

**A HISTORY OF BIRDING
IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND**

by
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DEDICATED TO
LUTHER CHASE GOLDMAN



DEDICATION

This history is dedicated to Luther Chase Goldman, who was born November 2, 1909, and died January 12, 2005. He was a Prince George's County resident for many years after his retirement from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For much of his 35-year career with the USFWS, he served as a Refuge Manager at national wildlife refuges in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and California. His excellent photographs eventually led to his being appointed as Manager of the Service's photographic file in Washington, D. C. He also translated Spanish language publications during his tenure in Washington. He was a member of the distinguished Washington Biologists' Field Club. Following his retirement from the Service, he frequently led nature tours in the U. S. and overseas for the former World Nature Tours and other groups. He maintained bird feeders and records at his College Park home and birded as often as he could in Prince George's County. The Luther Goldman Birding Trail is being established at Lake Artemesia Natural Area Park in his memory.

FOREWORD

When considering the cradles of birding in the United States, few would believe that Prince George's County, MD, would rank in the firmament of places that some of the great birders, naturalists, and field biologists in America came to call home.

Prince George's County may seem a rather unlikely place for serious birders. Founded in 1696, and formerly a rural-agricultural county known principally for its history of tobacco farming (and its singular contributions to the history of the nation during the War of 1812), Prince George's County later gained fame in the mid-twentieth century as the bedroom community for the burgeoning federal work force of Washington, D. C. Often looked down upon as the "poor sister" of the Washington suburbs, Prince George's has been transformed in recent decades by upscale development, to the regret of some who wistfully remember the slower-paced rural agricultural times.

However, notwithstanding its development history, Prince George's County also contained some remarkable attributes and quite outstanding natural resources. Among the natural features were abundant mature forests through the central portion of the 485- square mile county; 11 square miles of water; being bounded by two major tidal tributary rivers of the Chesapeake Bay – the Potomac and the Patuxent; a pleasant collection of rolling hills, fields, and farms; and quite diverse freshwater and brackish tidal and non-tidal wetlands – all in all, a very pleasant and appealing place for birders to while away their leisure hours.

But what put Prince George's County on the map for any birder's Hall of Fame was that it became home to a succession of some of the most noted birders, naturalists, biologists, and scientists in the country who happened to live in Prince George's County because they worked at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, the Beltsville Agricultural Center, the University of Maryland, or just a relatively short commute to the national headquarters of the Smithsonian Institution and the many federal agencies located in the District of Columbia. To read the history of bird references and records in Prince George's County is to read a list of the luminaries of American conservation and science.

And few, if any, would have ever learned of the illustrious and fascinating history of birding in Prince George's County if it weren't for Luther Goldman.

After Luther died at age 95 in 2005, a group of friends and admirers of Luther got together to discuss a fitting tribute for this remarkable man. A birder and biologist from his youngest days as he accompanied his father, the well-respected biologist, Edward A. Goldman, on research trips and family outings, Luther came to love the outdoors and all the wildlife that lived in it. He eventually became a biologist for the U. S. Biological Survey, went on to become manager of a number of national wildlife refuges, and capped an illustrious career by becoming the first official photographer of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In his later years, Luther enjoyed a productive and happy retirement as an avid birder and accomplished wildlife photographer. His narrated talks at local birding clubs at which he shared his outstanding photos were not to be missed, for Luther's knowledge, experience, and good story-telling of his experiences in his days in the field were of interest to even the most accomplished birders.

This eminently interesting history of birding in Prince George's County would not have come to pass if it were not for the enduring friendship and great respect for Luther that Don Messersmith, a colleague and friend of Luther's for three decades, had for him.

The “Luther Committee,” as we came to call ourselves, discussed a number of ideas for a memorial to Luther that would suitably recognize his lasting love of nature and his willingness to generously share that love of nature with everyone he met, young and old alike. We settled on the notion of proposing a birding trail, the first in Prince George’s County, at Lake Artemesia, one of the parks of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, a place Luther loved to bird with his friends.

In the ensuing discussion, I may have suggested that the Luther Goldman Birding Trail would be much enhanced if there was a birding site guide for those who birded the trail, and also, wouldn’t it be great to have a history of birding in Prince George’s, too. And to our satisfaction, Don agreed to write it.

There are few others who could have undertaken this project. Don has a depth and breadth of knowledge about the birding history of our county that is profound. And, truth be told, he remembers most of the contemporary birders because he likely was their professor or field leader once upon a time! He has matriculated more students that have gone on to distinguished careers in conservation, biology, and the sciences than any brace of professors from the University of Maryland.

The resulting fruit of Don’s labors in tribute to Luther Goldman is a gift to those of us living today who enjoy birds and nature and also to future generations who may wonder about the men and women who lived, worked, and birded in dear old Prince George’s, and who so enjoyed her fields, forests, wetlands and waterways. It is a fascinating history woven around the simple love and enjoyment of birds, and all the more rich for the friendship and respect which stimulated Don to write it in tribute to Luther.

- Richard J. Dolesh

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prince George's County was inaugurated on April 23, 1696, and named after Prince George of Denmark who was married to Queen Anne of England. The official County Bird is the Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialis*. It was designated the official bird by a Resolution of the Prince George's County Council on March 17, 1976.

