

Chandler S. Robbins: Maryland's Birding Treasure

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Chandler Seymour Robbins was born 17 July 1918, in Belmont, Massachusetts, the eldest of three sons of Samuel Dowse Robbins and Rosa Margaret Seymour Robbins. His younger siblings were Roger Wellington Robbins (one year younger) and Samuel Dowse Robbins (three years younger) (Figures 1, 2, and 3).

Chan's interest in birds was present to a degree from toddler years (Jane Robbins, in litt.). As a boy he went hiking with his grandfather, a Harvard botanist, in Waverly Oaks Park in Boston where he learned to identify the trees and other plants. He began pursuing his birding interest at about age 12. That is when he formed a two- or three-member neighborhood club and began keeping field notebook lists of birds sighted. He roamed the Waverly Oaks Park woods with 3x opera glasses observing birds and animals and spent summers observing shorebirds on the beach at Gloucester. When he was 16, he went on his first Christmas Bird Count. By the time he had graduated from Harvard with a B.A. in Physics, he had participated in 15 Christmas counts. While at Harvard, his Freshman Advisor was famed ornithologist Ludlow Griscom, a pioneer in identifying birds in the field. Chan's first job was teaching science and mathematics at the International Windsor Mountain School in Vermont.

In 1941, Chan joined the Civilian Public Service (CPS) (Figure 4). The CPS was developed at the beginning of World War II to provide "those whose conscience forbade them to kill, the opportunity to do work of national importance under civilian direction rather than go to war" (CPSS 2015). In 1943, as part of the CPS program, Chan was transferred to the Patuxent Research Refuge (PRR) to assist bird banding projects at the fledgling institution. Two years later in 1945, he was officially hired as a Junior Biologist by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to begin a distinguished career. From the Patuxent banding office, he enlarged his studies on doves, snipe, hawks, and songbirds to determine the effects of pesticides, particularly DDT, on birds (Robbins and Stewart 1949).

On a field trip with the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia, he met Eleanor Graham Cooley, the daughter of Dr. Jacquelin Smith Cooley (of horticultural fame) and Nellie Leah Graham Cooley. Chan and Eleanor were married in 1948 (Figure 5). They made their home on a 2.5-acre site overlooking the Patuxent River in Laurel.



Figure 1. Chandler Robbins and his two brothers. On the ladder, top to bottom: Roger, Chandler, and Samuel Robbins, with unidentified women, circa 1930-31. Pictured is the summer cottage that their father Samuel Dowse Robbins had built in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Their father drew up the plans for the cottage, as well as the Belmont house he had built for his bride, Rosa, and the later summer cottage on Berry Bay, Freedom, New Hampshire.



Figure 2: Left to right: Sam and Chan Robbins. Overlooking the open water at their childhood summer cottage in Gloucester, Massachusetts, circa 1930-31.



Figure 3: Left to right: Brothers Roger, Chan, and Sam Robbins. Near Biddeford Pool, Maine, birding at the marsh (possibly Scarborough Marsh) on a day outing from Berry Bay, New Hampshire, circa 1982-83.



Figure 4. Civilian Public Service Camp (Number 34, Subunit 1). Chan Robbins, third row, third from left, circa 1941-42. Digital Image from American Friends Service Committee: Civilian Public Service Records (DG002), Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania (CPSS 2015).



Figure 5. Chan Robbins and Eleanor Cooley on their wedding day. Photo taken during their wedding reception in the Beltsville garden of Eleanor’s parents’ residence “Hollyhurst,” 16 April 1948.

Chan learned new ornithological information on his wanderings around Maryland, and in 1950, he received his M.S. degree from George Washington University with his thesis entitled “*Ecological Distribution of Breeding Parulidae in Maryland.*” His career at Patuxent included a 14-year (1961-1974) stint as Chief of the Migratory Nongame Bird Studies Section.

Chan and Eleanor raised two sons and two daughters, all of whom are now active in environmental matters. Chan has banded 151 species of birds on their wooded property over the decades, his yard list reaching 202 with his sighting of a Common Raven over the house in 2008. Until very recently, Chan sang in his Methodist church choir in Laurel.

