



May 2021

Volume 52, No. 2

## President's Chat

Difficult to believe that we're practically at the end of the Club year. I wish we were also at the end of the pandemic. But there is no certainty here. However, the Club has continued to do well in membership and activities. Thanks again to all the trip leaders and to our trip coordinator, Linda Friedland.



I am also very happy that we finish the year with a new website. We had been well served by the site designed over 10 years ago by then Club member Eric Skrzypczak. Even after he left Maryland for Texas, Eric continued to maintain the site, increasingly helped by our current webmaster Ed Vigezzi. We are indebted to the two of them. However, websites have to evolve, and ours did not respond to our needs anymore. Last summer, the Club Council approved a plan to get a new website developed, and we selected Scott Moody of Labrador Design for this task. I want to heartily thank those who participated in this enterprise, especially the Website Content Committee: Cheryl Hogue, Dave Powell, Scott Young, and Ed Vigezzi who remains our webmaster. They were always ready for yet another late-evening Zoom meeting, even without refreshments.



The site has new content: an extensive section on bird conservation, for which I thank our Conservation Chair Gail Mackiernan; an updated "The History of Birding in Montgomery County" by MOS Historian Don Messersmith (thanks, Don!); a Members in the Spotlight section, which is still embryonic; and more. Please use the contact form directly from the

site, and do let us know what you like, what you don't, and what you would like us to add. Thanks in advance! We also intend the website to attract new members and help us grow strong and diverse. Here, too, suggestions are welcome.

I look forward to seeing you on Zoom at the May meeting, during which we will hold our annual elections (see p. 3). And I hope that, by September, enough of us will be vaccinated to have herd (flock?) immunity to COVID-19.

Enjoy the spring migration, and continue to be careful, especially if you travel over the summer.

– Evelyn Ralston

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# Spring Calendar

Despite the steady progress we have seen on COVID-19 vaccination in the county, we anticipate conducting our final meeting in May virtually. The Club will meet again in September, and we hope to be able to meet in person. Earlier this year, we reserved Woodend in Chevy Chase for Wednesday, September 29 (thank you, ANS!) for a delayed Social and to celebrate the beginning of what we hope will be a normal new year. Stay tuned!

## May 8 (Saturday), May Count

The Montgomery May Count will be conducted on May 8 this year, which also happens to be the Global Big Day. Please email your lists of sightings—eBird checklists or not—to Diane Ford, the Montgomery May Count compiler, at [dmford455@yahoo.com](mailto:dmford455@yahoo.com). If you are interested in finding out more about the May Count events, please visit the MOS website at <https://mdbirds.org/go-birdwatching/count-birds/may-count-spring-migration/>. For information on the Global Big Day, please visit the eBird website at <https://ebird.org/news/global-big-day-8-may-2021>.

## May 19 (Wednesday) 7:30 p.m.

### South African Birds

#### Speaker: Josh Engel

Josh is the founder and chief guide for Red Hill Birding. He grew up birding in the suburbs of Chicago and knew from a young age that birding and travel would factor heavily in his future. After spending a semester studying abroad in Ecuador as an undergrad, he knew he needed to get back there after graduation. He soon found a job guiding in Ecuador for a large international birding tour company; he then moved to South Africa where he spent nearly four years as a full-time guide, leading trips throughout southern Africa, Madagascar, Asia, and beyond. Before starting Red Hill Birding, Josh was an ornithologist at The Field Museum in Chicago. Based in Chicago, he appears regularly in the [local media](#), served on the board of the Illinois Ornithological Society, and helped run the Illinois Young Birders group.



*Knysna turaco*

# Club News

## Podcast with Cheryl Hogue

Last October, Cheryl Hogue was interviewed on the Women Birders (Happy Hour) podcast hosted by Hannah Buschert. The two met at the 2020 San Diego Bird Festival. In the podcast, they discuss boosting diversity, inclusion, and respect in the birding community, a goal Cheryl passionately supports. Cheryl also describes how she got into birding. As part of the podcast, Hannah invented a cocktail based on Cheryl's favorite bird: the Superb Fairywren of Australia. For the podcast and the drink recipe, visit <https://www.gobirdingpodcast.com/women-birders-happy-hour>. Scroll down the list of the podcasts to the left of the "Whisper to Me" tile to find Cheryl's.

