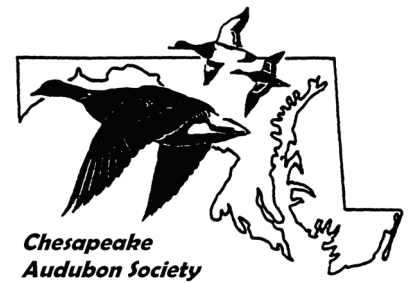


Chesupioc

Fall 2010—Winter 2011 Newsletter

A local Chapter of National Audubon Society



Silent in Flight

By Christine Holzmueller

Almost everyone has been outside at dusk, whether driving toward a destination or seeking out a prime spot to enjoy a sunset. Have you ever spotted the majestic silhouette of an owl perched in clear view, motionless? Mostly likely, this is a Great Horned Owl, the most common owl species on the North American continent, an owl with large ear tufts resembling a cat. This large predator hunts prey from a perch, swooping down and grabbing mammals as big as a rabbit.

Great Horned Owls are one of 19 owl species found on the North American continent, which includes the United States, Canada and adjacent islands, with the exception of Hawaii, Bermuda, and Greenland. Seven species inhabit Maryland at some point during the year. The Great Horned Owl, Barn Owl, Barred Owl, and Eastern Screech-Owl stay year round, while the Northern Saw-whet Owl, Short-eared Owl, and Long-eared Owl reside in the winter.

I had the pleasure of picking up an injured Eastern Screech-Owl, from a conscientious Glen Rock, Pennsylvania resident, and transporting it to Kathy Woods from the Phoenix Wildlife Center, Inc. in Phoenix, Mary-



land. The pleasure came from peeking inside the crab basket holding him captive, and being so close to this small raptor with barred breast and belly, ear tufts standing upright and reddish feathers flattened. I was also pleased to volunteer for a wildlife center that depends

Continued on page 6

Bryan MacKay, two-time author and director at large for CAS, is one of two speakers in a new Lecture Series occurring this Fall on a Thursday evening. MacKay will talk Nov. 18th.

David Curson, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon MD-DC will speak Oct. 7th. See the events calendar for more details.

What I'm Reading

Skipjack - by Christopher White

Review by Bryan MacKay, Director at Large

I just finished the best work of nonfiction I have read in some years: *Skipjack: The Story of America's Last Sailing Oystermen*, by Christopher White (St. Martin's Press, 2009). I am not the sort who gets all dewy-eyed about skipjacks and watermen, but White brings to life this way of work and culture, and the people involved, in an artful and always interesting narrative. It does not hurt that the three older skipjack captains around whom the story revolves are immensely colorful individuals in their own right; I have seen few characters in fiction so memorably and clearly drawn. White for the most part lets them tell their own stories, while his own personal experiences sailing with them are the glue that links the narrative together. And it is perhaps fortuitous that the year covered in this book marked a turning point in the fate of skipjacks, oyster dredging by sail, and the working water communities of the Eastern Shore.

White is clearly enamored by skipjacks and sail dredging for oysters; he accepts without skepticism the watermen's assertions that dredging, if properly done, benefits oyster reefs, that the harvest would be sustainable if not for sail dredging's rivals, hand- and patent tongs, and that

Continued on page 7

Bird Seed Sale!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Stock up on quality seed and suet for your feathered friends while supporting the children's environmental education programs at Patterson Park Audubon Center in Baltimore City. Complete the form you received in the mail, or print it from our website www.chesapeakeaudubon.org and mail it to our office (see page 8); **needed by Oct. 8th**. Pickup is Oct. 16th at the Wildlife Authority in Ellicott City or at the Chili Dinner on Oct. 23rd. Home delivery is available again this year for \$8.00 per order. Thank you.

Newsletter Contents:	Page
Field Trips & Lecture series	2
Kid's Corner; Patterson Park Programs.....	4
Annual Chili Dinner with Silent Auction.....	5
Chasing Rare Birds article	6
Important notices; Pickering Creek Programs	7
Volunteer opportunities.....	8

Field Trips and Programs:

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

Find us on facebook

Sunday, October 3, 8:00 AM

Ladew Topiary Gardens **Tim Houghton**

Please join us for a fall migration visit to one of Harford County's premier birding hotspots. The nature walk is free and should you choose, you can enjoy the beautiful gardens on your own for an additional fee. There is also a café available for luncheon on the grounds if you'd like a bite to eat. Be amazed at the variety of birdlife around you and be guided by one of our most knowledgeable leaders. This should be a great walk! Please register with Tim by email (thoughton@loyola.edu) or phone (410-510-7504).

