

The newsletter of the Baltimore Bird Club

February-March 2000 -- Online Edition

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Deadline for next *CHIP NOTES*: February 25, 2000 (the next issue will be February-March 2000). Send material to:

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Please help *CHIP NOTES* get out on time.

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First Wednesdays at Fort McHenry

The Fort McHenry Wetlands Avian Monitoring Project

Claudia Wilds, in her guide "Finding Birds in the National Capital Area", has described Fort McHenry as a "migrant trap." That's good news for birders! If you're interested in participating in a different kind of birding experience - come on over!

The Fort McHenry wetlands, which covers approximately ten acres, was created almost twenty years ago from the dredging of the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel. Presently, the National Aquarium and Fort McHenry's Park Service are conducting an environmental survey of the wetland at the fort. A request was made of the BBC to monitor the birds found at the fort's wetland.

The Baltimore Bird Club is sponsoring opportunities for you to assist in this survey by monitoring bird activity. Birders are invited to sit at the fort on the first Wednesday of every month from February through August at the Fort McHenry wetland overlook. The Wednesday counts will last from 9:30 until 12:00 noon. Participants will tally all birds that pass by, over or through the marsh. You may attend all or just a part of any of the "sits."

You will be recording: number of species, location of bird (the marsh is divided into numbered quadrants which are displayed on posts), behavior such as - circling, bathing, preening, courtship display, harassing, resting, feeding, vocalization, courtship displays. There will be someone present to assist you. **Please bring a paper and pencil to be used as a tally sheet.**

For a more detailed report concerning the fort and the people involved in the survey, see *Chip Note's* Dec/Jan issue: *Birding at Fort McHenry Wetlands* by Joy Wheeler.

Directions to Fort McHenry and dates of 'sits' may be found in this issue of *Chip Notes* in the **Activities** section (page 5.)

Questions? Contact either coordinator: Gail Frantz (410)833-7135, gfrantz@iadel.com or Carol Schreter (410)664-5151.

Subsequent monitoring dates at Fort McHenry will be posted in **Chip Notes**.

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Kirtland's Warbler

Mission Impossible?

By Steve Sanford

Most birders rightly suspect that combining activities with your non-birding family and one's own personal birding is a "Mission Impossible." But I defied the odds last summer - and won!

For some years, I had been contemplating taking a quick trip to Michigan to add the extremely localized Kirtland's Warbler to my life-list. In early 1999 I accepted an invitation to a family reunion in Milwaukee in late June, and I decided to combine this with a loop around Lake Michigan to seek Kirtland's Warbler. My parents, who are not birders, were planning to attend the reunion too. To my - uh - surprise - they said they'd also like to join me on my birding loop. I tried to subtly hint that they would be bored to death, that the Kirtland's Warbler territory is truly in the middle of nowhere (it really IS!), and that it would be a long hard drive. That last consideration only hardened their resolve because they knew they had to help me with that long hard drive.

So, the die was cast. We lined up flights in and out of Chicago and rented a car, a Buick Century, which was quite a pleasure to spend the trip in. We did a quick and painless pass along Lake Shore Drive in Chicago to see the city and elegant suburbs to the north. When we headed for the expressway north to Milwaukee, though, we tasted urban gridlock at it's worst. But we did make it to Milwaukee, and had a pleasant family reunion the next day.

We had allotted Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday (June 27-29) to complete the loop back to Chicago for our return flight on Wednesday. We spent most of the day Sunday driving around the top of Lake Michigan from Milwaukee. It was a long but pleasant drive with a few scenic stops along the lake. The habitat around northern Lake Michigan was boreal forest with lots of spruces, firs, and pines. On some quick stops in that area, I was amazed at the numbers of warblers, especially Black-throated Green, and Nashville's that were calling, but not showing themselves. If we had time to spare, I would certainly like to have checked them out more thoroughly. But we didn't have the time, even if my parents could put up with it. We crossed the Mackinac Bridge, which is almost a twin to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, into northern Lower Michigan, and arrived in Grayling around dimertime.

If you hate cities and suburbs, and like vast forests of scrubby pines, you'll love this area. Grayling is probably the largest town for a hundred miles around, but probably smaller than, say, Elkton or Hampstead. Who says you have to go west for wilderness!

So how do you find a Kirtland's Warbler? There are many dirt roads across the Kirtland's Warbler's nesting grounds, but entry into the forest is prohibited for the protection of the warblers. However, if IS permitted to drive these roads and bird from the roadside. Note, use of tapes to lure the warblers is quite correctly prohibited.

