

The Osprey

May 2008 VOLUME 38, ISSUE 8



www.geocities.com/smdaudubon

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

SMAS 2008 BIRDATHON FUNDRAISER

THIS MAY 5 - 7

By George M. Jett

Sponsor a team or join one in this all-day fundraising event to tally as many species as possible in a single day. This is a friendly event to see which county team can claim bragging rights for finding the most species of birds within their county. The individual county date may change by county depending on the weather, and availability of teams. The idea is to raise money, so we are flexible with the rules (see below).

The funds raised this year will go to the SMAS youth Binocular Fund. This fund has recently provided binoculars to environmental education centers in Charles, St. Mary's, and Prince George's counties, and it needs to be replenished. All proceeds are fully tax deductible since SMAS is registered with the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

Pledges: Sign up sheets will be available at the May monthly meeting and June Annual Meeting. There you can pledge a fixed amount, or an amount per species identified by your team. Some may think it is odd to pledge after the event, but our motto is "it's never too late to donate!" You don't have to support any specific team, and you can also support the Birdathon by sending your tax deductible donations made out to "SMAS" and mailed to Will Daniel, Treasurer; SMAS, P.O. Box 181, Bryans Road, Maryland 20616. Thanks in advance for your support.

If you want to be on a team or form one, the rules are below. County contacts are:

Calvert - Tyler Bell; 301-862-4623;

jtylerbell@YAHOO.COM

Charles - George Jett; 301-843-3524,

gmjett@comcast.net

St. Mary's - Kyle Rambo; 301-757-0005;

kyle_rambo@yahoo.com

The Rules: All teams operate under the same rules. The teams can pick the day that is convenient for the team members since this is a fundraising event, and the idea is to raise money for SMAS. 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 does find a "mega-rarity" (e.g., Yellow-headed Blackbird), that team should notify the other teams. The other teams then can decide to leave their county to see the rarity, but cannot count any more species until back in their assigned county. Any rare birds reported need to be documented either in writing or with photos. Team captains decide which species are to be counted. Disputes should 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 1. Come join in the festivities at the Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust. See the SMAS website for details:

www.geocities.com/smdaudubon.

BIRD BLITZ 2008 – JOIN THE SEARCH FOR IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

By David Curson

A year ago I wrote an article in *The Osprey* about a new kind of bird count called Bird Blitz, the purpose of which was to provide the data needed to identify Important Bird Areas. Now I am happy to report that the first statewide season of IBA Bird Blitz was a great success. No less than 50 volunteers completed 46 bird counts at 11 sites across Maryland in order to determine whether each of these sites is likely to be an Important Bird Area (IBA). This impressive effort resulted in a number of new IBAs being identified. There are now 26 IBAs in Maryland-DC and in some parts of the state nearly all potential IBAs have been documented.

In Southern Maryland volunteers conducted Bird Blitzes at two sites as follows:

Zekiah Swamp, Charles County

Two volunteers (David Curson, Wendel Landes) made a single visit to this 20km-long forested wetland, which is poorly known by birders, yielding 6 Prothonotary Warbler and 2 Red-headed Woodpecker. We need further Bird Blitz surveys in 2008.

Calvert Cliffs State Park, Calvert County

Two volunteers (Leslie Starr, Sue Hamilton) made three surveys at Calvert Cliffs, yielding Worm-eating Warbler, Kentucky Warbler and Red-headed Woodpecker, and a range of forest-interior species.

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However, there is still plenty of work to do. This bird-rich and heavily forested region of the state so far has just one IBA, Chapman Forest, yet there are several promising sites that will probably qualify as IBAs when more data on breeding birds have been collected. Among the highest priority sites for Bird Blitz coverage in 2008 are:

- Mattawoman Natural Environment Area/Myrtle Grove Wildlife Management Area, Charles County.
- Zekiah Swamp, Charles County.
- Forests in SW Charles County.
- St. Mary's River State Park, St. Mary's County.

