

# WHAT'S HATCHING?

Official Newsletter of the Maryland & DC Breeding Bird Atlas 3

ISSUE NO 8 | SEP 2020



Photo credit: Keith Eric Costely

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Have a story or a picture for the newsletter? We'd love to hear about it!

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## BIRD OF THE MONTH

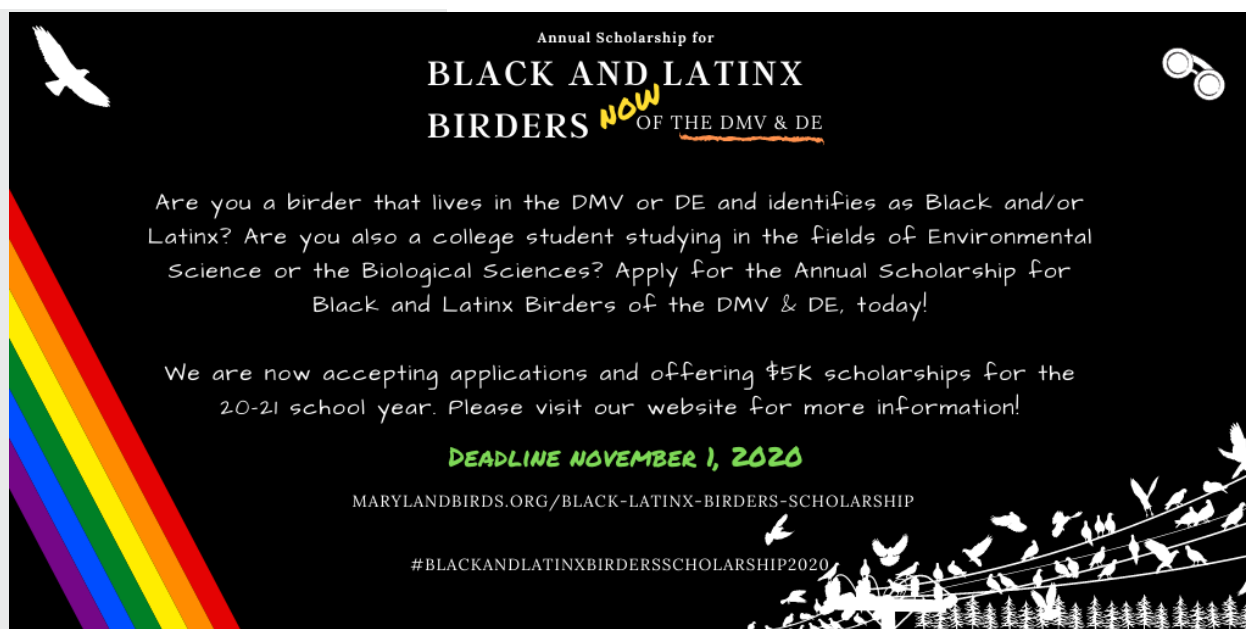
Yellow-throated Vireos are tough to Confirm—but with these behavior tips, things just got much easier.

## TIPS AND TRICKS

Time to change the portal back to normal! To do this, follow the instructions in Appendix C of the Handbook.

## OUT OF THE ARCHIVE

Learn about the Maryland breeding ranges of birds like Bachman's Sparrow, Bewick's Wren, and Swainson's Warbler in the 40s. You might be surprised at what was described as common!



Annual Scholarship for  
**BLACK AND LATINX**  
**BIRDERS** *NOW* OF THE DMV & DE

Are you a birder that lives in the DMV or DE and identifies as Black and/or Latinx? Are you also a college student studying in the fields of Environmental Science or the Biological Sciences? Apply for the Annual Scholarship for Black and Latinx Birders of the DMV & DE, today!

We are now accepting applications and offering \$5K scholarships for the 20-21 school year. Please visit our website for more information!

**DEADLINE NOVEMBER 1, 2020**

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#BLACKANDLATINXBIRDERSSCHOLARSHIP2020

"If you want more field observations, start by sending in some of your own!"

- Oliver B. Isaac, former Maryland Birdlife Associate Editor

55,000 checklists have been submitted to the Atlas—that's 55,000 stories about birds!

