President’s Perch

Autumn - Life is Silently on the Move

With warm summer days behind us, plant life now shows us its glorious colored leaves and pods. Now is a great time to collect seeds from native plants. Save seeds for the birds too! Use clean and sharp garden scissors to cut the pods or seed heads from your best performing plants (It is important to use only paper bags, as seeds can spoil in plastic). Spread seeds out on a screen or a piece of newspaper and dry them at room temperature for a week. Store seeds in a cool, dry, and dark spot for the winter. A temperature around 40°F. (5°C.) is best. Do not crush or damage seeds or allow them to freeze or overheat while in storage. I will miss fall-flowering natives. I get misty-eyed thinking about another year before I see again Blue Mist Flower, Boneset, Snakeroot, New York Ironweed, Goldenrod and the myriad of Asters. Until we meet again…sigh.

Remember we think differently now about preparing your garden area for the winter. Here are five reasons NOT to clean up your garden this fall:

1. Native Bees. – Bees need hollow stems such as those in bee balm and grasses.
2. Butterflies. – Leaf litter, bark, and soil are wintering spots for many of our butterflies.
3. Ladybugs. – They winter under leaves, base of trees, and crevices of rocks. More ladybugs, less pests!
4. Birds. – Do not top off your native plants; let the birds feast on their seeds and berries. Leaving your garden “messy” preserves more insects to help sustain birds over the winter. Also consider providing tree limbs and stick piles for winter habitat.
5. Predatory Insects. - Assassin bugs, lacewings, big-eyed bugs, minute pirate bugs, damsel bugs, ground beetles, and scores of other pest-munching predatory insects spend the winter “sleeping” in your garden as adults, eggs, or pupae. Good insects eat bad insects!

Nature lovers also notice the Monarch butterfly is on the move. As days grow shorter, this regal flyer graces many of our southern Maryland locales. Hopefully you checked out Monarch Mania October 7 in Cobb Island and can officially call yourself a Monarch maniac!

As we partake in the beauty of fall, our binoculars are trained on fall migrants. Neotropical migrants have mainly left us, and temperate ones are moving in. Hopefully you will spot raptors on their annual migration. Check out Andy Brown’s upcoming trip October 28 and 29 Raptor Migration Watch and Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding at carettanaturetours.com. Waterfowl find great wintering grounds in our neck of the woods. Check out our October 22 field trip at Newtowne Neck State Park which offers a wide variety of birding habitats as you walk through fields and forests to the bay. If you are in a thoroughly fowl mood, don’t miss the November 19 field trip to the Mattawoman Creek. We usually get a large concentration of waterfowl on this trip, and it is filling up fast! It is a beautiful one-mile walk through the Mattawoman Wildlands on the George Wilmot Trail.

Continued on page 2
Our other fall events are very “Halloweeny”. A great family trip is “Boo! The Ghosts of Mallows Bay!” on October 28 from 12 noon to 3 pm. We then fly so silently right into our November 1 Monthly Meeting “Happy Owl-O-Ween”. Our Raptor Conservation committee chair, Mike Callahan, along with his Adopt-a-Raptor chair, Carole Schnitzler, will present a show featuring multiple owl species. For details, see our schedule of events at the end of the newsletter.

I hope everyone enjoys this time of migration and change. Happy October eves!

Lynne Wheeler, President

“The milkweed pods are breaking,  
And the bits of silken down  
Float off upon the autumn breeze  
Across the meadows brown.”
- Cecil Cavendish, The Milkweed

Cove Point Field Trip
by Bob Boxwell

We had a bright and somewhat breezy morning for our Sunday field trip to Cove Point. The highlights were without a doubt the numerous opportunities to take some great pictures of shorebirds and eagles. Three of our group had some huge cameras and from their results, they knew how to use them. The birds seemed to understand that and one Bald Eagle in particular presented itself overhead close enough that even I could have gotten a good picture.