In this article, I will emphasize Chan’s contributions to Maryland ornithology. However, before going into that topic, it would be useful to note his “Lifetime Achievements” which were provided by Chan’s daughter, Jane Robbins (pers. comm., October 2014), via David Bridge (Table 1).

Table 1. Some “Lifetime Achievements” of Chandler S. Robbins. Projects in boldface type focus on Maryland.

Project	Years	Collaborators
Seasonal Distribution of Bird Populations at the Patuxent Research Refuge (Stewart et al. 1952)	1943-52	Robert E. Stewart, James B. Cope, John W. Brainerd
North American Bird Phenology Program	1943-70, 2014	Frederick C. Lincoln, Ruth Richards, Jessica Zelt
Impact of DDT on songbirds (Robbins and Stewart 1949)	1945-51	Robert E. Stewart, Rachel L. Carson
<i>Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia</i> (Stewart and Robbins 1958)	1945-58	Robert E. Stewart
Statewide Christmas Count Network	1946-48	Robert E. Stewart
<i>Maryland Birdlife</i> (Editor)	1947- 2014	numerous Maryland Ornithological Society members
Recording songs and calls of North American birds	1948-75	unnamed
<i>Audubon Field Notes/American Birds</i> (Technical Editor)	1952-89	John W. Aldrich, Robert E. Stewart
Nocturnal bird migration (Lowery and Newman 1955)	1955	George H. Lowery, Jr., Robert J. Newman,
Pacific albatross studies (Kenyon et al. 1958, Robbins 1966)	1958-67, 2014	USFWS, US Navy, Dale W. Rice, Karl W. Kenyon, et al.

“Operation Recovery” program (Baird et al. 1958, 1959)	1958-69	collaboration among banders, including weighing, measuring, aging, sexing birds (and ultimately creating Bird Observatories), James Baird, Aaron M. Bagg
North American Breeding Bird Survey (Ziolkowski et al. 2010)	1966-present	USFWS, Canadian Wildlife Service, North American Bird Conservation Initiative, United States Geological Survey (USGS), John R. Sauer et al.
<i>Birds of North America: A Guide to Field Identification</i> (a.k.a. <i>The Golden Guide</i>) (Robbins et al. 1966, 1983)	1966, 1983	Bertel Bruun, Herbert S. Zim, Arthur Singer (Illustrator)
<i>Field List of the Birds of Maryland</i> (Robbins and Van Velzen 1968, Robbins and Bystrak 1977)	1968, 1977	Willet T. Van Velzen, Danny Bystrak
Breeding Bird Atlas studies and publications (Robbins and Blom 1996, Ellison 2010)	1972-2013	Eirik A. T. Blom, Walter G. Ellison, Maryland/District of Columbia, New Hampshire, Maine, Pennsylvania, West Virginia volunteers
Forest fragmentation effects on breeding and wintering songbirds in North America, Mexico, Central America, and the West Indies (Whitcomb et al. 1981, Robbins et al. 1989)	1974-98	USFWS, USGS, Robert F. Whitcomb, Deanna K. Dawson, Barbara A. Dowell, et al.
Drafting and negotiating USA/Soviet Union Migratory Bird Treaty (USA and USSR 1978)	1976	USFWS, USSR, Earl B. Baysinger
Additionally, family genealogy including: the children’s ancestors; descendants of Reverend Chandler Robbins (1738-1799) of Plymouth, Massachusetts and of Asa Seymour (1757-1837) of Granville, Massachusetts; and 25 cousins in the White House	1932-present	parents, relatives

Chan's contributions to the knowledge of Maryland's avifauna are innumerable, but I will mention only a few of them. His name first appeared in *Maryland Birdlife* in the September-October 1945 issue when the District of Columbia Audubon Society had a field trip to Patuxent and he and Robert Stewart showed them around (Burner 1945). He joined that Society shortly afterwards. Many years later in 1979, he was recognized by the Audubon Naturalist Society with their highest honor, the Paul Bartsch Award, for contributions to birding population censuses, *The Golden Guide*, and more.

