

The Osprey

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society



Passenger Pigeon
John James Audubon Print

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Fall 2014**



<http://somdaudubon.org/>

President's Perch

**"The pigeon was no mere bird, he was a biological storm."
(Aldo Leopold)**

The Passenger Pigeon disappeared forever when Martha, the last of her species, dropped from her perch at the Cincinnati Zoo at 1:00 in the afternoon. September 1, 2014 marked 100 years since Martha died; a sad ending for a species which was estimated to number in the billions. In the early and middle 1800s, the sound of a Passenger Pigeon flock was compared to sound of a train. Flocks of pigeons would black out the skies for hours and sometimes days as they flew overhead. They were the most abundant bird in North America, and possibly the world. John James Audubon watched a flock pass overhead for three days and estimated that at times more than 300 million pigeons flew by him each hour. But deforestation and massive hunting for food by European settlers led to a slow population decline by 1870, followed by rapid decline in the next 20 years.

Passenger Pigeons thrived in large flocks which allowed the birds to locate areas of abundant beechnuts, acorns, and chestnuts. They practiced communal breeding, sometimes with up to 100 nests in a tree and nesting areas that stretched for miles. However, these traits made the pigeons easy prey for hunters. When the size of flocks plummeted, there were too few birds left to maintain the population. Naturalist Paul R. Ehrlich wrote that its extinction "illustrates a very important principle of conservation biology: it is not always necessary to kill the last pair of a species to force it to extinction."

Martha, part of the last known group of pigeons kept by C.O. Whitman at the University of Chicago, was sent to the Cincinnati Zoo in 1902. Whitman and the Cincinnati Zoo tried to breed the birds in captivity, but eventually they stopped breeding. Passenger Pigeons would initiate courtship when they gathered in large numbers—the remaining birds were too few to save the species. Martha was offered several mates but never nested with any of them.

We have the opportunity to prevent the loss of other species. Lessons learned from the Passenger Pigeon helped bring the Bald Eagle back from serious population declines as a result of DDT use in the lower 48 states. Wood Duck populations recovered when a hunting ban was imposed between 1918 and 1941. California Condors and Whooping Cranes continue to make progress as a result of conservation efforts. But we risk losing many other species if we don't act on their behalf. The need to educate the public about wild birds can't be underestimated. Everyone who cares about birds can encourage other people's interest in birds and nature. Participating in citizen science projects, like eBird, helps alert scientists about population declines. This initiative was started in 2002 by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to provide information on bird populations. The next time you go

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birding and make a checklist, enter your data into this real-time, online checklist program. You're always welcome to help us with a Christmas Bird Count or May Count.

If you want to be directly involved in efforts to help save vulnerable species, there are openings to become involved with the SMAS Board of Directors. Through our programs, outreach, and committees we promote conservation and protection efforts for wild birds. You can do something as simple as buying shade-grown coffee to protect Cerulean Warbler habitat on their wintering grounds or make other changes to live greener. Whatever you choose to do, the important thing is to show your concern for birds and other wildlife so that behavior that doomed Martha will not be repeated.

Michael Patterson

BP Found "Grossly Negligent" in Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill By Susan E. Matthews

BP is guilty of gross negligence for its role in the disastrous 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, a federal judge ruled this morning. The company may be forced to pay up to \$18 billion in penalties, according to Bloomberg News. At least 80 percent of these fines will be funneled directly into environmental restoration, per the Restore Act, says Brian Moore, Audubon's legislative director.

"It changes altogether the scope of the restoration of the Gulf," Moore says.

The explosion and resulting spill killed 11 people and caused immeasurable environmental damage, including killing thousands of birds. Leaked oil is still hurting birds in the area years after the 2010 disaster.

In 2012 BP accepted criminal responsibility for the disaster, and the company has already paid fines and restitution totaling \$4.5 billion, the Wall Street Journal reported. Following the announcement of the additional fines from the gross negligence decision this morning, BP shares fell more than 6 percent.

U.S. District Judge Carl Barbier held the trial without a jury, and did not rule on how much oil was ultimately spilled in months after the rig explosion. That figure will ultimately determine the eventual fine BP pays--the Clean Water Act dictates that \$4,300 is paid per barrel of oil spilled. The company is expected to appeal the decision, which could delay payment on the fines for years.

"It is a long-awaited step toward healing and recovery for the Gulf Coast, its birds and its people," says Audubon President and CEO David Yarnold. "BP said it was above the law; Judge Barbier said the law applies to everyone, even multinational giants."

