WHAT'S HATCHING?

Official Newsletter of the Maryland & DC Breeding Bird Atlas 3

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Saltmarsh Sparrow by Sam Miller/Macaulay Library

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BIRD OF THE MONTH

Maryland hosts 25% of the global Saltmarsh Sparrow breeding population, but they're in trouble.

TIPS AND TRICKS

"Dave Z" has provided an informative introduction to fledgling calls. *Veet!*

OUT OF THE ARCHIVE

Upland Sandpipers used to nest in Frederick County pastures, as this 1947 note relates.

Common Nighthawks used to be, well, common in urban areas. They nested on gravel rooftops, and their *peent* was a familiar backdrop in the evening soundscape. Gravel rooftops are now scarce and, coupled with nighthawks' precipitous decline in the US, they have essentially disappeared from urban centers. However, on May 12 John Stith recorded a nighthawk booming in downtown Cumberland. Nighthawks usually boom over nest sites and, sure enough, a nest was found and photographed by Dan Sheehe in mid-June. For BBA3, this represents both the first nighthawk nest and the first urban breeding report.

Common Nighthawk nest by Dan Sheehe/Macaulay Library

"Without intervention, the Saltmarsh Sparrow—the only bird species that breeds solely in the salt marshes of the Northeast United States—could face extinction due to rising seas."

--US Fish & Wildlife Service

Saltmarsh Sparrow by Bill Hubick/Macaulay Library

Bird Bio: Great Horned Owls

If you've ever wanted to know every detail about Great Horned Owl biology, Adele Clagett has you covered. She interviewed Judy Wink, Executive Director Emeritus at the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center and over 50 years of field experience working with Great Horned Owls. Adele has posted the hour-long interview on her website, complete with illustrative photographs (and even a few videos). Check it out!

www.birding.pictures/great-horned-owl

From the Coordinator

Consistent and efficient—nice!

Our fourth field season of BBA3 is complete! Over the course of the project, we have consistently added a little over 200,000 breeding codes to the dataset each year. Not only did we do that once again in 2023 (just over 220,000 codes were submitted), but we have become more efficient. On average, 18 breeding codes were on each atlasing checklist this year; in other years, checklists have had closer to 15.

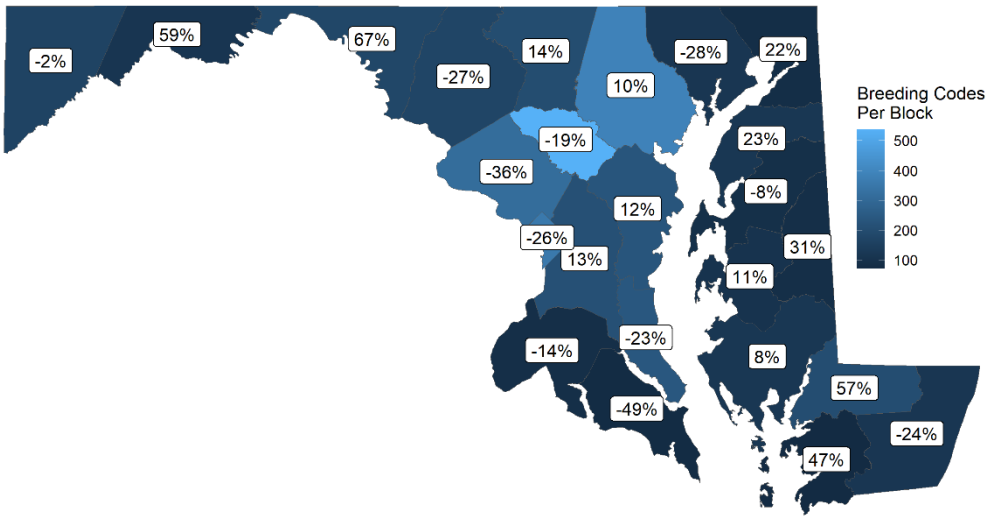
We also did better at increasing effort in under-atlased counties, a key goal for 2023. However, there's still a lot more to be done there and some of our most remote counties remain our least atlased counties. In particular, Allegany and Somerset counties need more effort, northeastern Cecil County can use help, and Prince George's County (not exactly remote!) needs both daytime and nighttime effort. On the other side of things, Howard County blocks were all marked complete prior to this field season, but the county still has the highest rate of codes per block. There's nothing wrong with continuing to work on a completed block, but that effort is much more impactful elsewhere.

