



CHIP NOTES

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Successful Christmas Bird Count at Hart-Miller Island1, 5

Welcome New Members1

Conservation Corner
Making Farmland into Meadows.....2, 3

Birding Trips & Tips
Albuquerque areas and Bosque de Apache- Nov 20214

Field Trip Reports6, 7

Remembering Bob Ringler7

BBC Info and Application8

NOTE: President's Corner will return next issue.

Successful Christmas Bird Count at Hart-Miller Island

By Libby Errickson, Community Science Chair

For the first time in over a decade, we were able to include Hart-Miller Island on the Middle River Christmas Bird Count (CBC) this year. While Hart-Miller Island has always been within the Middle River CBC circle, the island can only be reached by boat and is closed to the public during the winter. Maryland

Environmental Services (MES), who conduct regular environmental monitoring on the dredge material island, were able to provide a boat and crew as well as land transportation on the island to a team of grateful and happy Baltimore Bird Club members on the morning of the Middle River CBC, December 19, 2021. Hart-Miller Island, an artificial

island constructed of dredge material from Baltimore Harbor, has proven over the years to provide important habitat to large numbers of migrating, breeding, and wintering birds, particularly shorebirds and waterfowl.



Braving the cold, windy conditions to count the birds!

Photo Credits: Libby Errickson.

Continued on page 5



Sandhill Crane in Albuquerque
Photo by: Lou Taylor

WELCOME!

A warm Baltimore Bird Club welcome goes out to the following members who have joined us since the Winter Chip Notes was published. A couple of you were members in past years and have rejoined. Thanks for joining! We look forward to seeing you out there on our birding trips, and at our lectures and other events.

Kyle Gardiner Baltimore
Joe Halloran Baltimore
Kathryn Hendley Baltimore
Jeffrey Martin Baltimore
David Nyweide Baltimore
Julia Pierson Baltimore
Marilyn & Paul Timmel Baltimore
Chris & Cherie Miller Catonsville

Sarah Demarest Chevy Chase
Michael Lins Elkridge
Heather Ogden Elkridge
Thomas Burger Essex
Kimberly Gough Manchester
Mac Plant Towson
John Fairhall Baltimore

Making Farmland into Meadows

Article By Nancy O'Hara; Conquest Preserve photos taken by Marcia Watson

On September 11, Baltimore Bird Club had their first habitat/bird field trip to Conquest Preserve, a new public preserve located in Queen Anne's County near Centerville, Md. It is situated on the Spaniard Neck peninsula between the Chester and Corsica Rivers. The day started with perfect weather. Dan Small, Natural Lands Project Coordinator for Washington College, met us in the parking area, where our education on creating and managing habitat began.

Most of the property had been farmland until 2017. The property is now being converted to grasslands, scrubby edges, tidal and freshwater wetlands for wildlife, and open space for recreation. Currently, there are over 500 acres of grassland.

Grasslands have been declining rapidly throughout the world, with less than one percent remaining.



A peacefully resting Bobolink on well protected natural lands.
Photo by Nancy O'Hara

The decline has been particularly true for the east coast. Intensified agriculture, human population growth, increased suburbanization, the continued maturation of woodlands, and climate change have contributed to the decline. Grassland bird populations have severely declined throughout their range. New programs, such as the Natural Lands Project, hope to support and increase remaining populations.

We started along the path from the parking area, where land that was previously fallow fields is now filled with self-propagating grasses and wildflowers. Many species besides birds benefit from grassland habitats. Native bees and butterflies, along with other insects, will find food and shelter.

As we traveled around the first path, it became more apparent how special this place is becoming with excellent year-round birding due to the mix of habitats. On the first

loop, Bay-breasted, Magnolia, and many other species of warblers, many of which were first recorded here in 2021, greeted us. We spotted a Lincoln's Sparrow and Alder/Willow Flycatcher (Traill's Flycatcher) in the same tree. Since 2019, 15 species of sparrows have been reported here.

