

The Osprey

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

Cove Point Field Trip by Bob Boxwell



Ipswich Savannah Sparrow
Photo by: Bill Hubick

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<http://somdaudubon.org/>

As director of a trust involved with Cove Point the beach and marsh area are of particular interest to me. My first knowledge of the area was working at the Calvert Marine Museum and taking people on tours of the Cove Point Lighthouse. I would never remember to take my binoculars and check out the waterfowl but I was curious. Later I was invited to attend the trust meetings and read about the endangered tiger beetles and a treasure trove of rare plants.

Since then research at Cove Point has covered a multitude of areas and this year we finally got to some field work on birds. Dave Curson with MD/DC Audubon conducted BirdBlitzes at Cove Point and Calvert Cliffs this breeding season. We hope to see the two listed as Important Bird Areas next year.

Which finally brings me to this year's field trip. A small group of us approached the beach through the old titanium mine site. Lots of warbler action primarily Yellow-rumped Warblers (yikes fall really is here) but a few western and eastern Palm Warblers made it interesting.

The Chesapeake Bay was fairly flat but devoid of birds. The platform had all the cormorants, gulls, and a couple of terns. Bald Eagles are back with the Ospreys mostly gone. We had several high flying predators, mainly over the marsh. The marsh held a few hundred Canada Geese and four Mute Swans. DNR has come to visit and has not been able to catch this group. The marsh is really large and is only accessible by kayak. They will continue their efforts.

Several years ago Dominion undertook a Living Shoreline project as part of the effort to expand the platform capacity. The planting they did over the past two years have really taken off. Berms are rebuilding on the beach and the shoreline has moved back out. The salt marsh area is about half full of plants now and does provide excellent habitat for lurking birds like our target the Nelson's Sparrow. We had several opportunities to identify one if only it would have stopped. The glimpses we did get and the general flight did lend itself to a probable identification. Nothing like the photo op we had last year.

We hope to continue visiting the beach and marsh and work on updating a bird list for the area.

Rarity Roundup

Lee Vines noted at the monthly meeting that he had recently seen a Sandhill Crane fly over Waldorf. This sort of coincides with Fred Shaffer's report of a Sandhill Crane at Schoohouse Pond in Upper Marlboro. This is potentially the second Charles County record. Kyle Rambo had the first back in September, 1997.

San Diego by Tyler Bell

Jane Kostenko and I worked at the American Birding Association's Bird Rally in San Diego from October 12 to 16. If you've ever been to San Diego, you'll know that the weather is pretty static. Cool at night, cool to warm during the day and much warmer inland. Sometimes a bit of fog or, if you're near the water, the marine layer.

Work obligations kept us pretty busy most of the time but we did manage to get out and do some birding including an 11 hour pelagic. We've birded in southern California several times so we had only a few target life birds. The first one, Nutmeg Mannikin, the subject of the video in last month's Osprey, happened to be our first lifer. We had specific directions to a location only about 5 miles from our hotel at the end of Tecolote Road. We parked the car and looked around and finally found a group of about 20 birds foraging in some grass seed heads across a concrete drainage channel. Neat little birds!

On October 14, we were able to shadow one of the field trips which went to the mountains and chaparral to the east of town. Our first stop was an attempt at the recently split Bell's Sparrow, formerly a subspecies of Sage Sparrow. We'd seen another subspecies of Bell's Sparrow further north near Santa Maria but it's always prudent to see different subspecies as DNA work often determines that these are valid species somewhere down the line. Unfortunately, the group said they were only able to view the birds by using playback which Jane and I shy away from. We walked through the sage habitat but never found any likely candidates. Still, lots of neat western birds like California Towhee, White-crowned Sparrow and Audubon's Yellow-rumped Warbler, which was arriving in the area in substantial numbers.

Our next stop was at a much higher altitude from the low level sage scrub. Here in the mountains, conifers dominate. We birded in the Burnt Rancheria Campground. One of the target species for the trip was Oak Titmouse split from Plain Titmouse many years ago. We were fortunate to see several of these birds at close range. Also present were White-breasted Nuthatches. The western variety of these birds sound very little like our eastern version. They have a throatier call and song and are another candidate for splitting. Similar to our Brown-headed Nuthatches, there were Pygmy Nuthatches. They look and sound very similar. Acorn Woodpeckers were extremely common in the campground and we even found a cache tree where they were hoarding acorns. It's pretty amazing to see a large tree riddled with holes all filled with acorns!

