

# The Osprey



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[www.geocities.com/smdaudubon](http://www.geocities.com/smdaudubon)

*Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society*

## CAROLINA WRENS CHOOSE SOME ODD NESTING SITES

*by Beverly Walker*

One of the highlights of every spring breeding season for us is the discovery of at least one highly unusual location of nesting Carolina Wrens (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*). For some unknown reason, they rarely seem to choose an appropriate nest site. We have a lovely little log cabin nest box, received as a housewarming gift when we built our own log cabin. Our wrens have used it only once. They prefer instead the hanging baskets on the porch, usually setting up “dummy nests” (and making a mess) in several before deciding on the one in which they will raise their family. This year’s home site of choice appears to be the glove compartment of our John Deere Gator. Even though it is covered with a tarp every night, Warren finds a new supply of nesting material there every morning – which he has to remove, since we don’t think the future nestlings would enjoy going for a ride every day.

One year the wrens moved into Warren’s workshop, gaining access through an opening under the door left by a marauding squirrel, and finding a wonderful spot in some exposed insulation. We didn’t discover that nest until we heard the weak little “cheeps” one morning. The day the youngsters fledged was one we will never forget. Five tiny balls of fluff zooming all around the workshop! We opened all the doors and windows, and three of them quickly exited to join the waiting parents. The other two had other plans, however. Two hours later, the parents long since having departed with the other fledglings, we decided we needed to take action. Number four eventually left on his own, and I finally trapped number five in a corner – covered in dust bunnies, sawdust and spider webs. I cleaned him up as best I could, and carefully placed him outside – fervently hoping that the parents would return for him – but fearing the worst. The next morning at dawn I stepped out onto the porch to be startled by a flutter of tiny wrens emerging from under the porch furniture. And yes, I counted – two parents and **five** tiny not-quite-tailless babies!

On a lovely spring morning a few years back, we were looking forward to our first canoe outing of the season. Sadly, that had to be postponed. The wrens had begun to raise their family on the bottom of a seat in the overturned canoe. The following year they decided to upgrade to our powerboat – this time selecting the bucket holding the anchor and rope, which is stored on the back deck.

Returning to land, in a subsequent breeding season the wrens discovered our 40-something tractor and built atop

the radiator. And we have learned **never** to leave any sort of container upturned. Empty flowerpots stored on shelves are considered prime nest sites. So too are tiny crevices between assorted containers of motor oil, odd tools, and household items in general. We never know where they will turn up next!

But just when we thought we had a monopoly on outlandish nest site preferences, I came across this item on the Internet: “Nests ...have been reported in a great variety of nooks and crannies in, about, or under buildings of various kinds, under bridges, or in holes in fence posts. Almost any kind of receptacles left lying around, such as tin cans, coffee pots, pails, small baskets, pitchers, or empty boxes may be used. Old discarded hats and caps or the pockets of old clothes, coats, or overalls, left hanging in sheds or on porches, may offer acceptable nesting sites. Nests have been found in mail boxes, bird boxes, old hornets’ nests, and ivy vines growing over porches; and the nest is sometimes built in an unused cupboard or on a mantel shelf inside a house. Dr. Witmer Stone (1911) writes: ‘In a country place near Philadelphia, a pair of Carolina Wrens entered the sitting-room through a window that was left partly open, and built their nest in the back of an upholstered sofa, entering where a hole had been torn in the back. Needless to say, they were not disturbed, and given full possession until the young were safely reared.’”(Bent, Arthur Cleveland. 1948. Life Histories of Familiar North American Birds. Smithsonian Institution, United States National Museum Bulletin 195: 205-217.)

So now it is evident that our wrens have only just begun to explore our reserve of nesting choices. Every year when the first wren arrives to serenade us from the porch railing we know a new adventure awaits. Will this be the year they move back into that log cabin?

## JOIN BIRDATHON OR MAKE A PLEDGE TO RAISE FUNDS FOR SMAS PROJECTS

*by George Jett*

Sponsor a team or join one in this all-day event to tally as many species as possible within 24 hours. This is a friendly event to see which county team can brag of finding the most species of birds within that county in a 24-hour period May 5 and 6.

