



CHIP NOTES

SPRING 2021 • NO. 415



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2020: A YEAR FOR THE BIRDS

By David Fleischmann

Unlike for birds, for most people, 2020 didn't feel like a good year. Getting outdoors and becoming reacquainted with nature and all its peaceful bliss has allowed many people to help get through this difficult time. For me, it gives me a chance to remember the way it was and look forward to the way it will be, soon again. A place where the only social distancing required is the space between me and the birds. Being outside and watching birds is an incredibly important activity, for many people. It helps reduce stress and bring about some form of normalcy to our lives in this tumultuous time.

Some people are backyard birders, satisfied with whatever Mother Nature throws their way. Some are dedicated listers who want to see birds, every day, and immerse themselves, in all things birds, as often as possible. Then, there are people like me that love all things birds, but get the most enjoyment out of seeing the rare birds, the migrants that are astray; the birds that should, according to nature, not



Black-chinned Hummingbird

Photo Credit: Tyler Bell

be where they are currently being seen. That is an adrenaline rush for me. Seeing this rare lost creature becomes my focus and obsession. We are called "chasers". Some only chase birds within their home county or home state. Others are National Level Chasers and will chase birds all over the country. I am both. I chase rare bird sightings almost anywhere I can logistically and financially make happen. If it is in my home state, I most certainly

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WELCOME

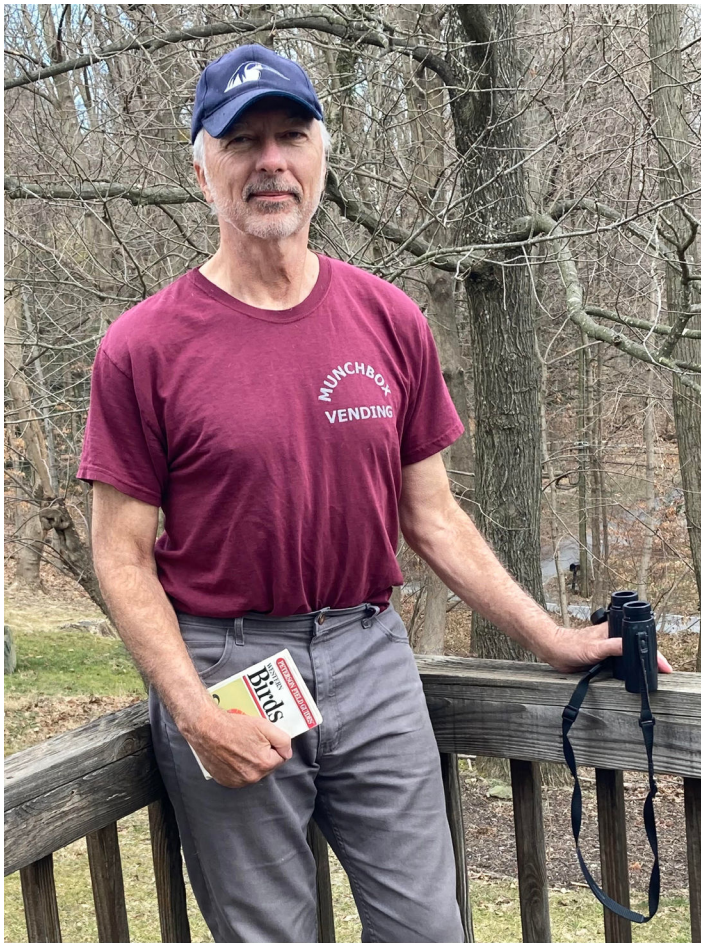
A warm Baltimore Bird Club welcome goes out to the following members who have joined us since the Winter Chip Notes was published. Thanks for joining. We look forward to seeing you out there in our birding trips and at our meeting.

Debbie Markwitz – Baltimore
Nivia Martinez – Baltimore
Beth Pointer – Baltimore
Guy Waters – Baltimore

Hannah Krocheski – Cockeysville
Jane Selewach – Idleylde
Heather Tolson – Middle River

President's Corner

By Joe Corcoran



The birding was simpler years ago (and there was a lot less gray!).

About 30 years ago I started taking birdwatching seriously. Whenever I could squeeze in some time, I'd get my running shoes or wax sealed boots on, grab a pair of jeans, and whatever else for the weather like a rain jacket, my binoculars, and maybe a bird guide, then I'd take off in to some woodland or natural area. Eventually I'd take some note paper for lists and notes and sketches for the many species I did not recognize. It was quite simple and relaxing, trying to see birds, alone many times on a trail, and at the end of the walk I'd go through my guide and notes and put my list together. It was my special pleasure to handwrite the list of species for the day over a cold beer - or four....I really liked beer - reliving the bird images in my head.

Note that I said "birdwatching" up front; there was no "birding by ear" for me back then. If I didn't see it, it wasn't there. And the number of individual birds..? Really? Why? That was reserved for the Christmas Bird Count. And more, Life Birds were king. Birdwatching was nice, but seeing a Life Bird was spectacular -

another two pints of ale at least. State List? County List? You gotta be kidding me. That was for nerdy goobers without a life.

So what the Henry Elbert Living Lab happened to me!!! Not only did I enter Dweebirdville voluntarily, I enmeshed myself so far as to become the Mayor of that town - Grand Birdpoo Joe, President of the Baltimore Bird Club. Unbelievably ironic!

(Or is it?)

Now, the birding (not birdwatching anymore) trips are a lot more complicated. To explain that, let's first do a little comparison of bird trip necessities.

