

The Osprey

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Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

A BRIEF REVIEW OF SOME BIRDING EQUIPMENT

By Ron R. Runkles

Recently, while my wife, Barbara, and youngest son, Mark, went to the International Double Reed Society Annual Convention in Ithaca, New York, I visited the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. I spent time hiking the trails in Sapsucker Woods, listening to about every available bird recording in the sound room, and looking at and through optical equipment. I was looking for a good binocular that does not cost a mortgage payment or more.

Two binoculars impressed me. The first was the new Yosemite, 8 x 30 binocular from Leupold made with young birders in mind. The optics and feel are impressive, even more so for the price (around \$100). The image and field of view are comparable to other 8 x 30 binoculars, making it easy for inexperienced birders to find objects. When a child shows interest in birding, some parents hesitate to spend the money that seems necessary for good optics, and with cheap, poor quality optics, the child quickly loses interest. Parents should take a serious look at this binocular if they have a budding ornithologist.

The other binocular was the Monarch, 8 x 36 binocular from Nikon. I added one of these binoculars to my collection and tested it in the field. It is comfortable to handle, light in weight (just under 20 ounces), focuses quickly, has a great depth of field, and an adequate field of view of seven degrees, a little more than 360 feet at 1000 yards. In field tests with my eyes and this one binocular, I consider the resolution and color transmission to be very good to excellent, depending on seeing conditions.

A lot of birding is about color, so I have, loosely speaking, a color test range at Greenwell State Park, Hollywood, MD. There is a hedgerow about 250 yards from where I stand and where I can usually find Northern Cardinals, American Goldfinches, and Indigo Buntings. With optics that transmit colors poorly, I have discovered that, with my eyes, red tends to go to brown, yellow to gray, and blue to black at this distance. As I said, this binocular seems to have excellent color transmission capabilities.

A couple pieces of equipment besides binoculars captured my attention. I found a sixty-two inch Polecat® monopod that extends by simply twisting its extensions and a binocular rest to attach to the top of it, both from Stoney Point. Why a monopod and binocular rest? I hate lugging heavy or bulky equipment in the field, such as tripods, large

telescopes, and the like, but I like something to steady ten power binoculars when I am watching ducks on a river or hawks at a watch site.

I grew up following Roger Tory Peterson, reading everything I could find about his birding and birding adventures. For years he used a German-made, ten-power binocular. A couple of years ago, what I call a “new generation” birder claimed that this particular binocular is a poor tool for birding—if I remember correctly the birder used even stronger language. Not wanting to spend a bundle of money on a ten power binocular, but curious, because I had never used one much in the field, I purchased a Browning, 10 x 42 binocular, made for Browning by Bushnell. The optics in this binocular are fantastic, the clarity, the resolution, and the color transmission, and I can understand why someone of Peterson’s capabilities would use a ten-power binocular. But, for me there are two drawbacks. It has a short depth of field compared to binoculars of lesser power, and it is difficult for me to hold steady for a long period of time—warbler and sparrow watching can be challenging. The monopod and binocular rest solve the problem of steadying the binocular for me for duck, shorebird, and hawk watching. They are light in weight, easy to carry, and stabilize a ten power binocular or small scope like the Brunton, 7 x 40 scope and extend its capabilities.

In conclusion if a person does not want to spend a mortgage payment for a good binocular, there are several worth considering, the Leupold 8 x 30 Yosemite, the Nikon 8 x 36 Monarch, and the Browning line of binoculars, particularly the 8 x 32 binocular for general birding. From what I saw in the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology store, more and more new optical and optical-related products are coming on the market that add to the enjoyment of birding, but do not cost a fortune. High prices do not always seem to correlate with quality optics. I admit that I find myself leaving the pricey European optics on the shelf and taking the Monarch and Browning binoculars with me more and more—they are only about one-fifth the price of their more expensive top-of-the-line counterparts.

MY WEEK ON HOG ISLAND

By Brenda Wright

I thank the Southern Maryland Audubon Society for giving me the opportunity to attend the Educators Workshop at Hog Island Camp in Muscongus Bay, Maine. As a child, I never had the opportunity to go to camp. I certainly did not expect to be going as an adult. I must say the experience was better than I ever expected.

