

# Chip Notes

U

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BALTIMORE BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER



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## Watchers of the Sky

### Monitoring Hawk Migration in Maryland

By Jim Meyers; Photographs courtesy of Neil Rothschild

Maryland's change of seasons is something we birders appreciate, and each time of year holds its own particular challenges and rewards. Winter may find us carrying spotting scopes along shorelines. Spring invites us into the woods, straining our eyes and ears. Summer heat beckons us to a shade tree by a riverbank. While each season means different things to different birders, autumn holds a special place in the heart of a certain breed of birder.

This type of birder is easy to identify. Usually in groups, they are found sitting or standing in open fields, on mountaintops and hill-sides, or at the tips of peninsulas. At first they may puzzle you. Some are looking this way, others are looking that way. Some are looking straight up, some are looking straight out. Some are looking at pages in a field guide. Some are looking at their peanut butter sandwiches! All have binoculars, and a few have spotting scopes and cameras at the ready. If you turn your eyes upward to see what they are looking at, you may see nothing but empty sky. But patience reveals their puzzling behavior. If one vocalizes, the others

*(Continued on page 4)*

2012  
MOS Winter  
Conference

February 24 - 26,  
2012

Clarion Resort  
Fontainebleau  
Hotel

Ocean City, MD

## President's Corner

by Joan Cwi



### Pleasures of the Covered Dish Dinner

By Joan Cwi

Winter is a relatively slow time for local birding activities, but is punctuated by two major events. The first is the Christmas Bird Count, which is described in another article in this issue of Chip Notes. And the second is our annual get-together—the **Covered Dish Dinner!** Held at the Cylburn Visitor Center on January 8<sup>th</sup>, we had 65 people attending—the highest number yet. Since this is our only social event, it was good to see so many attend from various walks of birdlife. Need I describe the good food—roast beef, pork, and brisket, chicken chili, several bean and/or rice dishes and the ever-popular macaroni and cheese, all of which ran out. Other annual winners include deviled eggs, cranberry raisin bread, and zucchini appetizer, as well as salads of all types to add some healthy food to our menu. Desserts included pies and brownies and Paul Chalmus' (pastry chef extraordinaire) multi-layered chocolate strawberry cake. Special kudos goes to those bringing the wine! Finally, a big thank-you to our event organizer, Kevin Graff, and the many members who helped set up and clean up.

In addition to food, there were **several exhibitions**, including our Lights Out Baltimore display, a display of the youth backpack submissions, our table of sale birding items (which brought in \$32 at the event), a presentation of proposed changes to the annual Christmas Bird Count area, and a table of give-aways thanks to Chris Davidson. We also got to show off our new BBC display board, badly needed for when we have a booth at local affairs.

Attendees included, of course, members--both long-term and new. Our lecturer, **Don Mess-**

(Continued on page 6)

## Conservation CORNER

### Fort McHenry Wetland—An Example of Wetland Mitigation at Work

By Mary E. Chetelat

*For the past six years, Mary has led BBC's Fort McHenry field trips beginning at 8:00 am the first Wednesday of each month from September through June. In addition, the BBC sponsors trips on the third Saturday of each month from September through May beginning at 8:00 am, and Wednesday evening walks beginning at 6:00 pm in fall and spring.*

Only been over the past 50 years have the functions and importance of wetlands become widely recognized. This recognition has led to the idea that if an area of wetland "must" be destroyed for some societal need, then the loss must be "mitigated" somewhere else. The benefits of these mitigation areas are being studied and evaluated especially as compared to a "natural" wetland.

So we come to consider the Fort McHenry Wetland. In establishing this wetland area, approxi-



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# Baltimore Bird Club

## Membership Year

By Catherine Bishop, Membership Secretary

I'm writing this brief article to help clear up confusion some members are having regarding membership renewal. The membership year runs from September 1 to August 31 each year. Accordingly, during August all current members are mailed a packet that includes the new Program Book, Membership Directory, and a membership renewal bill in the form of an envelope addressed to me. Within the next six weeks, most members promptly renew their membership based on this mailing. Those who have not paid by November are sent a reminder notice with another envelope and informed that they will be dropped from membership privileges if they do not pay by the end of January. During the September-January period, non-renewing members continue to receive many unpaid benefits, including the Fall and Winter issue of updated monthly field trip/lecture/event schedules via eNews, the Fall and Winter editions of Chip Notes, and Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) publications sent out during that period.

Beginning February 1<sup>st</sup>, unpaid members are struck from our books and will no longer receive these privileges. If a member renews in the February – April time period, their membership privileges will be reinstated. If renewing after April, membership will be reinstated immediately for the current year as well as being fully credited for the next membership year.

