

The Osprey

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society



Pine Siskins
Photo by Steve Arthur

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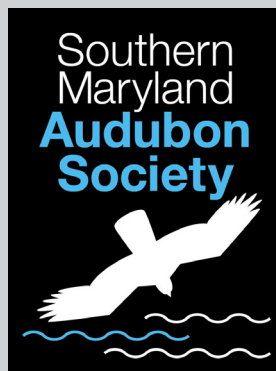
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<http://somdaudubon.org/>

President's Perch

Friends, we all have endured a year of grave difficulties; some have suffered loss and tragedy due to Covid-19. Indeed, most are relieved to bid 2020 adieu. However, new leaders have been elected as I write. Those who love birds and other wildlife, or even human life as we know it, must mobilize to avert the worst of climate change. National Audubon Society has issued its statement to election winners: "Birds are telling us there is no time to lose for bold, equitable, and durable action on climate." The full statement is reprinted herein and available at <https://www.audubon.org/news/national-audubon-society-election-winners-birds-are-telling-us-there-no-time>. There is no guaranteed outcome, but we must forge ahead.

A couple of days ago, while hiking at Chapman State Park, I saw my first Golden-crowned Kinglet of the season. Its manic foraging, a kind of bouncing enthusiasm, sparked excitement and in my heart. That is the magic of birds. During the isolation of this year, birds have been a saving grace, not only for hard-core enthusiasts. While under lockdown, newcomers found consolation and joy in birdwatching, too. With luck, many newbies will also become conservation advocates. Why not join our activities?

Whether you are a beginner or an old hand, the Christmas Bird Count offers an immersive day out. By helping to gather and share data, you contribute to scientific research and conservation, too. Please check dates inside and contact a coordinator for more information. We would love to have you join us!

In December and January our free, educational meetings continue online. On December 2, Gwen Brewer and George Jett will share their recent trip to Ghana. On January 6, David Curson will talk about restoring nesting sites for Common Terns and Black Skimmers on the Eastern Shore.

Finally, when shopping online this holiday season, please remember to visit smile.amazon.com and choose SMAS as your charity. You get the same products and prices as you do at Amazon, but your purchases earn .5% for SMAS! Maybe a membership to SMAS would be a perfect gift? Check out www.somdaudubon.org/support-us/join-somd/. You can also Adopt-a-Raptor for your loved ones at www.somdaudubon.org/support-us/adopt-a-raptor/. We realize this year has been especially challenging. But if you are planning end-of-year charitable donations, SMAS is extremely grateful for your support.

I wish all of you a happy holiday season with loved ones and a bright year ahead.
Tiffany Farrell
SMAS President



National Audubon Society to Election Winners:

“Birds are telling us there is no time to lose for bold, equitable and durable action on climate.”

Statement from National Audubon Society President and CEO, David Yarnold

NEW YORK – “People are rising up to demand action on climate change and racial equity. And birds are telling us there is no time to lose: more than two-thirds of North American birds are threatened with extinction because of climate change. We need bold, equitable, and durable action on climate. That’s why Audubon’s 1.9 million members are helping to lead this movement. Rural and urban, progressive and conservative, Black college students and white grandparents all agree that everyone regardless of race or ethnicity should have access to clean air and water and feel safe and welcome in the outdoors.

“Now that the votes have been counted, it’s important that the rule of law is respected and the peaceful transition of power proceeds as it has since the founding of our nation. The tone of this election season put a spotlight on the deep divisions in our nation. Audubon members are deeply troubled by the racist, sexist and homophobic rhetoric present in some campaigns. These divisions make it even harder to address climate change and to protect the places both birds and people need to thrive. But Audubon members know there is a better way forward—one that lifts up all people and creates a healthier, more resilient world.

“We have a long history as community builders, and because we are local everywhere, our membership reflects America. Our membership is 53 percent progressive and 47 percent moderate/conservative, and we have members in nearly every county in the United States.

“In a recent survey of our membership, we found that:

Nearly every Audubon member (97%) agrees that “every American, regardless of race or color, should have equal access to clean air and clean water.” That belief is shared by 98% of progressive Audubon members and 96% of moderates and conservatives—a deeply held value across political lines.

More than 95% of all Audubon members—including 9 in 10 moderate and conservative members—report concern about the following issues:

- Destruction of habitat for birds and other wildlife;
- Air and water pollution;
- Attacks on bedrock environmental laws;
- Oil drilling and mining on protected public lands.

75% of all Audubon members, including a majority of moderate and conservative members, rank climate change as one of their top three concerns among all issues facing America today—and 82% of Audubon members (including 61% of moderates and conservatives) are personally “very concerned” about growing impacts of climate change.