There are other potential sites, but those listed above represent the largest areas of habitat known to support at-risk species such as Red-headed Woodpecker, Kentucky Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Whip-poor-will and Chuck-will's widow. For a full listing of at-risk species used in identifying IBAs see the IBA Criteria for site selection on the Maryland-DC IBA Program website at <http://mddc.audubon.org>

The Bird Blitz method is designed to provide a minimum estimate of a species population at a site, based on a single visit. This method works because we identify Important Bird Areas by determining that the actual population of a particular species is greater than a threshold number given in the IBA criteria for site selection. The method involves walking a route through habitats where at-risk species are likely to be found, and mapping the locations of individuals of these birds on a large scale map. The way it works is this:

1. Birders select a site they know reasonably well and which they believe may qualify as an IBA.
2. They compile a list of bird species at risk from Table 2 of the IBA criteria that breed regularly at the site. These are the primary target species for the survey at this site.
3. They select a section of the site that can be covered in a morning and plan a route that covers as much as possible of the habitats where the primary target species occur.
4. They walk this route in the morning during the breeding season, tally individuals of primary target species on the Bird Blitz survey form and plot the locations of all individuals of these species on a large scale map. Also plot the route walked.

Please consider doing a Bird Blitz this summer at one of the sites listed above. The protocol is easy to follow and is unchanged from 2007. Bird Blitz instructions and survey forms, as well as IBA criteria are available at Audubon's website at <http://mddc.audubon.org>. For more information please contact Audubon MD-DC's Director of Bird Conservation, David Curson, at Audubon MD-DC, 2437 Eastern Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21224, or 410-558 2473.

A LUCKY SHOT

The Clapper Rail, *Rallus longirostis*, is a secretive denizen of salt marshes all along the Atlantic coast from Connecticut southward. Although they can be fairly abundant, we rarely see them, as birds tend to stay hidden in the marsh grasses and rarely fly. Thus Matt Tillett, a member of the Chesapeake Audubon Society, was very lucky to get this shot while canoeing at Point Lookout State Park on March 26 this year. His photo below is of one of three Clapper Rails he saw on the trip.



Clapper Rail at Point Lookout on March 26, 2008, photographed by Matt Tillett. Matt made this photo with a Canon XTi, at 1/2000 sec, f5.6, with 400 mm focal length lens. Matt says this shot is entirely fortuitous, as he was unprepared for it. (To see it in color, go to this issue at www.geocities.com/smdaudubon.)

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Jefferson Patterson Park & Museum, March 2, 2008, by Tyler Bell.

The day started out just above freezing but by the end of the trip it had warmed to the upper 40s. Still, as the temperature went up, so did the wind speed thus negating any warming benefit. But, the sun was shining and the birds were fairly productive.

We met at the parking lot near the museum and as we waited for the last couple of people to arrive, we listened to House Finches and Northern Cardinals singing. There was a Northern Flicker calling nearby and some Blue Jays and American Crows sounding off.

Once we had a quorum, we drove down to the bluff overlooking the sea water intake for the Morgan State University's Estuarine Research Center. On the intake warning marker were Herring and Great Black-backed gulls. A few Ring-billed Gulls flew overhead to round out the gull tally for the day. Usually there is a large raft of mixed scaup and other waterfowl in this area. The scaup flock, which often numbers two to three thousand, was a mere 150 and they all seemed to be Greater Scaup. I scanned the flock

and pulled out several White-winged Scoters which had been present on February 16 for the Patuxent River waterfowl survey. It was nice that they decided to stick around. It was a life bird for at least one participant, which is always nice! Scattered amongst the group were also Buffleheads, Common Goldeneyes and a bit further out in the river were Long-tailed Ducks (Oldsquaw) and Horned Grebes.

We worked the hedge row along the gravel road and found a female Eastern Towhee, many White-throated Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos, and some Song Sparrows. There were a few Eastern Bluebirds out in the corn stubble and a couple Yellow-rumped Warblers very nearby eating poison ivy berries.

Next, we drove down along the gravel road on the northern edge of the park. The larger of the two ponds there is usually very productive for dabbling ducks but there were none at all. We did flush a Wilson's Snipe, which flew away in its odd erratic flight. We picked up a few more sparrow species here including Field, Swamp and Fox (which was singing!).

On the way down to the water's edge, we flushed up a flock of birds from the edge of the road. Nobody was certain whether they were Savannah Sparrows or American Pipits and a scan of the fields produced neither. Both are usually fairly easily found here and the trip last year found a nice group of pipits. *C'est la vie*. Our consolation was a small group of Ruddy Ducks in the cove just to the north of the park. Usually there are several thousand of them in this area as counted on the waterfowl survey as well as a sizeable gathering of Tundra Swans but the rapidly approaching end of winter has already seen the departure of a number of waterfowl and they must have been among them.

