

The Osprey



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www.geocities.com/smdaudubon

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

COLORADO CHICKEN CHASE

by Tyler Bell

Jane Kostenko and I flew into Denver on Thursday, April 10, for an extended weekend of chasing several species of grouse that are restricted to the western prairies and Rocky Mountains. We landed in the middle of a blizzard. The snow was horizontal as we made our way to our rental car. Traffic crawled through town as we headed to I-25 south. Fortunately the snow let up about the time we got to Colorado Springs. Our original driving route had us going down Rt. 285 which crosses the Continental Divide several times at mountain passes over 10,000 feet. We opted for a longer but lower route. Unfortunately, we still had to cross Monarch Pass, at 11,312 feet, to get to Gunnison. Going from basically zero elevation in Maryland to over 11,000 feet in one day causes some interesting physiological responses! The dry roads turned to ice as we neared the summit but the ice only lasted about three miles on either side of the pass. Once down the western slope of the pass, it was smooth sailing again.

We drove through Gunnison and continued west to the south entrance to Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. When the area isn't inundated with snow, the rim drive from the western-most parking lot is one of the most productive places in Colorado for Dusky Grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*). Dusky Grouse was recently separated from what had long been known as the Blue Grouse, which is now recognized as two species, the Dusky, which ranges through the Rocky Mountains, and the Sooty Grouse (*D. fuliginosus*), which is found west from the Cascade Mountains and Sierra Nevada through the Pacific coast ranges. The rim drive was closed but there had been recent sightings of Dusky Grouse and since there are none in Maryland, we were at least fairly close to their range and habitat. We didn't see or hear any as we waited in our car well after sunset. As we drove back toward the main highway we tried a few more stops, but found none.

At 4 AM on Friday which, thankfully, was 6 o'clock body time, we awoke, grabbed optics and arctic wear, and jumped in the car. We pulled off of Rt. 50 onto Wuanita Hot Springs Road and pulled our car into the semi-circular paved wildlife viewing area, hopefully positioning ourselves for a decent look at the lek (communal display, or stomping, ground) where males of the very rare Gunnison Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*) do their mating display. This is a highly regulated viewing area and shortly after we arrived, two trucks parked nearby. One was driven by a wildlife officer from the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the other by an employee of an ecotourism board known as Sisk-a-dee. The employee of Sisk-a-dee approached our car and gave us a questionnaire asking where we were from, how we

had gotten there, how much we had paid for food, gas, airfare, had we come specifically to see the grouse and many other tourism related questions. It is required that you arrive at least an hour before sunrise to minimize disturbing the birds, which arrive on the lek in the dark well before sunrise.

As the sun began to rise, we began to make out silhouettes moving in the twilight. Eventually we were able to see several male grouse dancing, trying to entice nearby females. Both Greater (*C. urophasianus*) and Gunnison Sage Grouse have a similar dancing style. They fan their tails and inflate twin air sacs on their chest and make a sound similar to dropping a rock into the water, kind of a *plunk!* We watched as one by one, they either paired off and departed or flew off individually. When the last male finally threw in the towel, around 7 AM, the DOW officer came over to our car and asked to see our wildlife habitat stamp which we had purchased online. The stamp has a list of physical characteristics unique to each owner so that the stamp may be used by only one person. The fine for not possessing the stamp far exceeds the \$10 cost.

Since the show was over, we were free to leave. We drove back to Gunnison then headed east. We had to drive across Monarch Pass a second time. We noted that the temperature was dropping at a rate of about one degree per tenth mile. When we reached the summit, it was 14 and when we dropped back down below the snow line, it was back up to freezing. We stopped at a couple of locations along Rt. 50 in what appeared to be decent pinyon-juniper habitat but failed to find our target species, Juniper Titmouse (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*).

