Research Collaboration to Determine Success of Collision Birds

Prepared by Lindsay Jacks and Kathleen Woods

Lights Out Baltimore (LOB) is now in its 11th year as a project of the Baltimore Bird Club. LOB has had many successes from the daily rescuing of birds and bats to installing bird safe products, adding monitoring groups on college campuses, hosting educational workshops, testifying for legislation, and curating bird conservation art exhibits. We can now add research to that long list.

In early 2019, Luke DeGroote, Avian Research Coordinator at Powdermill Nature Reserve of Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, contacted Lights Out Baltimore to see if we would be interested in participating in a research project tracking the migration success of collision birds. Powdermill Nature Reserve is the home for the Powdermill Avian Research Center (PARC) where one of the oldest year-around banding stations can be found. Banding since 1956, PARC also focuses on various research including collision work. American Bird Conservancy and PARC collaborated to build the first-ever flight test tunnel to research in a research project tracking the migration success of collision birds.
President’s Corner
by Mark Linardi

First off, I would like to thank Peter Lev for his kind introduction. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank him for his tremendous job serving as the BBC president these last three years. His professionalism, dedication and attention to detail have served BBC well and helped position us for continued success. Peter will continue serving on the Board of Directors and assisting in other areas as well. Additionally, both he and his predecessor, Joan Cwi, have agreed to help me navigate my way through the trials and tribulations of the presidency.

I’m also very fortunate and excited to have the opportunity to work with a diverse, engaging and innovative group of BBC officers and volunteers. Their collective talents and enthusiasm will certainly make my job exciting and a whole lot easier.

I was going to wait until my retirement before undertaking this challenge, but with such a strong team of BBCer’s in place I felt now was a good time to take the leap.

I’ve been a member of the BBC for about sixteen years and feel quite humbled to have the opportunity to serve as the president of such an honored organization. I look forward to the challenges ahead and will work to keep moving us forward.

Conservation Corner

Bird Feeding & Unwanted Urban Wildlife
By Kirsten Held

Editor Note: Kirsten is working with the BBC Conservation Committee to track down the extent of this problem in the Baltimore City/County area, and potentially further abroad. See more on this topic on page 6.

You love feeding the birds in your backyard. You have installed a stunning array of houses, feeders, and suet baskets. The Chickadees and Tufted Titmice are ecstatic. But so are the rats and squirrels. The joy of seeing birds up close is wonderful indeed, and the conservation benefit of bird feeding has never been more important. But as conflicts between humans and wildlife increase due to burgeoning human populations and climate change, complaints about rats and squirrels grow and we begin to take our birdfeeders down.

Have you received complaints from the neighbors, the city or county health departments about rats or squirrels? BBC has learned of two such complaints; one that resulted in an administrative hearing and a Baltimore County order for the homeowner to remove her birdfeeders. We are monitoring complaints.

Have you taken your feeders down or not installed any in the first place because you might attract rats or squirrels? Although rats can carry disease and must be dealt with aggressively, and although squirrel problems might extend to the creatures nesting in your house or damaging your electrical wires, the difficulties with rats and squirrels can be solved without you having to simply stop feeding the birds. Look at page 6 of this issue of Chip Notes for ideas.

If you have had any complaints or problems regarding bird feeding, please contact Kirsten held at the Baltimore Bird Club (kirstenheld71@gmail.com)

We can help run interference with neighbors and respond to complaints directly and are very interested in tracking how often such issues arise.
Birding Northern California
By Lynne Parks

My partner Chris and I finally visited the West Coast. We arrived at SFI mid-day, picked up the rental car, and headed to Colma, City of the Dead. It became the burying grounds for San Francisco. Cemeteries are green spaces that provide habitat for birds and other wildlife. It’s good birding.

We stopped at Cypress Hill Memorial Park. I found nine life birds among the human dead that day including the pretty Townsend’s Warbler, industrious Nuttall’s Woodpecker, and sweet Black Phoebe (to me, not to bugs). Common Ravens guttural calls resounded on the green and in the tombs. I love ravens, but the populations out West are out of balance and stressing ecosystems, shutting down other species. On the other hand, if humans managed their waste better, it would keep populations in check. We didn’t find many crows.

