



The Bluebird

This newsletter is published by the Prince George's Audubon Society,
a local chapter of the National Audubon Society for over 30 years.

www.pgaudubon.org



PRINCE GEORGE'S AUDUBON SOCIETY

APRIL 2004

PRESIDENT'S PERCH

by Carolyn Sturtevant, President

In the last newsletter, I wrote about the Great Backyard Bird Count, a project open to all birders, and jointly sponsored by National Audubon Society and Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. The purpose of the count was to have volunteers identify and report the birds they observed at their feeders and yards in the middle of February. Although I didn't hear specifics from any counters in our chapter, by looking online at www.birdsource.org/gbbc/index.htm, I was able to draw some conclusions.

I enjoyed studying the level of participation in the count. Nationally, counters logged 42,492 checklists of their observations, counting 555 different species and over 4 million individual birds. Maryland counters submitted 162 reports, with 51 locations having only 1 report, making their data unique in the GBBC. Think how important it is that those 51 folks looked out their windows and collected data for the count!

Looking at the results from towns in Prince George's County, I could see that PG birders made a strong showing in the state. In a quick tally of 11 county place names that leapt out at me, I found that four locations hadn't even shown any reports on 2003. With 94 reports

Continued on page 3

Good News from the NAS Board of Directors

Back in August of 2003, PGAS President Carolyn Sturtevant used the Bluebird newsletter to update members on the state of chapter administration and finances. Item #3 on her the list of things that have changed in recent years was the ongoing reduction and planned elimination in mid-2004 of "safety net" payments from National Audubon to local chapters, essentially a redistribution of a percentage of the dues paid by PGAS members to the national organization. The elimination of these "safety net" payments is expected to severely impact our chapter's ability to print and mail newsletters, host our website, carry insurance for chapter meetings and field trips, support our Science Fair awards and other educational activities, and pay honoraria to our monthly speakers.

Now for the good news... Due to the proposed changes in the relationship between National Audubon and local Audubon chapters, the NAS Board of Directors formed an Ad Hoc Committee on Chapters, which reported back to the Board at their January meeting in Atlanta. The Board voted to extend the "safety net" payments to chapters for an additional year, through July of 2005, while they work to implement the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee. These funds will be routed through the state offices (PGAS is one of five chapters under the MD/DC office) in order to improve integration between the local and state levels.

What does this mean for PGAS? It gives us some breathing room, an additional year to look for ways to better manage our existing funds and to plan for future fundraising activities to maintain essential Chapter functions after July 2005. Money-saving strategies include maintaining our successful ongoing partnership with the Patuxent Bird Club and continuing to plan for future distribution of the Bluebird via email and on the pgaudubon.org website. Ideas for fundraising activities are always encouraged, and the website and each issue of The Bluebird contain contact information for PGAS Officers and Board members. If you really want to play a role in the future of the Prince George's Audubon Society, there are several open positions on our Board and election time is approaching soon.

- Beth Kantrowitz, Vice President & Webmaster

Field Trips



April 3 (Sat.) 7:30 a.m. - FUNA walk

April 17 (Sat.) 7:30 a.m. - Governors Bridge Park walk

April 24 (Sat.) 7:30 am

Bird trip (& atlasing foray) to Walker Mill Park, near Watkins Park. This is the first in a series of forays to lesser known birding areas led by Fred and Jane Fallon. Meet at Bowie Park & Ride.

May 1 (Sat.) 7:30 am - Walk at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, led by Chan Robbins. Meet at main gate on Rte 197 at 7:30. Call Fred Fallon for reservations (required). This will replace the May 1 FUNA monthly walk.

Trips depart from either the Bowie Park & Ride or Beltway Plaza on Greenbelt Road at the time given. Please arrive earlier so the group can leave at the scheduled time. Call the field trip leader in advance for reservations.

Fred Fallon 301 249-1518
Fred Shaffer 410 721-1744

Fran Uhler Nature Area: 1st Sunday of every month except January and July. FUNA is located at the end of Lemon Bridge Rd off Rte 197 just north of bridge over AMTRAK RR line.

Governors Bridge Park: 3d Saturday of every month except December and July. GBP is located on Governor's Bridge Rd 2 miles from Rte 301, entrance at double gate.

Walks start at 7:30 a.m.; no reservations are required.

Other Local Birding Opportunities (APRIL)

April 4 (Sun.)

8:15-10:30 am (Ages 16+)

Bird walk at the National Wildlife Visitor Center, Patuxent Research Refuge. Field guides and binoculars recommended. Call 301 497-5887 to register and get directions. Led by PGAS member and refuge volunteer naturalist Steve Noyes.

April 17 (Sat.)

7:30-9 pm (All ages)

Owl Prowl at the North Tract area of the Patuxent Research Refuge. Call 301 497-5887 to register and get directions.

April 15 (Thu.)