Conventional wisdom says that your only good chance of seeing Kirtland's Warbler is to go on a "tour" run by the US Forest Service out of Mio, or the Fish and Wildlife Service out of Grayling. I did some research, mainly via an inquiry to MDOsprey. I learned that the tours only go Tuesdays through Sunday out of Mio, but everyday at Grayling. We did see a Kirtland's Warbler on Tuesday.

Monday morning, June 28, we gathered with about 20 other warbler-seekers at the Holiday Inn at Grayling. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service started us out with an excellent slide-show that was full of dry statistics interestingly presented. They showed how Kirtland's Warblers are extraordinarily particular about their breeding habitat. They need large stands of young Jack pine about 5-15 years old. They showed the extremely limited breeding territories of the Kirtland's Warbler, and how the environmental programs of controlled burnings of their Jack pine habitat had brought them back from near-extinction.

Then our FWS guide led us to an area about 10 miles NE of Grayling. We parked and walked a few hundred yards down a dirt road. Soon we heard a distant singing Kirtland's Warbler. Finally, someone found it and got it in his scope. He graciously allowed the rest of us to line up and look at it. The light was poor, but it clearly was a warbler with a dark back and yellow breast, and it was singing the distinctive Kirtland's Warbler song. A little later we found what was probably a different Kirtland's Warbler a little closer with its field marks more discernible.

Wow! Now I could relax, having done my duty and ticked off another good life-bird.

My parents kindly ceded the use of the car to me for the afternoon while they napped and did the Grayling shopping scene by the motel: K-Mart and Family Dollar. The FWS tour leader gave me directions to a slightly possible Black-backed Woodpecker site that was also in more Kirtland's habitat. I didn't find any Black-backs but the area provided me excellent views of two Black-billed Cuckoos, a deep-voiced Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. I also **heard**, perhaps for the first time, an Upland Sandpiper.

But what was really amazing was that over the next few hours, without really seeking them, I heard and saw 4 more Kirtland's Warblers, one of which was only at arm's length from me. It pranced about in branches right in front of me for about 5 minutes. So much for conventional wisdom!

For your reference, the area I was in was on or near one Turney Ranch Road south east of Kirtland Community College. I had picked up a "UniversalMAP" of the area that showed all the dirt roads and even marked the Kirtland's Warbler areas.

The next day we did a leisurely drive back to the Chicago area, with several stops along the shores of Lake Michigan. We found that Traverse City MI was an inland equivalent of Ocean City. We took a pleasant loop to the north through the Old Mission Peninsula whose tip is exactly halfway between the equator and the North Pole, and is one of the leading cherry-growing areas of the world. The last evening and morning at Portage Indiana, my parents thrilled to the sight of numerous trucks with up to 12 rows of wheels, which apparently aren't permitted in our area. "Thrilled," you say? Well, you see, my father, in his "retirement," sells tires, primarily to trucking companies.

So, improbable as it might seem, birders and their non-birding families really can have a satisfying trip together.

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Friends We Will Miss

Seeing birds is of paramount importance to us in the Baltimore Bird Club. Yet, if truth be told, it's the people we are seeing the birds with that really matters. Since the last *Chip Notes* we have lost two of these people who have meant so much to us on the trails of Cylburn and beyond: **Elizabeth Fisher** and **Mitchell Gerber**.

The very second time I visited Cylburn on a guided tour Elizabeth was the guide. (Andrew Simon was the guide on my first tour.) On my second tour I came as a chaperone to a high school class, the first time the guides had ever hosted a tour of children of that age. Elizabeth stretched their knowledge of biology up, almost to her level, with ease. I'm sure the students had realized the marvelous possibilities of a walk in the woods.

Elizabeth had a way of stretching whatever knowledge of natural history we might have towards her educated knowledge of mosses, ferns, fungi, wildflowers, and her speciality, insects, whenever she lectured to us or led us through little known spots in Maryland. Under her tutelage we almost forgot about birds.

Mitchell Gerber did not forget about birds. For several years during his otherwise busy retirement he made it his business to keep Cylburn's feeders well enough stocked to attract the many birds we tour guides needed to excite our school visitors. Phyllis Gerber has been one of those guides and it was through her suggestion, I imagine, that Mitchell took on this duty. Paul Noel, birder extraordinaire himself, in a phone call to commiserate on our loss of Mitchell, related that in his estimation Mitchell was becoming pretty good at birding with the Lake Roland "regulars" as well.

