

# Chip Notes



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BALTIMORE BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER

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## The Ripple Effect of Conservation - Views of an MOS Scholarship Recipient

Photos and thoughts by Sophie Gerard



Rock shelter for Common Tern chicks—Stratten Island, Scarborough Bay, Maine

*Sophie was one of the 2012 scholarship recipients of the MOS ecology scholarships awarded annually to Maryland teachers and youth leaders for summer workshops at the National Audubon Society's camp on Hog Island, Maine. Each award covers the cost of tuition, room, and board for an intensive five or six-day course of study and instruction in ornithology, ecology, conservation, and natural history. Sophie graciously offered to write about this experience.*

Quick...what's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of seagulls? My first thought, ducking under an umbrella at the beach as they dive bomb me attempting to snatch my \_\_\_\_\_ ( fill in the blank), hot dog, french fries, sandwich, chips. To most of us, we consider nothing but a nuisance and once the threat of losing our lunch has past, we rarely give it a second thought other than to relay the dramatic tale to a friend. Much to my surprise there ARE people who do give it a second thought and in fact devote their lives to studying the behavior of seabirds like gulls. Did you know there was a researcher who sat outside a McDonald's taking notes as seagulls flew at people exiting the building causing them to spill their food. It happened over and over and over again, the birds seemed to have "figured" out a solution to get what they were after. So, what does this mean and why is it significant? After attending a Maine Seabird Biology and Conservation program at Audubon Camp in Maine on Hog Island, these questions seemed more meaningful .



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## President's Corner

by Joan Cwi



Increasingly this is becoming the era of electronic communication for reasons of breadth of coverage, speed of delivery, and cost efficiency. BBC is already incorporating this media in delivering our monthly E-News (which did not exist prior to last year) and Chip Notes. And MOS is in the process of going the same route in terms of delivering Yellowthroat.

**BBC Facebook Page.** There are now two more electronic communication channels that are open to BBC members. As announced in the August E-News, BBC now has its own Facebook page that already has 70 members and almost daily postings. If you are interested in checking it out or joining, the page can be found at <http://www.facebook.com/groups/382565775136349/>

To see postings, you need to be a member of Facebook; if you want to contribute you need both to be a Facebook member and join the BBC page.

**MDOsprey has become MDBirding!** There has been another birding development that will be of interest to many of you. For years Norm Saunders has administered MDOsprey at his own expense as a forum for Maryland birders to communicate their statewide bird observations. It was a wonderful forum, but had the disadvantage of being limited to 600 people and therefore excluded many people who wanted to join. For various reasons, Norm has disbanded MDOsprey. We thank him for his years of service to all Maryland birders.

In its place we now have MDBirding, a similar open-forum for Maryland bird discussion that has

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## Conservation CORNER

### HELP SAVE THE RED KNOT FROM EXTINCTION!

By Dixie Mullineaux

The spring migration of shorebirds along the Delaware Bay is one of the most amazing birding spectacles that we can witness in our area. Perhaps you have been fortunate enough to Red Knots on their stopover from Tierra del Fuego in South America to their Arctic breeding grounds at one of the many favored spots..Pickering Beach, Slaughter Beach or Port Mahon, for example. This refueling stop is crucial to the survival of the Red Knot, as they pause to feast on the eggs of the Horseshoe Crab.

The Horseshoe Crab has been coming up on the shores of the Delaware Bay to mate and lay eggs for millions of years. Their population has dwindled significantly over the past 20 years, due to harvesting for eel and conch bait, caught mostly for foreign markets. The crabs are also used in a medical test to ensure the purity of injectable drugs and implants. Technically this should not be fatal for the crabs, but there is a mortality rate of 30%

Surprisingly, **the State of Maryland allows for the highest harvest of Horseshoe Crabs!**

The numbers taken in Maryland have been the highest of anywhere on the East Coast in the past two years.

