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Chesapeake
Audubon Society



Winter-Spring 2015 Newsletter

Winter Songs and Vernal Drama

by Vicki Dodson

"...why should proud summer boast
Before the birds have any cause to sing?"
Shakespeare, Love's Labour's Lost (I.1.106)

Ah, winter. I try to be a good sport about it. I bundle up—in more layers than is probably necessary—brace myself, and optimistically head to the woods. I may be wimpy, but I admit that there are times when, instead of enjoying Jack Frost's hushed charms, I search for regrowth and for the promise of warm, sunny days to come. I appreciate those tough ferns, club mosses, hollies, and wintergreen that add cheerful pops of color to an otherwise gray-brown day.

Yet seeing isn't everything. There have been many frigid mid-winter hikes when I have heard "spring" months in advance. Did my ears deceive me? What made the woods suddenly bubble with sound?

Searching the trees, I soon find the source: Carolina Chickadees defending territory they will use for spring nesting; Tufted Titmice and White-breasted Nuthatches calling as they transport seeds to secret stores in rough bark; Downy Woodpeckers tapping and peeping. Jack Frost's forest isn't quite so hushed now thanks to this lively group, which proves that birds of a *mixed* feather also flock together. It is common to find foraging groups comprising five or more species (usually led by titmice and chickadees).

Farther down the trail, I hear my favorite off-season song of all—that of the White-throated Sparrow, a common winter visitor that breeds in northern boreal forests. Featuring "racing stripes" on its head, a white throat patch, and a splash of yellow on its lore (the area between eye and beak), what this sparrow may lack in dramatic avian beauty is made up for with its cheerful song and entertaining method of raking the ground for seeds and insects.

Now, about those racing stripes...

White-throated Sparrows are unusual because they are dimorphic—possessing head stripes of *either* white *or* tan. This nuance is important because this bird selects mates with different colored stripes than its own. We might consider this opposite attraction, but biologists call it 'negative assortative mating,' a behavior that helps maintain equal populations of both color morphs.

But the differences in morphs are not limited to color. Tan-striped females don't sing, yet white-striped males sing *a lot*. Maybe these guys simply need to advertise more because females actually prefer tan-striped males. Indeed,



White-throated Sparrow
(White Stripe Morph)



White-throated Sparrow
(Tan Stripe Morph)

ILLUSTRATIONS: V. DODSON

Article continued on page 4, column 2, green box

What I'm Reading

by Fred Brundick

Book Review: *Our Beautiful, Fragile World*
By Peter Essick

Peter Essick has been a photojournalist for National Geographic for over 25 years. His 2013 book, *Our Beautiful, Fragile World*, subtitled *The Nature and Environmental Photographs of Peter Essick*, is a collection of his photo essays on environmental issues. Each two-page spread has a photograph on the left page and a condensed version of the National Geographic article on the right page with commentary by the author. Most of his pictures are beautiful and scenes of nature while others show oil spills and pollution, all of them are creative and revealing. The article often describes how the location is in danger of being destroyed. An essay relevant to us is titled, "The Chesapeake: Why Can't We Save the Bay?" The stories are not all doom and gloom. I was especially interested in the essays about photography, such as "Finnish Moonlight" and "Midday Light, Low Tide," while "The Most Beautiful Place in the World" was very upbeat. The author's personal accounts tell us what it is like to be a National Geographic photographer. An example is his harrowing experience on board a yacht in stormy seas when he traveled to Antarctica to photograph Adélie penguins. [Fun fact about this seabird: they were named after the wife of the French explorer, Jules Dumont d'Urville, who discovered them.] The book has wonderful pictures and thought-provoking essays. You can view a sample of the book on Amazon. The publisher is Rocky Nook, Inc, Santa Barbara, California. ■ ■

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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!

