

The Bluebird

Newsletter of the Prince George's Audubon Society

PGAS is a local chapter of the National Audubon Society

May-August 2012



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President's Perch

Carolyn Sturtevant
President, PGAS

Are you as surprised by the weather as I am? How do we cope with all the changes? After very little snow this winter, record-breaking warmth in March, and an unusually dry early April, we have the seasonal showers. By now, the "May flowers" are already blooming in my garden. And then came the snow in the higher elevations!

How do birds travel north safely in such unpredictable weather? We can make birds' lives easier by following some of the tips on the Audubon at Home web page (athome.Audubon.org). Bob Martinka lists "Ten Ways to Make a Difference for Migrating Birds." Here's a slightly edited version:

- 1) Reduce or eliminate pesticide and herbicide use.
- 2) Plant native plants as food and as home to tasty invertebrates like bugs and spiders.
- 3) Keep cats inside.
- 4) Prevent window collisions. Put up screens, close drapes and blinds when you leave the house, or stick multiple decals on the glass - no more than two to four inches apart.
- 5) Provide cover in your backyard. Leave snags for nesting places and create a brush pile, a great source of cover for birds during bad weather.
- 6) Help birds stay on course. Close your blinds at night and turn off lights you aren't using. Some birds use constellations to guide them on their annual migrations, and bright lights can disrupt them.
- 7) Create or protect water sources in your yard. Change the water two to three times per week when mosquitoes are breeding.
- 8) Landscape for birds. Use lots of layers, including understory, ground cover, shrubs, and trees for different purposes, such as nesting, feeding, and singing.
- 9) Extend a bird safety net beyond your backyard. Contact your local Audubon Chapter to learn about opportunities to create healthy habitat in parks, beaches, and other places in your community.
- 10) Take the Audubon At Home Healthy Yard Pledge! When you take the Pledge, you commit to conserving water, planting native species, removing invasive plants, reducing pesticide use, protecting water quality, and keeping birds safe in your yard.

We can pat ourselves on the back for following some of these tips already. Are we ready to take the pledge in Tip #10? How much do we value the songs and sights of spring? Let's do what we can to be good hosts to the migrating birds this spring and to resident birds this summer.

Audubon's Mission Statement: To conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.

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Upcoming Monthly Meetings

“Herps: What, When, Where?”

Presented by Mike Quinlan

Tuesday, May 8, 7:30 pm

College Park Aviation Museum

1985 Cpl. Frank Scott Drive, College Park, MD 20740

Mike Quinlan will introduce us to the Maryland Amphibian and Reptile Atlas (MARA) project, a five-year effort to document the distribution of each of the nearly 100 species of herps (aka reptiles and amphibians) native to Maryland. This project is patterned after the breeding bird atlas project. The years 1983-1987 saw the production of Maryland's first *Breeding Bird Atlas*; its second atlas ended in 2007, revealing changes in the distribution of birds over the intervening 19 years. Prince George's and surrounding counties are areas of rapid urban growth with great impact on all wildlife populations, and MARA will likewise add to our understanding of herps, and will allow birders and other interested volunteers to make another significant contribution to our knowledge of the fauna of the state, understanding the expansion and contraction, and even the disappearance, of breeding ranges over time.

Mike retired after 30 years on active duty in the Army and decided to pursue his lifelong interest in all things natural. He is a regular volunteer of many years experience at the Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary, Patuxent River Park, and the Patuxent Research Refuge, and has a particular interest in birds and herps. He is a former board member of the Prince George's Audubon Society (PGAS) and is the co-coordinator for Prince George's County for the herp atlas project.

“Member-Share Night: Favorite Gadgets, Photos, Stories, and What Have You?”

