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Chesapeake
Audubon Society



Winter-Spring 2014 Newsletter

Unexpected Visitors

Nature Blog by Bryan MacKay

Winter seems to have arrived early this year, with more snow, ice and cold temperatures in December than during the entire winter of 2012-13. With three full months of cold weather still ahead of us, we humans have a tendency to hunker down next to a warm fire or cocoon with a stack of blankets. Yet the natural world, and the animals that live there, have no choice but to endure.

This year has brought a rare visitor to Maryland to enjoy what for that species is a balmy winter vacation residence. Snowy Owls are large, unmistakable and appealing to humans. As their name implies, snowy owls have white plumage, although first year birds have some dark flecks atop the head and on the body and wings. Snowies weigh about four pounds, twice as much as the common barred owl and half as much as a bald eagle. They stand about two feet high and have a four foot wingspan. During the day, snowy owls usually perch on the ground; at night they hunt from a perch, taking small mammals and birds like ducks and pigeons. In just the first half of December 2013, Snowy Owls have been sighted at Assateague and Hart-Miller Islands, a Baltimore County airport, and farm fields in Harford and Frederick Counties.

Snowy Owls nest on the Arctic tundra in late spring and summer. With the onset of cold weather, they migrate south, usually overwintering in the southern Canadian provinces and the northern tier of States. For years, it was thought that Snowy Owls who visit Maryland, well south of their normal wintering grounds, could not find enough food (typically a small rodent called a Lemming) there and were on the verge of starvation. However, recent capture data indicates that most of these owls are in good shape with plenty of fat stores, although most are immature birds. Scientists now believe Snowy Owls arrive in Maryland during years when there is good reproduction. In essence, these are surplus birds expanding the species' winter range southward. Invariably, however, a good reproduction year is followed by an average or poor one, so the next year snowy owls are again scarce in our area.

Count yourself lucky if you spot a Snowy Owl this winter. It's imperative that you view it from a distance, with binoculars or a spotting scope. Snowy Owls are very sensitive to human intrusion, and will fly away if disturbed. In winter, that uses energy and may threaten the bird's survival.

To keep up with recent sightings, consult the on-line Google group, *mdbirding*.

17th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count

If you enjoy watching birds and have 15 minutes or more, join in on the 2014 Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). This annual event will start Friday, February 14th and run through Monday, February 17th. Your participation will help researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society understand how birds are doing in your area. Last year's GBBC was a huge success! It provided the most detailed account of global bird populations ever done, with 134,000 checklists submitted from 111 countries or independent territories, representing all seven continents. The United States submitted the most checklists at 120,919; let's see if we can surpass that number this year! For information about how you can participate visit <http://www.birdcount.org>.

How do Birds Stay Warm

By Chris Holzmüller

Have you ever wondered how birds stay warm in winter? I watch them hopping around on the snow-covered ground, clinging to a flimsy branch swaying in a bitter-cold wind, flitting and flying for cover in a densely-foliaged Yew. Birds are warm-blooded like us, but maintain a higher body temperature than humans, usually about 106°F. Well, birds have many strategies to stay warm, some are likely no surprise and some are rather innovative. Seeking shelter in thick foliage, like a Yew, or a cavity is one well-know strategy. Did you know that sparrows will huddle together and share their warmth, tucking in their head and feet and sticking up their feathers to reduce the surface area exposed to the cold? Cardinals and some other small birds will puff up like a ball to reduce heat loss. Geese and grouse grow an extra layer of downy feathers, and chickadees and finches spend their days looking for fatty food sources to increase their body fat. Chickadees and other little birds also shiver to generate warmth, but not the same way that we shiver. They move opposing muscle groups to create muscle contractions. Many bird species can also circulate warm blood around their vital organs while letting their extremities cool, and some species (like the Black-capped Chickadee) can lower their body temperatures up to 22°F from their daytime temperature to sleep in a regulated hypothermic state.

One way we can help birds weather the cold is to feed them. Hang birdfeeders with black oil sunflower, mixed seeds, suet, safflower, and even peanut butter-seed covered pinecones (take a peek at the Kids Korner for a recipe).

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Field Trips and Programs:

Some of the dates provide an opportunity to choose a trip or double up and participate in two. Beginner birders are welcome and encouraged to attend our walks!

Schedule of Patterson Park walks on page 3.

Pickering Bird Walk-n-Talk Public Program Series on page 3.