Our final leg of the trip was a stomp through the woods on the Woodland Trail. As we dropped down the hill to the creek, we noticed substantial numbers of American Robins. This area is dense with hollies and the birds were gorging themselves. There were easily over a hundred. This is often a good place to look for thrushes but finding a Hermit Thrush among all of the flitting robins was a daunting task. However, several sharp eyed birders dug out a couple of Hermit Thrushes, the first being near the group of robins and the second further back along the trail near the southern edge of the park. The woodland walk turned out to be more of an exercise in fitness and not birding as the birds were scarce and the terrain steep. At the end of the trail, we found a cooperative female Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

One of the best birds seen by two participants was on the edge of the park. Most of us probably drove right under the Barred Owl that was perched near the entrance on Mackall Rd. The species tally ended up at 48. Not bad for 4 hours and considering we didn't find American Kestrel, which is regularly near the ponds, Red-tailed Hawk, or the Bald Eagles that nest just across the river at Sotterley. Hopefully a good time was had by all and we'll hope to see you back next year!

Friendship Landing Park, March 29, by George Jett.

On a cold, blustery late March day, seventeen brave souls ventured into the woods at Friendship Farm Park. This park is one of Charles County's well-kept secrets. This park has been open for several years, has good parking facilities, has a fine trail system, several good viewing platforms, and a few trail benches, but gets little promotion from the county tourism office. The park is located at the end of Friendship Landing Road, and features an excellent trail that travels along the Nanjemoy Creek and adjacent wetlands, before it turns into a lovely wooded property. The sloping mixed hardwood and evergreen forest can be very productive during all four seasons, and is recommended for a morning trip year round.

Our four-hour foray produced exactly fifty species. The highlight for me was a pair of Barred Owls flying during the daylight hours, and close views of Cedar Waxwings. Barred Owls are not often seen since they are nocturnal, but can be coaxed out in March when this species is at the height of its breeding season. The Waxwings are always a treat since they seem surreal in their masked face over a soft brown head, followed by blue-gray, yellow, tan, and white plumage over the body. This species is accented with a bold yellow terminal tail band, and blood red wing edgings.

We had a good mix of a number of the major groups of birds. The mix included nine species of waterfowl, six species of raptor, five species of woodpecker, and a good blend of forest songbirds. The waterfowl included Green-winged Teal doing courtship activities, plus a small number of Black Duck and Wood Duck. Out in Nanjemoy Creek we found a few Common Loons, and a large raft of Lesser Scaup. We also found about a dozen Common Mergansers as we turned the corner of the creek, and headed into the marsh habitat. Also on the water was a single Bonaparte's Gull.

Of the six species of raptor, Osprey was the dominant species with nests on almost every flat surface. We also found two Bald Eagle nests along the way. Both Black and Turkey Vulture were present, as well as Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks.

At the edge of the creek we had our first migrant shorebirds of the season when keen eyes and ears found a few Greater Yellowlegs doing their "tu, tu, tuuew" flight song. One of our budding youth bird camp graduates took her hand at photographing these nervous critters.

Once inside the forest the wind was less problematic, and helped us locate a few more species. Good scope views of a female Pileated Woodpecker added to the excitement as we moved further into the woods. A distant Hairy Woodpecker did its courtship drumming, and a few Red-bellied Woodpeckers called out.

Songbirds were fairly well-represented with three migrant warbler species counted. Early arriving Yellow-throated and Pine Warblers were singing on territory, as well as migrant

Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers starting to head north to breed. Eastern Phoebe and both kinglet species eventually visited with us along the way. Our only thrush was a single shy Hermit Thrush that those in the front of the string of participants got to see. This is often the case when you have a chain of birders along a trail. Those in front often see the bird. It is best to bird by ear so you don't miss any species, but that takes lots of practice, and good sound memory skills. Sparrows were poorly represented with only Song, Swamp, White-throated, and Dark-eyed Junco being counted. Our blackbird count was a lowly two species with Red-winged Blackbird and Common Grackle tallied.

Not all on a trip see every species, and some species are usually only identified by sound (drumming of a single Hairy Woodpecker), but everyone had a good time despite the less than ideal weather. We hope some will return to enjoy this poorly-publicized park. It is well worth a few hours spent walking the trail, but don't forget your binoculars.