Many blocks are close to meeting the completion criteria and a small focused effort will get them over the line. To help with that for next season, we will have a list of very specific needs for each incomplete block and we will be asking atlasers to sign up for each need. Ideally, each need will have a name associated with it so we can closely track and report on progress, adjusting as needed. County Coordinators will be the backbone of this approach.

We will also have two DNR technicians who will have access to boats and will be atlasing many of the Eastern Shore's marshier blocks. For safety reasons, technicians must work in pairs, but that partner can be a volunteer. If you would like to help out here and join DNR for a day or two on the water, please get in touch with me (mddcbba3@mdbirds.org).

One final update—in August, MOS supported a workshop and a symposium that I co-hosted at the American Ornithological Society's annual conference. The workshop brought together the North American Ornithological Atlas Committee, with folks representing almost every atlas project in North America. We discussed best practices and further standardization of data collection across the continent. Our symposium examined analysis challenges, particularly integrating different types of data. Both sessions were tremendously useful, and I am very grateful to MOS for their support!

--Gabriel



The colored fill in each county shows the number of breeding codes per block reported from each county. The labels on each county represent how different that was from the county's average in previous years. For example, in 2023 Washington County saw the largest increase with 67% more breeding codes per block (179 codes) than the average of 107 codes per block. Meanwhile, St. Mary's County had 74 codes reported per block compared to the average of 144 codes, a 49% decrease.

bird of the month:

SALTMARSH SPARROW

Saltmarsh Sparrow by Daniel Irons/Macaulay Library

In both name and appearance, Saltmarsh Sparrows evoke their palustrine home. The gray and orange on their face recall an early morning sun peeking over a marshy horizon, banishing an ashen pre-dawn. Emanating from that orange center, buff brightens a background of brown while black streaks shadow their way forward, retreating from the incoming daybreak.

Top Tips

- Locate likely habitat, with watercraft if possible
- Patiently watch and listen; be confident in the identification
- Provide comments and make an extra effort to Confirm breeding

Tightly bound to their chosen habitat, Saltmarsh Sparrows in Maryland are restricted to the southern Chesapeake coast. In the mid-20th century, they could be found on the Eastern Shore as far north as Kent Narrows and were uncommon breeders on the Western Shore north to Sandy Point and west to Cobb Island. However, their numbers have plummeted range-wide; since 1998, over 87% of their population has vanished. Extinction is a grave and genuine threat to this bird. Alongside this population decline has been a considerable range retraction. In BBA2, they were found in a single Western Shore block and only as far north as Dorchester County on the Eastern Shore.

Habitat

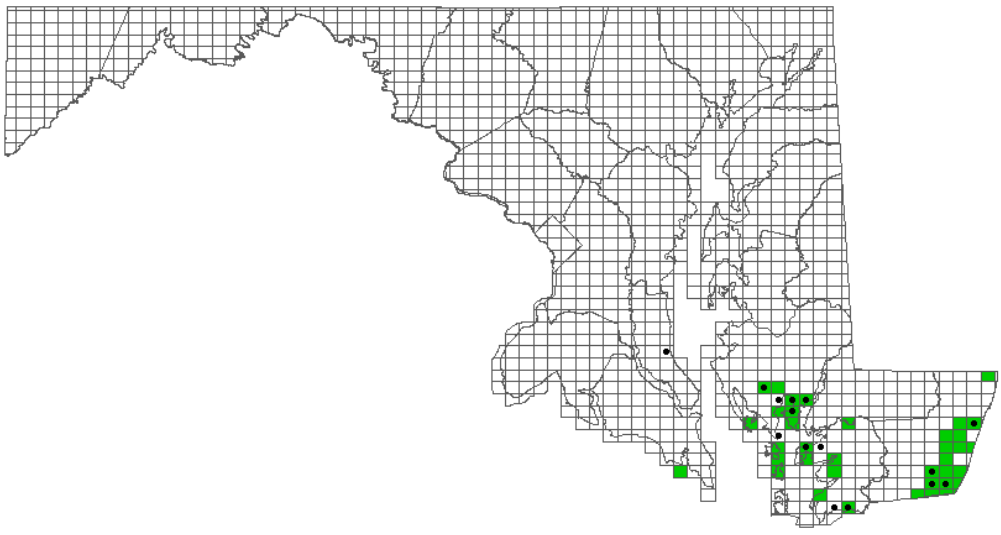
Saltmarsh Sparrows breed in elevated portions of saltmarsh (measured on a scale of inches) known as "high marsh" that are typically only flooded infrequently. The sparrows prefer nesting in high marsh vegetation that is taller and denser, preferably with a robust thatch layer. This microhabitat often occurs near edges or water. High marsh tends to have a vegetation community composed of saltmeadow cordgrass (*Sporobolus pumilus*) as well as saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*), saltmarsh rush (*Juncus gerardii*), and black needlerush (*J. roemerianus*). Low marsh, which sits below the mean high-water level, is typified by smooth cordgrass (*Sporobolus alterniflorus)*.

