



Chip Notes

Summer 2025, No. 432



Conservation Corner

Local Legislation Spotlight: Baltimore County’s Law for the Protection of Water Quality, Streams, Wetlands, and Floodplains

*by Libby Errickson, BBC Vice President and
Member, Conservation Committee*

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If you’re a member of the Baltimore Bird Club, it stands to reason that you probably think that environmental regulations are important. We are all familiar with landmark federal regulations like the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and of course, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. But do you know what additional environmental regulations are being enforced at the state and county level in your area? For this issue’s Conservation Corner, we will unpack Baltimore County’s local legislation that protects our aquatic resources.

Baltimore County Code Article 33 (Environmental Protection and Sustainability), Title 3: Protection of Water Quality, Streams, Wetlands, and Floodplains was enacted in 1991 for the purpose of restoring and maintaining the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the County’s streams, wetlands, riverine floodplains, watercourses, reservoirs, lakes, and the Chesapeake Bay. The primary mechanism through which this law achieves its stated goals is through the establishment of forested buffers along and around aquatic resources as a condition of approval of any kind of commercial, residential, or industrial development. For this reason, Article 33, Title 3 is commonly referred to as “Forest Buffer Law.”

What is a forest buffer?



Black-collared Hawk (Lou Taylor, Belize)



Example of stream/river forest buffer next to fields from MD Department of Natural Resources

As defined in the County Code, a forest buffer is a wooded area that exists or is established to protect a stream or wetland system, and includes trees, shrubs, and herbaceous vegetation. Newly established or unmaintained buffers may not contain much vegetation and thus the name “forest buffer” can seem confusing, and using the term “stream buffer” may feel more appropriate.

Any new development in Baltimore County—from a major commercial subdivision to a homeowner putting a shed in his back yard—must comply with this law if there are aquatic resources on or adjacent to the property.

How does compliance work? There are several steps:

1. Define the limits of any aquatic resources:

This is typically done through the preparation of a wetland delineation by an ecological consultant hired by the developer or property owner. It is essentially a map of where streams and wetlands exist on the property. These delineations are field verified by staff of the Environmental Impact Review section of the Baltimore County Department of Environmental Protection and Sustainability (DEPS).

2. Define the boundary of the forest buffer:

The width of the forest buffer off a stream is dependent on the stream’s use classification as defined by the Maryland Department of the

Environment. For streams designated as Use I or I-P, a 75-foot minimum buffer is required. For streams designated as natural and recreational trout waters (Uses III, III-P, IV, and IV-P), the required minimum buffer is 100 feet. These minimum buffers may be expanded depending on the presence of steep slopes, soil type and erodibility, vegetative cover, and other factors. Buffers may be expanded further if there are wetland areas hydrologically connected to the stream system or for the presence of a 100-year floodplain. Isolated wetlands unassociated with a stream system receive a buffer of 25 feet.

You can look up the use classification of a stream here:

https://library.municode.com/md/baltimore_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=ART33ENPRSU_TIT3PRWAQUSTWEFL

3. Quantify, minimize, and mitigate any proposed impacts to the buffer.

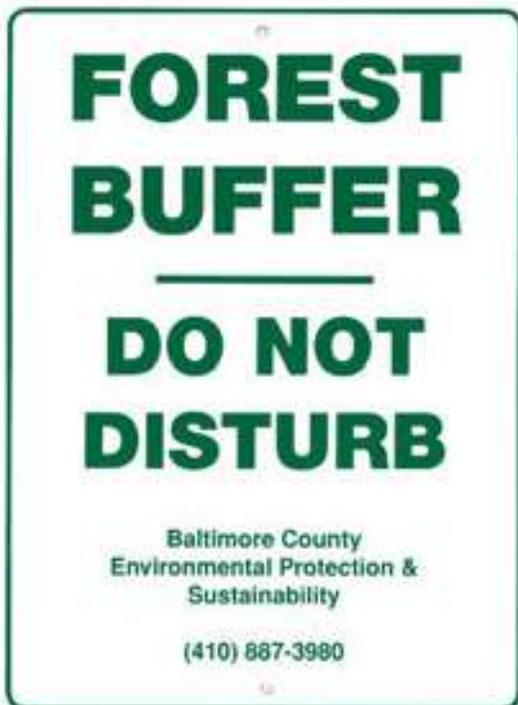
While the forest buffer is intended to be a non-disturbance area, certain activities are permitted within the buffer by the County Code. These include the installation of linear utilities such as sewer and water connections, stormwater management devices, as well as roads, driveways, and bridges over streams that provide necessary access to a property. Through an alternatives analysis, the developer or property owner must demonstrate that they have chosen the least environmentally impactful location and method for such installations and that they have minimized the impact to resources to the maximum extent practicable. Any unavoidable impacts are typically mitigated through the onsite planting of unforested areas of the buffer with native tree species.