Sunday, February 9, 8:00am **Phoenix, MD** **Loch Raven Reservoir** **Leader: Kye Jenkins**

Join Kye for a birding trip focusing on ducks at various locations around Loch Raven Reservoir. Rare birds such as Eurasian Wigeon, Cackling Goose, and Greater White-Fronted Goose have shown up here. Park along the beach area on Loch Raven Road, which is near the bridge. A scope is not necessary, but if you have one, do bring it, along with binoculars. **Contact Kye Jenkins at Kyebird46@yahoo.com or 410-628-7257 to register, confirm the meeting location, and ask questions.**

Saturday, March 1 **Aberdeen, MD** **Evening Woodcock Watch** **Leader: Tim Houghton**

Meet Tim in Harford County at the metal fab building between Country Club Road and Oakington Road **30 minutes before sunset** for an evening of Woodcock watching. (Take the road to the Father Ashley Center.) Just a hop, skip and jump from I-95, this location has hosted courting woodcocks in recent years. If you've never seen this interesting bird, or would like to see it again, **contact Tim by e-mail thoughton@loyola.edu or call 410-510-7504 in order to register. Be sure to contact him with any questions and keep an eye on the website in case the location changes.**

Saturday, March 22, 10:00am-1:00 pm **Ellicott City, MD** **Signs of Spring Walk** **Leader: Bryan MacKay**

Join naturalist, Bryan MacKay, in search of birds and blooms on (about) the first day of spring. We'll hike about 2 miles with some hills on muddy trails and with some paved sections in Patapsco Valley State Park. **Please register with Bryan by March 20th at mackay@umbc.edu or 410 747 7132.**

Saturday, March 29, 8:00-11:00am **Edgemere, MD** **Spring Migration - Beginner Bird Walk** **Leader: Ruth Bergstrom**

North Point State Park is a 1,310 acre park on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay. Fledgling birders are particularly welcome as we look for early migrant and resident birds. Park entrance fee is \$3/vehicle. **Contact Ruth at ruthb22@yahoo.com or 443-752-1967 to register and for meeting instructions.**

Sunday, April 6, 9:00am **Baltimore County** **Photographing Nature in Cromwell Valley Park** **Leaders: Fred Brundick and John Landers**

Bring your camera and binoculars as photographer and CAS board member Fred Brundick take you around wonderful Cromwell Valley Park. This is a great way to get into practice just as the flowers, butterflies, and birds are beginning to show their stuff. The park is off exit 29 of I-695 (visit the park Web site for directions at <http://www.cromwellvalleypark.org/mapAndDirections.html>). **To register, contact Fred at gpferd@gmail.com or 443-752-5607.**

Saturday, April 12, 8:30am-11:30am **Hawk Watch at Fort Smallwood for Beginners**

Leader: Ruth Bergstrom

Located on the Chesapeake Bay, Fort Smallwood is one of the best spots in Maryland to see spring raptor migration. Geared especially for beginners, we'll search for migrating songbirds first, then head to the hawk watch area where expert counters will be available to identify raptors as they soar overhead. Park fee is \$6/car. **Register with Ruth at ruthb22@yahoo.com or 443-752-1967.**

Sunday, April 13, 2:00pm-5:00pm **Ellicott City, MD** **Wildflowers Walk at Patapsco Valley State Park**

Leader: Bryan MacKay

We will walk about 2 miles over both paved and unpaved trails in search of springtime ephemeral forest wildflowers during a time of peak diversity. **Please register with Bryan by April 11th at mackay@umbc.edu or 410 747 7132.**

Saturday, April 19, 8:30am **Havre de Grace, MD** **Flowers & Birds at Susquehanna State Park**

Leader: Colleen Webster

Join naturalist, Colleen Webster, for an enjoyable time at one of Maryland's great, dynamic parks. Colleen has led many trips—introducing people to a variety of nature's spring wonders—at this location. We are glad that she is now leading a trip for CAS. Meet at the parking area near the walking bridge on Stafford Road. **For information and to register, contact Colleen at 410-459-4577 or cwebster@harford.edu.**



Waterfall in Susquehanna State Park
Photograph from Wikipedia Commons

Tuesday, April 22, 7:30am **Virginia** **Old Rag Hike** **Leader: Kevin McCahill**

