

The newsletter of the Baltimore Bird Club

April/May 1997 - Online Edition

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Deadline for next CHIP NOTES: June 25, 1997 (the next issue will be August/September 1997)
Send material to:

Steve Sanford
8412 Jomney Dale Drive
Randallstown MD 21133

or e-mail to manager@mail.bcp.lib.md.us
Please help CHIP NOTES get out on time

The Incredible Corroboration

by **Hank Kaestner**

One reason I prefer local birding is that it provides the opportunity to interact with other birders. It can be lonely in the jungles of Indonesia. Here in Baltimore it is fun to share a sighting, and to talk about a rare bird with other birders. Such was the case one year ago, when I discovered a Northern Goshawk at the Texas land fill, just south of Hunt Valley. Through the Baltimore Bird Line many people learned of the bird's presence, and several Baltimore Bird Club friends were lucky enough to find that rare raptor in subsequent weeks.

On January 23, 1997 I observed a Common Raven soaring over the Hunt Valley Industrial Park, so that the larger size of the raven compared to the crows, could be accurately determined. I was very pleased, since this was only my third raven for Baltimore County during my 42 years of birding, and was the best view that I have had of one here.

I called the Baltimore Bird Line, hoping that someone else could share my good fortune, and be able to add Common Raven to their county list. Three weeks passed, and in spite of several people having tried, the bird had not been relocated. I was sorry that my record could not be corroborated.

Then I received a note from my friend and fellow Baltimore birder, Steve Simon. Steve wrote: "Thanks for helping me to get a new county bird. On January 10 I saw a raven fly over the Marriott (Hunt Valley Inn) while I was swimming. I told Debbie Terry that I won't count it unless someone else sees one. You saw one on January 23 so now I can count it. Thanks (signed) Steve."

That's what is known as a reverse corroboration, in that instead of someone confirming the bird for me, I had confirmed it for Steve. And who would have expected a January observation of a raven to be from a swimming pool! Truly this is one incredible corroboration! !

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50 Warblers

by **Elliot A. Kirschbaum**

When Nancy and I began our trip on April 26, 1995, we had previously seen 41 of the 50 warblers which regularly occur in the United States. Our goals for the trip were to see what we could of the nation's culture, parks, birds and other wildlife during the next three months until we would return to Baltimore. We did not specifically intend to see the nine remaining life warblers, at least not at first.

Our trip took us through the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee, to a grape stomping festival in Memphis, through Arkansas and into Texas where we saw our first life bird for the trip. Actually there were 300-500 of them! Migrating Mississippi Kites soaring over our motel parking lot in Kingsville, TX just before dusk.

After that, the life birds came faster as we headed down to Brownsville, TX and followed the Rio Grande northwest:

Plain Chachalaca, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Couch's Kingbird, Green Jay, Cactus Wren, Long-billed Thrasher, Curve-billed Thrasher, Olive Sparrow, Hooded Oriole, Snowy Plover, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Chihuahuan Raven, Altamira Oriole, Hook-billed Kite, Elf Owl, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Pyrrhuloxia, and Harris's Hawk

When we reached Del Rio, TX we headed for some culture in San Antonio and then northwest to the Texas hill country for our first life warbler - Golden-cheeked Warbler - at Perdenales State Park near the LBJ Ranch. After the hill country, we headed back to the Rio Grande and continued on to Big Bend National Park; a beautiful place with temperatures in mid May ranging from 110° at the Rio Grande to 65° at night in the mountains at Chisos Basin. New birds for us included Mexican Jay, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Gray Vireo, Colima Warbler, Black-crowned Sparrow, Scaled Quail, Lucifer Hummingbird, Lucy's Warbler, MacGillivray's Warbler, Varied Bunting, Cassin's Sparrow and Black-capped Vireo (which we had missed in the hill country).

Heading north toward New Mexico, we stayed at Indian Lodge in Fort Davis State Park, a beautiful place built and furnished by the CCC and WPA during the Depression. New birds included Montezuma Quail coming to a feeder at the campground host's site and Phainopepla in the fields below the lodge.

We made a brief visit to Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico and then headed over the mountains and down to White Sands National Monument. Along the way we picked up two new birds Gray Flycatcher near the mountain top at Cloudcroft and Red-faced Warbler singing on territory in a mountain canyon.

