

The Osprey



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Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

POINT LOOKOUT STATE PARK: AN AUTUMN HOTSPOT

By Patty Craig

The magic of autumn migration can transform Point Lookout State Park, St. Mary's County, into utopia for birders. Variety and abundance can greet the birder, varying according to the weather, winds, and tides.

The Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay funnel northern migrants to Point Lookout on the Western Shore's southern tip (Birders use Route 5.). Reluctant to fly over water, birds gather before pushing farther south. Birding this area a day or so after a cold front or immediately after a hurricane passes, gives you the best opportunity for discovery. Species that were elusive all year can sometimes be easy to find in fall. This was the case in a recent August trip when I saw Sandwich and Black Terns and a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron.

A quick drive through the park can give you an idea of what species to concentrate on during any particular day. The park has a variety of habitats, none expansive except the Loblolly Pine forest which hosts the year-round resident Brown-headed Nuthatches and Pine Warblers. It is this forest that you meet at the entrance. Ovenbirds, Wood Thrush, Black-throated Green Warbler and nuthatches are likely. You could choose to walk Periwinkle Trail behind the visitor's center. It is the most reliable area for finding Brown-headed Nuthatches and it is possible to find rails, marsh sparrows and Marsh and Sedge wrens on this trail.

Back on the highway toward the point you will pass Tanner's Creek on your left and then cross the causeway separating the Chesapeake Bay on one side and Lake Conoy on the other. Scan for Brown Pelican, early waterbirds, gulls and terns as well as shorebirds. Spotted and Least Sandpipers, some of the earliest arrivals, might be seen on the jetty into Tanner's Creek especially at low tide. Later in the season these same rocks might shelter Sanderlings, Ruddy Turnstones or Dunlin. A Great Cormorant could be resting on a post, but you are sure to see many Double-crested Cormorants. If the wind is blowing off the bay Bonaparte's Gulls and Forster's Terns are possibly searching the surf off the rip-rap on the causeway allowing close observation. In August, late afternoon lighting enables you to search through the many Common Terns for Sandwich and Black Terns while they feed on the schools of bait fish.

You can check the boat launch area for early grebes and Buffleheads, young Forster's Terns begging to parents, a young Bald Eagle lingering near its nest or, on a very low tide, a Black Skimmer on the far sand spit.

The fishing pier can give closer looks at birds in the bay or those migrating down it. Interesting sparrows, Indigo Buntings and Blue Grosbeaks might be located near the parking lot.

The copse of trees behind the smokehouse at the point should be checked for those birds building their confidence to cross the open water at the mouth of Potomac or biding their time until the winds shift. Anything can be found here. It is also a good place for sparrows even in winter.

The ponds near the point have had their fair share of good birds: Wood Stork, White Ibis and Red-necked Phalarope; but drought conditions help. Swallows, rails, shorebirds, marsh sparrows, herons and even Eastern Meadowlark and Short-eared Owl can be found if you are lucky. In recent years Mute Swans residing there have limited the variety of species they allow in "their ponds".

The picnic area is popular with fruit eaters such as American Robins, Cedar Waxwings, orioles, and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks due to the ripening cherries and persimmons. Warblers are also attracted to the insects swarming over the fallen fruit. This is a good place for Blackpoll Warblers late in warbler migration.

My favorite area is Fort Lincoln and its surroundings. Warblers and flycatchers seem to be attracted to the hackberry trees. Impressive numbers of Eastern Phoebes and any of our warbler species regardless of their preferred habitat can be found in this area. Starting in August you can find migrants that have journeyed shorter distances from their nesting grounds - Black-throated Green, Worm-eating, Blue-winged, Canada and Blackburnian Warblers, Northern Waterthrush and Olive-sided Flycatcher. Bringing up the rear, Wilson's, Orange-crowned, Mourning or Connecticut warblers might be your prize. The trail nearer and parallel to the road I have named "Thrush Alley" because of the numbers of thrushes and mimic thrushes that have been found there. They may be seen in the brambles, viburnum, or the black tupelo trees eating berries.

While at the fort look out over the Potomac, more Brown Pelicans can be found loafing on the fishing nets or flying low in formation over the water and perhaps an Eared Grebe or Red-throated Loon might put in an appearance.

Don't be surprised if the birds vanish before your eyes - A RAPTOR IS NEAR! Falcons, accipiters and harriers are numerous in fall. Peregrines and Merlins especially like to travel down the shore. Barred and Great Horned Owls occasionally roost near Fort Lincoln during this season.

