

The Osprey

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

President's Perch

Dear birding friends,

Despite the double-whammy of Covid-19 and winter, I hope everyone is feeling well and keeping their spirits buoyed. How have you been coping? Some say that bird-related puzzles and games have been popular. During recent snow storms, I have revisited bird lists and photos from tropical vacations. What happy times and great consolation! I have also indulged in some armchair traveling with bird-themed books. Sometimes these uplift my mood, but just as often they leave me wistful for the “before Covid” time of unfettered travel. I guess deep down I have always aspired to the freedom we associate with birds themselves.

Just as I was surrendering to the winter doldrums, I began to hear bird song—from American Robins, Northern Cardinals, Tufted Titmice, and even snippets from the White-throated Sparrows. Just as welcome, the dialogue of drumming Red-bellied Woodpeckers always brings a chuckle. Thank goodness for early signs of spring!

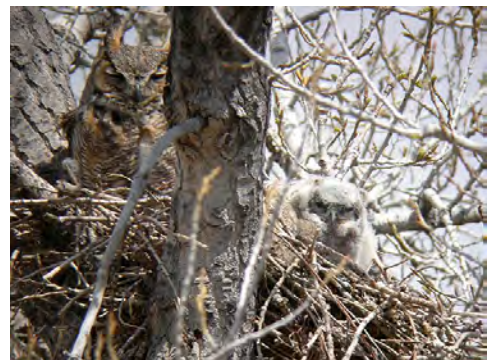
In the absence of SMAS field trips, I recommend getting involved in the Breeding Bird Atlas. Already we can observe and report breeding activity for Great Horned Owls, Barred Owls, and House Sparrows. Plus a few of our year-round resident songbirds can be reliably documented as of March 1—Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, and Tufted Titmouse. Learn more about the project and how easy it is to participate at <https://ebird.org/atlasmddc/about>.

Atlasing was so exciting last year that I have mounted a new Screech Owl nest box. Even if owls shun us, I would be thrilled with woodpeckers because it is a joy to “spy” on any nest. (I am experimenting with a wireless cam, but I don’t know if the batteries will last all season. For three years, I have had great luck with a hard-wired camera and families of wrens and chickadees.) Why not install a nest box in your yard? If successful, you could participate in the Atlas and/or Nest Watch (<https://nestwatch.org/>). If a box doesn’t work in your situation, consider offering a suet cage full of nesting material (like pet fur) near your deck or balcony and see who grabs some. (See related article inside.) These are easy ways to warm the heart, help birds, and get involved in research. Kids would love these activities, too.

Stay safe and keep birding,

Tiffany Farrell

SMAS President



Great Horned Owl adult and juvenile on nest
Photo by Bill Schmoker



Great Horned Owl adult on nest
Photo by Bill Schmoker

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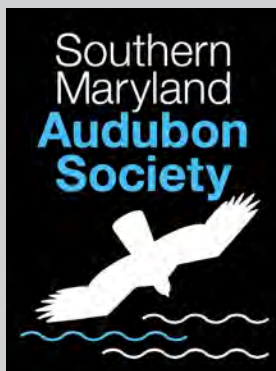
Wanted: Alive!

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<http://somdaudubon.org/>

Lawsuit Filed to Restore Bird Protections

(Washington, D.C., January 19, 2021) A coalition of national environmental groups filed litigation (Case Number: 1:21-cv-00448) today challenging the outgoing Administration's move to eliminate longstanding protections for waterfowl, raptors, and songbirds under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). The litigants include American Bird Conservancy, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The move challenges a new rule by the outgoing Administration that greatly weakens essential protections provided by the MBTA. This rule comes at a time when scientists have raised alarm over the loss of 3 billion North American birds during the past 50 years. It would end enforcement against "incidental take" of birds — the predictable and preventable killing of birds by industrial practices. The Administration seeks to codify this in spite of the fact that last August, a federal judge struck down this opinion.

"We urge President-elect Biden to quickly eliminate this threat to migratory birds and act to establish a permitting system to reduce preventable mortality," said Steve Holmer, Vice President of Government Relations for American Bird Conservancy (ABC). "Congress can support this effort by passing the Migratory Bird Protection Act.

"Last fall, a federal court overturned the Administration's reinterpretation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act that ended decades of enforcement and let industry off the hook for killing birds," said Holmer. "Today's lawsuit challenges a federal rule based on the same bad reasoning."