This is a deadly scenario for the Red Knot, whose numbers have already decreased more than 75% since the 1990's. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has listed the Red Knot as a species warranting listing under the Endangered Species Act and it may soon be listed as Threat-

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**WHEN:** September 22, 2012, 9:00-4:00 (optional pre-conference birdwalk begins at 8:00)

**WHERE:** Ashland Nature Center, Hockessin, DE

**MORE INFORMATION:** <http://www.aba.org/events/>

**TO REGISTER:** <https://www.aba.org/events/MAYBC12/reg/>

Dear Youth Birders,

ABA and Leica Sport Optics have partnered to create a unique birding experience focusing upon young birders and their mentors in the Mid-Atlantic area. The ABA Mid-Atlantic Young Birder Conference, co-hosted by the Delaware Nature Society and DOS's Delaware Dunlins Youth Birders Club, will prove to be a very special event this fall. The first-ever Mid-Atlantic Young Birder Conference will take place on the beautiful grounds of the Ashland Nature Center in Hockessin, Delaware. Bird walks and hawk watching at the peak of fall migration will feature prominently, as will concurrent indoor learning sessions for new and experienced young birders alike, allowing everyone from elementary school through late teens to find things of interest. There will also be special sessions by and for parents, mentors, and club coordinators.

Keynote presenters include Bill Thompson III, editor of Bird Watcher's Digest and author of The Young Birder's Guide to Birds of North America, and Marie McGee, ABA's Young Birder of the Year 2012. Bill and Marie will deliver a one-two punch that will have everyone fired up about birding and its potential to enrich and connect us all, kid or adult. Each registered participant will receive a FREE copy of The Young Birders Guide to Birds of Eastern North America upon checking in.



# Birdbits.....

## MEMOIRS OF A BIRD NERD

By Lindsay Jacks

*Lindsay is fairly new member of the BBC and has been a core member of our Lights Out Program this spring. She is an avian keeper for the Baltimore Zoo, and writes from this unique perspective.*

At the young age of 24, I needed a life change. I had been doing theater for 6 years from Blue Man Group to CENTERSTAGE in Baltimore. One bad night at work made me want to change my chosen path. I thought to myself, "what do I like the most?" and the answer was animals so I decided to head back to school to obtain yet another degree, this time in Biology. I also decided while enrolling in school I should look for an internship or volunteer work at a zoo to get a feel for my new role in life. I aimed high by searching the website at the Smithsonian's National Zoo in DC and found an internship opening in the Bird House. When, I first imagined working at a zoo, I envisioned being a keeper of big carnivores like lions and tigers or large land mammals like giraffes and elephants. So, when reading an internship at the Bird House, I thought well, not what I expected but I could try it out. After all, I did like parrots and toucans. Ha! Little did I know that I would fall in love with birds, dedicate my career to them, and become what I am proud to call myself-- a bird nerd.

After my year long internship at the Bird House, a keeper position opened up there and I landed my first avian keeper job at the National Zoo. As a Bird House keeper, I began my day making diets for all the birds that I care for on my primary line. Then the daily cleaning of every exhibit in and outdoors. The different species I fed and cleaned daily ranged from extinct in the wild Micronesian Kingfishers to non-threatened Swamp Sparrows to dangerous Double-wattled Cassowaries to cuddly Brown Kiwis.

One of the greatest challenges of being an avian keeper is learning your birds. Not just general information such as how far in advance does a Blue-crowned Motmot make a burrow before laying eggs (6 months at the most), but learning the personality



