

The Osprey

February 2006 VOLUME 36, ISSUE 5



www.geocities.com/smdaudubon

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

NINTH ANNUAL GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

February's GBBC Encourages First-timers

New York, NY & Ithaca, NY, November 28, 2005—The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) returns for its ninth season February 17-20, 2006. The National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology encourage everyone to count the birds. Bird enthusiasts of all ages can share their love of birds with a friend, a child, a scout troop, a school class, or a co-worker—opening new eyes to the joy of birding and the fun of creating a unique snapshot of winter bird abundance and distribution across the continent. Every pair of eyes is needed and everybody counts, whether in a backyard, in a park, or on any of the 730 million acres of public lands.

"This project has become a major source of scientific information about North American bird populations," said Dr. John Fitzpatrick, director of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. "It is a classic example of the vital role citizens and the Internet now play in understanding our planet."

Everyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to seasoned experts. During the count, bird watchers can tally up birds for as little as 15 minutes, or for as long as they like, keeping track of the highest of each bird species they see together at one time. People are encouraged to report birds from public lands and local parks, as well as from their own backyards. Participants enter their numbers online at www.birdsource.org/gbbc and can explore sightings maps, lists, and charts as the count progresses.

Anyone can view results from past counts, and how to participate, by visiting www.birdsource.org/gbbc. There is no fee or registration for the event, which is sponsored by Wild Birds Unlimited.

AUDUBON CAMP SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS DUE MARCH 27

Southern Maryland Audubon Society is accepting scholarship applications for summer workshops at the Hog Island camps of Maine Audubon. Teachers, naturalists and environmental educators working in Calvert, Charles, southern Prince George's and St. Mary's Counties are eligible to apply for the scholarship.

Go to MaineAudubon.org to see the many summer workshops available. For a brochure, call Millie

Kriemelmeyer at 301-372-8766 or email her at milliek@radix.net.

A one page application should state applicant's name, home and work addresses, phone numbers, email address, and which workshop is preferred. Include a statement of how the camp experience would enhance applicant's knowledge and teaching.

The applicant's supervisor or principal must provide a letter of recommendation. Deadline for receipt of the application and recommendation is March 27. SMAS Board of Directors will select the scholarship recipient at the March meeting.

The scholarship recipient will arrange for travel to the camp.

Mail application to: Millie Kriemelmeyer, SMAS Education Chair, 16900 Mattawoman Lane, Waldorf MD 20601. Fax: 301-782-7615.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Among the many members of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society are an impressive number of folks that have been members for a long time, some since the group's beginnings in the early 1970's. We are very fortunate to have people with this level of dedication and continued interest in our group. They have a unique perspective on the Society and its efforts through the years, and many of them have served and continue to serve SMAS in a number of capacities (Board members, past officers, field trip leaders, count compilers, etc.). While the long years of service and membership of a number of people in SMAS are something to celebrate, it also presents us with challenges. In order to continue SMAS into the future, new people are needed to take on the work that many have shouldered for so long. Youth programs are needed to grow the next generation of concerned citizens that enjoy the natural world and what SMAS has to offer. As the population of southern Maryland continues to grow at some of the highest rates in the state, we need to find ways to reach new potential members and ensure that SMAS is effectively carrying out its mission of nature study and natural resource conservation in this changing landscape. Please think about how you can help with these challenges, and respond positively when SMAS needs your help. The SMAS Board and I welcome your ideas on how to increase current member activity and attract new members, including youth and families. This will be a continued topic of discussion for the Board this year.

Another type of challenge that occurs as members age is the more limited mobility and night vision that can come with those golden years. I know that some folks do not attend as many evening meetings as they might like because of the challenge of driving at night. Can you help by giving someone a ride to one of our monthly meetings? Are you one of those people that would appreciate a ride to an evening meeting? Carpooling makes sense for energy conservation reasons as well, and might help more folks to get to meetings or field trips in more areas of southern Maryland. I am looking for a volunteer or a system to coordinate carpools to meetings and field trips, or at least a way to help people who need rides to evening meetings. Please contact me with your suggestions or needs. — Gwen Brewer, President glbrewer@comcast.net, 301-843-3524

BIRDING NEAR TUCSON, AZ IN JULY 2005

by Tyler Bell

Jane Kostenko and I knew it was hot when we got off the plane in Tucson at noon on July 15, but didn't know how hot until we got into our rental car. We needed to rent a four-wheel drive Jeep and it had all the amenities including an outdoor thermometer. It read 113° F!

