

**The newsletter of the Baltimore Bird Club**

**February/March 1998 - Online Edition**

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Deadline for next *CHIP NOTES*: February 25, 1998 (the next issue will be April-May 1998). Send material to:

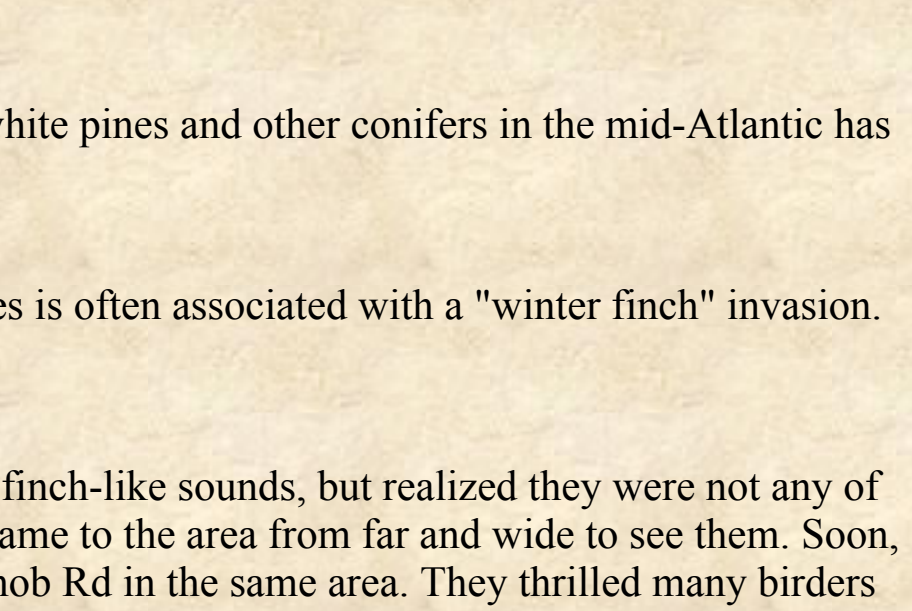
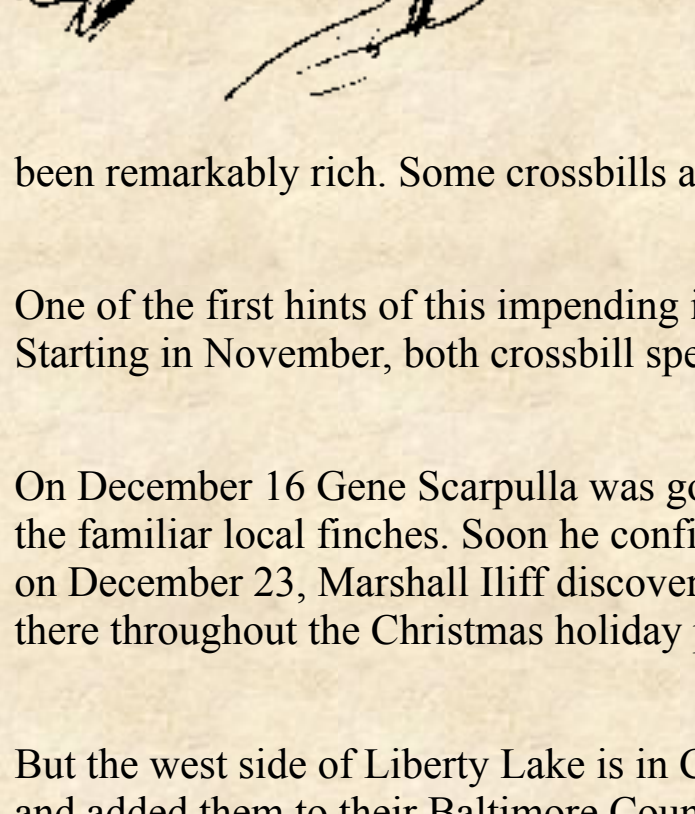
Steve Sanford  
8412 Downey Dale Drive  
Randallstown MD 21133

or e-mail to [manager@mail.bcpb.lib.md.us](mailto:manager@mail.bcpb.lib.md.us)  
Please help *CHIP NOTES* get out on time.