The following are a few of his studies of Maryland birds:

W. Bryant Terrell, who possessed Frank Kirkwood's Maryland bird record file from 1880 to 1920, loaned the file to Chan who copied the nest record cards for inclusion in the Patuxent file started by Robert Stewart in 1941. This became the baseline foundation for the Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) nest record file.

In 1947, Chan and colleagues at Patuxent conducted two censuses in deciduous scrub habitats at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (Robbins and Stewart 1949). They studied the effects of DDT on bird populations in the scrub forest.

In 1947, Chan and Robert E. Stewart prepared a census of the nesting birds in Belt Woods, a tract of virgin forest in Prince Georges County (Stewart and Robbins 1947). They found what they believed to be "the highest density bird populations ever reported in a pure deciduous forest without edge effect."

On the night of 22-23 September 1953, using a wire recorder, Chan counted 2188 birds flying overhead, which translated to 230,000 birds crossing a one-mile line centered on his driveway. That was the highest count ever recorded in North America (Lowery and Newman 1955).

An article by Chan in *Maryland Birdlife* (Robbins 1965) announced a new type of breeding bird census which is now the United States Geological Survey (USGS) North American Breeding Bird Census. Chan and others tested this in Prince Georges and Howard Counties before it was tested statewide in Maryland and Delaware. It was launched in 1966 and is now nationwide.

The Maryland Winter Bird Survey was initiated by Chan and others from the staff at Patuxent in 1968-69 as reported in *Maryland Birdlife* (Robbins 1970).

The Breeding Bird Atlas project was initiated by Chan in 1970 and tested in Maryland in 1971 and 1978 (Klimkiewicz and Buckler 1971, Klimkiewicz and Solem 1978). This culminated in the publication of the first *Atlas of the*

Breeding Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia in 1996 with Chan as Senior Editor (Robbins and Blom 1996). The *2nd Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia* was published in 2010 with the Forward by Chandler S. Robbins (Ellison 2010).

There are other numerous articles in *Maryland Birdlife* and elsewhere written by Chan about some observations of Maryland birds as well as his seasonal reports that he compiled for decades. In 1995, the University of Maryland awarded him an Honorary Doctor of Science degree, but in his humble way, he has never referred to himself as Doctor Robbins, although he could. He has attended all but three or four MOS Conferences since they were first held in 1948. Chan did his first Maryland Christmas Bird Count in 1943 (Figure 6; Brainerd et al. 1944) and since then, according to Chan, he has participated in over 370 Christmas Bird Counts, mostly in Maryland, with about 185 of them just in Prince George's County. He took part again in 2014. It is believed that he has participated in more Christmas Bird Counts than any other one individual, but this cannot be easily verified. Chan served as MOS President from 1952 to 1955, and Trustee (State Director) from 1961 to 2001. From 1947 to 1977, he wrote the quarterly reports of current bird observations for *Maryland Birdlife*, also serving as Editor from 1947 to 2014. He has summarized much of his work in an article in the soon to be published *The History of Patuxent: America's Conservation Research Story* (Perry and Smith [2013 draft]).

RECOLLECTIONS ABOUT CHAN

Don Messersmith

Many people have written about their first encounter with this now famous man. I first met him in 1962 on a field trip led by Dr. Irston R. Barnes, noted Audubon Naturalist Society officer and leader. The trip followed the International Congress of Ornithology held in Ithaca, New York, that year. One of our stops was at the Ocean City Banding Station where Chan was working on his "Operation Recovery" project (Figure 7). A few years later I was attending a bird meeting at the University of Maryland where a rumor was floating around about a possible sighting of an Ivory-billed Woodpecker. I asked Chan about this and he led me behind a partition so no one else could hear and told me that in the upper reaches of the Savannah River in South Carolina there was a super-secret research facility. Some zoology graduate students from the University of South Carolina had been going in there for unknown reasons, but the speculation was that an Ivory-billed might have been seen there, because the students would have had no interest in the research facility. Nothing more was heard of this.