Thursday, October 7, 7PM **Lecture Series**

Place: Catonsville Library, meeting room

Speaker: David Curson, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon MD-DC

Title: Audubon's Salt Marsh Conservation Campaign on the Atlantic Flyway

Salt marsh is a globally rare habitat that is seriously threatened by sea level rise. Consequently, salt marsh nesting birds, such as Saltmarsh Sparrow and Black Rail may be at risk of extinction on the East Coast over the next century. The National Audubon Society is launching a salt marsh conservation campaign, with the Chesapeake Bay as one of its focal regions, with the goal of ensuring that salt marshes and their unique birds survive over the long term in the face of sea level rise. (Library address: 1100 Frederick Road 21228)

Saturday, October 9, 8 AM

Cromwell Valley Park **Tim Houghton**

Cromwell Valley is always one of our most popular trips and we encourage you to visit this very birdy location with us. This time of year can provide some surprising sightings as migrants are moving around while residents are resting from their summer labors. Please register with Tim by email (thoughton@loyola.edu) or phone (410-510-7504).

Sunday, October 10, 10AM-4PM

Harvest Hoedown at Pickering Creek

Mark your calendars for the Harvest Hoedown Set-up Day on Thursday, October 7, 4-7pm and Harvest Hoedown on Sunday, October 10. We need many volunteers both to help with setup and the event. More details are on the Pickering Creek Website.

Saturday, October 16

Cromwell Valley Park **Hugh Simmons**

We return to Cromwell Valley Park because at this time of year, a week can make a big difference in what birds

are passing by. Join Hugh for the park's regularly scheduled walk and make a stop at the hawk watch. It should be a great time of year to see migrating raptors. Contact Hugh at 410-628-4246 before 9 PM or you can e-mail him at hughsimmons@comcast.net for information on meeting times and places.

On the Same Day ** 6 PM

Annual Chili Dinner

See page 5 for more details about dinner and **a silent auction for a beautiful painting!**



Tiny Tots and Family Programs in Patterson Park starting in October; see Kid's Corner on page 4.

Sunday, October 24, 8 AM

Oregon Ridge **Ruth Bergstrom**

Oregon Ridge Nature Center was previously a very active iron ore and marble mining operation during the mid-19th century. Now we can search for birds on trails winding through meadows and tree covered hillsides. We've seen half a dozen Swainson's Thrush and flocks of Kinglets on our last trips, and we'll search again for the Winter Wren. Contact Ruth Bergstrom at ruthb22@yahoo.com or 443-752-1967 to sign up.

Saturday, October 30**

Hawk Mountain Day Trip **Hugh Simmons**

Like hawks, eagles and falcons? Then, this is the trip for you. Hawk Mountain is near by in Pennsylvania's Kittatinny Ridge and one of the East Coast's premier hawk watching sites. This time of year will bring a variety of raptors with medium size birds like the beautiful Red-Shoulder and the speedy Peregrine taking center stage. You don't want to miss a visit to the well-stocked visitor center. Contact Hugh at 410-628-4246 before 9 PM or you can e-mail him at hughsimmons@comcast.net for information on meeting times and places.

On the Same Day ** Patterson Park Monthly Walk

Please join our monthly Bird Walk in a 137-acre Baltimore City park in time to catch the Fall migrants heading south. Meet at the fountain in the northwest corner of the park by the Pagoda. No need to register! The walk is **8AM to 9:30AM**. We have binoculars if you need them. A fun family activity! Call 410-558-2473 with questions.

Saturday, November 6, 1PM Blackwater by Bicycle **Bryan MacKay**

Tired of pre-dawn birding trips? Get up late, linger over coffee, and join CAS for a 7 mile bike ride through Blackwater NWR @ **1pm**. Stop by the new Visitor Center, walk the usual trails, cycle the auto tour, then watch the immense flocks of geese return at dusk. If it's cold or rainy, leave the bikes at home. Meet at the VC. Bryan MacKay, 410-747-7132, 6-10 pm, or mackay@umbc.edu

Continued on page 3

More Field Trips & Programs!