Here's where confusions sometimes arises. There is a membership application form in each Chip Notes issue and in the BBC brochure for ease in recruiting new members or for members to use if you lost the billing envelope. By the enclosed form accompanying payment, especially late ones, it is clear that many of you have used this form yourself or provided it to friends expressing interest in joining the BBC.

But be aware that these are NOT new billing requests! If you use it, double check that you aren't paying twice! I will notify you if you have, and most members have generously donated the second payment to the club, but we don't want to inconvenience you.

## MARYLAND BIRDS AND BIRD HABITATS

**Field Research in the World of Birds**

**A Program for Maryland Students**

**Grades 7 – 12**

**June 24- 29, 2012**

**Washington College**

**Chestertown, MD**

**Application Deadline: April 30, 2012**

**<http://www.ymos.org/summer-program/>**

**Students will work in the field with scientists and other students learning how to identify birds by ear and by habitat, map breeding areas and nest boxes with GPS and GIS technology, and initiate actual research projects. During the week, participants will both work in the field and classroom with trained ornithologists and researchers. They will both collect and learn to access the numerous available data sources.**

## Watchers of the Sky continued

react quickly. All will look in the same direction, binoculars aligning in unison. The group may become more compact, standing side-by-side or lining up one behind the other. A dot in the sky becomes a bird. The bird approaches and becomes a raptor. Closer still, and someone calls out "Red-shouldered Hawk, adult!" The puzzle is solved...they are hawk watchers!



Most hawk watchers are also hawk counters. We identify the species, and count each individual raptor migrating past the watch site. Records are kept, and we submit our information to a national database. We can boast about how our data is used to track population trends, identify established flyways, and determine how weather conditions affect hawk migration, all in the name of science. But the main reason for hawk watching is simply that it is FUN! It provides a personal connection with nature and its annual rhythms. Learning to identify migrant raptors is relatively easy, and skills improve with each sighting. Sitting on a hillside under a beautiful sky is pleasant in itself. Searching for winged migrants that may have traveled many hundreds of miles is engaging. Picnic lunch nearby, along with friends you may see only at this time of year...citizen science indeed!

There are several active hawk watch sites in Maryland, most of which record the fall migration period (mid-August to mid-December). Turkey Point is located in Cecil County, and is part of Elk Neck State Park. It offers great views of Red-shouldered hawks in late October and early November. Providing a grand vista of the Cumberland Valley, the watch site at Washington Monument State Park is situated atop a stone tower that is the earliest monument to our first president. Primarily a fall site, Washington Monument is located along the Appalachian Trail near Boonsboro in Washington County. Just outside the beltway, in Baltimore County, Cromwell Valley Park is an easily accessible site that draws many visitors from the Baltimore metropolitan area. Fort Smallwood Park is one of the few sites that record the spring migration, and is among the longest running and most active spring sites in the US. Located in Anne Arundel County, its season runs from February through early June with peak flights usually occurring in April.



In general, between 11 and 13 species of migrant raptors are regularly recorded at Maryland sites. Springtime highlights may include a non-stop procession of Sharp-shinned Hawks flying beak to tail at treetop level. The September passage of Broad-winged Hawks can leave an observer speechless, and a close look at a Red-shouldered Hawk is a thing of beauty. Small dramas are often observed: a Merlin dropping like a rocket into a group of sparrows, resident Red-tails escorting migrant Red-tails

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off their territory, a Kestrel snatching dragonflies in mid-air. Anticipation is a constant element at hawk watches, and the feeling that something exciting could happen at any moment gets us through the slow periods. Occasional rarities include Golden Eagle, Northern Goshawk and Mississippi Kite, among others.

New watch sites become active every so often, adding a true sense of discovery. We hawk watchers in Maryland are looking forward to a new site officially kicking off its first season in Spring 2012 in Allegany County. The Cumberland Gap Hawk Watch is located in Wills Mountain State Park, north-west of Cumberland, and preliminary counts are very promising, particularly for Golden Eagles. The single day record for Golden Eagles in Maryland (35) was recorded along the same ridgeline in spring 2008. We would encourage birders to visit the blog site of this new hawk watch for more information:

[www.cumberlandgaphawkwatch.blogspot.com](http://www.cumberlandgaphawkwatch.blogspot.com)



## President's Corner

ersmith and his wife and friends were also there. Don's lecture on *Changes in Birding in China over 25 Years—1982-2007* had us fascinated as we saw not only the birds of China, but also how the Chinese are rapidly modernizing facilities to attract tourists, birders in particular. Just in case you plan on going, you can now go in comfort!



