APRIL 2026 VOLUME 60, ISSUE 7

The Osprey

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHERN MARYLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY

Wood Duck male
Photo by Bill Hubick

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http://somdaudubon.org/

President's Perch

Spring Cleaning – Spring Migration Fever

Happy Spring! This has got to be the year we welcome spring season 'way more than previous years. What a brutal winter. Not only did it have a negative impact on us, it interfered with egg laying for some of our southern Maryland Bald Eagles. The thick layer of ice covering the egg cup wasn't conducive to some, such as the Port Tobacco River Park Bald Eagle pair. Doesn't sound like a fun Big Sit to me either!

Good news though – as I check on other nests, such as the one at my home property - I do see eagles sitting on eggs. While I think our numbers will be reduced, I was happy to see other pairs have persevered.

Speaking of nesting….as I write this article my husband John is cleaning out and repairing our Wood Duck boxes (we have five!), and I am jumping on the Eastern Bluebird boxes. All the things we do to help our avian friends have a successful breeding season.

It got me thinking, how are our Wood Ducks doing? It has been a while since I read a status report from our MD DNR Wood Duck Initiative, maybe you think the same and will enjoy the article included in this newsletter. It is such a gorgeous duck, and a joy to watch – so skittish!!

OSPREY! I SEE OSPREY! They're BAAAACCCKKK!

We have so much fun welcoming the return of the Fish Hawk. Come on out and join us at two upcoming events, "March on the Mattawoman" at Smallwood State Park March 28, and the "Maryland Osprey and Nature Festival" at North Beach April 18. Southern Maryland Audubon Society is an official sponsor of the Osprey festival and we look forward to seeing everyone and allowing us to share our love and knowledge.

And if spring migration fever has really hit you don't miss out from joining us for our April 1 Monthly Zoom Lecture. Not only will this be informative, but entertaining as well.

May warm weather and southerly winds prevail. Happy spring migration!

Lynne Wheeler
Interim President

Report on the Patuxent Christmas Bird Count, December 27, 2025

by Ben Springer

Although we had an unfortunately windy count day again this year, our dedicated Christmas Bird Count (CBC) counters braved the weather to tally and document a collective 88 species! Despite the cold, we amassed an impressive total of 66.4 party hours, 24.4 miles on foot, and 135 miles by car across 94 eBird checklists.

I'd like to highlight a few rarities that were found:

A Baltimore Oriole was found by Sheri McConville and Jen Cookus (You can see Jen's beautiful photos on their shared checklist).

A Cackling Goose was found by Maggie Silverman via a sunset audio recording.

And last but not least, two separate Common Ravens were found by Tyler Bell and Jane Kostenko, and Kern Freesland marking the first time we've documented ravens for the Pax circle!

Baltimore Oriole photo by Jen Cookus

Additionally, here are several more taxa that were only found by one person/party:

American Black Duck - Ben Springer
Surf Scoter - Ben Springer
Killdeer - Maggie Silverman
Brown Pelican - Ben Springer
Cooper’s Hawk - Kyle Rambo
Eastern Screech-Owl - Ben Springer
Merlin - Ben Springer
Horned Lark - Jim Swift
Fox Sparrow - Maggie Silverman
Common Grackle - Kyle Rambo

We also had record high counts for two species
Purple Finch (13) - Tyler Bell & Jane Kostenko, Jen Cookus & Sheri McConville, Gene Groshon, Harlan Higgins, and Emily Lynch
Pine Warbler (tied with 6) - Steve & Betty Arthur, Nathan and Joe Lindner & John Garrison, and Emily Lynch
Scoter sp. (1221) - Jim Boxwell & Bob Boxwell, and Ben Springer
Turkey Vulture (319) - Included in a whopping 60 checklists!

https://ebird.org/tripreport/453589

Report on the 45th Jug Bay Christmas Bird Count

December 21, 2025

By Marcia Watson, Compiler

The annual Jug Bay Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held on Sunday, December 21, 2025. It had originally been scheduled for December 14, but we postponed it for a week because of heavy snowfall predicted for the original date. This is the first time in over 20 years that we have rescheduled, but the weather bet paid off, with mild weather (temperatures 32°F to 51° F), no precipitation, and good viewing conditions on the 21st.

