President’s Perch
It’s Friends That Count

In more ways than one the title of this perch really says it all. We count on our friends more than ever at this time of year. We get so busy with the Christmas season and then on top of that it is Christmas Bird Count (CBC) time!

Since the Christmas Bird Count began over a century ago, it has relied on the dedication and commitment of friends like you. **All Christmas Bird Counts are conducted between December 14 to January 5, inclusive dates, each season.** There is a specific methodology to the CBC, and all participants must make arrangements to participate in advance with the circle compiler within an established circle, but anyone can participate.

Each count takes place in an established 15-mile wide diameter circle, and is organized by the compiler. Count volunteers follow specified routes through a designated 15-mile (24-km) diameter circle, counting every bird they see or hear all day. All birds are counted all day, giving an indication of the total number of birds in the circle that day.

If you are a beginning birder, you will be able to join a group that includes at least one experienced birdwatcher. If your home is within the boundaries of a CBC circle, then you can stay at home and report the birds that visit your feeder on count day as long as you have made prior arrangement with the count compiler. You can look at the circles by going to Audubon’s website at [http://www.audubon.org/join-christmas-bird-count](http://www.audubon.org/join-christmas-bird-count).

Please check out in this newsletter edition for the list of our southern Maryland compilers. Please sign up now! The data collected by CBC participants over the past century and more have become one of only two large pools of information informing ornithologists and conservation biologists how the birds of the Americas are faring over time. We count on friends like you!

If the CBC doesn’t fit into your schedule as an alternative, there is the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) organized by Audubon with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org). Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world. The 21st annual GBBC will be held Friday, February 16, through Monday, February 19, 2018. Also, watch our website for special youth events and challenges.

Continued on page 2
So please smile on our feathered friends. Help out with the counts. And while you are at it, don’t forget to smile on our society. When doing your holiday shopping go to https://smile.amazon.com/ and sign up to donate a percentage of your dollars to the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. We count on our friends. It’s friends that count.

Smiling while I count on you,
Lynne Wheeler
President

 Quest for the Spirit Bear in British Columbia
by Tiffany Farrell

When we finally touched down on the damp landing strip of Bella Bella, my friend Valerie and I had been traveling to this remote part of coastal British Columbia for 72 hours. The day previously, our tiny prop plane had made two attempts to land there amid thick fog and heavy rain. Our pilot gave up, and we returned for one more night in Vancouver. Thus, the “rainforest” part of Great Bear Rainforest had been impressed upon us in white-knuckle exhaustion. From Bella Bella, we took a one-and-a-half-hour boat ride through yet more drizzle to our lodge, located in the village of Klimtu, part of the Kitasoo/Xai’Xais First Nations’ territory.

Finally stepping onto the floating dock at Spirit Bear Lodge was like entering a mystical Neverland. Glacier-cut fjords wore a cloak of mist, blending water from ocean, rivers, and waterfalls with a mountainous emerald coast. Here coniferous forests (mainly spruce, cedar, and hemlock) create a primordial, untouched wilderness in the largest intact temperate rainforest on Earth. What better place to see wildlife behaving entirely naturally in native habitat?

Over the next few days we explored rivers and creeks during the height of salmon season for our best chance of finding bears. The region earned its ursine moniker from its grizzlies and black bears, as well as a rare genetic mutation of the black bear—-a white-coated one (not albino) called the Spirit Bear or the Kermode bear, found only here. According to Kitasoo legend, back in the time the glaciers receded, Raven, the creator, made everything green. But Raven decided to make one black bear in every ten white to remind people of when the world was covered with snow and ice.

Our group numbered seven guests, plus two guides and a captain. We usually motored on a large boat at least an hour and a half to a site where bears had recently been seen. Our first adventure near boiling rapids was slow——just one black bear darted from the edge of the forest to nab a salmon & quickly retreated. But a surprise awaited. A pod of about forty humpback whales were feeding nearby. With their alternating surfacing & spectacular blows surrounding us, another guest said, “It’s a symphony!” Several came so
close to our drifting boat that we could smell their sulfurous exhalations. I have no idea how long I was entranced---time stood still—but eventually our captain said as we reluctantly left, "They sure put on a show today!"