Any additional impacts to the buffer besides those permitted by the Code are addressed through the application for a variance to the law and are evaluated by DEPS on a case-by-case basis. There is no guarantee that a variance will be granted and the applicant must demonstrate

that full application of the law presents a practical difficulty or unreasonable hardship.

4. Record the forest buffer as a Forest Buffer Easement with a Declaration of Protective Covenants in the Baltimore County Land Records.

Forest Buffer Easements are non-disturbance areas in which no clearing, grading, construction, or disturbance of vegetation is permitted without permission from DEPS. Even mowing is prohibited. Most of the time, signs are posted around the edge of a Forest Buffer Easement so that users of the property know where the boundary lies and can avoid any accidental disturbance. Perhaps you've seen some of these signs while out birding around the County!



The establishment of forest buffers improves the health of riparian and aquatic ecosystems tremendously. They filter nutrients and toxins before they enter our water systems, reduce erosion and control sedimentation, stabilize stream banks, provide organic matter that is source of food and energy in aquatic ecosystems, provide tree canopy to shade streams and encourage trout and other

desirable aquatic species, provide habitat to our birds and other wildlife, and provide scenic value and recreational opportunity to communities. The establishment of forest buffers also reduces the amount of public funds that need to be put towards water restoration, stormwater management, and other water resource expenditures. Additionally, reducing pollutants entering our waterways throughout the County in turn reduces the amount of pollutants finding their way into our region's most precious resource, the Chesapeake Bay. This piece of legislation is just one of many contributing to the continued improved health of our bay.

Note: This is a County-level law and does not apply to Baltimore City or Maryland's other counties, though other jurisdictions may have their own versions of similar legislation. This law also doesn't apply to the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area (all shoreline within 1000 feet of tidal water), as those areas are subject to State-level legislation with, in some cases, stricter regulations. You can find the full County Code for Forest Buffer Law here: https://library.municode.com/md/baltimore_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=ART33ENPRSU_TIT3PRWAQUSTWEFL

When not out birding, Libby Errickson is a Natural Resource Specialist in the Environmental Impact Review Section of the Baltimore County Department of Environmental Protection & Sustainability. Her primary duties include ensuring the compliance of development with Forest Buffer Law and other local environmental laws. Feel free to reach out to her at eerrickson@baltimorecountymd.gov with any questions about this law or other local environmental regulations.



Ocellated Turkey by Lou Taylor

BELIZE March 7-17, 2025. Debbie and Lou Taylor

Our travels to Western and Northern Belize was the fourth Central American country we have birded. Finding 439 species overall was not difficult due to the fact that more than half of the country is considered protected areas, plus we had wonderful guides. It sure did not disappoint as we snagged at least 94 new species!

We met in Belize City Airport on a Saturday afternoon. Our guides from Wildside Nature Tours, Chris Brown and local guide Rudy Crawford, got eight of us loaded into the van. We headed north to the area/town of Crooked Tree, one of the “larger” populated towns in the area. The town has been relatively untouched by commercialism with just a few small mom and pop stores. There were many small houses with a few larger houses dotting the area. Close to our destination we were greeted by a Vermillion Flycatcher at eye level and although not an unusual bird, it still was a fun start. After arriving at Birdseye View Lodge in the late afternoon and settling in, we explored the area on foot.