We woke early on Day 2 and headed to the Embarcadero. We stopped at Pier 29 to watch the sea lions lazing about or having minor squabbles. Then we joined the boat to Alcatraz. It’s a gorgeous little island with a fascinating strategic significance that has protected the bay or isolated violent criminals or offered a platform for native rights. Brandt’s Cormorant’s roosted on the bluffs. The ride out and back provided a mini-pelagic. Elegant terns swarmed and dove over schools of fish. Afterwards, we took the trolley down to the Ferry Building for lunch and chocolate and, um, ice cream. We huffed up a hill to Coyt Tower, but we didn’t find any Red-masked Parakeets on Telegraph Hill. I read that rat poison has taken a toll. Then we walked in Golden Gate Park relocating the gorgeous Yellow-green Vireo who’d been documented.

Day 3 started with our second breakfast at IHOP, the only eatery open at six. We tried our luck at the San Francisco Botanical Garden and found a Western Tanager and a Pacific-slope Flycatcher—it’s coloration wasn’t that different from a Hutton’s Vireo, but body shape and behavior distinguished the two. The parakeets were here. We stopped at the Legion of Honor and nearly got blown off Battery Godfrey, but wow, what a view of the Golden Gate. As I scanned for birds along the shore, I found naked men facing full frontal to the ocean. Ha, it’s a nude approved park.

In Fairfax, we stopped at The Hummingbird, a New Orleans restaurant with a great name and amazing beignets. Then we set a course for Rodeo Lagoon, where we’d find the most variety of bird species. I adored the tiny white-eyed, long-tailed Wrentits and we had our first sightings of California Scrub-Jays. The trail ends at the beach, one of those notoriously beautiful beaches with dramatic rockscapes.

Day 4 we headed deep into Point Reyes at dawn startling Western Meadowlarks, California Quail, and Tricolored Blackbirds away from the roadsides. There were hundreds of Golden-crowned and White-crowned sparrows. Next stop was Bear Valley for the gorgeous, mildly cartoonish Acorn Woodpeckers.

Jump ahead to Day 6. We stopped at Bolinas Lagoon for the impossibly Long-billed Curlews. I was anxious to see one, but I shouldn’t have fretted. We found nearly a hundred. It was the first big gathering of Marbled Godwits we’d find too. We had many miles to travel, but we stopped at the Potter Schoolhouse in remembrance of Annie from The Birds. We ate at The Tides, which had the “it’s the end of the world!” scene. Western Gulls begged for food from the outdoor tables. Sadly, we know who’s struggling with an end of the world scenario. Birds.

Continued on page 7
Peregrine Falcons

Terry Ross reports that he has not seen any Peregrine Falcons at the Roland Park Water Tower for the last several weeks, although he does see occasional signs of predation around the Tower, but nothing like when the nest was active. There is no new news about reconstruction, although more details should be forthcoming.

Mark Your Calendar!

- The **Christmas Bird Count** will be at Loch Raven on Sunday, December 15th. Dinner/Tally Rally to follow at McFaul Ironhorse Tavern (old Sanders Corner) at 5pm. Non-Christmas Count Participants are welcome to attend. Please notify Kevin Graff at keyweststyle2001@gmail.com if you want to help out.

- **BBC Mid-Winter Bird Count** will take place on Sun Jan 19th. See details from last year’s Program Book or watch for it on the monthly eNews.

- Both BBC and MOS are celebrating their **75th anniversary** in 2020. In place of our usual Covered Dish Dinner, we will be celebrating on Sunday, Feb 23rd. In addition to BBC members, members from both MOS and the Natural History Society will be attending.
Nearly 3 Billion Birds Gone!!
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7 SIMPLE ACTIONS TO HELP BIRDS

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CAT BIRDNEST

ATTEMPTED MURDER
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WITH BIRD FEEDING
By Kirsten Held

While feeding birds is a rewarding experience, problems can arise with rats and squirrels. These creatures cause problems, big and small. Rats carry disease and must be dealt with aggressively. Squirrels might eat too much of your bird food or might nest in your home or damage electrical wires. Rest assured that problems with rats and squirrels can be solved. Here are some practical solutions.

RATS: If bird feeding has brought rats, the first thing to do is to temporarily stop feeding and clean up any food that has fallen on the ground. Second, have the rats exterminated, especially if they have taken up residence in your home or that of a neighbor. Once their dens have been eliminated, feeding can resume with some easy and inexpensive measures. The most important step is to keep the feed from falling on the ground. Install a catch basin under hanging feeders and regularly rake up any spillage. Pay attention to how long it takes the birds to eat the food you put out and don’t put out more than the birds will eat in a day or two.