Saltmeadow and smooth cordgrass can be differentiated by height and by their flowering spikes. Smooth cordgrass grows 3–6 feet tall and has spikes that stand erect at the top of the stem while saltmeadow cordgrass grows 2–2.5 feet tall and has spikes that angle out from the stem.

Identification

Confidently identifying Saltmarsh Sparrows sometimes requires patience, as views can be brief and distant. Look for an orange triangle on their face that contrasts with a buffy breast. Black streaks cover the breast and sides, and, with a close view, fine black markings can be seen in the post-ocular orange streak.

Seaside Sparrows are regularly found nearby, but are darker, larger-billed, and have yellow rather than orange on their face. Nelson's Sparrows are quite similar; they were considered the



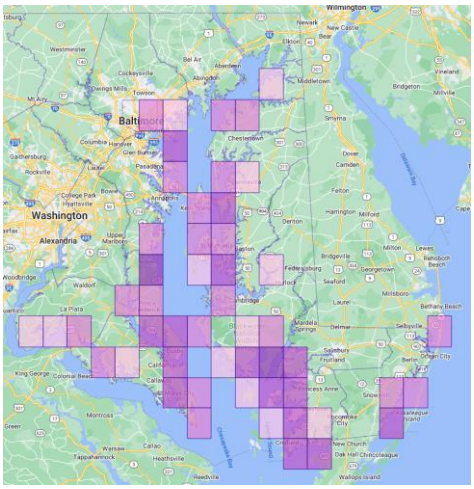
Saltmarsh Sparrow breeding distribution map from the Maryland & DC Breeding Bird Atlas 2 (2002–2006) and Atlas 3 (2020–2022). Green fill indicates a BBA2 Saltmarsh Sparrow breeding observation in that block, while black dots represent coded BBA3 observations.

same species as Saltmarsh Sparrow until 1995 (Sharp-tailed Sparrow) and the two will even hybridize. Nelson's have less contrast between face and breast and largely lack any post-ocular streaking—and are essentially absent from Maryland during the breeding season.

Behavior and Phenology

Saltmarsh Sparrows have a fascinating and unusual breeding strategy. They are promiscuous, meaning they do not form pair bonds. The males do not defend territories or help with any part of the breeding process beyond copulation. Males search for females throughout the breeding season and appear to forcibly copulate with the females they find, but there's no evidence that any sperm is transferred during these aggressive interactions. Instead, it is hypothesized that these are ritualized copulations that allow females to assess male dominance, and females then use these cues to solicit copulations from dominant males.

Saltmarsh Sparrows begin nesting one to three weeks after their return to Maryland in late April or early May.



Saltmeadow cordgrass (*Sporobolus pumilus*) quad map from the Maryland Biodiversity Project. Darker purple represents more records (n = 215, 1879–2023) in that quad; a quad is a collection of six atlas blocks.

Their nesting season is often protracted because flooding from "spring" tides—higher than normal tides that occur twice a month—can cause nest failure and force the birds to renest. Eggs have been recorded in Maryland nests from May 14 to August 21. The female lays 3–6 eggs in a simple cup woven from dried grass stems, then incubates the full clutch for twelve days. The young fledge at ten days, although by five days they can crawl out of the nest to escape flooding. The female continues to feed her fledglings for another two to three weeks before they reach independence.

Breeding Codes

Saltmarsh Sparrows are somewhat hard to detect and have fewer breeding behaviors than other songbirds. Females carrying food is the best way to Confirm them, but their low productivity makes it a challenge.

Habitat: Their breeding habitat is very specific, so code H (habitat) is straightforward to apply.

Singing: Their song is quiet, but singing (S and S7) may continue quite late in the year. Code M (multiple males singing) should not be used without considerable support, given this species' dwindling population.