Sunday, February 8, 8:00am Loch Raven Reservoir (Phoenix, MD)

Leader: Kye Jenkins

Join Kye for a birding trip around Loch Raven Reservoir. While the focus is ducks, rare birds such as Eurasian Wigeon, Cackling Goose, and Greater White-Fronted Goose have been sighted here. We will start at the beach area near the bridge on Loch Raven Road and drive from spot to spot. A scope is not necessary, but if you have one, do bring it, along with binoculars. Contact Kye Jenkins with any questions, and to [register](#) and [confirm the meeting location](#); email: kyebird56@yahoo.com or phone: 410-628-7257.

Sunday, March 8 (Backup date is March 15th) **Evening Woodcock Watch—Home Depot (Edgewood, MD)**

Leader: Tim Houghton

Meet Tim at the Home Depot in Edgewood (2703 Pulaski Highway [Rte. 40]). As you enter the parking lot, park on the right back (southwest) side of the lot. Tim describes it as an "excellent woodcock habitat." Bring a good flashlight if you have one and binoculars. Arrive no later than 7:00pm (around 15 minutes before sunset). If you've never seen the flight/mating display of this interesting bird, or would like to see it again, contact Tim [to register](#); email: thoughton@loyola.edu (preferred contact) or call 410-510-7504.

Saturday, March 28, 9:00am-noon Signs of Spring Walk—Patapsco Valley State Park (Ellicott City, MD)

Leader: Bryan MacKay

Join naturalist, Bryan MacKay, for a 2 mile stroll along the paved Grist Mill Trail as buds begin to swell and birds begin to sing. Learn about early season plants and the history of Patapsco Valley; we may even see a few birds! To [register](#), please contact Bryan at least one day in advance; email: mac-kay@umbc.edu or call 410-747-7132.

Saturday, April 4, 8:00am-11:00am Spring Migration: Beginner Bird Walk—North Point State Park (Edgemere, MD)

Leader: Ruth Bergstrom

North Point is a 1,310-acre park on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay. Fledgling birders will be particularly welcome as we look for early migrant and resident birds. Park entrance fee is \$3/vehicle. Contact Ruth to [register](#) and for meeting instructions; email: ruthb22@yahoo.com or 443-752-1967.

Saturday, April 11, 9:00am Photographing Nature—Cromwell Valley Park (Baltimore County, MD)

Leaders: Fred Brundick and John Landers

Bring your camera and binoculars! John Landers and photographer and CAS board member, Fred Brundick, will lead you around wonderful Cromwell Valley Park. This will be a great way to practice photographing nature, just as the flowers, butterflies, and birds are beginning to show their stuff. To [register](#), contact Fred; email: gpferd@gmail.com or 443-752-5607.

Saturday, April 18, 9:00am-noon Wildflower Hike—Susquehanna State Park (Havre de Grace, MD)

Leader: Bryan Mackay

We'll stroll about 2 miles at a slow pace along the Susquehanna River on an uneven, muddy trail to view acres of bluebells and trillium.

Susquehanna is one of the most biodiverse places in Maryland.

Although the primary focus of this walk

is flora, bring your binocs in case we see some early migrants. To [register](#), please contact Bryan MacKay at least one day in advance; email: mackay@umbc.edu or at 410 747 7132.



Free Photo: Bluebells @ Pixabay ©

Saturday, April 18, 7:30am Harford Glen (Harford County, MD)

Leader: Ruth Bergstrom

Join Ruth and the Harford Bird Club at the Glen. We will start our birding tour at the parking lot, then proceed to survey the triple riparian habitats of Atkisson Reservoir, the faster flowing Winter's Run, and the Plumtree Run tributary. The woodland trails and open meadows offer great opportunities for good birding. No need to RSVP, but contact Ruth with any questions; email: ruthb22@yahoo.com or 443-752-1967. Meet at the lower parking lot inside Harford Glen (west end of Wheel Road in Bel Air).

