

Chip Notes

BALTIMORE BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER



SPRING 2016 No. 395
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New Mowing Schedule of Fields to Begin at Cromwell Valley Park in Spring of 2016

By John Canoles

Photos by Bill Hubick

Last fall BBC member Rose Anderson wrote an article for Chip Notes about Mowing for Wildlife at CVP and what would constitute an ideal mowing plan. With her help and that of many other birders/ environmentalists, it seems success is around the corner! Read on....

Old field habitats are critically important year-round to many species of bird and insects. An old field may appear like a brushy mess to the uninitiated, but these unkempt habitats are unrivaled in their biodiversity and productivity. In the spring, fields provide ground nesting sites for birds like bobwhite, meadowlark and bobolink. In the summer, they are nursery grounds for these birds and for many insects including praying mantis, grasshoppers and Monarch butterflies. In fall, the old fields come alive with flowering asters and goldenrods and play host to migrating visitors like Nelson's sparrows. These fields are also invaluable feeding and resting areas for Monarchs heading on their southward journey. In winter, flocks of sparrows and finches glean seeds from the tangled remains of the wildflowers.



Field with milkweed

Continued on page 9

WELCOME!

A warm Baltimore Bird Club welcome goes out to the following members who have joined us since the Winter Chip Notes was published. Thanks for joining and we look forward to seeing you out there on our birding trips and meetings!

From Baltimore

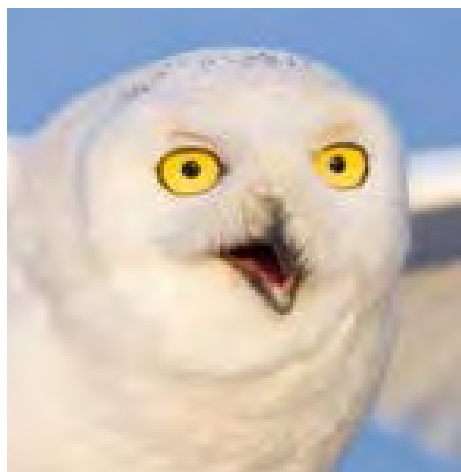
Michael Bradley Baltimore
Raymond S. Kandt Baltimore

Gabriel (Bud) Poole Baltimore

From Other Cities

Joe & Linda Corcoran Catonsville
Simon Best Cockeysville

Alan & Sue Young Millersville
Norvell A. Brown, Jr. Owings Mills



President's Corner

by Joan Cwi

Photo by Tim Carney



Yes, this is the Spring Chip Notes, although as I write I am watching my husband shovel 29.2 inches of snow off our cars. But by the time I finish editing Chip Notes articles, it is then laid out by our designer David Nelson, then goes to the printer, then the U.S. mail--you won't get this until late February or early March. This is one of the troubles with a quarterly—it is often caught betwixt and between! So there are articles about the Christmas Bird Count and Covered Dish Dinner, as well as some enthusiastic news about future environmental programs starting this summer.

One of them is about a new mowing schedule at Cromwell Valley Park (CVP). BBC's conservation group, in the person of Rose Anderson, has been working with others on establishing a

bird-friendly mowing schedule there, so we are thrilled by this success. But just as we get this news—wham bam—we get notification from our birders that the hedgerow along Minebank Trail had not



just been trimmed, but mowed flat, evidently by overzealous volunteers who did not understand the importance of this stretch of vegetation (invasive or not) for birdlife. Migrating passerines, especially the rarer warblers like Mourning and Connecticut, loved this particular stretch of dense undergrowth and one would often see a large group of birders huddled together to get a glimpse. So evidently we still have work cut out for us in educating the Trail Corp about our needs in the park. We understand the park's need to control invasive species, but perhaps a plan similar to that going to be used in mowing—one-third removal at a time—would benefit us all. Stay tuned....

Conservation CORNER

Forest Patches

By Leslie Starr

Photo by HEPP Park

The BBC Conservation Committee meeting on November 18, 2015 hosted two representatives from Baltimore Green Space, executive director Miriam Avins and board member Denise Duval. Per its web site, <http://baltimoregreenspace.org>: "Baltimore Green Space partners with communities to preserve and support community gardens, forest patches, pocket parks, and other open spaces managed by

city residents. At the request of community groups, Baltimore Green Space acquires community-managed open spaces and provides support to those who care for them. This allows communities to ensure that their urban oases endure without taking on the responsibilities of acquisition, ownership, and liability."

