

President's Chat

By Scott Young

As I complete my first year as President of the Montgomery Bird Club, I marvel at all the assistance and great advice I've received over the course of this past year. I'm also amazed by the willingness of members to step up and help when they are needed. And we are indebted to our members for the new ideas they bring to the Club. I tried to make these points at our recent successful Social Dinner. Our guest of honor was a Past President, Clive Harris, who has always been generous with his time and knowledge through leading field trips from Frederick to Worcester! And for his bird lectures, which I hope he continues as I'm still working on gulls and various shorebirds!! Diane Ford created a lovely painting of two Mottled Ducks, one of which was based on the one Clive discovered at Carderock previously.

For those of you who didn't have the opportunity to attend our May Social Dinner, I would like to briefly recap some of the awards we presented that evening. Outstanding Service Awards went to Ed Vigezzi, Brooke Levey, Tara Clifton, and Kathryn Carr for initiating our Youth Field Trips program. The Club is also indebted to Ed for all his hard work on keeping our website up to date and running. We thanked Dave Powell and Mark England for initiating "pop-up" field trips. Mark's trips to the Oak Landfill seem like an early precursor! Stella Tea was honored for her work on the Club's newsletter, the *Chat*, and on the Nominating Committee. We also recognized Solomon Woods for his technical help in getting the hybrid meetings up and going. Finally, we honored Emily Huang, our Vice-President, without whose hard work and dedication our Club would not be nearly as successful, especially with regard to the meetings.

Valued Service Awards went to five members. Anne Mytych was honored for her many years of service as a State and then Chapter Director. We honored Andy Martin for his "exceptional and multifaceted service to the Club in the areas of trip leadership, social entertainment, and support for the Breeding

Bird Atlas." Linda Friedland was honored for her indispensable organization of the Club's field trips.

I personally was especially grateful to our Past President and now MOS Vice-President, Evelyn Ralston, for her timely and relevant guidance to me. It is important to realize how important the previous President remains. The final Valued Service Award was presented to Chris Wright who served as our Treasurer for 8 years! And not for just writing checks, but for the numerous "little" things, like connecting with MOS and helping with the MailChimp. Thank you very much Chris.

And one final person I thanked was Joy Aso, who could not attend the meeting but for a decade (and with her husband prior to then) has provided the physical awards and pins we hand out.

We also announced the results of our annual election for Council members. We had a record turnout of email votes that unanimously elected the slate: President: Scott Young; Vice-President: Emily Huang; Treasurer: Lisa Norwalk; Secretary: Karen Cyr; State Directors: Mark England, Cheryl Hogue, Jim Ivett,

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President's Chat

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Janet Millenson, and Ed Vigezzi. (The Chapter Directors were not up for election this year.) Thanks to all who participated.

I'll close with a brief recap of the past year. We initiated hybrid meetings this year under the supervision of our VP, Emily Huang, and they went very well, I believe. All were recorded and are available to watch on our Vimeo channel. I am concerned that the teleconferencing aspect reduces the in-person attendance and opportunity for real personal socializing; so, if anyone has ideas about how to increase the incentive to attend the in-person meetings, I would be grateful for your suggestions.



Our finances remained steady thanks to our retiring Treasurer, Chris Wright. We are extremely pleased that Lisa Norwalk won election as our Treasurer and has, thus, just taken over Chris's responsibilities. Moira Davenport has supervised our expanding membership that has now surpassed 470 active members. Our website continues to develop under the Council's guidance and Ed Vigezzi's webmastership. As noted by our awards, our field trips, under the supervision of Linda Friedland, continue to be very popular.