As we left the first loop and joined the road, Dan explained how the fields had been managed previously and what had been planted to promote wildlife. We saw Eastern Meadowlarks and Dickcissels in the fields. In the winter, the grassland will fill with water, becoming the perfect habitat for waterfowl later in the season.

Dan pointed out that not just any grass would work. Many ground birds, such as quail, need grass that is not densely packed at the base so they may move freely on the ground. We moved further down the road, where he explained the need for hedgerows for quail to survive.

Making Farmland into Meadows

Continued from page 2

He showed us where Cedars had been planted in the grassland to create artificial hedgerows. We flushed a covey of Bob-whites, not once but twice.

Wetlands act as the earth's natural sponges. They filter, absorb, store, and prevent sediment and excess nutrients from entering waterways. They also help with flood control, shoreline stabilization, groundwater replenishment, and providing wildlife habitat. Conquest Preserve currently has five wetlands. So far, 22 species of waterfowl 15 species of shorebirds have been reported here.

Conquest Preserve has created a living shoreline along Conquest Beach. Over 1,000 feet of eroding bank has been transformed into sand and cobble shoreline. The key to this design is using lightweight cobbles to deflect wave energy, and the finer-grained sand will be pushed up the shoreline and held in place by marsh grasses. This will enable the shoreline to move and shift over time as sea levels rise. This shoreline will preserve habitat for fish and crabs, which will help other species. On the day of our trip, a wedding was scheduled, so we could not visit the shoreline but look forward to seeing it in the future.

Want to learn more about Dan Small and grassland creation? Dan was our BBC Lecturer in March 2021. His lecture "Natural Lands Project" is still available online at: https://youtu.be/wIT3ZqU4eHU_



Albuquerque Areas and Bosque de Apache- Nov 2021

Deb and Lou Taylor

This was our first time on a plane in almost two years and boy were we excited, but also a little cautious. Mostly everyone behaved in the airport and in the airplane.

Our first five days in Albuquerque was in an AirB&B casita. It was quite cute and authentic with adobe walls and authentic furnishings. The interesting thing about this AirB&B is although we were sort of in the burbs, the birding was great. Right outside our door were Sandhill Cranes, Roadrunners, Ladderback Woodpeckers, Curved-billed Thrashers, Gambel's Quail, White-winged Doves, and Cedar Waxwings. Lou was busy hiding in the bushes again waiting for the right photo op!



The authors at Sandia Mt., NM with fellow BBC members Mirat Shah and Ash Fawzy
Photo by Lou Taylor

We spent several mornings on the Rio Grande "trails." The trails in the Albuquerque area really consisted of a super long, many miles canal-like path accessed mainly through neighborhood dead end streets. The big secret in finding birds in this area is to go down into the Cottonwood tree paths which were near the Rio Grande River. The unconventional paths were lined with scrubby bushes, Salt Cedar bushes, dirt, and tumbleweed. We saw Black Phoebe and Spotted Towhee and a porcupine asleep in a tree! It was really neat to see birds eating apples from an orchard. Cows came over to eat the fallen apples too. We

saw no other birders. Another morning we saw a couple with binocs and got excited to have someone to talk to. I started asking questions but they too were unfamiliar with the area. We spent the morning with them and we continued on to lunch together. Several flocks of Sandhill Cranes caught our attention as they flew by.

One morning we ventured to the Rio Grande Nature Center and Park. Tons of White-crowned Sparrows and Spotted Towhees. The nature center has a wonderful enclosed glass viewing area allowing only a few people at a time to spread out and to see waterfowl from inside. Cackling geese seemed more plentiful than Canada Geese. A few bird feeding areas were helpful in spotting Black Phoebe, White-crowned Sparrow and several East coast birds, as well.

Tingley Beach was another spot that was recommended from eBird. It really wasn't a beach, more like several small man made ponds. Lesser Goldfinches greeted us. A variety of ducks were hanging out, but nothing special.

