

# The Osprey

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHERN MARYLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY



Ovenbird  
Photo by Bill Hubick

## IN THIS ISSUE

**Bird-Friendly Hay Farming  
Demo Kicks Off**

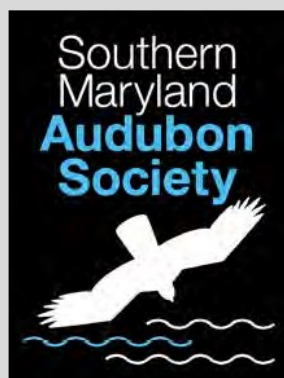
**Ready for Songbird Nest  
Box Season?**

**Leave It to Beavers:  
Keystone Species Provides  
Nature-based Restoration**

**Great Backyard Bird Count,  
2021 Final Results**

**SMAS Helps Town of La  
Plata Celebrate Arbor Day**

**SMAS Osprey Festival 4/24!**



<http://somdaudubon.org/>

## President's Perch

Readers, I have to ask, “Why?” Why aren’t you out enjoying the height of spring migration? Today I heard my first Ovenbird, for instance, and yesterday my first of year Northern Parula. The redbuds are at their peak, and the ornamental cherry and pear trees are a bit past their prime, but the warm spring breezes bring a snowfall of petals. This season is truly magical.

I am especially enthusiastic about year two of the Maryland and DC Breeding Bird Atlas. At the April meeting, Atlas Coordinator Gabriel Foley showed us our amazing accomplishments in 2020 and encouraged us to keep birding longer into the summer to catch begging nestlings and fledglings. I, for one, cannot wait! This morning I saw a pair of Northern Cardinals feeding one another. Intimate courtship, mating, and nesting moments are what make the Atlas project so rewarding. If you missed Gabriel’s talk, check out the recording on our Program Archive (<https://www.somdaudubon.org/our-work/program-archive/>).

Although we have not led trips, Southern Maryland Audubon Society has been incredibly busy. Thanks to a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, we held a groundbreaking ceremony in early April for a garden at the Dorchester Community Center in downtown La Plata. Soon an entire bed of native plants will teach folks about their beauty and importance—for birds, butterflies, and the whole ecosystem. We have also pledged support to several worthwhile research projects in Southern Maryland—one for grassland birds and two for Barn Owls. David Moulton’s article inside shares details about the grassland project.

There are more events planned, too. On Saturday, April 24, SMAS is sponsoring a Virtual Osprey Festival with guest speakers, including Greg Kearns. Please check our Facebook pages and website for details. Plus, we will host Dr. Chris Puttock of Chesapeake Natives plant nursery for our May 5 lecture via Zoom. Native plants host and nourish our insects—including important pollinators like bees and butterflies—as well as birds. Please join us!

Finally, if you seek information and resources for youngsters, check out World Migratory Bird Day (<https://www.migratorybirdday.org>). Their website offers great materials to learn about 11 featured bird species. A festival of virtual events takes place from April 23 to May 8. Their schedule is at <https://www.birddaylive.com/>. Bird Day Live will feature activities for youth, families, and schools.

Stay safe, everyone, and keep birding!  
Tiffany Farrell  
President, SMAS

## Bird-Friendly Hay Farming Demo Kicks Off In Hollywood, MD

What do Southern Maryland hay farmers and threatened grassland birds such as the Eastern Meadowlark have in common? They are both dependent on the survival of hayfields, and as a result, they are facing increasing pressure to survive in a changing world. Grassland bird populations have plummeted by as much as 70 percent since 1970, while hay farming in Southern Maryland is a continuous casualty of urban and suburban sprawl and conversion of hayfields to monoculture cropland.

This spring, in Hollywood, Maryland, a collaboration of four nonprofits have come together to begin testing methods of farming hay that work for farmers and birds. The “Saving Southern Maryland’s Grassland Birds through Bird-Friendly Mowing” project will devote 100 acres of hayfields next to Historic Sotterley to test hay farming methods that can make a difference, big and small, to our declining grassland bird populations.

When a meadowlark builds a nest in a hayfield before the first mowing, it is like building a nest in the middle of railroad track. When the haying begins, there is a good chance that the equipment will harvest not just the hay, but also any nest, eggs, newborn chicks, and even adult breeding birds that lie in its path.

Yet, most hay farmers are not in a position to simply forego spring haying. That first crop is usually the most commercially valuable, and the timing of haying is often dictated more by the weather than anything else. But does that mean there is simply nothing to be done that is both “bird-friendly” and “hay-friendly”?