Pairs: No pairs are formed, so this code should not be used for Saltmarsh Sparrows.

Territorial: No territories are maintained, and intraspecific aggression appears to be courtship-oriented.

Agitation: Females may chase away males that get too close to their nest and will chip repeatedly at intruders.

Distraction Display: Saltmarsh Sparrows do not perform distraction displays.

Maryland is home to a quarter of the


Saltmarsh Sparrow by George Jett

global breeding Saltmarsh Sparrow population—more than anywhere but New Jersey—and Maryland will play a critical role in conserving this species. To read more about the details of the conservation strategy in Maryland, go to page 101 of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture's conservation plan. Maryland has designated Saltmarsh Sparrows as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need, and they are a priority species for the Atlas. Any observations should be accompanied by comments and additional effort to Confirm breeding. If possible, watercraft should be used to access habitat away from roads; canoes were successfully used in BBA1 to search for breeding evidence.

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Author: Gabriel Foley

ATLASER SPOTLIGHT

Jonathan Irons, from Queenstown, is a lifelong birder and has partnered with BBA3 and MDNR to atlas in low-effort blocks, especially at night, on the Eastern Shore.

Where is your favorite place to atlas?

I spend all of my effort on the Eastern Shore. There are a few areas that are particularly productive and enjoyable to atlas, including the Pocomoke Drainage on the lower shore and the vast fields and woodlots along the eastern edge of Kent, Queen Anne's, and Caroline counties. Both areas hold unique nesting species and have endless backroads to atlas. If I had to pick between the two, the species diversity of the Pocomoke Drainage is unparalleled on the Shore and its abundance of breeding warblers, vireos, and nightjars makes it my favorite. Everywhere across Maryland and DC has its honey holes that are packed with nesting birds, it just takes a little effort to find them.

What is the best thing about atlasing?

Atlasing makes you slow down and pay attention to the small details in a bird's behavior, necessary for determining breeding codes. This helps you understand the characteristics and personality of each species which in turn, makes you a better birder. Atlasing also takes you to areas that you wouldn't normally bird, refining your understanding of the distribution of your local breeders.

What bird best reflects your personality?

Cuckoos match my personality well, they keep to themselves and like being alone, and are rather mysterious.

What made you interested in birds?

I was always interested in the natural world and enjoyed being outdoors, but my interest in birds sparked when I joined the Youth Maryland Ornithological Society (YMOS) in 2012. This organization bonded like-minded youth through monthly field trips across the mid-Atlantic and refined my knowledge and love for birds and their habitats.

What's our biggest conservation issue?

At least on Delmarva, I think the balance between agricultural lands, development, and preserved areas is vital and lacking. Programs like the Conservation Reserve Program, better known as CRP, are important in maintaining a healthy balance in land use. Also, the Natural Lands Project at Washington College is doing great work by implementing buffers and converting pockets of unproductive cropland into habitat for birds and much more. Collaboration of different agencies and organizations, with landowners and farmers can make a significant impact.

Who would you go atlasing with?

Birding with friends is the best and atlasing with anyone interested in birds and the atlas project is equally enjoyable.

What bird do you particularly like?

Common Terns are my favorite bird in Maryland and perhaps anywhere. I had the opportunity to monitor their colonies on Poplar Island this summer where we recorded egg and clutch info, banded chicks, and tracked them from banding to fledging and beyond. Their personality, sounds, and charisma are the best!

Have you been involved with other atlases?

No, this is the first atlas I have been involved with.

You can take binoculars, a field guide, and what other item?

I would bring my phone. It makes the technical side of atlasing so much easier. I cannot imagine logging breeding codes, identifying block lines, navigating unfamiliar back roads, or finding good habitat without one.

TIPS AND TRICKS

An incomplete audio guide to fledgling calls by Dave Ziolkowski

An incomplete audio guide to fledgling calls

My hope is that this guide will help you as you perform Maryland's 3rd Breeding Bird Atlas. This guide is not intended to provide a comprehensive catalog of species nor every variation that each species might make. Rather, I've aimed to provide a solid overview of the kinds of sounds you can expect to hear from fledglings in our area.

Never birded by ear before? Don't fret—my hope is that you'll click through the examples just the same to gain an appreciation for the diversity of baby bird sounds around us!

