

## The newsletter of the Baltimore Bird Club

April/May 1998 - Online Edition

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Deadline for next *CHIP NOTES*: June 25, 1998 (the next issue will be August-September 1998). Send material to:

Steve Sanford  
8412 Downey Dale Drive  
Randallstown MD 21133

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

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## An Intermediate Abroad on Hart-Miller Island

by Helene Gardel

I finally made the time to accompany Gene Scarpulla for a stroll on Hart-Miller Island on November 29, 1997.

Misconceptions: Smell, intolerable wind, only one habitat, an easy walk in a park.

Reality: No smell (the dump is not my garbage, duh, but mud and shells from the shipping channel); some wind on higher points of the dike, but on a mild winter day very tolerable, many habitats, a very challenging level walk for those without experience, and, for women, only one facility.

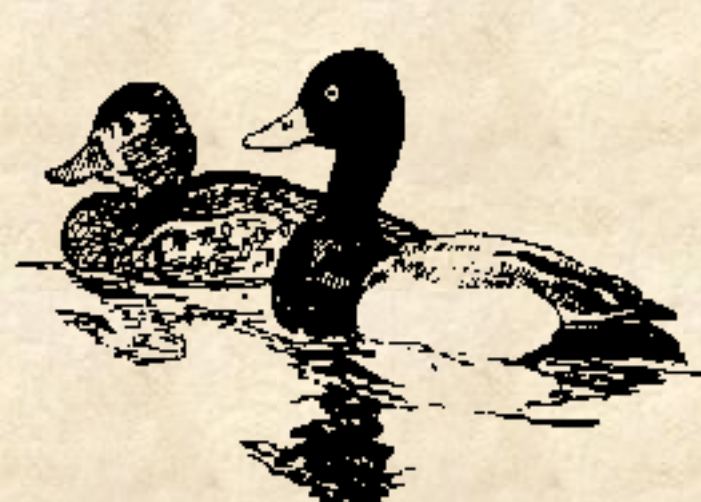
Physical outcome of this adventure: tremendous headache, exhaustion, uneasy stomach for five hours after I got home, and very minor joint and heel awareness. The hardest part of the day for me was standing and walking for nine hours over six miles. Any one have any ideas on different ways to carry a scope? Gene says that weekly visits to the Island have done wonders for his stamina. I certainly can see why.

Would I do it again? You bet! Gene told me to not expect too much, as this was the in-between season. But for an intermediate birder (I have upgraded myself from a beginner) it was great. I had my first close view of an Oldsquaw, and my first very close looks at Snow Buntings. I heard Pipits but might not recognize them again. I saw both Lesser and Greater Scaup but still couldn't get the beak-nail difference. Everyone should pray for the injured Lesser Scaup: Gene doesn't think it can make it through the winter.

I returned to Hart-Miller with Gene on February 28, not expecting much between seasons. What a surprise: thousands of Canada Geese and Tundra Swans flying over. My first view of a male Harrier; now I know there are three belly colors to look for: mama, papa and juvie. I didn't expect there to be shorebirds, nice surprise. Now with thousands of Greater Scaup heads to compare to the Lesser Scaup heads, I may notice a little difference. Still can't see the beak difference. About my body's ability to survive: no headache, no pains, a little tired of standing, and the sling for the scope worked relatively well. Debbie Terry and I will try to invent a strap or harness for such walks in the future.

For those of you who have not had this experience: do try it. In a few years this wild untamed island may have electric golf carts, benches, port-a-pots, and the crowds that invade Brigantine in New Jersey and other marshes near industrial sites.

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## Winter Birding: New Mexico Revisited

by Jim Highsaw and Linda Prentice

In January 1998 we returned to the Rio Grande Valley in south central New Mexico to repeat a trip we did in January 1994. Our goals were to spend time at the Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge near Socorro, visit some areas we missed in 1994, photograph as many birds as possible, and hopefully see a few new birds.