The coordinators of the Hollywood initiative—David Moulton, a bird specialist, and Joe Goldsmith and BJ Bowling, hayfield land managers—intend to demonstrate that there are haying techniques that can strike a better balance between the reproductive needs of the birds and the economic needs of hay farmers. These can range from alterations as simple as adding “flush bars” to the haying machines, so that at least the adults have a chance to escape the cutting blades, to mowing a particular field earlier than the traditional schedule, to avoid mowing during the peak breeding season.

“The meadowlark is one of the iconic birds of rural Maryland, and its populations are crashing due to a loss of habitat which hay farmers have nothing to do with,” noted Moulton. “But there are some bird-friendly practices that would make a difference.”

“Most hay farmers I know are interested in learning farming techniques that are good for the environment and make practical sense,” explained Goldsmith. “There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ answer here—but there are options to choose from that we want the farming community to know about.”

“We’re all going to learn something from each other,” added Bowling. “Small changes in traditional farming practices can make a big difference once they are proven



to work. That’s what we want to demonstrate.”

The four nonprofits involved in launching this project are Farmers Feeding Southern Maryland, Southern Maryland Audubon Society, Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust, and Historic Sotterley, Inc. Results from this year’s demonstration will be publicized through farming and birding networks with the hope that additional landowners will act to assist in this effort.

For more information about this initiative, email David Moulton at [Moulton.DavidH@gmail.com](mailto:Moulton.DavidH@gmail.com) or call 240-278-4473.



**Eastern Meadowlark**  
**Photo by Bill Hubick**

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## Ready for Songbird Nest Box Season?

It won't be long before cavity nesting songbirds begin searching for nest sites—natural tree cavities or old woodpecker-excavated nesting cavities. Bluebirds, wrens, chickadees, titmice, and some swallows are among the 88 species of cavity nesting birds in North America. But there's a problem: There is a lack of adequate natural cavities, including woodpecker-excavated nesting cavities, which creates a lot of competition, and may even mean that some pairs won't nest. That's where we birders come into the scene, adding nest boxes (bird houses) to our yards.

If you already have a bird house or 2 in your yard, you are already a birdhouse “landlord,” and appreciate all the fun and joy that wrens and bluebirds can bring to your yard, workplace, or extended property. If that's the case, it's time to give your nest boxes a “spring check” to make sure each one is ready for new occupants and the potential of a new avian family.

### New Additions

It's also a good time to consider adding a new nest box to your landscaping; it can only be a helpful addition for cavity nesting birds. Adding nest boxes to local areas across the continent, interested and concerned birders have been instrumental to increasing local populations of bluebirds in particular, although other species have benefitted similarly to the cumulative effects of birders' providing suitable, safe housing.

Every bird house is important, but some people take their nest box activities to more inspired levels, creating “bluebird trails” that may number somewhere between a few to many nest boxes positioned along a “trail” that the “landlord” can walk or drive to, perhaps along a fence line across a grassy field, along the edge of a wooded area, or through a number of habitats. This is especially true for bluebird promoters, who do all they can to help ensure their favorite birds have adequate safe nest sites.

### Size Conscious

Whether you have one or more nest boxes, it's important to understand there is more to it than simply installing a nest box. Providing a nest box with the appropriate dimensions, a swinging door, and an appropriate-sized entrance hole for the birds you wish to attract is the first important step. Luckily, there is a super resource for anyone to access that provides all the information you should consider to be a successful landlord.

NestWatch, a part of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, provides the essential information about any nest box for any North American cavity nesting species. This information includes the size of the nest box, the all-important size of the entrance hole, preferred habitats of different species, the nesting elevation preferred by

species, and more to help make your bird house landlord efforts most successful. All this and more is available at <https://nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses/>

### Predator Proofing

To truly benefit cavity nesting birds, we need to make sure that each bird house is predator-proof. By predators, we mostly mean small mammals including squirrels, chipmunks, cats, and raccoons, plus snakes, which are mostly a concern for birders in southeastern states. But you get the idea—make it predator-proof. As birdhouse landlords, we must make sure the afore-mentioned animals and others like them cannot reach the nest box entrance. This is best accomplished by installing raccoon-proof predator guard or baffle, which should keep any potential predators from accessing a nest box.