The target sparrow species may have been hiding in the grasses. Twice we had birds pop up and quickly disappear back into the vegetation. I went into the marsh and tried to encourage the bird to reappear but my bird dogging was for naught. On the second appearance several of us moved in where we thought it had vanished, but again no luck.

The wind made it a bit difficult to hear any calls and may have contributed to the small number of species as well. Unfortunately one of the species that did show up was a trio of Mute Swans. Besides a lone Pied-billed Grebe and a small flock of Canada Geese the marsh was fairly quiet. We did have a Great Blue Heron and Great Egret as well. And a lone male Belted Kingfisher was patrolling the beach and marsh on a pretty regular basis.

The Bay was choppy but a school of bait fish attracted a mixed flock of gulls and terns. Double-crested Cormorants and Brown Pelicans were also out on the LNG platform.

The area we visited is a restricted area and it does not get birded on a regular basis. Calvert County does not have a large amount of true beach area and this is one of the better ones for birding because it combines a fresh water marsh and an emerging salt marsh to go along with the beach habitat.

The walk is along a sandy beach and into an area of revegetation that was part of the Living Shoreline project from several years ago. In addition to the native grasses that were planted, Marsh Goldenrod and Groundsel (in bloom) have invaded the area.

A word to the wise for future trip participants is to be aware that this trip includes some walking through tall grasses and includes some cockleburs. Sturdy shoes, long pants, and sun protection are all part of the preparation.

This trip is usually planned once a year in October to try and find the elusive salt marsh sparrows (Seaside, Nelson’s, and Saltmarsh Sparrows). It is, however, also a good spot for waterfowl later in the year. Christmas Bird Counts are coming up and I always make sure to include this area regardless of how large the rest of my assignment is.

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Melva Abell, California  
Edward Dorsey, Owings  
Patricia Hall, Dunkirk  
Grace Jarboe, Dunkirk  
Karen Kleye, La Plata  
Kathryn Koch, Waldorf  
Harold P, Clinton  
Gladys L Stuart, Waldorf  
Duchess A Swift, La Plata  
Verioska Torres, Mechanicsville
Field Trip Report - Sotterley Plantation  
David Moulton, leader

Our SMAS field trip to Sotterley Plantation on September 23 yielded a nice variety of grassland and open farmland species. Walking the fenceline to the right of the entrance drive, we flushed numerous Eastern Meadowlarks and Savannah Sparrows, along with a Killdeer. A young Bald Eagle guarded the Patuxent River shore, and a Blue Grosbeak and Brown Thrashers made appearances. Although neotropical migrants were scarce on this warm sunny Saturday morning, our group uncovered 35 species as we strolled the woods and gardens of this lovely historic property.

WHEN DOES MY MEMBERSHIP EXPIRE?

Do you wonder what the membership expiration date is regarding your National Audubon Society membership, or your local SMAS chapter membership? Send us an email to:

somdaudubon@yahoo.com

Include your full name and mailing address. We will gladly look it up for you.

If you know your NAS membership expired over six months ago and you want to renew please mail your check to us. SMAS will get 100% of your first year membership dollars if we submit the check for you.

Pt. Lookout State Park, September 16  
by Tyler Bell

I look forward to leading this each year. Pt. Lookout State Park is one of the birding Meccas of Maryland and you never know what you’ll see. Sometimes it’s awesome, other times dead. This trip was in between but we had some great looks at several charismatic species.

I arrived a little early to wait in the parking lot by the toll booth. My usual attire is shorts and a t-shirt. Big mistake. The mosquitoes were voracious. As I walked around, I ran into a ranger who, thankfully, had some bug spray. Also thankfully, the bugs weren’t really bad anywhere else in the park.

Our group consisted of Bev and Warren Walker, veterans of my trips despite my attempts to bake or freeze them, and Jamie Drake, outdoors columnist for Southern Maryland Newspapers, and her family. Once we achieved a quorum, we drove slowly toward the picnic area. A Great Blue Heron and a Belted Kingfisher put on a good show along the causeway as did a squadron of Brown Pelicans as we were about to turn into the parking lot at the picnic area. Brown-headed Nuthatches danced around Loblolly Pine trunks in the parking lot.

