Welcome to a new SMAS program season—and a new year—of learning! In planning our spring calendar, our Field Trip Committee chair David Moulton and Program Committee chair Tiffany Farrell have done a wonderful job offering exciting field trips and programs throughout southern Maryland. It is very challenging given the geographic size of our chapter to offer events within a reasonable travel distance for members, but they sure did succeed. Check out our website and see how we fly to many locations across St. Mary’s, Calvert, Charles, and Prince George’s counties. Thanks, you two! We also greatly appreciate Mary Ann Scott, who helps lay out our event flyer. She always does a fantastic job! Thanks also to our new website administrator, Karen Showalter, who has already loaded the events on the website.

For these programs our goal is simple: we want everyone to get out and have fun, and get smart about birds and the challenges that they face. Our first lecture of the year on January 2 was led by Zach Slavin, the past president of the D.C. Audubon Society and program manager of the National Audubon Society’s Community Science effort. He spoke on “Birds and Climate Change”, starting our year off with a hot bang of getting smart about this serious issue. Check out www.Audubon.org/ClimateWatch and learn what we can do to help study the effects of climate change on birds.

One species we rarely hear these days is the Northern Bobwhite. Bob Long, Project Manager at Wildlife and Heritage Service of MD DNR, will make us smarter about the factors implicated in its decline. Fly to Flag Ponds Nature Park on February 6 and get smart about initiatives to restore Northern Bobwhite populations.

Next, it is time for the 22nd Annual Great Backyard Bird Count, February 15 through 18. We have events lined up throughout Southern Maryland; watch our Facebook page for postings. This is a great beginner birder activity to help you get smart about bird identification.

We continue to educate with our March 6 monthly meeting lecture program, “Straws – Plastic Pollution in our Waterway”. This event is co-sponsored with the Port Tobacco River Conservancy. Join us for a powerful documentary about the problems plastic straws pose. The April 3 monthly meeting lecture program is also educational: “Old Growth Forests in Maryland”. Our speaker, Dr. Gwen Brewer, Science Program Manager at MD DNR Wildlife and Heritage Service, will help us get smart about these special places that support animals and efforts to protect them. This program will be at Mount Aventine in Chapman State Park, a designated old growth forest in Southern Maryland. And finally, if your brain has room for more, on May 1 you can attend “Get Smart – with APPropriate Birding”. Bring your smart phone (or shoe phone, I love a flash back!) and come learn how to participate in citizen
science with birding and nature apps. This program will be at my favorite native plant location, the Charles Soil Conservation District in Waldorf.

The spring lineup will end with a real bang. Our June 2 Annual Picnic and Meeting will be hosted by the Alice Ferguson Foundation (AFF), Cafritz Environmental Center, in Accokeek. Come get smart about their fabulous accomplishment: full certification for the Living Building Challenge. We are very excited to be able to share this state-of-the-art building with our members and are deeply grateful to our friends at AFF for providing this venue.

In the meantime, February has love in the air with Bald Eagles nesting. Don’t forget to watch our Port Tobacco River Park Bald Eagle cam at www.wildstreaming.com or at www.charlescountyparks.com. This pair seems to be very smart in raising eaglets. Cross your fingers for another successful nesting year.

So, get out and get smart about birds!

Lynne Wheeler

Why Birds Need Us To The Keep The Noise Down
by Janet Bogue
Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS) member

(Excerpt from testimony submitted by ANS to the DC City Council regarding the banning of gas-powered leaf blowers because of their harm to birds and us.)

“Washington’s parks, gardens and rivers host 340 species of birds. Washington’s birds are gifts to our eyes and ears...Birds vocalize to warn of danger, recognize their own species, defend their territories, find mates, stay in contact with their young, and find their way during migration. Birds also need to hear predators coming, and some birds, such as owls, use sound to find prey. This dependence on sound makes birds especially vulnerable to acoustic impacts. Recent peer-reviewed scientific studies have shown that where there is loud, human-caused noise, many bird species suffer. Struggling to hear and be heard, they are less protected from predators and less able to find mates. Their stress hormones are elevated, with poor consequences for their health and reproductive success. Research has found that many species of birds have tried to change their voices to be heard above the roar of human activities -- or simply have abandoned noisy environments. Scientists have documented declines in bird numbers, bird diversity and bird nesting success in environments with elevated, non-natural noises.”

