

The Maryland Yellowthroat

Newsletter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

SEP/OCT 2015

VOL. 35, NO. 4



President's Corner

By Tom Strikwerda

A Diverse Organization

Several items of note are on my mind as we begin the 2015-2016 birding year. The first item is the recurring appeal for volunteers. In an organization of our size, with more than 25 committees or projects, it's not unusual for several committee chairs or project leaders to resign every year. Fortunately, we're doing quite well overall, with MOS members standing up to take the places of those who rotate out of positions, often without a strong appeal. And this is often true at the chapter level also. A "Thank you" goes out to all who are chapter officers and represent the chapters on the state board. However, we have very serious needs for volunteers to fill several key vacancies at the state level. Our most critical need is for a conference chair, but we also need leaders for our development/membership activities and for nominations. Without a conference chair, it will be very difficult to hold an annual conference next year. In addition, volunteers are needed to help the current chair carry out the committee's charter. Please help! Contact me if you have questions or any inclination to help.

There have been several key accomplishments and events this year. I reported in one of my columns that MOS had received a request for an easement through our Piscataway Sanctuary in Prince Georges County. The neighboring landowner/developer requested the easement so they could build a sewer line across the sanctuary. At our June meeting the MOS Board agreed to grant the request. Although habitat will be disturbed during the construction, the site, for the most part, will be allowed to return to its natural state afterwards, save for a pathway along the sewer alignment that we will use to better access the site. In addition, a small pavilion or shelter will be built, along with a parking area and trail down to the easement path, to aid access to Piscataway Sanctuary.

Our conservation committee, led by Kurt Schwarz, has drafted a policy statement on feral cats that will be voted on by the MOS Board at an upcoming meeting. The Board has already reviewed a draft and provided comments. As most of you know, feral and free roaming domestic cats kill an enormous number of birds every year. There's been a push recently in a number of communities in Maryland to establish trap, neuter, and release (TNR) programs for feral cats. These programs are

obviously controversial and MOS believes providing testimony and a formal position paper is imperative response. We hope you'll read the position paper when it's available to become better informed about TNR, and take action where appropriate in your community or at the state level.

Under the leadership of Colin Rees, our long range planning committee continues to research establishing a bird observatory in Maryland. Considerable data have been gathered on what states or organizations have done to establish observatories, and several Maryland meetings have been held to discuss ideas for goals and projects suitable for Maryland. Please contact Colin if you'd like to get involved in the early stages of this effort or have suggestions.

And the Maryland Birding Trail committee has been revitalized, with Joan Cwi leading the team. Site descriptions are being written for posting on a website, whose design is in progress. Perhaps by the time you read this edition of the Yellowthroat

continued on page 2

Inside This Issue

President's Corner	1
Social Networking	2
Well Deserved Honors.....	2
2016 Scholarships.....	2
Chapter Chatter.....	3
Fall Count	6
Conservation Committee Actions	6
Lights Out Baltimore.....	7
2015 MOS Conference.....	9
Calendar	10
Maryland Biodiversity.....	23

Conservation committee continued from page 6

by the Governor.

The Pollinator Protection Act, which we supported in both chambers of the state legislature, is being held over for study over the summer.

We wrote a letter supporting the purchase by the state of an inholding surrounded by Pokomoke State Forest, which was warmly received by Maryland DNR. The state Board of Public Works approved the purchase of the land.

We wrote Maryland's US Senators in opposition to a bill, which would have rolled back several environmental protections of BLM and Forest Service lands, and prevented the EPA from regulating lead in ammunition. It is still sitting in the Senate, with a co-sponsor signing on as late as May 19.

We wrote Governor Hogan in May reiterating our position that state forests and other lands are not suitable for ORV use. We support use of private lands for these purposes. This was in response to a public call by ORV enthusiasts to write the Governor seeking more ORV trails on state lands.

We wrote the director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service supporting the inclusion of a secondary non-waterfowl species on the federal duck stamp, as a means of increasing its appeal to the non-hunting public, and raise more funds for habitat purchase. Lobbying continues, and Stamp Friends put our comments at the very top of a summary of testimony so far.

