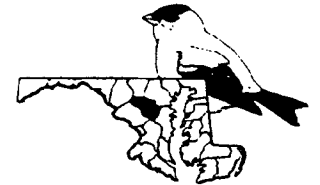




THE GOLDFINCH



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AUTUMN BIRD RECORDS: AUGUST 1 TO NOVEMBER 30, 1998 BY JOANNE SOLEM

Autumn is a four month reporting season which always holds the potential for rarities as well as expected migrants. If birders thought the reservoirs were low in 1997, that was merely a prelude to 1998. A combination of a drought and dam maintenance exposed and dried much of the edge from midsummer into winter which provided limited habitat for migrant shorebirds. Fall Count again demonstrated the advantage of putting many people in the field on the same day. The count turned up two Sedge Wrens, certainly a notable event in this county. Five reports of Orange-crowned Warblers also rate a special mention (normally, one is cause for rejoicing). Sometimes focus on a single group of birds pays off as it did this season for sparrows. In 1988 NM began reporting Lincoln's Sparrows from Schooley Mill Park (SLMLP). By 1990 they were being found spring and fall in several county parks. (Their consistency at half a dozen locations for the last decade indicates that most birders had overlooked them previously.) Success with this species and a few others led some local observers to take a greater interest in the little brown birds. In 1990 BO found a Henslow's Sparrow (the first in the county in almost two decades) at Rockburn Branch Park (RKBRP). Since then, her devotion to sparrows has become well-known. The highlight of the 1998 autumn reporting season was her (and four other birders') discovery on 10/25 of an immature Harris's Sparrow at the Univ. MD Central Farm (UMDCF). Intense field work during the fall season sorting through thousands of sparrows had tipped the odds in favor of finding something out of the ordinary.

As strange as it may seem, the only report of a Common Loon was a lone bird flying over Burleigh Manor (BURMN) 11/15 (MK). The first Pied-billed Grebe was spotted at Centennial Park (CENPK) 8/21 (RO) with a high of 12 on 10/29 at Lake Elkhorn (LKELK) (DE). The only autumn Horned Grebe appeared at CENPK 11/11 (HZ). Double-crested Cormorant numbers peaked at 13 on 9/13 at LKELK (DE). The same location produced the only American Bittern of the season on FALLC 9/19 (hereafter shown as FALLC without a date) (DW). With the leaves gone from the trees, it was possible to get an accurate count on 11/11 & 11/29 of the seven empty Great Blue Heron nests at Vantage Point—the county's only documented heronry (MC). Great Egrets continued to be seen at numerous locations with the latest on 11/27 along the Middle Patuxent River near Homewood (tying the 1994 late date—DE). A Green Heron was last seen 11/1 at CENPK (MK). LKELK and

EACH SEASON HOWARD COUNTY BIRD SIGHTINGS ARE COMPILED AND SUBMITTED TO *MARYLAND BIRDLIFE* AND *FIELD NOTES*. BECAUSE BOTH PUBLICATIONS PROVIDE OVERVIEWS FOR LARGE AREAS, ONLY A FRACTION OF HOWARD COUNTY SIGHTINGS ARE PUBLISHED. THE RECORDS ARE NOT LOST, HOWEVER, FOR THEY ARE THE BASIS FOR COUNTY RECORDS. ALL RECORDS ARE WELCOMED AND APPRECIATED. ANY INDIVIDUAL WHO TURNS IN SEASONAL SIGHTINGS RECEIVES A COPY OF THE COUNTY COMPILATION. TO REQUEST A FORM ON WHICH TO LOG DATES, PLEASE CALL 301-725-5037. THE BOARD HAS REQUESTED THAT A DIGEST OF THE SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS APPEAR IN THE NEWSLETTER. OBSERVERS ARE REFERRED TO BY THEIR INITIALS (SEE THE LIST AT THE END OF THE ARTICLE). LOCATIONS ARE WRITTEN OUT THE FIRST TIME CITED; THEREAFTER, ABBREVIATIONS ARE USED.

Wilde Lake (WILLK) continued to be the places to see Black-crowned Night-Herons with the last bird at WILLK 10/11 (HZ). There were as many as three (2 im) at LKELK between 8/28 & 10/1 (DE).

All Snow Goose reports were between 9/7 & 9/19 with a maximum of two at Brown's Bridge (BRNBR) (DOI). The Canada Goose total on FALLC was 848. A flock of eight Tundra Swans seen over Sandchain (SNDCH) 10/3 (J&TDC) was the only report until mid-November. On 11/15, 25 were seen over BURMN (MK), 12 over CENPK (CS), & two flocks (63 & 8) over the county line near Jessup (POs).

