

Middle Atlantic Region

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The summer was variously described as wet, hot, cool, dry, and average, depending on which part of the Region you were in. The collective impression is that it was fairly typical. As in the past, there was a heavy edge to waterbirds in the report, both because the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic coast dominate the Region, and because of ongoing colonial waterbird work. Except for the occasional oddity, woodland and grassland birds went almost unreported, despite the fact that some of the most pressing issues center around these guilds. We encourage observers to report on these birds, even if all that is offered is impressions.

We note with great sadness the passing of Roberta B. Fletcher, whose report this season was her last. Roberta collected and organized the reports from *Caroline* for more than 40 years and was one of the founding members of the Caroline Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society in the 1950s. It is in large part due to her efforts and dedication that *Caroline* was one of the best covered and most comprehensively re-

ported counties in the Region. It does not trivialize a lifetime of accomplishment to note that her reports were an editors dream—typed, in taxonomic order, and complete. The care and attention to detail are among the reasons she remained a dominate figure in an organization she gave so much to. The names of hundreds of people have appeared in these reports, but only a handful have been here every season and every year for half a century. We join with her friends and family in mourning her passing and in celebrating her life.

Abbreviations: C.B.B.T. (*Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel*); D.C. (*District of Columbia*); D.N.R. (*Department of Natural Resources*).

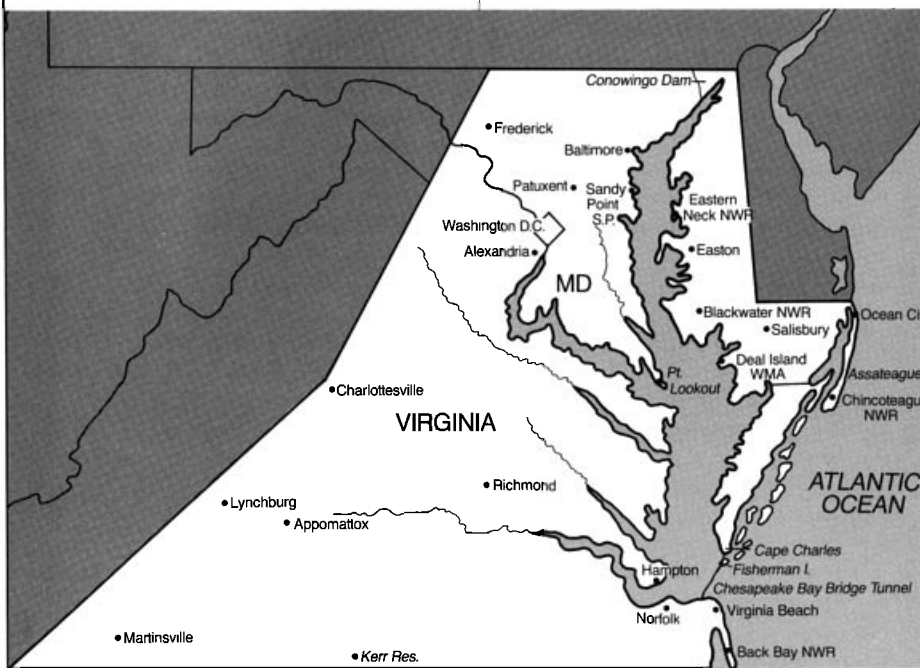
Loons to Anhinga

Two summering Com. Loons was a bit below average. The unprecedented Red-necked Grebe invasion resulted in the first summer lingerers ever in Maryland: one at Loch Raven Res., *Baltimore* until June 9 (SWS) and one at least to June 24 at Sandy Point S.P., *Anne Arundel* (*fide* LD). The only Pied-billed Grebes w. of the Chesapeake Bay, where they are rare breeders, were single stragglers at Centennial Park, *Howard* June 8 (JF) and Loch Raven July 26 (SWS). The only organized pelagic trip was June 4 out of Virginia Beach. The meager results were one Cory's, 29 Sooty, and three Greater shearwaters, and 373 Wilson's and one Leach's storm-petrels (BP *et al.*). Hoffman and others spent 4 days on fishing boats off Ocean City, but saw only a scattering of Wilson's Storm-Petrels; most fishing trips only go 10–15 mi offshore. A single Wilson's near Smith I., *Somerset* July 3