Before getting to the sounds, let's take a minute to consider some important caveats:

- CAUTION – please be judicious about identifying begging sounds to species without seeing a bird. And recall that begging sounds change as fledglings age because their syrinx grows too.
- CAUTION – use care when attempting to locate fledglings as they're usually buried in foliage and intentionally difficult to spot. It is far safer for birds and more efficient for you too to hang back, look for the adults, and identify them to species. Conveniently, most parents use the same approach path when delivering food.
- CAUTION – use care when visually distinguishing fledglings from adults. Fledglings have fleshy, often puffy, and usually yellow flanges to the bill and their feather is looser than that of adults. You can see these features, for example, in this photo of a nearly independent catbird fledgling. See how loose and 'cheap-looking' those feathers are? Fledglings grow feathers very quickly in the nest, so their feathers are less dense and of poorer quality compared to adults.

Cheers, Dave
Dave Ziolkowski (djziolkowski@yahoo.com)
Howard County co-coordinator, MD-DC Breeding Bird Atlas 3

Yellow-billed Cuckoo – cuckoo chicks leave the nest remarkably soon after hatching and make mechanical-sounding begging calls in their first week out (ML467543051). As the weeks progress, their begging calls gradually take on the familiar, hollow "kow, kow, kow" sound that adults make (ML359892711).

Ruby-throated Hummingbird – fledglings hang around the nest for just a few short days before moving around with the female. But while they're around the nest, they make high, thin "see" notes that carry surprising well (*this example is from the closely related Black-chinned Hummingbird: XC282797*).

HAWKS – the young of large birds of prey are dependent on their parents for months after leaving their nest. Their calls are loud and travel far, making them easy birds to confirm during the fledgling stage. Young hawks continue to give begging calls as they progress to foraging on their own but they stop once they've been driven from their natal territory by their parents. So, if you hear this call in summer, you know the young hawk is still on its parents breeding territory and thus confirms breeding.

Cooper's Hawk – fledglings make persistent shrill, whistle-like sounds (XC260179) up until they become independent of adults, which is about the time when most songbirds are migrating south.

Red-tailed Hawk – once you learn this you will wonder how you missed the loud, piercing summer cries of fledglings before. The calls have a hearty, eagle-like quality and can sound like a repetitive one-syllabled "vweet" when up close (XC444202) or a two-parted, "poo-eek" when further away (XC450756).

Red-shouldered Hawk – the calls of fledgling Red-shoulders may sound superficially like Red-tails but they lack the hearty, eagle-like quality. They are much more reminiscent of the calls of their parents (ML457801141).

Broad-winged Hawk – fledglings sound very similar to the calls of adult birds (ML61230471) but, of course, having 3 or 4 persistently calling Broad-wings in the same place at the same time is a good give away!

OWLS – owls are much like hawks in that they are dependent on adults for months after leaving the nest. The begging calls of our two largest species are loud, incessant, and diagnostic and makes them by far the easiest way to confirm breeding.

Eastern Screech Owl – Young screech owl fledglings are not easy to hear amid the din of spring birdlife (ML350106821). As they near independence from their parents, their calls begin to take on more of the adult-like "whinny" character (ML29361791).

Great Horned Owl – the shriek of fledglings is diagnostic when heard between late March and July (ML236737861). However, CAUTION must be used outside of those times because the calls are also given by females during courtship. This surprises many birders because, after listening to a limited number of recordings, it can be easy to get the impression that juvenile and female Great Horned Owl calls are distinctively different. However, calls of both are highly plastic and individuals of any age can modulate their calls to seamlessly transition between the begging shriek and what's often called the female "bark" call.

Barred Owl – juvenile calls are shrill, grating, and distinctive (ML381824601).

WOODPECKERS – although this audio guide is focused on fledglings, few nests are as loud and easy to find as woodpecker nests are, so those sounds are worth mentioning here. March thru May is prime time to be listening for the near-constant, harsh, raspy calls of broods of woodpeckers. Once nestlings fledge, they begin to give toy instrument-like versions of the adult calls with great persistence.