Before dinner we heard the squawking of 2 Red-shouldered Amazons and watched them fly by. We also saw a lone Roseate Spoonbill and a Bare-throated Tiger-Heron in the field next to the lodge and had Mangrove Swallows come close to dive bombing us. After watching the beautiful sunset, we enjoyed dinner, which was served outside under a covered patio. A Boat-billed Heron made its appearance each night as we ate not far from the waters edge. After dinner we started exploring outside around the lodge and found three Common Pauraque, a member of the

Nightjar family. The Pauraque are mottled brown, 12 inches long, have a rounded tail, and are year round residents. Also, in our search we almost flattened a few HUGE poisonous frogs (don't remember the names.) After calling it a night, a few of us went for a p.m. swim (pool) and the rest of collapsed into bed after a long travel day.

Overall, the weather was sunny with temps reaching into the 90s, with some cooling in the evening, especially at the last lodge. It was quite humid too, with no rain. We generally birded starting 6 or 7a.m. for a few hours, had breakfast, and then headed out on a field trip. After breakfast on the first morning, we headed by boat to the Crooked Tree Lagoon and Spanish Creek searching for birds, monkeys, and crocodiles. Luckily the vegetation on the water is somewhat low, making it easier to spot wildlife. We saw many enormous termite nests hanging on trees all around the river as well as bats hanging onto the bark on the side of trees. Belize has 73 species of bats.



Northern Jacana by Lou Taylor

We saw Northern Jacana, although not rare, still interesting to see. The adults have a rusty body with bright yellow on part of their head and beak and have long legs. The young Jacana were more white and fluffy and very adorable. They were running around the low wet grasses with both parents. It was also fun to see five Kingfishers in one area, Ringed, Amazon, Belted, Green, and American Pygmy. As we were floating along the New River, suddenly our guides got really excited and we made a 180 in our boat to spot a Sungrebe. Although the Sungrebe is not rare, it is not seen too often. It has a striped head and neck with a stout pointed bill. Apparently, it is

not a Grebe and does not like the sun but does remind you of a Grebe. This sighting happened so quickly that Lou couldn't catch a photo. It turns out the guide's photo showed a baby riding on the Sungrebe's back. The next really truly exciting find was the Agami Heron, which is near threatened. Overall it is dark maroon and dark blue with a long white stripe on the neck, through the chest. It's very large and reclusive with a long slender dagger-tipped bill. When the guides get excited seeing something, you better pay attention!



Agami Heron by Lou Taylor

After an exciting morning, we headed back to our lodge to have lunch and then siesta. After siesta we hiked at the upper end of Crooked Tree Island in a pine/oak Savannah forest. This is the home of the hard to find species such as Yellow-lored Parrot and Yucatan Jay. The very cute Olive-throated Parakeets were perched high up on a tree, feeding each other. Then, finding a lifer warbler is always a reason to get excited. Grace's Warbler is pretty even though it has many of the usual colors of white, yellow and black.

Our early morning walks and before dinner walks are where we saw a variety of lizards and related crawling things: Central Bearded Dragon, Brown Basilisk, and Green Iguana. They are so

camouflaged and the smaller ones are very easy to step on.



Grace's Warbler by Lou Taylor

There were many hummingbird feeders at all of the lodges, inviting the Rufous-tailed, Green-breasted Mango, White-bellied Emerald, Stripe-throated Hermit, Purple crowned Fairy, Cinnamon, and Wedge-tailed Sabrewing. One was prettier than the next. Our sighting represents about 1/3 of the hummingbirds in Belize. Other sightings include a variety of hawks making their appearance throughout the day: Roadside, White-tailed, Gray, and Black-Collared.

The next morning we loaded our boat and headed out. We saw the Jabiru, which nests in the savannah and wetlands in the north. It has a white body, red patch on the neck, red bill, and gives a stork-like appearance. We headed towards Lamanai Archaeological Reserve at New River Lagoon in our boat. This reserve was a huge Maya city with structures built before 16th century BC, supporting thousands of people. The many structures, including pyramids and ball courts were not excavated until 50 years ago. It was very impressive. We also saw a variety of birds, including three new woodpeckers for our life lists: Pale-billed Woodpecker, Lineated Woodpecker, and Chestnut-colored Woodpecker. A variety of Flycatchers also appeared, including Least, Dusky-capped, Brown-crested and Social. After our tour of the ruins, on this pretty hot morning, we scarfed down a picnic lunch. We then boated back to the lodge for a well deserved siesta. Once we recovered in late afternoon we birded around the lodge finding Russet-naped Wood Rails feeding young, a Northern Jacana, and a Roseate Spoonbill.