EARLY BIRD RECORDS

The earliest records of Prince George's County birds are difficult to determine, because they are mingled with reports from the neighboring District of Columbia and from other areas of Maryland. A vague reference to a quote by the Rev. Andrew White in 1677 stating that parrots abound in winter in Baltimore County might suggest Carolina Parakeets in what is now Prince George's County. The earliest published account to definitely mention birds in this area is found in *A Chorographical and Statistical Description of the District of Columbia* by David Baillie Warden [Paris, pgs. 210-211, 1816]. He listed 32 species. He mentioned that the Turkey had disappeared by this time.

As far as can be determined, the earliest serious birding was done by Dr. Elliott Coues and Dr. D. Webster Prentiss between 1858 and 1862 when they were medical students at Columbian University. They wrote that "the country all about was as primitive as the most enthusiastic naturalist could desire." An article based on their extensive notes and titled "List of Birds Ascertained to Inhabit the District of Columbia, etc." in the *16th Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution for 1861* [Pgs. 399-421, 1862.] reported on 226 species. This includes a few references to Prince George's County localities.

In 1879, Coues published a "List of Birds Ascertained to Occur Within a Radius of Fifty Miles around Fort McHenry Md." in *Zoology of Vicinity of Post, Ornithology*. [1879.]. This list contains 233 species. In 1883, Coues and Prentiss published a second edition of their "List" completely revised and rewritten, which appeared in the *Bulletin of the United States National Museum* [No. 26, 133 pgs.]. The list is entitled "Avifauna Columbiana: Being a List of Birds Ascertained to Inhabit the District of Columbia, with the Times of Arrival and Departure of Such as Are Non-Residents, and Brief Notes of Habits, etc." It includes some references to birds collected in Prince George's County. There are several pages devoted to rail hunting and the abundance of woodcocks along the Anacostia River. A map attached to the article covers an area that stretches as far as the Patuxent River in the northeast and Charles County to the southeast, thus encompassing the entire Prince George's County.

In 1895, Frank Coates Kirkwood published "A List of the Birds of Maryland" in the *Transactions of the Maryland Academy of Sciences* [2:241-382]. Although most of the records are from the Baltimore area, there are a few references to birds collected elsewhere including Prince George's County. Among those localities are Fort Washington, Upper Marlboro and Laurel. "In September, 1865, several Carolina Paroquets were shot while gunning for Sora on the Potomac River." Kirkwood lists several sightings of Passenger Pigeons as late as 1893 in the Baltimore area. He also has a reference from J. J. Audubon, "The Birds of America" [IV: 124, 1840], that the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is seen occasionally in Maryland (Could this be Prince George's County or some other county?). Kirkwood's report includes 288 valid forms (birds whose sightings are definitely confirmed) and 22 hypothetical (not definitely confirmed) birds. Incidentally, he reported that the last Heath Hen in Maryland was reported from Marshall Hall in neighboring Charles County in 1860.

Lucy Warner Maynard published her “Birds of Washington and Vicinity” in 1898. She mentions only one Prince George’s County location – Laurel. She states, “Passenger Pigeons are now very irregular in September and October.” This book lists 284 species for this region.

In 1902, Sylvester Judd published his interesting book, “Birds of a Maryland Farm” [*U.S. Dept. of Agric. Bull. 17*]. The farm was O. N. Bryan’s Farm and it is a study of the economic value of birds to a farmer. The farm is today the National Colonial Farm and a section of Piscataway Park on Bryan Point Road on the Potomac River opposite Mt. Vernon. He lists those birds that are inimical to the farmer’s interests and should be shot including “English” Sparrow, Sharp-shinned and Cooper’s Hawks, Great Horned Owl, sapsucker, crow, Crow Blackbird (Common Grackle). Beneficial ones include flycatchers, swallows, warblers, vireos, cuckoos, woodpeckers (exclusive of sapsuckers), quail, Meadowlark, Orchard Oriole, Mockingbird, House Wren, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Chipping Sparrow. On page 85 he wrote, “A specimen of the passenger pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*) collected at Marshall Hall (Charles County) by Mr. O. N. Bryan was donated by him to the Smithsonian Institution in 1892.”

Wells W. Cooke published two papers on bird migration in the District of Columbia in the *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington* [1908, 1913], explaining in the second paper that the District “in an ornithological sense includes the country within a radius of ten miles of the Capitol.” The ten-mile limit would extend just beyond the present Capital Beltway in Prince George’s County.

Dr. Harry C. Oberholser organized a Cooperative Bird Census in Washington, D. C. on May 13, 1913, published in the *Wilson Bulletin* [March, 1917]. Three of the lists published were from Prince George’s County: Harry Oberholser traveled 29 miles, 11 of them by rowboat from Benning to Bladensburg and return, and observed 91 species; E. R. Kalmbach had 61 species from Laurel to Woodridge, D. C.; and W. R. Maxon and T. H. Kearney had 51 species from Lanham to College Park.

In 1918, W. L. McAtee located and published some early bird records including one of a Yellow Rail killed on the Potomac River by George Washington Custis in 1843. Another note of interest for birds in Prince George’s County was reported by Howard Ball and Robert Wallace on some birds observed on Bolling Field in 1936. The first comprehensive bird list from Prince George’s County was published anonymously in *The Oologist* [46: 165-166, 1929] by R. Bruce Overington of Laurel. This list gives the status of about 183 species, but includes few dates. He shot his last three Passenger Pigeons along the Patuxent River in the fall of 1888.