This was the 45th consecutive year for the count, which began in 1981. We had 47 people spread out across the count circle, including 2 feeder/backyard counters. Some of our loyal band of annual counters were not available this year, but fortunately we were able to recruit nine new people to help us out, so we had full coverage of our territories and made new friends.

Our circle is divided into 12 areas for organizing purposes, and covers portions of three counties: Anne Arundel, Calvert, and Prince George's (see map). It's a good mix of open Bay waters and shoreline, the Patuxent River and other rivers and streams, upland forest, fields, and assorted wetlands and ponds, as well as some suburban residential areas and small towns. The Jug Bay CBC is regarded as one of the most highly productive circles in our region, and is known for the high number of rarities found every year – a continuing testament to good habitat, prime geographic location, and the skills and dedication of our birders.

This year, our counters covered a total of 85 miles on foot and 210 miles by car, and expended a total of 165 hours in counting birds.

Our birders found a grand total of 121 species – only one lower than our all-time high of 122 species in December 2001. For the first time in years, we did not add any additional species during Count Week (the three days prior to and three days after the official count day).

We use a checklist of 115 expected species, based on historical records for this circle.
Our counters found 108 of the 115 expected species (94%) on our checklist. Great work!
Only 7 of the expected 115 species (6%) were missed:

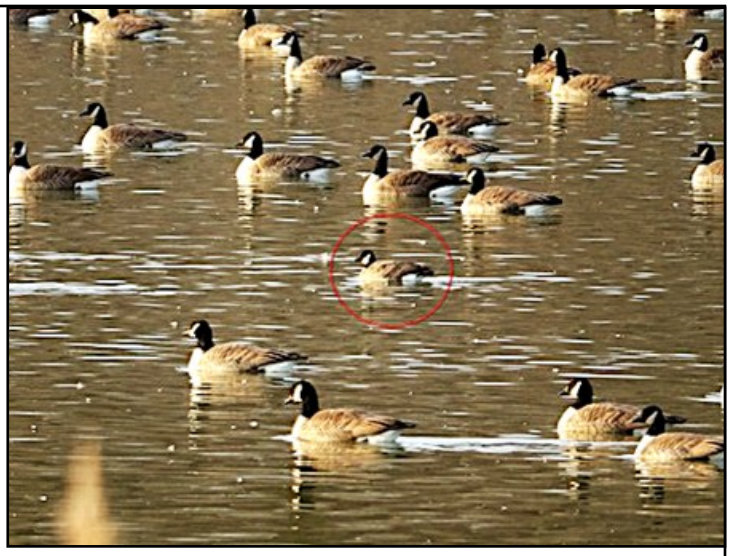
Snow Goose
Mute Swan
White-winged Scoter
Pie-billed Grebe
American Coot
Wilson's Snipe
Lesser Black-backed Gull

Continued on page 4. See Jug Bay CBC.

Jug Bay CBC continued

13 species found on count day were “write-ins,” not on our annual checklist – i.e., rarities! These accounted for 11% of the total of 121 species observed:

Trumpeter Swan
Clapper Rail
Sora
Dunlin
Bonaparte’s Gull
Iceland Gull
Red-throated Loon
Peregrine Falcon
Merlin
Common Raven
Northern House Wren
Sedge Wren
Orange-crowned Warbler



Great count-day photos by Frank Marenghi.
Top: showing just how small a Cackling Goose is when compared to Canada Geese.
Bottom Left: Gray Catbird, a half-hardy winter bird.
Bottom Right: Common Yellowthroat, another half-hardy.

Counters reported that in general, they felt that the numbers of individual birds were low this year. In fact, the total number of birds was 69,913, about 25% below the all-time average of 93,129 birds. The low numbers were reflected throughout the entire checklist, encompassing all types of waterbirds and landbirds, with few exceptions. This is the fifth year in a row of lower than average numbers of individual birds.

There were no new species for the count this year: all had been seen during the preceding years of the Jug Bay CBC. To date, the cumulative total of species seen during the 45 years of the count is 185.

