**Dedication of Eleanor C. and Chandler S. Robbins Birding Guide**

**Eleanor Cooley Robbins (May 6, 1916 – February 16, 2008)**

**Chandler S. Robbins (July 17, 1918 – March 20, 2017)**

This Maryland/DC Birding Guide website is fondly dedicated to the memory of Eleanor and Chandler Robbins, in recognition of their many contributions to the Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS).

Since its founding in 1945, MOS has been fortunate in having been sustained and supported by a succession of talented and devoted leaders. Few individuals and, arguably, no couples have had a greater impact on the organization for a longer period than Eleanor Cooley Robbins and Chandler Seymour Robbins. Their commitment of time, energy, and leadership is almost impossible to overstate or detail. Their frequent and generous monetary support (often made anonymously) was instrumental in the establishment and success of the sanctuary and scholarship programs. The founding of the Patuxent chapter is one of Eleanor’s enduring legacies.

From the time Chan is listed as an MOS member in June of 1946, it was a matter of barely a year before he was sharing the authorship of “The Seasons” report; within months he became the sole compiler; and by late 1947 he was the editor of *Maryland Birdlife*, a position he held until 2014! He held himself to high literary standards and expected no less of those who shared authorship or submitted material. He was, however, a patient mentor in shepherding initial articles to publication, enabling many birders to experience the joy of authorship.

Chan served the Society as president from 1952 to 1955 and was a chapter director for 50 years. That faithfulness in attending meetings reflected his realization that nurturing and maintaining an organization requires an investment of time and work. He and Eleanor sacrificed many personal hours to participate in MOS business.

Long before the term “citizen scientist” was popularized, Chan utilized the growing expertise and multiplying numbers of MOS members in a succession of statewide projects, such as the Hawk Watch weekend in mid-September 19— {Note: I searched MD Birdlie but could not find any reference to this, so no date} and an annual May Count. When asked to suggest a summer activity for the Montgomery chapter, his idea for a breeding bird atlas was based on an atlas in the British Isles. It not only led to two Maryland statewide breeding bird atlases engaging all MOS chapters, but was instrumental in introducing the concept across the continent. {Query: did Chan also initiate the mid-winter count?}

Chan was a popular speaker at chapter meetings and special events. When he spoke at the initial meeting of the Howard chapter in December 1972, he had already been on the speaking circuit for years. He concluded this portion of his contributions to MOS with the presentation “My Lifelong Quest for Extinct and Vanishing Birds” to the same group on November 10, 2016. It was his last public presentation.

Eleanor joined MOS in late 1946 and she quickly began contributing bird sightings. She soon became chair of the Breeding Bird Census Committee, which conducted a study of breeding birds at Lake Roland, eventually writing their final report[[1]](#footnote-1). Her comprehensive Song Sparrow article[[2]](#footnote-2) in *Maryland Birdlife* detailed information derived from the committee’s findings, and, in keeping with Eleanor’s botanical interests, opened with a detailed analysis of the plants found at Lake Roland.

After Chan and Eleanor’s marriage in 1948 and their move to Laurel, she remedied a lack of an active bird group in the immediate vicinity by founding the Patuxent Bird Club in 1961. From then until her death in 2008, her fervent support of that group was continuous. She served for decades as their Conservation Committee chair. Attendees at meetings recall not only her exhortations to write to legislators at all levels, but remember the many examples she provided, for Eleanor always came with multiple carbon copies of the numerous letters she had written the previous month. From [19—to 19—] {Note: I couldn’t find exact years, but an article in the Baltimore Sun in 2016 says she wrote the column “for 40 years.”} she wrote a monthly column entitled “Bird-watching” for the local newspaper, the *Laurel Leader*, detailing the activities of the local chapter, along with bird observations and natural history comments. Her newspaper articles were instrumental in recruiting members for the Patuxent Bird Club as well as in fostering a broader understanding of local nature. Her encouragement of the use of native plantings and the importance of habitat preservation were farsighted and ongoing. She was an indefatigable recycler and contributed money raised in this way to MOS’s Sanctuary Fund.

