

The Osprey

September 2006 VOLUME 37, ISSUE 1



www.geocities.com/smdaudubon

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

SMAS CELEBRATES 35TH ANNIVERSARY

The Southern Maryland Audubon Society commemorated its 35th year at its annual meeting held June 4, 2006 at Hard Bargain Farm at the Alice Ferguson Foundation in Prince George's County. From its beginning with 75 members, it has grown to over 650 members in Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's, and southern Prince George's counties. Its mission is to promote the appreciation, conservation, and protection of birds, other wildlife, and their natural habitats through education, research, and outreach.

Several events at the meeting marked this special occasion. Rick Leader, Executive Director of Audubon Maryland-DC, presented an award to the president, Gwen Brewer, recognizing the group for its achievements over the 35 years of its existence as the first local chapter of the National Audubon Society established in the state of Maryland. Lee and Dee Duer, owners of the Wild Bird Center in Waldorf, donated \$500 for the scholarship program. The first Adopt-a-Barn Owl certificates were made available at this meeting. This inaugurated a new program to raise money to support the conservation and research of barn owls and other raptors. All the members present at the meeting received a commemorative pin incorporating the SMAS logo.

The Society announced the Conservationist of the Year Award at the annual meeting. This year's winner is Nancy McAllister, first president of the St. Mary's River Watershed Association. In that role, she has successfully devoted endless hours and energy to insuring that the Watershed Association gained non-profit status. She also guided the Association through its first fund-raising endeavors, grant proposals, Riverfest Celebration, and the first general membership meeting.



Southern Maryland Audubon Society president Gwen Brewer receives \$500 donation from Lee and Dee Duer of the Wild Bird Center in Waldorf at the Annual Meeting. (Photo by E. J. Willoughby)

SMAS ADOPT-A-BARN OWL PROGRAM

By Mike Callahan

The Raptor Conservation Committee is excited to introduce the new Adopt-a-Barn Owl Program. Like our Osprey Program, all funds raised by the project will go to raptor conservation in Southern Maryland. With the introduction of SMAS's Project R.A.P.T.O.R. these funds will go toward barn owl conservation.

Here is how the program works. Currently Barn Owl nest boxes in Charles County are monitored. When a successful nest is found, the nestlings from that box become candidates for adoption. SMAS Raptor Conservation Chairman Mike Callahan, a licensed USGS Bird Bander, puts a serially numbered aluminum band on the leg of each nestling. This identifies each bird and can help provide important longevity and migration information. When you make the donation of \$25 per bird as a "Foster Parent" you receive a fine color certificate with a photograph of a nestling owl from one of our boxes, taken by SMAS member George Jett. The certificate includes the number of the band on your "Foster Owl" and a general location. (Because of the sensitivity of nesting owls to disturbances, we do not reveal exact locations.) You may frame the certificate and show all of your friends and guests how you helped with the conservation of a rare nesting bird in Southern Maryland.

The surprise kick-off for this program occurred at the Annual Meeting on June 4, 2006. Even Barn Owls banded that morning were adopted. More than \$225 in adoption donations came in that afternoon. Adoptions will be open to our membership at the September meeting. The number of Barn Owls available for adoptions is very limited, so don't wait and miss out on helping the population increase. We expect to have successful nest boxes all over our region in coming years. Help make that happen! Adopt-a-Barn Owl now!



Mike Callahan, assisted by Melissa Boyle, applies a serially numbered band to the leg of a baby Barn Owl eligible for adoption. (Photo courtesy of Melissa Boyle)

2006 SMAS YARD SALE FUNDRAISER NEEDS DONATIONS

By the Fleamarket/Yardsale Committee

A yard sale to raise money for the education fund is scheduled for **Saturday, September 23rd from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.** at Will and Julie Daniel's house, at 6622 Leonardtown Road in Bryantown, MD. A rain date is set for Sunday, September 24th (NOT September 30 as was published in the June *Osprey*). More donations are needed to make this yard sale a success (everything except for clothes and books). If you have items to donate or would like to volunteer on September 23rd, please contact Julie Daniel at 301-274-5756 or by e-mail at juliemdanield@hotmail.com. Please help SMAS raise money for our education fund by supporting the yard sale.

