



The newsletter of the Baltimore Bird Club

February/March 2008 -- Online Edition

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Deadline for next *CHIP NOTES*: March 10, 2008 (the next issue will be April/May 2008). If possible, please email material to

capitano.bryce@verizon.net

Please help *CHIP NOTES* get out on time.

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Lecture Schedule Change

by David Curzon

February 5 (Tue) 7:30pm. "Bird Blitz in Baltimore County and beyond: an update on the Important Bird Areas Program." David Curzon, BBC member and Director of Bird Conservation with Audubon Maryland-DC will report on the latest from the Maryland-DC IBA Program.

March 4 (Tue) 7:30pm. "Exploring for Bowerbirds and Birds of Paradise in Western Papua" Bruce Beehler, Vice President of Conservation International's Melanesia Center for Biodiversity Conservation, describes the amazing discoveries made by his expedition to a pristine forest region of Papua Province in Indonesian New Guinea. The group found a species of bird new to science, Wattled Smoky Honeyeater, 20 new frogs, and 4 new butterflies, and made headlines in 500 newspapers around the world. Not to be missed!

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Winter Finch Invasion: Update

In two previous issues of Chip Notes we wondered if the Red-breasted Nuthatch irruption presaged an irruption of other species, as in 1998. So far Pine Siskins and Purple Finches have been seen on field trips and at feeders throughout Maryland as reported on the Maryland Osprey listserve. But expectations for Crossbills and Redpolls have met with few sightings as recorded on MDOsprey.

- **RED CROSSBILLS** were reported from Finzel Swamp in Garrett Co, MD on Dec 21. A flyover was reported from Dan's Rock, Allegany Co, MD on January 13.
- A **WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL** visiting a backyard feeder in Silver Spring, Montgomery Co, MD was seen on Dec 18, 19, 20, and 24.
- A **COMMON REDPOLL** was seen at Loch Raven Skeet and Trap Club, Baltimore Co, MD on Dec 18. A flyover was reported from Antietam National Battlefield, Washington Co, MD on Dec 22. Kennard ES, Queenstown, MD on January 9; near Hances Point, Cecil Co, MD on January 12 (a flock of 40!); Finzel Swamp, Garrett Co, MD on January 13; McKee-Beshers WMA, Montgomery Co, MD on January 13; and Sandy Point SP, Anne Arundel Co, MD on January 13.
- **PINE SISKINS** were reported from backyard feeders in Talbot Co, MD on January 10 and 11; Darnestown and Germantown, Montgomery Co, MD on January 13; and near the aviary at Rocky Gap SP, Allegany Co, MD on January 13.
- **EVENING GROSBEAK**--12! Feeders near New Germany State Park, Garrett Co. January 20.

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Cylburn -- Spring -- 2007

by Joe Lewandowski

Many of you may have wondered where is the Cylburn write up about the bird walks this past Spring. Well, I must confess that I don't know. I usually keep notes regarding the walks and am able to describe the experience to you. Unfortunately, my notes have vanished. My quest for the notes have lead me to scour my work area for them and I have found my notes for 2002, 2003, 2006, etc., but no 2007. (Yes, I know what they call people who keep everything. My wife keeps reminding me about this issue.) However, with the help of Kevin Graff, I am able to provide you with a short synopsis of some of the walks.

4/1/07 -- This overcast day had 8 birders walking the trails of Cylburn. 34 bird species topped our list. A Junco was still around, a pair of Cooper's Hawks was observed carrying nesting material, and an American Kestrel was spotted.

4/8/07 -- It was around freezing on this cloudy day as 7 birders showed up at Cylburn. The Belted Kingfisher was the only note worthy bird to make our list of 31 species.

4/22/07 -- This sunny day brought 16 birders to Cylburn and they saw 45 species of birds. Notables were Cooper's Hawk, Wood Duck, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Brown Thrasher, Great Blue Heron, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Chipping Sparrow.

