

# HOWARD

MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
JANUARY - FEBRUARY 1981 VOL. 9 NO. 3

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## SECOND (AND LAST) SEED SALE OF SEASON IS COMING

Seed Sale Coordinator Eileen Clegg announces that the second seed sale of the 1980-81 year will be held on Saturday, January 17, 1980, with a snow emergency date of January 24. Listed below are seed sale prices.

50 lbs. Sunflower	-	15.00	, tax .75	, total - 15.75
25 lbs. Sunflower	-	8.25	, tax .41	, total - 8.66
25 lbs. Wild Bird Mix	-	5.00	, tax .25	, total - 5.25
5 lbs. Niger (thistle)	-	6.50	, tax .33	, total - 6.83

ORDERS MUST BE PREPAID and should be received by Monday, January 12, 1981. Make checks payable to Howard County MOS and mail to Seed Sale, c/o Eileen Clegg, 9094 Lambakin Lane, Columbia, MD 21045. Please include your name, address, and telephone number. Pickup is from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Saturday, January 17, at the First Presbyterian Church on Route 108, just east of Route 29.

THIS IS THE ONLY NOTICE THAT CLUB MEMBERS WILL RECEIVE. NO INDIVIDUAL MAILING WILL BE MADE.

A Wild Bird Mix is being offered this time in response to numerous requests. It is being sold with the advice that if you have large numbers of starlings, House Sparrows, blackbirds, or Rock Doves (pigeons) you stick solely to sunflower seed. It is true that mixes are attractive to our native sparrows, towhees, doves, juncos and others, but if you are deluged with pest species it is a waste of your effort and money.

Give Eileen a call at 730-4362 if you have questions or can volunteer an hour of your time on the pickup date. Those individuals who aid in the loading for customers will receive a free 25# bag of seed. Volunteers helping at the desk will receive a small refund on their order.

THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS! The following individuals helped to make the first seed sale of the season a success: Max Casper, Eileen & John Clegg, Alice & Terry Kretz, Grazina & Mike McClure, Jo Solem, Eva Sunell, and Martha Waugh. Thanks also to Brenda Ericsson who furnished items from the bookstore which were sold during the pickup period. Special applause is due Alice Kretz and Eileen Clegg who so generously provided baked goods to "sustain" the volunteers who processed over three tons of seed.

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## 1980 HOWARD COUNTY BIRD LISTS DUE

Be sure to send your 1980 bird lists for Howard County to David Holmes, 5043-A Harpers Farm Rd., Columbia, MD 21044. Try to get them to him by January 15, 1981. We would like to be able to publish the compilation in the March-April newsletter.

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## IDENTIFICATION: WHITE-THROATED vs. WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW - M. Chestem

The White-throated Sparrow (Zenotrichia albicollis) is a welcome and usually common visitor to our winter feeders. On winter bird walks almost every hedgerow and thicket protect numbers of White-throats. They respond quickly to "spishing." A far less common relative in our area is the White-crowned Sparrow (Zenotrichia leucephrys). One must not neglect to check every flock of White-throats because among them may be one, two or more White-crowns which can add a special bird to a day's list. In Howard County the White-crowned Sparrows seem to be more frequently found in the central and western parts of the county, but they have been seen countywide. Do not automatically dismiss most sparrows as White-throats without careful examination.

Both species have crowns of black and white stripes. The mature White-throated Sparrow has a yellow spot between the eye and bill (this spot is black on the White-crowned). The White-throated has a very white throat patch edged in black; the throat patch on a White-crowned is more gray, less distinct. Both sparrows have grayish-white breasts with some suggestion of fine streaking noticeable on the White-throats. The bill is the best quick field mark. Remember that the White-crowned has a pink bill (both mature and immature) while all White-throats have blackish bills. A mere subtle difference which is interesting to note when the birds are seen together is the shape of the head. The White-crowned has a dome-shaped head which appears more prominent than the White-throated's head which also seems to rest lower on the body.