Send your favorite atlas memory from this summer to [mddcbba3@mdbirds.org](mailto:mddcbba3@mdbirds.org) and share the fun.

## UPCOMING EVENTS



*Mark your calendar for the Big Day, October 17, 2020! This year, it's happening as a part of the first [Global Bird Weekend](#). The event's goals are to support ending the illegal bird trade, and to make October 17–18 the biggest birding weekend ever.*

*So on October 17, join in the fun and submit a checklist to eBird!*

*You can find out more info at [ebird.org/news/october-big-day-2020-bigger-than-ever](http://ebird.org/news/october-big-day-2020-bigger-than-ever)*

## From the Coordinator

*We received a Governor's Citation!*

Earlier this month, I was asked if I would meet with Lieutenant Governor Boyd Rutherford and Secretary of Natural Resources Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio at Merkle NRMA, in Prince George's County, and tell them about the Atlas. I was surprised—nothing I knew of had directly precipitated the request—but delighted. One of my favourite parts of being the Atlas Coordinator is telling people just how great the Atlas is, and how much fun it can be to participate.

My partner, Jordan, joined me for the trip and we introduced ourselves to the park staff. I hadn't been to Merkle in a while, although I did get my lifer White-eyed Vireo there in 2018 (with just three provincial records, it is not a common bird in Saskatchewan). We watched a large flock of two or three hundred Brown-headed Cowbirds mill about the visitor center, then met with the Lt. Gov. and the Secretary. I explained how the Atlas documented change in bird distribution at a large scale but with fine resolution, how it could help identify important habitats or problematic land use changes, and how engaged our community is with the project.

And, entirely unexpectedly, Lt. Gov. Rutherford presented the Atlas with a Governor's Citation. This recognition for the project came about because of the indefatigable efforts of



people like Chandler Robbins, Rick Blom, and Walter Ellison—but most importantly, it is a result of thousands of dedicated individuals who contributed hundreds of thousands of hours towards understanding and conserving our local birds.

That contribution is no small thing. Our atlases, and the knowledge they have provided, would not exist without you.

This one is for you!

--Gabriel



bird of the month:

# YELLOW-THROATED VIREO

Photo credit: Gabriel Foley

Despite being widespread across Maryland and DC, Yellow-throated Vireos are a somewhat uncommon breeding bird. Both sexes show the same diagnostic yellow spectacles, two broad white wing bars, and yellow throat and breast. With close inspection, juveniles look paler yellow and have a brownish cast to their olive upperparts, but otherwise they resemble adult plumage. The male's burry song is also distinctive; listen for short, disjunct phrases that have a harsh quality associated with them.

Although Yellow-throated Vireos appear to require large tracts of mature forest nearby, they are found most often along forest edges or openings, or along rivers and streams. They prefer tall, widely-spaced deciduous trees with little understory. They forage in the middle to upper canopy, moving slowly and methodically along dead or bare

branches. Their diet is almost entirely composed of moths and butterflies, true bugs, beetles, flies, and wasps and bees. In the fall, they will also occasionally eat berries or seeds from plants like sassafras, grape, or lamb's quarter.

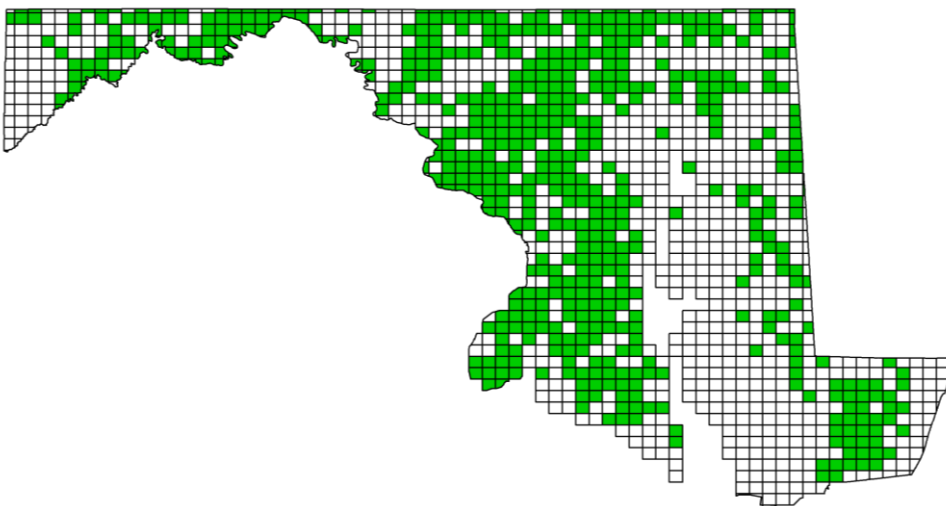
Yellow-throated Vireos begin to arrive in mid-April. Males sing sporadically during migration, but once they establish their territories they sing one song phrase every two seconds for most of the day. They select a few potential nest sites and lay a small amount of nest material at each site. Once they've attracted a female to their territory, they will sing and display to her at each pre-selected nest site. Once the pair has been formed, his song rate decreases by about 80%, and this continues to decrease as the nesting season progresses. Like most songbirds,

