The Southern Maryland Audubon Society has officially launched its Plants For Birds program, a campaign designed by National Audubon to help inform and encourage individuals and communities to grow native plants that benefit wildlife. By adding native plants in one’s yard, balcony, container garden, or public space, individuals can not only attract more birds but give them the best chance of survival in a modern landscape of fragmented habitat, and in the face of climate change.

The importance of native plants, with the removal of invasive species, is vital. Without these plants, necessary species of insects are lost or not sufficiently available. When absent other species that require that insect as a food source suffer i.e. birds.

Gardens are outdoor sanctuaries that, with some careful plant choices, can be a vital recharge station for birds passing through. Birds depend on native plants for food, shelter, and places to nest. Most landscaping plants available in nurseries are exotic species from other countries. Many are prized for qualities that make them poor food sources for native birds—like having leaves that are unpalatable to insects and caterpillars that feed on them. With 96 percent of all terrestrial bird species in North America feeding insects to their young, planting insect-proof exotic plants means a scarcity of food.

Native plants are hosts to many insects that are specialists rather than generalists to the plant they can feed on. Have you noticed the Zebra Swallowtail, the butterfly with the black and white stripes? Without our local Pawpaw tree, they would not survive. It is the only tree species the caterpillar stage can feed on.

Through Audubon’s public online native plant database (www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds) anyone nationwide can access a list of available plants that benefit specific bird species on a local scale. By entering one’s zip code, the database provides a list of native plants custom to the user’s region, with information about the local bird species those plants can support. The site also lists native plant nurseries and retailers for anyone seeking more knowledge and where to obtain the right plants.

Landscaping for wildlife is one of the most individually empowering conservation tools. Not only do native plants benefit birds, butterflies and other wildlife, they generally require less chemicals and water to thrive, reducing maintenance time and costs and environmental hazards such as chemical runoff into waterways.

Where birds thrive, people prosper. Every plant helps. Together, bird lovers across the country can rebuild a natural and sustainable landscape through the beauty of plants. Please come and learn more May 3 in Port Tobacco at our Monthly Meeting Program. For details visit our website at www.somdaudubon.org.

Plant Natives – They are Spreading like Wildflowers!

Lynne Wheeler, President
I was acquainted with Chan Robbins, but not a close friend. I had been on field trips with him, met and spoke with him at major ornithological annual meetings. In the 1970s and early 1980s he participated annually in our Point Lookout Christmas Bird Count, and attended tally rallies at our house.

It is true what they say about him, that he did not seek out attention or accolades for his scientific work and birding exploits. He acted like a modest, regular bird-watching enthusiast. He turned his love of birds into important scientific studies, such as the long-running Breeding Bird Survey that provides data on bird population trends over the decades.

For a long time, his Golden Guide to Birds of North America, first published in the mid-1960s, was to me the best pocket field guide to North American birds available for two decades, supplanting my trusty Peterson Field Guides to The Birds East, and West. It had good illustrations, but more than that, it had range maps, which Peterson did not have then, and it included a sonogram of the song or voice of the species, which was very handy if you know how to read that kind of graphical representation of sound.

The last time I was on a field trip with him was May, 2013, at the MOS conference held at the Holiday Inn in Solomons. The trip was at The Elms Environmental Education Center in St. Mary's County. He was in a wheel chair, pushed by his daughter, but he was there, and enjoying the birds!

Loss Of A Legend: Chan Robbins

On March 20, the ornithological world lost a legend. The outpouring from the internet has been extensive. Below are a few links to various obituaries and blog posts.

Chandler Robbins, friend to birds and birdwatchers, dies at 98
By Emily Langer
Enthusiasts revered his classic guide, “Birds of North America,” as the bible of their hobby.
http://tinyurl.com/Chan-Robbins-Washington-Post

In Memory of Chandler S. Robbins
An avid naturalist, enthusiastic birder, and citizen-science innovator, ‘Chan’ Robbins (1918–2017) was a conservation titan.