**Who can resist these African Penguins?**

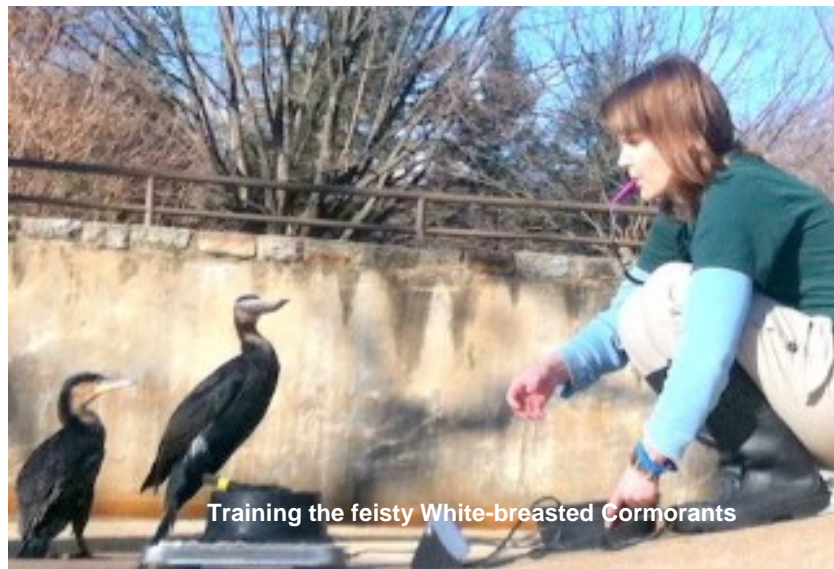
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and behaviors of each bird you care for. The Lilac-breasted Roller that always swoops down onto the same tree daily when you come into the exhibit doesn't one day. It isn't just odd, it means that the bird may be sick. Also, the bird that is normally social and calls when you walk in an exhibit that suddenly doesn't could mean that he/she may be sitting on eggs somewhere in the aviary. Small changes in a bird's behavior means a big deal to a keeper. Birds won't lie around the house and act lethargic or meow every few minutes like your house cat when sick or upset. Instead they may roost in a different location, ruffle their feathers, or fly around more than usual. Knowing your bird's normal behavior and when it changes is important.

Learning the personality is also challenging but rewarding. When I began my position as keeper, I had to care for a male and female pair of Red-fanned Parrots. The male would dive bomb my head the minute I went into the enclosure while his mate would fly to sit on my shoulder. The aggression from the male and the too-close-for-comfort landing locality of the female made cleaning the enclosure impossible—something had to change. I needed to figure out where the aggression was coming from by the male and why the female was over-friendly. I began watching the birds outside the enclosure daily and recording notes. I soon realized from the observations that the female was dominant over the male—she ate from the food pan always first and she would push him to the ground to express her dominance when keepers entered and then fly to the shoulder of the person. Since the male was being pushed to the ground by his mate he was associating the keeper as the cause of this behavior. To solve the situation, all it took was offering him a peanut every time I cleaned and pushing the female off my shoulder and giving her a peanut once she had landed back on a perch. Before long thanks to the treats, the male associated the keeper as a good thing and the female quit landing on my shoulder because she only received a treat when on the perch. Then the treat was slowly removed and the good behavior from both birds continued.

Another challenge but the greatest reward as an avian keeper is training your birds. Training is vital to being a good keeper. It eliminates



Training the feisty White-breasted Cormorants

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## The Ripple Effect of Conservation (continued)

As an ecological educator I have spent years looking at environmental issues and constantly coming to the realization that we live in a delicately balanced world. While other species simply fail to flourish in areas populated by people, the gulls ability to thrive and more importantly reproduce has significant implications. Throughout the week in the



Common Tern nest and eggs



Common Terns in Maine

Maine program participants were offered first-hand experience into such matters. We spent mornings constructing shelters for newly hatched Common Tern chicks who are routinely “picked off” by growing populations of Herring Gulls. Eider duck chicks face a similar fate if unable to effectively hide. Confronted with the

unpleasant mental images of large gulls swooping down to carry off chicks for a mid-day snack, many participants came to the conclusion of somehow trying to manage the increasing population of gulls. Interestingly enough, the moment we began considering how we as “nature and animal

lovers” would humanly carry this out, our team of instructors, among them scientists and curators of world renowned Universities pointed out this is not just an isolated concern. It is happening all over the world with many other species, one being, the Bald Eagle.



