

The Bluebird

Newsletter of the Prince George's Audubon Society

PGAS is a local chapter of the National Audubon Society

April 2014

President's Perch



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As I write on this first day of spring, a 3" remnant of snow in a shady nook is all that remains in our yard of our last 8" snowstorm, crocuses are blooming, daffodil leaves are pushing up, buds are forming on trees – and snow is in the forecast! What a winter! Who knows if snow will be on the ground when you receive this, but we can count on the annual rites of spring continuing – birds on the wing heading north, backyard birds already investigating nest boxes, & confusing fall warblers morphing back into – sometimes – more identifiable breeding plumage. Change is always in the air.

Look for board members representing you at the Bowie Green Expo on April 12th, one of several new initiatives to inform others of our chapter, its activities & goals to improve our communities & help birds. Enjoy and learn at upcoming bird walks and programs. Help clean-up our natural area parks. Join with other Audubon members at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge planting salt marsh grass as a buffer against future changes in sea level rise.

You are holding another important change. This is the last paper newsletter that will be delivered via the mail to our 800+ members. The board has made the decision to go digital, a step not taken lightly. It *is* a step that makes putting out *The Bluebird* simpler, easier, less time-consuming, much cheaper, and green. The May-June & future newsletters will be at www.pgaudubon.org for you to peruse at your convenience. This change requires your letting us know how you wish to receive it, if you haven't already. If you want to be notified when each issue is complete, just send your name, phone number and email address to info@pgaudubon.org and we will email and/or attach it. If you prefer to receive a print copy in the mail, please contact me with your name/address/zipcode/phone number and, if possible, your membership number on the label of a recent *Audubon*, and we will continue to mail that out to you. We want to stay in touch!

Maureen
301-262-5148; mblades@comcast.net

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

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Upcoming Monthly Meetings

7:30 pm - College Park Airport Annex, 1909 Cpl. Frank Scott Drive, College Park, MD 20740
Doors open at 7:00 pm. Call 301-262-5148 for more information & www.pgaudubon.org for directions.

Birding Cuba

with

Donald Messersmith

7:30 pm- Tuesday, April 8, 2014

Cuba offers many surprises for the first-time visitor. In 2012, Don went to Cuba on a bird survey trip with an Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS) group. It is a poor country, but facilities for the tour were excellent, the food was good & the birding was better than hoped for. In 12 days, they recorded over 150 species of birds, many endemic to Cuba. They had excellent guides, good bus transportation, & traversed about 2/3rd of this island nation. Don's Life List of birds at the end: over 4000 species.

Dr. Messersmith is a retired U. of MD Professor Emeritus where he taught Entomology, Ornithology & Environmental Ed. He has been teaching adult evening courses for the ANS Field Studies Program with the U.S. Dept. of Ag. Graduate School for 50 years, & teaches a bird class for senior citizens at Johns Hopkins U. He opened China to regular birding tours in 1982, & has taught & lectured there, in India, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Cyprus & Britain. He organized & led worldwide nature/general tours for 57 years. After the death of Orville W. Crowder, organizer of Crowder Nature Tours, the 1st overseas nature tours, Don & his wife Sherry continued his tours as World Nature Tours. They sent tour groups throughout No. America & many parts of the world for over 20 years.

Don was a member of "The Luther Committee," 6 friends of National Wildlife Refuge Manager Luther Goldman, longtime PGAS member/field trip leader & renown wildlife photographer & presenter, who died in 2005 at age 95. Luther had been a tour leader for World Nature Tours. The committee worked with the Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission to create the Luther Goldman Birding Trail at Lake Artemesia, the county's 1st & only. Don spoke at the May 2008 dedication. His *History of Birding in Prince George's County, Maryland*, a 1st & only, was a dedication memento, since updated & self-published. Don's most recent adventure was a 5-month-9-day x-c trip planned after his Sherry's death in 2012, on which he hoped to visit places & add birds not yet seen. He left in spring 2013; visiting places he & Sherry had attachments to, friends, family, & more parks, national wildlife refuges, national parks, states, restaurants - & miles - than can be listed here. The trip added 10 new birds, bringing his Life List to 4030 species!