“Our membership demonstrates strong support across the political spectrum for action on environmental, climate, and community priorities.

“We need durable solutions with support across political lines—and our members are ready to raise their voices. Environmental concerns are no place for partisan divisions.

“Audubon is resolute in our ambition for inclusivity, our commitment to becoming an anti-racist organization, and our determination to address the disproportionate impact climate change and air and water pollution have on marginalized communities.

“To that end, we will advocate for a more resilient and inclusive economy with more green jobs, for cleaner air, and stronger communities that protect birds, conserve water, restore wetlands, and reduce emissions.

“We look forward to working with elected officials to achieve this vision.”

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About Audubon

The National Audubon Society protects birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow. Audubon works throughout the Americas using science, advocacy, education, and on-the-ground conservation. State programs, nature centers, chapters, and partners give Audubon an unparalleled wingspan that reaches millions of people each year to inform, inspire, and unite diverse communities in conservation action. A nonprofit conservation organization since 1905, Audubon believes in a world in which people and wildlife thrive. Learn more at www.audubon.org and on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @audubonsociety.



Providing Ice-free Water for Birds

Wednesday, October 21, 2020

The simple act of providing fresh water for birds in your yard – or anywhere – will attract the greatest variety of birds for you to enjoy during any season. As fall temperatures dip periodically birders in the northern latitudes are reminded that it's time to think about how we will keep ice-free fresh water for birds at our bird baths and other water features. Actually, it's pretty simple, there are a number of options, and it's an important part of providing a top-notch feeding station for fall and winter birds.

Electric Heated Bird Baths – In more northern latitudes, in order to provide ice-free water for birds during winter it's necessary to use an electric heater. The solar water heaters on the market just aren't meant for northern winter conditions. There are the inherent safety factors any time electricity, water, and weather are combined, but there are some safety features to utilize including safety cord connectors (described below). Keep in mind that electrically heated bird baths can be used through all four seasons – just unplug the electric cord during ice-free months.

Duncraft's Heated Bird Baths – Duncraft is one of two birding equipment companies that offer a nice variety of electrically heated bird baths. Choose from pedestal, deck-mounted, and ground bird baths at https://www.duncraft.com/index/page/category/category_id/236/category_chain/1071,236/name/Heated+Baths+%26+Heaters/?view_all

BestNest's Heated Bird Baths – BestNest also offers a fine collection of heated bird baths, as well as heaters for an existing bird bath you may prefer to utilize. Some of these bird baths offer longer electric cords and safety connectors to protect cord connections from water, weather, and other outdoor concerns, see https://www.bestnest.com/bestnest/heated_bird_baths.asp

Safe Electric Connectors – To ensure your outdoor electrical connections remain water-tight and safely linked using an Allied Precision Clickshield Cord Connector, see <https://www.bestnest.com/bestnest/RTPProduct.asp?SKU=API-28CSK>

Solar Bird Bath Accessories – In the southern tier of states, many birders will be able to utilize solar-powered bird bath accessories that keep ice from forming during sunny not-too-cold days. Also, the solar heaters or wigglers can be used during fall and spring up north when temperatures temper. Duncraft offers 7 different solar-powered bird bath accessories that keep water moving and less apt to freeze. Plus the sound of moving water helps to attract new birds to your water feature, see https://www.duncraft.com/index/page/category/category_id/178/category_chain/1071,178/name/Solar+Powered+Bird+Baths/?view_all

And then there are the lucky birders who never have ice in their bird baths – imagine that! In that case you may want to keep a dripper or mini-fountain in mind to add to your bird bath – the sound of water can make a difference for new birds to find your water and feeding station when they pass through your neighborhood.

However you provide water through the fall and winter, your water feature will surely be the hit of the neighborhood for birds during cold-weather months. Enjoy the action, enjoy the birds, and appreciate that you may be providing the only ice-free water in the area that birds can rely upon. Keep up your commendable efforts for birds.