The outgoing Administration continues to argue that the law applies only to the intentional killing of birds and not "incidental" killing from industrial activities — activities that kill millions of birds every year, such as oil spills and electrocutions on power lines. This reinterpretation was first put in place in December 2017 through a legal opinion from the Interior Department.

Citing *To Kill a Mockingbird*, U.S. District Court Judge Valerie Caproni wrote that "if the Department of the Interior has its way, many Mockingbirds and other migratory birds that delight people and support ecosystems throughout the country will be killed without legal consequence." In rejecting the Administration's opinion, the court noted that the MBTA makes it unlawful to kill birds "by any means whatever or in any manner" — thus the Administration's interpretation violates the plain language of the statute.

"Implementation of this rule will result in the needless killing of birds at a time when many bird species desperately need our help," said ABC President Mike Parr. "It's always our preference to solve problems without lawsuits, but the egregious nature of this rule requires nothing less."

American Bird Conservancy is a nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving wild birds and their habitats throughout the

Americas. With an emphasis on achieving results and working in partnership, we take on the greatest problems facing birds today, innovating and building on rapid advancements in science to halt extinctions, protect habitats, eliminate threats, and build capacity for bird conservation. Find us on <https://abcbirds.org/>, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (@ABCbirds).

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Expert Contact: Steve Holmer, Vice President of Government Relations, 202-888-7490 | sholmer@abcbirds.org

WANTED: ALIVE!



Female Painted Bunting



Male Painted Bunting
Photos by Bill Hubick

Last spring, several Painted Buntings were reported in St. Mary's County during what might be safe dates in the Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA). Since Painted Buntings have never been documented breeding in Maryland, the hope is that by the end of the atlas in 2024, perhaps someone will discover a breeding pair. The Virginia BBA just ended in 2020 and Painted Buntings were found nesting near Kiptopeke, at the southern tip of the Delmarva Peninsula, a relatively short distance from Worcester or Somerset Counties. Or St. Mary's County.

This winter, about a dozen have been reported in the DC area including a rather famous bird at Great Falls which made the Washington Post. Possibly the most recent report is from southern Anne Arundel County in Tracy's Landing. That bird, a male, seems to have returned for the third winter in a row!

So, as winter winds down, there is hope that some of these birds might stick around and breed. If you find any at your feeders, please report them to eBird or your county BBA coordinator.

<https://ebird.org/atlasmddc/home>

Backyard Buffer Program



What is the Backyard Buffer Program?

The Backyard Buffer program is supported by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and provides St. Mary's County homeowners free tree seedlings to create a native woodland buffer in their backyard. It is intended for landowners who have a drainage ditch, stream, creek, or river flowing through their property, or live adjacent to such a waterway. This program is for smaller landowners who are not eligible for agriculture cost-share programs.

More information about Maryland DNR's Backyard Buffer program can be found here --> [Backyard Buffers Program](#)

What is a forest buffer?

A forest buffer is an area of vegetation (trees and shrubs) that slow the flow of stormwater runoff, trapping sediment and allowing polluted water to soak into the soil before reaching our waterways ([Chesapeake Bay Program](#))

What is in a "buffer in a bag"?

The bag includes native tree and shrub, bare-root seedlings, approximately 1-2 feet in height. Seedling bundles come in two sizes and will include a mix of the following species: Northern Red Oak, White Oak, Service Berry, Redbud, and Southern Crabapple. The native tree species included in the bundles will vary from year to year.

- Small Bundle: 9 seedlings (mix of species) - intended for properties with a minimum of 350 sq. ft. available space.
- Large Bundle: 15 seedlings (3 of each species) - intended for properties with approximately 0.5 acres of available space for planting.

**Note: Bundles cannot be separated.*

How can I reserve my "buffer in a bag"?

If you would like to reserve seedlings for pickup Spring 2021, please use the following form.

[Buffer Bundle Reservation Form](#)

When can I pick-up my bundle?

Please check back Spring 2021 for details about bundle pickup.