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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Each day started with a bird walk at 6:00 AM. As a novice birder, I was surprised to find out that bird walks don't necessarily involve a lot of walking. Our group spent most of its time sitting on the porch with binoculars in one hand and a cup of coffee or tea in the other. Tom, our guide was amazing; he would point out all the different birds fluttering around in the spruce, apple and birch trees. I can finally add some warblers to my list, including Blackburnian Warbler.

During all the educational sessions the same theme kept recurring, the need to get children outside, to get them seeing, smelling and touching the natural world around them. After being at Hog Island, and doing just that, I am very excited about getting to work to put what I have learned into action with all the children that visit Hard Bargain Farm.

The week was full of amazing opportunities, to discover, explore and learn about the natural history of the Maine Coast. An extensive nature walk through the spruce forest and the exploration of several tidal pools were two of our more interesting and educational activities. During a trip to a nearby island to see Atlantic Puffins and Razorbills, we were fortunate to also see a colony of Harbor Seals and have porpoises swimming around our boat. Seeing these animals in the wild was a definite WOW moment for me.

Too quickly the week came to an end. Our last night everyone shared a special meal, fresh lobster right out of Muscongus Bay, what could be better than that? The next morning we said good-bye to Hog Island and all of its beauty, wildlife, and wonder. It is a place I will never forget and hope to be able to visit again.

(Brenda Wright, naturalist at the Alice Furguson Foundation's Hard Bargain Farm, received the SMAS Audubon Ecology Camp Scholarship for 2007, to promote education of children in conservation and wildlife issues.)

Rare nuptial display observed, May 19, 2007 by Ernest Willoughby.

On May 19 several of our members observe one of the mainstays of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society engaging in a pair-bonding display involving the mutual sharing of particularly desirable food morsels. Robert John (Bob) Boxwell, past President of SMAS, and currently our webmaster and member of the Newsletter and Publications Committee, married Joanne Frances Bona at the Resurrection of Our Lord Church, Philadelphia, PA. The display, pictured below, occurred a little while later at the Philadelphia Quartet Country Club. Congratulations to the happy couple!



Mates reinforcing pair-bond in mutual feeding ritual. (Note the special nuptial dress of the pair.) Photo by Harry Kriemelmeyer.

Calvert County Birdathon, May 5, by Tyler Bell.

This year the Calvert birdathon team consisted of Arlene Ripley, John Hubbell and me. We met at 2:50 AM at the park and ride at Rts. 2 & 4. The first bird on our list was a Northern Mockingbird singing in the light of the parking lot.

We drove down Lower Marlboro Rd. toward Smoky Rd. and the managed hunting area there. A bird that we had missed in years' past turned out to be relatively easy both here and at King's Landing: Whip-poor-will. We had several Barred Owls calling at Smoky Rd. and an Eastern Screech-owl at King's Landing. We found a Great Horned Owl calling along Mackall Rd. just before sunrise and found a Barn Owl to close out the likely owls for the day.

At sunrise, the Grasshopper Sparrows were singing along Cage Rd. but Bobolinks weren't to be found either at Cage and Mackall or at the end of Soller's Wharf Rd. They were



PLANNED FOR SEPTEMBER 29

Our annual fund-raiser Yard Sale is planned for Saturday, Sept. 29, 8 a.m.-2 p.m. (rain date Sept. 30). Julie and Will Daniel have again generously offered their premises on MD Rte 5 for the sale. Start collecting things you no longer need for recycling to help support our education programs. No clothes or books, but clean household and yard items in working order are ready sellers, as are small furniture pieces. Items can be dropped off **after September 1** at the Daniels at 6622 Leonardtown Road (301-274-5756) or may be brought the day of the sale. Help is always needed for this fun event!

to show up in numbers by the next week. But we did get Eastern Meadowlarks at both of the above locations.

Next we headed for Flag Ponds to beat the crowds. Fortunately, Arlene, as a volunteer, has gotten permission to enter in off hours. It's nice to bird there before the 9 a.m. gate time which is late for some of the best birding. Shorebirds were scarce but we did get a Marsh Wren and several Seaside Sparrows near the ponds at the point. A Solitary Sandpiper at Duncan's Pond proved to be the only one of the day.