A male Gadwall was noted 10/13 at CENPK (J&TDC); the latest reported was a female 11/27 at CENPK (DE). Two American Wigeon arrived on 9/18 at CENPK (KS). There was a single report of a female Northern Shoveler 8/21 at CENPK (RO). A female Northern Pintail obligingly stayed on LKELK from 10/25 (J&TDC;DE) to 11/12 (DE) giving patient birders a chance to locate it. The first Green-winged Teal was in a cove near Rocky Gorge dam on FALLC (JC,JS) and the latest (one male) 11/18 at CENPK (J&TDC;KS). A group of five at LKELK 10/8 was the high (DE). Two male Canvasbacks appeared 11/16 at WILLK (HZ). A female Ring-necked Duck was the first on 10/11 CENPK (KS) with the high a modest 23 on 11/12 LKELK (DE). One Oldsquaw was spotted at CENPK on 11/4 (HZ)—the only seasonal report. The first Buffleheads were a flock of 15 at LKELK 10/25 (J&TDC). One female Common Goldeneye was seen at

CENPK between 11/13 (MK) & 11/22 (DE). A female Hooded Merganser was present at BRNBR from 8/30 (DE) to at least 9/16 (J&RS). There were 13 Hooded Mergs at the Elliott Rd. Pond 11/12 (MC). A sighting from Brighton Dam 11/22 of eight female Common Mergansers (KS) and another of one male Red-breasted Merganser 9/11 at CENPK (KS) were the only reports for these species. Although the first two male Ruddy Ducks arrived 9/8 at WILLK (HZ), most sightings were in November with a high of 27 on 11/6 at LKELK (DE).

There were Bald Eagle reports in each of the autumn months from a total of five locations: Pigtail (PIGTL-DE); UMDCF (WE;SS); Manahan (MANHN-BO); CENPK (BL,TN;J&TDC) Henryton (HENPV-DE). Northern Harriers had a long migration period from the earliest 8/31 at Johns Hopkins APL (NM) to the latest 11/16 over the Middle Patuxent Env. Area (J&RS). No major Broad-winged Hawk flight was detected here in the fall with 200 the largest single group on 9/11 over WILLK (HZ). The last Broad-wing of the year was reported from Stanford Blvd. on 9/24 (JC). Red-tailed Hawks are relatively late migrants. Seven were spotted on 11/1 at CENPK (DE). An immature Golden Eagle over SLMLP 11/1 (NM) was a new species for the park as well as the only seasonal report. A Merlin was seen 9/8 at LKELK (DE) and two on FALLC. The only Peregrine Falcon was glimpsed 9/23 at Font Hill Wetland Park (FHWLP) (BO).

The lone Wild Turkey sighted was in the Timberleigh (TIMBR) area 11/11 (DN). Northern Bobwhite have been few in recent years, so it was a pleasant surprise to receive two reports: one 8/14-16 at Montgomery Run (NM) and one on 11/1 at SLMLP (GC). A Sora stayed a few days at CENPK: 8/28 (MK;KS) & 8/31 (BO;HZ). American Coots, which were first detected on FALLC at CENPK (MK+), built to a high of 10 on 10/27 CENPK (DE; JS).

Although there were few unusual shorebirds, observers spotted a good variety. Two Black-bellied Plovers were found on recently

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graded damp earth at Gateway (GATWY) on FALLC (ES,MB). **Semi-palmated Plovers** could be found at PIGTL from 9/7 (five-KS) to 9/26 (two-JS). A flock of 60 Killdeer at theUMDCF 10/12 was the season's high (BO,JS,CG). A **Greater Yellowlegs** was found 8/23 at Big Branch (DE); the last one 9/22 FHWLP (BO). The first **Lesser Yellowlegs** was at Fulton (FULTN) 8/9 (J&TDC); three at the same location 9/20 were the last of the season (J&TDC). The three **Western Sandpipers** 8/30 at BRNBR (DE) were a choice sighting. An **American Woodcock** strutting (waddling?) in a back yard in Kings Contrivance the evening of 11/9 was a special treat (K&BB).

Now that Alpha Ridge landfill lacks much attraction for gulls, the 1500 **Laughing Gulls** there on 8/22 were a distinct surprise (NM,J&RS). Six **Caspian Terns** moved through 8/9 on Triadelphia Reservoir (TRIRS) (J&TDC); the last three on 9/20, also TRIRS (JC,J&RS). Five **Forster's Terns** were noted 8/9 at the same location (J&TDC). **Black Terns** are not often detected (the last reported was 1994), so it was pleasant to receive a report of one over FULPD 8/10 (J&CW).

Two **Black-billed Cuckoos** were noted: 8/2 TIMBR (DN) and 9/24 WILLK (HZ). Although large numbers of **Eastern Screech-Owls** are seldom reported, they are undoubtedly widespread in the county. On FALLC seven answered DE's tapes in the HENPV sector. This year it was easy to miss **Common Nighthawks**. They were reported in a small window from 16 on 8/27 MANHN (BO) to five on 9/7 BRNBR (DOI) with a high of 57 the evening of 9/2 at Cedar Lane Park (RG). Two hundred **Chimney Swifts** were over the lake at CENPK 8/26 (KS). The last ones were seen as expected about the middle of October: two on 10/13 at WILLK (HZ) & eight at Allview (ES). **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** departed on 9/28 WILLK where one was spotted (C&PN).