Red-bellied Woodpecker – a nest full of raspy-sounding nestlings is hard to miss (XC101322). Fledglings give shrill calls and a version of the adult's "quirrr" call that sounds more like a "chup" (XC101320). [Adult "quirrr" call for comparison: XC477003]

Downy Woodpecker – a nest full of youngsters can be easily mistaken for an insect (XC565022), but fledglings give a rattle call (XC574170) that is very reminiscent of the adult whinny call. [Adult whinny call for comparison: XC667190]

Hairy Woodpecker – if you are familiar with the strong "peak" call of an adult Hairy Woodpecker, then you'll have no trouble recognizing the sound of a nest full of youngsters (XC450529). Fledglings

give a whining version of the adult "peak" call (XC728100). [Adult "peak" call for comparison: XC687585]

Northern Flicker – nestlings are loud and raspy (XC450926) but fledglings give "clear" calls (XC323227) that sound much like adults. [Adult "clear" call for comparison: XC267750]

FLYCATCHERS –fledgling flycatchers generally give sounds that are like the most common, year-round call given by adults of their species.

Eastern Wood-Pewee – Whereas adult Eastern Wood-Pewees give a "pwee" call throughout the year, fledglings make a similar-sounding call that has a raspy end (ML469522321). [Adult "Pwee" call for comparison: ML437850541]

Eastern Phoebe – Most birders know the familiar "Fee-Bee" song of an adult Eastern Phoebe, and many also know the sweet-sounding "chip" that's given with regularity throughout the year. The fledgling call is similar to the "chip" but thinner and more plaintive (ML347835601). [Adult "chip" call for comparison: XC566104]

Eastern Kingbird – The electric-sounding sputtering notes of kingbirds are a familiar sound throughout summer. Calls of fledglings blend right in with their parents and a family group can make for quite a ruckus (ML356317051).

VIREOS – vireo fledglings produce sounds that are very similar to the whine sounds given by adults of their species so, as is typical for songbirds, context is important. Fledgling calls are uttered seemingly non-stop and speed up whenever adults approach to deliver food.

White-eyed Vireo – (XC197329)

Warbling Vireo – (XC383038)

Red-eyed Vireo – (ML246010171)

CORVIDS – young jays, crows, and ravens are not afraid to disturb their neighbors! They give varying calls as they grow and so are most diagnostic when fresh out of the nest.

Blue Jay – if you can imagine a Blue Jay's call being any more nasal than it already is, then you have an idea for what a fledgling sounds like (ML248599441).

American Crow – if you can imagine what an American Crow with a stuffy nose and a belly ache would sound like, then you have a good idea for what a fledgling sounds like (ML173032731). Fish Crow fledglings sound very similar so it's best to hear the attending adults to make certain of the ID.

Common Raven – the higher pitched calls of fledglings imparts a distinctly 'planet of the apes' type feel (ML450630731).

CHICKADEES AND TITMICE – after they leave the nest, fledglings become conspicuous as they travel around in noisy family groups, trailing their parents and begging loudly for weeks.

Carolina Chickadee – individual fledglings give persistent, thin-sounding, "see-dee, see-dee dee" calls (XC34950) that are reminiscent of adult calls. Family groups can be noisy (ML243930291)!

Tufted Titmouse – individual calls are beefier and more burry than chickadee calls and sound like, "see-jwee, see-jwee jwee" (ML228446981). Family groups are noisy and hard to miss (ML463437631).

SWALLOWS – many birders are surprising to learn that fledgling swallows make begging calls too. Swallows usually occur in flocks so homing in on these sounds is a quick, efficient way of drawing your eye to a confirmation. The young of most swallows stay in the vicinity of their nest in the first days after fledging and then travel with adults to a nearby feeding area (usually a field). Fledglings are dependent on adults at that time and can be easily confirmed as they sit on wires and fences to beg for food. After several days, they will begin hounding adults in flight, begging on the wing. Once the young are independent, they stop begging and begin dispersing more widely, at which time they cannot be counted as fledglings.

Barn Swallow – Barn Swallow is a good example of how, even amid the background noise of adults, the persistent, repetitive scratchy sounds made by fledglings can be picked out (XC253979), especially as the calls intensify when adults with food approach.

MISC. SONGBIRDS

White-breasted Nuthatch – if you can imagine Woody Woodpecker trying to imitate the "yank" call of an adult nuthatch, then you have a pretty good idea of what a fledgling sounds like (ML468500371). Fledglings follow adults in family groups for a couple weeks after leaving the nest and those groups can sound a bit like distant Laughing Gulls (XC321970).

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher –listen closely to the nasal calls of adult gnatcatchers and you're likely to be impressed by how varied the noises they make are. By contrast, fledglings have the same nasally quality of adults but their calls are endlessly monotonous (XC35103).

