

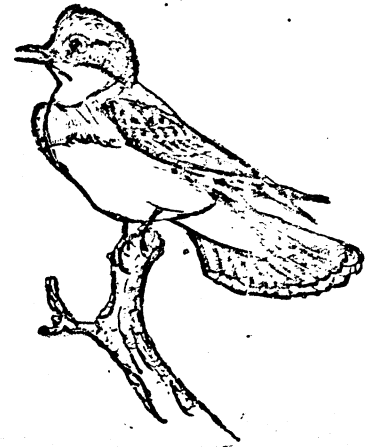


# Howard County

M O S

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## AVIAN PENTHOUSES

When walking through the woods in spring and summer, study the trees with holes and damaged trunks. These are to some blights upon the landscape but to the wildlife enthusiast, they are veritable treasures of wildlife habitats. Besides several species of mammals, there are more than twenty species of birds that are dependent on defective trees for their nesting needs.

The woodpeckers (hairy, downy, red-bellied, pileated, red-headed) are well known penthouse dwellers but among other species preferring tree cavities are prothonotary warblers, brown headed and white-breasted nuthatches, sparrow hawks, barred owls, horned owls, red-shafted flicker, wood ducks, bluebirds, tufted titmice, Carolina chickadees, crested flycatchers, screech owls. Some of these house hunters customize their dwellings, others remodel ready made cavities and some look for just the right small natural ones. There are those that take over deserted homes left by other species, such as the screech owls who nest in old woodpecker holes, furnishing not even nesting material for their four or five white eggs. (Screech owls do not nest in tree holes exclusively).

The size and shape of the entrance can give clues to the inhabitants. The one inch hole of the brown-headed nuthatch excludes most of the other tree dwellers while the pileated woodpecker's nest is larger than two inches and elongated. Sometimes a favorite tree is riddled with the distinctive pileated woodpecker holes.

Hardwoods have more cavities and suitable places for excavations than pines. Older trees which are more than 50 years old and more than 12 inches in diameter are the best trees. These larger trees are more likely to offer suitable housing to more species. For example, wood ducks need the inside diameter of their cavity to be approximately nine inches.

Trees growing in water seem to be especially attractive perhaps because they attract fewer snakes and other predators. Dead trees have special values and should be left standing. Red-headed woodpeckers prefer them, and their cavities often make suitable nest sites for crested flycatchers and bluebirds.

## M E S S A G E   F R O M   T H E   P R E S I D E N T

I wish to express my appreciation to all of you who have helped getting the newest chapter of MOS on its feet. The founding board who volunteered for whatever needed to be done, the members who have already put in time helping with one thing and another, and of course, those of you who joined proving to all of us that a Howard County Chapter was indeed meeting a present need.

Our opening meeting with Chan Robbins' informative lecture with slides on Howard County birds was the first in a series of interesting and colorful programs. We have been to Greenland and Iceland with Dr. Donald Messersmith, out gathering nests with Jerry Longcore, to the Yucatan with Dr. Erv Klaas, to Africa with David Holmes, and visiting Birds of Prey through the courtesy of the Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources.

A number of field trips were taken in all kinds of weather: two local walks, a bird feeder trip, visits to National Refuges (Blackwater, Bombay Hook, Chincoteague and Assateague) and trips to Sandy Point State Park and Kent Island. There was the predawn wild turkey walk at Sycamore Landing Turf Farm, a picnic and woodcock walk in Mid-May, a trip to Patapsco State Park, Sugarloaf Mountain and New Design Road. (The last trip on a rainy morning produced 76 species--teaching us not to cancel or defer trips because of rain). We are extremely fortunate to have among our members some of the very best leaders in the State.

Members have taken part in both the Annual Christmas Count and May Count, and are presently hard at work tracking down nesting birds for the Atlas Bird Breeding Project.

We have held photography workshops and in conjunction with the Patuxent Chapter, we have taken part in identification classes which have been among the best I have ever attended.

John Healy, our Trustee, was elected as a member of the Executive Council of the Maryland Ornithological Society for the next year. Next year's program promises to be an interesting and varied one with illustrated lectures, speakers, and a good selection of field trips. I look forward to these myself and in getting to know all of you better.

---Nan Rhineland

## C O M I N G   E V E N T S

There will be no programs or newsletters for July or August. But we will keep in touch through field trips and two very good ones have been planned.

JULY 21 SATURDAY: A four mile hike along the Patuxent River lead by Larry Hood. He warns this will be a strenuous trip and everyone must wear old comfortable hiking clothes with tennis shoes or sneakers, get a good night's sleep and bring lunch. Meet at Swansfield Elementary School parking lot at 7:30 a.m. Larry's number: 730-9251.

AUGUST 19 SUNDAY: A more relaxing easy trip to Elliott Island Marsh and Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. The marsh lands are fantastically beautiful. Bring lunch. Leader to be announced. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Swansfield Elementary School parking lot.

VERY SPECIAL PROGRAMS AND EXCITING FIELD TRIPS ARE PLANNED FOR FALL SCHEDULE

## H E A R D   B U T   N O T   S E E N

Springtime birding can be frustrating when birds can be heard so distinctly but are almost impossible to see because of all that foliage. They have an uncanny ability to "disappear" in the leafy background while singing on and on and on. To add to the pleasure of birding and to solve those puzzling identification problems, a birder has to learn to identify the songs and call notes (identifying chip sounds takes considerable experience in the field).

There are many commercial records that can be of some assistance--some find it helpful to tape from the records and use a small recorder in the field. The records in the back of the book, Song and Garden Birds of North America (Alexander Wetmore, National Geographic Society, Washington D. C.) are very popular.

Irston R. Barnes, columnist for the Washington Post suggests one of the best methods of learning bird songs is by using the simplest of phonetics, listening to the song and writing down syllables that will recall the song. It is helpful to see the bird while it is singing, the sound and the physical characteristics become associated in the birder's mind and the species is more easily recalled later when only the song is heard. It's a good idea to carry a small notebook and pencil in the field to jot down the sound as it is heard by the birder. A check with the Chandler field guide sonagrams after phonetically spelling the sounds can be a useful memory aid.

The trick in using the phonetic method is to use the syllables the birder actually hears and this may not always be exactly the same as the interpretation given in the various books. For instance the towhees usually are credited with singing "drink your tea ea ea" but Mr. Barnes hears it as "phil-tow-hee". Some of the birds found in this area and the phonetic sounds most commonly given for their songs or calls are:

Bobwhite: poor BOB WHITE

Cardinal: Whistle--wheat, wheat, wheat, what-cheer, what-cheer, what-cheer  
or whoit whoit, cheer, cheer, cheer.

Spotted sandpiper: crisp, clear peet-weet or pee-weet

Ovenbird: teaCHER, teaCHER, teaCHER or you're rich, you're Rich,  
YOU'RE RICH or chertea, CHERTEA' CHERTEA'

Yellowthroat: which IS it, which IS it, which IS it or witchity-witchity  
witch

Olive-sided flycatcher: quick-three-beers or Hip! Three Cheers.

Black and white warbler: a thin, wiry we see, we see, we see or weesee,  
weesee, weesee

Blue-gray gnatcatcher: shrill, high pitched peevish spee, spee, spee or  
zpee, zpee, zpee

Prairie warbler: zee-zee-zee-zee-zee

Eastern meadowlark: spring-o-the year or tee-yah, tee-yair

Prothonotary warbler: emphatic tweet tweet tweet tweet tweet on one pitch

Eastern kingbird: hurried, shrill chatters kit-kit-kitter-kitter-kitter-  
kip or bickering dzee-dzee-dzee