

Chip Notes

BALTIMORE BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER

No. 390

Winter 2014

WINTER 2014 No. 390

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Reminder!

TIME TO PAY
YOUR ANNUAL BBC
MEMBERSHIP DUES -
payment envelopes are
in the mail!

See **page 12** for
application form.

PLEASE RETURN AS SOON
AS POSSIBLE.

Ode to Martha, the Last Passenger Pigeon

by Joan Cwi

September 1, 2014 marks the 100th anniversary of the death of the last Passenger Pigeon, named Martha. Born in captivity at the Cincinnati Zoo in 1885, she died at the age of 29 in 1914. Passenger Pigeons once accounted for up to 40 percent of the total U.S. bird population with an estimated 3-5 billion occupying North America when European explorers first arrived. In migration, flocks were reported that were so large they sometimes blocked the sun for hours. Yet by the early 1900's they had all but disappeared falling victim to two threats that still haunt endangered species today—overhunting and habitat loss.

I was recently helping clear out old journals (now available online) in BBC's Cylburn library when I came across an article on Passenger Pigeons in Maryland Birdlife, March to December 1951 about an event witnessed in 1876. The article was written by Edward R. Grant and titled *The Last Maryland Flight of the Passenger Pigeon*. It seemed fortuitous that one of our past members documented in 1951 this eye-witness account seen as a young man in 1876, and that I rediscovered it in Martha's anniversary year. Below are some excerpts from this article.

Although I many not be the only man alive who has seen Passenger Pigeons (Estopistes migratoris) in Maryland, I expect I am the only person who can give an eye-witness account of the last big flight and the disaster which befell it.

I was born and reared at Franklin Hill, a few miles north of Westernport at the base of the Allegheny Plateau in Allegany County, Maryland. My earliest memories of the Passenger Pigeon, or Wild Pigeon, as we always called it, date back to the early 1870's. At that





...in with the New

As many of you know, Karen Morley, our previous chairperson for the MOS/BBC Collections Committee, has left Maryland. This summer she sold her house here in Baltimore, and now plans on migrating north in the summer to her "camp" on a lakeside in Maine and migrating south to Arizona for the winter. So she will not be around to continue guiding us in our endeavors. Karen, we thank you for all you managed to accomplish over the last couple of years and look with some trepidation at all the tasks remaining!



For several months now I have been looking for Karen's replacement as Collections Chairperson with no results. Then, out of nowhere, I get an email from John Dennehy stating he would be interested in taking on this interesting project

as he loves "to organize and catalog things!" John and I met at the Cylburn office where I introduced him to the project, showed him the various collections and inundated him with reams of materials on what has been accomplished to date and what remains to be done. (I was actually surprised at how much has been completed in the inventory effort!) Despite the fact there is a huge amount left to inventory and deaccess (and we haven't even inherited Chan's collections yet), John

Continued on page 4

Conservation CORNER

State of the Birds 2014 Report

by Carol Schreter

The numbers from bird counts such as the Christmas Bird Count, the North American Breeding Bird Survey, and eBird get analyzed, but what happens then? What do these numbers show? The State of the Birds



2014 report uses these numbers to assess long-term population trends of our nation's birds. It presents these trends in three ways: by habitat,

with a Watch List of the most the vulnerable species, and with a list of 33 common bird species in steep decline. The report points to conservation policies that work, and to what we as citizens can do to help protect birds and their habitat.

I especially appreciate the idea of "Preserving Abundance." Keeping common birds common -- while we still can -- is as important as preventing the extinction of rare species, notes this report. For instance, the Chimney Swift is grouped with "aerial insectivores" in decline, a group that also includes the Bank Swallow and Common Nighthawk. The State of the Birds 2014 report claims that the rapid decline in Chimney Swifts, which has so surprised our BBC SwiftWatch Team, is a result of the increased effectiveness and use of agricultural insecticides. Pesticides such as neonicotinoids have greatly reduced the number of flying insects needed for the birds' survival. Neonicotinoids are also suspected in declines in the number of native pollinators.

