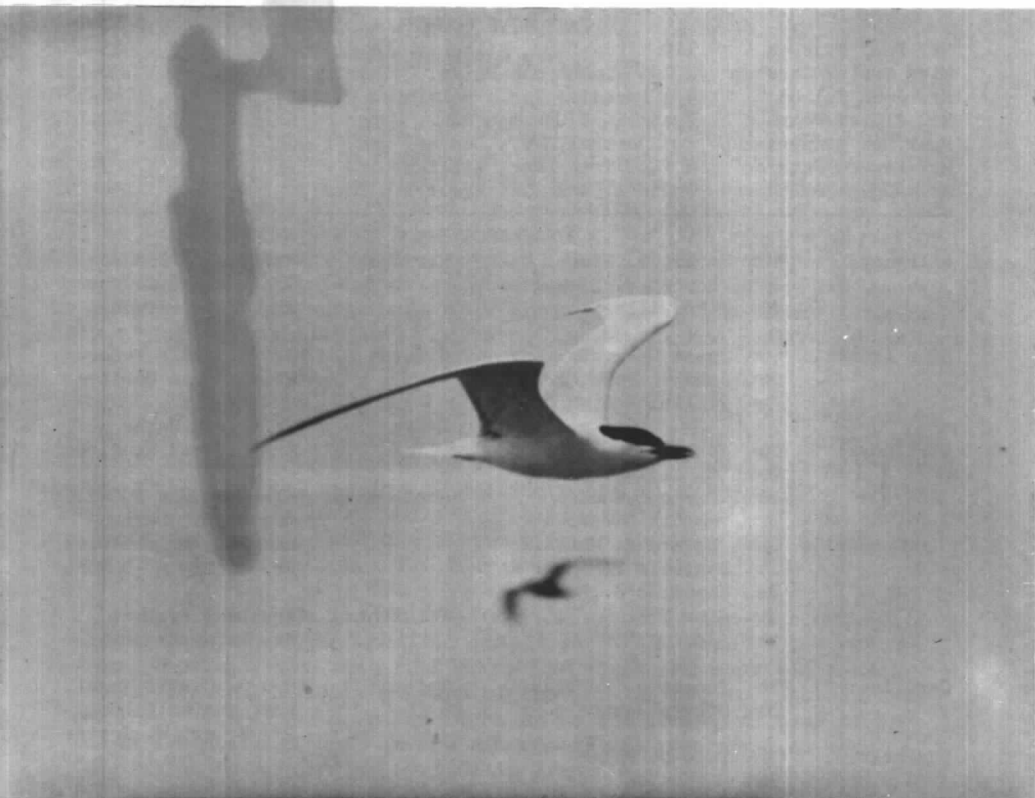


ISSN 0147-9725

MARYLAND BIRDLIFE



Bulletin of the Maryland Ornithological Society, Inc.

DECEMBER 1977

VOLUME 33

NUMBER 4

MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, INC.
 Cylburn Mansion, 4915 Greenspring Ave., Baltimore, Maryland 21209

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Cover: Gull-billed Tern at Sinepuxent Bay, Md., June 12, 1976.
 Photo by Robert F. Ringler.



WINTER GULLS IN THE BALTIMORE HARBOR AREA IN 1977

Rick Blom and Jim Stasz

It appears one of the largest concentrations of wintering gulls in the Middle Atlantic region can be found in the Baltimore area, around the municipal landfills bordering the harbor and Back River. Until recently these birds have received little or no attention from birders. Beginning in January of 1977 that changed, with startling results. Not only is the sheer number of birds staggering, but the species diversity even more so. When the smoke (or gulls) had cleared, ten species had been identified, including on one memorable day, 9 in only a few hours! The purpose of this paper is to talk about not only the interesting variety of birds, but also total numbers, locations, and prospects for the future.

What brings the gulls to Baltimore is trash. There are four major active landfills near the harbor, and each one has its own, large, population of gulls. Proximity to water makes them far more attractive than the landfills in the interior of Baltimore and in surrounding counties. Though all four have large numbers of birds, only two offer reasonable prospects for viewing, and one of these is so superior that it has received the most attention. The four locations are:

1. Pennington Landfill -- On Pennington Avenue near Curtis Creek. Access to the landfill itself is at the whim of the operators, though a dirt road runs along the south and east sides and offers reasonable looks at part of the population, at least in the morning. The trash is piled right up to the fence, so many of the birds are quite close. In the afternoons one can stand on the Pennington Avenue bridge over Cabin Branch and scope thousands of gulls on the water or ice. The sidewalk is wide, but trucks are abundant.

2. Fort Armistead Park -- At the southwest end of the Francis Scott Key (outer harbor) Bridge. There is a private landfill from the other side of the highway, with no access. From the park a small number of gulls (3-400) can be seen on the water. There is the possibility of winter waterfowl at the same location, though results have been spotty. The State may construct a prison on the spot.

3. South Baltimore General Hospital -- At the south end of the Hanover Street Bridge. From the parking lot one can scope a great

number of gulls and waterfowl. The landfill is $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to the west, but is not generally accessible. Most of the gulls spend some time during the day in the water near the hospital. Species total here is the second highest recorded in the area. Nearby Waterview Avenue and Swann Park offer good looks at waterfowl, gulls, and terns. Red-necked Grebe, Ruddy Duck, and Red-breasted Merganser have been most consistent here.

4. Back River Sewage Treatment Plant -- The best by far, both for access and viewing. On Rt. 150 (Eastern Ave.), 500 yards east of the Baltimore Beltway (Rt. 695). A sight guide to the location has already appeared in Baltimore Chapter Newsletter No. 168. Briefly, it has three components that make it almost ideal for wintering and migrant gulls. The Sewage Plant, with the large circular settling tanks and sludge piles; a huge PRIVATE landfill (DO NOT trespass, birders are not welcome); and the river, often frozen in winter and narrow enough to offer excellent viewing. The place from which to watch is the plant itself. It is operated by the city, and birders are free to visit during daylight hours. In spring and fall shore-birds, terns and landbirds are often numerous.

NUMBERS

This is a guessing game, and the figures run a very wide gamut. Unfortunately it does not suffice to say that there are a lot of birds. For the entire area the total figure runs anywhere from 18,000 to 100,000 depending on whose opinion one seeks. The following figures are ours, arrived at after almost a dozen different counts at various times during the season, and careful consultation with other birders who spent time in the area. These are maximum estimates for all species of gulls.

1. Pennington - 7,500 to 10,000
 2. Fort Armistead - 5,000 to 6,000
 3. South Baltimore - 15,000 to 18,000
 4. Back River - 25,000 to 35,000
 5. Other minor locations - 5,000 to 7,500
- Total: 57,500 to 76,500

Not all these birds are here at the same time, as is evidenced by species ebb and flow during migration. When we look at how the common species come and go, a clearer picture emerges.

1. Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) - Abundant at all locations in winter. Arrives later in the season and leaves earlier than most others.

2. Ring-billed Gull (*L. delawarensis*) - Peak in December and March. By April they are easily the most common gull, especially at Back River.

3. Bonaparte's Gull (*L. philadelphia*) - The Sewage Plant in spring is the place, with as many as 4,000 at one time. Very scattered

elsewhere, less common in the fall. Usually rare or absent in January and February.

4. Greater Black-backed Gull (*L. marinus*) - Several hundred at each location, traveling with Herring Gulls generally.

5. Laughing Gull (*L. atricilla*) - A few hundred spring migrants at Back River, several thousand there in August - October.

RARE BIRDS

In any group of birds this large, an occasional oddity will occur if people look often enough. In the winter of 1977 they looked, and they found.

It started with an early morning call from a very excited Bob Ringler at Druid Lake. From then on it was only a question of how often people could get out, and how many new locations we would "discover." There were certainly enough birds to look at. The real problem was identification. Gulls may well be the least adequately described group of birds in the field guides. We soon realized that it would take an entire 300-page guide to cover the strange and difficult plumages, ages, molts and sequences we were seeing.

Before we look at the evolving picture of what was found, one piece of information will serve to put the gull picture in Baltimore in better perspective. Before this winter, only the 5 species of gulls listed above had ever been positively identified in Baltimore City and County. In the winter of 1898 F. C. Kirkwood saw an unidentified white-winged gull in the inner harbor. Though it was probably an Iceland, experts concluded from his description that other species were not excluded. Now, --

THE GREAT GULL CHASE

The beginning was that excited phone call from Bob Ringler on the 14th of January. His habit of stopping every morning and evening at Druid Lake had finally paid dividends. In the dim light of just barely dawn he had found and photographed an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*). The bird had a lead-gray mantle, pale yellow legs, was slightly smaller than a Herring Gull, and had a heavily streaked head. The only other person who managed to get there in time to see the bird was Mike Resch, much to the consternation of the rest of us. This obviously was going to be the "Bird of the Year."

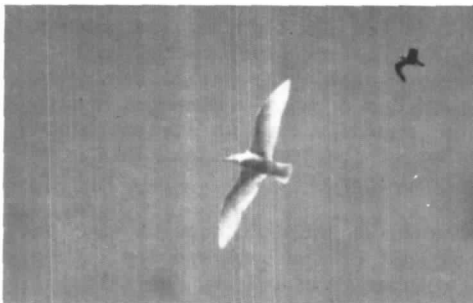
Bob waited exactly five days, and when we couldn't come up with the first bird, he produced a second, though not of the same species. When Jim Stasz and Mike Resch drove up to Druid at dawn and saw Bob taking pictures of the gulls they didn't get very excited. Anyone who has had the fortune (?) to see Bob's gull pictures knows he has a photograph of every one he has ever seen. When they found out what he was looking at the scopes appeared quickly. A first winter Iceland Gull (*Larus*

glaucoides). His photos represented the first documented record for the county. This bird was more co-operative, appearing the next day for another group of searchers. Meanwhile Mike and Jim were still searching for a Lesser Black-back. At South Baltimore General Hospital the same day they had to settle for a Peregrine Falcon, but at Cabin Branch of Curtis Creek their persistence was rewarded. Among the several thousand gulls sitting on the water was an adult Lesser. The only problem was that it obviously wasn't the same bird Bob had seen. The head was completely unstreaked, and the legs were deep yellow. There were two Lessers around!

At the time we thought February was a less exciting month, though we would find out later that we had missed one of the best birds of the winter. Lesser Black-backed Gulls were seen at South Baltimore General Hospital on the 4th by Benton Basham and on the 12th by Chuck Graham and John Wortman. On the 19th, while Steve Hardiman and David Williams were watching an Iceland Gull from the same location, Rick Blom stumbled across three (!) different Lesser Black-backs at a place called Back River, which was to receive a great deal more attention. It was three weeks into March before gull finding became exciting again.

If Jim Stasz and Peter Knight had not been sleepy on the morning of March 19th, they wouldn't have missed a turn on their way to meet another flock of birders, and they wouldn't have had to find a place to turn around, and they wouldn't have ended up on Diamond Point Road looking at a flock of gulls; and though they didn't have much time, something as startling as a second-year Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*) is quick to catch the eye. Another first county record! Although it was gone an hour later, Glaucous Gulls were found regularly and without real difficulty through the rest of the spring, with the last sighting being a first-year bird at North Point on April 30.

April was the month of the gull. Lesser Black-backs were seen almost daily at Diamond Point Road, with two together on the 12th (J. Stasz and John Trochet). Icelands were harder to find but still there, and Glaucous Gulls stayed through the 9th. In late March Bonaparte's Gulls



Glaucous Gull in second winter plumage at Pennington Landfill in Baltimore on Apr. 9, 1978. Photo by Robert Ringler



Adult Little Gull in winter plumage at Back River Sewage Treatment Plant on Apr. 6, 1977. Photo by Charles Eck

began filtering into Back River. On into April they came, and came, and came. By April 5th 4,000 birds were around the Sewage Plant. That night Hal Wierenga called to say he had seen a Little Gull (*Larus minutus*) flying past Sandy Point in a flock of Bonaparte's on April 2nd. That inspired Stasz to invite a group to join him at the Sewage Plant the next day to search for more rarities. At 2:30 p.m. on the 6th they arrived at the plant and immediately found what they were hoping for and didn't really expect: an adult winter-plumaged Little Gull. A camera appeared and Baltimore County had its ninth documented gull of the year. (Or so we thought.) When the word went out another stampede began. And the greatest good fortune fell to David Williams, who was waiting patiently at Diamond Point Road the next morning for the sun to come up. Shortly after dawn a small gull rose out of the flock, circled, and flew away. To David's mind, this is what he had been told to look for, a small gull with even grey wings above and dark below. Except that this bird had a full hood! The reports had emphatically insisted that the Little Gull seen at the Sewage Plant did not have a hood. So he waited, and sure enough, several minutes later he saw another bird, exactly the same except for its white head. Now content that he had seen the lifer he had come for, he headed home, though not before calling several people and causing considerable consternation.

Sure enough, there were two birds. That day, and on several days after, both were observed at leisure (and photographed) in the circular tanks at the Sewage Plant. Both birds were seen through the 11th.



