DECEMBER 2026 VOLUME 61, ISSUE 4

The Osprey

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHERN MARYLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY



Peekaboo, who are you?
See Rarity Roundup for answer!
Photo by Steve Arthur

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http://somdaudubon.org/

President's Perch

There is less than a month until the first annual SMAS Holiday Craft Fair at Thomas Stone High School in Waldorf, MD. It will be held on December 6 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay (**https://chesapeakebay.wildones.org**) will be joining us at the craft fair and are sponsoring a Pop-Up Thrift Store fundraiser for their organization. They will also be accepting donations for the Thrift Store such as books, artwork, household items relating to nature, and holiday décor. If you have anything to donate, see you on the 6th! We have already sold out all the premium spots at the fair and are still receiving registrations for the hallway spaces. Also, there will be a food truck from Pizza Hotline and a coffee truck from Primal Coffee. Please come out to support the craft fair and all our local crafty vendors! SMAS received an Osprey costume, and we have a student volunteer to debut it at the craft fair.

October was a busy month for SMAS as we had five different outings including a birding by kayak trip led by Gabi Zabel. In November, Tyler Bell organized and led the first Rarity Roundup for SMAS. It focused on Point Lookout and other southern reaches of St. Mary's County. The results are inside this issue!

Our November program was Conserving Maryland's Farmland Raptors. Alex Pellegrini of the Maryland Bird Conservation Partnership's Farmland Raptor Program (**https://marylandbirds.org**) led the presentation. It was highly informative and troubling at the same time. One of the indicator species is the Barn Owl and they have declined 79% over the last 40-years based on data from the breeding bird atlases, and American Kestrels fared only slightly better with a decline of 53%. This really shows the impact loss of habitat, especially nesting areas, has on these important raptor species. The Farmland Raptor program helps research and education on the importance of replacing lost nesting cavities with appropriate nesting boxes. If you could not make the presentation, please visit our website and you can watch this program as well as other archived presentations.

Please remember to tune in on December 2 for our next program – Bats in Southern Maryland. We also have the Christmas Bird Counts coming up 12/19, 12/20, 12/27 and 1/2 – Please sign up if you are available.

Will Daniel
SMAS President

Boo! The Ghost Fleet of Mallows Bay Oct 31, 2026

By Lynne Wheeler



On October 31st, Halloween Day, I led a nature walk at Mallows Bay-Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary in Nanjemoy, Charles County, Maryland. The event was extra special; we combined it as a history & nature walk. Attendees learned about the history of the sunken ghost fleet of Mallows Bay - presented by my favorite ghoul and goblin – Shellie and Joe Perrie, owners of Atlantic Kayak Company. Mallows Bay is one of the locations that Shellie and Joe lead kayak tours, and their historical knowledge about the sunken ships is impressive! If you are a reader like me, you can purchase the book Ghost Fleet of Mallows Bay and Other Tales of the Lost Chesapeake by Donald Shomette, and learn all about it.



The event kicked off with their historical presentation, followed by a half-mile nature walk led by me. Our group of eight also got a treat of seeing myself and Shellie in Halloween festive gear. And of course, candy was also involved.



Backdrop: In February 2019, NOAA, the state of Maryland, and Charles County Parks, announced the designation of this new NOAA national marine sanctuary to protect the remains of more than 100 abandoned steamships and vessels built as part of America's engagement in World War I. While the history is fascinating, equally so is the habitat that the sunken vessels have provided – the structures provide a complex interaction and relationship within the surrounding ecosystem. This is a park that should be on your bucket list! You will be treated to multiple hiking trails along the water edge, as well as through the forest. This location is an **eBird HotSpot**, has 151 bird species documented, and 72 species proof of breeding. While our Halloween nature walk was not at a preferred time for birding (noon – 3 p.m.), we did document 22 species. Best bird was a Sharp-shinned Hawk.

But wait! We now have a new treat at the park! Hand-crank informational devices (or eco-posts) have been installed that have recordings about everything you might want to learn about this gem of a park. You can listen to recording about its history as well as birds, habitat, and wildlife…and they are really cool!!