SQUIRRELS: If you or a neighbor has a squirrel infestation or you find that the squirrels are eating too much of the bird feed, there are several solutions. Safflower seed is said to be unattractive to squirrels, while birds love it. In my experience, it depends on your particular squirrel population. When I tried safflower seed, my squirrels loved it. So I tried bird seed mixed with hot chili oil. The birds are unaffected by the hot oil, and in my case, this was extremely successful. I put out the “hot” food and watched as the squirrels took one sniff and headed for the hills!

If you are able to invest in some new feeders, this is the most effective method of keeping squirrels away. I purchased new feeders and my husband made it his personal mission to build a pulley system with a peanut tray where the squirrels couldn’t reach the food but the Blue Jays and Red-bellied Woodpeckers could eat to their hearts’ content.

I also purchased several squirrel busting feeders, a double wired suet cage, a peanut feeder, which is perfectly weighted to snap shut when a squirrel attempts to access it, and another weighted tube feeder for the highly sought after fruit, nut, and sunflower mix. These feeders have worked exactly as advertised and were worth every penny.

I have successfully weathered the squirrel problems we had in our neighborhood, which included a complaining neighbor and, frankly, some real anxiety on my part that I might have to give up feeding birds in order to restore good neighborly relations. My parents had a rat issue and they had to go the extermination route and temporarily suspend feeding. I purchased new feeders for them, and today, both my mother and I have successful bird feeding operations that bring us joy and satisfaction. If you have had similar issues and have had success or failure with possible solutions, I’d love to hear about it. Please email me at kirstenheld71@gmail.com. Look for periodic updates to this information as I learn about other people’s experiences.
Next day we tore ourselves away to head north to Arcata Marsh. There were greater masses of Marbled Godwits with a smattering of American Avocets and Willets. Then we had a long drive on windy roads up to Happy Camp to visit my cousin Dave. There he was waiting with a hug, bushy beard and all.

He has native trees full of Chestnut-backed Chickadees and Dark-eyed Juncos (Oregon). His hummingbird feeders attract Anna’s. A mob of Stellar’s Jays hangs around all day and one immature likes hopping over for egg yolks. It’s a naturalist’s wonderland with collected bones and botanical specimens. Dave took us to the gushing Indian Creek where river otters fished for salmon. We stopped along some flats by the Klamath and had a nice smattering of birds. Bluebirds, waxwings, and jays fed on the ripe wild grapes. We thought we heard a Northern Pygmy-Owl, hmm. Ravens mobbed the Bald Eagles.

It was time to say goodbye and head east to Mt. Shasta.

We started up the mountain early. Near the peak, my spirit animal moment was when a Clark’s Nutcracker paused on a treetop and then flew over my head in a striking pattern of grey, black, and white. Evening Grosbeaks fed in the pines and bits of seed husks rained down. Their feeding was the only sound. The Peregrine Falcon that tried for a chipmunk was silent as it streaked by. Coming off the mountain we had to find a park ranger to help rescue a junco stuck in an idiotically designed rest area building.

We’d been lucky with sunny days and wonders, but it was time to head home. We woke at two-thirty a.m. and made our way to the airport. Then my backpack zipper broke. Considering the gifts of NorCal, I didn’t complain. I had twenty-seven lifers.
the effectiveness of bird safe products. Birds are caught by mist nets and then flown in the test tunnel (a renovated storage unit) to test the various products on the other end of the tunnel. Don’t worry; there is a net to catch the birds, so they do not collide with the product or control side. This flight tunnel testing allows products to be rated for effectiveness. All products that are rated effective (aka “bird safe”) are then promoted on American Bird Conservancy’s website and literature.

In addition to the flight test tunneling, PARC, led by Luke DeGroote, has developed a first-of-its-kind, three-year study into the long-term effects of what happens to birds after they’ve survived a collision with a building. How often do you hear, “Ooh the bird flew into my sliding glass door, but it eventually flew away, so it must be fine, right?” Now, with the results of this study, we can finally answer that question. Do the collision birds recover well? Do the birds migrate successfully after the head trauma or end up on the wrong navigational path? From a 2014 study by Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and U.S. Fish and Wildlife, it is estimated that up 1 billion birds are affected by building collisions in North America each year.