Chandler Seymour Robbins, 1918–2017
By Ted Floyd, on March 21, 2017

Renowned FWS Ornithologist Chandler Robbins Dies
http://tinyurl.com/Chan-Robbins-FWS

Ornithologist Chandler Robbins has lifelong passion for things with wings
http://tinyurl.com/Chan-Robbins-Balt-Sun

My North Star: Chandler Robbins (1918–2017)
http://blog.lauraerickson.com/2017/03/chandler-robbins-19182017.html
GO BIRDING WITH A PURPOSE IN SOUTHERN MARYLAND’S IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS
By David Curson and Marion Clement

Between 2007 and 2012, more than 100 volunteer birders, including several SMAS members, rallied to the cause of identifying Important Bird Areas (IBAs), by conducting “Bird Blitz” surveys at candidate sites across Maryland. Now it is time to rally again, and go birding with a purpose. Audubon Maryland-DC and the recently established Maryland Bird Conservation Partnership (MBCP) are joining forces in 2017 to expand the monitoring of bird populations at IBAs. Last year we piloted the monitoring program with bird surveys at Chapman State Park and the Myrtle Grove WMA, including the newly acquired Pomfret Tract. Seven SMAS members generously gave their time to conduct these surveys and were rewarded with counts of forest-interior specialties such as Hooded and Kentucky Warblers!

Monitoring birds at IBAs can help bird conservation in two main ways. First, data on the numbers and locations of at-risk species can help site managers more effectively cater to the habitat needs of those species. And when monitoring is repeated over time, revealing local population trends, managers can be alerted to issues with declining populations while there is still time to act. Second, counts of birds at IBAs can build a case for protecting an area from threats like poorly-planned development. It is not just the bird data per se that lead to land protection – the fact that local citizens care enough about birds and their habitats to go out and monitor bird populations sends a powerful message to community leaders when land use decisions are being made.

In 2017, we will continue monitoring at Chapman State Park and Myrtle Grove and will add other Southern Maryland sites at Mattawoman Creek IBA, Parker’s Creek IBA and Jug Bay IBA. At Parker’s Creek, which is known for its healthy forest-interior bird populations and understory vegetation, Audubon and MCBP are partnering with the American Chestnut Land Trust (who owns and manages much of the site). ACLT’s land manager, Autumn Phillips-Lewis, will be coordinating volunteers and assigning survey routes.

We need your help to help the birds at Southern Maryland’s IBAs! Monitoring is focused on the breeding birds and involves:

1) Walking a designated survey route during the morning, before 9:30 a.m., and completing ten point counts. These are counts of all birds heard or seen from a fixed point.

2) Identifying and counting all individuals of all bird species seen or heard at designated survey points for five minutes.

3) Recording the data on a provided datasheet for later submission online.

Audubon and MBCP will provide volunteer training in May and assign survey routes based on volunteer preferences and availability. Most survey routes will be laid out along well-worn trails, but for the more adventurous, some routes go off-trail and will require navigation with a hand-held GPS.

We need your help! Your birding expertise will be tremendously helpful in providing the ornithological data necessary to plan appropriate conservation measures for Important Bird Areas in Maryland. It is a small time commitment with a big conservation impact!

Looking to get involved? Please sign up to volunteer at MCBP’s IBA registration page: https://marylandbirds.org/register-iba-monitoring
Here you can select which counties or specific IBAs you would like to help, and indicate your experience level with identifying birds. Beginner birders can help too, by accompanying a more experienced observer!

See you in the field!
David Curson
Director of Bird Conservation
Audubon Maryland-DC
dcurson@audubon.org
410-558-2473

Marion Clement
Director, Maryland Bird Conservation Partnership
director@marylandbirds.org
Tel: 410-573-4560

For more information on Maryland’s Important Bird Areas, visit http://md.audubon.org/conservation/important-bird-areas
Owl Prowl Etiquette
by Bob Boxwell

I can’t recall the first owl prowl I ran but I know it was at Myrtle Point Park. Maybe it was 2008 or maybe 2009. It drew a few people to begin but has expanded exponentially since then. Maybe it’s a phenomenon of the immensely popular Harry Potter series. Personally being a fan of the History Channel’s Vikings I like the owl on Lagertha’s shoulder. Regardless, owls are cool and mysterious and fun to find. Our last owl prowl at Myrtle Point Park on December 2, 2016 drew sixty people! Even more amazing we actually got Eastern Screech-Owls to respond.

Owls are nocturnal creatures and humans are not. Our night vision is limited and we aren’t usually comfortable with the dark. So to find an owl we need to overcome both of these obstacles. Using recorded calls is a good way to attract birds as this is how they defend territories. Their response to a call is their way of communicating with the other “bird”. Conditions need to be good to be successful. High wind or other noise is a sure formula for failure. Rain is a no go as well. And owls are usually heard not seen. Only a couple of times have I had one show itself.

Usually I start with the smallest owls and work my way up. So here the Eastern Screech-Owl is first on the list. If I don’t get them I go on and try the Barred Owl and finally Great Horned Owl. If I get the first I won’t generally try for Great Horned Owl unless I’ve gone a long way away from where the Screech-Owl answered. Why? Great Horned Owls will eat anything (skunks for instance) and a Screech-Owl would not be spared. I’m pretty sure they’d attack a Barred Owl given the chance.

