CHIP NOTES

The newsletter of the Baltimore Bird Club

February-March 2003 -- Online Edition

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Deadline for next *CHIP NOTES*: February 25, 2003 (the next issue will be April-May 2003). If possible, please email material to

tanager@bcpl.net

Otherwise, Send material to:

Steve Sanford
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Randallstown MD 21133

Please help *CHIP NOTES* get out on time.

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Goshawk at Fort McHenry

By Keith Eric Costley

On December 4th I arrived at Ft. McHenry at 11:45 and found Jim Peters, in his SUV, desperately trying reach me on his cell phone. When he saw me standing there; he jumped out (I'm not sure he used the door at all) and nearly shouted "there's Northern Goshawk preening near the second feeder." After teleporting to site, I found an immature Goshawk sitting ten feet off the trail and only as high as my waist. It was actually seven feet up in tree that grew on the slope. The Goshawk faced away from us and turned it head around to look at the feeder. When Jim joined me, he pointed out every field mark: the white supercilium; the white spots on it's greater secondary coverts; the heavier bill; and the jagged tail bands. When it flew a short distance to the trees above the seawall I ran back to my car for my Sibley's.

We found it again near the wetland sign and watched for another four minutes before it flew over our shoulder's and out over lawn. I could then see the pointed feathers in it's tail.

The Goshawk is bird number 201 on Jim's fort list. He also reported seeing an American Tree Sparrow, a Common Golden Eye, a Long-tailed Duck, and a Redhead during the Fort's First Wednesday Walk (with Mary Chetelat), or earlier this week.

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BBC West

By Bea Nicholls

On the way to my dermatologist appointment this week: I spotted Pyrrhuloxia, Phainopepla, White-crowned Sparrows, Great-tailed Grackles, Kestrels, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Gila Woodpecker, and Lesser Goldfinch, but missed the Lewis' Woodpeckers and Lawrence's Goldfinches which usually hang out around there. Lack of time kept me from any serious birding that day, but after my appointment, I did drive up the road to the lower end of Madera Canyon for a half hour and saw Mexican Jays, Verdin, both kinglets, Spotted Towhee, and Acorn Woodpecker, among others. Today, I was startled to see a Roadrunner scooting through the Walmart parking lot, even though there were hundreds of parked cars and dozens more cruising through the aisles.

Although I have not had time to visit all of the possibilities, there are lakes with Ross' Goose, teals, Shovelers, Western and Clarke's Grebes, Common Goldeneyes, Redheads, Ring-necked Ducks, Coots, Mergansers, Buffleheads, Ruddy Ducks, egrets, etc. in this area. During migration, which is just now ending, there were plenty of shorebirds.

I can't wait until our first spring here!!! Come on out and bird with me.

November 2002

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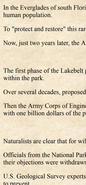
Chickadees

By Paula Warner



Looking out the window of my cabin in West Virginia in January, 2001, I -- who only knew Blue Jays, Cardinals, and Robins, the rest were just generic - noticed this little bird. It had a black cap - how cute. What was it? And so my interest in birding began with the Black-capped Chickadee.

Here in Maryland, east of western Washington County, Carolina Chickadees are year-round residents. While their diet consists of conifer seeds, fruit and insects, they can often be seen at backyard feeders where they particularly enjoy sunflower seeds. In winter, they can be found foraging for food in mixed flocks of titmice, nuthatches, kinglets and woodpeckers.

Why do chickadees join in these mixed flocks? It is hypothesized that by participating in mixed flock foraging, birds can more easily defend against predators since there are more eyes and ears on the lookout and the sight of many individuals fleeing might confuse the predator. Another hypothesis is that feeding efficiency is increased. Participating in a mixed-species flock allows individuals to find food sources they might not have located on their own. Additionally, when foraging with birds with different feeding preferences, there is less competition for a single food source.