Kurt Schwarz, Chair



Lights Out Baltimore: Saving Birds One Building at a Time

Carly Barron

Animal Keeper, The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore
Miami University's Global Field Program

Birds and Buildings

According to the [American Bird Conservancy](#), collisions with human built structures are the leading cause of death of migratory birds in North America, with between 100 million and 1 billion birds dying each year from collisions with buildings. In search of the guiding light of the moon and stars, migratory birds are drawn to and disoriented by cities and their clusters of artificially lit buildings. Once inside a city, migratory birds often have difficulty making their way back out and back to their intended migrations. Avian building collisions occur when these birds are then fooled by the reflection of outdoor vegetation in building windows or glass facades, or they see well-vegetated indoor courtyards or lobbies. The birds try to perch in a tree or bush, and instead strike the glass in a mistaken attempt to land. These collisions occur most often within the first thirty feet of a

structure. Many birds are killed by the window collisions, suffering brain trauma and other internal injuries. Others are simply stunned or sustain beak, wing, or leg damage serious enough to keep them from continuing with their intended migration.

The Role of Lights Out Baltimore

The Maryland-based non-profit, Lights Out Baltimore, is one of a number of organizations throughout North America dedicated to making cities safer for migratory birds. A major goal of LOB is to convince city officials to mandate that all decorative lighting (signage and other lighting unnecessary when buildings are not in use) be turned off during the hours of 10:00 PM and 6:00 AM during peak migration seasons. This organization also works closely with local business owners and community members to educate them about the value of protecting migratory birds through more bird-friendly lighting and building practices.

Beyond persuading community members to employ bird-friendly building and lighting practices, LOB performs daily monitoring of window collisions in downtown Baltimore during the spring and fall migration seasons. This daily monitoring requires volunteers to walk a fixed route through the downtown area between 5:00 AM and 8:00 AM. Volunteers inspect the perimeter of glass buildings, collecting all collision victims, both dead and alive. Dead birds are delivered to the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, where they are catalogued and used in future research. Live birds are carefully inspected for injury, placed in paper bags to prevent further trauma, and brought to Phoenix Wildlife Center in Phoenix, Maryland for rehabilitation and eventual release.

What We Have Learned: Death Toll, At Risk Species, and Problem Buildings

Lights Out Baltimore members have collected data on each bird victim they have discovered since the fall migration season of 2008. Data collected includes date and address of collision, species, age, sex, whether the bird is dead or alive, and direction of impact.

Throughout its almost seven year existence, LOB has collected 2,483 window strike victims. Although 1,816 of these birds were found dead, the remaining 667 found alive were successfully transported to Phoenix Wildlife Center for critical care and rehabilitation. Through this daily monitoring, LOB has encountered a total of ninety-eight bird species. White-throated Sparrow has the highest number of collisions of all species recorded, making up 23% of the 2,483 birds catalogued by LOB. Other frequent victims include the Common Yellowthroat (13%), Ovenbird (10%), Gray Catbird (10%), twenty-three warbler species (6%), Song Sparrow (6%), and five thrush species (5%).

While over one hundred individual buildings have had avian collision incidents, the Baltimore Convention Center is responsible for the most collisions, with 840 individual incidents (34% of total collisions.) The Convention Center is most dangerous to migratory birds, as it spans two city blocks and has many glass walls. It also has a massive, well-lit glass lobby that contains various indoor plants. While the Convention Center has begun working with Lights Out Baltimore to employ more bird-friendly lighting practices, the abundant glass surfaces and

continued on page 8

Lights out continued from page 7

excessive lighting, as well as the general enormity of the building, remain an issue to birds. Other heavily hit buildings include the Sun Life Building (181 collisions), TransAmerica building (147 collisions), the Harborplace pavilions (112 collisions), and Hopkins Plaza (122 collisions).

This valuable data has allowed LOB to identify the least bird-friendly buildings in the city and thus narrow their community efforts. This includes directly communicating with local businesses in the buildings listed above about turning off lights and appropriately bird-proofing windows and other glass surfaces. While changing city light usage laws will have to occur on the government level, working closely with individual businesses will certainly make a difference in decreasing bird deaths during critical migration periods.

Lights Out Baltimore continues to monitor avian window collisions during each migration season, saving injured birds and working closely with community members to spread awareness about bird-friendly lighting and building practices. The work being done by this organization is crucial to the survival of migratory birds, and will hopefully have an impact on future city planning. For more information regarding bird-friendly lighting and building design, or if you find an injured bird in the downtown area, please contact Lights Out Baltimore at (256) 493-7393 or lightsoutbaltimore@gmail.com, or visit their website at www.lightsoutbaltimore.org.