4/29/07 -- This bird walk was crowded with 22 birders out and about and the large group netted 57 species. An Osprey, Great Horned Owl, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Hummingbird, Great-crested Flycatcher,

Blue-headed Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Wood Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Black-and white Warbler, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, hooded Warbler, Field Sparrow, and Baltimore Oriole were the prized birds of the trip.

As I indicated, it is short for the Spring write up, but I can tell you that all the birders had a great time observing the birds at the Arboretum. Till Fall.

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Annual Covered Dish Supper and Lecture

Review by Joan Cwi

The Baltimore Bird Club held its annual Covered Dish Supper and accompanying lecture on Sunday, January 6th at the BYKOTA Senior Center in Towson, which graciously allows us to use their facilities for this event. This event becomes more popular each year. This year 52 people brought food to share for the dinner and 5 more came for the lecture. We also welcomed several new members to this event. As usual, the food was marvelous starting with wine and soft drinks, deviled eggs and an assortment of cheeses, through delicious home-made main courses and side dishes such as lasagna, chicken tetrazzini, meatloaf, beef stew and an assortment of waldorf salads. And the dessert table was positively sinful accompanied, of course, by shade grown coffee. (Sorry if I didn't mention your contribution, but there was just too much good food to list everything!)

The dinner was followed by guest speaker, Hank Kaestner, birder extraordinaire. Hank travels with his brother, Peter, to some of the most far-reaching destinations on the globe in search of new birds. He and his brother have 6,000-8,000+ birds on their life lists and must now go to more and more remote areas to list new finds. Hank showed slides from their latest adventures to Yemen and Kazakhstan. Yemen, visited in 2006 and on the U.S. State Department's travel warning list at the time, provided opportunity to view several several endemic species, as well as some misses from both Europe and Asia. Kazakhstan, visited in spring 2007, was chosen both for endemics and to fill in many Asian birds not seen on previous travel.

The photographs of Kazakhstan were studies in contrast in that they showed a progressive country with a lot of new building in major cities, while in parts of the countryside living conditions that were extremely primitive. One especially interesting story involved their driver going off the road and getting lost for several hours in the steppe -- the same steppe used by Genghis Khan as he swept across Asia in an attempt to conquer Europe in the 13th century. The photos showed an endless, featureless grass plain that seemed to go on ad infinitum. Fortunately the driver eventually found the highway back to the city -- a narrow two track dirt road!

A fascinating part of the lecture was learning how Hank and his brother plan their trips. They do not go on guided tours, but make their own plans based primarily on the index birds they want to see. So their trips are not all-inclusive, but very targeted. But in this quest, they of course see many other wonderful birds that are not new to the team but were new to most of the audience. In addition to the birds, Hank shared many stories and photographs of interactions with local people, as well as shots of stunning scenery.

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Field Trip Reports

Compiled by Kevin Graff

Nov 10 - Old Picnic Area Trail - No one but the leader showed up on this damp, gloomy day. I walked the picnic area trail and the reservoir shore, and found few good birds: Horned Grebe, Bald Eagle, WInter Wren, Fox Sparrow. 28 species. 1 participants. Leader: Peter Lev.

Nov 17 - Blackwater NWR - Highlights of the trip was a nice group of 4 Pine Siskins on a tree after leaving the Marsh Edge Trail and heard, then see Brown-headed Nuthatches along the trail. Afterward we saw a single avocet on the river flats on Key Wallace Drive. On our way to Cedar Creek Rd, we came across a swarm of Tree Swallows coming in/out of berry bushes along the road. Estimate at 550 birds, no Cave Swallow. In the late afternoon, we found our target birds we were hoping for, an imm light phase Rough-legged Hawk and a distance flyby Short-eared Owl. According to others, it was the best trip as far as they can remember. 83 species. 8 participants. Leader: Kevin Graff

Dec 2 - Old Picnic Area Trail - The Baltimore Bird Club held its Dec. 2 trip as scheduled at Loch Raven Reservoir. 4 stalwart birders showed up and saw a nice collection of late fall birds, including: Redhead, Wood Duck (unusual for December), Horned Grebe, Black Vulture, Bald Eagle (3), Winter Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird (many), and Yellow-Rumped Warbler. We found hundreds of Ring-Necked Duck and American Coot. Ben Poscover (the younger Ben) predicted 7 woodpecker species, but we had to settle for 6-- no Red-headed Woodpecker. We missed some common species, including Robin and Goldfinch. 40 species. 4 participants. Leader: Peter Lev.