Listening to and Recording Night Flight Calls:

What's It All About?

with

Andy Martin

7:30 pm – Tuesday, May 13

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Upcoming Bird Walks, Events & Other News

PGAS sponsors bird walks at two natural areas of the Patuxent River Park co-managed by the Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission & PGAS, & along the Luther Goldman Birding Trail at the Lake Artemesia Natural Area. For complete details & directions, go to www.pgaudubon.org.

Thurs., April 3 & 17; May 1 & 15, 6 pm -
Lake Artemesia, Luther Goldman Birding Trail
Meet parking lot, Berwyn Heights, MD. No
reservations needed. Contact: David Mozurkewich,
Patuxent Bird Club, 301-509-2212 or
mozurk@bellatlantic.net

Sat., April 5; May 3, 7:30 am - Fran Uhler Natural
Area. Lemons Bridge Rd, Bowie, MD. No
reservations needed. Contact: Bill Sefton
(kiwisuits@msn.com)

Sat., April 12, 1-4 pm - 4th Annual Bowie Green
Expo, Kenhill Center, Bowie. How to live a
healthier green lifestyle while reducing your
footprint. Environmental agencies, non-profits,
local and regional businesses with green
products/services. New: Green Kids Center with
hands-on activities. www.bowie.greenexpo.org

Sat., April 19; May 17, 7:30 am - Governor Bridge
Natural Area. Meet parking lot, Governor Bridge
Rd. Bowie, MD. No reservations needed. Contact:
Bill Sefton (kiwisuits@msn.com)

Sun., April 27, 7 am - Points along the Patuxent
River for migrant waders and songbirds. Meet
at Bowie P&R. Contact Dave Mozurkewich,
Patuxent Bird Club, 301-509-2212 or
mozurk@bellatlantic.net for more info.

Chapter Address Change

PGAS has changed its P.O. box number and city.
Please note the new address:
PGAS, P.O. Box 1311, Bowie, MD 20718

Trip Report & Clean-up Governor Bridge NA, Sat., March 15

Tho' windy/cold days preceded it, the day warmed up for the 17 birders who came out. Picking up trash as they bird is common on these 3rd Sat. walks, but this day was designated the spring clean-up. With bare hands, gloved hands, and handy picker-upper gadgets, dozens of plastic bags were filled to bulging with a gigantic teddy bear, tiny rusty bicycle, a sheet metal panel, 5-gal. paint bucket, and countless plastic and glass bottles, cans, paper, bits and pieces. A MNCPPC Park Ranger came by and took some in his pick-up truck for disposal. The leftovers were piled at a trash barrel for a photo op. Check it out on our Facebook page: Prince George's Audubon Society.

43 species birds were seen, down somewhat from the approximate same time last year, undoubtedly because of colder weather this winter.

Highlights:

- * 5 sp. of woodpeckers, minus Hairy
- * 3 Golden-Crown Kinglets; no Ruby this year
- * 1 Brown Creeper, 1 Killdeer, 1 E. Phoebe
- * At the pond, heard a Belted Kingfisher, saw a Great Blue Heron, 5 mallards, 45 Ring-necked Ducks - and a lone Rusty Blackbird!
- * Sparrows were sparse in the beginning, but did see 1 Field, 4 Fox, 8 Song, and 14 White-throated
- * A swirl of 92 Red-Winged Blackbirds in the wood edge of a cornfield dropped down into the rows with a small number of Grackles and Starlings and over 4 doz. Robins mixed in.
- * 14 E. Bluebirds - always a sight for sore eyes
- * 67 Canada Goose
- * At least 2 sp. of gull: Herring and Ring-billed
- * There were the 2's: Brown Thrasher, E. Towhee, Junco, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Fish Crow
- * And 11 M. Doves, 11 Jays, 8 Am. Crow, 6 C. Chickadee, 4 Tufted Titmouse, 6 C. Wren rounded off our list

eBird record by Trip Leader Mike Sampson, narrative by Maureen

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Slate for Election of PGAS Officers & Board of Directors

The following slate for 2014-15 will be presented at the June 10 annual meeting for election. All current members of the National Audubon Society are eligible to vote or run for office. Nominations are welcome from the floor June 10, or can be called in beforehand to 301-262-5148.