As in 1994, the Bosque del Apache Refuge was fabulous both for birding and photography. In addition to the large numbers of Sandhill Cranes and Snow Geese, the refuge was loaded with Bald Eagles, Northern Harriers, Red-tailed Hawks and Kestrels. There were also ten species of ducks, Great Blue Herons and Black-crowned Night-Herons, Eared and Pied-billed Grebes, shorebirds, and an assortment of passerines. Photo opportunities were excellent - we were able to photograph Common Snipe, Western Meadowlark, Red-tailed Hawk, Ring-necked Pheasant, Sandhill Crane, Snow Goose, and White-crowned Sparrow. We were also able to observe the resident coyotes attempting to catch snow geese. One change since our 1994 visit was that the number of visitors has noticeably increased, especially at the visitor center.

After two full days at Bosque del Apache, we headed down the Valley to Percha Dam State Park. This was a productive spot, and even had a new bird for us - Phainopepla. Other highlights were three different phoebes, Western Bluebirds, Pyrrhuloxia, and Rufous-sided Towhee (western form). As in 1994, there were few people in the park, so we were able to wander through the camping and picnic areas without distractions.

The following two days we stayed in Las Cruces and did day trips to the nearby Organ Mountains. On the way to the Aguirre Springs Recreation Area we encountered a flock of sparrows in the scrub, including another new bird - Brewer's Sparrow. Aguirre Springs had Cactus Wren, Black-throated Sparrow, Canyon Towhee and Pyrrhuloxia, among others. At the Dripping Springs Recreation Area we found Roadrunner, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Curve-billed Thrasher and Loggerhead Shrike, among others. The prize find was a Canyon Wren (another new bird) at the old hotel site at the end of a 1½-mile hike.

From Las Cruces we headed back up the Valley. At Elephant Butte Reservoir we found a large group of Western Grebes (another new bird) with a few Common Mergansers mixed in. An unexpected sight was a group of White Pelicans in flight. From Elephant Butte we returned to Bosque del Apache for another half-day before returning to Albuquerque and the flight home.

Although we saw many of the same birds as in 1994, we found four new species, got some great photographs, and thoroughly enjoyed the magnificent landscape. We would not hesitate to do this trip again.

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## Board of Directors Meetings

by Alan Bromberg and Mary Paul

### January 12

The board considered favorably a suggestion to move the January covered-dish supper and Mid-winter Count to later dates next year to allow more time between the supper and the holidays and put the Midwinter Count further from Christmas Count.

The board also discussed a proposal to place a professionally developed, permanent display of the Web of Life at Cylburn for educational purposes. Action was deferred until the board could be given a better idea of what the display would depict.

The board defeated a motion to have the BBC pay the five-dollar fee for members who participate in the Christmas Count to have their names published by the National Audubon Society.

-- Alan Bromberg, Recording Secretary

### February 9

Bob Rineer reported the following nominations for next year:

- President -- Terry Ross
- Vice president -- Mary Paul
- Recording Secretary -- Alan Bromberg
- Membership Secretary -- Roberta Ross

We need two people on the nominating committee for state or BBC director and someone to fill the treasury position for next year.

Joy Wheeler is working with Graham Egerton and the Alder company to make a Web of Life display that will focus largely on birds and other animals and plants around Cylburn. It will be available for everyone, especially school groups, visiting the second floor of Cylburn. The Board approved the funds to make this endeavor possible.

Roberta Ross reported that we have 463 members. That is down from 475 members in 1997 and 483 members in 1996.

-- Mary Paul

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## Black: The Color of Cheer

by Joy Wheeler

Three Black Vultures, or was it four? From the other side of the trail I had already seen one Black Vulture earlier in the morning. So it could be four Black Vultures, maybe five. But by the time I'd raised my binoculars there were only three Black Vultures in the tree. How black they were perched among the top branches of a bare locust tree with a cluster of dark spruces behind.

It was hard to take my binoculars and walk on. Just as if I had nothing else more important to do, I continued to stand and gaze giving me time to become aware of some commotion at the shrubby base of the tree. Out of that weedy disorder was ascending unhurriedly a large black form to match those at the top, long pale yellow legs and feet stepping deliberately, one at a time up the gently sloping tree trunk. At each step the large black wings flapped powerfully, lifting the creature to join the other members of the species into the bare angled branches above. Now there were four bulky black bodies each with a black head, a pointy black beak and two beady black eyes huddled together in silent conference.

