



# The Whoosletter

**Spring at Last Issue**

A Quarterly (Almost) Publication of the Carroll County Bird Club

Ah... Spring is just around the corner. And it's about time too. This year, the snow and ice even caused the club to cancel a regular meeting. A number of field trips were poorly attended because of the cold. We're only birders after all.

A few of our members braved the icy winds of Ocean City, Maryland to attend the MOS Convention. C.J. McAuliffe writes about her experiences there. Make sure to read her article, beginning on page eight.

Many more took part in the Mid-Winter Count, although we got a slight break on the weather that day. The results appear on page five.

If that makes you too cold, I would suggest you flip back to page one and read Craig Storti's piece on birding in Southeastern Arizona. Believe it or not, some people actually pay Craig to write. (We don't, of course.) In fact, he has a new book coming out entitled **Why Travel Matters, A Guide to the Life-Changing Effects of Travel**. Many club members travel the world in search of new birds for their life lists.

Speaking of books, in view of the fact that our April speaker, Debbie Maeder, will deal with butterflies, I review a book on that subject beginning on page seven.

Last but certainly not least, our species profiled this issue is the House Wren. This is another sign of Spring I suppose. Even though "my" wren doesn't make it up to northern Carroll County until around April 20th.

## The Further Adventures of the English Birder and The American Dude \*

### Birding Southeastern Arizona: The People You Meet—Part I

by Craig Storti

The people you meet? Shouldn't it be the birds you see? I mean this is **The Whoosletter**, after all, not **The New Yorker**.

Not to worry: there will be birds. But when I was thinking about this series of articles, I was looking for a theme, a recurring motif that would link everything together. And I realized that almost all the really good birds we saw on this trip were the result of a tip we received from people we met along the way. In one thrilling instance, we were the ones who did the tipping, but in most cases we were the beneficiaries of other birders' discoveries.

*\*Some Whoosletter readers may not know Bill Oddie's Little Black Bird Book, wherein the British humorist distinguishes three types of birdwatchers: twitchers, who are super serious life-listers and not always socially adept; birders, who are serious, usually listers, but who have interests—and lives—outside of birding; and dudes, who are amateurs, not very skilled, but well-adjusted human beings.*

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The English birder in this saga is John B. and the American dude is yours truly. **Whoosletter** fans may remember similar sagas featured in these pages, including one about The Great Salt Lake Birdfest, a three-parter about chasing the Snail Kite in Florida, and (in the more recent issue) one about birding on the King Ranch in Texas. John has been visiting once annually for a number of years, and each time we try to go some place where he can get new North American life ticks. We also spend one day each visit here in Maryland, going out with Bob Ringler and Don Jewell who somehow manage to find John something new every time (though the field of candidates keeps narrowing). This year it was the Hooded Warbler.

This adventure began in Phoenix, the evening before John and my wife Charlotte flew in from Baltimore. I was already out west on a business trip and flew into Phoenix the day before. While our focus would be Tucson and south, flying into Phoenix was more convenient, and there was one other reason: the Rosy-faced Lovebird. This is actually an African parrot sold in pet stores in the US, but a few years back someone in Phoenix liberated three or four birds and they have since bred very successfully—there are an estimated 20,000 in the Phoenix area—so that the ABA now lists them as a countable North American species. I was supposed to do a reconnaissance for John so he could get the bird more or less straight from the airport, before we headed south to Tucson.

I wrote the Phoenix Audubon Society to ask them to suggest a reliable spot for the bird and was directed to Encanto Park, where I went the evening I arrived. The birds are communal nesters, often in palm trees, so I imagined it would not be hard to locate them, but I had not counted on the size of Encanto Park and wasn't sure where to start. Normally in these situations, you look for people with binoculars and your questions are answered. But I soon discovered this was not a birding kind of place. I approached a young couple sitting on a bench:

*"Do you know where the lovebirds are?"*

*"Lovebirds?"*

*"You know. The parrots?"*

*"Parrots?"*

I approached a group in a picnic area: *"Really? We have parrots in Arizona? That's pretty cool."*

I approached another man: *"There's a lot of birds over by the water."*

This wasn't going well and the sun was slowly setting. Then I had a stroke of luck, my first encounter of the-people-you-meet variety. I noticed a lady (with two small children) who appeared to be selling something displayed on a small makeshift stand. She's probably here every day, I thought, so she just might know about the parrots. But when I asked her about parrots, she had no idea.

