbered aluminum bands in cooperation with the Bird Banding Laboratory of the U. S. Department of the Interior, as part of our bird research and conservation activities in Southern Maryland. Limited numbers of Osprey and Barn Owl nestlings become available each year for adoption. The gift of \$10 for an Osprey adoption, or of \$25 for a Barn Owl adoption, contributes to a special fund for the support of raptor research and raptor conservation projects. The foster parent receives:

- A certificate of adoption with the number of the U. S. Department of the Interior band, and the location and date of the banding.
- Information on the ecology and migration patterns of the species, photo of a fledgling, and any other information on whereabouts or fate of the bird that may be available.

Interested? Here's how to become a foster parent of an Osprey or a Barn Owl. Send \$10.00 for each Osprey, or \$25 for each Barn Owl to:

Southern Maryland Audubon Society
ATTN: Adoption Program
11350 Budds Creek Rd.
Charlotte Hall, Maryland 20622



ADOPT A RAPTOR

Name: _____

Address: _____

I wish to adopt (check one):

_____ (number of) Osprey, \$10.00 each

_____ (number of) Barn Owl, \$25.00 each

Amount Enclosed: _____

(Make checks payable to:
Southern Maryland Audubon Society)

ADMINISTRATION IGNORES ITS BIOLOGISTS ON EAGLE PROTECTION

Washington, DC, February 15, 2007 - Earlier this month, a federal appeals court extended the deadline to June 29 for the Fish and Wildlife Service to develop its plan for delisting the bald eagle, as the agency's proposal for protecting the bird comes under fire for going against the recommendations of wildlife biologists. Audubon scientist Greg Butcher recently briefed the Associated Press on the issue, saying the bald eagle is one of the Endangered Species Act's great successes. The bird has rebounded from around 400 breeding pairs in the lower 48 states in the early 1960s to more than 7,000 breeding pairs today. Audubon has long supported the delisting.

FWS has, however, been facing critics in developing protections for the eagle once it is no longer under the wing of ESA, and particularly what it means to "disturb" a bird. The deadline extension does permit some extra time to resolve the issue in line with Audubon's view that the eagle should receive maximum protection under the existing federal law once it is de-listed.

The eagle is also protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, which prohibits taking or disturbing eagles. FWS proposed regulations last December to define "disturb" as actions that would cause injury or death to an eagle. Many conservation groups, including Audubon, say that definition of "disturb" is far too limited, and FWS biologists seem to confirm that view in a secret memo that was leaked to National Public Radio. The memo has been posted on the NPR website at http://www.npr.org/documents/2007/feb/20070207_eagle.pdf.

ANOTHER CITIZEN-SCIENCE PROJECT AVAILABLE

The Birdhouse Network: A Decade of Dedication— If you're looking for a new way to indulge your passion for birds, consider joining The Birdhouse Network, a citizen-science project of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Participants put up nest boxes and record information once or twice a week about what the birds are doing. Over the past 10 years participants have submitted nearly 70,000 records detailing when birds build their nests, how many eggs they lay, and

when the fledglings take their first flights. These efforts have helped expand scientific knowledge about bluebirds, Tree Swallows, House Wrens, and other cavity-nesting birds.

People of all ages and skill levels can be part of The Birdhouse Network. To sign up or find out more, visit the project's web site: www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse <<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse>>, or call (800) 843-2473. The project fee is \$15 (\$12 for Laboratory of Ornithology members).

CALIFORNIA CONDOR TO BENEFIT FROM STATE'S FIRST VOLUNTARY DISCONTINUANCE OF THE USE OF LEAD AMMUNITION

Los Angeles, CA, March 1, 2007 - Tejon Ranch Company joined with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Audubon California to further protect the California Condor by announcing it would discontinue the use of lead hunting ammunition on Tejon Ranch, the 270,000-acre privately-owned ranch in California's Tehachapi Mountains that is home to the state's largest private hunting program.

While tremendous progress has been made in bringing the California Condor back from the brink of extinction, poisoning from lead ammunition is regarded as the single greatest threat to the continued recovery of the species. Lead ammunition poses a threat to the condors when the birds eat carrion containing the bullet fragments. This move by Tejon Ranch is the latest effort by the Ranch to help protect the condor, which has historically used portions of Tejon Ranch for foraging and roosting.

Effective with the 2008 hunting season, only non-lead ammunition will be allowed on Tejon Ranch, making it the first major private wildlife management program in the state to voluntarily require the use of non-lead ammunition. It covers all lead ammunition used in hunting. Tejon Ranch Company worked closely with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish & Game, Audubon California and several hunting and environmental organizations to design the new regulation.

To learn more about Tejon Ranch, please visit <http://www.tejonranch.com>.



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APRIL EVENTS

April 4—**Wednesday**—7:30 PM. **Monthly Meeting**
La Plata United Methodist Church, Corner of Rtes. 6 and 301 in La Plata, Charles County. **Bay Friendly Landscaping** by Chesapeake Bay Foundation. As spring planting season approaches, learn about using native plants to improve wildlife habitat while reducing the need for chemicals and mowing. Find out how to create a more environmentally friendly space to enjoy the great outdoors while also protecting the Chesapeake Bay.

April 7—**Saturday**—8:00 AM to noon. **Field Trip**
Flag Ponds Nature Park, Calvert County. **Spring Migrants and Wildflowers**. Leaders: Sue Noble and Jack Leighty (410-535-5870, jack.leighty@comcast.net), and Arlene Ripley. Greet spring by visiting one of the best wildflower displays in Southern Maryland. The varied habitat here also yields a nice variety of birds. From Rte. 2/4 about 10 miles south of Prince Frederick take Flag Pond Parkway to the entrance gate by 8 AM sharp. Facilities, but an entrance fee.

April 21—**Saturday**—8:00 AM to noon. **Field Trip**
Smallwood State park, Charles County. **Migrants with Jean: Youth Field Trip**. Leader: Jean Artes (301-743-2288, pojartes@aol.com). This field trip is especially geared

for elementary and middle school ages. From Rte 225 at Mason Springs, go south on Rte. 224 about 4 miles to the park entrance on the right. This location is especially good for forest interior birds, Red-headed Woodpecker, late waterfowl, and early neotropical migrants. Previous years have produced Philadelphia Vireo, and both Least and Olive-sided Flycatchers. Bring a spotting scope if you have one. Facilities, but an entrance fee.

April 25—**Wednesday**—7:00-9:00 PM. **Board of Directors Meeting**
Calvert County Library, Prince Frederick, Meeting Room 1. Directors meetings are open to any member.

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The deadline for the Osprey is the fifth of each month. Please send all short articles, reports, unique sightings, conservation updates, calendar items, etc. to the above address.

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