On the last day in the Albuquerque area we went to the Sandia Mountains. These mountains are known for Crossbills later in January. We knew that we would probably not see them but wanted to see if there was anything else interesting. We wound our way up to the top of Sadia where it was very windy and cold. We decided that we were going to walk a short trail, so we bundled up. We walked for a little bit, letting some anxious hikers pass us. The elevation was starting to wear on our breathing (12,000 feet). We passed a couple, but the man stopped us and asked, "Are you Debbie and Lou Taylor?" We thought, who would know us up here, especially since we were so

bundled up? It happened to be two members of the Baltimore Bird Club, Mirat Shah and her husband, Ash! We started laughing because what are the chances of meeting someone from your hometown on the top of a mountain in New Mexico in the freezing cold? Just crazy and funny!

Moving down south towards our next AirB&B, we went to Gordon/Ladd Bernardo NWR. This was a smaller NWR, but still interesting with small lookout towers and short trails. Several Harriers, Kestrel and usual east coast birds. Very pleasant.

The Bosque de Apache was 1 1/2 hours from Albuquerque with lots of 75 miles per hour highways. The Bosque reminded us of Blackwater NWR. Fortunately we did find the White Tailed Kite, although not where it was originally reported. Speaking with the locals always helps. Great-tailed Grackle, Western Meadowlark, Say's Phoebe, and Ross's Goose were seen. Lots of Red-tailed Hawks and Northern Harriers. The Visitor's center was quite productive with us finding Gambel's Quail, Pyrrhuloxia, Verdin and Phainopepla. Driving the loops produced many Kestrels, Harriers, and tons of White-crowned Sparrows.

What was most interesting and exciting was watching the Sandhill Cranes and Snow Goose arrive by the thousands to settle down for the night, mostly resting in the water. Quite spectacular.

Although New Mexico reminded us of Southeast Texas at times, it really was unique in it's own way.

Have a recent birding trip?

Please consider contributing by sending to **Alina Martin** – alinacmartin@gmail.com by the next Chip Notes deadline.

Successful Christmas Bird Count at Hart-Miller Island

Continued from page 1

Our count team consisted of Neville Fernandes, Alina Martin, Claire Wayner, Kojo Baidoo, Devi Abbott, and myself. Significant wind and cold made for less than ideal count day weather, and the count would have been impossible without the MES bus to ferry us to various vantage points throughout the 1,100-acre island. Each stop provided views of different portions of the island's extensive wetlands and the surrounding Chesapeake Bay. At each spot, we delegated each bird species present to a different member of our crew, and we each counted the individuals of our assigned species, often with the help of handheld clickers for the species present in greater numbers. This way, we were able to systematically cover a large portion of the island and generate estimates of the number of individuals of each species present.



Baltimore Bird Club birders Libby Errickson, Alina Martin, Claire Wayner, and Kojo Baidoo. MES boat and crew provided transport for 10 birders to HMI.

After ten different stops over about three hours, we were able to tally over 15,000 individuals of 53 different species. As expected, waterfowl were in the greatest abundance. Ruddy Ducks and Greater/Lesser Scaup dominated the count, with approximately 5,800 Ruddy Ducks and around 5,700 scaup tallied.