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**Crossbill Invasion**

by Steve Sanford



A glorious event for Maryland birding happened around Christmas, 1997, and may be continuing as you read this. We have been "invaded" by crossbills - both Red and White-winged Crossbills and White-winged Crossbills. These colorful birds with their unusual crossed bills normally reside somewhere near, or north of, the Canadian border, or in the Rockies and far-northwestern states and provinces

Crossbills' main food is nuts from the cones of pines and other evergreens. Their bills are designed to penetrate cones to get at the nuts. This winter the crop of cones on white pines and other conifers in the mid-Atlantic has been remarkably rich. Some crossbills apparently found that the cone crop down here was better than up north, so they invaded Maryland and vicinity, for the first time since the mid 1970s.

One of the first hints of this impending invasion was the appearance of many Red-breasted Nuthatches in our area as early as late August, with our Liberty Lake field trip on August 26 as an example. This species is often associated with a "winter finch" invasion. Starting in November, both crossbill species were being seen repeatedly at Cape Henlopen, Delaware, and here-and-there in other mid-Atlantic locations.

On December 16 Gene Scarpulla was going out to check the mail at his rustic "Reservoir Natural Resources Office" amidst the pines at the end of Oakland Road on the west side of Liberty Lake. He heard some finch-like sounds, but realized they were not any of the familiar local finches. Soon he confirmed that they were ... Red Crossbills! Over the next week or two there were repeated sightings of Red Crossbills and occasional White-winged Crossbills there. Birders came to the area from far and wide to see them. Soon, on December 23, Marshall Lift discovered flocks of both crossbill species in greater numbers a few miles north on the west side of Liberty Lake along Deer Park Road. Soon more were discovered along Pine Knob Rd in the same area. They thrilled many birders there throughout the Christmas holiday period.

But the west side of Liberty Lake is in Carroll County. Rick Blom brought Baltimore County into the crossbill camp by finding both species of crossbills at Pine Ridge Golf Course off Dulaney Valley Road north of Towson. Other birders soon found them there too, and added them to their Baltimore County lists. White-winged Crossbills were also found near Prettyboy reservoir. Both species were also found repeatedly at Broad Creek Boy Scout Camp in Harford County.

We hope this invasion will continue all winter. As of mid-January it is still going strong. Check the Baltimore Birdline (410-467-0653, or on the Internet at <http://www.bcpb.lib.md.us/~cross/birdline.html>). Another good source of information is the new MD Osprey mailing list on the Internet which can be viewed at <http://www.ari.net/mdosprey/>. And, of course, watch your yards and feeders, especially if you have pine trees. If you see any crossbills, or any other notable birds, be sure to report them to the Baltimore Birdline 410-467-0653.

Art note: Thanks to *Tim Carney* for providing the bird drawings for the [crossbill article](#), and the [Postcard](#) from Sulawesi.

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**Hart-Miller Island Needs Your Help**

by Gail Frantz

Hart-Miller Island is a 13 year-old, 1100-acre island created when the highly eroded Hart Island and Miller Island were connected by a 6-mile long perimeter dike. The interior cells of the dike are being filled with dredged material obtained from the Port of Baltimore and some portions of the Baltimore and Chesapeake Bay navigation channels. The island is divided into two cells: the North Cell, which will be used for dredged material placement until the year 2009, and the completed 300-acre South Cell, which is the area currently under consideration. Over the years, many ideas have emerged to develop the island, ranging from a golf course to an amusement park to a wooded tract. The most recent proposal is a wildlife habitat with passive (non-invasive) use by citizens.

The decision how the South Cell area will be developed is now in the home stretch. All Baltimore County citizens, but birders in particular, have the unprecedented opportunity to influence the establishment of a migrating shorebird and nesting tern habitat on Hart-Miller Island. As one birder put it, "we'll never have another chance like this."