Sunday, November 14, Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge **Hugh Simmons**

Hugh Simmons will lead us through this wonderful refuge by car and on foot (weather permitting) so we don't miss anything. The gathering of thousands of Snow Geese is always an amazing sight, watching them as we drive into the refuge will take your breath away and there may be some winter ducks already visiting the impoundments. Please register by November 7th. Contact Hugh Simmons at 410-628-4246; call before 9:00PM please or you can send e-mail to (hughsimmons@comcast.net).



Thursday, November 18, 7PM Lecture Series

Place: Woodlawn Library, 1811 Woodlawn Dr. 21207
Speaker: Bryan MacKay, senior lecturer, Department of Biological Sciences at UMBC.

Join author and naturalist (and local resident!) Bryan MacKay for a journey through the cycle of seasons in Baltimore and around Maryland. From armor-plated arthropods lumbering ashore to breed in uncountable numbers, to aerial rivers of tiny songbirds passing overhead against the full moon, to late-blooming wildflowers struggling to set seed before winter, natural Maryland is an amazing and sometimes poorly-known place. This slide show and talk will attune you to our natural heritage in all seasons, and tell you the most interesting and exciting locales to see nature at its best. (Library address: 1811 Woodlawn Drive 21207)

Saturday, November 27, 8:00AM-9:30AM **Patterson Park Monthly Walk**

Time for the monthly Bird Walk in our Baltimore City park in time to catch the late Fall migrants heading south. Meet the group at the fountain, which is in the northwest corner of the park close to the Pagoda. No need to register! The walk runs from 8AM to 9:30AM. We have binoculars for you to use if you need them. It is a fun family activity! Call 410-558-2473 with any questions.

Saturday, December 4, 8:00AM **Eagles at Conowingo; Brunch at Harry & Marian's; Hugh and Marian**

Eagles, eagles everywhere and warm up with some hot soup! We'll meet at the base of the dam at 8 AM to see how many eagles will be visiting the area this year. There is usually a large gathering of Great Blue Herons stoically braving the cold! After a short walk to look for wintering birds along the river path (another Winter Wren or Golden Crowned Kinglet, perhaps?), we'll gather at the

Argentino house – a short 5 miles away - and feast on Harry's homemade soups and whatever other goodies show up on the table! Please register early so that there is enough to go around. Call Marian Argentino at 410-752-9913 or e-mail her at (ChesAudubonInfo@aol.com).

Saturday, December 11, 10:00-11:00AM **Holiday Ornament Making Family Program @ Patterson Park**

Create festive ornaments using natural and recycled materials. This one is fun for the whole family! Registration required, call 410-558-2473 or email ppaudubon@gmail.com; \$5/participant. Place to be determined.

Sunday, December 12, 8AM **Marshy Point Nature Center Ruth Bergstrom**

Marshy Point is located in Baltimore County. The Center, built along the Dundee and Saltpeter Creeks, has open wetlands, dense marshlands, and tidal creeks that open to the Chesapeake Bay. We'll join their monthly bird walk to search for waterfowl and other wintering residents. Scope helpful. Email Ruth at ruthb22@yahoo.com or call her at 443-752-1967 to register.

Saturday, December 18, 8:00AM-9:30AM **Patterson Park Monthly Walk**

Need a break from the holiday bustle? Join us for our monthly Bird Walk to see who will be making the park their home this winter. Meet the group at the fountain, which is in the northwest corner of the park close to the Pagoda. No need to register! The walk runs from 8AM to 9:30AM. We have binoculars for you to use if you need them. It is a fun family activity! Call 410-558-2473 with any questions.

Saturday, January 15 **Terrapin Park (Sandy Pt) Hugh Simmons**

Join Hugh at this beautiful location for a great morning of birding on the Chesapeake Bay shores. Located by the Bay Bridge, this park offers easy trails and a pond filled with migrating and resident songbirds, waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors. If we hear of any Snow Buntings visiting Sandy Point, we'll stop for a look on the way home. Join us by contacting Hugh at 410-628-4246 before 9PM or e-mail him at hughsimmons@comcast.net for information on meeting times and places.