There were two reports of **Red-headed Woodpeckers**: one immature 9/24 & 29 on MANHN (BO+) and an adult 11/12 on Marriottsville Rd. (MARVL) (KZ,BO). On FALLC the first **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** were counted: one on MANHN (BO) & one at David Force Wildlife Mgmt. Area (WMA) (CS). **Olive-sided Flycatchers** are always special sightings. One was noted at Daniels 9/5 (D&LS); on 9/12 BO+ had two at MANHN with one remaining till 9/13.

The last **White-eyed Vireo** was found at Alpha Ridge Park (ALRGP) 10/24 (DE+). A **Blue-headed Vireo** stayed until 10/21 at Dunloggin (KS). **Philadelphia Vireos** were reported from both LKELK 9/14 (DE) and CENPK on FALLC (ML+) & 9/23 (J&TDC). **Red-eyed Vireos** were not abundant during migration; the high was 12 on 9/15 at LKELK (DE).

The latest **Tree Swallow** flew over UMDCF 10/12 (BO,JS,CG). A **Carolina Chickadee** exhibiting partial albinism came to a feeder in Fulton aperiodically from early October until at least mid-November (RM). The first **Brown Creeper** showed up at WILLK 9/9 (MC).

Fall was a good season for wrens. Three **Winter Wrens** were seen at HENPV 10/3

(NMJS), but 10/11 was the day to find them at WILLK when HZ had 6! FALLC turned up two **Sedge Wrens**, both in the eastern half of the county. One was at the Belmont Conference Center (MSP,MJB) & one in a small wetland near Patuxent Valley Middle School (RO). A **Marsh Wren** was spotted 9/22 in typical cattail habitat along the boardwalk at FHWLP (BO); another in a small sedge, wet meadow at Mt. Pleasant (MTPLT) on 10/18 was watched for 10 minutes (BO,JS,MJB). (MJB was the only birder who had the good fortune to see both a **Marsh Wren** and a **Sedge Wren** in the county in 1998.)

The last **Veery** was tallied at Hugg-Thomas WMA 10/4 (DH). The only **Gray-checked Thrush** reported for fall was a bit early for this species on 9/9 at LKELK (DE). Nine **Swainson's Thrushes** were seen on FALLC. The first **Hermit Thrush** showed up at WILLK 10/13 (HZ); by 10/17 more had moved into the county with six at SLMLP (JC+) & one at Meadowbrook (MDWBK) (BO). A **Gray Catbird** was still present 11/18 at CENPK (J&TDC). We don't usually think of **Northern Mockingbirds** as migrants, but KS noted that in early October he was seeing more mockers than usual: 10/2 he had 20+ at MDWBK & 10/10 20+ at LKELK.

A flock of 60+ **American Pipits** was at UMDCF 10/3 (BO+); the following day JS counted 127 there. Not until October did **Cedar Waxwings** show up in sizable flocks. The high of 100 was 10/24 at ALRGP (DE+).

Two **Golden-winged Warblers** were found: 9/6 CENPK (BO) & 9/13 SLMLP (CS). **Tennessee Warblers** are more common in fall than in spring. This year early and late dates were from LKELK (9/4 to 10/29-DE). Five reports of **Orange-crowned Warblers** were extraordinary for this county: FALLC at MTPLT (CS), 9/21 Plum Tree Path (PLTRP) (BO), 9/23 FHWLP (MC,JS,HZ), 9/30 LKELK (JG), and 10/12 Hallmark (WEB). **Magnolia Warblers** peaked on 9/13 at RKB-RP 60+ (BO,HZ,MJB,CG). Thanks to unusually moderate weather a **Black-throated Green Warbler** was spotted 11/22 in Allenford (RT). HZ had a **Yellow-throated Warbler** 9/5 at WILLK; two were reported on FALLC: Lake Kittamaquidi (MC); LKELK (DW). The **Palm Warbler** high was 30 at MTPLT 10/18 (BO,JS,MJB). DE had a **Prothonotary Warbler** at LKELK 9/3. Two **Connecticut Warblers** were reported on FALLC: WILLK (C&PN); Lynn Buff Ct. (ES,KP). The lone fall **Mourning Warbler** was on FALLC on McNeal Rd. (MW). Interestingly, of the expected warbler species the only two not reported were **Cerulean** and **Yellow-breasted Chat**.

Field observers dream of migrant fallouts. September 13 at RKB-RP was one of those memorable mornings for MJB,CG,BO & HZ. They had 17 species of warblers including at least 60 **Magnolias**, 1 **Bay-breasted**, 5 **Ovenbirds**, 1 **Northern Waterthrush**, 30 **C. Yellowthroats**, 4 **Wilson's**, 3 **Canadas**, 1 **Chestnut-sided**, 8 **Black-throated Blues**, 5 **Black-throated Greens**, 1 **Blackburnian** & 4 **Palms**. What a great day!