Arizona is wonderful, Cave Creek, Ramsey and Madera Canyons; the Chiricahua Mountains, Patagonia, Saguaro National Park, and the Anasazi pueblos at Canyon de Chelly. Not to mention new birds: Western and Whiskered Screech-Owl, Spotted Owl, Broad-billed, Violet-crowned, and Blue-throated Hummingbird, Elegant Trogon, Gila and, Strickland's Woodpecker, Greater Pewee, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Pinyon Jay, Mexican Chickadee, Bridled Titmouse, Hutton's Vireo, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Yellow-eyed Junco, Painted Redstart, and Virginia's and Olive Warblers. Hey Nancy, isn't that 49 warblers?

We headed north and continued our trip through Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana and saw along the way Barrow's Goldeneye, White-tailed Ptarmigan, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Franklin's Gull, Three-toed Woodpecker, Sprague's Pipit, Brewer's Sparrow, McCown's and Chestnut-collared Longspurs, and Gray-crowned and Black Rosy-Finches.

Then it was the beginning of July and time to head east. We started across the northern States, crossing North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. We saw ten new birds for the trip, but no lifers. We discussed taking a 568 mile round trip detour to the Lower Peninsula to try to find the Kirtland's Warbler, but it was July 8 and the tours into the protected Jack Pine habitat are only scheduled from about mid-May until the Fourth of July. We decided that it would probably be unproductive and frustrating to try and find one of the 485 nesting pairs in some 25,000 acres of habitat created by the Mack Lake fire of 1985 without assistance.

Nevertheless, early the next morning we headed due south to Mio, Michigan. Maybe the car was on birding autopilot. We arrived in Mio at about noon, and had a hard time finding even the Forest Service headquarters, which has an address on Court St., but is actually located on another street nearby. It was Sunday and the office was closed. The sign in front of the building informed us that this year's Kirtland's Warbler tours ended on July 2. It looked like the closest we were going to get to see one is the Kirtland's Warbler statue on Main St. Nancy took my picture in front of it.

We headed off following roads toward Mack Lake and found the Jack Pine forest, posted with endangered species notices. After a couple of miles we headed off onto a dirt road through the forest and made a right turn onto another dirt road after another two miles. Driving, and walking, these roads is allowed as long as you do not go off the road into the forest.

This was the deadeast looking habitat we had seen in a long time. It was quieter than the Arizona desert. Nothing was stirring. Then we made another right turn and suddenly we heard a bird singing. We jumped out of the car and there, not five feet from the road, perched on an open snag in perfect view -- a male Kirtland's Warbler singing a lively song! Amazing! We enjoyed watching the bird until he flew off into the woods. We never saw another bird in the forest.

All told we saw 397 species on our trip, including 69 life birds for me, and enjoyed them all, but warbler 50 sure made the 284 mile drive back north to US Rt. 2, and the 1,000 plus miles back home seem so easy to do.

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Frontyard Birding - On the Waterfront

by **Bea Nicholls**

From my living room window, I see very few of your "normal" yard birds, but then I have a rather unusual front yard - Middle River. As an ex-teacher, this has been the first fall and winter season I have been at home during the day. It has been an interesting experience...

In September, I watched an immature Belted Kingfisher fly by and perch on the perch on the poles off the end of our wharf, the first I have seen on the river. He dove into the water, but I never saw him come up with a fish. October brought an American Coot swimming with the ubiquitous Mallards. This is the first one I have seen in this close and, perhaps, the first one I have seen in Middle River. When I threw some corn in the shallow water of the community beach next to us the mallards floated in and ate, while the coot came in as far as it could and stood to eat in the shallowest water. The next evening, two Red-necked Grebes fished out in the channel until two spoonbats began to race back and forth.

Four Mute Swans floated across the river for several days in late October, then again in December. Years ago, we would have a dozen or more Tundra Swans wintering on the river. (My husband has great photographs of these), but these are the first swans we've seen since 1992. At least a dozen loons stopped by in early November for a few weeks, as well as fifteen or more Common Terns, and a possible Horned Grebe. (I went for my scope instead of my binoculars, and he was gone before I could confirm the identity... Will I never learn? He was close enough for binoculars, too.)