Jan 1st - Old Picnic Area Trail - 9 birders (including 4 new members) braved cold and winds to see 46 species. Enjoying seeing large # of bluebirds, robins, waxwings, yellow-rumped warblers, white-throated sparrows and juncos. Both kinglets provide us good view near end of the trip. Only one observer saw hen Long-tailed Duck and drake Red-breasted Merganser. 46 species. 9 participants. Leader: Kevin Graff.

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Conservation Corner: Conquering the Enemy -- English Ivy

By Joan Cwi

It is difficult to believe that anything as pretty as English ivy growing on trees could be the Enemy until one actually removes the ivy and discovers beneath the pretty leaf cover a constricting gridwork of vines strangling the host tree. We're not talking about slender morning glory tendrils encircling the trees, but strong cords, some as thick as a wrist, that encase the trees in an ivy vise. The first tree I girdled because a Chip Notes article convinced me English ivy was killing trees. Appalled by what I found, the remaining trees were girdled for the sheer delight of knowing I was giving the tree another chance at life.

So I became a crusader for the cause, engaging the services of my partner. John is not an enthusiastic gardener, but he tends to be a sucker when it comes to helping herbaceous underdogs. We started attacking nearby trees, but were discouraged to find we only averaged about two trees an hour and knew we couldn't do them all ourselves. When I learned that our community (Roland Springs) was having a landscape clean-up day this fall, I persuaded the leader to make ivy removal one of the main tasks. I showed him the literature and pointed out the extent of



the problem including dead and dying ivy-encased trees. About 30 people showed up for the morning's activities, encouraged by nice weather, fresh coffee, apples and pumpkin bread.

I showed those tasked with the ivy detail some previously girdled trees to demonstrate the extent of ivy encasement and explained briefly what to do. Some admitted that this was the first time they had set foot off the sidewalk into the mini-woods surrounding the community. As diverse in style as Paul Bunyan and Paris Hilton and armed with everything from latex surgical gloves and household scissors to heavy leather construction gloves and chain saws, each tackled removal his or her own way. Some worked in teams, some individually. Some could not resist taking down every piece of ivy (OK for small vines but not advised for larger ones as it causes bark destruction) and tidying up around the base; others swiftly hacked out the obligatory inch of space between the root and upper vine (which will cause the upper vine to die as in the attached photo) and hastened on to the next tree. With great gusto they girdled 88 trees that morning!

That's the good news. The bad news is that there are at least 50 ivy clad trees left to girdle (some enhanced with poison ivy), and English ivy grows in great profusion in the understory ready to strike again. We are in discussion with the Jones Falls Watershed to get advice on how to rid ourselves of this pest and replace it with non-invasive plants in future cleanup days. This is a young community (30 years), and the trees are just beginning to reach maturity, bringing with them a broader diversity of songbirds that we are attempting to lure from older Roland Park trees just across Cold Spring Lane. And, along with the trees, we all breathe a little easier as the dying ivy slowly peels away from the trees.

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Bird Brains: Some Birds Can Communicate About Behavior Of Predators

from [ScienceDaily \(Jan. 11, 2008\)](#)

With the aid of various alarm calls the Siberian jay bird species tells other members of its group what their main predators--hawks--are doing. The alarm calls are sufficient for Siberian jays to evince situation-specific fleeing behaviors, which enhances their chances of survival. This discovery, being published by Uppsala University researcher Michael Griesser in the journal *Current Biology*, shows for the first time that animals can assess and communicate about the behavior of predators.

Many animal species are exposed daily to the risk of being killed by a predator. Certain apes and marmots have developed specific alarm calls that communicate the category of predators or the distance of predators to other group members. It has been proposed that this is an adaptation that helps them survive daily encounters with predators.