Next day was our pelagic trip. It's always a gamble going out on the water. It can be calm, rarely, or rough, more often than not. Luck had it that our trip, and the trip the next day, had seas around two feet. That's almost like glass and very few people were seasick. Unfortunately, on our day,

we had a dense marine layer that didn't burn off until after lunch. Still, we started seeing Black-vented Shearwaters before we even headed out to sea. They were replaced by Pink-footed and Sooty Shearwaters and frequent Parasitic and Pomarine Jaegers which typically harass gull flocks. Near shore we also had Cassin's Auklets which look like footballs with wings. We were headed to a location where a large mixed storm-petrel flock had been for more than a week. Although they had begun dispersing, there were still several thousand Least, and Black Storm-Petrels. These birds look quite similar to each other but the Black Storm-Petrel is about twice as big as the Least so it was easy to pick them out.

The best sighting of the day was a pair of Craveri's Murrelets that allowed very close approach. Participants on the next day's trip got these as well as Guadalupe Murrelets, split from Xantus's Murrelet into Guadalupe and Scripp's Murrelets a couple of years ago. Any of these murrelets are quite difficult to find on the open ocean and some people have spent decades trying to find them.

On our final day, we decided to chase Blue-footed Boobies at a reservoir lake north of San Diego. A couple of weeks before the conference, a wave of Blue-footed Boobies invaded California and Arizona in unprecedented numbers. Initially, they were seen around San Diego but as the invasion progressed, they moved further north along the coast being seen as far north as Bodega Bay. Fortunately, Lake Skinner is only about an hour away and the freeways were clogged in the opposite direction as we headed north in rush hour traffic. Jane spotted one of the birds flying by so we worked our way around the lake ultimately finding three of them. We were able to capture some distant but recognizable digiscoped images.

Southern California is a pretty amazing place to bird and once you get away from the sprawling civilization, there are some excellent, wild places to bird. Hope you all have a chance to get there someday!

Long term member, and our haiku author, Jane Klemer, is in a nursing home and would enjoy being remembered by her SMAS friends. Please drop her a line. She'd love to hear from you!

Jane (Doris) Klemer
Clinton Nursing Home
9211 Stuart Lane
Clinton, MD 20735

MARA Data Needed!

Anyone with data for the Maryland Amphibian and Reptile Atlas should send their data to the coordinators by the end of November. George Jett has had some luck recently with salamanders. Folks should still be looking and sending in data if they find anything.

The coordinators are:

Andy Brown, Calvert

George Jett, Charles

Kyle Rambo, St. Mary's



Northern Two-lined Salamander

Photo by: George Jett



Northern Watersnake

Photo by: George Jett

Seeking Junior Audubon Club Alumni



Were you a member, or a child of a member, of the National Audubon Society's Junior Audubon Clubs in the 1920s-30s? If so, Amy Weidensaul, Director of Education for Audubon Pennsylvania, would love to talk with you! Amy is researching the history of the original Junior Audubon Clubs and seeking firsthand accounts of involvement. She is looking at the impact Junior Audubon clubs had both on those who participated and on modern environmental education programs. If you have a story to share, please contact Amy by email (aweidensaul@audubon.org) or call 570-617-9748.

Christmas Bird Count

Fort Belvoir, Maryland Sector, Jan 5, 2014

The official National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count period is December 14 - January 5. This year SMAS will be counting each Sunday of the period, with our Fort Belvoir count on the last Sunday, January 5. Come join us as we again survey the Maryland Sector of Virginia's Fort Belvoir count circle. Our territory runs from Fort Washington, south to the Naval Surface Weapons Center, Indian Head, including the environs. We cover lots of Potomac River shoreline and its tributaries, as well as woods, fields, and some developed areas. The territory also includes Piscataway Park, Ferguson Farm, Ruth Swann Park, Chapman State Park, part of the Mattawoman Natural Environment Area and Mattawoman Wildlands, and part of the Indian Head Rail Tail. We always need help, including backyard feeder counters. Reach sector leader, Carol Ghebelian, at 301-753-6754 or ghebelian@comcast.net And join us for the evening tally rally at the home of Bob and Dottie Lukinic, 5850 River Road, Bryans Road, MD.

Russell Greenberg: RIP

Sadly, Russell Greenberg (b.1953), Director of the Migratory Bird Center at the National Zoo's Conservation Biology Institute, passed away in late October.

Among other things, Russ Greenberg pioneered the idea of promoting shade-grown coffee as a bird-friendly product and applying research on birds in neotropical ecosystems to the marketplace. He helped profoundly change the terms of discussion in the coffee industry by developing science-based criteria, along with standards based on how shade-grown coffee benefits both birds and broader biodiversity. The "bird-friendly" approach continues to be a pioneering way to link economics and bird conservation.

Greenberg was an early leader in the field of addressing neotropical bird declines, was instrumental in launching International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD), authored over 110 papers and chapters on migratory birds, and was a champion of the much-neglected Rusty Blackbird.

In August, he was awarded the prestigious Elliott Coues Award from the American Ornithologists' Union. The award recognizes outstanding and innovative contributions to ornithological research.