How important is predator proofing? If predators can get to the eggs, nestlings, or adult birds, you aren't providing a nesting site, you are providing a feeding site for predators; that's a cold hard fact. So for more information about predator proofing options, refer directly to the NestWatch “dealing with predators” page at <https://nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses/dealing-with-predators/>

With this information in mind, consider your current bird houses, and be encouraged to move existing birdhouses on your property to a safer location if needed—perhaps secured on a post with a predator guard attached to ensure the safety of future residents, year after year. When you check habitat and elevation preferences of species you wish to attract, you may find you need to reposition a nest box to attract a pair of the species you hope to attract.

Perhaps you're already dialed in and your existing nest boxes are in all the right places with all the right predator options. Then, it may be picking out your next addition to benefit cavity nesting birds I your area. In this issue, we feature a list of interesting nest boxes in our Products section that may interest you, or even inspire you. When you really think of it bird houses are really important, but they can also offer interesting and rewarding observations, and add some more fun to your spring and summer birding activities. Being good nest box landlords helps to make us better and more successful birders. Think spring, think birds; good luck!

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

Share your backyard birding experiences and photos at [editorstbw2@gmail.com](mailto:editorstbw2@gmail.com)

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## Leave It to Beavers: Keystone Species Provides Nature-based Restoration

The North American beaver (*Castor canadensis*) was once ubiquitous throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Mostly trapped out by the close of the 19th century, beavers have been making somewhat of a comeback, and that is great news for the Chesapeake Bay.

For the past 25 years, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources has been working with local ecological restoration firms and environmental organizations to implement what is now called a “process-based” approach to stream restoration, an essential component of bay restoration. In this approach, ecology rather than engineering is the driving force promoting improved water quality, aquatic habitat, and floodplain habitat.

And now DNR is looking to build on these successful techniques and incorporate beaver-based restoration approaches that are done in the American west, but are becoming more of these restoration sites. Their dam building prowess traps sediments, processes nutrients, and creates lush wetland and floodplain habitat which not only filters water but provides incredibly diverse habitat for other wildlife. It’s no surprise that the North American beaver has been referred to as a keystone species.

At the 2020 BeaverCON—a biennial, international conference held in March in Hunt Valley, Maryland—wildlife and environmental professionals gathered to learn what works in human-beaver conflict management and restoration. Following the conference, DNR staff and other partners formed a Beaver Working Group to help promote the science and understanding of beavers as ecosystem engineers and to elevate “process-based” stream restoration as a climate-resilient bay cleanup tool. Photo of blue-spotted sunfish

Throughout 2020, the Maryland Beaver Working Group has met virtually to discuss a path forward for beavers in Maryland—seeing beavers becoming a key player in increasing wetland acreage, improving habitat for a myriad of different wildlife species, and promoting healthy watersheds for brook trout and other aquatic species in need of conservation, such as the native coastal plain sunfish.

One of the favored techniques to encourage colonization of beaver in a watershed is called a beaver dam analog (BDA). This low-tech method of nature-based restoration has gained momentum in the Mid-Atlantic region as a cost-effective, adaptive best management practice for restoring ecological function and resiliency. BDAs typically involve the installation of wooden posts and other natural materials in a stream, encouraging beavers to construct and maintain a dam. Research



Photo by Angela Genito

has shown that beaver colonization after BDA installation can help combat stream channel erosion and entrenchment by promoting sediment deposition.

Over time, the stream will become hydrologically reconnected with its floodplain, promoting riparian vegetation growth. The riparian corridor eventually becomes a robust and resilient ecosystem that allows biodiversity to flourish, which sustains the stream restoration.

To further the science and implementation of this relatively new approach, DNR is partnering with the Baltimore and Harford County Soil Conservation Districts and Ecotone, a Maryland-based ecological restoration company, to implement this approach in a number of degraded stream systems. This approach promotes ecological recovery with minimal corrective intervention. The partners in this effort are cooperatively monitoring existing beaver dam complexes to determine effects on stream temperature and fish habitat.

Early findings indicate that while some areas behind a beaver dam can see increased water temperature, the technique promotes groundwater recharge, resulting in an overall cooling effect on water temperatures.

Beavers can modify their environment more than any other animal except humans, and have a large role to play in combating climate change. For example, elevated water tables surrounding beaver-modified areas increase the density and height of vegetation, reducing diurnal fluctuation of water temperatures, maintaining base flow, and increasing aquatic habitat complexity. These environmental modifications created by beaver activity can be essential components to restoring riparian corridors and building resilient ecological systems which help to mitigate against the effects of land use changes, increased impervious surfaces, and effects of climate change.