**Note: These are bareroot seedlings, that will be bundled into a large paper sack. A truck or large vehicle is NOT required for pick-up.*

<https://extension.umd.edu/st-marys-county/water-chesapeake-bay/backyard-buffer-program>

Nicole Basenback

Watershed Restoration Educator
University of Maryland Extension
St. Mary's County - 301-475-4484
Calvert County - 410-535-3662



WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Lawrence Burroughs, North Beach
Pat Collier, Mechanicsville
Sally Deese, Leonardtown
Kendall Elliott, Port Tobacco
Shirley Gray, Temple Hills
Juanita Harris, Suitland
Matthew Huchla, Huntingtown
Lisa Katchka, Fort Washington
Maria Miller, Lusby
Joseph Russell, White Plains
Neil Tillman, Accokeek
Herbert Winnick, Solomons
Jennifer Wood, Mechanicsville

Windmill Removal Improves Water Supply for Livestock While Enhancing Prairie Bird Habitat

Windmills are an iconic sight on the landscape of eastern Montana, but often these structures no longer serve landowners, rangeland management programs, nor the ground-nesting birds that live near them. Benefiting cattle and birds alike, a new initiative that began last summer helps to bring down these obsolete structures, replacing them with efficient solar-powered pumps.

Partners in this effort include private landowners, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), and American Bird Conservancy (ABC).

ABC seeks to reverse declines of grassland bird populations on working ranches, without negative impacts to local economies. The organization's Northern Plains team collaborates with landowners to support diverse, well-managed rangelands using livestock grazing techniques that improve soil health, enhance water quality and yield, provide forage for livestock, and meet the habitat needs of grassland birds and other wildlife species.

The results of an extensive 2019 survey of landowners in Prairie County, Montana, conducted by the NRCS Field Office in Terry, showed that landowners are concerned that their windmills are obsolete. Not to be confused with wind turbines, these windmills are mechanical structures moved by the wind that sit atop 20- to 40-foot-tall wooden or metal towers. These devices are used specifically for pumping ground water into tanks for livestock use. Solar-powered pumps now dominate the marketplace, while parts to keep the archaic windmill systems functioning are becoming difficult to find.

A landowner's ability to sustain grasses for both livestock and wildlife depends upon having enough reliable water sources available. During calm, hot summer days when the wind speed is not enough to keep traditional windmills pumping, landowners are forced to move their animals to other areas where enough water is available to support them. Heavy use of these areas leads to a depletion of grasses and eventually the land needs a break from grazing in order for vegetation to regrow. Additionally, the tall windmill towers provide perches for predators of such declining prairie birds as the Chestnut-collared Longspur, adding further stress to already dwindling populations.

NRCS partnered with ABC to develop a Targeted Implementation Plan (TIP) to enhance habitat for prairie birds while solving the needs of livestock producers by removing windmills. NFWF's Northern Grassland Restoration Incentives Program funded windmill disassembly and removal from the landscape, and solar-powered pumps were installed in their place with NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding. NFWF also funded bird deterrent strips to keep raptors from perching on the pumps' solar panels.

A benchmark goal was reached in the summer of 2020: Ten windmills were removed from the landscape. As replacements, solar pumps will provide a more reliable summer water supply

for livestock, allowing for better management of grasslands that will enhance nesting habitat for the Chestnut-collared Longspur and Baird's Sparrow on a collective 6,400 acres in southern Prairie County, Montana. In addition to the windmills removed with the funding, several landowners removed others from their property at their own expense.

The project will continue in the southern part of the county through 2021. Going forward, the Terry NRCS Field Office plans to request funds to implement similar projects in northern Prairie County in 2022 and 2023. The TIP continues to generate a lot of interest and applications for future projects.

This successful partnership has provided an example of the beneficial outcomes of collaborations, and encouraged more landowners to sign up for the next round of TIP funds in Prairie County. Future projects could bring similar projects to landowners and land managers in other areas of Montana, as well as in Wyoming, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

"NRCS saw an opportunity to help ranchers solve ground-nesting bird and livestock-related issues in Prairie County through a Targeted Implementation Plan, and ABC is a dedicated partner in helping landowners achieve those efforts," says Kathy Meidinger, District Conservationist in Terry.