Previous fines paid by BP and other responsible parties have already been filtered toward restoration efforts in the Gulf, but this decision was "the last thing we were waiting on," Moore says. "This is the final and biggest piece--the piece that will help fund the most important conservation."

In his decision, Barbier concluded that of the guilty parties, BP was found 67 percent responsible; Transocean was found 30 percent responsible, and Halliburton was found 3 percent responsible. Transocean, which owned the faulty rig, and Halliburton Co., responsible for the well's cement work, were both found to be simply negligent in the disaster, rather than grossly so.

"This was the largest oil spill in the nation's history," says Moore, "and it deserves the largest fine."

Published: 09/04/2014

<http://www.audubonmagazine.org/articles/birds/bp-found-grossly-negligent-deepwater-horizon-oil-spill>

Tip Of The Month: Personalize Your Field Guide

In this month's "Book Notes," we mentioned that the second edition of the new Sibley guide has a multi-page bird-species checklist in the back of the book. This is a nice feature that harkens back at least to the early Roger Tory Peterson guides. This element gives the owner/user the opportunity to check off new species when they are seen.

There are other novel ways to personalize bird field guides, regardless of the title. Some field guide users color-highlight the species they have seen, others slip in a date or location, and still others underline or otherwise emphasize one or another field mark in the text. Individually drawn arrows have also been used to enhance the illustrations.

Stickers, Duck Stamps, and, most importantly perhaps, the owner's name, phone number, and e-mail address is often inserted into the front inside cover of a field guide - a smart move should the valued personalized guide ever be lost in the field.

The opportunities to personalize your field guide are practically endless. Remember, a field guide is for use "in the field," and is not intended to be kept in a pristine, pure, and unaltered state. If you want to have a field guide in that ideal condition, buy a duplicate copy just for home use!

Birding Community E-bulletin

Paul J. Baicich

410-992-9736

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

www.refugenet.org/birding/birding5.html

Hog Island An Educational Experience of a Lifetime By Kristen Frill

Maine is known as “Vacationland.” Hog Island and its beauty is the epitome of vacationland, with a healthy dose of learning. When I arrived to the Todd Audubon Camp in Bremen, Maine, I was so excited, with a side of apprehension, to embark on a week of a lifetime. I did not know a lot about birds, so I was rather intimidated as I walked down the long, steep hill to the boat dock. Fellow campers shouting out; Osprey, Merlin, Herring Gull, Black Guillemot! Out of those four, I was familiar with one.... but by the end of the week; I came to recognize the majestic birds by not only their body but also their amazing sounds. Never did I know how many types of Gulls existed. To this Florida girl, all I knew of was a “Sea Gull”, how shocked was I when I learned that was not even the real name for them!

Arriving at the camp was so exciting. I planned to be one of the first ones there so I could look around and, of course, claim the best bunk! As we walked around the camp waiting for other campers, we were engaged in such rich conversation with such an amazing staff. Professors, Environmentalists and Photographers. All with a common goal: immerse us immediately in our beautiful surroundings. I was led to my cabin for the week, The Crow’s Nest, an original cabin from the vacation property that once existed on Hog Island. I was greeted by a family of Merlins that made their home in a tall spruce near my cabin. They proved to provide a melodic backdrop through the week.



The first evening was extremely overwhelming to this 3rd grade teacher that knew very little about birds, but a lot about nature! 55 other educators that soon became such a wonderful extended family surrounded me. All of us so excited to explore the week as we hiked, discussed environmental concerns and how can we get our students involved in anything nature. Listening to our schedule for the week I knew we were in for a treat.



Fast forward to Tuesday, July 22. A group of us, known as the “Women of Wonder” went on a daylong hike around Hog Island. Taking in the beauty of flowers, trees, lichen, moss and birds was so tranquil. Add to it that absolutely amazing history of Hog Island and how Mabel Todd fought to save it from being bulldozed, and my leaders had me hooked! We spoke to an author that was



living in a primitive cabin that once belonged to Mabel and David Todd from the early 1900s. He was there

writing a book about Mabel and her relationship with Emily Dickinson. Can this little island of heaven get any cooler?