Many thanks to all our counters and area leaders for upholding the venerable Jug Bay CBC traditions. We hope you’ll join us for the next Jug Bay Christmas Bird Count, which will be held – rain, snow (within reason), or shine – on Sunday December 20, 2026. Send an email to me at marshwren50@comcast.net, ideally no later than December 8, to be

Wood Duck Report – MD DNR

Background

Maryland Wood Duck Initiative's mission is to enhance Maryland's Wood Duck population and to generate a greater appreciation of the wetland habitats in which they live by advocating and demonstrating a Best Practices approach in artificial nest box programs. Educational and other youth oriented activities which complement the "Total Wetland Experience" are increasingly being incorporated into our projects.

Beginning in late 2004, this all-volunteer effort has made some notable strides. Field operations began in Kent Co. at the Eastern Neck Federal Wildlife Refuge, Chesapeake Farms – Corteva's conservation property and at MD DNR's Millington WMA. Since then, MWDI's scope has grown to more than 120 public project sites in 2021. Approximately 1,800 boxes are now involved on these sites and a Best Practices resource management approach is now either in effect or being implemented at each participating site.

Box capacity on public sites has grown more modestly despite the increase in project sites as many old boxes are being replaced to upgrade housing quality or removed from existing sites to de-cluster the program design so that productivity can be enhanced. Strategic placement (re-locations) and predator protection have also being upgraded. As a result, productivity of each functional box has been substantially improved and further gains are expected. In recent years, we have also begun to eliminate various project sites for logistical and low performance issues in certain sectors.

MWDI's statewide collaborators are currently the MD Dept of Natural Resources' Wildlife & Heritage Service (MD DNR), the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USF&W) and Ducks Unlimited, Inc. (Collaborating Partners). Many other wildlife and conservation organizations are directly involved in MWDI's efforts and collaborate in a variety of ways. MWDI has received exemplary cooperation and support of many Federal, State and County organizations and their employees. Currently, more than 100 organizations and private program sponsors are participating.

From the MD DNR Wood Duck Initiative website:

December 2025 Director's Message

MWDI's lumber order is underway. Aaron Ward is handling all aspects for MWDI (aaronward3838@gmail.com, cell 410-251-3838). I will continue to assist in coordinating deliveries for boxes and guards. Predator guards are in ample supply and prices are unchanged from last year. Contact Aaron or Phoenix Metals as indicated elsewhere on the website.

Wood Duck pair. Photo by Elena Gilroy

Continued on page 6. See MWDI.

MWDI continued

The 2025 woodie hatch in Maryland from MWDI's public sites was believed to have been lower than recent years which were considered stable at around 6,700 ducklings from ~1,500 boxes. Data reporting is not as robust as in prior years but the major projects were off by some 500 ducklings. This year, Kent and Queen Anne counties were more noticeably lower than 2024 by some 250 ducklings. this year. Patuxent State Park in PG Co. (Jug Bay) had a comparable hatch year at around 600 ducklings. Visual observations and hunting success during the fall were relatively weak compared to prior years – another anecdotal negative variable.

Private nesting programs continued to expand favorably by ~75-100 new nest boxes for the 2025 season as MWDI's primary focus the past few years has been increasingly to support new private programs by site inspection, program advice and access to relatively low cost materials.

MWDI is pleased to report that the Grand National Waterfowl Association not only funded the Chicamicomico River site (70 boxes and guards) which was completed early in 2025 but they agreed to underwrite additional wood duck and other wildlife projects generated by MWDI in Dorchester Co. This year, with their funding support MWDI and MD DNR completed the renovation of the 12 box Nanticoke WMA site that had been neglected for the last 5 years. Other projects generated by MWDI included the re-building of the handicap blind at Lecompte WMA and the purchase of wetland seeds for the pending 20 acre impoundment also at Lecomte WMA. The refurbishment of the 39 box program at Blackwater National Refuge is pending completion before the 2026 nest season after neglect since 2018. Volunteers to manage various sectors of this "easy drive up access" project are now being sought. The Mrytle Grove WMA 25 project (Charles County) is also pending refurbishment for the 2026 nest season. The Adkins Arboretum site n QA Co. has been expanded to 10 boxes from 7. Expansion of the Mattawoman River site in Charles Co from 10 to 14-16 boxes is being planned.