Bears came out in force on day two, as we explored a river estuary. Our outboard-motored skiff puttered gently past the sheer, granite-cliffed entry, as gulls lifted en masse through the fog and a lone Great Blue Heron stood sentinel. I saw lots of birds, as you’d expect with salmon covering—and ultimately nourishing—the water and shores. Steller’s Jays jetted around, protesting our intrusion and warning others, including a Belted Kingfisher. Goldeneyes and Common Mergansers paddled among huge flocks of Bonaparte and other gull species. There was an exposed Bald Eagle nest on the cliff face, and we saw the mature adult pair soar and roost throughout our day. Most exciting for me, I watched my first American Dipper dancing on a rock in the river. We took in a parade of bears, including two different grizzly families, each mom with two cubs. We also spied several single grizzlies, as well as a few black bears, including one solitary cub. Watching so many of them catch salmon, gulls squawking overhead, and their interactions with each other was a lesson in civility. Mothers run off cubs to avoid other grizzlies, of course, but generally all the bears give one another a wide berth in the certain knowledge that there is plenty to eat for all. After we boarded our skiff for one final sweep of the river, about twenty harbor seals perched on the rocks and bid us farewell.

Day three was more tense because it was my last opportunity to find a Spirit Bear. Our destination was a different estuary where the previous crew had sat for seven hours with no animal sightings at all. After a Zodiac transfer to shore (enlivened by a loon sighting), we hunkered down for an hour and a half, during which I spied only ravens, robins, chickadees, and a couple of kingfishers—no mammals in sight. Apart from the croak of the raven pair, it was eerily quiet. Eventually, our guide decided we would hike further upstream. First she showed us a tree trunk, fitted with a wire comb of sorts, which researchers had installed for passive bear research. These First Nations are opposed to darting and tranquilizing the bears, so instead they rely on these “scratching posts” to trap fur, which they then analyze. This “trap” had an impressive amount of bear fur—lots of it white, so we knew that spirit bears passed through. There I also saw my first Western Red-backed Salamander curled up at the mossy base of a tree. As our hike continued, our guide noticed a lot of packed-down grass. She identified it as a bedding area for rare coastal gray wolves. The tension ratcheted upward. These animals are extremely elusive, and I was on alert. Soon we encountered several piles of wolf scat—two of which included bear fur. Suddenly we understood why it had been so eerily silent—both for us and for the previous day’s group. A bear, probably a cub, had died here recently. As we marched back to our Zodiac, our guide said, “Even though we can’t see it, there is probably a scout from the wolf pack watching us.”

We passed the afternoon at a different site perfectly arranged for bear watching. This narrow creek is surrounded by steep cliffs. We had to scramble over big boulders at the water’s edge and climb up a seemingly vertical trail—no mean feat with a ten-pound pack that wanted to flip me like a turtle! Finally we reached a notch in the cliff wall furnished with benches. Fresh bear prints in the mud of our ledge seemed a good omen. Amidst the loud rush of water over the rocky creek below, I amused myself by watching more ravens and Steller’s Jays and the drops of water forming on the mosses. My friend silently alerted me: a bear was clambering down the wooded trail on the opposite cliff. This one, a young female black bear of about four years, tightrope-walked along a fallen tree bridging the river—lumbering toward us. She then walked upstream, bathed herself completely, shook off not unlike my dog, and then took one more stroll along the “catwalk” log and around the trail before disappearing. She was aware of our presence, and I had the distinct impression she was modeling for us. As our two-hour limit approached, I prayed for my elusive white bear. We departed, prayers unanswered. Our guide reminded us, “If the wildlife appears on command, you are in a zoo, not the wilderness.”

The next morning we bid our group members farewell (thankfully, they did go on to glimpse a Spirit Bear that day), and we watched sea lions and a large sea otter as we returned to Bella Bella. The long boat trip allowed us to speak at length with the captain and our guide, both from the tribe. There is an effort to teach the native language in school, and the community is earning an environmentally-sustainable income (and creating jobs) from its lodge and adventure business. Our captain, Moose, was unfazed by our thwarted attempt to see a Spirit Bear. “You have a two-legged Moose right here. That’s a lot more rare than a Spirit Bear.” Indeed, the people we met—whether staff, locals, or fellow travelers—made even richer memories than the wildlife.