We had arrived early for the American Birding Association convention, and had arranged to meet a friend from Ohio and his friend for a pre-convention trip into California Gulch. As we headed south toward Nogales, we ran through a thunderstorm and the temperature dropped to a comfortable 75°. The ABA was holding its annual convention in Tucson to take advantage of the monsoon season, which was starting late this year. The thunderstorm was an indication of its imminent arrival.

Ruby Road is paved out of Nogales but eventually becomes gravel. As we rounded a turn on the gravel road, I noticed two plump birds running toward the road edge. A male and female Montezuma Quail! I braked then put the car in neutral and turned off the engine. We coasted up a little bit closer until they were off to the right of the car. Excellent views of this very secretive quail.

Eventually we came to the entrance to California Gulch. This is where the 4WD is required. We bumped and banged our way down the trail to the parking area above the gulch. Since the temps had dropped, we only took along a small water bottle each and not the gallon bottles that would have been necessary with the earlier oven setting. The hike down is easy and soon we came to the second stream crossing. A small bird flew up onto the rocks on the steep canyon wall and posed briefly before flying to a tree branch overhanging the trail. It was our target bird: a male Five-striped Sparrow. Their range in the US is limited to a couple

of canyons that encroach into southern Arizona from northern Mexico. We watched the sparrow for a while then decided to head back to the car.

Our next target required darkness so we moved the car over to the abandoned Oro Blanco Mine site and waited. Soon after, a border patrol vehicle came by to see what we were up to. We were obviously gringos so we chatted briefly then they headed out to look for illegal border crossers. Another vehicle soon arrived. It was Tucson's Melody Kehl, leading a tour to look for our target bird: Buff-collared Nightjar. As darkness settled, night creatures awakened. First, bats. Next, Common Poorwills and Lesser Nighthawks. Then a Western Screech-Owl sang in the distance. No nightjar. Melody heard the nightjar call a couple of times but it wouldn't fly over. She brought out her night vision scope and scanned the area and finally found the nightjar perched on a fence post. She gathered us all around her and told us what field marks to prepare to look for and then briefly turned on a flashlight. After about five to ten seconds, she turned it off, hoping we had all seen the bird clearly. We had. It would have been impossible to find without the night vision!

The ABA convention began and our duties as convention volunteers prevented us from doing much birding until the first field trip day. We headed to Aravaipa Canyon to look for a nesting Common Black Hawk. When we arrived, Terry Moore, US Leica representative, was already there with his scope on the nest. Sometimes you work for your bird, sometimes they're spoon fed to you. That was my 700th ABA area bird!

On our final forays, we headed to Patagonia Lake State Park and slogged around the Mesquite forest in search of the reported Black-capped Gnatcatcher. We ran into a field trip group who had just seen two so we headed in the direction of the last sighting and finally found a male actively feeding in the trees. He moved from tree to tree in our direction so we stood still and got excellent looks at close range.

After dark, we headed up onto Mt. Lemmon, which borders Tucson to the north. As you drive up the mountain you move in geographic equivalents further and further north until the ecozone is similar to southern Canada. It can be over 100° in Tucson and near 60° at the top of the mountain. No wonder so many people flock there on weekends. Anyway, we made several stops to listen for Flammulated Owls and Whiskered Screech-Owls with no success. On one of our last planned stops, as soon as I turned the ignition off, we heard a Whiskered Screech-Owl singing about 20 feet above the car. Another called back from nearby and still a third from further away. We sat and listened to the chorus and celebrated Jane's 700th bird!

As the convention came to a close, Tucson broke the record for the most consecutive 100°+ days. We had to endure these temperatures while unloading convention field

trip buses in the hottest part of the day! With 14 buses returning, we would drink one 500 mL bottle of water per bus, sometimes more. That's 7+ liters which is almost two gallons of water. And it still wasn't enough. Amazing.

So, the monsoon rains had finally begun and the rebirth of the desert brought about a second nesting season for many resident birds. This is why so many birders brave Arizona in the summer. If you think we're crazy, you wouldn't be far off!

