

The Osprey

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

CALVERT CLIFFS STATE PARK, SEPTEMBER 24, 2011

by Tyler Bell



Upland Sandpiper
Photo by: Fred Fallon

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<http://somdaudubon.org/>

George Harrington, Susan Lukas, Mary Sokol and Diana Gyuras joined me for my annual field trip to Calvert Cliffs SP. The parking lot was abuzz with Pine Warblers and Carolina Chickadees as we headed back toward the Red Trail. Due to Hurricane Irene damage, the boardwalk around the pond was under reconstruction so we detoured around the parking lot and dropped down onto the trail a bit further east than usual. About that time, it started to rain. It sounded worse than it was a ground level. The canopy seemed to be absorbing most of the rain and very little was hitting us for which we were grateful.

Once on the trail, we had to work for our birds. One of the problems with the Red Trail is that it follows a creek down to the Bay so you are basically as low in elevation as you can be. The trees tend to be up slope so everything is above you and, of course, the warblers pick the highest trees to flit around in giving everyone a bad case of warbler neck.

For the first time in many years, the Red-headed Woodpeckers would not put in an appearance. We scanned all of the usual areas of standing dead trees and neither saw nor heard any likely suspects.

When we got to the Bay, George bit us adieu. We scanned the liquid natural gas dock and surrounding waters to bolster the trip list. We hit the jackpot on Bald Eagles between the last pond and the area near the LNG dock. There were several juvenile and adult birds seen together. There were no Osprey which must make the eagles sad because now they actually have to catch their own fish instead of letting the Osprey do the work for them!



Perhaps my best birds of the trip were found in the parking lot after the group had disbanded. I found a Philadelphia Vireo and an Eastern race Palm Warbler in the same stand of trees in the upper parking. Perhaps if we had had more time, we might have dug these birds out as the group walked by? Maybe next year.

Bald Eagle and Philadelphia Vireo
Photos by Bill Hubick

PRNAS “GRASSPIPER” FIELD TRIP

Photo by: Fred Fallon



On Sunday, September 11th, leader Kyle Rambo escorted a group of 9 other birders onto the Patuxent River Naval Air Station in search of some very specific target birds – grasspipers. “Grasspipers” is an unofficial term used by birders to describe those species of shorebirds, including sandpipers, that are more typically found in grassy habitats, rather than on sandy beaches, intertidal zones, or mudflats. Examples in this region include Upland Sandpiper (UPSA), Buff-breasted Sandpiper (BBSA), Pectoral Sandpiper, Baird’s Sandpiper, American Golden-Plover (AMGP), and Killdeer. And the Naval Air Station’s airfield, our planned destination, abounds with grassland habitat of varying types and grass heights.

However, without having any advance scouting information since the big Labor Day weekend air show (which put over 50,000 people in the prime grasspiper habitat), we piled into our van and headed to the field with fingers crossed. It didn’t take long to figure out that luck was with us that day, as the group pretty quickly spotted a small flock of 4 juvenile Upland Sandpipers that had not yet left for their South American wintering grounds. “Uppies” normally start arriving in late June, with the arrival of migrating adult birds, and occupy the short grass portions of our airfield through late August, as the juvenile birds follow. Flocks of 30-50 birds are not uncommon during the peak of migration. We occasionally get a few birds hanging on through early September, so these were truly cooperative birds.

After watching these birds do their “funky chicken” strut, chasing down grasshoppers and moths for lunch, we moved on in search of our most desired quarry, the Buff-breasted Sandpiper. We didn’t have to wait long to find our “Buffies.” The first of these tiny, cinnamon-colored birds appeared in a small flock, feeding with a few Pectoral Sandpipers. The BBSA migration period is more compressed than the UPSA migration and is typically confined to mid-September, although birds occasionally linger through the end of the month and into early October. Birds migrating along coastal routes, like ours, are almost always juvenile birds, as were all of the 12 birds observed this day. Observations at Pax River (perhaps one of the premier sites for observing BBSA in the mid-Atlantic region) have included flocks of up to 30 birds in some years!