Little Gull (left) and Bonaparte's Gull at Sewage Plant on Apr. 10, 1978
Photo by Robert Ringler

The best of all days, in many respects, was the 8th of April. The authors, among many others, spent the entire day at the Sewage Plant and Diamont Point Road. Steadily the list built. In mid-afternoon, while scoping the mud-flat on the river, we found ourselves with a Lesser Black-backed, an Iceland, and a Glaucous Gull, all in the scope at the same time! The 7th, 8th, and 9th species for the day! (Greater Black-backed, Glaucous, Iceland, Herring, Ring-billed, Laughing, Lesser Black-backed, Bonaparte's and Little)

On the 9th, only Stasz, Dave Holmes, and Hank Kaestner returned to the plant. While watching the Little Gulls in the tanks, Stasz looked up, and unbelievably, right over his head, was an adult, breeding plumaged Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)! After chasing it around the plant, pictures were secured and Baltimore County had its first Black-headed Gull. Almost. In letting people know the bird was around, we put in a call to Chuck Graham in Harford County, who ho-hummed and confided that he and John Wortman had seen one flying around the harbor on February 12! Incredible! At least until we received a call from Bob Augustine of Annapolis, who wanted to know what all the excitement was about, since he had seen one flying over the Hanover Street Bridge on December 30! He just hadn't known who to call locally to tell about it.



Black-headed Gull (left) with Bonaparte's Gull at Back River Sewage Plant on Apr. 9, 1977. Photo by James L. Stasz

On April 12th the Great Gull Chase ended, just as it had begun, with a bang (though not with a gull). On that morning Jim Stasz and John Trochet went to the Sewage Plant and found the gulls gone, at least 80% of them anyway. During the night they had pulled out and headed north, except for a few thousand stragglers that hung around the mouth of the harbor till mid-May; two Iceland Gulls favored us with a visit on the Statewide Bird Count on May 6. But on the 12th, try as they might, none of the rarities could be found except two Lesser Black-backs. At

Diamond Point Road however, was waiting the last, and best, surprise of the season. Sitting with the Forster's and Common Terns were two birds that didn't quite fit. Carefully the field marks were checked off: thin black bill, drooping slightly at the tip; even gray mantle, not darker near the wing tips; and a long white tail, extending at least 3 or 4 inches beyond the folded wing tips. Roseate Terns! Certainly the first county record, and the first inland record for the State, besides being a record early arrival! Both birds were closely watched at a distance of 75 yards, in good light, through 30x & 40x scopes, by observers familiar with the species. There could be no doubt. It was a fitting way to finish the season. The greatest misfortune was that only four observers had the pleasure of seeing them before they moved on. Maybe next year.

Only one bird remains unexplained. On April 30 the authors and Steve Sapperstein watched what appeared to be a white-winged gull in the water off North Point. What struck us about the bird was the small dark bill, and the gray webbing in the primaries and the gray-brown tail band. Could it have been a Thayer's? We don't know. Too little is known about not only Thayer's, but the molt sequences of Iceland and Herring Gulls. Certainly it was suggestive. Again, maybe next year.

THE TALLY

What did it all add up to: A quick rundown of the rare species reveals the following:

1. Glaucous Gull - The largest one day count was three birds, though not every location was checked carefully. Consistent with other reports from the region in recent years, most of the birds were in second-year plumage. Why this should be the rule is unknown to us.
2. Iceland Gull - First-year birds are the rule here, though an adult and a second-year bird were seen. The high count was five, and as many as ten were suggested.
3. Lesser Black-backed Gull - Between three and seven individuals wintered. Only birds with substantial amounts of adult plumage were considered, since according to British authorities, first-year birds are impossible to distinguish from Herring Gulls, even in the hand. Reports from around the region suggest they may be more numerous than previously thought as winter visitors and migrants. The other problem is one of races. *Larus fuscus graellsii* is the British race of the Lesser. *Larus fuscus fuscus*, the Scandinavian race, is a much darker bird, having a mantle color like a Greater Black-back. Its presence has not been confirmed in North America to the best of our knowledge, though one of the birds seen this winter was dark enough that some observers considered the possibility. Such a determination is probably not possible until we know for certain the range of plumage variation in each subspecies.
4. Black-headed Gull - Probably two birds, one in the harbor in winter and one in Back River in spring, though they could have been the

same. There was the slight possibility that two birds passed through in the spring, though no more than one was ever seen at once. If such large numbers of Bonaparte's Gulls show up at Back River each spring, then this is certainly a bird to be sought.

5. Little Gull - The same prognosis as the preceding is true for this species. At least two birds were seen, and it is possible that there were three individuals. Since they are now breeding on the Great Lakes, they should be of regular, if rare, occurrence.

A last word about identification and about the future. When scoping through a flock of 10,000 gulls, you can "find" anything. That doesn't mean it is there, just that something will look like any species you happen to be looking for, especially if you are using the standard field guides. The field guides will take care of most of the adult birds very nicely, but after that you are on your own. The format just does not permit field guides to deal with the bewildering array of plumages that most gulls are capable of displaying. It was not possible, even with the best resources available, to identify every gull. There were numerous birds that remained unidentified, combining plumage characteristics that just failed to make sense. Most of them didn't even make good "hybrids," a possibility more remote even than some of the bizarre things that were considered. The upshot is that the birder should search out every additional piece of information he or she can find about gulls before tackling large flocks. And don't automatically trust what is written just because the authors seem to know what they are saying. Look for information that confirms what they say. We found many things written in various sources that were just plain wrong.

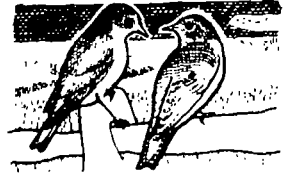
THE FUTURE

If you enjoy hours spent hunched over a scope in the biting wind, trying to discern the leg color of a sleeping gull at two hundred yards, the future is very bright. There is every reason to suppose that as long as the trash holds out, the birds will. And there is no reason whatsoever to suppose that the trash won't just keep coming. And will we just keep getting the same "old" stuff? Probably. And maybe more. After watching the gulls in the harbor for a winter, and the size of the migration passing through Back River, we concluded that we "missed" five expected species. There are five more species of gulls that could well show up here. After that, things will really get exciting.



9709 Branchleigh Rd., Randallstown 21133
and 3051 Guilford Ave., Baltimore 21218

Black-headed Gull at
Sewage Treatment Plant
on Mar. 21, 1978.
Photo by Robert Ringler



THE SEASON

BREEDING SEASON, JUNE 1 - JULY 31, 1977

Robert F. Ringler

Temperatures during June averaged 2 to 3 degrees below normal. Rainfall was variable, but near normal in most areas as light rains continued throughout the month separated by short dry periods of 2 or 3 days. Humidity and temperatures started reaching higher in the last week of the month and this trend continued into July which was dry during its first week. Light rains resumed for the remainder of the month, but precipitation was definitely below normal in all areas except the mountains where Hancock received nearly 8 inches of rain in July.

