

Chip Notes



No. 380

Summer 2012

BALTIMORE BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER

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Chan Robbins and Hank Kaestner

The Best Advice I Ever Got By Hank Kaestner



Photo by Bill Hubick of a Vermillion Flycatcher in Mexico

I started bird-watching at a young age. I was 10 when I saw that red and black bird in Mexico City's Chapultepec Park, and a few days later found my first bird book with a vermilion flycatcher on the cover! I was hooked. After returning to Baltimore, my father wanted to help me cultivate this new hobby, so he went to Patuxent Research refuge in Laurel in the hopes of finding

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This year has been different for birders in Maryland. First, the weather—no winter to speak of, and an incredibly warm March that has led to the **early arrival, departure, and nesting of many birds**. Many thanks to Bob Ringler who checked earliest arrival dates from past years to confirm that the several warblers (Palm, Orange-crowned, Yellow-throated, Louisiana Water-thrush), swallows (Tree and Barn), Phoebe, Eastern Kingbird, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and others were indeed record-setters or at least very early arrivers. Likewise nesting Cardinals and Mourning Doves seemed to be racing for records. The same mild conditions also brought **gardens into bloom** two to four weeks early making March look like April. And have you ever seen such a crop of the weed Hairy Bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*), often called popping cress, that made yards and gardens green in March.



The flowers appeared in February and by March seedpods had developed. In April as you walked through the garden these trigger-happy pods explode skyrocketing up to 1,000 seeds per plant for a distance of one yard. Beware, these seeds can start the cycle over again within a few days! According to a couple of articles online, at least

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BBC Board for 2012-2013

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Hospitality & Trip Reports, Kevin Graff

Youth Activities, Marty Brazeau

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Education, open

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Representative to MOS Sanctuary Committee, Brent Byers



Birdbits

BBC's Joy Wheeler Receives MOS Distinguished Service Award

During the MOS convention this winter, one of our BBC members was honored by MOS with a Distinguished Service Award plaque "in appreciation of 37 years as Librarian of the Maryland Ornithological Society, steward of the MOS & BBC natural history collections, and a leader in ornithological education, especially for children." As the award states, no one deserves this award better than Joy whose mentorship of youth produced some of today's premier birders. Joy could not attend the convention, so BBC president, Joan Cwi, picked up the plaque for her and presented it to her a couple of weeks later while she was showing off the Nature Museum to **Julie Zickenfoose** who was in town giving a lecture for the Cylburn Arboretum Association. In case you don't know about her, Julie is a widely published natural history writer, artist and a regular contributor to Bird Watcher's Digest (published by her husband, Bill Thompson III). We were lucky to have her celebrate Joy's award with us.



L to R: Debbie Terry, Julie Zickenfoose, Honoree Joy Wheeler & President Joan Cwi at the Cylburn Nature Museum

Birding Treasures

Spring brought two special treats to Baltimore birders. The first was that the Red-headed Woodpecker that has been residing in Robert E. Lee Park is now sporting a magnificent, full red head, rather than the brownish head with a few red highlights seen over the winter. As of early May, he was still seen at his "spot" between the trail that leads down to the Light Rail and the Dog Park. He's made several large nesting cavities--we wish him luck with the ladies!



The second treasure is the return of the nesting Yellow-crowned Night Herons beneath the bridge on Wyman Park Driveway (between Stieff Silver and Druid Hill Park). From the south side of the bridge three nests can be easily seen (at least before the leaves came out), with at least seven herons on the nests or lounging about. (Photos by Rose Anderson)



Baltimore Area Residents Receive Four MOS Scholarships for 2012

Each year MOS awards scholarships to teachers and nature center staff to attend summer one-week nature programs at the Hog Island sanctuary in Maine. Operated by the National Audubon, these programs focus on environmental education, developing ornithological skills, or assisting with research projects. This year four of the five awardees come from the greater Baltimore area. **Erin Reed** is an educator at the Patterson Park Audubon Center, **Elizabeth Kopf** teaches high school studio art at Roland Park Country School, **Susan Steele** teaches ninth grade science for Baltimore County Public Schools' Crossroads Center, and **Sophie Gerard** teaches pre-school-age children at Irvine Nature Center. Congratulations to our local crew, as well as to the fifth recipient, **Jessica Beebe**, an art educator at Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art!!! More information about the program and awardees can be obtained in the March/April edition of Yellowthroat, available online at: <http://www.mdbirds.org/publications/yellowthroat/pdf/yt3202.pdf>