The immatures of both have brown and tan stripes on the crown. According to some experts some of these individuals may be an adult color phase. The bill color can help a lot in identifying these birds since the yellow spot is not seen and the white throat may not appear as distinct as it does on the more commonly seen bird. Most simply the pink bill marks the White-crowned Sparrow and the blackish bill belongs to the White-throated Sparrow.

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## NEW HOWARD COUNTY CENTRAL LIBRARY NEEDS A BIRD LIST

The new central county library will open in January 1981. Not only has the interior been carefully planned, but the exterior has been equally well arranged--only with wildlife instead of readers in mind. A committee has worked with the landscape architect to consider plantings which not only enhance the setting but also will attract various kinds of wildlife. The bird feeder the club is donating will be one facet of this positive wildlife program.

Alice Grant has prepared a handout for library patrons describing some of the plantings. We are being asked to cooperate in compiling a bird list for the library grounds which would be available to interested individuals. As you have occasion to use the library, keep your eyes and ears open. Let either Marty Chestem, 730-1527, or Jo Solem, 725-5037, know what you note on the library grounds, flying over, or visible in any direction. It (the list) will help library users in a unique educational and aesthetic effort.

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DEADLINE FOR THE MARCH-APRIL NEWSLETTER IS FEBRUARY 25. Submit material to Editor Jo Solem, 10617 Graceloch Rd., Laurel, MD 20810. Submissions welcome.

## C A L E N D A R

Meeting place for programs and field trips is the Grempler Realty Building on Little Patuxent Parkway in Columbia unless otherwise indicated. From the south entrance of Columbia, turn left. The building is beyond Symphony Woods and the Fire House, but before you reach Howard Community College on the east side of the street, across from the Wilson Garden Center.

### PROGRAMS - 7:45 p.m.

Jan. 8 - Thur. - "Adventure from Lake Okeechobee to the Dry Tortugas" - M. Kathleen Klimkiewicz, biologist in the banding laboratory at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. Kathy takes us on a southern Florida trip as she searches for the unusual birds found in the area. Why fly or take a lengthy boat trip to the Dry Tortugas? She'll show you what is there. Although she is an avid lister she does not neglect the flowers, amphibians and reptiles of the region.

Feb. 12 - Thur. - "Annual Member Potluck" 6:30 p.m. at Nan & Fred Rhinelander's. Old members know this meeting as one of the highlights of our program year. Any photographer may bring a dozen of his (or her) best nature slides to contribute to the program which is unpredictable but always breathtaking. Families bring food to share for the potluck, the business meeting is ever-so-brief, and the slides are eagerly anticipated. This event by 1978 had become so popular that last year we were forced to limit the group to about 65 people. Because this system seemed to have deterred some people we did not reach our limit. Reserve space and make your food choice by calling Marjorie Mountjoy, 730-5875 by Feb. 5, if possible. The Rhinelanders live on Folly Quarter Rd. about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile west of the Franciscan Friars. Their road is marked with "The Herbiary" sign. Continue to the stone house at the end of the lane. Call Nan at 286-2427 for more specific directions if desired.

### FIELD TRIPS

Eva Sunell, 995-0029, is in charge of field trips. Severe weather conditions can result in trip cancellation at the leader's discretion. If in doubt, call first. Carpooling efforts will continue. Riders are expected to share gas & toll costs.

Jan. 18 - Sun. - HABITAT WALK: BENSON BRANCH PARK - Leaders: Bill Eckert, work phone 992-2483 & Nan Rhinelander 286-2427. Second in a series of seasonal habitat walks to this area co-sponsored by Rex & Parks. 1:00 p.m. till mid-afternoon. Meet either at Grempler Realty at 12:30 p.m. or at the entrance to the Glenelg Country School on Folly Quarter Road at 12:50 p.m.