We spent the night in Granada at a bed and breakfast operated by Fred and Norma Heidecamp, who run Arena Dust Tours, an ecotourism outfit focusing on Lesser Prairie-Chicken tours in early spring. Saturday morning before 4 AM, we were on the bus with Fred at the helm. We picked up two van-loads of other participants in Granada then drove the half hour to the viewing location. We bumped across a prairie trail then positioned the bus in the area of a lek of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*). As soon as we pulled in we dropped the windows on the right side of the bus. Soon we could hear the clucking of the males. Prairie-Chickens display in a more horizontal way than do the Sage Grouse. They stick their tails up and lower their heads and inflate neck sacs which make a kind of a hooting sound. They also have feathers called pinnae that normally lie flat along the neck, but which stand up over the head during their display. There is a distinct hierarchy in male Prairie-Chickens. Young males get fringe territories and rarely mate. Older males occupy territories at the center of the lek. There are frequent territorial

squabbles which result in charging and short vertical flights with both males flailing at each other. Once the dispute is settled, they go right back to hooting. When copulation occurs, the female soon leaves the lek, but will usually visit another lek to mate with another alpha male to increase the odds of successful fertilization.

Sunday morning found us on yet another bus. We had booked a tour with the Wray Chamber of Commerce. The Wray COC, the CO DOW and a local rancher have been working in conjunction to provide excellent viewing opportunities at a lek of the Greater Prairie-Chicken (*T. cupido*). Unlike the previous two leks, we got off the bus and into a viewing trailer. When everyone was in position on the two-level bench seats, we turned off the interior lights and opened the viewing windows. Immediately we could hear males displaying very close by. Their main vocalization is known as booming which sounds similar to blowing across an empty bottle. Apart from being slightly larger than Lesser Prairie-Chickens, Greaters have bright orange neck sacs unlike the Lesser's reddish-purple sacs. During the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial, Jane and I were fortunate to attend a Pow-wow in Newtown, North Dakota. The Native American dancers frequently imitate the Prairie-Chicken male strutting with heads down and fanned tail feathers flying!

Once the prairie-chickens' dances began winding down, we headed to a nearby ranch for breakfast before heading our separate ways. Jane and I had a long drive from Wray to Allenspark, a tiny ski community on the front range of the Rockies just west of Boulder. During the winter, Rosy-Finches descend from the upper montane breeding ranges to forage in more snow-free areas in the foothills. The Fawnbrook Inn in Allenspark had been hosting several hundred Rosy-Finches which were mostly Brown-capped (*Leucosticte australis*) with a few Black Rosy-Finches (*L. atrata*), and Gray-crowned (*L. tephrocotis*) Rosy-Finches to represent all three species. We had seen both Black and Gray-crowned at Sandia Crest in New Mexico several years ago but had missed Brown-capped in New Mexico and during a previous visit to Colorado. When we arrived, another birder was already there. He had been waiting for about an hour with no luck. Within about 15 minutes, a brownish bird flew into the top of an aspen tree. It was a male Brown-capped. Soon, a flock of about 25 more arrived and briefly fed in the scattered black oil sunflower seeds at the inn. They stayed for about 5 minutes then flew off and didn't return for the remainder of our 90-minute stay.

The intense sun, the early morning hours, and long hours driving across a very large state had taken their toll. We headed back to our hotel near the airport and crashed early. We had put 1290 miles on the rental and experienced the lack of oxygen caused by living at sea level and ascending, without acclimation, to 11,000+ feet. But we also got to experience something unique in the natural world, the strange and bizarre mating rituals of Lesser and Greater Prairie-Chickens and Gunnison Sage Grouse. I can only imagine what it must have been like when the settlers first crossed the prairies when these species were at their peak

of abundance. It must have been sensational!

For information about these three species and more I recommend these web sites: <http://www.siskadee.org/>, <http://www.arenadusttours.com/>, <http://www.wraychamber.net/prairiechicken.html>, <http://www.coloradocountybirding.com/>

SMAS PRESIDENT GWEN BREWER HONORED FOR HER BIRD CONSERVATION WORK

At the March 2008 North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Phoenix, Arizona, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director and U. S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) Committee Chair, Dale Hall, honored **Gwen Brewer** of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, **Steve Wendt** of Canadian Wildlife Service (retired), and **Wild at Heart**, an Arizona raptor rehabilitation organization, with an award for their unparalleled contributions to bird conservation at the local and regional levels. **Gwen Brewer**, was honored with a certificate at the recent Atlantic Coast Joint Venture Management Board meeting in North Carolina for her outstanding work at the regional level for bird conservation. She will receive her official award at a meeting this summer. Steve Wendt will be honored at an event this summer in Canada.