MBC Artist-in-Residence Diane Ford (left) and MBC President Scott Young (right) presented Guest of Honor Clive Harris with a painting of Mottled Ducks. Photo by Evelyn Ralston

Editor's Corner

By Stella Tea

I am excited that MBC members Cintia Cabib, Becky Cromwell, and Ryan Carr are back to jazz up our summer issue with another documentary film update for *Bird Walk* and new book reviews. One of the two books, *Maryland Bird Guide*, was written and illustrated by Xaviana Leis, an 11-year-old girl from Edgewater, and she has been donating money from the book's sale to Owl Moon Raptor Center in Boyds, MD. Although Xavi is not a Montgomery birder, her work should be celebrated far and wide! She is a great example of what a passionate young person can accomplish given her knowledge, motivation, and the support behind her. It is with this thought that I am thrilled to introduce the Club's new youth program in the *Chat* (see page 7). The first time I typed "YMBC" I couldn't help but grin. It will be so wonderful for our current and future young Club members to have a local program to help nurture the spark of curiosity for the enjoyment and conservation of birds. Speaking of youth birding, I want to congratulate Ryan and his YMOS teammates on winning the elementary category in the Youth Division at the 40th Annual New Jersey Audubon's World Series of Birding a few weeks ago. Congratulations also to other Montgomery and DC young birders who participated. Have a great summer, everyone. See you out in the field!



Club News

In Remembrance of Tony Mead

By Anna Urciolo, Past MBC President

Tony Mead passed away in February of this year. He was a longtime member of the Montgomery Bird Club along with his wife, Cynthia.

When our meetings were in person, I would always chat with Tony while hanging around the refreshment table. His genial smile would greet anyone who talked with him. Tony was especially proud of his screech owl box that he had installed in his backyard. I can't remember if a screech owl ever took up residence (I somehow think that it did), but Tony would always entertain me with the antics of the squirrels that called it home.

Mike Bowen remembers Tony helping out on one of the "Earliest Bird" field trips that Mike led every year on January 1. He reports that "Tony had volunteered to give a lift to lots of participants on the trip in his capacious but ancient VW Bus. It was a generous gesture but everything fell apart when it started to rain, everyone piled in, only to find that the bus couldn't restart. We had to ferry all the erstwhile riders back to Georgetown Reservoir in a series of rescue missions."

Tony was a warmhearted patch in the quilt of our bird club. I will miss his smiling face.



MBC Participated in Montgomery Parks' Community Science Festival

By Emily Huang, MBC Vice-President

The Montgomery Bird Club, represented by Karen Cyr and Emily Huang, was a community partner at Montgomery Parks' Community Science Festival on April 29. It was an overcast and drizzly morning, but a sizable crowd showed up to attend the festival. Emily led a short bird walk at Lake Needwood with over 30 participants; she was able to explain the basic characteristics of the Barn Swallow, the White-breasted Nuthatch, the Baltimore Oriole, and a surprise Osprey that showed up at the lake. Karen and Emily then received visitors at the MBC tent, where they handed



out MBC business cards, played a binoculars game (using bins on loan from Montgomery Parks), and answered the community's many bird questions. We thank Montgomery Parks for inviting us to participate! For more event photos, please visit the Montgomery Parks Flickr page here: https://www.flickr.com/photos/mc_parks_mncppc/sets/72177720307927747/.

Emily Huang (center) led a bird walk during the Montgomery Parks' Community Science Festival at Lake Needwood. Photo by Montgomery Parks



Field Trips Will Return in the Fall

By Linda Friedland, Field Trip Coordinator

The Club has once again had a successful late winter and spring season with most trips fully attended, and some with long waiting lists. Check out the trip reports on our website at montgomerybirdclub.org/trip-reports/! A note of thanks to Ed Vigezzi for keeping the site up to date with new reports as well as any changes or cancellations.

Kudos and a big thank-you to all the leaders (see list below). Special thanks to Cheryl, Dave, and Mark who initiated our pop-up trips—informal "no reservations" trips geared to those members who can't make long-term commitments and would prefer a more last-minute approach!

We typically don't schedule trips when the Club's program closes down for the summer, but we will start up with a bang in September. We are already lining up leaders for the fall and early winter; it will be another exciting season!