The collision study involves banding and fitting the bird with a nanotag, a digitally encoded radio transmitter, upon release from rehabilitation. In March 2019, Lindsay Jacks of Lights Out Baltimore and Kathleen Woods, licensed wildlife rehabilitator from the Phoenix Wildlife Center spent two days at PARC learning more about the project, how to make the elastic band harnesses for the tags, and practicing the tagging techniques with birds that were caught daily in the mist nests from their banding station. Upon leaving PARC from days of training, we they were inspired and ready to begin the research work.
The next step to begin the project was the most monumental—adding a Motus Wildlife Tracking System to the new Phoenix Wildlife Center on Sweet Air Road. The new center, a completely renovated farmhouse, sits on the Gunpowder State Park run by the Department of Natural Resources. The amazing DNR team was excited to add the Motus satellite onto the roof of the new center to track migration. Motus is Latin for movement and originated in Canada; the Motus Wildlife Tracking System now has more than 500 stations tracking migratory birds, bats, and monarchs. As a tagged individual passes by a Motus system on their migratory path, the data is collected and each week, or more often if they choose, all Motus owners upload their data.

Once the Motus was installed by PARC technicians, then the project officially began. Lights Out Baltimore has found 111 species since monitoring began in 2008, but for this study there were seven target species identified: Common Yellowthroat, Magnolia Warbler, Ovenbird, White-throated Sparrow, Gray Catbird, Wood Thrush, and American Woodcock. Once one of the seven target species has been rescued downtown during LOB monitoring shifts, rehabilitated at Phoenix Wildlife Center and deemed ready for release, the work begins. Usually one or two days prior to the determined release date, Kathy contacts both PARC and Foreman’s Branch Bird Observatory located on Washington College campus to let them know what species we are planning to tag and release. Foreman’s Branch banding station is the control for the LOB collision birds in the study. Once Foreman’s has caught, banded and tagged the species we are planning to release, Kathy is contacted and then the collision rehabilitated bird is banded (collecting vital info including sex, age, wing chord, and weight) and fitted with a transmitter and released. The comparison of the LOB birds with the wild caught Foreman’s birds, both fitted with transmitters to track migration, will help tell the story of collision birds. Do both birds follow the same migratory path? Does the collision bird take a few days to recoup and then travel? Do both birds reach their destinations?

In addition to the LOB birds, both Lights Out Cleveland and Fatal Light Awareness Program are a part of the study to add more data to the project. This fall migration LOB and Phoenix have banded and tagged a juvenile Gray Catbird, American Woodcock, and White-throated Sparrow to contribute to the study. Hopefully, we will band and tag more this fall as we are just now hitting the sparrow portion of fall migration. The study is still in its first year, so we have two more years of banding and tagging migratory birds upon release along with Foreman’s Branch and partnering organizations.

With the exciting collaboration of this project, we are hoping to finally answer what happens to birds after colliding with buildings. More importantly, we hope to prove that both the rescue by Lights Out Baltimore and rehabilitation by Phoenix Wildlife Center contribute to the bird’s successful migration.
AUG 27–CROMWELL VALLEY PARK– A surprisingly good day in overcast conditions. Among the highlights were Least Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, a bright yellow Orchard Oriole (female), and eight warbler species. Good, closeup looks at Canada Warblers. 56 species. 23 participants. Leader: Peter Lev.

SEP 10–CROMWELL VALLEY PARK– It started out with great views of a Great Crested Flycatcher behind the Nature Center. Then, at the top of the hill behind the Hawk Watch we had good views of a Baltimore Oriole and a Blue-winged Warbler. There were more warblers and other birds in the area as well. Up the hill from there we spotted a White-eyed Vireo and a Veery. We continued the usual route with not much to see until we reached the trail above the Kiln. There the group was able to observe a flurry of warblers and vireos, including another singing White-eyed Vireo and a Canada Warbler. Down the Minebank Stream Trail, I was able to pish out some Common Yellowthroats and a House Wren for everyone to observe. The only other highlight was seeing not one, but two Yellow-billed Cuckoos above the stream on the Sherwood side. 48 species. 16 participants. Leaders: Debbie & Lou Taylor.  

SEP 15–FALL SWIFT WATCH 2019– It was a warm, lovely evening with a cloudless sky. We had an amazing 103 participants who got to see an amazing 2250 chimney swifts enter the Bookbindery chimney in 24 minutes (7:22-7:46pm). 1 specie, 103 participants. Leaders Joan Cwi and Alice Nelson.