Share your birding experiences and photos at

editorstbw2@gmail.com

To subscribe, click on this link, <https://subscription.theoutdoorwire.com/subscribe?brand=birding>

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121st Christmas Bird Count



*Please join us and help count birds.
Participate in one of the largest
and oldest citizen science programs.*

Dec 20 – Port Tobacco, MD

Compiler: Mike Callahan, 240-765-5192 or
raptorsrulemc@gmail.com

Dec 27 – Patuxent River, MD

Compiler: Andy Brown, 410-535-5327 or
Andrew.Brown@calvertcountymd.gov

Jan 2 – Fort Belvoir, VA and MD

MD Sector Leader: Lynne Wheeler, 301-751-8097 or
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Jan 3 – Point Lookout, MD

Compiler: Bob Boxwell, 410-610-5124 or
bobboxwell@hotmail.com

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Linda Pickeral, Waldorf
Rebecca Wolf, Coltons Point
Peter Zombori, Lexington Park
Jennifer A. Johnson, Clinton
Erma Smith, Waldorf
Sharon Legal, Pomfret
Nattee Burgess, Owings

Purple Finch: American Bird Conservancy's Bird Of The Week: October 16, 2020

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Haemorhous purpureus*

POPULATION: 5.9 million

TREND: Decreasing

HABITAT: Coniferous or mixed forests and edges. In winter, also shrubby fields and backyards

Described by American ornithologist Roger Tory Peterson as “a finch dipped in raspberry juice,” the male Purple Finch is a treat for any birder to see. Its genus name, *Haemorhous*, is slightly less appetizing, as “haemo” is Greek for blood, but it accurately describes the reddish-purple shades of this songbird and its North American relatives, the widespread House Finch and the Mountain West’s Cassin’s Finch.

The male Purple Finch is purplish-red on its head, upperparts, and breast. Its underparts are light with blurry red streaks, and the rump shows another splash of raspberry red. The female Purple Finch has streaky brown-and-white plumage and a strong facial pattern, with none of the bright raspberry color of the male. This marked difference between the sexes’ appearances, known as sexual dimorphism, is seen in many other bird species including the [Black-throated Blue Warbler](#) and the [Juan Fernández Firecrown](#), a rare hummingbird.

Boom-and-Bust Bird

Some years, including 2020, eastern birders note large numbers of Purple Finches moving into their areas. These movements, called “irruptions,” are different from regular migrations and are likely triggered by a poor crop of conifer seeds, an important food source for the finches, in the north.

Other species prone to food-driven irruptions include the Pine Siskin and Evening Grosbeak. Some boreal-breeding raptors, such as the Northern Saw-whet and Snowy Owls, also range south in irregular, irruptive movements. These birds depend upon small mammals such as lemmings, which, like conifer cone supplies, also often follow boom-and-bust cycles.

Winter Wanderer, Sweet Singer

There are two Purple Finch subspecies, one found in the East and across much of Canada, and the other along the Pacific Coast region. The western subspecies is a bit less colorful and sings somewhat faster than its eastern counterpart. While the Purple Finch is a short-distance migrant, the subspecies show different migratory patterns: The western subspecies is an altitudinal migrant, similar to the Dark-eyed Junco and Western Tanager, while the eastern migrates in irruptive patterns as discussed above.

The Purple Finch sings a cheery-sounding series of slightly slurred whistles. Females have a similar song that can last one to two minutes; they often sing from the nest. In addition to their songs, Purple Finches also have calls that are shorter whistle-warbles, as well as a sharper “pik” note to sound alarm or to indicate position within a flying flock.

Purple Finch song by Todd Wilson, XC97357. Accessible at www.xeno-canto.org/97357

Purple Finch call by Matt Wistrand, XC342339. Accessible at www.xeno-canto.org/342339

Farmer’s Friend

The Purple Finch has a strong conical bill similar to that of a Northern Cardinal. This big bill is a useful tool for splitting open seeds of maples, tulip trees, elms, sycamores, sweet gum, and many other species. It also crushes the bases of buds and flowers to extract nectar and feeds on small fruits, eating both seeds and pulp.

This latter feeding habit gave the Purple Finch an unjustified reputation as a species that damaged orchards and other crops. Closer examination of their feeding behavior reveals that Purple Finches don’t harm crops, despite their consumption of small fruits and tree blossoms. In fact, they can be beneficial: They also eat crop-damaging cutworms as well as other caterpillars, plant lice, and plenty of weed seeds, particularly those of ragweed and burdock. Purple Finches often visit backyard feeders for sunflower and thistle seeds in winter, especially during irruption years.

Finch Family Matters

Courtship between Purple Finches is more than a brief display. A male will “dance” in front of a female with a hopping performance, often balancing on one foot while holding a piece of grass, straw, or a small twig. With drooped, fluttering wings and a soft song, he will woo his prospective partner, pointing his bill up and making other moves that show off his color and prowess.

Once paired, the female assumes the bulk of the responsibility for nest-building, constructing her cup-shaped nest far out on an evergreen tree limb. The nest is built of twigs and rootlets, with finer grasses, moss, and animal fur lining the interior.