Continued on page 4

Ode to Martha, the Last Passenger Pigeon, cont'd

time this species was a regular spring and fall migrant in Allegany County. It normally arrived from the South in about the middle of April. The return flight took place during Indian Summer; I suppose this would make it about the first half of October. I always saw fewer in the fall than in the spring, because they left in scattered bunches and returned in a, so to say, concentrated body...

To my knowledge the Wild Pigeon did not rear its young in Allegany County in the '70's. In those parts of Garrett County with which I was familiar... they were not found around the towns themselves, only back in the nearby woods. I believe these birds were attracted to Garrett County by the abundance of farmland, which supplied the grain which formed such an important part of their diet. Acorns, which they also relished, were found in abundance in surrounding woodland...

The Pigeons were usually lean when they first arrived in the springtime, but they quickly put on weight. When they were well fed up, my father, Patrick Grant, would go out and shoot about a dozen. I well remember his returning from a successful hunt in the Franklin area, laying his dozen plump birds on the kitchen table, and saying to my mother: "Rosey, pick out what you want and give the remainder to the neighbors." My two brothers and I always looked forward to a pigeon meal; they were the finest kind of eating...

On New Years Day in 1876, I walked from Phoenix Foot up to Barton... We had had fine weather all through December, and the first day of the new year was warm and sunny—so warm that I was



dressed in summer clothes. At about 1:30 or 2 o'clock in the afternoon, when I was about

half way... a strange shadow suddenly engulfed me. Looking up, I was astonished to see a tremendous flock of Wild Pigeons flying toward the west. Had this event taken place in April instead of January, I would still have been greatly impressed due to the large size of the flock. It was definitely the largest I ever saw. But what were these birds doing in Maryland in the dead of winter? As I watched the flock in amazement, the birds continued to come, in a dense band which as I recall was about 75-100 feet wide. The flock stretched continuously for something between one-eight and one-quarter of a mile, and contained thousands and



thousands of birds. They flew rapidly westward and soon disappeared over Phoenix Hill in Garrett County. During the remaining two miles to Barton I watched for additional flocks of Wild Pigeons, but no others appeared...

I have read (Coues and Prentiss, *Avifauna Columbiana*, Bull. U.S. Nat. Mus. 26;90-91, 1883) that the last large flock seen in the vicinity of Washington, D.C., was in about 1858 or 1859. The only Maryland records I can find since the flight I observed were small flocks near Jefferson and Laurel, both in the fall of 1889.

It is a terrible shame that such a fine bird should have disappeared, never to return. Let us all strive together for better protection of endangered species so that no other shall follow the fateful path of the Wild Pigeon.

President's Corner cont'd



determined to stick it out despite getting a new appreciation on the magnitude of the task ahead. FYI, John is a nurse at Sinai Hospital (right next to Cylburn) and an expert birder, but feels the time is right to take on some other responsibilities. He has been working hard at this task since that meeting a few weeks ago.

Which brings to mind a couple of other recent replacements and additions to our volunteer staff that took place over the summer. Claire Wayner is now our BBC Facebook administrator replacing Mike Hudson, who is off to college. Roberta Ross became Membership Secretary just in time for dues renewal, replacing Catherine Bishop who donated more than a decade of her life to this task. John Robinson is now leading our Youth Program, taking over from Marty Brazeau. Lynne Parks joined the Conservation Committee and Peter Lev joined the Field Trip Committee. And this doesn't include the many newcomers who are leading field trips or who participate in the Lights Out Baltimore effort.

We are a volunteer organization. With no paid staff, we accomplish a tremendous amount each year. But we need constant replenishment—replacements for our old feathers and fresh new faces and ideas so we don't get stale. Most notably, with Karen's departure, we are still missing a vice president—no one to take on the helm when the president (namely me) cannot be around or wants to retire. If you think you want to give this position a try—call me!

Conservation CORNER cont'd

So decreasing pesticide use, in agriculture and around the home, will benefit bees and butterflies as well as aerial insectivores, says this report.