U.S. MOVES FORWARD WITH MASSIVE WAIVER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND OTHER LAWS ON BORDER FENCE

STATEMENT OF JOHN FLICKER, PRESIDENT,
NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

New York, NY, April 1, 2008 -- "This is no April fool's joke, unfortunately it's real. The DHS decision to abandon U.S. laws to construct a border fence will jeopardize the economy, quality of life and beauty of south Texas. They are insisting that we close our eyes and minds to the risks to unique wildlife and ecosystems, as well as the communities that depend on them.

"The administration is effectively putting America on notice that it will ignore even the gravest concerns about the border wall. The DHS waiver is breathtaking in its scope. It waives nearly all legal requirements that would apply to anyone else. This decision will cost America dearly, especially when the benefits of the misguided border fence remain uncertain.

"The administration and Congress need to abandon this unprecedented and extreme course before it is too late."

More Information

Today, the Department of Homeland Security announced it was bypassing environmental and land-management laws to build hundreds of miles of border fence between the United States and Mexico.

Conservation groups have said the current design amounts to an impenetrable concrete wall that would prevent wildlife from migrating and fragment habitat. Among the 30-some laws being waived are the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.

FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED

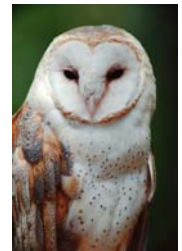


Southern Maryland Audubon Society sponsors the banding of nestling birds of prey, or raptors, with serially numbered aluminum bands in cooperation with the Bird Banding Laboratory of the U. S. Department of the Interior, as part of our bird research and conservation activities in Southern Maryland. Limited 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)

MAY EVENTS

May 3—**Saturday**—7:30 AM to noon. **Field Trip.** Southern Prince George's County. **Peak Migration along the Patuxent River.** Leader: Fed Shaffer, 410-721-1744, e-mail Glaucousgull@verizon.net. Targets will be songbirds and shorebirds at Merkle, Mt. Calvert, and Milltown Landing in various fields, forests, and ponds. Take Rte. 301 to Rte. 382 (Croom Road). Go east to St. Thomas Church Road, turn at the church and follow to Fenno Road, which leads to the entrance to Merkle. Meet at the Visitor Center. Reservations required, limit 10. Facilities, entrance fee at Merkle possible.

May 7—**Wednesday**—7:30 PM. **Monthly Meeting.** La Plata United Methodist Church, corner of Rtes. 6 and 301 in La Plata, Charles County. **Fabulous Bird Photos! Birding in Colombia: It is as easy as ABC**, by Dr. Gwenda Brewer and George Jett, Southern Maryland Audubon Society. The program will feature the natural history that our intrepid birders encountered on a three-week trip in February 2007. They traveled as part of a donors foray to a number of the natural preserves being protected and managed by ProAves, the Colombia partner with American Bird Conservancy. You won't want to miss the always spectacular photography and stories these two have to tell.

May 10—**Saturday**—All day. **Special Event, County May Counts.**

Calvert, Charles, Prince George's, and St. Mary's Counties. Help is needed from all to contribute data to the statewide May Count of the Maryland Ornithological Society. Backyard

birders, bird watchers of all experience levels, and team leaders can contribute significant data. These observations help save our birds by monitoring the health of our bird populations. To help, please contact any of the county coordinators: Calvert—To be determined; Charles—George Jett, 301-752-9240, gmjett@comcast.net; Prince George's—Fred Fallon, 301-249-1518, fwfallon@earthlink.net; St. Mary's—Bob Boxwell, 410-394-1300, bobboxwell@hotmail.com.

May 17—**Saturday**—9:00 AM to noon. **Field Trip.** Greenwell State Park and Trent Hall, St. Mary's County. **Youth Trip; Peak of Spring Migration.** Leader: Bob Boxwell, 410-394-1300, e-mail bobboxwell@hotmail.com. Explore the state park and historic Trent Hall. Greenwell could produce a nice collection of neotropical migrants. Trent Hall has produced Black-necked Stilt. Meet leader at 9:00 AM at Greenwell State park. To get there, take Sotterley Rd off Rte. 235 to Steer Horn Neck Rd., and turn right. Look for the first gate on

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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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