8:15-10:45 am (Ages 16+)

Bird Tour at the North Tract area of the Patuxent Research Refuge. Field guides and binoculars recommended. Call 301 497-5887 to register and get directions. Led by PGAS member and refuge volunteer naturalist Steve Noyes.

April 18 (Sun.)

8-10 am (All ages)

Bird walk at the North Tract area of the Patuxent Research Refuge. Field guides and binoculars recommended. Call 301 497-5887 to register and get directions.

Visit new birding spots with Fred and Jane Fallon this spring and summer. Beginning on April 12 (see above), they will be leading trips to some lesser known birding areas as well some more well-known sites. These are areas that are not currently being covered for the ongoing MD Breeding Bird Atlas and will help make us aware the bird activities in these areas. Stay tuned in the next newsletter for specifics about future forays with Fred and Jane.

President's Perch

Continued from page 1

in 2004, this year's activity represents a big jump over the 2003 total of 70 reports for the same group of locations. It tells me that more Prince George's County birders did the GBBC this year, yielding better coverage!

Counting winter birds is mostly a matter of seeing them. Spring turns the rather silent birds into singers, and some into stars of operatic dimension, eager to express their passion and to demonstrate command of their chosen branch or tree. It's time for the GBBC birders to study up on the songs and plumages for the heady days of migration. Fred Fallon will welcome our help to cover the territory during the May Count on May 8 at least as well as we covered it in February. Every birder counts!



Upcoming PGAS-Patuxent MOS Programs

Optics for Birding

Dave Mozurkewich and Fred Fallon

Tues. April 13, 2004

College Park Airport Annex Building
College Park, Maryland

Are you a relative new-comer to birding and have you been wondering what kind of binoculars to get; or perhaps, having become more seriously involved, you feel the need for an up-grade? What factors determine the quality of binoculars and spotting scopes? Club members Dave Mozurkewich and Fred Fallon, astronomers by profession as well as veteran birders, share between them a wide background in the science of optics. In this program they will explain in easy terms the basic principles that underlie good birding optics and what to look for in choosing equipment. A selection of modern binoculars and scopes will be available for examination under twilight conditions, with a review of their relative merits. The new art of "digiscoping" - digital camera + scope - will also be discussed; so too will be devices for amplifying birdsong. A good program for novice birder and gear-head alike.

Kruger National Park

by Greg Kearns

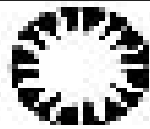
Tues. May 11, 2004

College Park Airport Annex Building
College Park, Maryland

Come and learn about the wildlife of the vast Kruger National Park in South Africa, visited by Greg Kearns in 2003. Enjoy outstanding slides, video and narration of his visits to Cape Town and Kruger National

Directions to the College Park Airport Annex can be found on the PGAS website .. pgaudubon.org

PGAS Members are invited to submit items of interest to fellow birders, including announcements of local bird-related activities (programs, walks, etc.), details of recent birding forays, or other tidbits of information. Send your input to *The Bluebird* editor, Steve Noyes (noyessh@yahoo.com) by the 10th of the month.



Smithsonian
Institution

You're Invited to a Smithsonian Ornithology Sampler!

Sunday, April 25 from 2:00 to 4:30 pm



“**Birds of a Feather**” is a mini-symposium that will offer a rare opportunity to learn about birds and the innovative research being conducted by Smithsonian ornithologists. Following an introduction by **Russ Greenberg**, head of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, four Smithsonian scientists will give brief talks about the varied research they are conducting on birds around the world:

- **Carla Dove**, a forensic scientist, reveals how she is able to identify birds from just a fragment of a feather—a skill that proves useful in various investigations, from determining the causes of jet crashes to identifying bird remains that are thousands of years old.
- **Rob Fleischer** tells how he uses modern methods of DNA analysis to study relationships among birds on the family and species levels. DNA can reveal the secret lives of birds and help to better conserve them.
- **Helen James**, an avian paleo-ecologist, explains how she uses clues from fossils to reconstruct extinct species and to determine what they ate, how they lived, and how they evolved.
- **Peter Marra**, an avian ecologist who studies the migration of North American songbirds, explains how old-fashioned fieldwork and modern technologies can help us to better understand migration, and why so many migratory birds are in trouble.

After the symposium, please join the scientists at a wine reception—and a toast to Smithsonian Ornithology!

Tickets are available online at the Smithsonian Resident Associate Program's web site: <http://residentassociates.org/com/feather.asp> or by calling 202-357-3030 weekdays 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

This program is co-sponsored by the Smithsonian Resident Associate Program and the Smithsonian Ornithology Initiative.

MD Breeding Bird Atlas Workshop

Thursday, April 22, 7:30 p.m.

College Park Airport Annex
College Park, MD

We are now entering the 3rd year of the Breeding Bird Atlas. Come to this workshop for discussions on this project. A special guest expert from the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center will be there. This is an opportunity to sign up for a block that needs coverage.