Directions to the Daniel's house from St. Mary's county: Take Route 5 or Route 235 north to Charles County. Continue on Route 5 through 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.

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Greenwell State Park, May 6, and St. Mary's River State Park, May 27, by Bob Boxwell.

This is my second spring living at the Helen Creek Preserve in the middle of the woods in Lusby. Living with nature makes it so much easier to observe the seasonal changes. After a fairly mild winter there were lots of projects to keep me outside. It was fun watching the trees bud, following the zebra swallowtails, and listening for new birds as they stopped over. Between this activity and a class I was teaching there were several opportunities to do some bird watching. Song has always been my favored way of identifying the birds and it wasn't long before the list began. Louisiana Waterthrush, Pine Warbler, Northern Parula, Ovenbird, Worm-eating Warbler, and Common Yellowthroat

are the ones nesting on the Preserve. But field trips to Greenwell and St. Mary's River State Parks padded out this list considerably.

Every warbler but the waterthrush made our list and we added Prairie, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-breasted Chat, Kentucky, Hooded, Yellow, Black-and-white, and American Redstart. Gnatcatchers, both tanagers, Red-eyed, White-eyed, and Yellow-throated Vireos were also available. I am not sure if I have ever seen and heard as many Indigo Buntings as I did at Greenwell. Although a pair of Orchard Orioles did a good job competing for our attention.

Flycatchers were another group that we enjoyed welcoming to our area. Eastern Wood Pewee, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Kingbird, Great-crested and Acadian Flycatchers were all evident. With the arrival of large numbers of Brown Thrashers and Gray Catbirds, our mimic list is complete for the season. A bird I'd like to see but rarely do is the Yellow-billed Cuckoo. We heard this rapid throaty song several times without visual confirmation.

We had a nice turnout for both field trips. Good weather and a variety of birds always make for a rewarding day. And I remembered to bring a loaf of banana nut bread to share afterwards. Some traditions deserve to be continued. See you this Fall.

SMAS Birdathon, May 7 and 8, 2006, by Tyler Bell

First, I'll summarize by stating the winning team was the St. Mary's team of Patty Craig and Kyle Rambo with 128 species. Second place went to George Jett and Gwen Brewer in Charles with 118. And in third was the Calvert team of Jane Kostenko and Tyler Bell with 108.

The highlights by team go in order of first to third.

Patty and Kyle did their day (May 8) the day after Charles and Calvert. They were in heavy rain most of the day. Despite the atrocious weather conditions, they had excellent birds. One of their highlights was being showered from above by a flock of Wild Turkeys that had been roosting in a large tree and as Patty and Kyle sat quietly underneath waiting for dawn and listening for night birds. At some magical amount of daylight, the turkeys realized there were strangers below and burst from their safe hiding place, shaking the branches as they flew.

Another highlight for the St. Mary's team was finding all species of swallows except Cave Swallow. The latter is a rarity now found with some regularity in late October and early November along the east coast.

Gwen and George started late at 4:00 a.m. and finished around 9:00 p.m. They didn't do as well as hoped,

missing all three nightjars, and finding no rails or bitterns, so night birding was dismal. If it were not for Eastern Screech Owl they might as well have slept in! With the help of staked-out Barn Owls, and a Barred Owl along the way, that was it for night birds.

They found only two late migrant ducks (female Canvasback and Hooded Merganser), picked up an all-time low seven shorebird species (highlight was a Wilson's Snipe), and the six nesting woodpeckers.

George and Gwen did pretty well on songbirds with both Veery and Cape May Warbler being the highlights. They tallied eighteen warbler species along the way, including migrant Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, and Myrtle. They also had both tanagers, eight sparrows including Savannah, both grosbeaks, and all seven expected blackbirds.

