

Howard County Bird Club

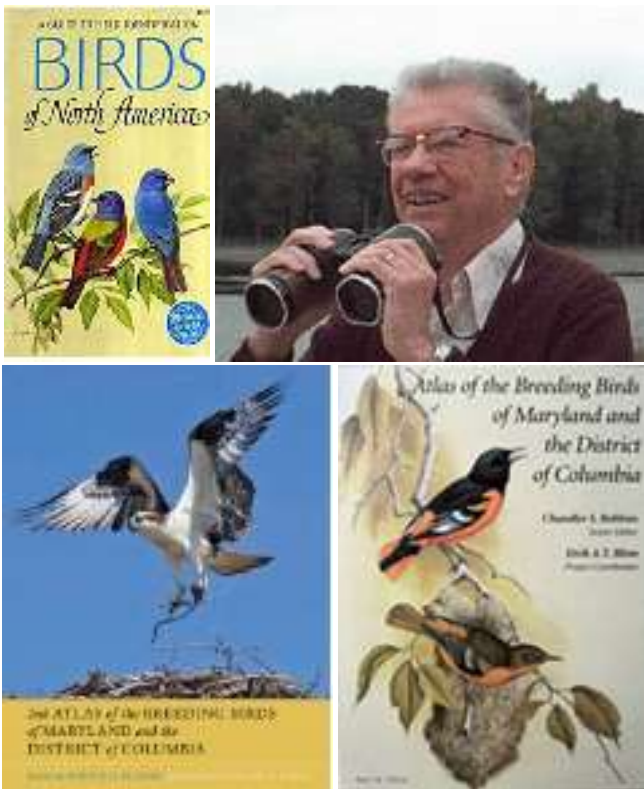
A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society



In Memoriam

Chandler S. Robbins

(July 17, 1918 – March 20, 2017)



Chandler Seymour Robbins died March 20, 2017, at the age of 98. With his passing the world lost an eminent ornithologist; Howard County lost much more.

For more than 60 years, "Chan," as he was known to most birders, studied the birds of Howard County, doing research for many purposes including *Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia* (Stewart and Robbins 1958) and the Forest Fragmentation project in the mid-70s. Locally, he monitored two Breeding Bird Census plots in the Middle Patuxent Environmental Area (MPEA) for more than a decade and conducted a multi-year study at High Ridge Park. Chan participated in dozens of county seasonal counts. Additionally, he mentored an unknown number of individuals in bird banding and field birding in his understated, almost courtly manner. Underpinning his formidable work as a research biologist at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, he was an educator, an enthusiastic field birder with legendary eyes and ears, a cheerleader for birds and their habitats, and, for decades, a relentless investigator pursuing the cause of bird population declines.

Long before the term "citizen scientist" became popular, Chan utilized talented amateurs in various projects such as the continent-wide Breeding Bird Survey he initiated, with some of the initial experimental routes run in Maryland. He was not naive about the abilities of amateur birders. During the Breeding Bird Atlas Project in Montgomery and Howard Counties in the early 1970s (which established protocols for the later continent-wide efforts) and again in the first Maryland Breeding Bird Atlas, he either personally spot-checked certain quarter-blocks or assigned professionals to randomly-chosen blocks to make sure that amateurs were maintaining the standards he expected.

During day-long seasonal counts he usually covered the Middle Patuxent Valley between MD 32 and MD 108 (much of which is now MPEA), although in the 1950s and 1960s when local birders were few, his territory covered much of the southeastern portion of the county. Howard County's only Bachman's Sparrow record was the result of one of those May Count sweeps. Chan could be counted on to attend the tallies. Jan Randle, who hosted the May Count tally for decades, remembers Chan knocking on her door at 6:00 a.m. to drop off ice cream for the tally, although he was always considered an honored guest who was not expected to bring food. At the tally he quietly made notes and kept a running count. If someone reported a wildly unlikely bird, Chan's reaction was likely to be a raised eyebrow and an upward inflected, "Oh." That might be followed by a quiet comment to the effect that this would be the first time the species had been seen in Maryland in May, which led to a prompt reexamination of the identification and listing of the details observed.

For many birders, their introduction to birding and to Chan was as co-author of *A Field Guide to the Birds of North America, a Golden Guide* (1966). This was a field guide with revolutionary features: it covered the whole continent, all drawings were in color, birds were shown in a variety of postures and often with some suggestions of habitat, text and photos were on opposing pages, range maps were incorporated into the text, measurements were of live birds, and sonagrams (graphic representations of bird songs) were introduced. By the early 1980s, the guide was in need of revision. To celebrate the revised edition and to honor Chan for his decades of work in the county, the Howard County Bird Club (HCBC) held a reception and book-signing the afternoon of November 20, 1983, followed by a banquet in the evening. Seven Maryland Ornithological Society chapters were represented and five current or former MOS presidents attended. HCBC President Jane Coskren presented Chan with a lifetime membership in the HCBC.

Chan was the featured speaker at the first meeting of the HCBC in December 1972. He also presented the program at the tenth- and twentieth-anniversary meetings. His last public presentation was to this group on November 10, 2016, "My Lifetime Quest for Extinct and Vanishing Birds," just one month before the HCBC's forty-fifth anniversary meeting.

Everyone who knew Chan will treasure special moments and experiences shared with one of the giants of ornithology. By quiet and patient example, he taught us all the value of appreciating every individual bird.

Much of the above material was taken from the introduction to Chan's November 10, 2016, program

– Joanne Solem



Tenth anniversary program 11-12-1982



Jane Coskren and Chan Robbins



Chan Robbins honorary Life Member HCBC



Twentieth anniversary meeting 10-8-1992
Martha Chestem, Joanne Solem, and Chan Robbins

At the time of the twenty-year celebration, Martha was a charter member and Joanne was president of HCBC

My Lifetime Quest for Extinct and Vanishing Birds
HCBC Program November 10, 2016



John Harris and Chan Robbins



Jan Randle, Sue Muller, and Chan Robbins