Key Policies for America's Birds

What are the key governmental policies that help protect our nation's birds, according to educators and scientists of the 23 organization collaborative that created this report? If we birders want to help protect our nations' birds, we may need to raise our voices in support for these policies:

- The North American Wetlands Conservation Act and Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act;
- Revenue provided by the sales of the Duck Stamp;
- The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels treaty that endorses America's bird-friendly ocean fishing;
- Conservation programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Migratory Bird Joint Ventures, and State and Tribal Wildlife Grants;
- The Conservation Reserve Program; and
- Policies that reduce the impacts of climate change and help birds adapt.

The report, a 4-minute video overview, and other information on this State of the Birds 2014 can be accessed at a website created by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, at:

<http://www.stateofthebirds.org>

For a 4-minute National Public Radio segment (NPR, September 9, 2014) about this report go to:

www.npr.org/2014/09/09/347131720/u-s-gets-middling-marks-on-2014-state-of-birds-report-card

Memorial Walk for Joy Wheeler

On Sunday, October 25th, we held a bird walk in memory of Joy Wheeler at Northampton Furnace Trail in the Loch Raven watershed. Joy led walks there for many years. This was one of her favorite birding spots. Nine

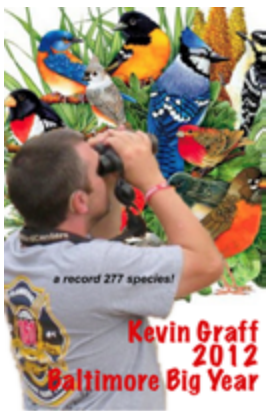


BBC members joined us in the walk, along with Joy's daughter, Debbie Wheeler. We all had fond flashbacks of Joy as Debbie

whipped out a trash bag and started collecting cans and bottles left on the trailside by inconsiderate users, just as her mother did for many years. It was a great day for birding and memories—see the Field Trip Report for details. Debbie is wearing the white sweatshirt in the photo.

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Place Baltimore Big Year?!

You may recall that Kevin Graff beat Rick Blom's long-standing Baltimore Big Year (City/County combined) record of 265 birds in 2012 when he found 277 birds! Impressive enough, but Kevin never gave up hope of beating his own record. In 2013 he found 271 birds, giving him both first and second place records, and this year he is trying to surpass his own first place record. As of mid-October,



he accumulated 276 species for 2014, one short of his 2012 record. Will he surpass himself for first place this year? Stay tuned... Regardless of outcome, he will still hold first, second and third place for Baltimore Big Year, leaving Rick's record in fourth place.

SEP 21 (Sun)

Chimney Swifts at Dusk

Preparation for the swift watch found most of our usual chimneys unproductive. Roland Park Country School—none, Druid Hill Park Conservatory and Hampden chimneys—only a handful, Scottish Rite Temple—none. So we scurried around following other leads and chose the Johns Hopkins Safety and Security Building at 3001 Remington Street and St. Michael's Archangel Church on Belair Road. It was a beautiful end of summer evening and both sites brought plenty of people. The Remington chimney was smallish and located at the intersection of two small urban streets.



Our small crowd of watchers kept growing as local residents and JHU's security police joined in reaching a maximum of 33 people. After about a half hour of circling and circling,

260 swifts slowly entered the chimney to the delight of the crowd who were encouraging them on as they teased us with false forays close to the opening.

St. Michaels, where last fall we saw about 2,000 enter at the same time of year, had NONE this year. A few swifts circled around, but for reasons we don't understand, they rejected last year's favorite, much to the dismay of the 20 watchers who had gathered. A few did enter the smaller chimney to the rear. We really don't know why the swifts change chimneys from year to year. And we can only speculate if their decreasing numbers (see Conservation Corner) make them select smaller chimneys. Nevertheless, even in smaller numbers, they are a joy to watch!



Birdbits.....

Sweets for Tweets

Our friends at the Greater Baltimore Chapter of American Association of Zoo Keepers (GBAAZK) held a fundraiser for Lights Out Baltimore on August 7th, hosted by La Cakerie in Towson. It was a huge success! We all ate (and drank) well, and there was a raffle, door prizes and lots of socializing. Best of all, we earned \$475 for one of our favorite causes.

Save the Date!