(JBB) was the only report from the Chesapeake Bay, but better coverage in past years suggests they are present in small numbers in the lower Chesapeake most years. An Am. White Pelican was at Wise Pt., at the tip of Cape Charles, VA June 5 (*fide* LW). The species is annual on the Virginia Eastern Shore but rare elsewhere in the Region. The Brown Pelican colony near South Pt., *Worcester*, MD had 6 pairs, down significantly from the previous 2 years. The decline was presumably a result of last winter's bad weather, a pattern that has been repeated since the colony's initiation (DB). The 3-year-old colony at Shanks I., just s. of the Maryland/Virginia line in the Bay, contained 25–35 pairs, down from last year's 50. Twenty-four Brown Pelican chicks were banded July 15 and about 50 nonbreeding birds were present (DB). Two at Pt. Lookout, *St. Mary's* July 30 (PC) continued the pattern of recent years. The colony of Double-crested Cormorants at Poplar I., *Talbot* continued to grow, with 350 pairs this year (DB). At Conowingo Dam, *Harford/Cecil*, >200 stayed the summer; breeding is anticipated in the next year or 2 (EB). A first summer Great Cormorant found at Conowingo Dam July 10 remained through the end of the period (EB). Great Cormorants lingered at the C.B.B.T. with three June 3 (DS) and one June 5 (LW). There were two Anhingas June 8 at the Region's only Anhinga site, *Stumpy L.*, VA.

Hérons to Stork

Preliminary data from the Maryland D.N.R. indicate that Great Blue Herons continued to do well in the Bay (DB). This year >50 colonies were found, with about 4400 pairs, up from about 2500 in the 1970s. On Bloodsworth I., *Dorchester*, Armistead noted that about half the 121 nests were on artificial platforms, and the remaining birds were concentrated in the declining number of available trees. At the nearby Holland I. colony July 9, his nest count was: 10 Great Blue, 20 Great Egret, 25 Snowy Egret, 10 Cattle Egret, 15 Little Blue, five Tricolored, two Green, three Glossy Ibis, five Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, and 15 Black-crowned Night-Heron. Armistead noted that the diverse colony contained every Maryland nesting heron. Completely unexpected was the confirmation of 2–3 Snowy Egret nests in the Black-crowned Night-Heron colony at the e. end of the Key Bridge, *Baltimore* in June (DB). The species has apparently been present since 1990, and this finding represents the northernmost breeding record in the Bay and the first for the county. Great Egrets may also be using the site. A new colony at Battery I. on the Susquehanna Flats contained approximately 40 Cattle Egret and 35 Black-crowned



Night-Heron nests, both representing first breeding records for *Harford*, and the northernmost ever in the Bay (DB). The post-breeding dispersal of herons into the Piedmont was unremarkable (v.o.); most notable was a Tricolored at Brown's Bridge Road July 22 (EB), a first for *Howard*. Yellow-crowned Night-Herons made a good showing with 5 inland reports (v.o.). Last year's White Ibis invasion did not repeat itself; there were 2 reports from s. Virginia and one from Ocean City, MD (v.o.). Inexplicable were three Wood Storks reported flying over Fruitland, *Wicomico*, MD July 4 (SHD, JB).

Waterfowl

Lingering Tundra Swans in Maryland were at Allen's Fresh, *Charles* June 17 (GJ) and Gaithersburg, *Montgomery* July 15 (M. Mitchell); but a bird at Lilypons, *Frederick*, MD throughout the period was variously identified as a Trumpeter and a Tundra x Trumpeter hybrid (GM, BC, JLS *et al.*). Both identification and origin are uncertain and several of these "Trumpling" swans have been floating around the Region in recent years. Although Armistead noted 38 Mute Swans near Belleview, *Talbot* June 12, and 61 in the Bloodsworth I., *Dorchester* area July 9, both local records, Maryland D.N.R. personnel report that it was a very poor year for the species, with few nests found and very low numbers of young, perhaps a result of the harsh winter (*vide* DB). Rare in the Region, Hooded Merganser was finally confirmed breeding at Lilypons when 6 juveniles were seen in early July (GM, BC). Lingering ducks included a Ring-necked at Piney Run, *Carroll*, MD through June 7 (RFR), a White-winged Scoter at Pt. Lookout, *St. Mary's*, MD June 12 (RFR, JLS), a Com. Goldeneye at Tilghman's I., *Talbot*, MD June 18 (JGR), a Red-breasted Merganser at Bethel Beach Preserve, *Matthews*, VA July 4-5 (JBB), and a ♂ Com. Merganser at Conowingo Dam July 10+ (EB).