The best news is they may have raised over \$1200 from our efforts, so their disappointing (to them!) but respectable 118 species made their effort worthwhile.

The Calvert team started around 4:30 a.m. but the strong winds made night birding impossible. If there were any owls, we didn't hear them. We ended up with 17 species of warblers but missing Yellow-throated, which is usually a gimme at Patterson Park, and Prothonotary, which we should have had at Calvert Cliffs State Park if the trail had not been closed.

Jane and I did get four species that the other teams did not: Chuck-will's-widow, Belted Kingfisher, Blackburnian Warbler, and our best bird of the day, Piping Plover. The plover was feeding on the point at Flag Ponds Park and was a state bird for both Jane and me as well as one of only a few records for Calvert County.

The cumulative total for all three groups is 145 species. Anybody who wishes to view the species lists may find them on the SMAS web site. The link is: <http://www.geocities.com/smdaudubon/index.html>

Birding aboard the Dee of St. Mary's skipjack, June 10, by Millie Kriemelmeyer.

The trip was held without a hitch (clove, or otherwise). Captain Jack Russell oriented the 29 spectators into the mysteries of fishing with pound nets, various watermen's crafts, and the secrets to finding birds by boat.

The scene at the Chesapeake Bay Field Lab on St. George Island immediately catches your attention. Beautiful water, converted oyster house, and many kinds of work boats, including a model the size of a jon boat. The model was built at Calvert Marine Museum for the

Field Lab to use in the environmental education program, where the parts of the boat are taught. Each year, several thousand school children learn about bay work boats, the life of watermen, and critters of the land and water.

Flat calm it was not! The wind whipped us from all sides as the Captain and his Mate piloted us out of the shelter of Island Creek and into the broad waters of St. George's Creek and the St. Mary's River. The wind provided amusing aerial acrobatics of various species, especially the ospreys. The osprey trying to feed her chicks at the mouth of Island Creek took off with the fish as we passed by. Several small heads popped up from the nest to watch mom fly off with breakfast. We did not hoist the sails because of the high wind.

We headed close to shore and found several species feeding or hunkering out of the wind. At the pound net, cormorants were drying their feathers and warming up. Other species were resting on the posts and watching the birding boat go by.

Several members of the group were not SMAS members and you can be sure I gave them applications. Many trippers wanted to know if we would have another skipjack birding trip. One family came because Grandma always wanted to sail on a skipjack. The 6-year old was initiated into steering and nautical terminology by Captain Jack. The two-hour trip ended too soon, but provided a brief and enjoyable respite.

Here are the 22 species of birds we saw:

Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Killdeer, Laughing Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Royal Tern, Forster's Tern, Eastern Kingbird, American Crow, Fish Crow, Purple Martin, Northern Mockingbird, Common Yellowthroat, Red-winged Blackbird, Orchard Oriole, House Sparrow.

Special thanks to Tyler Bell for spotting and calling birds for the group.

American Robin carrying toad in bill, July 20, by George Jett

I photographed this Robin on July 20, 2006 while atlasing in Indian Head SW. I considered this a confirmed breeder since it had food for young (FY).

Working one of the roads off of Rt. 224 around 9:00 AM, I looked up, and saw the Robin on an electrical wire with the

Continued on page 4

frog in it's mouth. I carefully reached for the camera which I keep on the front seat. Ready, aim, fire! The bird stayed long enough for this shot, then was gone. I did have the presence of mind to fill flash since the bird was back-lit. [Editor's Note: From the proportions and markings visible in an enlargement of the frame, the frog appears to be either a juvenile Fowler's Toad (*Bufo woodhousei fowleri*), or more likely, a juvenile American Toad (*B. americanus*), two very similar species common in this area, which can be distinguished upon closer inspection than is possible with this photo.]