Wednesday April 22, 7:00am (all day) Earth Day Hike Up Old Rag Mountain—Shenandoah National Park (Virginia)

Leader: Kevin McCahill

Join us to celebrate Earth Day and enjoy the beauty of nature on the premier day hike in the Washington area. We will meet at 7:00am at the Park-n-Ride at I-70 and RT-32 (located just north of I-70). The climb is strenuous but not technically difficult. It is about an 8 mile circuit hike, and takes 6-7 hours, including time for lunch at the top, where your efforts will be rewarded with stunning views of the Shenandoah Valley. You will need well broken in walking/trail shoes or boots with hiking socks, lunch, at least a quart of water, warm clothing, rain gear (just in case), and a day pack to carry it all in. For those who are interested, after the hike we will stop for dinner in Warrenton, VA. We usually arrive back home around 8 pm. To [register](#) for the hike or for more information call Kevin McCahill at 443.831.3111

Saturday, April 25, 8:00am Sweet Air Section of Gunpowder State Park (Baldwin, MD)

Leader: Hugh Simmons

The Sweet Air Section of the Gunpowder State Park provides many scenic trails through varied bird habitat. We will walk through some steep, rocky, and wet trail sections. To [sign up](#) and for details contact Hugh Simmons; email: lenson-nature@gmail.com or 410-456-0017.

Saturday, April 25, 8:30am Flowers and Birds—Susquehanna State Park (Havre de Grace)

Leader: Colleen Webster

Join naturalist, Colleen Webster, for an enjoyable time at one of Maryland's great, dynamic parks. Colleen has led many trips at this park—introducing people to a variety of nature's spring features. Meet at the parking area near the walking bridge on Stafford Road. For information and to [register](#), contact Colleen; email: cwebster@harford.edu or 410-459-4577.

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Field Trips and Programs continued

Saturday, April 25, 6:00pm
Annual Spaghetti Dinner

See details at bottom of this page.

Sunday, April 26, 8:30am
Pickering Creek Audubon Center (Easton, MD)
Leader: Kye Jenkins

Participants can expect to see a variety of birds: ducks, shorebirds, and migrating or breeding songbirds just as migration is starting to heat up. Meet at the Pickering Creek Audubon Center in Easton, MD. To [register](#) and to ask questions, contact Kye; email: Kyebird56@yahoo.com or call 410-628-7257.

Saturday, May 2, 8:00am
Holt Park (87 Elmont Ave, Baltimore; near 695 & Bel Air Road)
Leader: Tim Houghton

Join Tim at this little-known, small and often wonderful migrant trap. Sometimes the woods at Holt Park are filled with warblers and other songbirds. Easy parking. LIMIT OF 15 PEOPLE. To [register](#)—and ask questions about location or anything else—contact Tim; email: thoughton@loyola.edu or call 410-510-7504.

Sunday, May 3, 2:00-5:00pm
Wildflower Hike—Patapsco Valley State Park (Ellicott City)
Leader: Bryan Mackay

We'll be hiking about 3-4 miles of backcountry trails in search of spring wildflowers. With luck, we may even see some orchid species! Bring your binoculars too; how can we ignore peak warbler migration?! To [register](#), please contact Bryan at least one day in advance; email: mackay@umbc.edu or call 410-747-7132.

Sunday, May 10, 7:30am
Susquehanna State Park (Havre de Grace)
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. LIMIT OF 15 PEOPLE! To [register](#) and find out information, contact Tim; email: thoughton@loyola.edu or call 410-510-7504. Meeting place will be at Rock Run Mill (corner of Stafford Rd. and Rock Run Rd.).

Saturday, May 30, 9:00am (day trip)
Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge (Delaware)
Leader: Hugh Simmons

Bombay Hook is considered one of the best birding locations on the east coast, and the Delaware Bay hosts the annual spawning of horseshoe crabs and the associated shorebird feeding frenzy. Always a full and fun day. Not a lot of walking; what there is easy on level ground but may be muddy in places. To [sign up](#) and for details contact Hugh Simmons; email: lenson-nature@gmail.com or 410-456-0017.

Patterson Park Urban Bird Watching Walks

See page 6 for the calendar of dates and details about these walks. This park is a must see—Middleton Evans — guest speaker at the Spaghetti Dinner published a book about it!

Would you like to know what we find on our field trips?
Visit our blog at <http://chesapeakeaudubon.blogspot.com/>

Visit us at



CAS Annual Spaghetti Dinner

Saturday, April 25, 2015 at 6:00 p.m.