Raptors to Rallids

Twenty-six Osprey nests at Bloodsworth I. was a good count considering the declining number of suitable nest sites (HTA), and 4 Piedmont reports was about average (v.o.). Mississippi Kites continued to be found along the Meherrin R., *Greenville/Southampton*, VA, with ≤ 10 June 25-26 (*vide* LW). Very rare in the Region in summer, a Sharp-shinned Hawk was at Ashburn, *Loudon*, VA June 4 (DA). The Region's breeding accipiter, Cooper's Hawk, was reported 7 times, about average (v.o.). The long-term decline of N. Bobwhites in the Maryland Piedmont was probably hastened by the bad winter: One heard by Ringer near Winfield July 4 is the first he has found in *Carroll* for more than a year, and

one near Darnestown, *Montgomery*, June 25 was a surprise to D. Simonson, who noted that they have become "virtually extinct" in the county. On the other hand Wild Turkeys, reintroduced to every Maryland county and doing well, were widely reported, the high count being 23 (3 hens and 20 young) at Prettyboy Res., *Baltimore* July 29 (*vide* EJS). As expected, King Rails were at Huntley Meadows throughout the period (v.o.), but one at Centennial Park, *Howard* June 22-July 6 (CB, JS *et al.*) was a first summering record for the county and suggested a rare Maryland inland breeding attempt. Nearly as rare in summer in *Howard* was a Virginia Rail June 4 at Plum Tree Path, in the same area it was found in May (JS, JF, PO), and a Sora June 10 at Schooley Mill Park (D. Stinson). The latter is a rare breeder in the Region, with a few known sites on the Eastern Shore. Further proof that we know little about the factors controlling rail vocalizing: On the night of June 18 Reese, Olsen, and Effinger spent 8 hours covering 6000 acres of typically rail-filled marsh habitat along Elliot I. Road in s. *Dorchester*, in what Reese called "ideal conditions." The result was a single Virginia Rail and a few owls and wrens. Wierenga led his annual rail trips June 11 and July 16 to Elliot with similar results—one Black and only a couple of Virginia and Clapper rails. Explanations are welcome, but speculations are overstocked—we have 25 years worth in storage.

Shorebirds

An Am. Oystercatcher nest at Bethel Beach Preserve May 29 produced 3 young and provided the first nest record for *Matthews*, VA (JBB). Black-necked Stilts continued to thrive at Deal I. where 18, including 3 young, were seen July 14 (HTA), and at Craney I., VA with 18 July 30 (LW). The only other one was at Elliot I., *Dorchester* June 11 (LD, HW). The only Am. Avocets were at Craney I., with ≤ 7 in July (KK *et al.*), and at Hog I., VA, where one was present July 24 (MM). Very rare in spring was a W. Sandpiper on Assateague I., June 5 (MLH), and slightly late were four Purple Sandpipers on the C.B.B.T., June 3 (DS). The following high counts are from Hoffman's shorebird surveys on Assateague I.: 130 Lesser Yellowlegs July 24, 2060 Sanderlings July 31, 500 Semipalmated Sandpipers July 22 & 29, 330 W. Sandpipers July 16, 180 Least Sandpipers July 24, 15 Stilt Sandpipers July 24, 370 Short-billed Dowitchers July 29, and two Long-billed Dowitchers July 22. He noted the first "Western" Willet of the season June 26. Fall migrants of this race typically arrive early and stay later than eastern birds. Upland Sandpipers were only

reported from 2 locations, well-below average. Two Hudsonian and three Marbled godwits along the coast was typical, both in numbers and location (v.o.). The rarity of the season was the Rufous-necked Stint extensively studied and documented at Craney I., July 22-25 (FD *et al.*, m. ob.), a first for Virginia and the Region (although they have been nearly semiannual in Delaware the past decade). *Howard*, MD had its first Stilt Sandpipers, two at Brown's Bridge Road July 21 (MI *et al.*). The only Ruffs were single males at Chincoteague June 30-July 30 (T. Dalmas *et al.*) and on Assateague July 17 (MLH, DC, MAT). Five Wilson's Phalaropes were at Craney I., July 17 (EMW) and one-three were at Chincoteague June 30-July 26 (v.o.), but the species appears to be less common in the Region that during the 1980s. The only Red-necked Phalaropes were two seen from a fishing boat off Ocean City July 30 (MLH)

SA The n. 6 mi of Assateague I. is now a washover area and fox free, resulting in the most successful nesting season for the Endangered Piping Plover in many years. Over 30 pairs bred this year, averaging 2 young per pair, about twice the number normally produced. One marked bird apparently nested twice, a behavior not previously reported. Details will be published elsewhere (*vide* DB). In September, the press reported on a recent study that concluded that the n. end of the island is in imminent danger of being washed away, and that one n.e. storm could do it. The story noted that such an event would threaten a community on the mainland and create a crisis for boaters by altering the channels in the Ocean City area. One proposed solution is a massive beach-building and restoration project, but no mention was made of the possible effect on plovers and other rare beach-nesting species.