BIRD-RELATED ORGANIZATIONS

Several organizations have contributed to the development of birding in Prince George's County. The Biological Society of Washington, formed in 1880, published lists that included Prince George's birds. In the *Proceedings* [Vol. 34: 1-22, 1921], May Thacher Cooke reported on "Birds of the Washington Region." This report deals with migration dates for 299 species and subspecies, 2 hybrids, and 2 hypothetical (unconfirmed) forms. Prince George's County localities are Laurel, Camp Meade and Upper Marlboro. Another of these reports, published by May Thacher Cooke in 1929 in the *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington* [42: 1-80], lists 301 species and subspecies and three hybrids found within a radius of about 20 miles of the Capitol. On page 2 she mentions "that the valley of the Patuxent in the vicinity of Laurel had been a favorite collecting ground in the [18] eighties and nineties and many important finds were made there, but is now largely abandoned by birders of my time." She also says, "the Heath Hen, Passenger Pigeon and Carolina Paroquet, are now extinct or extirpated."

The Natural History Society of Maryland, founded in 1929 by Mr. Edmund Fladung, had an active ornithological program and published bird records. The most noteworthy of these is "A Preliminary List of Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia" by Irving E. Hampe and Haven Kolb published in 1947. It lists 338 accepted forms (species and subspecies) and 27 hypothetical (unconfirmed) ones. Laurel is occasionally mentioned by them in the book.

The Audubon [Naturalist] Society of the District of Columbia (now of the Central Atlantic States) was formed in 1897. Maynard's 1898 list contains 290 species for Washington, D.C. and vicinity. The Society's first official birding trip in Prince George's County has not been recorded, but a trip on March 23, 1946, to the Patuxent Wildlife Research Refuge conducted by Robert E. Stewart and Chandler (Chan) S. Robbins yielded 50 species observed by 22 people. A second trip on April 6, 1946, went to Fort Washington where 53 species were recorded by 18 people.

A mimeographed four-page leaflet called *Audubon Bird Bulletin* No. 2, May 1945, by Richard Tousey, is entitled "Where to See Birds in the District of Columbia Region." It mentions Fort Washington and the Patuxent Wildlife Refuge in Prince George's County. An article in the *Wood Thrush*, the first journal of the Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS), reported in its May 1946, issue that a field trip was conducted to Langley Park. In 1947, the Audubon Naturalist Society published the first edition of "A Field List of Birds of the District of Columbia Region" compiled by John W. Aldrich, Irston R. Barnes, Roger Tory Peterson, Chandler S. Robbins, Robert E. Stewart, and Richard Tousey. Four Prince George's County sites are listed – Patuxent Research Refuge, Bowie, Beltsville and Tidal Patuxent River. The second edition was published by the same authors in 1953. It did not include Bowie and Beltsville as birding localities.

Two other ANS publications were "Where Birds Live: Habitats in the Middle Atlantic States" edited by Shirley A. Briggs and Chandler S. Robbins, 1951, with Prince George's County localities scattered throughout the book, and, "Washington – City in the Woods" edited by Shirley A. Briggs, 1954, also with some mention of Prince George's County localities. Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr.'s 1951 "A Guide to Bird Finding East of the Mississippi" has a section on Laurel, namely the Patuxent Research Refuge, but the Laurel reference was dropped in the 1977 revision when the Central Tract was no longer open to the public.

When the Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) was founded on April 9, 1945, as an offshoot of the Natural History Society of Maryland, record-keeping became more organized. The first reference to

birds in Prince George's County to appear in their journal, *Maryland Birdlife*, is a report of a field trip to the Patuxent Research Refuge on October 26, 1945. They were greeted and shown around by Robert E. Stewart and Chandler S. Robbins. The MOS group was shown the laboratory and on a three-hour walk recorded 40 species. On April 14, 1946, MOS had another trip to Patuxent and they recorded 49 species.

On September 27, 1960, the Patuxent Bird Club held its first meeting, and on May 6, 1961, was accepted as a Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society. Melvin H. Kleen was the first President. It remains an active organization to this day. Chan and Eleanor Robbins have been active members in this chapter since its beginning. For many years, Eleanor's conservation reports alerted members to important conservation issues and her articles regularly appeared in the *Laurel News Leader* newspaper (now *Laurel Leader*). Another Chapter of MOS was formed in Prince George's County in February 1984. It was the Jug Bay Bird Club and it was accepted as a Chapter of MOS in March 1984, with an active membership of over 50 people. John Gregoire was the first President. Due to declining membership, however, it ceased operations at its final meeting on September 21, 2000.

There is also an active chapter of the National Audubon Society. The Prince George's Audubon Society (PGAS) was formed in the county in 1972 by four persons: Benjamin Bereskin, Matthew Perry, Robert Patterson and Donald Henderson. These four inaugurated the Bowie Christmas Bird Count that same winter which included the older Patuxent Wildlife Research Center count which ran from 1938 to 1948. Bereskin, Perry, and Patterson served as early presidents; Carol Beyna, Maureen Blades and Fred Fallon served as presidents in following years. In 1987, PGAS "adopted" the Fran Uhler Natural Area (FUNA), an abandoned gravel pit site turned illegal dump adjacent to the Patuxent Research Refuge. Fran Uhler, a Refuge wildlife biologist, donated the land to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC). In cooperation with M-NCPPC, members of PGAS conducted a massive clean-up that restored this forested floodplain of the Patuxent River to its natural state. PGAS leads monthly field trips to both FUNA and the Governor's Bridge Natural Area, annual FUNA clean-ups, other field trips, Christmas Bird Counts and other activities. PGAS began hosting joint program meetings and field trips with the Patuxent Bird Club in 2005. In 2006, the Prince George's Audubon Society provided early financial and administrative support for the fledgling Luther Goldman Birding Trail, and began hosting a link on its web site. For more information, go to www.pgaudubon.org.