This is an enjoyable way to raise money for SMAS. The Charles County team aims to contribute \$1000 for the Bird

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Conservation Alliance appeal for 2007 for the purchase of more than 1000 acres of significant wintering habitat for the Cerulean Warbler in the Rio Chucuri basin in Santander, Colombia. Other support can be directed to your favorite SMAS project such as the Education Fund, Raptor Conservation Fund, Youth Binocular Fund, etc. Sponsors can designate where the funds go, but all proceeds go to SMAS, and are fully tax deductible.

**Donations:** Sign up sheets will be available at the May 2 Monthly Meeting and June 3 Annual Meeting. You don't have to support any specific team but can also support the Birdathon by sending your tax deductible donations payable to "SMAS" to Will Daniel, Treasurer; SMAS, P.O. Box 181; Bryans Road, Maryland 20616. Thanks in advance for your support. It's never too late to donate!

If you wish to participate with a team or lead one, or register your pledge with a particular team, contact your county coordinator:

- Calvert - Arlene Ripley; 301-855-2848; arleneripley@comcast.net
- Charles - George Jett; 301-843-3524, gmjett@comcast.net
- Prince George's - Fred Fallon; 301-249-1518; fwfallon@earthlink.net
- St. Mary's - Dean Newman, 240-895-7321, dean.newman@verizon.net.

**The Rules:** All teams operate under the same rules. We use the American Birding Association rules which standardize the procedure, and put less stress on the birds being observed. The event is for a single day, and up to 24 hours. Species can be listed by sight or sound. Each member of the team should see/hear and identify at least 95 percent of the species reported. No tape playback is permitted during the entire 24-hour period since some birds may be on breeding territory. Scouting is permitted but not required, and stake out nests can be used. To count the nesting species, stand close enough to the nest to see it, and wait 5 minutes before moving on.

Teams can be more than four birders, but team members must stay within sight of each other, unless in the bathroom. Birding through sun roofs is permitted, but discouraged for the driver. Teams should bird only in their team's county. If a team finds a "mega-rarity" (e.g., Yellow-headed Blackbird), they should call the other teams. The other teams called can decide to leave their county, but new species cannot be counted until they return to the assigned county. Rare birds must be documented either in writing or photos. Team captains decide what species are counted, disputes to be settled at gun point and ten paces. This is an honor system.

**The Results:** The tally rally and the announcement of the winners will be held at the annual meeting on June 3. Come and join in the festivities at Greenwell State Park.

## **YOUTH BIRDING DAY CAMP FOR STUDENTS ENTERING GRADES 5-12 TO BE HELD JUNE 25 -29**

*CO-SPONSORED BY NANJEMOY CREEK ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER AND SMAS*

Have you ever wanted to turn our youth on to your passion for birds but didn't have the time or resources to do so? Well the Youth Birding Day Camp is the perfect opportunity. By encouraging students entering grades 5-12 to register for this action packed week of birdwatching and other field ornithology activities you will help start a new generation of birders. Activities include daily birding, birding by ear, Osprey banding, birding by habitat, a bird-a-thon and more. The day camp runs from June 25-29, 2007 and is held at Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center (NCEEC), with field trips to birding sites in Southern Maryland. The registration for camp is \$175.00 and includes the daily school bus ride from La Plata to Nanjemoy or to field trip sites and back. Camp staff includes Mike Callahan of NCEEC and members of SMAS. Don't delay! Sign a camper up today and take a stake in the birding future of Southern Maryland.

To register a student for Youth Birding Camp contact Mike Callahan at 301-743-3526 or mcallahan@ccboe.com or download a camp registration form the NCEEC website at [www.ccboe.com/nanjemoy](http://www.ccboe.com/nanjemoy)