December and January were busy for me. Perhaps they were there earlier, but it was early February when I noted in my journal the first of the Scaup and Common Goldeneyes. Throughout the month we had at least a thousand Scaup, mixed Lesser and Greater, and perhaps a dozen or more Goldeneyes on the river. Except for a few loners, they usually stayed out in the channel or toward the other side, but when boats went out the river they came over this way, not far beyond our wharf. On February 6 & 7, a lone Canvasback showed up in the front of our bulkhead. (This was quite exciting for us as we have seldom seen Canvasbacks on Middle River, much less in this close.) He was with a group of seven Scaup, and all were diving around and under our wharf. Then, in late February a pair of Canvasbacks swam by, again feeding close to shore. On the same day 11 or more Ruddy Ducks were feeding in the channel with the Scaup.

We observed one instance of that part of nature which is upsetting, but intriguing. We watched as a Lesser Scaup tried valiantly to shake off a clam which had firmly attached itself to the end of its bill. To make matters worse, several gulls were chasing the Scaup, presumably to grab the clam. Each time the gulls flew at him the Scaup dove beneath the water and eventually surfaced elsewhere, only to have the scenario repeated each time. It became dark soon after, and we never saw the clamped Scaup again.

There are Ring-billed Gulls galore on Middle River all year round, but in the fall the Great Black-backed Gulls and the Herring Gulls begin to congregate in greater numbers, including adult gulls and many immatures. It has amused us that the gulls have usually chosen to break open their clams by dropping them on our neighbor's wharf, rather than ours. (You probably know the old joke about the pigeon who suggested to his friend, "Let's make a deposit on a new car.") Our wharf is old, untreated, and very weathered, and our neighbor has just invested quite a bit of money in building a beautiful new wharf which he has treated with preservative twice this year and has washed off weekly to keep clean. Our neighbor has tried placing a plastic owl on one of his poles, and has string cords and strips of cloth across the wharf to try to scare the gulls away. ... Just the other day, I saw a gull perched on a piling plastically pulling on one of the cords. Although they often perch on our wharf, the gulls really seem to enjoy the amusement park our neighbor has created for them.

It was nice that a few of my friends from the BBC were able to join me this year in observing the bird life on Middle River. As with all birding, some days are terrific and some are less interesting, but you are welcome to come and give it a try.

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May Count

The 5th Annual North American Migration Count and 1997 State May Count will be held on Saturday, May 10. If you would like to participate in counting birds for Baltimore City or County, please call Michele Melia at (410) 358-5920.

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Central Panama

by **Jim Highsaw and Linda Prentice**

It's dawn at the Rio Chagres Environmental Center in the central Canal area in Panama. A Collared Forest-Falcon flies across the clearing and Toucans, Aracaris, Puffbirds and Blue Cotingas appear in the trees near the lodge as we watch from the balcony. A little later our small group starts off on the long loop trail through the forest, through mixed-species flocks, to an area where male Red-capped Manakins are displaying. As we continue slowly and quietly on the trail, suddenly a large shape glides silently through the branches off to our right and lands nearby at eye-level. Spectacled Owl! The owl turns to face us and remains there while we observe it for the next 10-15 minutes. Further along the trail we spot three different species of Trogons. This morning, our seventh in Panama, was one of the highlights of a 10-day trip in January 1997 organized by Victor Emmanuel Nature Tours, focusing on the Panama Canal region.

Another highlight was the two days spent birding on the Pipeline Road, one of the better-known birding sites in the Panama Canal region. Pipeline Road's many birds included Broad-billed Motmot, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Semi-plumbeous Hawk, Little Tinamou, Squirrel Cuckoo, White-tailed and Slaty-tailed Trogon, and Great Potoo. Other productive areas visited included Escobal and Achiole Roads on the west side of Gattun Lake, Summit Gardens, and Madden Forest. We saw over 225 species of birds on the trip and also encountered howler monkeys, marmosets, Capuchin monkeys, coatimundi, and three-toed sloths. A close-up view of a perched Peregrine Falcon near Panama City, on the last afternoon, was a splendid way to end the trip.

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Covered Dish Supper

by **Mitchell Gerber**

The social periods before our regular Baltimore Bird Club "Tuesday Evenings at Cyburn," with their light refreshment format, are always pleasurable. However, it's our annual covered dish suppers at the Cyburn Mansion that evoke special enthusiasm.

