Happy New Year, all! Instead of resolutions, I am making a list of gratitude. What are you grateful for? A deep breath of fresh air? In the Covid-era, such simple things are a profound gift. Were there exceptional bird sightings in 2021? Under self-imposed travel restriction, I discovered that I needn’t race around to seek life birds. Rather, closely observing the behaviors of relatively common birds in my nearby “patches,” especially during the breeding season, can be equally rewarding.

Here’s a recent example. Taking my old dog outside at all hours of the night is a drudge. In winter, the cold blast often keeps me awake for hours. Yet in late December while walking at midnight I heard a Great Horned Owl singing. I counted a series of six “hoo, hoo, hoo-hoos” punctuated with long pauses. Previously I had not heard a Great Horned here, much less one I could assign a breeding code. Even without seeing him, the moonlit setting and the fading “hoos” as he moved farther away will remain one of my mysterious and poetic birding memories. Just knowing that our largest owl species sings outside my window while I sleep brings me joy. I get much the same delight thinking about the wonders of migration or, also in this season, the evening mating ritual of the American Woodcock.

Even though I skip resolutions, I do indulge in the optimism of new beginnings. What are you looking forward to in 2022? I can’t wait to see many of our friends at SMAS field trips, which we had suspended for nearly two years. Please see our list of events in this issue (page 7) and online at https://www.somdaudubon.org/events/. This month also marks the Great Backyard Bird Count, a fun way to begin taking part in community science with as little as 15 minutes of birdwatching. This year’s count takes place the weekend of Feb 18 to 21. See the article inside (page 5) or the official website at https://www.birdcount.org/ for more information. Hope you stay well and enjoy the outdoors.

Grateful, as always, for the birds,
Tiffany Farrell
SMAS President
Meet the Bird Guide and Blogger on a Mission to Keep Women Birders Safe

*Tiffany Kersten spent 2021 shining a light on the dangers many birders face in the field—and broke a birding record along the way.*

By Cinnamon Janzer
Reporter, Audubon Magazine
January 07, 2022

***Content warning: The following story includes references to sexual assault.***

Last February, Tiffany Kersten climbed the Sandia Mountains east of Albuquerque in her blue Chevy Spark. At some 10,000 feet, she set up her spotting scope along Sandia Crest, where bird feeders provide a rare opportunity to see Black, Brown-capped, and Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches together in one spot. The air was cold and thin, but that wasn’t why Kersten soon found herself struggling to breathe.

As she peered through her scope trained on the feeders, a pickup truck pulled up and two men got out, dressed in jeans and tennis shoes despite the snow.

Kersten suddenly found herself alone on a mountaintop with two strangers and no cell service. The men wandered about, and one lit a cigarette. “I was having a full-blown panic attack at this point,” recalls Kersten, a survivor of sexual assault. Finally, after a few minutes that seemed to her like centuries, the men drove off.

Kersten was at Sandia Crest as part of what birders call a Big Year. Early in 2021 she set a goal of seeing 700 species across the contiguous United States. She blew past that milestone in October and went on to break the previous Big Year record for the Lower 48.

But the anxiety Kersten felt on the mountaintop gave weight to her larger mission for the Big Year and beyond: making the outdoors safer for women. While chasing rare birds and local specialties across the country, she handed out hundreds of personal safety alarms to women she met along the way and urged the birding community—through speaking engagements, one-on-one conversations, and online—to acknowledge and address the threats women face in pursuit of their passion.

Kersten is under no illusion that the alarms themselves will solve the problem, but she hopes that her larger effort can help create change. “I don’t have all the answers,” she writes on the blog where she’s been dutifully detailing her adventures. “But I do believe I can help by being the vector through which tough conversations can be had and shared. It is a responsibility of us all—men and women alike—to change the narrative here, to create a safe, welcoming place for all in this community.”
Big Year continued

Despite her fear, she continued on, but decided she needed a mission greater than herself. A few days later, while she was seeking a Williamson’s Sapsucker in California, an ad for Birdie personal safety alarms popped up on her newsfeed. The alarms hook onto keys or bags and, when their circular tops are popped off, they flash a bright LED light and chirp loudly (hence the name). The company also gives a portion of its proceeds to organizations that support women’s empowerment.

Kersten immediately reached out to Birdie’s female owners who offered her a 50 percent discount on the alarms, which cost $30 each. A friend donated the money for her first 100 alarms, Kersten set up a GoFundMe page to help purchase another 200, and the bigger mission for her Birdie Big Year coalesced.

While getting to see rarities like a Yellow-faced Grassquit in Texas’s Estero Llano Grande State Park and a California Condor in Pinnacles National Park are undeniable highlights of the project, Kersten’s favorite memories are of giving away the alarms. One recipient, in tears, gave Kersten $50 so she could buy one for another woman. “There are a lot of reactions like that,” Kersten says. “It’s been a really powerful experience not only for me, but for a lot of other women.”