Birding Community E-bulletin

Paul J. Baicich

410-992-9736

paul.baicich@verizon.net

You can access past E-bulletins on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website:

www.refugenet.org/birding/birding5.html

Feds Propose Listing Greater Sage-Grouse Sub-Population As Threatened, Angering Energy Developers

By Jason Dearen, Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Federal wildlife officials on Friday proposed to list as threatened populations of Greater Sage-Grouse in Nevada and California in an effort to save the struggling species, a decision that promises to pose new challenges for ranching and energy development in the West.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that invasive species and energy development in the desert have had a devastating effect on the large, ground-dwelling bird's populations, said Ted Koch, Nevada state supervisor for the service. "It's not the 11th hour for Greater Sage-Grouse here, but it is maybe the 10th hour," Koch said. "And that's good news. It means we have some time and space to turn things around."

The service found multiple threats facing this specific sub-population of the Greater Sage-Grouse, a chicken-size bird whose males have a large white tuft of feathers around their necks. The service estimates there are only about 5,000 of the birds left. Non-native pinyon pine and juniper trees introduced to the habitat and power lines have given low-to-the-ground perches for raptors, which eat the grouse, Koch said. The service also found that an invasive grass from Asia that burns easily has helped decimate sagebrush, which is key to the grouse's survival.

Industry, federal and local officials say a local effort already underway to save the bird is a promising start. Passed in 2012, the plan is being used by federal officials to help clear red tape for industry in the area. Some state legislators greeted the proposed listing with suspicion, saying it could have wide-ranging economic impact on the rural economies in the region. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada said the decision will have "major ramifications" on the way of life in parts of Nevada and California. "This listing is further proof that we need to work together to protect sensitive species before they get to such a dismal point and negatively affect our rural economies," Reid said in a statement. The final decision on the service's proposal will occur next year, and the public will have 60 days to comment.

Ranchers, miners and energy developers who use the mostly public lands that serve as the Greater Sage-Grouse's habitat have opposed the listing, saying it would have a deep economic impact in the rural West.

Friday's proposed listing comes as the service is also determining whether the entire western Greater Sage-Grouse population should be federally protected. Greater Sage-Grouse also live in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington,

Wyoming and parts of Canada. Ranchers worry that protections will scuttle or block outright vast grazing areas. They say it adds a lot of uncertainty to any plans to expand or even launch habitat restoration plans on their lands. "For guys talking about expansion and going to the bank for loan, I'm not sure what the bank is going to tell me," said JJ Goicoechea, a rancher and veterinarian who is president of the Nevada Cattlemen's Association. "And the rural economy is heavily dependent on those ranching families, who generate revenues that help keep towns and schools running. What's going to happen to those rural communities?" he asked.

The Center for Biological Diversity, which sued the service to protect the Greater Sage-Grouse, said the decision was long overdue. "The Greater Sage-Grouse we have here in Nevada and California is a true symbol of all that is wild -- what a relief that it's finally getting the protection it needs to survive," Rob Mrowka, a Nevada-based center ecologist, said in a statement.

Associated Press reporter Michelle Rindels contributed from Las Vegas.

The Washington Post, October 25, 2013



Greater Sage-Grouse

Photo by: Pacific Southwest Region U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Nestbox Cleaning Time!

It's a beautiful moment when your backyard birds depart their nestboxes. By October, it's time for one last duty as nestbox landlord: to clean it out. Cleaning will reduce the incidence of parasites in the box and make it more inviting to next spring's tenants. It will also help you know for sure if it gets used again. Watch a video about how to clean a nestbox:

<http://birdnote.org/video/2013/10/how-clean-birdhouse-or-nestbox>

BirdNote

PO Box 99456 Seattle, WA 98139

<http://www.birdnote.org>



Thanking SMAS's Raptor Conservation Fund for sponsoring new nets for the Point Lookout Saw-whet Station.
Photo by: Tyler Bell

There are "new" 2013 Saw-whet Owls now available for adoption! They make great holiday gifts!



Melissa Boyle with a Northern Saw-Whet Owl captured at the banding station at Pt. Lookout State Park, 3 November 2013.
Photo by: Mike Callahan

Thanking SMAS's Raptor Conservation Fund for sponsoring new nets for the Point Lookout Saw-whet Station. There are "new" 2013 Saw-whets now available for adoption! They make great holiday gifts!!

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!

