

## First Record of Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*) in Maryland

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At 6:08 p.m. on 10 June 2017, I was on Drayden Road, Saint Mary's County, Maryland, approaching the intersection of Flat Iron Road. Earlier in the week, a Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) was observed near some large hay bales. I slowed down to look for the hawk and saw what I thought was a Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*) standing right next to the hay bale with a small, short-tailed rodent (Rodentia: Cricetidae: Arvicolinae), likely a vole (*Microtus* sp.), in its beak (Paradiso 1969, Maryland Biodiversity Project 2018). Thankfully, I had thought to bring my camera with me when I left the house and I was scrambling to get some photos before a car would come up behind me. I took a few shots from the car on the Drayden Road side (Figure 1) and then took a few more from the other side on Flat Iron Road (Figures 2). The two roads come to a point with a small field in-between and this is where the caracara was. There was nowhere to park and no shoulders on either road, so I was stuck taking photos from my car. I took as many as I could, hoping a few would turn out, and finally had to leave due to other vehicles approaching. Fortunately, a few decent photos were taken and I posted some on my Facebook page (Hammett 2017), then decided to post a few to another bird page, where Tyler Bell saw them and asked where and when I observed the caracara. He suggested I enter them onto the MD Birding Facebook website (2017). I did and found out later that this was the first sighting of a caracara in Maryland. I had seen Crested Caracaras in bird books and a few on some photography pages on Facebook but I never expected to see one just a mile from my house in Drayden!

Crested Caracara is a bird that one would expect to see on a trip to south Texas or perhaps south of Lake Okeechobee in Florida (Figure 3). However, it seems to be a fairly recent phenomenon that they are appearing with regularity in the east, particularly in the Mid-Atlantic region (Figure 4). New Jersey seems to be the hotspot with reports from expected locations like Cape May and Sandy Hook, but also in other areas like Woodstown, Princeton, and other unlikely spots (eBird 2018). Delaware has reports from west of Bethany Beach to the Lewes/Cape Henlopen area. North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania have all reported Crested Caracaras (eBird 2018). Crested Caracara is a bird that's been long overdue in Maryland—until now.



**Figure 1. Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*) carrying a small rodent.** Drayden Road at the intersection of Flat Iron Road, Drayden, St. Mary’s County, Maryland, 10 June 2017.



**Figure 2. Crested Caracara carrying a small rodent.** Flat Iron Road at the intersection of Drayden Road, Drayden, St. Mary’s County, Maryland, 10 June 2017.

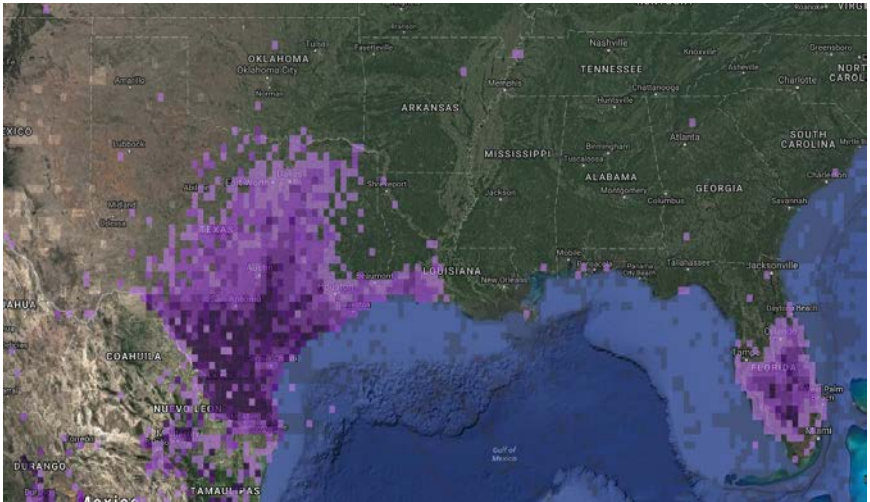


Figure 3. Expected distribution of Crested Caracara. (eBird 2018)

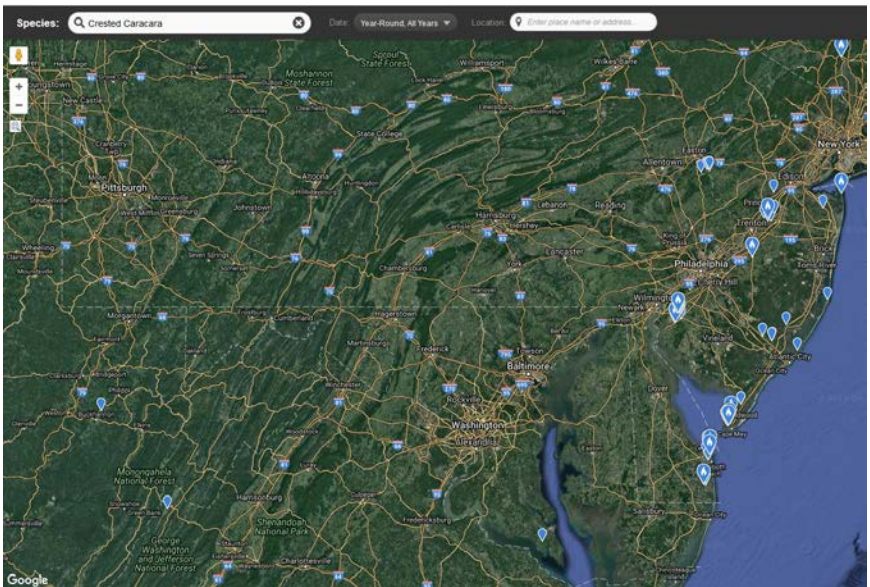


Figure 4. Mid-Atlantic Crested Caracara reports. (eBird 2018)

Note: This report (MD/2017-030), of an adult bird, was accepted in 2017 by the Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee, which added Crested Caracara to the Official List of the Birds of Maryland (MD/DCRC 2018).

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers who helped edit this note.

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