Grebes, Cormorants. Pied-billed Grebes are scarce breeders in the Piedmont Section of the State. A bird seen on a pond in the Worthington Valley of Baltimore County during July (Rick Blom, Mike Resch) may have been nesting. Double-crested Cormorants are seen in small numbers during the summer in tidewater areas. These are probably non-breeding vagrants rather than migrants. Sightings this year were 2 at Sandy Pt., Anne Arundel County on June 1 and one there on July 10 (Hal Wierenga), 5 at Neavitt on June 13 and 2 in Talbot County at the Cambridge bridge on June 27 (Jan Reese), 10 at Bloodsworth Is., Dorchester County on June 19 (Henry Armistead), and 3 flying south over Miller Is., Baltimore County on July 12 (Blom).

Hérons. Armistead reported the following census of heron nests at Holland Is., Dorchester County, June 19: 20 Great Blue Heron, 10 Green Heron, 45 Little Blue Heron, 40 Cattle Egret, 10 Great Egret, 50 Snowy Egret, 10 Louisiana Heron, 30 Black-crowned Night Heron, and 15 Yellow-crowned Night Heron. At other locations in Dorchester County Great Blue Heron nests totaled 22 at Barren Is. on June 4, 101 at Bloodsworth Is. on June 19, and 10 at Adam Is. on June 19; another 47 were at Deal Is. Wildlife Management Area, Somerset County on June 25. An additional 16 Great Egret nests were at Barren Is. June 4, but for the first time none bred at Bloodsworth Is. Wierenga reported up to 5 individual Great Egrets at Sandy Point during most of June and July. They appeared to be non-breeding, non-migrating summer visitors. In Calvert County, John Fales noted Cattle Egrets at Plum Point through most of the season, with a high count of 10 on June 20. Post-breeding dispersal brought a single Louisiana Heron to Sandy Point on July 20 (Wierenga) and 2 to Black Marsh, Baltimore County on July 28 (Blom). A Yellow-crowned Night Heron was seen at the Botanical Garden adjacent to Wheaton Regional Park in Montgomery County on June 18 by B. C. Getchell.

Ibises. Armistead reported that nesting of Glossy Ibis has declined substantially at the colonies he covered in Chesapeake Bay. He found 15 active nests at Holland Is., June 19. The irruption of White Ibis into the region is the first since 1972. All sightings were of immature birds. The first report came from Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Prince Georges County, where Woody Martin found one on July 2. Observations at Patuxent continued through Sept. 18 (Brooke Meanley), with 5 birds present on Aug. 5 (Danny Bystrak). Another was feeding in the backyard of Chan Robbins in Laurel on July 3. Other birds arrived in Anne Arundel County, where Shirley Geddes reported 2 at Bayside Beach on July 4 and Bob Patterson found 1 near Crofton the same day. The latter was joined by a second bird on the 5th. Jim Orgain watched 6 soaring northward near Baltimore-Washington International Airport on July 9. This was the largest group seen. Hank Kaestner found one at the north end of Loch Raven, Baltimore County, on July 11. This bird was last seen July 17, soaring away to the northward. Another for Baltimore County was a fly-by at Black Marsh on July 18 (Blom).

Waterfowl, Raptors, Rails. A flock of 23 Canada Geese was at West Ocean City, July 23 (Robert Warfield). On June 25 at Deal Is., Armistead counted about 80 Gadwalls including females with broods of 3 and 7 young. Another female with 7 young was at Fairmount Wildlife Management Area, Somerset County, the same day. Armistead also reported a new summer location for Gadwall when he saw a pair at Barren Is., Dorchester County, June 4. The same day he also found Blue-winged Teal there for the first time, also a pair. On June 25 he reported a female Green-winged Teal at Deal Is. and, at Fairmount, a female Blue-winged Teal with 9 young. Late migrant or summer vagrant diving ducks included a drake Greater Scaup on Druid Lake, Baltimore City, June 15 (Blom), 2 Surf Scoters in Talbot County, June 2 (Reese), 6 Ruddy Ducks (2 male, 2 female, and 2 immature males) at the Back River Sewage Plant, Baltimore County, and 5 others in Baltimore harbor through the summer (Blom), and Red-breasted Mergansers with one each at Sandy Point, June 15 (Wierenga), Adam Is., Dorchester County, June 19 (Armistead), North Pt., Baltimore County, July 6 (Blom), and West Ocean City, July 19 (Warfield). On June 4 in Dorchester County, Armistead found raptors in new locations when he flushed an adult Black Vulture from the undergrowth on Barren Is. and watched a Sharp-shinned Hawk fly by east of Blackwater Refuge. On June 19 he counted 28 active Osprey nests at Bloodsworth Is., including one on the target ship in Northeast Cove and one on a target, wrecked helicopter. Wierenga found no nesting Black Rails at Sandy Point, but 1 or 2 were heard calling in Black Marsh, about 15 miles to the north, during July. Fales observed an American Coot at Chesapeake Beach, Calvert County, on June 8, and 2 were on a pond in Sparrows Point, Baltimore County, July 14 (Blom).

Shorebirds. See Armistead's article in the previous issue of *Maryland Birdlife* for details of American Oystercatchers nesting in Chesapeake Bay. A Lesser Golden Plover at Sandy Point on July 30 was an exceptionally early fall migrant for that species (Wierenga). June records of Black-bellied Plover included 19 at Barren Is., June 4 (Armistead), 2 at Sandy Point, June 9 (Wierenga), 1 in Talbot County, June 13 (Reese), and 1 in Somerset County at Fairmount WMA, June 25 (Armistead).

Another early rarity at Sandy Point was a **Marbled Godwit** on July 25 (Wierenga). The first fall migrant **Whimbrel** was seen at West Ocean City on July 8 (Warfield); another 4 on **Pleasure Is.**, Baltimore County July 25 (Blom) were unusual for the Upper Chesapeake. Three **Lesser Yellowlegs** at Fairmount, **June 25** (Armistead), were three days earlier than the State fall arrival record. A **Solitary Sandpiper** at the north end of Loch Raven, Baltimore County, July 3 (Resch), was another early migrant, while 2 **Willetts** on June 1 and a **Spotted Sandpiper** on June 6 were late spring birds at Sandy Point (Wierenga). A June 30 **Willet** on **Pleasure Is.** (Blom, Resch) was out of place. A high count of **Ruddy Turnstones** for so late was 18 on **Barren Is.**, June 4 (Armistead). A **Short-billed Dowitcher** June 19 at **Holland Is.** (Armistead) may have been a non-breeding summer vagrant. Two **Red Knots** on June 9 at Sandy Point (Wierenga) were late and 70 **Semipalmated Sandpipers** on **Barren Is.** on June 4 (Armistead) constituted a high count. Three **Dunlins** at Sandy Point on June 15 (Wierenga) were quite late, but another 6 in **Northeast Creek**, Baltimore County, July 26 (Kaestner) were extremely early fall birds. On July 22 Blom found a **Ruff** in **Northeast Creek**. During the following four days numerous other observers were able to pick it out from among the oiled **Lesser Yellowlegs**. Reportedly, it was last seen on July 25 by Peter Knight and Bob Bullock from England with David Holmes as it flew past the Back River Sewage Plant. There is only one other July record for the State.