Although shorebirds, hawks, and warblers usually receive the spotlight in turn during autumn, more retiring stars of the season are the sparrows, arriving or passing through, mostly

in October. This year an immature **Harris's Sparrow** at the UMDCF 10/25 & 26 (BO,DE,MJB,HZ,DG) definitely deserved the enthusiasm it generated. The species has been seen only twice before in the county (the last time in 1965) so it was understandable that the sighting aroused much interest. It was a challenge to balance the desire to help individuals see the bird and, at the same time, to keep a low profile at the farm where we wanted to retain our good working relationship.

The UMDCF, MTPLT, and MDWBK were the most productive sparrow spots last fall. Some of the high counts or notable dates were the following: **Chipping** 10/22 MTPLT 25 (BO,HZ,MC), 10/25 UMDCF 150 (BO,DE+); **Field** 10/18 MTPLT 80 (BO,JS,MJB), **Vesper** 10/12 UMDCF one (BO,JS,CG), 10/22 MTPLT two (BO,HZ,MC); **Savannah** 10/12 UMDCF 320 (BO,JS,CG), 10/22 MTPLT 200 (BO,HZ,MC), 10/25 UMDCF 200 (BO+); **Grasshopper** 10/23 one MTPLT (BO,JS,MJB,DG); **Fox** 11/14 MDWBK 11 (BO,JS); **Song** 10/12 UMDCF 340 (BO,JS,CG), 10/17 MDWBK 200 (BO), 10/22 MTPLT 480 (BO,HZ,MC); **Lincoln's** from one on 9/21 PLTRP (BO) to one on 10/23 MTPLT (BO+) with a high of four on 10/22 MTPLT (BO,HZ,MC); **Swamp** 10/12 UMDCF 80 (BO,JS,CG); **White-crowned** 11/16 MDWBK 40-50 (HZ). An impressive sparrow migration record! A **White-throated Sparrow** with partial albinism frequented WILLK from November into the winter (MS; HZ). Be especially careful in identifying it for it looks much like a **Snow Bunting**. It does not, however, frequent bunting habitat but stays at the wood edge in undergrowth like a typical **White-throat**.

Bobolinks were few. Two flocks of **E. Meadowlarks** were reported: 10/21 MTPLT 19 (BO,JS) & 11/1 UMDCF 11 (JS). **Rusty Blackbirds** were reported from five locations between 10/24 ALRGP (six-DE+) and 11/15 GATWY (one-J&RS) with a high of 43 on 11/8 CENPK (DE). A late **Orchard Oriole** was at UMDCF on 10/12 (BO,JS,CG).

The only northern visitors reported were two **Purple Finches**: 10/7 MARVL (CF) & one male 11/16 MDWBK (HZ).

Observers: MB-Maud Banks, MJB-Mary-Jo Betts, K&BB-Karan & Bill Blum, GC-George Chase, MC-Martha Chestern, JC-Jane Coskren, TDC-T.Dennis Coskren, WE-Wes Earp, WEB-Ward Ebert, DE-Darius Ecker, CF-Cathy Franklin, JG-Jonathan Gallagher, CG-Carol Garza, RG-Ralph Geuder, DG-Dot Gunderson, DH-Dave Harvey, MK-Mike Kerwin, ML-Mike Leumas, BL-Bob Linz, NM-Nancy Magnusson, RM-Rosamond Munro, DN-Diane Nagengast, TN-Tim Nedzel, C&PN-Carol & Paul Newman, DOI-Daryl O'erson, RO-Richard Orr, POs-Peter Osenton, BO-Bonnie Ott, KP-Karla Pierce, MSP-M.Suzanne Probst, SS-Steve Sanford, KS-Kurt Schwarz, JS-Jo Solem, RS-Robert Solem, D&LS-Dan & Linda Southworth, MS-Michelle Stewart, CS-Chuck Stirrat, ES-Eva Sunell, RT-Robin Todd, MW-Mark Wallace, DW-Don Waugh, J&CW-Jim & Carol Wilkinson, KZ-Kim Zaruba, HZ-Helen Zeichner. A + after an observer's initials usually indicates a trip leader.

EXCITED BIRDERS BORE BLACK-TAILED GULL

BY DARIUS ECKER

On the beautiful Saturday morning of January 16 seventeen Howard County birders set out to spend the weekend birding the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel. After handing all the drivers their maps, we left for our long drive to Virginia. To break things up we had several stops planned during the drive down.