THEN

- Inexpensive Binoculars with neck strap holder
- Bird Guide Book
- Hat
- Pen and Paper or Index Cards
- Jeans
- Rest of clothes (weather dependent)
- Boots or Running Shoes

NOW

- Expensive (Leica) Binoculars and Body Harness holder
- Bird Guide Books
 - Illustrated (Sibley)
 - Pictorial (Crossley)
 - Specialty Guide
 - + Peterson Warblers
 - + Oceanic Birds
- Hat (Birder Colors)
- Pen and Paper or Index Cards (becoming less and less used with all the other tools)
- Birder Pants (Birder Colors with Lots of Pockets)
- Birder Shirt (Desert Shirt or equivalent with pockets)
- Hiking Boots or Crosstrainers
- Waders
- Tripod with Tilt and Pan Head
- Spotting Scope (soon to be an expensive one)
 - iPhone adapter for digiscoping

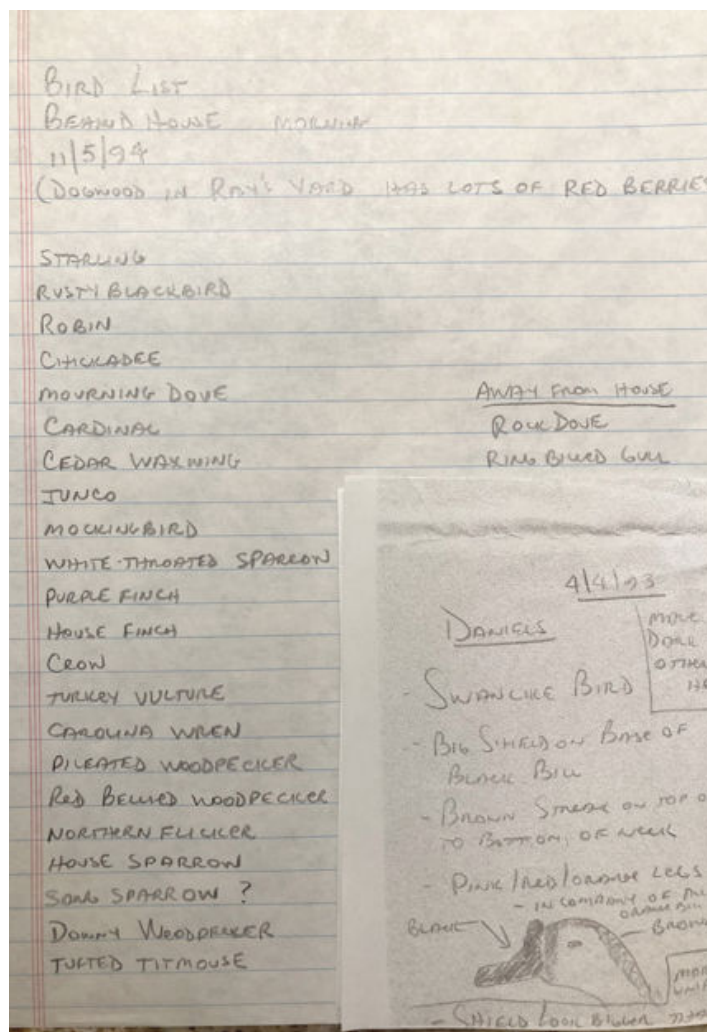
President's Corner

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Really? All this? My how things have changed.

- Camera for Birding photo documentation
 - Tripod adapter to mount camera
- Camera case and strap with spare memory chip and charge cable
- Portable Charger
- Hearing Aids for high frequency bird sounds
 - Spare Batteries for Hearing aids
- Spare distance Contacts
 - Reading Glasses for seeing up close
- iPhone with:
 - Birding Apps for Descriptions and Bird Sounds (Songs and Calls)
 - + Sibley (to compare species)
 - + Merlin Bird ID
 - + Larkwire



Simple List and Note writing pleasure.

- + BirdsEye
- + Band Codes (I guess for lazy modern birders who can't spell anything more than 4 letters long!)
- + eBird for:
 - Life List
 - ABA List
 - State List (All Time & Year)
 - County List (All Time & Year)
 - Region Target Lists (All Time & Year)
 - Rare Bird Sightings Lists
 - Top 100 Lists (to see who's next to breathe

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the dust behind me – or vice versa more typically:)

- Checklists Input
- + SpectrumView for recording spectrographs of bird sounds and calls
- + Voice Recorder for recording bird songs and calls
- + Rare Bird Alert Apps
- Charging Cables
- Internet Services (two or more to make comparisons easier)
- + For further information like Xeno-Canto for sounds
 - Territory Songs
 - Mating Songs
 - Alarm Calls
 - Location Calls
 - Flight Calls
 - All the other Calls!
- + For more rarity information
- Speaker for playing Bird sounds to attract birds
- Ear buds to play bird sounds for reference so no one else hears and is confused
- GOOGLE MAPS App



Find what you need and where to go with the click of a button now.

- CD of Eastern (or whatever region) Bird Songs and calls to listen to in the car on the way to the birding location
- Day Pack to carry some of this CRAP!
- Sunscreen!!
- Rest of Clothes (dependent on the weather conditions – all birder colors of course)

Look at all this! I can't remember it all for any trip, and I frequently find myself going back in to the house to get the stuff I forgot, and then occasionally forget what I forgot! SMH (Shaking My Head for those of us not keeping up).

And I haven't even gotten to the trip location preparation. Let's see. There's the Target Species, multiplied by the Locations the target species have been seen, times the time available, divided by the number of birders in the group with different targets exponentially increased by the number of different targets, to figure, in order to predict the maximum Target Tick Success Index. Or in mathematical terms:

$$TSI = TS \times L \times T / B \times N$$

But this has to be figured the night before the trip, then refigured the next morning and constantly throughout the day as the Rare Bird Alerts roll in. No wonder my brain hurts all the time now!

Then there's the Target Species visual pre-study. You look at images of the target species Female Breeding, Male Breeding, Male Non-breeding, Female Non-breeding, Juveniles, First, Second, Third years, Hatch Year, etc., all Sitting, Swimming, Standing, Crouching, Crapping, Flying and Farting.

And of course the sound pre-study... The songs are relatively easy, but only compared to the calls. "Was that a "chip", or a "cheep", or was it a "chimp, with a mild middle trill"? Or are your Gortex jacket sleeves rubbing against your camera case again?!"

"I dunno. Let's take a spectrograph recording... There... Got it... it says House Sparrow, orrrr... wait a minute ... West Baltimore Walking-Cuckoo"... (It was the jacket) SMH again!