Gulls, Terns. Wierenga counted 29 **Greater Black-backed Gulls** at Sandy Point, July 25. See the article by Armistead on the first breeding record of **Herring Gulls** in **Dorchester County**. Wierenga noted juvenile **Ring-billed Gulls** with adults at Sandy Point, July 22. They are not known to breed in Maryland. Also at Sandy Point were 2,400 **Laughing Gulls** on June 9 and 2 very late immature **Bonaparte's Gulls** June 1. One **Forster's Tern** at **Poplar Is.**, **Talbot County** on June 5 (Reese), was away from known nesting areas. Armistead reported a new breeding locality for **Common Terns** at **Holland Is.**, **Dorchester County**, where he found 21 nests with eggs or young on June 19. Another nest with 3 eggs was in nearby **Tar Bay** on June 4. On **Barren Is.** he found only one pair of **Little Terns** (possibly non-breeding) where there had been large colonies the past two years. However, on shell islands in **Tar Bay** on June 4 there were 59 nests with eggs. Because of human disturbance **Little Terns** failed to nest at Sandy Point for only the second time in over a decade. A new colony was discovered on **Pleasure Is.** in **Baltimore County**, where about 40 pairs nested and young were seen on July 12 (Blom). **Royal Terns** rarely get very far north in **Chesapeake Bay**. In **Talbot County** Reese noted two **Royals** at **Poplar Is.** on June 5 and an immature at **Broad Creek** on June 13. On June 9, under strong southwest winds and rainy conditions, Wierenga observed 3 **Royal Terns**, 11 **Caspian Terns**, and 3 **Black Skimmers** at Sandy Point. Other summer reports of **Caspian Terns** were about 100 at **Cedar Is.**, **Somerset County**, June 24 (Armistead), 7 at **Cornersville**, **Dorchester County**, June 27 (Reese), and 40 at **Miller Is.**, **Baltimore County**, July 12 (Blom). **Caspian Terns** are not known to nest in Maryland, but such large and widespread numbers in summer may indicate that they actually do, or may soon do so. Further evidence came from Sandy Point, where Wierenga observed several food-begging juveniles with adults. His high count was 7 birds on July 16.

Unusual summer records of Black Terns were a breeding-plumage bird on July 9 at Miller Is., Baltimore County (Blom, Steve Simon), and one at West Ocean City, July 18 (Warfield). About 100 Black Skimmers were at Cedar Island WMA south of Crisfield, June 24 (Armistead).

Barn Owls, Goatsuckers, Kingfishers, Woodpeckers. The Barn Owls at Irish Grove Sanctuary had one young and 5 eggs in the barn on Apr. 22, and in Mountain Lake Park, Garrett County, a pair nesting in a tree had 2 downy young and 3 eggs on May 29. Chuck-will's-widows may be extending their range. Possible breeding birds have been heard in Baltimore County in the pines in Black Marsh (Blom) and in Washington County at Indian Springs WMA. A late migrant Common Nighthawk was flying over Annapolis on June 7 (Wierenga). As an indicator of losses of certain species during the past severe winter I have taken the totals from Breeding Bird Surveys throughout the State and compared the figures for 1976 and 1977. Belted Kingfishers have shown a 73% decrease in that one year. Red-headed Woodpeckers are down 18%.

Flycatchers, Swallows. Eight Eastern Kingbirds at Sandy Point on June 1 were very late migrants, and an early fall bird was there on July 8, followed by increasing numbers, up to 15, during the rest of the month (Wierenga). Breeding Bird Surveys showed that numbers of Eastern Phoebes are down 49% from 1976. Charles Hills reported singing Yellow-bellied Flycatchers in Garrett County at Mt. Nebo WMA and Muddy Creek Falls on June 2. These were probably late migrants. An Acadian Flycatcher singing in the middle of Barren Is., Dorchester County on June 4 was a surprise for Armistead because the area is almost pure loblolly pine forest. More late spring migrants at Sandy Point were a Bank Swallow, 2 Rough-winged Swallows, and 5 Purple Martins on June 6. Going the other way on June 25 were 2 Bank, 50 Barn, and 375 Rough-winged Swallows coming to roost in the phragmites at dusk (Wierenga). High swallow counts there during July were 500 Banks on the 22nd, and 200 Trees, 400 Banks, 400 Barns, and 35 Purple Martins on the 30th.

Creepers, Wrens, Thrushes, Vireos. On Apr. 23 Fran Pope observed a pair of Brown Creepers nest-building under the bark of a small dead white pine, eight feet from the ground at Herrington Manor, Garrett County. Nests of this species are rarely found in the State. Another was singing at Bellevue, Talbot County, on June 20 (Armistead). In sheer numbers the Carolina Wren probably suffered more than any other species during the past winter. This is well documented by the Breeding Bird Surveys which show a 68% decrease from 1976. The Eastern Bluebird was also hard hit, losing 31% according to the BBS results. Late spring Swainson's Thrushes were the 2 over Annapolis, June 5 (Wierenga). On July 24 Holmes found a Hermit Thrush in eastern Garrett County, which may signify a slight eastward expansion from its known breeding area near Swallow Falls. Moving westward could be the White-eyed Vireo, as Holmes also found an immature of this species the same day at Carey Run Sanctuary.

Warblers. A male Prothonotary Warbler near Loch Raven, Baltimore County, during June and July may be indicative of a new breeding locale (Blom). Numerous migrant warblers were observed into June. These in-

cluded 2 singing male Tennessees near Mt. Nebo WMA, Garrett County, June 2 (Hills); a Magnolia south of Chestertown, Kent County, June 1 (Floyd Parks), and another at Sandy Spring, Montgomery County, June 5 (John Weske); 2 singing male Cape Mays near Oakland, Garrett County, June 2 (Hills); a Blackburnian south of Chestertown, June 1 (Parks) and another singing at Myrtle Grove WMA, Charles County, June 3 (Leonard Teuber); a singing male Bay-breasted at Muddy Creek Falls, Garrett County, June 2 (Hills); a Blackpoll at Sandy Point, June 9 (Wierenga), and a singing male in Ocean City, June 11 (Evan & Ives Hannay); a singing male Wilson's near Oakland, June 2 (Hills); and 2 American Redstarts at Sandy Point, June 5 (Wierenga). Both the Tennessee and Cape May Warblers are record late spring departure dates for the State, by 3 days and 1 day respectively. A Tennessee Warbler at Carey Run Sanctuary July 24 broke the State fall arrival record by two weeks (Holmes), and is the only July record in Maryland. A Yellow Warbler in Wierenga's backyard in Annapolis on July 8 was probably another early fall transient. According to BBS data the Pine Warbler showed a decrease in population of 27% from 1976, indicating that this species, which regularly winters farther north than most warblers, may have suffered during the recent cold period.