The North American Bluebird Society had its roots in Prince George's County. Lawrence Zeleny, a Prince George's County resident, first noted the decline in bluebirds as he would take his noontime-break walks around the grounds of the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture Research Center in Beltsville. He erected some nest boxes to form a "bluebird trail" on the property and had almost immediate success in attracting Eastern Bluebirds which had successful nesting seasons. Delos C. "Chuck" DuPree had similar good results on the adjacent Goddard Space Center grounds. Larry's wife, Olive, was a strong supporter of his efforts as he began to give lectures, slide shows and write articles about the plight of bluebirds. Others joined his cause to promote the preservation of all three species of North American bluebirds and on March 20, 1978, the North American Bluebird Society was begun with an initial membership of 600 persons from across the United States and Canada. Details of the society's history can be found in their journal *Sialia* [1:33-34] and on their web site www.nabluebirdsociety.org with a link to NABS History, which is an article by Mary E. Janetatos, who was the first Executive Director and co-founder with Larry Zeleny.

RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY BIRDS

Some of the early research on the effects of DDT on bird populations was conducted at the Patuxent Research Refuge and nearby Beltsville as reported by Chandler S. Robbins and colleagues in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* in 1946, 1949 and 1951.

In 1947, Robert E. Stewart studied 51 pairs of Red-shouldered Hawks nesting along the Patuxent River in Prince George's and Anne Arundel counties and found an average of 2.7 young per nest in 47 occupied nests as reported in the *Wilson Bulletin* [61: 26-35]. Subsequent follow-up by Henny and colleagues, reported in *Ecology* [54: 545-554, 1973], and by Elwood M. (Woody) Martin, as found in *J. Raptor Research* [38: 312-319, 2004], document gradual population declines and make this one of the most intensively studied species in Prince George's County.

Robert E. Stewart, James B. Cope, C. S. Robbins and John W. Brainerd published "Seasonal Distribution of Bird Populations at the Patuxent Research Refuge" in *The American Midland Naturalist* [Vol. 47 (2): 257-363, 1952]. It gives detailed records for the 229 species and 2 hybrids that had been recorded on the refuge from 1936 to 1949. This is 74% of the 309 species reported in Maryland by Hampe and Kolb in 1947.

It was not until 1958 that we find rather complete coverage of the subject with frequent mention of Prince George's County. This is found in the great work of Robert E. Stewart and Chandler S. Robbins, "Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia" in *North American Fauna* [No. 62, 1958, 401 pgs.]. Stewart and Robbins also list many people who carried out field studies in the early part of the 20th century. It includes records of 333 species plus 19 hypothetical (unconfirmed) species. Three of these are introduced species, the Ring-necked Pheasant, Starling, House Sparrow and four are extinct: Heath Hen, Eskimo Curlew, Passenger Pigeon, and Carolina Parakeet.

In March 1968, the Maryland Ornithological Society published *Field List of Birds of Maryland* by Chandler S. Robbins and Willet T. Van Velsen. Known as the "Yellow Book," it listed 333 species and included two specific Prince George's County birding spots, Cedarville State Forest and Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. The second edition by Chandler S. Robbins and Danny Bystrak, published in April 1977, listed 374 species and added Patuxent Marshes as another county birding site. The third edition, compiled by Marshall J. Iliff, Robert F. Ringler and James L. Stasz, appeared in May 1996. The number of species had now increased to 399 plus 11 unsubstantiated species. This edition lists each bird by county, and of the 399 + 11 unsubstantiated Maryland species, 324 have been recorded in Prince George's County in recent years. An interesting note in the *Atlantic Naturalist* [29/3 for Autumn 1974], reported that Brooke Meanley and Matthew C. Perry saw 2 Red-cockaded Woodpeckers near Bowie on May 11, 1974, probably the last record of these rare birds for the county.

In 1989, Patuxent biologists Chandler Robbins, Deanna Dawson and Barbara Dowell published a prize-winning *Wildlife Monograph* [No. 103, 34 pgs.], "Habitat Area Requirements of Breeding Forest Birds of the Middle Atlantic States" for which many study sites were in Prince George's County. This was followed by a more intensive study restricted to Prince George's County, "Effects of Urbanization in the Distribution of Area-Sensitive Forest Birds in Prince George's County, Maryland" by Dawson, Robbins and Darr, published by Glenn D. Therres, ed., in "Conservation of Biological Diversity – a Key to the Restoration of the Chesapeake Bay Ecosystem and Beyond" [Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources, pgs. 207-213. 2001].

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

A perusal of *Bird-Lore* and *Audubon Magazine* showed that the very first Christmas Bird Count for Prince George's County occurred in 1901 at Cheltenham and was done by W. G. Cady. The next one was on December 24, 1911, in Kenilworth (now part of the Bowie CBC) and Congress Heights. Wells W. Cooke, a well known birder of the time and the father of May Thacher Cooke, was out from 8:30 to 11:30 and 12:30 to 2:00. It rained all day. He recorded 435 individuals of 27 species. There wasn't another Prince George's County Christmas Bird Count until December 23, 1916, when Ira N. Gabrielson and E. R. Kalmbach were out from 8:30 to 5:00 on a clear day. They recorded 3,796 individuals of 33 species going from Berwyn to Anacostia. There was another one on December 25, 1916, to Contee (Laurel) and Bowie conducted by Douglas C. Mabbott and Ernest C. Holt. They were out from 7:30 to 4:00 on a cloudy day and recorded 1,423 individuals of 34 species. Robert Overing did a CBC in Landover in 1934 and 1935. The first to be done in Prince George's County with any regularity was centered around Accokeek and was run systematically from 1932 to 1978 by USGS biologists A. A. Baker, Edwin T. McKnight, Thomas B. Nolan and W. W. Rubey. The one at Patuxent Research Refuge began in 1941 by 14 scientists. Chan Robbins did his first Maryland Christmas Bird Count there in 1943. Since 1901 and including 2006, about 170 Christmas Bird Counts have included parts of Prince George's County according to Chandler S. Robbins.