WELCOME NEW MEMBEFRS

Julie Allinson, Lusby
Sharon Boyer, Lusby
Donna Boylan, Dunkirk
Mrs. J. H. Briscoe, Sunderland
The Carbone Family, Huntingtown
Ruth Carr, Suitland
James Clement, Huntingtown
Bruce Cobb, Chesapeake Beach
William Daywalt, Jr, St Leonard
Mr/Mrs Joseph Dement, Mechanicsville
Joan Dempsey, La Plata
Roger Ennis, Oxon Hill
Carolyn Evans, Leonardtown
Caroline Fairless, Hollywood
Susan Finan, Dunkirk
Mr/Mrs David Gardiner, La Plata
Gisela Gilbert, Ft Washington
Kat Gott, Pt Republic
Carolyn Gryczkowski, Huntingtown
Irmgard Kratz, Owings
Gerhardt Kuehn, Waldorf
Sally Long, Temple Hills
Anita Marchitelli, Accokeek
Joseph McGinn, Newburg
Carmel McGrath, Waldorf
Sarah Merry, Leonardtown
Susan Miller, Leonardtown
Regina Patente, Ft Washington
Linda Redding, La Plata
A.Edith Sheahan, Lusby
James Simmons, Lusby
K. Tayman, Brandywine
Barbara Turner, St Leonard
Kirk Williams, Mechanicsville
The Wright Family, Lexington Park



GIFT-WRAPPING FUNDRAISER SUCCESS

By Millie Kriemelmeyer

Gift wrapping at the Wild Bird Center raised \$350 toward the camp scholarship. Once again, SMAS thanks Lee and Dee Duer for helping us with this project by providing the space, wrappings, and their own donation. Thank you to the volunteers who gave time in the busy Christmas season: Carmen Anderson, Bob Boxwell, Jenny Neat, Marcia Nelson, and Ann Wearmouth.

NEW TREASURER NEEDED

We still need a volunteer to finish out the term of our current Treasurer (to June 2006). The Society's annual budget, overseen by the Board, is about \$10,000, and accounting is done with Quicken, but can be handled in another way. Will someone please volunteer? Larry Brown, our current Treasurer is willing to help get the new Treasurer going and share his computer files. Contact President Gwen Brewer, telephone 301-843-3524, email glbrewer@comcast.net.

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Myrtle Point Park, September 5, by Mary Piotrowski. Bob Boxwell led the small but mighty troop of Bev and Warren Walker and Mary Piotrowski on a 3-hour trek covering the perimeter of MPP on a beautiful 80-degree day. We started out with a Great Blue Heron overhead and a Fish Crow at the park entrance. White-eyed Vireos in the Multiflora Rose/mixed vine brush at the entrance set the tone for the numerous WEV we would hear throughout the day and they would prove to be the most numerous songsters this late in the summer. Is it my imagination or have these vireos taken over in the last decade and if so what particular circumstance has accelerated their upswing compared to other migratory species? Carolina Wren, Tufted Titmouse and a gorgeous Monarch were on the infamous stroll down the wide road headed toward Mill Creek. Bicyclists also were enjoying this path, as it was fairly level terrain.

We took time noting native and non-native plants we knew as we were without guidebooks. Fox Grape was not ripe, nor was Virginia Creeper. Some others we took time to discuss: Ailanthus, Dogbane, Horsemint, Trumpet Creeper (a few blooms), Paulownia, Black Walnut dropping nuts, Foxtail, Red Admiral butterfly, Jimson Weed (poisonous), Common Whitetail Dragonfly, Nutburr, Boneset and Asiatic Dayflower. Wineberry with its reddish, hairy stem dominated the understory. This is a non-native and even though its

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berries are a favorite food for some wildlife it is crowding out native raspberries and other plants like ferns. I was curious to note Wax Myrtle growing this far from the sandy, wetland soil up just yards from the barns. We marveled at a huge doubled-stemmed Sassafras whose larger half diameter measured ~ 12". We would like to get back there and clear the vines to highlight this tree for future walks.

