Are You A Crow Or A Vulture?

Now that we have entered into the New Year I cannot help but correlate our avian world to the new political world. Many like-minded nature lovers are concerned, even frightened, of the change that is coming. We now add to our concerns about climate change, loss of habitat, pollution, the probable slashing of funds to our environmental protection laws and groups; who would have thunk it could get this bad?

As we sit back, many of us ask how we could have prevented this and more importantly, what are we going to do about it. It is so tempting to sit back and let others be the doers. Wait for others to take action on an issue then complain they did not do it the way you would have. Some complain about their national, state or local government or maybe even the local club they are involved in. But, are they involved enough to really understand certain issues? Did they get the full story or facts before voicing an opinion? If you do not understand the facts and possible ramifications about an issue that in itself is a problem, but it is an even bigger problem when you actively come out against it or for it.

Sometimes I envision that people treat important decisions like fast food – make it quick and easy – do not make me take time to read and do homework! Bottom line we know problems can stem from a lack of proper research and understanding regarding an issue, due to a variety of reasons. Some even only want to hear what they want to believe.

You ask yourself, what does this have to do with a crow or a vulture? Research shows that a crow is supposedly as smart as a 7 year old. They have the capacity to problem solve using reason. They actively pursue the problem; work it, not waiting for someone else to do it for them. Whereas a vulture, waits for the road kill (or fast food!) and swoops down for the pickings.

Are you a crow or a vulture? Do you take the time to more fully understand an issue before you speak or get engaged? Do you let someone else come up with ideas and then swoop in at the end to pick it apart? Do you understand how to identify truthful information vs hoax? It can be hard, but hard work is necessary.

So, as the year proceeds, please read, study and get engaged. Be at least as smart as a 7 year old. Don’t sit back and wait for the road kill. And please don’t get discouraged!! Analyze what you can do to help, act on it, and then take a bird walk and smell the native plants.

Happy trails,

Lynne Wheeler
President

P.S. Thanks to all the vultures for helping to keep America beautiful. Now if they could pick up the fast food litter too!
**Cat Wars**

Members of the birding and conservation community have long suspected that free-ranging cats pose a threat to birds and other wildlife. Little did we know that they also threaten the health of countless people around the globe, and pose a management conundrum that’s nearly as contentious as the debate over climate change.

“Cat Wars: The Devastating Consequences of a Cuddly Killer”, a book I co-authored with my good friend Chris Santella, explores the science of cat predation, extinction and feline-borne diseases, as well as the legal, political and ethical considerations surrounding the issue. America-focused but worldwide in scope, Cat Wars looks at:

- The demise of several bird species from cats including the Stephen’s Island Wren
- The science of decline, the magnitude of mortality and the agony of disease, all from cats
- The perfect storm - the rise of our love of cats and the rise of our love for birds
- The in-the-field practice of TNR…and the erroneous science that supports its spread
- The ethical dilemma of killing one species to save another
- The nature that awaits us if the cat problem is not addressed

Cat Wars has received strong and positive reviews and endorsements from Jonathan Franzen, Jared Diamond, Ted Williams, Bill Thompson III, Scott Weidensaul, Publishers Weekly, Nature, Scientific American and New Scientist, among many other sources.


Peter P. Marra
peterpmarra@gmail.com

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**Patuxent River CBC**

Thank you again for helping with the Patuxent River Christmas Bird Count. This year the weather was fantastic and even though we had nearly half the participants as last year, we counted over 5,000 more birds of 97 species. Not too shabby!

We had 2 newcomers to the count list this year. Tyler Bell and Jane Kostenko were able to check off the Rufous Hummingbird that has been present, and banded by Bruce Peterjohn, in the Wildwood sector. Additionally, Tyler and Jane spotted during the count week, the Greater White-fronted Goose that has been present in Solomons for the last several years. Additionally, they got the second record for Rusty Blackbird in count history and a new location for Red-headed Woodpecker [Editor’s note: these birds were found by David Moulton in 2016].

Count highs included Common Loon – 73, Double Crested Cormorant – 206, Black Scoter – 809, Wild Turkey – 25 and Red-headed Woodpecker – 19. The Calvert Cliffs group of Robbi Ross, Gail Joyce and I saw 17 at that location! We also got the counts only Northern Pintails, which hadn’t been recorded since 2007 and the only Brown Creepers for the day.

Speaking of old records, Mary Hollinger and Lisa and Chris Garrett found 2 Redheads in Broome’s Island. These ducks hadn’t been recorded since 2004!