## YELLOW-THROATED VIREO

***Their dating is just him pretending to be good at construction.***

A male establishes his territory, scouts out a few potential nest sites, and sings as frequently as he can until he has attracted a female. Then, to convince her that he is indeed worth spending the summer with, he shows her the nest sites he has selected and demonstrates his nest-building aptitude—or at least, his potential.

He doesn't use any actual materials, nor does he accomplish anything useful. Instead, he lowers his head into the nest site and moves his head as though he were constructing the nest. If she is sufficiently impressed with his display, she will pick one of his nest sites to use and they will begin work on a nest together within a matter of hours. Most of his contribution towards their nest happens on the first day of construction. Each subsequent day, he is involved less and less with the nest building.



Yellow-throated Vireo distribution map from the Maryland & DC Breeding Bird Atlas 2.

Yellow-throated Vireos sing most early in the morning and least during midday, but it is possible to hear their song at any time of day.

How frequently a male is singing, and where he is singing from, can greatly assist with finding better breeding evidence. In the second atlas, only 10% of blocks had Yellow-throated Vireos Confirmed, yet most singing by mated males takes place near the nest and is associated



Photo credit: George Jett

with nest-building and egg-laying. Conversely, unmated males move throughout their territory, singing constantly. When you hear a Yellow-throated Vireo singing inconsistently, make an additional effort to locate him and you may very well Confirm him for the block. You may also want to become familiar with their trill call; this vocalization is used by both sexes when approaching the nest, or when chasing other Yellow-throated Vireos out of their territory.

Yellow-throated Vireos build a cup nest in the upper portion of a live deciduous tree near the edge of the forest, 20-50 feet high. The nest rim hangs from a fork in a small branch, usually coming off the main trunk. Both sexes help build the nest, and construction begins shortly after the pair has formed. The male and female are nearly inseparable during this time. The nest is built using spider

web to bind together strips of bark, dry grasses, and rootlets. Materials are wrapped around and laid over the selected fork; once enough material has accumulated, the vireos use their feet and body to push down on the structure to form the hanging cup shape. Adornments of lichen, birch bark, or spider egg cases on the nest's three inch exterior provide camouflage, and the female adds a lining of dry grasses to the interior. Egg-laying begins the morning after completion.

She lays four oval, white eggs with brown blotches at the wide end, and both sexes take turns incubating for 13 days. The female occupies the nest at night, but during the day they relieve each other every 15–45 minutes. To signal the exchange of incubation duties, the pair will vocalize with each other. Then, in a winged sleight, the adult on the nest leaves just as its partner is incoming, creating an illusion to onlookers that a single bird flew through the tree. For six days after the eggs hatch, both adults continue to share brooding responsibilities. After that, the chicks can thermoregulate sufficiently well that both parents can forage simultaneously for their brood.



Photo credit: Laura Wolf



Most activity throughout the season takes place within 300 ft of the nest, and food—mostly small caterpillars—is brought to the chicks 2–5 times per hour. When bringing food to the nest, the adult may appear to be fly-catching, but this behavior is yet another illusory approach.