Icterids, Finches. Five Bobolinks flying over Sandy Point on June 15 were extremely late for the spring, and one there July 8 was extremely early for the fall (Wierenga). Two singing, displaying males east of Thurmont on June 28 may well have been breeding or attempting, in light of the recent increases on the piedmont of Pennsylvania (Bystrak). Armistead noted some late nests of Red-winged Blackbirds at Bellevue, Talbot County. On July 30 he found a nest with 2 young and 2 other nests with 3 eggs each, one of which still had 3 eggs in it on Aug. 13 and 14 with a female present. It is not known if the nest was successful, but Aug. 14 is the latest previous viable egg date for the State. Wierenga observed a probable migrant Northern Oriole in Annapolis on June 4. On a BBS in Dorchester County Armistead found a singing male Rose-breasted Grosbeak near Golden Hill on June 5, exceptionally late for this bird to be on the Eastern Shore. A belated report from Kaestner of a Black-headed Grosbeak in late May was an adult male which flew directly over his head while he was bicycling in northern Baltimore County. No Dickcissels were reported this year. House Finches are continuing their advance through the State. Wierenga and Paul Bystrak found juveniles at their feeders in Annapolis and Gambrills, respectively, through the summer, Holmes found 2 on a BBS in Cumberland, Allegany County, June 16, and Warfield saw 1 at West Ocean City, July 7. They are present throughout the summer from Garrett to Worcester Counties, but, unfortunately, not very well reported.

Sparrows. Notable reports of breeding sparrows came from several areas. Holmes reported at least 3 singing Henslow's Sparrows south of Accident, Garrett County, July 23 in the evening. Seaside and Swamp Sparrows may have expanded their range. Several pairs of each were noted on Miller Is., Baltimore County, July 12 (Blom). Hills reported a pair of White-throated Sparrows, including a singing male, at Mt. Nebo WMA, Garrett County, June 2.

TRIP REPORT - DELMARVA PENINSULA

Jim Stasz

The first MOS fall Listers' Trip, through the Delmarva Peninsula, yielded a total of 131 species on October 23-25, 1976. Although the total species list was lower than the leaders' expectation of 150, a few unexpected sightings made up for a long list of "missed" birds.

The parking lot at Bombay Hook Refuge provided a fine start with the finding of a singing White-crowned Sparrow (a new species for several Delaware lists), the only Barn Swallow of the trip, our first Bald Eagle of the trip; and a patch of woods nearby provided a pair of Barn Owls, one of which obliged us by perching for a few minutes. The only Merlin of the trip was a male that flew in front of the lead car while we were canvassing along Shearneck Pool. Unfortunately, this bird was missed by many in the tail of the line.

Little Creek was a disappointment, as the impoundment was too deep for shorebirds and the waterfowl were far in the center. This area was not a total loss, as a couple of Sharp-shinned Hawks put on a little dog-fight with a Cooper's Hawk--a nice chance to compare these two similar species.

Cape Henlopen, Delaware, proved to be the location of our first surprises. We had hoped to pick up a few unusual wintering gulls and some shorebirds. We did not find the hoped-for gulls; the shorebirds were not those we had anticipated. Two Baird's Sandpipers brought a bit of excitement as they walked about and allowed comparison with Sanderlings, Dunlins, a Pectoral, and a "White-rumped" sandpiper. The "White-rump" was called out by someone (who shall remain nameless) who caught the primary field mark (the white rump) as the bird flew in. I glanced at the bird, and with the rear view I had did not suspect anything amiss until the bird turned its head. The bill was as long as a Dunlin's and curved downward throughout its length - a Curlew Sandpiper!

Our first day ended at Gordon's Pond at Cape Henlopen, with Snow Geese swirling overhead and flocks of all three species of scoters streaming down the coast.

The second day started in the thickets behind the Fenwick Inn at Fenwick Island, Maryland. With a dismal sky, dribbles of rain, and a strong breeze, the weather was against us all day. Stops at 120th and 4th Streets on the bay side of the barrier beach yielded Horned Larks, American Bittern, Common Snipe, Virginia Rail and a few terns. A distant elusively diving Red-throated Loon was a life-lister for one leader and a year-bird for the other.

The Inlet at Ocean City exposed birders to the elements. The birds were smarter and stayed away. Two members of the group caught a glimpse of the only Bonaparte's Gull of the trip. The Purple Sandpipers had not

yet arrived. Minutes after the group broke up for a rest stop before reforming on the Route 50 causeway in West Ocean City a Peregrine Falcon buzzed across the mouth of the Inlet and skimmed the length of the south jetty before vanishing among the Assateague Island dunes. This fine addition was species number 100 on the trip list.

The West Ocean City pond had flocks of Canvasbacks, Ring-necked Ducks, and a Bufflehead in addition to the usual dabbling ducks. A Black-crowned Night Heron sat in a willow tree while a Common Gallinule moved in and out of the cattail edgings.

South Point afforded a chance for some land birds. Numbers were high (Myrtle Warblers), but diversity was low. An immature Sharp-shinned Hawk buzzed the dickey-birds in a multiflora rose hedge before perching on a telephone wire in full view of the group.

The party broke ranks for the drive to Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge on the Virginia coast and reassembled at the Visitor's Center. The predicted 4 mph wind was an order of magnitude higher than this. A Royal Tern in full flight was able only to remain where it was, while flying Snowy Egrets moved backward. Brant, American Oystercatcher and Lesser Scaup were added to the tally. A nice group of Long-billed Dowitchers generated a discussion of the field marks of this overlooked species. While one group scoured the dunes in a vain search for previously reported Brewer's Blackbirds, John Trochet and Bob Ringler found an immature Northern Gannet (much to the chagrin of this writer, who needed this bird for his year-list).

The third day began at the Chincoteague Visitors' Center with a steady heavy drizzle. Undeterred by the poor visibility a sharp observer found a lovely Cape May Warbler among a cloud of kinglets and Myrtle Warblers. We then abandoned Chincoteague in favor of moving in a home-ward direction. A stop at Deal Island introduced this out-of-the-way but excellent birding location and provided a feeding stop for hordes of mosquitoes, which turned away even the fanatical birders.

While on the way to the rendezvous at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge a few members were lucky to find another highlighter of the trip--a Western Kingbird. As usual with kingbirds, it sat on a telephone wire for a few minutes, then flew and landed again a few telephone poles away. We moved along to the appointed meeting place a few miles away to alert the group, but a scout who rushed back to search for the bird was unsuccessful.