Bob Boxwell recorded the count’s only Mute Swans on Hellen Creek. Thankfully this number is down to 4 from last year’s 7.

Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum covered by Steve Ferrell produced the only Ring-necked Ducks and Eastern Screech-Owl for the day.

Tom Harten, on the Lloyd Bowen and Mackall Roads area, found the count’s only Brown-headed Nuthatches, White-crowned Sparrows and a second count record for Common Redpoll.

Thanks again to Sue Hamilton’s son for providing boat service for observing the off-shore waters. She was able to tick off the count’s only Gannets and recorded over 70 Brown Pelicans.

While we missed coverage of the airstrip on the Base, Sigrid and Bill Stiles were able to scope out the rest of the property. They had the count’s only Northern Harrier, Dunlins, and Brown Thrashers.

Count lows were Gray Catbird -1 and Yellow-rumped Warbler -20. Notable misses were Cooper’s Hawk and Savannah Sparrow.

This count continues to be a good one and routinely reaches counts close to, or above, 100 species. I think we can make it better with more observers so please pass the word and hopefully we can get most of the area covered next year.

Thank you again for your help,
Andrew Brown

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Leucistic Turkey Vulture in Huntingtown
Photo by Mary Hollinger
Cool Internet Links!

Ever heard of “Frazil Ice”? Me neither! Wait until you see this video...fascinating! Makes me want to go to Yosemite Park in late March/early April.
https://www.youtube.com/embed/9V9p4mFEYXc?time_continue=15

In Love With Nature: Time Lapse
https://www.facebook.com/InL0V3WithNature/videos/1858796661032324/?hc_ref=NEWSFEED

Turtle Cam

How Boa Constrictors Really Kill
http://tinyurl.com/jshmsto

Earthquake Time Lapse
https://www.facebook.com/scienceonasphere/videos/10157877630135083/?hc_ref=NEWSFEED

Harpy Eagle Talons
https://www.facebook.com/natgeo/videos/10154029616853951/?hc_ref=NEWSFEED

Time Lapse Video of Earth
https://www.facebook.com/time/videos/10154220218201491/?hc_ref=NEWSFEED

Iguana Escape!
https://www.facebook.com/yahoosports/videos/10154658811761597/?hc_ref=NEWSFEED

VA & MD Birders

The Ft. Belvoir CBC preliminary results show that we tallied 107 species!! The sky was overcast all day with periods of light rain, and temperatures ranging from 38 to 46 degrees. The 150+ participants had several highlights including: White-crowned Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Baltimore Oriole all in the Maryland sector; hundreds of Tundra Swan; and 25 other waterfowl species including Common Goldeneye, Horned Grebe, Blue-winged Teal, and over a thousand Canvasback. All 3 local falcons and mimids, all 7 local woodpeckers, and 10 sparrow species besides the aforementioned White-crowned were observed. Count Week birds observed include Glaucous Gull, Sandhill Crane, and Common Loon.

Thanks to all the counters, route leaders, and especially the sector leads. Larry Cartwright continues to be a great source of wisdom as not only Mason Neck sector lead, but as compiler on the DC count. Jan Frye was awesome in showing me the route she and Kurt Gaskill have blazed at Hallowing Point, and Kurt has been great in support of my efforts filling in while he is temporarily overseas. Thanks again to all who, with the Birds, brought a lot of joy to an otherwise dreary day!

Phil Silas, Interim compiler

Breaking News!

NOAA just announced the completion and public availabilty of the Draft Environmental Impact Statements (DEIS) and Draft Management Plans (DMP) for both the proposed Mallows Bay - Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary (MPNMS) and the proposed Lake Michigan National Marine Sanctuary in Wisconsin and recommended a preferred alternative for their designation.

This is great and long awaited news for our nearly three year effort to achieve this designation. It will bring national recognition and new tools to conserve and promote one of the largest collections of historic WWI, Civil War, and Revolutionary War-era shipwrecks and maritime artifacts in the Western hemisphere.

For Maryland and Charles County, it will bring economic benefits from increased recreation and tourism, and new education and job opportunities.

MPNMS would join with only 14 other bodies of water around the country and the proposed new shipwreck sanctuary in Wisconsin on Lake Michigan recognized as areas of special national significance due to their conservation, recreational, ecological, historical, scientific, cultural, archeological, educational or esthetic qualities.

