It’s Beginning to Look a Lot Like...
...an Irruption Year!

You guessed it! Snowy Owls are back. In order to save you time and energy, I recommend rereading the amazingly well written December 2013 President’s Perch by Matt Hafner (click the hyperlink). Ditto to what Matt said in 2013.

On the morning of November 9th, 2017, I was driving to work having my daily conversation with my fiancé, Joe. We were going over all of the things that we each had to accomplish at work before clocking out and heading home for the day. Meetings, paperwork, emails, lesson plans, copies, conference calls, incident reports and more... brains spinning we said goodbye and cracked down on our lengthy ‘To-Do’ lists. Mid-morning, Joe sent a text that he had to run to the store for work and asked if I needed anything (sweet, right?). My phone started exploding in my hand with texts, emails and alerts. A Snowy Owl has been spotted in Havre de Grace- a mere five minutes from Joe’s current location! Bird EMERGENCY! Sirens going off in my head and all! With a phone call, his multitude of stresses disappeared, his truck made a dramatic u-turn (picture Dukes of Hazzard circa 1982) and that owl was the only thing on his brain. The few minutes he spent with the owl changed the entire tone of his day. Joy and excitement emanated through Harford County that day as birders everywhere rejoiced! It was like Christmas came on November 9th!

Irruption years are exciting, the obvious show stealer is the Snowy Owl, but many other birds can irrupt in Maryland. You may find Red-breasted Nuthatches, White-winged Crossbills, Rough-legged Hawks, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks and more. An irruption is defined as a dramatic, irregular migration of large numbers of birds to areas where they aren’t typically found, possibly at a great distance from their normal ranges. A population shift of this magnitude could be attributed to a variety of factors. Most of the time it is due to a shortage of food in the natural wintering grounds. For example, if the crop of seed producing vegetation was poor, there are not enough seeds available for all of the seed-eating birds. In this case, they move south until they find copious amounts of seeds. Raptors such as owls and hawks do not eat seeds, but their food source is dependent upon seeds. If there are no seeds, the population of rodents and small mammals decreases causing the raptors to fly to a location where seeds are plentiful and rodents are fat and happy.

(Continued on page 2)
In 1798, Thomas Robert Malthus wrote ‘An Essay on the Principal of Population’. In his work he describes population irruptions in terms of human beings, but this description also applies to our avian friends. Malthus stated, ‘the increase of population is necessarily limited by the means of subsistence’ and ‘population does invariably increase when the means of subsistence increases’. Simply stated, when food is scarce, the population decreases; when food is plentiful, the population increases. In the case of raptors, who always irrupt individually and not as a flock (Can you imagine the sheer chaos a flock of Snowy Owls would bring?), it is often the immature birds and females that are found outside of their area. This makes sense. The adult males have an established territory and are better at standing their ground. Females and juveniles are forced to move in order to survive.

Irruption years are exciting for birders, but have heartbreaking undertones for the birds themselves. We turn them into temporary rock stars and eagerly talk about them on email and social media, but these birds are undergoing a change in their normal routine. Are they stressed? Possibly. Or maybe they have overcome their challenges and are just hanging out where they know food is readily available.

During that famous 2013 Snowy Owl irruption, Joe was in Delaware photographing a beautiful bird. He arrived early in the morning, respectfully remained a safe distance from the bird and used his large lens (500mm?) to snap photographs. Realizing he could not get any closer without causing the bird to fly off or stress out, he threw in the towel and packed up his gear. As he opened the truck door, he felt a presence and looked up. The owl had flown right up to his vehicle as if to inspect Joe’s actions. Joe continued to pack up and sat down in the drivers seat. The image below is the result of this interaction. The bird came to Joe. Not all close up shots are taken while trespassing or causing stress to the bird. Some people just have all the luck.

Here’s to your luck this winter and the prospect of seeing the bird of your dreams in your backyard!

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**Harford Bird Club Executive Board**

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<tr>
<th>Position</th>
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*(Continued from page 1)*
Club News?
Have news the club should know about? Births, deaths, marriages, or any other notable events that belong in the newsletter? Please contact Corresponding Secretary Madeline Lovera at 443-425-3974 or send an email to lovebluebird206@gmail.com.