The first Prince George's County Christmas Bird Count to be reported in *Maryland Birdlife* is in Vol. III, No. 1, January-February, 1947. This count took place on December 26, 1946, on the Patuxent Research Refuge. Among the 8 participants were Chandler S. Robbins, Francis M. Uhler and Luther C. Goldman. In over 9 hours, they recorded 46 species.

Today, Prince George's County is the home of two Christmas Bird Counts. The Bowie Christmas Bird Count began in 1972 and the Jug Bay Christmas Bird Count in 1984. Both have been conducted every year since, adding a wealth of information on bird life in the county to all those counts and studies that preceded them.

NOTEWORTHY BIRD PROTECTION AREAS IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

We have been in a fortunate position with the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center located in our county. It was established in 1936 by an executive order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Patuxent Research Refuge is the only National Wildlife Refuge established to support wildlife research. Originally administered by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the Department of Interior, today most of the USFWS research on the refuge is conducted by the U. S. Geological Survey (USGS) through the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. With land surrounding the Patuxent and Little Patuxent rivers in Prince George's County, the Refuge has grown from the original 2,670 acres to its present size of 12,850 acres which encompasses land originally administered by the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture and the Department of Defense. Throughout its history, the Patuxent Research Refuge's mission to conserve and protect the nation's wildlife and habitats through research and wildlife management techniques has remained virtually unchanged. On the Refuge, endangered species such as Whooping Cranes are studied and bred. Research on wildlife diseases, waterfowl, game mammals and birds, migratory birds and fishes is conducted. The National Bird Banding Office is located there. Records of Christmas Bird Counts, Breeding Bird Surveys, Winter Bird Surveys and similar surveys are preserved there. About 270 species of birds have been observed on the Refuge. The North Tract, which was transferred from the Department of Defense in 1991, offers bird walks on its 20 miles of roads and trails in its 8,100 acres.

The National Wildlife Visitor Center in the southern portion of the Refuge opened in 1994. It is the largest science and environmental education center in the Department of Interior. It highlights the work of professional scientists who strive to improve the condition of endangered species and other wildlife and their habitats through interactive exhibits, teacher workshops, environmental lectures and traveling exhibits. With its large auditorium and multiple meeting rooms, it hosts scientific conferences and program meetings for environmental groups. It has outdoor wildlife management demonstration areas, hiking and birding trails, popular tram rides and outdoor education sites for school classes. About 200 species of birds have been observed in the vicinity of the Center.

The Jug Bay Natural Area of Patuxent River Park with its Visitor Center first opened in 1961. It is headquarters for the M-NCPPC's Patuxent River Park properties. This 2,111-acre tract of land in Croom is comprised of various natural habitats that buffer the Patuxent River and provide a critical link in conserving the county's natural resources, especially the bird life. Jug Bay is a component of the NOAA-administered Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Maryland, a nationwide network of diverse coastal estuaries that serve as laboratories for scientific research, education and monitoring. The park is also a site on the *Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network*, a partnership of parks, refuges, museums, historical communities and trails where visitors can experience and learn about the Chesapeake Bay. Jug Bay has been designated an "Important Birding Area" by the National Audubon Society. More than 290 species of birds have been identified here with over 100 confirmed as nesting. Since 1970, monthly birding trips have been offered to the public. There are 8 miles of trails that birders may use. Jug Bay Natural Area is part of the 7,273 acres in Prince George's County owned by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission that protect the natural resources and preserve the scenic character of the Patuxent River, which was declared a scenic river in 1968. A four-mile self-guided Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Tour with educational displays connects Patuxent River Park to the state's Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary. A sturdy timber bridge with an observation platform offers excellent birding possibilities of the marshlands of Mattaponi Creek, which separates the two. The driving tour is open Sundays, 10 am to 3 pm; and open for hikers and bikers, Saturdays, 10 am to 3 pm. On the sanctuary side, a short walk leads to a tall observation tower offering what has been said to be "the best view in Prince George's County."

Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary and Visitor Center is adjacent to the Jug Bay Natural Area and connected to it via the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Tour described above. It is operated by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. The sanctuary is named after Edgar Merkle (1900-1984), an active conservationist who devoted much of his life to protecting and providing for wildlife. In 1932, he originated a plan to introduce breeding Canada Geese to the western shores of Maryland. With much perseverance, he eventually encouraged thousands of geese to visit his 400-acre farm to feed and rest. In 1970, the Merkles sold their land, including some donated parcels, to the State of Maryland. With the acquisition of adjoining tracts, the wildlife sanctuary now includes 1,670 acres. About 50 to 100 geese stay there year-round, but starting in mid-October some flocks build up to 5,000 birds that come to feed on the crops grown for them. Many other birds also use the sanctuary. It is open year-round except for holidays. The Visitor Center is open 7 days/week May 15 to September 15, other seasons, on Sunday only.