Below is the link to NOAA’s Mallows Bay Potomac River webpage which has all of the information on the documents, the public meetings, as well as how to submit comments:
http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/mallows-bay/

There will be a public comment period ending on March 31, 2017 and two public meetings on March 7th at the Charles County Government Building in La Plata and on March 9th at Anne Arundel Community College in Arnold, running from 6 to 9 pm.

We need you to come to these meetings, speak in support of the designation, and send written comments in.

Thanks so much for your continued support.
Charlie Stek
Chair
Partnership for the Mallows Bay Potomac River NMS
301 575-7957 cell

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Phil Silas, Interim compiler
Birds’ beaks come in an incredible range of shapes and sizes, adapted for survival in environments around the world. But as a new study from The Auk: Ornithological Advances reveals, there’s even more to bird beaks than meets the eye—the insides of birds’ bills are filled with complex structures that help them meet the demands of hot climates.

Nasal conchae are complex structures inside bird bills that moderate the temperature of air being inhaled and reclaim water from air being exhaled. Raymond Danner of the University of North Carolina Wilmington and his colleagues from Cornell University and the National Museum of Natural History used CT scans to examine the conchae of two Song Sparrow subspecies, one that lives in warm, dry sand dunes and one that lives in moister habitats farther inland. In this first comparison of conchae structure from birds living along a moisture gradient, the conchae of the dune-dwelling sparrows had a larger surface area and were situated farther out in the bill than those of their inland relatives, hypothetically increasing their beaks’ ability to cool air and recapture water.

Danner and his colleagues used Song Sparrow specimens that were collected in Delaware and the District of Columbia and preserved in ethanol and iodine to help soft tissues show up in scans. The contrast-enhanced CT scans they used to visualize the insides of the sparrows’ bills is a relatively new technique that is letting researchers see the details of these soft, cartilaginous structures for the first time.

“We had been studying the function of the bird bill as a heat radiator, with a focus on heat loss from the external surface and adaptation to local climates, when we began to wonder about the thermoregulatory processes that occur within the bill,” says Danner. “I remember the entire team assembled for the first time, huddled around a computer and looking in amazement at the first scans. The high resolution scans revealed many structures that we as experienced ornithologists had never seen or even imagined, and we were immediately struck by the beauty of the ornately structured anterior conchae and the neatly scrolled middle conchae.”

“This study highlights the remarkable complexity of the rostral conchae in songbirds. This complexity has gone largely unnoticed due to the ways in which most birds are collected and preserved,” according to Jason Bourke, a researcher from the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences who was not involved in the research. “Thanks to the use of innovative techniques like diceCT, we are now able to really appreciate just how complicated bird noses can be.”


The Birding Wire
A Service of the Outdoor Wire Digital Network
Presented by Swarovski Optik
http://www.birdingwire.com/
Lost Among the Birds by Neil Hayward (2016 Bloomsbury) chronicles in poignant detail the author’s record-setting “Accidental Big Year” in 2013. By finding 749 species in North America in one year, Neal Hayward successfully eclipsed the standing record of 748 species set in 1998. However, unlike most of his predecessors in this near-Olympic birding endeavor, Hayward didn’t initially plan to do a Big Year until well into 2013! As the book’s subtitle suggests, the author recounts “Accidentally Finding Myself in One Very Big Year.”

Unlike similar Big Year-type accounts, this beautifully and sensitively written volume is not just about chasing birds - rather it’s an autobiographical journey describing self-discovery, personal love, and a passion for birds seldom folded into one story. Readers get to know and feel both the pathos of Hayward’s inner journey, as well as the enjoyment of finding and pursuing some of the most exciting bird species on the continent. His descriptions of exotic and often remote regions (many no doubt familiar to some readers) and the spectacular birds that inhabit them are worthy in their own right, but when Hayward’s personal story is intimately bound with these avian pursuits, the end result is a thoroughly enjoyable read.

You can access all the past E-bulletins on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website: http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/

Paul J. Baicich 410-992-9736 paul.baicich@verizon.net

Barred Owl
Photo by Donald M. Sweig
New Year's Resolution 2017: more eBirding!

Many Maryland birders are using and contributing to eBird, which is great. Others haven't taken the plunge. For you folks, I encourage you to read this article on the eBird homepage. I hope it will convince you to give it a try. http://ebird.org/content/ebird/news/newyear2017/

Click on the link below to see statewide county species rankings. Worcester County leads the pack, but St. Mary’s, Calvert and Prince George’s are ranked fourth, fifth and seventh respectively! Charles County needs some eBird love with a rank of 19 out of 23.

http://ebird.org/ebird/subnational1/US-MD/regions?yr=all&changeDate=Set

More SMAS members using eBird will get those numbers even higher in 2017!