Brown-headed Cowbirds regularly parasitize Yellow-throated Vireo nests; anywhere from a third to half of nests have been found with cowbird eggs. Adult vireos recognize cowbirds, and will give alarm calls or give chase if a cowbird is seen near their nest. They have also been known to bury cowbird eggs in the bottom of the nest or even desert the entire nest, but the majority of the time, the vireos raise the cowbird chick (or chicks—as many as three cowbird eggs have been found in Yellow-throated Vireo nests). The cowbird's parasitization often results in the loss of the vireo chicks, but despite the high parasitism rate and the low number of vireo chicks fledged from parasitized nests, the average across successful Yellow-throated Vireo nests is 2.5 vireo chicks and only 0.3 cowbird chicks. If the first attempt fails, the pair will build a new nest and try again, but they only raise one brood each year.



Photo credit: Keith Eric Costley

Nestlings can fly weakly at thirteen days and typically leave the nest then. Initially, both parents look after all the fledglings together. After a few days the parents split the brood up and each parent takes half. When an adult arrives, the fledglings quiver their wings and beg loudly. Fledglings will follow adults and continue to beg for a month after fledging. The family may stay together until migration, generally within a quarter mile of the nest. They stay in contact with soft *wit* notes. If these contact calls are heard, it usually indicates a pair or a family is present.

*Author: Gabriel Foley*

#### References

Rodewald, P.G. and R.D. James. (2020). Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (A.F. Poole, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.yetvir.01>



Photo credit: George Jett



Photo credit: Gabriel Foley

# ATLASER SPOTLIGHT

***Alan Young is a retiree from Westinghouse/Northrop Grumman and past board member for My Brother's Keeper in Baltimore. He now enjoys his big family, birds, and looking forward to each day, filled with surprises.***

*How did you become interested in birds?*

My interest in birds dates back to an early age, but, in 1967, it jumped to a new level. In an Environmental Science class, I read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* that detailed a threat to the existence of Ospreys and eagles. I followed their subsequent 'fight back' over the years which sealed the deal for my love for birds; I hope it never ends.

*What MD-DC bird do you particularly like?*

I often feel that my favorite bird is the one I am looking at, and I am always looking for that really special one just up ahead. But that one particular bird for me in the MD-DC region is the Osprey. In 2007, David Gessner's *Soaring with Fidel—An Osprey Odyssey from Cape Cod to Cuba and Beyond* gave me an understanding that allows me to imagine where our local breeding pair, Ozzie and Odessa, are throughout their annual travels.

*If you went atlasing and could only bring binoculars, a field guide, and one other item, what would you bring?*

My camera; I love capturing birds living their lives in their habitat.

*Where is your favorite place to atlas?*

Kinder Farm Park in Millersville, Anne Arundel County.

*If you could pick anyone to go atlasing with for a day, who would it be?*

This is easy. Of course it would be my wife, Sue. We share a passion for 'our birds' and our eBird user name is "Sue and Alan Young". With Suzie's eagle eyes and bird song and call identification skills, and my love of details and numbers, we do it together (with the help of many experts and friends in MOS).

*What do you think the biggest issue in conservation is today?*

The greatest threat to birds is habitat loss in a complex myriad of ways. The biggest issue in conservation today is the lack of a global understanding, interest, and cooperation to address these losses in forests, plains, farms, mines, urban developments, swamps, and wetlands, all at the same time. It is a broad struggle in each these areas driven by education, cooperation, legislation, and leadership.



*What do you think is the best thing about atlasing?*

The best thing about atlasing is the in-person experience of witnessing, enjoying and learning about the lives of many birds. I love the opportunity to increase my knowledge and appreciation of migration, mating, nest building, competition, predation, molting, fledging, and dispersal.

*Have you been involved with any other atlases?*

MD-DC BBA3 is the first time I have been a participant in atlasing. In 2015, with the help of AABC experts, eBird data and BBA2 findings, I updated the 1996 Kinder Farm Park Checklist of Birds, including species known to have nested in Kinder.

**Want to show your support of the Atlas with some swag?**



Check out [cafepress.com/mddcbba3](http://cafepress.com/mddcbba3)



# BLOCK PARTY

## Princess Anne SW, Somerset County

By now, there are few blocks without checklists left in Maryland and DC, particularly ones that are full land blocks and not just a sliver along a state border or the tip of an island. But Princess Anne SW has managed to elude atlasers so far, despite being along the County's main artery, Hwy 13, and just a few miles south of the county seat. Somerset County currently lacks a County Coordinator and, as a whole, has less effort than many other regions.