Featuring: Middleton Evans

Middleton will speak about his new book, *Miracle Pond*, which displays a photographic story of wildlife in an unlikely place – an urban park. His book features almost 400 photographs in Patterson Park, including the pond (called the boat lake by many locals) and the Wood Ducks that helped this book idea take flight.

Where: St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, 4713 Edmondson Avenue, Baltimore, MD

Cost: \$10.00 per person for dinner and the program, \$13.00 if you would like a glass of wine or a beer with dinner.

Reservations: We ask that you reserve your meal ticket(s) in advance so we can plan for food—call (410) 203-1819—leave your name, telephone number, and number of people; specify if you prefer vegetarian sauce. Please send checks payable to the Chesapeake Audubon Society, PO Box 3173, Baltimore, MD 21228.

Directions: Take Baltimore beltway to exit 15A (Rte. 40, Baltimore National Pike east, towards Baltimore.) Take Rte. 40 about 2 miles, just past the convergence of Route 40 and Edmondson Ave. The Church is on the right.

We are again extremely fortunate to have a local guitarist and songwriter, Sean McCahill, performing for your listening pleasure during the dinner.

National Audubon Leadership Training: Hog Island, Maine

by Susan Hutson

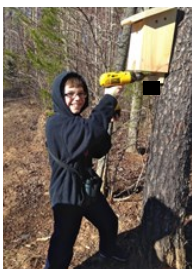


I was vice president of the Chesapeake Audubon Society (CAS) when the president and CAS Board offered me an opportunity to attend a leadership workshop at Hog Island Audubon Camp near Bremen Maine in July 2014. With enthusiastic encouragement, some funding from CAS, and a scholar-

ship from the National Audubon Society (NAS), I joined several Audubon Chapter leaders from the Atlantic Flyway region for training. Color-streaked skies at sunrise and sunset framed our idyllic 4 days on the 330-acre Hog Island, one of about 50 islands in Muscongus Bay. On our first pre-breakfast bird walk, our guide, Scott Weidensaul, author of *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds*, was nearly speechless when he unexpectedly spotted a Black Guillemot within feet of the shore. Related to the puffin, who we would observe later in the week at East Egg Island, a guillemot had not yet been spotted at Hog Island. It was only 6:00 a.m., day one.

The workshop combined formal lectures highlighting NAS priority programs and informal discussions exploring Audubon Chapter resources. NAS priorities are Bird Friendly Communities (BFC) that establish connected habitats dominated by native plants with minimum threats posed by the built environment; the International Alliance Program's (IAP) hemispheric approach to conserving and restoring natural ecosystems; and adopting a science-to-action strategy to respond to climate change.

Two chapters showed how the pursuit of likely partnerships and an awareness of community needs can result in high-caliber effective BFCs. North Carolina State Audubon paired with an international migratory wood thrush campaign and a Toyota TogetherGreen grant to work with Habitat for Humanity on "Nest boxes for Nuthatches." The New York Capital Chapter used community gardens, participation in a House and Garden Tour, and Finch Friendly Space programs to promote BFCs.



The impact of climate change was a hot topic. Most striking has been a northward shift in the geographic center of abundance of 177 of 305 documented species. For example, over 40 years, the geographic center for the purple finch shifted 433 miles northward. Closer to Hog Island, the beloved puffin population has declined, partly because ocean warming has shifted or reduced food supply.

Establishing BFCs and responding to climate change are integral to achieving the goals of Audubon's International Alliance Program, which strategically selects project sites and partner organizations that are Important Bird Areas (IBAs) along migratory flyways throughout the western hemisphere. Presently, the goal of Audubon is to achieve on-the-ground conservation results at 100 critical IBAs covering 10 million acres by 2020. National Audubon is interested in participating with



Audubon chapters to raise money (and awareness) for IBAs, BFCs, and climate change.

With these national priorities in mind, the leadership sessions focused on preparing local Audubon chapters for success. Chapters are important because they enable like-minded folks, such as members and others to meet and explore their common interest—focusing on the conservation and restoration of birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. Members are the most important resource for keeping a chapter relevant and active.