Like an estimated 90 percent of all bird species, Carolina Chickadees are monogamous and pairs will remain together throughout the breeding season. They are early nesters (March) and will excavate or enlarge a cavity in a tree, 1 to 23 feet above the ground. Chickadees will also use man-made nest boxes.

Nesting duties are shared by both the male and female. They line their nest with plant material - grass and moss, as well as feathers and hair. Each sits on the nest during the incubation period (11-12 days). When hatched, the young are altricial - they are immobile, downless, eyes closed -- and remain in the nest 15-17 days, being fed (mostly larval insects) by both parents. Carolina Chickadees will typically have 1-2 broods each year. Each clutch will have about six oval eggs; white with reddish-brown markings.

Finally, did you ever wonder how Chickadees (or any perching bird) can stay on a limb while sleeping without falling off? Tree-dwelling birds have a tendon in their legs that extends to the tips of their toes. When they bend their ankle to settle on a branch, the tendon automatically forces the toes to clamp tight around the perch. The tension releases when the bird stands up.

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Tidbits in Lieu of Field Trip Reports

By Steve Sanford

The few field trips scheduled in the Nov-Dec period were either canceled due to bad weather or we received no report. So here are a few interesting fall sightings that may not otherwise have been mentioned.

On September 18 after some slow days, hawk watchers were rewarded with 628 **Broad-winged Hawks** passing over *Cromwell Valley Park*. Several **Merlins** were seen there in this period, including an adult male perched in one of the dead trees. Also there were several sightings of **Lincoln's Sparrows.**

On September 25 a **Gray Kingbird** was seen at *Jug Bay Sanctuary* in Ann Arundel County.

In late November a **Brant** was at *Fort McHenry*. A **Northern Goshawk** was there for several days in early December as described in the article on the first page.

In the same period a beautiful male **Harlequin Duck** frequented the causeway at *Point Lookout* in southern Maryland, often quite close to shore. There were also multiple sightings of one or more **Cave Swallows** at the Point. Some Baltimore birders went down there on December 7 and had good looks at the **Harlequin Duck**. All three **scoter** species were unusually abundant as were **Brown Pelicans** and **Northern Gannets. American Pipits** and **Horned Larks** were numerous at the very end of the Point. **Fox Sparrows** and **Brown-headed Nuthatches** were well seen nearby. Unfortunately the Cave Swallows were gone by then.

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BBC Officers for 2003-04

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Conservation Corner

Mining Limestone in the Everglades?

By Carol Schreter

In the Everglades of south Florida, home to the white ibis and the endangered wood stork, the numbers of nesting wading birds have declined by 93% in 70 years. Half of this extensive wetland has been drained, filled or diverted to meet the needs of a growing human population.

To "protect and restore" this rare saw grass prairie, in 2000 Congress authorized $8 billion for Everglades restoration.

Now, just two years later, the Army Corps of Engineers, with Bush administration approval, has issued permits to 10 different companies to mine the Everglades for limestone. This limestone will be crushed and used in building roads and parking lots.

The Mining Project

The first phase of the Lakebelt project will turn 5,000 acres of rare wetland habitat into a series of mining pits. Some areas slated for mining are just 1,100 feet from border of Everglades National Park -- primary foraging habitat for over 90% of wood storks nesting within the park.

Over several decades, proposed mining will extract 1.7 billion tons of limestone rock and destroy over 30 square miles of the Everglades, an area the size of Miami.

Then the Army Corps of Engineers proposes to build two fresh water reservoirs. One will contain drinking water for the south Florida population. The other will be used to rehydrate the Everglades. The so-called restoration, creating two reservoirs, will be funded with one billion dollars of the public money already appropriated by Congress.

The Opposition

Naturalists are clear that for wildlife, a reservoir is not the equivalent of wetlands. In addition, mining the Everglades violates the Endangered Species Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty.

Officials from the National Park Service, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have stated that the proposed mining just outside of the park undermines Congressional intent to protect and restore the Everglades. But their objections were withdrawn at request of the White House.

U.S. Geological Survey experts say that the proposed reservoirs may not hold water as intended. Instead, they may encourage seepage of water out of the Everglades through underground aquifers, which the Congressionally funded restoration project was intended to prevent.