SMAS SPONSORS JUNIOR BIRDWATCHING DAY CAMP 2006

By Mike Callahan

Charles County Public Schools Enrichment Program in cooperation with SMAS hosted the second Junior Birdwatching Day Camp for students going into grades 6-10. The camp ran from June 26 to 30 at Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center (NCEEC). SMAS director Mike Callahan and Vice President Julie Daniel staffed the camp for a week of birding with more field trips than last year. Six campers enrolled and all were return campers from last year. Owing to the low number of students, the camp would have been cancelled if the SMAS Board of Directors had not decided to support the camp with more funds than they had planned. The campers and their parents greatly appreciated the support and dedication of SMAS to the camp.

Our busy week began with a trip to the Patuxent 4-H Center in Upper Marlboro where campers quickly learned about birding in the rain and retreating to buildings during thunderstorms. Tuesday's excitement began at NCEEC where the Chesapeake Bay Adventure Camp (CBAC), also using the site, joined us for a NCEEC first. More than twenty very excited campers helped band the barn owls

nesting there for the first time. Later in the day we birded the local habitats of marsh, field, forest, and open water where we worked to improve birding skills by habitat, sight and sound.

Wednesday we visited Calvert County's Jefferson Patterson Park in the morning and Flag Ponds in the afternoon. Thursday we went to Allens Fresh for a morning of field and marsh birding. Here campers observed fledgling barn owls in the wild. In the afternoon our birding students led three groups of CBAC campers on bird hikes at Gilbert Run Park. Some groups found an active Belted Kingfisher nest and both heard and saw Barred Owls calling. On the bus back to La Plata, Julie acting as the SMAS representative, presented each of the six campers with a gift copy of Peterson's "Birding By Ear" compact disc.

Friday morning found campers banding Ospreys on Nanjemoy Creek with Bander Woody Martin of Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and Doc Carroll of NCEEC, the man who installed the nesting platforms for SMAS. Our week ended with a two team Bird-a-Thon competition. Campers put their field identification skills to use to identify as many birds as possible by sight and sound. Camp staffers were not permitted to give identification help, and could only confirm their findings. Campers discussed their hopes for the start of a youth birding club in Southern Maryland. We hope to make their dream a reality during the coming year.

Both Julie and Mike were exhausted at the end of each hot and busy day, but it was well worth it to see so much hope for the future of birding in Southern Maryland. Birding memories made and shared at the Junior Birdwatching Camp will last a life time. Look forward to meeting these youth birders at future SMAS sponsored trips. They will inspire you and recharge your birding experience and pleasure.

NAS CONGRATULATES EPA FOR BANNING DANGEROUS PESTICIDE

Washington, DC, August 3, 2006 - Following the announcement that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would not re-register the pesticide carbofuran for any purposes, Greg Butcher, Director of Bird Conservation for the National Audubon Society praised the group.

"We congratulate the Environmental Protection Agency for banning the use of the deadly pesticide carbofuran," said Butcher. "By resisting intense lobbying pressure to keep the dangerous chemical on the market, they have ensured that millions of birds will no longer need to suffer and die simply because they came into contact with farms that used carbofuran, or contaminated water and wildlife with the chemical."

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY CONDEMNS SENATE APPROVAL OF DRILLING NEAR U.S. COAST

Washington, DC, August 3, 2006 - The Senate's vote on Monday cleared the way for final approval of offshore drilling legislation there, and follows House action last month, where a broader bill was approved. It remains unclear whether the two bodies will be able to work out a compromise.

According to Mike Daulton, Director of Conservation Policy, National Audubon Society, "it's unfortunate the Senate has chosen to pass legislation opening our precious coastal areas to offshore drilling. Americans want our leaders to enact real solutions to our oil dependence, not just more favors to big oil companies.

"The oil and gas industry already has access to over 80 percent of the known reserves of oil and natural gas in our offshore areas. They have rights to more than 4,000 untapped leases in the Gulf of Mexico alone. It makes no sense to put our coasts at risk when the industry has not even tapped into the leases they already have.