Wednesday, July 23, the day I have been waiting for: Puffin excursion day! 9 miles off the coast of Maine, on Eastern Egg Rock, sits an amazing habitat for Atlantic Puffins. Unfortunately, 4 foot swells and too much motion took away the magic of the day for me, I was going to have to rely heavily of my friends’ photos and the quick glimpses I could get through the cracks of my eyes. What I was able to witness, though, was breathtaking. Puffins swooping freely through the air, diving in the water and taking off with the cutest little kicks through the water. I sat there and was amazed at the work that is being done to save this species from disappearing completely. The sight of the puffins made me so happy. I could not wait to talk to my students about this when I returned to the classroom and we read *Night of the Puffins* by Bruce McMillan. Having a discussion with Steve Kress and Pete Salmansohn later that day just made it even more amazing! Bring on “Pennies for Puffins”, my brainchild idea while fighting seasickness, to raise \$100 to adopt a puffin from Eastern Egg Rock.

Advance to Friday, July 25. I found it so hard to believe that the week is over. It was the most amazing week of learning. I listened to so many educators speak about what we can do in our homes, in our classrooms, and with our school staff to make a difference. I ate some of the most amazing food ever! I met wonderful people that I will forever hold dear after our week of exploring together. Throughout the week I ate periwinkle snails, seaweed and seaweed pudding, items I never would have ventured to try. The call of the young Osprey, the swooping motion of the Great Black-backed Gull became commonplace throughout the week. None of this would be possible without the support of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society and the scholarship I was awarded. The week I spent at Hog Island can never be duplicated, but definitely repeated.



WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Jean Fenstermacher, Port Republic
Judy Kaleta, Leonardtown
Raymond & Visitacion Lepasqueur, Fort Washington
Mary A. McLaughlin, Clinton
Elizabeth Rozenbroek, Sunderland
Lois A. Smith, Fort Washington
George Stevens, Fort Washington
Carmen Workmon, Owings

Wild Birds' Songs, Feather Colors Changed by Mercury Contamination

Helen Fields and Alanna Mitchell
for Environmental Health News

WAYNESBORO, Virginia—Standing in the woods along the South River, Kelly Hallinger held the microphone up to capture the cacophony of songs, one at a time: the urgent, effervescent voice of the House Wren; the teakettle whistle of the Carolina Wren; and the sharp, shrill notes of the Song Sparrow.

It was the summer after her freshman year at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, and Hallinger was working with her professor, ecologist Dan Cristol, to investigate the effects of mercury left behind by a factory. Over and over she recorded birdsong, visiting various sites in the woods and along the shore, some polluted, some unpolluted.

When she got back to Williamsburg with her tape recorder, Hallinger sorted through the hours of bird songs. She turned them into digital files in the computer, then analyzed them. The differences were striking: The wrens and sparrows along the contaminated South River were singing simpler, shorter, lower-pitched songs.

Scientists have long known that mercury is a potent toxicant: It disrupts the architecture of human brains, and it can change birds' behavior and kill their chicks. But after extensive research in rural Virginia, scientists have shown that mercury also alters the very thing that many backyard birds are known for—their songs.

Emitted by the burning of coal, mercury in the atmosphere has quadrupled since the days before industrialization, according to a recent study published in *Nature*. And the amount of methylmercury in animals throughout much of the world is rising, too.

"There's a global decline in songbird populations," and while the causes are unexplained, "I can't help but think that mercury and other chemicals and organic compounds are partly implicated in this," said Nil Basu, an environmental toxicologist at McGill University in Montreal.

In children exposed in the womb, methylmercury causes problems with speech, language development, learning, and memory. So understanding why mercury-contaminated songbirds can't sing their songs could help scientists learn more about how human brains are damaged, too.

"Methylmercury can affect the very motor functions that control speech—something that may have a parallel in the bird world," said Philippe Grandjean, a Harvard University environmental health scientist who led pioneering research on the IQs of mercury-exposed children.

The songbirds in the woods downstream of the chemical plant "are affected profoundly by mercury in a way that suggests learning problems," Cristol said, "and this has indirect implications for humans."

The Winged Warnings series is produced by Environmental Health News, an independent, nonprofit news organization, and published in conjunction with National Geographic. Read additional stories in the series at EHN's website. Follow EHN on Twitter.