In previous atlases, Princess Anne SW had 71 (BBA1) and 65 (BBA2) species documented breeding. Chuck-will's-widow was missed in the second atlas, but it has been recorded this year in a third of the surrounding blocks. Green Heron, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Northern Rough-winged Swallow were also

found in BBA1 but not BBA2.

Conversely, BBA2 added Wild Turkey, Great Horned Owl, and House Finch to the block's cumulative list.

The habitat within the block is a combination of oak-pine forest, agricultural land, and marshy riparian areas and with some effort should yield a similarly diverse species list. The block has decent road access, but narrow shoulders; be cautious of where you stop and avoid parking in field entrances. There is no publicly accessible land, but a combination of strategically exploring the block's roads and detailed notes should net S7 codes for most species. Two waterways, Manokin River and Back Creek, cut through the block's north and south sides, respectively. Bridges over both can be found within the block.



Photo credit: Gabriel Foley



Photo credit: Gabriel Foley

Princess Anne SW is right on the way to other Somerset County birding hotspots. When you hit the turn-off for Crisfield and Janes Island State Park, consider spending half an hour logging a few breeding species for this under-atlased block. Or, if you would like to adopt this block and ensure it reaches its completion targets by 2024, send an email to [mddcbba3@mdbirds.org](mailto:mddcbba3@mdbirds.org) and I'll get you set up.

*Author: Gabriel Foley*



# TIPS AND TRICKS

September brings with it the autumnal equinox, after which the Northern Hemisphere's nights become longer than its days. Most of Maryland and DC's breeding birds have intuited this information and are already southbound. The attention of many atlasers has shifted away from breeding behavior and towards the tantalizing prospect of extralimital and vagrant birds. Few species will attempt to nest here over the next few months. Rock Pigeons will nest year-round (even on the ultra-cold Canadian prairies!), and so will Eurasian Collared-Doves—but for collared-doves this tends to occur in the southern portion of their North American range. Otherwise, we are by and large forced to wait until midwinter to begin looking for nesting birds like Great Horned Owls, Common Ravens, or Red Crossbills.

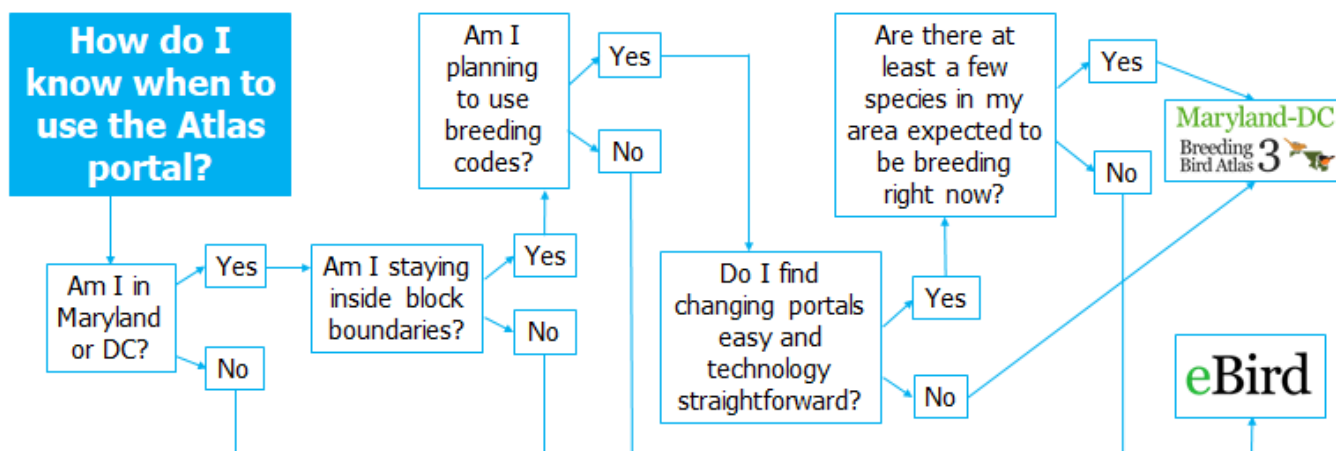
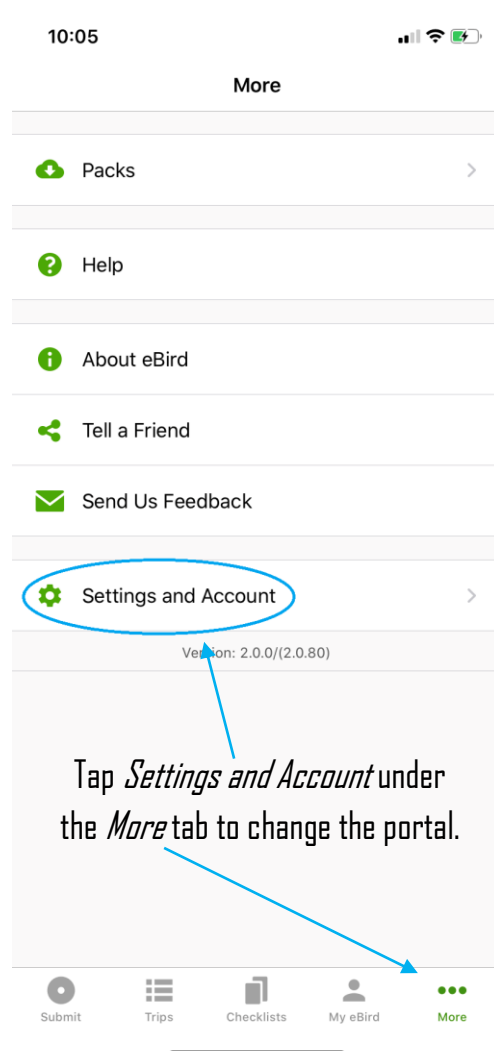
For the intervening months, many atlasers will continue to record birds in eBird (I know I certainly will!), but their checklists will be devoid of