The last one was held on January 5, 1997. The planning, attention to detail, and hard work that Mary Byers and her committee put forth were immediately obvious. The attractively set-up tables and chairs signaled a "ready-to-go" preparation.

The fun evening began with a scrumptious social hour with wine, cheese, veggies, dip, etc. The buffet-style supper was served in an atmosphere of friendly casualness. The menu consisted of hot main courses, salads, desserts and beverages. Mary Byers coordinated the items of food and drink to be brought in by each individual. Her selections in this tough assignment had to be uncanny in order to achieve a balanced menu. The cleanup group, which consisted of all the attendees, quickly set up the area for the lecture by Hank Kaestner that followed.

Throughout the entire evening the warm camaraderie among our bird club members was in evidence. Now back to the main event:

Thank you, Mary Byers.

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Postcard from the Edge

by **Hank Kaestner**

Feb 17, 1997

I've just returned from Jamaica, where I saw the last of the 27 island endemics. I had previously missed the yellow-billed and black-billed parrots, 2 large cuckoo species, and the Jamaican owl. It is actually quite easy to see all 27 endemics in a single day in the Cockpit Country of west-central Jamaica. Also interesting was the large number (15 species) of wintering North American wood warblers.

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Field Trip Reports

compiled by **Mark Pemburn**

Your of Field Trip editor was caught asleep at the switch for the last issue and for this he apologizes. This time we take a brief visit back to those golden days of yesteryear (i.e., 1996) to review the late summer and fall episodes afield.

August 17 - A mostly sunny day in the high 80's on the shores of Delaware Bay for Gene Scarpulla Delaware Shorebirds trip. Among the 77 species witnessed by the 23 attendees were nearly all of the available tern species (Caspian, Royal, Common, Forster's, Least, Black and Gull-billed) and a decent selection of shorebirds including Upland Sandpipers and Wilson's Phalaropes.

August 25 - Of the Cylburn Self-Guided tour on this date, Joe Lewandowski writes, "Today marked the first of the tours for this fall. Cylburn is still open and for that a round of thanks must go out to all who did their best to make this so. Thirteen birders visited the Arboretum with the pleasant result of seeing 21 species. Hummingbirds we seen by many of us and the fly-over of two Great Egrets was a sight to behold. Viewing a pair of Baltimore Orioles and an Osprey made our day. The weather was magnificent -- a picture-perfect summer day, making it hard to believe that this was just around the corner. The flowers are still in bloom at Cylburn so come out and see them sometime. You'll be glad you did."

August 25 - That same day, in that same place (Cylburn) Gail Frantz, and a similarly sized group were walking the trails and meadows to good effect, garnering 33 species in the process.

August 31 - A few days later, Burton Alexander plus 15 of the binocular brethren (and sistren) strolled the paths of Liberty Reservoir to return a checklist of 45 species. Burton writes, "... good views of a few Baltimore Orioles ... a Broadwing flew low and closed to Rte. 140 bridge. Kingfishers posed for scope view ... some warblers." The tally sheet records Black-throated Blue, Parula, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Redstart and Common (or if you prefer *Maryland*) Yellowthroat.

(The September to November field trips, for which reports were received, were summarized in the Dec-Jan. issue)

December 7 - Steve Sanford writes of the Southern Maryland trip, "To my astonishment, 11 bird-starved birders were willing to go to Point Lookout despite the high probability that it would rain heavily all day. And, indeed, it *did* rain heavily all day!

"Nevertheless, a good time was had by all. The first highlight was a group of Wild Turkeys on Route 2-4 in southern Calvert County. At the Point, Oldsquaw were abundant, and we managed to squeak out all three Scoter species. The rain became extremely heavy but we took shelter under the eaves of the museum building. Surprisingly, we were treated to a marvelous intra-pluvial plethora of land birds: Brown-headed Nuthatches, a close-up Merlin, Bluebirds, Kingfishers, and many others. The hoped-for Short-eared Owls near Leonardtown did not appear. Finally, after lunch, sanity prevailed, and we ended the trip around 2:00 PM. Despite the wretched weather, we ended up with 58 species."