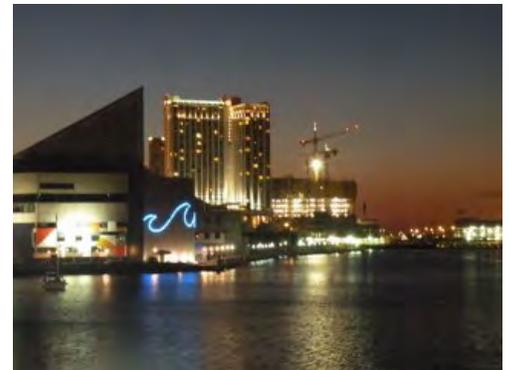
BBC Birder Cam

Lights Out Baltimore! consumes 20 weeks of volunteer time over spring and fall migrations. This novella is a compilation of thoughts and events that have happened to volunteers conducting this task.

A Day in the Life of...Wendy, Keith, Clare, Joann, Ruth, Bryce, Maire, Joan, Fred, Kevin, Judy, Stephanie, Lindsay, John, Dean, Lynne, Mary, Lally, Mike, Maggie, Katherine, Kathy and all the others contributing in years past.....

Year five, and it doesn't get any easier. The alarm rings at 4:15 a.m. Not that it matters since I've been awake for an hour waiting. I quickly shower, dress and eat half a banana to keep my stomach from growling. Then I pull on a jacket, put a few dollars and my license in my pocket, and take my backpack and cell phone. I checked the backpack last night to make sure all the equipment was ready—binoculars, camera, bags of various sizes (ziplock for dead birds, paper for live birds), identification/location forms, a clipboard with instructions on recording sightings, butterfly net, flashlight--along with miscellaneous stuff like hand sanitizer, latex gloves and granola bars.

It's pitch dark leaving the house. It always is. On the drive downtown it never ceases to amaze how many cars are on the road that early. We park on Redwood Street where it intersects with Charles. My LOB partner hasn't arrived yet so I look around--two large rats investigating the gutters and early morning commuters at the bus stop. They seem surprisingly cheerful. My partner arrives and we greet each other, put on our backpacks and begin. Other than this, the City is calm and quiet as it sleeps for the first hour.



Our route is a 3.5 mile oval in downtown Baltimore, 4 miles if you count all the deviations. We begin at 5:00 am and are usually finished by 6:30ish, hot or cold, rain or shine (except downpours). We start at Hopkins Plaza area, first at 36 South Charles, then the buildings around the vegetated Plaza. One becomes very



Death often comes in the best-lit places!

aware of light and dark throughout the walk, and this area is punctuated by brightly lit buildings and deep, dark recesses. Migrating birds are attracted to the light, and a couple of buildings here have the double whammy of being well lit--full of glass seeways and glass corners. We can anticipate finding birds on a regular basis. We weren't disappointed this morning. A dead Ovenbird and a dead Common Yellowthroat, two of the most commonly-found birds. We place them in individual snack-sized zip

bags. We place them in individual snack-sized zip



Wendy and Joann bag dead and injured birds

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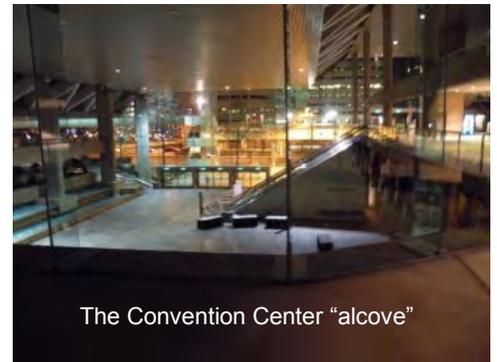
BBC Birder Cam

lock bags, recording when and where they were found.

The next leg is the Transamerica (old Legg Mason) building. In the past we consistently found birds here, but for reasons unknown, since the recent rehab strikes have been far fewer. This building has a nesting box built in the upper stories that Baltimore's Peregrine Falcons have used for thirty years. As a result, we often encounter Peregrine leftovers—heads and wings chopped from their recent prey. Flickers, Woodcocks, and Blue Jays seem to be their favorites. Contrary to popular belief, we've never found a Pigeon head—maybe Peregrines prefer gourmet food when available. Nothing there this morning.