Time Again for January's Covered Dish Dinner and Lecture

BBC will once again have our Covered Dish Dinner and Lecture, open to all members, on the evening of Sunday January 11th, 2015 beginning at 4:30 pm. Once again it will be held at Cylburn's Visitor Center. We look forward to this opportunity to socialize, see the exhibits, have some fun, and hear a fantastic lecture.

This year's featured talk is "Exploring New Guinea in Search of Birds of Paradise and Other Natural Wonders." Ornithologist and tropical ecologist Bruce Beehler made more than 50 field trips to New Guinea over a span of four decades. He will present highlights of his field trips, with a focus on the birds and other amazing inhabitants of New Guinea's rainforests.

Be sure to contact Kevin Graff (KeyWeststyle2001@gmail.com) to let him know you are coming and what you plan to bring. If you prefer the telephone, call Joan Cwi at 410-467-5352. Hope to see you there!

Speaking of Window Collisions...

The Cylburn Arboretum has installed Acopian BirdSavers on the southwest corner windows of the Vollmer Center where they have the most trouble with bird strikes. These BirdSavers were purchased by BBC from funds dedicated for this purpose from the Lights Out Baltimore budget. These simple “hanging strings” made of parachute cord have been found to be quite effective in preventing bird strikes. They are a simple design, inexpensive, easy to install, and aesthetically pleasing. Starting with spring migration, we will be able to see if they make a difference...



If interested for your own home, go to their website to order or to download instructions on how you can make them yourself. <http://www.birdsavers.com/>

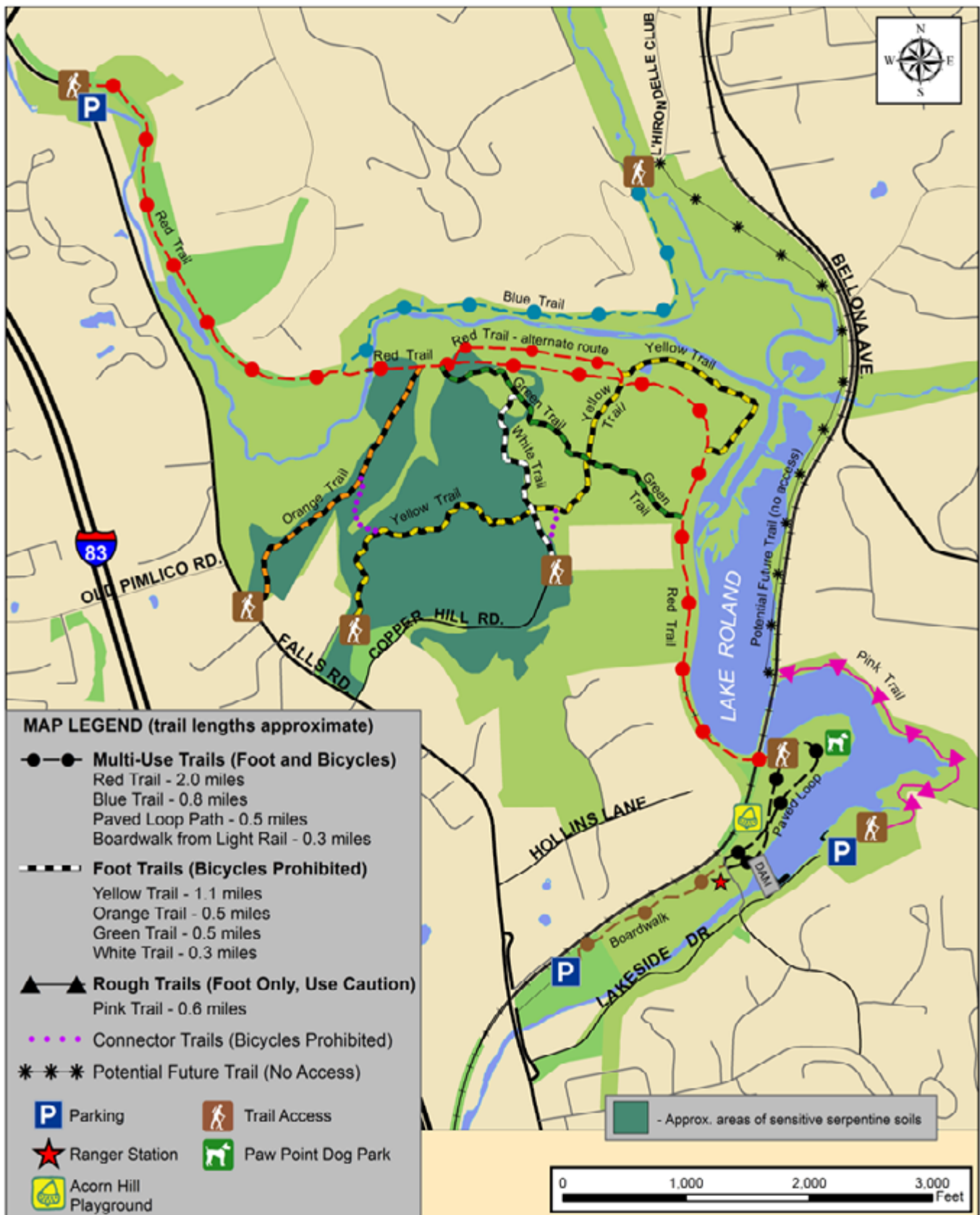
Interested in Birding Costa Rica in 2015?

