

HOWARD

MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

March - April 1977 VOL V NO 4

BIRDING '77 WORKSHOP - NATURE ARTS/CRAFTS DISPLAY & SALE

Saturday afternoon March 19 is the date for the fourth annual workshop jointly sponsored by the Howard County chapter of MOS and the Patuxent Bird Club which will be held at the Glenelg Country School on Folly Quarter Road.

The featured identification session this year will be "Fall Warblers and Vireos" by David Holmes. Fall warblers are a most confusing group of birds; no one can expect to learn more than a few every year so join this group to see some close-ups David has taken while banding. He is also one of the state's outstanding field birders so that it should be an interesting session.

Kathy Klimkiewicz, known to many Howard birders, will discuss the fascinating topic of "Habitat Birding". What can you expect to find if you visit certain areas? This approach may well add new birds to your life list if you find out where to look and what to expect or it may simply add to your enjoyment of birding trips.

"The Biology of Birds" by Stephen Simon promises to be an excellent introduction for those birders who have long forgotten high school or college biology or have never had an opportunity to find out what fascinating individuals birds are. Do terms about bird structure in your field guides puzzle you? Let Steve explain—bring your questions; he'll be glad to try to answer them.

"Birds as Pests" may be a thought you had never considered, but House Sparrows, Jackbirds of several species, Rock Doves and Starlings can all at times be included that category. What causes them to be considered pests and what is being done to reduce their impact on other species and people? Paul Bystrak will discuss this intriguing topic.

An addition to the Howard club's slide shows available for presentation to county groups is "Spring Wild Flowers of Howard County." Mid-March is the beginning of another flowering season; if you'd like to know what the season has in store, join Anita Conron who is one of our most enthusiastic amateur botanist-novices.

This year we will have a single session designed for children which will be a feeder session with Eileen Glegg. Simple feeders made from recycled materials will be discussed and some made by the children. Except for the feeder session each of the topics will be presented twice during the three sessions. There will be three sessions beginning at 1:15 P.M. and finishing by 5:00 P.M. Come for one or all sessions.

Even if you cannot come for the whole afternoon or take advantage of the workshop we encourage you to drop in because the gymnasium will be the scene of a nature arts and crafts display and sale during the same afternoon. The gym will be open to members and friends from 12:30 P.M. until 5:00 P.M. A share of the profits from sales will be donated to the MOS Sanctuary Fund. It will be an excellent place to pick up one-of-a-kind gifts or objects. Among the items to be displayed for sale will be decorated eggs, dried arrangements, bird drawings, water colors of wild flowers and mushrooms, photographs in both color and black and white, ceramic and clay objects, wood and wood-inlay items and jewelry. The Howard County bookstore will be set up so that you can purchase guides, records, patches and other items of interest and there will be a few feeders for sale. A framed bird print donated by Frank Griffin will be raffled. Do stop in, even for just a few minutes, and look over the selection. Call Jo Solem 725-5037 if you have questions or need more specific directions. If you have items you'd like to sell, display or donate contact Eileen Glegg 730-4362.

CALENDAR

THURSDAY EVENING MEETINGS at 7:30pm at Swansfield Elementary School.

- March 10 Mr. William Shirey, a naturalist, will speak to us on "Amphibians and Reptiles of Maryland." He is bringing with him a live exhibit which should prove edifying to all of us interested in this aspect of Maryland fauna. Wear warm clothes as the school thermostats have been turned down due to the energy crunch.
- April 14 Mr. Frederic W. T. Rhinelander will share his slides of his last summer's cruise along the almost deserted coast of Newfoundland. This southern coast is a land of grandiose beauty and isolation since sea going vessels are the only means of transportation.

FIELD TRIPS Meet at Swansfield Elementary School.

- March 27 Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge. Plan to leave at 7:30am and bring lunch. Sunday Leaders-Eileen and John Clegg. In addition to possible Ospreys and Bald eagles there should be good views of ducks in breeding plumage as they wend their way north.
- April 20 Woodcock walk led by Al Reis. Meet at 6 pm. *Wed*
- April 24 A Wildflower Walk led by Jo Solem beginning at 1:30pm. Wear Waterproof footwear and plan to hike about 2 miles. This will be a marvelous opportunity to explore a new area with a very rich endowment of flora. Bring binoculars, too. *Sunday*
- April 30 C & O Canal Trip led by Kris Krishnamoorthy. Both Pennyfield Lock and Sycamore Saturday Landing will be covered. Myriads of spring warblers as well as flycatchers and tanagers are expected. Meet either at Swansfield at 6am or at Pennyfield Lock at 7am. Call Kris (997-5967) for directions. Bring lunch and a breakfast snack.