Even on a slow day frogs, turtles, butterflies, dragonflies

and cicadas can keep your interest. My favorite turtles (Snapping, Spotted and Diamond-back Terrapin) could be found. I know of at least 5 species of cicadas residing in the park along with many species of dragonflies with names like: Four-spotted Pennant, Yellow-legged Meadowhawk, Seaside Dragonlet and Carolina Saddlebags. Migrating Cloudless Sulphurs can often be seen flying up the bay and thousands of Monarchs can turn the Groundsel bushes to gold!

Did we forget to look up? The flyover possibilities are almost limitless! But, the spell is broken and the migrants have left as quickly as they arrived. Is it any wonder it was once believed that geese magically turned into barnacles in autumn?

I guess it is time to leave, but the promise of another cold front passing or the arrival of the winter season bringing waterfowl, including all three scoters, and possibly Purple Sandpipers, eiders or Snow Buntings will bring you back!

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

May 17-18 Trip to Delaware Bay by Millie Kriemelmeyer

A dozen SMAS members, friends, and children had a wonderful weekend on the horseshoe crab/shorebird trip in May. Dean Newman led the Saturday morning search for migrants at Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge and we were not disappointed. We even saw a ball of mating water snakes! Bombay Hook was having its spring horseshoe crab/birding festival, so there were many things to see and do.

The new DNREC visitor center at Mispillion is attractive mimicking a screwpile hexagonal lighthouse and is sited high enough that spawning horseshoe crabs and feasting shorebirds were visible from the porch. Several of us saw the elusive Red Knot there.

We tallied 66 species. Besides the Red Knot, shorebirds and waders included Black-necked Stilt, Avocet, Dunlin, Short-billed Dowitcher, Greater Yellowlegs, Ruddy Turnstone, American Oystercatcher, Sanderling; Western, Semi-palmated, and Spotted Sandpipers; Killdeer, Black-bellied Plover, Black-crowned Night Heron, Snowy Egret, Great Egret, and Great Blue Heron. Land birds of note included Barn Owl, and Boat-tailed Grackle.

May 24, Field Trip to Chapman State Park, by Carol Ghebelian.

Eleven of us met at Chapman State Park on the late cloudy May day to enjoy the park and the treat of birding with Gwen Brewer.

From the parking lot we birded the historic cedar lane leading to Mount Aventine, the 1840 manor house. The cedars offered up Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers, House Finches, Eastern Bluebirds, Chipping Sparrows, Carolina

Chickadees, and Tufted Titmice, while Indigo Buntings, Red-eyed Vireos, and Parula Warblers sang nearby. Wood Thrushes are found in good numbers in the park and could be heard singing from deep within the forest. We paused to reflect upon the magnificent Potomac view from Mount Aventine, and the sweeping meadow that leads up from the river to the house. A Bald Eagle appeared on cue. We admired the annual Eastern Phoebe nest on a prominent ledge on a Mount Aventine porch column. I saw them fledge 2 weeks later.

But on to serious birding. We followed the road leading to the river; first alongside deep woods, then a field formerly used for horse training, and again through marshy woodlands, and to the Potomac beach itself. Except for a few Double-crested Cormorants, waterfowl were gone, but Ospreys and Bald Eagles abound along this sparsely developed shoreline. The park itself enjoys 2 miles of shoreline and is opposite the largely protected Mason Neck on the Virginia side. We backtracked, crossed the field, and entered the Marsh Walk, a rich bottomland woods that leads to a large impounded marsh along the Potomac. The change in birdlife from the sandier woodlands at the Potomac was immediately apparent. With her famed bionic eyes and ears Gwen located more warbler and other species for us and even spotted a Gray-cheeked Thrush lurking in the leaves. (Unfortunately, laggard George Jett missed adding this shot to his big photo year) Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Great-Blue Heron, Wood Ducks, Mallards, as well as usual scrub-shrub species were found at the marsh. Good woodpecker numbers were heard throughout the morning but we missed the oft seen Red-headed. Our only hawk of the day was a resident Red-tailed. The trip totaled 60 species, including 13 warbler species. Thanks to Gwen for a very special time. She even held off the rains until we finished eating the delicious banana bread Cora sent for the occasion. The SMAS Annual Meeting and potluck picnic will be held at Mount Aventine next June 7. Save the date!

July 27, Green Heron fledglings and other observations at Smith Creek (St. Mary's County), by Anne Bishop.