## In Memoriam: John Williamson

We recently learned that longtime Club member John Williamson has died at the age of 83. Those of you who have been in the Club for a while will remember him as a rather quiet member with a British accent. John was vice-president of the Club in 2006-2007 (with Helen Patton as president). He also volunteered at ANS as guide for the free Saturday Beginner Bird Walks that introduced some of us to birding. His obituary in the *New York Times* details his accomplishments as an economist at the International Monetary Fund and also mentions that, during his career, he often chose conferences to attend "based on the ornithological opportunities they presented." His life list included more than 4,000 birds. Unfortunately, in recent years, he had not been able to attend Club meetings because of ill health. Read more about John's life here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/15/business/economy/john-williamson-dead.html?smid=em-share>.



# May Is Election Time

As in 2020, the yearly election of Club officers and Chapter and State Directors will take place online during our May 19 meeting. Andy Martin, the chair of the Nominating Committee, which also included Rae Dubois and Moira Davenport, presented the slate of candidates on April 21 during the Club meeting held on Zoom. No additional nominations were made, and the nominations were formally closed. The number of Club members attending the meeting was above the required 20% of the active membership for a quorum.

According to the Amendment of the MBC Constitution accepted at the February meeting (see the February 2021 issue of *The Chat*) and given that there are only single candidates for each post, we can hold a single vote for or against all the candidates at once, as a slate. The vote will take place by a show of raised hands.

Here is the slate of candidates:

## **Officers** (1-year term)

President: Evelyn Ralston (2nd year)

Vice-President: Scott Young (2nd year)

Secretary: Alice Jacobsohn

Treasurer: Chris Wright

## **Chapter Directors** (2-year term)\*

Becky Cromwell

## **State Directors** (1-year term)

Anne Mytych

Dave Powell

Ed Vigezzi

\* Chapter Directors John Houghton, Moira Davenport, and Cheryl Hogue have one year left in their current term and do not need to be re-elected.

## Welcome New Members

**Abigail Caldwell**

**Martha Clarke**

**Joan Cleary**

**Janet Conley**

**Pamela Feldman**

**Scott Garrison**

**Maribeth Hassett**

**Elizabeth Holliday**

**Roy Howard**

**Jim Ivett**



**Bill and Patty Jensen**

**Kristen Lekstrom**

**Brooke Levey**

**Joel Lynn**

**Sandra Rosenhouse**

**Peter Siegal**

**John Sojda**

**Eric Spillman**

**Matthew Von Hendy**

**David Whitford**

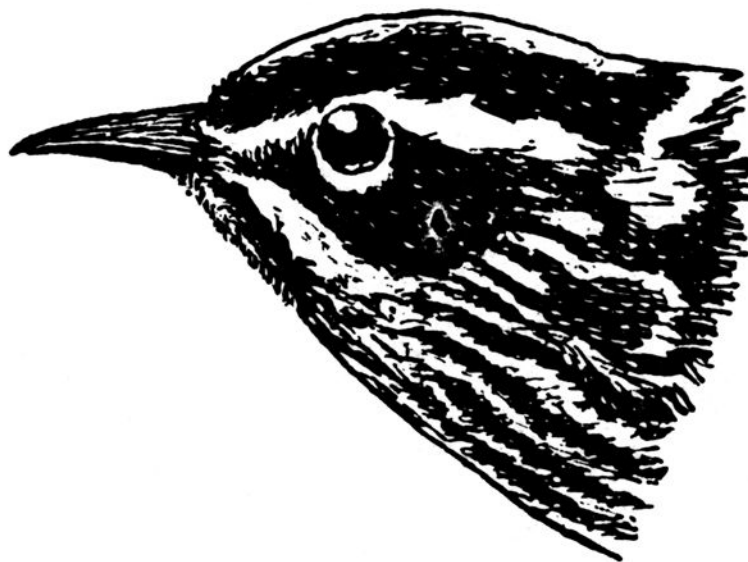


# Spring Field Trips

**MAY 7 (Friday)**

## **BIRDING BY EAR AT HUGHES HOLLOW**

Tune up your ears as we listen for and learn to identify the songs and calls of migrant and local breeding birds. The trip will be geared to new birders but all are welcome. Start at 7 a.m. at the parking lot at Hughes Hollow. Limit: 10. For more information and reservations (required), contact the LEADER: Paul Woodward at [grackling@att.net](mailto:grackling@att.net).



**MAY 8 (Saturday)**

## **LITTLE BENNETT REGIONAL PARK**

Half day. We will be looking for warblers and other migrants on the Wilson Mill and Kingsley Trails. Possible Kentucky Warbler. Limit: 10. For reservations (required) and more information, contact the LEADERS: Woody and Rae Dubois at [dengue1@verizon.net](mailto:dengue1@verizon.net).