Tuesday, June 12, 7:30 pm

College Park Airport Annex

1909 Cpl. Frank Scott Drive, College Park, MD 20740

This program is the last of our monthly programs before a summer break – from programs, but not from our regularly scheduled bird walks. There will still be *twelve* bird walks before Sept 11, our kick-off program of the 2012-13 program year! Unlike previous programs, this informal evening has no official speaker. Instead, members have traditionally shared their favorite nature, bird, or wildlife photos and stories to the interest and/or amusement of others. Have a favorite photo? Bring it (up to 10)! Have a favorite story? Tell it! This year, come share other favorites as well. What good bird watching tip has helped you? How do you keep your fingers warm in winter and still focus your binoculars? Do you have a favorite way to carry your gear, or perhaps you have *finally* found or created a system to keep track of the birds you've seen, when and where? Others want to know. You've had a number of binoculars over the years, but you like your present ones best because.....? Do you have a favorite gadget you wouldn't go out in the field without? Bring it and tell us why not. Maybe you've got a birding app on your Smartphone that helps you ID birds faster/better. Show us why you like it and how you use it. What hummingbird feeder do you swear by? The list is limitless. IMPORTANT NOTE: This is a venue change! We are returning to the College Park Airport Annex, just past the turn for the College Park Aviation Museum in whose auditorium we have been meeting this past program year.

This promises to be a fun-filled and interesting evening. Programs are open to all who are interested, not only to members of the Prince George's Audubon Society and Patuxent Bird Club. This one is no different. Bring your special photos, stories, or favorite what-have-you and join us! Doors will be open at 7:00 pm. Feel free to come early to mingle and enjoy refreshments at either of these meetings. Call Maureen Blades at 301-262-5148 for more information.

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Upcoming Field Trips

PGAS-sponsors Saturday morning bird walks to two areas of Patuxent River Park co-managed by PGAS and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission:

Fran Uhler Natural Area

Lemons Bridge Road, Bowie, MD

This park features miles of trails through mature woodlands and open water wetland that can host migrant warblers, Barred Owls, and the occasional Yellow-crowned Night Heron.

Dates: First Saturdays monthly (May 5, June 2, July 7, August 4, September 1, October 6, November 3)

Time: Meet in the parking area at the end of Lemons Bridge Road (off of 197) at 7:30 am.

No reservations are needed.

Leader: Bill Sefton (410-765-6482)

Governor Bridge Natural Area

Governor Bridge Road, Bowie, MD

This park offers a wide variety of habitats along the Patuxent River – mature riparian woodlands, second growth scrub, open grassy fields, and small ponds and creeks.

Dates: Third Saturdays monthly (May 19, June 16, July 21, August 18, September 15, October 20)

Time: Meet in the parking lot at 7:30 am. This is about 1 mile east of Route 301. No reservations are needed.

Leader: Bill Sefton (410-765-6482)

Luther Goldman Birding Trail Lake Artemesia Natural Area

Berwyn Heights, MD

The 2.2-mile paved birding trail loops around the 38-acre lake and alongside Indian Creek. Open water, wetlands, wood edge, riparian forest, and meadow offer opportunities to see a wide variety of resident and migrating songbirds, waterfowl, and raptor flyovers in different seasons. For beginners and experts. Binoculars recommended.

Dates/Times: PGAS and members of the Patuxent Bird Club invite you to join us on 1st and 3rd Thursdays monthly (May 3 and 17, June 7 and 21, July 5 and 19, August 2 and 16 at 6:00 pm.) Meet at the parking lot at Berwyn Road and Balew Ave. No reservations needed. **Contact:** 301-459-3375 for more information.

Delaware Bay

Dates/Time: Sunday, May 27 and Saturday, August 4. Meet at the Bowie Park and Ride at 7:00 am to carpool. RSVP Required.

Contact: Check www.pgaudubon.org for updates.

May 27: All day trip to the Delaware Bay to experience the great concentrations of shorebirds feeding on horseshoe crab eggs.

August 4: Join us for another all day trip to the refuges along the Delaware Bay in search of early fall migrant shorebirds. This early in the season, there are fewer migrants but the birds that are present are predominantly adults making identification easier. And early in the season is a good time for rare strays.