Friends who live on Smith Creek called the evening of July 27 to say they had strange herons in their yard, so I went to look. There were three young green herons foraging in their driveway. The birds had the slight crest of downy feathers. After a few minutes one bird flew up into a gingko tree and perched where we could easily see it, and a second went up into a cedar tree and walked up a limb in plain sight. As we stood there talking, an osprey landed on the large, free-standing metal antenna next to their house. As the bird landed, one of its feet caught in the cross bar of the antenna. Within seconds the bird was hanging upside down and struggling frantically. We were feeling very helpless, even climbing the antenna would leave no way to get to the end of the cross piece where the osprey was trapped. Finally my friends just shook the antenna until finally the bird, after fifteen minutes upside

down and flapping, came loose and flew strongly away.

July 31, dolphins in Smith Creek, St. Mary's County, by Anne Bishop.

I saw at least 6 Bottle-nosed Dolphins in Smith Creek off Miller's Wharf Road this morning. They went up the creek at 7:15 AM, and came back down about an hour later. I had seen them once last summer, and had been waiting impatiently this summer.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Bob Lukinic

I want to thank the members for their confidence to have me serve as their president. I am following in a line of very competent and devoted SMAS members who held this position. I hope to uphold the professional standard my predecessors have set.

I cannot say enough for the past-presidents, committee chairs, directors, and officers that comprise the Board of Southern Maryland Audubon Society. They devote their time, energy, and wisdom to better our organization. They are a dedicated group that deserves all of the member's thanks. With their leadership, we are enjoying the benefits that SMAS brings to the members and the community.

Many of you enjoy the monthly meetings and field trips. A lot have benefited from projects such as the binocular fund and environmental educator camp scholarship program. Our wildlife has benefited from such efforts as RAPTOR (Return Avian Predators To Our Region). We are all very glad these are used by our members and others. The board is intent on keeping all these going and expanding them.

SMAS needs your help. In recent years we have been fortunate to add some new members to the board. We need to continue this. The new faces have new ideas and new energy. This will keep SMAS in the forefront of environmental service to Southern Maryland.

At this time SMAS needs a chairperson for the hospitality committee. This is a position that coordinates with other volunteers to make sure there are refreshments at the monthly meetings. This is not a hard job. It just takes a little time every month. I am asking anyone who wants to help our organization to volunteer to take this spot. If this is not your fancy, there is always a place on our board or on a standing committee for anyone to help

If you want to volunteer to help, or have any questions or suggestions, please contact me at:

Mailing address:
5850 River Road; Bryans Road, Md. 20616
Phone/fax 301-283-6317
E-mail rlukinic@peoplepc.com

So, happy birding to us all. Bob

YARD SALE ON FOR SEPTEMBER 27

VOLUNTEERS AND DONATIONS NEEDED

By Julie Daniel, Flea Market/Yard Sale Committee

The annual yard sale to raise money for the education fund is scheduled for **Saturday, September 27th from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.** at the house of Will and Julie Daniel. The address is 6622 Leonardtown Road in Bryantown, MD. The rain date will be Saturday, October 4th. Donations are being accepted for this yard sale after September 1st (everything except for clothes and books). If you have items to donate or would like to volunteer on September 27th, please contact Julie Daniel at 301-274-5756 or by e-mail, juliedaniel@hotmail.com. Please make sure that all donations are in good working order and are clean. We appreciate your help in raising money for our education fund by supporting the yard sale.

Directions to the Daniel house from St. Mary's county: Take Route 5 or Route 235 north to Charles County. Continue on Route 5 past Hughesville. About 3.5 miles north of Hughesville watch for their house on the north side of the road, 1/4 mile north of Ted Bowling Drive. If you get to the intersection at Oliver Shop Road you have gone too far. The house is an old white farm house with a white board fence around all of the property.

From Calvert County take Route 231 west to Charles County. Follow directions above from Hughesville.

From Charles County go through Waldorf and then take Route 5 south towards Bryantown and Hughesville. In Bryantown, one half a mile past the intersection at Oliver Shop Road do a u-turn and go back north on Route 5, their house is 1/4 mile north of the u-turn. The house is an old white farm house with a white board fence around all of the property.

FIELD ORNITHOLOGY CAMP AT HOG ISLAND AUDUBON CENTER

By Bill Townsend

I was very grateful to be chosen to attend the Field Ornithology Camp at the Hog Island Audubon Center in Maine. As a naturalist at Hard Bargain Farm, I have heard many others describe the wonderful week spent at various camps there and this year was my turn thanks to SMAS. I was not disappointed!