Large numbers of Killdeer rounded out our grasspiper list, without any sightings of AMGP (which are more common

here in October) or the very rare Baird’s Sandpiper (only 2 records at PRNAS). Low numbers of other shorebird species were found utilizing small puddles on the airfield, including 1 Least Sandpiper, 1 Semipalmated Sandpiper, and 1 Semipalmated Plover. The most interesting non-shorebird seen on the airfield in the morning was a Peregrine Falcon, drinking and preening at a large puddle, apparently taking a break from harassing the flocks of Killdeer or Upland and Buff-breasted Sandpipers. Fully satisfied that we had met our grasspiper mission objectives, we spent the rest of the morning visiting several other sites, sorting through mixed flocks of passerines for the occasional gem, such as the cooperative Nashville Warbler found in a locust tree near Goose Creek, racking up a total of 67 different species seen for the morning. Good camaraderie, good weather, and good birds made for an excellent field trip all around!

Kyle Rambo, PRNAS Conservation Director

OUT-OF-SEASON; OUT-OF-RANGE HUMMINGBIRDS

Hummingbirds are fascinating animals. This was a good year for our nesting Ruby-throats, but they are leaving. Most of our nesting birds leave the region by mid October, but I recommend leaving your hummingbird feeders out from now until January 1 for two reasons. Migrant Ruby-throated that might stop by need additional energy for the dangerous trip south, and this is the time period when non-breeding hummingbirds start showing up in Maryland

I call non-breeding species in our region “out-of-season, out-of-range birds”. Maryland now has four documented non-breeding hummingbird species on the state list: Rufous, Calliope, Anna’s and Allen’s Hummingbirds. The District of Columbia has a documented Black-chinned. All are rare visitors. They show up in the east during October through January. For example, in 2008 within about a 20-mile stretch in Calvert County along the western side of the Chesapeake Bay, we had the fourth Maryland state record of a Calliope Hummingbird (North Beach), a hatch-year female Rufous (Port Republic), and a first Maryland state record hatch-year female Allen’s (Prince Frederick) . The Allen’s was discovered on December 23. To see images of a number of these rare hummingbird visit www.georgejett.net .

All these records resulted from hummingbird feeders being left out to attract birds during the October to January period. There is absolutely no truth to the old wives’ tale that if you leave out your feeder the birds won’t leave, and will freeze in the winter. Hummingbirds migrate based on the available light and suitable weather conditions. Suitable weather is a big high pressure with a good tail wind. Hummingbirds leave when the available daylight triggers chemicals in the brain to tell them it is time to move along, and this occurs around the fall equinox – late September.

continued▶

TIP OF THE MONTH: PRACTICE GIVING DIRECTIONS

These rare visitors are normally hatch year birds that have yet to learn which way to migrate. Hatch-year birds are those born this spring or summer. We have two Rufous Hummingbird records for Charles, and many others across the state. So many that the Maryland rare birds records committee no longer reviews this species, but the other species are reviewable. If you get a hummingbird after November 1 please report it to me. I can be reached at gmjett@comcast.net.

Rufous and Allen's are very hard to separate in the field. They are in the genus *Selasphorus*, and non-adult males look very similar. Proper identification is important. This is done by certified hummingbird banders. Fortunately I know two in the area. You need detailed measurements of the bird in hand, especially when you are determining the first state or county records. Documenting these birds to species help provide useful scientific data on the migration of these birds, and you could be a part of learning more about these amazing animals. Additionally, the Allen's stayed until December 29, and as many as 50 avid birders got to see this new state bird due to the generosity of the property owner. The Allen's probably migrated from northern California, and went east instead of south to Mexico where the species normally overwinters. Because the bird got extra feed during her stay in Maryland, she likely had a more successful trip south once she decided to continue migration.

Non-breeding hummingbirds will be hungry when they arrive from the long flight from as far away as Alaska. When leaving out your feeders please make sure your feeder is clean, the food is fresh, the feeder is located where you can see it easily, and check it on a daily basis. This way you will know when you have a potential non-Ruby-throated Hummingbird, and the bird will be provided a healthy meal. If it gets below 20 degrees at night, bring in the feeder so the liquid feed won't freeze. Nothing worse than to arrive and find a frozen dinner! I use one part sugar and three parts water for non-breeding hummingbird bait. It is a higher energy source than I feed during the normal breeding season of April to September. Sugar and water will freeze around 20 degrees, so to prevent damage to your feeder when ice expands inside it, fill it just two-thirds full. If a hard freeze is expected, it is best to bring the feeder in at night. Put the feeder out about one-half hour before sunrise as these birds tend to feed early. When you put out the feeder in the morning it will be liquid and ready to help the bird survive.

I have over the years received several communications asking if hummingbirds are supposed to be here on Thanksgiving. At that point I ask the informant where do you live. Will you be the next person to help out these fascinating animals?