Olive-throated Parakeets

Day 4, We said goodbye to Bird's Eye Lodge and headed west to Shipstern Conservation Area for two days. Shipstern is 21,500 acres of land in the northern Corozal District. It is located on Shipstern Lagoon and is one of the largest inland lagoons in the country. It is considered to be one of the most important areas of its kind in Belize because of the approximately 300 bird species in the area. During the drive we stopped for a wonderful lunch at a more modern restaurant called Maracas. As we were sitting in a partially covered outside area on the New River we were suddenly greeted by a few really large Iguanas. Even though they are kind of scary looking, and huge, they are kind of interesting and pretty in their own way, as long as they leave you alone!

When we arrived at Orchid Bay we found it to be a really quiet area, especially since the vacationers had left. The area was meant to be sort of "touristy," Belize style, but oddly enough, the complex was never finished and many of the plots of land were for sale. We each had our own little cottage, very close to the beach. The warm water was very shallow and continued quite a ways out. Again beautiful sunsets. All meals were served in an enclosed patio

restaurant, family style, with the servers being very accommodating.



Northern Potoo

That night we went searching for owls and other night time surprises. With very clear skies, we had a VERY successful trip: seven Mottled Owls, three Northern Potoos, four Ferruginous Owls, two Middle American Screech Owls, and two Yucatan Nightjars!!! WOW and WOW. Our guides were so skillful in using their spot lights and Merlin to find these reclusive birds. Especially impressive was the Northern Potoo which look like tree bark but with HUGE yellow eyes.

Being on the edge of a marine biosphere, powdery soft sand, and lots of wild orchids, there were so many wonderful birds. Each morning was so productive, but we needed to start 6 a.m. due to the heat. We encountered the Squirrel Cuckoo, Keel-billed Toucan, and Rose-throated Becard. During our walk, an owner of one of the small houses saw us and came to speak with us about the area and the wildlife. She was from Kansas and has lived in Belize part time for a few years. She stated that she

really loved all the wildlife and the birds. We then continued birding for a few hours and then went back to headquarters for breakfast. After breakfast we regrouped and then headed out for a few more hours of birding before lunch. We saw a Gray-tailed Hawk, Short-tailed Hawk and an Orange Oriole. Again, lunch and then siesta!



Black-cowled Oriole

On day 7 we left Orchid Bay area and headed to the Orange Walk area, in the NW corner of Belize. Our drive had periods of high humidity, dust and bumpy roads. We learned that there is quite a large Amish community in the area. The Amish kids were so cute, riding in their horse and buggy, with their special clothes. The Amish work mostly in the agriculture and construction industries in that area.

The Rio Bravo Conservation area, our third and final lodge, is a privately held wildlife sanctuary and research area within a tropical dry forest. This area is the third largest Maya site in Belize. Archaeologists estimate that over 46,000 people lived in La Milpa, in the Early Classic Period. The site includes over 85 structures, none of which you can actually see. The area looks like grass covered hills and mounds. Students come year round to work on the remains of these archaeological ruins. They are required to rebury the ruins and artifacts that they found because

they cannot be maintained above ground, due to cost. Hundreds of visitors also come to this area for birding because lifers are plentiful. The staff was so nice and especially accommodating. A few of the women have lived there for almost a decade, serving food which was fresh and plentiful. There was always large pitchers of fresh squeezed juices: Papaya, Orange, Sapodilla, and Guava, which everyone loved.



Barred Antshrike

Our most challenging base was the Milpa Lodge, an ecolodge for sure! Although the lodge was in the mountains, it was still pretty hot and humid. And yes, it did cool off slightly at night, with the help of fans in our room. Lou and I were also kind of surprised when we went into our cabin and the beds were netted from the ceiling, all around the beds. I looked at Lou and said UHOH! That being said, we carried on. Surprisingly we didn't feel or see any bugs, up to that point. A great surprise near the lodge was the Great Curassow, which is a very large game bird that has been hunted almost into extinction. It is rarely found unless in a protected area. Its huge yellow knob on top of its nose is very distinctive

Again, early mornings, rugged roads, breakfast, bird again, lunch, siesta, bird, dinner, bird again, yadyada. Rinse repeat. Red-legged Honeycreepers, and many varieties of hummingbirds including Rufous-tailed, White-bellied Emerald, White-necked Jacobin, Striped-throat, and Purple-crowned Fairy were at various hummingbird feeders. A variety of orioles made their appearance periodically.