Welcome!
A warm Harford Bird Club welcome goes out to the following new members. Thank you for joining... we look forward to seeing you out there on our birding trips and at our meetings!

MARTHA KEENER of ABINGDON
JOY MAYFIELD of BEL AIR
JOHN PIGG of BEL AIR

And welcome back to

PAULA CONOSCENTI of ELKTON

HBC Membership Renewal Notice

Urgent! Some members have still not paid their dues for the 2017-2018 Membership year. If you have not paid by February 1, your membership will expire, and your name will be removed from both the State (MOS) and local (HBC) list of members. We do not want to lose you! Since the next newsletter will come out after February 1, this is the last notice you will get to remind you not to let your membership lapse. If you have questions about renewal, please contact Eric Vangrin at evangrin@msn.com or 443-417-7219.

January Meeting- NEW START TIME!!
The next club meeting is on Friday, January 5, 2018 at Churchville Presbyterian Church (2844 Churchville Road Churchville, Maryland 21028). This launches our new birding year and year of great speakers, meetings and trips! We will gather at 6:45 PM with a congenial social gathering around homemade cakes, snacks, soft drinks, and as past president Bob says, "Hail Good Fellow" exchanges. Followed by a short business meeting at 7:10 PM. Please let Amanda (AmandaKoss01@hotmail.com) know if you can bring a dish to share (cookies, brownies, cake, veggies and dip, chips and dip, pretzels...). If Harford County schools are closed for the day, or close early due to weather, the meeting will be postponed until Fri. Jan. 12.

Have you ever wondered how you can attract more birds to your yard? Master Gardeners and Harford Glen teachers Ruth Eisenhour and Melanie Kane will help you identify the perfect plants and the best land management strategies to create a bird friendly habitat in your backyard. The presentation will focus on using native plants to provide birds with food, shelter, and nesting spots.

MOS Conference
The MOS Conference Committee invites you to the 74th annual convention of the Maryland Ornithological Society, at the Holiday Inn 67th St and Oceanfront, Ocean City, MD. Winter birding on Maryland's coast can be as exciting as any other season. Waterfowl, both sea ducks and dabbling ducks, are in peak numbers and this is the season for gannets, alcids (dovekies, murres, etc), and off-course vagrants bumping up against the ocean. As a special bonus, expert birders will be stationed at the Ocean City jetty/inlet throughout the daylight hours; any registrant is free to drop by any time w/o prior sign-up. Click to see the MOS Conference Brochure. Feel free to reach out to HBC club members to carpool to the conference or share the cost of rooms.
2017 Rock Run Christmas Bird Count

The 54th annual Rock Run Christmas Bird Count will take place on Saturday, December 30th, 2017. This event is centered around Susquehanna State Park and covers a 15-mile circle spreading inland around the lower Susquehanna River and upper bay in both Harford and Cecil Counties. Sponsored by the National Audubon Society, information about the count, its history, previous years’ results and a photo gallery can be found at http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count. The Rock Run CBC is an excellent opportunity for Harford Bird Club members to have fun and build friendships while contributing to one of the largest scientific databases concerning bird populations. At the end of the afternoon, count participants may gather at MacGregor’s Restaurant in Havre de grace to warm up with good food and tales of the day’s adventures. Whether you are veteran participant or a first-timer, become a citizen scientist and participate in this year’s Rock Run CBC. Register today by e-mailing the HBC Count Coordinator Mark Johnson at marksjohnson2@gmail.com.

2018 Mid-Winter Count

The 2018 Mid-Winter Bird Count is scheduled for Saturday, January 27th. The Mid-Winter Count is a bit more flexible than the Christmas Count in that you can bird anywhere you wish in Harford County! Feeder counts are welcome! Contact the coordinator to let him know where you will be counting to avoid overlap. The coordinator will be announced at a later date by email and social media. Have fun, stay warm … and good birding!

4th Annual Christmas Bird Count for Kids

January 27 (Saturday) 9 - 11:30 am at the MAEF Education Building on Swan Harbor Farm in Havre de Grace

Open to young birders ages 4–7, and 8–16 years old – no experience necessary. We’ll start with birding basics, then go birding in teams to identify and count as many birds as we can, ending the morning with a tally of birds seen while enjoying refreshments.