**MAY 9 (Sunday)**

## **ROCK CREEK PARK, DC**

Near peak time for migrant warblers, vireos, etc. Start at 7 a.m. at the Nature Center parking lot. Limit: 10. For reservations (required) and more information or directions, contact the LEADER: Gerry Hawkins at [maineusa@comcast.net](mailto:maineusa@comcast.net) or 571-277-8406 (cell).

**MAY 9 (Sunday)**

## **RICKMAN/WOODSTOCK EQUESTRIAN PARK**

Join us as we explore this location for some spring early-morning birding on the west side of Route 28 (<https://rb.gy/qpdqda>). We'll bird the broad fields and separating woods, beginning at 7 a.m., hoping for warblers and sparrows, vireos, woodpeckers, and raptors. Limit: 10. For reservations (required) and more information, contact the LEADER: Scott Young at [wsyacy@verizon.net](mailto:wsyacy@verizon.net). Dave Roberts will co-lead.

**MAY 13 (Thursday)**

## **BLUE MASH AND OAKS LANDFILL**

Half-day trip starting at the Blue Mash Nature Trail, where we will look for a variety of songbirds and other species. Then we will drive over to the adjacent Oaks Landfill to look for raptors, Blue Grosbeaks, possible Dickcissels and Grasshopper Sparrows. Start time: 7 a.m. at 20500 Zion Road, Laytonsville, MD. Limit: 10. For reservations (required), contact the LEADER: Mark England at [englandmark@comcast.net](mailto:englandmark@comcast.net) or 240-308-4114.

**JUNE 12 (Saturday)**

## **PATUXENT RIVER AT BROWN'S BRIDGE**

On a morning walk, we'll look for Cliff Swallows building mud nests beneath this bridge in the northeastern part of the county. We will also explore wooded trails on WSSC property bordering the reservoir to observe other possible breeding birds including Scarlet Tanager, flycatchers, and thrushes. Be prepared for bright sunlight at the bridge and possible biting insects in wooded areas. Trip will be cancelled in case of heavy rain or thunderstorms. Limit: 10. For reservations (required), time, and directions, contact the LEADER: Cheryl Hogue at [cheryl.hogue@gmail.com](mailto:cheryl.hogue@gmail.com).



# Youth Birding



Photo by Stella Tea

The key highlight of the last several months had to be the March Birdathon fundraiser. The passionate young birders of the YMOS checked off all of the 100 species on this year's challenging must-see list, an impressive first for this group! Many are now preparing for the Big Day on May 8. YMOS is a subgroup of the Maryland Ornithological Society and runs birding trips for youth throughout the year. For more information, upcoming events, and trip highlights, visit the Youth Maryland Ornithological Society page on Facebook, the Young Birders page on the MOS website (<https://mdbirds.org/young-birders/>) or the MBC website (<https://www.montgomerybirdclub.org/young-birders/>), or contact George Radcliffe at [radclifg@gmail.com](mailto:radclifg@gmail.com).

– Stella Tea

## COVID-19 Restrictions

Given the overall decrease in COVID-19 cases in the county; the progress in vaccination; the high demand for field trip participation; and the fact that birding trips are, by definition, taking place outdoors, the MBC Council has agreed to lift the maximum number of participants per trip from 6 to 10. Trips with a co-leader may have 2 groups of 10, as long as the two groups follow different routes. To find out specific information about a trip, please contact the trip leaders.

Please continue to observe these rules for every field trip:

- Wear a mask.
- Keep at least 2 arms-lengths (6 ft) apart from others.
- Do not share binoculars, spotting scopes, or phones except with members of your household.
- *Cancel your participation*, even at the last minute, if you are presenting any symptoms of COVID-19.

These rules are subject to revision depending on the evolution of the pandemic. We also recommend avoiding carpooling unless it is with a member of your household.

A special note of thanks to our intrepid trip leaders for continuing—in spite of restrictions—to take us to new places (and old favorites!) and to share their love of birds with us.