breeding codes. This makes it a good time to switch from using the Atlas portal to using 'core' eBird (you know, just the regular one). This prevents all of your birding effort from contributing to the atlasing effort totals in each block—and you won't have to worry about those pesky block boundaries! (Remember, if you are submitting checklists to the Atlas portal, regardless of whether there are breeding codes on it, you must not cross block boundaries.)

To make the switch in the app between portals, you can follow the screenshots in [Appendix C of the Handbook](#). To enter winter checklists on a computer, just go to [ebird.org](http://ebird.org) instead of [ebird.org/atlasmdc](http://ebird.org/atlasmdc).

If you find all of this portal talk confusing, feel free to [email me or your County Coordinator](#) for help.

*Author: Gabriel Foley*



# FROM THE FIELD

*Contributions from the atlas community!*



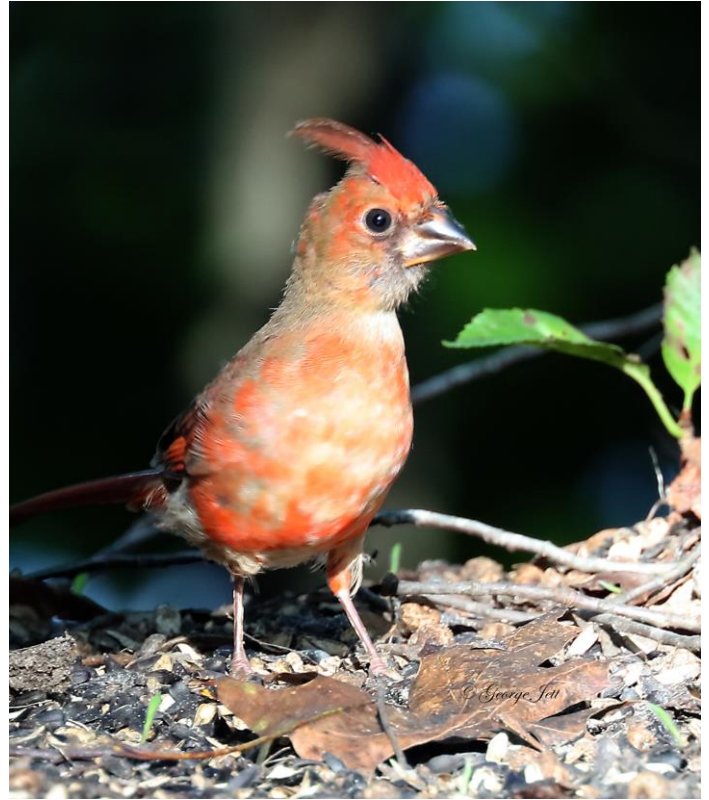
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher carrying nest material. Photo credit: Fred Fallon