**The Folks Who Care**  
In December 1997, the second public workshop was held at the Chesapeake High School in Essex. Participants included Baltimore County citizens, elected officials from Baltimore County, the Hart-Miller Island Study Team and Michael Baker Jr., Inc., an environmental engineering consulting firm that put together an informative display depicting the various proposals that are on the table. The purposes of the workshop were to update the public and to continue receiving input from involved citizens. The issue was whether to develop Hart-Miller as habitat for migrating shorebirds and nesting terns.

**Proposals Under Consideration**

Presently, the three main proposals are

1. Upland Migrating Birds Concept
2. Wetlands/Shorebirds Bird Concept
3. No Action

Knowledgeable birders from around the state presented articulate arguments in favor of developing Hart-Miller as a refuge for shorebirds and terns as represented in proposal 2, the Wetlands/Shorebirds Bird Concept. It was pointed out that grasslands established for breeding grassland birds (proposal number 1) are counterproductive due to abnormally high predation rates unless the area covers at least 1000 acres. As for migratory grassland birds, Hart-Miller does not appear to be in a geographic position to attract many grassland species. Because many thousands of acres of shore have been destroyed by development, the construction of mudflats and wetlands on Hart-Miller appears to be the best choice. This relatively small island could be an important effort to replace a tiny portion of Maryland's lost shorebird and tern habitat.

**Maryland Ornithological Society Bird Surveys**

Over the last thirteen years, much migratory information about 267 species has been recorded by Maryland Ornithological Society members. Gene Scarpulla currently conducts weekly bird surveys on Hart-Miller Island and also represents MOS on the Study Team. At the December public workshop, Gene pointed out that in addition to the fascinating birding opportunities that Hart-Miller would afford us as birders, there could also be exciting educational opportunities for Maryland schoolchildren. In addition, Gene's weekly monitoring of the island will undoubtedly help to reveal hitherto unknown migratory patterns.

**Who Pays For All This?**

The Federal Government and the State of Maryland will share the cost. After the restoration work is completed, the state will be responsible for operating and maintaining the restored facility.

**Begin Voicing Your Support Now**

The next meeting in March is critical. The plans will be finalized very soon after that. Only your endorsement of the number 2, the Wetland/Shorebirds Bird Concept will make this extraordinary birding wetland happen. Fran Saunders from MOS writes, "We urge you to send your comments as soon as possible, since the draft report is expected to be released for public review and comment in January or February 1998."

**How To Help**

- To register your endorsement of plan 2, please write to:

Mr. J. Richard Kibby  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District  
Hart-Miller Island South Cell Environmental Restoration  
ATTN: CENAB-PL-P (HMI)  
P.O. Box 1715  
Baltimore, MD 21203-1715

or e-mail your support to: [richard.kibby@nab02.usace.army.mil](mailto:richard.kibby@nab02.usace.army.mil)

- Include yourself on the public mailing list by requesting the publication "Hart-Miller Island South Cell Environmental Restoration" in your correspondence.
- Try to attend the last public meeting, which is tentatively scheduled for May 1998.
- For current developments & more information, see Gene Scarpulla's report, "Hart-Miller Island: Environmental Restoration of the South Cell," which appears in the current *Maryland Yellowthroat* (January/February) and the [MOS Home Page](#). *Chip Notes* will also keep you informed.

**YOUR INPUT COUNTS!**

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**Birdwalk Volunteers Needed**

North Point State Park, which includes Black Marsh Wetlands, is looking for volunteers to lead occasional morning bird walks at the park. Walks are generally scheduled to last two hours. Participants on the walks are usually beginning bird watchers. This is an excellent opportunity to hand out BBC membership information and attract new members to the club. For further information or to volunteer, please contact Ranger Michael Lathroum at (410) 477-0757.