– Linda Friedland, Field Trip Coordinator



# Birds of Note (mid-January to mid-April 2021)

Jim Ivett was first to report 2 **Short-eared Owls** hunting over a fallow field at the southwest corner of West Willard Rd and Izaak Walton Way in Poolesville on February 21. And to the delight of many birders, these owls stuck around for almost a month. On some evenings, as many as 4 owls were seen. Additionally, parking and viewing were easy thanks to the kindness of the Izaak Walton League of America, Bethesda Chevy Chase Chapter, which allowed birders to park safely along the property's access road. The owls were last seen on March 17 by Monte Tarbox. **Short-eared Owls** were also reported from Mark England's ANS and MBC forays to the Oaks Landfill in January and February.

The small wooded island near the dock area at Lake Whetstone near Gaithersburg has experienced a tremendous influx of nesting **Black-crowned Night-Herons** starting in late March, with as many as 90 (yes 90!) birds being reported there by Victor Ramirez on April 11. This island has traditionally hosted a handful of breeding **Great Blue Heron** pairs and a few **Black-crowned Night-Heron** pairs each season since the early 2000s, but 90 individuals is truly unprecedented! D. Woolverton reported a **Glossy Ibis** at Hughes Hollow on April 8. The first **American Bittern** of the season was noted by Louis Warren from the same location on March 21.

February 25 produced a couple of notable eBird high counts for waterfowl species in the county. Joe Hanfman reported 200 **American Wigeon** and 175 **Northern Pintail** on the Potomac River at Violette's Lock. And that same day and at the same location, MaryAnn Todd noted 280 **Gadwall**. A **Surf Scoter** was reported by Scott Young at Violette's Lock on February 20.

February 26 was a big northward migration push for **Tundra Swans**. Toni Evans estimated at least 1,000 birds at Triadelphia Reservoir (another high count for the county). That same day, 969 **Tundra Swans** were reported by Jim Ivett at Little Seneca Lake within Black Hill RP. An additional 280 birds were seen that morning on the Potomac River at Violette's Lock by Dave Czaplak. Will Knowland found and photographed a **Trumpeter Swan** at Lake Churchill in Germantown on March 5.

John Sojda reported a **Sora** at Hughes Hollow on March 21.

Howard Youth reported the first **Caspian Tern** of the year over the Potomac River near C&O Canal Lock 7 on April 10. The following day near Riley's Lock, Dave Czaplak

noted both **Forster's** and **Common Terns** and a single **Laughing Gull**. Two **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were seen at the Patton Turf Farm near Poolesville on February 28. Concetta Goodrich found a **Great Black-backed Gull** at Riley's Lock on February 25.

A **Rough-legged Hawk** was seen during Mark England's trips to Oaks Landfill on February 4 and 9. Another **Rough-legged Hawk** was seen by several birders near the intersection of Prices Distillery and Burnt Hill Rds. First spotted by Robin Skinner on February 15, the bird was seen again on February 16. Thorny DeMarco reported a **Rough-legged Hawk** slightly west of this location near the Montgomery/Frederick border on February 17. Monte Tarbox reported a **Golden Eagle** soaring over Blue Mash Nature Trail on April 3.

A surprise **Red-headed Woodpecker** started coming to the feeders at Locust Grove Nature Center in Cabin John RP on February 7. First noted by Jackie Raiford, the bird became an instant celebrity. Max Wilson was still seeing this particular bird in and around the park's feeders as of April 12.

Johnnie Ramos found 3 **Common Redpolls** mixed in with a flock of **American Goldfinches** at McKee-Beshers WMA on March 9.

On February 9, Clive Harris noted 3 **Lapland Longspurs** in the fields of Homestead Farm near the intersection of Sugarland and Montevideo Rds. When Clive returned on February 14, he counted 29 **Lapland Longspurs**. A county record!

Renate Wilson had an amazing 3 **Baltimore Orioles** come to her jelly feeders in the Olney area on February 12. She was still reporting them as of April 15. Patricia Milligan hosted either a very early or more likely an overwintering **Baltimore Oriole** at her Dickerson backyard on March 28.

Melissa McCeney was surprised to see an "out of season" **Tennessee Warbler** at her backyard suet feeder in Germantown on January 20 and 21. Ken Clark came upon an overwintering **Common Yellowthroat** along Elton Farm Rd near Patuxent River SP on January 24.

The Great Falls **Painted Bunting** reported in the February issue was still being seen through February 12. Although no additional **Painted Buntings** were reported from elsewhere in the county, as many as 10 other birds were seen (mostly at feeders) at nearby locales in VA, MD, and DE over the past few months.