We will miss Elizabeth and Mitchell, but our birding will continue to be infused with their spirits.

Joy Wheeler

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Field Trip Reports

Compiled by Steve Sanford

October 24, 1999 - **Cylburn Self-guided** - Joe Lewandowski reports:

Nine birders ventured out to walk Cylburn and the birds were not cooperative. We walked the Circle Trail this time and continued to see the changes in the forest due to the earlier storm. Fourteen birds graced our list. Notables included a Pheobe, Turkey Vulture, White-throated Sparrow, Junco, and a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. We did see an unidentified thrush and hawk, but these creatures were too far away for a positive identification. However, Cylburn still held its charm for us and we all look forward to our next visit.

November 27, 1999 - Gail Frantz reports:

Jim Meyers led a Baltimore Bird Club walk this AM at **Cromwell Valley**. Observers had outstanding looks at: two cooperative Merlins throughout the morning (one of the Merlins caught a Junco, then carried the bird in close to the observers who were able to scope the bird for more than 20 minutes), a Bald Eagle flyover, Red-breasted Nuthatch, a flock of Pine Siskins, and a roosting Great Horned Owl.

October 30, 1999 - **Northampton Furnace Trail** - 6 birders saw 37 species including Winter Wren and Rusty Blackbird on this trail on the west side of Loch Raven. There was "glorious" although very foggy at first. Leader: Joy Wheeler.

December 4, 1999 - 12 people joined the annual ramp through **Southern Maryland**. Our first major stop was Battle Creek Cypress Swamp in western Calvert Co. As often is the case there were a number of Winter Wrens, and they occasionally delighted us with their bubbly little song. A Hermit Thrush periodically issued a loud whistle in addition to it's expected "chuck" notes - a winter sound from that species that was new to all of us. As we departed we had a close fly-over of a Pileated Woodpecker, and a soaring near-adult Bald Eagle.

At Point Lookout, the Scoters and Oldsquaw were thick and fairly close. Unlike most years, the most numerous species seemed to be Black Scoters, mainly off the causeway. We spotted several distant Gannets off the fishing pier at the limit of identifiability.

The weather was remarkable for December: approaching 70°, mostly sunny and windless. The price for this was that the mosquitoes were rather thick at Point Lookout.

We ended up at the Sea Breeze Restaurant in Sandgates. St Mary's Co., home of the nationally-famous Kelp Gull. The Kelp Gull unfortunately was not present for us, but we had a nice dinner, enjoying the luscious cream of crab soup, even if the crab cakes were a little disappointing.

The species count, 56, was also a little disappointing. This probably was because we skipped our normal stops at the Beauvue Ponds and Leonardtown. Also, some common species such as Mourning Dove, Pigeon, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and (God forbid!) House Sparrow evaded our conscious observation. Leader Steve Sanford.

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Postcard from China

December 4, 1999

Dear Fellow Baltimoreans,

I am ending my two-week tour of China. We have seen the 6 species of wintering cranes - Common, Black-necked, Red-crowned, Hooded, White-winged, and Siberian. Other interesting birds were Cinnamon Bittern, half the world population of Oriental Storks, 2000 Baikal Teal, Smew, Imperial Eagle, Swinhoe's Rail, Saunders's Gull, Speckled Piculet, Citrine Wagtail, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Elliot's Laughingthrush, Green-backed Tit, and Azure-winged Magpie. A great adventure I hope to share with you.

Bob Ringle

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Florida Whooping Cranes and Swamp Hens

By Jim Peters

For those contemplating a Florida vacation this winter here are directions to two very good birding spots that will yield a variety of state specialties as well as Whooping Crane and Swamp Hen* (Florida's latest exotic).

Whooping Cranes and Central Florida Specialties

From I-95 exit 71 (Melbourne FL) proceed west on Rt. 192 approximately 24 miles to Holopaw FL and Rt. 441. Turn left (south) onto Rt. 441 and drive approximately 21 miles to Kenansville FL and Rt. 525. Turn right (west) onto Rt. 523 and drive approximately 10 to 12 miles to an intersecting dirt road on the left with a large sign for the Overstreet Ranch. Turn left onto this dirt road and begin birding.