EPA scientists worry that the industrial process of mining could contaminate Miami-Dade County's drinking water aquifer with deadly bacteria.

Lakebelt project feasibility studies will take a decade, but the Bush administration is willing to allow mining to start now.

What to Do?

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) has filed suit in federal court. This will be an expensive and lengthy legal battle. Watch their website for developments.

Alert other nature lovers about this sneak attack on the Everglades.

Alert your Congress people that Congressional intent is being subverted. The $8 billion authorized by Congress in 2000 was to be used to "protect and restore," not destroy, the Everglades.

Resource: Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) www. nrdcwildplaces.org

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Book Review

By Ben Poscover

Kross, Amy Goldman, *Where Fish Go In Winter,* (New York: Penguin Putnam Books), 1987.

During the summer, Ruth and I help with a reading program for young children held in the library of Durbin, West Virginia. We continually look for readings that may be of interest to the children. Recently we came across a dandy. It is Amy Goldman Koss's *Where Fish Go In Winter.* It is a book of fourteen poems on subjects about fish as well as "How Popcorn Pops", "Why Do Snakes Shed Their Skins", and so on. The book is written for children ages 6 - 9. My favorite is "Do Spiders Stick To Their Own Webs". If some day you'd happen to see me, I would be more than happy to recite it. A sample is:

HOW DO BIRDS FLY?

If I had wings, could I then fly,
And swoop and soar across the sky?

To fly, I'd need much more than wings,
'Cause wings are just the start of things.

Some birds have wings that are too small.
So ostriches can't fly at all!

A flying bird's proportioned right,
To make her swift and strong and light.

Her beak weighs less than teeth and jaws.
Her bones are hollow, head to claws.

With lungs and heart big for her size,
She hardly tires when she flies

And feathers are the perfect touch.
They keep her warm, but don't weigh much

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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 and Beyond

By Gail Frantz

Baltimore City

- From Helene Gardel, November 12: Walking up our walk between azalea plantings, Sondra flushed a brown bird that flared its short tail like a turkey or peacock. A **Woodcock**! The bird flew across the yard again, past the azalea hedge row to hide in some leaves and ivy. We were very excited but managed to take a few digital pix.

Mt Washington

- Carol Schreter in December: I'm seeing few **House Finches** this year in Mt. Washington: In previous years, I've had up to 20 House Finch at my feeder much of the day, noisily vying for space and food. In early December 2002, in the snow, I see just 2 or 3 pairs at a time. Are their numbers decreasing all over, or just here?

Catonsville

- December 8 from John Cullom: I am wondering if others have experienced the reduction in yard birds this year that I have. During last winter, especially when there was snow on the ground, there would be 15-20 male **Cardinals** in my yard and feeders at any one time. I count males because they are easier to see. This year the most I have seen is three. Also, the **House Finches have practically disappeared** and the **House Sparrows have made a comeback**. The only birds that seems to be around in regular numbers are the doves. Has the West Nile virus wiped out the Cardinals and finches? I haven't seen references to this problem.

Reisterstown

- Bob Slaterbeck has been getting his share of **Cooper's Hawks and** two amorous **Great Horned Owls** calling to each other for the last three weeks. That's good for Probable in the Atlas.

Pretty Boy. Freeland

- December 29 Jeanne Bowman writes: I have about seven and a half inches of snow. I believe I have a resident **Sharpie**. Many **White-throats**, **Juncos**, about a **dozen Cardinals**, **Jays**, **1 Chipping Sparrow** (three **Chipping Sparrows** on 12/30), **1 Towhee**. A herd of **forty-seven Cedar Waxwings** finishing off the crab apples. I heard the **Barred Owls** this morning about 5 AM wooing back and forth. Is "wooing" a word? Is now!

January 6 This morning, from the kitchen I heard a bunch of bird sounds, so got the binoculars and eased out on the porch. There is a very large silver maple in my back yard and it was loaded with at least 150 **Cedar Waxwings**. There are some small crab apples left on several of the trees, but I guess they will work on the new buds of the maple.