Monthly Bird Walks

Sponsored by Old Bowie Wild Bird & Nature

Dates/Time: Second Sundays monthly. Meet at the store (8700 Chestnut Ave, Bowie, 20720) by 7:00 am to carpool. You will return to the store by 12:00 noon. You may also meet at the sites.

May 13 ~ Governor Bridge Natural Area, Bowie

June 10 ~ Jug Bay Natural Area, Upper Marlboro

July 8 ~ Patuxent River Scenic Trail, Upper Marlboro

August 12 ~ Huntley Meadows Park, Alexandria, VA

September 9 ~ Merkle Wildlife Management Area

October 14 ~ Wootton's Landing, Harwood

November 11 ~ Terrapin Nature Park, Stevensville

December 9 ~ Kinder Farm Park, Millersville

Contact: Meghan First (301-464-2663)

At left: Eastern Bluebird feeding youngster a native Virginia Creeper berry.



AUDUBON ADVENTURES AND OUR CHILDREN

We've heard it before: today's children spend too much time in front of screens – TV, computer, iPod/iPad/DS – and less time outside playing, running, riding bikes, and exploring. When that balance is off kilter, the reduced time outside is worrisome to those concerned about children's relationship with nature and our planet's future. The National Audubon Society (NAS) bestowed its 2008 Audubon Medal on author Richard Louv for his bestseller, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Long before that, in 1984, NAS created *Audubon Adventures* to improve nature education for children in grades 3-5, and instill in them a love of nature in all its forms. A comprehensive kit correlated to state education standards, it has reached over 7 million children. Our chapter would like to put it into the hands of children in our chapter area, northern Prince George's County.



What is it? This year, teachers received 32 student issues on four topics: *Feathers, Fur, Fins & You!* Each topic came with an Educator's Guide with class activities, discussion points, etc. An Education's Toolkit had reproducible pages for nature activities: how to set up a Nature Discovery Corner, broach environmental disasters, keep a nature journal, teach sketching, etc. A beautiful flier opened to what a "flyway" is, then, to four birds significant in each flyway, and, finally, to a striking poster of the Americas color-coded with the different migration flyway routes.

Your board was impressed. Believing it to be an excellent teaching tool, we agreed to sponsor some classrooms this coming school year. How many students we reach depends on our efforts, and our resources. With shipping, kits are \$46.95/classroom. For 32 students, that comes to \$1.47/child! A bargain, right? Yes, except that also means eleven classrooms come to over \$500, so how many classrooms can we potentially, and responsibly, reach? We could use your help. Perhaps you have a special child in your life and would like their whole class to receive *Audubon Adventures*. A check for \$46.95 would sponsor a specific classroom, or one we enlist. Any donation will be of help. Know a teacher or principal you think might be interested? Tell us and we will be glad to contact them. However you might be able to help, you will make a difference and children will benefit. Any checks should be made out to PGAS, and mailed to the address on this newsletter with *Audubon Adventures* on the Memo line.

If you have any questions, please contact me, Maureen Blades, at 301-262-5148 or at mblades@comcast.net. I have sample packets of the four student issues you might like to see, or have to show to potential teachers. Thank you for your help and interest. We will report in the future how our project is coming along.

PGAS Volunteer Needs

The Prince George's Audubon Society still has an opening for a Membership Chair. This person would receive chapter-recruited applications from new members and mail them to the National Audubon Society. At meetings, the Membership Chair would circulate the clipboard that members and visitors sign, and would add new names to a list after a meeting to enable email notices in between gatherings. We all have fun when we see new birds, and our fun is multiplied when new members join. If you want to learn more, please contact Carolyn Sturtevant, crstur@aol.com.

Please also consider becoming a Director of the Board for Prince George's Audubon Society! The slate for upcoming elections is listed on the back cover of this issue. You may contact Carolyn Sturtevant, Chapter President at the above email address for more info.