Between the picnic area and the point, we ran into a group of Palm Warblers. I don’t usually see more than one or two a year in St. Mary’s but we had six of them including both subspecies. This is a potential species split as the migration timing of the two groups is usually quite different. At the pond near the point, there were three Great Egrets and a white phase Little Blue Heron. It was at this point that I realized I had removed the quick release plate from my scope so it was useless. In the bushes at the point, Monarchs and Cloudless Sulfurs were flitting around with some skippers.

Next destination was the brambles between the picnic area and the fort. This is often an excellent place for migrants. Except for this day. Then, on to the beach on the Potomac side to look for gulls and terns which were almost completely absent! There were a few Forster’s Terns and a bunch of Laughing Gulls, Ring-billed Gulls, Herring Gulls and Black-backed Gulls. The pilings of the fishing weir were covered with Double-crested Cormorants and Brown Pelicans but the gulls and terns disappointed. This is where we usually score a Sandwich Tern among the Forster’s, Common and Royal Terns.

On the way back through the brambles, we finally found a nice cluster of American Redstarts. First, it was one bird drinking at a puddle then there were five birds foraging almost directly overhead. Binoculars were not needed to see the orange or yellow outer tail feathers that are so diagnostic for this species.

In total, we had 45 species. Not great but a respectable tally! What will next year bring?
Drone Designers Accidentally Explain Color Of Albatross Wings

It’s not every day that an aerospace engineer raises new questions about bird flight. But Abdessattar Abdelkefi and his team at New Mexico State University did just that while trying to devise better drones.

Many large soaring birds like the albatross have wings that are white underneath and black on top. Previous explanations focused on camouflage, says Graham Martin at the University of Birmingham, UK. But does that coloring really boost endurance in flight? Most soaring needs no flapping of wings; instead, the bird exploits air currents to glide.

Abdelkefi’s team discovered that a wing’s black upper surface absorbs sunlight very efficiently, causing it to be around 10°C warmer than the lower surface. That effectively lowers air pressure on the upper surface, lowering drag and generating extra lift (Journal of Thermal Biology, doi.org/f96ggw).

Svana Rogalla at the University of Ghent, Belgium, says thermography has proved that the dark upper wing gets hotter in sunlight, but it is too early to pin down its effect on drag. The impact of color on flight could be a further inducement for birds to make costly melanin pigment to darken feathers, she says.

The team hopes the findings will help them design more efficient and durable drones for use at sea.

https://www.newscientist.com/

World’s Rarest Songbird Is So Rare Because It’s Not Real!

A new study into one of the world’s most “elusive” species of songbird found that the Liberian Greenbul may be so hard to spot because... it never actually existed.

A team of researchers from the University of Aberdeen conducted the study into the species to find out more, or any, information about the bird that has “eluded experts for decades”. In fact, the Liberian Greenbul has only ever been spotted on nine occasions in Cavalla Forest, southeastern Liberia, between 1981 and 1984, and was considered different to the commonly found Icterine Greenbul, because of its white spots.

Now, DNA analysis of the only specimen ever collected (in 1984) has concluded that the distinctive white spots were probably caused by a nutritional deficiency while its feathers were still growing. Furthermore, when the specimen’s DNA was compared to that of the Icterine Greenbul, scientists found no significant genetic difference between the two.

“The Liberian Greenbul has gained almost ‘mythical’ status since it was sighted in the ‘80s”, said Professor Martin Collinson, a geneticist from the University of Aberdeen’s Institute of Medical Sciences. “We can’t say definitively that the Liberian Greenbul is the same bird as the Icterine Greenbul but we have presented enough evidence that makes any other explanation seem highly unlikely,” added Collinson.