Now to the other part of the equation which is the people who attend the owl prowl. It’s really hard for people to be quiet. My last experience with the large number of Cub Scouts was amazing in that they were as quiet as a large group can be. And that’s why we were successful. On other trips I’ve had kids in snowsuits swish, swish, swish with every step. It’s annoying and it’s not conducive to success. Lights are another issue. We like to be able to see where we are going but hard as it may be to believe, we actually can see at night. It is not that dark around here. There is ambient light from manmade sources everywhere. Not to mention the stars and moon. If you think it is pitch dark around here, try a cave sometime. Night vision takes a while to kick in but give it ten to twenty minutes and you can see well enough to get around. A flashlight in your eyes will ruin that. If you have to have a flashlight use a red filter and/or keep it pointed at the ground. Owl prowl is not conducted in the woods, we stick to paths, trails, or a road. We aren’t in a hurry, we walk slowly, and we stop a lot.

Southern Maryland Audubon holds quite a few field trips every year. They require the planning and coordination of several people, all of whom are volunteers. Please read the information concerning any field trip. Sometimes there is limited space. Frequently the leader needs to know how many people will be joining them. There is always a designated meeting place and time. People who know me know I’m not the most patient person in the world. I hate it when people show up late at a meeting and expect to be brought up to speed. Waiting for people should not be part of the field trip experience. We call it burning daylight if it happens on a count day. For a night trip that’s not an issue but catching up with people in the dark is hard especially when you are trying to be quiet.

So please by all means join us on our field trips. We have these to encourage people to enjoy the birds and find out what a fun group we are. But please read the information and arrive early. We don’t want to keep the birds waiting.

May Count, Saturday, May 13

The second Saturday of May is the all-day statewide bird count. It is timed to be during the peak of spring migration and the goal is to get a snapshot of birds as they head north to breeding grounds. SMAS has several county coordinators who will gladly accept help in any form. This can be as simple as watching your feeders during the day, or better yet, helping accompanying people out counting birds in the field. No experience is necessary if you are willing to act as a scribe. It is often difficult to keep track of birds particularly while driving! If you are a beginning birder, you will be immersed in field identification during the process. No better way to learn birds than to tag along with someone who can help you with the ID firsthand.

Marilyn Veek, with the Maryland Ornithological Society, is the new statewide compiler. She notes that "the May count data are published in the spring issue of Maryland Birdlife. This publication is distributed to MOS members, but also a number of libraries subscribe to it, so the data are more widely available for researchers to use.

“The Maryland Bird Conservation Partnership is in the process of identifying what information/data are useful to bird conservation in Maryland, and the May (and other) Count data will be considered by them as part of their effort to determine how to respond to all the threats to wild birds. Their website is www.marylandbirds.org “.

If you’d like to help, please refer to the Upcoming Events section at the end of the newsletter for contact information in your county!
Tip Of The Month: Feeder Transitioning

It used to be that backyard bird feeding was mostly a winter experience, especially for those backyard feeding stations in the northern half of the Lower-48 states, and for those in much of Canada. One common standard for winter bird feeding was the mantra of starting at Thanksgiving and ending at Easter.

That no longer applies. Just because we may be approaching Easter, don’t take down your feeding station. It may simply be time to start transitioning. Our tip this month is that preparation for year-round feeding should be the standard for any family station or nature-center experience.

Depending on your latitude and weather, now may be the time to start shifting the fare at your feeding station. As winter visitors drop off, getting ready for migrant birds and, soon, summer residents will be in order. As seasons change, so should the selection of foods and feeders.

The bird-feeding industry has created appropriate items like no-melt suet and special seed mixes to serve this growing, four-seasons trend. And there is the easy use of fruit pieces (e.g., apples, oranges, and grapes), jellies, and the dusting off of oriole- and hummer-feeders, replete with the correct sugar-mix.

Think backyard transition. A caveat to this advice is to recall that in some regions, bird feeders readily attract other wildlife species - even bears! - and that drawing such predators into heavily human-occupied environments can potentially pose a threat to both pets and humans. We suggest you check with local wildlife agencies for advice on this subject because in some areas it represents an increasing problem.

You can access all the past E-bulletins on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website: http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/

Paul J. Baicich
410-992-9736
paul.baicich@verizon.net

Southern Maryland Audubon Society
ADOPT-A-RAPTOR
Foster Parents Needed!!