If you are new to MBC or want to improve your birding skills, consider signing up when the trips are announced in the *Chat* and on the website at montgomerybirdclub.org/calendar/. This is a great way to gain new skills from our knowledgeable, experienced leaders and a good way to meet members of our local birding community. Watch for Club emails later this summer for more information.

- Mike Bowen and Anne Cianni
- Josephine Cox
- Mark England
- Clive Harris
- Gerry Hawkins
- Cheryl Hogue
- Emily Huang
- Brooke Levey
- Andy Martin
- Martha Morris
- Gene Murray and Susan Higginbotham
- Anne Mytych
- Jim Nelson
- Dave Powell
- Gemma Radko
- Evelyn Ralston
- Kathy Reitz
- Dave Roberts
- Paul Woodward
- Scott Young

Welcome New Members

By Moira Davenport

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Laurie Allen | Kathy Milani | Monique Shimm |
| Carolyn Avery | Julia Misplon | Kai Spratt |
| Les Becker | Daniel Myers | Alexis Stern |
| Rena Dubensky | Nathan Parmeter | Linda Tabach and Bob Elmore |
| Ellen Howe | Haoyu Qian | William Ueckermann |
| Donna Kurak | James Rostron | Trevor Valentine |
| Michelle McKay | Luis Selva | |



Birds of Note (February through Mid-May)

By Andy Martin



Ryan and Kathryn Carr were among a group of MBC birders reporting a **Short-eared Owl** on a Mark England-led field trip to Oaks Landfill (adjacent to Blue Mash Nature Trail) on February 11.

Stephen Davies found a quite unusual (for the spring) **American**

Golden-Plover, flying away from the Zion Rd pond (the small pond) at Blue Mash on March 26. This sighting represents the first springtime record for this species since one was reported by Dave Czaplak at Homestead Farm in March 1996. Stephen Davies also found another “rare for spring” shorebird species at Blue Mash a month later on April 26. A single **Stilt Sandpiper** was noted in the Zion Rd pond mixed in with a couple of **Solitary Sandpipers**. Some wet weather toward the end of April produced good conditions for migrant shorebirds in wet field areas along upper River Rd and Whites Ferry Rd. John Sojda found a single **Dunlin** along Whites Ferry Rd on April 29 and reported a **White-rumped Sandpiper** in the same area on April 30.

It has been a great spring for **Least Bittern** at Hughes Hollow within McKee-Beshers WMA. Hearing this furtive species is always easier than seeing one. Jared Fisher was the first to note one at Hughes Hollow on April 19, and Rob Hilton reported an amazing four **Least Bitterns** there on April 27. Peter Anderson found a **Tricolored Heron** along the Potomac River above Great Falls on April 25. A **Snowy Egret** was reported along the Potomac shoreline just upstream of Pennyfield Lock near the mouth of Muddy Branch Creek by Josephine Cox on April 29.

It seems **Anhinga** is almost on the verge of becoming an annual vagrant in Montgomery. James Boughton and Lesley Simmons found one on April 21 along the Potomac near Sycamore Island. This has occurred four years in a row. If you count Jim Ivett’s **Anhinga** from 2018, that’s five out of the last six years!

Bob Augustine found a **Clay-colored Sparrow** along the Gude Trail in Rockville on April 27.

Jared Fisher and John Sojda heard an **Eastern Whip-poor-will** along Izaak Walton Way near Poolesville on April 13 and an additional bird near Hughes Hollow on April 16. Although this bird seems to have been

extirpated as a breeder in Montgomery, it’s still possible to detect them in migration.

John Sojda noted the county’s FOS (first of season) **Virginia Rail** at Hughes Hollow on March 27. Reports of **Virginia Rail** also came from Crabbs Branch Pond, Lake Frank, Tucker Lane in Ashton, and Violette’s Lock. A **Sora** was noted by Greg Cooksey at Hughes Hollow on April 23, and Hartmut Doebel found one at Blue Mash on May 1.

