

The Osprey

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society



Horned Lark
Photo by Steve Arthur

In This Issue

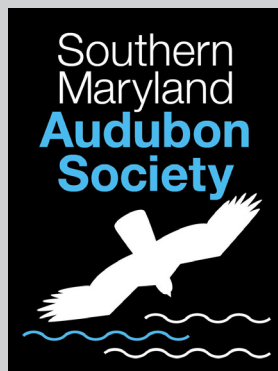
**Southern Maryland Youth Birders
Big Day!**

**2020 Great Backyard
Bird Count**

**Pandemic Birdwatching Is
Booming, and Brooklyn
Is One of the Best
Places to Do It**

What do birds tell us?

**How eBird Changed
Birding Forever**



<http://somdaudubon.org/>

President's Perch

As the calendar year turned, my optimism surged, especially with Covid-19 vaccines on the horizon. I was particularly excited to restart in-person SMAS field trips later this year. Tragically, the violence at the United States Capitol proved that even when Covid subsides, we, as a country, still have much work to do. Throughout the difficulties of 2020, birds were a consolation and an escape valve. Indeed, when I set aside social media to enter the natural world, I rely on my senses of observation in the physical environment. First-hand experience, with an emphasis on factual reality, is grounding in all senses of the word. To say nothing of the political sphere, common understanding based on facts forms an essential step in healing our nation's social chasms. Is it naïve to hope that a shared joy in birds and nature—and by extension, support for science and truth—might help our pained world?

In my very small way, I have resolved to contribute to that effort. I wrapped up December and the New Year with two days of outings for the Christmas Bird Count (CBC), one of the longest-running community science projects. While counting I spied many birds I don't usually find at home, like Bald Eagles, Horned Larks, Eastern Meadowlarks, and Cedar Waxwings. This long-term data, now compiled annually for 121 years, helps scientists. The beauty is that anyone—even beginning birders—can help with this project. Many, many thanks to all of you who participated in our Southern Maryland CBC! If you are curious about how North American birds have fared over the years, check out the annual summaries at www.audubon.org/content/american-birds-annual-summary-christmas-bird-count.

Thankfully, February offers another opportunity to help. The Great Backyard Bird Count is a great way for beginners to get involved. You simply count birds in your yard or near your home at any time from February 12 through 15 for at least fifteen minutes. Then you report the birds you saw at the online portal eBird. That's it! For more information, look up www.birdcount.org or write to us at somdaudubon@yahoo.com.

Even though we are finding ways to bird safely, I still hope that SMAS will have fewer restrictions on our in-person activities at some point later this year. Meanwhile, visit our Bald Eagle nest cam at <http://somdaudubon.org>. Hope and Chandler, our eagle pair, are already busy with "nestorations." During this dangerous spike in the pandemic, please stay home as much as possible and wear masks when you must venture out. We are all in this together!

Tiffany Farrell

SMAS President

somdaudubon.president@gmail.com



Bald Eagles nesting at Port Tobacco River Park

Southern Maryland Youth Birders Big Day!

by Phin Rouland

With rising Covid cases and the safety of its members in mind, Southern Maryland Youth Birders (SMYB) rather than do bird walks, took a different approach to encourage its members to get out birding. Instead, the club organized a Big Day challenge set on Saturday December 19 where those participating would venture out individually or in family groups. The traditional Big Day is a twenty-four hour effort, from midnight to midnight, where one tries to observe as many bird species as possible. A dynamic constricting the challenge was that none of the members owned a driver's license, making any travel harder to figure out logistically. Different approaches could be taken including walking and bird-watching only locally, bicycling around to cover a bit more distance, having parents act as chauffeur, or using the competition as an excuse to work on driving hours towards getting a license. Five youth expressed interest in the challenge while none of them, understandably, had any intention of participating in all twenty-four hours.