In this brief slow-moving moment I found myself transported backwards through countless millennia to where wings and feathery scales had begun the lift up from the earth's cumbrous surface to the lightening skies above. How inspiring to remember that at that moment it did the same for me.

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## Field Trip Reports

Compiled by Steve Sanford

January 18 - **Conowingo Dam**. The weather was dreary with clouds and drizzle and temperatures about 35-40°. Gull numbers were low, but included 2 Lesser Black-backed Gulls. No "raptures" (as referred to in the Program Book) were seen, but some good raptors may have induced rapture: 26 (!) Bald Eagles, and one Peregrine Falcon. Leader: Gene Scarpulla. 6 participants.

January 31 - **New Design Road and Lily Pons**. Leader Pete Webb reported mainly frustration. The New Design Rd. area (Frederick Co.) produced only a few Horned Larks. The group moved on to Pine Knob Road in Carroll Co. in hopes of seeing some of the crossbills that were grazing that area, but none were found. Then, they went to western Carroll Co. for field birds, but got only a flock of Horned Larks that scattered quickly.

February 14 - **Cape Henlopen to Ocean City**. The trip began slowly in Cape Henlopen with a surprising lack of waterfowl: just a few scoters and mergansers. Crossbills had been seen that day, but not by the group. The temperatures, in the 30's, were lower than expected, and made worse by penetrating wind. Things picked up at Silver Lake, Rehobeth Beach, with large rafts of Canvasbacks and Lesser Scaup, and a few Redheads. Ocean City Inlet, however, was surprisingly calm and tolerable. And it provided the best birds: 11 beautiful Harlequin Ducks, some Common Eider, many close-up Purple Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstones, with two Red Knots, and a Peregrine Falcon perched on the water tower. Leader: Pete Webb. Participants: 18.

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## May Count 1998

by Michele Melia

The Annual North American Migration Count and 1998 State **May Count** will be held this year on Saturday, May 9<sup>th</sup>. Volunteers are needed to help count birds in Baltimore City and County. No prior experience counting birds is needed, and you need not be an "expert" at identification. If you can identify most of our common birds then we can use your help! You can help by counting birds at your favorite local hotspot, in your neighborhood, or at your backyard feeder for as many hours as you can commit. Last year, 71 birders from the Baltimore Bird Club tallied 172 species of birds in Baltimore City and County! If you would like to participate, please call Michele Melia at (410) 358-5920. Also, **please look for and save the May Count Form** that appeared in the March issue of the *Maryland Yellowthroat*.

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## Membership Reminders

by Roberta Ross

Please don't forget to notify us of address changes, so we will be able to send you information about the 1998-99 membership year, which will begin September 1, 1998.

If you know people who would like to [join the Baltimore Bird Club](#), tell them to join now. If they pay a full year's dues (\$20 for an individual or \$30 for a household) now, this amount will be applied to the 1998-99 year, so their dues will actually cover the period from May 1, 1998 to September 1, 1999.

Address changes or applications for membership should be sent to

Roberta Ross  
4128 Roland Avenue  
Baltimore MD 21211-2034

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## 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 [birder@xtrabox.com](mailto:birder@xtrabox.com). For best results, please include the specific words: "BBC BirdLine Sighting" on the subject line.

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## Back Yard Birding

[Gail Frantz](#)



### Baltimore City

- E-mail from Scott Crabtree:

"In the for what it's worth column, on the evening of the Jan. 17 (Baltimore County and City Mid-Winter count), just before dark, I observed a **Peregrine Falcon** (yeah, I'm sure!) on Stamford Road in the Ten Hills section of Baltimore: well seen, at close range, both perched and flying. I saw her right out our front door! Seemed to be avoiding the County like the plague!"

### Baltimore County

- Shirley Geddes reports that some of her friends tell her the birds aren't even eating the suet cakes. Due, no doubt, to this mild winter we're having.

- E-mail from Pete Webb: Sun, Feb. 22, 5 PM: two **Fox Sparrows** in my back yard today.