I recommend you come and see the remnants of the ships. Next nesting season come see Osprey nesting on the Accomac (sadly all five nests failed this year), view multiple Bald Eagles, Great Blue Herons, nesting Orioles, Eastern Kingbirds, and last May I saw my first Virginia Rail there! And for a really great visit to this national treasure, contact Atlantic Kayak Company and join in on one of their guided tours. See their website at **www.atlantickayak.com**

Top three photos by Lynne Wheeler
Bottom photo courtesy of Google Earth

Inaugural Southern Maryland Rarity Roundup!

By Tyler Bell

Worcester County, Maryland, has been hosting a rarity roundup for the last 28 years. They have a combination of good habitat and an ocean barrier that stops vagrants from going any further east. Just to the north is Cape May, New Jersey, one of the best vagrant traps in the US. The geography is basically a funnel with the Delaware Bay and the Atlantic Ocean presenting a barrier. If you look at Point Lookout, at the southern tip of St. Mary's County, we have something similar on a smaller scale. Pt. Lookout State Park has turned up some amazing rarities over the years including the first Maryland record of Cave Swallow, and the only Maryland record of Cassin's Sparrow. With all of that in mind, I have always thought that it would be the prefect location on the western shore for a rarity roundup. This year, it came to fruition!

A howling wind gust woke my wife and me at 4:45 am on Saturday, November 7. The alarm was set to go off at 5. Knowing that there was a small craft advisory in effect and through the entirety of Saturday, the wind gust didn't bode well. But, when I arrived in Ridge to start driving several known productive roads, my arctic wear was more than adequate with the windows rolled down. My phone chirped! Ben Springer, SMAS Vice President, reported a Dickcissel on Cornfield Harbor Road. I drove there since I had some time before I was to meet the rest of my group at the Ridge Post Office at 8:00 am. Ben was with Matt Ichniowski, SMAS Field Trip Coordinator, and Mikey Lutmerding, the rarity whisperer who had found the Cassin's Sparrow. The Dickcissel had flown away but there were two Sedge Wrens calling nearby. Expected at this location in the winter but uncommon in Maryland. Something moved about ten feet in front of us and Mikey put his glasses on the bird. It was a LeConte's Sparrow! This is a skulking sparrow of the northern plains and quite rare in southern Maryland. This is only the third St. Mary's County record and there are zero records in Calvert or Charles County. Steve Arthur and Geoff Wysham arrived shortly after, and we all waited anxiously for it to reappear. At one point, it perched out in the sun and the cameras were clicking. It was a life bird for most and a county bird for some. I was lucky enough to have seen the second county record found in 1999 during the Pt. Lookout CBC. Wow, what an auspicious way to start the day.

We all headed south to go into Pt. Lookout State Park. I was greeted by the squeaky toy call of Brown-headed Nuthatches as I swiped my park pass at the entrance. A good sign that they could be heard over the wind which didn't really seem that bad. I noticed that Mikey was pulled over just beyond the causeway. Steve and Geoff pulled in behind me. The road and the grassy edges were covered with Dark-eyed Juncos and White-throated Sparrows. Easily 250 juncos! No rare sparrows but a single Chipping Sparrow which are often uncommon in fall and winter in southern Maryland.

Steve, Geoff and I parked at the picnic area and headed to the point. Lots of Yellow-rumped Warblers calling in the brush and more juncos and white-throats. But one oddly flat brown bird stood out on the grassy edge by the weather station. It had a bluish tail! There are two possibilities: Indigo Bunting or Lazuli Bunting. Steve got many diagnostic photos, and it turned out to be an Indigo Bunting. Uncommon in late fall and winter but nowhere near as rare as the hoped-for Lazuli Bunting.

Meanwhile, Ben and Matt had found a couple of late Cape May Warblers and seasonally uncommon Orange-crowned Warblers in the campground. Mikey also found an Orange-crowned Warbler near the north end of the picnic area and three Great Cormorants on the fishing weir near the harbor entrance.

And Darcy White, who recently found an 11th Maryland and first St. Mary's County record Lark Bunting, had a Blue-headed Vireo at the Elms public beach!

Given that this was pulled together at the last minute, we all felt it was an epic day of birding. We're already looking forward to the second roundup on Saturday, November 6, 2027. Please join us!

Continued on next page. See Roundup!