Gulls to Terns

Spring I., *Dorchester*, now part of Blackwater N.W.R., contains one of the largest gull colonies in the county. Armistead noted the following pairs July 7: 15 Great Black-backed, 275 Herring, and five Laughing gulls, as well as 100 Common and 250 Forster's terns. The Laughing Gulls represent the first Maryland breeding in several years and only the 3rd for the Maryland section of the Bay At Shanks I., VA, 1100 pairs of Herring and 175 pairs of Great Black-backed were present July 26 (HTA, JSW). Unexpected were four Laughing Gulls in the Piedmont July 24 in *Howard* (JW), and expected but frequently overlooked was a first-summer

Lesser Black-backed Gull at Ocean City June 19 (MLH). Two Gull-billed Terns at Hart/Miller June 2, the northernmost location in the Bay where they have been recorded, provided only the 3rd or 4th *Baltimore* record (MLH, RD). At Shanks I., Weske's team banded 1279 chicks from 1200 Royal Tern nests July 3. The Royal Tern colony at Skimmer I., Ocean City, continues to grow, with 450 pairs this year, joined by 2 pairs of Sandwich Terns, the first in Maryland in more than a decade. One nest failed and the other fledged one chick (DB). A Sandwich at Pt. Lookout, *St. Mary's* June 12, may be the earliest record there (RFR, JLS). Roseate Terns, which have not bred in Maryland in about 50 years, showed up at Ocean City for the 3rd time in 4 years. Up to seven were present on Skimmer I., June 18–July 1 (MLH *et al.*). Two Forster's Terns were at Centennial Park, *Howard* June 6, one of the very few midsummer Piedmont records (JS *et al.*). Black Terns, increasingly rare in the Region, peaked at 15 at Assateague by the end of the period (MLH).

SA Least Terns traditionally select open sandy or gravel beaches and spoil islands for nests sites. But in response to habitat loss and disturbance, these terns have increasingly adopted gravel rooftops for colony sites. In the past several years, 90% of Maryland's 400–450 pairs of have nested on roofs, a percentage that dropped slightly this year when the colony on the n. end of Assateague I. grew from about 20 to nearly 100 pairs, attributed to the disappearance of the only pair of foxes on the island. The only other known natural site colony was at Battery I., *Harford* and contained 10–15 pairs; nesting failed because of foxes. The largest colony in the state was the 125 pairs on the roof of the Sparrows Pt. High School in *Baltimore*; 75–100 pairs are using the roof of a mall on Kent I., *Queen Anne's*. All other colonies are small, typically fewer than 20 pairs (D.N.R. data, *vide DB*). Maryland D.N.R. biologists have a hard time locating rooftop colonies and ask that birders who see Least Terns near buildings with flat roofs report the sightings by calling (410) 974–3195. The state has recently proposed changing the status of Least Tern from *In Need of Conservation* to *Threatened*.

Cuckoos to Starlings

Cuckoos show significant year-to-year and local fluctuations. Only two Black-billeds were reported, and Yellow-billeds were scarce in *Carroll* (RFR) and numerous in *Frederick* (BD). Ricciardi found a pair of ad. Chuck-

will's-widows with a newly hatched young near Pasadena, *Anne Arundel* June 2, providing one of the few nest records for Maryland. Several Willow Flycatchers on Assateague I. throughout the period were apparently breeding (MLH *et al.*). They have been irregular at the Isle of Wight since at least 1986, the only other place in coastal Maryland where they breed. The closest regular breeding is at Prime Hook N.W.R. in Delaware. An Alder Flycatcher frequented a bog in n.e. *Carroll* June 4–July 4, but there was no evidence of breeding (RFR); there are currently no known breeding sites in the Region. In Virginia, Clapp reported that Tree Swallows doubled their population at Sky Meadows S.P., *Loudon* and occupied 9 of 15 new boxes at Lucketts. Despite the increase in swallows, which Clapp attributed to the nest boxes, E. Bluebirds had an excellent year. A new colony of Cliff Swallows on the bridge at Rt. 7 and the Shenandoah R. had 44 nest cups June 8 (RBC), and 3 pairs of Cliffs at the Roosevelt I., Bridge in *DC* may have provided a first local breeding record (BD). The harsh winter apparently clobbered Carolina Wrens, with reduced numbers reported from one end of the Region to the other (v.o.). Maryland has proposed listing Sedge Wren, which may no longer breed in the state, as Threatened. The only Loggerhead Shrikes were a pair at Lilypons being harassed by a Cooper's Hawk July 4 (D. Cohen).