Binoculars provided; parent or guardian must be present.

Free, but registration is required by emailing Rachel Hebert at hebert.rachel2@gmail.com

(Sponsored by the Harford Bird Club and MAEF)

Field Trip Reports

Eastern Neck Island NWR
November 4

A beautiful sunrise announced a day-long “tug-of-war” between sun and clouds. By the end of the day, the sun won. The misty, gray but beautiful-in-its-own-way drive over contrasted sharply with the spectacular drive back with the victorious sun creating a light show of fall colors at each bend in the road. The fall beauty of Eastern Neck Island was also on full display as the lighting constantly shifted threatening to draw attention away from its diverse offering of birdlife. The focus of the eight birders was on waterfowl. While the sightings were a bit distant, we did fairly well with ducks, seeing at least 10 species. Good views of some gulls and terns allowed several more experienced birders to help some beginners with species identification. While little effort was invested in passerines and raptors, nice additions to the species total of about 33 included a chatty half dozen Brown-headed Nuthatches found in a copse of loblolly pines and a fairly certain ID of a soaring Rough-legged Hawk. Several sightings of both perched and soaring mature and immature Bald Eagles enhanced a day that was enjoyed by all. ~ Tom Gibson

Sweet Air
November 18

The fields of corn were not yet harvested, which changed the birding habitat and perspective of this section of the Gunpowder State Park in Baldwin. The raptors weren’t as active as usual, though Cooper’s and Sharp-shinned Hawks caused a stir and alerted us to a Ruby-crowned Kinglet among residents giving alarm calls. An adult and a juvenile Bald Eagle pair flew overhead in their regular spot near the aptly-named Eagles View houses at the eastern edge of the park. Fox Sparrows were in their usual location nearby, but hidden on the windy day and needed coaxing. One sang just as rain began, so the searchers decided to curtail the search and retreated back to the parking area. We tallied 30 species, a few of which were heard but not seen. ~ Susan Hood
2017 Predictions Contest Comes to a Close
(Close but no Winner, that is)
by Dennis Kirkwood

Disclaimer – This is being written before the end of 2017 in order to make the newsletter deadline. A winner could still emerge in the waning days of the year, in which case most of the article is, you guessed it, FAKE NEWS.

The Harford Bird Club tried a new contest to see who might be able to predict the next addition to the County’s growing birdlist in 2017. This was partially inspired by a 2016 year that saw 3 new species arrive within our boundaries for the first time: Tufted Duck, Ruff, and Black-throated Gray Warbler. We apparently jinxed our chances as no new birds found us in the current calendar year.

But not all is lost. Maryland statewide gained three new species for the year bringing this list to a total of 453. The exciting discoveries included a Shiny Cowbird in Bethesda, Montgomery County, first seen in October and rediscovered on November 23 and is still being seen. Our own Matt Hafner found a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at the Swan Creek wetlands in Anne Arundel County on August 30, which hung in for another two days. The third bird was a one-day wonder in St. Mary’s County on June 10 – a Crested Caracara. This was one of three top vote getters in our Harford Contest and would have made contest winners of Ruth Bergstrom, Amanda Koss, and Volney Ford. Great prediction but wrong county, only about 150 miles to the south.

Three other entrants came within a mile and a half of being declared contest winners. Matt Hafner, Josh Emm, and Rick Cheicante all predicted a Sedge Wren and one was found across the Gunpowder River in Baltimore County on January 28 through February 1. So close!

Two of the other top voted birds made an appearance in Maryland but not very close to Harford. A Northern Shrike was found in Queen Anne’s County in January into February and a second bird found in Montgomery County also in January. Lark Sparrows were seen in September in both western Baltimore County and Ocean City and one appears to be using DC as a wintering site this November and December. We really dipped on the last of our top listed birds with a Northern Lapwing. It never even made it to North America in 2017. What were you thinking?!!

Nobody was thinking Roseate Spoonbill but one spent a couple weeks in nearby Pennsylvania, as did a White-winged Tern. They probably flew right over Harford unnoticed. A Pink-footed Goose is being seen less than 100 miles from Maryland right now in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. And then there was the late (he got hit by a car) Corn Crake about three hours north on Long Island. Amazing!