These species were mostly present in large rafts in the Chesapeake Bay waters surrounding the island, visible when we counted from vantage points around the island's perimeter. Within the island's interior, which consists of some open water as well as marshy wetland areas, the duck count was made up of Gadwall (~400), Northern Pintails (288), American Wigeon (274), Ring-necked Ducks (186), Hooded Mergansers (180), Mallards (176), American Black Ducks (150), Northern Shovelers (93), Buffleheads (50), and Red-breasted Mergansers (20). Other waterfowl present included almost 300 American Coots, a few individuals of both Pied-billed and Horned Grebes, around 200 Canada Geese, 78 Tundra Swans, and a resident family of Trumpeter Swans that bred on the island this past summer, quite a rarity in Baltimore County. Two Great Egrets, which do not typically winter in the Baltimore area, made for another highlight. The forested and scrubby areas of the island also produced some birds, with six different sparrow species making it onto our list (Field, Fox, White-throated, Savannah, Song, and Swamp), as well as other expected but fun winter passerines such as Golden-crowned Kinglets, a Brown Creeper, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and three species of woodpecker (Northern Flicker, Red-bellied, and Downy). A few raptors made appearances, including at least nine Bald Eagles, five Northern Harriers, and a Red-shouldered Hawk. We even saw two of the bald eagles clasp talons in their aerial courtship display!

While the wind likely limited the bird activity on the island to an extent, it was still an enormously successful

CBC. The Christmas Bird Count tradition began with 25 counts on December 25, 1900. Today, the event is sponsored by the National Audubon Society and consists of thousands of count circles and countless participants across the Americas. The data collected during each CBC contributes to one of the longest-running, most consistent bird population datasets in existence. This data is used to assess changes in bird populations throughout North America and is one of the primary reasons researchers have been able to track the declines of many bird species over the past century. The first step in addressing conservation issues is figuring out they exist, and the CBC has been an integral tool in the conservation efforts of birds in North America. Being able to include Hart-Miller Island in our circle has the potential to increase—some years perhaps even double—the number of birds that would typically be counted during the Middle River CBC. This allows us to provide a more accurate picture of the winter bird population present within our 15-mile diameter count circle and contribute more robust data to Audubon and the massive CBC dataset. We hope that our partnership with MES will allow us to continue to access Hart-Miller Island on Christmas Bird Count day in the future, allowing the island's important wealth of birds to be included in the count for years to come.

A link to our checklist for the day can be found here: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S99137491>.

More information on the Audubon Christmas Bird Count can be found here: <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>.

September 28, 2021 Cromwell Valley Park, Baltimore, MD

Leaders: Deb and Lou Taylor

Cromwell Valley Park gave 12 birders a run for their money on Tuesday Sept 28. We got lucky not far from the Hawk Watch spot



Cedar Waxwing photo by Bill Hubick

where a Red-shouldered Hawk was perched high in the trees. It was extremely quiet the first hour as the skies started to darken and it began to drizzle.

Yet as we approached the Lime Kiln area it quickly cleared. We started to see a few exciting birds, including Bluebirds, Red-eyed Vireo, Cedar Waxwings and the highlight, a Magnolia Warbler.

As we made our way back to the Mine Bank Trail, Dave Spector spotted a Green Heron in the stream near the little bridge (not far from the parking lot). Most of us got to see it.

John Landers found a female Red Breasted Grosbeak near the stream and then the group saw a

few Common Yellowthroats (both sexes) in the meadows. Another exciting bird was a Yellow-billed Cuckoo found not far from box 11 by Deb Taylor. It was a first for a few birders.

Although we started off slow and the weather seemed a little iffy, we ended up with a respectable list of 30 birds.

October 30, 2021 Howard County Conservancy

Leader: Mark Linardi

Halloween Eve (day). The weather was predictably *frightening*, looking like a washout. The closer I got to the destination the harder it rained. A grave situation. However, once I reached the parking lot and stepped outside the rain started to let up. There were some breaks in the clouds! It would remain a bit gloomy with overcast skies, but on this day we would dodge the rain and have some fun looking at birds.

Twelve strong, we traversed the muddy hillside and made our way to the stream below. Crossing over to the adjacent farm fields we started our Sparrow quest in earnest. We had decent success and numbers, but the highlight here was the small group of Meadowlarks Debbie Taylor spotted on the slope of a distant hill.

Moving on, we observed most of the usual woodland birds. We paused to observe a distant Merlin before proceeding to a grove of Dogwood trees, where we watched a couple of White-breasted Nuthatches and Hermit Thrushes feeding away on the ripe, red fruit.