Baltimore Green Space is interested in teaming up with the birding community to assess and promote its Forest Patch program. A Forest Patch is an area of tree canopy at least 10,000 square feet in area, preferably with an understory of mixed age young trees and smaller plants. Patches such as this cover 4,822 acres and make up 34% of Baltimore's tree canopy, 2,154 acres or 20% of which are not in parks. These patches may be composed of many lots with different owners or be a single tract with one owner, but

most lack protection from development and are subject to misuse. Baltimore Green Space focuses on helping neighbors take care of their local urban oases and also is working toward acquisition of forested land.

Mary Chetelat and I went on a tour of four Forest Patches with Green Space Program Manager Katie Lautar on January 12 and were very impressed with the sites. The first one we visited, HEPP Park, not far from Mount Pleasant Golf Course, is a large level block with many mature white oaks, among the best tree species for insects and thus for birds, too. A smaller patch on Fairwood Avenue in Hamilton, where Kevin Graff co-led a Nature Walk with 24 bird species on Nov. 22, 2015, is a long, thin, terraced tract. Springfield Woods has a stream running through it which has been lovingly cleaned and now bridged by a neighbor. Wilson Woods is being cared for by the community and features plantings along the perimeter to show it isn't a neglected vacant lot.

Baltimore Green Space would like the assistance of the birding community in 1) assessing the

various patches' use by birds, both resident and migratory, and 2) participating in outreach events. Data gathered about the various patches will strengthen the case for their protection. Sharing the enjoyment of these mini-woods with their communities will encourage stewardship. As part of objective #1, Mike Hudson surveyed 35 patches in summer 2014 and identified 61 species of birds, but there are over 1,000 of these patches. Both Mike and Kevin have assisted with #2, outreach, by identifying birds during community events at several of the patches.

Some birders prefer to bird alone or in small groups and some love to share their knowledge. Surveying one or more Forest Patches would be the perfect activity for our loner birders. Volunteering to identify birds at a community event would be a great way to foster awareness of the value of these mini-woods while introducing people to the joys of birding. If anyone is interested in helping in either of these areas, please contact Program Manager Katie Lautar at katherine@baltimoregreenspace.org, 443-608-0353.

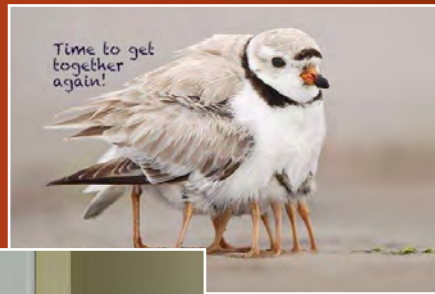


2016 Covered Dish Dinner

Photos by Lou Taylor

This year's Covered Dish Dinner turned out to be quite a success, with about 100 members attending—35 more than last year!! Perhaps it was the lure of the plover postcard! Like last year, in addition to the food, we had artwork for sale by LOB artists Lynne Parks and Rose Anderson, our usual book& things sales table run by Joe Lewandowski, and a raffle table full of goods. This year's raffle was organized by Debbie and Lou Taylor, and they acquired an impressive array of give-

aways to lucky winners. Lou also served as our "official" photographer. The continuous slideshow was updated and joined by continuous bird melody. Thank you Hospitality Chairperson Kevin Graff for pulling this together for us, and to members Mary Shock for getting such good speakers, Mary Anne Fluke for arranging the food tables, John Fleishman for helping us set up and take down, and to Ben Poscover for greeting members at the door and helping them carry food downstairs. By the way, we made a total of \$506 between the raffle and sales table.

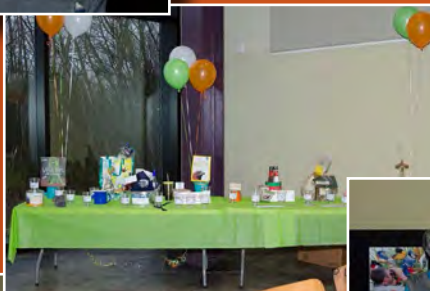


The “business” meeting included an overview of BBC achievements in 2015, an acknowledgment to Catherine Bishop for all she gave to us in her lifetime, presenting yet another *Baltimore Big Year Award* to Kevin Graff, and *Exceptional Service Award* to Lights Out Baltimore leaders Wendy Olsson, Lindsay Jacks, and Lynne Parks. At the last minute Lindsay, who works at the Aquarium, had a work emergency and could not make it to receive her award. The emergency—an aggressive male crocodile bit off the upper snout of a younger female!! Alas, she (the croc)

did not survive the ordeal.