**Continued on Page 5**

DNR and its partners are working to place beaver dam analogs on more than three miles of tributaries in Little Gunpowder Falls in Baltimore and Harford counties. These streams and tributaries are suffering from bed and bank erosion and disconnected floodplains, which exacerbates stream flow and furthers erosion and stream degradation. Multiple landowners have signed on to collaborate on a restoration approach that relies on beaver and nature-based restoration techniques.

Low-tech, natural wood structures will encourage the river to do the work of spreading flood energies out across the floodplain. Combined with an extensive riparian planting pallet, the “lighter touch” approach will encourage beaver to colonize the site, initiating a positive and regenerative biological loop. The water moving through the stream valley will be allowed to spread out over a wide area that will slow flood velocities, increase hydrologic connection to the water table, promote sediment storage, and process nutrients. Combined, these practices will restore approximately 40 acres of stream and wetland forests and meadows.

Beaver Working Group (BWG) members believe that like oysters, the beaver should be thought of as a keystone species in our restoration efforts. The difference is that the beaver is at the top of the watershed. Oysters are at the bottom. Both are equally important in maintaining healthy ecosystems. But beavers can help filter nutrients and sediments before they get into the tidal systems—leaving oysters with less work to do “filtering” the bay.

“We’ve scarcely begun to plumb the potential of beavers to restore water’s rightful way throughout bay landscapes,” said BWG member Erik Michelsen of the Anne Arundel County Bureau of Public Works. “I am convinced that, even in a highly urban watershed, they can do wonders, if we just allow them to work.”

[dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife](https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife)

Claudia Donegan directs the Center for Habitat Restoration, Maryland Department of Natural Resources Chesapeake and Coastal Service. Article reprinted from Maryland Natural Resource magazine in Vol. 23, No. 4 of the Maryland Natural Resource magazine, winter 2021.

<https://news.maryland.gov/dnr/2021/01/01/leave-it-to-beavers-keystone-species-provides-nature-based-restoration/>

### Birds Bring Us Together

In an unprecedented year, the Great Backyard Bird Counts reminds us that thousands of people around the world are united in their enjoyment of watching birds. Turnout this year was incredible, albeit with many people understandably staying closer to home. Perhaps this gave us an even deeper appreciation for the beauty of the natural world in and around our homes and communities? Our deepest gratitude to each and every bird enthusiast around the world who shared Merlin Bird ID(s), eBird checklist(s), or photos, sounds, or videos from February 12th–15th, 2021. We broke records once again and we could not have done it without you!

### In a snapshot:

- 6,436 species of birds identified
- 190 participating countries
- 379,726 eBird checklists
- 479,842 Merlin Bird IDs
- 151,393 photos added to Macaulay Library
- 300,000+ estimated global participants

Numbers may change slightly as final checklists are added and validated by our reviewers. Data reflect totals through March 12th, 2021.

### Participation Is Growing

In 2013, the Great Backyard Bird Count started saving data in eBird. We compiled participation from 2013 to 2021 to see how the project participation has changed over time. Each year more and more people join in the fun of sharing their bird sightings. We are continuously humbled by the numbers. Anyone who is passionate about preserving biodiversity can be heartened to see how the world is coming together to admire, watch, and count birds. Be inspired and proud of our accomplishments.

### Respect for Birds Is Global

The map clearly shows that the world is actively engaged in watching and reporting birds. We had 190 countries submit at least one checklist in 2021. Record-breaking participation from the United States, Canada, and India was followed by impressive numbers in Spain, the United Kingdom, and Australia. In Latin America, Argentina had the most checklists, followed closely by Mexico, with Colombia holding the 10th spot. A growing country for participation is Taiwan, which came in 9th place with 2,050 checklists.

<https://www.birdcount.org/2021-final-results/>



Southern  
Maryland  
**Audubon**  
Society



## May 5 Monthly Lecture via Zoom, 7 p.m.

### *Native Plants for Birds and Butterflies*

Native plant gardens, are quite literally for the birds. While many of us like songbirds, it's a different story when it comes to insects. But backyard species like caterpillars play a crucial role in supporting our most beloved bird species. When you create native plant gardens you support insect diversity – more bugs for birds! Join **Dr. Chris Puttock** as he explains the importance of native plants. Chris has three decades' experience in conservation and restoration. He is the chair of ESRAG, and the executive director of Chesapeake Natives, Inc., a native plant nursery producing plants to sustain the ecology of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Watch your email from SMAS to receive the link to join this Zoom lecture.