We noticed lots of ant swarms on the forest paths

which brought a variety of tanagers and wood creepers, such as the Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, and Olivaceous Woodcreeper. Right near our cabins were Ocellated Turkeys. They are near threatened, and only seen in protected areas. It was fun to watch the male show off to the females. They are similar sizes to our turkeys with crazy color combos not seen in our U.S. turkeys.

As we were finishing up the trip and heading to the airport, the group was talking about their favorite birds. Not sure if we have a favorite...just too many to pick from, although we sure were excited to add a few orioles to our lists: Orange, Black-cowled, Hooded, and Yellow-tailed. Our final thoughts about the trip were, all in all, this was a very pleasant trip with nice people and great guides. As we were getting off the plane in the States, I said to Lou "I am really itchy," "you?" "yep!" Chiggers got us badly, on the ankles and legs. It took about nine days to clear. But YES, we were still glad we were able to experience Belize and its wonderful beauty, birds and simplicity.

Backyard Bird Notes

By Jane Aughenbaugh, Baltimore Bird Club member



This beautiful female Pileated Woodpecker sitting on my fence seemed to enjoy its surroundings on an April day. She was in my backyard for about one half hour foraging for food on the ground. She also encircled my large tulip poplar tree looking for insects. My tiered garden may have made it interesting for this large bird to explore. The Pileated Woodpecker was fun to watch as she hopped and

hopped on the ground. For me, seeing this special bird was like finding a gold nugget.

Welcome New Members

Join us on one of our Fall bird hikes!

- Nathaniel Alper ... Baltimore*
- Robert Baker ... Baltimore*
- Kellan Baker and Mary Hansen ... Baltimore*
- Rachel Braver ... Baltimore*
- Zach Breit ... Baltimore*
- Briana Chang ... Baltimore*
- Ty Engelke ... Baltimore*
- Nicholas Grant and Mary Marchand ... Baltimore*
- Amy Jain ... Baltimore*
- Gail and Stephen Manza ... Baltimore*
- Matthew Novak and Jennifer Ellis ... Baltimore*
- Julia Pearson ... Baltimore*
- Brian Schwartz ... Baltimore*
- Paul Sodolak ... Baltimore*
- Gregg Wilhelm ... Baltimore*
- Mollie Young and Denny Dingus ... Baltimore*
- Susan Behen and Andrew Goldberger..Catonsville*
- Susan Reider ... Columbia*
- Barbara Bennett and Jamie Colson ... Dundalk*
- Nalayini Sivaraman ... Ellicott City*
- Leo Charpentier ... Hunt Valley*
- Sarah Bankard ... Lutherville*
- (Ava) Quinn Hilzendeger & Alexander Furugesan ... Lutherville*
- Joanne Dintzis ... Nottingham*
- Jim Meyers ... Nottingham*
- Bryan and Brittany Stouffer ... Parkton*
- Blair and Norine Andrew ... Towson*

PRESIDENT'S CORNER (literally)

HELP WANTED

Creative person to design Chip Notes layout, select photos, and add fun content

Does not have to be a club member, and could be a student or other wanting to improve their word processing/publishing skills and/or earn service hours

Contact Joe at corcoran2921@gmail.com



Jones Falls by Sam Tillman

Trip Reports: January 2025 – April 2025.

February 16, 2025 - Gwynns Falls / Leakin Park. Leaders: Elise and Paul Kreiss.