This is the second year of the Bird Conservation Awards from NABCI and the Association of Joint Venture Management Boards, given to those individuals and groups who have significantly advanced integrated bird conservation and management by increasing funding, broadening partnerships, and/or facilitating monitoring, research, modeling, or habitat conservation work.

Gwen Brewer is the Science Program Manager for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. She has shown great leadership and dedication to protecting and restoring populations and habitats of North American birds by increasing the effectiveness and coordination of integrated bird conservation in the Atlantic Flyway region. Gwen is the Maryland representative on the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture Management Board, and the first and current chair of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture Integrated Bird Conservation Committee, a position she has held since its inception in 2004.

In her position as Chair, Gwen works to increase communication among the regional bird conservation initiatives, to integrate information and priorities from each, and to present the highest common priorities for consideration by the Board and other partners. The Board is then able to use its resources to address these common issues and to seek funding and support from various sources.

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Gwen has served as Co-chair of the Northeast Partners in Flight Working Group since March 2003. In this position Gwen demonstrates exceptional leadership in helping Partners in Flight and integrated bird conservation efforts in the Northeast to move from conservation planning to implementation. Gwen has persistently encouraged the Working Group to develop habitat management guidelines and best management practices that can be applied in a coordinated manner across jurisdictions and organizations. She has been an articulate advocate for improved bird monitoring in the Northeast region to the point where creation of a formal coordinated bird monitoring effort was possible.

Gwen works extremely hard to promote these regional partnerships in addition to fulfilling her full time responsibilities for the Maryland Department of Natural Resource's Wildlife and Heritage Service. In Maryland, she is active in bird habitat conservation, research and monitoring, and various volunteer efforts on behalf of birds, including leadership of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society.



Gwen Brewer of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources receives Bird Conservation certificate from Paul Schmidt, Assistant Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Migratory Birds Program. (Photo by NABCI)

SLATE OF NOMINEES FOR ANNUAL ELECTION

Bob Lukinic, Chair of Nominating Committee

The following are nominated as the officers and directors for the July 2008—June 2009 activity year.

- President — Bob Lukinic
- Vice- President — Mike Callahan
- Treasurer – Will Daniel
- Secretary – George Jett
- Director – Warren Walker (3 year term)
- Director – Jean Artes (3 year term)
- Director -- Harry Kriemelmeyer (3 year term)
- Director – Ernest Willoughby (1 year term)

SMAS cannot thank Matt Dement enough for his years as secretary. He did an outstanding job. Matt reluctantly had to give up the position owing to conflicting schedules.

We are glad to nominate Jean Artes again as a director. Our thanks go to Ernest Willoughby for agreeing to stand for dual roles as director and newsletter editor.

This is Harry Kriemelmeyer's first nomination to the Board of Directors. SMAS should certainly benefit from his input.

Further nominations may be made from the floor at the Annual Meeting on 1 June, before the election of officers and directors commences.

RENEWALS DUE FOR "CHAPTER-ONLY" MEMBERS

Policy for renewals for all Chapter-only Members was changed last year to an annual basis to match our fiscal year of July--June. For all with expiration date of "6/08" on your mailing label, please send in your renewal dues promptly to avoid need and expense for follow-up. Make check to Southern Maryland Audubon and send to: SMAS, Attn: Membership, PO Box 181, Bryans Road, MD 20616. We do thank you for your continued support of our chapter programs.