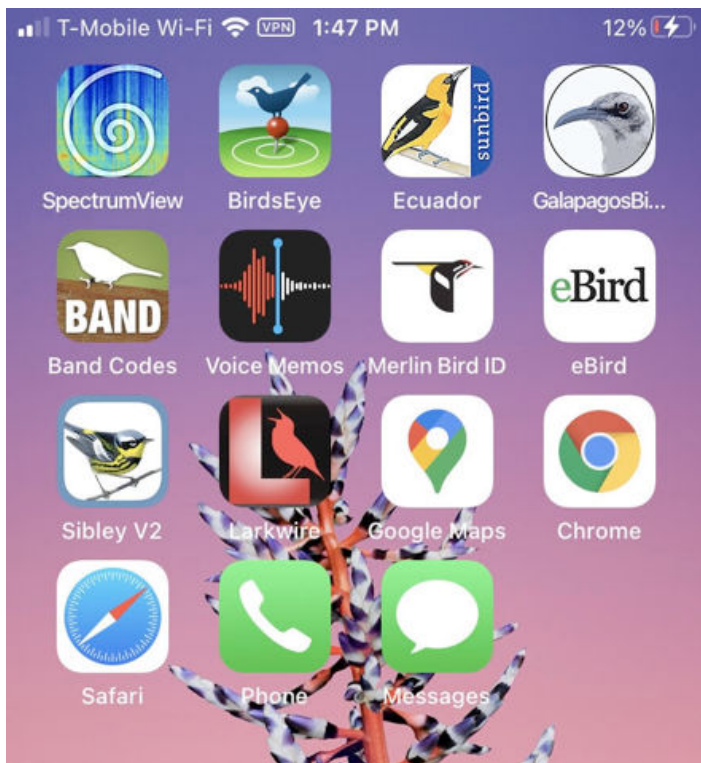
That was a joke.

This is Madness! Birding is consuming my life, except for the few hours spent with my grandchildren, one of whom I'm Helping To Convert To Being a Birder/Naturalist!

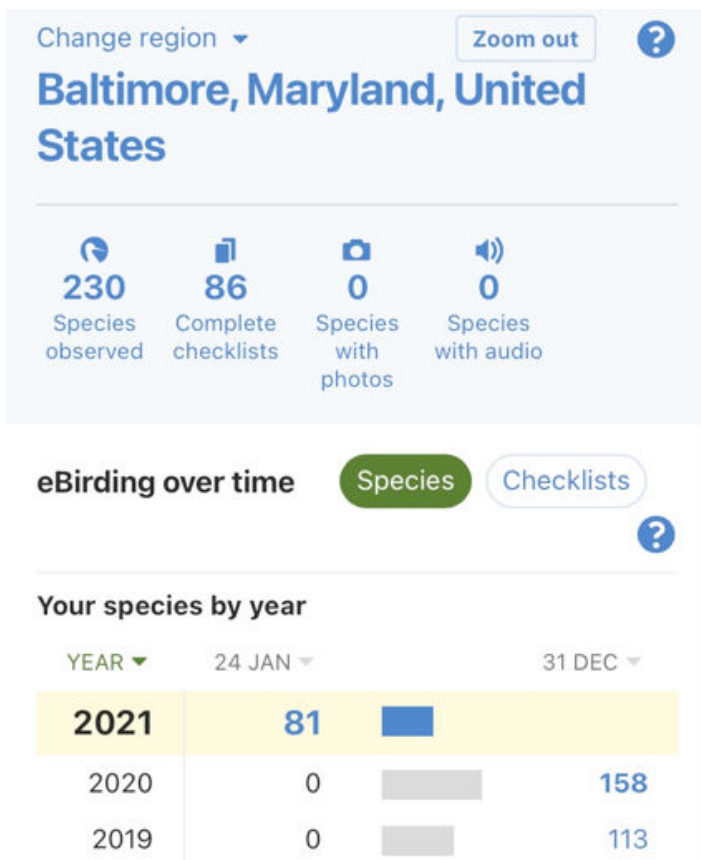
The writing has degenerated. I'm done, in many more ways than one. I'm Hooked and I Love Birding!

President's Corner

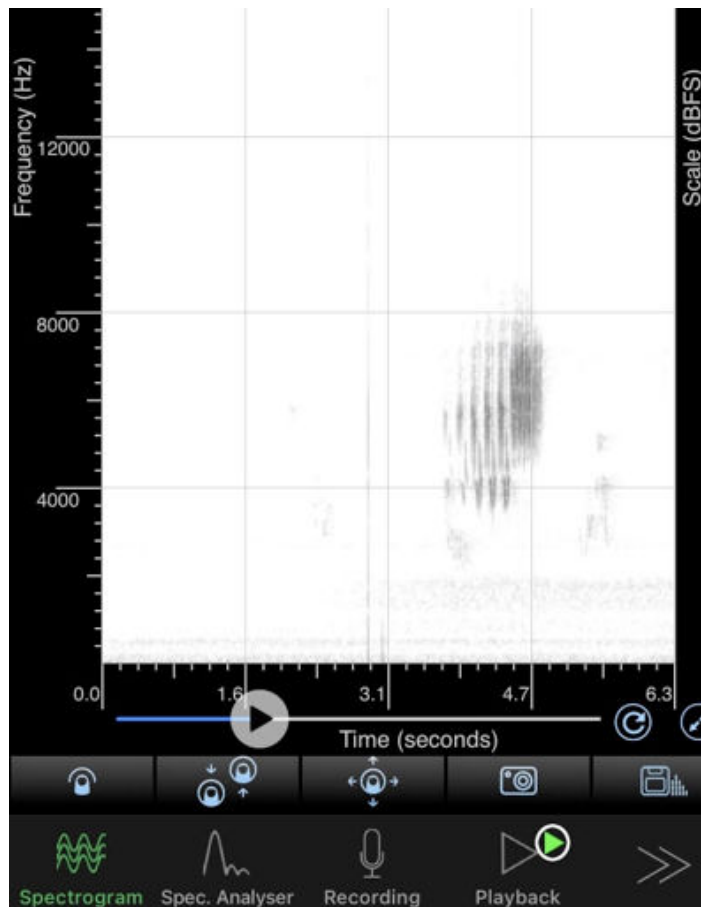
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The array of “necessary” birding and logistics Apps.



Anything you need to know about any region.



Spectrogram of American Redstart song.

American Redstart Photo Credit: Bill Hubick



Grandfather and Public Service Champion

My Grandfather's Legacy

*By Nico Sarbanes,
BBC Board Member*

A few weeks ago, my grandfather, former U.S. Senator Paul Sarbanes, passed away after an incredible life of public service. While many have already eloquently shared their thoughts on his contributions to the state, and specifically on his relentless environmental advocacy, I wanted to share just a few words of my own.

While I never got the sense that my grandfather was a nature “fanatic,” the strength of his connection to nature was undeniable. Whether attributable to his Greek heritage, or to his upbringing on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, my grandfather understood the inherent value of nature, the visceral sustenance that it provides to all people, and the absolute necessity of preserving it.

