

## The newsletter of the Baltimore Bird Club

**October-November 1999 -- Online Edition**

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Deadline for next *CHIP NOTES*: October 25, 1998 (the next issue will be December 1999 - January 2000). Send material to:

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Please help *CHIP NOTES* get out on time.

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## My Vacation with the Birds

By Joan Justice

I am an elementary school teacher, with an interest in the environment. Unfortunately, except for summers, I have almost no time to pursue this interest. My husband, son Eric, good friends Mary and Tom Kemp, their children, and I went to Hilton Head SC July 16 through 23rd. When searching for fun and excitement on vacation, I read that Sea Pines Nature Center, an Audubon Center, and a place called Pickney Island were right on or by Hilton Head. South Carolina's tourist industry failed to mention that Hilton Head is a birder's dream and, as a beginning birder, I was totally unaware that so many birds breed here. Mother Nature graciously allowed me to observe quite a show.

The entire group of adults and children drove to Pickney Island early one morning. They call this part of South Carolina the Low Country. It's just a euphemism for a swamp. We know this because we were greeted with swarms of mosquitoes. As everyone swatted and scratched, a heated discussion ensued about the feasibility of hiking in a place where we humans, were a meal for ravenous bugs. Bug juice to the rescue, the hike continued. (My son reminds me that the bug juice really didn't work that well.)

We consulted a map of the island and strolled the 0.9 mile down the road to Ibis Pond. We happily observed about 20 to 40 Ibis, Herons, and Egrets from about 100 yards. I thought this place was terrific. I had no idea of what was to come. Mary Kemp decided to explore on her own. After about five minutes, she excitedly ran back and hand signaled for us to follow her. We came around the bend when suddenly a stand of trees was white with Ibis and Egrets. At the same time we were bombarded with the sounds. The rookery was a very small island on this small island sanctuary. We continued to creep slowly toward the island. All of us expected the entire flock to scatter as soon as they spotted us. But the birds are protected on their island and must feel safe in their sanctuary. They didn't fly away and so we were able to observe this island from about 20 to 30 feet. We took full advantage.

The island was alive with squawking birds. Dominated by, as the pond's name might indicate, White Ibis. At first, I really only noticed the adults. Then I had this realization: those nests had chicks and eggs in them. In one Snowy Egret nest, three babies were sitting. One of the chicks was considerably smaller than the other two. I watched this trio for some time, the mother had stopped feeding the smallest bird. He was hopefully trying to snatch a bite from his nest mates. This desperate, but hopeful runt, didn't seem too successful to me.

The Discovery Channel has some of my favorite programs. From one of their shows, I recognized the jerking motion of a different Snowy Egret mom as she regurgitated to feed her babies. Feeding those babies is very physical.

We watched a Wood Stork, as he sat majestically on the top of a tree. The guy looked bald to me and we tried to decide if it was a vulture or not. Peterson says they eat meat. The Cattle Egrets nested at the edge of the trees. We could see their eggs inside their nest. I saw a couple of Ibis chicks. I had looked in my book to make sure that I wasn't just seeing an adoptive mother raising babies. But sure enough, the Ibis babies were dark.

The most interesting spectacle we watched was a nest of Tricolored Herons. Two adults came to feed them. The babies kept squawking and pecking at them. After feeding them both parents moved about an arm's length away. The adult herons looked like they just wanted a rest. The movement seemed like any adult who, exhausted from parenthood, needed a moment for peace and quiet.

Returning the next day, we observed this same Tricolored Heron nest. In horror, we watched as a Black Crowned Night-Heron, stole one of the Tricolored Heron chicks out of its nest. Amazingly, my friend, Tom Kemp, somehow managed to locate the Black Crowned Heron nest. He watched as the Tricolored chick was ripped apart and fed to the Black Crowned Heron babies. Nature is not always so gentle.

One more birding experience was in store for us. Two weeks later on a trip to Tahoe, we went hot air ballooning and flew over a Bald Eagle!