The weeks leading up to the Big Day provided plenty of time for planning the best route to take. What's more, weather for the 19th seemed promising for a fun day out with the prediction of clear skies and minimum wind. The earliest of the participants kicked off the day around 4:30 am and was quickly followed by a couple more hoping to get owl species out of the way. As the sun rose, however, there was a visible move towards bodies of water in everyone's plan. With winter migration slowing to a halt, many ducks and open water birds had already arrived in Southern Maryland, making them a clear target for beefing up the species lists. The most popular places to bird in the morning were consequently parks on the bay like Point Lookout and Calvert Cliffs State Parks while other places with high priority were large ponds that could also hold a number of water birds. Along with birds from the bay, these parks also provided suitable habitat for a number of winter songbirds, making much of the morning spent in the same general area worthwhile. As the day progressed, there was a swing in strategy for many to scour farmland back roads for species including sparrows, foraging raptors, and mixed flocks of blackbirds. In the afternoon participants began working their way towards home, dropping by certain spots on the way where new species could be guaranteed. Arriving close to home and being familiar with the best local birding patches, we spent much of the remainder of the day searching for a number of more common species still missing from the species lists. As sunset approached there was a mad dash for any last-minute species before it would be too dark, and apart from those going out for owls later, the Big Day had come to an end.

The next day SMYB members joined in a video call to discuss the Big Day results. We found rare birds including Palm Warbler, American Tree Sparrow, Purple Sandpiper, and St. Mary's County's first record of American White Pelican since 2015. Other highlights included over a hundred Horned Larks found by David Miller on Turner Road, Calvert, and Zach Stickney's lifer Sedge Wren from Cornfield Harbor Road, St Mary's. In total SMYB tallied a whopping 114 species on the December 19 Big Day. Through the entire challenge the team kept up a steady supply of text messages or emails giving advice on where

they found specific birds or noting rarities found. Even in the pandemic crisis all around us, the club has always kept a positive spirit and is constantly brainstorming unconventional ways to foster community and encourage its members to get out and enjoy the birds.

The Southern Maryland Youth Birding club is newly formed. It currently has six members. Please promote the club to your family and friends, we will help guide them into the wonderful world of birds. Feel free to contact the club at southernmarylandyouthbirders@gmail.com. From there you will get in contact with other SMYB youth and be notified with any upcoming birding activities or video call presentations. All are welcome!



Long-tailed Duck

Photo by Eaton Ekarintaragun



American White Pelicans

Photo by Zach Stickney

2020 Great Backyard Bird Count

The 2021 GBBC will take place Friday, February 12, through Monday, February 15. Please join us for the 22nd annual count!

<https://gbbc.birdcount.org/about/>

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are. GBBC checklists can be accepted from anywhere in the world!

Everyone is welcome—from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds. Participants tally the number of individual birds of each species they see during their count period. They enter these numbers on the GBBC website.

Continued on page 3

New participants must set up a free GBBC account to submit their checklists or use login information from an existing account for any other Cornell Lab citizen-science project. You'll only need to do this once to participate in all future GBBC events. Click "Submit Your Bird Checklist" at the top of this page or see "How to Participate" for more details.

As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported. Participants may also send in photographs of the birds they see for the GBBC photo contest. A selection of images is posted in the online photo gallery.

Why count birds?

Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Bird populations are dynamic; they are constantly in flux. No single scientist or team of scientists could hope to document and understand the complex distribution and movements of so many species in such a short time.

Scientists use the GBBC information, along with observations from other citizen-science projects, such as the Christmas Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, and eBird, to get the "big picture" about what is happening to bird populations. The longer these data are collected, the more meaningful they become in helping scientists investigate far-reaching questions, like these:

- How will the weather influence bird populations?
- Where are winter finches and other "irruptive" species that appear in large numbers during some years but not others?
- How will the timing of birds' migrations compare with past years?
- How are bird diseases, such as West Nile virus, affecting birds in different regions?
- What kinds of differences in bird diversity are apparent in cities versus suburban, rural, and natural areas?

For highlights of past results, visit the Summaries section of this website.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada and sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited.

