



By Ron Ketter

Baltimore Oriole

(Editor's note: Ron Ketter is a member of the Talbot Bird Club and a Maryland Ornithological Society board member.)

Perhaps no bird is more closely associated with Maryland than the Baltimore Oriole.

Whether identified as the State Bird of Maryland or associated with Baltimore's major-league baseball team, the Baltimore Oriole has long been tied to the history of Maryland.

In 1698, a shipment of "Birds & beasts of Curiosity" sent from Maryland to England included several "Baltemore Birds." In 1731, Mark Catesby described and illustrated the "Baltimore Bird" in his *Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands*. He noted how the plumage resembled the coat of arms colors of Sir George Calvert, 1st Lord of Baltimore.

Based on Catesby's documentation, Carl Linnaeus included the species in his 1758 scientific publication *Systema Naturae*, noting its similarity to old world (Europe and



Asia) orioles belonging to the family Oriolidae. That's how it became known as the Baltimore Oriole.

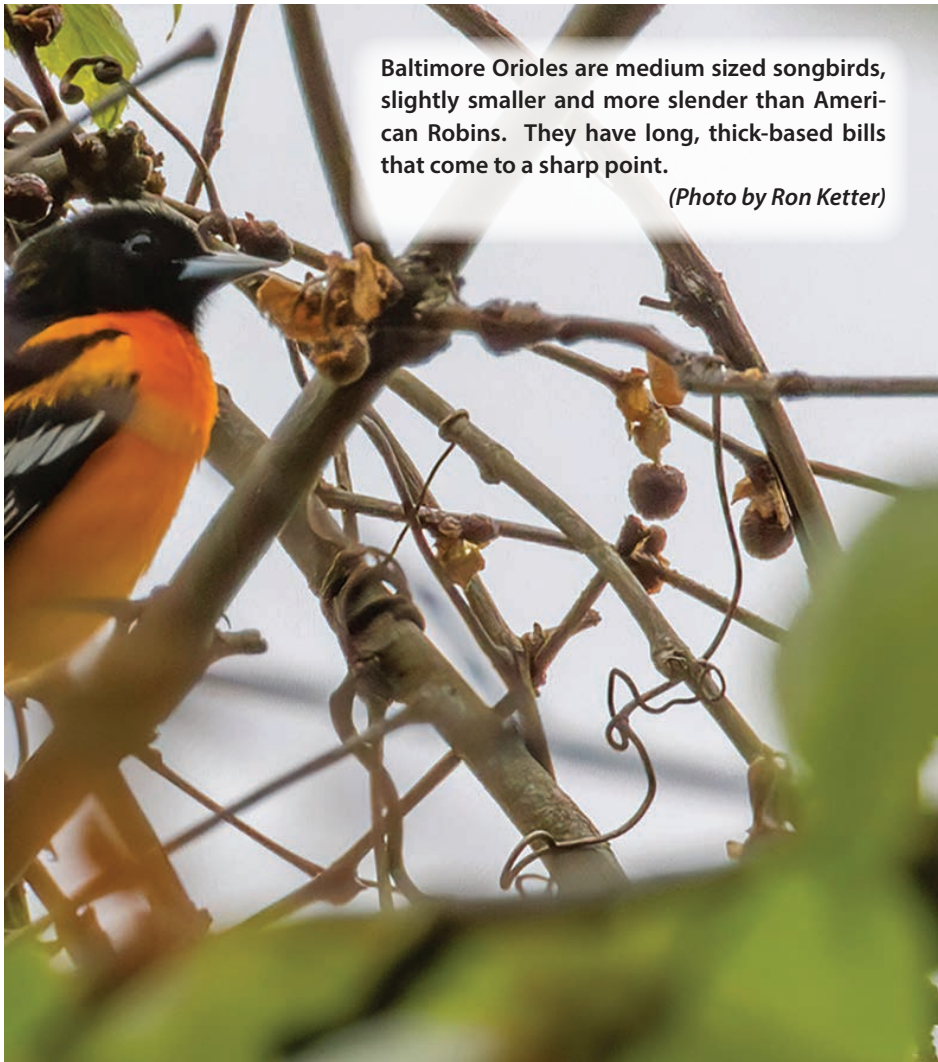
Despite their similarities, New World Orioles (those found in the Americas) are not closely related to Oriolidae species. Instead, they belong to a family of birds called Icteridae, which include species commonly referred to as "blackbirds."

Baltimore Orioles are summer residents of the Eastern Shore, typically arriving during the last half of April. They prefer deciduous trees, mainly open woodlands, forest edges, orchards, parks, river or creek edges, and backyards. Their

breed throughout the United States east of the Rockies, extending into the southern parts of Canada. They overwinter from Mexico, through Central America, and into the northern parts of South America.

Baltimore Orioles are medium sized songbirds, slightly smaller and more slender than American Robins. They have long, thick-based bills that come to a sharp point. Adult males are bright orange with mostly black wings and a solid black head.

They have a single, broad white wing-bar, with white edges on their wing feathers. Females and im-



Baltimore Orioles are medium sized songbirds, slightly smaller and more slender than American Robins. They have long, thick-based bills that come to a sharp point.

(Photo by Ron Ketter)

matures are yellow-orange on the breast, with a grayish head and back, and two white wing bars.

The musical song of a Baltimore Oriole is a series of clear whistling notes, flute-like in quality, tied together in brief phrases. Some of the mnemonics used to describe the song include whistling “*chitty chitty bang bang*”, “Here, here, come right here, dear”, and “Here I am! Look at me!”

While the male is the primary songster, females sometimes sing, although their songs mostly consist of a few descending, whistling notes rather than the more complex

songs performed by males.

As soon as they arrive on their breeding grounds, male Baltimore Orioles claim territory and try to attract a mate.

Males enthusiastically court females by singing, hopping in front of her, and bowing while lowering his wings and fanning his tail. While some females ignore these displays, others will sing back and give a wing-quiver display by fanning her tail and fluttering her wings.

Once a pair bond is established, nest building begins. Oriole nests resemble an enclosed basket woven from plant material (PAGE 48)

Feeders can welcome Orioles on deck

Story by Leslie Milby

Hummingbirds and their feeders may be one of the more popular bird niches, but if you are looking to cater to another fun-to-watch bird, try attracting orioles.

In Maryland, two main types of orioles return from the winter for breeding season.

The most popular is the Baltimore Oriole.

Their trademark black and orange feathers are named for the First Lord of Baltimore, Sir George Calvert, whose coat of arms were of the same color.

The second type found locally are the Orchard Orioles, who have a darker copper orange coloring.

There are several other Oriole species, but many such as the Bullock’s Oriole or Audubon Oriole prefer the drier temperatures of the western United States.

With both varieties, the males are more vibrantly colored with the females having more dull hues, though with every molt, the ladies get brighter and brighter. The males are also known for their singing, which resembles a flute type tone.

Where female (PAGE 49)