Saturday, January 29, 8:00AM-9:30AM **Patterson Park Monthly Walk**

Please join the first monthly Bird Walk for 2011. It's always good to see what birds are wintering in the park; there is usually a nice surprise at the pond. Meet at the fountain, in the northwest corner of the park by the Pagoda. No need to register! We have binoculars if you need them. It is a fun family activity! Call 410-558-2473 with any questions.

Continued on page 4

KID'S CORNER



Dissect an Owl Pellet

Which food in this list will an owl eat?

1. Grass
2. Pizza
3. Mice
4. Sunflower Seeds

If you picked number 3, mice, you are correct! How do we know? When Owls eat mice or other small mammals or birds, they swallow it whole since they cannot chew like we can! A few hours later, they regurgitate (you know - throw up) the parts they can't digest, like the bones, fur or feathers, in small grayish pellets. You can find these pellets in the woods underneath the trees where they perch. We can look inside them for clues to find out what they ate.



Photograph by Deane P. Lewis (visit <http://www.owlpages.com>)

How do you dissect an owl pellet you've found? If it is dry, soak it in water for a few minutes, then use some toothpicks or tweezers to gently pull it apart on newspaper or a paper towel. Separate the bones, teeth and other hard material from the fur and feathers. Clean the bones and teeth by soaking them in a 20% bleach solution (ask your parents to make this for you) for 3 minutes. Try to identify them using a field guide on mammals. You can mount the bones on construction paper or try to put them together to form the animal.

Remember to always wash your hands after handling the pellets.

Can't find a pellet? You can ask your parents, or maybe your teacher, to order one for you off the internet. Or, you can dissect one virtually; pretty cool huh! Click on this website and practice dissecting pellets from a Barn Owl, Barred Owl, and many other birds: <http://www.kidwings.com/owlpellets/flash/v4/index.htm>



Most owls live in the holes of trees, like this one.



Owls are active at night.

Great children's book authored by Jennifer Keats Curtis and published by Sylvan Dell.



More Field Trips & Programs!

Sunday, January 30

Delaware Beaches

Ruth Bergstrom

We'll visit Prime Hook, Cape Henlopen State Park, and/or Delaware Seashore State Park depending on what's being reported for wintering Bay and Sea Ducks. Email Ruth at ruthb22@yahoo.com or call her at 443-752-1967 to register and for details.

Tiny Tots Programs in Patterson Park

Fun & educational programs for children 2-5 with an adult. Please register no less than 2 days before the program. Meet @ the northeast corner of the Boat

Lake. \$5 per child

Owls of the Night Oct. 22nd or Oct. 30th

Camouflage Nov. 19th or Nov. 20th

Animals Tracks Dec. 13th or Dec. 18th

Family Programs in Patterson Park

Pumpkin Carving Oct. 23rd \$8 per pumpkin

Holiday Ornament Making Dec. 11th \$5/person

See website for more details about Patterson Park programs: <http://mddc.audubon.org/events/2030>

Chesapeake Audubon Society

Annual Chili Dinner
6:00 p.m., Saturday October 23, 2010

Featuring

Hugh Simmons
Vice President, Chesapeake
Audubon Society and an avid birder and
nature photographer

"Avian Life in Veracruz"

The Mexican State of Veracruz is home to the largest migration of birds of prey in the world. Called the Rio de Rapaces, River of Raptors, this is one of the world's great birding spectacles. Hugh Simmons will chronicle his trip to Veracruz to view this event and the great diversity of avian life in this Gulf coast state.

AND

Dinner music by the Ten Directions Jazz Quartet



Photography by Hugh Simmons

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

Cost: \$9.00 per person for dinner and the program, \$12.00 if you would like a glass of wine or a beer with dinner.

Reservations: Please call 410-203-1819 and leave a message with your name, telephone number, and number of people you will be bringing, and whether you prefer vegetarian chili. Please send checks payable to The Chesapeake Audubon Society PO Box 3173, Baltimore, MD 21228. It is best to reserve your meal ticket in advance. While we welcome walk-ins, we can't guarantee there will be enough food if we don't have advance notice.



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

This beautiful painting by artist, Mary Kokoski, could be yours. Reserve your plate at the dinner and join in on the silent auctioning of this work! Bidding will begin at \$100.