You should see flocks of Wild Turkey, Sandhill Crane, Woodstork, Carolina, both vultures, many hawks, Bald Eagle (nest in pines on the right near the ranch house) and Whooping Cranes from the Lake Jackson release site. Continue on the dirt road to its terminus at a boat ramp and public fishing camp on the shore of Lake Kissimmee. Here you will find Bald Eagle, Osprey, Snail Kites, both ibises, herons, and egrets, Limpkins, some shorebirds, and if your luck holds, a few Boat-tailed Grackles and other passerines.

Swamp Hen* and South Florida Specialties

From Florida Turnpike exit 49 proceed west on Rt. 820 (Hollywood/Pembroke Blvd.) past the I-75 interchange to 178th Street (a distance of approximately 12 miles). Turn right at 178th Street through the entrance to Silver Lake Estates onto Silver Lake Blvd. Proceed 1/2 mile and turn left onto NW 9th Street. Once on 9th Street an inlet of Silver Lake will be on your right. Proceed a short distance (2/10 mile) to the Boaters' Park on your right and park your car. Walk back along the marshy margin of Silver Lake to see both ibis, a variety of herons and egrets, and Moorhens (adults and immatures). There is another arm of Silver Lake on the opposite side of the road with the same Florida specialties as well as many Swamp Hens.

* The Eurasian Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio porphyrio*

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Postcard from Sumatra

Dear Chippers,

I was lucky that my spice trip to Sumatra (where we get all of our cinnamon, as well as lots of black pepper and vanilla from) ended one day early, as I was ready to visit Waykambas National Park in south Sumatra, located just 50 miles from where I was doing our vanilla crop survey. The park contains 200,000 acres of fast disappearing lowland rain forest: 20 or so almost extinct Sumatra tigers; and 2 severely endangered birds: the Storm's Stork and White-winged Wood Duck. I was lucky to find both, plus some other wonderful species such as Crested Fireback Pheasant, Plain-Pouched Hornbill, the gaudy Banded Pitta, and lots of shy babbler species.

BEST,
Hank Kaestner

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Kevin Graff's Hawkwatch

Here are the results of Kevin Graff's Hawkwatch for the fall season of 1999 (August 3 - December 31) which he conducts from his backyard in northeast Baltimore with occasional assistance from other birders. The focus is hawks ("raptors") but this count also shows all bird species plus butterflies.

An asterisk indicates a record high count for the site.

RAPTOR SPECIES	1999	1998	Non-Raptors (cont'd)	1999	1998
Turkey Vulture	155*	525	Purple Martin	5	n/a
Black Vulture	36	49	Barn Swallow	175*	3
Golden Eagle (im.)	1	1	Tree Swallow	149*	5
Bald Eagle	32*	22	House Swallow	35	n/a
13 ad. & 21 imm.			Am. Crow	69	n/a
Northern Harrier	37	48	Red-bellied Nuthatch	5	n/a
Sharp-shinned Hawk	385*	260	Ruby-cr Kinglet	107*	11
Coeper's Hawk	232*	153	Golden-cr Kinglet	48*	7
Osprey	4*	1	Gray Catbird	6	n/a
2 ad. H. & 2 imm.			W. Woodpecker	9	7
Red-shouldered Hawk	194*	108	H. Nuthatch	2	n/a
Broad-winged Hawk	12,113*	11,782	Hermis Thrush	5	4
Red-tailed Hawk	192*	526	Am. Robin	1,281*	866
Rough-legged Hawk	5	7	Blue Jay	2,914*	576
Osprey	8*	48	Cedar Waxwing	170*	30
American Kestrel	136*	64	Red-eyed Vireo	1	n/a
Merlin	36*	15	Nashville Warbler	1	n/a
Peregrine Falcon	5*	4	Yellow Warbler	1	1
Swainson's Hawk	0	1	B. Blue Warbler	1	n/a
Unidentified Accipiter	2	1	Scarlet Tanager	1	n/a
Unidentified Buteo	8	3	Am. Redstart	4	n/a
Unidentified Falcon	2	1	Bobolink	3	n/a
Unidentified Raptor	14,805*	13,621	Am. Tree Sparrow	1	7
			Chipping Sparrow	7	7
			Song Sparrow	28	7
Non-Raptor Species	1999	1998	White-thr Sparrow	103*	63
Common Loon	41*	21	Swamp Sparrow	1	n/a
Red-throated Loon	4*	2	D.-d. Junco	95*	51
DB-cr. Cormorant	95	141	Unid. sparrow sp.	281	7
Great Blue Heron	12*	4	Red-wg Blackbird	60	n/a
Tundra Swan	75	78	Common Grackle	84	n/a
Canada Goose	2,328	2,934	Pine Siskin	3	n/a
Snow Goose	149	230	Am. Goldfinch	136*	50
Am. Black Duck	2	n/a	Evening Grosbeak	1	n/a
Northern Pintail	4	n/a	Scarlet Tanager	1	n/a
Short-bill Dowitcher	9	n/a	House Finch	26	n/a
Common Rail	1	n/a	Purple Finch	3	3
Laughing Gull	1	n/a	Unid. non-rapt. sp	1,502	4,283
Risp-billed Gull	125	467		13,001	14,539
Common Nighthawk	63	188			
Chimney Swift	2,082	4,486	Butterflies	1999	1998
Ruby-cr Hummingbird	1	n/a		6,595	7,399
Belted Kingfisher	1	n/a	Queen Mark	1	n/a
Eastern Woodpecker	5	2	Mourning Cloak	5	n/a
Northern Flicker	18*	5	Red Admiral	4	n/a
Baybreasted Woodpecker	3	2	American Lady	11	n/a
Least Flycatcher	1	n/a		6,616	7,399