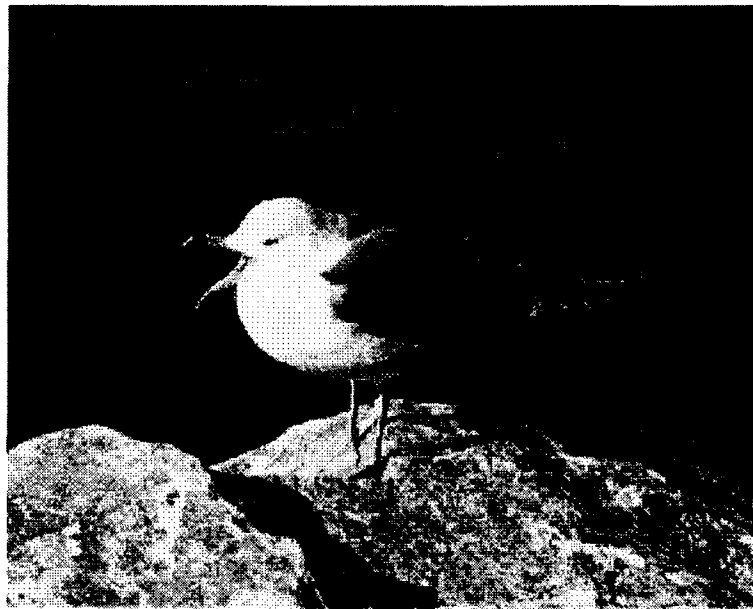
At Kent Narrows we stopped for a quick look out over the water. Waterfowl was sparse there but we did see both Tundra and Mute Swans, a Red-tailed Hawk overhead and a Killdeer. After a bathroom break, we continued on.

At the Cambridge Fishing Pier (the old bridge over the Choptank River) we did see some interesting birds. There were two Bald Eagles on the western shore of the river. The most exciting birds were a couple of male Oldsquaw which dove under the new bridge while we watched from the old bridge. A large flock of mostly female Lesser Scaup were present, along with Common Goldeneye and a few Ring-necked Ducks.

After lunch in Cambridge we turned towards Blackwater Wildlife Refuge. On Egypt road on the way in we found some Tundra Swans sitting in the farm fields, but more exciting to some of us were the two Horned Larks found nearly hidden in the corn stubble. Another stop along Egypt road turned up Eastern Meadowlarks, an immature Bald Eagle, and a Belted Kingfisher over a small farm pond. Somehow, we'd lost one of the cars. I didn't dwell on it to much, since I knew they had good maps and knew our itinerary.

As we entered the Blackwater Refuge we entered "Pintail City." Northern Pintails dominated the first impoundment. A few sparrows turned up in the brush by the road; Song, White-throated and Swamp along with a couple Yellow-rumped Warblers. The small flock of Snow Geese present had an abnormally high instance of the "blue" form present. At one point I saw 8 Blue Geese fly off together. Further around the wildlife loop Bald Eagles again took over the show, with several pairs sitting out in the marsh. By the time we got to Virginia that evening we counted 12 Bald Eagles for the day. Some good birds seen on the road by some of us as we left Blackwater were Wild Turkeys and farther down and closer to dusk an American Woodcock flew across the road.

As we arrived at the Best Western I was relieved to see our missing car there waiting for us. After reunited we went and quietly checked



"Finally, the Black-tailed Gull turned and yawned and I snapped a photo which summed up it's feelings for the day."

in (yea, right, this group does nothing quietly). After some fast talking at the restaurant next door we got the proprietor to agree to seat us all. There was a birthday party being held there and they were nearly full. I think in the end some of us even joined in the party.

The next morning we met in the hotel's breakfast area to grab a quick bite before heading for the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel. After paying our toll, we proceeded to Island #4, the spot where a Black-tailed Gull, a rare gull normally seen in Asia and Japan, had been seen in the past weeks. We arrived to find several birders had already located it and we joined them to admire this bird as it sat just 30 feet away. While we were very excited to see it, I'd say it was less than thrilled with us. It sat with its bill tucked under the feathers of its back most of the time. I watched it for 20 minutes and saw its red and black markings on its bill just twice. At the right angle, you could see the black on the top of the tail. Finally, the Black-tailed Gull turned and yawned and I snapped a photo which summed up it's feelings for the day.

While I watched over the gull, others were just as excited about seeing the close by Northern Gannets, the stunning male Harlequin Duck, (see photo page 4) Black, Surf and White-winged Scoters, Brant and Red-breasted Mergansers. Both Common and Red-throated Loons were seen though they were distant most of the time. Horned Grebes were seen by some, though we didn't find a Red-necked Grebe. I was also disappointed that neither Common Eider or King Eider

were found.

We moved on to the other islands and stopped on Island #1 to eat at the restaurant. Before entering we had a flyby group of three Brown Pelicans. While we ate, Dave Harvey spotted a pilot whale out the window. It was showing off for a whale watching boat. It was cooperative and those who had their binoculars in the restaurant got to see it. After lunch, Dave Holyoke and I went out to find his 200th life bird, an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull on the southeast side of the island.

As we left the tunnel we stopped at the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge. By this time, Bonnie had her fill of "water birding" and took us on a sparrow search. We found Song, Savannah, White-crowned and White-throated. We heard a Gray Catbird and saw Northern Harrier. Our next stop was Kiptopeke State Park. We didn't find much there, though later on we would find we'd missed a Red-necked Grebe. We did watch a beautiful sunset and see a large flock of American Robins and Eastern Meadowlarks.