Don Messersmith

There were two award sessions. The first was to honor **Shirley Geddes** with a Distinguished Service Award for her 30 plus years of dedicated service to BBC. A review of Program Booklets from 1950 to today saw her listed in multiple roles, year after year. In total, she was a BBC director, corresponding secretary and hospitality chairperson--each for six years. She served as a MOS director for 13 years, on the nominating committee for 10 years, and as general information agent for 31 years. In her spare time she led more than 80 field walks as

well as undertaking miscellaneous duties such as Chip Notes editor and leader of the Audubon Wildlife film lectures. It is service like Shirley's that helps perpetuate the BBC in all its various aspects. Thank you Shirley!

For the fourth year we honored winners of our **Youth Backpack Award**. This year contestants were required to submit entries on one of two topics: drawing/painting the Maryland State Bird and include some information about them, or submitting a map with prime Baltimore City/County birding spots and birds you would expect to find there. We had six winners between the ages of 8-13, all present along with their families to receive their awards. First and second prizes went to Sophie Warfield and Robin Azzam, respectively. Runners-up included Emma Anderson, Miles Anderson, Audrey Azzam and Emma Flanagan.



Left to right: Audrey Azzam, Emma Anderson, Sophie Warfield (1st place), Emma Flanagan, Robin Azzam (2nd place), and Miles Anderson

In addition to the fun, we accomplished one piece of business at the dinner. As required by our **Constitution and Bylaws**, members voted on the proposed changes to this document. The vote was unanimously in favor.

Off to spring events, although we have hardly had a winter. Look for our scheduled walks, especially at the newly opened Robert E. Lee Park. And we are in the process of planning a springtime event at Cylburn again. E-News will keep you up to date on walks and other events.



BBC President Joan Cwi with Shirley Geddes

## Fort McHenry Wetland continued

mately 10 acres of former beach/waterfront/open water adjacent to the Fort McHenry National Park were chosen to replace about 40 acres of open water—what is now the Seagirt Marine Terminal. This area was filled in with materials removed when the Fort McHenry Tunnel was built.



Over the past 12 years the mitigation area and its immediate surroundings have undergone a series of changes. Some have had and will continue to have lasting impacts—trails and monitoring stations were established, various plantings were tried, water movement in the marsh was improved, surrounding businesses have eliminated some desirable habitat features, etc. Experimental projects were tried with varying degree of success. For example, thousands of dollars were dedicated to making the water movement in and through the marsh more

“natural” (fairly successful) and to establishing a varied native plant population (much less successful--phragmites rules again!). There continues to be an ongoing learning process.

The National Aquarium at Baltimore, the Fort McHenry staff and the work of premier volunteer and BBC member Jim Peters (10,000+ volunteer hours over the past 12 years) were key in this effort to learn from and improve the area. Thousands of volunteer hours were spent on establishing the trails, observing and recording the birds and wildlife, doing the plantings and cleaning up the marsh after it is periodically inundated with everything from driftwood and downed trees to the ubiquitous plastics and just about any other form of human cast-off. It seems that the area is a “catch basin” for the surrounding waterways and “stuff” tends to collect there.



The Fort McHenry Wetland site is especially remarkable for the number of bird species observed there over the past 12 years (257 species overall, 30+ resident species). Recently river otters have been visiting, and other mammals (foxes, deer, beaver) also come and go.



So we continue to learn from this little experiment in mitigation. For one thing, it seems that the location matters (the “catch basin” idea). And with this comes the need for continued maintenance as part of the plan for a mitigation site—something that the areas it is replacing may NOT have needed. Regular clean-ups involve coordination of volunteers and disposal of the detritus, the difficulties of managing invasive species, monitoring and reporting observations and data collected—all need to be figured into the equation.

It will take a continual effort on the part of many people, organizations and surrounding neighbors to obtain the best outcome for the Fort McHenry Wetland. It is a “work-in-progress” and the enjoyment of this special area by those who visit is tempered by the knowledge of the amount of work it has and will continue to take to keep it functioning as we’d like it to.



# Field Trip Reports



Compiled by Kevin Graff



Ring-necked Duck by Bill Hubick

**Dec 3 - Piscataway Park** - Most of the waterfowl were in Piscataway Cove, accessed via Wharf Rd. There we saw several hundred Ruddy Ducks, several hundred Ring-necked Ducks, perhaps 50 Lesser Scaup, about 130 Tundra Swans, and smaller numbers of Mallards, Hooded Mergansers, Canvasbacks and Pintails. An immature Bald Eagle was sitting in a tree some distance away. A handful of Double-crested Cormorants were either sitting on a snag or flying in and out of the cove. It was chilly, but the observers were well bundled up. We went on to Piscataway Park, off Bryan Point Road. There the main drive was gated off beyond a small parking area near Bryan Point Road, where we set off on foot. We got out of the car and saw a hawk flying by over the tree tops - a calling Red-shouldered Hawk, soon joined by a second one. Following the drive beyond the gate, we passed through an open overgrown field and enjoyed a large flock of Cedar Waxwings feeding on berries in some small trees in and around the field. We continued onto the rebuilt boardwalk and enjoyed views of a soaring adult Bald Eagle and a couple of Hooded Mergansers mingling with about a dozen Mallards along the shoreline of the Potomac River. We pushed on past the wooded swamp, enjoying a few White-throated Sparrows, Downy Woodpeckers and Flickers, Tufted Titmice and a Swamp Sparrow along the way, and emerged into a large mowed grass field, home to the grave of a recent Piscata-