Greg Cooksey clued into the distinctive “che-bek” call of a **Least Flycatcher** at Lake Needwood on April 29—never an easy bird to get in the county as they migrate through to points further west and north. And it’s easier to confirm via their distinctive call in spring than upon their mostly silent return through our area in fall.



Joshua Heiser found a **Marsh Wren** at Ken-Gar Palisades Park on March 7, and Louis Campagna noted one at Hughes Hollow on March 17.

Stephen Davies reported a **Black-billed Cuckoo** at Blue Mash on April 29. Jared Fisher heard the distinctive flight call of two **Black-billed Cuckoos** passing over his house while listening for night migrating birds on April 30.

Roxy Wolfe came across the county’s first **Summer Tanager** of the season at the NIH pond in Bethesda.

Some other notable spring migrants include a **Cerulean Warbler** found by Clive Harris along Hunting Quarter Rd within McKee-Beshers WMA on April 20 and a **Lincoln’s Sparrow** found on the same date by Jared Fisher at Violette’s Lock.

As of May 12, there have been 225 species of birds reported in Montgomery County. The top five county listers are Jared Fisher, John Sojda, Mark Ross, Mary Ann Todd, and Roy Howard.



Book Reviews

Slow Birding: An Alternate Approach

A review by Becky Cromwell

Slow Birding

The Art and Science of Enjoying the Birds in Your Own Backyard

by Joan E. Strassmann

TarcherPerigee (2022)

352 pages, hardcover (\$23.49)

“Slow birding” is a term I first heard during the height of the pandemic. Remember those days when our Club field trips were cancelled, and the meetings were Zoom only? A lot of us still went birding by ourselves or sat on the deck watching birds at the feeder. Pretty soon we began to notice new things about our regular customers: the way the White-breasted Nuthatch always took a single sunflower seed and quickly flew away. Or the time it gave a fierce display, spreading its wings to try to intimidate a European Starling who was competing for food. It was during this time of isolation that the idea of slow birding gained some popularity online. My Google search failed to nail down exactly when and where this term originated, although Bridget Butler, a naturalist based in Vermont, created a website in 2020 that has parallels with this book.

Here is Joan Strassmann’s explanation of slow birding: “If we all took a little more time with the birds that are around us then we might appreciate their actions and begin to understand the biological underpinnings of bird behavior... simply watching birds close to home in a way that makes a list of ten carefully observed birds more exciting than a list of a hundred seen quickly with only names and numbers.”

The key words here are “close to home” and “carefully observed.”

The concept of paying attention to bird behavior is not original, but this book makes a persuasive case for rethinking our traditional way of birding. Most of us head out with our binoculars, hoping to see some “interesting” birds, add them to our eBird list, and then keep going until we run out of bird sightings. The

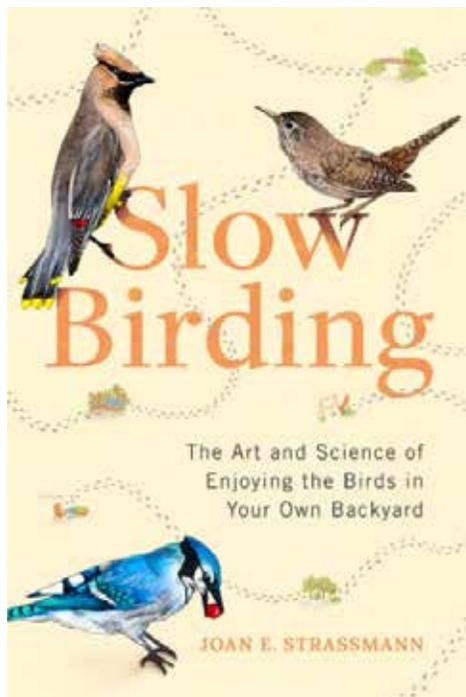
activities of birding are often reduced to getting better at the visual and auditory identification. That is fun and satisfying, and we can spend lots of time adding to our life list. But Strassmann suggests that this is a relatively shallow way to bird. She emphasizes staying in one place, whether it is the backyard or one corner of a nearby park. Observing birds, in a relaxed and mindful way, puts quality over quantity.