The Southern Maryland Audubon Society supports raptor conservation and research projects in the Southern Maryland area through the "Adopt-A-Raptor" Program. The program currently includes four species: Osprey, Barn Owl, American Kestrel and Northern Saw-whet Owl. Each bird is banded by a licensed bird bander with a serially numbered metal band, in cooperation with the U.S. Bird Banding Laboratory. A limited number of birds are available for adoption each year!

"Adopt-A-Nest” now available for Osprey, Barn Owl & Kestrels!

Adoptive “parents” will receive:
A certificate of adoption with the bird’s band number, and location and date of banding.
Information on the ecology and migration patterns of the species
Any other pertinent information that may become available

Your support helps provide:
• Barn Owl Nest Boxes
• Osprey Nesting Platforms
• Kestrel Nest Boxes
• Mist Nets or Banding Supplies
Complete the form below to “Adopt-A-Raptor” with the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

Mail completed form to: Carole Schnitzler, Adopt-a-Raptor, 3595 Silk Tree Court, Waldorf, MD 20602

Name:_______________________________________
Address:_____________________________________
____________________________________________
I wish to adopt:
_______(# of) Osprey, $10 each / $25 per nest
_______(# of) Barn Owl, $25 each / $50 per nest
_______(# of) Northern Saw-whet Owl, $30 each
_______(# of) American Kestrel, $35 each / $75 per nest
Amount Enclosed:______________________
as it should appear on Adoption Certificate
Make checks payable to: Southern Maryland Audubon Society
2017 Field Trips and Programs

April 22 – SATURDAY – 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
EARTH DAY SPECIAL EVENT – Charles County
Mallows Bay Park, Charles County
1440 Wilson Landing Road, Nanjemoy, MD 20662
“Walk and Learn about the Birds of Mallow’s Bay”
Please join us for bird walks and an informative display about birds and the Southern Maryland Audubon Society at “Discover Quest: A World War I Commemoration” hosted by Charles County Department of Recreation, Parks & Tourism at Mallows Bay Park. See the county website at www.charlescountymd.gov for full information regarding the event. This is a great place to celebrate Earth Day!! Walks scheduled for 10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Inquiries to Lynne Wheeler, 301-751-8097 or somaudubon@yahoo.com.

April 29 – SATURDAY – 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
FIELD TRIP
Indian Head area, Charles County
“CHAPMAN STATE PARK AND INDIAN HEAD RAIL TRAIL”
Mount Aventine at Chapman State Park
3452 Ferry Place, Indian Head, MD 20640
Leader: Lynne Wheeler
The Indian Head Rail Trail is one of the best locations for Red-headed Woodpeckers in the state. We will also bird one of Audubon’s Important Bird Areas, Chapman State Park, home to many of Maryland’s coastal plain rare natural heritage resources. Come and see the Red-heads on the trail and help us find migrants and spring ephemerals at the park. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the entrance to Mount Aventine-Chapman State Park, Indian Head, Indian Head, MD. This is a joint trip with the Audubon Naturalist Society. RSVP to Lynne at 301-751-8097 or comstockel@aol.com

April 29 – SATURDAY – 9:00 a.m. – 12 Noon
FIELD TRIP
Elms Environmental Education Center, St. Mary’s Co 49300 St. James Road, Dameron, MD 20628
“BIRDING 101”
Leader(s): Dean Newman and Margarita Rochow
Calling on all wannabe birders!! Youths Welcome!! Are you tired of wondering and saying “What bird is that?” Do you want to get better at knowing what birds you are seeing? Birding 101 is the field trip for you! The more you walk the walk, the better you become! The Elms Environmental Education Center offers great habitat for birds. Dean and Margarita will share helpful identification pointers such as: bird bill and facial markings, plumage details, field marks, flight patterns, sound, behavior, and habitat and seasonal expectation. Learn about birding apps too. The address is 49300 St. James Road, Dameron, MD 20628. Take Rt 235 south, left onto St. James Church Road (opposite Mattapan Road). You will see the sign for the Elms Environmental Education Center. Meet in the hunter’s dirt parking lot on the right before the gate. Call or email Dean to register: dean.newman@dau.mil or 301-672-5464.