See entire testimony at www.anshome.org/newsroom

Testing Facial Recognition Techniques on Birds
Wednesday December 12, 2018

Downy Woodpeckers were studied to test ways to identify individuals.

Birder and computer scientist Lewis Barnett was intrigued with a suggestion that backyard birders can identify individual Downy Woodpeckers by studying the feather patterns on the head of individual birds. Using a number of tests, Barnett found the patterns of spots on Downy Woodpecker’s folded wings were more consistent for distinguishing individuals than head plumage. He collected 2,450 photographs of eight different woodpeckers at a feeding station fitted with an automated camera and found that by using ‘convolutional neural networks’ he was able to identify individual woodpeckers with 97 percent accuracy.

Ornithologists need accurate information about how bird populations change over time. Because many species are very specific in their habitat needs during nesting, wintering and migration periods, these data could be useful for determining the effects of a changing landscape. Information about individual species like Downy Woodpeckers could then be matched with other information, such as land use maps, weather patterns and human population growth to better understand the abundance of a local species over time.

An automated monitoring station approach could provide a force multiplier for wildlife biologists concerned with specific species or specific locations. Using this automation would broaden their ability to gather such valuable information with a minimum of human disturbance.


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http://www.birdingwire.com/releases/3f8f0f37-92ac-4277-bd82-8f7d2338512c/
Festival of the Cranes
by Tiffany Farrell

For a long time I have dreamed of seeing Sandhill Cranes on their wintering grounds in New Mexico. While struggling through a tough work project, I decided I had earned a trip to the Festival of the Cranes at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. I joined Friends of the Bosque so I could register early, ensuring I nabbed my preferred events. And what choices they offer! In its thirty-first year, the festival program ran more than 70 pages long. In the end, I chose three birding field trips, one workshop, and four programs focused on the cranes---enough to fill three days at the festival---maybe too much!

In retrospect, I wish I had allowed myself more free time to hike this beautiful refuge. Even in an unseasonably frigid November, the desert colors of the Bosque ignite the spirit. Dawn and dusk, when the cranes fly out of and into their shallow roosting waters, are the best times to savor that warm glow. Of course, one can cruise around the refuge to watch Sandhills forage in the grain fields during the day. Those peaceful scenes, however, cannot compare with the spectacle of crane families gliding effortlessly, three or four at a time, into temporary wetlands at sunset. When backlit, and with their “landing gear” down, the cranes resemble Thai shadow puppets---at least until they descend below the mountain ridge, when they meld into the dusk and you finally hear the splash of their feet. I witnessed hundreds parachute downward in that quickly fading golden hour.

Also memorable were the Snow Geese and Ross’s Geese, which blanket ponds and fields by the thousands. When they lifted en masse, I felt I was in a living snow globe. The festival’s field trips were helpful for a beginning or solo birder as well. An owlwatching adventure yielded two Western Screech Owls, a long interlude with two Great Horned Owls, and a pair of ghostly Barn Owls circling and darting overhead. Distant Coyote howls capped the evening. During daytime birding trips on the Bosque and in the nearby Magdalena Mountains, I saw Loggerhead Shrikes (one with a mouse cached in a small roadside cedar!), Green-tailed Towhee, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Acorn Woodpecker, Williamson’s Sapsucker, and Red-naped Sapsucker, among others. Only the Pyrrhuloxia eluded me.

Still, the celebrities here are the Sandhill Cranes---affirmed by the paparazzi that await their comings and goings at the water’s edge. Arriving before dawn to stake out our spot---surprisingly near the sleeping birds---Paul Tebbel and Keanna Leonard led a fascinating “fly out” program. Their fun banter explaining crane behavior, calls, and coloration distracted from my frozen fingers and toes on that 17 degree morning. There we witnessed cranes gurgle one by one as they slowly woke up, then preen and lower their heads to take their first sips. The volume increased as more awoke and performed unison calls with their mates. Parents moved in orderly procession with their juveniles to a runway-like staging area, waiting until one would lean its head forward, signaling it is time to leave. Springing up and flapping their six-foot wide wings, each family took to the brightening sky.