Prior to this trip, I couldn't identify any but the most common birds. I now know the difference between Great, Snowy, and Cattle Egrets. I can tell Green, Tricolored, and Black-crowned Herons apart. The entire experience reinforced for me the value of sanctuary. Even beginning birders, children, and people with little knowledge in nature, need chances to see how awe inspiring nature can be. And nature surely needs more voices to protect it.

*Joan Justice is a relatively new BBC member who lives in Reisterstown. Thanks for sharing your sense of wonder and discovery with us.*

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## Hummingbird Fairy Tales Persist

By Gail Frantz

If you attended, Rick Blom's BBC lecture "*Bird Watching's Top Ten Myths...*" last February you would have heard Rick relate one of the most persistent birding myths that: Hummers migrate on the backs of geese. So here we go again

This past summer, you may have watched PBS's highly acclaimed ten part series, *The Life of Birds* narrated by David Attenborough. In preparation for the series one of the producers of the show asked Bob Sargent, prominent Alabama hummingbird bander, to give some technical advice concerning hummingbirds. One of the questions asked was: Where do Canada Geese land in Mexico? Reason? The producers of the series wanted the film crew to get some good video of hummingbirds migrating on the backs of the geese.

Bob's generous response as to how he felt about this legend still being promulgated?

I think these folk were dedicated to what they were assigned to do...the videos and graphics are truly stunning. It was my feeling that they had discovered that the world was quite a large place and that birds were not as easily found as they had been led to believe. Unfortunately, much of their background research had been done using materials that were less than accurate. I spent much time trying to assist them, hoping that the part about Ruby-throated would be reasonably accurate.

To learn more about hummingbirds check out Bob Sargent's, *Ready For Returning Hummers*, from the March/April '99 issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest* and his newly published book, *The Ruby-throated Hummingbird* (\$19.95, ISBN number 0-8117-2688-6) available from Stackpole Books: [www.stackpolebooks.com](http://www.stackpolebooks.com) or tele: (800) 732-3669, ext. 128.

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## West Coast of Florida in Spring

By Jim Highsaw and Linda Prentice

At 8:15 a.m. we are the first people down the Commodore Creek canoe trail at the J.N. Ding Darling NWR. Our efforts are rewarded when we spot a Mangrove Cuckoo in the thick vegetation, and are able to stay on it long enough to get good looks. The previous day we had seen one fly across the wildlife drive, but this is a much better look at a new bird. So began a week-long trip in late April to see migrants and resident birds on Florida's west coast.

We enjoy Ding Darling so much that we spent 21 1/2 days there on this trip. Some of the highlights were the great photo opportunities. Cape May Warblers along the wildlife drive, several warbler species at the Bailey Tract, three new species for us (Mangrove Cuckoo, Black-whiskered Vireo, and Gray Kingbird) and, of course, the Roseate Spoonbills. It was hard to leave, but we knew that good things were waiting at Corkscrew Swamp.

Corkscrew did not disappoint. Some of the highlights were a red-shouldered hawk catching a frog next to the boardwalk, the Barred Owls (including an immature one at close range), Limpkins, five warbler species, the wonderful photo opportunities and, of course, the Wood Storks. We easily could have spent two or more days here.

After Corkscrew we headed up the coast to Fort DeSoto County Park to look for warblers and other spring migrants, which were numerous here. Cape May Warblers and Parula Warblers seemed to be the most abundant (and easy to see), followed by Redstart, Black-and-white, and Black-throated Blue. Other highlights of the 1 1/2 days here were Orchard Oriole, Indigo Bunting and Cedar Waxwing.

We spent the last two days of the trip at inland parks near Tampa - J. Chestnut County Park, Hillsborough River SP and J.B. Sargeant Park. These areas were not as productive as the coastal areas, but we enjoyed walking the trails and picked up a few more species, including Prothonotary Warbler. If doing this trip again we would avoid Fort DeSoto on a weekend (too crowded), and spend more time at Corkscrew.

