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# Howard

A Chapter of the  
Maryland Ornithological Society



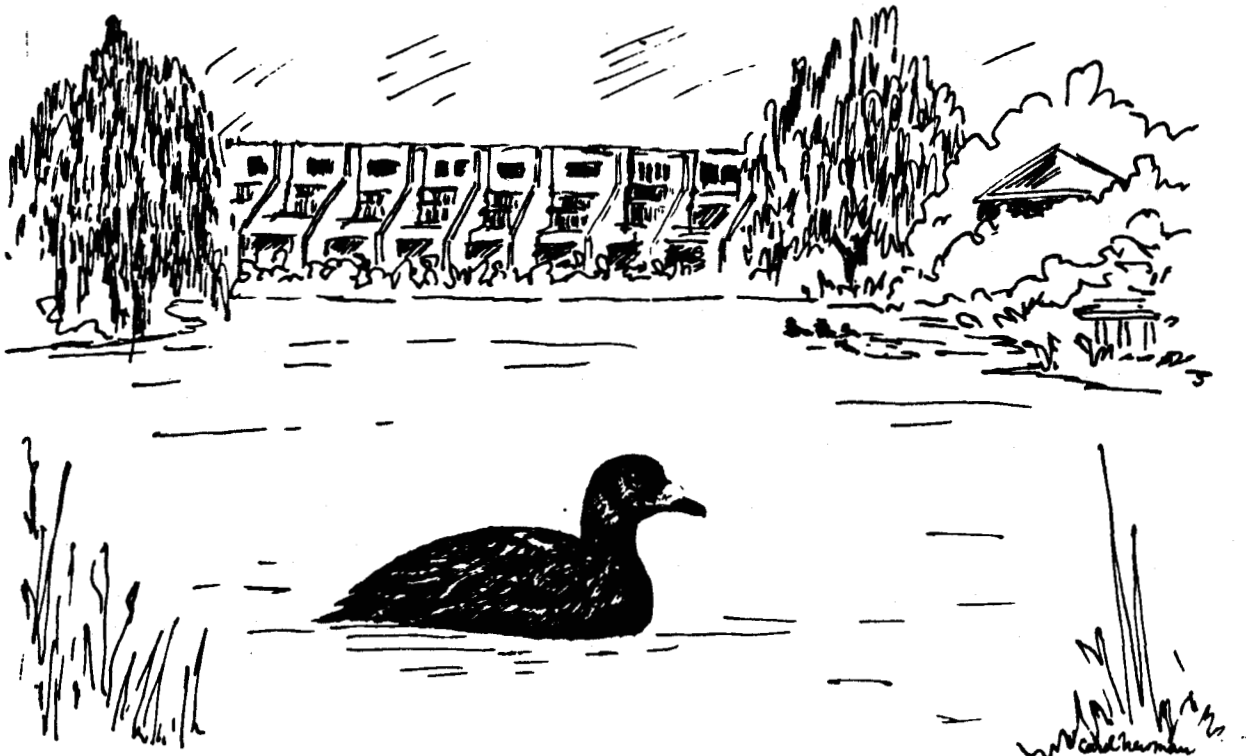
## BLACK SCOTER ON WILDE LAKE A FIRST FOR COUNTY Helen Zeichner

On a mild sunny morning in late October I was passing Wilde Lake as I do each time I leave my home and return to it. I make a habit of pulling over at various check points to scan with binoculars to see if anything new has arrived. During one of the checks on this Tuesday morning, I noticed a bird among the Ruddy Ducks that looked a little different. Although my initial observation was that the stiff tail was held like that of the Ruddy Ducks, I noticed some differences. Since the bird was sleeping with its head buried, I could not see any field marks on the head or bill. What was visible appeared to be completely black. It was larger than the Ruddy Ducks.

The second time I checked was about 9:45 a.m., but the bird's position had not changed; it was still sleeping. When I saw another birder, Bill Van Horn, approaching, I called him over. He agreed that something looked different, so I decided to return later with a scope and guides. After spending some time at home painting, I decided to break for lunch and check to see if there had been any change in the unidentified bird.

This time I was happy to find the bird in an upright posture with head and bill completely visible. After looking at the rounded black head, large orange knob on the bill, and large size, I was able to identify a mature male Black Scoter.

*(Text continued on next page)*



It was exciting to think that this seabird, so unusual in an inland location, was on Wilde Lake and that I was fortunate enough to find it. The important next step was to call and alert other birders. This resulted in the quick arrival of Connie Bockstie, Bonnie Ott, Jo Solem, and David Holmes. The scoter was back to resting with its bill buried in its wing. Occasionally, it lifted its head so that we could get a quick look at the bright orange patch. Because of the position of the bird in relation to the sun, David was not able to get a good angle for photographs so Connie, David, and I continued to the other side of the lake where the light was better and the bird was closer.

Back home I finally reached Marty Chestem, and then Bea Newkirk in order to start the Rare Bird Alert. A few additional people were able to see the bird before dark. Paul and Carol Newman live near this lake so they walked over during the afternoon. Carol made the drawing that accompanies this article. Early the next morning I met Bob Ringler and Mike Kerwin on the path, but the Black Scoter was nowhere to be found. It appears to have rested here for a single day before moving on.

