The Osprey

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHERN MARYLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY



Great Horned Owl fledglings
Photo by Bill Hubick

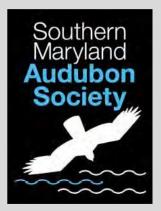
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http://somdaudubon.org/

President's Perch

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



American Woodcock
Photo by Robert Hurry

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



Tiffany Kersten in Big Bend National Park. Photo: Courtesy of Tiffany Kersten

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."

Continued on page 3
See **Big Year**

Big Year continued

Data on women's safety in birding and the outdoors is scant, but two-thirds of the more than 2,000 women Outside magazine surveyed in 2017 said they had felt unsafe, and 53 percent said they'd been sexually harassed, during outdoor recreation. Men and the threat of harassment or assault topped the list of safety concerns among respondents, far surpassing the next-biggest fear: bears. A separate 2018 survey of women climbers found that roughly half had been sexually harassed or assaulted while partaking in their sport.

"It's important for us as women to listen to our intuition and just be aware of our surroundings whenever we're in nature, especially alone," Kersten explains. "But that can be really hard to do because when you're birding, sometimes you're so super-focused on the bird that you're not quite paying attention to everything else that's going on around you."

As a female birder and assault survivor, Kersten emphasizes protecting women, but conversations about safety in the outdoors can also benefit other marginalized groups. "Safety is number one, because if you don't feel safe you don't go out there in the first place," says Karla Noboa, president of the Feminist Bird Club, a volunteer group dedicated to providing safe and equitable access to the outdoors for those of all identities across sexuality, gender identity, ability, and more.

Kersten didn't start 2021 with an ambitious project in mind. Last January, due to COVID-19, she had lost her job managing a nature center, and the gyms where she had been training for the American Ninja Warrior TV show were closed. So she took a spontaneous trip to Florida with a friend and saw 200 species, including some exceptionally rare strays like the Cuban Pewee and Red-legged Thrush. Back home in Texas she quickly picked up another 86 species. When she flushed some Scaled Quail on a February trip to Arizona, something clicked. Brimming with encouragement from friends, she decided to commit to a Big Year.

She had only just begun her new adventure when a Georgia writer published a detailed allegation that a prominent birder had raped her while they were birding together. The news jolted Kersten back to her own experience. While preparing to compete in the world's largest archery tournament in Las Vegas three and a half years ago, Kersten says her coach assaulted her. "I left archery pretty much immediately after that," she says. Now she wondered: "Am I putting myself in a situation where this

could happen to me again?"

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."



Birdie personal safety alarms. Photo: Courtesy of Tiffany Kersten

https://www.audubon.org/news/meet-bird-guide-and-blogger-mission-keep-women-birders-safe

Welcome, New Members!

Seth Berry, Springfield, VA

Joseph Butler, Lexington Park

Paul Bogner, Hollywood

Richard J Bowman, Waldorf

Diane Perrine Coon, White Plains

Peg Corl, Solomons

Joan Creighton, La Plata

Melinda Deatley, Oxon Hill

Jaime Escano, Oxon Hill

Joseph Faunce, Mechanicsville

Manuel Geraldo, Fort Washington

Daisy Graham, Accokeek

Margaret A Howard, Fort Washington

Nancy Hunter, Hughesville

Claudette Jordon, Lusby

Alma Rita Joy, Lusby

Robert Gordon Kelly, Suitland

Lori Keyton, Waldorf

Frank McPhillips, Huntingtown

Mike Moody, Owings

Karen Murphy, St. Leonard

Katherine Nelson, St. Leonard

Penelope Norris, La Plata

Charles Paxton, Temple Hills

Charita Proctor, Fort Washington

Alain Rajack, Clinton

Nancy Riddell, California

Anne Scott, Fort Washington

Ralph Sita, Dunkirk

Bert Stevenson, White Plains

Gail Stone, Port Tobacco

Cameron Toms, Great Mills

Melissa Watkins, Oxon Hill

Shirley Wells, Oxon Hill

William Willis, Temple Hills

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 <u>eBird Mobile</u> <u>app</u> or enter your bird list on the <u>eBird website</u> (desktop/laptop).

People enjoying birding. Clockwise from top left: Belize Audubon Society/Audubon; Justin Dutcher/GBBC; Parvaiz Shagoo/GBBC; Bethany Gray/GBBC.

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.



Wilson's Warbler Photo by Steve Arthur

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. <u>Required of all events</u>: 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.



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: __1year \$20 __2 year \$35 __3 year \$45

☐ Lifetime Membership: \$500

■ Donation:

Please enroll me as a first time member of he 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—juliemdaniel@hotmail.com Secretary, Barbara Hill —tytito@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