## Welcome, New Members!

Susan Burch, Waldorf  
Annette R Cook, Mechanicsville  
Joyce Edelen, Port Tobacco  
Mary Hall, Chesapeake Beach  
Cynthia Hartman, Hughesville  
Kyra Harvey, Upper Marlboro  
Charles Lewis, Clinton  
Mary Lou Lindholm, Lusby  
Nicolette May, Port Republic  
Ellen McCormack-Ament, Port Republic  
Margaret Menkart, Washington, DC  
Gaither Pugh, Lexington Park  
Donald Ramsey II, Clinton  
Jan de Regt, Waldorf  
Dee Rumford, Huntingtown

## 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! Please contact the following county coordinators for more details:

CALVERT: Sherman Suter (401-586-1073),  
[sjsuter29@verizon.net](mailto:sjsuter29@verizon.net)

CHARLES: Lynne Wheeler (301-751-8097),  
[comstockel@aol.com](mailto:comstockel@aol.com)

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

ST. MARY'S: Tyler Bell (301-862-4623),  
[itylerbell@yahoo.com](mailto:itylerbell@yahoo.com)



## SMAS HELPS TOWN OF LA PLATA CELEBRATE ARBOR DAY



### Maryland's First Bird City also Tree City USA!



The Arbor Day Foundation's mission is to inspire people to plant, nurture, and celebrate trees. Birders experience every day the value of native trees, since they provide nesting habitat and food for wildlife. Last year the Town of La Plata became the first Bird City Maryland, and they were also designated Tree City USA! What a great combination for us – more trees for birds!

On Wednesday, April 7, the Southern Maryland Audubon Society and the Conservancy for Charles County, our Bird City Maryland partner, joined shovels with town leaders and celebrated Arbor Day. Mayor Jeannine E. James proclaimed the official native tree for the Town of La Plata the Sweetbay Magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*). The selection was made by the residents of La Plata, who voted from a list of many great options. We planted a Sweetbay Magnolia as well as a Tulip Poplar, donated by the Conservancy for Charles County, to the right of the town hall. Lynne Wheeler represented the Southern Maryland Audubon Society and the Port Tobacco River Conservancy, she shared with everyone the advantages of native trees and facts about the Tulip Poplar.

Did you celebrate Arbor Day? It's never too late to add native plants to your landscape. Once you go native – you never go back!



## Osprey Festival 2021

Join us for our first Osprey Festival on Saturday, April 24, 2021, from 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM. This event will be held via Zoom and Facebook Live.

### Ospreys of the Patuxent

Keynote speaker Greg Kearns will discuss his 38 years of Osprey research on the Patuxent River. In addition to leading dynamic tours for SMAS for many years, Kearns is also the subject of a newly released children's book titled *Mr. Greg's Ospreys*, which encourages involvement in wildlife conservation.



### Ospreys of Hampton Roads, Virginia

Reese F Lukei, Jr. with the Center for Conservation Biology, College of William and Mary, has banded over 1,000 Osprey since about 1982. Mr. Lukei will talk about Osprey biology, population, and the problems they encounter. He is also the co-founder of **Osprey Watch**, a community science nest monitoring project.

The SMAS Raptor Conservation Committee will launch its participation in **Osprey Watch** and its partnership with the Center for Conservation Biology during the festival. **Learn how to adopt an Osprey nest in Southern Maryland!**





## 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: \_\_1 year \$20 \_\_2 year \$35 \_\_3 year \$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 your dues will be received by 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

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](http://somdaudubon.org) for this new option.



**Osprey**

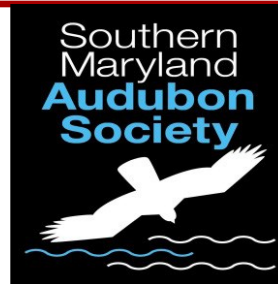
**Photo by Bill Hubick**

**Editor: Tyler Bell Email: [jtylerbell@yahoo.com](mailto: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](mailto:somdaudubon.president@gmail.com)**  
**Vice-President, Margarita Rochow—[margarita@usa.net](mailto:margarita@usa.net)**  
**Treasurer, Julie Daniel—[juliedanieal@hotmail.com](mailto:juliedanieal@hotmail.com)**  
**Secretary, Julie Simpson [jsimps@runbox.com](mailto: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: _____    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 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: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State, Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

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*