This was followed by the lecture by Jim Brighton, who along with Bill Hubick, started the Maryland Biodiversity Project three years ago to spread the word on the species that surround us. The Project’s website is: www.marylandbiodiversity.com/

If you didn’t come, you missed a good time. Set aside the second Sunday in January 2016 for next year’s event.





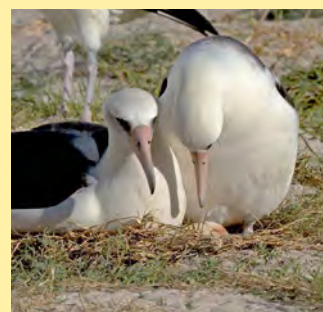
Birdbits... BIRDS IN THE NEWS!

We bring updates on two birds we have been following—Wisdom the 64-year old Laysan Albatross and Baltimore, the Snowy Owl. We conclude with a humorous article about Baltimore pigeons. Unless in italics, these articles come directly from their source.

Remember Wisdom?

By Darryl Fears, extracted from the Washington Post, November 30, 2015

She's back. The oldest known bird to lay an egg and raise a chick landed over Thanksgiving weekend at the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge in the Pacific Ocean, apparently to do it again, at age 64. Her name is Wisdom, but it should probably be Ancient Wisdom, because she apparently knows things that scientists don't. "It continues to just blow our minds," said Bruce G. Peterjohn, chief of the Bird Banding Laboratory at the U.S. Geological Services Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Md.



Here's why Wisdom's accomplishments are mind-boggling, and why she's a celebrity among bird scientists and bird watchers. First, albatrosses are expected to live a little more than half as long as Wisdom. They are certainly not expected to lay eggs and raise chicks at an age when most Americans are starting to collect Social Security payments.

Her backstory is incredible. Wisdom has raised chicks six times since 2006, and as many as 35 in her life, according to the USGS. Since the day she was first tagged in 1956 at Midway Atoll, the end of the Hawaiian Island chain, she has likely flown up to 3 million miles. Do the math, the USGS said. That's "4 to 6 trips from the Earth to the Moon and back again with plenty of miles to spare."

As if laying eggs and raising chicks when many Americans are starting to collect Social Security payments isn't enough, there's another twist to Wisdom's story. The man who first held her and placed a band over her webbed foot was Chandler Robbins, then in his 40s. Still working at the atoll nearly 40 years later, he picked up a bird among the quarter million that nest there and found a signature on its tag that he recognized — his own. He was 81. Because of her celebrity status -- bird watchers "keep an eye out for her and know when she comes back" -- a single metal band that all albatrosses get isn't good enough for Wisdom. She's banded with a second plastic tag that's easier to spot so she'll stand out in the crowd.

Get a good look, Peterjohn said. As with premium athletes, the great ones are rare and must one day exit the stage. "She's the only one to live this long and avoid all the problems that confront [an] albatross," he said. "Something could happen and they could find her dead on Midway. Some day she's going to fly off the island some spring and never come back."

You can see live video of the new parents nesting and learn more here: <http://bit.ly/1O2dDVI>

Baltimore, the Snowy Owl, Online

Remember Baltimore? This third year male was banded as an immature after being trapped by Project SNOWstorm at Martin State Airport in Baltimore, Maryland on March 14, 2014. He was relocated to Middletown in Western Maryland. Baltimore was recaptured at Martin State Airport a year later on February 13, 2015, and fitted with a transmitter and relocated to Assateague Island National Seashore on February 14, 2015. He moved north and spent the winter near Lake Ontario. Baltimore's transmitter was sponsored by the Baltimore Bird Club—from hence he got his name.

This year, Baltimore's reactivated transmitter checked in on December 19, 2015 making him the first of Project SNOWstorm's owls to appear in all three of their first three seasons. As of this writing, he currently resides on the northeast edge of Lake Erie. Baltimore has already moved further south than reported in the following article. Everyone is waiting to see if he'll return to the same Baltimore airport he visited the prior two winters.

In May, 2014, David Brinker a regional wildlife ecologist working from the DNR, gave a BBC lecture about Project SNOWstorm, especially about the transmitters used in tracking and DNA and feather analysis. This year, on March 1st, he will present on what has been learned from this project. All are welcome to attend. Meanwhile you can follow Baltimore's progress at <http://www.projectsnowstorm.org/snowstorm-owls-winter-2015-16/>



Photo by Chris Hudson

Three's a Crowd?