Blackwater gave us good views of the perennial Bald Eagles, thousands of Canada Geese, and a hundred or so of the Blue phase of the Snow Goose. Persevering Bob Ringler screeched up a Brown Creeper. A cruise along Wildlife Drive gave us the last of our really good birds--a second Western Kingbird. Like the first one, it too disappeared too quickly for most of the group.

1979

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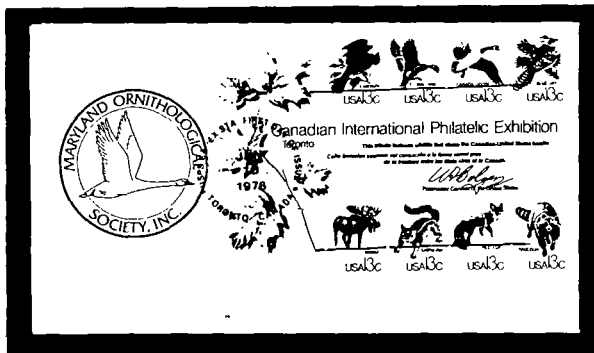
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BOOK REVIEWS

EAGLES OF THE WORLD

Leslie Brown. 1977. Universe Books, N.Y. 224pp., 40 halftones, 20 line cuts, 12 charts. \$12.50.

Reading *Eagles of the World* will give you a more nearly complete picture than any world-wide trip you could take in search of eagles... their physical characteristics, their breeding and nesting behavior, their development to maturity, and the status of their populations in our changing world. The book has a bibliography, an index, many lovely photographs, and 4 appendices charting much of Brown's findings for easy comparison of the many kinds of eagles.

While Leslie Brown has discovered an abundance of information about eagles, his recurring statement "There must be more study" underscores how much more there is to know about these spectacular birds that prefer the high crags and lonely places of the world. A man who can say, "Life would be poorer for me and for many others if we could not sometimes see an eagle and revel in its aerial mastery," and who can also present charts, graphs and maps to clarify his discoveries, deserves to have his book read by both the serious ornithologist and the serious birdwatcher.

No longer completely satisfied with seeing the eagles at Blackwater Refuge, I've now set my sights for at least a Verreaux's Eagle in the Matopos Hills in Rhodesia and a Monkey-eating Eagle in the Philippines. I've left the publisher's complimentary copy at Irish Grove Sanctuary and hope you'll have a chance to read it the next time you're there.

Joy Wheeler

WATCHING BIRDS, An Introduction to Ornithology

Roger F. Pasquier. 1977. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. 301pp. \$9.95.

Someone with an already well developed interest in watching birds may be the wrong person to review this book. How can an MOS member be objective about a book with the title "Watching Birds" and a foreword by Roger Tory Peterson? The book's subtitle may be meant to indicate that a complete range of ornithological subjects is covered, enough to satisfy a beginning student or a curious hobbyist, but that the more specialized technicalities for advanced students are omitted. This is exactly the way it is. It wasn't difficult for me, a confirmed watcher of birds but only a sometime student, to read through the entire book, reinforcing things I've learned, refreshing my memory on some points, and being introduced to many ideas, without being baffled by the purely scientific. The beautifully clear black and white drawings, maps, and diagrams by Margaret La Farge are valuable additions to the book, aesthetically as well as for the information they present. The appendix includes lists of suggested readings for each chapter, a list of ornithological and conservation organizations (no mention of MOS, unfortunately) and an index. It's available at the MOS Bookstore.

Joy Wheeler

HOUSE SPARROWS AS BLUEBIRD FOSTER PARENTS

Anne Sturm and Lawrence Zeleny

Bluebird trail operators frequently encounter clutches of eggs that have been deserted. Following are some of the reasons for these desertions:

1. Death of the female bluebird. The male, lacking a brood patch, does not contribute to the incubation of the eggs.
2. Death of the male bluebird. Under this circumstance the female will often abandon the eggs, but if the incubation is well advanced she will usually continue unaided with the incubation of the eggs and the rearing of the young.
3. Excessive harassment or eviction of the bluebirds from their nest by competing species.
4. Inability of the female to produce a clutch of more than 1 or 2 eggs. Single egg clutches are usually abandoned and clutches of only 2 eggs are often abandoned.
5. Infertility.

Eggs that are abandoned for any of the above reasons except infertility may sometimes be profitably salvaged and transferred to other nests or incubated artificially. Artificial incubation of bluebird eggs and hand rearing of the young birds to maturity is possible but generally impractical for most bluebird trail operators. The techniques for accomplishing this are quite involved and are beyond the scope of this article.

Bluebird eggs should never be removed from their original nests unless one is certain that they have been abandoned, keeping in mind that the eggs are normally left unattended in the nests until the penultimate or last egg of the clutch is laid and sometimes for a day or two longer. It must also be remembered that even after incubation has started the eggs may be left unattended for periods of as long as two hours, especially on very warm days.

Fertile bluebird eggs that have not been incubated will usually remain viable for at least a week. After incubation has been started, however, the embryos are likely to perish within a few hours if the eggs are not kept warm. These facts should be kept in mind in assessing the possibility of the successful salvaging of abandoned eggs.

The best chances for success in this kind of salvage operation occur when the abandoned eggs are transferred to other active bluebird nests. Unincubated eggs should be placed in nests containing incomplete or just completed clutches. Partially incubated eggs

should be placed in nests with eggs that have been incubated for approximately the same length of time. In this way the eggs in any nest should all hatch at nearly the same time and the nestlings can then compete on equal terms for the food supplied by the adult birds. To avoid overcrowding, not more than 6 or 7 eggs should be in any nest.

If no other suitable bluebird nest is available in which to place salvaged eggs, consideration may be given to utilizing the nest of some other species. An interesting experiment of this kind was conducted by one of us (A.S.) during the spring of 1977.

House Wrens (*Troglodytes aedon*) on May 11 successfully evicted a pair of Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) from a nesting box on a bluebird trail near Barnesville, Maryland. The bluebird nest contained 5 recently laid eggs, one of which had already been broken by the wrens. Since the wrens were in full control of the box and the bluebirds had abandoned it, the 4 unbroken eggs were removed. One of these was broken in the process of cleaning it, since it was badly soiled by the dried yolk of the other broken egg.

No bluebird nest with freshly laid eggs was available at the time, but one of the nesting boxes on the trail contained a House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) nest with a partial clutch of 3 eggs. After a telephone conference on the matter it was decided to remove the sparrow eggs and replace them with the 3 remaining bluebird eggs. This was done on May 12.