Good bird watching, and if anyone asks you why they are called hummingbirds, tell them they don't know the words.

George Jett Waldorf, MD. gmjett@comcast.net
www.georgejett.net

When you're birding with a group in the field and you hear a companion say, "There's an oriole in the largest tree ahead at three o'clock." you probably know what that means. The familiar "clock technique" is a useful way for one birder to direct others to seemingly hard-to-spot birds. By using the "clock technique" you'd at once know that the imagined clock face was superimposed over the tree and that the oriole could be found at the outer right edge of the tree. (As we increasingly go digital, in the future, analog clocks may be less understood!)

But the clock technique is only one tool. Many of us also need to polish up our direction-giving, since general terms such as "straight ahead" or "up there" are often not clear enough for our colleagues to readily spot a bird in the field. "In top of the bush that's the shape of Ukraine" or "in the top of the Osage Orange tree," might also seem perfectly clear to you, but perhaps not to others.

Beyond the clock orientation, consider some additional possibilities. When giving directions, think about the precise location of the tree, bush, or other supporting feature in question; any outstanding characteristic in the supporting feature; how close or far away the bird or vegetation is located; how near to the edge or how deep into the vegetation/water's-edge/or pond the bird might be; any obvious foreground or background objects that might be useful for orientation; what direction the bird might be moving; and the color or tone of the bark, the branch, the leaves, the water's edge that will serve to help locate the bird.

Locating a bird in the sky for your companions – say, a soaring raptor – takes additional practice, involving orienting on other birds in the sky, objects in the foreground (e.g., treelines, towers, buildings), cloud shape, distance, and flight direction.

Then, try to convey the location in the clearest, most sequential order (from general to specific) to guide your companions to seeing the desired bird. At the same time, think about doing it as quickly as possible.

It takes practice at first, but practice makes perfect.

Footnote: giving directions on a boat at sea is totally different, and is a subject we will take up another time!

Birding Community E-bulletin
Paul J. Baicich 410-992-9736 paul.baicich@verizon.net

FEDERAL BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT EXPANDS STRATEGY TO PROTECT SAGE-GROUSE & SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM AUDUBON HELPED PIONEER APPROACH THAT BALANCES ENERGY AND WILDLIFE NEEDS

Greater Sage-Grouse
Published: Aug 1, 2011
Washington, D.C.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) took an important step forward on behalf of our nation's iconic sagebrush habitat and wildlife like the Greater sage-grouse with the release of its National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy. The strategy outlines a region-wide effort and builds upon the work of diverse stakeholders, including Audubon Wyoming and Wyoming's governors (former Governor Dave Freudenthal and current Governor Matt Mead.)

"This is a landmark decision for a species that crosses so many state borders and is dependent on a habitat that has historically been dismissed and degraded. I am encouraged to hear that sound science is being incorporated into federal policymaking. The benefits will extend to many wildlife species that use this unique habitat," said Brian Rutledge, Audubon Wyoming executive director and a key proponent of the core habitat approach in Wyoming.

"This proactive, balanced approach will enable all of us, working together, to protect the sage-grouse without the need for federal listing as an endangered species," emphasized Rutledge. (Last year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found Greater sage-grouse warranted protection under the Endangered Species Act, but listing was precluded by higher priority species. Because of its status as a candidate species, federal agencies and public have limited additional time to take efforts such as this proactive landscape level action.)

Sage-grouse require large tracts of sagebrush habitat, found in Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, the Dakotas, Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah and Colorado. Over the last century, nearly 50 percent of their original range has been lost to various kinds of development. Remaining populations – some in small, isolated colonies – face growing threats from energy development, diseases, wildfires, and invasive plants. There is concern among wildlife managers and scientists that local populations may disappear in the next several decades, leaving the species vulnerable to extinction.

With Wyoming home to more than half of the world's Greater sage-grouse population, it has taken a lead in innovative sage-grouse conservation actions due to fear of economic impacts associated with a listing decision. Wyoming's science-based and broad stakeholder approach mapped

eight million acres of federal land in the state as important sage-grouse habitat requiring careful management actions. BLM manages more sage-grouse habitat than any other government agency — approximately 57 million acres. Proactive efforts begun by the state of Wyoming, followed by the Wyoming BLM, is now being expanded across all 11 states inhabited by grouse through amendments to Resource Management Plans. The result of this bold move will be management consistency across the region, indicating a commitment by BLM for a cooperative approach and the inclusion of sound science in management decisions across the Sage-grouse's range.