Jessica Gorzo is one of them. A longtime birder, Gorzo had connected with Kersten on social media before they met in October at New Jersey’s Cape May Fall Festival, where Kersten gave her one of the devices. “The alarm made me feel a lot better because I try to at least be vigilant when I’m alone in a remote place,” Gorzo says. “I’m really thankful that she came up with this and I think it’s going to make a world of difference.”

The Big Year has made a big difference in Kersten’s life, too. “I’ve just really gotten to know myself,” she says. “I’ve been able to move forward in a very conscious way. It has been just absolutely amazing for my healing from my assault.”

That’s not all she’s accomplished. On December 18, Kersten broke the previous Lower 48 Big Year record of 724 species, set in 2020 by Jeremy Dominguez.

Conclusion on page 4
See Big Year Final
Big Year Final

After all her travels, the bird that put her over the top was right in her home county in South Texas, at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. And oh, what a bird: It was a Bat Falcon, the first one confirmed in this country. “I had a bunch of friends there, so I had to walk down the trail and cry a bit,” she recalls. “It was really emotional.” Although she missed the super-rare Steller’s Sea-Eagle that delighted birders in Massachusetts and Maine, she was able to add a Northern Lapwing to her list in New Jersey, ending the year with 726 species.

With 2021 freshly behind her, Kersten hopes to continue giving out the alarms as she moves into the next chapter of her life: officially launching her own bird guiding company in the male-dominated industry this month. “My hope with accomplishing the Big Year record and with starting my own company is to show women that there’s space for us here,” Kersten says. She’s found that women often have to create their own opportunities, rather than waiting for someone to hire them. “So,” she says, “let’s freaking start our own company.”


Welcome, New Members!

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<tr>
<th>Seth Berry, Springfield, VA</th>
<th>Frank McPhillips, Huntingtown</th>
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<td>Joseph Butler, Lexington Park</td>
<td>Mike Moody, Owings</td>
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<td>Paul Bogner, Hollywood</td>
<td>Karen Murphy, St. Leonard</td>
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<td>Richard J Bowman, Waldorf</td>
<td>Katherine Nelson, St. Leonard</td>
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<td>Diane Perrine Coon, White Plains</td>
<td>Penelope Norris, La Plata</td>
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<td>Peg Corl, Solomons</td>
<td>Charles Paxton, Temple Hills</td>
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<td>Joan Creighton, La Plata</td>
<td>Charita Proctor, Fort Washington</td>
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<td>Melinda Deatley, Oxon Hill</td>
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<td>Jaime Escano, Oxon Hill</td>
<td>Nancy Riddell, California</td>
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<td>Joseph Faunce, Mechanicsville</td>
<td>Anne Scott, Fort Washington</td>
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<td>Daisy Graham, Accokeek</td>
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<td>Margaret A Howard, Fort Washington</td>
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<td>Nancy Hunter, Hughesville</td>
<td>Cameron Toms, Great Mills</td>
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<td>Claudette Jordon, Lusby</td>
<td>Melissa Watkins, Oxon Hill</td>
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<td>Alma Rita Joy, Lusby</td>
<td>Shirley Wells, Oxon Hill</td>
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<td>Robert Gordon Kelly, Suitland</td>
<td>William Willis, Temple Hills</td>
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<td>Lori Keyton, Waldorf</td>
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Great Backyard Bird Count

How to Participate

COVID Statement: Watching birds is a safe and enjoyable activity we can do during the Covid global pandemic. For the 2022 Great Backyard Bird Count, we strongly urge participants to comply with all current country, province, state, First People’s lands, or municipal Covid-19 regulations and guidelines. This includes, but is not limited to, social distancing while bird watching and wearing a mask when birding with others.

https://www.birdcount.org/participate/

Participating is easy, fun to do alone, or with others, and can be done anywhere you find birds.

Step 1 – Decide where you will watch birds.

Step 2 – Watch birds for 15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days, February 18-21, 2022.

Step 3 – Count all the birds you see or hear within your planned time/location and use the best tool for sharing your bird sightings:

If you are a beginning bird admirer and new to the count, try using the Merlin Bird ID app.

If you have participated in the count before, try eBird Mobile app or enter your bird list on the eBird website (desktop/laptop).

If you are participating as a group, see instructions for Group Counting.

Below, explore step-by-step instructions for entering data using each available tool.

Merlin Bird ID

If you are NEW to the Great Backyard Bird Count and have a smartphone, we recommend you using the Merlin Bird ID app to enter your first bird. It is FREE and easy to use.