Because of Strassmann’s career in biology, she understands the value of unlocking the mysteries of behavior. She illustrates this aspect of slow birding by devoting chapters to common birds, such as the House Sparrow and the European Starling. She wants us to see how delving deeper into the behavior of these birds can be fascinating, even though the birds are ubiquitous and (sometimes) annoying.

The chapter on House Sparrows has several pages about DNA information, which traces their origins in the Steppes of Central Asia. This is interesting, but I found this kind of detail to be too dry and technical. I see her intent here, to teach us new and potentially interesting aspects of these birds. But learning this did not overcome my irritation with this species, which cheeps incessantly outside my bedroom window and takes over my bluebird boxes.

At the end of each chapter, there are suggested activities for slow birding which provide structured ways to observe behavior. For example, in the chapter about American Robins, Strassmann suggests that the reader locate a nesting pair and then take the time to observe them, making notes about their time on the nest. In the chapter about Dark-eyed Juncos, she describes the dominance behavior of these birds and sets up a strategy to observe this by using sunflower seeds and noting which birds are more assertive at the feeder.

All of this adds up to a well-written and informative book. Strassmann provides us with copious endnotes of her sources and a comprehensive index. The principles of slow birding are clearly articulated and illustrated with concrete examples. The point of this book is not to position slow birding as “better” than our usual eBirding forays but rather to demonstrate how a slower, more thoughtful approach to birding is an alternative that can broaden our appreciation of birds and nature in general.



Check Out the New Maryland Bird Guide!

A review by Ryan and Charlie Carr (ages 11 and 8)

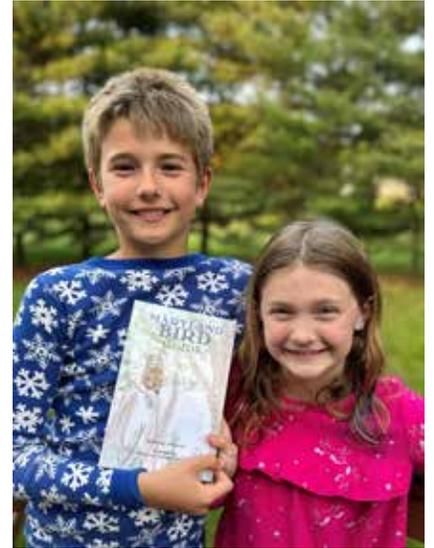
Maryland Bird Guide

by Xaviana Leis

Independently published (2022)

88 pages, hardcover (\$23.00)

Recently, we read the *Maryland Bird Guide* by Xaviana Leis. This book was written and illustrated by an 11-year-old (just like Ryan!). We thought the illustrations were impressive. Xaviana clearly put a lot of work into this book! Our favorite part was the fun facts. Some of the ones we found most interesting were that one male Red-winged Blackbird can have up to 15 different nests and that an American Robin has about 2,900 feathers! The book was broken up into several sections: Birds of Prey, Water Birds, and Backyard Birds. The last section, How to Help Birds, was fascinating and important. This book is an excellent complement to a traditional bird guide and very accessible for kids!



To order Xaviana's book, please visit her Girl Scout Troop Facebook page Girls Making the World a Better Place at <https://www.facebook.com/troop11023>.

Youth Birding: Special Edition

By Ryan Carr, Kathryn Carr, and Tara Clifton

We have exciting news this quarter! The MBC is starting new bird walks geared toward youth, and we would love to have all interested youth participate. The Y(outh)MBC walks are all located within Montgomery County and last about two hours. No experience is needed to join one of the walks; just bring binoculars. The walks are mainly youth-led, with adult mentors to help with identification and answering questions. If you are interested in mentoring a youth walk, please let us know! We hope that this endeavor will be an excellent opportunity for youth (ages 5 to 17) to learn more about birds and nature in a low-key and friendly environment.

