



MOONWATCH

The local moonwatch this past month had its ups and downs. Sunday, Oct. 19 was overcast but the clouds were moving fast and it was hoped that they would disappear. But alas! No moon.

Monday, Oct. 20 was definitely cooler and the moon beautiful. We set up two stations, one 100 yards from the other with Bob Herndon manning the outpost. Despite the fun moonwatching can be frustrating in that the blink of an eye can cause one to miss the quick flight of a bird across the moon's face. Bob's count was 31 birds an hour while the main post clocked in 36 birds an hour. Based on an hour's count the following cities reported the following numbers of birds: Hagerstown 29, Frederick 33, Laurel 39, Severna Park 62, Annapolis 74, Cambridge no birds seen. These figures are very similar to the Sept. count. Why when the mainland has good solid reports are there so few birds seen on the other side of the bay? Perhaps more data will solve the question.

Tuesday, Oct. 21 the weather was very warm and the local birders outnumbered the birds with a bat and 2 birds seen. However, we were able to see two photos taken by Bill Flow of birds against the moon which he had taken during the September watch. For you doubters one is only a speck but the other an undeniable bird.

COMING EVENTS

In all cases the meeting place is Swansfield Elementary School.

November 13, Thursday - Evening Program at 7:45 - George Jonkel, head of the banding lab at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center will give a slide lecture on Antarctica including some interesting aspects of National Science Foundation projects going on there.

November 15, Saturday 7:30 am Scouting Trip to the Patuxent River State Park. Leader-Jay Sheppard. We have been invited to visit the park with the prospect of establishing some data on birdlife for the park authorities. Bring a lunch; this will be a 3/4 day trip.

December 6, Saturday 8am - Local Feeder Trip, Ashton area. Leader-Nan Rhineland. Morning only.

December 11, Thursday - Evening Program at 7:45 pm.

January 1 - Christmas Count - call Kris Krisnamoorthy (997-5967) by Dec. 10 if you would like to participate.

January 11, Sunday 7:30 am - Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge with the Sierra Club. Leader-Bob Herndon. All day trip so bring lunch, coffee, warm clothes. Highlights should include Snow and Canada geese, wintering ducks, and a bald eagle or two.

Board Meeting, Nov. 20 (date change) (Krisnamoorthy's, 5840 Alderleaf Place.

*Nan Rhineland
d: 2 4 10 1975*

An Unexpected Guest

On Sept. 8 a barn owl was turned over to the Rhinelanders. He couldn't fly due to an apparent broken wing. Chan Robbins referred us to a local authority whose family had sheltered a blind barn owl over the summer. Jim Ruos after inspecting the owl said that it had a compound fracture and needed a pin in its wing in order to mend properly. As a falconer he had on hand some frozen baby chicks which he generously gave us to start feeding the owl. One of the most difficult problems in harboring unusual wildlife is supplying a normal diet or some facsimile thereof. The second is that it is against the Federal Law to pick up dead, injured or homeless birds without a permit. (Excepted are English sparrows, starlings, and pigeons.) I had visions of being descended upon by angry Feds, and caught redhanded with an illicit owl.

First things first. The barn owl, Hootman, needed expert medical attention. Jim Ruos had estimated veterinary fees at about \$60. I called a bird specialist in Boy but he was not interested in donating his expertise. Therefore I picked up the cage and carted Hootman over to the local vet, a friend of long standing who agreed to give the wing "the old college try", and put a pin in the wing joint. He said that in two weeks Hootman would be able to fly if the wing mended as it should. He also gave me an antibiotic to counteract possible infection which was to be given twice a day orally. Temporarily we wrapped gauze around the owl's wing binding it to his body, while he snapped at us with his powerful bill. Adhesive tape would have pulled the feathers off but the Columbia Clinic willingly gave us the end of a light adhesive paper, just enough to do the job.