Roundup! continued



Dickcissel photo by Ben Springer



Sedge Wren photo by Ben Springer



LeConte's Sparrow photo by Mikey Lutmerding



Indigo Bunting photo by Steve Arthur



Cape May Warbler photo by Matt Ichniowski



Orange-crowned Warbler photo by Ben Springer

Public Comment Sought for Proposed Changes to Regulations on Maryland Native Reptiles and Amphibians

November 6, 2026



Eastern Box Turtle, photo by Patricia Habicht, submitted to the 2022 Maryland Department of Natural Resources Photo Contest.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is accepting public comment on proposed changes to the native reptile and amphibian regulations, designed to protect the species.

Due to conservation concerns including collection pressure, disease transmission, and illegal trade, DNR is considering changes to regulations under COMAR 08.03.11.

These changes would prohibit collection of native reptiles and amphibians from the wild – including turtles such as diamondback terrapins and box turtles, plus most native snakes and frogs – and limit possession, breeding, sale, and trade except by special permit. The public can view the proposed regulations, FAQs, and **comment online** now through November 27, 2026.

The regulations would only apply to amphibians and reptiles native to Maryland. Also, anyone who legally possesses any native reptile or amphibian species under the current regulations can qualify for a free grandfather permit to maintain possession of their pets.

Educational facilities and animal rescue organizations will still be able to obtain a Captive Reptile and Amphibian Permit to possess reptiles and amphibians.

In drafting these changes, DNR considered expert advice from wildlife veterinarians, scientific studies, and assessments by law enforcement that reflect changes since the reptile and amphibian regulations were last updated in 2016.

Public comments providing additional information and perspectives will help refine and finalize this proposal.

DNR is also accepting feedback by phone at 410-260-8540; by fax to 410-260-8596; or in writing to:

Maryland Department of Natural Resources

Wildlife and Heritage Service

580 Taylor Avenue, E-1

Annapolis, Maryland, 21401

Citizens with questions may contact the Wildlife and Heritage Service at 410-260-8540.

All comments must be received by 11:59 p.m. on November 27, 2026.

Before you head out for Fort Belvoir, Jug Bay, Port Tobacco, Patuxent River or Point Lookout, warm up with 15 winter feeder birds, from Northern Cardinal and Carolina Wren to Purple Finch, hidden across, down, diagonally and backward. How many are at your feeder this month?

Christmas Cardinals

Southern Maryland winter feeder birds: words run across, down, diagonally and backward

H S P N H S U R H T T I M R E H
T E V O D G N I N R U O M C H L
U C C R C H J M G N H G G S C Y
F A A T E N C P B G K K V F N A
T M R H C P U N I U T H L U I J
E E O E E E E J I W T S U L F E
D R L R D W F E D F T N I F E U
T I I N A N P O R E E L A I S L
I C N C R B M U J C Y L F U U B
T A A A W G T T H Y N E P E O C
M N W R A O E G R K U W K R H D
O R R D X C D H K I Y S O R U P
U O E I W E F W E S S L H R A P
S B N N I I E L G A E D L A B D
E I D A N F O X S P A R R O W P
M N H L G S O N G S P A R R O W

CAROLINA WREN
CEDAR WAXWING
BLUE JAY
MOURNING DOVE
FOX SPARROW
TUFTED TITMOUSE
PURPLE FINCH
AMERICAN ROBIN
HERMIT THRUSH
BROWN CREEPER
NORTHERN CARDINAL
DARK-EYED JUNCO
SONG SPARROW
HOUSE FINCH
BALD EAGLE

Puzzle from Ben Rine Puzzles, publisher of A Cardinal Christmas

Answer key on last page.



Volunteers Needed for Christmas Bird Counts

The five southern Maryland Christmas Bird Counts will take place on **Saturday and Sunday, December 19 and 20, Sunday, December 27, and Saturday, January 2**. We need volunteers to count in all parts of the count circles.

The counting territories are within a circle that is 15 miles in diameter. Each count circle is divided into sectors with leaders who coordinate the volunteer counters in each area.

Volunteering for a Christmas Bird Count is a good way to get up close and personal with a particular part of the region. It's not just about the popular, well-known hotspots — counters are encouraged to seek out all the hidden little pockets of habitat where birds may be wintering. You work at your own pace, stopping for breaks as you need and setting your own start and stop times.

The Christmas Bird Count is the longest running community science project in the country, now in its 127th year. The data amassed over the last century and a quarter is invaluable in giving us insights into where birds spend the winter and how populations have changed over time.