The 2015 trip in early April has already filled up due to the overwhelming success of last year's trip to Costa Rica. However, Mario Cordoba and Bob Ringler are working on setting up a second trip in mid-April for 2015. If you think you might be interested, contact Bob at ringler1@comcast.net

Some people have all the luck...

And one of them was Chris Davidson who won a Brother printer at Baldino's Lock and Key card drawing! And being the generous person he is, he donated it to the Baltimore Bird Club for our use where it arrived just as we need it most. John Dennehy, the new Collections Chairperson, has already put the printer to good use compiling inventories of our belongings. Thank you Chris for this generous offer as well at your time during field walks, bringing in all the free give-aways at meetings, and often chauffeuring some of our members who can no longer drive. We are most appreciative of all you do.

ROBERT E. LEE PARK TRAILS



Displayed park property boundaries and extent of serpentine soils are approximate and not to be considered authoritative. Trails captured through the use of GPS equipment. Map created by the Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks, Revised June, 2014.

Opposite: Robert E Lee Park has produced a great trail map to the park. You can cut out this one, or print it from their website at:

<http://relpnc.org/relpnc/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Robert-E-Lee-Park-Trails-Map-June-2014.pdf?426ac9>

Welcome!

A warm Baltimore Bird Club welcome goes out to the following members who have joined us since the Fall Chip Notes was published. Thank you for joining and we look forward to seeing you out there on our birding trips and at our meetings!

From Baltimore:

Laurence Doering & Donna Honemann
Judy Jacobson
Bernd & Lucy Kiekebusch-Steinitz
Husain Poonawala
Peter Rattigan
Betsy Willett

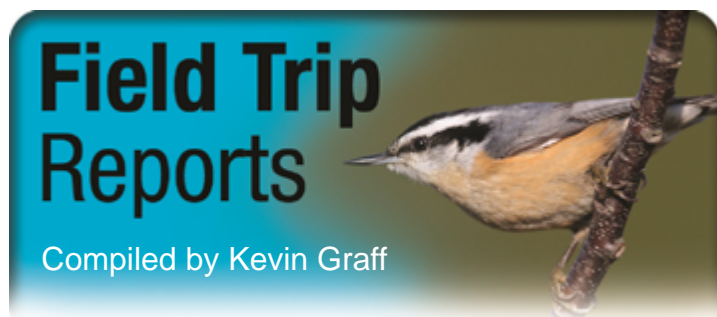
From Other Cities

Christopher Davis, Phoenix
Carroll Frank, Cockeysville
Sarah Luttrell, Randallstown
Carolyn Marlow, Essex
Sherry McCarter, Timonium
Sue Proper, Owings Mills

Check Your Estimate!

Here's a little quiz to see how accurately you can "estimate" the number birds found in a flock of birds. This test was found in an early edition of Maryland Birdlife (December, 1967). First estimate, then count to see how accurate you are.