When we had covered the area as best we could, we went to Calvert Cliffs State Park, usually the best warbler spot in the county. Not this time! We had to work hard for the few new birds and the only benefit to hauling the scope and tripod all the way to the beach was a distant look at a Peregrine Falcon on the liquid natural gas terminal. We didn't even need Red-headed Woodpecker as John had found one, the first for the park, at Flag Ponds. The usually reliable Prothonotary Warblers were absent and we only lucked into one at the very end of the trail, in the rain, at Battle Creek Cypress Swamp near the end of the day.

Lunchtime found us in Solomons. After a nutritious lunch of fast food, we headed into Asbury to whiff on Rock Pigeon which we did manage to find under the Solomons bridge. Then it started to rain and never completely stopped until sundown. Arlene and I started to flag at the end of the day but John persisted and dug out several birds that were skulking in various areas along the way.

Our final stop was at Warrior's Rest along Parker's Creek. It had cooled significantly and though the rain had stopped, the marsh birds were not cooperative. We heard a Sora vocalize twice and that was it. We waited there for about 45 minutes before the quiet and the mosquitoes made us throw in the towel. Still, we ended up with a very respectable 131 species! That was our best effort yet. I can't even imagine what it might have been had we gotten some of the easy birds that we missed like Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Semipalmated Sandpiper and Bobolink and several of the warblers. Oh well, there's always next year. Coincidentally, the Charles county team was only one species behind and the St. Mary's team tied us at 131. That's the closest score ever. It would have been remarkable if we had had a three way tie!

Charles County Birdathon, May 5, by George Jett.
On May 5 Gwen Brewer, Bill Hubick, Tom Feild, and I made a run at the Charles County Big Day record while doing a fund raising event for the Cerulean Warbler Preserve in Colombia.

We finished with 130 species, one short of the big day record. This was not for a lack of effort. We started at 3 AM

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)

and birded until well after 10 PM. The afternoon rain may have been the main reason we did not break the record. It started raining in Charles County around 1 PM and continued until 8 PM. The rain may also have helped us find the three Cattle Egrets and one adult Little Blue Heron, but the songbirds went totally silent. They were smarter than the team members who stayed out in the rain trying to eke out one more species.

Our first bird was my most wanted. We all heard Whip-poor-will from our back yard just before we hit the road. Likely a migrant since I have not heard it since May 5. The last species was a Black-crowned Night-heron in Benedict. After dark my motto is "When all else fails, clap your hands". I clapped, the night-heron said hello, and we said good night. We did pretty well on night birds with four owl species, Virginia Rail, and one nightjar (the Whip-poor-will), but could not get the recently reported Chuck-will's-widow to sing. Day brought a flurry of activity and many quick stops getting those morning songsters, and some true migrants. Most of the breeding birds were staked out in advance, and were eventually tallied. We had our 100th species by 10:55 AM. What a start. The sky was heavily overcast with rain threatening, but we were hopeful. We had a lot more common birds to go, but by 1 PM the rains came and steady until after dark.

Some statistics tell the story that the county record of 131 will eventually fall. It is a matter of time and weather conditions. We tallied a total of five species of herons, which is good for this area of the coastal plain. We also had a good number of nesting songbirds, but only three species of swallows (poor), and 17 species of warblers (poor since most were breeders), but few true migrants like Black-throated Blue. Other migrants included an early Swainson's Thrush and a late Rose-breasted Grosbeak singing, but no other migrants could be found after the rain started.

We also had some huge misses like Great Egret (never missed before), Solitary Sandpiper (I had several stakeout locations the day before), Yellow-billed Cuckoo (common but maybe too early for a reliable spot), and Hairy Woodpecker (old reliable in the back yard failed me for the first time). Counts of waterfowl (6 species) and shorebirds (8 species) were also lower than expected. 130 species with weather like this is respectable, but I think 150 are possible.

Some memorable moments bring smiles to my face as I write this, such as staring at the Shoppers World sign after dark trying to see if there were Rock Pigeons (they count), hearing the song of a House Wren at Cobb Island in a steady rain (high fives for all on that one), and quietly observing the neighbor's staked out Red-shouldered Hawk nest.

Demonstrating the plight of the Cerulean Warbler, we could not find one even with lots of scouting, and the long day in the field, but we did find an American Redstart. Perhaps

with your support, next year we will be able to find Cerulean Warbler for our list.

