

Waterbirds at Liberty Reservoir, 1985

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During the spring of 1985, the water level at Liberty Reservoir, on the border of Baltimore and Carroll Counties, was low by several feet. This allowed shorebirds to find exposed mudflats at the upper extremities of the reservoir. With drought conditions prevailing during most of the year, the water level dropped continuously, providing fresh mudflats to replace those which had become overgrown with vegetation. By far, the best mudflat was created at the confluence of Beaver Run and the reservoir in Carroll County, about 1.5 mi (2.4 km) south of Finksburg near a new housing development called Cold Saturday.

METHODS

I visited this particular section of the reservoir 31 times from March to December and recorded the numbers of all waterbird species I observed. These are summarized in the annotated list that follows. Because of the unusual nature of the habitat, several species new or rarely seen in Carroll County were recorded. The actual dates I visited the reservoir are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Waterbird monitoring dates at the confluence of Beaver Run and Liberty Reservoir, Carroll County, Maryland, 1985.

Month	Monitoring Date
March	25
April	6, 14, 21
May	5, 8, 10, 12, 19, 22, 29
June	(none)
July	14, 27, 28
August	19, 20, 22, 25, 26, 30
September	13, 21, 22, 29
October	6, 20
November	9, 17, 24
December	8, 15

Other observers who visited the reservoir with me included Alex and Helene Hammer on 27 July, Rick Blom on 25 August, and Jim Wilkinson on 26 August. Harvey and Marion Mudd made several independent visits. All observations listed below are my own or ones made with the observers. Additional reports from the Mudds, in which I did not participate, follow the annotated list.

ANNOTATED LIST OF THE WATERBIRDS OF LIBERTY RESERVOIR IN 1985

- Canada Goose** (*Branta canadensis*) – seen periodically throughout the year. Several pairs nested around the reservoir and the flock of 105 birds seen on 13 September was probably composed of these plus others that nested on nearby farm ponds.
- Wood Duck** (*Aix sponsa*) – seen only during the spring with a high of 6 on 22 May.
- American Black Duck** (*Anas rubripes*) – 1 on 20 October
- Mallard** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – nest around the lake and could be seen at any time. The high count was 11 on 14 July.
- Blue-winged Teal** (*Anas discors*) – 10 on 6 April, 3 on 19 August, and 1 on 26 August.
- Green-winged Teal** (*Anas crecca*) – 2 on 25 March and 6 on 20 October.
- Great Blue Heron** (*Ardea herodias*) – 1 on 5 May was the only spring observation, but birds were present on most of the summer and fall trips with a high of 7 on 26 August.
- Snowy Egret** (*Egretta thula*) – 1 on 19-25 August.
- Little Blue Heron** (*Egretta caerulea*) – 1 immature on 28 July.
- Tricolored Heron** (*Egretta tricolor*) – 1 on 22-25 August was first discovered by Blom. This was a new species for Carroll County and only the fifth inland record in Maryland.
- Green Heron** (*Butorides virescens*) – seen 14 July-30 August, with 3 on 25 August.
- Black-bellied Plover** (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – 1 bird in breeding plumage on 19 August was only the second Carroll County record.
- American Golden-Plover** (*Pluvialis dominica*) – 3 on 13 September, 1 on 21 September, and 2 on 22 September were collectively the fourth Carroll County record (three previous records).
- Semipalmated Plover** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – a fairly common migrant with observations on 10-22 May in the spring including 13 on 12 May. Observed on 27 July-6 October in the fall with a high of 5 during the period 19-30 August.
- Killdeer** (*Charadrius vociferus*) – seen on all but one visit with seasonal highs of 10 on 10 May, 33 on 14 July, and 105 on 17 November.
- Spotted Sandpiper** (*Actitis macularius*) – a common visitor 5-29 May, with 20 on 10 May; and 14 July-22 September, with 6 on 28 July.