The next major stop is the Convention Center, which takes up two square blocks and is built mostly of glass. Before observing the Center, we stop at the guardhouse to let them know we are there. Evidently we had been inadvertently setting alarms off throughout the property in the first couple of years. Now the guards know the intruders are us. Walking back up we are always surprised by the two men seated in conversation at the building's northeast corner. You would think by now we would expect this lifelike statue, but it never ceases to surprise.

The Convention Center has five sets of steep stairs, at the top of which are vast expanses of windows. One area in particular, that we call the alcove, is particularly bad for strikes. Sometimes we are joined by other urban predators—rats, raccoons, feral cats—who seek the same prey we do. But we are alpha and they go away when we arrive.



The Convention Center "alcove"



Two birds in the alcove, one stunned (Gray Catbird), one dead (Hermit Thrush). Unless really badly damaged, stunned birds can be surprisingly hard to catch as they have a "flight or die" reflex action. We use various techniques to catch these birds—butterfly net, baseball cap, jacket, by hand--and usually succeed. One of our partners, Keith Costley, has achieved the skills of the "bird whisperer." He slowly approaches the bird from the side with his arms wide out. He tries to keep the bird focused on his moving

left hand stealthily slipping his right behind the bird to catch it. His technique and lightning reflexes usually work! The stunned bird is put in a paper bag along with paper toweling for gripping, then labeled. We put the bag in our backpack, and from that point we carry the backpack with its handle instead of wearing it so the live bird does not get jostled too much. Handling live birds has some surprises. For example, the tiny Black-and-white Warbler would gladly tear your hand apart if it could, while the generally obstreperous Gray Catbird is quite docile in the hand. We then head off



Too stunned to know not to try again

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BBC Birder Cam



toward the Inner Harbor.

There are some real pleasures in walking the City at this early hour. It is very quiet with little traffic. You can cross streets almost anywhere, anytime. Over the ten weeks of migration, dawn comes increasingly earlier (or later in the fall). Dawn is quite beautiful at the Inner Harbor. The rising sun highlights the sharp edges of the Aquarium and the red Domino Sugars sign. We almost always see the Mallards near the Constellation, and sometime hear the Peregrine calling above us as it begins its morning forage. Frequently several Black-crowned Night Herons perch on the paddle-boat

dock.

There are few people out until it starts to get light when activity picks up. Especially around the harbor we see joggers, sometimes alone, sometimes in groups, sometimes with dogs. Sidewalk cleaners begin to sweep up by 6:00 am—after all, customers don't like seeing dead birds. We've befriended many of them and they alert us to birds they found and saved. A cleaner once dumped a Bay-breasted Warbler from his dust pan for me! The homeless are sleeping at discrete locales at this hour, sometimes singularly, sometimes in groups. They change locations



based on temperature and rain. If not arising on their own, the City's homeless patrol gives them a gentle nudge to start moving on at sunrise.



Off to the Aquarium, where we see what appears to be bird on the sidewalk. It turns out to be a bird look-alike—a crumpled glove. We often have to check out crumpled paper, leaves, etc. to distinguish them from the real thing. The Aquarium has done a tremendous job reducing bird strikes on its all-glass façade. This includes dimming lights within and persuading the boat attractions nearby to dim their

lights, and installing green (rather than white) night safety lights. We seldom find birds there now. The Aquarium, along with the Holocaust Memorial, have large planted areas that attract migrating birds—in a good way. They provide respite in the hostile urban environment, and song to our early morning ears.

Constellation Energy is the easternmost point of our route. A surprise greets us in the unlit, narrow, concrete canyon alley on the western side of the building—an American Woodcock clearly befuddled by the dark, hostile environment that has killed plenty of other birds. Apparently uninjured, it flies from side to side down the alleyway in an at-



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BBC Birder Cam

tempt to escape. But that's what hoodies are for—while fluttering against the wall we are able to entrap it. It was released in Druid Hill Park within the hour, a much more suitable environment north of the City.

Time to wind our way back through the back streets. Although we don't find many bird strikes by the smaller buildings along the route back, there are often urban surprises that entertain, such as the Bunny wall and with its fashionable abandoned shoe. I once found a dead hummingbird by a small window in a narrow, mostly concrete street. What was it doing there? A final sweep by the Metro stop concludes the walk.