Taken directly from Project SNOWstorm website, Jan 25, 2016 by Scott Weidensaul

Most winters, Amherst Island (Lake Ontario) is one of the best places to find snowy owls, and that's certainly the case this year — especially if you're looking for a snowy owl with a Project SNOWstorm transmitter.

Two of our owls, **Flanders** and **Baltimore**, have been on Amherst for the past month or so. And although Flanders moved off the island last week, another of our 2015 tagged birds, **Chaumont**, has moved in. Maybe they thought three was a crowd. **Baltimore** remains on Amherst, and has now sent us almost all of his backlogged data from the subarctic. He did give us a real scare, however. Wednesday evening his transmitter checked in, on schedule, sending us almost 4,100 GPS locations from his autumn movements.

Continued on page 8

Three's a Crowd? cont'd...

To my surprise, the next morning he checked in again, sending just a few dozen points. Odd, I thought — and when I plugged in his lat/long, I was shocked to find it was precisely the same spot where he'd been the evening before, along a road just outside the village of Stella. Alarm bells started going off in my head — the chance that he'd be in exactly the same spot 12 hours apart was pretty slim. Had he been hit by a car, and had the collision caused the weird, truncated transmission?

Fortunately, I'd been in email contact with Judy Bierma, who lives in Stella and had been following our reports closely. Although she was in Toronto that day, Judy immediately phoned Janet Scott, the well-known Bird Lady of Amherst Island. It took no time at all for Janet to call me back, from the site, to report that a thorough search had revealed no sign of trouble. We had by then determined that the transmitter had just thrown a duplicate transmission — and while it was (thankfully) a false alarm, we're deeply grateful for Judy and Janet's rapid-fire assistance. What's more, Janet emailed later to say she'd seen a very white snowy, presumably Baltimore, perched on the radio station tower not far from where she'd been looking.

Baltimore (the city) Named City with Best Quality of Pigeon Life

Taken verbatim from The Onion, January 5, 2016

Noting key indicators such as safety, health, and climate, a new survey published Tuesday in the *Wall Street Journal* ranked Baltimore the number-one city in the U.S. for quality of pigeon life. "Baltimore came out ahead of pigeon-friendly cities like New York and Boston due to its ample nesting alcoves, the lack of bird-repellent spikes, and the accessibility of dropped French fries and corn dogs," said the newspaper's senior editor, Bethany Crandall, adding that pigeons in the mid-Atlantic metropolis enjoyed sprawling public parks and some of the lowest rates of toddler-



chasings in the country. "Baltimore has a vibrant and diverse pigeon population, and there are lots of flock-friendly places to raise chicks. The number and variety of puddles is a major draw, and the awnings are world-class. It's no wonder that more and more pigeons are choosing to make the city home." The survey also found that Philadelphia was the best city for single pigeons.

New Mowing Schedule, cont'd...

Though essential for the survival of many species, old field habitats have been overlooked and mismanaged for decades. Their disappearance has led to steep declines in birds such as the Eastern Meadowlark and Boblink, as well as Monarch butterflies. Old fields are now probably the least common habitat type remaining in the County. In natural progression, fields revert back to forest, and fire, the natural creator of fields, is no longer feasible in most areas. Thus humans must artificially maintain old fields through periodic mowing to keep out the trees and shrubs.

A movement to protect old field habitat was sparked last fall by birders outraged when County mowers cut down the old field habitat at Hydes Field park. The birders had flocked to the fields trying to catch a glimpse of a Nelson's sparrow that had been reported there. The timing of the mowing was terrible for the visiting sparrow, but it highlighted the need for more habitat-sensitive maintenance. Following up on an initial meeting with Baltimore County's Commission for Environmental Quality (CEQ), Cromwell Valley Park board member Laurie Mitchell-Taylor, Gunpowder Valley Conservancy member Charlie Conklin, and Baltimore Bird Club member Rose Anderson worked with Chris McCollum of Baltimore County Recreation and Parks. Together they have created a sustainable model for periodic mowing of the fields at Cromwell Valley Park with the primary goal of old field habitat preservation.