We awoke Monday morning to the rain. The rain was light when we left southern Virginia but as we traveled north towards Chincoteague it rained harder. At our first stop over the marshes before Queen Sound flats everyone got soaked. We did pick up a few new species, Hooded Merganser, including both live and decoy.

The bird everyone wanted to see at Chincoteague was a Brown-headed Nuthatch. We couldn't have had worse conditions in which to find one. We tried at the woods by the Light-house. We did hear one but it was off the path in a restricted area so we never did see it. I decided we try one last time at the visitor's center. Bonnie and I looked and looked, and pished and pished. Finally Bonnie found one on a pine tree. I saw it fly across the parking lot to the top of another pine. We all walked over and I set up the scope. We were finally treated to scope views of two Brown-headed Nuthatches cuddling against one another in the top of the pine. A great way to end the trip.

After lunch at Bill's Restaurant in Chincoteague we disbanded and all headed for home. Our final tally showed we had seen 105 species for the weekend. Everyone had picked up at least one life bird, some as many as ten, and Dave Holyoke broke his 200 species barrier. A very exciting way to spend a January weekend.

AMERICAN REDSTARTS IN THE NEWS

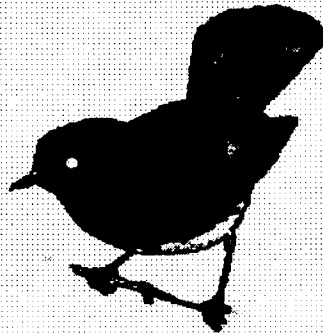
BY BRYAN MACKAY

Spring is the best of times for Maryland birders as we scan the newly greening forests for Neotropical songbirds migrating through or arriving to breed. American Redstarts are one of the most colorful, common and easy-to-see Neotropical migrants. They are noisy, active warblers that nest throughout much of the eastern United States and most of Maryland. Males are mostly black but with orange wing and tail patches that flash brightly when the bird flares from a perch for insects or chases other redstarts. Females are duller, wing and tail patches are yellow rather than orange.

Redstarts would not seem to be newsmakers, but late 1998 found two otherwise unrelated papers concerning redstarts appearing in the scientific literature. A number of these Neotropical migrant species have been declining in numbers for the last several decades. Scientists have been trying to figure out whether population declines are primarily due to problems on the wintering grounds, the summering grounds, during migration, or some combination thereof.

The question has been difficult to answer because there is no way to track individual birds from one location to another. A recent report in the journal *Science* (282:1884-1886) is the first attempt to answer this question.

The scientists studied American Redstarts, in Jamaica in winter and in New Hampshire in summer. In Jamaica, redstarts occupied two distinct habitats: mangrove forests and upland scrub. Mangroves are high quality winter habitat for redstarts, with an abundance of insect prey, but there is insufficient mangrove habitat for all the redstarts. In fact, mangrove habitat is generally being lost in the neotropics due to the actions of humans. The mangrove habitat was dominated by males (65%), who actively displaced other birds. The drier scrub habitat has fewer insects, is less high quality, and is occupied by fe-



"American Redstarts are one of the most colorful, common and easy-to-see Neotropical migrants."

males (70%) and immature and less dominant males.

The scientist found that birds of the mangrove forests maintained or gained weight over the winter, while those in the scrub lost up to 11% of body mass. Mangrove birds were in better condition, and thus left for migration earlier, arrived earlier on the breeding ground, were in better shape upon arrival, and seized the best territories. Previous work had shown that birds that arrive and set up territories first have higher reproductive success.

This article demonstrated the value of winter habitat, and how it affected several parameters correlated with breeding success in the summer. But in my opinion the authors should have included data on the reproductive success of these particular birds.

Another paper, in the journal *Conservation Biology* (12:1377-1389), examined the role of forest age in redstart breeding success using a mathematical model. The author noted that early successional habitat in Vermont and New Hampshire has declined in the past century as farms abandoned in the 1800's reverted to woodland and, eventually, mature forest. Redstarts

have higher densities in early successional habitats relative to older forests. The author generated a mathematical model incorporating historical patterns of habitat change that yielded population change curves approximating Breeding Bird Survey data. Unless nest success in early successional habitats is better than published values for mature forests, redstart populations in the model declined toward extinction. These results suggest that mature forest may act as population "sinks" for redstarts, where reproductive success does not reach replacement levels. Conversely, young forests may act as populations "sources", supplying excess birds to restock areas of less suitable, more mature, habitat. Of course, all this is speculation based on the author's mathematical model, unsupported by any actual field data. I hope that the author will examine redstart demography in various habitats in the coming field seasons in order to test the model.

Even given the weaknesses in both these papers, they do represent important and interesting advances in our understanding of these charismatic warblers. The gaps in our knowledge about birds like redstarts contribute to their exotic nature. Something to remember on your next spring warbler trip!