Spirit Bear Lodge, Welcome video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5HORdG_8mA
Newtowne Neck Trip Report
by David Moulton

Eight of us explored the bird life of Newtowne Neck State Park on Sunday, October 22. It was a lovely morning to be out in the field. A layer of fog drifted lightly on the water as we assembled at the entrance parking lot. A lingering Osprey circled above, and a huge flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers moved through the tree by the shore – until a handsome Merlin cruised to a stop in the same tree, scattering the “butterbutts.” Driving to the beach at the very end of the peninsula, we scanned the Potomac for waterbirds. A single Caspian Tern and several Royal Terns were fishing the river, as well as a distant Northern Gannet. The pound nets were festooned with Double-crested Cormorants, Bald Eagles and Great Blue Herons. Later, we walked the woods trail down to a hidden pond, and were rewarded with both Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, smacking Brown Thrashers, and a late Yellow-billed Cuckoo. The cuckoo sat still in the open for minutes, allowing for good views and photos.

Total species for the trip – 43.

Birding 101 at the Elms
by Bob Boxwell

We had a slightly breezy, very overcast morning for our field trip on Saturday, October 14. After several last minute cancellations we were happy to have ten people arrive at the Elms Environmental Education Center. Migration had seemed to pick up after five straight days of dreary overcast weather. A variety of interesting birds had been reported on our listserve.

For those of you familiar with the Elms, we decided to take the loop around the pond and down to the beach. The path was full of Northern Cardinals of all ages and lots of activity on the treetops and in the bushes. With less than half the group having (or wanting to carry) binoculars we probably missed a few species. That was made up for by a youngster named Scott who went through the Master Naturalist class this spring. He was very good at finding birds and figuring out what they were. I have high hopes for recruiting him for the Point Lookout Christmas Bird Count [on December 17].

After our short hike through the woods and along the shore, we checked out the marsh to the south of the center. Outside of a Great Blue Heron, the marsh was very quiet. Waterfowl really have not moved in yet with the only thing close to them being groups of Double-crested Cormorants. Several Bald Eagles also soared overhead throughout the trip. But our only other birds of prey were the Turkey Vultures. Several of us had seen Osprey over the last week and I had one while I was crossing the bridge later in the week, but none were seen on the day of the trip.

Both Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets did show and were very active checking out the insect population. All three mimics also were on the list with Gray Catbirds being the most evident. We had at least two warblers but the only one we could nail down for an ID were several Common Yellowthroats.

After the walk we returned to the classroom where I had a dozen or more study skins to show the group. For many years I have been using these loaners from St. Mary’s College. I use these to illustrate different characteristics of the various species and to help improve people’s skills at birding. Margarita Rochow and I have done this trip several times at the Elms and are looking forward to our next adventure at there!
Port Tobacco River Park
Open House - October 28

Lynne Wheeler

On Saturday October 28, SMAS participated in the open house for the Port Tobacco River Park, Tom Roland Natural Resource Area in Port Tobacco. We were co-sponsors along with the Port Tobacco River Conservancy, U of MD Extension Charles County Master Gardeners, and Charles County Tourism. We are so grateful to have this new park, in which preserving nature in its natural state is celebrated. The event from 9 a.m. to noon was a beautiful day. Our table featured an electronic bird identification board that young birders-to-be enjoyed, an eagle puppet craft, and a nature and bird walk. The walk had great attendance, almost 20 people, and truly was a pleasure for all. The park has four trails, for this open house walk we explored the Eagle Trail, Wetlands Trail and a portion of the Butterfly Trail.

While I focused on the avian species, our Youth Outreach committee chair Lee Vines shared his extensive knowledge of flora in the park. It is always so funny to have Lee explain the difference in the identification of grape vines vs poison ivy Julie Simpson and Lee Vines with such an appropriate moniker.

My favorite memory was playing the sound of the Eastern Towhee and getting a return song response and view. It was the look on their faces which made it so rewarding. We also had fun with about a dozen Swamp Sparrows and many seemed to enjoy learning the sound difference vs. the Song Sparrow.

While the great weather is now leaving us, this park will be the gift that keeps on giving this winter season. A local Eagle Scout Ted Hoxie has installed multiple Wood duck boxes along the riparian buffer we can monitor, the trails along the river will give us great views of waterfowl, and we have an active Eagle nest! We are excited to host upcoming educational events to view the nest, and to participate in the Eagle Nest Monitoring program organized by the Maryland Bird Conservation Partnership with youth groups.

Thank you Charles County for such a gem of a park! We appreciate greatly this gift and will cherish and respect it through the years.
November 19 - SUNDAY - 8:00 a.m. - 12 noon

FIELD TRIP
Mattawoman Wildlands, Marbury, Charles County
"EARLY WINTERFOWL 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 winterfowl 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.