Pandemic Birdwatching Is Booming, and Brooklyn Is One of the Best Places to Do It

by Jessy Edwards

Brooklyn is on the Atlantic Flyway, a major migratory bird route stretching from South America to Greenland
January 4, 2021

Birdwatching has taken off as a pandemic-hobby in Brooklyn, and the borough's birders say now is one of the most exciting times to get involved.

Not only is there an influx of birds to the borough during winter, it's also a special year for birdwatching, with a winter finch

"irruption," Brooklyn Bird Club president Dennis Hrehowsik said.

"I would say it's a particularly exciting year, at a time when we expect to have a good variety in December and January, but a little extra spice this year because of the boreal finches."

In 2020, the numbers of amateur birders spiked. With many turning to new hobbies and stress-relievers during quarantine, birding rose along with baking sourdough and cycling as one of the newest pastimes of Brooklynites.

During the pandemic, the Brooklyn Bird Club grew its membership by more than 30 percent to over 300 people, Hrehowsik said. And the new members have brought the average age down.

"Now the 25- to 34-year-old demographic is almost as big as the retired demo. It's what I would call the 'hipster demo,'" Hrehowsik said.

He pointed to Brooklynites looking for hobbies that weren't cool, but could be. "And they landed on birding and were like, 'Oh this is pretty cool'."

Park Slope's Diana Quick said she has enjoyed birds for a while, but became more interested — and had more time — during the pandemic.

"I'm really lucky to live within easy walking distance of both Green-Wood Cemetery and Prospect Park, which are both great for birding. The pandemic started around the same time as the spring migration, so it was an excellent opportunity to spend more time observing and learning," she said.

In the spring, a two-year-old bald eagle appeared in the cemetery, with the bird community dubbing him 'Rover'. He disappeared over summer, but returned in the late fall. "I saw him for the first time in a while on election day, swooping around over Sylvan Water, which I took as a good omen," Quick said.

She didn't see him again until last week, when a friend spotted him again. She went down to the cemetery on her lunch break and saw him "in his favorite tree at the edge of Sylvan Water" and snapped some incredible photos.

"It's also thrilling when 'exotic' birds appear that usually aren't in this part of the world, like the western tanager and ash-throated flycatcher that were in the cemetery recently," she said.

Bald eagles are actually one of the rarer birds of prey to see in Brooklyn — most time you see a raptor it is likely a red tailed hawk, Hrehowsik explained.

Brooklyn is also home to more than 100 nesting pairs of North America's littlest falcon, the American Kestrel, which likes to nest in the rusted tin scrolls on the corner of brownstones.

Continued on page 4

Birdwatching as a whole has boomed across the country. Online birdwatching database eBird saw 186,377 new birders sign up to its platform from just March to June last year (a 68% increase year-over-year). And bird identification app Merlin was downloaded more than 150,000 times in April.

Not only is birding a safe, socially-distanced activity to do, the community and connection to nature can also provide mental health benefits. Hrehowsik said having a life based around the cycle of the birds gave people stability in uncertain times.

“There’s this thing happening in our human world, but the world at large — nature — is just chugging along, and it’s going to be OK, and it’s something bigger than us. That’s comforting to look to.”

Brooklyn is a particularly exciting place to start bird watching, with the city located along a unique natural “bird highway” called the Atlantic Flyway. The Atlantic Flyway — a major migratory route — stretches from the tropical areas of South America towards Greenland.

Brooklyn birdwatchers might start out in Prospect Park, which is one of only five city parks in the country to be designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) critical for bird conservation.

Right now, the birding community is excited for an influx of winter finches like the beautiful red crossbills, redpolls and pine siskins. Amateur birders can track other birds coming through on spring migration beginning February here.

But there’s plenty of other places to spot birds in the borough, too. Some of the big ones are Green-Wood Cemetery, where birders like Quick have recently sighted Rover the bald eagle, as well as the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Marine Park Salt Marsh, Floyd Bennett Field and under the Verrazano Bridge.