Eastern Screech Owl. Photo credit: Simon Best



Fledgling Brown-headed Cowbird begging its Chipping Sparrow parent for food. Photo credit: Ron Ketter



Fledgling Northern Cardinal. Photo credit: George Jett



Prothonotary Warbler. Photo credit: Sriram Bala

*Do you have a story or photo you would like to see in What's Hatching?*

*We'd love to hear about it! Send your submissions to the editor at [mddcbba3@mdbirds.org](mailto:mddcbba3@mdbirds.org).*



# OUT OF THE ARCHIVE

## The Distribution of Maryland Birds (#2 of a Series)

Stewart, R.E. 1947. The Distribution of Maryland Birds. *Maryland Birdlife* 3(5):55-57.

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Purple Gallinule. Photo credit: Bill Hubick

This is the second of a series of papers written for the purpose of presenting new information on the geographical distribution and abundance of Maryland birds. The eleven items which follow, concern extension of the breeding ranges of four species, clarification of the breeding ranges of two others, the first winter records of two species, the second Maryland occurrence of one, and the only known specimens of two others.

### Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio* [*Porphyrio*] *martinica*)

One bird was found on June 24, 1947, at the Patuxent Research Refuge by F. M. Uhler. This same individual was seen several times during the period June 24 to 26, 1947, by a small number of observers including C.S. Robbins, and at a distance of ten feet. The only previous record of this species in

Maryland was of one collected on Oct. 12, 1938, in Anne Arundel County, by R. B. Smithers (Hampe, Seibert and Kolb, *Auk*, 56:475, 1939).

### Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*)

A female was collected on Oct. 6, 1946, at the West Ocean City mud flats by R. E. Stewart, accompanied by C. S. Robbins and Max Carpenter. This bird, the first specimen for Maryland, is now in the Fish and Wildlife Service Collection. Previous records of this species include four single birds seen by Stewart near Ocean City during the period Aug. 20 to 30, 1945, and one rather indefinite reference to a bird shot on the marshes along the coast (W. H. Fisher, *Oologist*, 11:97, 1884).

### Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*)

A female was collected on Aug. 23,

1947, at Winter Quarters, Assateague Island, by John H. Buckalew, accompanied by Martin Karplus, Brina Kessel and C. S. Robbins. Mr. Buckalew presented the specimen to the Fish and Wildlife Service. The only previous record of this species in Maryland was of one collected at West River, Anne Arundel County, in 1886 by J. Murray Ellzey (Kirkwood, *Birds of Maryland*, 1895). The whereabouts of the latter specimen is not known.

### Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*)

Several Forster's terns were seen by Dr. Earl L. Poole and Dr. David Berkheimer at Ocean City on Dec. 29-30, 1946. Six were seen in this same area on Jan. 24, 1947, by C. S. Robbins and R. E. Stewart. These apparently represent the first wintering records of this species in Maryland.

### Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*)

Our concept of the breeding distribution of this species in Maryland has been greatly clarified as the result of many field trips in the western part of the state during the past two years by several observers, including Orville W. Crowder, William B. Green, Leonard M. Llewellyn, Richard May, Mrs. Helen B. Miller, C. S.

Robbins, Dr. R. S. Stauffer, and R. E. Stewart. Its breeding status may now be described as follows: fairly common in the central Appalachian ridge region of Allegany County and western Washington County; rather rare on the Allegheny plateau of Garrett County and in the Hagerstown valley of Washington County; there is no positive information of its breeding east of the Hagerstown Valley.

Swainson's Warbler (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*)

At least four singing males were recorded on July 13, 1947, in the Pocomoke river swamp about ¼ mile below the Delaware line, by Martin Karplus and R. E. Stewart. Previous records of this species in Maryland were all made along the Pocomoke river, and include one by Joseph M. Cadbury near Willards on May 9 and 10, 1942, and several (one bird was collected) by C. S. Robbins and R. E. Stewart in an area about five miles southwest of Pocomoke City during the spring and summer of 1946. These records indicate that this species occurs regularly in the swampy woodland along the Pocomoke river from the Delaware line to the edge of the tidal marsh several miles below Pocomoke City.