May 3 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m. 9:00 p.m.
MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM
Historic Port Tobacco Courthouse, Charles County, MD
8430 Commerce Street, Port Tobacco, MD 20677
“BIRD-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES”
SMAS Bird-Friendly Communities Committee
The human-dominated landscape no longer supports functioning ecosystems or provides healthy places for birds. Our rural landscape is also under threat by loss of forests and farms to development and modern farming practices. Where birds thrive, people prosper. Creating Bird-Friendly Communities is Audubon’s commitment to the sustainability of our urban, suburban, and rural places. We can restore and reconnect these places. We can reestablish the ecological functions of our cities and towns. We can provide essential, safe habitat for birds. Come and learn about the importance of landscaping with native plants, avian architecture for raptors and Osprey, and other threats that exist and how we can help. Light refreshments and mingling starts at 7 p.m. Public invited. Inquiries to Lynne Wheeler, 301-751-8097 or somaudubon@yahoo.com

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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

☐ Please enroll me as a member of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. All of my membership dollars will help support local conservation initiatives and enable us to provide southern Maryland teacher education scholarships to attend Hog Island, Audubon Camp in Maine.

☐ Individual/Family:  __1year $20  __2year $35  __3year $45
☐ Lifetime Membership: __$500
☐ Donation: ____________

☐ Please enroll me as a first time member of the National Audubon Society. You will automatically become a member of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. You will receive six issues of National’s award winning Audubon Magazine. A fraction of my dues will be received to our chapter.

☐ Introductory Offer: __1 year $20

Name: ____________________________
Address: __________________________
City: _______ State: _______ Zip: _______

☐ Please enroll me for electronic delivery of our monthly newsletter The Osprey: ___ Email me a link to download the pdf, ___ Email me a notice it is available on the website. My email address is: ____________________________

☐ No thank you, please mail me a paper copy.

Please make your check payable to Southern Maryland Audubon Society or National Audubon Society.

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

GREAT NEWS!! You can now go online and join SMAS via PayPal. Go to our website at somaudubon.org for this new option.
May 7 – SUNDAY – 8 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
FIELD TRIP
Sotterley Plantation, St. Mary’s County
44300 Sotterley Plantation, Hollywood, MD 20636
“EAGLES, SPRING MIGRATION AND SOTTERLEY”
Leader(s): David Moulton and Michael Patterson
Celebrate the surge of migrating birds through St. Mary’s County at this scenic and historic Patuxent River property. May is “Moving Month” for birds as they return from their wintering grounds, some to nest here and some to refuel on their journey further north. Nesting Bald Eagles, migrating warblers, meadowlarks, woodpeckers and waterfowl can all be found via Sotterley’s extensive new trail system. From Rt. 235, go north on Sotterley Road, turn right through the gates to the gravel parking lot on the Sotterley historic property. RSVP at 240-278-4473 or moulton.davidh@gmail.com

May 13 – SATURDAY – ALL DAY
COUNTY MAY COUNTS
Calver, Charles, Prince George’s, St. Mary’s Counties
Help is always needed and appreciated from all. This is a great way to learn and improve your bird identification skills! The county coordinators for you to contact are as follows:
CALVERT: Sherman Suter (410-586-1073, sjsuter29@verizon.net)
CHARLES: Lynne Wheeler (301-751-8097, somdaudubon@yahoo.com)
PRINCE GEORGE’S: Fred Fallon (410-286-8152, fwfallon@gmail.com)
ST. MARY’S: Tyler Bell (301-862-4623, jtylerbell@yahoo.com)

Barn Owls & Breakfast, Charles County
Youths especially welcome!
Mid-May to early June. The exact date to be determined, it all depends on the owls! Watch our Osprey newsletter and website for date and details.
Leader: Mike Callahan (240-765-5192, raptorsrulemc@gmail.com)
A different kind of B&B! Come and enjoy breakfast before helping our Raptor Conservation Committee chair Mike check a Barn Owl nest box, and hopefully band nesting owls. This trip takes place on private property in southern Charles County. The location and directions will be given when you contact Mike to register and reserve your spot. This event fills up rapidly. There is a small fee involved to cover the cost of food. Please bring your own reusable plate, mug, and utensils.

June 4 – SUNDAY – 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
ANNUAL MEETING
Mount Aventine at Chapman State Park, Charles County
3452 Ferry Place, Indian Head, MD 20640
Potluck Lunch ............................................. 1:00 – 2:15
Welcome .................................................. 2:15 – 2:30
Award Presentations and Elections .............. 2:30 – 3:00
Bird Walk .................................................. 3:00 – 4:00

Bring your family, friends, and a favorite dish and join us at this beautiful setting overlooking the Potomac River. Chapman State Park is part of a 2254 acre site purchased in 1998 by the state of Maryland to save this treasure from development. Come and enjoy the miles of trails winding through woods and along marsh trails. This Important Bird Area offers fabulous flora and fauna. The 1840 Mount Aventine manor house will also be open, the other big treasure at this location.