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## Lake Roland Restrictions

By Steve Sanford

We have received word just before press time that the pedestrian bridge into the heart of Lake Roland (Robert E. Lee Park) is going to be rebuilt. The work will begin November and the bridge will be totally closed in February. It is estimated that it will take about 6 months to finish the new bridge. The city is apparently not planning to provide an alternate route into the park. This, of course, could have severe impact on our spring field trips there. We will try to have more information in upcoming issues of **Chip Notes** on this issue.

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## A Bird Count at the Baltimore Zoo

By Julie Tomita

On Friday, May 9, 1999, we celebrated the return of our spring migrant birds with the second annual International Migratory Day walk around Waterwolf Lake. The overcast and misty morning was not ideal for a bird count, however, we had a great time and documented 61 species of birds by sight and sound. Participants in this year's count included Steve Sarro, Lori Catalone, Lisa Murphy, Sharon Overholser, Gil Myers (our official recorder), Amy Myers, Holly Vrablic, Tammy Anderson, Helen Wilson, Nena Storch, Clair Chesapeake and myself. Our count began at 6:30 a.m. and ended at 8:15 a.m.

Steve Sarro, Curator of Birds and Mammals, wins this year's MVP (Most Valuable Player) award for spotting and identifying three Bobolinks perched high in a tree. That was, without a doubt, the highlight of the morning. Let's all give Steve a big round of applause - Yay!

Here is our list of 61 species: Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Mallard, Solitary Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Herring Gull, Rock Dove, Mourning Dove, Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, White-eyed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Fish Crow, N. Rough-winged Swallow, Barn Swallow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, House Wren, Swainson's Thrush, Wood Thrush, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Northern Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher, European Starling, Northern Parula, Yellow Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, Scarlet Tanager, Eastern Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Indigo Bunting, Bobolink, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Baltimore Oriole, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow

Many thanks to all the great people who got up at the crack of dawn to participate in the bird walk. Hope to see everyone this time next year when we will once again welcome our beloved spring migrants!

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## Cylburn's Summer Solstice Celebration

By Joy Wheeler

At 8:10 AM a dozen people gathered to get the solstice celebration underway with a bird walk. With 12 people participating - 5 of them members of the Baltimore Bird Club, and the 7 others new birders - we listed 31 species. Our youngest observer was Vice President Mary Maxey Paul's 8-month-old daughter, Sierra, one of our brightest-eyed observers.

At 1 AM we got together again for the dedication of our illustrative panel on the second floor, *Web of Life: Cylburn's Connection*. There were 12 people there, a different group, except for Mary and Sierra. Sierra was again one of our brightest-eyed observers. We look forward to the day when she can see the panel as much more than just pretty pictures, which it is, of course.

*See "Cylburn's Connections" which follows for more about the panel.*

## Cylburn's Connections

By Joy Wheeler

At the January 1998 board meeting I requested funds from the Dorothy Blake Martin fund for an educational display at Cylburn. The board was receptive to the idea but chose to use a different source of money, the Etta Wedge Education Fund. This was a fund first created by Frances Covington to honor Ms. Wedge with a new trail through Cylburn's forest: the Etta Stem Wedge Bird Walk. All of the money had not been used and was augmented by the Museum Committee through donations made for educational purposes. The amount in the Etta Stem Wedge Education Fund was enough to cover the cost of the proposal.

The project *Web of Life: Cylburn's Connection* was planned to direct the viewer to think of how Cylburn's resources, plant and animal, are connected to each other and ultimately to the "Web of Life". Cylburn does not exist by itself. Its well-being depends on the well-being of the entire Jones Falls Valley watershed. Perhaps the following paragraph paraphrased from the original proposal influenced the board.

There is one question that should engage thoughts and imaginations as the beauty and diversity of Cylburn is viewed. **How do all these elements come together to illustrate the interconnectedness of living things on the small scale of Cylburn and on a planet-wide scale?** Students on tours are prime subjects for the introduction and reinforcement of the ideas involved in the realization of this interconnectedness of living things. The message of the proposed graphic of the WEB OF LIFE cannot be repeated enough.