We branched off to the right onto Deep Woods Trail and with a full canopy everything changed. Two huge Persimmon trees, and several other smaller ones were immediately on our right. What really caught our eye and thrilled us was the huge patch of native raspberry with no invasive wineberry in sight! We plan to keep an eye on the site from intrusion of the enemy. Warren noted several monster-sized hardwoods on this trail — Tulip Poplar, Red Oak, and White Oak — and we will do a future Big Tree Walk. I would include the Cherry, Sassafras and Persimmon and Chinese Chestnut. It was here we started hearing the Osprey on a regular basis. This is a good place to note that at every canopy opening during the day if we looked up we always saw a Turkey Vulture. We ran into familiar Pokeberry, which robins love Bob informed us. I added not too many critters seemed to dine on this plentiful purple fruit and of course Bob hit the books to send me this impressive list later: Mockingbird, Cardinal, Catbird, Mourning Dove, Great Crested Flycatcher, Phoebe, Sapsucker, Starling, Thrasher, Cedar Waxwing, Red Fox, Opossum, Raccoon, and White-footed Mouse. He was showing off. As a result I will be examining bird droppings and scat this winter with great intensity. Ebony Spleenwort, several Black Walnut, Christmas Fern, two Box Turtle shells (one with bones), white Smartweed, pink Smartweed, Carolina Wren and Goldenrod were noted. It was odd in the upland sandy woods, though not far from water, to find Pawpaw, a definite wetland species. We found a large whitewash site on a cliff edge under a great roost spot and the others argued over owl versus Osprey. There is a history here of Great Horned Owls. We found a large patch of Crow's Foot with noticeable die back. I estimated 70 plants for my records. We later ran into Running Cedar so we could compare the two species, which are often argued over. Both are *Lycopodium*. Everywhere we walked Warren noted that no matter what the availability of other food, the deer had clipped off every Greenbrier stalk nice and neat at the same level. No doubt it is the preferred food. We ran into Black Gum or Tupelo with berries almost ripe, Tiger Swallowtail, Blue Jay, Mourning Cloak, and a Red-bellied Woodpecker.

We were walking the end lap of Deep Woods Trail and noted that little rain had fallen in recent time. We had relied almost the entire day on calls for our bird count but Bev spotted movement ahead around a large pool of water in the trail. There we spotted a Brown Thrasher, pair of Cardinals, Mockingbird, two Mourning Doves, pair of Summer Tanagers, White-eyed Vireos, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and a Blue Grosbeak. We heard an Am. Crow and the puddles yielded Green Frogs and tadpoles by the dozens! Raccoon

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FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED

The gift of an osprey adoption becomes part of a special fund for the support of osprey research and raptor conservation projects in Southern Maryland. The foster parent receives:

- 1) A certificate of adoption of an osprey fledgling banded with a numbered U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service leg band. The certificate gives the location and date the osprey was banded.
- 2) Information on osprey ecology and migration patterns, a 5"x7" photo of a fledgling and information that Steve receives on the whereabouts or fate of the bird.

Interested? Here's how to become an Osprey parent.
Send \$10.00, with the form, for each fledgling to be adopted to:

**Southern Maryland Audubon Society
P.O. Box 181
Bryans Road, Maryland 20616**

ADOPT AN OSPREY

Name: _____

Address: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____



and deer tracks finished the day. Whew. We ended with a bird count of 18 so Bob can hold his head up — not bad for late summer in the middle of the day. And we had talked the whole way!

Unusual concentration of Egrets

Kathleen Logan of Mechanicsville, MD reports seeing 60 Great Egrets on September 8 resting and feeding in a small swamp near the corner of Beall Hill Road and Berry Road in Charles County. She notes that after the prolonged dry spell during August and September, other wet areas had disappeared, possibly explaining why so many egrets were concentrated in this small swamp.

Kings Landing Park Field Trip, September 24, by Arlene Ripley.

Fourteen of us met on a cool, gray morning at Kings Landing Park in Huntingtown, Calvert County. For the first couple of hours we had to wonder whether the birds had deserted the area for sunnier climes. Peering at the river we found only a few Canada Geese, a pair of Belted Kingfishers, a Great Blue Heron and a lone Double-crested Cormorant. A few gulls flew overhead.

We then proceeded to check the fields and woodland trails. We strained to see a Yellow-billed Cuckoo playing hide-and-seek in the canopy. Eventually we would see four more. Over Cocktown Creek we watched both a Cooper’s Hawk and Merlin fly on by.