For several years I invited him to come to my Ornithology class at the University of Maryland, which he graciously did and told the class about the sonograms he developed. His *Birds of North America: A Guide to Field*

Bowie, Md. (entire area of the Patuxent Research Refuge of the Fish and Wildlife Service, 2656 acres; bottomland and swamp, 32%, upland oak 28%, fields 18%, pine 14%, terrace (beech, white oak) 6%, lake 2%).—Dec. 23. Fair; temp. 11°—20° wind NW, 2-8 m.p.h.; ground bare; lake and most of river frozen. Observers in 7 parties. Total party hours, 47; total miles afoot, 52. Mallard, 1; canvas-back (?), 5 (flying over); turkey vulture, 30; Cooper's hawk, 1; red-tailed hawk, 3; red-shouldered hawk, 4; marsh hawk, 1; sparrow hawk, 1; bob-white, 42; mourning dove, 26; barred owl, 5; kingfisher, 1; flicker, 24; pileated woodpecker, 1; red-bellied woodpecker, 27; yellow-bellied sapsucker, 3; hairy woodpecker, 13; downy woodpecker, 71; blue jay, 6; crow, 115; Carolina chickadee, 79; tufted titmouse, 125; white-breasted nuthatch, 49; red-breasted nuthatch, 25; brown creeper, 22; winter wren, 13; Carolina wren, 15; mockingbird, 8; hermit thrush, 3; bluebird, 32; golden-crowned kinglet, 380; ruby-crowned kinglet, 2; starling, 9; myrtle warbler, 20; English sparrow, 12; meadowlark, 28; red-wing, 2; grackle, 41 (including at least 1 purple grackle—I. N. G.); cardinal, 53; goldfinch, 120; junco, 449; tree sparrow, 151; field sparrow, 35; white-throated sparrow, 11; swamp sparrow, 9; song sparrow, 35. Total, 46 species; 2108 individuals. (Seen in area earlier in week: black vulture, 1; sharp-shinned hawk, 1; robin, 1.)—JOHN W. BRAINERD, JAMES B. COPE, IRA N. GABRIELSON, NEIL HOTCHKISS, A. C. MARTIN, CHANDLER S. ROBBINS, MR. and MRS. ROBERT E. STEWART, MR. and MRS. HEWSON SWIFT, LOU WENDT.

Figure 6. Chandler Robbins' first Maryland Christmas Bird Count. Bowie (including all of the Patuxent Research Refuge), 23 December 1943 (Brainerd et al. 1944).

Identification (Robbins et al. 1966, 1983) was a required book for the students. In 2001, Chan and Eleanor joined my own World Nature Tours trip to the Amazon. I never thought that I would lead a trip with Chan as a participant, rather than him being a leader for one of my trips. It was very gratifying to me to have them on the trip. My most treasured award is "The Chandler Robbins Education and Conservation Award" given by the American Birding Association (ABA), which I received at the 2011 MOS Annual Conference with Chan sitting next to me at the table (Figure 8). ABA established this award in 2001 and "considers that the quality and scope of Chan Robbins' work make him an outstanding person after whom to name the award" (American Birding Association 2015a). In 2015, Chan was awarded ABA's "Roger Tory Peterson Award for Promoting the Cause of Birding" (American Birding Association 2015b).



Figure 7. Albert Perdick (left), ornithologist from The Netherlands, and Chan Robbins. “Operation Recovery” project, Ocean City Banding Station, 1962 (Photographed by Don Messersmith).



Figure 8. “The Chandler Robbins Education and Conservation Award.” Presented by the American Birding Association to Donald Messersmith (with the Award’s namesake at his side) at the MOS Annual Conference, Wisp Mountain Resort Hotel and Conference Center, McHenry, Maryland, 21 May 2011 (Photographed by Bill Murphy).



Figure 9. Chan Robbins (left) and Winston Banko (USFWS) aboard the *Blackhow*. Laysan Island (Northwestern Hawaiian Islands), March 1965.