“I’m so spoiled when I really think about it — that a lot of the beauty I get to enjoy on a regular basis is only a subway ride away,” Hrehowsik said.

“All these different habitats, all this nature, it’s all accessible, all free for the taking once that curtain is pulled back.”

First Time Brooklyn Birder Starter Park:

1. You don’t need anything except an interest to learn about birds, Hrehowsik says
2. To start out, just go to your local park and look at the birds
3. Start by looking at ducks, they’re big and easy to see and they don’t move a lot, Hrehowsik said
4. Try identifying a mallard, a swan, and then if you see something you don’t know, grab a printed guide of North American birds or download an identification app
5. If your interest grows, reach out to your local nature organizations. Places like Brooklyn Bird Club sponsor bird feeders at Breeze Hill in Prospect Park where you can go and see goldfinches and woodpeckers with the naked eye

6. If you still want to see more, Hrehowsik recommends investing in the better-quality binoculars instead of the cheapest option, as it can be the difference between seeing stunning detail and seeing nothing.



Red-breasted Nuthatch

Photo: Corey Raffel/Audubon Photography Awards

What Do Birds Tell Us?

A tradition among bird-lovers is taking note of the first bird we see on New Year’s Day. Whether it’s a charming Red-breasted Nuthatch or the ubiquitous American Robin, the first bird you see can symbolize the start of great things in the year to come.

As you reflect on your first bird of 2021 and the things you want to accomplish in this new year, [we ask that you join us and pledge to protect birds from the threats of climate change and to create a brighter future for us all.](#)

Birds tell us so much about our surroundings. And birds are telling us that it’s time to act on climate. [Audubon’s own science](#) shows that climate change is by far the biggest threat to the birds that we love. It also shows that if we take action now, we can improve the chances for hundreds of bird species.

Audubon and our network will be working across the country this year to protect birds and the places we all share—and we need your help to make this work successful.

[Take the Pledge](#)

<https://act.audubon.org/a/birds-tell-us>

How eBird Changed Birding Forever by Jessie Williamson

Dec 4, 2020

Originally published in Outside Magazine.

Over the past two decades, eBird has become the go-to online platform for scientists and hobbyists alike to upload and share bird observations. But it has also transformed the process and etiquette of birding.

In July 1992, two Danish birders visiting Patagonia, Arizona reported the first-ever, mega-rare cinnamon hummingbird in the United States. Back then, reporting rare birds required phoning in observations to a “rare bird phone tree,” usually via the nearest pay phone—and hoping that word got out. Sometimes it did, sometimes it didn’t. In this case, a couple of other out-of-towners—a birder from Mississippi and another from Nebraska—saw the species. The Nebraskan photographed the hummingbird, flew home, developed the slide film, and snail-mailed photos to the Arizona committee in charge of validating unusual sightings. Only then did word spread, but it was too late: the hummingbird was gone, and Arizona birders missed it.

This kind of tragedy would never befall Arizona birders today. Now, within minutes of seeing a rarity, birders can text friends, alert listservs, post sightings to Facebook rare-birds groups, and—the choice of many—submit observations to eBird, a global online database.

At its most basic level, eBird documents bird sightings. A team at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology created the platform in 2002, and it became widely used by birders within a few years. As of 2020, it has collected more than 860 million global bird observations from over 597,000 registered eBirders. By sheer numbers alone, eBird is one of the world’s largest citizen-science projects. It is now used to understand species distributions, population trends, migration pathways, and even habitat use.

“If used properly, it should be a tool to understand bird populations at scale in ways we never have before, and to apply that to conservation actions,” Marshall Iliff, an eBird project leader, told me. Scientists use eBird’s open-access data to study evolution and movement of invasive species and to highlight the importance of public lands in conservation. The eBird team has also created conservation-oriented status and trend maps for hundreds of species, and eBird data are used to create live bird-migration forecasts.