Our first walk was held on February 26 and was mentored by Brooke Levey and Ed Vigezzi (thank you!). There were about a dozen kids who participated, and we saw 34 species. It took place at Gunners Lake in Germantown, which is a great place to view waterfowl in the winter. Overall, it was a really great experience, and we are glad so many kids came. On April 16, seven youth got together, and Andy Martin mentored our walk around Blue Mash Nature Trail (thank you!). It was a great day, and we spotted 49 species! To read our trip reports, please visit montgomerybirdclub.org/trip-reports/.



Andy Martin (second from left) joined several youth on a YMBC bird walk at Blue Mash. Photo by Tara Clifton

The YMBC plans to offer several bird walks this summer. For additional information about the YMBC walks, either to participate or to mentor, please contact Tara and Kathryn at youth.birding@gmail.com. For general information about youth birding opportunities, visit the Young Birders page on the MBC website (montgomerybirdclub.org/young-birders/).



Bird Walk Documentary Update

By Cintia Cabib

I never knew there were so many different species of sparrows! I had never seen a Belted Kingfisher or a Red-winged Blackbird. But during my multiple visits to Rockville's RedGate Park to produce my latest documentary *Bird Walk*, my eyes and ears became attuned to a whole new world of birds. Now I can spot the differences between a House Sparrow, a Song Sparrow, and a Chipping Sparrow. I recognize the familiar rattle of the Belted Kingfisher. I have even become a bit jaded when I come across a Red-winged Blackbird.

Since I last wrote about my film *Bird Walk* in the *Chat* one year ago, I have filmed over 60 bird species at RedGate Park, interviewed many more individuals for my documentary, captured aerial footage of the park, and secured several grants to help fund the film.

First, a recap: My documentary *Bird Walk* will focus on the birds and birders who have flocked to Rockville's RedGate Park and on the citizen campaign that lobbied to preserve the defunct golf course as a public park. Birders of all ages and diverse backgrounds will describe why they are drawn to RedGate Park, how and why they became interested in birds, the joys of birding, and the work they are doing to ensure that the park's ecosystem remains favorable for the survival of birds. An ornithologist will shed light on the sharp decline in the bird population and the conditions that make RedGate Park an ideal habitat for birds.

If you have visited RedGate Park lately, you may have noticed that some of the birds' favorite perching sites—the flagpoles, the fencing, the tall wooden poles, and the wide netting—are all gone. These last vestiges of the old golf course are being taken down as the City of Rockville begins to implement the Reimagining RedGate Master Plan. Adopted by Rockville's mayor and City Council in October 2022, the master plan envisions that 90 percent of the park will be "passive," emphasizing natural habitats and improved pathways. Over a period of years, the entire park will be developed as an arboretum. Recreational amenities will include community gardens, a small amphitheater, a playground, a dog park, and a new visitor center.

According to a 2019 study in the journal *Science*, the bird population in North America has declined by nearly 30 percent since 1970. That is a loss of almost three billion birds. I hope that through my film, I will inspire others to discover the pleasures of birding; delight in the variety, colors, and sounds of birds; and engage in efforts to preserve the bird population. I believe that when individuals forge a personal connection with nature, they are more likely to take action that will conserve and improve their environment.

Bird Walk is funded in part by the Maryland State Arts Council, the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County, the Sierra Club Maryland Chapter, and Women in Film and Video. Watch a preview of the film at <https://vimeo.com/761194526>. Visit the film's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/RedGateBirds/>. I look forward to sharing the documentary with you in 2024!