– Andy Martin



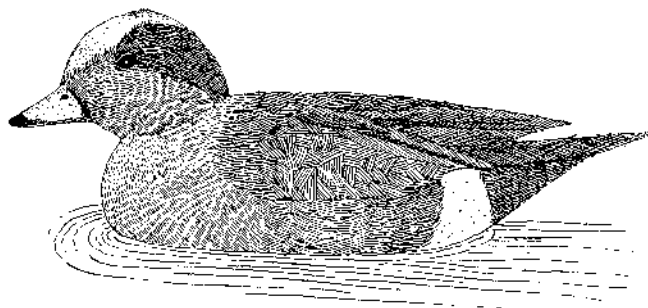
# Trip Reports

## Wednesday, January 6, 2021, Cambridge and Blackwater NWR

Leader: Mark England. Participants: 7 including leader. Weather: Mostly overcast, mid-40s, but stiff winds made it seem much colder. Species: 46 that I can remember. As on the December trip exactly a month earlier, we started on the bitter-cold bank of the Choptank River in Cambridge and made our usual several stops along the waterfront. Wind-driven swells and spotting scope instability made it difficult to scan the river, but we had the expected Surf Scoters for sure, Bufflehead, and Double-crested Cormorants. At the marina, we again found very close Long-tailed Ducks, both male and female. Unlike in December, there were at least 200 ducks at the end of Oakley Street, mainly Canvasbacks and Lesser Scaup, with numbers of American Wigeon, Redheads, and Ruddy Ducks as well. There also appeared to be a few Greater Scaup, based on close observation of head shape and bill details. The slow trip down Egypt Road was more productive than in December, with a well-seen eastern Palm Warbler at our first stop, a distant flock of about 100 American Pipits, some Eastern Meadowlarks in flight, and, surprisingly, two Pine Warblers perched together on a telephone wire at the intersection of Egypt Road and Key Wallace Drive. The refuge Life of the Marsh Trail through the loblolly pines was very quiet till the end, where we took the alternate path back to the parking lot through more shrubby habitat. We found a close Brown Creeper and then several Brown-headed Nuthatches very low down on nearby tree trunks, certainly the best looks at them that any of us had ever seen. At the Observation Point marsh overlook platform, we were able to look down on a puffed-up American Bittern stalking through the shallow water to finally catch and swallow a small minnow, one of the high points of the trip. We had more expected waterfowl on the refuge including Northern Shovelers, flying Northern Pintails, Ring-necked Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, American Black Ducks, and hundreds of Tundra Swans. Rather amazingly, we saw no kestrels, bluebirds, or Red-tailed Hawks this time, and only one distant Northern Harrier. Three of us did see harriers at the Bestpitch Ferry bridge near sundown but no Short-eared Owls as we had hoped since three had been seen there on the previous visit in December.

## Sunday, January 17, 2021, Black Hill Regional Park and Gunners Lake

Leader: Gerry Hawkins. Nine persons joined the leader in a search for waterfowl at Black Hill Regional Park and nearby Gunners Lake on a mild, overcast morning. Notwithstanding unseasonably warm weather this winter, we saw 13 waterfowl species and other waterbirds at four stops. At the Black Hill RP Visitors Center, we observed Common Mergansers, Buffleheads, and distant Canada Geese, as well as Pied-billed Grebes and Great Blue Herons. Here we also enjoyed various songbirds at the well-stocked feeders, including a couple of beautiful Eastern Bluebirds. A short drive to the boat ramp area at Black Hill produced several Mallards, American Black Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, and a continuing female Greater Scaup, all at close range. A stop at the Route 121 bridge over Little Seneca Lake produced more Common Mergansers and Pied-billed Grebes and a distant adult Bald Eagle perched on a cell tower. A 10-minute drive brought us to Gunners Lake, a 20-acre, man-made lake in a sea of development in Germantown that is known for its winter waterfowl, and it did not disappoint. Here we walked part of the 1.25-mile paved trail around the lake to see a small number of Canvasbacks and Redheads, including males and females of both species, over 20 Hooded Mergansers, several male Ring-necked Ducks, several Ruddy Ducks, a pair of Gadwall, a solitary male American Wigeon, and a solitary Wood Duck standing on a log next to the trail, as well as Mallards, of course. Thanks to all participants for coming on this fun field trip during these difficult times.