BOARD MEETINGS at 8 pm

- March 31 Ben Dawson's, 5404 Iron Pen Place, Columbia. (730-8549)
- April 28 Lucile Peter's, 9013 Crestleigh Rd., Ellicott City. (465-6293)

WORKSHOP 877

- March 19 Seminars sponsored by the Howard and Patuxent Bird Clubs. See article for details.
 - Fall Warblers and Vireos - David Holmes
 - Habitat Birding - Kathy Cimkiewicz
 - The Biology of Birds - Stephen Simon
 - Birds as Pests - Paul Bystrac

Slide presentation
Howard County Spring Wildflowers
Anita Conron

Children's Special
Making Feeders
Eileen Clegg

NATURE ARTS/CRAFTS DISPLAY

RAFFLE

NATURE ARTS/CRAFTS SALE

CALL TO CONVENTION

May 13, 14, 15, Fenwick Inn, Ocean City, Md. \$95.00/2 people, meals included. Excellent birding at an exciting time of the year with the area's top leaders.

MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION STAMPS will be put out for the first time this year by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Buy one - revenues from the sale of these stamps will be used to purchase land for wildlife habitat. They will be on sale in July at post offices, sporting goods and other retail stores.

of some of the birds we have, but I don't know the best way to contact him. In the past years Nan provided management's and described some birds that you can look for but I can't describe them. I can provide an idea of species that can be expected to nest in a yard. It is possible to find birds in a wide variety of habitats. Exhaustion or hunger force migrants down into strange areas indeed. Observers have found warblers and thrushes in the middle of Baltimore but that doesn't mean they nest there. Sharon Gorham, from our club, found a Common Snipe dead along a Columbia street last spring but one would not plan a field trip to downtown Columbia to look for such a bird. If you are fortunate in having a yard of any size you may have more than one type of habitat, while if your land is measured in acres you probably already have a number of differing habitats - with some planning you might be able to arrange a few more.

A cardinal rule of bird searching and nest finding is that the POPULATION OF BIRDS IS GENERALLY HIGHEST AT THE EDGE OF THE HABITAT. Do you ever recall walking through a dense deciduous woods in early summer and thinking it strange that there seemed to be so few birds visible or singing? If you were to go to the edge of that woods where it meets another type of habitat you would find a sudden rise in the numbers and density of birds. A person desiring to attract a variety of nesting species must be willing to accept some untidiness in the landscape and maybe even (horror) weeds in the lawn. Birds not only live in certain types of habitats but many of them can be categorized by the height at which they live. Like apartment dwellers in a highrise building they live on different floors with a certain amount of overlap. If undergrowth is cleared from beneath all trees, weeds are all mowed, hedges are clipped frequently, weed killers are used lavishly on lawns, every dying limb is promptly trimmed and all dead trees are removed, you generally have wiped out one or more of the nesting "floors" in the birding highrise and you can't expect the richness of birdlife possible in less managed surroundings. One must use common sense however; this is not to advocate that you let your lawn become a weedy meadow if you have close neighbors or that you leave dead limbs or dying trees where they endanger people or property. The study of birds or any other aspect of nature is rarely a static condition but instead can be looked on as a process of constant and continuing change. As small plantings mature, saplings become large trees, bare lots give way to some cover of greenery, second-growth becomes a mixed deciduous forest and cultivated fields are allowed to lie fallow you will note changes in your bird population.

EVERGREENS: Cedars, pines, spruces, hemlocks and various broadleaf evergreens such as hollies, whether as foundation plantings, single specimens or forests, are immensely important. They are vital in winter weather as cover and, because they provide camouflage before most deciduous trees and shrubs leaf out, they are the choice of early nesters. The first brood of Robins may usually be found in evergreens though they nest in deciduous trees later in the season. Mourning Doves, G. Grackles, Blue Jays, Common & Fish Crows and Chipping Sparrows all use evergreens at least part of the time.

URBAN or SUBURBAN LAWNS: unshaded - A relatively bare area with short grass is less likely to attract numbers of species than if there are a few trees; however, a minimum of foundation plantings and a few specimen shrubs may attract Chipping & Song Sparrows, Mockingbirds and Robins. If your house or outbuildings have uncovered holes or crevices you may also find your yard harboring Starlings and House Sparrows which are much less desirable. If there are actual bare spots or gravel Horned Larks and Killdeer may be a possibility. Bluebirds also like these wide open spaces so put up a box.

URBAN or SUBURBAN LAWNS: shaded - In any listing of possible habitats for nesting birds this is one of the better possibilities. Depending on the type and size of the trees and shrubs, their spacing and the presence of dead limbs & undergrowth you may find nests of not only many of the birds listed under the unshaded section but also the Wood Pewee, E. Kingbird, Northern (Balt.) Oriole, Gray Catbird, various woodpeckers, C. Chickadee, T. Titmouse, Scarlet Tanager, Carolina & House Wren and Cardinal.