OTHER BIRD-RELATED ACTIVITIES – CENSUSES, SURVEYS, ATLAS PROJECT

In 1941, Robert E. Stewart designed a nest record card for birds nesting on the Patuxent Research Refuge in Laurel. W. Bryant Terrell, who possessed Frank Kirkwood's extensive Maryland bird record file from the 1880-1920 eras at that time, loaned the file to Chandler Robbins, who copied the nest records onto similar nest cards, and these became the basis for the MOS nest record file.

The National Audubon Society began their breeding bird census program in 1937 to record breeding densities of birds in specific habitats throughout the continent, but there were no Maryland participants until the tenth year. Even the Patuxent studies that were completed in the 1940's were not submitted for publication. Finally, in 1947, two censuses taken in deciduous scrub habitats in Beltsville by Robert E. Stewart, Chandler S. Robbins, and Martin Karplus and one at Belt Woods by Stewart and Robbins were published in *Audubon Field Notes*, followed by one along a Patuxent power line right-of-way by Jerry Longcore in 1971. In 1972, David Holmes and Kathleen Klimkiewicz censused an abandoned field at Piscataway Park in Accokeek that was recensused in 1974 and studied again as a Winter Bird Population Study in 1977. In 1975, Robert Whitcomb and sons censused an upland mixed forest on the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, and in 1977 he published three forest fragmentation papers based on censuses in Beltsville and at Belt Woods in *American Birds* [vol. 31, no. 1]. A major forest fragmentation paper by Whitcomb and colleagues, published in 1981 in *Ecological Studies 41* edited by Burgess and Sharpe, Springer-Verlag, was based largely on field work in Prince George's, Montgomery, and Howard counties.

In 1953, when Drs. George H. Lowry, Jr. and Robert J. Newman of Louisiana State University were coordinating a nationwide study of nocturnal bird migration in which observers focused their telescopes on the full moon, several MOS members participated. The highest count for the continent, calculated at 230,000 birds per mile on the night of September 22-23, 1953, came from observations of Chandler and Eleanor Robbins at their home in Laurel. This is reported in *Recent Studies in Avian Biology* by A. Wolfson, Univ. of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1955.

An article in *Maryland Birdlife* [21(2): 48, June 1965] announced a new type of breeding bird survey of randomly selected routes of 50 stops where birds would be recorded for 3 minutes at each stop. What is now the USGS North American Breeding Bird Survey was field-tested in Prince George's and Howard counties before it was tested statewide in Maryland and Delaware in 1965, and launched continentally from 1966 to 1968. The survey, now in its 40th year, consists of 3,000 roadside routes surveyed annually, providing regional and continental trends in bird populations.

Maryland's Winter Bird Survey was initiated by staff members of the Migratory Bird Populations Station in the winter of 1968-69. In January 1970, an invitation was extended to selected members of the Maryland Ornithological Society to participate in this 5-year survey of central Maryland. An 8-km walking route was established at the center of each 7.5 minute quadrangle. The area covered included a portion of northern Prince George's County. Chandler S. Robbins reported on this in *Maryland Birdlife* [26(1): 11-20, 1970]. The initial 8-km transect for testing the methodology was on the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and is still surveyed each year as part of the Bowie Christmas Bird Count.

A little-known forest habitat gem located in Prince George's County is Belt Woods. Some of this woodland, about 40 acres, is virgin forest. This, and a section of forest on Savage Mountain in Western Maryland, are the only such habitats left in Maryland. An article by Mary Sykes Wylie in *Maryland Birdlife* [43(1):3-7, 1987] reviews the history of this [formerly] pristine woodland. She states, "In 1947, Chandler Robbins and Robert E. Stewart prepared a bird census of the South Woods and found

what they believed to be ‘the highest density bird populations ever reported in a pure deciduous forest without edge effect.’” Robert Whitcomb and his associates repeated the census in 1975, and found essentially the same populations as 30 years before. These populations are now expected to decline because of the destruction of the North Woods. In 1981, the timber in the North Woods was sold by the Episcopal Diocese to a New Jersey furniture company for wood veneer. This is not what W. Seton Belt, the original owner who died in 1959, stipulated in his will should happen to his bequest to the Diocese. He wanted the original 624 acres to remain unspoiled and never cut. About this time, a group was formed by Dan Boone, Hob Calhoun, Pam Cooper and Fred Fallon called the Western Shore Conservancy. Their goal was to manage the property for natural history uses. However, much of this task was taken over by DNR. Since 1986, the remaining 109 acres including the South Woods is now protected under the ownership of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and entry to it is restricted. On July 1, 1986, the southern tract came under the protection of the Maryland Natural Resources Wildland and Open Areas Act. Thus, it is now completely protected and is to be used only for educational, research and similar purposes. Birders can obtain permission to enter Belt Woods by contacting the Maryland Forest, Park and Wildlife Service.