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Expert Contact: Elizabeth Emeline, Northern Plains Conservation Specialist | eemeline@abcbirds.org

MAY 8 – SATURDAY – ALL DAY

COUNTY MAY COUNTS

Calvert, Charles, Prince George's, and St. Mary's Counties

Help is always needed and appreciated from all. This is a great way to learn and improve your bird identification skills! The county coordinators for you to contact are as follows:

CALVERT: Sherman Suter (401-586-1073),
jsuter29@verizon.net

CHARLES: Lynne Wheeler (301-751-8097),
somdaudubon@yahoo.com

PRINCE GEORGE'S: Fred Fallon (401-286-8152),
fwfallon@gmail.com

ST. MARY'S: Tyler Bell (301-862-4623),
jtylerbell@yahoo.com

Great White Heron in Calvert County

by Tyler Bell



On September 1, I received an email from a friend, Fritz Riedel. He and his wife, Georgia, were coworkers for decades. They both know I'm a bird nerd. Fritz had attached a photo (above) of a tall white heron-like bird that he couldn't figure out. It didn't look right for a Great Egret. Turns out, it was a Great White Heron which is sort of in taxonomic turmoil. Most field guides treat it as a "color morph" of Great Blue Heron with Wurdemann's Heron, an intermediate color morph. Others list it as a subspecies. Formerly, it was treated as a separate species. With the proliferation of relatively inexpensive DNA analysis, many of the birds that 19th century ornithologists labeled as full species, which had been lumped in the mid-20th century, are now being re-split. Who knows what the ultimate status of Great White Heron will be?

Anyway, Great White Herons are not that uncommon in Florida but are quite uncommon in Maryland. There are so few records that the Maryland/DC bird records committee tracks them. Phil Davis, the secretary of the committee, contacted me about it and wanted to know when the bird was first seen and when it was last seen. As of press time, it was still hanging in there ranging from just north of Flag Ponds Nature Park to around Matoaka Cabins in the St. Leonard area of Calvert County.

There was another Great White Heron in Calvert County back in the fall of 2006 in basically the same location. Fourteen years is a long time for a bird to survive but is it possible that it's the same one?



Great White Heron
Photos by Fritz Riedel

Nesting Material For Hummingbirds

By Sheri Williamson

January 3, 2015



A female Broad-billed Hummingbird collects nesting material provided by her host.

Photo by Sheri Williamson

Along the southern Pacific Coast and in the lower elevations of the Desert Southwest, Anna's and Costa's hummingbirds are already nesting or will be shortly. You can help by providing safe nest material such as clean pet hair, short lengths of white or light-colored wool yarn or roving, natural wool fleece, natural cotton or wool batting, and down salvaged from worn-out garments or comforters.

Short fibers (1/2" or less) are easier for females to take and use and less likely to get wrapped around tiny feet. Hummingbirds prefer white and very light colors, but other birds may take darker fibers. Avoid synthetic fibers, dryer lint (which may be too absorbent and contain fabric softener residues), and hair from pets treated with flea/tick products.

Stuff the fibers moderately tightly into a clean onion bag or suet cage and hang the dispenser near your feeders, then sit back and watch the fun!

<http://fieldguidetohummingbirds.com/nesting-material-hummingbirds/>

[Editor's Note: in personal communication with Sheri, I told her about how last spring, I was trying to find a Red-winged Blackbird nest in a small cattail marsh. I noticed motion out of the corner of my eye and watched as a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird zipped in, grabbed a beak full of cattail fluff, then zoomed off. That's confirmed breeding for the MD/DC Breeding Bird Atlas! If you use this method and notice a hummingbird gathering material, please report this to the BBA.

Here is Sheri's response: "Cattail fluff is great nest material. It's not easy to find here in the desert, but anyone who has access to a supply should definitely consider adding it to their nesting material dispenser."]



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.

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).

April 7 @ 7 p.m.

MD/DC Breeding Bird Atlas Year One Review



The MD/DC Breeding Bird Atlas project had an extremely successful year. Please join us for this presentation from the coordinator Gabriel Foley. He will provide an overview and update on the Atlas, and discuss how to best focus efforts for 2021. This is an excellent opportunity for those who are interested in participating and honing their skills.

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.



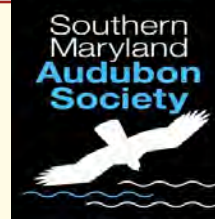
Osprey
Photo by Bill Hubick

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:

Osprey, \$10 each Total Amount: _____
 Barn Owl, \$25 each Total Amount: _____
 Northern Saw-whet Owl, \$30 each Total Amount: _____
 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