We ticked off a few more species before concluding our walk at the garden atop the hill. At the last minute an American Kestrel made an appearance, giving everyone a good show. The final tally for the group was 41 species. Thanks everyone!



Eastern Meadowlark photo by Bill Hubick

October 31, 2021, River and Field Campus (RAFC)

Leaders: Dan Small and Nancy O'Hara

Trip report and photo by Nancy O'Hara

We met Dan Small at a local Royal Farms and caravanned to the River and Field Campus (RAFC), which is private land that is being restored to native habitat. The day started off cool and slow. When we arrived we were greeted by Northern Harriers. We heard a Bobwhite calling in the distance. As the sun warmed the fields we started seeing more activity, like the two Palm Warblers and quite a few Yellow-rumped Warblers. But the highlight of our trip was the late pair of Grasshopper Sparrows. They stayed in sight for quite a while.

We saw nine species of sparrows, along with gulls, woodpeckers, and a wide variety of birds including over 3,000 Red-winged Blackbirds. Unfortunately, the wind started picking up so we had to cut our trip short. We had four participants and ended the day with 54 species.



White-crowned Sparrow

In Memoriam

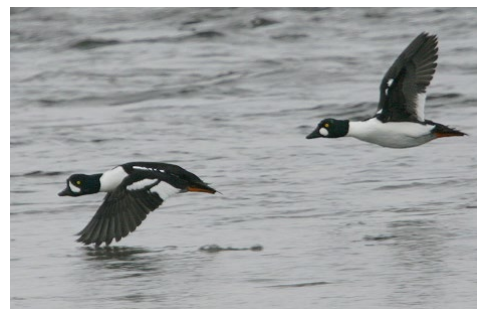
The Baltimore Bird Club (BBC) is saddened to announce that well known expert Maryland birder Bob Ringler passed away on February 15, 2022. Bob was a past president of BBC from 1983-86. He was also president of the Maryland Ornithological Society 1988-89. His many important contributions to birding will be documented more in the next edition of Maryland Yellowthroat. There are many posts about him now on the MD Birding site.



November 13, 2021 Oregon Ridge and Agricultural Center

Leader: Libby Erickson

Our walk started off strong with a Winter Wren dancing around one of the garden sheds at Oregon Ridge. We also got great looks at both kinglet species, as well as a great opportunity to compare Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers. The real treat of the morning at Oregon Ridge was an Eastern Screech-Owl snoozing in its cavity. We then went over to the MD Agriculture Center, where we were treated to good looks at a few Eastern Meadowlarks and a surprising amount of Horned Larks zipping around one of the agricultural fields. Overall a great morning despite overcast and somewhat drizzly weather. Nine people participated.



Common Goldeneye photo by Bill Hubick

January 22, 2022 Chesapeake Environmental Center, Queenstown MD

Leaders: Brent and Mary Byers

We had eight participants birding from 9:00 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. COLD and clear (average temp 24F). We found thirty-six species including a life Common Goldeneye for Sarah and Brina, two club members.

BALTIMORE BIRD CLUB
<http://baltimorebirdclub.org>

A Chapter of

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Submit materials to
Alina Martin – alinacmartin@gmail.com

Moving or email change?
Send update to
Terry Ross at trosstva@gmail.com

**Deadlines for submitting articles
for upcoming issues:**

April 24, 2022



Application

The membership year is September 1-August 31. New members only joining after March 1 will be members for the upcoming year as well as the remainder of the year that they enroll.

The most convenient way to join is at the Maryland Ornithological Society website using this address: <https://mdbirds.org/join/chapters/baltimore-bird-club/#toggle-id-3>, where you may pay your dues using PayPal.

OR, you may join by mail.

Make check payable to "MOS" and mail with completed application to:

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Rockville, MD 20852