OFFICERS:

President: Maureen Blades (Incumbent)
Vice-President: Meghan First (Incumbent)
Treasurer: Larry Williams
Secretary: Sherry Williams

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Bob Elvander (Incumbent)
Lynette Fullerton
Beth Kantrowitz (Incumbent)
Mike Sampson (Incumbent)
Bill Sefton
Teresa Watson (Incumbent)

Wanted!

Newsletter Editor

The Bluebird needs a new editor, help included! Going digital means a much simpler process. A format already exists, but if you are creative, and have computer or graphic skills, you can create your own. Questions? Contact: Meghan, 301-464-2663 (w), 202-247-6974 (c) or polyxenes@verizon.net or Maureen at 301-262-5148 (h) or mblades@comcast.net

Writer

We need help putting together a tri-fold brochure to tell about our chapter: who we are, what we do - bird walks, programs, clean-ups and other activities. Such a handout is needed for newcomers at all the above, at libraries, other public places, and at our PGAS outreach table at community events. A past example can be a guide. Won't you give us a hand? Please contact Maureen, as above, with questions or more details.

You Are Invited! *Audubon at Blackwater Day* 10 am-3 pm, Saturday, May 31

Pickering Creek Audubon Center of Easton is again partnering with Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge to highlight the value and importance of salt marshes. Regional Audubon chapter members will mingle with one another while experiencing the wonders of our marshes firsthand. Participants start at Blackwater restoring habitat with a salt marsh grass planting for 1-1/2 hours, break for lunch, then, spend the afternoon on a tour of the refuge led by Pickering Creek staff.

Blackwater, in Dorchester County, Maryland, is one of the largest extensive contiguous tidal marshes in the northeastern U.S. The vast landscape provides habitat to a great diversity of plants and animals, many of which are found nowhere else. This uniqueness led to its recognition as a globally significant Important Bird Area (IBA), a designation that brings awareness to and conservation of areas vital to birds and other life. Four birds that will benefit from the recognition are on the American Bird Conservancy's and the National Audubon Society's Watch List are the Black Rail, Saltmarsh Sparrow, Seaside Sparrow, and Clapper Rail.

People, too, benefit from protecting marsh habitat. Dave Curson, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon Maryland and our chapter's September speaker, reminds us that marshes are "Critical to all of us. They provide a first line of defense against rising sea levels and increased storm damage. Fishing, recreation and tourism makes the economical impact of salt marshes great in Dorchester County."

Learn where and what a salt marsh is, what species use them, factors contributing to habitat loss, and what's being done to "adapt" them. Kids welcome! Free. Pizza provided for lunch. Often wondered, "What can I do to make a difference?" You can do this. Contact Maureen to make reservations, and for details and what to bring.

Pickering Creek Audubon Center in Easton is dedicated to community-based conservation of natural resources through environmental education and outreach on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay. Check them out at www.pickeringcreek.audubon.org

Project SNOWstorm Update

At the time of our Feb.-Mar. newsletter (online at www.pgaudubon.org), Maryland had only one Snowy Owl banded and fitted with a harness and GPS-GSM solar transmitter, *Assateague*. Two more have joined him, *Hungerford* and *Monocacy*, and, now, they are among the 22 from PA, DE, MA, NY, WI and MN you can track at www.projectsnowstorm.org. See where these Snowys have been, are now, how photos sent in can help researchers age and sex the owls – and how they got their unique names.