MWDI has supplies for new public projects if you wish to initiate one. We review site habitat, assist box location and train volunteers but you must have a project manager identified to monitor the project after installation. MWDI is also ready to assist all private projects. As always, a huge "thank you" to our dedicated volunteers and to MD DNR for helping to make a difference.

Cliff Brown
703-447-5142
Cliftonabrown@aol.com

Wood Duck ducklings. Photo by Bill Hubick.

Upcoming Events

March 27 – FRIDAY – 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

MOVIE NIGHT AT CSM

College of Southern Maryland La Plata Campus, CE Room 101, Charles County

8730 Mitchel Road, La Plata, MD 20646

"THE LITTLE THINGS THAT RUN THE WORLD"

Join us for a free screening of the documentary *The Little Things That Run the World* on March 27 at 6:00 PM in CE Room 101 on the La Plata Campus. This engaging film explores the vital role that insects and other small organisms play in sustaining ecosystems around the globe. From pollination to nutrient cycling, these often-overlooked species are essential to the health of our environment and our own survival.

In addition to the film, representatives from local and national conservation organizations — including Xerces Society, Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay, and the Southern Maryland Audubon Society — will be present to share information, resources, and opportunities to get involved in insect and pollinator conservation efforts within our community. Whether you are interested in conservation, ecology, sustainability, or simply enjoy thought-provoking documentaries, this screening promises to be both educational and inspiring.

We hope you will join us and help support our Bee and Bird Campus outreach initiatives - and we welcome our Town of La Plata Bee and Bird City nature friends too! So come on out and enjoy this one-hour film, popcorn and candy may appear as well!

This is a free event. Please let us know you will be attending so we can plan accordingly.
See link below:

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=uLi3RpOeRUauZj3KPYRh7ChVsNlj-DZLjRPWX7JlYR9URFZDN1FSNFFKS0lXQ0JHNU02QUM5SThZNS4u

March 28 - SATURDAY – 12 Noon – 4:00 p.m (Multiple Activities, Mini Bird Walk 1:30 pm)

FIELD TRIP – SPECIAL STATE PARK EVENT

Smallwood State Park, Charles County

2750 Sweden Point Road, Marbury, MD 20658

"MARCH ON THE MATTAWOMAN"

Family fun! Come and welcome back our Osprey, family fishing activities, hands-on kids activities, explore the Discovery Center, food truck, demonstrations, and a bird walk. Park entrance fee $5/vehicle. Pre-registration required. Go to QR code to register, or link below:

Osprey
Photo by Bill Hubick.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1tBol9RAMtQC7ey_YRCD8nvbVb-dDae5ptP8mAWu3Q5E/viewform?edit_requested=true&pli=1

Upcoming Events continued

April 1- WEDNESDAY - 7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM – ZOOM MEETING
"SPRING MIGRATION IN SOUTHERN MARYLAND"
Speaker(s): George Jett & Dr. Gwen Brewer
George and Gwen will be presenting a snapshot across the ornithological spectrum of what you might encounter along your birding forays in Southern Maryland during the spring migration period.
As winter subsides and the weather turns warmer, the water beings to thaw and we get good winds from the south. Here come the birds that you have not seen for months! Good habitat is also critical for finding your feathered friends. We will provide some advice on times and locations that you might search, and we will compare some of the harder species to separate and songs you should listen to, including tips that will help you learn the songs. For example, listen for the **"I am so lazy"** of the black-throated blue warbler. Join us on April 1, 2026, to refresh your birding brain.
Speaker Bios: Dr. Gwen Brewer manages the science program for rare species at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife and Heritage Service. Gwen has MS and PhD degrees in Ecology from the University of Minnesota. George Jett is a retired Chemical Engineer who spent 30 years at the Environmental Protection Agency but always had a passion for nature. **A zoom link to attend this meeting will be sent out prior to the meeting.**