December 8 - Kye Jenkins plus six others performed the rounds at Loch Raven on this date under clear skies and temperatures approaching the 50's. Their efforts were rewarded by a great look at a Hermit Thrush and "Steve Simon with his outstanding ears picked up a Fox Sparrow!" Forty-five species were recorded in toto.

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Volunteers Needed

1. Delamra Birding Weekend

Volunteer birders are needed to lead canoe field trips for the 1997 Delmarva Birding Weekend, which will be held April 26 - 27 in Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester Counties. The purpose of the weekend is to showcase the natural beauty of the Lower Eastern Shore to future birders. Canoe trips needing guides include the Pocomoke River, Nassawango Creek and Assateague Island. Each trip lasts 4 hours, and guides can work solo or in pairs leading groups of 4 canoes. Canoes will be provided at a cost.

For more information, call Jim Rapp at the Salisbury Zoo at (410) 548-3116 or Lisa Challenger at Worcester County Tourism at (410) 632-3110.

2. Wyman Park

Wyman Park, located next to the Homewood campus of the Johns Hopkins University, is one of the loveliest parks in Baltimore. With its water course, Stoney Run, and its wooded areas, it has a wide variety of birds at all times of the year. What it needs is volunteers to help restore it, to pick up refuse and to put in plantings to halt erosion. Last year more than one hundred interested persons helped. The effort begins this year on the morning of April 5 (a Saturday). Come early to bird the park and help with the restoration. Call Guy Holliday at (410) 366-6827 for more information.

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Board of Directors Meetings

by **Alan Bromberg, Recording Secretary**

The Board of Directors had its first meeting of the new year on January 13. The board approved a motion to send a letter to the General Assembly supporting a bill to provide for registration of all-terrain vehicles. The board also voted unanimously to donate \$5,000 from the Martin Fund to support the purchase of the Belt Woods property in Prince Georges County from the Episcopal Church. Other topics of discussion included nominations for new officers and the Nominating Committee and confidentiality for persons whose names are mentioned in the Chip Notes and the Yellowthroat when they are put on the Internet.

The board also met on February 10. The board voted to support a team from the Western School of Technology and Environmental Science in the Envirothon competition and to authorize up to \$425 from the Etta Wedge Fund for the team's expenses for travel and materials. The board discussed the preparation of the site guide and whether it will be possible to have it published in time for the MOS conference in May. A budget committee was appointed to work on the 1997-1998 budget. Joy Wheeler is contacting area colleges with community service offices to request student volunteers to lead school groups and work on other projects at Cylburn.

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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 1997-98 membership year, which will begin September 1, 1997.

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 1997-98 year, so their dues will actually cover the period from May 1, 1997 to September 1, 1998.

Address changes or applications for membership should be sent to

Roberta Ross
4128 Roland Avenue
Baltimore MD 21211-2034

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Back Yard Birding

by **Gail Frantz**

In early summer when pulling into her driveway, 17-year-old Julie Cannon noticed a tiny form lying on the ground. It turned out to be a baby bird with just a few feathers. Carefully picking up the limp body, she took it into the house. Julie spotted a baseball cap hanging inside the door and decided that the cap, with the addition of a bit of cotton, would make a perfect bird nest. In a mild panic about what the bird might eat, Julie decided to chop up a bit of the roast beef her family had eaten for supper that night. She stirred it up with some milk then fed the little guy small bits of the mixture with tweezers. To give him water she used a clean, old eye dropper. Following this eating regimen, would you believe the baby bird thrived? As the days passed and the bird's feathers grew in, Julie realized that her small charge was a Robin.

The weeks passed and the bird began leaving the yard in the morning to disappear during the day. By this time Julie learned to recognize his "voice." Since she always used the same whistle to call him in, he recognized hers too and would quickly appear to gently perch on her shoulder. Toward the end of summer, the bird often flew around the neighborhood. By this time Julie learned to recognize his "voice." Since she always used the same whistle to call him in, he recognized hers too and would quickly appear to gently perch on her shoulder. Toward the end of summer, the bird often flew around the neighborhood. By this time Julie learned to recognize his "voice." Since she always used the same whistle to call him in, he recognized hers too and would quickly appear to gently perch on her shoulder. Toward the end of summer, the bird often flew around the neighborhood. By this time Julie learned to recognize his "voice." 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