Steve Huy of Project OwlNet answered questions after the showing of the film *Magic of the Snowy Owl* before a large crowd at the National Wildlife Visitor Center on March 22, part of the annual D.C. Environmental Film Festival. Steve was winding down from his Project OwlNet research on Saw Whet owls and their migration in November and December, but his usual respite never came as reports came in of a Snowy Owl in Harrisonburg, VA, Nov. 27, then, in Frederick, and, then, a couple hundred on Christmas Bird Counts in Newfoundland! More owls were banded than fitted with transmitters. He banded 7 and fellow researcher and past chapter speaker Dave Brinker, of Maryland DNR and Project SNOWstorm, banded 1-2. Steve estimated that a couple of hundred Snowy Owls were banded from the northeast down to Maryland.

Harnesses are custom-fitted and made to last the life of each bird. Transmitters set to collect data every 30 minutes, retrieved every 3 days, may now be reset for every 2 minutes, as recent movements show the owls becoming restless, indicating migration is at hand. Feather, blood samples, and other data are taken. Stable isotopes will tell where each owl originated.

You can support this fast start-up project. Steve appreciated receipt of a check from Friends of Patuxent saying donations go directly to research, Researchers, banders, tech experts, and others all volunteer their time, gas, etc., because of the exceptional opportunity they saw to learn more and the urgency of working quickly with this largest irruption of Snowy Owls in decades. It is gratifying that their goal of raising \$20,000 was quickly surpassed to \$70,000.

Epcot Features Audubon Hummingbird Garden

Heading to Orlando and Disney World? The National Audubon Society is excited to announce the new *Hummingbirds at Home* garden exhibit at the Epcot International Flower & Garden Festival in the Walt Disney World Resort. The exhibit runs March 5 - May 18, 2014 and features walk-through hummingbird gardens, tips for attracting these magical creatures, and information on how to report them through the Hummingbirds at Home citizen science program.

Contact NAS exhibit host Don Kendzior at donkendzior@gmail.com to schedule a guided tour. Park tickets are required for entry.

(Audubon Chapter Leader Update, March 12, 2014)

2014 Great American Arctic Birding Challenge March 1 - June 1, 2014

Birds from six continents rely on America's Arctic in Alaska for nesting, breeding, staging, and molting; their ranges reach across the Lower 48 states and beyond. Birdwatchers from around the United States can test their skills in the Great American Arctic Birding Challenge this spring to find the most birds in their state from the contest checklist of Arctic birds. The contest runs from March 1 through June 1 so that teams of birders all over the U.S. can spot birds as they migrate. Find a warbler expert, your friend with the top-of-the-line scope, or someone with supersonic hearing to identify those sparrow calls...or head out with your regular birding buddies. Each team can have up to six members.

Contact Audubon Alaska's Beth Peluso at bpeluso@audubon.org or 907-276-7034 for checklist and contest rules or if you have questions. Let the games begin!

(Audubon Chapter Leader Update, Feb. 26, 2014)



Prince George's Audubon Society

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The Prince George's Audubon Society (PGAS) was established 42 years ago as a chapter of the National Audubon Society to serve northern Prince George's County. In the ensuing years, PGAS has been instrumental in the clean-up & creation of the Fran Uhler Natural Area (FUNA), the creation of the Luther Goldman Birding Trail at Lake Artemesia, starting bluebird nest box trails, conducting clean-ups, and providing free nature/bird walks, field trips & countless programs to its membership & the general public. In cooperation with the Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission, PGAS has led bird walks at FUNA for 27 years & at the Governor Bridge Natural Area (GBNA) for 11. Incorporated in the State of Maryland, PGAS is a non-profit 501(c) 3 organization of over 800 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 & receive *The Bluebird*, official newsletter of this chapter, keeping them informed of bird walks, field trips, monthly programs & other news of interest. In 2001, the PGAS & the Patuxent Bird Club, a chapter of the Maryland & Ornithological Society, began jointly planning programs & field trips. See activities & news inside & come join us to learn more about the natural world, birds, their challenges, & what we can all do to help.

New Membership Application

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

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Email Address: _____

Please make checks payable to: **National Audubon Society** & mail to:
PGAS, P.O. Box 1311, Bowie, MD 20718

Prince George's Audubon Society Chapter C2ZL010Z