"Audubon will continue to advance the core area approach developed in Wyoming, because it recognizes the importance of stakeholders, wildlife and fragile landscapes, yet still encourages energy independence and economic growth for our communities." Rutledge said.

Read Audubon President David Yarnold's Op Ed on Winning the West's Energy Wars
More about BLM plan http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/info/newsroom/2011/july/NR_07_21_2011.html
More on Audubon's Sagebrush Initiative
About Greater Sage grouse <http://birds.audubon.org/species/gresag>



Greater Sage-Grouse
Steven Ting, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

AN UNUSUAL EXPERIMENT IN BIRD BEHAVIOR

by Paul Nistico

In May of this year, I participated in a pelagic trip that departed from Ponce Inlet on Florida's Atlantic Coast. The word "pelagic" refers to the open ocean and, in this context, to the birds that live in that habitat, coming onshore only to breed. This particular trip was a grueling search of the Gulf Stream, departing in the dark for a 17 hour trek that extended 100 miles offshore.

Twenty miles out, as the light grew brighter, I was impressed by the number of perching birds that were migrating over the ocean. Tired and looking for a place to land, they would circle at length before deciding that our boat was not a safe haven. Those that were identifiable were mostly warblers. I identified four warbler species: Blackpoll, American Redstart, Cape May and Wilson's.



Over the years, Michael Brothers, the trip organizer, has wondered whether he could encourage this type of bird to land on the boat by bringing some greenery on board. When I saw him carrying a cheap plastic tree onto the

boat and securing it to the upper deck, I wondered if he had spent too much time under the tropical sun.

Guess what? Shortly after sunrise, and after circling for some time, a female Blackpoll Warbler landed in the faux Ficus and stayed for ten minutes. She was clearly looking for something to eat, which of course wasn't to be had. We stopped the boat and photographed the bird at length, but when we resumed our eastward course, the compass in her little brain told her that we were no longer doing her a favor, and she immediately flew off, heading west. A female Redstart also landed in the tree, but stayed only fifteen seconds.

For me, this episode was a lesson in "thinking out of the box" – always keeping oneself open to a new idea and willing to experiment to test the concept.

(I've attached photos of our tree, battened down behind the pilot house, and of our female Blackpoll, peeking out among its cloth leaves.)



FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED



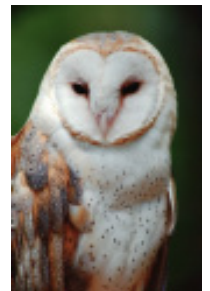
Southern Maryland Audubon Society sponsors the banding of nestling birds of prey, or raptors, with serially numbered aluminum bands in cooperation with the Bird Banding Laboratory of the U. S. Department of the Interior, as part of our bird research and conservation activities in Southern Maryland. Limited numbers of Osprey and Barn Owl nestlings become available each year for adoption. The gift of \$10 for an Osprey adoption, or of \$25 for a Barn Owl adoption, contributes to a special fund for the support of raptor research and raptor conservation projects. 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, photo of a fledgling, and any other information on whereabouts or fate of the bird that may be available.

Interested?

Here's how to become a foster parent of an Osprey or a Barn Owl. Send \$10.00 for each Osprey, \$25 for each Barn Owl, or \$35 for each American Kestrel to:

Melissa Boyle
10144 Point Lookout Road
Scotland, MD 20687



ADOPT A RAPTOR

Name: _____

Address: _____

I wish to adopt (check one):

_____ (# of) Osprey, \$10.00 each

_____ (# of) Barn Owl, \$25.00 each

_____ (# of) American Kestrel, \$35.00 each

Amount Enclosed: _____

Make checks payable to:
Southern Maryland Audubon Society

UPCOMING EVENTS

October 22- Saturday – 8 AM-noon – Field Trip
Indian Head Rail Trail, Mason Springs, Charles County
“RED-HEADS ON THE RAIL TRAIL”

Leaders: Beth and Jason Groth (301-705-7922, ecocat@yahoo.com)
There are a few hot spots along the Indian Head Rail Trail (IHRT) that provide good wintering habitat for Red-headed woodpeckers, yielding high numbers of individuals. One of the hot spots has revealed as many as 23 individuals. Come join us for a leisurely morning of birding along this wonderful trail and search for these beautiful birds as well as sparrows and other land birds. Meet and park at MD Rt. 224 IHRT Parking Lot, located just East of MD Rt. 225.