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**Board of Directors Meetings**

by Alan Bromberg, Recording Secretary

The Board of Directors met on November 10 and December 8. At the November meeting, the board heard a report on the first Gwynns Falls bird survey, in which all BBC members are encouraged to participate. The next survey will be part of the Mid-Winter count. The board discussed production of the maps for the site guide and a proposed effort by the city to improve the image of Cylburn. Complaints that the BBC Birdline was not updated every week were noted. Updates depend on receipt of reports. Reports, as well as questions about the BBC, have been sporadic. The board discussed whether to continue the Birdline and how to obtain additional information on bird sightings.

At the December meeting, the board approved a change to the by-laws providing that former BBC presidents be members of the board. The change is shown below and will be presented to the membership for a vote at the annual meeting in March. The board further discussed the production of maps and other issues related to publication of the site guide. A group has been formed to glean rare bird alerts on the Internet in order to provide more information on sightings in Maryland and nearby areas for the Birdline. The board heard a report on a meeting held on December 2 concerning the future of Hart-Miller Island. BBC members are urged to write letters in support of preserving the south cell of the island as a habitat for migrating shore birds.

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**Proposed Change in BBC Bylaws**

Add to Article VI Section 1. (6) The Immediate Past President.

The article will read as follows:

Section 1. The Board of directors shall consist of

1. the officers of the Chapter;
2. six members duly elected as directors;
3. the one or more members nominated by the chapter and duly elected as directors of the Maryland Ornithological Society, Inc.;
4. the chair of the standing committees;
5. Representatives as set forth in Article III, Section C of the manual of operations;
6. The immediate Past President of the Baltimore Bird Club.

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**The BBC BIRD LINE**

A Reminder

This is a reminder that **we do have a Baltimore birding hotline, and we need your reports.**

Let us hear about your sightings. Naturally we want to hear about uncommon birds and "rarities." But also let us know about highlights of your birding in the region, as well as interesting yard birds, seasonal arrivals, and nesting. We urge field trip leaders especially to report trip highlights directly to the BirdLine in addition to mailing in your reports. You can call in your sightings to (410) 467-0653. You can also e-mail your sightings to the BirdLine at [birdr@xtrabos.com](mailto:birdr@xtrabos.com). For best results, please include the specific words: "BBC Birdline Sighting" on the subject line.

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**Postcard from over the Edge I**

by Hank Kaestner

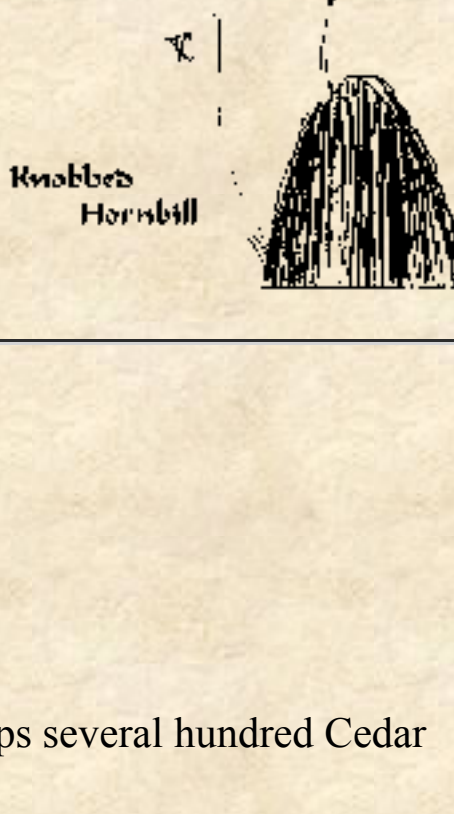
12 November 1997

Dear Chippers,

I have traveled to SE Asia to do a crop survey on Indonesian vanilla. A visit last week to the major production area in northern Sulawesi Island revealed that the El Niño-induced draught has killed more than 50% of the vanilla vines. Large numbers of clove trees have also died. For a birder Sulawesi is a paradise, with over 100 endemic species in the region, many very unusual and brightly plumaged. I was able to spend a free Sunday in Tangkoko Park, a large part of which had been burned by fire, but still managed to see 10 lifers including the rare **Green-backed Kingfisher**. One of the highlights of Tangkoko is the world's densest population of hornbills. We saw hundreds of the large, gaudy **Knobbed Hornbill**. We did very well on "night" birds, including a great daytime view of the seldom-seen Minhassa Owl (a forest barn owl), the Ochre-bellied Hawk-Owl, and the Sulawesi Scops Owl.