<http://www.environmentalhealthnews.org/>

Published August 28, 2014

For the rest of this article, please follow this link:

<http://tinyurl.com/birdsong-Hg>



Song Sparrow
Photo by: Bill Hubick

Newtowne Neck State Park Open House

Southern Maryland Audubon Society Members are invited to Maryland's Newest State Park, located in St. Mary's County- Newtowne Neck State Park Open House- Saturday, September 27th

The Maryland Park Service will be hosting an Open House at Newtowne Neck State Park on Saturday, September 27, 2014 from 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Newtowne Neck Farmstead, located on Newtowne Neck Road, in Compton, Maryland. The Southern Maryland Audubon Society will be leading three bird walks on the property throughout the day, at Noon, 1:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. No pre-registration is required for the bird walks. Bring binoculars, if you have them. Youth welcome and are encouraged to attend with an adult.

During the Open House, Newtowne Neck State Park's natural beauty will be showcased with Rangers on site to talk to visitors and gather public input, using a survey, as part of the master planning process for the 776-acre property. Rangers and Volunteers will be on hand to provide kayak/canoe paddles, bird watching walks, and Scales and Tales Programs. Local archaeologists will be available to talk about the rich history of the park and collect information about the community about past activities there. A Design Charrette at the College of Southern Maryland will follow the Open House from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. If you are interested in attending the Design Charrette, for additional information and to register call 301-872-5688. (Registration is recommended to ensure appropriate space and staffing.)

Additional information about Newtowne Neck State Park and a link to the Survey can be found at: <http://dnr2.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/southern/newtowne.aspx>

eBird's Missing Species
31 July 2014

The Blue-winged Racquet-tail, of the Sulu Archipelago, is one of the rare, critically endangered birds with no eBird record...yet

As of early June 2014, eBird's database has validated records for an amazing 9902 species. The August 2013 eBird taxonomy (following [version 6.8 of the Clements Checklist](#)) recognizes 10,324 species of birds worldwide, so roughly 96% of the world's bird species have at least one confirmed record entered into eBird. Below we investigate the 4% that have yet to be recorded in eBird—a snapshot of the most isolated, elusive, threatened, and understudied birds in the world. If you are a world birder and spot any species on this list that you have seen, please get those records in eBird! 7 AUG UPDATE: 34 species have already been added, and there are more coming in! This amazing progress speaks volumes to the dedication of the eBird community. Even so, there's always more work to be done, especially when it comes to mapping the ranges and understanding patterns of avian distribution! Expect more details later in the month when we publish an official update to the missing species article! Check out [eBird on Facebook](#) to see some of the additions.

For a project that began in 2002, and expanded globally in 2010, this extent of coverage of the world's species is pretty amazing. On the other hand, why is the total not closer to 100 percent? Which species have eluded eBirders, and why? To answer these questions, Andrew Dreelin and Reid Rumelt, two undergraduates at Cornell University who help out with eBird and other Lab projects, pored through the eBird database to find the species that have yet to be entered into eBird. Their analysis and downloadable list give a compendium of some of the rarest and most poorly-known species in the world. Thanks to Andrew and Reid for this superb analysis.

Note that this article and analysis addresses only species; records of subspecies groups, hybrids (e.g., [Palm x Yellow-rumped Warbler](#)), and other taxa are not included here (but would be interesting to look into as well).

For the rest of this article, please click on this link: <http://tinyurl.com/eBird-missing-species>

60th Anniversary Celebration

Join the Alice Ferguson Foundation on October 18, 2014 for our Diamond Jubilee as we celebrate 60 years of leadership as environmental stewards and service to students from throughout the Washington, DC metro area. Come to Hard Bargain Farm Environmental Center from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

More activities and details will be posted as we get closer to the event.

For more information, click on this link: <http://fergusonfoundation.org/events/60th-anniversary/>

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

Programs & Field Trips Fall 2014

Sept 20 – SATURDAY – 8:00 a.m. – 12 Noon

FIELD TRIP

Gilbert Run Park, Charles County

“WWW: Walk, Water, Woods”

Leader(s): Lynne Wheeler and Jean Artes

Come join us for a first in a long time at this Charles County park. We will look for FIDS and migrants on a beautiful 3 mile trail around the 60 acre fresh water lake. The trail is moderate difficulty, not beginner, due to hills and exposed root structure, but gorgeous sections and wonderful avian habitat. The park is located 8 miles east of La Plata on Rt. 6. You can GPS at 13140 Charles Street, Charlotte Hall, MD 20622. **RSVP** to Lynne Wheeler at comstockel@aol.com or 301-751-8097.

September 28 – SUNDAY – 8:00 a.m. – 11 a.m.