Please consider volunteering for this important project. To volunteer, please contact the coordinators listed in the Upcoming Events section!

Upcoming Events

December 2- WEDNESDAY - 7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM – ZOOM MEETING
"BENEFICIAL BATS"
Speaker: Kerry Wixted
Hold on to your hats – Kerry is BAAAACK!! And we will all enjoy her going batty! Kerry will share her knowledge about the vital role bats play in ecosystems around the world, from pollination and seed dispersal, to natural pest control. This session will explore the incredible diversity of the bat species globally, with a special focus on the bats found right here in Maryland. Kerry Wixted will explain why bat populations are declining, what threats they face, and, most importantly, how you can help. **A zoom link to attend this meeting will be sent out prior to the meeting.**



An adult male eastern red bat (Lasiurus borealis)
Photo by Merlin Tuttle.

Christmas Bird Counts December 19, 2026 – January 2, 2027
See next page for details.

January 6 – WEDNESDAY – 7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM – ZOOM MEETING
"OSPREY – A SYMBOL OF THE CHESAPEAKE BAY IMPERILED AGAIN"
Speaker: Greg Kearns
Join us to learn about Ospreys, the often seen and beloved "fish hawk" of local rivers and symbol of the Chesapeake Bay presented by Greg Kearns, Senior Park Naturalist for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC) at the Patuxent River Park in Prince George's County, MD. Greg will discuss Osprey biology, his banding program with the public, band tracking and how this once-imperiled bird became a conservation success story in the past 50 years, as well as the latest troubling news on the recent dramatic Osprey population decline and their relationship to Menhaden. He is currently cooperating and guiding an Osprey migration and foraging study with cellular telemetry on the Severn and Patuxent River. Greg is always a pleasure to have as a speaker; passionate, knowledgeable, as well as entertaining! **A zoom link to attend this meeting will be sent out prior to the meeting.**

January 17 – SATURDAY – 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
FIELD TRIP – 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: Jim Swift
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. We will be escorted and traveling together in a van; participant size is limited. No restrooms. RSVP to Jim at james.r.swift4.civ@us.navy.mil

January 23 – SATURDAY – 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
FIELD TRIP
Point Lookout State Park, St Mary's County 10444 Point Lookout Rd, Scotland, MD 20687
"SEA DUCKS AT THE POINT"
Leader: Alex Donley
We will meet at the picnic area parking before walking to the Chesapeake Bay side of the point to scan for sea ducks including all three scoter species, Common Goldeneye, Greater Scaup, Bufflehead, and Long-tailed Ducks. Other species of note could include Horned Grebe, two loon species, and Northern Gannet. The remainder of the time will be used walking the picnic area and trails around Fort Lincoln and could include Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine Warbler, and Fox Sparrow. Flat but unpaved. Fee area. Restrooms available. RSVP to Alex at ajdonley212@gmail.com



Audubon 127th Christmas Bird Count



Tis' The Season to Count Birds

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is an annual bird census powered by volunteers that takes place between December 14 and January 5 each year all over the world. Participation is free and open to bird enthusiasts of any level. Southern Maryland offers four circles that you can help us count, if your yard is in a circle you can count there, or you can contact one of our CBC Circle Coordinators below for assignment. Read all about it at www.audubon.org/community-science/christmas-bird-count.

Port Tobacco
December 19-Saturday
raptorsrulemc@gmail.com

Patuxent River
December 20 – Sunday
ben.springer@comcast.net

Jug Bay
December 20 - Sunday
marshwren50@comcast.net

Point Lookout
December 27– Sunday
robertboxwell1@outlook.com

Ft Belvoir, Maryland Shoreline: Accokeek to Indian Head
January 2 – Saturday
somdaudubon@yahoo.com

rdlukinic@gmail.com









Welcome, New Members!