After the ban of DDT, scientists, birders, politicians and countless others focused their attention on working to increase Bald Eagle populations. The efforts eventually paid off and Bald eagle populations began to re-



Eider Duck hens and ducklings

bound. Similar to the tern and eider chicks whose numbers are threatened by species like the Herring gull, Double-breasted cormorant chicks are preyed upon by eagles. Bald eagles actually threaten other populations of birds in Maine like the cormorant. So, what now? It's not like anyone in the group was about to suggest any solutions for humanely getting rid of Bald Eagles. In our eyes, gulls are one thing, but eagles are untouchable. Is one life more valuable than the other?

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The dilemma surely gave us lots to consider regarding the ever delicately balanced world we live and in the countless species of plants and animals we share it with. Off -set one element and the ripple effect is infinite. I believe my influence as an environmental educator is directly related to my personal involvement in programs



Herring Gull and Double-crested Cormorants



Bald Eagle at Hog Island, Maine

like the one on Hog Island. The insight a person receives from first hand involvement is indeed irreplaceable. However, as an educator it is my job to take those meaningful personal encounters and turn them in rich teaching opportunities in effort to create time and space for others to experience such understanding and powerful revelations.

Thank you to the Maryland Ornithological Society for providing me the opportunity to attend the 'Sea Bird Biology and Conservation Workshop.' The trip will certainly have lasting impact on the lens through which I see the world and help remind me something we all often forget - *"when one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world"*- John Muir.

## Nothing to Crow About

*A clipping, brown and tattered by age, was sent to us by Patsy Perlman.*

The metal stripes used by the United States Department of the Interior to tag migratory and other birds are now inscribed: "notify Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C." They once read: "Washington biological Survey," abbreviated because of lack of space on the small tabs to Wash Biol. Surv."

This was changed after an Arkansas farmer shot a crow and disgustedly wrote to the wildlife agency: "Dear Sires: I shot one of your crows the other day. My wife followed the cooking instructions on the leg tag and I want to tell you it was horrible."

Knight News Service



*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

**May 1 - Robert E Lee Park** - Today we saw or heard 67 species of birds including 11 species of warblers. Our group enjoyed long close looks at the Red-headed Woodpecker and for many, first of the year looks at Gray Catbird, Eastern Kingbird, Spotted Sandpiper and Red-eyed Vireo. Fine morning spent with birds and friends. 67 species. 13 participants. Leader: Peter Lev.

**May 5 - Milford Mill Park** - This crowded as usual trip produced again - 14 varieties of warblers including Cape May Warbler, Wilson's Warbler (on return by lower loop), summer resident Veeries and migrant Swainson's Thrushes, late lingering White-throated Sparrows, Scarlet Tanagers, and a host of regular woodland birds. 58 species. 21 participants. Leader: Pete Webb.

**May 6 - Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park** - Everyone enjoys seeing 8 common loons flying over, Swamp Sparrow, Scarlet Tanager, both orioles and 12 warbler species (Parula, Redstart, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, Blackpoll, Black-and-white and Canada). 59 species. 7 participants. Leaders: Elise & Paul Kreiss.

**May 8 - Robert E Lee Park** - 2 adult and immature Red-shouldered Hawks soaring above our head. 12 warbler species. Both orioles. Overcast and cool. Morning become more overcast and wind picked up from 4 mph to about 15 mph by the end of the trip. Good effort and good time had by all. 68 species. 21 participants. Leader: Ron Davis.

**May 13 - Owings Mill Mall Wetland** - An Orchard Oriole nest was found during this walk. We watched Barn Swallows collecting mud and grass at the large settlement pond. Warblers found were Northern Waterthrush, Tennessee Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Yellow Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Canada Warbler, Wilson's Warbler and Yellow-breasted Chat. 60 species. 7 participants. Leader: Keith Costley.

**May 15 - Robert E Lee Park** - The steady rain at 8:00 am kept everyone away except me, the leader. But the rain stopped by 8:10, so I decided to walk a bit. Not a lot of bird activity, and couldn't find the Red-headed Woodpecker. At 10:00 I was joined by two other birders; and by 11:00 by a third. Highlights were Great Blue and Black-crowned Night Herons at the dam with a couple of Solitary Sandpipers and many swifts and swallows. Great day for raptors - Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks, 3 Osprey, 4 Bald Eagles, and a great view of 4 Barred Owls, the parents and two fledglings still fluffy with down! Also saw both orioles, including a Baltimore chasing some crows, and a Scarlet Tanager. Other adventures included hundred of tiny toads on the pathway and being narrowly missed being hit by a falling tree limb. 61 species. 4 participants. Leader: Joan Cwi.