## **CALLING SMAS VOLUNTEERS TO HELP LEAD YOUTH BIRDERS AT DAY CAMP**

Help make a direct impact on the future of birding by assisting with the Youth Birding Day Camp. This SMAS/ Nanjemoy co-sponsored camp will be held from June 25 - 29. With fun filled and rewarding experiences, both you and the students will get much from each day. To find out how rewarding this experience can be, just ask Jean Artes, Julie Daniel or George Jett who have assisted with the camp in past summers. A stipend is available if you can help with the whole week. If you are only available to help with a day or two let leader Mike Callahan know too. Your day will begin at 8:15 AM and end at 4:00 PM, but your impact will last a lifetime. Interested SMAS Members please contact Mike Callahan at 301-259-2162 or at [raptorsrule@juno.com](mailto:raptorsrule@juno.com)

## **SMAS SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS**

Congratulations to the two naturalist-educators who received scholarships from SMAS to attend the Maine Audubon Workshop for Educators: Brenda Wright of Hard Bargain Farm Environmental Center; Beth Wisotzkey of Clearwater Nature Center.

## A QUICK LITTLE CATBIRD STORY

by Marcia Nelson



Perhaps this seems silly, but it's based on personal experiences with several Gray Catbirds encountered and befriended in the last 20 years or so. I truly believe the bird wants to communicate, maybe just to tell you to keep away from his nest, or to say he approves of the environment and plans to stay,

Speak to your neighborhood catbird early in spring, when he has just come back from his winter residence. It is

very rewarding to have frequent neighborly talks with him. Although your languages are different, we all understand that a quiet *meow*, a little like a soft-spoken cat's, is the equivalent of "hello". Thereafter, if you just tell him little bits of news, like "my winter was cold, how was yours?", he'll begin to tell you little whispery bits about how he spent his winter months - it is important to keep up your side of the conversation by saying such things as "oh, really?", and "I'm so glad to hear that", or "Oh, please tell me more about that busy day". He will often stay and chatter with you for many minutes. You will notice from his attitude that there are some things he is telling you that are confidential, because he cocks his head a little and talks a bit more softly.

It is literally true that I have chatted this way with numerous catbirds, and I'd be surprised if other birders or bird-lovers have not done so too.

## REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

### Jefferson Patterson Park, March 10, by Tyler Bell

Due to an unfortunate last minute schedule snafu, I had to shorten the field trip wrapping up at 10 instead of noon. I felt particularly bad for the folks who drove down from Montgomery County. There were a total of 16 participants including a couple of people who survived my arctic death march in February. There was an interesting addition to the mix with a Boy Scout working on his bird watching merit badge. The participants were good sports about dedicating a lot of birding time to helping this young man in his pursuits.

We started by walking around the circular parking lot near the museum. We found most of the usual suspects like Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Northern Cardinal,

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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)

etc. The field in front of the museum was left un-mowed over the winter and was full of sparrows which were being most uncooperative. We did manage to get some halfway decent looks at a couple of Song Sparrows feeding underneath a roadside sign. We also got excellent scope looks at a couple of Eastern Bluebirds perched on the split rail fence.

Next, we formed a caravan and drove down the gravel farm road on the north end of the park. We stopped adjacent to the larger of the two ponds which had a few ducks. Using the cars as a blind, we scoped out a male and several female Gadwall, Hooded Mergansers, Mallards and a male Ring-necked Duck. Leaving the cars on the roadside, we walked down to the Patuxent River and scanned for waterfowl. Just past the barns, we paused to check out a cooperative Eastern Meadowlark that had perched in a small tree on the edge of the field. We watched it through the scope as it threw its head back and sang. The lighting was perfect for its bright yellow breast. Before we moved on, we watched a flock of about 20 American Pipits fly between the fields on either side of the road. We got poor scope views of the pipits as they foraged among the corn stubble. Being small birds compounded with heat shimmer, the looks were certainly not worthy of a life look. For some, they had to take for granted that they were indeed pipits.

The river yielded better looks at waterfowl. A lot of them had headed north already but we managed to get some good looks at a number of Ruddy Ducks and Buffleheads, Tundra Swans and Canada Geese. In the cove just north of the park there were a couple of Great Blue Herons.

To those who were on the trip, I apologize again for shorting you. There was a large part of the park that we didn't have time to explore. There is generally a nice flock of mixed scaup near the old Academy pier where I like to point out the differences between Greater and Lesser Scaup. We also would have increased the tally on a walk along the Woodland Trail. Despite the brevity of the trip, we managed to see 44 species. Not bad for a two hour trip!