# Trip Reports

## Sunday, February 21, 2021, Hughes Hollow

Leaders: Nathan and Stella Tea. Species: 30. After the delay caused by the snow/ice storm, six brave participants joined us on a slippery, makeup walk at Hughes Hollow. Forecast predicted the temperature to be sunny in the mid-30s with little to no wind, and that is exactly what we experienced. The little wind and clear skies allowed us incredible views of some of the birds at this time of the year. The once full impoundments were mostly covered in a layer of ice, but a handful of ducks were present in a solitary pool of open water. In the flock were the continuing Redheads (a lower number than before but still pleasant to see), a couple of female Canvasbacks, a single Ring-necked Duck, and some Hooded Mergansers. We birded along the icy dike as many of the participants eagerly looked for good opportunities for photographs. Along the dike, we picked up an overwintering Eastern Phoebe, great looks at foraging Swamp Sparrows, a Winter Wren, and a Yellow-rumped Warbler. We continued to walk carefully down the dike toward the sunflower fields and eventually came upon a flock of fast-moving sparrows. Among them, a very cooperative Brown Thrasher and a Fox Sparrow offered excellent views and opportunities for photographs as they foraged near our group. Nearby we picked up some more foraging birds including a Brown Creeper, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and many other sparrows. Then, out of nowhere, one participant spotted a white, flat flying object swooping down right in front of our group and into a little crevice in a tree. It turned out to be a flying squirrel! We have not seen flying squirrels out in the wild, away from feeders, and during the day! Everyone got excellent views as it came in and out of the crevice. After a few minutes, it glided away into the forest. As we walked closer to another open field, we stumbled upon the same flock of sparrows and attempted to make our way through the snow-covered ground for a closer look at the Fox Sparrow only to be met by sharp burrs and a flyover Sharp-shinned Hawk. With exhilaration, we gingerly made our way back to the parking lot where we were delighted by another Ruby-crowned Kinglet, a Brown Creeper, and a Hermit Thrush actively bathing and foraging.