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IKEA: An Interesting Birding Place

I want to share an interesting birding place for you to check out behind IKEA on Route 1 in College Park, Md. If you travel along the wooden fence and, then, the chain link fence at the side and back of IKEA, you can look down onto U.S. Department of Agriculture land, the southeast corner of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center. Little Paint Branch flows through this area, and resident beavers have dammed up parts of the creek and formed a pond. Deer and foxes walk through this combination of woods and wetlands with its creek and pond. I stay up top and just look down. I'm usually in my car sipping coffee, binoculars in hand and field guide on the seat. I feel like they don't even know I'm there when I'm sitting in the car.

Birding here for the last several years, I have logged in some very interesting sightings including: Bald Eagles, Hawks (mostly Red-shouldered), Turkey and Black Vultures, a pair of Belted Kingfishers, nesting Kingbirds, Eastern Bluebirds, a pair of Blue Grosbeaks, Goldfinches, Robins, Doves, Blackbirds including Red-winged Blackbirds (large flocks), Baltimore Orioles, Cedar Waxwings, Nuthatches, Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers, Sparrows (lots of varieties including White-Throated and Junco), Blue Jays, Swallows, Titmice, Chickadees, Catbirds, Mockingbirds, Chimney Swifts, Wrens, and Phoebe. I've seen Pileated, Red-bellied, Yellow-shafted Flicker, and Downy Woodpeckers. Waterfowl include: Canada Geese, Mallards (83 at one time!), Wood Ducks, a pair of Ring-necked Ducks, American Black Ducks, and a male Hooded Merganser (1/30/12 was my first sighting there.). Also seen were Great Blue Herons, Green Herons (4 were there all last summer), Great Egret (11 at one time), Common Moorhen (appeared this past fall and stayed several weeks), and many varieties of warblers, which I'm still working on identifying.

This has become one of my favorite spots. This morning, a female Yellow-shafted Flicker landed right near to me sitting in the car. The male Flicker flew in soon after. I drove off to leave, but the universe turned me around to go back and check the Red-shouldered Hawk nest I'd spotted – and there was the hawk! I sat and watched it trying to break off twigs from the surrounding trees. The nest doesn't look very sturdy – yet. Spring is coming and it gets very active there. I can't wait!

DIRECTIONS TO IKEA: (1) Going south on Rt. 1, turn right onto IKEA Center Blvd. (2) Going north on Route 1, turn left at the light onto IKEA Way and drive past the front entrance and left around the building. (3) Going up the ramp of Exit 25 off the Beltway, cross Rt. 1 at the light onto IKEA Way and follow (2) above.

Terry Watson, PGAS Board Member
February 17, 2012



Honoring Fred Fallon

The Prince George's Audubon Society honored Fred Fallon at our April program meeting for his 23 years as coordinator of the Bowie Christmas Bird Count. He had been a counter for 32 years, but as coordinator, he was responsible for recruiting others to go into the field and bring back the annual December census of birds in the Bowie count circle. It's a job for a man who knows his birders and their skills, who knows his territories, and who knows how to match birders with territories to get the most out of the 24 hours of daylight and darkness in uncertain weather. Those of us who have birded and counted with Fred also know how quick he is to share his birding tips and to compliment us on the lists we report after the count. Congratulations and thanks to this member and friend for his dedication to the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count!



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SLATE FOR BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR 2012-2013

The following slate of members is nominated for election as your officers and directors for 2012-2013. The election will take place at the June 12 meeting at the College Park Airport Annex. There are additional openings on the board - won't you consider joining the team? Nominations may be made at that time from the floor. Those elected begin serving after the election.

Officers:

President - Carolyn Sturtevant
Vice President - Meghan First
Treasurer - Bill Sefton
Secretary - Maureen Blades

Board of Directors:

Bob Elvander
Lynette Fullerton
Beth Kantrowitz
Mike Sampson
Teresa Watson

Membership Application

Join the National Audubon Society for an introductory rate of \$20.00 and receive these benefits:

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Please make checks payable to National Audubon Society and mail to:
PGAS, P.O. Box 1658, Greenbelt, MD 20768-1658

Prince George's Audubon Society Chapter C2ZL010Z