Celebrate Earth Day and enjoy the beauty of nature on the premier day hike in the Washington area. We will meet at 7:30am at the Park-n-Ride at I-70 and Route 32 (located just north of I-70) and car pool to the trail head in the Shenandoah National Park. The climb is strenuous but not technically difficult. It is 7.5 miles round trip, and takes 6-7 hours, including time for lunch at the top. You will need well broken-in walking shoes or boots with hiking socks, lunch, at least one quart of water, warm clothing, rain gear, and a pack to carry it all. For those who are interested, we will stop for dinner on the way home in Warrenton, Virginia. We usually arrive back home around 8pm. **For more information, call Kevin McCahill at 443-831-3111.**

Saturday, April 26, 8:30am **Easton, MD** **Pickering Creek Audubon Center** **Leader: Tim Houghton**

A visit to Pickering Creek on the eastern shore will reveal a variety of birds: ducks, shorebirds, and migrating or breeding songbirds just as migration is starting to heat up. Meet at the wonderful Pickering Creek Audubon Center in Easton, Maryland. **To sign up, contact Tim by e-mail, thoughton@loyola.edu, or call 410-510-7504.**

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Calendar continued on next page



PATTERSON PARK Audubon CENTER

Field Trips and Events continued

Sunday, April 27, 8:00am Eastern Shore, MD
Adkins Arboretum Leader: Kye Jenkins

Join Kye at this 400-acre native garden and preserve for warblers and other birds just as migration is starting to get especially active. Native plants will also be available for purchase. **To register and ask questions, contact Kye at Kyebird46@yahoo.com or call 410-628-7257.**

Sunday, April 27, 2:00pm-5:00pm Ellicott City, MD
Orchid & Wildflower Search at Patapsco Valley State Park
Leader: Bryan MacKay

We'll see plenty of wildflowers on this spring hike over hilly back-country trails. We may even find a few **orchids**, if we're lucky!
Please register with Bryan by April 25th at mackay@umbc.edu or 410 747 7132.

Sunday, May 4 Chesapeake Audubon BIRDATHON

How many bird species can you see in 24 hours? The Chesapeake Audubon Birdathon is an opportunity to raise money for the Patterson Park and Pickering Creek environmental centers. It is an all-day event to spot as many bird species as possible. You can form a team and solicit others to sponsor you, or you can sponsor an existing team. We already have at least one team signed up! There is no limit on the donation amount. **Contact information@chesapeakeaudubon.org for more information.**

Saturday, May 10, 7:30am Havre de Grace, MD
Susquehanna State Park Leader: Tim Houghton

Susquehanna State Park is Harford County's (and maybe the state's) best place to find Cerulean Warblers and many other warbler and songbird species. What birds will the river, creek, woods, and fields reveal for our list? This spectacular park has a little bit of everything. **E-mail [Tim](mailto:thoughton@loyola.edu) for information and to register at thoughton@loyola.edu or call 410- 510-7504. LIMIT OF 15 PEOPLE! Tentative meeting place will be at Rock Run Mill (corner of Stafford Rd. and Rock Run Rd.).**

Sunday, May 11, 8:00am Bel Air, MD
Harford Glen Environmental Center
Leaders: Ruth Bergstrom and Phil Powers

We will join the Harford Bird Club at the Glen during prime migration season. The varied habitats in this region promise some great birdwatching! No need to RSVP, but contact Ruth with any questions (e-mail, ruthb22@yahoo.com or phone 443-752-1967). **Beginners welcome.**

Sunday, May 25, 10:00am-1:00pm
Memorial Day Weekend Canoe Trip at Marshy Point
Leader: Ruth Bergstrom

Join our annual trip to honor Rachel Carson's birthday. We will learn about the Chesapeake watershed by paddling the tidal creeks and dense marshlands. All equipment provided. Bring a lunch and picnic on the grounds after our trip. **Register with e-mail, ruthb22@yahoo.com or phone 443-752-1967.** Cost: \$10/person; children 8-15 years of age allowed with parent.

Park Urban Bird Watching Walks

More than 180 bird species visit Patterson Park and more than 50 species are permanent residents. Stroll and search for resident and migrant birds with Audubon. The park is an urban oasis, with 44 native plant species in Audubon-maintained habitat gardens, and 50 species of trees. Friday walks are led in partnership with Chesapeake Audubon Society and Saturday walks are led by Audubon MD-DC's conservation director.