The Liberian Greenbul had been officially listed as “critically endangered” up until 2016. The shocking results of the study have been published in the Journal of Ornithology.


WHAT KIND OF BIRDS STICK TOGETHER?

VEL-CROWS
GENERAL FORECAST: Cone crops in the Northeast are bumper in 2017. It is the best cone crop in a decade or more. This will be a banner winter to see boreal finches in central and northeastern Ontario, Quebec, Atlantic Canada, northern New York, and northern New England States. White-winged and Red Crossbills and Pine Siskins have moved east to areas of abundant seed crops. The Big Question is: will finches concentrate in areas of highest cone abundance (more likely) or be spread out across the Northeast? This is not an irruption year south of traditional wintering areas in the Northeast. Cone crops are generally low west of a line from Lake Superior to James Bay extending west across the Prairie Provinces, British Columbia and Alaska. See individual finch forecasts below for further details.

PINE GROSBEAK: Most should stay in the north because the mountain-ash berry crop is good to excellent across the boreal forest from Alaska to Newfoundland. Some should get south to Algonquin Park. At feeders they prefer black oil sunflower seeds.

PURPLE FINCH: Most Purple Finches east of Lake Superior should stay north this winter because of heavy seed crops on eastern conifers and mountain-ashes. They prefer black oil sunflower seeds.

RED CROSSBILL: There will be a good showing of Red Crossbills in Ontario and the Northeast this winter. Red Crossbills comprise about 10 “call types” in North America. Matt Young of The Cornell Lab of Ornithology reports that Eastern Type 10 is currently the most common type from the Great Lakes through Ontario into the Maritime Provinces and Northeastern United States. This year Matt also reports that Type 2, Type 3 and Type 4 and a few Type 5s from the west are moving east, the latter is a vagrant east of the Rockies. This movement started in late June/early July, presumably linked to poor or failed crops on several conifers in the western U.S. and Canada. Most types are impossible to identify without analyzing recordings of their flight calls. Recordings can be made with an iPhone and identified to call type by audio spectrographic analysis. Matt Young (may6 at cornell.edu) will identify types for you if you email him your recordings or upload them to an eBird checklist. This helps his research. He is particularly interested in recordings from Maine, Vermont, Michigan, Ontario and the Maritime Provinces. Red Crossbills probably will be breeding this winter into next spring. Expect to hear them singing and to see streaked juveniles.

WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL: This crossbill flooded into the Northeast over the summer, drawn here by the bumper cone crops. Winter trips to hotspots such as Algonquin Park, Laurentians and Adirondacks are guaranteed to see this crossbill. They probably will be breeding this fall and winter. Watch and listen for their loud trilling songs given from tree tops and during circular slow-flapping display flights. Expect to see streaked juveniles in the flocks.

COMMON REDPOLL: Redpolls should move south because White Birch and alder seed crops are below average in northern Ontario. However, as redpolls move south they likely will be slowed or stopped by abundant conifer seed crops and better birch crops. If they get into southern Ontario south of latitude 45, good seed crops on birches and European Black Alder, and an abundance of weedy fields this year will attract them. When redpolls discover your nyger seed feeders, feeding frenzies result. Feeders are best for studying fidgety redpolls. Watch for the larger and darker “Greater” Common Redpoll (subspecies rostrata) from Baffin Island (Nunavut) and Greenland.

HOARY REDPOLL: Watch for Hoaries in flocks of Common Redpolls. The “Southern” Hoary Redpoll (nominate subspecies exilipes) breeds south to northern Ontario and is the subspecies usually seen in southern Canada and northern USA. Watch for “Hornemann’s” Hoary Redpoll (nominate hornemanni) from northern Nunavut and Greenland. It is the largest and palest of the redpolls. Hornemann’s was formerly considered a great rarity south of the tundra, but recently it has been documented in the south more frequently with better photos. See link #2 for photos and identification of Common and Hoary Redpoll, and their subspecies.