*Flying Squirrel at Hughes Hollow.  
Photo by Mark Ross.*



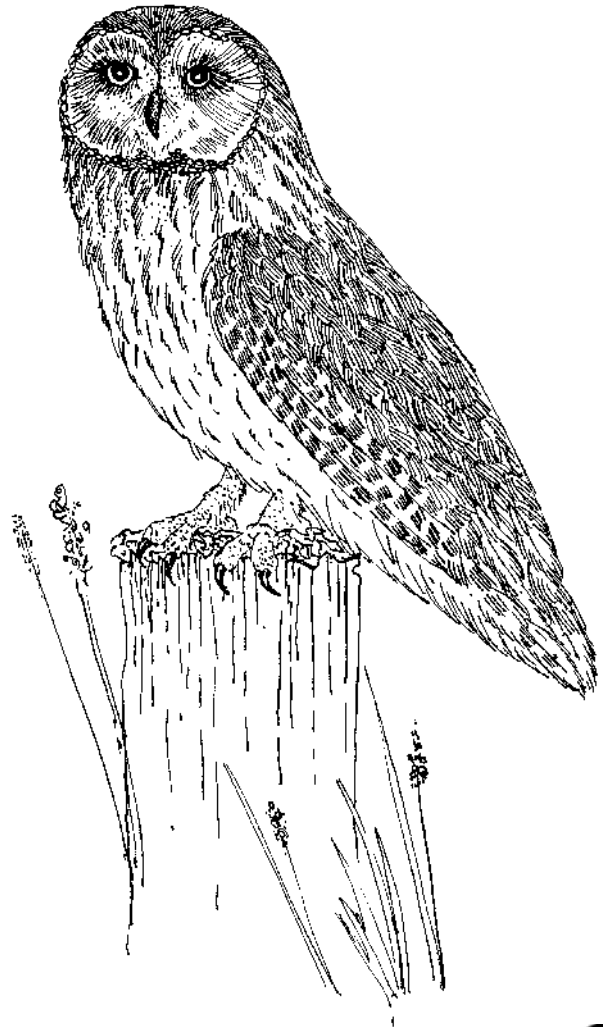
*Photo by Stella Tea*



# Trip Reports

## February 2021, Oaks Landfill: Highlights of five trips

Leader: Mark England. Because of a lengthy waitlist held over from January and the six-person limit on current trips, there were five late-afternoon MBC trips into the closed Oaks Landfill in February, primarily intended to see raptors and sparrows, which this site is best known for. The first trip on Thursday, 2/4, was exceptional for raptors, with eight species seen, most notably a probable first-year Rough-legged Hawk (RLHA), which I had seen while scouting before the trip. We went directly to the top of the landfill and saw the RLHA very well, though it never perched very close. We also had four Northern Harriers, Cooper's, Red-shouldered (RSHA) and Red-tailed (RTHA) Hawks, a Bald Eagle, a Merlin, and the male Short-eared Owl (SEOW) that had been present since January. The next trip, on 2/6, had to be entered through the Blue Mash side of the landfill, as there had been a shooting on Rt. 108 in the morning and the road was closed for the police investigation. I saw the RLHA during scouting about 3:15 p.m., but it proved very elusive during the trip, flying away from us at one point over the big pond to Blue Mash and never allowing the group a good look. We did see 4 Northern Harriers, the continuing SEOW, an Eastern Phoebe, 4 Savannah Sparrows, and 7 Eastern Meadowlarks. On a heavily overcast 2/9 trip, we saw the RLHA quite well, and some got good pictures, including one by Scott Young of a harrier buzzing the hawk as it perched in a pine tree. There were also RSHAs and RTHAs and good views of the hunting SEOW. A week later, on 2/16, the RLHA was gone, possibly reappearing in some fields east of Clarksburg for two days, where it was flagged on eBird and seen by a number of birders. It seemed similarly marked to the one we saw at the landfill. On the windy 2/16 trip, we had great looks at White-crowned Sparrows and, later, American Tree Sparrows, spotted by Clive Harris. The harrier show before sundown was excellent as usual, and there were now Gadwall and Green-winged Teal in the mostly thawed pond, among other ducks. On 2/27, we finally got in a trip that had twice been rescheduled due to snow and ice. The trip was for beginners and those who had never been to the landfill. With clear weather near 50 degrees, the large pond was finally ice-free, and a nice variety of waterfowl was viewed in great light, including two Northern Shovelers (rare at this location), 3 male Canvasbacks, 2 Wood Ducks, 2 Gadwall, 3 American Wigeon, 4 Green-winged Teal, a Hooded Merganser, Bufflehead, and assorted Ring-necked Ducks, Mallards, and a lone American Black Duck. Raptors included 3 RSHA, 2 RTHA, 1 Cooper's Hawk glimpsed only, and at least 3 harriers. We saw 2 juvenile White-crowned Sparrows and an Eastern Phoebe and were then treated to exceptional looks at 3 hunting SEOW well before sundown. As I was locking up the gate to leave, I heard at least two displaying American Woodcock adjacent to the landfill entry road, giving us 35 species for the trip, a particularly good number for this site in winter.



# Trip Reports

## Saturday, March 6, 2021, North Branch and Kengla Trails

Leaders: Josephine Cox and Anne Mytych. Participants: 14 including leaders. Species: 35 for Jo's group and 27 for Anne's group. Weather: upper 20s to low 30s and sunny. We split into two groups; Jo's group opted for the circular route along Rock Creek's upper stream valley. They started off along the open area heading east toward the stream valley, which has a mix of small marshes, open fields, and wood edges. They heard the first of many Red-winged Blackbirds setting up their territories. They spotted an American Kestrel perched on a fairly distant tree, which then flew down closer to them for a better look. Once they entered the stream valley, they heard and saw the usual winter resident woodpeckers and other woodland species. They had good looks at 2 Red-shouldered and 2 Red-tailed Hawks before the end of the trip. There is a well-marked path that meanders back and forth near the creek, but at one point they followed a path right next to the creek with a grove of large sycamore trees where they had a flurry of activity including several Eastern Bluebirds, 2 Brown Creepers, an Eastern Phoebe, and an Eastern Towhee. As they headed out of the stream valley, a Wild Turkey ran across the path not far from them. They could also see several other turkeys scuttling along the brushy edge. Their luck continued near the end of the trip along the open marshy field area where they had a really nice photo op of a male kestrel, a Common Raven flew overhead, and they had close-ups of Black and Turkey Vultures sunning themselves. Just over 4.5 miles of walking and a respectable 35 species. Anne's group did the shorter route focusing on the meadow areas. They saw several Red-winged Blackbirds, as well as Dark-eyed Juncos, Chipping Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Field Sparrows, Swamp Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows, and a nice surprise of an American Tree Sparrow, who very cooperatively posed for photos. They also got a nice look at an American Kestrel and the two hawks seen by Jo's group before finishing. Jo's full list can be seen here (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S82861510>), and Anne's full list can be seen here (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S82859359>).