Stated goals measured by the Maryland State Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) encourage teachers to look for ways to explore and reinforce lessons of interconnectedness on the planet. These teachers are the impetus behind scheduling school tours as they extend and illustrate learning outside the classrooms. The large, artfully presented diagraphic mural will help focus attention in this very important direction, something which may easily be overlooked with the many other elements of Cylburn to highlight.

After I had arranged with Adler Display to produce the 9' x 4' panel on Cylburn's second floor, I engaged the educated imagination of Jim Peters to work with me. We had many discussions on how it should be presented and called on Patsy Perlman, Beth Watts, Charlie Davis and Bill Bridgeland for ideas, scientific validity, artfulness and interpretation. Jim Peters presented our purposes very persuasively to our board and the board of the Cylburn Arboretum Association. The entire consulting committee is grateful to the board of the Baltimore Bird Club for its support.

You will find that the panel is not just pretty pictures. *The Web of Life: Cylburn's Connections* invites your thought processes. Use them and then connect Cylburn to Baltimore and the rest of the planet.

## Membership Dues

By Roberta Ross

Our 1999-2000 membership year began September 1, 1999. Thanks to all who paid their dues promptly. If you have not paid your dues, please forward them as promptly as possible to:

Roberta Ross  
4128 Roland Ave  
Baltimore MD 21211-2034

**If the expiration date on your mailing label is printed in red, we have not received your dues.** Our regular dues, which include membership in the state organization, are \$20 for an individual or \$30 for a household. Members of another chapter or life members of MOS who joined after 6/1/90 pay the "chapter only" dues of \$10 for an individual or \$15 for household memberships.

Roberta Ross

## Field Trip Reports

Compiled by Steve Sanford

August 24 **Lake Roland** - Leader Chris Manning writes: "The first Lake Roland trip for the fall didn't start off too promising due to rain. We persevered and by 9 AM the rain stopped and some birds did come out to join us. It turned out to be a very pleasant trip." 40 species. 9 participants.

August 31 **Lake Roland** - The trip's highlight was a Philadelphia Vireo plus 6 warbler species. 50 species overall. 20 participants. Leader: Shirley Geddes.

September 4 **Phoenix Pond** - Birding was slow thanks to the approach of the remnants of Hurricane Dennis. There were 13 woodchucks at the pond including one in a tree! 27 species. 8 participants. Leader: Sukon Kanchanaraksa.

September 7 **Lake Roland** - The weather started overcast but became partly sunny and around 75°. The trip featured a good look at 3 Great Crested Flycatchers in one tree, and some good looks at Yellow-billed Cuckoos. 43 species with 4 warbler species. 17 participants. Leader: Chris Manning.

## Book Review: *Flute's Journey*, by Lynne Cherry.

Reviewed by Ben Poscove

(San Diego: Harcourt Brace) 1997 [ISBN: 0-15-292853-7]

If you have a friend like mine who loves to read and is in the third grade, you are always looking for books that are interesting, challenging, and educational. Boy! Have I found a gem that includes all of these factors. It is about the life of a Wood Thrush that was born in Belt Woods in Maryland and named Flute by two children who visit the woods regularly for the enjoyment it gives them. The story traces Flute's life growing up in Belt Woods, his first migration to Costa Rica, his life there, his return to Belt Woods, and his finding a mate and raising his own family. The story ends with the beginning of his second migration.

The story also points out many of the hazards Flute faces including cats, chemicals, and habitat destruction.

The book is beautifully illustrated. A bonus includes drawings of birds inside the front and back covers. Those in front are birds one might see in Belt Woods and in the back, birds that might be seen in the Monteverde Rain Forest.