FIELD TRIP

Sotterley Plantation, St. Mary's County

“BIRDING THE FIELDS AND TRAILS OF SOTTERLEY”

Leader(s): David Moulton and Michael Patterson

Join us for a fall excursion to this scenic and historic Patuxent River property. Bald Eagles, migrant songbirds and lingering meadowlarks and sparrows can be found via Sotterley's extensive trail system. Beginners welcome! Directions: From Rt. 235, go north on Sotterley Road, turn right through gates to the Sotterley Plantation visitors center parking lot. RSVP to David at moulton.davidh@gmail.com or 240-278-4473.

October 1 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m.

MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM

Calvert County Library, Fairview Branch, Calvert County
8120 Southern Maryland Boulevard, Owings, MD 20736

“The Brazilian Pantanal”

DR. GWENDA BREWER AND GEORGE JETT –
Photographers and Naturalists

In July 2013, George & Gwen travelled to the Pantanal region of Brazil in search of unique animals and plants to photograph and study. The focus was wildlife of the region with a great group of geeks: butterfly and dragonfly specialist, botanists, and one of the best mammalogists I know, Fiona Reid. The three week trip produced some delightful images of birds (Chestnut-eared Aracari), mammals (Jaguar, bats), insects (stinging wasps, tons of butterflies & dragonflies), etc. Gwen & George will also show some of the most magnificent landscapes on our planet, and we are sure of a humorous discussion of the many experiences they enjoyed and endured. Programs start at 7:30 p.m. but please come at 7 p.m. for refreshments and pre-program mingling.

October 4 – SATURDAY – 8:00 a.m. – 12 Noon

FIELD TRIP

Cove Point Beach and Marsh, Calvert County

“SHARP-TAILED SPARROWS AND MIGRANTS”

Leader: Bob Boxwell

Cove Point beach and marsh is a unique habitat on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay. A living shoreline

project is helping to restore the fresh water marsh from salt water incursion. We will target sparrows, marsh inhabitants and migrants. This is a restricted area and we are limited to ten guests. RSVP by September 28th to Bob at 443-404-5549, bobboxwell@hotmail.com

October 11 – SATURDAY – 8:00 a.m. – 12 Noon

FIELD TRIP

Indian Head Rail Trail, Charles County

“RED-HEADS AND MIGRANTS”

Leader(s): Michael Patterson and Lynne Wheeler

There are areas on the Indian Head Rail Trail (IHRT) that provide us with one of the best hot spots for Red-headed Woodpeckers. This fall trip enables you to enjoy hearing the chatter of Red-headed juveniles and of course the fun of fall warbler identification. Meet /park at the parking lot off of MD Rt. 224 and the IHRT (just east of MD Rt. 225). NO RSVP. This is an open field trip to enable last minute joining.

November 5 – WEDNESDAY – 7:15 p.m. – 9:00 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

“Ordinary Extraordinary Junco: Remarkable Biology from a Backyard Bird”

Come and enjoy this film developed for both the general avian lover and science students and educators. The film highlights past and present biological research on one of the most common and abundant – yet amazing and diverse – groups of songbirds in North America, the Juncos. It explores key themes in animal behavior, ecology, or evolution, and conveys the process of scientific research with high school and college science standards in mind. *Note start time of 7:15 as the film is 88 minutes long.

November 16 – SUNDAY – 8:00 a.m. – 12 Noon

FIELD TRIP

Mattawoman Wildlands, Marbury, Charles County

“EARLY WATERFOWL AND LATE MIGRANTS ON THE GEORGE WILMOT TRAIL”

Leader(s): Gwen Brewer and Carol Ghebelian

This is a joint trip with the Audubon Naturalist Society and the Southern MD Audubon Society. We usually expect large concentrations of waterfowl on the Mattawoman Creek, along with songbirds, woodpeckers (some red-headed), and raptors. Dr. Gwen Brewer is one of our top waterfowl identifiers with great eagle eyes! **Meet time/place:** 7:30 am at Burger King (3165 Marshall Hall Rd, Bryans Road, MD 20616), on right at MD 210/227. 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 co-leader Carol Ghebelian at 301-753-6754, ghebelian@comcast.net.

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.

2013-2014 Officers

President, Michael Patterson (301-752-5763)
Vice-President, Bob Lukinic (301-283-6317)
Secretary, Lynne Wheeler (301-743-3236)
Treasurer, Will Daniel (240-518-8006)