With the help of a playback experiment in which the scientist played the various alarm calls for Siberian jays, he was able to demonstrate that each alarm call is sufficient to get Siberian jays to evince a situation-specific fleeing behavior. Upon hearing the call that is given for sitting hawks, they fly up to the tops of trees and look for the hawk. The attack call prompts them to flee to the closest refuge as quickly as possible and then to start to look for the hawk. Playing the call that is given for hawks searching for prey gets the jays to flee to the nearest refuge and stay there without moving, for several minutes, to avoid being discovered by the hawk. "These findings are astonishing and show for the first time that animals can assess and communicate about the behavior of their predators, and that not only mammals but also birds have developed advanced communication systems," says Michael Griesser.

An earlier study of Siberian jays showed that parents protect their young but not unrelated group members with their alarm calls and that this extra protection leads to much lower odds that related group

members will be taken by a hawk during their first winter. Together with the new study, this shows for the first time that alarm calls actually do enhance the survival of other individuals. Until now this was merely an assumption, even though this is a basic function of alarm calls.

Adapted from materials provided by Uppsala University, via EurekAlert!, a service of AAAS.

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Back Yard Birding and Beyond



Let It Snow!

More snow fell on Baltimore the weekend of February 15-17, 2003 than any storm since the last ice-age. That's a fantastic opportunity for a feeder based bird banding station. I spent an exhausting two days shoveling snow to clear a walking lane and feeding areas. Then I set mist nets and traps to capture and band birds,. But it was great! The best capture rates I've had in years. Summary: 3 nets, one tired man, 118 birds. I also chased away a Red-tailed Hawk and flocks of grackles (released a dozen unbanded). The hawk plucked a few feathers from a cardinal, but she was banded and flew away. No major problems, just a few cold, stiff feet (theirs and mine).

Here are the highlights for Feb. 15-17

- Northern Junco, 16 banded, 51 recaptures, 11 returns(from previous years), TOTAL= 78
- White-throated Sparrow, 5 banded, 11 recaptures, 4 returns, TOTAL= 20
- I also banded 3 Song Sparrows, 1 Carolina Chickadee, 1 Carolina Wren, 1 Blue Jay, 1 Downy and 1 Red-bellied Woodpeckers, and 10 Northern Cardinals.
- WEEKEND TOTAL= 39 banded, 66 recaptures, 15 returns, TOTAL= 118

**recaptures were banded this winter, returns were banded an earlier winter

From this weekend and earlier banding and recaptures I estimate (calculate) the local winter population of White-throated Sparrows is 45, while the local winter population of Juncos is 100 birds.

The most interesting individual birds were W.T. Sparrow 4501-89685 banded Jan. 11,1999. It was recaptured last winter (March 10, 2002) and three times this winter (Feb 9, 11, 16, 2003). Junco 2040-67208 was banded Jan. 31,1998 and recaptured the next winter (Jan. 16, 1999). It returned three years later on Jan. 12, 2002, and three times this winter (Jan.15, Feb. 1 & 16, 2003). Neither of these species breeds in Baltimore. Most spend the summer far north of here.

David Thorndill, Ph.D. Professor of Biology
Community College of Baltimore County, Essex
Vice President, Baltimore Bird club

A Fantastic Tale of a Fan-tailed Warbler

by Paul Wildgust.

The first week of September 2007, my wife and I took a trip to Big Bend National Park in South-Eastern Texas. We camped in the Chisos Mountains and along the Rio Grande enjoying the stark yet beautiful Chihuahuan Desert scenery and the great birding that the area has to offer. Despite the day-time heat and spectacular evening thunderstorms, we were able to see some great birds including Vermillion Flycatcher, Blue-throated Hummingbird, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Common Blackhawk, Scott's Oriole, Townsend's Warbler, Black & Say's Phoebe, Black-throated Sparrow, Pyrruloxia, Summer Tanager, Verdin and Ladder-backed Woodpecker. Although we failed to find two of Big Bend's signature species -- the Colima Warbler and Lucifer Hummingbird - we will always remember this trip for one other very unusual sighting.