## Cylburn Lecture Report: Pete Webb on "Identifying Fall Warblers"

By Gail Frantz

The BBC's first lecture of the season was on September 7<sup>th</sup> at Cylburn. Pete Webb entertained and instructed his audience with slides of warblers in both spring, but primarily fall plumage. Pete pointed out contrasts and similarities between warblers that sometimes confuse birders. Pete reminded us to observe details of color not only in plumage but also legs and feet. He pointed out facial patterns, wing bars, eye-stripes and color variations in various species. By the end of the lecture, we acquired new skills that will enable us to increase our recognition of those difficult and often puzzling "confusing fall warblers."

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## BBC Mail Order

The Baltimore Bird Club is now offering its merchandise for sale through its mail order section. The following items are available. All prices include shipping costs.

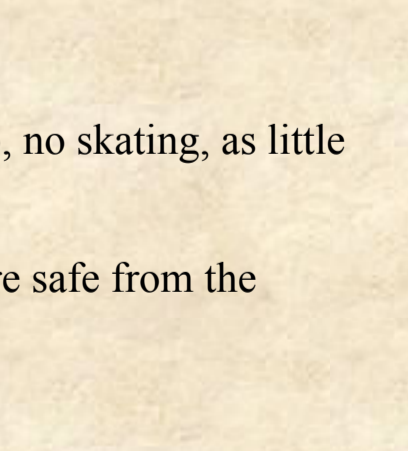
Baltimore Bird Club's Birding Site Guide - \$12.00  
Baltimore Bird Club T-Shirt - \$18.00 (only XL left)  
MOS Patch - \$3.50  
MOS Decal - \$3.50

Please make your check or money order payable to "The Baltimore Bird Club" and send your order to: Joseph Lewandowski, 3021 Temple Gate, Baltimore, Maryland 21209.

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## Back Yard Birding

by Gail Frantz



### Baltimore City

#### Mt. Washington

- Carol Schreter had a warbler bonanza in August. **Magnolia, Black-throated Green, Common Yellowthroat, Redstart, Chestnut-sided and Blackburnian Warblers** decorated her trees in a surprise visit. Carol also reports that in early June she witnessed two **Broad-winged Hawks** feeding each other on a tree trunk that forms a sort of platform. Fortunately, she was able to see this feeding platform easily from the back of her home. Later in the summer, during August, she saw the pair feeding snakes and other bird friendly plants which include; inkberry shrub, swamp magnolia tree, monarda, scarlet sage, and pink lithrum. Her patio overlooks a ridge with a spectacular view that attracts migrating raptors. So far, the Slaughter's has seen a **Bald Eagle** and nine other raptor species.
- Michele Melia is recuperating from a painful accident she had recently, she writes:

I have another 2 or 3 weeks before the burn is healed-which will make about 6 weeks altogether for the healing process. It has seemed like forever. So, no birding (except looking out the window from the sofa in my living room), no skating, as little walking as possible.

I got a **Mourning Warbler** a few days ago. It flew into our living room window. I went to see what the big bang was, and the bird was sitting outside on the patio, stunned. I picked it up with the intention of moving it somewhere safe from the neighborhood cats; it perched on my finger for a while and then flew into some bushes. I've also had a **Red-breasted Nuthatch** coming to my feeders. Not too bad for a crippled bird-watcher!

#### Baltimore County

#### Cockeysmill-Hunt Valley, Broadmead

- Eddie Slaughter entertained a **Winter Wren** that enjoyed scurrying under her bird bath and on her patio from August 25 through the 28<sup>th</sup>. Eddie attracts a large variety of birds with hummingbird and seed feeders. She also has an especially nice variety of bird friendly plants which include; inkberry shrub, swamp magnolia tree, monarda, scarlet sage, and pink lithrum. Her patio overlooks a ridge with a spectacular view that attracts migrating raptors. So far, the Slaughter's has seen a **Bald Eagle** and nine other raptor species.