"Others were just as excited about seeing the stunning male Harlequin Duck"
See Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel Article on page 3

CALENDAR OF PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS

Programs are held at Longfellow Elementary School, 5470 Hesperus Dr., Columbia. Meeting is cancelled if schools are closed for any reason. Hospitality session at 7:30 pm. Meeting/program begins at 8:00 pm. Club bookstore opens at 7:30 pm.

- March 11, Thursday "Birding the Adirondacks: a Boreal Bonanza," by Bill Barber.
 - April 8, Thursday "Ecological Factors Influencing Avian Nest Success," by Jeff Duguay.
 - May 13, Thursday "Earthwatch Findings from the Whooping Crane Release Program in Florida," by Michael Kreger.
- Field trips meet as described for each trip. Carpooling is encouraged; riders share the cost of gas and tolls. Dress for the field trip with stout, reasonably waterproof footwear and layers of clothes. Trips do not always follow paths. NO pets. Leaders may cancel due to inclement weather or fewer than three participants. FOR INFORMATION, CALL BONNIE OTT, at 410-461-3361.
- March 3, Wednesday 1998 Annual Lists Due - Please mail as soon as possible to Jane Coskren, 6324 Sandchain Road, Columbia, MD 21045.
 - March 3, Wednesday Winter (Dec 1 - Feb 28) Records Due - Mail as soon as possible to Jo Solem, 10617 Graeloch Rd., Laurel, MD 20723.
 - March 14, Sunday Feeder Watch and Walk (weather permitting) - Meet at 8:00 am at Bonnie Ott's (Ellicott City). We'll spend some time observing the birds at the 14 feeders behind her house. There are Carolina Wrens that put in a daily appearance for mealworms. Finishes with a neighborhood walk. Please contact Bonnie to reserve a spot and obtain additional details.
 - March 21, 28, April 4, 11, Sunday Centennial Park Walks - Meet at 8:00 am at the west end parking lot. Leaders: 3/21 Jane Coskren, 3/28 Mike Kerwin, 4/4 Maud Banks, 4/11 Paul Zucker. 1/2 day walks looking for migrants. Call Bonnie for more information.
 - March 27, Saturday Introduction to the Birds of Lake Elkhorn - Meet at 9:00 at the Broken Land Parkway parking lot. Leader: Mike McClure. Join Mike as he introduces us to the behaviors and sounds of the birds you see at Lake Elkhorn.
 - March 31, Wednesday Weekday Walk at David Force Park - Meet at 8:30 am at the sign off Pebble Beach Drive. Leader: TBD. Casual walk down woodchip trails and through fields.
 - April 3, Saturday Meadowbrook Park - Meet at 8:00 am at the Route 100 park and ride. Leader: Bonnie Ott. Very heavy walking through fields and wet meadows. This is a great sparrow area dotted with wetlands and ponds.
 - April 5, Monday Weekday Walk at Gwynn Acres - Meet at 8:30 am at Columbia Rd. & Rams Horn Row. Leader: TBD.
 - April 10, Saturday University of Maryland Central Farm - Meet at 8:00 am at the farm office parking lot off Folly Quarter Road. Leader: Bonnie Ott. We will walk the fields in search of Vesper and other sparrows. Heavy walking through tall grass possible.
 - April 16, Friday Weekday Walk at Font Hill - Meet at 8:30 am at Font Hill Drive. Leader: TBD.
 - April 22, Thursday Habitat Walk at Alpha Ridge Park - Meet at 9:00 am at the parking area near the tot lot. Leaders: Bob & Jo Solem. Celebrate Earth Day by examining the varied habitats in this small county park (exit 83 north from I-70; 0.8 mile west of Marriottsville Rd. on Rt. 99). Option of continuing to Warfield's Pond (another county park). Waterproof footwear suggested for floodplain and wet meadow. Call leaders at 301-725-5037 for more information.
 - April 24, Saturday Rockburn Branch Park - Meet at 8:00 am at the park office off Landing Road. Leader: Darius Ecker. Join us in this search for warblers and other migrants. Paths may be muddy. Call leader at 410-312-9165 for more information.
 - April 25, Sunday Wildflower Walk, Gwynn Acres Path - Meet at 1:00 pm at Columbia Rd. & Rams Horn Row. Leaders: Bob & Jo Solem. Easy walk along a paved path for early spring wildflowers. Call leaders at 301-725-5037 for more information.
 - May 1, Saturday 1st Annual Howard County Big Day - Meet at 7:00 am at Alpha Ridge Park. Leader: Darius Ecker. Join us for a full day as we find as many species as possible in Howard County. Itinerary to be determined by the birds. Carpooling necessary. Call leader at 410-312-9165 for more information and optional pre-dawn owling schedule.
 - May 8, Saturday May Count - Mark your calendar. Details will be in the next issue of the newsletter.
 - May 14-16, Weekend Maryland Ornithological Society 1998 Annual Conference - Details were mailed to you by the MOS.
 - May 19, Wednesday Weekday Walk at Wilde Lake - Meet at 8:30 am at the boat dock. Leader: TBD.
 - May 22, Saturday Breeding Birds of Mt. Pleasant - Meet at 8:00 am by the shed. Leader: Bonnie Ott.
 - June 5, Saturday Elliott Island Marshes - Meet at 11:00 am at the Route 32 and Broken Land Parkway park and ride (car parking). Leader: Darius Ecker. Join us for an afternoon and evening of night birding in the marshes of Elliott Island. Rails possible, mosquitoes definite. Overnight optional. Call leader at 410-312-9165 to obtain final details and reserve a spot.
 - July 24, Saturday Huntley Meadows, VA - Meet at 7:30 am at the Route 32 and Broken Land Parkway park and ride (car parking). Leader: Darius Ecker. Join us for a morning of birding in this popular Virginia Park. King Rail is possible.
 - August 21, Saturday Dragonflies at Centennial - Meet at 9:00 am the west end parking lot. Leader: Richard Orr.
 - September 11, Saturday Middle Patuxent Environmental Area - Meet at 8:00 am at the Board of Education Building on Route 108. Leader: Jeff Duguay. Moderate walking through fields and second growth woodlands to look for migrants.