WOODLANDS: This is a large and to some extent eclectic category since there are many kinds of woods and even within large tracts some birds will have specific requirements, e. g. the Red-shouldered Hawk and Barred Owl near a stream or river, usually a flood-plain forest. Among the interesting possibilities in woodlands, both coniferous and deciduous are several kinds of hawks and owls, Turkey Vulture, T. Titmouse, C. Chickadee, woodpeckers, Great Crested and Audubon Flycatchers, Wood Thrush, Veery, Red-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireos and several species of warblers such as the Ovenbird, Kentucky, Black & White and La. Waterthrush (near water).

OUTBUILDINGS: Especially if they are not in good repair so that birds have access to the interior, one may find a variety of species nesting depending on the size and location of the structure. Carolina Wren, Starling, Rock Dove, House Sparrow, Barn Owl, E. Phoebe, and Barn Swallow are all possibilities. Chimneys may occasionally attract Chimney Swifts.

GRASSLAND and PASTURE: These are areas where shrubs and trees have not yet started to intrude but consist solely of grasses and weeds of various heights. Depending on the height of the vegetation this habitat may be attractive to Field, Song, Grasshopper, Weaver & Savannah Sparrows, E. Meadowlark, Red-winged Blackbirds, Bobwhites, Ring-necked Pheasants & Dickcissils. Killdeer and Horned Larks are possible if there are bare or very short grass areas.

SECOND-GROWTH: This is a rather all-inclusive category which is one of the finest habitats for a variety of birds. It can include saplings (either deciduous or coniferous) as well as grasses, weeds, shrubs, briars, vines or any combination of them. Birds are not always mutually exclusive in their habitat choices so that here you may find some species that you have seen elsewhere. Possible are Field & Song Sparrows, Cardinals, Gray Catbirds, Brown Thrashers, Mourning Doves, Indigo Buntings, Yellow-breasted Chats, Tangle Warblers, Am. Goldfinches, Am. Robins, Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Rufous-sided Towhees, Am. Redstarts & White-eyed Vireos.

PONDS and MARSHY AREAS: This is undoubtedly one of the habitats in shortest supply in Howard County. There are few natural ponds and marshy areas and yearly the number of these shrinks as they are drained. Here and there farmers and landowners have put in ponds; these can be attractive to wildlife if water plants are allowed to grow or there is weedy cover at the shoreline. Ponds and marshes are attractive to ducks, geese, herons, rails, some sparrows, marsh wrens, Belted Kingfisher and Yellowthroats but most of these birds need some protective vegetation in which to nest though Canada Geese have adapted to metal baskets placed in several feet of water to thwart predators.

The habitats listed above are by no means the only ones in which you can expect to find nesting birds but they are among the most common in Howard County. As noted in last month's article some species can be encouraged to stay in your vicinity by putting up a box. Water is an often overlooked necessity when birds choose a nest site. If birds have a year-round natural source of water within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile you probably do not need to bother with water but otherwise you may tip the balance in your favor by providing water for bathing and drinking. Many species prefer water at ground level and always shallow. Watch birds bathing in a stream. They choose a very shallow, rather slow-moving area with a firm bottom. Many species are attracted to running water but a slow drip is as effective as a rushing river; if you can arrange moving water fine, but available water of any kind is appreciated all year. Once you have established some plantings, cover and water to attract a variety of birds keep a list of the species seen in your yard, on your farm or in your neighborhood. How many of them are permanent residents, how many could possibly nest in your area, for how many have you found nests seen fledgling young? Birding doesn't always involve extensive trips and long lists of exotics although that is certainly one of the attractions of the hobby. Even if you never leave home you can be rewarded with many pleasant hours of observation in an area you have planned for maximum feeding and nesting density.

Jo Solan

BOOK REVIEW

A Field Guide to Birds' Nests, East of the Mississippi River. Hel H. Harrison, Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston, 1975. \$8.95 (one of the Peterson Field Guide series).

What bird watcher, no matter how slight his interest, has not at some time found a nest? Many times the nest is empty or perhaps it contains a few eggs but the builder and main occupant is generally not "at home" and the finder knows the frustration of not being able to readily identify the nest.

A Field Guide to Birds' Nests is the answer to the bird watcher's dilemma and an excellent way to further his knowledge of the breeding or nesting habitat of any species. Nest sites, descriptions, measurements and nest building behavior along with the shape, size and number of eggs, their color and markings and incubation time are all noted. Also a very informative paragraph simply headed "notes" is included under each listing.