Thirty-four Wood Ducks flew up from the marsh and a Common Yellowthroat scolded us from the cattails. We studied fall plumage on several Indigo Buntings. Finally we found a small concentration of migrants—warbler species included: Black and White, Nashville, and Magnolia. Identifying these birds was a challenge due to their height in the canopy and our inability to distinguish much in the way of color against the glare of colorless sky.

As we approached the south side of the park, we noticed a lot of activity in a small clump of trees and shrubs in the middle of the lawn area. This turned out to be the best birding of the morning. We did not have to strain our necks looking up, as we all sat on the sloping hillside like spectators at a stadium and watched as the following birds popped in and out of the vegetation: Baltimore Orioles, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Acadian Flycatcher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Brown Thrasher, Chipping Sparrow, Northern Parula, and Northern Mockingbird. Nearby a tree held a small flock of Cedar Waxwings.

A bit later, as we walked the field edge, a small flycatcher confused us for a while until it helped us out by calling out its name — “peeee weeee”. We enjoyed hearing its bill snap as it flew out and nabbed small insects on the wing. We ended our morning’s outing by watching the migrating Monarch butterflies nectar on the goldenrod blooming in the fields. Total bird species seen: 45.

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NEW OR RENEWAL MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

- Please enroll me as a member of the Audubon Family and the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. I will receive the chapter newsletter, *The Osprey*, and all my dues will support environmental efforts in Southern Maryland.
- Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society at the Introductory Offer. My membership will also include membership in the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. I will receive National’s *Audubon* magazine, the chapter newsletter, *The Osprey*, and support National and local environmental causes. A fraction of my dues will be returned to the local chapter.
- Please **renew** my membership in the National Audubon Society and the local chapter, the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. A fraction of my dues will be returned to the local chapter.

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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

Chapter-Only Dues (new/renewal)
Make check payable to
Southern Maryland Audubon Society

- Individual/Family __1yr \$20 __2yr \$38 __3yr \$56
- Senior/Student __1yr \$15 __2yr \$28 __3yr \$42
- Optional Donation \$_____

National Dues, Make check payable to
National Audubon Society

- Introductory Offer - 1 year \$20
- Introductory Offer – 2 year \$30
- Senior/Student \$15
- Renewal Rate \$35

FEBRUARY EVENTS

February 1—Wednesday—7:30 p.m. Monthly Meeting Calvert Library, Prince Frederick, Calvert County. *State of the Chesapeake Bay* by Chesapeake Bay Foundation. Southern Maryland has a strong connection to the Chesapeake Bay, both directly and through the many tributaries that flow into it. A speaker from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation will discuss with us the current state of the Bay. The health of the Bay affects us all in a number of ways. Come and learn about this important topic for our area, including what you can do to help!

February 17-20—Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday—Special Event. Great Backyard Bird Count. Everyone from beginner to expert is encouraged to count birds and submit the count to the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and National Audubon Society. See article on page 1 for rules and how to report results.

February 18—Saturday—8 a.m. Field Trip. Calvert count winter birding, Calvert County. **Winter Waterfowl Trip.** Leader: Sue Hamilton (410-586-1494, seal10n2002@yahoo.com). Two-thirds day trip. Open fields and wooded areas provide good land birding and river frontage for close views of waterfowl. Tufted Duck, Eared Grebe, and other rarities have been found in past winters. Bring scopes if you have them, food, and drink. Meet in the parking lot near Rte. 4 in front of Kmart in Prince Frederick. Reservations required. Facilities but no fees.

Board of Directors Meeting. Location and time to be determined. Directors meetings are open to any member. The meeting day is usually the last Wednesday of the month, but meetings are not held every month. If you wish to attend, contact your County Representative or any Director or Officer for details of time and place

March 1—Wednesday—7:30 p.m. Monthly Meeting. Battle Creek Cypress Swamp Nature Center, Prince Frederick, Calvert County. *Birds and Plants of the Nanjemoy Natural Resources Management Area* by Ashley Traut and Kate Kricher, Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Douglas Point and the Nanjemoy Natural Resources Management Area make up part of the largest tract of intact forest in southern Maryland. In 2005, Ashley studied the birds of this area, with a focus on forest interior birds. At the same time, Kate investigated the plants of the forests, old fields, and wetlands of this stunning property. They will discuss their findings and the uniqueness of this beautiful gem in western Charles County.

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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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