While the female alone develops a brood patch and incubates her eggs, her partner brings food to her on the nest. He plays a role in the chicks’ lives as well, helping bring food to the hungry young once they hatch, while they’re in the nest, and even for several weeks after they fledge.

Changing Range

Although the Purple Finch remains a widespread species, it has experienced gradual population declines. One of the main reasons seems to be habitat loss, which may be partly due to climate change. A close relative poses another threat: Originally a western species, the House Finch was introduced and is now also widespread in the East, where it often outcompetes the Purple Finch, particularly in urban and suburban areas. In some studies, this species dominates 95 percent of interactions with the Purple.

Continued on page 5

Human-dominated landscapes include other threats that affect the Purple Finch, from predation by outdoor cats to collisions with cars, wind turbines, and glass.

ABC is taking on these threats through a number of programs. Our Cats Indoors program advocates for responsible pet ownership, and we lead the way in providing solutions that reduce bird mortality at windows, wind turbines, communications towers, and powerlines.

Red-cockaded Woodpecker Downlisting?

In late September, the Department of the Interior announced a proposal to “downlist” Red-cockaded Woodpecker from Endangered to Threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The announcement was made at Fort Benning, Georgia, as military bases in the Southeast have worked to improve habitat for the species in order to achieve recovery goals. For example, in 1998, at Fort Benning, there were 153 potential breeding groups of these semi-colonial woodpeckers, with a recovery goal of 351 clusters. Today, there are an estimated 412 breeding groups on the fort.

At one time, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers were abundant from New Jersey to Florida and west to Texas and Missouri. But after significant habitat loss, the numbers dropped to an estimated 1,470 clusters of the species. Cooperative conservation efforts have focused on a variety of programs including creating artificial nest cavities, reestablishing and restoring longleaf pine forests, and building partnerships with private landowners through Safe Harbor Agreements. Through these efforts, and with military bases playing a major role, more than 1.3 million acres of new longleaf pine stands have been established and hundreds of cavity inserts have been installed. Today, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates there are nearly 7,800 clusters of the birds across 11 states from southern Virginia to eastern Texas.

In addition to the proposal for down-listing, the USFWS is proposing a special rule under section 4(d) of the ESA. Fortunately, this would prohibit “incidental take” from actions that reduce or degrade woodpecker habitat. This would include damage to cavity trees, harassment of the woodpeckers during the breeding season, and the use of insecticides near the woodpecker groupings.

This proposal has been published in the Federal Register, and the 60-day public comment period ends on 7 December. The proposed rule and supporting details are available online under Docket No. FWS-R4-ES-2019-0018:

<https://bit.ly/36kyg1b>



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

<http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>

Paul J. Baicich 410-992-9736 paul.baicich@verizon.net

Mountain Bluebird in Havre de Grace! by Tyler Bell

There are a lot of different ways to hear about rare bird reports these days. Back in the 90s, when Jane Kostenko and I first started birding, we got on the local phone tree. If you were lucky, you’d get a call within a few days of a bird being seen and if you were luckier, it was still there if you chased it. Now, there are eBird alerts, texting groups, Facebook groups, email, even live video feeds that provide nearly instantaneous reports from the field. On Sunday, November 9, I got a text from a Maryland Rare Bird Alert texting group at 10:35 am, “MOBL (banding code for Mountain Bluebird) at Swan Harbor in Havre de Grace.” While waiting for more details, we collected munchies and optics. At 11:15 am, a definitive photo was posted. We were out the door and on the road at 11:30 am. To get to Havre de Grace, you have to go through or around Baltimore and deal with tolls and I-95. Ugh.

We arrived at Swan Harbor just in time to watch a bunch of birders scanning the skies as the MOBL flew away and kept going. Driving 2.5 hours to miss a bird by five minutes is the pits. Thankfully, Josh Emm, local birder extraordinaire, relocated it about 15 minutes later in about the same location whence it disappeared earlier. A bunch of us had walked down the lane to check out a bunch of Eastern Bluebirds when the call came. Never been a runner but joined the group jogging back up the lane with cameras and bins bouncing the whole way. The MOBL put on a nice show preening in a tree then dropping to the ground to catch prey. Watching it showing off the sky blue feathers while on the grass briefly was a joy.

Knowing that we had another 2.5 hour drive to get back home, we didn’t linger. It’s unfortunate that it’s difficult to socialize due to Covid social distancing. Plus, wearing a mask makes it really hard to know who you’re talking to. We knew many of the birders that were there, though, having seen them many times over the years. Two birders hit major milestones with this bird, 400 and 425 Maryland birds. 400 is huge and I can’t even imagine having seen 425! Congrats to Ed Boyd and Mark Hoffman, respectively.