Two goslings snuggle at RedGate Park. Photo by Cintia Cabib



Producer Cintia Cabib films Stephon Sterns and his 11-year-old daughter Karsyn at RedGate Park. Photo by John Z. Wetmore



A Backyard Birding Journey

By Stella Tea

I recently spent several days birding Magee Marsh along the Lake Erie coast in Ohio for the first time with my family. I finally understand why so many people flock to the “warbler capital of the world” during spring migration, year after year. Warblers filled the air with their hopeful songs and painted the trees with their brilliant colors. They were so close to me at times that I found myself having to step back on the narrow boardwalks to focus my camera lens. In May, love was definitely in the air, and I spotted several nesting birds including Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Yellow Warbler, American Woodcock, Common Grackle, and Blue Jay. The Blue Jay on its nest was a special treat because it was the first time I ever saw one on a nest, and it reminded me of home, which is where I have spent most of my time birding.

When my family moved to our Layhill area home almost 20 years ago, we were not birders. At the time, we fell in love with the characteristics and potentials of an older home and a small creek that cuts through a good-sized backyard. Little did we know that the small creek, which can swell many times its size during heavy downpours, would offer many birds a place to drink, bathe, rest, and hunt. From Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Mallard, Wood Duck to hawks and sparrows, it has been fascinating to watch them away from the feeders. We fell in love with the idea of a shady yard with towering pines and oaks and fruit-bearing trees. We also didn't know that these trees in time would provide food and shelter for both resident and migrating birds.

For many years now, on my days off, I look forward to birding from my kitchen windows first thing in the morning or afternoon (depending on how late I went to bed the night before). On average, I spend about an hour watching the feeders and scanning the trees, the creek, and the sky for familiar birds and unexpected ones. If the weather is nice, I may step outside, watching and listening. Quietly, I may also walk down to the creek and spy on the ducks from afar, trying not to rouse them from their naps. Recently, such curiosity led me to seeing a Green Heron and a Black-crowned Night-Heron stalking for meals. Like the mornings, I also watch the birds feed and move about before they go to roost. The pandemic, which overlapped a good portion of the Maryland & DC Breeding Bird Atlas 3 timeline, allowed me to spend more time observing and photographing birds in my yard. Since 2018, I have submitted over 1,040 eBird checklists from home, about 50 percent of my total, with the Blue-winged Teal as the latest yard bird, bringing the total to 101.

When people ask whether we have pets, I like to joke that we do, but our “pets” live outside and come and go as they please! In 2020, my husband set up a nesting box, hoping the Eastern Bluebirds would come, and they did! We have several boxes now in different areas of the yard and have successes with the bluebirds, House Wren, Carolina Chickadee, and House Sparrow. The “sparrow” box is one the House Sparrows prefer to use, and most of the time they share the yard space peacefully with other birds during breeding season. Spring and summer are fun to watch adult birds building nests and feeding young, and eventually the young birds fledging and returning to our yard to feed. The fall and winter seasons are fun too, seeing groups of Dark-eyed Juncos, White-throated Sparrows, and the occasional Red-breasted Nuthatch.

Like many birders, I enjoy the thrill of hiking area parks and trails, traveling to see new birds, and chasing rarities. However, birding at home to me is meditative and informative. I get to know many of the birds well. Regardless of my mood, they always lift my spirit and teach me something new. To me, this is slow birding at its finest.



Wood Duck in the backyard creek. Photo by Stella Tea

May Social Photos

Photos by Evelyn Ralston, MOS Vice-President and Past MBC President



Two of the evening's award recipients, Chris Wright (left) and Mark England (right)



Guest of Honor Clive Davis



Andy Martin, another award recipient of the evening, at the bartending table

May Social Photos



MBC members Jyoti Dayal (left) and Alice Young (right) sharing part of the evening together.



MBC Vice-President Emily Huang with husband Solomon Woods who was recognized for helping make the hybrid meetings a success.



MBC members Anne Cianni and Mike Bowen talk to Lisa Alexander (right), executive director of Nature Forward (formerly Audubon Naturalist Society), where the dinner was held.

The Chat
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