way Indian chief and a sweat lodge, which is evidently in regular use, although nobody was there when we were. At the edge of the grass field was a bit of brush by the river's edge and a sparrow, which upon closer looks turned out to be our bird of the day: an American Tree Sparrow! Neither of us had seen one in years, but here it was - minus the usual prominent central dark spot below the throat. There was a faint smudge there. No streaks to indicate a youngster, this was evidently a light colored adult, with all of the other field marks present - conspicuous rufous cap, eye line, white wingbars, bi-colored bill (upper bill dark, lower bill light), long tail for a sparrow, etc. (see field guides for more details). 41 species. 2 participants. Leader: Pete Webb.

**Dec 4 - Loch Raven** - Fog was intense for the first 1.5 hours of the trip. Then it lifted quickly and we saw that there were some birds on the reservoir. Best sightings were 2 Bald Eagles, Hermit Thrush and 8 species of waterfowl. 37 species. 4 participants. Leader: Peter Lev.



## Corrigendum

In the Winter issue of Chip Notes, we misidentified one of the volunteers of the BBC Collections effort.. Carolyn Sheffield is the young lady who helped develop the natural history collection assessment. She is pictured on page 11 of the newsletter. We are sorry for the mistake.

## Baltimore Harbor Christmas Bird Count

Saturday December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011

By Pete Webb, compiler, Baltimore Harbor Christmas Bird Count

The Christmas Bird Count started in 1979. This year was the 33<sup>rd</sup> year of the Baltimore Harbor Count. On a partly to mostly cloudy day, temperatures mostly in the 30's, 17 hardy observers took to the field around the area of southeast Baltimore County, eastern Baltimore City, and a piece of northern Anne Arundel County, to count 11,992 birds of 81 species. The rarest birds were three Cackling Geese in a grassy field with 94 regular Canada Geese near the Eastern Avenue bridge over Back River, and a solitary Pine Warbler at the Back River Plant near there. A complete listing of the birds by species follows.

Next year, the Count Circle will be moved, and instead of a Baltimore Harbor Christmas Bird Count, we will return to a historic Loch Raven Christmas Bird Count. Reasons for the move include loss of access to critical locations for the Harbor Count and hopes that the Loch Raven location will be closer to homes of most BBC members and will generate more interest and participation. Another article with more details on some of these reasons and historical significance of the Loch Raven Count will come out next fall.

Observers: Wendy Alexander, Myles Anderson, Rose Anderson, Keith Costley, John Denehy, Kevin Graff, David Larkin, Peter Lev, Mark Linardi, Jim Peters, David Sandler, Debbie Terry, Robin Todd, Dave Walbeck, Pete Webb (compiler)

## Some Visitors Over the Winter

### The Appeal of the Trail Tracker

German birders, Benjamin (7) and Phila (5) became fast friends with the Trail Tracker while visiting last October. They entered all their Cylburn sightings that day.



### A Cooperative Winter Visitor

A Black-headed Gull in a local mall parking lot.....and a reminder to keep checking all those gulls hanging out in parking lots.



Photo by Bill Hubick .

BALTIMORE BIRD CLUB

http://baltimorebirdclub.org

A Chapter of

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**Moving or email change?**

Send correction to  
Catherine Bishop at jcbishop1@verizon.net  
Or... 6111 Bellona Avenue  
Baltimore, MD 21212

**Deadlines for submitting articles**

**for upcoming issues:**

SUMMER: April 24 for June—August issue



**Baltimore Bird Club  
APPLICATION**

*Membership year is September 1-August 31. Individuals/households  
joining after March 1 may pay half-year rate. A full year's dues  
received after April 30 will be applied to the next membership year.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

How do you want your newsletters delivered? Electronically \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Check dues category and circle amount sent.**

Category	1-YR	½ YR	Chapter Only+
___ Individual	\$35.00	\$17.50	\$15.00
___ Household	\$45.00	\$22.50	\$20.00
___ Sustaining	\$100.00		
___ Junior*	\$10.00	\$5.00	\$5.00

\* Through 17: record age here \_\_\_\_\_

Mail completed application  
with check payable to:

Baltimore Bird Club

Attn: Membership Chairman