Then I happened to mention that they were partially blue, whereupon her young son immediately piped up: *"We see blue birds in that tree all the time,"* he said, pointing to a palm directly behind me. And sure enough, there they were, at least a dozen Lovebirds. I marked the tree and hoped I could find it again the next day. I did find it, and John got his first new life tick of the Arizona trip straight from the airport

I should mention here, before going any further, that this was the 2nd time the three of us had birded southeastern Arizona. The first time was January 2010, and it was John's first foray out of the eastern US, which meant that just about anything that flew by was a new life bird for John. He got a total of 74 on that trip, but he was disappointed not to get two common ones, Canyon Wren and Black-Tailed Gnatcatcher, and was hoping to get them this trip.

This time, with that trip under our belt (plus subsequent trips, meanwhile, to the Rio Grande valley, southern California, and Utah), our list of possible new life ticks had shrunk. We were hunting specific birds, in short, which is always more challenging. John said he could get as many as 35 new birds but would be happy if he got more than 20.

From Encanto Park we drove two hours south to Tucson and then another half an hour or so to Green Valley, the gateway to Madera Canyon in the Santa Rita Mountains, where we were to spend three nights at Santa Rita Lodge. The lodge has a large number of feeders and within a few hours of our arrival John had three new birds—Broad-billed, Broad-tailed, and Magnificent Hummingbird—and a very good lead, from someone we met, of course,

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on an Elf Owl. It was a man who worked at the lodge and who lived just across the street. An Elf Owl was nesting in a tree in his yard and we were told that it appeared at 7:15 every evening, looked around for a bit, and then always flew out to hunt by 7:30. Quite a group had assembled by 7:00, and the bird appeared just on schedule.

While we were waiting for it, as the sky darkened, several Nighthawks were flying around. John thought they must be lesser, a bird on his list, but we did not get good enough views of it their white wing bars to be sure. Even so, John now had five new birds for Arizona and six for the trip. Two other good sightings (as distinguished from life ticks) that day were Rufous-winged Sparrow and the Arizona Woodpecker.

Our second day (and 1st full day) started well when even before breakfast John got bird #6, a Varied Bunting, in a woodpile beneath the feeders at the lodge, and later a Hepatic Tanager (#7) at a feeder. Like most good birders, John prefers to see birds in the wild, as it were, and not just at feeders. As luck would have it, we saw both of these birds again later that same day; the Bunting was in a shallow, dry streambed near Florida Wash, and the Tanager was in some woods. Later that day we had bird #8, Bell's Vireo; the bird was close so we had good views, but the call is the give-away here. With eight days to go, John was almost half way to his goal of 20.

### ***Birding Southeastern Arizona: The People You Meet—Part II***

The story so far: Craig and Charlotte (the dudes) and their English friend John (the birder) are birding for their second time in southeast Arizona. John got 74 life birds the first time, in January 2010, and now he's back for the warm weather birds. He could get as many as 35 but would happily settle for any number over 20. As we begin our third day, he already has eight.

Day three was destined to be momentous. And while I was the chief cause of all the excitement (which reverberated for at least two more days), I was not aware, until it exploded that morning, that I was in possession of quite such a bombshell. It all happened at a place called Proctor Road, at the entrance to Madera Canyon, where our Arizona book said there was a good chance for Lucy's Warbler. This is a nice paved trail with great views across

Green Valley to the mountains to the West, including Kitts Peak. There is even a large map under glass at the start of the trail identifying some of the formations in the distance.

It was while John and Charlotte stopped to study the map and I walked ahead that the drama began. At a point where the trail entered a wooded area, I looked down through the trees and saw first a yellow bird and then a red one fly down out of sight. I left the trail, descended a steep bank, and came out into a small meadow, almost stepping on two small birds hopping around in the grass at my feet. There was an elderly gentleman (we later learned he was 92) just entering the meadow from the upper end, carrying his binoculars and a small, folding 3-legged stool, and I asked him if he knew what those two birds were. "I do," he said. "I'm the one who discovered their nest back in March. Every time I come here I see them. They're Black-Capped Gnatcatchers." I took this in, completely unaware of the significance, and joked with him: "You keep the birds here. I'll go get my friend." I wasn't sure if they were on John's list or not, but I thought I should tell him.

When I caught up with John and Charlotte, I casually asked John if he "needed the Black-capped Gnatcatcher." And he said "Yeah?" in a very funny way, almost as if it were a question. Much later I realized it had been a question, in the sense of "Are you kidding? Who doesn't need a Black-capped Gnatcatcher?" "I've got one," I said, and John followed me down the trail at a casual pace. As we walked I explained to him about the nonagenarian who had found the nest and who had ID'ed the birds for me, and suddenly John picked up the pace (although I still did not know why). We descended the bank into the meadow, and while the birds were not there at that moment, they soon returned, one male and one female, and John had very good views (#9). He put down his bins at this point and turned to me: "These are a real rarity."