Board of Directors meetings are held the fourth Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm, unless otherwise noted, at the home of the board member listed. If directions are required, please call the hosting board member.

March 25, Thursday Kurt Schwarz, 9045 Dunloggin Court, Ellicott City, MD 21042

April - 22, Thursday Jeff Friedhoffer, 10042 The Mending Wall, Columbia, MD 21044

MAY-JUNE 1999 NEWSLETTER MATERIAL IS DUE MARCH 26, 1999. Anyone is welcome to contribute articles or ideas which you think will be of interest to other birders. Call or mail to Paula and Darius Ecker, 9270 Crazyquilt Court, Columbia, MD 21045, Phone 410-312-9165 or e-mail to Paulae2156@aol.com. Also, please visit the club's site on the World Wide Web at <http://www.abs.net/~dariuse.birding.html>.

HOWARD COUNTY BIRD CLUB

Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

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CONSERVATION COLUMN BY BOB SOLEM

The 5th Maryland Environmental Legislative Summit was held in Annapolis January 18. It was kicked off by Governor Glendening who told the audience that politicians need to realize the environment is one of today's most important issues and drives votes.

If your local politicians are not involved with environmental issues, you may want to remind them of its importance. Some of them still think they can ignore environmental issues, but the last elections should have awakened them.

Environmental Issues to be brought forward for legislation this year are as follows:

- 1) The American Heritage River Protection Act—Designed to protect the Potomac River.
- 2) Deregulation of Electric Utilities—Plug loopholes in the Clean Air Act that allow heavily polluting utilities to provide cheap electricity.

- 3) Smart Transportation Initiative—Reduce the annual vehicle miles traveled
- 4) Industrial Pollution from Large Poultry Companies—Provide regulations for the disposal of poultry waste.
- 5) Notification of Pesticide Spraying on School Grounds.
- 6) Environmental Crimes—Make the penalties in Maryland tougher.
- 7) Environmental Permit Renewals—Reduce the number of facilities operating on expired permits allowing discharge into waterways.
- 8) Improvement of Mud Pollution Control Laws on Construction Sites.
- 9) Water Appropriations—Protection of groundwater quality and quantity.
- 10) Water Quality Improvement Act—Addresses nutrient pollution from agriculture sources.

FIELD NOTES ERROR DISCOVERED BY DARIUS ECKER

ABA Field Notes in the Spring 1998 issue reports a Loggerhead Shrike seen at Lake Elkhorn in Columbia on May 4, 1998. This report was actually due to a data entry error and really should have been reported as a European Starling (uuggghh). They're next to each other on the list. The error got into Field Notes before I was able to get it corrected. Sadly, Loggerhead Shrike has not been seen in Howard County since 1979. Anyone can make a mistake, but to really mess up you need a computer.

BEGINNING BIRDING CLASS AT HOWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Beginning Birding will be offered as a continuing education course at Howard Community College during the spring semester. The three sessions consist of evening classes on April 12 and 19 with a half-day field trip on the 24th. The class is designed to introduce beginning birders to equipment, identification methods, and local hot spots. Jo Solem is the teacher.

Registration is through the college. Catalogues are sent to every county household.

IN MEMORIAM BY PAT SCHLAIRET

Tish Bell, who had been a member of the Howard County Chapter of the MOS for about 8 years, passed away on Sunday, October 25, 1998, after a long illness. She worked at a florist shop close to Dayton, MD, where she lived and took care of her elderly parents. Tish originally joined MOS as a result of a New Year's Resolution to do something different each year. When she joined MOS, she fell in love with the members, the birds and the club activities. There was a special place in her heart for MOS. Tish asked me to let you all know how much joy you brought her and to be sure to thank you. It was very important to her that I give you this message. Several times when I visited her, she reminded me to tell you. She attended all the annual conferences and almost all the annual pot luck dinners since she joined. Birding became one of her favorite activities and she would call me when she would see a new bird, even though she did not keep a list. She will be greatly missed.