As an example if you were to look under Purple Finch this is some of the information you would find: Breeding range: Can. Wis. to Maine, so. to n. Ill., n. & e. Ohio, W. and N.E. Pa., n. N. Jersey; in mts. to Md., W. Va. Habitat: Coniferous forests, roadside conifers, Christmas tree plantings. Nest: Almost always placed on horizontal branch of conifer. . . 5-60 ft. above ground. Female builds well-concealed, neat, shallow cup of twigs, grasses, weed stems, bark strips, rootlets; lined with fine grasses, hair. Eggs: 3-5, commonly 4; Oval to short-oval. . . Incubation by female, 13 days. Notes: Commercial evergreen plantings (Christmas trees) have influenced range extension of species. . . Species noted for ability to conceal nest in clusters of needles. . .

Each description is headed by an excellent color photograph of the nest and eggs in its natural habitat and a sketch of the bird is included on the same page. The author's wife has sketched egg markings and shapes for the end papers. A Field Guide to Birds' Nests is recommended as a part of every bird watcher's basic library for its factual material as well as the highly interesting and easily readable style.

A. Lucile Peters

MEET THE BOARD

Dr. "Cris" Krishnamoorthy was born in a mud hut in a remote south Indian village. After spending his childhood on farms his late teens brought him to the city where he completed his undergraduate studies in engineering.

Winning a scholarship to study in England he subsequently obtained his Ph.D. at Southampton University. There, too, he met his charming wife, Mercedes, known to us as Marcia.

He has studied the flow of air over the wing of the "Concorde" supersonic aircraft, as well as other aircraft and fast ship projects. In pursuit of these studies he left England in 1967 for Buffalo, N. Y. and then on to Washington in 1974. He is currently a principal research scientist with Hydronautics, Inc. in Laurel.

Cris joined the Howard County Chapter in 1974 and in these past few years he has become one of our most knowledgeable birders. He is, however, interested in all aspects of natural history and includes among his hobbies tennis, swimming, and skiing. He also holds an expert rating with the American Chess Federation and has won championships in contract bridge.

We are extremely fortunate to have the Krishnamoorthy family active and resourceful members of the club. Marcia has devoted endless hours and her own special touch of originality to the bookstore. Anu, aged 9, can be relied upon to add spirit to any gathering. Our continued thanks go to Cris for his past help in planning and leading field trips, and his current contributions as our treasurer.

Rosamond Munro

Too tentative to tip the scale to song
The January whitethroat starts to whistle;
Stops suddenly and listens to an inner echo;
Knows now the note was wrong, begins again,
Testing: "One, two. . . to? too?"
Too cold to find the key!

RARE TREAT - Anita Conron

Have you ever tried to explain to your children the difference between the Hairy and the Downy Woodpeckers? I'd say the usual things like "the Hairy is a little over 3" longer than the Downy" or "the Downy sports a much smaller bill" but it still seemed to be inadequate.

One cold blustery winter afternoon when all our children and several of their friends were in the den playing, I happened to walk into the room and glance at the suet bag hanging just outside the window. There, to my delight, perched on one side of the bag was a Downy and on the other side a Hairy Woodpecker. I quickly gathered everyone beside the window and we watched them peck away at the suet. All my comparisons from bird books could never measure up to the few minutes we were treated to viewing them side by side.

BIRDING IN SCOTLAND - Eileen Glegg

While staying in Scotland this past November, John and I were fortunate enough to contact two excellent birders. One fellow, Angus Maciver, is a personal friend of mine who was generous with his time. He guided us around Loch Leven—a RSPB reserve. The Nature Center houses educational dioramas, literature and provides 3 German binoculars for viewing—excellent optics! Among some of the birds we viewed were hundreds of Greylag & Pinkfooted Geese, Tufted Ducks, Lapwings, Oystercatchers, Pochards and Fieldfares (winter visitors from Scandinavia)—32 species in all.

Our second and last birding day was led by a professional birder, George Oughton. He met us at the Montrose Basin, an area measuring 1 by 2 miles that reveals acres of mud flats daily. In view were thousands of birds: Eiders, Shelducks, Curlews, Dunlins, Ringed Plovers, Golden Plovers, Grey Heron, Common Gulls and Mallards.

Next we visited a salmon hatchery at the mouth of the North Esk River. The operation is very successful and helps to stock many rivers. After searching for a Dipper during the last six years I finally added one to my life list—seen along this river.

We changed our terrain and habitat into hill country—gorse and heather. There we found Red Deer, Rabbit, Kestrel, Red Grouse and a Common Buzzard (similar to our Redtail) and spectacular scenery. Total winter species for 2 days birding was 72.

Mr. Oughton operated birding tours April-September. He houses 5 people in his home for 7-14 days, meals included. Daily tours are taken to different habitats for a wide range of bird species: mountain, lake, estuary and seaside included. Pelagic lookeries dot the coastline. For a birding holiday in Scotland write to Mr. George Oughton, 23 Church Street, Brechin, Angus, Scotland.