

The Osprey



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www.geocities.com/smdaudubon

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

BROWN-HEADED NUTHATCH IN CHARLES COUNTY

by George Jett

On August 15, Gwen and I received a cell phone call from John Hubbell. John is a fellow birding friend, and was in Charles County doing county listing hoping for Black-bellied Plover (a shorebird) as a "close out". A close out is when you have found that species in all twenty-three counties in Maryland. It is one of the listing games more birders are drifting toward as we have more time to bird or become more competitive in our pursuits. Some might say birders who list have a deeper commitment to their passion (obsession), and a close out is a kind of a merit badge, and the more close outs the larger the badge.

County listing of close outs started back in the late 70s by Sam Droege, and was soon picked up by the likes of Rick Blom, Bob Ringler, and Jim Stasz. Jim Stasz is the current leading county close out lister with 182 close out species. Jim has spent decades and virtually every weekend combing the state and all its nooks and crannies compiling this hefty list. Consequently Jim may know more about the avifauna of Maryland than any person.

County listing does have its benefits to birders and the birds in spite of its contribution to global warming by increasing the birders carbon footprint so the listing games are not all bad. Because you are out birding, listing can provide some useful natural history and educational information while playing the game. It teaches you to bird by habitat since particular species use the same kind of habitat regardless of where they are. Rails and ducks use marshes, Black & White Warblers prefer pine forests, shorebirds use wetlands, etc. It also shows the need to protect certain kinds of habitat if we want to protect the species we are searching for. Occasionally while doing these county searches one finds a rare bird. I once found a Ruff, a European shorebird, in Talbot County while looking for an Eastern Wood-Pewee as a "close out". By searching particular habitats for particular species you become a better birder, and you can help contribute to the knowledge of the ranges and distribution of our birds in Maryland. There is no way you can find all 429 species on the Maryland state list in all twenty-three counties since many of the 429 species, like Ross's Gull, only appeared once in the state. Some species like our more localized resident Carolina Chickadee do not wander over the mountain ridges into Allegheny and Garrett County. Shorebirds, gulls, and terns are also extremely rare west of the Piedmont, and likely only about 200 species could achieve that "close out" status.

There are many other games the listers play. State lead lister (currently 401), county lead lister, total ticks (the sum of all species seen in all 23 counties and D.C.), and my favorite - the number of species you have photographed in the state. I have photographed 377 species in Maryland, and 274 species in Charles County in my lifetime, both of which are number one in those categories. John Hubbell is now in the number two slot for the "close out" category, and the competition for "close outs" has grown substantially since its early beginning. One hundred used to be the mark of excellence, but now perhaps a dozen birders have reached that plateau, and the competition is growing. For all the games we listers play see the **Brag List** compiled by Norm Saunders at <http://www.mdbirds.org/birds/mdbirds/locality/lstrep2008.pdf>.

At this point you may wonder why did John call me. John had found one of my most wanted species in Charles County - a **Brown-headed Nuthatch**. There are only perhaps three records of this species in Charles County in spite of the fact that the species nests just south in St. Mary's. The species, based on Calvert and Charles County records, does not wander very far from its breeding range on the eastern shore and lower western shore of the Potomac. This species is never likely to become a "close out" candidate, but was a great find. I have for over thirty years searched for BHNU in Charles County since they have occasionally wandered across the county boundary and into Cobb Neck.

Gwen and I promptly packed up our gear and headed to Southern Park where John observed the bird. John also graciously offered to stay on the bird until we arrived. I owe John one and will be on the lookout for other "target" species John needs to increase his close out totals. A target species is one not currently on your county list. As you can see from the attached image we were successful. Thanks to John for his prompt attention to this most wanted species.



BELATED SPRING CLEANING

by Chris Ordiway

Over the course of the last year your Board of Directors has been making plans for some major spring cleaning for the local chapter. It's time to begin implementing the cleaning jobs but we need the help of the entire membership. We're working on two projects that are both very important and closely related to one another. Please read this entire article to see how you can help and why it's critical that you do.

The first task is a major overhaul of our membership database. A big job indeed. As everyone knows, lists of any kind get muddled with old and out of date information, making the list inefficient and difficult to use. Over time our membership database has grown and grown but has retained too much out of date data. The only truly effective way to clean it up is to start fresh. In an upcoming issue of *The Osprey* we will be including a small information update that we are asking every member to please, please return to us with your current contact information. We will also include an email address if you would rather send us the information by email, which we strongly encourage. We know this will be a bumpy trip to get our database up to date but it's an overdue task that can't wait any longer.

