

## Birds and Birding in our Eastern Shore Backyard

*A collaboration with Pickering Creek Audubon Center*

Ask anyone who has taken a birding class from Dr. Wayne Bell and you will hear fond stories of his love of birds and birding. “He gets a genuine pleasure of saying ‘hey, this is a good day to be out birding,’” says Mary Helen Gillen of Pickering Creek Audubon Center, “It is contagious! It makes you want to know what he knows!”

It is no surprise that when the Pandemic hit Talbot County, Bell was already thinking about how he could adjust his teaching method so that course participants could learn safely.

Gillen says that the collaboration with Bell for the upcoming Chesapeake Forum semester was his idea. “Wayne’s been teaching this class for years now and he reached out to me

and Mark

***With this, a collaboration between the Chesapeake Forum and Pickering Creek Audubon Center was born...***

work together to use ZOOM as an online platform for his birding class.”

Right now, Bell wants to keep his course to a smaller group setting where he can interact more with participants being able to ask questions. “I was particularly impressed with how Mary Helen and Mark did their webinars,” says Bell. “I can share my screen while accessing on-line bird guides for both pictures and audio, just like we do in a classroom setting.” Limiting class size allows Bell to also maintain the interactive discussion style of teaching that he thrives on.



***Our bird feeders provide a wonderful opportunity to observe and learn about birds in our backyard.***

Scallion last May when it was looking like he would have to rethink the method of teaching this course in the fall. He had attended a couple of our ZOOM public programs and thought we could

Adds Gillen, “We are interested in trying this interactive model to see how it works. Since the start of the pandemic, we have had several webinars that have



*We commonly see fledgling gray catbirds this time of year in our backyards*

been well-received, but we’ve had a much larger audience, so interaction has been thru Chat and the polling function that we use like a quiz as we go. We anticipate that we will still do webinars even after we come out of this pandemic.”

What’s new with Bell’s class is that he wants the interaction of participants so they can ask questions and contribute to the discussion. People can mute themselves on Zoom, or they can engage.



*And this red-bellied wood pecker provides a good example where red-hooded is the first thing you notice*

Describes Bell, “We will hold one Zoom webinar session a month for three months starting in September, with two different field trip destinations between each class. With 12 participants in the course, we can have everyone on the screen for a class with more give and take among us all, and for field trips we can split into two groups of six to maintain social distancing.”

Field trips will be shorter (8am to

***“Adults are not that different than working with kids,” says Bell, with a bit of a chuckle in his voice, “Adults squeal just as loudly and get just as excited as the kids when they see a new bird for the first time. Their thrill is a real thrill for me.”***

11am) and local - selected from a short list that includes Black Walnut Point at Tilghman Island, Pickering Creek, the Oxford conservation park, and even some private lands through the generous permission of the landowners.

“Offering up the idea of splitting each of the field trips into two with six participants in each, which is double the work, is pure Wayne,” comments Mary Helen. “He is trying to make sure people are safe and not putting themselves at risk. I’m really glad that Wayne just jumped right on that and suggested splitting the field trips.”

Gillen attributes Bell with fostering her love of not just bird watching, but bird studying. “There is so much to learn. Birds are beautiful and fascinating. We have such diversity of birds here. Add in the seasonal changes, the migration, what comes in the winter, and the spring...

“He is so much fun to go birding with,” describes Gillen enthusiastically. “He is

***“He is very welcoming. Wayne will joke around, but he really makes you appreciate birds in a way that goes beyond the bird feeder.”***

such an approachable person. He responds to questions with stories that explain... ‘Oh, and we also learned this other thing.’ Such a wealth of knowledge that he easily shares. “

“It’s a win-win partnering for us with Pickering Creek,” Bell concludes, “At heart I’m a community guy... working together is important!”

### **Editor’s Note:**

This course is presented thru Chesapeake Forum, an Academy for Lifelong Learning, and is scheduled this semester as a ZOOM course. **Registration is EXTREMELY LIMITED so be sure to register early!** For those who cannot get into the live course, recordings of Dr. Bell’s three ZOOM classes will be available for purchase during the registration process.

Mark the date: **Thursday, September 10, 2:30 to 4pm.**

Registration is available at [ChesapeakeForum.org](http://ChesapeakeForum.org) starting August 24<sup>th</sup>.