Loch Raven

- Elise Kness on November 29: At about 1:15 today I saw a bright yellow Tanager with a little orange under its chin and two thick wing bars, at least one of which was yellow. Surely a **Western Tanager!** It was perched in some vines along the fire trail behind the Trap and Skeet club at Loch Raven, about 50 feet along the fire trail past the wire across the trail as you head away from the club.

- Debbie Terry on December 15: Today I scanned the reservoir from the #1 Bridge and the White Pine Circuit. The number of ducks in these locations was lower than my numbers during the last 4 weeks. Believe it or not I did not see one American Coot. I did see my first **Common Merganser and Long-tailed Duck** for the fall. An adult **Bald Eagle** surveyed the scene from his perch high in a deciduous tree. I checked for the Western Tanager behind the Skeet and Trap Club house. There were **forty+ Bluebirds** and **over 100 Starlings** here.

- On December 21, Stan Arnold reported: I took advantage of the nice weather today to avoid the holiday shoppers, and try to fill in some gaps in my Baltimore County waterfowl list at Loch Raven Reservoir. Most of my time was spent at the Skeet Club, off of Dulaney Valley Rd. The most interesting find came as I was leaving there, and I heard the two-noted song of what sure sounded like **Black-capped Chickadee**. I pished, and scanned the large flocks of **White-throated Sparrows**, and within a minute I was viewing a chickadee with not only a significant amount of white edging to the secondaries, but also a lot of white in the greater coverts. The pinkish buff of the flanks appeared brighter than on the typical Carolina Chickadee. All in all, I thought this was a darn good candidate for a Black-cap. The tally for the entire trip included: **Pied-billed grebe, Canada Goose**, **Ducks were: Gadwall, Wigeon, Black, Mallard, Redhead, Ring-necked, Bufflehead, Hooded Mergansers** Also: **Cooper's and Red-Tailed Hawk** with a plentiful supply of **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers**.

- From: Peter Lev in December: Yesterday afternoon near the beginning of the White Pine Circuit, I saw an interestingly plumaged **Hermit Thrush**: Olive back, brown wings, light brown face, off white eye-ring (much larger behind the eye than in front), large, asymmetrical white spots on the flanks, reddish tail which moved up and down in Hermit Thrush fashion. The big white spots were eye-catching, but the strong contrast between back and wings was also unusual. All in all, a very pretty bird. Let me know if anyone else comes across it.

Fort McHenry

- December 16 from Elise and Paul Kreiss: My husband and I had a very pleasant Sunday morning at Ft. McHenry. Overdressed in winter coats and caps, we made a circuit from the water near the parking lots around to the maintenance yard. **Ring-billed Gulls** padded around looking for handouts; **Greater Black-backed Gulls** could be seen across the water, and a couple flew overhead, calling. A lone **Fish Crow** topped a pier, cawing and "uh-uh"ing hoarsely. **Bufflehead** and **Lesser Scaup** floated around past and out of sight. Approaching the maintenance yard, against the shore in front of us were **twenty dozing Canvasbacks** and a similar number of closer than close **Wigeon**. We saw also some distant **Ruddy Ducks, a Pied-billed Grebe, a Sharp-shinned Hawk** and a **Kingfisher** next to the birdy area kept locked when Jim Peters is not conducting a walk. If there had been a window, our noses would have been pressed against it.

- Keith Costley reports: I talked with Jim Peters and thought that it would be interesting to post the last twelve species to hit the Fort's list. Sadly, I missed the Seaside Sparrow - it would have been a lifer. **Seaside Sparrow, Black-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Worm-eating Warbler, Cliff Swallow, Bank Swallow, Clay-Colored Sparrow, Brant, Redhead, Long-tailed Duck, Common Goldeneye, Northern Goshawk**. That's a total of 201 species!

Let us hear about your Back Yard and Maryland Birding too!!,

Call or write to:

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