NAS provides tools and resources to assist Chapters, including an online Chapter Services page and an online Chapter Resources Guide. The Guide includes sections on chapter-created products and publications, E-outreach and networking, and marketing resources. Chapter

problems can be difficult to solve, especially leadership transitions, and recruiting and retaining volunteers. Diversity and inclusion are an important part of the NAS formula for chapter success. The take home message was that each chapter leader should be an ambassador for Audubon.

As for the Chapter leader experience, it was outstanding. We had fun. We had a Climate Change party. Wow! We networked, and now share ideas through a Google group. We were passionate when we arrived, and inspired when we left. Hog Island takes hold of you. And don't forget the puffins!



Winter Songs and Vernal Drama

Continued from page 1

white-striped males don't appear to be ideal mate material: they are more aggressive, more likely to "trespass" on another bird's turf, less attentive as parents, and less faithful as mates (hey, at least they're good singers). Likewise, female white-stripes are more aggressive than their tan counterparts. They also initiate mating twice as frequently as tan-striped females. Interestingly, studies show that while the latter are dutiful mothers, males of both colors prefer white-striped females.

As I stand in the cold forest, I hear little promises of spring—and a little "romantic" drama, too. Just in time for Valentine's Day.

A generous donation was made to the Chesapeake Audubon Society

In Memory of Alice Brown

Alice was a *regular* at the CAS dinners and always brought a crowd along. She loved nature and bird watching, always enjoying a variety of common birds at her feeder. One year, both hairy and downy woodpeckers visited her feeder and she distinguished the two by measuring them against the feeder. Alice died on January 21, 2015 at the age of 92. She will be sorely missed!

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Mallard dabbling, courtesy of TrekOhio

DABBLING DUCKS AND DIVING DUCKS

Duck, duck, GOOSE! ...shrieked 5-year old Noah as he tagged Chapin. The cousins broke into a run. Chapin caught Oliver, and the game began again. On this cold winter day, after hot chocolate and Grammy's famous cookies, the cousins huddled in Adirondack chairs and watched the ducks in Harness Creek perform their usual tricks. Bianca laughed most when a Mallard tipped forward, dipped his head and neck under water, wiggled his tail, and paddled his feet.

Vivian intently studied the water as a Canvasback duck dove head first, disappeared, and then popped to the surface. Uncle John explained that the ducks were actually doing what the cousins had done earlier around Grammy's kitchen table. The ducks were feeding. Amazingly, ducks like the Mallard prefer pond scum to chocolate chip cookies. Head under water and tail in the air is the trick of a dabbling duck (also called dabbler or puddler) and diving ducks go all the way under the water.

Dabblers and divers are different in other ways. Dabblers are more buoyant, meaning they float higher in the water, most often like shallow water (thus the name puddlers), and have longer bills designed for filtering food out of the water. Pond scum and invertebrates (creatures with no backbone, like insects) are favorite snacks. Diving ducks float lower in the water and prefer deeper water for diving. To help them swim under water, divers have short legs set back near their rear with large feet. Besides pond scum, divers catch insects, worms, fish, and mollusks (creatures with shells, like snails) with their shorter bills. A dabbler can get airborne quickly. It pushes its feet down while beating its wings, and lifts up nearly vertically. A diving duck, with its stubby wings, must run or hop across the water while beating its wings to start flying.

Credits: Photo and information from TrekOhio and San Diego Zoo



Lesser Scaup, courtesy Fred Brundick

CHESUPIOC WORD NEST

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Search the Word Nest

Look for the following names (not underlined) in the word nest:

diving ducks
canvasback
 redhead
 scaup
 bufflehead

dabblers
mallard
gadwall
pintail
shoveler

Diving duck almost airborne, courtesy TrekOhio



For more information about dabblers and divers visit one of these web sites:

<http://blogs.sandiegozoo.org/2012/07/18/dabbling-vs-diving-ducks/>

<http://trekohio.com/2013/12/31/an-introduction-to-dabbling-ducks-and-diving-ducks/>