April 18 – SATURDAY – 8 a.m. – 11 a.m.
FIELD TRIP
Biscoe Gray Heritage Farm, Calvert County
2695 Grays Rd, Prince Frederick, MD 20678
"FOREST AND MEADOWS - EARLY SPRING MIGRATION"
Leader: Ben Springer
Meadow birds and warblers – what could be better? Join Ben for a birding adventure at the farm. Biscoe Gray Heritage Farm offers great habitat for you to see a diversity of birds. Parking: meet at the small parking lot by the barn, across the road from the dog park. Maximum of 10 participants/vehicles. See link to register: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0448A8AF2AAAF9C43-62821545-forest

April 18 – SATURDAY – 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Maryland Osprey and Nature Festival
SPECIAL EVENT
Town of North Beach, Calvert County
If you love birds, wildlife, and nature, or just want to learn more, please come out and be a part of this wonderful Festival for a great cause. It is an event for the entire family and people of all ages. See a live raptor up close, enjoy vendors on the boardwalk, meet Oscar the Osprey and get a selfie, and move through the child-focused nature activity stations, and take part in the lecture series. SMAS will have a table and we can't wait to see you! Entry fee $10/person, $20/family. See marylandospreyfestival.org for additional information.

April 26 – SUNDAY –- 11 a.m. – 2 p.m.
SPECIAL EVENT AND BIRD WALK
Mallows Bay Park: Mallows Bay-Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary
1440 Wilson Landing Rd, Nanjemoy, MD 20662
BIOBLITZ, BIRD WALK, WALK CHARLES COUNTY
Leader(s): Lynne Wheeler, Karen Kleyle, NOAA
This is a whatever floats your boat event! You can come and help document the biodiversity in the sanctuary using iNaturalist, join us for a bird walk, or get your exercise joining in for a walk led by Walk Charles County Karen Kleyle.
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeX6SD7lT66Etpskp40ZOR7rZ8Y2_DSdfg0-z8YdGLZEaPUuQ/viewform

back for
2026

MARCH ON THE MATTAWOMAN

CELEBRATE THE ARRIVAL OF THE OSPREYS AND THE START OF SPRING FISHING!

SMALLWOOD STATE PARK
2750 SWEDEN POINT RD.
MARBURY, MD 20658

Saturday
MARCH 28, 2026
12 Noon - 4 p.m.

Fishing Activities for All Ages
Return of the Ospreys
Family Friendly Activities
Discovery Center OPEN
Guest Speakers
Demonstrations
Food Trucks
And Much More!

FREE ACTIVITIES

PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED
PARK ENTRANCE FEES APPLY
$5 per vehicle

REGISTER HERE:

For More Information:
smallwood.statepark@maryland.gov

MARYLAND PARK SERVICE

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Maryland Osprey and Nature Festival

April 18

11am – 4 pm

Town of North Beach Boardwalk

Photo by Sal Icaza

Come celebrate the return of the Osprey at this wonderful event.

The Maryland Osprey and Nature Festival is entering into their sixth year of offering nature lovers a wonderful family event filled with a variety of activities, all guaranteed to tickle your talons!

This Festival was created by the citizens of the Mid-Atlantic region to **celebrate** our charismatic Ospreys, to **educate** the public, agencies, and owners of structures to foster an attitude of co-existence and **conservation** awareness throughout the Chesapeake Bay and its estuaries. Come and enjoy a live raptor show, meet local environmental groups, observe Osprey up close, attend lectures, live music, and enjoy child-focused nature activities. The Southern Maryland Audubon Society is a proud sponsor of this event. For additional information about the festival see their website at marylandospreyfestival.org – there is a suggested donation fee of $10 per person; $20 per family.

SQUEAL!!

Dr. Bryan D. Watts will be delivering a keynote presentation!! Dr. Watts is the Mitchell A. Byrd Professor of Conservation Biology, Director of The Center for Conservation Biology at William & Mary. He has worked with Ospreys in the Chesapeake Bay for more than 30 years.

This festival has donated over $20K to Owl Moon Raptor Center, Phoenix Wildlife Center, Calvert Nature Society, and many more… Please come and help us give more!

FREE SPRING BIRD WALKS!

Piscataway MOS Sanctuary
@ Hardy Tavern Drive

Come on out and enjoy a morning of learning about birds at your local Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) Sanctuary at Piscataway (14300 Hardy Tavern Dr, Accokeek)!