Using Merlin Bird ID

Merlin covers bird species from 7 continents and is available in 12 languages.

eBird Mobile

If you are already using eBird to track your birding activity, the FREE eBird Mobile app is a fast way to enter your bird lists right from the palm of your hand.

Using eBird Mobile

Desktop or Laptop

If you prefer to enter your sightings on a computer, perhaps after making a list while on a hike or watching your feeders, we’ll walk you through how.

Using eBird on a Computer

Note: You can start entering bird lists at midnight local time on the first day of the count, anywhere in the world. Data entry remains open until March 1, but the information you enter should only be from the four days of the Great Backyard Bird Count.
Point Lookout CBC, December 19, 2021
by Bob Boxwell

The morning of December 19 was rainy and cold. I already had a call from my partner for the St. George’s Island sector that she had solid rain at Piney Point. So, we didn’t start until mid-morning and our numbers (between 500 and 600 birds) was disappointing to say the least. Our longest walk yielded a Downy Woodpecker. Somewhere between 1 and 3 p.m. the weather broke. This didn’t improve our numbers much.

Overall, the species count was quite good with 97 total. The total number of individuals of 8331 was possibly the lowest in my memory (somewhere we had a snowstorm count that might have been worse). This count has in past years had flocks of geese, ducks, and blackbirds that have topped this number. The largest group of waterfowl were the Canada Geese with 1,705. They numbered more than the rest of the waterfowl combined. Again, species count was good with both scaup, all three scoters, the usual suspects, and Redheads. No Barrow’s Goldeneye this year. But two Cackling Geese were unusual. Red-throated Loons outnumbered Common Loons, while the Great Cormorants had lower numbers than the Double-crested Cormorants. Both Northern Gannet and Brown Pelicans were in double digits.

Maybe because the weather was so miserable, we found some harder to find marsh species with 5 Clapper Rails, 4 American Woodcock, and a Wilson’s Snipe. A Black-headed Gull was a great find along with over 70 Bonaparte’s Gulls at the Elms Environmental Education Center.

We swept the usual woodpeckers, owls, and mimics. Purple Finch and Pine Siskins were nice northern visitors. Pine, Palm, and Yellow-rumped were the only warblers on the count day though a Wilson’s Warbler, found by Steve and Betty Arthur on count week was quite uncommon! Nine species of sparrows including Fox and White-crowned. Chipping Sparrow number of 110 was higher than usual. Winter, Sedge, and Carolina comprised the wren team. Birds of prey were dominated by 29 Bald Eagles. The real find was 4 Northern Harriers.

The really horrid weather held our numbers down. The quality of the teams we had in the field are responsible for the great variety we did find. Point Lookout has always had the potential to be a really good Christmas Bird Count. Waters, woods, fields, marsh, we have it all. One of my joys in doing counts is meeting new birders and getting excited about finding birds again. Please join us!

[Editor’s Note: follow this link for:
Count Day eBird summary report: https://ebird.org/tripreport/23153
And this link for:
Count Week eBird summary report https://ebird.org/tripreport/23649 ]
January 2022—March 2022 Events

COVID POLICY: SMAS is restarting its program of in-person events January 2022 using the following public health guidelines to ensure the safety of all participants. Required of all events: 1. All participants need to be fully vaccinated, except those with medical exemptions. 2. Masks are optional for outdoor events, but may be required for in-person lecture programs, depending on the status of infection rates. 3. Do not attend if you are experiencing any symptoms of a cold, flu or COVID; 4. Maintain social distancing.

January 14 – FRIDAY – 7:00 p.m.
Field Trip – Great Family Owting!!
Elms Environmental Center, St. Mary’s County
49300 St. James Church Road, Lexington Park, MD 20653
“OWL PROWL AT THE ELMS”
Leader(s): Bob Boxwell and Margarita Rochow.
Come “call out” the owls!! Owls are nocturnal, and therefore not easy to spot. A great Friday night family outing at The Elms. Dress appropriately for the weather, and avoid noisy clothing. This event is weather dependent. Rain or high winds will result in cancellation. Directions: Take Rt 235 south, left onto St. James Church Road (opposite Mattapany Rd). You will see the sign for The Elms Environmental Education Center. We will meet in the hunter’s dirt parking lot on the right 100 yards before the gate (Do not drive past the gate!) RSVP to Bob Boxwell at robertboxwell1@outlook.com or 410-610-5124. COVID: Per St. Mary’s County Public School masks are not required outdoors at this site.