118th Christmas Bird Count
Please Sign Up Now!! Birds count!!

Jan 3 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 pm – 9:00 pm
MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM
North Point High School, Staff Development Room, Charles County
2500 Davis Road, Waldorf, MD 20603
"WHOOPING CRANE CONSERVATION IN NORTH AMERICA"
JOHN B. FRENCH, JR., Ph.D., Director, USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center
The presentation will cover the history of Whooping Crane conservation efforts from the early decades of the 20th century until the present. Current reintroduction projects of a non-migratory flock in Louisiana and of a migratory flock of Whooping Cranes in the eastern part of the US will be discussed. Finally, we will look forward to the challenges of future conservation of Whooping Cranes. Enter through front doors at school. Follow sign to staff development room. Light refreshments and mingling starts at 7 p.m. Public invited. Inquiries to Lynne Wheeler, 301-751-8097 or somdaudubon@yahoo.com.

Jan 19 – FRIDAY – 7:00 p.m.
FIELD TRIP – YOUTHS WELCOME!!
Elms Environmental Center, St. Mary's County
49300 St. James Road, Dameron, MD 20628
"Owl Prowl at The Elms"
Leader(s): Bob Boxwell and Margarita Rochow
Come "call out" the owls!! Owls are nocturnal, and therefore not easy to spot. A great Friday night family outing at The Elms. Dress appropriately for the weather, and avoid noisy clothing. This event is weather dependent. Rain or high winds will result in cancellation. Directions: Take Rt 235 south, left onto St. James Church Road (opposite Mattapany Road). You will see the sign for the Elms Environmental Education Center. We will meet in the hunter’s dirt parking lot on the right 100 yards before the gate (do not drive past the gate)! RSVP to Bob Boxwell at 410-610-5124, Bobboxwell@hotmail.com.

Jan 21 – SUNDAY – 8:00 a.m. – 12 noon
FIELD TRIP
Piscataway Park & Hard Bargain Farm, Prince George’s County
Meet at 15785 Livingston Road, Accokeek, MD 20607
"Winter Waterfowl and Resident Birds"
Leader(s): Lynne Wheeler and Mark Rositol
This is a joint trip with the Audubon Naturalist Society. The varied habitat of water, woods, farm fields and edges provide for a great variety of birds. Take Rt 210 (Indian Head Hwy) to Livingston Road. (south of Farmington Rd. and north of Rt 228). Take Livingston Road east, meet at the Burger King in the Food Lion Shopping Center (15785 Livingston Road, Accokeek, MD 20607). No facilities. No fee. Limit to 20 participants. RSVP to Lynne Wheeler at somdaudubon@yahoo.com or text (301) 751-8097.

Jan 28 – SUNDAY – 8:00 a.m. – 12 noon
FIELD TRIP
Jefferson Patterson Park, Calvert County
"Winter Waterfowl Trip"
Leader: Tyler Bell
Open fields and wooded areas provide good land birding and the river frontage close views of waterfowl. Loons, mergansers, seaducks and dabblers likely, often in great numbers. Call or email Tyler for directions to the meeting location. RSVP to Tyler Bell at tylertbell@yahoo.com or 310-862-4623.

Feb 7 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM
Southern MD Higher Education Center, St. Mary’s County
Bldg I Room 123
44219 Airport Road, California, MD 20619
"A FEATHERED FRIEND MOVIE NIGHT! NATURE: ANIMAL HOMES, EPISODE 1, THE NEST"
Bring the family for movie night. This is episode 1 of 3 from the wonderful Nature series Animal Homes. Bird nests come in all shapes and sizes, crafted from an inexhaustible diversity of materials, including fur, grasses, leaves, mosses, continued on page 7
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
- Barn Owl, $25 each
- Northern Saw-whet Owl, $30 each
- American Kestrel, $35 each
- General Donation to Raptor Fund

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

---

EDITOR: Tyler Bell  E-mail: jtylerbell@yahoo.com

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.

2016-2017 Officers
President, Lynne Wheeler - 301.743.3236; 301.751.8097
Vice-President, Bob Lukinic - 301.283.6317
Treasurer, Will Daniel - 571.237.1122
Secretary, Julie Daniel - 240.346.1931

---

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.