Mary Geisz, Solomons
D. E. Biesiadecki, Accokeek
Christine McNelis, Solomons
Gabriel Ponton, Waldorf

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

The 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



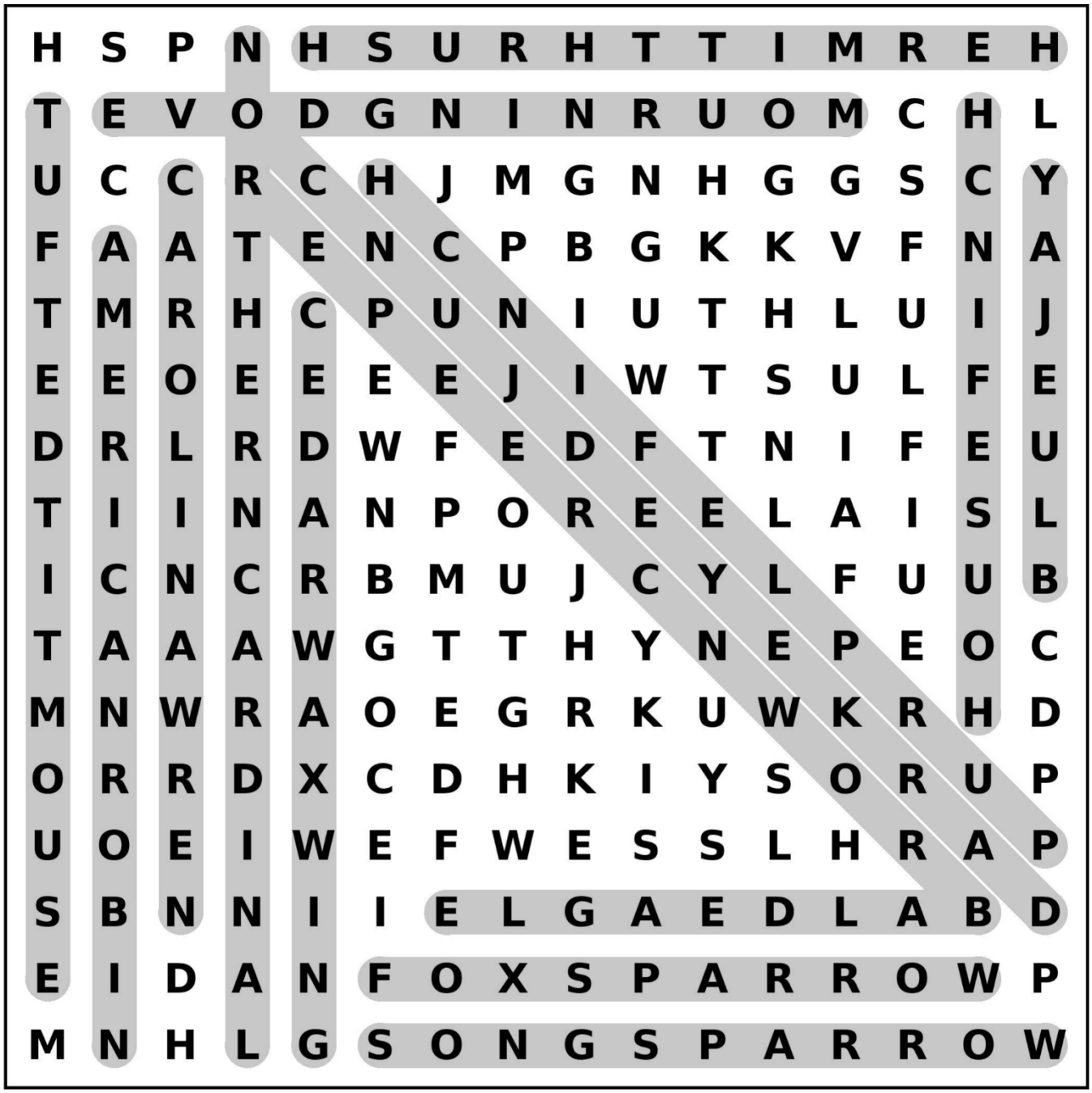
Osprey
Photo by Bill Hubick

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.

2026—2027 Officers
President, Will Daniel — wdaniel.somdaudubon@yahoo.com
Vice President, Ben Springer — ben.springer@comcast.net
Treasurer, Julie Daniel — juliemdaniel@hotmail.com
Secretary, Lynne Wheeler — somdaudubon@yahoo.com

Christmas Cardinals — Answer Key

Southern Maryland winter feeder birds: words run across, down, diagonally and backward



CAROLINA WREN
CEDAR WAXWING
BLUE JAY
MOURNING DOVE
FOX SPARROW
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Puzzle from Ben Rine Puzzles, publisher of A Cardinal Christmas