This event is completely free, and the walk will be led by an MOS Bird Guide. Anyone who wants to learn about birds is strongly encouraged to come, and no experience is necessary! The walk is open to folks of all ages, so bring the whole family, and binoculars can be provided upon request!

Sunday, May 3rd &
Saturday, May 23rd
7:30am - 10:30am

Please scan the QR code to RSVP for a walk! →

For more details and to ask any questions, please contact Alex at **piscataywaysanctuary@gmail.com**

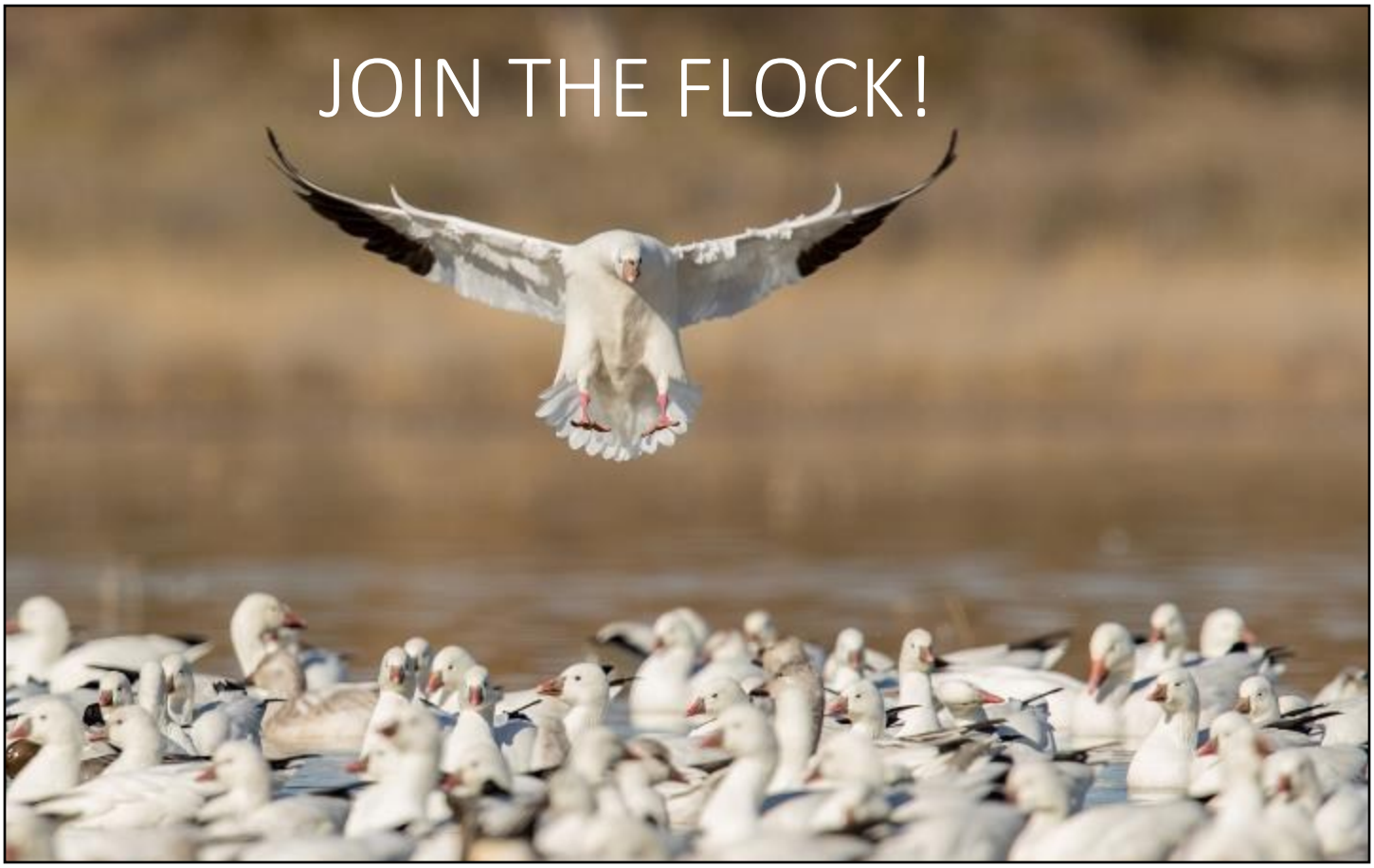
YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. JOIN OUR FLOCK OF VOLUNTEERS!