Chris agreed that rotational mowing might be the answer. Starting this spring, before the beginning of the nesting season, the County will initiate a new three year rotational mowing schedule for some of its old field habitats. The fields are badly overgrown with shrubs and invasives, so this year, all fields will be mowed – an action also strongly endorsed by the Park Naturalist, Kirk Dreier. They will also be mowed high, not near the ground. Each subsequent year, the County will cut roughly 1/3 of the old field habitat so that no section of the fields goes more than 3 years between cuts. This helps to control woody succession but also ensures that the



Tree in Field

majority of the critical old field habitat is retained each year.

In addition, the Cromwell Valley Park Council and an anonymous donor have provided the resources to purchase a Kubota and a mower for Cromwell Valley Park, which will be used to mow areas according to the needs of the park, to keep sections free from noxious weeds as required by State law, and to keep areas maintained around stands of milkweed and other native plants for pollinators. These solutions are a win-win for the County: mowing, gas expenses are reduced, and valuable habitats are preserved.

This new schedule is thus the result of many collaborators. We are grateful for the efforts of Chris McCollum, who followed through on getting estimates and funding for the mowing schedule (\$12,000 to mow all of the fields initially), and to Tucker Langway (Baltimore County Property Management) who will supervise this work. The Park Council approved the funds for the equipment necessary to maintain areas between the County mowing, and the Baltimore Bird Club also provided major input. Laurie has revived a Habitat Restoration/Weed Warrior program at CVP last year and is always soliciting volunteers to help control invasive species at Cromwell Valley Park. If you are interested in helping at CVP, please contact her by email at ltmitchell4@comcast.net.

2015 Middle River Christmas Bird Count

By Kevin Graff and Pete Webb, Compilers

Photo by Bill Hubick

On Saturday, December 19, 2015 we had our third annual Middle River Christmas Bird Count, although it was the 71st Christmas Bird Count that BBC has participated in (previously in Baltimore). We garnered 99 species on that day, plus six more within "Count Week", which covers from 3 days before to 3 days after the actual



Wilson's Snipe

official Count. This compares to 104 species seen in 2014. Total birds seen and identified: 21,502. The numbers seen this year are about 30 percent lower than last year (30,119).

Our compilers speculate that is because the unusually warm weather kept most waterfowl and some winter resident passerines up north, and the blustery winds on count day kept birds hunkered down. For a full listing, see the top box announcement box of the BBC website: <http://baltimorebirdclub.org/>

The effort to conduct the count consisted of 51 observers in 24 groups working from 6:00 am to 3:30 pm who put in 84 hours and 60 miles on foot, plus 10 car hours and 205 car miles and an additional 1.25 hours owling and time watching feeders. The weather was moderate although the winds were blustery; water remained open. Many of the observers met at Bill Bateman's in Towson after the rally for a couple of hours socializing, eating and tabulating.

There were a few standout birds found on the count day. They include:

Snow Goose – 1 found in Chase

Red-throated Loon -- 1 found in Back River

Virginia Rail – 1 found in Chase

Wilson's Snipe – 1 found in Chase

Laughing Gull – 379 found in Chase

Thayer's Gull – 1 found in Chase

Lesser Black-backed Gull – 4 found in

Short-eared Owl – 1 found in Back River

Red-headed Woodpecker – 3 found in North Point

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – 1 found in Back River

American Pipit – 1 found in Chase

Pine Warbler – 1 found in Back River

Savannah Sparrow – 7 found in Chase and Back River

White-crowned Sparrow – 2 found in Chase

Rusty Blackbird – 11 found in Middle River

Baltimore Oriole – 1 found in Middle River

Purple Finch – 2 found in Back River

Other standout birds were found during the Count Week, as follows:

Mute Swan at Hart Miller

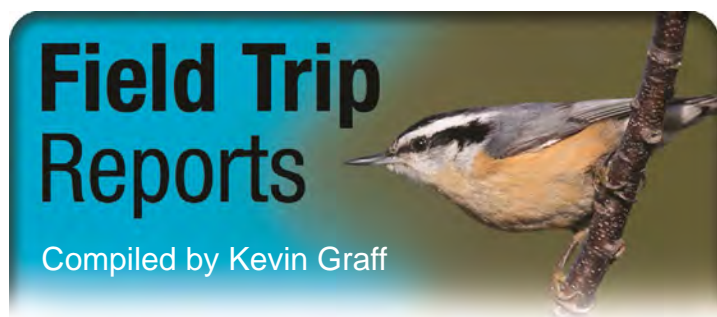
Peregrine Falcon at Hart Miller

Greater Yellowlegs at Hart Miller

Great Horned Owl in Chase

Horned Lark at Hart Miller

Snow Bunting at Hart Miller



NOV 8 - Swan Harbor - 2 Northern Harrier put on a good show. A few hundred Ruddy Ducks on the bay. 1 Palm Warbler marked by ebird as late. 37 species. 8 participants. Leader: Peter Lev.