The Fan-tailed Warbler [Photo: Mark W. Lockwood], more usually found in Mexico, has been recorded only a handful of times over the years in the Southern USA, but never before in Texas. Internet reports told us that this accidental visitor had been seen almost daily for several weeks in one specific Canyon in the Chisos Mountains. A Ranger told us that people had been traveling from all over the country to see it, and that it was still being seen daily.

So on the morning of our last day in the park we picked our way very carefully up the rough, stony track to the Pine Canyon trail-head in our rental car, occasionally stopping as small groups of scaled quail exploded angrily from the desert scrub. When we finally made it to the parking area, several cars were already there, including a beat-up Camry with Pennsylvania plates and an SUV from Minnesota. We set off on foot along the sun-baked trail and chatted with a birder who was walking back down to his car. When we nervously asked him if he'd seen it, he said "Oh yes, it's a knockout bird!". Re-energized, we carried on, pausing only to admire a few Acorn Woodpeckers and raucous Mexican Blue Jays along the way. After about forty minutes we reached the end of the trail, where a narrow and rocky canyon ended at the base of an overhanging waterfall. This was where the ranger said that the bird had been seen. About half a dozen birders were already there, chatting excitedly as they finished their lunch. "Have you seen the bird?" we asked hopefully "Oh yeah,!" two of them said "it was very obliging a few hours ago, but we haven't seen it for a while."

While we caught our breath after the hike, one by one the other birders crept back into the rocky canyon to take up strategic positions where they thought they might get a clear look at the bird if it re-appeared. They looked more like Special Forces than birders as they crawled into their chosen hidey-holes. As I unpacked a sandwich, I joked with my wife that we'll probably just see it appear on one of these rocks nearby (we'd been told by the ranger that the bird spent nearly all its time on the ground, looking for insects between the big boulders). I wandered about 20 yards back along the trail while my wife rested on a rock. Sure enough a flicker of movement suddenly caught my eye, and there it was in all its rare glory - the Fan-tailed Warbler - hopping around happily very close to the boulder I'd just joked about. There was no mistaking its yellow crown and white-tipped tail that bobbed up and down just like a fan. I nearly choked on my lunch.

After the initial shock, I was suddenly faced with a tricky dilemma that I'm sure other birding couples have been faced with at one time or another -- do I take this (possibly once in a lifetime) opportunity and selfishly enjoy it through my binoculars... or do I tell my wife and risk scaring it away...? Fortunately, I have been blessed with a keen instinct for self-preservation, and so I gesticulated as wildly as I dared, hoping to catch her attention. Luckily she caught on immediately, and we soon had the warbler in a binocular crossfire from our respective vantage points.

Birding in Thailand

by Irma Weinstein

While in Thailand this past December I spent two days birding. Each day I had a guide who drove and provided a telescope. Day one we visited Samut Sakohn, an area of salt pans, fish ponds, and wet lands adjacent to the Gulf of Thailand. I saw 31 species of birds common to that area. We visited a Buddhist Temple, Wat Chong Lam, where I observed the nests and young nestlings of Germain's Swiftlet which builds and glues its nests to the interior temple walls with saliva. Some of the nestlings had fallen and were cared for by a monk who kept them in a basket and fed them by hand. Day two we visited Khao Yai National Park. In addition to 27 forest birds we saw a variety of animals including giant black squirrels as big as beaver. Waiting by an enormous fig tree we saw a Great Hornbill, Oriental Pied Hornbill, and Wreathed Hornbill. A Crested Serpent Eagle was seen wheeling overhead. The guides were knowledgeable and fluent in English. I highly recommend the trip. I will be glad to share my bird list upon request.