Chasing Rare Birds

By Bryan MacKay

There is a subset of birders who travel the globe in search of rare birds to add to their life list. Similarly, birders who are Maryland residents scour the state to improve their state and county lists. But heretofore, I was not one of them. I don't keep any lists, and I never understood the attraction. But then five black bellied whistling ducks (BBWD) showed up about a mile from my home. And before I knew it, the chase was on!

My guidebook says BBWD's are only regularly found at the extreme southern tips of Texas and Arizona. But then there are a bunch of little green dots scattered over the rest of the U.S. where isolated sightings have been confirmed. There is now a little green dot over Arbutus, MD. Sometime in June, five BBWDs arrived unannounced and uninvited at the nature pond of the Charlestown Retirement Community. When word got out via a listserv that they were present, birders started to arrive, and emails announced the best place and time to view the birds. Well, I figured, for such a rare life bird, I might as well give it a try, especially since my food store was adjacent. I could combine birding and shopping in one trip.

They say third time is a charm, but for me and my wife Debi, it took four tries to spot the BBWD's. But it was worthwhile. What beautiful birds! They had pink legs and an orange-red bill that almost glowed in the perfect morning light. One even did a wing stretch to reveal the pure white wing patch that is so evident in flight but concealed at rest. For such rare birds, they were remarkably unconcerned. All five were sitting on an observation deck; an old guy was fishing nearby. We had noted that one bird on the deck was lying on the railing with his head dangling down; I wondered if he was sick. But Debi later noted that they spend large amounts of time on the water in that same position - head dangling down feeding underwater, in contrast to mallards, which of course tip up, butts in the air. Interesting.

In the end, I was glad I put effort into seeing these birds. I think I'll go add it to my life list. ■■

Silent in Flight continued

on donations and in-kind support, and to get this alarmed and injured bird the care it needed.

Owls are amazing raptors, with keen eyesight and acute hearing, able to turn their head around to look directly behind them, hunting by perch or in flight, silently flying

through the night. Because owls cannot chew, they swallow their prey whole, and later on regurgitate indigestible parts (see the Kid's Corner for more information). The Eastern-Screech Owl is a perch hunter, waiting along forest edges or open woods looking for small rodents and insects. The one I transported was reddish in color, but they can also be gray.

Another perch hunter, found in woods, is the Barred Owl. This brown-plumed predator has vertical bars on the breast and belly, dark eyes, and well-defined facial discs around each eye, creating the appearance of a pair of binoculars. All owls have facial discs and inset fixed eyes, and the Barred's are very prominent I think.

The Barn owl has a distinctively different appearance than other owl species. They have a heart-shaped facial disc, pale tawny and white plumage, and long legs (see picture on page 8). This lovely raptor hunts in flight, unlike the other owls I've described, over open spaces but does hunt at night, like most owl species. Another owl that hunts on the wing is the Long-eared Owl. This winter resident has prominent ears, a dark vertical stripe through the eyes, and a tawny orange face. While the Long-eared Owl has dark streaking and barring on the breast and belly, the Short-eared Owl has very fine light downward streaks on the breast and upper belly.

I bet more people have spotted a Short-eared Owl than any other owl species, and many don't even know it. Have you watched any of the Harry Potter movies? Yes, the most memorable is Hedwig the Snowy Owl, but a Short-eared Owl is also in this movie series. This species also hunts in flight and an exception to the nocturnal rule, they often hunt in daylight. Look for them this winter, flying over a field or marsh. Our final Maryland resident, in winter, is the Northern *Saw-whet* Owl. This little owl is even smaller than a screech-owl, lives in mixed coniferous-deciduous woods and hunts rodents from a perch.

Most owl species nest in tree cavities, or another cavity source, although some will take over old tree nests made by raptors or crows. They have soft fluffy feathers to keep them warm in extremely cold weather, 3 protective eyelids, a short curved beak for gripping and tearing food, and four toes with powerful talons for capturing prey. If you would like to know much more about owls visit <http://www.owlpages.com>. A great children's book about owls is *Baby Owl's Rescue* written by Jennifer Keats Curtis, illustrated by Laura Jacques, and published by Sylvan Dell. The author worked with Kathy Woods to ensure the content was accurate and book royalties support the Phoenix Wildlife Center. ■■

Book Review *continued*

disease plays a minor role in the oyster's demise in the Chesapeake Bay. And it is easy to see why; the values and ethics of behavior held by the older captains are truly admirable, in the best American tradition, even as they remain fiercely independent.