### Ruxton

- Midge Nelson has had a **Hermit Thrush** visiting her yard since January 15. The bird prefers to remain hidden in bushes and under the cover of some holly trees. Midge describes the neighborhood as having mature woods and a stream close by. This habitat has proven to be an attraction for Hermit Thrushes in previous years also.

### Woodensburg

- Jim Peters writes, "Since our feeders are only a couple of miles apart, I thought you might like to know what has been seen this fall. I've had great variety so far (Dec. 30.) A pair of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** has been regular since late October. On November 11, **nine Pine Siskins** showed up along with a female **Purple Finch** that stayed two days. On November 17, I had **13 Evening Grosbeaks (4 males, 9 females)** who spent several days before moving on. **Hairy, Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers** are regular with an occasional **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**.

"All the other yard birds are present as well: **Titmouse, Chickadee, Dove, White-breasted Nuthatch, Junco, White-throated Sparrow, Cardinal, Blue Jay, House Finch, Brown Creeper, and Carolina Wren. Cowbirds, Grackles and Starlings** are in very small numbers. Thank goodness! I also have a good flock of **Goldfinches** with my thistle feeder and I'm hoping for a Redpoll before winter's end.

"I'm feeding black oil and striped sunflower seed, thistle and peanut butter suet cakes thus far and having good success in attracting a variety of birds. I also attract 6 squirrels which I would be willing to share with anyone in short supply."

- At the Frantz's, this year's first snowfall (Dec.30) brought in a millet eating **Tree Sparrow** that has continued coming in throughout February. At long last, on Jan. 2, **one Pine Siskin**. Still no Evening Grosbeaks. They're probably all over at Jim Peter's house! However, we did get **80+ Cowbirds** on Dec. 31. Hmmm, Jim lives a crow-flying mile or so away from us but his feeders attract Evening Grosbeaks while we're visited by every Cowbird in the area. Harry Frantz observed a perched female **Common Redpoll** on Jan. 25. Was amazed to hear and observe a lovely singing **Field Sparrow** on Feb. 20 in the PM.

### Reisterstown

- Carolyn Herbst was impressed with the "look of grandeur" a pair of **Red-tailed Hawks** presented while settled side-by-side in a tree in her backyard one afternoon in late December.

Carolyn was also curious and excited about the "Robin-sized yellow, black and white bird with yellow eyebrows -- kind of like a very big Goldfinch." She wanted to know what kind of bird it might be. Do you agree that her vivid description has to be a male **Evening Grosbeak**?

### Randallstown - What is a "winter finch"?

- Steve Sanford explains: **Winter Finches** include Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, Redpolls, Red and White-winged Crossbills, and Evening Grosbeaks as well as Fox Sparrows, and even Red-breasted Nuthatches (sort of). I doubt that there is any official definition. It just means 'get your snow blowers ready!' [Which we now know is not true!]"

### In and Out of State

#### Winter Finches & Red-breasted Nuthatches

- Thanks to Terry Ross, who deciphered an incorrect web address obtained from the Audubon Naturalist Society newspaper, you can track this year's movements of **winter finches** and **Red-breasted Nuthatches** all over the continental U.S. on animated maps shown on the [Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology website](#).

This page presents an overview of the current winter finch invasion along with bios and sound samples of Red-breasted Nuthatches, White-winged and Red Crossbills, Siskins, Common Redpolls, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks. For those of you who would like to contribute to the web page, Cornell has a form you may fill out with your observations of the exciting winter finches we've been privileged to observe this year.

- The February issue of *ANS* has an excellent article entitled "Of Finches and Crossbills: Birders Find Winter Bounty in Local Pines," written by Jane Hill, who is a birder, botanist, and the compiler of *ANS's Voice of the Naturalist*. If you're interested in reading this informative piece let me know and I'll send you a copy. (GF)

- A compassionate backyard birder in Virginia reported having "a male **House Finch** with a broken beak at my feeder, how can I help it?" The next day a more knowledgeable birder identified the bird as a **Red Crossbill**.

- Don't miss Deborah Bowers's piece on the **Townsend's Solitaire** that visited her yard in Harford county for several weeks in the spring of '96. The article is in this March/April issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest*.

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

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

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