Cerulean Warbler (*Dendroica [Setophaga] cerulea*)

Field work during the past two years has helped to clarify the status of this species in Maryland during the breeding season. Observers who have contributed recent information on the cerulean warbler are the same as those listed under Bewick's wren, with the addition of C. Haven Kolb, Jr. On the basis of this new information, the breeding status of this species in

Maryland may be described as follows: common in the central Appalachian ridge area of Allegany County and western Washington County; rather uncommon in eastern Garrett County in the vicinity of the Savage river; common in the flood plain forest along the Susquehanna river; occurs locally on the piedmont, being common in one five-mile stretch of flood plain forest along the Patapsco river near the intersection of the Baltimore, Howard and Carroll County lines, and occurring in the vicinity of Towson and Cockeysville (Kolb, *Auk*, 60:275, 1943).

Boat-tailed Grackle (*Cassidix mexicanus [Quiscalus major]*)

Until recently this species has been known only as a summer resident along the coast and on the eastern shore of lower Chesapeake Bay. On Jan. 25, 1947, C. S. Robbins and R. E. Stewart saw a flock of 95 boat-tails in the Chesapeake marshes at Crisfield. Although they spent the whole morning in that area, only this one flock was found. This species winters on Assateague Island just a few miles south of the Maryland line, and doubtless occurs sparingly on the Maryland portion of the island as well.

Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

Although widely distributed in Garrett County in summer, the savannah sparrow has not been reported as nesting in the lower parts of Maryland. John H. Buckalew of the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, not only discovered that this species is a regular though local summer resident in the Maryland portion of Assateague Island, but also found a nest, thereby extending the known breeding range in the coastal plain from southern New Jersey (A.O.U. Check List, 1931) to southeastern Maryland. On two occasions, C. S. Robbins and R. E. Stewart accompanied him to the breeding locality and were shown singing birds.

Bachman's Sparrow (*Aimophila [Peucaea] aestivalis*)

On July 17 and 18, 1947, R. E. Stewart found three singing males of this species in a field on Green Ridge Mountain, one mile north of the Potomac River in Allegany County. Previously this







Red-necked Phalarope, formerly known as Northern Phalarope. Photo credit: Gabriel Foley

bird had been found summering only in Garrett, Montgomery, and Prince Georges Counties. Three or four singing males were also found in June 1947 at a new Beltsville locality, about three miles north of the area where a nest was found in 1942 (Stewart and Meanley, *Auk*, 60:605–6, 1943).

#### Swamp Sparrow (*Melospiza georgiana*)

This species was heard singing along the Nanticoke river near Vienna, Wicomico County, during July 1946, and again on May 24, 1947, by Neil Hotchkiss. On July 11, 1947 thirteen adults, including eight singing males were recorded in this same area by Martin Karplus, C. S. Robbins and R. E. Stewart. An adult male which was collected, was obviously in breeding condition, as indicated by the enlarged testes. Like the savannah sparrow, this species has been recorded as summering only on the Allegheny plateau in Garrett County. The discovery of this breeding colony in a tidal marsh suggests the swamp sparrow may also nest locally in other

marshes in the eastern part of Maryland. It had previously been reported as nesting south along the coastal plain only to New Jersey.

The northern phalarope [Red-necked

Phalarope] (Preliminary List of the Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia, Hampe and Kolb, 1947, p. 27) must be relegated to the hypothetical list as far as the State of Maryland is concerned, since the specimen procured "near Cumberland" on May 23, 1901, was stated by Eifrig (*Auk*, 19:76, 1902) to have been shot at the "Swamp Ponds" which he admits are in West Virginia, although surrounded on three sides by a loop of the Potomac river. There remains one sight record of this species from Indian Head, Maryland (Oberholser, *Bird-Lore*, 32:279). Since no new species are added to the Maryland list in this issue of *Maryland Birdlife*, the State total now stands at 309 species.

*Author: Robert E. Stewart*



Swamp Sparrow. Photo credit: Bill Hubick