Out of the 38 total birds mentioned by contest participants, 21 made at least one showing in Maryland. The other closest birds to our county were both at Hart-Miller Island (one can actually see Harford from there, i.e. Poole’s Island) where Hudsonian Godwit in October and Black-necked Stilt in May through July were discovered. A Brown Booby was only a little farther west in the Baltimore Inner Harbor in October.

The remaining Maryland sightings of our no-shows for Harford included:

Purple Gallinule (Worcester Co. in April); Cave Swallow (Assateague in November); Common Eider (St. Mary’s Co. in January-March and Ocean City in January and November); Western Tanager (Worcester Co. in November and Calvert Co. in December); Fork-tailed Flycatcher (Ocean City in November); and Harris’s Sparrow (Prince George’s County in November-December).

Last year’s contest had 21 brave souls who made their best guesses. Four folks at least had their three birds make an appearance in the State – Dave Webb, Matt Hafner, Volney Ford, and Dennis Kirkwood. I think we should try this again for 2018 since we can’t officially crown a winner yet - a chance to dream big again and prognosticate the future. Send me your top three choices and don’t be afraid to push the limits. We will see what surprises the new year has in store for us. As usual, names will be kept secret to protect the innocent and slightly deranged. If you find a new Harford record, you know who to call first.
Harford Birdlife
by Monroe Harden

Snowy Owl season is here! I hope everyone gets to see one of these beauties. Be mindful of the bird’s welfare and don’t get too close. This report covers the period from October 1st through November 30th, 2017.

Geese, Ducks, Grebes

DK found his first-of-season Cackling Goose at Turney’s Pond on Nov 16th. By Nov 29th, the count had grown to 12. That’s the largest group he has seen there. He also saw and heard a group of 18 Tundra Swans flying over his Newark Farm home on Nov 10th. JE saw a juvenile Brant in a Canada Goose flock near Berkley Rd on Nov 21st. DL saw 4 Gadwall, 6 Ring-necked Ducks, and 5 Hooded Mergansers at Lakeside Business Park on Nov 11th. He also saw a Ruddy Duck there on Oct 8th. DK had one at Turney’s Pond on Oct 16th. It was there through Oct 27th. EH saw a continuing Redhead in the Havre de Grace area between Oct 4th and 12th. MH saw 2 Red-necked Grebes near the Broad Creek Bridge on Nov 6th.

Woodpeckers, Vireos, Swallows, Nuthatches

DL saw a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at Perryman on Oct 21st. TH saw a White-eyed Vireo there on Oct 6th and 7th. JE noted 3 Northern Rough-winged Swallows at Swan Harbor on Oct 8th. MJ counted about 50 in a larger Tree Swallow flock at Tydings Park on Oct 12th. He also saw 20 on the power lines there on Oct 16th. SH saw a Red-breasted Nuthatch fly in Fallston on Oct 1st.

Egrets, Hawks, Falcons, Shorebirds

DL saw 2 Great Egrets at Lakeside on Oct 8th. JA had 3 at Tydings Park on Nov 9th. AVS saw 2 there on Nov 18th. SH saw an Osprey, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, and a Belted Kingfisher fighting over a perch near the Ma and Pa trail on Nov 13th. DL saw a Broad-winged Hawk in Perryman on Oct 21st. TH watched an American Kestrel catch a rodent at Swan Harbor on Oct 25th. DK had a Merlin at his Newark Farm home on Nov 1st. TD saw a Greater Yellowlegs at Swan Harbor on Nov 19th. BP saw 8 Dunlin in winter plumage there on Nov 8th.

Gulls, Terns, Owls

JE saw 5 Bonaparte’s Gulls at Lapidum on Nov 5th. JaE saw 12 a little farther upriver on Nov 7th. JE also saw a Caspian Tern at Tydings Park on Oct 31st. MBH saw and photographed a Snowy Owl at Tydings Park on Nov 9th. He was alerted to the owl’s presence on the island across from the marina by a neighborhood online posting. This owl was only seen in the vicinity a few times that same day. Another Snowy Owl was seen by many birders in Northern Harford County starting on Nov 21st. Yet another was seen near Street on Nov 29th and 30th.