**May 20 - Halethorpe Ponds** - I was joined on Sunday morning by one other birder for the BBC's field trip to Halethorpe Ponds #4 and 5 in Baltimore County. It was a pleasant but unremarkable outing as migrants were nearly non-existent and even some of the regulars were few. Good num-

*(Continued on page 9)*



bers of Cedar Waxwings were omnipresent – they seem to have suddenly returned from oblivion -- and we saw expected numbers of Chimney Swift, Warbling Vireo and Yellow Warbler. Other warblers were Prothonotary, Redstart, Parula and Blackpoll, the only migrant. We found only one oriole -- a male Orchard Oriole. It was good, though, to see an adult Black-crowned Night Heron on the big pond, a species that seems much less common here than it used to be. 48 species. 2 participants. Leader: Joel Martin.

**May 22 - Robert E Lee Park** - A lot more birds were heard than seen. Folks did see a Yellow-throated Vireo, Scarlet Tanager and Bald Eagle. Yellow Warblers were there in numbers, but well-hidden in the willows on the now very overgrown "island" in the lake. We were very glad to have Gary Green, a very enthusiastic "newer" birder who lives in the city, with us! 61 species. 9 participants. Leader: Mary Chetelat.

**May 29 - Robert E Lee Park** - Only one birder showed up and reported 60+ species in 4 hours.

**Jun 2 - Bombay Hook** - Weather: mostly sunny, 70's - 80's. Highlights: a mama turkey with six fuzzy tan babies crossing the road at Bombay Hook, both adult and sub-adult Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons at Bear Swamp Pool (usual spot hidden in the trees), Black-necked Stilts on nest at Shearneck Pool, American Avocets in full breeding plumage, one fly-by Red Knot at the beach at Ted Harvey WMA, Black Skimmers at the Ted Harvey south impoundment, Willow Flycatchers, Marsh Wrens, Yellow Warblers, Orchard Orioles and Seaside Sparrows on the boardwalk trail before Raymond Pool (where the Avocets also flew by for our first look at them before viewing them later at Raymond Pool), and a surprisingly low number of other shorebirds; apparently most have gone north by the beginning of June. This may be a long-distance all-day trip, but it's worth it to see some of these birds which just aren't easy to come by closer to home. 73 species, 6 participants. Leader: Pete Webb.

**Jun 9 - Carroll County Field Birds** - Everybody who didn't come missed a really good trip this time. Highlights: Got all of the serious target species and saw them well! These included a cooperative Vesper Sparrow perched on a nearby pickup truck in a field, singing and posing close enough for excellent views with binoculars, Grasshopper Sparrows at a couple of locations, seen well at Jasontown Road, along with the Vesper Sparrow and the Horned Lark on the road in front of us. The Dickcissel was found on North Fringer Road - it was singing in an evergreen tree on the west side of the road at the first bend of the road when going south from the intersection with Walnut Grove Road a bit south of Ruggles Road. The Bobolink was more of a luck bird - it was doing a singing display flight which was heard driving by; we backed up to see it perched a way back in the field, where it remained, motionless and quiet, for the few minutes we studied it with binoculars and telescope, without any further attention-getting behavior near the road. Had it simply been sitting there as we went by, we would have missed it. Along the roads during the trip, we saw six Red-headed Woodpeckers, including two visible from our picnic lunch stop on Nusbaum Road next to Big Pipe Creek, and four American Kestrels including a pair seen together, a cooperative Willow Flycatcher at the tight bend on Walnut Grove Road north of Taneytown, and enjoyed nice looks at singing Meadowlarks. 63 species. 2 participants. Leader: Pete Webb.