PINE SISKIN: Siskins will be frequent and locally common this winter in the Northeast drawn here by abundant cone crops, particularly on White Spruce. Feisty siskins prefer nyger seeds in silo feeders. See link #3 which discusses siskin irruptions related to climate variability.

EVENING GROSBEAK: Most should stay in the north this winter because of abundant conifer seed crops and increasing outbreaks of spruce budworm. The most reliable spot to see this spectacular grosbeak is the feeders at the Visitor Centre in Algonquin Park. In 2016 the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) assigned the “Evening Grosbeak as a species of Special Concern due to strong population declines occurring mainly in central and eastern Canada.”

To read the rest of the forecast, click here: http://www.jeaniron.ca/2017/wff17.htm
2017 Field Trips and Programs

October 22 – SUNDAY – 8 am – 12 noon
FIELD TRIP
Newtowne Neck State Park, St. Mary’s County
Church address: 21370 Newtowne Neck Road, Leonardtown, MD 20650
“BIRDING NEWTOWNE’S FIELDS, FORESTS AND BAYS”
Leader: David Moulton
A peninsula defined by Breton Bay, the Potomac River and St. Clements Bay, this 776-acre property of woodlands, wetlands and agricultural fields offers a wide variety of birding habitats. Newtowne was the first settlement in the Maryland province after St. Mary’s City. Owned for nearly 3 centuries by the Jesuits, the land was reclaimed as a state park in 2009 to protect it from development. Take Rte.5 North from Leonardtown. Turn left (south) on Rte. 243 (Newtowne Neck Road) for 4.5 miles to parking lot just beyond St. Francis Xavier’s Church. RSVP to David Moulton at 240-278-4473 or moulton.davidh@gmail.com

October 28 – SATURDAY – 12:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
FIELD TRIP – YOUTH TRIP
Mallows Bay Park, Charles County
1440 Wilson Landing Road, Nanjemoy, MD 20662
“BOO!! THE GHOSTS OF MALLOWS BAY”
Leader: Lee Vines
What better way to enjoy Halloween than to visit the “Ghost Fleet” of Mallows Bay and scare up some birds! Walk with the Southern Maryland Audubon Society at Mallows Bay Park and learn about shipwrecks, archaeological sites, and wildlife all situated in a unique wetland, woodland and aquatic habitat which includes an evolving ecosystem. Come and enjoy the numerous Bald Eagles soaring above along with a discussion of the history of the fleet. The trip will include a bird walk on the parks one-mile trail where we will look for migrants, snatch final peeks at our summer friends, and welcome in our winter residents. RSVP to Lee at leevines3@gmail.com (preferred) or 301-752-4976.

November 1 – WEDNESDAY – 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.
MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM – YOUTHS WELCOME
Mount Aventine at Chapman State Park, Charles County
3452 Ferry Place, Indian Head, MD 20640
“HAPPY OWL-O-WEEN”
MIKE CALLAHAN, Raptor Conservation Committee Chair, Environmental Educator
Be a night owl this Halloween. Join us for a night about owls. In today’s culture, owls are strongly associated with Halloween alongside the black cat and the witch on her broomstick. So, in honor of the upcoming festivities of All Hallow’s Eve, please come and commune with this fabulous bird species. See website for additional details. Public invited. Inquiries to Lynne Wheeler, somdaudubon@yahoo.com, or 301-751-8097 (prefer text).

November 19 - SUNDAY - 8:00 a.m. - 12 noon
FIELD TRIP
Mattawoman Wildlands, Marbury, Charles County
“EARLY WATERFOWL AND LATE MIGRANTS ON THE
GEORGE WILMOT TRAIL”
Leader: Lynne Wheeler
This is a joint trip with the Audubon Naturalist Society and the Southern MD Audubon Society. We usually expect large concentrations of waterfowl on the Mattawoman Creek, along with songbirds, woodpeckers (some red-headed), and raptors. Meet at Lackey High School parking lot, 3000 Chicamuxen Road, Indian Head, MD 20640 at 7:45 a.m. Bring waterproof shoes or low boots, and dress for possible wind. Be prepared for a one-mile walk to and from the head of the trail, and then a half-mile walk on uneven forest trail. Make reservation with Lynne at 301-751-8097 (prefer text) or somdaudubon@yahoo.com.