He was intensely proud of the state of Maryland, where he’d spent essentially his entire life. And, while I doubt he was ever able to completely understand the more obsessive aspects of my birding hobby (I can’t imagine his steadfastly rational mind

could entertain the ridiculous idea of pursuing “county closeout” birds), he did appreciate how that hobby took me to obscure corners of the state—to a grassland preserve in Kent County, or a WMA in Wicomico, or a swamp in Allegany—and how, in doing so, I developed my own deep connection to Maryland.

His dedication to restoring and preserving the health of Maryland’s natural lands and waterways has been well-documented, and I can think of no better testament to the scope of his impact than that which rests in three particular locations that bear his name:

- The Paul Sarbanes Trail- found in Garrett County by the northern branch of the Potomac and Jennings Randolph Lake, and just a few miles from Deep Creek Lake, where we spent multiple family vacations when I was younger;
- The Paul S. Sarbanes Coastal Ecology Center- a hub for environmental education, research, and public outreach, the Center is a facility of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. My grandfather was a proud native of the Eastern Shore, specifically the city of Salisbury. It was on the many trips we would make from

Baltimore to Wicomico (usually with a stop at Blackwater on the way) that I developed a strong fascination with the Shore’s ecosystems, particularly the huge expanse of marshes and wetlands that seemed so foreign compared to the deciduous forests I was used to in Baltimore. Sitting at the western end of the Verrazzano Bridge, the Center is frequented by countless visitors on their way to Assateague Island, and has provided me a smile each time I’ve crossed Sinepuxent Bay on the way to the beach; and, of course...

- The Paul S. Sarbanes Ecosystem Restoration Project at Poplar Island- Before my grandfather spearheaded the restoration effort at Poplar, only a handful of bird species were being recorded on the heavily eroded island. Now, as many of you are likely familiar with, Poplar is one of the premier birding destinations in the state—with upwards of 250 species having been reported (per eBird)—and a valuable nesting site for various terns, waders, and shorebirds. My grandfather considered the Chesapeake Bay the heart and soul of the state of Maryland, and it is fitting

Conservation Corner: Remembering Senator Paul Sarbanes

that this collaborative feat of engineering and conservation, sitting in the heart of the Bay itself, bears his name.

From Garrett to Assateague, from the summit of Hoyer-Crest to the bottom of the Bay, my grandfather had an immense pride and deep love of every inch of this state and its diverse natural lands. I have inherited that deep connection to Maryland, and hope to continue his legacy of environmentalism in my own life.

A Public Service Champion

*By Carol Schreter,
BBC Conservation Chairperson*

Dear Nico, I wish to thank you for writing the article on the preceding page in honor of your grandfather Paul Sarbanes, pointing to his environmental accomplishments. I consider Paul Sarbanes an environmental hero, a role model. To me, his most important accomplishment was early on, in the late 1960's. As a member of the State Legislature, he co-authored the public law creating the real estate transfer tax mechanism for financing Maryland's Program Open Space, one of the most progressive programs to fund state and local parks and land conservation in the country.

And yes, he was a Public Service Champion of the Chesapeake, as he was dubbed in 2016 when given an award by the Chesapeake Conservancy. See: www.chesapeakeconservancy.org/champions-of-the-chesapeake/champions-2016/us-sen-paul-sarbanes/

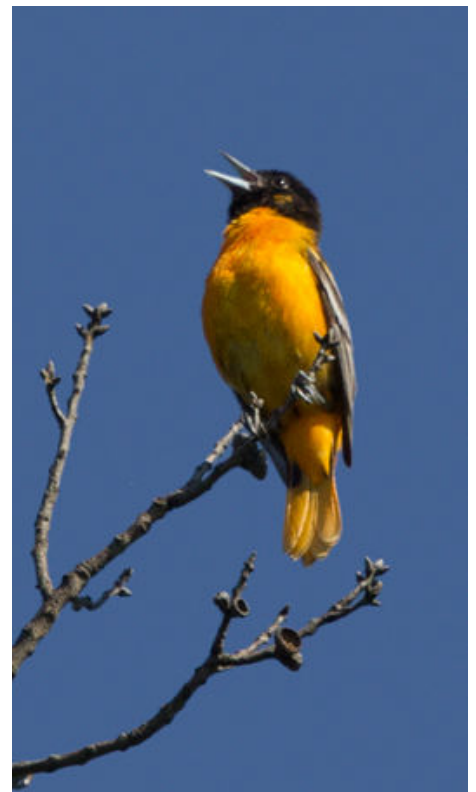
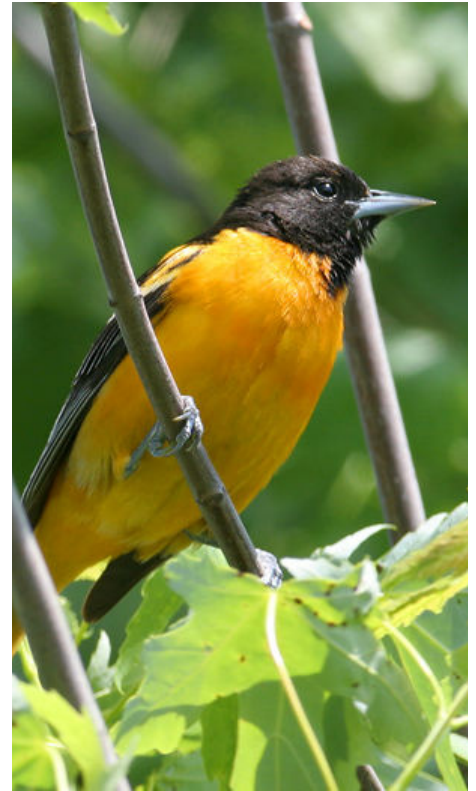
Nico, your article reminded me of the time when I briefly joined Senator Paul Sarbanes corps of volunteers. It was 1981; I was working on a Ph.D. dissertation. "The New Right" in Congress with its political action committees had just started its campaigns of meanness. They targeted your gentle, honorable, grandfather Paul Sarbanes because, I think, he lived on the periphery of Washington DC. If the ads and the meanness could unseat a sitting Senator right there, in the view of all elected officials in DC, it would be a threat to all of them.

As a social worker, I went to the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter, and got their agreement to 1) supply their state-wide membership list, and 2) help recruit social workers to phone our members from the Sarbanes' campaign office. We might have been 10-15 social workers working once a week, for many weeks, to reach our membership across the state.