- Solitary Sandpiper** (*Tringa solitaria*) – a common visitor 5-19 May, with 28 on 8 May; and 14 July-22 September, with 17 on 27 July.
- Greater Yellowlegs** (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – 3 on 21 April were the only spring birds. In fall, 1 or 2 birds were seen 14 July-19 August; then none were present until 1 on 6 October and 4 on 20 October.
- Willet** (*Tringa semipalmata*) – Blom and I watched 11 of these birds drop onto the mudflats during a light rain on 25 August. We provisionally identified them as being of the “Western” subspecies (*T. s. inornatus*) on the basis of their large size, coloration, and gull-like calls. This was the second Carroll County record for both the species and subspecies.
- Lesser Yellowlegs** (*Tringa flavipes*) – a common visitor 5-19 May, with 15 seen on 8 and 10 May; and 27 July-20 October, with 60 on 25 August.
- Red Knot** (*Calidris canutus*) – 1 in breeding plumage on 19 August was not only a first for Carroll County, but the first inland record for Maryland.
- Stilt Sandpiper** (*Calidris himantopus*) – another feature of the rainy 25 August visit was a flock of 10, the second record for Carroll County.
- Sanderling** (*Calidris alba*) – 1 on 27 July, 1 on 22 August, and 3 on 21 September.
- Dunlin** (*Calidris alpina*) – 3 on 20 October.
- Baird’s Sandpiper** (*Calidris bairdii*) – 1 on 25-26 August was the second Carroll County record.
- Least Sandpiper** (*Calidris minutilla*) – a common visitor 21 April-29 May, with 40 on 12 May; and 14 July-8 December, with 40 on 20 August. The last bird, which was present from 17 November, was the latest for the Maryland Piedmont and disappeared only when the reservoir began to freeze.
- White-rumped Sandpiper** (*Calidris fuscicollis*) – 9 on 22 May (the first spring record for Carroll County) and 9 on 29 September.
- Buff-breasted Sandpiper** (*Calidris subruficollis*) – Harvey Mudd discovered this bird on 22 September, another Carroll County first. After receiving a call from Harvey, I observed the bird later that day.
- Pectoral Sandpiper** (*Calidris melanotos*) – common 27 July-20 October, with 25 on 26 August and 29 September.
- Semipalmated Sandpiper** (*Calidris pusilla*) – a fairly common visitor 19-29 May, with 7 on the latter date; and 27 July-13 September, with 15 on 26 August.
- Western Sandpiper** (*Calidris mauri*) – 1 on 27 July was, unexpectedly, the only observation.
- Short-billed Dowitcher** (*Limnodromus griseus*) – 5 on 27 July and 19 August, 1 on 22-26 August.
- Wilson’s Snipe** (*Gallinago delicata*) – 30 feeding in the open at the edge of the reservoir on 25 March was the largest flock reported in Carroll County at the time. Otherwise, there were single birds on 21 April, 5 May, and 9 and 17 November; and 5 on 8 December.

Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*) – 1 on 14 April; and regular 21 September-15 December, with a high of 23 on the latter date.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) – 3 on 6 October, 2 on 9 November, 65 on 8 December, and 10 on 15 December.

Harvey and Marion Mudd also found two additional waterbird species:

Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – 1 on 22 September.

Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – 1 on 13 October, the second Carroll County record.

DISCUSSION

All of this points out the opportunistic nature of the birds and their capacity to utilize manmade opportunities to feed or rest during migration. Many of these birds would never have been seen in the Maryland Piedmont without the creation of a special piece of habitat. Judging by the frequency and abundance of each species, we can estimate which species regularly migrate overland through the region and which are less likely to do so.

I encourage other observers to make similar studies of local areas which present the opportunity to observe a variety of species throughout the migration period. This is not the first such article in *Maryland Birdlife* to document periodic visits to one birding locale. Other examples include Waterfowl Populations at Loch Raven Reservoir, March-April, 1964 (Kaestner 1964), Migrating Waterfowl at Triadelphia Reservoir, 1964 (Warfield 1965b), Migrating Waterfowl at Seneca (Warfield 1965a), Shorebird Concentration at Baltimore's Lake Montebello (Kaestner 1971), and Waterbirds on a Baltimore City Reservoir (Ringler 1978).

LITERATURE CITED

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