The second spring cleaning task is an exciting new option to help the chapter save some money as well as to save some trees. The *Osprey* newsletter is a wonderful way to keep in touch with the goings on of our chapter but it's expensive to print and expensive to mail to everyone, not to mention all the paper involved. An electronic version of *The Osprey* is in the works and with a little luck will become available later this year. As a part of the cut-out in the upcoming newsletter we're asking you to choose one of three options for receiving *The Osprey*. 1) Continue to get the paper copy 2) Receive an electronic copy in an email or 3) Receive an email note that the electronic version is available online. Number three is a good option for anyone with a slower internet connection (i.e. no big email) but who would prefer an electronic version.

There will no doubt be a few hiccups to deal with as we make these updates and changes but we know that with the help of the membership we'll work through them and end up with a smoother, more efficient system for the future.



MAINE TIDES

by Tyler Bell

For two weeks in late August, I was in the Bangor, Maine area for work. Over the years, we've sampled in some interesting areas like the Florida Everglades, the boreal forest of NW Ontario and the coastal shelf off the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay but this was our first trip sampling sediment along the Penobscot River. Perhaps you've heard of the Bay of Fundy which separates New Brunswick and Nova Scotia? The tidal range there is the highest in the world and due to the inverted funnel topography, when the tide comes in, it forms a tidal bore, a wall of water often 4-6 feet high. Unfortunately we didn't have such a phenomenon on the Penobscot but the tidal fluctuation is pretty incredible.

Our sampling strategy is to take sediment from the mud flat, low marsh, mid marsh and high marsh and timing is everything. If you get to a mid marsh site and the tide is ebbing and the site is under water, just wait about 30 minutes and it will have dropped at least a foot, maybe two.

The lab facility that we were using is a converted restaurant and we were lucky enough to get the old dining room which has a bank of windows facing the river. I took the following photos showing the extent of the tides. It's really amazing.



Of course, no field trip could avoid birds. One of our sites has an extensive *Spartina*/Three-square marsh. If you've ever spent time looking in vain for Nelson's Sparrow (formerly Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow), this is the place. At times I was surrounded by them. They were still singing their weak song, which has been described as putting a hot poker in water, kind of like "Kssssshh". And at one of our locations downriver at the head of the Penobscot Bay, we had several inquisitive Harbor Seals pop up near the boat to see what the goofy humans were doing. We didn't have a chance to get down to Acadia National Park but it's a location that I'd highly recommend for both birds and incredible scenery. Whale watching boats leave from Bar Harbor (Ba Haba in Maine-ease) and often cater to birders. If you want to see an Atlantic Puffin, you'll have to go out to their nesting rocks, which are fairly inaccessible. But you'll see lots and lots of them. Pack your woolies because the average water temperature in the Gulf of Maine doesn't get much above 50°F and the boats create quite a wind chill.

EGG DISCOVERY FUELS HOPE OF RARE BIRD'S RETURN TO EASTERN U.S.

Success Marks 17 Year Long Audubon Effort to Restore Penguin-like Seabird to Maine Islands

New York, NY, July 6, 2009 - For the first time in more than a century, a Common Murre egg has been discovered south of the Canadian border, boosting hope for the success of valiant efforts to restore the species. The rare egg was discovered by an intern working for Audubon's Seabird Restoration program on Matinicus Rock, one of 50 islands in Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge.

"We are absolutely elated. This is a small egg, but with a big promise," said Dr. Stephen Kress, director of the Seabird Restoration Program. "We have high hopes for the successful hatching and fledging of this egg, and for greater numbers of murrens in years to come."

The egg marks the first time since 1883 that the species, which spends most of its life at sea, has nested south of the Canadian border on the U.S. east coast. It was discovered on a rocky cliff by intern Maria Cunha, after she noticed a pair of murrens in typical incubating posture. The nest was surrounded by about 50 murre decoys, and artificial eggs, and close to a sound system that emits murre calls to encourage the long-absent birds to establish new nests.

While widespread on the Pacific coast from Alaska to California, and breeders in Canada's Maritime Provinces, Common Murrens were eliminated from their Maine breeding sites in the 1800s by people hunting the birds for food. Collecting of eggs—a popular pursuit at the time—may also have contributed to the disappearance. Common Murrens are especially vulnerable to oil spills and predation, so new colonies within their historic range offer the best assurance for their survival. .

Audubon and partners from the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge have spent 17 years trying to bring the Common Murrens back to the islands. Regardless of the fate of this specific egg, its presence signals a success story in the making.

"Each new colony offers another margin of safety for Common Murrens and other seabirds," said Kress. "The return of the Common Murre to its long-lost nesting grounds shows that conservation works – even against great odds."