## Sunday, March 7, 2021, Lois Green Conservation Park, Gaithersburg

Leader: Mark England. Participants: 7 including leader. Weather: Sunny but cold, 28-36 degrees. Species: 23. We did the full circuit of the park on this bright but cold morning, but birds were pretty scarce, as perhaps they were waiting for it to warm up. We had excellent looks at some waterfowl including 7 Green-winged Teal, 3 Canvasbacks, and good numbers of American Black Ducks and Ring-necked Ducks, among others. We had several good looks at Eastern Bluebirds in great light and glimpses of a few sparrows, including Field. Red-shouldered Hawks were the only raptors seen, but we saw both adults and juveniles. A Barred Owl flushed out of some white pines, and we saw it flying further into some woods. Surprisingly, we did not see a single woodpecker species but only heard a Red-bellied or two. Despite the relative absence of birds, the group enjoyed the introduction to the park, as none of them had been there before.

## Wednesday, March 10, 2021, Gunners Lake

Leader: Mike Bowen. Participants: 6. Weather: Sunny and delightful, temps. in the 50s and 60s. Species: 32. This trip had been postponed for a month because of frozen and potentially dangerously icy conditions on the original February date. Fortunately for everyone, the lake was not only ice-free but offered a number of waterfowl that—typical for this small body of water—gave everyone really great views. For the first time that the leader can remember, Redhead was the most abundant diving duck here, with more than 20 easily seen and photographed at close range. Other diving ducks on the lake were Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck, and Hooded Merganser. Two American Wigeon and 6 Gadwall accompanied the usual numerous Mallards in the “dabbling duck” category, together with a drake Wood Duck in gorgeous plumage. Three Pied-billed Grebes were spotted just as we were finishing up. Bird(s) of the day were a pair of Red-shouldered Hawks that copulated in full view of the group, albeit briefly. The moment was captured photographically by our unofficial photographer and can be seen on eBird at <https://ebird.org/atlasmdcc/checklist/S83128814>.



# Trip Reports

## Friday, March 12, 2021, Wheaton Regional Park for Beginners

Leaders: Evelyn Ralston and Susan Hunt. As predicted, Friday marked a change in weather from sunny and warm to gray and moderate. But no rain! Besides the co-leaders, there were 7 participants including grandparents with their 5-year-old grandson, who was the reason for their presence. At first it appeared eerily quiet along the mini-train tracks, but things picked up. Sparrows and ducks were down from previous days (gone was a Fox Sparrow, and only one Ring-necked Duck remained instead of 8 the day before), but Eastern Towhees were not only heard but also repeatedly seen, and two Ruby-crowned Kinglets surprised us. Pretty much all the common species were seen, with a total of 31 bird species, not bad for this between-seasons moment. The best was at the very end: as we were back at the parking lot, the young boy lifted his head and asked “What is this bird?” Indeed there was a large dark bird...a juvenile Bald Eagle! This little boy shows promise!

## Saturday, March 27, 2021, Cabin John Regional Park

Leader: Max Wilson. Participants: 6. Species: 40. We had a marvelous morning for our walk of the powerline cut bisecting Cabin John Regional Park. Sparrows, woodpeckers, and a pair of American Kestrels are the highlight here, and both performed. Even before leaving the parking lot, we had a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Once we were under the powerlines, we almost immediately had a group of sparrows, including half a dozen Field Sparrows that sat up well for the group. We hit the jackpot later in the walk when we found two red Fox Sparrows. Not everyone was able to get their bins on them, but one eventually sang several times for the group. On the return trip, we came across a female American Kestrel on the high-tension tower holding a snake. That bird eventually dropped the remainder of its meal and flew off. We later found a second female kestrel enjoying another snake meal. At that point, about half the group carpoled to Locust Grove Nature Center, which had been hosting an adult Red-headed Woodpecker since mid-February. The bird was on its favorite limb when we arrived and was eventually spooked into a cavity by a Cooper’s Hawk.

## Wednesday, March 31, 2021, Pennyfield Lock

Leader: Dave Powell. Six people joined me on a walk on the C&O Canal at Pennyfield Lock. A total of 37 species were seen. The woods along the entry roads were full of White-throated Sparrows, which was our most common bird of the walk. Flocks were encountered all along the canal along with flocks of Yellow-rumped Warblers. Highlight of the walk was a Purple Finch (Brownie), which unfortunately did not stay long enough to be seen by everybody. Other highlights were a singing Eastern Towhee, pairs of Wood Ducks, and Common Mergansers. Best bird of the walk was a roosting Barred Owl! The owl allowed great looks and was seen by all. Nice morning for a walk.



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