A huge undertaking initiated by Chandler Robbins at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel and coordinated by the Maryland Ornithological Society, with support from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, was the Breeding Bird Atlas Project. In setting up the project, the entire state was divided into a grid of blocks based on the “quadrangles” of the well-known U. S. Geological Survey ‘7.5 minute series’ of topographic maps, each quadrangle sub-divided into sixths – in halves by longitude and in thirds by latitude. The resulting “blocks” come out to be roughly square, about three miles on a side. These blocks made up the units for field work, each atlas volunteer being assigned specific blocks. The same blocks are the ‘pixels’ in the distribution maps published in the Atlas. In order to attain a higher spatial resolution, the blocks in some counties (including Prince George’s) were further divided into four ‘quarter-blocks’, though the quarter-block data was not displayed in the final publication. Each block was designated by the geographic name of the quadrangle. The first North American trials were reported by Kathy Klimkiewicz and Ed Buckler in *Maryland Birdlife* [Vol. 27(3):129-138, September 1971]. One of their blocks was in the Beltsville quadrangle. Initial trials of survey techniques were conducted 1971 to 1973 in Montgomery and Howard counties and were reported by Kathy Klimkiewicz and Jo Solem in *Maryland Birdlife* [34(1):3-39, March 1978]. The main field work for the first “Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia” [Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1996], was done from 1983 to 1987. Professional biologists and some 800 volunteers spent hundreds of hours in the field compiling records of 199 breeding birds in Maryland. Twelve quadrangles covered Prince George’s County, which was still 24% wooded. Each of Prince George’s twelve 7.5-minute quadrangles was divided into six atlas blocks (24 quarter-blocks). All of these were surveyed to varying degrees of thoroughness. The highest number of breeding species compiled over the five years of the project in a single block for the entire state was in Prince George’s County – Bristol SW, the block that includes Jug Bay, had 115 species; the second highest in the county was Laurel CE, which covers the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, with 101 species. In the second, 2002-2006, atlas, those blocks held 107 and 100 species respectively. The County Coordinator was John Gregoire. This entire project was repeated annually from 2002 to 2006. Results of the second Breeding Bird Atlas have not yet been published, but will include the quarter-block data. Fred Fallon was the County Coordinator during this second five-year period.

A Winter Bird Atlas, “Distribution and Abundance of Birds Wintering in Maryland, 1988-1993” by Jeff S. Hatfield, Sue A. Ricciardi, Greg A. Gough, Danny Bystrak, Sam Droege, and Chandler S. Robbins, was published in *Maryland Birdlife* [50:3-83] in 1994. This is the first winter bird atlas to be published in the New World.

Brooke Meanley, an extraordinary wildlife biologist (1917-2007), specialized in water and marsh birds and their habitats in the Chesapeake Bay Region. In 1993, he published for a small readership *The Patuxent River Wildrice Marsh*. In 1996, at the urging of Rich Dolesh and others, he expanded the earlier work into a book called *The Patuxent River Wild Rice Marsh* [Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. 91 pgs.]. Much of this book deals with research at Jug Bay carried out by Meanley and other colleagues including Fran Uhler, Gorman Bond, Matt Perry, Greg Kearns and others. In 2001, Meanley summarized some of his earlier work in a privately printed book *Notes on Southern Marshes, Swamps and Pineywoods*. He mentions finding a Bachman's Sparrow on the Agricultural Research Center in 1942. He also discusses the effect of resident Canada Geese on the Patuxent Wild Rice Marsh. In recent years, Greg Kearns and Mike Haramis have jointly worked to restore the Patuxent wild rice marshes and have done extensive research at Jug Bay on Soras, *Audubon Naturalist News* [Vol. 20: 28-29, 1994]. Several additional papers have been published related to this work. Greg Kearns has also been working to restore the Osprey population on the Patuxent River.

Sometime in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Helen Meleney and Marge Koester began regularly watching birds on the University of Maryland golf course. Donald Messersmith arrived in Maryland in 1963. After he and Dr. Wayne Kuenzel initiated a new Ornithology class in 1972, he began taking his University of Maryland Ornithology class students on weekly Friday morning bird walks on the golf course in the spring and, thus, continued what Meleney and Koester had begun. The first of these trips occurred on April 17, 1973, when they recorded 23 species. These walks continued more or less regularly every spring and occasionally at other times until 1989. These records will be compiled and published in the future.

Beginning about 1995, Douglas Bolt has been leading monthly birding trips for U. S. Dept. of Agriculture employees and retirees on the grounds of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center where many good bird habitats can be found. An active Bald Eagle nest is one of the features of these walks.

During the 1980's, the late Claudia Wilds, an internationally recognized authority on shorebirds, developed a book that would become an invaluable guide to local birding: *Finding Birds in the National Capital Area* [Smithsonian Institution Press. 215 pgs.]. This carefully researched and comprehensive guide set the standard for all guidebooks to follow. Published in 1989 and revised in 1992 [263 pgs.], the book describes good birding sites in Maryland, Virginia, Delaware and North Carolina. Prince George's County sites that are included are Oxon Hill Farm, Piscataway National Park, Jug Bay Natural Area, and Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary. The book tells birders how to get to good birding areas, what birds are there and also where to find selected species in this area.

Other noteworthy people who contributed to Prince George's County birding knowledge include Dr. Robert Ridgway and Dr. Alexander Wetmore, Smithsonian scientists, who collected birds in and near Laurel in the early part of the 20th century. Ira N. Gabrielson and Robert E. Stewart, Sr. collected birds at Patuxent in the 1940's. Local egg collectors included Prince George's County residents Edward J. Court, R. Bruce Overington, and William Marshall who were active into the 20's, 30's and 40's.

Chan Robbins moved into Prince George's County in 1943, settled on his 2½-acre property in Laurel, and began banding birds there that same year. Since then, he has banded 151 species of birds in Prince George's County and has seen 201 species on or over his home property. He also did his first Prince George's County Christmas Bird Count in 1943. Since 1943, he has participated in Christmas Bird Counts in three Prince George's County areas – Patuxent, Triadelphia and Bowie. Over this period of

64 years, he has participated in about 125 counts just in this county. He and his wife, Eleanor, who died this February, attended all but two or three MOS conventions. He believes the best birding areas are the M-NCPPC's Patuxent River Park sections, parts of the Patuxent Research Refuge that are open to the public, Laurel River Front Park, the M-NCPPC's Fran Uhler Natural Area, Kenilworth area, and Belt Woods (permission needed).