This was a week of top level birding with very knowledgeable bird guides such as Scott Weidensaul. We had delicious meals including a lobster dinner! I saw puffins and tern nesting sites and learned how to band hummingbirds. Hiking in spruce-fir forests our group had the opportunity to experience fieldwork firsthand. I learned many identification tips.

My hobby is photography. I made a short DVD of my week at camp and will share it at the SMAS December meeting.

**AUDUBON URGES ADMINISTRATION
TO KEEP SEABIRD
PROTECTIONS IN PLACE**

PROPOSED RULE ALTERS HOW THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA) APPLIES TO OCEANS; WOULD CREATE A BAD PRECEDENT, STIFLE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Washington, DC, July 31, 2008 - Audubon and other conservationists today urged the Bush administration to withdraw its proposed procedures for complying with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) when managing ocean fish and to craft a new rule that will protect valuable natural resources while allowing for greater public participation in the environmental review process. The Bush administration's proposal, published on May 14, 2008, is full of loopholes and exclusions that would do little to protect the environment.

NEPA, the nation's preeminent conservation law, ensures that public officials make informed decisions about the environmental consequences of their actions by requiring thorough environmental assessments with public participation. This is the same law that helped to protect thousands of square miles of deep sea coral, reduced mortality of endangered sea turtles and began the process of rebuilding depleted fish populations while ensuring robust public participation in federal fisheries management. The administration's NEPA proposal could create a bad precedent affecting the application of NEPA to other aspects of the environment since it provides a roadmap for other federal agencies to modify their NEPA procedures.

"Overfishing, pollution, bycatch and global warming are already putting a heavy strain on the habitats of several imperiled seabird species," said Steve Kress, director of Audubon's seabirds program. "More than ever, we need to make decisions based on good science. Instead, the federal government's weakening of environmental review protections will stack the odds in favor of industry and likely degrade habitat further."

"This proposal is a cynical attempt to shove the public out of its rightful role in protecting public resources," said Andrea Treece, senior attorney in the Center for Biological Diversity's oceans program. "Fishing affects virtually every ecosystem and species in the sea, from the fish we eat, to whales we thrill to watch, sea turtles we strive to protect and coral reefs that support local economies. Leaving the management of these national treasures to guesswork and backroom deals instead of sound science and public input is simply unacceptable."

According to law, a NEPA review must include an analysis of a full suite of alternatives to the proposed action. This will

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)

SEPTEMBER EVENTS

September 3—**Wednesday**—7:30 PM. **Monthly Meeting.** La Plata United Methodist Church, 3 Port Tobacco Road (Rte. 6 at Rte. 301), La Plata, Charles County. **Brazil Highlights**, by Greg Kearns, naturalist, Patuxent River Park. Mr. Kearns spent time in Brazil on an exchange program through Partners of the Americas. Share his experience in his always fascinating stories and pictures as he explores Rio de Janeiro, Iguazu Falls, and the Pantanal.

September 20—**Saturday**—8:00 AM to noon. **Field Trip.** Hard Bargain/Piscataway park, Accokeek, Prince George's County. **Fall Migrants and Resident Birds.** Leader: Chris Ordiway, 301-203-8014, olebuck@strixvaria.org (e-mail use preferred). Woods, marsh, open water, farm fields, and edges provide a good variety of birds. Take Rte 210, Indian Head Highway to Livingston Road (South of Farmington Road, and North of Rte 228). Turn west toward B&J Carry Out, and meet the leader in the Barber Shop parking lot behind B&J's. No facilities or fee. Limit of 20, so reservations are required.

September 24—**Wednesday**—7:00-9:00 PM. **Board of Directors** Meeting room at the Memorial Library in Charlotte Hall, intersection of Rtes. 5 and 6, St. Mary's County. Members of SMAS are welcome to attend meetings of the Directors.

September 27—**Saturday**—8:00 AM to 2:00 PM. **Yard sale fundraising event.** 6622 Leonardtown Road in Bryantown. See article on page 3 for details. Rain date is Saturday, October 4.

CHAPTER-ONLY MEMBERS PLEASE RENEW!

If your mailing label reads 6/08, you need to renew your chapter membership. Please use the membership form in this *Osprey* and return to

SMAS
Attn: Membership
P.O. Box 181
Bryans Road, MD 20616

Thanks!

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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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