I was gratified not only that Senator Sarbanes won his re-election in 1982, but his margin of victory was greater than it had been in his previous election. For background on this moment in history, see this November 1982 article from the Washington Post.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/11/03/sarbanes-strategy-turned-nepac-attack-into-votes-for-him-6/2a6169da-bd7f-49b5-8f24-0ae8908d5b81/>

Thank you again, Nico, for your Chip Notes article in memory of Senator Paul Sarbanes, and for continuing his public service legacy by joining the BBC Board.



Baltimore Oriole
Photo Credit: Bill Hubick

BBC Needs You

Our volunteer organization is growing in the areas of Bird and Natural Habitat Conservation and Birding Inclusivity of underrepresented groups. We need more volunteers to help in our missions.

We have three important positions on the BBC Board that need filling, and a few Committees like Youth Outreach and Community Outreach that could use your help.

For the Board positions see below, and if you can help out or can suggest someone else for that position, contact the person listed. We meet monthly (except for summer) at the Cylburn Greenhouse, but for now the meetings are held via Zoom. Board Members vote on important actions and plans to keep our club moving forward.

If you have particular talents that you think would help our club please contact one of us.

Vice President

The Vice President has one main responsibility—to fill in for the President when he/she is not available - and typically, is in training to become President. The Vice President needs to attend Board meetings, BBC events, and occasional field trips to stay abreast of what is happening. The VP, however, is welcome and encouraged to take on more responsibilities of interest!! Contact: Joe Corcoran at corcoran2921@gmail.com.



Eastern Towhee
Photo Credit: Bill Hubick



Hospitality Chairperson

Although there is not much for this person to do during the pandemic, as soon as we can meet in-person the tasks are listed below. All expenses are reimbursed.

- 1) Attend each club lecture and provide purchased snacks, i.e. drinks, lite fare (popcorn, grapes, sweets, etc). Set up and clean up after the meetings.
- 2) Assist in purchasing food/drink and setup for special events such as a book signing.
- 3) Assist with annual picnic-food and setup/cleanup.
- 4) Attend monthly Board meetings.

Contact: Deb or Lou Taylor at lougregdan@verizon.net.

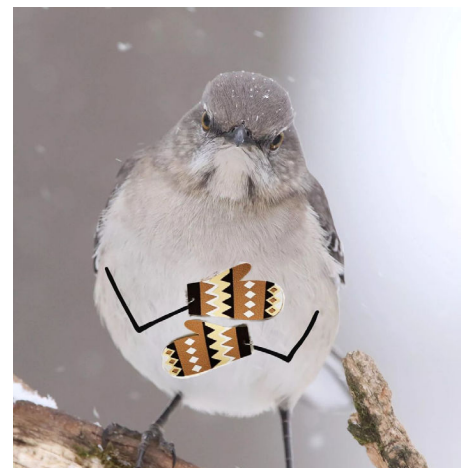
Chip Notes Editor

Chip Notes is a 12-page newsletter that comes out quarterly/. The Editor is responsible for identifying articles to be included, and keeping after the writers to meet the deadline. There is not much to be done in the months before production, but at production time the Editor needs to edit the articles, have them second-edited and passed onto the design editor. The Editor is also responsible for getting the mail-out copies (about 30) printed and into the mail.

In addition, the Editor has been responsible for getting other BBC materials printed and mailed, including the renewal notice and Program Booklet. The Editor needs to attend Board meetings, BBC events, and an occasional field trip to stay abreast of what is happening and who is doing what. Contact: Joan Cwi at jaffsc@verizon.net.

Bird Bits: Help BBC and Bernie the Birder

Bernie the Birder



A Year for the Birds

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will drop everything and try and see the bird immediately. I really have no other choice as my mind is now focused on this bird and all other activities are now on the back burner. It is about more than the birds. When I go to a new place to chase a bird, I am exploring a new area of Maryland, or America. Getting to see so much of the diverse landscape, non-avian critters and natural aspects of America is an added special bonus for me.

Luckily, this year has been a banner year for Maryland and the rest of the USA. While people have had to limit their travel and change many plans, the birds didn't. Their lives continued without a hitch, unaware of the challenges around them. For those who aren't traveling but still desire to see some birds that we normally don't see around here, Maryland has had quite a few wonderful avian wonders to keep us busy, close to home. In 2020 I garnered 13 new Maryland life birds and even added one lifer from MD, for my USA/ABA list. Twelve of the 13 birds were rare for Maryland.

The year started with a bang on



Burrowing Owl
Photo Credit: David Fleischmann



White-winged Dove
Photo Credit: David Fleischmann

January 18th, when Maryland's first state record of Black-chinned Hummingbird showed up at a private residence's feeder. A special thanks goes out to Tyler Bell and Jane Kostenko for graciously spending an immense amount of time facilitating a schedule, so people could see the bird. As this was a first state record, many, many people wanted to see the bird, as you can only imagine. It was quite the daunting task.

The Black-chinned Hummingbird is the western cousin of our local, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, both members of the *Archilochus* genus of hummingbirds. The most notable visible difference, to a novice birder, would be the Black-chinned has purple gorget, (throat) feathers, while the local ruby-throated, as the name suggests, has a ruby colored gorget. You will notice in the picture the purple gorget feathers beginning to show.

It wasn't long after this bird that the pandemic hit and the definition of birding changed drastically. You can't plan where a rare bird will

show up, or else they wouldn't be rare anymore. Sometimes luck comes into play. It was April 7, 2020, and I was doing an appraisal in Calvert County. As I was finishing up, an incredible rare bird alert came across my phone. Maryland's second occurrence of Burrowing Owl was just found about 25 miles away. The first was in 1983, in Garrett County. I was in a slight quandary as I was only 25 miles away but there was a travel ban. As I was so close, and performing essential services, I could not pass up the opportunity. There were other birders there and most were in their car and all were maintaining social distancing.

This owl should be south or west of us in Florida, South Texas or Nevada; most definitely not in Maryland. These owls are one of the easiest to find, in their range, as they roost out in the open, usually on the ground, near a drainage ditch or culvert. They prefer open prairie grassland, with little cover. It is interesting that the more western species prefer to

A Year for the Birds

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use existing burrows, from prairie-dogs or ground squirrels, while the Florida owls prefer to dig their own burrows. This gem of an owl was only seen for about six hours and unfortunately was never re-found.