Common Murrens are not the first seabird species that Kress and his team have helped restore to Maine. Pioneering the use of decoys and sounds now employed to attract the Murrens, the team began working to attract Atlantic Puffins to the Maine coastal islands in 1973; four breeding pairs

nested at Eastern Egg Rock in 1981, after an absence of nearly a century.

Today, Project Puffin protects more than 42,000 of Maine's rarest seabirds on thirteen islands. The techniques have helped establish 12 new tern colonies in Maine and are proving useful globally, helping endangered seabirds in California, the Galapagos Islands of Ecuador, and Japan. At least 40 seabird species in 12 countries have benefited from seabird restoration techniques developed by Audubon.

To learn more about the murre egg discovery, puffins and seabird conservation visit www.projectpuffin.org

RARITY ROUNDUP

A **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher**, perhaps the same individual seen at Eastern Neck NWR in May, was reported just north of Sudlersville, MD, about 22 miles east of ENNWR on August 21. It continues to be seen, sporadically, at press time.

Birders reported a **Swallow-tailed Kite** at Hughes Hollow, just off of River Road in western Montgomery County, MD on September 4 & 5. This unmistakable bird was seen hawking dragonflies in midair and eating them on the wing.

Hummingbird reminder! Please keep your feeders up at least through Thanksgiving. Mix 4 parts water with 1 part sugar. No need for red food coloring as long as the feeder has red on it, which most do. Migrant Ruby-throated Hummingbirds will continue to move south through our area hopefully being replaced by a vagrant from the west once we get into October and November. Maryland's list of hummingbird species grows incrementally and is now up to five: Ruby-throated, Anna's, Calliope, Rufous and Allen's. Contact George Jett if you have a late hummer.



Photo by Bill Hubick

WINGING IT ON THE WEB

by Lynne Wheeler

As a first year "fledgling" birder I have learned to not get frustrated and that a wealth of information is available to help us new birders. My eyes, and now ears, were really opened when I went on my first SMAS bird walk last May. I had no idea the abundance of species that was up above and down on the ground. No more just feeder watching for me!! I will never forget my first Ovenbird, learning the songs and calls of the two Tanagers, the Common Yellowthroat. Hooded Warblers, Etc... Etc... I was in total awe and excited to learn more.

I purchased the Birding by Ear and More Birding by Ear CDs by Dick Walton. I added to my bird book library, and, since I am a lover of the internet I was "Googling" up a storm. I want to share some worthwhile sites that you may not have noticed that were very helpful. Enjoy, and feel free to add your own "Winging it on the Web" sites too on the SMAS Yahoo group e-mail. If you have not signed up yet go to the SMAS website and click on the link:

www.geocities.com/smdaudubon/index.html

Here are some sites I recommend you migrate to:

eBird (online database) by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

www.ebird.org

The Birds of North America from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the American Ornithologists' Union

www.bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/

All About Birds from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

www.allaboutbirds.org

The Feather Atlas-Flight Feathers of North America by The National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory

www.lab.fws.gov/featheratlas/

Patuxent Bird Identification InfoCenter by USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center

www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov



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)

OCTOBER EVENTS

NEW!

Field Trip - For Beginners Only. Custom one-on-one (or two) trips in PG, Charles and St. Mary's Counties. If you feel that you would benefit from some individual attention to ease you up the learning curve of bird identification, we have three leaders who will help you. Contact leaders to make arrangements:

Charles - Jean Artes (301-743-2288, pojartes@aol.com).
Southern PG and Northern Charles – Chris Ordiway (301-203-8014, BirdRamble@strixvaria.org (email use preferred)).
St. Mary's – Patty Craig (eyrie@hughes.net (email only)).

September 26– **Saturday** – 8 AM – noon. **Field Trip.**
Calvert Cliffs State Park, Calvert County

"Fall Migration"

Leader: Tyler Bell (301-862-4623, jtylerbell@yahoo.com).
Neotropical migrants should be near their peak. Warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks, and other songbirds. Good trails through wooded habitat & along the creek. Take Rt. 2/4 south of Prince Frederick for about 14 miles. Follow signs to the park. Meet leader in parking lot. Facilities and fee. 3 miles round trip. RSVP required.

October 11 - Saturday - 8 AM – noon. **Field Trip.**

Caledon Natural Area, King George, VA

"Fall Migrants And Resident Birds"

Leader: Mike Callahan (301-259-2162, raptorsrule@juno.com).

King George, Caledon Natural Area, VA state park, \$3 per vehicle fee, meadow and river bottom habitat, known for Bald Eagles (at least 15 in one spot!), Red-headed Woodpeckers too. On the Potomac River. Meet at MD 301 visitor center just north of Harry Nice Bridge. Toll southbound for bridge. Contact leader for more info. RSVP required.

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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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