Jan. 25 - Sun. - FEEDER TRIP. East side of Columbia and southern Howard County. Leader: Eva Sunell, 995-0029. Check out birds and feeders at the homes of several members. Good opportunity for close views of confusing species. Meet at Grempler Realty at 12:30 p.m.  
*Leave 1:00 p.m. - (first stop)*

Jan. 30 - Fri. - NIGHT SKY IN WINTER. Leader: Joe Field, at the Rhinelanders, 286-2427. 8:00 p.m. An evening that will be spent checking the planets and constellations in the winter sky. NOTE: A cloudy sky or precipitation will force postponement to Feb. 7.

(continued on next page)

NIGHT SKY IN WINTER (cont.) If in doubt, contact Eva, 995-0029. Be sure to dress warmly. A hot drink and donuts will be supplied to thaw star-gazers. If the weather is cold enough the pond will be frozen and anyone interested is invited to bring skates. Several telescopes will be available; bring binoculars or spotting scopes also.

Feb. 1 - Sun. - VISIT TO BIRD REHABILITATION CENTER. Jane Zuke has the necessary permits in order to nurse injured birds. Her home in Adelphi is a haven for numerous species, particularly birds of prey. She can make no promises of what she will be caring for at the time we visit. If you would like to go reserve space by calling Eva Sunell, 995-0029. Maximum of 15 people.

Feb. 14, 15, 16 - OHINGOTEAGUE WEEKEND????? If you are interested in a three day winter weekend birding the lower Eastern Shore call Eva by Feb. 5.

(Sat. - Mon.)  
Feb. 15<sup>r</sup> OWL TRIP - Jay Sheppard - Patuxent R. ST-PK.

Feb. 22 - Sun. - COURTSHIP OF THE MALLARD. Leader: V. "Kris" Krishnamoorthy. Meet at 1:00 p.m. at Grempler Realty. This will be an opportunity to observe closely the intricacies of the courting behavior of a single species on one of Columbia's lakes. Dress warmly for walking will be minimal. Kris will thoroughly orient viewers and describe what to watch for.

#### BOARD MEETING

A Board meeting will be held on Thursday, January 15, at 7:30 p.m. at the home of Mike McClure, 12237 Mt. Albert Rd., Ellicott City. Call 531-6170 for directions.

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#### CAPE MAY BIRDING HOTLINE & VOICE OF THE NATURALIST

A new taped message for birders has been added to those available for travelers who roam afield searching for rarities. The Cape May Bird Observatory recently announced that they are sponsoring a six minute taped message containing rare and unusual sightings, hawk watch reports, and seasonal birding tips for the Cape May area and Delaware Bay. The tape will be changed at 6:00 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays, more often if necessary. Call day or night, 609-884-2626.

Don't forget to call the local Voice of the Naturalist, 652-1088, sponsored by the Audubon Naturalist Society, for rarities in this area.

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#### NORTHERN SPECIES WANDER SOUTH THIS WINTER

Not every winter is equally exciting for birders. This promises to be a good one. In addition to Evening Grosbeaks and Purple Finches already reported, those who have feeders should be on the lookout for Pine Siskins and Common Redpolls. Black-capped Chickadees are a possibility but are tricky to identify. This seems to be an invasion year for Snowy Owls (one has paid a visit to D.C. already). The only recorded sighting for Howard County was in 1960. If you do spot such a bird in the county please let other birders know so that we can verify the sighting. It has been six years since the last Snowy Owl invasion. Call the Voice of the Naturalist regularly to keep up on the latest rarities along with directions to try to find them.

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A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS - V. Krishnamoorthy

Little did I suspect that one of our common birds, which usually rummages noisily among the dead leaves, would astonish me by its strange behavior. The incident occurred near the edge of a pond surrounded by woodland. This secluded spot is not far from where I work, so I have been walking there every noon for many years. On this particular October day last fall I was absorbed in watching the swirling leaves when my attention was diverted by a bird walking slowly at a distance. I did not have binoculars with me so I walked silently to the very spot where it had disappeared into the clumps of grass and sedge.