Later John explained that the reason for his quizzical Yeah and his initial slow pace was because these are rare birds and he was pretty sure they were not what I had seen, especially since the much more common Black-Tailed Gnatcatcher (a definite target on this trip) also has a black spot on its head. It was only when I started talking about the man who had ID'ed them for me that John got excited. He later said he didn't even have this bird on his list as there was almost no chance of seeing one.

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(The nonagenarian told me at one point that he brought along his folding seat because there was a waterfall just below the meadow where he often sat and watched the birds fly in for a drink. A birder we met later in Ramsey Canyon knew that waterfall quite well. He said he was birding there one day when he came across a photographer doing a nude model shoot. This man said he got out of there fast before he was discovered: *"I thought a middle-aged man skulking around with binoculars and a camera probably didn't look too good."*)

After the triumph at Proctor Road, we drove up through the canyon to the place where the road ends and all the hiking trails begin. This elevation was Trogon country, the iconic bird of southeastern Arizona, and while there were no new leads on Trogon sightings, we were definitely in their habitat, as well as that of some other higher altitude birds John was after. In the parking lot we ran into our new friend Sean, whom we had met two evenings earlier down at Santa Rita Lodge, just before we saw the Elf Owl. Sean, who was waiting for two friends he was birding with to show up, asked us how our day was going so far. When John mentioned the Black-Capped Gnatcatcher, Sean couldn't believe his ears. "Really? Where?" John described the place very accurately and Sean was hopping around waiting to go straight down the mountain as soon as his friends arrived. I didn't say anything (like how I was the one who found the bird), but I was very pleased.

We walked up one of the trails a good distance, looking carefully at all the sycamore trees, which Trogons prefer, but there were no Trogons that day. We did get a Sulphur-Bellied Flycatcher (#10) and a Painted Redstart (#11). And then, as it was after 1PM and getting hot, John said let's go back to the lodge and have a rest. Now for dudes a rest means you lie down on your bed and have a short snooze, but for English birders it apparently means a quick trip to the loo and then back out on the porch in a comfortable chair with your binoculars at the ready. So while I napped, John got a Scott's Oriole (#12). When I went out later and he told me, I said I wish I had seen it. *"They're not usually seen from your bed,"* was all he said.

When we headed out again after our rest, we ran into a guy over by the feeders who came up and asked us if we'd seen anything good. We mentioned the Gnatcatcher, of course, and he nodded. Then as we started chatting, it dawned on me this was no ordinary

birder. He lived in Florida, was good friends with Larry Manfredi, one of the best birders in southern Florida (He was featured in my earlier **Whoosletter** piece.), and was obviously a very experienced birder. He then mentioned that he had done two Big Years. I asked him how many birds he got, and he casually said *"over 700."*

*"Wow. You're in the 700 club."*

*"I guess so."*

*"How many did you get exactly?"*

*"748."*

*"748! You must be Sandy Komito? You're famous!"*

And he was.

Readers may wonder how a dude like me had ever heard of Sandy Komito, much less knew how many birds he got in his record-setting Big Year (which was described in a book and later made into a movie). Well it so happens that I had just finished reading Neil Hayward's book **Lost Among the Birds** in which he chases Sandy Komito's record, and mentions Sandy and his number (748) every few pages. So the name and number were fresh in my mind.

We had a very nice chat, talking about the book and the movie, in which Sandy is played by Owen Wilson and comes off as quite the insensitive cad; his young wife wants to get pregnant and Sandy is always off after the next bird. The real Sandy said he's really not a cad and that, moreover, he was 65 at the time of that big year, his wife was 62, and they had three grown children. (He said the author conflated two different big years to make a better story.)

I was eating up Sandy Komito's stories while John was getting impatient to hit the road. We finally said good-bye and as we were walking away, I said to John: *"I could have talked to him all day."* "Yes," he said. *"That was obvious."* Other good sightings that day were Hooded Oriole, Western Tanager, and Summer Tanager.

The next day we left Madera Canyon and the Santa Rita Range and headed southeast toward Sierra Vista, home of the famous canyons in the Huachuca Range: Ramsey, Millers, Carr, and Ash. On the way, as any serious birder knows, one must stop at Santa Gertrudas Lane, where we got birds #13 (Lucy's Warbler) and #14 (Ash-Throated Flycatcher) and then on to Patagonia and Patons Feeders, one of the most reliable places in America for the Violet-Crowned Hummingbird (#15).