Birding in June and July, in Maryland, tends to be a slower time of the year. Lots of fledglings to see and our feeder birds are starting to return, after raising the next generation of birds. Once in a while we get lucky. The next two rarities are both doves that are common throughout their respective regions. To have them both, in our state, about a month apart, was quite a treat to many Maryland birders.

The first dove was found June 23rd at the home of birder Jeff Culler, in Howard County. This is a White-winged Dove, a cousin to our more common Mourning Dove. This was MD's 17th state record and first for Howard County. This bird flew into Jeff's feeders and decided it liked it there. It especially liked the Red Maple tree, on Jeff's property, where it spent hours just perched and happy. This bird is usually found in the southern USA, not much north of Florida, on the east coast. It was very kind of Jeff and his neighbors to host many birders in their neighborhood for two days. This beautiful dove was literally 15 feet from the road and seemed to enjoy the paparazzi.

Just 33 days later, a cousin of the White-winged Dove showed up at Swan Harbor Farm Park, in Harford County. A Eurasian-collared Dove was found by Kojo Baidoo and Jerald Reb and immediately shared to the birding hordes. This is MD's 26th state record and second Harford County record. These doves are found virtually everywhere in the US, other than the Mid-Atlantic region, Great

Lakes area and New England area. It is noted that the breeding range of this bird is highly expanding and it will probably be found in all states in a matter of years. At the end of the summer the bird finally departed only to be found a few months later, in the same place, by Joshua Emm. The dove is still being seen at the time of this writing, in late January, 2021.

Wow, wow and a triple wow! Swan Harbor Farm Park strikes again! Now that I have mentioned Josh Emm, it would be the appropriate time to bring up one of the craziest rarities of the year. Mid-October, Josh located what was originally identified as an odd Dunlin. A week went by and eBird reviewer and extreme birder, Tim Carney said, hold everything! That is not a Dunlin!! Josh had found Maryland's fifth and Harford Counties first Curlew Sandpiper!!!! The slightly decurved bill is a key field mark, but one not easily discernible in the field, even by an advanced birder, like Josh. This bird breeds on the other side of the planet, in Eurasia. This beautiful shorebird makes frequent

stops in remote Alaska locations and along the eastern seaboard, almost annually. This was a very special find for Maryland and much appreciated by the entire regional birding community.

Unfortunately, as happens much too often to vagrant birds, this bird was found expired, a couple days later. Josh recovered the specimen and it awaits delivery to the Smithsonian Museum archives to become a part of science. Thank you to Mikey Lutmerding for his contacts and setting up this scientific endeavor. RIP Curlew Sandpiper!

During Halloween, what's more appropriate than a black and orange bird? Maryland's seventh record and Caroline County's second record of Black-headed Grosbeak. What's crazy is that the county's first ever record occurred in 2011, just a stone's throw away. The bird entertained people from all over the state for several days. A special debt of gratitude goes to Gina Bergey and her entire, large family, for being truly hospitable hosts. This bird is a species that

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Eurasian-collared Dove
Photo Credit: Kojo Baidoo



Curlew Sandpiper
Photo Credit: Joshua Emm

A Year for the Birds

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can be seen fairly easily in Arizona and throughout the west. Not often can it be seen in Denton, Maryland. Maryland annually hosts the Rose-breasted Grosbeak-which a beautifully colored bird in its own right, and it breeds throughout western MD.

In November, Swan Harbor Farm Park, delivered again. This time, it is one of my all-time favorite North American passerines (song bird), the Mountain Bluebird. Unbelievably beautiful bird. Austin Jennings found this one along the entrance road into Swan Harbor. You can almost guarantee seeing it's local cousin, the Eastern Bluebird, hanging out on the power lines, all year long. They were not happy about this western vagrant on their turf, lol.

I went back multiple times so I could enjoy this bird. To me, it is the epitome of beauty. So many hues of blue. Almost mesmerizing. And it hasn't even achieved its

ultimate adult plumage. One of my life's bucket list photography moments. Trust me when I say this, it is not easy to get in-flight shots of this quick flitting beauty. This bird is my favorite bird of 2020. Not necessarily the rarest, but overall, truly made the year for me!

What a year it was, and December was no exception! This find belongs to two of Maryland's newest up and coming birders. One of them is Alina Martin, who is a recent college graduate, on a birding mission to see all things birds. I am quite confident we all will be chasing many of Alina's finds in the future. I know I look forward to her youthful eyes and ears. The second, Johnnie Ramos, is quite the aspiring new Maryland birder who had a very memorable first year introduction to Maryland. A huge congrats on seeing 339 birds, in Maryland, in 2020. He was helped by his mentor, John Dennehy, who ended up with 336 birds for the

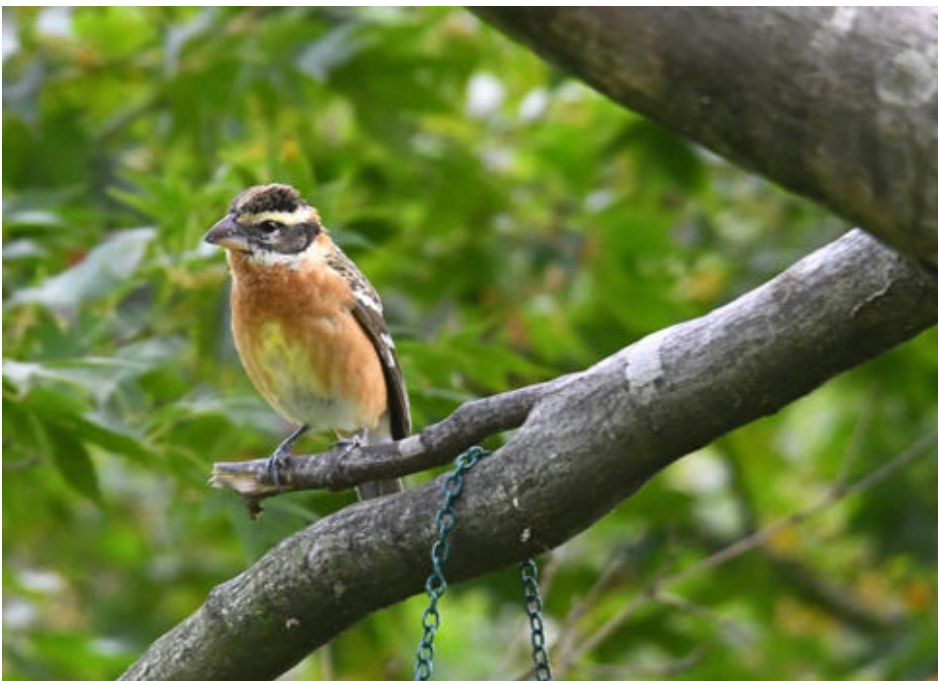


Mountain Bluebird
Photo Credit: David Fleischmann

year. They have joined an elite group of birders who have reached that milestone. Welcome to the Maryland birding scene!