To my surprise the bird was lying amid the grass stalks making no attempt whatever to fly despite my standing close to it. I wondered whether it was sick or injured because a wild bird normally will permit a predator or a man to approach only to a certain distance before it flees. This bird obviously relied more on concealment for safety than swift escape by flight. I could see only its dark head and long tail in the tangle. Parting the stalks would have revealed its identity, but I wanted to determine what it would do if I sat quietly on the soggy bank and waited.

At first the bird was agitated by my presence moving its head sideways repeatedly and breathing fast which could be clearly seen in the rapid beating of its throat. Soon it calmed, ignoring me altogether. Having waited fifteen long minutes with no sign of any action by the docile bird, I eased into a more comfortable position. My slow but definite movement triggered a series of fast responses in the bird.

It stood up, took four steps into the open, slightly spread its tail feathers showing patches of white, and tightly compressed its body contour. Then it rolled on its side to the ground and lay rigid with its bill closed and its eyes fully open. The mysterious bird was a female Rufous-sided Towhee (Pipile erythrophthalmus) and I quickly realized that it was "playing 'possum."

I stood watching incredulously the apparently helpless towhee for five minutes while she remained in that trance-like state. To determine how long she would maintain the deception, I retreated up the bank, out of her sight. Within a minute she righted herself into a standing position. Sensing that the danger had passed, she began to move away with short pauses.

It was time for me to return to work, but curiosity got the upper hand. I had to find out whether she would do it again. She was indeed an obliging lady. I descended the slope stealthily and confronted her again, only five feet from where she stood. Though she was close to the water now, she repeated the act in the same meticulous fashion. It was pitiful to see only her head resting on the dry land while her entire body was submerged in the water, so immediately I ran far from her. She lay there for two minutes, got up, and again moved slowly to the nearest bush, water dripping from her soaked body. She neither shook nor preened her feathers to get rid of the water.

"Playing 'possum" has been attributed to a variety of animals such as foxes, birds, kangaroos, snakes and even some insects. For some reason the opossum has become well-known for this behavior, although mammalogists point out that only a few go into the death-feigning spell.

The exact cause for this baffling behavior remains a mystery. Fear, excessive stress, or rough handling can induce this state in some animals, but "playing dead" is not acting. It is an involuntary response triggered by a powerful stimulus. Neither is "playing 'possum" the same as "freezing" as observed, for

example, in ducklings when warned by the hen of imminent danger. Here the immobility is not so deep or protracted and the ducklings resume their activities seen.

Does this dramatic behavior have any survival value contributing to the success of the species which practice it? We can only guess that many predators are after moving prey and will not waste their time on a seemingly dead carcass. If this behavior lessens the likelihood of attack or of being eaten, will the animal then pass this valuable characteristic to its offspring?

The next noon I combed the woods long and hard looking for my special bird, but nowhere was she to be found. I do hope she is safe and sound somewhere ready to display her ruse when it is needed.

## WHERE DO ALL THE PROFITS GO?

This is the second year the Howard Chapter of MOS has made seed available at two sales in the course of the fall and winter. Thanks to organizer Eileen Glegg and an enthusiastic crew of volunteers each sale has netted several hundred dollars for the treasury. The question very naturally arises as to what is being done with this money. Certainly it is not spent without careful thought; much of it is in a fund for future use. Below are listed some of the items which the Board has authorized in the last year although not all of them have been completed. Board members welcome comments and suggestions from club members. The support of these sales by you and your friends and neighbors is appreciated.

1. Use of funds to offset rising costs of newsletter production, principally postage, so that dues do not have to be raised;
2. Purchase of a zoom lens for the club slide projector;
3. Purchase of a carrying case for the slide projector;
4. Denation of a Hilarious metal feeder to the new central Howard County library along with a continuing supply of sunflower seed. (Do look for the feeder and enjoy the birds it attracts when you visit the library.)
5. Establish a minimum honorarium for all speakers at our meetings;
6. Mount these birds for our collection that are not subscribed by individuals;
7. Reproduce and mail the Howard County May Count results to all participants (beginning with 1981);
8. Build wooden carrying cases for the portion of our mounted bird collection that is not now so housed;
9. Revise the Winter Birds of Howard County slide show;
10. Purchase materials for the construction of two Barn Owl boxes to be mounted in western Howard County; (Mark Wallace has completed these boxes.)
11. Reprint the club brochure;
12. Make a donation to the Nature Conservancy for the Nassawange Creek Preserve;
13. Pay the designated fee for authorized leaders on Howard Bird Club/ Recreation & Parks sponsored bus trips.