December 1 - FRIDAY – 8:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.
FIELD TRIP – YOUTHS WELCOME!
Myrtle Point Park, St. Mary’s County
“WINTER OWL PROWL ON MYRTLE POINT”
Leader: Bob Boxwell
This trip is co-sponsored with the Friends of Myrtle Point Park and is an annual event which attempts to “call out” the resident owls of the park. Owls are nocturnal, and therefore, not easy to spot. We will meet in front of the park gates and attempt to attract owls by having them respond to recorded calls. Please dress for the weather, but avoid “noisy” clothing (please no snowsuits!). This event is weather dependent. Rain or high winds will result in cancellation, so please RSVP with good phone/email address. To find Myrtle Point Park, take Rt. 4 in St. Mary’s County to Patuxent Boulevard, and follow to the end. RSVP to Bob Boxwell at (410)-610-5124, or Bobboxwell@hotmail.com.

December 6 – WEDNESDAY – 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM
Accokeek Foundation at Piscataway Park Education Center, Prince George’s County
3400 Bryan Point Rd, Accokeek, MD 20607
“OWLS IN MYTH AND CULTURE – A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE”
DAVID H. JOHNSON, Director, Global Owl Project (GLOW)
Every society on earth has myths and legends about owls. What people believe about owls makes a difference in how they protect and conserve owls. The GLOW project interviewed about 6,000 people in 30 countries, using a 4-page interview form translated into 18 languages. The answers gave remarkable and wildly varied insights about the current ecological knowledge and cultural perspectives about owls. In this presentation our speaker will describe the methods, cultural insights, and powerful results of the projects findings. Attendees will find that this is a ‘deep dive’ into the beliefs about owls. The Global Owl Project (GLOW) is a non-profit consortium of some 450 researchers, museum curators, MS & PhD students, and passionate volunteers working in 65 countries on the science and conservation of owls. Light refreshments and mingling start at 7 p.m. Public invited. Inquiries to Lynne Wheeler, somdaudubon@yahoo.com, or 301-751-8097 (prefer text).
Directions: see accokeekfoundation.org>visit>location>directions.
Southern Maryland Audubon Society

Adopt-a-Raptor

Foster Parents Needed!

Southern Maryland Audubon Society sponsors the banding of nesting 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. Limited numbers of Osprey, Barn Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl and American Kestrels become available each year for adoption. Your donation will be specifically utilized for raptor research and raptor conservation projects such as:

- Barn Owl Nest Boxes
- Osprey Nesting Platforms
- Kestrel Nest Boxes
- Mist Nets or Banding Supplies

Please indicate which raptor you wish to adopt. You may adopt more than one:

- Osprey, $10 each  
  Total Amount:_____
- Barn Owl, $25 each  
  Total Amount:_____
- Northern Saw-whet Owl, $30 each  
  Total Amount:_____
- American Kestrel, $35 each  
  Total Amount:_____
- General Donation to Raptor Fund  
  Donation Amount:_____ 

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.
- A photo of a fledgling and any other available information on the whereabouts or fate of the bird.

Name:______________________________________________
Street Address:_______________________________________
State, Zip Code:______________________________________
City:_______________________________________________
Email:______________________________________________
Phone:______________________________________________
If this is a gift, please include the recipient’s name for the certificate:________________________

Mail To: Southern Maryland Audubon Society
         Carole Schnitzler
         3595 Silk Tree Court, Waldorf, MD 20602

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:  ___1 year $20  ___2 year $35  ___3 year $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. Your renewal information will come directly from the National Audubon Society.

- 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 somdaudubon.org for this new option.