Southern Maryland Audubon Society's primary missions are education, public outreach, and environmental advocacy to support birds and the habitat they need to thrive in Southern Maryland and beyond.
SMAS's robust activity calendar includes:

- Bird Walks
- Workshops
- Presentations
- Youth & Public Outreach
- Festival Exhibits
- Community Science

Volunteers of all ages, levels of birding expertise, and availability are needed to help support our programs and activities. Even small actions make a difference!

Act Now! Contact somdaudubon@yahoo.com for more information about volunteering with SMAS.



Ross's and Snow Geese Photo by Mick Thompson

Welcome, New Members!

Logan Klasmeyer, Leonardtown

Peter Hughes, Lusby

Michael Nowotny, Hollywood

Ana Donnelly, Lexington Park

Janice Zeiger, Casselberry FL

Dear Readers:

If you have any observations, announcements, articles, etc. that you'd like to see in the newsletter, send them in! The deadline for submissions for *The Osprey* is the 5th of each month.

Follow us on Facebook @somdaudubon

Please follow us on Instagram @southernmarylandaudubon

You'll find our latest event updates, tantalizing tidbits of bird lore, how-tos on attracting more birds to your yard, and updates on how you can pitch in to help protect birds and their habitat in Southern Maryland and elsewhere. And of course, there will always be awesome bird photos!

Follow **@southernmarylandaudubon** and please invite all your friends to join our flock!

Visit us at www.somdaudubon.org

Southern Maryland Audubon Society

Adopt-a-Raptor

Southern Maryland Audubon Society sponsors the banding of nesting birds of prey with serially numbered aluminum bands in co-operation with the Bird Banding Laboratory of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Limited numbers of raptors to sponsor 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, American Kestrel Nest Boxes, Eastern Screech Owl Nest Boxes, and 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: _____
- ☐ General Donation to Raptor Fund — Amount: _____

When you adopt, 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, and a photo of a fledgling and any other available information on the whereabouts or fate of the bird.

Name: _____

Email: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____

State, Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____

If this is a gift, please include the recipient's name for the certificate:

_____

For online purchase go to: https://www.somdaudubon.org/support-us/adopt-a-raptor/

To purchase by check and mail via USPS, send this form to:

Carole Schnitzler, 3595 Silk Tree Court, Waldorf, MD 20602

Barn Owl photo by Stacy Howell

Southern Maryland Audubon Society

Membership Application to our Local Audubon Chapter

Please enroll me as a member of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. Southern Maryland Audubon Society is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization, so 100% of your membership, renewal, or donation supports our bird conservation, education, and advocacy programs. With a chapter-only membership, ALL of your dues support Southern Maryland Audubon and our work protecting birds and the places they need to survive in Southern Maryland. To purchase online go to https://www.somdaudubon.org/support-us/join-somd/
Please select the type of membership from our list below:

Individual/Family: __ 1 year $20 __ 2 year $35 __ 3 year $45
Lifetime Membership: __ $500
Donation: $_____

To purchase by check and mail via USPS, send this form to:
Southern Maryland Audubon Society, P.O. Box 181, Bryans Road, MD 20616

Membership to the National Audubon Society

Please consider supporting the National Audubon Society by becoming a member. Your membership automatically enrolls you as a member of Southern Maryland Audubon Society. You will support their avian conservation efforts, and receive four issues of National's award-winning *Audubon* magazine. To join the National Audubon Society, go to:
http://www.audubon.org/membership

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.

2025—2026 Officers
Interim President, Lynne Wheeler — somdaudubon@yahoo.com
Vice President, Ben Springer — ben.springer@comcast.net
Treasurer, Julie Daniel — juliemdaniel@hotmail.com
Secretary, Barbara Hill — tytito@verizon.net