Jan Reese

Jan Reese relates his first encounter with Chan. “Chan always participated in the St. Michaels Christmas Count, and I first met him there in 1952 as a teenage student of Richard Kleen’s. I remember vividly my first Chan moment. The 4:00 a.m., pre-Christmas Count, gathering and assignment to count areas was breaking-up at the Boy Scout Lodge in St. Michaels and as the group proceeded to the automobiles this booming “who, who-who, who, who” jarred the still night. Being a naive teenager and novice bird watcher, I had never witnessed or heard anything like that, especially coming from an uninhibited adult in the middle of the night.”

“Another similar Chan moment came the following spring while listening for rails at Pokata Creek marsh along Elliott Island Road in Dorchester County at 10:30 at night. Few if any rails were calling. In the dark we hardly noticed Chan walk over to his car from which he pulled a shotgun and instantly fired it into the air scaring the dickens out of all of us. I was especially alarmed since I had previously seen this uninhibited adult do that “hooting” thing on the night of the Christmas Count. My alarm was short-lived as the marsh all around us suddenly burst into more rail calls than one could count.”

“Annual MOS Conferences in the 1960s at the old Hastings-Miramar Hotel in Ocean City were sort of like a family reunion with the highlight being Chan’s pre-dawn trip to Pocomoke Swamp. This usually involved Chan’s car trailing a lengthy caravan rolling along slowly in the dark on narrow back roads to a destination. When Chan’s car stopped, you knew to quickly disembark or you would miss the show. Stepping out of the car, Chan would start walking backwards paralleling the caravan while orchestrating with a pointed arm left “Kentucky Warbler”, right “Prothonotary Warbler”, left “American Redstart”, right By the time he reached the last car we would usually have amassed at least 15-20 species of birds. His concentration and hearing were on a par with a bat.”

As the years went by, Jan participated in Chan’s “Operation Recovery” banding projects and Breeding Bird Survey routes. In the early 1960s, Jan initiated bird studies of his own. Chan was his professional contact. “A time came when I felt ready to publish something and Chan was there with interest, advice, cooperation, enthusiasm, and most of all, lots of encouragement. With his help, in 1964, I realized my first publication in *Maryland Birdlife* (Reese 1964). This has continued with Chan’s editing advice right up to 2014 (Reese et al. 2014).”

Jan concludes: “The enthusiastic guy with flat top hair, expressive eyebrows, Hawaiian shirts, a bounce in his step, distributing encouragement, and tuned into more sounds than you will ever hear, is an exemplary individual and worthy role

model for all aspiring birders. Success of the MOS is largely the result of Chan's dedication, volunteer efforts, and significant monetary contributions."

Phil Davis

Phil Davis, current Secretary of the Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee (MD/DCRC) wrote that "Chan was one of the founding members of the MOS Records Committee, serving an original four-year term from 1985-1988, under the Chair of renowned birder Claudia Wilds. After rotating off the committee for a required one year hiatus, Chan was reelected to a second four-year term, from 1989-1993."

"The seminal publication, *Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia* by Stewart and Robbins (1958) served as the baseline document for the committee's continuously evolving Official List of the Birds of Maryland and also for the District of Columbia. Regional rarity reports published in Stewart and Robbins (1958), including sight records accepted by the authors, are considered to be accepted records by the MD/DCRC. This important publication directly contributed 445 MD/DCRC rarity reports and records for Maryland and the District of Columbia. The oldest of these published historical rarity reports is of an Anhinga collected at Elkridge Landing on the Patapsco River sometime prior to 1805."

"Chan, himself, is credited with providing documentation to support 36 MD/DCRC rarity reports. His first documented report was of 9 Wilson's Storm-Petrels observed inland in Worcester County on 3 July 1945, following a hurricane, the first report of this species in Maryland from other than offshore. His second report of 2 Sandwich Terns observed on 19 September 1945 on an exposed mud flat in Ocean City, promoted this species from the Maryland "hypothetical" list. Notable records that were personally credited to Chan include Maryland's first White-winged Dove, which he observed while conducting his Cokesbury (Somerset County) Breeding Bird Survey route in June 1970. He also found a rare inland Ipswich (Savannah) Sparrow on the Lower Kent Christmas Bird Count in January 1971."