About the Great Backyard Bird Count

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) 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. 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.

Each checklist submitted during the GBBC helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share. Last year, more than 160,000 participants submitted their bird observations online, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded.

The 21st annual GBBC will be held Friday, February 16, through Monday, February 19, 2018. Please visit the official website at birdcount.org for more information and be sure to check out the latest educational and promotional resources.

Bird populations are always shifting and changing. For example, 2014 GBBC data highlighted a large irruption of Snowy Owls across the northeastern, mid-Atlantic, and Great Lakes areas of the United States. The data also showed the effects that warm weather patterns have had on bird movement around the country. For more on the results of the latest GBBC, take a look at the GBBC Summary, and be sure to check out some of the images in the 2017 GBBC Photo Contest Gallery.

On the program website participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during and after the count. Be sure to check out the Explore a Region tool to get an idea of what you can expect to see in your area during the next GBBC.

For questions and comments, please contact the National Audubon Society or Cornell Lab of Ornithology:
National Audubon Society
citizenscience@audubon.org
Cornell Lab of Ornithology
Inside the US: (800) 843-2473 Outside the US: (607) 254-2473
gbbc@cornell.edu

The Great Backyard Bird Count is made possible, in part, by generous support from Wild Birds Unlimited.
The new Farm Bill passed by Congress last week is getting a favorable first look from conservation leaders. “This Farm Bill is a huge win for birds and it gives us real tools to work together on clean water and places birds need while increasing productivity for farmers and ranchers across the country,” said David O’Neill, Chief Conservation Officer for Audubon. “We are still reading the fine print, but it looks like this bill gives birds a lot to celebrate. It elevates support for water conservation for the benefit of birds and people, and it keeps promises to American families by preserving nutrition programs.”

O’Neill was commenting on the 2018 Farm Bill, which was passed by Congress and is on the President’s desk. The Farm Bill will shape what happens on 914 million acres of farms and ranches and 300 million acres of private woodlands; plus, the Farm Bill is the largest source of conservation funding for these lands. The bill, the Agriculture Improvement Act Of 2018 (H.R. 2), passed the U.S. Senate on December 11 by a bipartisan vote of 87 to 13, and the House passed it the following day by a decisive vote of 369 to 47.

The 2018 Farm Bill expands funding for, and improves access to, several key programs that will benefit birds and other wildlife through Audubon partnerships across its Working Lands Programs, including:

* Doubling mandated wildlife funding from 5 percent to 10 percent of overall Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) spending. It also brings total EQIP spending to just over $2 billion by 2023. EQIP contracts help ranchers partnering on Audubon’s Conservation Ranching Program to pay for the necessary environmental improvements on their ranches that benefit cattle and wildlife; Audubon has won Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) to help develop its Conservation Ranching work.

* The Farm Bill triples dedicated funding for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to $300 million and streamlines administrative processes and partner barriers overall. This program, which supports locally innovated partnerships, has allowed Audubon to partner with dairy farmers and industry organizations to implement practices that protect Tricolored Blackbirds, listed as a threatened species by the state of California, and give the species the time they need to nest and fledge young.

* The Farm Bill mandates $50 million annually for the Watershed Act, which will allow for landscape-level conservation planning and implementation through new partnerships because wildlife doesn’t recognize property ownership or jurisdictional boundaries. Along with changes in EQIP, the bill makes improvements to address drought conditions and other climate-related impacts to farmers and birds.

* The Farm Bill increases the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) from 24 million acres to 27 million acres, which pays farmers to temporarily remove some acres from production and create wildlife habitat. The CRP has been responsible for many local and regional wildlife recovery programs, including projects that benefit nesting Henslow’s Sparrows in Illinois and other breadbasket states.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources announced that the Maryland Biodiversity Project and its founders, Bill Hubick and Jim Brighton, have been recognized as Conservationist of the Year by the Maryland Wildlife Advisory Commission.