Luther C. Goldman birded avidly in the county, especially Lake Artemesia and its earlier pre-Metro life as a private water garden. The Beltsville Agricultural Research Center and Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens were other favorite spots of his. Up until about 1992, he led PGAS field trips, usually in conjunction with Leonard Lutwack. He was always ready to go birding with anyone who asked; once, in his eighties, he did a Birdathon with Fred Fallon and his wife, Jane, regaling them with his stories from his national wildlife refuge manager days. Almost to the end, he birded with Mike Donovan, going over to Bombay Hook, Port Mahon, etc. He actively participated in the Patuxent MOS Chapter and in PGAS, regularly attending meetings, and occasionally giving slide lectures, and he served on the boards of both organizations at various times. Shortly before his death in 2005, he gave many of his excellent photographs to Chan Robbins for use in *Maryland Birdlife*. In his memory and honor, the Luther Goldman Birding Trail is being created at Lake Artemesia Natural Area Park in Berwyn Heights. His sightings and records were used to make the first-ever bird checklist for that area.

From the above summary, it can be seen that Prince George's County birders have played a large role in birding activities for Maryland and indeed for the entire United States. The Patuxent Research Refuge with its staff of ornithologists has included such noteworthy people as Frederick C. Lincoln, Robert T. Mitchell, Durward L. Allen, Max M. Carpenter, Ernest Ediger, Arnold L. Nelson, Allen J. Duvall, Leonard M. Llewellyn, Brian Sharp, Paul Springer, Seth H. Low, Joseph Hickey, Ira N. Gabrielson, Robert E. Stewart, Sr., Jay M. Shepherd, Sam Droege, Fred Schmid, Martin Karplus, Woody Martin, Matthew W. Perry, Barbara Dowell, Dan Boone, Danny Bystrak, Deanna Dawson, Bruce Peterjohn, John Sauer, Kathy Klimkiewicz, David Ziolkowski and Dr. Chandler S. Robbins, who developed several new bird survey programs. There are others such as Ray Erickson, George Gee and Damien Ossi, who have worked on saving endangered species such as the Whooping Cranes, plus people at the Migratory Bird Section, the Bird Banding Section, etc. Some others of note have moved on to other jobs and include John Terbourgh, Ted Stiles, Vernon Kleen, Willet T. Van Velsen and David Bridge. In addition to the professional biologists at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, various Naturalists such as Rich Dolesh, Greg Kearns, Carol Beyna and others have made their Prince George's County birding contributions. Many outstanding amateur birders have resided or worked in the county and have made significant contributions. Among these are William Howard Ball, R. Bruce Overington, Robert Overing, John Gregoire, W. Bryant Tyrrell, Carl Bucheister, John W. "Bud" Taylor, Lawrence Zeleny, Paul Nistico, Fred Shaffer, Tom Loomis, Leonard Lutwack, Fred and Jane Fallon, Paul Baicich, Lawrence Murphy, Bill Murphy, Mike Donovan, Maureen Blades, David Mozurkewich, Lynn Davidson, Hal Wierenga, Paul Jung, Paula McNeil and the remarkable Luther C. Goldman, to whose memory this history is dedicated.

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ADDENDUM

SOME BIRDING PLACES IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND

M-NCPPC Patuxent River Park Properties – www.pgparcs.com

Jug Bay Natural Area, headquarters – Upper Marlboro (Croom area)
Governor's Bridge Natural Area – Bowie
Fran Uhler Natural Area – Bowie
Mount Calvert Archaeological Park – Upper Marlboro
Aquasco Farm – Aquasco
Patuxent River Scenic Trails at Queen Anne

M-NCPPC Natural Area Parks – www.pgparcs.com

Cheltenham Natural Area – Cheltenham
Dueling Creek Natural Area – Colmar Manor Community Park
Lake Artemesia Natural Area Park – Berwyn Heights/College Park
Bladensburg Waterfront Park – Bladensburg
Suitland Bog Natural Area – Suitland
School House Pond – Upper Marlboro

Paved Hiker/Biker Trails – www.pgparcs.com

Anacostia Tributary Trail System
Luther Goldman Birding Trail
Henson Creek Trail System
Washington, Baltimore and Annapolis Recreation Trail

Regional Parks – www.pgparcs.com

Louise F. Cosca Regional Park – Clinton
Fairland Regional Park - Laurel
Walker Mill Regional Park – District Heights
Robert M. Watkins Regional Park – Upper Marlboro

State Parks/Properties – MD DNR website: www.dnr.state.md.us

Fran Uhler Environmental Area – Bowie
Cedarville State Forest – Brandywine
Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary – Upper Marlboro
Rosaryville State Park – Rosaryville
Laurel River Front Park – City of Laurel; www.laurel.md.us/riverfront.htm

Federal Properties

Patuxent Research Refuge Visitor's Center – Laurel; www.fws.gov/northeast/patuxent
Patuxent Research Refuge North Tract – Laurel; (must have permission)
www.fws.gov/northeast/patuxent/index.htm
Greenbelt National Park – Greenbelt; www.nps.gov/archive/gree

Non-Profit Educational Foundation Property – www.fergusonfoundation.org

Alice B. Ferguson Foundation/Hard Bargain Farm – Accokeek