"According to data provided by Danny Bystrak at the Bird Banding Laboratory, Chan has banded over 184,000 birds in North and South America and the Pacific Ocean between 1950 and 2011" (Figure 9). Some were banded by his sub-permittees under his Master Banding Permit. About half of the banded birds were albatrosses banded on Midway Island: ~65,000 Laysan Albatross and ~25,000 Black-footed Albatross!

Chan also banded the second Clay-colored Sparrow in Maryland as well as several Western Wood-Pewees.

Davis also had an opportunity to go through the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center (PWRC) archives and located some interesting historical information in Chan's files from the 1930s to 1980s. One item referred to DC Audubon birdwatching trips with lists from Roger Tory Peterson 1944-46, one of which hosted 160 birders (!); there also was an announcement of the first Ocean City pelagic trip in 1973.

“As part of the MD/DCRC historical canvass, Davis also reviewed the 2” x 5” Bird Phenology Program card file for additional reports and supporting documentation for regional rarities. This set of cards begun by Wells W. Cooke in the late 1800s was last maintained by Chan into the 1970s.” These cards are now being digitized by Jessica Zelt (Nuwer 2014).

David Bridge

David Bridge is another person who has had a long association with Chandler Robbins. He wrote, “Chan is one of my great mentors and a pronounced influence on my career and life. I went on my first Christmas Bird Count (Triadelphia Reservoir) with Chan on 28 December 1958; we slept at his house the night before the count. We went owling in the morning (naturally); I was a senior in high school, age 17. *Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia* (1958), was ‘my Bible’ growing up; I took this book everywhere, wore out several copies. By the spring of 1958, I was contributing observation/data for ‘The Season’ in *Maryland Birdlife*. I received a banding permit in August 1959 at age 18 as soon as it was legal, with Chan as my sponsor.”

“He encouraged young and old, and new alike. ‘This presents a wonderful opportunity for amateur ornithologists to make a worthwhile contribution to science’ (Robbins et al. 1959). It was statements like this that stimulated me, and I’m sure others to become better observers and birders. Chan inspired me and many others, to become bird banders and to make real contributions. Being a bander, I think, made most of us much more serious about birds, bird study, ornithology, etc. You could study birds in the hand, examine plumages and molt, ask more questions, take measurements, etc. Bird banding, at the least, provided an opportunity to do these types of activities.”

Paul Bystrak

Paul and Danny Bystrak have known and worked with Chan for over 50 years. Paul has submitted some of his memories of Chan which I am including here. “I first met Chan when I was young - I think it was 1962, when I was 15. The next door neighbors belonged to the same church as Vernon Kleen. They noticed Danny and I had an interest in birds, and connected us with him. Vernon introduced us to Chan. We helped Vernon with his banding, and we used to spend long days at PWRC. Vernon took us to Patuxent Bird Club meetings since we were too young to drive. I think that we became members of MOS in the fall

of 1962, but don't really remember. Vernon introduced us to Christmas Counts and the May Counts, but Chan was the one who drove us to do the Christmas Counts outside the Laurel area. I think the first one I did was Lower Kent, and we stayed at Dotty Mendinhall's estate 'Dam Site' on the shore of the Chesapeake Bay. The first year, I did shore counts in street shoes because I didn't own rubber boots! I got pretty wet and muddy."

"One month to the day before I was born, Chan did the first run of the Southern Dorchester Christmas Count. One of the life lessons I got from doing this count happened at sunset at the Bestpitch Bridge in Dorchester County. We were on the bridge waiting for Short-eared Owls and watching large flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds going to roost. I commented about the huge numbers. Chan asked how many? I said I don't know. Chan said, 'Don't just look – count!' And he taught me how to pick out and count a small block of birds and then use that block as a unit to count the larger mass. So that started me on the path to precision in thought, which has stood me well throughout my life. I always count now."