#### Reisterstown

- Evelyn Taylor had not one but two **Red-breasted Nuthatches** in her yard this September. Could this be another winter finch invasion? Let's hope so.
- On August 31, Phyllis Grimm saw: **Tennessee Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Common Yellowthroat and Black-throated Green Warbler** in the pecan tree next to her deck on Tuesday about 1:00 PM and lots of **Chipping Sparrows**.

In September, Phyllis reported funneling **Chimney Swifts** in downtown Reisterstown.

#### Randallstown

- From Steve Sanford:

On June 30 I finally put up my hummingbird feeder. I put it off because in previous years I got virtually no hummers before late July. Surprisingly though, I got a brilliant male **Ruby-throat** July 1<sup>st</sup>. The hummers almost disappeared for the rest of July but came back for August and visited the feeder just about every day.

On July 11, I had a **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** fly by, which is something I see once or twice a year from my yard. My house is near a tributary to Gwynns Falls, which is a nesting area for this relatively rare heron. I noticed a recent TV news report about something in the Gwynns Falls area just happened to have a quick shot of one sitting on a rock.

Today (July 16) I had a few **Purple Martins** fly over, which is only the second time I've seen them here. I also had a quick visit from a **Hummingbird**, but it seemed to be chased off by the bees around the "bee guard." I have a new Perky Pet feeder with perches, but it is harder to close up tight and I think fluid is leaking and attracting the bees and wasps.

#### Woodensburg

- In mid-July, George Frakabe reported that he narrowly missed hitting a black and white bird that flew directly in front of the car as he was pulling into his driveway on Old Hanover Rd. He was pretty sure it was a **Red-headed Woodpecker**. George kept his eyes open and sure enough, a week later, the adult bird with a juvenile RHW, appeared across the road from his home. This is the first confirmation of breeding in this area for over fifteen years.
- Several months ago, Bob Ringle made the assertion that **Blue Grosbeaks** erect a sort of crest on their heads. Luckily, a male **Blue Grosbeak** appeared on Old Hanover Road this summer. After chasing the bird in and out of our yard and up and down Old Hanover Road for several weeks, I finally got a good look at it. Sure enough, whenever the bird sang, the feathers on top of the bird's head would rise up in a crest similar to that of a Purple Finch.(GF)
- July 15 - Had my head stuck in the computer trying to figure out why a message to Pete Webb came back DaemonMailer. About that time, a gobble sound drifted in from the open window. My subconscious heard it but ignored it. Just then, my husband Harry called to me softly from the yard. Although the computer problem hadn't been solved I reluctantly got up and walked to the window. Harry whispered that there was a **Turkey** next to the house and he'd just flown further into the backyard to the top of a tree (well, well, that explained the gobble sound.) I ran outside with binoculars and tried to see the gobbler as it moved about in the trees. Unfortunately, I never had more than a silhouette look 'cause he/she stayed up high and was obscured by heavily-leaved branches. Was the bird wild or domestic? Don't know, the bird just evaporated. Please spare me from my next concentrated non-wildlife focus when birds are vocalizing outside the window.

July 14: While walking through the backyard, a juvenile **Ruby-throated Hummer** perched on an empty hummer feeder that I was holding. He tried sipping from two of the plastic flowers but finally gave up.

Our next door neighbor, Kathi Carber, has done even better. She has a **Louisiana Waterthrush** which will sip from the feeder while sitting on her finger and.(GF)

#### Carroll County

#### Westminster

- During the summer drought, Chris Wright got a big kick out of giving her **Ruby-Throated Hummer** a shower with the hose. The little bird darted in out of the cooling spray several times. In August, Chris's backyard hosted a **Hairy Woodpecker**.

#### Out of State

- Wise words from Lanny Chambers of St. Louis, MO:

I swear, if **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** were the size of sparrows, it wouldn't be safe to go outdoors without full body armor.

**Let us hear about your Back Yard birding too !!!**

Call or write to:

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Reisterstown MD 21136

Tel: (410) 833-7135

e-mail: [guineabird@aol.com](mailto:guineabird@aol.com)

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