NOV 21 - Papermill Flats and Ashland NCR - At the "flats" we saw several duck species, Green-winged Teal, Gadwall, Hooded Merganser and the highlight, Blue-winged Teal. Great looks at the Black-headed Gull and his buddies, the Ring-bills as well as the cryptic Wilson's Snipe. Our walk along the Ashland Trail turned up Hermit Thrush, both kinglets and a Yellow bellied Sapsucker. A very nice morning. 4 participants. Leaders: Debbie Terry and Kevin Graff.

DEC 5 - Wild Birds Unlimited Holiday Open House



Mary Anne Fluke, Kevin Graff and Debbie Taylor at WBU

- Many members visited WBU this day to exchange pleasantries with Kevin Graff at our exhibit table, see up-close-and-personal the four owls of different sizes that Phoenix Wildlife

Center had on exhibit, and get good discounts on seed and other bird products from the store.

DEC 6 - Prettyboy Reservoir - We visited Prettyboy on a cold but beautiful morning. Early morning fog on the CCC Trail broke up as the sun came out, creating gorgeous beams of light. However, the reservoir was completely fogged in, so the only waterfowl on our list were Canada Geese (heard). Best birding was in an area of scrubby brush and low trees near CCC Trail - here we had both kinglets, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and Eastern Bluebirds. A few saw a Common Raven being harassed by crows. A Fox Sparrow in the same area was seen only by one of us, co-leader Kevin Graff. 32 species. 11 participants. Leaders: Peter Lev & Kevin Graff.

JAN 1 - Old Picnic Area Trail - Annual new year walk started off on a cold, cloudy morning. We were surprised to see a Great Horned Owl flying low over reservoir to other side while we scanned rafts of Gadwalls, American Wigeons, Ring-necked Ducks, Buffleheads, Hooded and Common Mergansers. At the point area, we had nice scope view of Horned Grebes. A few heard and seen Winter Wrens. 39 species. 8 participants. Leader: Kevin Graff.

JAN 9 - New Design Rd/Lilypons - Highlights: Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, female Pintail (real study bird), Horned Larks but no Longspurs. Seen were plenty of Hooded and Common Mergansers, flyover adult Bald Eagle, bluebirds, waxwings. Lousy weather-fog and light sprinkle getting little drops onto the surfaces of the optics making it hard to see anything. 30 species. 4 participants. Leader: Pete Webb.

JAN 9 - Special Youth Birding Trip in Harford County - This Saturday trip to Conowingo/Swan Harbor actually went off (surprise!) thanks to Jasper Merry and his mom Christine, who drove out from Frederick to see the Iceland Gull (terrific bird!), Black Vultures and Bald Eagles. We were also joined by David Fleischman and his friend Barry Hershfeld from Cape May. A short stop at Lapidum let us get some nice looks at a Pileated Woodpecker or two, and Swan Harbor, though very quiet around the ponds (sparrows were about it), we found some Pied-billed Grebes, Canvasbacks and a huge amount of Tundra Swans way across the river (among other pretty normal things). 5 participants. Leader: John Robinson.



Pretty Boy in Fog

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

A Chapter of

MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
4915 Greenspring Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21209

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David Nelson, Design

Submit materials to
Joan Cwi - jafjsc@verizon.net

Moving or email change?
Send update to
Roberta Ross at robertabross@aol.com

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

April 24, 2016



Baltimore Bird Club APPLICATION

*Membership year is September 1–August 31. New members only
joining after March 1 may pay half-year rate. A full year's dues received
after April 30 will be applied to the next membership year.*

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Benefits include membership in the BBC and Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS), free field trips, quarterly BBC and MOS newsletters sent electronically, lectures and other events.

Check dues category and circle amount sent.

Category	1-YR	½ YR	Chapter Only+
Individual	\$35.00	\$17.00	\$15.00
Household	\$45.00	\$22.50	\$20.00
Sustaining	\$100.00		
Junior*	\$10.00	\$5.00	\$5.00

* Through 17: record age here ____

+Chapter Only membership is available to MOS members who are already members of another MOS chapter or who are MOS life members.

Mail completed application with check payable to:
Baltimore Bird Club, Attn: Membership Chairman,
4915 Greenspring Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21209