October 29 - Saturday - 8 AM - noon – Field Trip
Caledon Natural Area, King George, VA
“FALL MIGRANTS AND RESIDENT BIRDS”

Leader: Mike Callahan (240-765-5192, raptorsrule@juno.com).
The Caledon Natural Area is a Virginia State Park on the Potomac River on the opposite shore from Riverside and Nanjemoy. Meadow and river bottom, swamp and marsh habitats and is known for Bald Eagles (at least 15 in one spot!), Red-headed Woodpeckers too. Last fall we had flocks of both Wood Stork and White Pelican at Caledon! Meet at MD 301 visitor center just north of Harry Nice Bridge. Toll southbound for bridge. Contact leader for more info. Limited to 12 participants due to space in the park van. RSVP required. \$3 vehicle fee.

NOVEMBER 2 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m.

Battle Creek Cypress Swamp Center, Calvert County
Gray’s Road off of Sixes Road (Rt. 506), Prince Frederick, MD
Call 410-535-5327 for additional information or visit
www.calvertparks.org

“The Art of Falconry - The World’s Oldest Sport”
JEREMY ALLEN, Falconer

Falconry dates back 3000 years and is known as the oldest sport in the world. Learn about the history, art and regulations of hunting with a bird of prey. Jeremy will have a live bird with him and may also be in the company with another falconer. Great close up opportunity for photographing and observing a live raptor.

November 6 – Sunday - 8 AM - noon – Field Trip
Myrtle Grove WMA, Charles County Youths especially welcome!
“BIRDING FOR ALL LEVELS”

Leader: Fred Burggraf (301-934-8042, fburggraf@aol.com). Diverse habitat for hawks, sparrows, woodpeckers, and early waterfowl. Great for beginning birders! From Rt. 301 in La Plata, take Rt. 225 west about 4.5 miles to the WMA on the right. From Rt. 210 take Rt. 225 east about 4 miles to the WMA. Follow the dirt road to the end (about a mile) and meet in the parking lot near the lake. RSVP required.

November 13 - Sunday - 8 AM - noon – Field Trip
King’s Landing Park, Calvert County
“LATE FALL BIRDS”

Leader: Tom Harten (443-964-5042, tomharten@comcast.net)
King’s Landing Park, in Huntingtown, offers a variety of habitats attractive to wintering birds including forest, open fields, freshwater wetlands and the Patuxent River. We’ll meet next to the CHESPAX office near the main parking lot of the park. King’s Landing is located 5 miles north of Prince Frederick following Route 4. Turn left onto Old Town Rd. (MD 524). Turn left at Bowen’s Grocery Store and continue straight for about 3 miles to park entrance. RSVP required.

November 19 - Saturday - 8 AM - noon – Field Trip
Mattawoman Natural Environmental Area Wildlands, Charles County
“EARLY WATERFOWL FROM THE GEORGE WILMOT TRAIL”

Leader: Gwen Brewer (301-843-3524, glbrewer@comcast.net) Come search for migrating waterfowl on Mattawoman Creek and for songbirds in this prime natural area. This time of year as many as 5000 individuals and 13 species of waterfowl have been present, including Eurasian Wigeon. On Rt. 224 (Chicamuxen Rd.) off Rt. 225 between La Plata & Indian Head. Meet in the lower (2d) parking lot at Lackey High School (left side of Rt. 224). Bring a spotting scope if you have one and be prepared for a moderate walk. No facilities and no fees. This is a joint trip with Audubon Naturalist Society. RSVP required.

DECEMBER 7 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m.

Charlotte Hall Library, St. Mary’s County
37600 New Market Road (Rt. 6 at Rt. 5), Charlotte Hall, MD 20622
“Local Photographers Night and Holiday Gift Sale”

Come see what others have photographed on trips, backyards, and local birding hot spots. Feel free to bring your own photos to show. Contact Lynne Wheeler by November 15 at 301-743-3236 or fidsruschic@aol.com to coordinate electronic viewing equipment. We are also highlighting our SMAS book and gift store to help you with your hard to find holiday gift shopping. Gift wrapping included!



White-lored Warbler
Photoby: George Jett

EDITOR: Tyler Bell
23035 Forest Way, California, MD 20619
E-mail: jtlyerbelle@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.

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