

Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS)

Field Trip: Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge

Trip Leader: Kurt Schwarz

Date of Trip: Saturday, January 13, 2018

Number: 10

Details: The annual Blackwater Trip was moved to mid-January because the early December trips had been rather short on waterfowl for the past few years. Ten gathered on January 13, with a temperature of 48 degrees. The drive to Cambridge was in light to moderate rain, which fortunately abated by our first stop at the Cambridge Visitor Center. Alas, the wind had come up, and at one point Tom measured an average speed of 13 mph, gusting to 20. The thermometer ultimately fell to 32 degrees, and the wind made for a bracing wind chill.

Delaying to mid-January appeared to pay off. The Choptank was largely frozen earlier in the week, but there was plenty of open water by the time we got there. We encountered lots of Canvasbacks, as well as other ducks, dabbling and diving. Loons and grebes, however were conspicuously absent. On the Cambridge waterfront we were unable to find the Iceland Gull that had been present the previous two days. Oakley St. was a highlight, with close up looks at Canvasback, Lesser Scaup, American Widgeon and Mallard. A nice and attractive surprise was a Canvasback x Redhead hybrid, perhaps the same one that was at Oakely St. last February.

On the way to Blackwater, we scanned a flock of 100+ Tundra Swans in hopes of spotting the Mute Swan seen the previous day, but without success.

At Blackwater, the Marsh Edge Trail was closed, as it is every year at this time, for nesting Bald Eagles. We did stop at the nearby blind to try for Red-headed Woodpeckers, seen the previous days, but again, no luck. A stop in the woods a short time later produced the Brown-headed Nuthatches, a single White-breasted, Golden-crowned Kinglets, a Hairy Woodpecker, and a very accommodating Brown Creeper. A later stop generated a rather cooperative Hermit Thrush.

As we proceeded along the Wildlife Drive, we located a flock of 34 Tundra Swans, and found a single American White Pelican among them. Later we had good looks at Northern Shovelers and Northern Pintails. A massive flock of Snow Geese put on a nice show, with both white and blue phase present. We then visited the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park, seeking the Vesper Sparrows seen in the days before, but once more dipped. Oddly, others arriving just an hour after us, did find some.

We subsequently drove to Hooper's Island, but only saw a few routine waterfowl, and wound up at Shorter's Wharf Road, in hopes of Short-eared Owls at dusk. While there were Northern Harriers present in the late afternoon, a hopeful sign, no owls appeared. A total of 58 species and one hybrid were recorded.

Group photos by Clayton Koonce. Bird Photos by Kurt Schwarz



Cambridge Visitors' Center



Cambridge Visitors' Center



Mixed ducks



American Wigeon drake



Canvasback hen



Canvasback drake



Canvasback x Redhead hybrid drake



Canvasback x Redhead hybrid drake
w/ Lesser Scaup drake above and behind.
Part of a Canvasback in lower right.



American White Pelican

- Snow Goose - 2801
- Canada Goose - 1682
- Tundra Swan - 163
- Northern Shoveler - 11
- American Widgeon - 22
- Mallard - 278
- American Black Duck - 20
- Northern Pintail - 315
- Canvasback - 598
- Canvasback x Redhead hybrid - 1
- Ring-necked Duck - 18
- Greater Scaup - 2
- Lesser Scaup - 54
- scaup species - 5
- Surf Scoter - 20
- Belted Kingfisher - 1
- Downy Woodpecker - 1
- Hairy Woodpecker - 1
- Northern Flicker - 5
- Pileated Woodpecker - 1
- Eastern Phoebe - 1
- Blue Jay - 4
- American Crow - 7
- crow species - 3
- Carolina Chickadee - 3
- Tufted Titmouse - 4
- White-breasted Nuthatch - 1
- Brown-headed Nuthatch - 12
- Brown Creeper - 1
- Golden-crowned Kinglet - 2

- Bufflehead - 158
- Common Goldeneye - 7
- Hooded Merganser - 1
- Ruddy Duck - 3
- American White Pelican - 1
- Great Blue Heron - 3
- Turkey Vulture - 7
- Northern Harrier - 4
- Bald Eagle - 10
- Red-shouldered Hawk - 1
- Ring-billed Gull - 141
- Herring Gull - 48
- Great Black-backed Gull - 1
- Rock Pigeon - 23
- Rub-crowned Kinglet - 1
- Eastern Bluebird - 3
- Hermit Thrush - 1
- American Robin - 1
- European Starling - 4
- Yellow-rumped "Myrtle" Warbler - 6
- Chipping Sparrow =1
- Dark-eyed Junco - 28
- White-throated Sparrow - 2
- Song Sparrow - 13
- Eastern Towhee - 1
- Red-winged Blackbird - 937
- American Goldfinch - 8