The incredible sailing and navigation skills these men have are detailed in admirable fashion. White describes sailing the Bay in a pea-soup fog, where the captain reads his location from the color of the water, the shape of the waves, and the movement of tidal water. The best captains maintain a mental map of the Bay's bottom on oyster bars not by depth finder technology but by the feel of the dredge passing over it and what the dredges bring up. It is a cultural heritage that was fading even as White chronicled it, and is now, already, all but gone.

At first I was disappointed that the events chronicled in this book took more than a decade to reach print, and so did not reflect the current situation, but the Epilogue brings the reader up to date, and the interval of ten years gives a perspective that is more enlightening than a shorter interval would be. Watermen, skipjacks and working water communities have changed dramatically in the last decade, perhaps unavoidably so, and that heritage is lost forever.



You'll find *Skipjacks* not just an intellectually interesting read, but a fun one as well. White knows how to tell a good story.

Are you reading an interesting book about nature or the environment that you'd like to share with our members? Please send an email to Chris at cholzmu1@jhmi.edu with the title and a short summary and we may include it in an upcoming newsletter. ■■

Sunday Bird Walk n' Talk Series – Pickering Creek

Cost: \$10/adult; \$5/child

The new Bird Walk n' Talk series introduces beginning birders of all ages to the birds found along the Delmarva Peninsula. Each month will be an exploration of the habitat, identification and calls of different bird groups. Naturalists will lead introductions about the monthly bird groups, then adults and children will split up for specialized hikes. Adults learn some in-depth identification skills and bird/habitat connections. Kids look for birds then get to interpret their imaginations into bird crafts. Hot beverages and homemade treats await us on our return to ease the winter chills. Registration required. To register call (410) 822-4903, or register on-line: <http://www.pickeringcreek.org/calendar/index.html>

Feeder Birds - November 14th, 2-4 PM

Winter Songbirds - December 12th, 2-4 PM,

Owls - January 23rd, 1-3 PM,

Geese and Swans - February 6th, 1-3 PM,

Ducks - March 13th, 2-4 PM,

Important Information

If every American had one meat-free meal per week, it would be the same as taking more than 5 million cars off our roads. Having one meat-free day per week would be the same as taking 8 million cars off American roads (Environmental Defense Fund, visit <http://www.edf.org/article.cfm?contentid=6604> for more information).

Do you have a gently used item that you don't need anymore? Instead of adding it to your local landfill, consider giving it to one of your neighbors in need. Freecycle is a nonprofit organization dedicated to people giving and receiving items for free in their own area. See www.freecycle.org for more information.

Maryland State Board of Ed votes on environmental literacy. On September 21, 2010, the Maryland State Board of Education voted unanimously to require that all Maryland public school students must now have access to environmental education and graduate environmentally literate. This means that every local public school system must now provide a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary environmental education program aligned with the Maryland Environmental Literacy Curriculum. See www.mdncli.org for more information.




**PATTERSON PARK Audubon
CENTER**

Volunteers Needed!!!!
Saturday, October 2nd, 8am
Saturday, November 6th, 8am

Audubon Garden Club

Help Audubon maintain the native gardens in the Park! New native plants will be added to the garden just west of the Boat Lake during our October garden club meeting. We need your help to clear weeds to make way for the new arrivals and plant the natives in their new home. Gloves, garden tools, and refreshments provided. For more information call 410-558-BIRD (2473) or email ppaudubon@gmail.com

Barn Owl



Chesupioe is published by
Chesapeake Audubon Society
PO Box 3173, Baltimore, MD 21228
 (410) 203-1819

President: Ruth Bergstrom
Vice President: Hugh Simmons
Treasurer: John Love
Secretary: Norman Meadow, Ph.D.
Field Trips Chair: Marian Argentino
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Original artwork: Mary Kokoski

Directors at Large:
 Dick Worsham Kevin McCahill
 Mary Kokoski Stuart Strahl, Ph.D.
 Bryan MacKay Richard Schurmann

Director Emeritus: Rodger Waldman
Wildlife Rehabilitator: Kathy Woods phone: 410-628-9736
 phoenixcenter@comcast.net

Visit our website at
www.chesapeakeaudubon.org
 CAS e-mail: information@chesapeakeaudubon.org