Since we have two injured birds, the day continues with a trip to Phoenix Wildlife Center, located in Phoenix MD above Loch Raven Reservoir--about a half hour drive from downtown. During the drive one of the two birds is hopping and vocalizing like crazy in its paper bag, the other sits silently.

Kathy Woods treats all our injured birds, greeting us cheerfully, often in bare feet, at 7:00 am. About 15 percent of the injured birds we find are injured (not dead), and Kathy manages to restore about two-thirds of them back to health for release again in the wild. Duty done--time now to return home, go to work, work out or whatever our individual schedules require...and to yawn our way through the afternoon.





Note: Now that we are leading field trips to Lake Roland again, we will refer to the park by its official name, Robert E Lee Park, as it is referred to in all publications and signage.

Compiled by Kevin Graff

Mar 10 - Middle Creek - Nine hardy souls came together one chilly morning at this Pennsylvania watering spot for migrating waterfowl. Already many Snow Geese and Tundra Swans had passed through this unseasonably warm stopover. Still, we found over 9,000 Snow Geese and 67 Tundra Swans among the migrants. Other notable birds were 3 Greater Scaup, 2 Bald Eagles, drop-dead looks at a nearby Northern Harrier mantling its kill and a distant look at a Rough-legged Hawk. Only single looks at: Belted Kingfisher, House Finch, Killdeer, Starling(!) and a ROSS'S GOOSE, seen only by Kevin Graff. Sparrow activity was almost non-existent, with no Tree or Fox Sparrows. One memorable experience was people walking along the paved path to the observation point passing literally only a foot or two away from foraging Snow Geese, which (apparently) took no note of their close passage! And me (P. Noell) without my camera for drop-dead close-ups! A hot chocolate stopover at Jeanne Bowman's house (& feeders) yielded 5 more species: Red-shouldered Hawk, Blue Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, Dark-eyed Juncos and Common Grackle(s), for a grand total of 55 species for the day. 9 participants. Leader: Kevin Graff (substitute).

Mar 17 - Blackwater - Several members went down on their own and saw hundreds, possible thousands of ducks, several Tundra Swans, White Pelicans continuing, several raptors overhead, some early shorebird arrivals, brown-headed nuthatches, pine warblers. 50+ species.

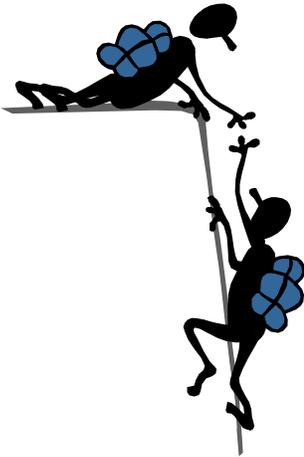
Mar 27 - Robert E Lee Park - Our first walk here in two years. We started the walk along the new boardwalk trail that held several species, some seldom seen in other parts of the park. We saw all but one of the 7 woodpecker species seen locally--minus the sapsucker. The Red-headed Woodpecker, here since November, had molted into full adult plumage (almost). Everyone had a nice look at the Brown Creeper. 37 species. 9 participants. Leader: Kevin Graff

Apr 3 - Robert E Lee Park - Its great to see the Red-headed Woodpecker again. Also we had a Broad-winged Hawk flyover on our way back. 42 species. 19 participants. Leader: John Landers.

Apr 10 - Robert E Lee Park - A beautiful day for birding, but our quarry wasn't that plentiful. Waterfowl were scarce but highlighted by a pair of Green-winged Teals. Raptors were also few in numbers. A young kestrel was very obliging, allowing all to cluster below its perch as it preened. A Bald Eagle was twice sighted, lending credence to reports of a nesting pair. A late sighting of a Northern Harrier and a Cooper's Hawk, high up, was welcome. A 5 'pecker day was notable, lacking Pileated and Hairy for a close out. Phoebe, Tree and Rough-winged Swallow, plus BG Gnatcatcher were reminders of the advancing spring. Both kinglets and a Palm Warbler were also nice additions. The resident Red-headed Woodpecker, now in adult plumage provided the day's highlight for many, affording extended good looks as it posed outside its hole. In all, 45 species, including the lone warbler, make for a decent outing. 45 species. 16 participants. Leader: Paul Noell.