The Maryland Biodiversity Project is a nonprofit organization that has produced an online database and public information source with the mission of cataloging all flora and fauna in Maryland, and building a vibrant nature study community. Hubick and Brighton started the project in 2012 and since then, along with a following of more than 800 naturalists and photographers, have documented 18,000 species, including more than 10,000 photographs.

The award was presented Nov. 13, in conjunction with the commission meeting.

“While the accomplishments of these two dedicated conservationists sound terrific, there is nothing like experiencing the Maryland Biodiversity Project firsthand to demonstrate the wealth of information and the dedication of the community they have built,” Wildlife and Heritage Service Director Paul Peditto said. “Our experts visit their site often, as they constantly add new and unique content.”

Scientists and conservationists in other states have also praised the Maryland Biodiversity Project, and are using their content to get a deeper and wider appreciation and understanding of Maryland’s uniquely diverse natural resources.

For more information and references, see [https://www.birdingwire.com/releases/775e6cff-aceb-420e-973c-cfff6e3e312b/](https://www.birdingwire.com/releases/775e6cff-aceb-420e-973c-cfff6e3e312b/)

January 13 – 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, sea ducks and dabblers likely, often in great numbers. Call or email Tyler for directions to the meeting location. RSVP to Tyler Bell at tylerbell@yahoo.com or 301-862-4623.

January 18 – FRIDAY – 7:00 p.m.
FIELD TRIP – YOUTH 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 Bobboxwell@hotmail.com or 410-610-5124.

January 20 – SUNDAY – 8:00 a.m. – 12 noon
FIELD TRIP
Piscataway Park & Hard Bargain Farm, Prince George’s County
2301 Bryan Point 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. See fergusonfoundation.org for directions. Bill Townsend, HBF Educator Associate will meet you at the entrance (red Chevy). No fee. Limit to 20 participants. RSVP to Lynne Wheeler at somdaudubon@yahoo.com or text (301) 751-8097.

February 6 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM
Flag Ponds Nature Park, Calvert County
1525 Flag Pond Parkway, Lusby, MD 20657
“NORTHERN BOBWHITE IN MARYLAND”
BOB LONG, Project Manager, Wildlife and Heritage Service, MD DNR
The number of Northern bobwhite have declined by more than 90% in Maryland. This presentation will outline the factors implicated in the decline, biology, and habitat requirements of quail. Projects and initiatives to restore populations will also be discussed. Light refreshments and mingling start at 7 p.m. Public invited. Free event. Inquiries to Lynne Wheeler at somdaudubon@yahoo.com or 301-751-8097 (prefer text).

February 16 – SATURDAY – 7:00 p.m.
FIELD TRIP
Private Farm, Charles County
“Barn Owl Prowl”
Leader: Mike Callahan
Join us on this night hike to look and listen for the rare, year round resident owl of Southern Maryland, the Barn Owl. The farm is owned by the Wicomico Valley Foundation of Southern Maryland. This is a great family outing! Bring a reusable mug for hot chocolate. The exact meeting location will be given at registration. Suggested donation of $5.00 per person. RSVP to Mike at 240-765-5192, or raptorsrulemc@gmail.com.

February 15 – 18 is the
21st ANNUAL GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT!
Special GBBC events have been scheduled throughout Southern Maryland!!! Please see our website and Facebook page for local activities throughout Southern Maryland.

February 24 – SUNDAY – 8 a.m. – 12 noon
FIELD TRIP
Patuxent River Naval Air Station, St. Mary’s County
“Winter Birds And Tundra Specialists At Pax River Airfield”
Leader: Kyle Rambo
We are fortunate to have access to airfields that provide tundra-like habitat. This trip will feature typical winter airfield birds such as Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs, Short-eared Owls, Horned Larks, Savannah Sparrows, and possible Wilson's Snipe and Peregrine Falcon. Preregistration is required and open to U.S. citizens only. Trip is limited to 10 people. Must bring a photo I.D. Meet at Gate #1 Visitor Parking Lot. RSVP to Kyle at kyle.rambo@navy.mil or 301-757-0005.