## SUPPORTERS OF MANDATORY DEPOSIT LEGISLATION WILL TRY AGAIN

In Howard County in the fall of 1978 there was a determined effort to pass a bottle bill. In the 1980 session of the state legislature, bills were introduced in the Maryland Senate and House of Delegates with the same goal. In both instances the efforts were defeated although, for the first time, a "bottle bill" came out of a committee of the House for a floor vote.

1981 will see a vigorous new attempt to pass Mandatory Deposit legislation. Senator James Clark of Howard County, president of the Maryland Senate, expects for the second time to sponsor this legislation.

What will it do? As proposed it will do the following:

REQUIRE A MANDATORY DEPOSIT OF 10¢ on any glass, metal, or plastic container for beer, ale, or malt beverages and mineral waters, soda water, and similar carbonated and non-carbonated soft drinks;

REQUIRE DEALERS IN SUCH ITEMS TO REFUND 10¢ for any such container returned clean and whole;

REQUIRE DISTRIBUTORS TO PAY 20% OF THIS AMOUNT (2¢) for containers returned by the dealer to the distributor;

PERMIT ESTABLISHMENT OF REDEMPTION CENTERS, which may also accept other materials for recycling.

The Department of Natural Resources shall have the responsibility of overseeing and promulgating rules and regulations.

What would such legislation accomplish? It would

1. CLEAN UP OUR INCREASINGLY LITTERED ENVIRONMENT.
2. SAVE SCARCE RAW MATERIALS, such as bauxite ore used in aluminum cans by remelting used ones.
3. SAVE ENERGY. It takes 70-90% less energy to melt down aluminum cans than it does to begin with the raw ore. Washing bottles uses less energy than manufacturing them and a glass bottle is estimated to be reusable 15 times as opposed to single-use throwaways.
4. SAVE SPACE IN LANDFILLS.

Citizens Against Waste is the coalition of individuals and organizations actively supporting such legislation. These include Audubon Societies, Garden Federations, and many civic organizations. You can show your support by subscribing individually as well as encouraging organizations to which you belong to join. The address of CAW is 501 St. Paul Pl., Suite 1401, Baltimore, MD 21202.

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Editor's Note: We thank Harriet Baldaou for this article. Although not a member of this club, she was kind enough to write the above in order to alert Howard Bird Club members to this important legislation. The opposition is always well-financed with money from large corporate donors (mostly out-of-state). Your donations are needed to counteract this influx of opposition funding. Write or phone your elected state representatives so that they know how you feel. Letters to the editors of local newspapers are also useful. The following states have already enacted such legislation: Oregon, Maine, Vermont, Iowa, Connecticut, and Michigan.

## ORNACROSTIC AVAILABLE

The newsletter editor has a limited supply of Marjerie Mountjoy's "Ornacrestic" for word puzzle fans which was originally published as a bonus at the end of 1976. If any new members (or old ones) are interested in receiving a copy, call Jo Selem, 725-5037.

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## OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN ORNITHOLOGY AWARD

The state MOS Education Committee regularly makes awards to young people through 18 years of age to recognize achievement in ornithology and to encourage participation in this field. If you know of any young person deserving of recognition for their work in this area of natural science, please contact President Mike McClure, 531-6170, who will be glad to forward the name along with achievement(s).

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If the birds in your area don't have a natural source of water try to provide one. Water may be more critical than supplementary feed during the most severe weather in the winter.

Howard County MOS  
10617 Graelech Rd.  
Laurel, MD 20810