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Calendar February-March, 2008

(check [web site](#) or booklet for details and directions)

- FEB 5 (Tue) 7:30 p.m. LECTURE AT CROMWELL VALLEY.
- FEB 6 (Wed) 8:00 a.m. FIRST WEDNESDAYS AT FORT MCHENRY. Monthly survey of bird activity at the wetland. Telescope can be useful. Automatically cancelled in bad weather (rain, sleet, snow, fog, etc.). Meet outside the Visitor Center. Leader: Mary Chetelat, 665-0769
- FEB 10 (Sun) 9:00 a.m. MARSHY POINT NATURE CENTER. Half-day trip for winter waterfowl, raptors, passerines. Half-mile trail leads to point overlooking Dundee Creek. Boots advisable, telescopes useful. Leader: Debbie Terry, 252-8771 or gt5s@bcpl.net, and Mary Byers, 410 686-7294 or baypuffin@hotmail.com
- FEB 16 (Sat) 7:30/9:00 a.m. HENLOPEN TO OCEAN CITY. Meet at 7:30 am at the Nursery Road Park & Ride OR at the Lewes-Cape May Ferry passenger lot 9:00 or 9:30 for loons, gannets, sea ducks, Great Cormorants Leader: Pete Webb 486-1217 or pete webb@juno.com
- FEB 16 (Sat) 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon SATURDAY MONITORING WALKS AT FORT MCHENRY. A continuing survey of bird activity at the Fort. Meet outside the Visitor Center. Cancelled in bad weather (high winds, fog, rain). Leader: Jim Peters, 429-0966
- MAR 1 (Sat) 7:30 a.m./8:30 a.m. HORSEHEAD WETLANDS CENTER MEET AT NURSERY ROAD PARK & RIDE. at 7:30 am OR 8:30 am at Horsehead visitors center lot. Varied habitats for winter birds. Leader: Kevin Graff, 557-2456 or whitemarlin2001@yahoo.com
- MAR 2 (Sun) 8:30 a.m. LOCH RAVEN. Telescopes useful. Two mile level walk. Beginning Birders Welcome. Leader: Debbie Terry, 252-8771 or gt5s2bcpl.net
- MAR 4 (Tue) 7:30 p.m LECTURE AT CROMWELL VALLEY.
- MAR 5 (Wed) 8:00 a.m. FIRST WEDNESDAYS AT FORT MCHENRY. See above. Leader: Mary Chetelat, 665-0769
- MAR 8 (Sat) 8:00 a.m. MIDDLE CREEK WMA. Bring lunch for an all-day trip to visit this major gathering place north of Lancaster, PA., for Snow Geese and other waterfowl. Leader: Kevin Graff, 557-2456 or whitemarlin2001@yahoo.com Meet at Timonium Park & Ride on Greenspring Drive/Deereco Rd off Timonium Rd just east of I-83.
- MAR 10 (Mon) 7:00/9:00 a.m. POPLAR ISLAND. Meet at Nursery Road Park & Ride for Carpool OR meet at Tilghman Island at 9:00 am. Habitat similar to Hart-Miller Island. Boat ride from Tilghman Island. 2 hour bus ride around Poplar Island, stopping wherever birding looks good. Scopes are very helpful. Facilities are available. Bring snacks if desired. Lunch will be at a local restaurant. RESERVATIONS REQUIRED. Limit 8 to 24 people. Leader: Robin Batcheller. Coordinator: Kevin Graff, whitemarlin2001@yahoo.com

- MAR 15 (Sat) 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon SATURDAY MONITORING WALKS AT FORT McHENRY. Cancelled in bad weather (high winds, fog, rain). Leader: Jim Peters, 429-0966
- MAR 26 (Wed) 9:30 a.m. LOUDON PARK CEMETERY, LOCATED AT 3801 FREDERICK AVE. . Leader: Joy Wheeler, 825-1204
- MAR 29 (Sat) 7:30 a.m. ALL-DAY SEA WATCH AT OCEAN CITY INLET, WITH OPTIONAL EXTENSION TO MAR 30. Join us in the inlet parking lot for full day watch for Gannets galore and other seabirds headed north.. Leader will provide snacks. Bring lunch. Dinner/Tally Sat evening at local restaurant. For motel reservations, meeting place, additional information. Leader: Kevin Graff, 410-557-2456,

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