### **Merkle, Jug Bay, and Mount Calvert, March 24, by Fred Shaffer**

On Saturday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, the Southern Maryland Audubon Society held a joint field trip with the Patuxent Bird Club and the Prince George's Audubon Society. Seven observers visited several stops along the Patuxent River in Prince George's County. Despite the overcast conditions, the birds were active at all stops, and participants got close views of several species.

The group started at Merkle Wildlife Management Area. From the comfort of the visitor's center, we surveyed the feeders, fields, and ponds nearby. Birds were active at the feeders, with one highlight being an adult White-crowned Sparrow that fed beneath one of the feeders just outside the windows. This attractive bird provided extended and close views. Other species visiting the feeders included Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Downy Woodpecker, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, and Red-winged Blackbird. Also of note was a small group of Purple Martin flying overhead. The pond behind the visitor's center included a pair of Wood Ducks and a small group of Ring-necked Ducks.

We then visited the boat launch at Jug Bay, and saw countless Tree Swallows coursing over the river. Ospreys were actively tending their nests and flying over the waters of Jug Bay, and one Forster's Tern perched in view. Waterfowl included several Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Black Duck, and a male Red-breasted Merganser.

The final stop was just upriver at Mount Calvert overlooking Billingsley Marsh. One of the highlights of this stop was hearing the vocalization of a group of Tundra Swan hidden behind the marsh. The flock of over 25 Tundra Swans flew up and into view. We got great views of the noisy flock as they circled the marsh, flew overhead and then out of sight. Tree Swallows lined the top of the metal fencing protecting the marsh vegetation at the north end of Jug Bay. All in all, it proved to be a productive morning of birding along the Patuxent River in Prince George's County.



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## MAY EVENTS

May 2—**Wednesday**—7:30 PM. **Monthly Meeting**  
Clearwater Nature Center, 11000 Third Road, Clinton, Prince Georges County. **Warbler Workshop** by Gwen Brewer, Southern Maryland Audubon Society. Are you a little rusty on warbler identification, or ready to learn them better? We will take advantage of a program put together by the Maryland Ornithological Society to get ready for the upcoming spring migration and May Count. This presentation will cover 37 warbler species that either breed in or migrate through Maryland. Multiple photos (including some from SMAS members) and the songs of each species will be reviewed, with something for birders of all levels.

May 5—**Saturday**—8 AM to noon. **Field Trip**  
Gilbert Run Park, Charles County. **Peak Spring Migrants.** Leader: George Harrington (301-934-9703). For those not doing the birdathon (see below), young and old, join us to explore the park. A walk on the trail around the 60-acre lake could produce a nice collection of neotropical migrants and nesting birds. Meet just inside the entrance to the park, past the fee-collection station. Gilbert Run Park is located 8 mi. east of LaPlata on Rte. 6. Facilities and an entrance fee.

May 5/6—**Saturday/Sunday**—All day. **Birdathon**  
Sponsor a team or join one in this all-day event to tally as many species as possible within 24 hours. This is a great and fun way to raise money for SMAS. Contact your county

leaders for details. *Calvert County:* Arlene Ripley 301-855-2848, arleneripley@comcast.net. *Charles County:* George Jett, 301-843-3524, gmjett@comcast.net. *Prince George's County:* Fred Fallon, 301-249-1518, fwfallon@earthlink.net. *St. Mary's County:* Dean Newman, 240-895-7321, dean.newman@verizon.net. See page 1 for additional information

May 12—**Saturday**—all day. **County May Counts**  
Help needed from all, from backyard birders and beginners to experts. The May Count data and habitat information obtained help save our birds. To participate, contact your county coordinator: For Calvert Co., Arlene Ripley (301-855-2848, arleneripley@comcast.net. For Charles Co., George Jett (301-843-3524, gmjett@comcast.net. For St. Mary's Co., Bob Boxwell (410-394-1300, bobboxwell@hotmail.com. For more information about the annual Maryland May Count, see the following web site: <http://www.mdbirds.org/counts/>.

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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.

**Southern Maryland Audubon Society**  
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