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Century-Old Bird Count Shows Effects Of Climate Change

A 116-year-old bird census, which began as a conservation effort, is now tracking the effects of climate change on avian species. The Christmas Bird Count, the world’s longest-running wildlife count, was founded by ornithologist Frank Chapman in 1900 to counter traditional Christmastime “side hunts,” in which hunters jockeyed to kill the most birds in a day. Chapman, who was involved in the recently formed Audubon Society, recognized that many bird species were threatened by overhunting and proposed counting birds instead.

The first Christmas Bird Count saw 27 birders in 25 locales across the United States, while this year’s count expects over 72,000 watchers across more than 2,500 spots in the Western Hemisphere.

Decades of records from the count show how certain species are responding to warmer temperatures. Today, scientists trawl through birding data to demonstrate that Red-bellied Woodpeckers in the Southeast began moving northward in 1910, then accelerated in the 1950s. The species is now common across New England.

The Audubon Society now expects the ranges of 314 winged species to shift by 2080. The Christmas Bird Count also shows the numbers for Northern Bobwhite, American Kestrel and Wood Thrush dropping due to habitat loss, while Peregrine Falcons and Bald Eagles are on the rise (Nicholas Lund, Washington Post, Dec. 19).

The Greenwire
susan_jewell@fws.gov An E&E News Publication
http://www.eenews.net/gw

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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

- Please enroll me as a member of the **Southern Maryland Audubon Society**. All of my membership dollars will help support local conservation initiatives and enable us to provide southern Maryland teacher education scholarships to attend Hog Island, Audubon Camp in Maine.
  - Individual/Family: ___1year $20 ___2year $35 ___3year $45
  - Lifetime Membership: __ $500
  - Donation: ______

- Please enroll me as a first time member of the **National Audubon Society**. You will automatically become a member of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. You will receive six issues of National’s award winning **Audubon Magazine**. A fraction of my dues will be received to our chapter. Your renewal information will come directly from the National Audubon Society.
  - Introductory Offer: ___ 1 year $20

Name: ___________________________________________
Address: _________________________________________
City: _________________ State:_________ Zip:_________

- Please enroll me for electronic delivery of our monthly newsletter **The Osprey**: ___ Email me a link to download the pdf. ___ Email me a notice it is available on the website. My email address is: ___________________________. ___ No thank you, please mail me a paper copy.

Please make your check payable to Southern Maryland Audubon Society or National Audubon Society.

Mail to: **Southern Maryland Audubon Society**, P.O. Box 181, Bryans Road, MD 20616.

GREAT NEWS!! You can now go online and join SMAS via PayPal. Go to our website at [somdaudubon.org](http://somdaudubon.org) for this new option.
January 20 – FRIDAY – 7:00 p.m.
FIELD TRIP – YOUTHS WELCOME!!
Elms Environmental Center, St. Mary’s County
49300 St. James Road, Dameron, MD 20628

“OWL PROWL AT THE ELMS”
Leader(s): Bob Boxwell and Margarita Rochow
Come “call out” the owls!! Owls are nocturnal, and therefore not easy to spot. A great Friday night family outing at The Elms. Dress appropriately for the weather, and avoid noisy clothing. This event is weather dependent. Rain or high winds will result in cancellation. Directions: Take Rt 235 south, left onto St. James Church Road (opposite Mattapany Road). You will see the sign for the Elms Environmental Education Center. We will meet in the hunter’s dirt parking lot on the right 100 yards before the gate. RSVP to Bob Boxwell at 410-610-5124, Bobboxwell@hotmail.com.

January 22 – SUNDAY – 8:00 a.m. – 12 noon
FIELD TRIP
Piscataway Park & Hard Bargain Farm, Prince George’s County
15785 Livingston Road, Accokeek, MD 20607 (Burger King)

“WINTER WATERFOWL AND RESIDENT BIRDS”
Leader(s): Mike Callahan and Michael Patterson
This is a joint trip with the Audubon Naturalist Society. The varied habitat or water, woods, farm fields and edges provide for a great variety of birds. Take Rt 210 (Indian Head Hwy) to Livingston Road. (south of Farmington Rd. and north of Rt 228). Take Livingston Road east and meet at the Burger King in the Weis Shopping Center (15785 Livingston Road, Accokeek, MD 20607). No facilities. No fee. Limit to 20 participants. RSVP to Mike Callahan at 240-765-5192 or raptorsrulemc@gmail.com.