AUG 26 - CROMWELL VALLEY PARK AUG 26

- Cromwell Valley Park - Slow, end-of-summer day. Not a lot of migrating birds seen, but a few were quite nice. Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Great Crested Flycatcher, and numerous Warbling Vireos and Cedar Waxwings were the standouts. Most interesting was the Double-crested Cormorant brought by a lady who had found it injured or ill. She did not have time to take to rehab, and the rest of us wanted to birdwatch, and since the Cormorant seemed ok, we placed it on a stone in Minebank Run to give it a chance to mend. Two hours later when we returned, the cormorant was still there, so intrepid birder Kevin Graff waded in and caught it with a blanket. It was not clear who was going to win the ensuing struggle as the cormorant whipped it's snake-like head around jabbing Kevin a few times in the face and arms. It was finally subdued and placed in a box and a shaken Kevin took it to Phoenix Wildlife Center for repair (to the bird and to Kevin!). Follow-up: Rehabber said cormorant ok to release, so Kevin let it go at Loch Raven Point. 42 species. 22 participants. Leader: Joan Cwi

SEP 2 - CROMWELL VALLEY PARK - A warm Tuesday morning at CVP with 8 species of warblers seen and/or heard. The highlight was a Mourning Warbler seen by many. 46 species. 20 participants. Leader: Debbie Terry.

SEP 6 - NORTH POINT STATE PARK - Birding was fairly slow except for an excellent count of Little Blue Herons, in both adults and juvenile plumage. One juvie photographed by Terry Lang turned out to be a Snowy Egret (youngster). We had great, close looks at a Green Heron and good scope looks at Common Terns. Passerines were disappointing. 29 species. 5 participants. Leader: Peter Lev.

SEP 9 - CROMWELL VALLEY PARK - Cedar Waxwings in large numbers. There were also Black-billed Cuckoos, Baltimore Orioles, and Yellow-throated Vireos. Dreary day but great birding and great company! 42 species. 13 participants. Leader: Mary Chetelat.

SEP 16 - CROMWELL VALLEY PARK - Limited representation of bird families occurred. A few Warbling Vireo songs were heard, but in fewer numbers than in spring and early summer. The first foraging group on top of the Lime Kiln consisted predominantly of American Goldfinches, along with multiple Eastern Wood-Pewees with their calls, Chipping Sparrows, and some other common species. Returning upstream to the field, along the scrub and stream border, were a Common Yellowthroat and fall Chestnut-sided Warbler that gave all of us close views. A Magnolia Warbler and Redstart were seen in a side trip to the stream. Assorted passerines kept our interest along the fenced-hedgerow and field-stream-forest edge. A separate birder reported a Connecticut Warbler that, alas, was not re-found by us. Although the sun was out by 8am, it took more than

an hour or two for the thermocline vultures to appear. After passing the second bridge we spotted the awakening



Photo by Bill Hubick

vultures and local raptors. A perched buteo flew close by proving to be a Red-tailed Hawk. Also at the second bridge was a perched Osprey with a fish--probably from Loch Raven. I saw him there an hour later as I drove out of the park! In the office garden was a giant swallowtail caterpillar, a noteworthy sighting!! Finally we ended up at the ongoing hawk watch. 43 species. 17 participants. Leader: Chris Davidson.

SEP 20 - MILFORD MILL PARK - A slow warm morning except for the American Robins' that were everywhere. Our bird group had quality looks at the Wood and Swainson's Thrushes. In addition 6 warbler species were seen well by all. 31 species. 8 participants. Leaders: Debbie Terry & Pete Webb.

SEP 21 (SUN) CHIMNEY SWIFTS AT DUSK.
See page 5.

SEP 23 - CROMWELL VALLEY PARK - Morning started off slow due to cool temperatures but soon became very active. Had 20 species at Lime Kiln area including Black-throated Blue and a small group of Black-throated Green Warblers moving through the area low in trees. We also had Blue-headed Vireos. The walk along Sherwood Farm trail produced Great Blue Herons taking off from creek, as well as multiple species of warblers--Common Yellowthroat, Chestnut-sided and Magnolia. The group had good looks at a Red-breasted Grosbeak, Least Flycatcher and Yellow-billed Cuckoo at the far bridge. 50 species. 15 participants. Leader: Mary Anne Fluke.