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When we got to Ramsey Canyon Lodge, just below the Nature Conservancy's reserve, we were told about a Whiskered Screech-Owl in a tree right in front of the gift shop, looking out for all to see (#16). Three other good birds that day were Phainopepla, Cassin's Kingbird, and Inca Dove. As night fell John had 16 new life ticks, and the canyons—not to mention Mt. Lemmon back in Tucson, our next stop—still awaited us.

**To be continued...**



## Species Profile

### House Wren *Troglodytes aedon*

The Chippewas bestowed a name on the House Wren that meant something like “making big noise for its size.” (O-du-na’-mis-sug-ud-da-we’-shi) Anyone who has had one of these birds nesting nearby would certainly agree. And while its relative, the Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*), may take the prize for being slightly louder, the House Wren makes up for it by being more persistent.

Male House Wrens appear to sing constantly in the Spring and Summer. (Females may sing as well however, only occasionally.) Their song has been described as “stuttering” and “bubbling”. If you have to listen to it all day, it’s more like “annoying”. Still, a bird has to do what a bird has to do. Using its song, the House Wren sets out his territory and attracts females to it. That territory can cover up to ½ acre.

Returning from their winter range in the southern states, Mexico, and northern Central America, the older males show up here a couple weeks before the females and the yearling males. We usually hear one around April 20th. That’s my son’s birthday. After that, it seems like there are wrens everywhere, even if it is only one.

Singing continuously, the male rushes from place to

place, checking out every possible nesting site and claiming it for his own. There is actually quite a bit of site fidelity among House Wrens, so the one that shows up may well have been there before. Being capable of living up to seven years adds to those odds.

House Wrens are cavity nesters. Around my place, this means bird houses. However, these birds frequently improvise. Tin cans, flowerpots, car radiators, boots, and the pockets of clothes hanging out to dry have all been used. My favorite painting of House Wrens is one done by John James Audubon. His birds are nesting in a hat!

When my children were young, I put up a swing set out back for them to play on. It was one of those types with the hollow metal poles. I was pushing someone on the swing when we heard a faint scratching sound. Zeroing in on it, I lifted the bottom of one of the supports and out popped four baby wrens, fully fledged and ready to go. I wondered how long they had been in there.

Back to the beginning though. After arriving and setting out his territory and locating every possible nest cavity, the male wren rushes about frantically trying to fill them all up with sticks. This is no doubt an effort to cut down on the competition. Unfortunately, he doesn’t seem to particularly care whether any of these nest cavities are already occupied. Woodpeckers can usually take care of themselves, however, the nests of smaller birds often fall victim. Male House Wrens may peck holes in eggs or even kill young birds of other species. Needless to say, this doesn’t make them popular around the avian neighborhood. It doesn’t go over that well with bird-watchers either.

However, as my sister-in-law is fond of saying, “It is what it is.” At least when the female arrives on the scene, she adds a bit of taste to the nesting process. Her main concern isn’t with how loud her suitor sings, but with the quality of his territory. (Of course, a male who sings well can hope to maintain a larger territory.) She sets about examining the real estate and once she decides on where they are going to set up housekeeping,

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throws out a lot of the sticks the male has stuffed in there and starts working in some finer materials (grasses, plant fiber, feathers, etc.) to make a deep cup where the eggs will rest.

Six to eight eggs are laid. In appearance these are white with lots of reddish brown spots. The female does all the incubation. When hatching occurs in about two weeks, both partners feed the young. Grasshoppers, beetles, stink bugs, leafhoppers, all sorts of caterpillars, and spiders may appear on the menu. Fledging takes place about seventeen days later.

Most House Wren couples raise two broods per season. Males have a wandering eye, however, and may mate with more than one female on territory. It can all be rather daunting when you think about it. That is also why, when sitting on your porch in summer you may feel inundated with wrens. The chatter produced by the parents to keep the young ones in line can be quite distracting. This is why I always breathe a sigh of relief when the House Wrens finally quiet down.

The quiet time may have something to do with their annual molt. This takes place in late summer. Their new plumage is darker and grayer. Most head south in September and October. On their winter territories, House Wrens tend to be rather quiet and inconspicuous. When the birds return here again in spring they are lighter in color and more brownish. This is not due to another molt, but to the erosion of their original darker feather tips.

The House Wren is probably much more abundant today than in the past. Their favored territory is along edge habitats. Farming and logging has helped them considerably, not to mention housing construction.

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## **Mid-Winter Count Report**

The Carroll County Bird Club Mid-Winter Count was held on Saturday, January 20, 2018. Nineteen club members and guests in eleven parties covered 41.3 miles on foot and 385.5 miles by car. 18,299 individual birds belonging to 70 species were recorded. The number of species was low compared to other recent years. 2013 had the highest with 90. Others followed with 84 in 2014, 80 in 2017, 79 in 2015, and 76 in 2016.