## President's Corner

the advantage of being available for posting to all interested parties, and can be accessed by non-members who want to review content. Jared Fisher is the administrator. If you have not joined already, detailed sign up instructions are available at:

[https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/mbirding/4\\_IzYlNvHpQ](https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/mbirding/4_IzYlNvHpQ)

**BBC Website.** You may have noticed that the BBC website was down for a couple of weeks this summer due to troubles with our hosting site. Our webmaster, Terry Ross, changed the hosting company to Hostgator, which offers better service and more modern features. You won't notice the change when entering our website, but this new hosting company will allow us to modernize our site in the upcoming months. Thank you Terry for your prompt attention to this.

## Conservation CORNER

ened or Endangered, since it's population has declined at an unprecedented rate. We are watching the extinction of the Red Knot before our very eyes. The Maryland Ornithological Society has made a formal request to Governor Martin O'Malley to place a moratorium on the harvesting of Horseshoe Crabs in Maryland for bait, and for restrictions to reduce mortality caused my medical harvesting. You may support this request by writing your own letter to:

**Governor Martin O'Malley**

**100 State Circle**

**Annapolis Maryland 21401**

You may also e-mail him on this subject to:

**<http://www.governor.maryland.gov/mail/>  
(note, limit of 4000 characters)**

## Horseshoe Crabs and Red Knots on Delaware Bay

Photos by Bill Hubick



Spawning Horseshoe Crabs on Delaware Bay



Thousands of shorebirds feeding along Port Mahon Rd, Delaware



Thousands of shorebirds feed on the Horseshoe Crab's eggs and depend upon this annual feast to fuel their long northward migration, including the Red Knot (3rd from right)

## MEMOIRS OF A BIRD NERD continued

stress when you have to catch your birds to trim bills, nails, feathers, or to have a vet check in case of injury or sickness. After two years at the National Zoo, I relocated to the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore, where I am still an avian keeper. At the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore, I spend every morning and afternoon training the 5 adorable yet feisty White-breasted Cormorants that live at Rock Island with 47 African Penguins. The Cormorants are scale, crate, and station trained (trained to go to a certain area and stay there). Their next challenge is target training where they will touch a buoy with the tips of their bill with a one-word command. One can train any species of bird from that cute little finch or sparrow that visits your feeder to an exotic Northern Ground Hornbill. All it takes is a plan and a reward. Birds are extremely smart no matter the size and strive to learn more skills.

Once, the cormorants excelled at one aspect of training its then time to take their next step up. When I first began training them, one cormorant named Blue for his band color would come to the training session and stand next to the scale or crate and not do his desired behavior even though he had exhibited it in the past. He was testing me to see if he could still get the



Training continues for the Cormorants

reward without doing the behavior. However, after observing the others get the reward after doing the correct behavior, he too wised up and jumped on the scale -- he didn't want to leave without a yummy trout. Blue still tries to test me every once and while. He will come to the training session with a stick in his bill, drop it at my feet and flirt with me with his pretty blue eyes. It takes will power on my part to not give in and give him a fish.

Feeding, cleaning, training, medicating, restraining for vets, bill trims, keeper chats, and more encompass my daily routine as an avian keeper at a zoo. Every day is a different challenge and every day offers an amazing reward. Whether its seeing a bird use a perch that you added to its exhibit to teaching a family about sustainable seafood to conserve penguins. If someone had asked me when I graduated college what do I envision myself doing in 10 years-never would I have said feather trimming a Saddle-billed Stork. Now, I can proudly say that I do.

BALTIMORE BIRD CLUB

http://baltimorebirdclub.org

A Chapter of

MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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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:**

WINTER: Oct. 24 for Dec. 2012—Feb 2013 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 \_\_\_\_\_

Hard Copy \_\_\_\_\_

**Check dues category and circle amount sent.**

Category	1-YR	½ YR	Chapter Only+
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$35.00	\$17.50	\$15.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Household	\$45.00	\$22.50	\$20.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining	\$100.00		
<input type="checkbox"/> Junior*	\$10.00	\$5.00	\$5.00

\* 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