January 28 – SATURDAY – 8:00 a.m. – 12 noon
FIELD TRIP
Jefferson Patterson Park & Museum, Calvert County

“WINTER WATERFOWL TRIP”
Leader: Tyler Bell
Open fields and wooded areas provide good land birding and the river frontage close views of waterfowl. Loons, mergansers, sea ducks and dabblers likely, often in great numbers. Call or email Tyler for directions to the meeting spot. RSVP to Tyler Bell at jtylerbell@yahoo.com or 301-862-4623.

February 1 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM
Washington Square Community Center, Charles County
101 Kennedy Place, La Plata, MD 20646

“What Keeps Maryland Native Plant Communities Functioning: Native Bees”
SAM DROEGE, USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center
Current data shows there are at least 430 species of native bees in Maryland and DC. These numbers grow as more people explore and observe bees in the state. Like birds there are close ties to geography and plants communities...and unlike birds there are often 1:1 relationships with individual plant species. Sam will show pictures, tell stories, and present the many ways these species are different from honey bees and point out ways to increase their numbers in your yard and increase your ability to identify and watch bees. Light refreshments and mingling starts at 7 p.m. Public invited. Inquiries to Lynne Wheeler, 301-751-8097 or somdaudubon@yahoo.com.

February 12 – SUNDAY – 8 a.m. – 12 noon
FIELD TRIP
Patuxent River Naval Air Station, St. Mary’s County
Gate #1 Visitor Parking Lot

“WINTER BIRDS AND TUNDRA SPECIALISTS AT PAX RIVER AIRFIELD”
Leader: Kyle Rambo

We are fortunate to have access to airfields that provide tundra like habitat. This trip will feature typical winter airfield birds such as Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs, Short-eared Owls, Horned Larks, Savannah Sparrows, and possible Wilson’s Snipe and Peregrine Falcon. Preregistration is required and open to U.S. citizens only. Trip is limited to 10 people. Must bring a photo I.D. Meet at Gate #1 Visitor Parking Lot. RSVP to Kyle at 301-757-0005, kyle.rambo@navy.mil.

February 19 – FRIDAY – 7:00 p.m.
FIELD TRIP
Private Farm, Charles County

“BARN OWL PROWL”
Leader: Mike Callahan
Join us on this night hike to look and listen for the rare, year round resident owl of Southern Maryland, the Barn Owl. The farm is owned by the newly-founded Wicomico Valley Foundation of Southern Maryland. This is a great family outing! Bring a reusable mug for hot chocolate. The exact meeting location will be given at registration. Suggested donation of $5.00 per person. RSVP to Mike at 240-765-5192, or raptorsrulemc@gmail.com.

March 1 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM
Southern MD Higher Education Center, St. Mary’s County
44219 Airport Road, California, MD 20619

“MOM’S BIG YEAR”
NANCY MCALLISTER, Biologist, Bird Banding Laboratory, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center & Professor, Environmental Science, University of Maryland Baltimore County
Join Nancy McAllister on her journey through a ‘Mom’s Big Year’ of birding the U.S. Nancy traveled to hotspots from coast-to-coast to see as many birds as possible throughout 2016. A Big Year is no small feat for a mom managing all the duties that go along with three young children, a husband and two unexpected new jobs! Hear more about how Nancy juggled life, work, and family and used her birding adventures to heal, renew, and rediscover herself. Come and hear about how fueling your passion for nature can change your life too! Light refreshments and mingling starts at 7 p.m. Public invited. Inquiries to Lynne Wheeler, 301-751-8097 or somdaudubon@yahoo.com.

March 11 – SATURDAY – 8:00 a.m. – 12 noon
FIELD TRIP
Patuxent River Naval Air Station, St. Mary’s County
Park and Ride lot across from Lex Park Post Office, Tulagi Place

“LATE WINTER LAND BIRDS AND WATERFOWL”
Leader: Dean Newman
This trip has produced in the past Lapland Longspurs, Snow Buntings and Short-eared Owls. Facilities are available. No fee. Meet at the Park and Ride lot across the street from the Lexington Park Post Office on Tulagi Place. Call or email Dean to register: dean.newman@dau.mil or 301-672-5464.