~~Donation of their Garrett County property to MOS to be used as a sanctuary was the ultimate example of their unflagging quest to preserve valuable habitats. Chan and Eleanor did not donate the property directly.~~ {Note: The Garrett property was left in Chan’s will to the 4 children, who made the donation}. Change this sentence to “Preservation of their property at Red Run in Garrett County was the ultimate example of their unflagging quest to preserve valuable habitats; this property is now an MOS Sanctuary, thanks to the generosity of the children of Chan and Eleanor, who donated the land to MOS following their father’s death.”

Both were enthusiastic supporters of eager and interested young birders. Chan and Eleanor’s mentorship led to some of those individuals becoming biologists who established their own distinguished careers and many of whom, in turn, became leaders within MOS. All who were touched by this couple’s interest and attention developed a lifelong appreciation of the natural world.

Any bird trip with the two of them turned into a multi-faceted adventure, focusing as much on Eleanor’s botanical interest as Chan’s beloved birds. They rarely missed an MOS convention; during convention weekends Chan led field trips almost non-stop. While his legendary hearing and acute eyesight created a lengthy bird list, Eleanor took on the more mundane tasks of checking in participants, ~~enforcing~~ organizing carpooling, and moving the group from one location to another on schedule. Publication of the Golden field guide[[3]](#footnote-3) in 1966 introduced Chan to the wider birding community leading to ever-larger field trips. In those days, participation limits were not uniformly enforced which led to lengthy caravans.

I remember one of those Eastern Shore convention trips. Our string of cars headed for the Pocomoke with its interesting complement of birds. It was easy to park a dozen vehicles on the sand roads where traffic was almost non-existent. At one stop, as soon as we gathered around Chan and the single telescope, he began calling out species and identifying songs while gesturing in multiple directions. There were many new birders among the group so he patiently picked out individual birds while describing their essential field marks. He found a Red-eyed Vireo along the treeline and positioned it in the scope. As the bird moved, he made numerous adjustments helping as many people as possible see what, for most, was a new bird. The fine-tuning of the scope was interspersed with comments about the bird’s song and breeding habits; other species were noted as their calls or presence caught his attention. It was quintessential Chan. I wandered along the line of cars looking for other birds. As I approached the last cars, a vehicle with out-of-state tags pulled up. Three men piled out, each quickly shouldered a scope, and the closest individual inquired what was going on. When told ~~them~~ that it was an MOS convention field trip led by Chandler Robbins, their eyes widened. Seeing Chan alternately gesturing and then carefully readjusting the scope, they asked excitedly what he had, anticipating that it might be a Swainson’s Warbler, the bird they were seeking. When I replied, “Red-eyed Vireo,” their expressions changed to mixed astonishment and disgust. They turned around, got back in their car, and drove slowly around our group. They had no idea what they had missed.

To honor Chandler and Eleanor Robbins by ~~naming~~ dedicating this *Birding Guide* to them is highly appropriate, for they were at their best in the field sharing their extensive knowledge with patience and zeal. Moreover, Chan and Eleanor had a deep and abiding love of the natural places throughout our state, and this *Birding Guide* is meant to acquaint birders with those very sites. You can do no better to honor the memory of Chan and Eleanor than by going out birding in these special places.

Joanne K. Solem, March 26, 2019

1. Cooley, Eleanor G., 1947. Breeding bird census: Shrubby field with stream-bordered trees. *Maryland Birdlife*, Vol. III, #4, pp. 59-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Robbins, Eleanor Cooley, 1949. Song Sparrow nesting. *Maryland Birdlife*, Vol. V, #2, pp. 16-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Robbins, Chandler S., Bruun, Bertel, and Zim, Herbert S.; Singer, Arthur (Illustrator). 1966. A Guide to Field Identification: Birds of North America. Golden Press, New York. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)