SEP 15–MILFORD MILL PARK– It was a beautifully sunny day, around 70 degrees. The walk started off with several Chimney Swifts and quickly thereafter a Great Crested Flycatcher flew in. Black-and-white Warblers, a few Eastern Wood-Peeves and a variety of Woodpeckers appeared as well as many American Robins. Eventually we spotted an immature Scarlet Tanager and at least one Veery and one Wood Thrush. It was a somewhat productive morning for this spot. 37 species. 16 participants (including 2 kids). Leaders: Debbie & Lou Taylor.

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SEP 17–CROMWELL VALLEY PARK– Leader didn’t show up. We found two Yellow-billed Cuckoos, three hummingbirds, a flyover Caspian Tern, a kettle of Broad-winged Hawks, two Yellow-throated Vireos, a young male Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and 12 warbler species including Nashville and Canada. 52 species. 23 participants. Leader: n/a. Coordinated by Kevin Graff.
SEP 21–JUG BAY NATURAL AREA– Members of BBC participated with the Carroll County Bird Club in a joint pontoon boat trip to see Soras at Patuxent River Park. Not only did we see the elusive Soras but had the opportunity to hold Soras after they were removed from the traps. A beautiful late summer day filled with information, Soras, egrets, ospreys and eagles. Leader Greg Kearns.

SEP 24–CROMWELL VALLEY PARK– Highlights were beautiful weather, Ravens, Cape May Warblers and great company. 56 species. 21 participants. Leader: Mike Bradley.

SEP 28–CYLBURN ARBORETUM/QUARRY LAKE– Good activity early at Cylburn 8-9am, including Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Brown Thrashers (three together), Hairy Woodpeckers, plus big numbers of Blue Jays and Catbirds. We picked up a few more species at Quarry Lake, notably Pied-billed Grebes and Killdeer. 31 species. 6 participants. Leader: Peter Lev.

OCT 1–CROMWELL VALLEY PARK– We had some good birds on this walk: Great Egret (unusual for Cromwell), Broad-winged Hawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Brown Thrasher, 9 warbler species (very good for October), Rose-breasted Grosbeak. One birder saw a Connecticut Warbler. Cromwell is one of the best local spots for fall migration. 57 species. 17 participants. Leader: Peter Lev.

OCT 5–HABITAT WALK/LAKE ROLAND SERPENTINE– This was a “habitat” walk that explored the ecology of a unique area in addition to looking for birds. Dwight Johnson of the Native Plant Society was an excellent co-leader. Dwight showed us native and invasive plants and talked about the geology of the area. We saw some good fall birds: 14 Eastern Phoebes (they were everywhere), Palm Warbler, Blue-headed Vireo, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Pine Warbler, and four species of hawks. 23 species. 11 participants. Leaders: Peter Lev/Dwight Johnson.

OCT 6–SOLDIERS DELIGHT– A bit slow on a nice cool day. Black-throated Green was the only warbler for the day. Lots of towhees, Field Sparrows, bluebirds and thrashers all over the place. All woodpecker species except for Red-headed. Some nice views of Red-shouldered Hawk (on perch), Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Blue-headed Vireo. 35 species. 16 participants. Narrative by Kevin Graff. Leader: Sarah Luttrell.

OCT 8–CROMWELL VALLEY PARK– Heavy dark clouds and a low ceiling gradually gave way to northeast winds and clearing weather in the 60’s. Relatively few warbler species observed but the group did see at least four species of hawks, two Peregrine Falcons, and American Robins which became too numerous to count. Surprisingly, the group observed four Brown Thrashers. Lots of American Goldfinches were also abundantly seen. 56 species. 13 participants. Leader: Ron Davis.

OCT 12–NORTHAMPTON FURNACE TRAIL– A calm, cloudy morning on the Northampton Furnace trail at Loch Raven gave some of us our first winter birds of the season. White-throated Sparrows were plentiful, a Winter Wren briefly appeared, and we had good looks at several Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers. A smattering of winter ducks including American Wigeon, Gadwall and Ring-necked Ducks were seen on the lake. A Peregrine Falcon flew by early on, and a Merlin was spotted later in the day. Most birds were seen, a few were heard only, and we enjoyed practicing birding by ear. 49 species. 8 participants. Leader: John Dennehy.
**Baltimore Bird Club**
http://baltimorebirdclub.org

A Chapter of
**Maryland Ornithological Society**
4915 Greenspring Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21209

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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
Terry Ross at trosstva@gmail.com

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**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.

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

Jan 24, 2020