Carolina Wren – older nestlings give loud, insect-like buzzing sounds from the nest (ML447606531). Fledglings give high, shrill whistle-like calls (ML430903041) that become louder and take on a more scraping quality with age (XC57030).

House Wren – old nestlings give loud, shrill, scraping sounds (XC560506). Once they fledge, they give a harsh chatter (ML462414601) that sounds a lot like the adult chatter call.

Gray Catbird – catbirds are among the most numerous and frequently encountered fledglings so it pays dividends to gain familiar with their calls, allowing you to quickly sift them out and concentrate on other fledgling sounds. Fledgling catbirds give a metallic, somewhat cardinal-like chip (ML245666201) and also a waxwing-like ringing call (ML140280). Although these might sound different to us, fledglings can seamlessly transition between these two (ML261239071).

Northern Mockingbird – homeowners actually call exterminators in hopes of getting relief from the endless, loud, breathy "seet" calls of fledgling mockingbirds (XC370896) so, if there's one bird that everyone can easily confirm, it's this one!

Brown Thrasher – fledgling thrashers give somewhat mellow (for a fledgling anyway) quavering calls (XC144655) that become more rapid and intense-sounding when adults approach (ML62168741).

European Starling – don't blame me but, once you've learned the distinctive "djjjj" sound of fledglings, you'll be dismayed at how many breeding starlings you'll find all around you (XC320704).

Eastern Bluebird – fledgling bluebirds give a "tur-a-wee" call (ML244718721) that is similar to the familiar "zewy" call of adults, but it's less musical and more oscillating. [Adult "zewy" call for comparison: ML445904461]

Wood Thrush – if you already know the sounds of adult Wood Thrushes, you might be surprised to hear the not-so-thrush-like call of fledglings. Fledglings give a loud, sweet small call that is more reminiscent of a chipmunk or a warbler than a thrush (ML154765211).

American Robin – young robins utter a great variety of calls but one of the most common is a high, squeaky trill-like sound (ML455352631). Another common sound given when adults approach with food sounds like this: XC323247.

Cedar Waxwing – if you dislike learning new sounds, then this is the bird for you! Fledglings sound about the same as adults do (XC604912).

House Finch – arguably the best way to learn the House Finch begging call is to hang a potted plant on your porch and endure a summer's worth of scratchy "veet" notes. Alternatively, you could just listen to this example and imagine the torture: XC326408.

American Goldfinch – fans of Sesame Street will know what I mean when I say that fledglings sound much like Ernie saying, "hey Bert" (ML258733961).

SPARROWS – the fledgling call of sparrows is generally a simple, repeated note. Species that nest low or on the ground are at great risk of predation so, not surprisingly, their young generally leave the nest much earlier than other species. The flightless young remain near the nest and hide in deep cover for about the first week after fledgling. Once flighted, they become more conspicuous as they follow parents around and beg for food.

Song Sparrow – recently fledged young give an airy "bphee" sound (ML175633211). Over time, that call begins to take on a slight buzz, sounding more like "bzee" (ML68385171) and eventually onto a hearty, buzzy "bzeept" (ML67994611).

Chipping Sparrow – fledgling Chipping Sparrows are conspicuous and loud as they utter constantly repeated bursts of chip notes, usually while following adults around (ML355226401). This is a near ubiquitous feature in the soundscape of park parking lots throughout the summer.

Eastern Towhee – towhees are similar to Song Sparrow in their call note progression but their final, most conspicuous version is less buzzy and sounds more like "tseea" (XC109897).

Yellow-breasted Chat – it's not just the taxonomy of this bird that's been difficult to place, it's fledgling call is equally hard for an ear to place because it sounds reminiscent of a cross between a catbird, vireo, and gnatcatcher (ML212162).

BLACKBIRDS – blackbird fledglings are generally loud and conspicuous, making them some of the easiest youngsters to find.

Baltimore Oriole – fledglings give calls in a short series that sound like "pwee pee pee pee" (ML347595761). Also, a thrush-like "djee djee djee" (ML460262651). Excited birds run these sounds together into a long twittering sound (ML349839681).

Orchard Oriole – this oriole is one of our earliest fall migrants and birds begin leaving our area in July, with almost all having departed by late August. Fledglings give a short, rapid volley of 5 to 6 non-musical notes that have a woodpecker-like quality to them (ML64075791, ML463033001). Excited fledglings cram these calls into a run-on series (ML461867481).