Wanderings of a Birder

by PGAS Member Steve Noyes

In early March 2004, I traveled to Fernie, British Columbia (in Canadian Rockies in southeast corner of BC), mainly to go skiing. Of course, as an avid birder, I always take along a pair of binoculars. After doing some research, I made up a list of "wish" birds, especially new birds. I am currently trying to get my life list to 400! Last November, I went on a birding foray with the Audubon Naturalist Society to south Texas and was able to add 58 birds to that list. All I needed in British Columbia was to add FOUR birds and I would reach 400.

Each morning, I ventured out at the base of the mountain in search of birds as well as on the mountain while skiing during the day. Birds are not abundant at 6000 feet and I started seeing the usual birds I've seen at ski areas...Black-capped Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Common Ravens, Stellar's Jays, and Gray Jays. Other birds I found on this trip were Mallards and Green-winged Teals (along the Elk River in the town of Fernie), American dip-pers (at least four) "dipping" in the river; American Robins, Varied Thrushes, Red-shafted (Northern)

Flickers, and an "Oregon" (Dark-eyed) Junco in the woods by our condo. My "new" bird (but not a new species) on this trip was an "Oregon" Junco; I've also seen the "Pink-sided" Junco in the Colorado Rockies. I witnessed the courtship activities of two Red-shafted Flickers. They sat in a tree, facing each other, rocking back and forth and fanning their tails; their moniker being evident by the pinkish-red undersides of their tails. Suprisingly, I found no finches or other wood-peckers, although I heard drumming off in the distance during a woodland walk.

Although I was somewhat disappointed that I saw no NEW species, a friend described a large owl he and others saw on a cloudy day on the mountain. Their description convinced me that they had seen a Great Gray Owl (yes, that would have been a "life" bird!).

As you might imagine, friends don't normally ski WITH me as I stop every time something flies by (other than skiers). That's okay...I don't just go on ski trips to SKI!

MARCH FIELD TRIP

On Saturday, March 13, The Patuxent Bird Club and PG Audubon Society had a field trip to Upper Marlboro area ponds and the Patuxent River at Mount Calvert. Six people were in attendance and highlights included a beautiful Red Headed Woodpecker, a Bald Eagle on a nest (both at Mt. Calvert), five or so Wilson's Snipe (at Schoolhouse Pond), close views of both Kinglets, a very high flyover flock of Tundra Swans, and several Blue Winged Teal, as well as numerous other waterfowl. The trip list was as follows:

Pied-billed Grebe	Black Vulture	Carolina Wren	Dark eyed Junco
Mute Swans	Bald Eagle	Song Sparrow	Blue Jay
Tundra Swans	Red Shouldered Hawk	White Throated Sparrow	Cardinal
Canada Geese	Red Tailed Hawk	Swamp Sparrow (heard only)	Eastern Phoebe
Mallards	Osprey	Brown Creeper	Ring-billed Gull
Wood Ducks	American Kestrel	Carolina Chickadee	Herring Gull
Ring-necked Ducks	Northern Harrier	Tufted Titmouse	Great Black-backed Gull
American Wigeon	Rock Pigeon	House Finch	Northern Mockingbird
Green Winged Teal	Mourning Dove	American Robin	
Blue Winged Teal	Red Bellied Woodpecker	Cedar Waxwing	
Black Ducks	Northern Flicker	Red Winged Blackbird	
Gadwall	Pileated Woodpecker	Brown Headed Cowbird	
American Coot	Wilson's Snipe	Common Grackle	Fred Shaffer
Great Blue Heron	Golden Crowned Kinglet	European Starling	Patuxent MOS
Turkey Vulture	Ruby Crowned Kinglet	House Sparrow	<u>glaucousgull1611@aol.</u>



PRINCE GEORGE'S AUDUBON SOCIETY
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*The Prince George's Audubon Society (PGAS) was established over 30 years ago as a chapter of the National Audubon Society to serve northern Prince George's County. Incorporated in the State of Maryland, PGAS is a non-profit organization of about 650 members with officers elected by the general membership. Membership in PGAS comes from joining the National Audubon Society; members from northern P.G. County automatically become members of PGAS and will receive the award winning Audubon magazine and this newsletter, **The Bluebird**, which advises members of field trips, monthly program meetings, other activities and topics of environmental interest. A membership application is included with this newsletter for your convenience.*

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Join the **NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY** for an introductory rate of just \$20.00 and receive these benefits:

- 4 issues of **Audubon** magazine
- Membership in the local chapter (PGAS)
- The PGAS newsletter - **The Bluebird**

NAME: _____
 ADDRESS: _____
 CITY, STATE, ZIP _____
 E-MAIL _____

Please make check payable to: **National Audubon Society**
 and mail to:

PGAS
 P.O. Box 693
 Bowie, MD 20718

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