Many of the reservoirs and other bodies of water which had been frozen solid earlier in the season opened up enough to allow for a respectable number of duck species. These included Gadwall, American Black Duck, Mallard, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Ruddy Duck, and Northern Pintail which was a write-in from two separate locations. There were no grebes of any species this time.

Black Vultures and Turkey Vultures were abundant. Other diurnal raptors included Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, and American Kestrel. The latter was reported from seven different parts of the county which is encouraging.

Owl species included Barred and Screech. No one heard or saw a Great Horned Owl this time.

Two game bird species were recorded. The Wild Turkeys would have been exciting enough, however, the Ring-necked Pheasant listed as a write-in was definitely not to be expected.

Woodpeckers were well represented with all the species expected for this time of year. These included Red-headed, Red-bellied, Downy, Hairy, and Pileated as well as Northern Flicker and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

The Yellow-rumped was the only warbler species. Any others would have been rare indeed.

Sparrows included Field, Fox, Song, and White-throated, along with Eastern Towhee and Dark-eyed Junco. In all of the most recent Mid-winter Counts (except 2016) we have had White-crowned Sparrows. This was not to be the case in 2018

Other write-ins included Greater White-fronted Goose, Snow Goose, and Gray Catbird.

Many of the birds we associate with northern climes (like Red-breasted Nuthatch and Pine Siskin) did not

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appear this year. That was a bit of a disappointment, however, we were all able to enjoy a nice day in the field. Thanks to all who counted. Special thanks also to Amy Hoffman who graciously hosted the Tally Rally at her home.

Now for the top twenty species in terms of numbers:

|                                       |      |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| Canada Goose                          | 8514 |
| American Crow                         | 1942 |
| European Starling                     | 1633 |
| Brown-headed Cowbird                  | 1500 |
| White-throated Sparrow                | 607  |
| Dark-eyed Junco                       | 370  |
| Mourning Dove                         | 248  |
| Northern Cardinal                     | 238  |
| Turkey Vulture                        | 234  |
| Mallard                               | 217  |
| Carolina Chickadee                    | 201  |
| Rock Pigeon<br>and Horned Lark (tied) | 178  |
| Blue Jay                              | 170  |
| Song Sparrow                          | 166  |
| Tufted Titmouse                       | 149  |
| House Sparrow                         | 142  |
| American Goldfinch                    | 138  |
| House Finch                           | 134  |
| Black Vulture                         | 131  |

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## Book Review

### *Butterflies of Pennsylvania, a field guide*

by James L. Monroe and David M. Wright, University of Pittsburgh Press, Copyright 2017

When this book arrived from Amazon, my first thought was that “*I may not know a lot about butterflies, but I do know how to spell Pennsylvania!*” That was because of the rather curious yellow sticker attached to the spine of the book. On it was written “*Butterflies of Pennsylvania*”. Underneath, however, appeared to be “*Butterflies of Pennsylvania*.” At least that’s what I think it was originally.

I looked over the hundreds of other books in my library, many of them on butterflies, but could not find another instance where the spine had such an extra layer added. Having been a graphic designer myself in a previous life, I felt for whomever did the cover layout. Perhaps

our neighbors to the north (This book was printed in Canada.) are unfamiliar with the early exploits of William Penn. I’ll bet everyone proofed the pages very carefully and missed the book cover.

Other than being a bibliographical oddity, the cover really doesn’t matter. My grandmother always told me that “You can’t judge a book by the cover.” I’m sure you have been told the same thing. True enough. While I may not know much about butterflies, the two authors of this book certainly do and they share this information in a very pleasant manner.

The first chapter introduces the reader to butterflies, whether they be in Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania, or any place else for that matter. Topics covered include Evolutionary Origins, Anatomy, Scientific Names, Life Cycle, Seasons, Migration, Overwintering, Mating, Egg Laying and Host Plants, Predators, Protective Coloration, Diversity and Habitat, Butterfly Watching, Butterfly Gardening, and Conservation. A couple of pages are devoted to the Physiographic Provinces of Pennsylvania. These are still worth reading as we have similar types here in Maryland.

Then, it’s on to the butterflies. Although wait! There are butterflies on the inside front and back covers too. This is where one should begin any identification process. The authors refer to this as a “Quick Guide”. The butterflies pictured represent the various families and are divided into groups labeled as Large, Medium, Medium to Small, and Small. Next to each representative are listed a general description, i.e. “Predominantly orange with black dashes, spots, etc.” Below this the page numbers are listed where one should search.