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Postcard from the Cayman Islands

12/3/99

Greetings to "Chippers" from the sunny Caribbean:

This is a "simple" place for bird-watching as only one species is endemic - the Vitelline Warbler. The hard part is telling it from the migrant Prairie Warbler which differs mainly by the white vent. Fortunately I have heard several Vitellines singing, and the voice is more like Black-throated Green Warblers than the Prairie. Other interesting birds include Cuban Parrot, West Indian Woodpecker, Cuban Bullfinch, and West Indian Whistling Duck. This is the only Caribbean island without a hummingbird.

Best, Hank Kaestner

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State of BBC Officers

2000-2001

President	Helene Gardel	
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Nominating Committee	Catherine Bishop Dot Gustafson Gail Frantz	Elliott Kirschbaum Debbie Terry

* incumbents starting the second year of their two-year term

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Birds at Home on MPT

By Lillian and Don Stokes

Hello Baltimore Bird Club. We have an exciting new half hour 13-part public TV birding series called Stokes Birds At Home that will bring the world of birding to viewers homes nationwide in winter through spring 2000. It will start airing in Maryland on all your public TV channels, Saturday at 10:30 am on January 15, 2000.

We are the hosts and creators of Stokes *Birds at Home* and our series is produced in association with Maryland Public Television. The series will cover how-to information on watching and attracting birds, birding tips, a mystery bird quiz, visiting birding hotspots all over the country (such as Alaska, and Bosque Del Apache in New Mexico, etc.) and feature "people and birds" stories about birders who are passionate about this hobby.

For more extensive information about this series visit the website

stokesbirdsathome.com

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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.

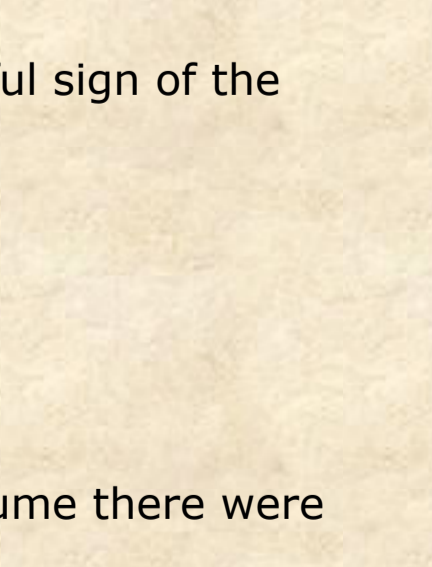
- Baltimore Bird Club's Birding Site Guide - \$12.00
- Baltimore Bird Club T-Shirt - \$18.00 (only XL left)
- MOS Patch - \$3.50
- MOS Decal - \$3.50

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 County

Portonville

Joe Martin didn't see his latest life bird in his back yard, but he experienced an owl sighting that he had on Port Mahan road that probably strikes a familiar chord for us all. Sadly, the bird died a few days later from injuries that were sustained from a collision with an automobile.

12/13: I just wanted to report that everything is OK with the world. (At least it was until I came to work this morning.) I saw the **Snowy Owl** yesterday! What a very, very special moment that was. Seeing that bird in a vast salt marsh (my favorite habitat) as the first rays of the sun touched it ... it's hard to describe, I'll never forget it...I've