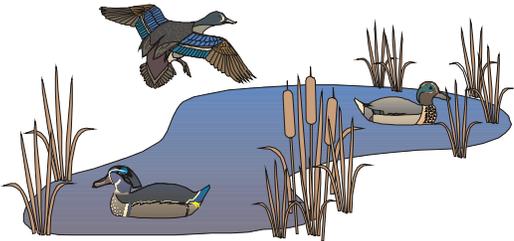
"Offshore drilling does little more than offer some false hope to consumers that it may lower gas prices. Perhaps the

gulf that exists between the House and Senate version of this bill will spur Congress to consider energy solutions that actually reduce our dependence on oil."

For more information about the bill, please visit: http://www.audubon.org/news/press_releases/OffShoreDrilling_07_31_06.html

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Linda L. Marks, Accokeek
Keith Linville, Indian Head
Nancy Rosnow, Dunkirk



NEW OR RENEWAL MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

- Please enroll me as a member of the Audubon Family and the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. I will receive the chapter newsletter, *The Osprey*, and all my dues will support environmental efforts in Southern Maryland.
- Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society at the Introductory Offer. My membership will also include membership in the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. I will receive National's *Audubon* magazine, the chapter newsletter, *The Osprey*, and support National and local environmental causes. A fraction of my dues will be returned to the local chapter.
- Please **renew** my membership in the National Audubon Society and the local chapter, the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. A fraction of my dues will be returned to the local chapter.

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Mail to: Southern Maryland Audubon Society
Attn: Membership
P.O.Box 181
Bryans Road, MD 20616

Chapter-Only Dues (new/renewal)
Make check payable to
Southern Maryland Audubon Society

- Individual/Family __1yr \$20 __2yr \$38 __3yr \$56
- Senior/Student __1yr \$15 __2yr \$28 __3yr \$42
- Optional Donation \$ _____

National Dues, Make check payable to
National Audubon Society

- Introductory Offer - 1 year \$20
- Introductory Offer – 2 year \$30
- Senior/Student \$15
- Renewal Rate \$35

SEPTEMBER EVENTS

September 2—Saturday—8:00 a.m. to noon. **Field Trip** American Chestnut Land Trust, Calvert County. **Fall songbird migration—YOUTH TRIP.** Leader: Sue Hamilton (410-586-1494, seal10n2002@yahoo.com). Old farm fields and woodland edges provide excellent habitat for fall migrants. This field trip is geared to middle school and older, but all are welcome. From Rte. 4 take Parker's Creek Road east 1/8 mile to Scientist's Cliff Road, turn right and go one mile to the ACLT parking lot on the left. No fees or reservations required.

September 6—Wednesday—7:30 p.m. **Monthly Meeting** La Plata United Methodist Church, Corner of Rte. 6 and Rte. 301, La Plata, Charles County. **R.A.P.T.O.R. Program Introduction** by Mike Callahan, Southern Maryland Audubon Society. Mike Callahan, the chairman of our Raptor Conservation Committee, will introduce Project RAPTOR (for Reestablishing Avian Predators To Our Region). The project is designed to help declining populations of cavity-nesting raptors and to encourage participation by our members and the community at large. Target species enrolled in the project are American Kestrel and Barn owl. Volunteers will build, install, and monitor nesting boxes in appropriate habitats. Learn how you can help raptor conservation in Southern Maryland. Everyone age 7 to 107 can participate! Live captives of American Kestrel and Barn Owl are expected to attend the meeting.

September 16—Saturday—8:00 a.m. to noon. **Field Trip** Chapman State Park, Charles County. **Return of fall migration.** Leaders: Carol Ghebelian and Gwen Brewer. Contact Carol at 301-753-6754, ghebelian@comcast.net. Fields, woods, and marsh on the Potomac River can provide excellent fall neotropical migrant songbirds and early fall arrivals. From Rte. 210 between Bryans Road and Indan Head take Chapman's Landing Road to the park and the Mount Aventine gate. Facilities and no fee.

September 23—Saturday—8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. **Yard Sale Fundraiser** at 6622 Leonardtown Road in Bryantown, Charles County. See the article on page 2 for details. Donations needed.

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.

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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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