On December 3, 2020, at about 4 pm, an alert was issued that Alina and Johnnie had located, not one, but two, western style *Aechmophorus* genus grebes. 15 miles and 23 minutes later, I arrived on scene. The identification, which still has not been confirmed, is most likely one pure Western Grebe and one possible hybrid Western/Clark's Grebe. The Western Grebe would be Maryland's 8th record and Baltimore Counties second record. Many people have differing opinions and the actual identification will probably never be known. These two birds are still present as of this writing. The pair has remained close to the Dulaney Valley Road Bridge for almost two months. They do not leave each other's sight, it seems. Pretty cool birding experience to witness these love birds! They are gorgeous waterfowl.

And no conversation about 2020 rarities would be complete without mentioning the true superstar of the year. On December 30th, an absolutely stunning male Painted Bunting was found by Christopher Coleman, at Great Falls Park, along the C&O Canal, in Montgomery



Black-headed Grosbeak
Photo Credit: David Fleischmann

A Year for the Birds

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County, Maryland. The flying rainbow has since been enjoyed and enamored by literally hundreds, if not over a thousand people, since the original find. He has made a circus of social media, been the subject of several news reports and even made the Washington Post newspaper. He is quite the ham and is apparently loving the throngs of people that have come out to see him. People have been concerned that all these people would affect the bird and his survival ability. Well, for a month now he has been seen daily, in almost the same identical spot. Since he has wings, if he was uncomfortable, in any way, he certainly would have flown away to a different location by now. He seems incredibly content and enjoys being the subject of many photographers, amateurs and professionals alike.

The Painted Bunting is my all time favorite song bird in all of North America. Maryland plays hosts to at least one or more annually. Both the male and female are astoundingly stunning birds. A juvenile or female is all lime green and has a color that is very unique. Within the last month or so there have been multiple continued sightings of Painted Buntings, throughout the state. Many people, much smarter than I, are predicting that Painted Bunting will be the next breeding species in Maryland. I really look forward to that.

If all of these birds are not enough to satisfy most levels of birders, there were several other rare birds, seen throughout the year. In mid-November, there were several different hummingbirds spread throughout the state. If there is a hummingbird, in Maryland, seen



Western Grebe (Right)
Photo Credit: Alina Martin

after mid-October, most likely it will not be our local Ruby-throated. Odds are it will be a vagrant western species, that is lost. Some of the birds were banded and identified to species, while several will remain unidentified hummingbird species forever. All of the identified birds were Rufous Hummingbirds, which have been in MD, 18 previous times. Most birders were hoping that the hummingbirds might be the Rufous' twin, an Allen's Hummingbird, which is much rarer in the state, only three previous times. One of the banded Rufouses, from Harford County, is still being seen daily!

Then in mid-December, several western type flycatchers were seen and photographed, in several counties around MD. Western type means that it is either a Pacific-Slope or Cordilleran Flycatcher, that at one point were the same bird, Western Flycatcher, before being split into two unique species. Before these sightings, there was only one previous record of Pacific-slope/Cordilleran, from 2015. A DNA sample was obtained from the Frederick County bird and we are awaiting a definitive



Painted Bunting
Photo Credit: David Fleischmann

ID. If an ID is obtained, it will be a first state record of either species. It is more likely to be a Pacific-slope Flycatcher, rather than a Cordilleran, as I believe the latter has never been definitively identified east of the Mississippi! Thank you to Andy Wilson and Kevin Bennett for making the DNA test happen; now we wait for the science to tell us the truth!

What a year 2020 was. With the many changes occurring, 2021 surely will be another memorable year. We all need to hope and pray for a successful end to the pandemic so, life can find some form of normalcy again. I know I have a lot of traveling and rare birds to see, so I am very hopeful. Please stay safe, healthy and happy in this more hopeful year of 2021. May birds rule the year again!

Reflections on One's Spark Bird

One's spark bird is defined as the bird species that cemented your future relationship to bird watching. Sometimes it's one particular bird, sometimes birding events. We will produce a couple of examples from BBC members over the next few editions of Chip Notes.

My Spark Birds

Joseph Lewandowski

What is a spark bird? I am not going to answer that question here. I believe that in the life of a bird watcher, there are many birds and events that give that spark of encouragement and wonder that makes bird watching so enjoyable. My first spark bird came when I was in elementary school. My Dad and I built a platform bird feeder. We painted it blue. My Dad attached the bird feeder to the window sill of our garage window. This was great. I could look out my bedroom window and see the bird feeder perfectly. My Dad gave me his old WW II field glasses and I was in seventh heaven. Up until this time, I mostly saw Robins, Starlings, and Sparrows; but it was at this bird feeder that I saw my first Cardinal and Blue Jay. A vivid red bird and a blue bird, sitting in plain view, usually separate but sometimes together. A mix of beautiful red, blue, white, and black patterns that was so unique, it took my breath away. The birds would fly up into our backyard Red Maple tree and... disappear. How could that be? I just saw them. They were so colorful. Did they vanish or change colors? How did they become invisible? And so, my quest began to study natural history, watch birds, read about animals, and learn the wonders of the natural world that we call Earth.

My Spark Bird

Joan Cwi

Although I was always into nature (hiking, camping, kayaking, etc.), I was never particularly into bird watching. By mid-age (mid 40's) I met my second husband,

John Fleishman, and our 30-year relationship began. John was never interested in nature per se (he had never slept in a tent and never would!), but he was fascinated by birds. So after we moved in together, I figured—what the hell! Birds were nature. I found an online course through Johns Hopkins Odyssey program on beginning birding and signed us up. Lead by David Holmes, it consisted of classroom and on-site birding, and was fascinating. We bought cheap binoculars and ventured forth.