Warblers to Icterids

There were virtually no forest bird reports, and vireos and warblers were barely mentioned. Two reports stand out: A Cerulean Warbler was in Rockville, *Montgomery*, where they do not breed, June 13 (PJO). And the imm. ♂ Summer Tanager at Liberty Res., *Carroll* reported in spring remained until June 3 (EJS). Dickcissels are either more widespread than a decade ago or observers are better at finding them. Once again there was a spate of summer records of this bird once thought accidental as a breeder in the Region. Virginia reports included a male at Sky Meadows Park June 27 (RBC), three singing near Nokesville in late June (KB), ≤five at Curles Neck Farm near Richmond through the period (FD *et al.*), and, unreported in spring, three–four near Manassas May 29 (KB). In Maryland, ≤three Dickcissels were near Scotland, *St. Mary's* (PC, BB *et al.*), furnishing a first summer record for the county, and ≤10 at traditional sites in s. *Frederick* throughout the period (v.o.), where one was seen building a nest in a freshly-mowed alfalfa field July 12 (PJO). The small Regional population remains persistent, despite mowing, and it is hard to believe that the species would not benefit from some proactive management. Armistead's annual 7 mi hike around the dikes at Deal I., June 10 produced

a Maryland record 228 Seaside Sparrows, along with 18 Sharp-tailed and 42 Song sparrows, and 85 Marsh Wrens. The only Swamp Sparrow away from the Bay was at Gunpowder Falls, *Carroll* June 19 (RFR). A Savannah Sparrow at Sky Meadows S.P., June 27 was a first, but it disappeared after mowing (RBC). The only summering report of White-throated Sparrow was one singing in a yard in Easton, *Talbot* for several days in mid-June (*vide J.* Reese). Although Henslow's Sparrow is virtually extirpated in Maryland, and perhaps hangs on at only one site in the Region, the state has proposed listing it as Threatened rather than Endangered, further evidence of the state's desire to avoid listing grassland species for fear of creating confrontations with agriculture interests. As usual, Bobolinks were noted at 3 locations in n.w. *Carroll* and *Frederick* (v.o.). Craig found single Boat-tailed Grackles at St. George I., June 21 and Pt. Lookout July 30, both in *St. Mary's*, where they are at the n. edge of their range on the w shore of the Bay; breeding is irregular there. Among the species reported parasitized by Brown-headed Cowbirds were: Acadian Flycatcher, E. Phoebe, E. Bluebird, Black-and-white Warbler, Carolina Wren, Song Sparrow, N. Cardinal, and House Finch. Clapp commented that House Finches are the most common victims of cowbirds, with at least 25% of nests parasitized. Observers are encouraged to note instances of parasitism in future reports.

Not received in time for the spring report was an Am. White Pelican at Patuxent River Park, *Prince George's/Anne Arundel* in late May (G. Kearns), and a Red Crossbill at a feeder in Sterling, *Loudon*, VA May 26–28 (D. Mullen).

Observers: David Abbott, Henry T. Armistead, Ken Bass, John B. Bazuin, Jim Biggs, Connie Bockstie, Bob Boxwell, David Brinker, Roger B. Clapp, Barry Cooper, Patty Craig, David Czaplak, Lynn Davidson, Fenton Day, Robert Dixon, Bill Dobbins, Samuel H. Dyke, Jeff Effinger, Ethel Engle, Jane Farrell, Roberta B. Fletcher (*Caroline*), Linda Freedland, David Halstead, Mark L. Hoffman, Marshall Iliff, George Jett, Kerrie Kirkpatrick, Pat Lindsay, Bev Leeuwenberg, Gail Mackiernan, Nancy Magnusson, Mike Mathieson, Harvey Mudd, Paul J. O'Brien, Beth Olsen, Peter Ossenton, Bonnie Ott, Brian Patteson, Jan G. Reese, Sue Ricciardi, Robert F. Ringler, Stephen W. Simon, Joanne Solem (*Howard*), J.L. Stasz, David Spector, Doug Stinson (DSt), Mary Ann Todd, John S. Weske, Hal Wierenga, Jim Wilkinson, Les Willis, Erika M. Wilson.

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