Even though Jim Ruos had thoughtfully clipped Hootman's talons he was a formidable adversary. Each time we handled him, particularly in the beginning we were frankly terrified of both his talons and his awesome beak. Whenever anyone approached the cage Hootman swayed back and forth. This seems to be an instinctive action designed to appease the aggressor. On opening the cage he retreated to a corner ready to use his claws in self defense. I feel certain that our fear of him in the beginning was communicated to him but as we became better able to cope he became less upset. However never in any way did he condone our outrageous behavior or attentions. To get him out of the cage we threw in a cloth into which he sank his talons. We then picked him up by the body. My husband held him and opened his beak while I force fed first the antibiotic dissolved in water with a dropper and then cubes of fatless beef. Whatever is put back in an owl's throat he seems to swallow involuntarily. Only on one occasion did he ever take the meat when offered. However, he did eat frozen chicks, frozen baby pilot blake snakes, newly dead moles and fresh killed mice left in his cage. He often made clicking noises when being fed. He disliked this operation intensely and glared at us with regal condescension.

Meanwhile I had written for an application for a special purpose permit and later filled out and sent in the forms. I felt certain that I wouldn't receive the permission but that perhaps Hootman would fly the coop before Larry Hood got to me!

After two weeks the day arrived to set Hootman loose. We were crushed; he seemed unable to rise more than two feet off the ground. On attempting to retrieve him he managed to sink both claws into my husband's hand. He let out the most unbelievable screech which continued at ear boggling decibels until we freed him from his clutch. To this day I'm not sure which bothered my husband more the pain of the sunken talons or the unearthly screaming.

After several trials, five days later at dusk Hootman flew off to some thick deciduous woods a hundred yards away. His wings were not precisely symmetrical but he was certainly ready to fend for himself. I don't know which of us was the most relieved and triumphant at his successful departure.

A week later I received a telephone call from Tom Thurman, Chief Law Enforcement Agent for Maryland and Delaware granting me a special purpose permit. I was delighted to report that the barn owl and the Rhinelanders had both reverted to their natural states.

Book Review

Confessions of a Bird Watcher. Roger Barton. McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York and other cities, c. 1974. \$7.95

Roger Barton, now retired, was employed in advertising. Fortuitously, this vocation required extensive travel in North America so that he could combine a lifelong interest in birds with his frequent business-related travel; in fact, one could not help wondering if sometimes the location of trips was not determined by the birding in the vicinity. For some twenty-five years he edited a column in a New Jersey newspaper entitled "Outdoors with Roger Barton."

The most valuable aspect of the book was Barton's description of birding areas in each major flyway he has visited, but this reviewer found the format of the book singularly unsettling. The ten chapters consist of brief descriptions of an area, bird, experience, etc. headed by boldface type ranging in length from one paragraph to a little more than a page. The Atlantic Flyway for instance, a chapter of 32 pages, contains no less than 42 separate subjects. Most of them would not even constitute a decent newspaper column. One no more becomes interested in a subject than it is dropped summarily. Perhaps his experience in the advertising milieu has formed his style but there is a pronounced lack of supportive detail or even the evidence of an inquiring mind which is roused to dig for a larger grasp of a subject. This is an excellent book for summer vacation reading. Because of its numerous headings it can be picked up for a few minutes or an hour and then left with no loss of continuity. To add books to my personal library I judge them in terms of long-term reference value or enduring literary quality. This book has precious little of either. If listing is in your blood it is worthwhile reading once; I would recommend borrowing a copy from the library rather than purchase.

Jo Solem

Sightings

This is only a highlight of the listing handed in this month. This portion of the newsletter is becoming increasingly popular. Our watcher on the lake, Martie Chestem reports 6 coot, 1 horned grebe, male and female ruddy ducks as well as a canvasback. Lucille Peters and others have seen both ruby-crowned and golden crowned kinglets. They seem to be attracted by insects swarming around the fruits of flowering crabs and hawthorns. Chris Krishnamoorthy reports white throated sparrows in late Sept., a solitary vireo, purple finch, blue grosbeak, a pied billed grebe, fox and white crowned sparrows, a brown creeper, dark eyed juncos and a water pipit. As if this were not enough to keep one birder happy, he also spotted an albino robin and a Lincoln sparrow. Rosamund Munro adds red and white breasted nuthatches, yellow rumped, Cape May, and Prairie warblers, a brown thrasher, catbird, and a phoebe. She was also visited by a red fox and 6 deer. Both she and Jo Solem saw 10 to 12 red cross bills. Jo also reports a winter wren, a yellow bellied sapsucker, a black throated green warbler, and a ruby throated hummingbird.