I thank the many great conservationists who helped support the beautiful Cerulean Warbler. With your help, we raised over \$2500 for the Cerulean Warbler Preserve.

Many supporters have sent in their checks, and I thank you. If you have not please send your checks, made out to the **American Bird Conservancy** with a note on the check for the Cerulean Warbler appeal, to me at: George M. Jett, 9505 Bland Street, Waldorf, Maryland 20603.

June 9 field trip to Myrtle Grove by George Jett.

On June 9 four birders joined Gwen Brewer and me to walk around Myrtle Grove Wildlife Management Area. The three and one-half hour foray netted exactly 51 species. Highlights on the fresh, warm day were my first Great Egret of the year, and Green and Great Blue Heron. Also present were the resident Red-shouldered Hawk, and Barred Owls (a possible family trio singing along the back dykes was a treat for all). We also had one Wild Turkey run away heading down the back impoundment, and a very cooperative Acadian Flycatcher stepped out of his forest to view the birding contingent.

All three local nesting Vireos were located along the way. They are White-eyed, Yellow-throated, and Red-eyed. It is convenient to have accurately described names for one's bird list. It is far easier to understand these names than the hard to see Red-bellied Woodpeckers I often get asked about from new birders.

Myrtle Grove is a good place to find the mimics and we easily located two of our three nesting species. Gray Catbird was absent on this trip. We did see and hear good numbers of Brown Thrashers and Northern Mockingbirds.

Gwen's keen hearing picked out a small flock of Cedar Waxwings as we picked up nine species of nesting warblers. The warbler contingent included Black & White, Prothonotary, Kentucky, Hooded, American Redstart, and a very cooperative Yellow-breasted Chat. We completed our list by adding both nesting species of tanagers - Scarlet and Summer.

Many of the usual suspects like Downy Woodpecker, Carolina Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Eastern Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, and Common Grackle were also added to our total.

All six participants had a productive but short visit on the last SMAS fieldtrip of this season. Come join our next field trips, September 2 at Calvert Cliffs State Park, and September 22 at Point Lookout State Park (see September Events on page 6 for details).

SEPTEMBER EVENTS

September 5 – **Wednesday** – 7:30 p.m. **Monthly Meeting** Charlotte Hall Library, 37600 New Market Rd. (Rte 6 at Rt 5), Charlotte Hall, St Mary's County. **"Alaska Treasures for the American People"** by Walter Taldi, National Audubon Alaska Field Coordinator. As the debate over the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge takes on new dimensions, many other Alaska natural treasures, set aside decades ago for the benefit of the American people, also deserve our attention. These include the Tongass National Forest, Chugach National Forest, and National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. Mr Taldi will share with us opportunities to protect these places for current and future generations.

September 2—**Sunday** –8:00 AM to noon. **Field Trip** Calvert Cliffs State Park, Calvert County. **Birds and Butterflies with Bill**. Leader: Bill Hubick, 443-854-9753, bill_hubick@yahoo.com. Greet fall migrants at one of the best spots in the county with one of Maryland's rising stars. The varied habitat here yields confusing fall warblers, sparrows, and other migrating songbirds plus butterflies. The park is located on Rt. 4 near the Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant, just north of Lusby. Meet in the parking lot at the entrance. Fee, facilities.

September 22 –**Saturday**—8:00 AM to noon. **Field Trip** Point Lookout State Park, St. Mary's Co. **More Fall Migrants and Butterflies**. Leader: Marty Cribb, 301-872-9464 (H), 301-481-7978 (C); pauraque@tqci.net. Located

at the confluence of the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay, Point Lookout can be excellent for fall migration (shorebirds, gulls, terns, songbirds, and butterflies), and resident Brown-headed Nuthatch. Meet in the parking lot at the end of Route 5. Fee, facilities.

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. If you wish to attend, contact your County Representative or any Director or Officer for details of time and place.

September 29—**Saturday**—8:00 AM to 2:00 PM. **Fundraising Event** Annual Yard Sale fundraiser (rain date, September 30). Will and Julie Daniel will host again, at 6622 Leonardtown Road (301-274-5756). Donate items and help with sales. See more details on page 2.

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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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