NEW FOR 2013!! "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: Melissa Boyle, Adopt-a-Raptor,
10455 Point Lookout Rd. Scotland, MD 20687*

Name: _____
as it should appear on Adoption Certificate

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: _____

Make checks payable to: Southern Maryland Audubon Society

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 23 - SATURDAY – 8:00 a.m. – Noon

Field Trip

Mattawoman Natural Environment Area, Charles County
“EARLY WATERFOWL FROM THE GEORGE WILMOT TRAIL”

Leader: Gwen Brewer (301-843-3524, glbrewer@comcast.net)

Come search for migrating waterfowl and songbirds in this prime habitat! Up to 5,000 individuals and 13 different species of waterfowl have been present, including Eurasian Wigeon. From Rt. 225 (Hawthorne Road)/Rt. 224 (Chicamuxen Road) intersections take Rt. 224, go approximately ½ mile and take a left into Lackey High School. Meet in the Lower (2nd) parking lot. Bring a spotting scope if you have one, and be prepared for a moderate walk. No facilities and no fee. This is joint trip with the Audubon Naturalist Society. RSVP required.

December 4 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30

Monthly Meeting Program

Leonardtown Library, St. Mary's County
23250 Hollywood Road (Rt. 245), Leonardtown, MD 20650
“Holiday Nature Arts Fest”

Come display your photography, artwork. Or any nature-oriented craft. Some work may be offered for holiday purchase. Enjoy an evening of sharing and viewing while nibbling cakes and cookies. If interested in selling your work at this event contact: Lynne Wheeler at 301-743-3236 or comstockel@aol.com. A great start for the holiday season!

December 6 AND December 13

FRIDAY – 8:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Field Trip

Myrtle Point Park, St. Mary's County
“WINTER OWL PROWL”

Leader: Bob Boxwell (410-610-5124, bobboxwell@hotmail.com)

Youths especially welcome!

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. To find Myrtle Point Park, take Rt. 4 in St. Mary's County to Patuxent Boulevard, and follow to the end.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS 2013/2014

Dec. 15 Port Tobacco Count

Gwen Brewer - glbrewer@comcast.net

Dec. 22 Point Lookout Count

Bob Boxwell - bobboxwell@hotmail.com

Dec. 29 Patuxent River

Andy Brown - brownaj@co.cal.md.us

Jan. 5 Ft. Belvoir

Carol Ghebelian - ghebelian@comcast.net

January 8 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m.

Monthly Meeting Program

Charlotte Hall Library, St. Mary's County
37600 New Market Road (Rt. 6 at Rt. 5), Charlotte Hall, MD 20622
“Kenya and Tanzania”

Come join us as Lance Benedict takes us on a visual journey to Kenya and Tanzania. Lance has a doctorate in Aerospace Engineering. He is the Montgomery County Coordinator of the Maryland Amphibian

and Reptile Atlas. He has made two recent trips to East Africa. His presentation promises landscapes, flora and fauna (mostly birds, of course!!)

January 26

Sunday – 8 a.m. – Noon

Field Trip

Piscataway Park & Hard Bargain Farm- Prince George's County
“WINTER WATERFOWL AND RESIDENT BIRDS”

Leaders: Mike Callahan (raptorsrulemc@gmail.com or 240-765-5192) & Michael Patterson (301-752-5763)

This is a prime area for wintering waterfowl. The varied habitats of woods, farm fields and edges also provide great variety of birds. Take Rt. 210 (Indian Head Highway) to Livingston Rd. Take Livingston Rd. east and meet at the Burger King in the Food Lion Shopping Center (15785 Livingston Rd. Accokeek, MD 20607). No facilities. No fee. Limit of 20 participants. RSVP Required. Joint trip with the Audubon Naturalist Society.

February 2

SUNDAY – 8 a.m. – Noon

Field Trip

Jefferson Patterson Park & Museum, Calvert County
“WINTER WATERFOWL TRIP”

Leader: Tyler Bell (301-862-4623, jtylbell@yahoo.com). Open fields and wooded areas can provide good land birding and the river frontage for close views of winter waterfowl. Call or email the leader for directions to the meeting location. RSVP required.

February 12 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m.

Monthly Meeting Program

Battle Creek Cypress Swamp Center, Calvert County
Gray's Road off of Sixes Road (Rt. 506), Prince Frederick, MD
“A Night in Belize”

Andy Brown is the Senior Naturalist for Calvert County and founder of Caretta Nature Tours. In June he led a trip to Belize to assist biologists from the Gales Point Wildlife Sanctuary collect data on the largest nesting beach in Belize for endangered Hawksbill Sea Turtles. Andy's slides will offer a glimpse of the tropical flora and fauna of this beautiful Central American country.

February 15

Saturday – 7 p.m.

Field Trip – Owl Prowl

Private Farm, Charles County- Youths Welcome!

Leader: Mike Callahan (raptorsrulemc@gmail.com or 240-765-5192)

On this night hike, we will look for and listen for owls in Charles County. A great family night outing! Due to the sensitivity of possible nesting owls, the location will be given upon registration. RSVP required. Suggested donation of \$5 per person.

EDITOR: Tyler Bell **E-mail:** jtylbell@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.