On the following day, May 13, the nest was examined. The bluebird eggs were intact and were accompanied by another sparrow egg. This was followed by still another sparrow egg on May 14, the final egg of the clutch. It was decided not to remove these last two sparrow eggs, so the mixed clutch consisting of 3 bluebird eggs and 2 sparrow eggs was left in care of the sparrows. The sparrows proceeded normally with the task of incubation.

One of the bluebird eggs hatched on May 24, 12 days after placement in the sparrow nest. Since the normal incubation period for bluebird eggs is 13 or 14 days, it appears that the bluebird eggs may have been incubated a day or two before the bluebirds were evicted from their nest. Four days later, on May 28, one of the sparrow eggs hatched. None of the remaining eggs of either species hatched.

On June 8 the single bluebird nestling was found to be in excellent condition and nearly full grown, but the sparrow nestling had disappeared. Presumably it had been unable to compete with the much larger and older bluebird nestling, and had died and had been removed by the adult sparrows.

The nest was again examined on June 9. The bluebird nestling was 16 days old and appeared ready to fledge. Bluebird nestlings usually fledge at the age of 17 or 18 days. On June 15 the nest was found to be empty as would be expected. Since there was no sign that

predation had occurred all evidence indicated that the nestling had fledged successfully approximately on schedule. Several times later a single juvenile bluebird was seen in the vicinity of the nesting box and was presumed to be the one raised by the sparrow foster parents.

From a strictly scientific standpoint the experiment was not considered a complete success. But the results obtained do point the way toward a possible new means by which abandoned bluebird eggs can be saved and used to help increase the population of the species. This may be the only case on record in which House Sparrows have proved to be an asset rather than a liability on a bluebird trail.

Box 341, Barnesville 20703
4312 Van Buren St., Hyattsville 20782



NOTES ON BEHAVIOR OF RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER

John H. Fales

At 8 a.m. on the clear and cold (20°F.) morning of February 8, 1977 at Plum Point, Maryland, I was startled to hear a rapid high-pitched woodpecker-like hammering. I examined the immediate area and located a male Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) perched on a television aerial mounted on a chimney of a house. Several more times I watched this bird hammering loudly on the metal pipe supporting the aerial. Hammering on metal by this species is an unusual activity that I had not observed before during many years of bird study in Maryland.

At 11 a.m. on the following day in a nearby wooded area while I was watching a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) feeding on sap from holes in a trunk of a maple tree, a male Red-bellied Woodpecker flew in and dislodged the sapsucker and proceeded to feed on the sap. This unusual behavior has been reported by McGuire (1932). Bent (1939) mentioned that the Red-bellied Woodpecker in Florida, "damaged the orange trees by boring holes in them and sucking the sap." This was the first time I had observed this feeding behavior of the Red-bellied Woodpecker.

Literature Cited

- Bent, A. C. 1939. Life Histories of North American Woodpeckers. *U.S. Nat'l Mus. Bull.* 174. 334 p.
McGuire, N. M. 1932. A Red-bellied Woodpecker robs a Sapsucker. *Wilson Bull.* 44: 39.

Ridge Road, Neeld Estate, Huntingtown 20639



COMING EVENTS

- Oct. 3 BALTIMORE Ornithology course. Mark Catesby: Colonial Naturalist by David Thorndill. Cylburn Mansion, 8 pm.
- 5 BALTIMORE Trip to Soldiers' Delight, 1 pm. Jean Worthley.
- 6 ANNE ARUNDEL Monthly Meeting. David Holmes. County Library, 8 pm
- 7-9 DELMARVA LISTERS' TRIP. Meet Bombay Hook Refuge, 8 am. Bob Ringler & Chan Robbins. Register Dr. Poscover 823-2548
- 7-9 ANNE ARUNDEL Trip to Brigantine & Cape May. Bill Battin.
- 12 BALTIMORE Lake Roland walk. Meet 8 am, Robert E. Lee Park foot-bridge. Mrs. Walter Bohanan.
- 14 BALTIMORE Trip to Fort Howard. Meet 8 am, Eastern Ave. entrance to Eastpoint Mall. Jim Stasz & Bob Ringler.
- 14 ANNE ARUNDEL Mystery trip, 7:30 am. Ellen Gizzarelli 674-9501.
- 15 BALTIMORE Trip to Gunpowder River. Meet 7:30 near self-service P.O., Towson Plaza, Dulaney Valley Rd. & Fairmount Ave.
- 20 BALTIMORE Audubon Wildlife Film, American Heartland, Walt Berlet. Dumbarton Jr. High, W of 7000 blk York Rd, 8 pm.
- 21 BALTIMORE Trip to Liberty Lake. Meet Carrolltowne Shopping Center, Rt. 26, Eldersburg, 7:30. Steve Hardiman.
- 21 ANNE ARUNDEL Gambrills Power Line Trail hike. Ty Tydings 267-7748
- 22 BALTIMORE Trip to Lily Pons & Monument Knob. Meet Security Square Mall, Security Blvd; enter from Beltway Exit 17, 8:30 am. Bradley Lear.
- 22 BALTIMORE Come-as-you-are Tea. Switzerland (West) by Joseph & Mary Brown. County Library, Towson, 2:45 pm.
- 27 BALTIMORE Fall Social Evening. Our Magnificent Birds of Prey, Maurice Broun. Grace United Methodist Church, N. Charles St. & W. Belvedere, 8 pm. Reservations 486-3442.
- Nov. 2 BALTIMORE Tree walk, Cylburn, 10 am. Gordon Filbey.
- 3 ANNE ARUNDEL Monthly meeting. Shorebirds at Chincoteague, Claudia Wilds. Anne Arundel Library, West St., Annapolis, 8 pm.
- 5 BALTIMORE Trip to Blackwater Refuge. Refuge headquarters, 9:45 am
- 7 BALTIMORE Ornithology course. Herons as Biological Indicators by Philip Creighton. Cylburn, 8 pm.
- 10 ANNE ARUNDEL Trip to Blackwater Refuge. 7:30 am. Bill Battin.
- 11 BALTIMORE Trip to Phoenix. Meet site of old Phoenix RR Sta, 7:30.
- 18 ANNE ARUNDEL Trip to Sandy Point State Park, 7:30. H. Wierenga.
- 18 BALTIMORE Trip to Piney Run. Meet CSC (see Oct. 21), 7:30.
- 25 BALTIMORE Trip to Eastern Neck Refuge & Remington Farms. Meet at Rock Hall wharf, 10 am. Rodney Jones.
- 26 BALTIMORE Come-as-you-are Tea. A Trip through Dolly Sods, Elmer & Jean Worthley. County Library, Towson, 2:45 pm.

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Published Quarterly by the Maryland Ornithological Society, Inc.
to Record and Encourage the Study of Birds of Maryland

Editor: Chandler S. Robbins, 7900 Brooklyn Bridge Road,
Laurel, Md. 20810 (725-1176)

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