At 8:00 a.m., the temperature was just below freezing at 31 degrees, but sunny and with little wind. It turned out to be a very nice day for a walk, with the temperature rising to 41 degrees by the time we ended about 10:30. Special moments included watching a female Kingfisher working Dead Run and perching to provide good looks for all. Similarly, a Barred Owl landed in a tree near Winans Meadows as the group descended down the hill from the Carrie Murray Nature Center. The group got an extended look at the perched owl, who looked back. The group observed about 11 White-throated sparrows lined up along the edge of the Gwynn Falls taking a drink while other sparrows moved in the bushes behind them. We also particularly enjoyed seeing the Eastern Bluebirds. Eighteen species were seen or heard.

March 23, 2025 - North Point State Park. Leader: Charisma Burrows.

We had a group of eight birders in attendance for an early spring walk through North Point State Park. We got great views of a Blue-winged Teal pair, some early Tree Swallows, and Rusty Blackbirds. Luckily, on the day of the trip we got reports that the Tufted Duck reported throughout the week was still being seen from Crystal Pier, so our group headed that way and spent 30 minutes scanning the rafts of

ducks for the rare Tufted Duck, which we managed to find for everyone on the trip. Right before we left the pier, we saw two large white birds in the distance coming in to land on the water, which turned out to be Mute Swans, capping off our species list for the day at 59 species.

March 29, 2025 – Jones Falls, Yellow Crowned Night Herons along the Jones Falls. Leader: Sam Tillman.

We had a fantastic morning of city birding with our target species, the Yellow-crowned Night Heron, making an early appearance. Nearly as soon as we'd parked we spotted a pair of herons sitting near a nest over the Jones Falls. Shortly thereafter two more arrived, but weren't exactly welcomed by the first pair, and made their way back up river. We proceeded to walk upriver along the Jones Falls, noting a number of recently returned migrants including Osprey, Tree Swallow, and Eastern Phoebe, and a few winter residents on their way out including Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Brown Creeper. A Common Raven flew low over us, and we searched for its nest under the 29th Street bridge to no avail. Our final stop, Round Falls, was a crowd pleaser. The site of a 19th century grist mill, torn down in 1930 to manage flooding along the river, its unusual architecture and history made for a nice addition to the walk.



Jones Falls Walk by Sam Tillman



Yellow-crowned Night Herons by Sam Tillman



Fun hiking by Sam Tillman

March 30, 2025 - Hydes Road Park. Leader: Brian Rollfinke.

An enthusiastic group of 23 was treated to quite a gathering of farmland species before even leaving the parking lot! The fields across from the park had recently been plowed, and the upturned soil brought in several flocks of hungry birds. The spectacle occupied our attention for over half an hour, even though we had barely stepped away from our cars! Closest to the road was a delightful assemblage of at least 32 American Pipits, a species which proved to be a "lifer" for many; closer looks detected a few Horned Larks among them. Farther afield was a group of 17 Killdeer, congregating on and around a small mound of overturned dirt. A bit east of these birds was a large flock of an estimated 115 Ring-billed Gulls, rummaging through the bare earth. An adult Bald Eagle watched over all of the activity from atop a tall spruce, a perch it occupied for most of the morning.

Once we finally got moving, we explored the large beaver pond from both sides. An unusually dry month had left water levels quite low, and very few waterfowl and no shorebirds were found, although we were treated to some nice views of flyovers, including two Osprey, a Cooper's Hawk, and a Great Blue Heron. A flyby pair of Wood Ducks and a speedy American Kestrel, which zipped by, were viewed by some participants. Recently returned Tree Swallows were incredibly active on the stream side of the pond, while several Swamp Sparrows, a lone Palm Warbler, and a handful of 'Butter Butts' foraged at the pond edges.

We ended with a short trek across the street to look into the Long Green Creek Wetland Restoration Site, where we turned up a Rusty Blackbird and several Field Sparrows. In all, we tallied 42 species for the morning--not bad, especially considering how little standing water was in the pond. There really is no such thing as a bad birding day at Hydes Road Park!



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JoAnn Bochmann, Editor
Linda & Joe Corcoran, Design

Submit materials to
JoAnn Bochmann - jlbochmann@gmail.com

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

Deadline for submitting articles for upcoming issues:
July 24, 2025

Membership Application

The membership year is September 1 – August 30. Only new members 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 which can be found at https://baltimorebirdclub.org/MembershipApplication_website.pdf

to:

Carol S Daugherty
MOS Treasurer
11925 Oden Court
Rockville, MD 20852