SEP 30 - CROMWELL VALLEY PARK - Busy day with raptors: both vultures, Osprey, Bald Eagles, Sharpie, Cooper's, Red-shouldered, Broad-winged, Redtails, Kestrel and Merlin. Black-throated Blue Warbler was very close for all to see! 52 species. 18 participants. Leader: John Landers.

OCT 7 - CROMWELL VALLEY PARK - A day that started out overcast, turned into a lovely fall day. The trail on Minebank Run down to the Lime Kiln again proved productive, but unremarkable. This was followed by walking the Minebank Run west of the bridge to Sherwood Farm. Again, unremarkable with but one warbler species. There was a surprising turnout of a rather large number of Eastern Bluebirds and an abundance of Blue Jays. The American Kestrel was a bit of a highlight and all 17 observers shared a good morning together. 33 species. 17 participants. Leader: Ron Davis.

OCT 25 - NORTHAMPTON FURNACE TRAIL - On Joy Wheeler's memorial walk it was a delightful, sunny day and very birdy on the trail.

White-throated Sparrows were there in abundance, along with a couple of Juncos. We ran into a bonanza of Hermit Thrushes, about a dozen in the vicinity of one tree laden with berries and scattered individuals at other places along the trail. Winter Wrens were furtive and silent, with only two seen briefly. A surprise American Woodcock flushed up off the side of the trail in front of us and flew away, whistling, with that big, long bill in front. After viewing a raft of ducks and Pied-billed Grebes, we started our return, to be greeted by two or three Brown Creepers fairly close together, probing their way up the tree bark looking for goodies. We also had very nice looks at both Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, sometimes together sharing a tree. Continuing on our way back, we encountered American Robins feeding next to the path, and among them was a Fox Sparrow kicking

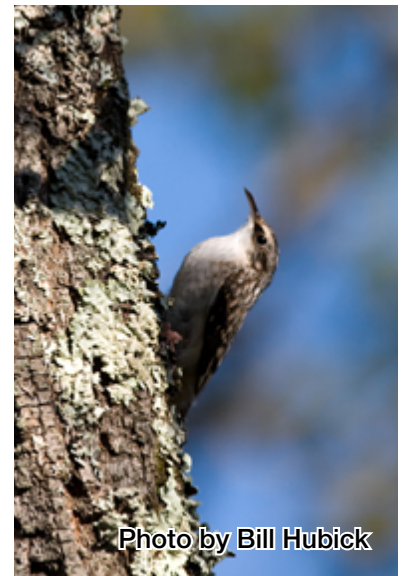


Photo by Bill Hubick

up leaves like a White-throated Sparrow, then a Hermit Thrush, then of all things, a Rusty Blackbird. Finally a hiker with a couple of dogs came along and broke up the party. After that, we were logging in Turkey and Black Vultures for the day's species list, when we spotted a House Wren (NOT a Winter Wren) and an Osprey flew by overhead. We also saw a couple of brown-plumaged Purple Finches and heard a male singing nearby. 55 species, 10 participants. Leader: Pete Webb.

BALTIMORE BIRD CLUB
<http://baltimorebirdclub.org>

A Chapter of

MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
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Joan Cwi, Editor
David Nelson, Design

Submit materials to
Joan Cwi - jafjsc@verizon.net

Moving or email change?
Send update to
Roberta Ross at robertaross@aol.com

**Deadlines for submitting articles
for upcoming issues:**

January 2015



Baltimore Bird Club APPLICATION

*Membership year is September 1–August 31. New members only
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: _____

Benefits include membership in the BBC and Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS), free field trips, quarterly BBC and MOS newsletters sent electronically, lectures and other events.

Check dues category and circle amount sent.

| Category | 1-YR | ½ YR | Chapter Only+ |
|-------------------------------------|----------|---------|---------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | \$35.00 | \$17.00 | \$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