The Species Accounts are thorough, but not boring. Topics covered for each includes Distinguishing Marks, Typical Behavior, Habitat, Larval Hosts, and Abundance. There is also a short section for remarks. Each species is illustrated with a photo, front and back, of the male and female. These are obviously collected and pinned specimens. Anyone used to using one of Jeffrey Glassberg’s *Butterflies Through Binoculars* field guide series may be a bit disappointed at this. I would maintain, however, that there is just as much information (perhaps more) provided in these photos as in ones of the living insects. You just have to learn how to use it.

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That being said, I'm not sure I would use this book in the field. It is much better for before or after a day of butterflying. If you take your own pictures, it would make a handy resource to help you figure out exactly what you saw.

There are also special mini sections referred to as "Special Topics". This is where the book really shines. Many of these deal with problems in identification like how to tell the difference between the Three Witches (three small female skippers of similar appearance), Fall Migrant Skippers, Tiger Swallowtails, etc. These sections all have headers backed in green so that they are easily identified. Many of these use photos of living butterflies as examples.

Speaking of colors, the distribution maps could have used more intense shades. The gray designating the counties where a particular species was recorded, but not within the last 20 years, is fine. The yellow used for counties where a species was seen in the last 20 years, however, is a bit washed out and (depending on the light) rather difficult to see next to the white of counties where species have not been seen at all.

Of course, maybe I'm just getting old and can't see as well I used to. You be the judge. Hopefully, you will purchase a copy of this book and enjoy it as much as I have. In spite of the fact that it pertains mainly to Pennsylvania, most of the species are the same ones as we have here and the basics would still apply. You will still find it a valuable resource. Or, you can drive up to Pennsylvania and use it there. Just don't spell the name wrong.



*A Viceroy Butterfly*

## **The MOS Convention in Ocean City, A Personal View** *by C.J. McCauliffe*

The forecast for cold, windy weather in Ocean City made me thankful that I had registered for the MOS Convention fairly late. No boat trips were still available, letting me avoid deciding whether the draw of super bird sightings would overcome the threat of miserable motion sickness in a boat on a windswept ocean. There were still plenty of field trips, I thought, and I could surely bundle up enough to take advantage of those. As it turned out, when I got to Ocean City on Friday morning, the field trips for the afternoon were already filled! (Should I have gone down the night before? Make a note for next year.)

So I went ahead and signed up for trips on Saturday and Sunday. Since I have never birded Ocean City, I had no idea which field trips would be "the best," so I picked mainly by choosing the ones that were least full. (I know—that's counterintuitive. But still . . .) I was disappointed that the trip I REALLY wanted to go on – Bob's Rarities Roundup on Sunday morning – appeared to be seriously oversubscribed. This was no surprise; with a name like that and a leader like Bob Ringler, it promised to be the best trip of the convention. Oh well—make another note for next year.

Having Friday afternoon free from organized birding was no real problem, though. First, the MOS had arranged for expert birders to be available on the jetty at Ocean City Inlet; anyone could go there, stay as long as they liked, and see what was being seen. In addition, there were three workshops planned that day. The convention materials noted that the workshops would overlap the field trips, but they suggested (with some amount of prescience, I thought) that the seminars "may be a welcome respite in case of inclement weather."

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The three workshops were entitled “Getting the Most out of eBird”; “The New Taxonomy, or, House Sparrow is Now WHERE?”; and “Ecology of the Eastern Shore, Past and Present.” The first and third of these were of particular interest to me. The first sounded useful because I refer to the data on eBird regularly, but I have never actually contributed a list. I’ve been thinking I really ought to do that, and I was hoping the seminar would answer some of the questions I’ve had about it. The third seminar sounded interesting as well.

I’m a native of the Eastern Shore, but I know very little about its history: geological, ecological, sociological, or any other “logical” for that matter. If I don’t learn something now, when will I? Both of the workshops I attended were worthwhile, and I was happy that I had sat in on them. Too, given some of the comments I heard later from people who had gone birding all day, I was really glad I had taken advantage of the “welcome respite” aspect of attending. It was really cold and windy on Friday.

The highlight of Friday evening was the presentation by the keynote speaker, Peter P. Marra, Director of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and co-author (with Chris Santella) of the book *Cat Wars: The Devastating Consequences of a Cuddly Killer*. Mr. Marra gave a fascinating but frightening account of the problems of free-ranging cats: for the bird population, the human population, and, indeed, the population of the cats themselves. I of course am familiar with the environmental damage caused by such cats, as we all are. Even so, as an owner and lover of (indoor) cats, I found it a very difficult lecture to listen to.