Apr 14 - Smith Island - Point Lookout, southern Maryland across the Chesapeake to Smith Island, walk-around on Smith Island, then back to the boat and back to Point Lookout. Highlights: Gannets on the Chesapeake in various age plumages, a nice, cooperative yellow phase Palm warbler feeding on the grass near a

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BBC Gives a Helping Hand

Starting in late winter and blossoming into the spring, BBC members extended themselves to help other organizations in their spring events. Below is a list of what events we participated in this spring, above and beyond our usual field trips and lectures. If you are interested in helping out at these kinds of events, please contact BBC President Joan Cwi at jafisc@verizon.net or 410 467-5352



Feb 18 & 19 Robert E. Lee Park's Birding Extravaganza. Kevin Graff, Bill Wolf, and Linda Carver manned the BBC exhibit.

April 28th and May 5th, Oregon Ridge and Cromwell Valley Park, Workshop on Youth Bird Watching. Marty Brazeau held a half day workshop at each park on beginning birding for youth, including the latest electronic devices used, at these two Baltimore County parks. Several youth along with their parents attended both sessions.

April 29th at Cylburn, Backyard Birding for Families. Joan Cwi, Debbie Terry, Bill Seigart and Kathy Woods gave a two hour presentation on common backyard birds that included a brief discussion about how birds are special, a visit to the Nature Museum and feeders, and up close looks at live owls and raptors brought in from the Phoenix Wildlife Center. Thirty people attended this event.

May 19th, Cromwell Valley Park. BBC members staffed two display tables (BBC and LOB) during this day-long event. Our tables were staffed Mike Stahl, Mary Schock, and Joan Cwi.

The **Guilford Community Association** asked if we could help them out in creating a list of bird species that can be seen in the community. This is part of a broad range of information, including the natural, architectural and historical, they are collecting to put on their website in celebration of the community's centennial year. Kevin Graff and Joan Cwi are working on this list.

President's Corner

finches and a couple of other seed-eating birds eat these seeds because they sure have a bumper crop.

The **MOS annual conference** was also early this year, taking place in Ocean City in late February rather than in May or June as usual. This, at least, was by design. Members have wanted to have the convention on the eastern shore, but prices in spring were prohibitive. So we changed the date, which in turn changed the types of birds we saw. Despite high winds, rain, snow flurries and tornado warnings, it turned out to be a very successful endeavor. Alas, the planned pelagic trip had to be cancelled because of wind, but our convention planners had contingency plans in place so all attendees remained satisfied. The 190 people attending saw 134 species including Harlequin Ducks, Razorbills, Long-tailed Ducks, Red-throated and Common Loons, Oystercatchers, an Iceland Gull, Northern Gannets, Lark Sparrows and a Saw-whet Owl. According to the evaluations, this convention venue was very popular. Next year we return to our normal schedule and will convene at the Ramada Conference Center, Edgewood on Memorial Day Weekend, May 24-26.

You may have read about the City of Baltimore's possibly **selling or leasing 15 historic landmarks, including Cylburn Mansion and gardens**. Baltimore, like many urban cities, is cash-strapped and unable to budget for the care these buildings require. The intent is to enhance the properties and turn them into profitable enterprises, a strategy that has been used in other cities, states and the Federal government at various levels of success. The Mayor has approved a \$46,500 consulting contract to determine the market value of the buildings for use by potential buyers. Of course this is of great concern to BBC and MOS since we have been housed, for free, at the Mansion since our inception 50 years ago. Little is likely to officially happen until the evaluation report is released late this summer. We will keep our membership apprised of the situation, and how it might impact our organizations.

Field Trips continued

mail box, Barn Swallows flying around, Glossy Ibis, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night-herons, Seaside Spar-

rows singing on territory in the marsh, flyover Monarch Butterflies, Tricolored and Little Blue Herons, Wilson's Snipe, Willet, Sanderlings and Purple Sandpipers, American Oystercatchers, Ospreys on nests, Great Blue Herons on nests on Goat Island, and a distinct change of pace on the Island, in contrast with the hustle of city life. 77 species (65 on island). 42 participants. Leaders: Pete Webb & Joe Hanfman.