Best,  
Hank Kaestner, from over the edge.

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**Field Trip Reports**

compiled by Steve Sanford

November 15 - **Piney Run**. Predictions of rain apparently frightened off all but three participants. The weather was actually dry, mostly cloudy, and in the 40s. There were 11 species of waterfowl, and a total of 39 species. Flocks of perhaps several hundred Cedar Waxwings periodically landed in the trees and appeared to replace the recently fallen leaves. The group missed a Bald Eagle that was seen there a little later. Leader: Burton Alexander.

November 29 - **Blackwater NWR**. No report received, but we hear some participants saw a King Eider in the Choptank River at Cambridge.

December 6 - **Southern Maryland**. The trip was almost canceled due to the prediction of high winds and temperatures only in the thirties. The wind and cold were actually much less of a problem than anticipated.

The 12 participants had excellent looks at all three Scoter species at the fishing pier at Point Lookout State Park, with Surf Scoters most abundant, followed by White-winged and Black. Oldsquaw and loons were less numerous than usual, and grebes were strangely absent. One distant Gannet was spotted. There was a very close Purple Sandpiper on the small jetty east of the southernmost parking area.

Land birds were rather scarce. The group did not find any Brown-headed Nuthatches at Point Lookout for the first time in years on this trip. The Beaudé ponds near Leonardtown had far less waterfowl than in previous years, and no Meadowlarks or Short-eared Owls. Battle Creek Cypress Swamp (Calvert County) was unusually inactive, but the interesting visitor center was cozy as always. Schoolhouse Wood (Upper Marlboro) produced some Shovelers, Gadwall, and Swamp Sparrows.

The trip had 64 species. Leader: Steve Sanford.

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**Postcard from over the Edge II**

by Hank Kaestner

Nov 20, 1997

Dear Chippers,

This is a card from over the edge.

This is the most isolated and primitive place I've ever visited. I've spent a week on New Britain Island in Papua, New Guinea. I was looking for, and found, lots of vanilla being grown by the native Melaneseans.

Although the bird life is not as diverse as I've mentioned New Guinea, the birds that are here are unique, with many endemics. My favorite has been the Blue-eyed Cuckoo. Also beautiful are the various lorikeets, imperial pigeons, fruit-doves, honeyeaters, etc.

Hank Kaestner

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**Back Yard Birding**

by [Gail Frantz](#)

**Winter Finches**

Steve Sanford forwarded this message from **Harford County's** Les Eastman, Nov. 11:

Between chores at home today, I have been keeping an eye on the feeder (also putting out the winter complement of feeders) and I had a short visit by **5 Pine Siskins**, **Purple Finches** have been reliable (outnumbering the **House Finches** on Sunday), and Saturday I had at least **2 Evening Grosbeaks**, so the winter finches are here. Now, where are the Crossbills?

The news about his winter finches is tantalizing!" Steve wrote. "I've seen a few other indications on the Internet of winter finches in the area, too. Unfortunately not in my yard, though. How about yours?"

(After reading Steve's message, I checked the back yard and voila! There was a **Purple Finch** drinking from the bird bath. (GF)

Happily, **White-winged** and **Red Crossbills** did turn up at Liberty Lake and other central Maryland locations in December (see "[Crossbill Invasion](#)" above). **Baltimore County Suburbs**

- Steve Sanford on Nov. 22: "I had a **Red-breasted Nuthatch** at my feeder this morning -the first I've ever actually SEEN in my yard, which naturally makes me feel a lot better about listing it."
- See [Louise Snyder's article](#) for another tale from the suburbs.