I vowed afterward to learn more and then take whatever action I can to help address what the book’s cover calls a “complex global problem.” My first step was to buy the book; now, of course, I must read it, and I sheepishly admit I’ve been somewhat reluctant to do so. “Afraid” is probably a better word to use. I will, though. And once I have, I’ll be happy to lend the book to anyone interested and discuss with them ways we might begin to make a difference. I believe it will be a tough discussion.

The weather on Saturday, though still cold, was more temperate, even at 6:30 when my first field trip began.

I had signed up for the trip to the Assateague Island National Seashore “Life” Trails, a very pleasant and easy trip where we saw 42 species of birds. I admit that I did not record our sightings. But Kevin Graaf, one of the trip leaders, did, and he was kind enough to use the “share” function when reporting to eBird so that everyone who asked could have the sightings posted to their eBird account. (Not only do I have a record of our sightings, but I actually now have a “list” on eBird!) Most of us were hoping to see a Snowy Owl; various reports had put one in the vicinity. But it was not to be. I did hear that an owl was later spotted on Assateague--we probably passed it on our way back to Ocean City! Still, we saw lots of birds. I was thrilled to get a long and fairly close look at my first Merlin, which made the whole trip worthwhile for me.

My second field trip was to North E.A. Vaughn WMA and Truitt’s Landing. It was a long drive, and what I remember most about the first leg of the trip was the field where we saw eight Eastern meadowlarks, the most I’ve ever seen at one time. At Truitt’s Landing there were practically no birds. That area on Chincoteague Bay was virtually empty; our leader blamed the weather in part, which by that time had begun to turn damp and cold and windy again. We watched for a while but finally decided that, with the light fading, not much was going to happen.

The ride back was of course just as long as the ride out, and we had stayed much longer looking for birds than anyone expected. Several of us were concerned for one member of our group, who was scheduled to give a poster presentation during the wine and cheese social. It became clear fairly early that she was not going to make it back in time. In fact, I wasn’t sure that we’d make it back for wine and cheese at all! We did get back to the hotel eventually, and I would have made it to the social if I hadn’t succumbed to the call of a hot cup of tea back in my room. I figured I could get wine and cheese at home.

In fact, when I finally got downstairs to the conference area, there was still some “social” going on. Many people were looking at the

entries to the bird photo contest, probably trying to decide which three photos were going to be chosen as best. How judges decide those things is always a mystery to me. In this case, there were many wonderful pictures, and it must have been a difficult task. I'm afraid I don't remember who won; the prizes were announced during the business meeting, and I'm sure they will be recorded in the next issue of the "Yellowthroat." But I do remember the many murmurs I heard when the first-prize winner was announced. It seems the winner had entered more than one photo, and while the winning photographer was no surprise, the winning photograph apparently was!

After dinner, the MOS held its annual business meeting. Next year's officers were elected, a report on the MOS financial situation was given, and major activities of the MOS were discussed. Notable subjects were the expansion of the Irish Grove Sanctuary, the gift to MOS from the Chandler Robbins family, and the introduction in the Maryland Assembly of legislation, drafted by Safe Skies Maryland, to address the problem of window strikes in government buildings. I was pleased to get a feel, for the first time in person, of how the MOS works and what it is accomplishing.

Also after dinner, a number of interesting books were offered for sale, and their authors were available for signing. I was pleased to meet Bruce Beehler and purchase a signed copy of his newest book, *North on the Wing: Travels with the Songbird Migration of Spring*. Those of you who read *Bird Watcher's Digest* might have noticed that the book is highlighted in their Book Notes column of this year's March/April issue. That book is next on my list to read after *Cat Wars*, and it too will be available for borrowing once I've read it.

Sunday dawned much less bright than I had hoped. I was happy, though, to be able to join the Bob's Rarities field trip after all, and I was still hoping for a sighting of a Snowy Owl. After all the reports of sightings, I had begun to think I was the only one who had missed out. Our stop at the Inlet got me a Bonaparte's Gull (what a lovely bird!) and a Purple Sandpiper, neither of which I had seen before. And Bob took us to see a pair of Mute Swans, which we confirmed with the homeowner to be not wild but what I suppose might be considered "pets." I believe

their wings were clipped, so that's some comfort. Still, however, no Snowy Owl for me.

The last activity of the convention itself was the tally. I did not attend that, but according to Fred Fallon, there were 128 species tallied. Organizers had hoped for more alcids, gannets, jaegers, and other such birds, but there was only one: a Razorbill, which was seen both at the OC inlet and the Indian River inlet. The complete list will be put in the summary for the next "Yellowthroat."