HELP SMAS PROVIDE BINOCULARS FOR SCHOOL AND YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

DONATION FOR BINOCULAR FUND (tax deductible)

Your name: _____ Amount: _____

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

U.S. TO CONTINUE SELLING OFF MASSIVE WESTERN LANDS AT FIRE SALE PRICES

STATEMENT OF JOHN FLICKER, PRESIDENT,
NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

New York, NY, April 28, 2008 - "The administration's recently announced next wave of lease sales in June will further the relentless and shameless devastation of the American west for the benefit of energy companies. Nearly every other month, massive tracts of pristine habitat are put on the block at fire sale prices – with tragic results. If sales like this continue, the mythic west may vanish before our eyes.

"Even Vice President Cheney may not recognize his Wyoming home when he returns after eight years under his own favored policies. Wyoming's sagebrush landscape, which has long defined the state's ruggedness and which shelters scores of unique plants and animals, including its signature species, the Greater Sage-grouse, are rapidly disappearing. In their place is acre upon acre of gas fields and the checkerboard of roads, power lines, pipelines, compressor stations, and wellheads that go with them.

"Audubon does not oppose responsible energy extraction, but this continuous pattern of massive giveaways simply goes too far. We urge the Bush administration and the industry itself to change course. It is time to focus on ways to allow grouse and gas production to coexist. Industry ignores that reality at its own risk. Driving the sage grouse toward extinction could in effect kill the gas industry's own golden goose if the bird receives federal protection."

MORE INFORMATION

Last week, the Bureau of Land Management announced the June sale of leases on 260,367 acres of federal land to energy companies in Wyoming – with nearly 40% of these acres representing critical sage-grouse habitat. The news follows sale of 370,000 acres in April. Many conservationists say BLM has failed in recent years to serve as an ecological caretaker of public lands by maintaining the health of the plant and animal species that live there in Wyoming. According to Audubon Magazine, since 2000 the agency has approved more than 17,000 drilling permits in Wyoming. Mule deer and sage grouse populations are plummeting in Wyoming as residents deal with continual ozone air quality alerts brought about by energy extraction.

DUDLEY LINDSLEY NAMED CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR

Congratulations to Dudley Lindsley, who has been selected by Southern Maryland Audubon as our 2008 Conservationist of the Year.

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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)

JUNE EVENTS

June 1—**Sunday**—1:30 PM. **Annual Meeting.**
Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust, 11785 Clifton Drive, Lusby,
Calvert County.
Bring your family, friends, and a favorite dish to share and
join us at this beautiful site on Hellen Creek in southern Calvert
County.

1:30—3:00	Potluck Lunch
3:00—3:30	Host's Briefing
3:30—4:00	Election and Business Meeting
4:00—5:00	Bird Walk

Directions: In Calvert County from Solomons take route 2/4
north. Look for the left turn light for Coster/Mill Bridge Road.
Make the left and another immediate left onto Coster. Follow
this 0.9 miles to Clifton Drive on the right. Turn here and
follow for 0.3 miles to a driveway on the left. It is labeled "the
Boxwell's 11785."

From Prince Frederick take route 2/4 south to Lusby. Look
for the full stop light for Coster/Mill Bridge Road. Make the
right and then an immediate left onto Coster. From there,
follow the directions above.

Because parking space will be limited, we encourage
carpooling. Also, bring your own folding chairs, if you have
them.

Southern Maryland Audubon Society
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WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Rita Allen, Swan Point
Melanie Anderson, Lexington Park
The Family Beach, Pomfret
Helen Bergling, Lexington Park
Sheila Bowling, California
G. Brown, Lexington Park
Ann Cook, Mechanicsville
Alicia Dorr, Waldorf
Mr/Mrs Jack Edwards, Leonardtown
Alice Farrell, Oxon Hill
Michael Helmick, Clinton
Katherine Lewis, Lusby
Katherine Logan, Ft Washington
Rosa Miller, Solomons
Beth Senecal, Suitland
Shefall Shah, Leonardtown
April Solitro, Mechanicsville
Madeleine Taylor, Lexington Park
Alfred Thomas, La Plata
Bill Townsend, Accokeek

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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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