**Baltimore City**

- Kevin Graff's 1997 fall count is one that we may all envy!

This is one of my best years. The total count for September 4 to October 31 is 4,939 hawks. The **Broad-winged Hawks** rated the highest count: 4,324. The single highest count in **one minute was 1,047 on Sept. 15!**

Interesting hawk includes a **Golden Eagle** on Oct. 13 and Oct. 21. Then a **N. Goshawk** on Oct. 28.

Species count for Sep. 4 to Oct. 31:

- 244 Turkey Vultures
- 98 Red-tailed Hawks
- 7 Rough-legged Hawks
- 20 Ospreys
- 21 Am. Kestrels
- 5 Merlins
- 1 Peregrine Falcon
- 7 Unidentified Raptors
- 6 Black Vultures
- 2 Golden Eagles
- 9 Bald Eagles
- 34 Red-shouldered Hawks
- 89 Sharp-shinned Hawk
- 61 Cooper's Hawks
- 1 N. Goshawk
- 4324 Broad-winged Hawks

Other birds seen during migration: **16 Cattle Egrets** on Sept. 6. **4 Double-crested Cormorants** on Oct. 16. **Canada** Broad-winged Hawk on Oct. 1 and on Oct. 16, **1,483**.

During hawk migration, my yard has been under attack by hungry **Sharp-shinned** and **Cooper's** Hawks. They caught a total of **3 House Sparrows**, **1 House Finch**, **1 Blue Jay** and **1 mouse** from the garden and feeder. After 3 years of unsuccessful hunting, this is the first time I've seen the hawks finally catch some lunch.

Oct. 27, the **Juncos** came back. I also observed a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** for food on several trees. My first **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** is a welcome new bird on my final tally list. On November 1 a **Carolina Wren** was checking out the nest box on our back porch.

During the week of Nov. 11 Kevin's yard hosted a **White-breasted Nuthatch**, increasing numbers of **Juncos** and **Am. Goldfinch**, **Purple Finch** and a **Fox Sparrow**. **Country**

- E-mail message received from MAG PAM: "Wooden Sparrow seen at Worthington Farm, Glyndon, MD, on November 6 at feeder."
- **Foxesburg: One wheezy sounding Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, two melodious Fox Sparrows, and four Purple Finches**, have been regular visitors in the yard since mid-November. We were not surprised that the lovely **Meadowlark song** we enjoyed on Nov. 21 turned out to be a **Starlings'** expert rendition. We have a resident **Red-breasted Nuthatch** that has been snarfing up the peanut butter mixture smeared on the back porch banister. (GF)
- Reisterstown (north): Since the end of Nov., Phyllis Grimms' **Goldfinches** have been bringing along at least **2 Pine Siskins** with them to her thistle feeder.

**A Feeder for Acrobatic Goldfinches**

From Steve Sanford: "I recently bought Perky Pets brand *Upside Down Thistle Feeder*, on the recommendation of the salesman at the Wild Bird Center. This feeder places the feeding holes UNDER the perches, on the theory that Goldfinches like to feed upside down, unlike junk birds (if you'll pardon the expression).

Boy was he right! Previously, I only saw a few **Goldfinches** at my feeders. Now I have a Goldfinch "problem." They are almost always there. Once I saw a **House Sparrow** (pardon my English, again) try to use the feeder. It literally fell off the perch!"

- Ray Hardy from Catonsville has had success with the same feeder. Ray gleefully observed that his **House Finches** are fed.

**Bird Bottle Feeders that Squirrels Hate**

- For sunflower seeds, Joe Lewandowski and Jim Peters endorse a different kind of feeder called the *Soda Bottle Bird Feeder*. With this feeder you use a 2 liter bottle, screw on the threaded zinc metal gasket to the bottle top, hang it up (a hanger is supplied) or mount it and you're in business. Both Joe and Jim like the effective way that squirrels are thwarted.