Walks are from 8:00am to 9:30am and all ages are welcome. Free. No registration required. Meet at the fountain in the northwest corner of the park. No need to RSVP but contact Patterson Park Audubon if you need to borrow binoculars; either email ppaudubon@gmail.com or call 410-558-2473. Walks are scheduled on the following dates:

	Friday	Saturday
February	14	22
March	14	29
April	11	26
May	9	31

Pickering Bird Walk-n-Talk Public Program Series

Join us on one or all of guided walks each month at Pickering Creek Audubon Center. Great for folks who wish to sharpen their birding skills while they enjoy learning more about birds through the seasons in their varying habitats. Participants will contribute to the collection of data for our e-bird monitoring program--one aspect of Pickering's citizen science program. These programs are **free of charge**. However, registration is required at least **three days** in advance of each program by calling 410-822-4903.

Saturday, February 15, 8:00-10:00am
Great Backyard Bird Count

Come participate in this national census of birds in winter. Check out waterfowl and other birds in freshwater wetlands, meadows, and forests and behind the office at Pickering Creek Audubon Center.

Friday, March 14, 6:00-8:00pm Woodcock Watch

Woodcocks, sometimes referred to as Timberdoodles, are shore-birds but they prefer hanging out in upland meadows instead of along shorelines. Come out at dusk to see if you can glimpse male Woodcocks perform their unique aerial display to woo the ladies.

Saturday, April 19, 8:00-10:00am Early Voices of Spring

Celebrate spring by looking for early migrants and enjoying a morning of bird song in the wetlands meadows and woodlands of Pickering Creek Audubon Center.

Saturday, May 10, 8:00-10:00am
International Migratory Bird Day

Participate in this international celebration of migratory birds at the peak of migration.

Visit us at



KID'S

Backyard Pinecone Birdfeeder

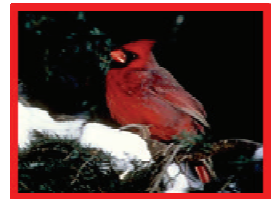
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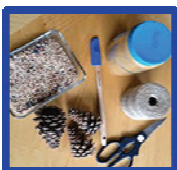
Maddie and Caitlin pushed open the patio door, peanut butter still covering their fingers, and raced through the cold winter air to the apple tree outside of Grandpa Khole's kitchen window. Holding their just-completed pinecone feeders, the sisters loudly voiced which one of their favorite birds would be the first to sample the peanut butter and seed treat. Maddie was determined it would be a chickadee, and Caitlin was holding out for a female cardinal. With so many other bird feeders in the yard, would their newly-made pinecone feeders even be noticed?



Peanut butter is a high-energy food that lets birds stay warmer in winter, and in the spring is a nutrient-packed food for nestlings. Add the right, high-quality seeds or fruit to the mix, and you should attract most of the same insect-eating birds that visit suet feeders. Look for woodpeckers, nuthatches, titmice, mockingbirds, wrens, jays, brown creepers, orioles, warblers, kinglets, cardinals, towhees, sparrows, bluebirds, thrashers, and others.



Ingredients and Supplies—One or more open pinecones. To open, put in oven at 200°. Watch closely. ** Natural smooth or crunchy peanut butter, optional suet ** Bird seed, optional bits of fruit or nuts ** Spreading utensil ** Sturdy string, yarn, or fishing line ** Paper plate.



Instructions—Using at least 2 feet of string, tie a knot around the top of the pinecone.** Generously slather peanut butter on the pinecone. Fill in all of the pinecone petals. ** Pour seed onto a paper plate. ** Roll pine cone over the seed. Coat thickly. ** Enjoy the bird acrobatics.



Helpful hints—Use shelled sunflower seeds. Slippery hulls (seed casings) are difficult for birds to open. ** A pinecone hung nearer to the edge of branches should discourage squirrels. ** The peanut butter-seed mixture can also be smeared on branches, fence posts, or placed in tree hollows.

Find out more about feeding your favorite backyard birds at:

Book: Secrets of Backyard Bird-Feeding Success: Hundreds of Surefire Tips for Attracting and Feeding Your Favorite Birds by Deborah L. Martin

Audubon web site: <http://www.audubonmagazine.org/articles/living/bird-feeding-tips>

Noteworthy Information

Volunteer! Do you enjoy helping out at special events, like to write letters, or have an idea for a field trip or workshop? Chesapeake Audubon is always looking for volunteers or new committee members. Please e-mail information@chesapeakeaudubon.org if you'd like to become more involved with our chapter. Visit our Web site for a peek: <http://www.chesapeakeaudubon.org/>.

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