January 29 – SATURDAY – 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Field Trip – S MD Audubon Youth Birders – Youth Welcome to Join!
Newtowne Neck State Park, St. Mary’s County
21110 Newtowne Neck Road, Leonardtown, MD 20650
“WINTER BIRDS AT THE NECK”
Leader(s): Ben Springer
Join us for our first field trip scheduled specifically for the Southern MD Audubon Youth Birders Club. This birding field trip is targeting all youth interested in joining the bird club, or simply to get together with other kids that love birds and want to learn and enjoy birds more. Come on out! Newtowne is a peninsula defined by Breton Bay, the Potomac River and St. Clements Bay, this 776-acre property of woodlands, wetlands and agricultural fields offers a wide variety of birding habitats. It was the first settlement in the Maryland province after St. Mary’s City. Owned for nearly 3 centuries by the Jesuits, the land was reclaimed as a state park in 2009 to protect it from development. From Rte. 5 north of Leonardtown turn on Rte. 243 (Newtowne Neck Road) for 4.5 miles to parking lot on left just beyond the graveyard and before St. Francis Xavier’s Church. NOTE: This event will include two adults for supervision of youth. All youth under the age of 12 must include an adult. RSVP to Lynne Wheeler at somdaudubon@yahoo.com or text 301-751-8097.

February 2 – WEDNESDAY – 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.
Monthly Meeting Program - Virtual Zoom Meeting
“Local Wildlife – River Otters”
KAREN MCDONALD, STEM Program Coordinator, Smithsonian Env. Research Center
Join us and be introduced to the North American River Otter. It is native to the Chesapeake Bay, but not much research has been done on its populations, habits, and role in the Bay’s food webs. In this talk Karen will share with us basic river otter biology, and introduce us to the research occurring at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center related to otters, their behavior, finding latrines, and parasites. She will also touch on the newly formed Chesapeake Bay River Otter Alliance.

Upcoming Events continued on page 8.
February 18 – 21 is the GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT!

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the Great Backyard Bird Count was the first online citizen-science project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real-time. For information about the GBBC see their website at birdcount.org. You can help out by counting birds for as little as 15 minutes! Local GBBC get togethers throughout southern Maryland will be advertised on our Facebook page.

February 20 – SUNDAY – 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Field Trip – Great Backyard Bird Count
Piscataway Park & Hard Bargain Farm, Prince George’s County
2301 Bryan Point Road, Accokeek, MD 20607
“WINTER WATERFOWL AND RESIDENT BIRDS”
Leader(s): Lynne Wheeler and Bill Townsend
The varied habitat of water, woods, farm fields and edges provide for a great variety of birds. See fergusonfoundation.org for directions. Bill Townsend, HBF Educator Associate, will meet you at the entrance (red Chevy). No fee. Limit of 12 participants. RSVP to Lynne Wheeler at somdaudubon@yahoo.com or text 301-751-8097.

February 26 – SATURDAY – 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Field Trip – One of our Best! Don’t miss out, this trip fills up quickly!
Patuxent River Naval Air Station, St. Mary’s County
21866 Cedar Point, Bldg. 2189, NAS Patuxent River, MD 20670. Gate #2, pass office parking lot.
“WINTER BIRDS AND TUNDRA SPECIALISTS AT PAX RIVER AIRFIELD”
Leader: Dean Newman
We are fortunate to have access to sections of the navy base fronting on the confluence of the Patuxent River and the Chesapeake Bay, which hosts airfields that provide tundra-like habitat. Previous trips have turned up winter birds such as Snow Bunting, Lapland Longspurs, Short-eared Owls, Horned Larks, Savannah Sparrows, Wilson’s Snipe and Peregrine Falcon. Preregistration is required and open to U.S. citizens only. Must bring photo I.D. and Covid vaccination and masks are required. We will be escorted and traveling together in a van; participant size is limited. RSVP to Dean Newman at deannewman03@gmail.com

March 2 – WEDNESDAY – 7:00 a.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Monthly Meeting Program - Virtual Zoom Meeting
“What's Up with Maryland Plants?”
CHRIS FRYE, State Botanist, MD DNR Wildlife & Heritage Service
Chris Frye has served as the State's chief botanist for 26 years. He leads conservation efforts for plants, maintains the State's list of rare, threatened and endangered plant species, and serves as the curator of vascular plants at the TAWES herbarium in Annapolis. Chris will discuss some highlights of his research, detail some activities for management and recovery of rare plants, S3 plant species to look for, and talk generally about the challenges to conservation posed by small population size and isolation.
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 join SMAS via PayPal. Go to our website at somdaudubon.org for this new option.

Osprey
Photo by Bill Hubick

Editor: Tyler Bell  Email: 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.

2021–2022 Officers
President, Tiffany Farrell - somdaudubon.president@gmail.com
Vice President, Elena Gilroy—elenabode@yahoo.com
Treasurer, Julie Daniel—juliebdaniel@hotmail.com
Secretary, Barbara Hill —tityto@verizon.net

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: __________________________________
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