"Another time we were there and he asked if I thought that the hawk high up above was a Sharp-shinned or a Cooper's. Isn't it a Red-tailed I asked? He replied, "No, not the red-tail, the hawk way above that!" I couldn't see the bird above it without my 10x binoculars, but he had seen it without binoculars! We agreed it was a sharpie." I think it was the summer of 1966 when we went to work for Chan, who shared an office in the basement of a building at PWRC with Willet Theodore Van Velzen. One of my memories was that a report came to the office of a Bachman's Warbler somewhere (I'on Swamp, South Carolina, I think). Chan suggested that Danny and I go look for it, but I didn't know birds well enough to realize that it was the last chance to see one, and missed out."

"In those days statistics were run on huge calculators with a large keyboard. I think they were Monroe brand and they had 8 rows of 10 keys on them. Chan would sit in the office clicking away on one for hours some days, running sums of squares and squares of sums or whatever. Occasionally, he would comment that the results weren't always what expected, but he couldn't figure why. Finally, he had a service man come in and look at it. The guy discovered that the return spring on one of the keys (a 7 key, I think) was out of position, and the key did not return fast enough under some use patterns! So, every once in a while, he got slightly anomalous results. This taught me to trust my hunches – if data do not look 'right', you need to go through it until you are sure that it is right. You would be shocked and dismayed at how often I find entry errors in studies I review."

"Once we were gathering at Irish Grove Sanctuary the night before the Crisfield Christmas Count. Off in the dark somewhere, there was an owl doing the

‘begging’ call. A few of us were listening and opining as to whether it was a Barn Owl or a Great Horned Owl. Chan arrived about that time, so we asked him to come over and identify the odd bird we were listening to. He listened for a minute or less, and said ‘It’s an owl!’ and went on into the house. It was the precise answer, since further identification would be speculation. The Crisfield circle nicks a tiny piece of Saxis, Virginia, and Chan was the only one to work that sector. Since he stopped participating, no one else has been willing to drive an hour-and-a-half each way to get a few acres of Virginia. He is the ultimate team player.”

“For nearly 50 years, Chan and I worked the Bucktown territory on the Southern Dorchester Count. We developed a pattern where I would arrive about dawn and hike in the closed area of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. He would get the key at some point in the morning and pick me up at lunch. It’s been a couple of years now, but I still miss seeing that Chevy Belair station wagon moving slowly through the pines, looking for me.”

Bob Ringler

Bob Ringler accidentally met Chan in 1975 when Chan was in the middle of running a Breeding Bird Survey route in Howard County. Later, Chan gave Bob one of his last BBS routes when he could no longer hear bird songs well enough. Chan and Bob worked closely together proofreading the *2nd Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia* (Ellison 2010) and he also assisted Chan with the Season Reports in *Maryland Birdlife* as the Assistant Editor.

Barbara Dowell

Barbara Dowell has a unique perspective on Chandler Robbins. She worked for and with him for 27 years and participated at his side on several projects in Guatemala (Figure 10) and elsewhere. It is her work with him in Maryland (Figure 11) that she remembers and summarizes here and I quote, “Working with Chan was always a learning experience for me. He always led by example. He believed in hard work and doing a thorough job. I first joined him and Deanna Dawson on the Forest Fragmentation project while working 50% secretary and 50% field work (which was my first love) locating forests of different sizes each day and getting permission from the landowners to conduct point counts on each of three different visits. Chan always believed in rewarding your effort. While Deanna and he had done most of the work (meeting with statisticians, analyzing the data, writing and rewriting after editorial review), he rewarded me by putting my name on the manuscript (Robbins et al. 1989). I had never been an author before. We spent many hours together conducting vegetation surveys on the hundreds of plots where we had done our bird surveys. This, too, was a learning experience, as soon I was taking young interns out and



Figure 10. Chan Robbins recording bird songs. Cerro San Gil, Guatemala, April 1996 (Photographed by Barbara Dowell).



Figure 11. Chan Robbins conducting a bird survey. Patuxent Research Refuge, August 1986 (Photographed by Barbara Dowell).

we had to learn to identify correctly the trees and shrubs. We carried a lot of books with us in those days. I wished I had taken more botany courses!”