I remember our first trip to Fort Howard Park in 1996 where I could see many of the birds, but not the “exotics.” OK, for cardinals and robins and in-your-face chickadees, but warblers, orioles, nuthatches, thrushes?? But then I somehow got my binos on a Blackburnian Warbler!! And WOW, what a bird — it's breast on fire! John and I became hooked. We spent the next 30 years bird watching in our back yard, locally, throughout the Americas and across most of the rest of the world. I later spent four years doing the LOB walks in downtown Baltimore, and ironically the first dead bird I found was a Blackburnian Warbler.

Spark Birds?

No, Spark People!

Carol Schreter

For me, there was not a spark bird, but spark people. I visited Egypt in 1980, just after Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty. I took a small paddle boat up the Nile with 35 tourists. Half the travelers were English, half American. The English people had binoculars, were calling out birds all along the way. They seemed to be having

more fun than the Americans. This was my first exposure to birdwatchers. I came home and adopted a pair of binoculars from my parents' attic. I began watching birds in my backyard, and never stopped. I'm still an avid backyard birder.

My Spark Bird

Shirley Geddes

In 1950 when I married, I moved from the city to the suburbs. In our backyard were a mature female holly, beech trees and various maples. It did not take me long to become fascinated by the variety of birds that came for the holly berries and the beech nuts. At that time there were not many stores that sold things to attract birds to your yard, so I made a feeder out of two pie plates and a broom stick, put in sunflower seeds and was delighted to see a cardinal come almost immediately. I located the Baltimore Chapter of the MOS which had meetings at the Central Enoch Pratt Library. On the first meeting I attended, I proudly announced that I had a Baltimore Oriole at my feeder! This was special for me too because the date was December 29th, my birthday. I was very proud.

After that a member gave a talk to the club about birding in Tucson, Arizona and I was amazed at the variety of the birds there. I organized a group of 12 members of the club and we took off. I believe I saw about 80 new species. This was the beginning. After that I attended American Birding Association's yearly conventions in other states. My total of Life Birds now is 635. Not much compared to birding totals today. It was all great fun.

Field Trip Report

Compiled by Nancy O'Hara



Merlin
Photo Credit: Bill Hubick

November 8, 2020 Irvine Nature Center

Leader: Brian Rollfinke

Ten participants shared a delightfully warm morning exploring the meadows and wooded edges of Irvine Nature Center. As we gathered to start, someone had just commented that the winter-resident Merlin was not occupying his usual perch atop the tall snag on the northern edge of the parking lot, when a pair of Merlins flew in, circled the lot, and headed on their way. This was only the third time that multiple birds of this species have been reported at Irvine. A good portion of the morning was spent in the vicinity of the large sunflower field on the Bauer Preserve, where the group was rewarded with very close views and photo-ops of goldfinches and siskins attacking the flowerheads with gusto. On the margins of the field, we found a treetop Fox Sparrow, a small secretive group of Rusty Blackbirds

(one seen + at least one heard), and a highly cooperative Brown Creeper, all while small numbers (3 here, 4 there) of Purple Finches zipped back and forth between the field and the safety of the trees around it. Although Vesper Sparrow was a miss, we did find good numbers of most of the expected species; a flock of five Savannah Sparrows made a much-appreciated appearance near the end of our walk. The mercury was hitting the mid-70's when we wrapped up a little after noon, and, just as it had started, our walk closed out with several nice raptor sightings, including an adult Bald Eagle soaring in the clear blue skies overhead and a Sharp-shinned Hawk harassing an oblivious Turkey Vulture over the Pollinator Meadow. 10 participants.

December 5, 2020 Masonville Cove

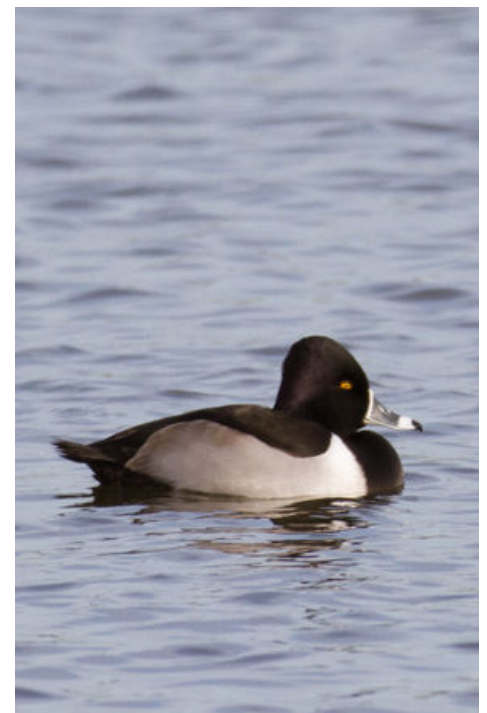
Leader: Alina Martin

Baltimore bird club walk-- thank you to Lily of Masonville for letting us in before the gate normally opens. We began our walk at 7:45am. It was rather windy so most of the passerines were hunkered down, but we still heard white-throated sparrows and a flock of flyover Cedar Waxwings and Eastern Bluebirds. On the water there was the normal huge flock of Lesser Scaup and while we didn't spend the usual amount of time searching for Greater Scaup we didn't see any. Mixed in were Canvasbacks, Ruddy Ducks (as well as a separate Ruddy flock around the bend), Hooded Mergansers, and Buffleheads, and we also saw a Bald Eagle, which was notable because their nesting seasons was about to start and they had a large nest on the property. 10 participants.

January 1, 2021 Loch Raven Old Picnic Trail

Leader: Joe Corcoran

Our first walk of the year was especially good as the 5 participants on a rain threatening cold day were almost all very new birders, and all learned much more about birding and saw many species. Together we saw 30 species, highlighted by many ducks easily seen like American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, and Hooded and Common Mergansers, plus a raft of over 200 American Coots! We started by reviewing the basics of binoculars and getting on birds, then having everyone see the birds, and then even learning some bird sounds and calls. Other highlight species were Pileated Woodpecker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Bald Eagle and Swamp Sparrow. 5 participants.



Ring-necked Duck
Photo Credit: Bill Hubick

Baltimore Bird Club

<http://baltimorebirdclub.org>

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Moving or email change?

Send update to

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

April 24, 2021



Application

The membership year is September 1-August 31. New members only joining after March 1 will be members for the upcoming year as well as the remainder of the year that they enroll.

The most convenient way to join is at the Maryland Ornithological Society website using this address: <https://mdbirds.org/join/chapters/baltimore-bird-club/#toggle-id-3> where you may pay your dues using PayPal.

OR, you may join by mail.

Make check payable to “MOS” and mail with completed application to:

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