At least 120 million observations are submitted per year, many through the handy eBird app, a kind of Strava-Yelp-Pokémon Go hybrid for birders. The app doesn’t ID birds for you—Cornell offers another app called Merlin for that—but instead provides an easy way to record and upload the birds you spot. To log sightings, you start a checklist (similar to the way you’d start a run on a smartwatch) and the app automatically pulls your location via GPS. You can choose hot spots near you, which generate lists of species you’re likely to see created from data submitted by users in those areas. The app tracks time and distance traveled while you “tick” species and numbers of birds seen and heard. It even lets you keep an offline checklist, so you aren’t inconvenienced

without cell service. On the web platform, users can upload photos and audio recordings to beef up checklist documentation. Once submitted, the observations join thousands of others being made on the platform at any given time.

The scope and accessibility of eBird make it a resource for birders and scientists alike. The majority of eBirders use the platform as a handy bird-logging tool. I study birds for my Ph.D. at the University of New Mexico, and I also watch them recreationally. I use eBird almost daily for everything from tracking how far I walk while scanning treetops, to planning vacation birding spots, to scouting remote Andean field sites for my doctoral work. Anyone can review lists of species in hot spots like the Ramble in Central Park stretching back decades, study maps of where birds are seen, analyze how frequently certain birds appear at different times of the year, and peruse photos and audio recordings from all over the globe.

<https://www.outsideonline.com/2419209/ebird-online-platform-app-birding>

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

David C. Andrews, Oxon Hill
Molly Boron, Leonardtown
Margrett Brooks, Leonardtown
Roberta Bums, Fort Washington
George Chisholm, La Plata
Joanna Colvin, Valley Lee
Mark Duval, Leonardtown
Mike Green, Fort Washington
Michelle Hayes, Lexington Park
Elizabeth Jolie, Saint Leonard
Florence Knapper, Prince Frederick
Rosauro Lindogan, Fort Washington
Mike Love, Waldorf
Jill Menassa, Chesapeake Beach
Roderick Milstead, Bryans Road
Rudolph Monroe, Temple Hills
Tony Newman, Hollywood
R Proctor, Indian Head
William Renahan, Hughesville
Cynthia Rikard, Lexington Park
Christy Schumacher, Leonardtown
Patsy Scott, Temple Hills
Mian Shah, Clinton
Joanne Slattery, Waldorf
Pamela Stewart, California
Joseph Sullivan, Clinton
Gonzalo Tornell, Port Republic
Lillian Turner, Hollywood
Barbera Vogentanz, Lexington Park
Susanne Wise-Campbell, Leonardtown

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.

February 3 @ 7 p.m.

The Secret Life of Cardinals



The Northern Cardinal is one of our most recognizable and charismatic birds. Even John James Audubon praised it, writing "In richness of plumage, elegance of motion, and strength of song, this species surpasses all its kindred." In this Zoom program, Dr. Jodie Jawor will talk about the ecology and behavior of cardinals, drawing on her many years of studying them.

March 3 @ 7 p.m.

Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird



Vultures are often unloved, despite the vital role they play healthy ecosystems. Worldwide, vultures are more likely to be threatened or endangered than any other group of raptor, but in the U.S. Turkey and Black Vultures may be increasing in number. Katie Fallon discusses the life and times of the Turkey Vulture, including its common misconceptions. Fallon is the author of *Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird* (2020, 2017).

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*:

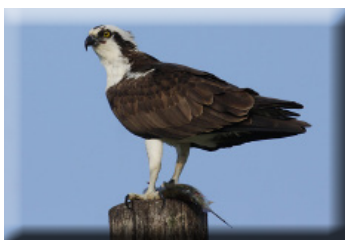
- ☐ ___ Email me a link to download the pdf,
 ___ Email me a notice it is available on the website. My email address is:

 ___ 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.



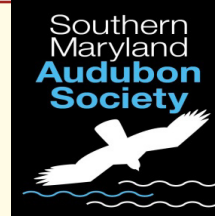
Osprey
 Photo by Bill Hubick

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