Warblers, Sparrows, Blackbirds

DB found a Black-throated Blue Warbler at the Clubhouse Rd Pond on Nov 12th. RK saw a Pine Warbler on the Edgewood portion of APG on Nov 3rd. DL had 3 Palm Warblers at Perryman on Oct 21st. BP saw 2 there on Nov 8th. JE had a Black and White Warbler at Swan Harbor on Oct 14th. BP and TH saw a Clay-colored Sparrow at Swan Harbor on Oct 11th. TH also saw a Vesper Sparrow at Perryman Park on Oct 25th. RJ and TC had a Grasshopper Sparrow there on Oct 22nd. CR had a continuing Lincoln’s Sparrow at Emory Knoll Farms on Nov 19th. She noted that it had been seen there several times this fall. TH saw 1 adult and 5 immature White-crowned Sparrows at Swan Harbor on Oct 25th. BP and TH saw 2 Indigo Buntings and 2 Dickcissels at Perryman Park on Oct 17th. MA found a female Yellow-headed Blackbird at the Bloom Dairy on Nov 21st.

Contributors

December 30 (Sat.) – Christmas Count – Contact the compiler, Mark Johnson at marksjohnson2@gmail.com for details.

January 1 (Mon.) – Perryman Area – Celebrate the New Year or recover from New Year’s Eve by getting back to nature in the always productive Perryman Area with leader Phil Powers (443-417-7520; birdsinmd308@gmail.com). Meet at the Walmart parking lot at 8:30 AM.

January 13 (Sat.) – Feeder Tour – Join our annual feeder tour to visit the private homes of two of our club members to watch the avian visitors who come to their bird feeders and to get some new ideas for attracting a variety of birds to your yard. Light refreshments will be served. The hosts this year are Marjie Heagy and Marty Crousse. The event will begin at 8:30 AM at Marjie’s house and later continue at Martie’s. More specific details will follow by email. Because of space limitations this event is open to HBC members and guests only.

January 20 (Sat.) – Bradenbaugh Flats – Meet at the Jarrettsville Elementary School parking lot at 8:00 AM. Dennis Kirkwood leads us on a pleasant tour through NW Harford County’s agricultural area to find wintering field birds and waterfowl. Expect Horned Larks, Longspurs and Snow Buntings, Ring-necked Ducks, and maybe a Cackling Goose. The trip ends at the leader’s house where you can enjoy hot soup, homemade breads, good conversation and maybe even a brief glimpse of the resident screech owl. Contact Dennis at newarkfarms@gmail.com or 410-692-5905.

January 27 (Sat.) Midwinter Bird Count - Details and contact information will be publicized by email, social media and on the website prior to the event.

February 3 (Sat.) Eagle Watch at Conowingo Dam – Meet at 9:00 AM at Fisherman’s Park just below the Conowingo Dam on the Harford County side of the Susquehanna. Bring your camera for a chance at many excellent shots of a large number of bald eagles, various gulls, waterfowl, and shore birds. Our leaders are Colleen Webster (cwebster@harford.edu or 410-459-4577) and Sue Procell (procell1@comcast.net or 443-417-4919).

February 25 (Sun.) – Loch Raven – Meet at 7:30 AM at the park and ride on Rt.152 just north of Rt.147 near Fallston for a leisurely walk through the Loch Raven watershed. Enjoy the rich habitat of Baltimore’s premier watershed for wintering migrant songbirds, waterfowl and raptors. The leader is Dave Larkin (larkin3001@comcast.net or 410-569-8319).

March - Timberdoodle Searches - Two searches will be scheduled during the month. Times, dates and locations will be determined by recent sightings. Details will be provided via email, social media or by contacting the HBC field trip chairperson, Tom Gibson (gibsonlld@aol.com; 410-734-4135).

March 3 (Sat.) – Perryman Area - Meet at 9:00 AM at Stumps Point at the far end of the Perryville Community Park. Expect to see eagles, winter ducks, woodpeckers, and hopefully swans. Leaders are Colleen Webster (cwebster@harford.edu or 410-459-4577) and Sue Procell (procell1@comcast.net or 443-417-4919).