“We always had to work within a strict budget, so we decided to pick forests of different sizes (close to Patuxent) on which to conduct more thorough Breeding Bird Counts. It was in the 1980s and numerous articles were being written about the disappearance of Neotropical migrants in our forests. At this point, Chan turned our attention to monitoring the nesting success in some of our study sites that were close to Patuxent. I found so many nests in Belt Woods that I couldn’t keep them checked regularly so Chan recruited help at a local bird club where he was a guest speaker. Jane and Fred Fallon volunteered and Jane was an excellent nest finder and also was a very expert computer programmer and was looking for work in a field she loved. Chan and I had a lot of data that needed to be analyzed and Jane was the person we needed.”

“During my tenure with Chan, we worked on two of Maryland’s Atlas projects. While most of the Atlas was conducted by volunteers, Chan felt that there needed to be a control to measure how well these volunteers were covering their blocks. He selected a number of blocks (at random throughout the state) for professionals to monitor on a quarter block basis. We hired two exceptional students during these atlases, John and Michael O’Brien. They were the quality recruits Chan attracted. They worked early and late, seven days a week and did so with minimal supervision. We did not have the funds to hire interns for the second Atlas, so I’m sure we didn’t get as good coverage.”

“Working with Chan for 27 years was such a joy. I needed to go back to school for statistical training and for graduate degrees, but felt that I couldn’t learn more and enjoy more the projects we were working on. I was getting to work with birds and learn from Chan. He always welcomed my ideas. We repeated sites he had studied fifty years earlier with Stewart, the original data published in *Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia* (Stewart and Robbins 1958). We found several sites in Garrett County that were still intact. We repeated them to see how bird populations had changed over time. At least two or three of the sites have been altered since our study, even the State-owned ones, and others which were privately owned, so it was a once in a lifetime opportunity to study bird populations over time. He always had infinite patience with my questions. I’m sure so many people feel the same about his helpful way. I never enjoyed (actually hated) public speaking and quickly learned that Chan was a master at it and always in demand, so we made a good team. He recruited experienced volunteers from his many talks at the many ornithological meetings he attended, and I did the behind the scenes organizing.”

“I can say without reservation that I worked with a man I truly admired. I have never known a more generous couple than he and his beloved wife Eleanor. I

witnessed on so many occasions, over the years, examples of their generosity – funding students, paying for meeting expenses so a whole Cuban group could come and give presentations. I could go on and on, but I’m sure he did it with no intent of being praised for it. I was honored to have worked with and known him.”

“I had two wonderful mentors in my life. Don Messersmith whose ornithology class was the best class I ever took. It was on an ornithological field trip that I met two wonderful bird banders, Margaret and Don Donald. I learned the best techniques possible from the Donalds for banding and handling birds, which I used so much in my work with Chan. I enjoyed my ornithology class so much that I took two entomology classes from Don Messersmith and thought about doing graduate work in entomology and probably would have tried to get into graduate school had I not gotten the job working with Chan, and of course, because of Chan himself, with whom I have enjoyed a special friendship.”

These comments from people who have benefited from knowing and learning from Chan represent only a few of the many people whom Chan has helped, as well as the thousands who have benefited from his pioneering censusing work in this and other countries. He is still active at age 96 and is working to organize files, compile Eleanor’s writings (Eleanor passed away at age 91 on 16 February 2008.), pursue more family genealogy records, and welcome people who wish to consult with him. It is indeed an honor to know him and a pleasure to have compiled these few lines about him. To bring together a complete history about Chan would require a lengthy book. Chandler S. Robbins is truly “Maryland’s Birding Treasure.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A number of people helped me compile this article about Chan Robbins, but I especially want to thank David Bridge, Paul Bystrak, Phil Davis, Barbara Dowell, Jan Reese, and Bob Ringle for their submissions about Chan. They provided personal insights about their relationships with and encouragements from Chan. Space did not permit me to include comments from the many Marylanders, both professional and amateur, who have known and worked with Chan. Thanks are also extended to Kinard Boone (Computer Specialist, PWRC) and Barbara Dowell for providing photographs, and to Jane Robbins and Barbara Dowell for supplying information about the photos. I also want to thank Gene Scarpulla for his help, his additions, and careful editing of this article.

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