There are only two previous records of MOBL in Maryland, The first in 1970 and the second in 2003. There are no details on the 1970 record but the 2003 bird was a flyover on Assateague with two observers. So, this is the first record which allowed multiple observers to see it over a couple of days so far.

Kudos to Austin Jennings for this awesome find and mega thanks to Josh Emm for pulling us back from the abyss by relocating it!



Mountain Bluebird
Photo by Sean McCandless



Monthly Meeting Program Upcoming Zoom Lectures

Please join us for these upcoming virtual lectures using Zoom. If you are on our mailing list you will receive an email with the link to join the lecture. If you do not get our Osprey newsletter via email, please sign up. Go to our website SoMdAudubon.org - sign up at the bottom of the homepage.



**BIRDS, BUTTERFLIES AND MAMMALS
GHANA, WEST AFRICA**

December 2 @ 7:00 p.m.

Ghana is home to almost 800 species of birds and over 900 species butterflies. Enjoy the flora and fauna of Ghana's grasslands, forests, and wetlands as experienced by Gwen and George during their three-week January 2019 trip. Bird highlights include the unique yellow-headed picathartes; colorful turacos, bee-eaters, and sunbirds; impressive hornbills; and 11 species of kingfishers. Many insects and mammals are also discussed.



**COMMON TERN AND BLACK SKIMMER
RESTORATION IN MARYLAND**

January 6 @ 7:00 p.m.

Common Terns and Black Skimmers are listed as state-Endangered in Maryland due to rapidly declining populations in MD's Coastal Bays. The barren sandy islands they require for nesting are eroding due to climate-driven sea level rise, and colonies are threatened by human disturbance and predation by gulls, crows and other predators. Dr. David Curson, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon MD-DC, will introduce a new project that provides artificial nesting platforms in an attempt to establish new colonies.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

- ☐ Please enroll me as a member of the **Southern Maryland Audubon Society**. All of my membership dollars will help support local conservation initiatives and enable us to provide southern Maryland teacher education scholarships to attend Hog Island, Audubon Camp in Maine.

- ☐ Individual/Family: ___ 1year \$20 ___ 2year \$35 ___ 3year \$45
☐ Lifetime Membership: ___ \$500
☐ Donation: _____

- ☐ Please enroll me as a first time member of the **National Audubon Society**. You will automatically become a member of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. You will receive six issues of National's award winning *Audubon Magazine*. A fraction of my dues will be received to our chapter. Your renewal information will come directly from the National Audubon Society.

- ☐ Introductory Offer: ___ 1 year \$20

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

- ☐ Please enroll me for electronic delivery of our monthly newsletter *The Osprey*:

- ☐ ___ Email me a link to download the pdf,
 ___ Email me a notice it is available on the website. My email address is:

 ___ No thank you, please mail me a paper copy.

Please make your check payable to Southern Maryland Audubon Society **or** National Audubon Society.

Mail to: *Southern Maryland Audubon Society, P.O. Box 181, Bryans Road, MD 20616.*

GREAT NEWS!! You can now go online and join SMAS via **PayPal**.
 Go to our website at somdaudubon.org for this new option.



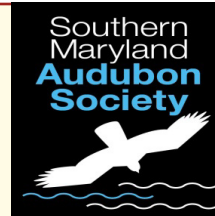
Osprey
 Photo by Bill Hubick

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.

2020-2021 Officers

President, Tiffany Farrell - somdaudubon.president@gmail.com
 Vice-President, Margarita Rochow - margarita@usa.net
 Treasurer, Julie Daniel - juliemdaniel@hotmail.com
 Secretary, Julie Simpson - jsimps@runbox.com



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:

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Osprey, \$10 each | Total Amount: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Barn Owl, \$25 each | Total Amount: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Saw-whet Owl, \$30 each | Total Amount: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Kestrel, \$35 each | Total Amount: _____ |

- ☐ General Donation to Raptor Fund Donation Amount: _____

The foster parent receives:

- A certificate of adoption with the number of the U.S. Department of the Interior band and the location and date of the banding.
- Information on the ecology and migration patterns of the species.
- A photo of a fledgling and any other available information on the whereabouts or fate of the bird.

Name: _____
 Street Address: _____
 State, Zip Code: _____
 City: _____
 Email: _____
 Phone: _____

If this is a gift, please include the recipient's name for the certificate: _____

Mail To: *Southern Maryland Audubon Society*
Carole Schnitzler
 3595 Silk Tree Court, Waldorf, MD 20602