March 17 (Sat.) – Harford Waterfowl Tour – Meet at 6:45 AM at the McDonalds in Edgewood on Rt.40 for a chance to search a variety of locations to see the many species of waterfowl that use our waterways. Leader is Dave Webb (porzana@comcast.net or 410-939-3537).

March 24 (Sat.) – Perryman Area – Meet at 7:30 AM at the Aberdeen Walmart parking lot. Explore several spots within this Bush River region that attract a variety of species (wintering sparrows, raptors migrating waterfowl). The leader is Mark Johnson (marksjohnson2@gmail.com) or 410-692-5978).

March 31 (Sat.) – Susquehanna State Park – Meet at 8:00 AM at the Lapidum Parking Lot at the south end of Susquehanna State Park. We will look for gulls, lingering waterfowl and perhaps some early surprises. Additional sites in Susquehanna State Park may also be visited. Leader is Dennis Kirkwood (newarkfarms@gmail.com or 410-692-5905).
Prospect Mill Elementary School Early Birds and Meadowvale Elementary School Feathered Friends began meeting in October. We have record numbers of students again this year! Early Birds has 20 members while Feathered Friends had more than 50 students sign up. The October meetings were devoted to "building a bird" with Ruth Bergstrom, who led the students in thinking about how beaks, feet, and wings all play a part in a bird’s adaptation to its environment. During the November meetings, the students learned about hazards that birds encounter as they migrate and took part in a “Migration Obstacle Course”. Because it was American Education Week, parents enjoyed helping out by taking the parts of the obstacles. Our December meetings was an outdoor experience with Ruth Eisenhour from Harford Glen, who took the students on a schoolyard survey and looked for bird-friendly plants and habitats.

Our school bird walks have been very successful this season. The students have seen some unusual species like an Eastern Towhee, a flock of 40 Cedar Waxwings, and a Snow Goose flying with a flock of Canada Geese. Typically, we can count at least 12 species around the schools in just 30 minutes. A huge THANK YOU to HBC for the purchase of 10 new binoculars for the students to use. Having the right equipment makes for better birds walks and more excited kids. We’ll be using these binoculars throughout the year, including the Christmas Bird Count for Kids and the Havre de Grace Promenade walks.

Al Conrad was the guest speaker for the Havre de Grace Green Thumbs Club on December 12. He gave a presentation on migration and shared the journey of his favorite bird -- the Red Knot.

Word is getting around! "A little bird" told Churchville Elementary School about our school bird clubs. They have requested that HBC start a before-school bird club for their students. The club will begin in January and run through May. This program will be part of their Green School initiative and fulfill the requirement of a sustained community partner.

HELP -- HELP -- HELP!!!! With the success of our young birder school clubs, Mary is in need of some assistance to meet the requests coming in. The commitment is about 1 hour a month and you’ll be finished by 9:00 am. Ideas, lessons, and fun activities for the kids will be provided for you. If you would like to be part of the HBC Education team, lead a walk, give a talk, and share your passion for birding with some wonderful kids, please contact Mary at murraymary@gmail.com or 410-812-6621.
Club Member’s Photography Recognized
Club member Barbara Saffir’s photo of a male Ruby-throated Hummingbird flying out of an outstretched hand during one of the summer bandings at club member Diane Jone’s house was juried into the Nature Visions Photo Expo. This 16th annual expo and photo contest is staged by eight nonprofit camera clubs in Virginia and Maryland. See the winners at http://naturevisions.org/.

Support Our Sponsors
The following businesses generously donated prizes for the raffle at the last meeting. Please patronize them and thank them for their support of the club.

JOHN & LINDA IRELAND
WILD BIRD MARKETPLACE
OPERATING OUT OF 3765 SALEM CHURCH ROAD
IN JARRETTSVILLE
410 836-5000
Harford Bird Club
January Meeting

"Gardening in Harford County"
by
Ruth Eisenhour and Melaine Kane

Friday, Jan. 5th, 2018
Social Gathering 6:45, Snacks, Cakes, Soft Drinks, and Camaraderie
Business Meeting 7:10 PM
Bring a friend
(if Harford County schools are closed for the day, or close early due to weather, the meeting will be postponed until Fri. Jan. 12)
Location: Churchville Presbyterian Church
2844 Churchville Road