Red-winged Blackbird – fledglings give nasally "phwaa" calls (ML302345781) and their source can be surprising difficult to pinpoint as the youngsters move about in their marshy haunts the first week out of the nest. As they age, the youngsters become more conspicuous, chasing parents while giving paired calls (ML171197401).

Brown-headed Cowbird – it defies logic how so many conspicuously loud, delectably plump cowbird fledglings could survive each year to reach adulthood. Their loud, buzzy calls are a common and distinctive sound in our summer landscape (ML347389161).

Common Grackle – the noisy and rather unpleasant sounding fledglings are difficult to overlook, especially if you loiter in fast food parking lots (XC196110). Pool owners are also plagued by grackles because of the bird's unsavory habit of making sorties over water to drop voluminous fecal sacks.

WARBLERS – what fledglings lack in size and vocal complexity they make up for in incessant repetition. They typically repeat a lesser version of the contact call of their species. You needn't know the contact calls of all warblers to make this work for you. If you hear a simple warbler-like call note repeated non-stop, you can use process of elimination to arrive at an educated guess for the species you're looking for. This will help you track down and confirm the species. This is a surprisingly easy and effective way to achieve confirmations of species that might otherwise be difficult. Here are some examples:

Ovenbird – (ML61077121)

Louisiana Waterthrush – (XC343081)

Common Yellowthroat – (ML463264171)

American Redstart – (ML352608561)

Yellow Warbler – (ML351484131)

FINCHES – fledgling calls often have a metallic-like quality and can sound much like adult calls. Unlike adults, fledglings call persistently and speed up when parents approach with food.

Northern Cardinal – short volleys of "chip" notes (ML365702021).

Blue Grosbeak – chink, but not as strong as adults (ML255290961).

Indigo Bunting – "spit" calls very similar to Cardinal (ML67072091).

FROM THE FIELD

Furry Feeder Frenzy—Sue Muller

Looking for a new idea to Confirm breeding birds in your own backyard? Try a "furry feeder"! Yes indeed, many birds will gladly collect pet hair for nest building. Simply take a square suet cake holder and stuff it with pet fur (as long as the fur is not treated with flea powder, *etc.*). Hang it near your window or patio where you will have ample opportunities to notice birds collecting the fur.

This can work well to document Ruby-throated Hummingbirds too. Just hang the furry feeder next to the hummingbird feeder and watch the hummingbird dine and then zip over to the furry feeder and grab some fur! Any bird collecting fur from your furry feeder is a confirmation of breeding and receives the breeding code CN (carrying nest material) in your eBird checklist.

This would make a great summer science project for children to observe the furry feeder and see how many different bird species take the fur! In Howard County we have Confirmed the following birds collecting fur from furry feeders:

- American Goldfinch
- Carolina Chickadee
- Carolina Wren
- European Starling
- House Finch
- House Sparrow
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- Tufted Titmouse

Ruby-throated Hummingbird by Anir Bhat/Macaulay Library

Tufted Titmouse by Joe Turner/Macaulay Library

OUT OF THE ARCHIVE

The Upland Plover in Frederick County

Meanley, B. 1947. The Upland Plover in Frederick County. *Maryland Birdlife.* 3(4):53–54.

On May 25, 1947, Bill Pruitt and I spent an entire day working the Frederick Valley from the city of Frederick to the Montgomery County line and over to the Catoctin Mountains in quest of Upland Plovers [Sandpipers]. A single day in an area of this size is hardly enough to make an exhaustive population check on the number of individuals in a locale; and, as a result only six (6) individuals were noted in a typical environment where unquestionably many more can surely be found.

The six birds recorded were in one group, frequenting a newly planted corn field, a timothy field and a field of mixed grasses and weeds, approximately a mile south of Buckeystown. Four of the six birds were adults while two of them were two-day old young. This means that the eggs must have been laid the very first part of May, since the period of incubation is about 21 or 22 days for this species.

The adult males spent most of their time in the newly plowed cornfield feeding principally on insects. The female with the chicks was in a timothy field, and the second female probably had a nest nearby.

The Frederick Valley is well known for its limestone soils and is essentially a corn-wheat-dairy region. Its topography is gently rolling to flat and with its extensive area of open fields is a grand place for the plovers.

Upland Sandpiper by Steve & Betty Arthur/Macaulay Library