Both the *Soda Bottle Bird Feeder* and the Perky Pet *Upside Down* feeder may be purchased at the Wild Bird Center. The Towson store recently moved from Perring Plaza and is now located on west Padonia Rd. in Roundwood Center. Phone: (410) 666-4550.

If you live near Westminster area you may want to visit Bowman's, which has expanded to two stores, side by side. They sell the *Upside Down* feeder, and also have a good selection of all kinds of birding supplies. Their seed prices are the best I've found, that is if you're into buying 40-50 lb. bags. R.D. Bowman & Sons is on Engler Rd. Phone: (410) 848-3733

The *Upside Down* feeder costs about \$18 to \$20. The *Soda Bottle Feeder* costs about \$10.

**More Feeder Tips**

- In Baltimore County's Glen Dale area, Ruth Culbertson's thistle feeder has attracted a male **Evening Grosbeak**, **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, a **Pine Siskin** with numerous **Goldfinches**, and one **Fox Sparrow** scratching for seed on the ground beneath. The question is: Where may we purchase that type of feeder, Ruth?

**Teaching Responsibility -- What's Wrong With This Picture?**

- Did you hear about the change in the virtual pet world in Japan? Yes, virtual pets, like virtual cats, newly hatched birds tweet when they need to be fed and die when they're neglected.

Apparently, the real advantage is the price. Virtual pets can cost up to forty bucks apiece while live baby birds may be replaced at a bargain: 25 cents each.

**Terry Ross's "Birding and the Internet" Lecture**

On Nov. 11 at the Johns Hopkins Univ. Space Telescope Science Institute, Terry Ross gave a marvelous lecture which he called *Birding and the Internet*. The arrangements to use that awesome facility with its enormous screen hooked up to a computer were made by Shireen Gonzalez, a gracious BBC member who works there. Terry gave us a comprehensive and oftentimes **humorous** computer-user view of the birdwatching action that is keeping a record on the net. He walked us through many available sources which he has linked from his [BBC web page](#). In addition he gave us tips for "sailing" out on our own. Terry keeps records of the number of "hits" that his pages get (tens of thousands!) He also keeps a record of the number of **countries heard from**. Words mostly often heard from the audience were "incredible" and "unbelievable." Try it, you'll love it. (GF)

Let us hear about your Back Yard birding too. Call or write

Gail Frantz  
13955 Old Hanover Rd.  
Reisterstown MD 21136  
e-mail: [gumeabird@aol.com](mailto:gumeabird@aol.com)

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**Why Thanksgiving Dinner Was Late**

by Louise Snyder

My backyard on Edmondson Avenue doesn't attract many interesting birds - mostly sparrows and pigeons. But once in a while I'm treated to something exciting.

Glimping out the dining room window last Thanksgiving day, I saw something at the edge of the driveway. At first I thought it was some dry leaves. Looking closer it was a bird resting on the ground no more than eight feet from the house, facing the window. It sat there motionless except for the head which turned to the right and then straight ahead as if staring at me.

It had an owl-like face, white, heavily streaked breast and something white near the tip of its folded wing, and with binoculars I could see that it was feathers. It had yellow eyes, a pale eyebrow and a small white patch just above the nostrils. I ran to the second floor and looked down and realized it was a large chestnut colored bird, with a very long tail that had alternating bands of light and dark. Back to the dining room. After about fifteen minutes, it stretched a little and extended a bright yellow leg and then slowly retracted it.

Another thirty minutes went by and it still sat there. Could it be injured or sick and can't fly? Another ten minutes went by and to my surprise it stood on both legs and slowly turned around. I was relieved to see that it didn't appear injured. With one eye on the bird and the other searching through bird books, I'm pretty sure it was a female Northern Harrier. As I watched, she fluttered her wings slightly, and then with great energy and speed she took to the sky and was out of sight in less than two seconds. The next hour I spent comparing my notes with descriptions in my books. The white rump feathers convinced me that it really was a Northern Harrier.

Could I be wrong?

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