March 6 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM
Port Tobacco Courthouse, Charles County
8430 Commerce St, Port Tobacco, MD 20677
“STRAWs - PLASTIC POLLUTION IN OUR WATERWAY”
This is a joint program hosted by SMAS and the Port Tobacco River Conservancy. Join us for a 30 minute powerful documentary about plastic straws and other forms of plastic pollution that inundate our waterways and oceans. The film illustrates how individuals, groups, and businesses around the globe are reducing plastic straw use through education, collaboration, policy development and utilization of non-plastic alternatives. With colorful opening animation narrated by Oscar winner Tim Robbins, STRAWS is entertaining as well as educational. The event will also feature our local Ocean Guardian students from J.C. Parks Elementary and North Point High School, further emphasizing the harm plastics are causing to our environment. Information about
our recent Charles County ban on plastic straws will also be made available. Light refreshments and mingling start at 7 p.m. Public invited. Free event. Inquiries to Lynne Wheeler at somdaudubon@yahoo.com or 301-751-8097 (prefer text).

March 17 – SUNDAY – 10:00 a.m. – 12 noon
FIELD TRIP
Port Tobacco River Park, Charles County
7685 Chapel Point Road, Port Tobacco, MD 20677
“Get Your Green On! Eagle Nest and Signs of Spring”
Leader: Lynne Wheeler
Join us for an update about our Port Tobacco River Park eagle nest and learn about the Maryland Bird Conservation Partnership citizen-science monitoring program. Volunteers document the nesting success and productivity of Maryland’s Bald Eagle population to help us to identify what conservation actions may be needed in the future. Maintaining an active monitoring program is vital to knowing when and where changes to breeding eagles are taking place.

April 3 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM
Mount Aventine at Chapman State Park, Charles County
3452 Ferry Place, Indian Head, MD 20640
“OLD GROWTH FORESTS IN MARYLAND”
GWEN BREWER, Science Program Manager, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife and Heritage Service
Maryland may not have the majestic old growth redwood forests of the western U.S., but the state does have some amazing forest patches with trees over 400 years old. Come learn about these special places, including the animals that they support and efforts to protect them like the Old Growth Forest Network. Light refreshments and mingling start at 7 p.m. Public invited. Free event. Inquiries to Lynne Wheeler at somdaudubon@yahoo.com or 301-751-8097 (prefer text).

April 21 – SUNDAY
EARTH DAY SPECIAL EVENTS
Protect Our Species
Earth Day 2019 is Monday, April 22. This year the focus will be to Protect Our Species. Join us in helping to protect our native plant species with invasive plant removal, and learn about the importance of bird habitat and declining species. Please check our website for other events that may have been added throughout southern Maryland.

Veena Agarwala, Lexington Park
Jan Apel, Waldorf
Steve Arthur, Leonardtown
Sally Balenger, Coltons Point
Julita Canal, Mechanicville
Lennard Celestine, Clinton
Trella Collins, Accokeek
Judy Couper, Great Mills
David J Delzingaro, Suitland
Michael D Duffy, Chesapeake Beach
Jackie Eanes, Owings
David Friese, Chesapeake Beach
Sheila Gatchell, Indian Head
Eliot Girsang, Solomons
Clevie Gladney, Temple Hills
Michael Glaser, Saint Mary’s City
Mark Gorsak, Lusby
James Hardin, Solomons
Helen Harrington, La Plata
Morse Hendricks, Clinton
Mary Hollinger, Huntingtown
Paul Impelluso, Leonardtown *
Michael Judd, Lexington Park
Laura McCrory, Huntingtown
Melanie McGinnes, Piney Point
Maria Miller, Lusby
Sharon Montillo, Chaptico
Tara Nadzadi, Brandywine
T Neal, Temple Hills
E Orlando, Fort Washington
Shirley Patterson, Accokeek
Kenneth Pritchard, Lusby
Mary Rolape, Bushwood
Elizabeth Sanders, Hughesville
Karen Sandrock, California
Michael B. Schaub, Chesapeake Beach
Mary Shelton, Leonardtown
Norman Taylor, Bel Alton
James Tetlow, North Beach
Verna C. Thayer, California
Schuster Vance, Bel Alton
Linda Wilson, Lexington Park
Helen Zudrell, Newburg

* Special thanks to our new lifetime member Paul Impelluso!
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

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.