The MOS had arranged several "homeward bound" trips as final birding opportunities for convention attendees. These sounded like a great idea, especially the one at the Cambridge waterfront. But my plan was to drive a bit out of my way to visit my hometown for a few minutes on the way back to Carroll County. That meant a longer drive home even without birding stops, so I decided to forgo them. As it turned out, the weather took a turn for the worse just as I was leaving Ocean City. Freezing rain became a possibility later in the day, and the prospect of driving home in it made me choose to make a beeline straight home to Taylorsville. I was happy though, to be treated to a field full of Snow Geese somewhere between Salisbury and Cambridge; that seemed a fitting end to a very worthwhile weekend.

Given the obvious demand for pelagic trips – the original ones were "sold out" very early -- the MOS had arranged for an additional trip to be available on Sunday afternoon. On Sunday morning the word went out: the afternoon pelagic trip had been cancelled due to high winds. Did I mention how cold and windy Ocean City was that weekend?

## Carroll County Bird Club 2017-2018 Schedule

Wednesday, April 4 - 7:00 pm, speaker program

Butterflies and Gardening Strategy by Debbie Maeder at Carroll Nonprofit Center in Westminster. Contact Don Jewell at [jewelldg@gmail.com](mailto:jewelldg@gmail.com).

Saturday, April 28 - 8:00 am, half-day trip

McKeldin Area of Patapsco Valley State Park – Watch Bob work his magic. Meet at the Park and Ride on Route 32 just south of Route 26 in Eldersburg. For more details, contact Bob Ringler at 410-303-2792.

Wednesday, May 2 - 7:00 pm

Your MOS Sanctuaries by Marcia Watson at Carroll Nonprofit Center in Westminster. Contact Don Jewell at [jewelldg@gmail.com](mailto:jewelldg@gmail.com).

Saturday, May 12 - up to all day

Carroll County May Count - Parties of counters will set their own schedules in their pre-arranged areas to count resident and migrant bird species throughout the County. Contact Don Jewell to verify your bird counting area ([jewelldg@gmail.com](mailto:jewelldg@gmail.com) or 410-259-4716). The Tally Rally will be hosted by Susan Bollinger and Barbara Olsh at their home. If you will be attending the tally rally, please RSVP to Susan (410-848-2050) no later than Wednesday, May 9th. Plan on bringing a food item or a cash donation (\$5).

Saturday, May 26 – 8:00 am, half-day trip

Birding and Botanizing Along Saw Mill Road - Contact Bob Ringler for directions and more information at 410-303-2792.

Saturday, June 2 - 8:00 am, half-day trip

Upper Gunpowder River at River Valley Ranch for nesting warblers and other neotropical species. Meet at the parking lot in front of the North Carroll Senior Center at 2328 Hanover Pike (between Hampstead and Manchester). Parking at birding site is limited so we will carpool. Contact Henry Leskinen for more information at 443-259-6572.

Saturday, June 16 – 8:00 am, half-day trip

North Tract of the Patuxent Research Refuge – This is a great place to bird. Be sure to bring a photo ID. Everyone must sign in separately. Meet at the Park and Ride on Route 32 just south of Route 26 in Eldersburg. Contact Bob Ringler at 410-303-2792.

Saturday, June 23 - 1:00 pm - until ?

Summer Picnic at Amy's House - Amy Hoffman will again be hosting this annual event. Enjoy good food and good company. Bring your bathing suit if you are so inclined. Amy has a great pool. Contact her (410-549-3598) if you plan on attending and tell her what food item you will be bringing.

All meetings of the Carroll County Bird Club will be held at the Carroll Nonprofit Center at 255 Clifton Boulevard in Westminster. Directions to the Center may be found online at <http://carrollnonprofitcenter.org/directions.html>.

Meetings begin at 7:00 pm with a brief period for socializing, followed by the guest lecturer. Afterwards, there will be a short business meeting.

The doors of the Carroll Nonprofit Center are set on a timer to automatically lock at 7:15 pm. CCBC members arriving after the doors lock may call Don Jewell at 410-259-4716 for entry. (An effort will also be made to check the doors from time to time for late arrivals.)

## The Last Laugh

*“I can do this with my eyes closed!”*



Photography is a great tool for studying bird behavior. Catching a bird in action often reveals things that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. This White-breasted Nuthatch was caught in action while foraging on a tree trunk. At some point, the bird closed its eyes. Was this to protect them from flying wood chips? Or was it a bit of bavado on the bird's part? *“I can do this with my eyes closed”* it appears to say. Or, maybe the bird just blinked.

## The Whoosletter

*A Publication of the  
Carroll County Bird Club*

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