Apr 17 - Robert E Lee Park - For our fourth walk at Robert E Lee Park we had a lovely sunny day. We again had very good looks at the Red-headed Woodpecker and at a Bald Eagle overhead, as we did on the first three of these walks. We had Yellow-rumped Warbler before, but this time we also had Common Yellowthroat and Northern Parula. Only these three warblers so far, but spring migration is beginning to be seen and heard. Another newcomer was White-eyed Vireo. Most of our people met at the Light Rail parking lot by the boardwalk at 8:00, but we also had a couple at the bridge when we got there. The boardwalk is a welcome addition to the park. 54 species. 18 participants. Leader: Roberta Ross.

Apr 21 - Huntley Meadows - It was nice to see the greens of spring and spring/summer-like weather. Not as many migrant warblers as expected. The woods were mostly quiet, except for the regular year-round residents and the summer resident Blue-gray Gnatcatchers busy building their nests. I was surprised we didn't get any Chimney Swifts; we had them at Smith Island and other places, and usually do have them at Huntley Meadows and no Broad-winged Hawks??? Should have had some .. ? We had an exceptionally good view of the Wilson's Snipe, not an every day bird. Such a huge bill on that bird. Other highlights: the Prothonotary Warbler seen singing on territory and checking out a possible nest cavity (one of two North American warblers that nest in cavities), and early birds like the White-eyed and Red-eyed vireos, a Green Heron, a Solitary Sandpiper, Wood Ducks are always nice, the swallows and the Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers. And the place itself is always nice, with the level, paved path through the woods opening up onto a wooden boardwalk over the wetlands, the turtles, muskrats and frogs and other wildlife. Mostly sunny, temp's 60's - 70's. 52 species. 15 participants. Leader: Pete Webb

Apr 29 - Swift Night Out - On this beautiful spring evening, we saw only 20 swifts enter the Bookbindery Chimney in Hampden. This was a big surprise since only two evenings before 280 had entered! Despite the small numbers, participants were still enthusiastic. Many were repeat attendees. 20 swifts. 12 participants. Leader: Joan Cwi

The Best Advice I Ever Got continued

someone to help me learn more about birding. He found Chan Robbins. It was 1957 and I was 12 years old.

From that moment I began to bird-watch with Chan and his family. Many trips were made to Garrett County for MOS meetings, Christmas counts at Blackwater NWR, and banding at Ocean City in the fall. Those were magic times, and with Chan's patient teaching I became a decent field observer.

One of the things that I remember most was receiving a post card from Chan while he was studying Laysan albatrosses in Hawaii. How exciting to learn of new birds in new places! That made me think that there was a whole world of birds out there, waiting for me to find.

I graduated from college in 1967, and after my two years of military service (I was drafted at the height of the Viet Nam war, but lucked out by serving our country as assistant lacrosse coach at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point), I decided that I wanted to go to Cornell University to get a degree in ornithology. I was so excited about this, and went to Chan's office at Patuxent to give him the good news.

But Chan was not as excited about my news as I was. He knew me well enough to be able to give me the best advice I ever received: "Don't do it", he said. "Ornithologists just work in labs and colleges, and don't have the money to be able to travel the world to see birds. You would be much happier with a job that allowed travel, rather than be stuck in a museum, college, or lab studying birds."

Chan was right. What I really wanted to do was to see birds, not necessarily study them.

So, the rest, as they say, is history. Taking Chan's advice, in October of 1969 I took a job as a management trainee at McCormick and Company in Baltimore, and within 13 months I was on my first of 187 international trips made during my career. That November, 1969 trip started in London, where northern lapwing became my first "business" lifer; then went on to Bombay, India; and next to Kenya and Uganda where I had a weekend free to go birding from Nairobi. That trip resulted in 61 lifers in England; 34 lifers in India; and 190 lifers in Kenya/Uganda. Chan was right. This was GREAT.

Over the next 35 years I traveled all over the world, seeing over 6,900 species of birds. During each trip I thanked Chan for his wonderful advice by sending him a postcard, often with a photo of a bird on the front, with a message of the incredible experiences I was having, thanks to his advice so many years ago.

BALTIMORE BIRD CLUB

http://baltimorebirdclub.org

A Chapter of

MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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Joan Cwi, Editor
Karen Morley, Design

Submit materials to
Joan Cwi - jafjsc@verizon.net

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:

FALL: July 24 for Sept – Nov 2012 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: _____

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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
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* Through 17: record age here _____

+Chapter Only membership is available to MOS members who are already members of another MOS chapter or who are MOS life members.

Mail completed application with check payable to Baltimore Bird Club, Attn: Membership Chairman, 4915 Greenspring Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21209