Birds of Note – by Les Roslund

In early May the birders of Maryland are inundated with chances to find and enjoy the migrants that normally pass through our state. Warblers typically dominate the scene, but this year a tiny shorebird slipped in to give greatest joy to the many fortunate folks who managed to share the viewing. The bird was a SNOWY PLOVER, and this was the first reported sighting of the species in Maryland! The SNOWY PLOVER was initially found on Monday, May 4, by a team conducting a weekly bird census at Hart-Miller Island, Essex, Baltimore County. The team consisted of Bob Ringler, Kevin Graff, Joe Hanfman and Jeff Culler. The bird was foraging on the flat west berm in the north cell in the company of one SEMIPALMATED PLOVER along with several LEAST and SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPERS. The census team immediately recognized the special nature of this sighting, and promptly spread the word. Though the normal Hart-Miller schedule would not have allowed more birder visits until the following Monday, special arrangements were made with Maryland Environmental Services for additional birding visits on May 6 and May 8, including provision of a bus to transport the birders after they reached the island. These arrangements, negotiated with MES by Kevin Graff, allowed many more birders to share the sighting, attain highly satisfying views, get numerous splendid photos and just share in the pure joy of watching the gentle antics of a new Maryland species. The following Monday, during the next normal survey of Hart-Miller Island the bird was not found.

Another visiting species in our area that showed up in early May was a NEOTROPIC CORMORANT, reported at Violette's Lock in Montgomery County on May 9. The finder was Mike Ostrowski of Derwood, MD. This bird has remained in the same general area throughout the summer and was still being regularly reported as of Jul 22. It quite possibly is the same bird as seen in that region during much of the summer of 2014. The present bird has been quite reliable as a target species, thereby providing great pleasure for numerous local birders.

In late May while looking for nesting warblers, Kevin Graff and Pete Webb flushed a RUFFED GROUSE in northwestern Baltimore County. The bird was found on May 30 at the end of the Hemlock Gorge Trail off Gunpowder Road in the Prettyboy Watershed. This medium-sized game bird, larger than a bobwhite but smaller than a pheasant first walked and then took flight along the edge of a steep hill upstream from the trail. This would be a fairly normal sighting in Garrett or Allegany County, but is quite unusual for Baltimore County. No later sightings were reported.

Within the warbler parade of the spring there were two sightings of GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLERS, a species for which the numbers in our area are getting quite low. The first was spotted on May 3 at Little Bennett RP in Montgomery County. The finder was Mike Ostrowski of Derwood. Mike attained a 20-minute view fairly early in the morning before the bird moved on and could not be relocated. Later in the month, on May 14, Lynne Parks found another GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER during a morning visit in Milford Mill Park, Baltimore County. This bird also did not loiter in the area, for no additional sightings were reported.

During the spring migration of goatsuckers through our region there are a few locations where one can manage to hear two species of them singing within hearing range of each other. At dusk on May 28 Dave Littlepage of Abingdon, Harford County, successfully found two calling WHIP-POOR-WILLS in the Soldiers Delight Natural Environmental Area of western Baltimore County. While enjoying the two he was suddenly treated to the added bonus of the song from a CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW that, according to Dave, --"was singing like crazy." Dave attained fine recordings of this unusual chorus.

CLIFF SWALLOW nesting colonies in Maryland are present at several locations if one knows where to look for them, but the discovery of new colonies is always good news. Such good news was reported June 21 from Little Falls, along the Potomac River in Montgomery County. At this location John Hubbell of Washington, DC, found 26 CLIFF SWALLOW nests under the bridge over the C&O Canal a short walk upstream from Lock 6. John also reported having seen CLIFF SWALLOWS in recent weeks near the Dalecarlia Reservoir which is not far from this nest site. Back on Jun 14, Hugh McGuinness of Washington, DC, confirmed that CLIFF SWALLOWS were again nesting in a hard-to-see site at Georgetown Reservoir in DC. The Georgetown Reservoir nests had been first reported in 2014 by Frank Hawkins of Washington, DC.

continued on page 9

POSTMASTER: TIME-DATED MATERIAL—PLEASE EXPEDITE!

MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL
SOCIETY, INC.
P. O. Box 105, Monrovia, MD 21770-0105

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
at Hagerstown, MD
Permit No. 184

The Maryland Yellowthroat
Newsletter of the Maryland
Ornithological Society, Inc.

Editor: Richard Donham
rdonham8@gmail.com

Designer: Eric Skrzypczak
ericskrz@gmail.com

Calendar Editor: Marilyn Veek
mveekmos@yahoo.com

Chapter Chatter: Jean Wheeler
jswheeler3@verizon.net

Mailing list: Martha Crouse
crouse.martha8@gmail.com

MOS web site: <http://www.mdbirds.org>

Webmaster: John Hays Christy
SiteMaven@mdbirds.org

Anyone is welcome to contribute articles, photos, or ideas that would be of interest to other birders. Copy may be e-mailed to Richard Donham by Sep 25, 2015 for the Nov/Dec 2015 issue.

Illustrations pp. 1,3 ©M. Suzanne Probst