October 29, 1991 will be a day I will long remember, when, for the first time, a Black Scoter spent the day in Howard County--and I was lucky enough to be there.

Editor's Note: This sighting does not need to be submitted to the MDDC Records Committee according to their guidelines. Surrounding counties in the Piedmont and west have records. The photographs, when developed, will enable it to be listed as an accidental visitor. Many thanks to David Holmes for photographing it, to Carol Newman for the drawing, and to Marty Chestem for the special display at the November meeting.

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## TRICOLORED HERON FIRST FOR HOWARD COUNTY Norman & Frances Saunders

The location of the sighting was approximately three-quarters of a mile upstream from the ~~Triadelphia Lake Road boat launch ramp on August 25, 1991.~~ We were in a canoe. At this point the reservoir begins to narrow as it approaches the Rt. 97 bridge. Due to relatively low water levels, the area was an extensive collection of mudflats and sandbars with little canoeable water and without foot access along either bank. The area where we observed the bird was a large mudflat on the Howard county side of the main stream of the Patuxent River. It was between 11:30 a.m. and 12:00 noon on a clear, breezy day.

The mudflat held about a dozen Canada Geese, eight Green-backed Herons, one Great Egret, six Great Blue Herons, several Killdeer, two Spotted Sandpipers, and the lone Tricolored Heron.

We first noted the bird from some distance. It stood out as being a medium-sized wader, noticeably smaller than the Great Blue Herons or the Great Egret. It was a very upright bird and noticeably larger than the Green-backed Herons there. At first appearance we thought it might be an adult Little Blue Heron since the predominant feather coloring visible from a distance was a dark blue-gray on head, neck, and body. As we drew closer, however, we noted two very obvious field marks that convinced us of the identity of this bird. First, there was distinct white striping on the throat and neck. Second, there was an extensive white belly that became increasingly obvious as we neared the bird. It was either already molting into basic plumage or was in very worn alternate plumage as none of the reddish feathering of a fresh alternate-plumaged bird was visible.

Editor's Note: Without a photograph or a specimen, this sighting will be placed in the hypothetical category on the Howard County list. Carroll and Montgomery Counties both have records of this species.

In addition to the Black Scoter and the Tricolored Heron, two other species were reported during the autumn period (August-November) which would be new county birds. Both species have been submitted to the MDDC Records Committee by the observers; if accepted, details will be published in this newsletter.

## CLUB MEETINGS -- PLEASE NOTE

As one of the ways to help reduce the county deficit, thermostats in all school buildings are being set back when students leave. In order to conserve heat in the cafeteria at Longfellow Elementary School, when attending monthly meetings we ask that you use the front door instead of the doors opening directly into the meeting room from the parking lot.

## COUNTY BUTTERFLY LIST AVAILABLE

Richard Smith is highly enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the butterfly species that can be found in the county. He has compiled a General Butterfly Occurrence List for Howard County, Maryland which lists their name, abundance, general period in which they can be found, and usual habitat(s). If you would like a copy, speak to him at any meeting, or send a self-addressed envelope with a first class stamp to Richard H. Smith, 5213 Eliot's Oak Road, Columbia, MD 21044. Dick says there is much to be learned about the butterflies of this county (he found a new one last year). He welcomes help in compiling butterfly lists for some of the major parks. Watch for summer trips he leads.

## MARYLAND BIRDLIFE MAILED

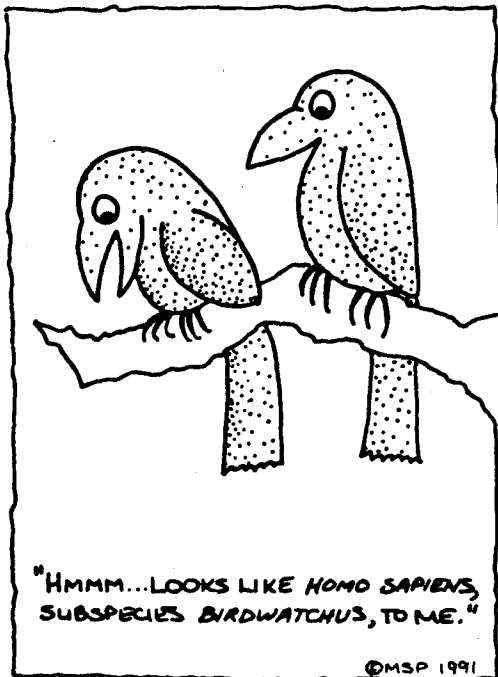
The Howard County Chapter has volunteered to continue mailing *Maryland Birdlife*, the state journal. Recently, the following individuals gathered at Maud Barks' home for a few hours to label and prepare the September 1990 issue for mailing. Thanks to Tom Strikwerda, Marty Chestem, Nancy Magnusson, Helen Zeichner, Ruth Leffler, Ralph Geuder, and Maud. The time goes quickly and the work is easy. If this sounds like something you'd be willing to help with occasionally, contact Maud at (410) 381-3240.

## HOWARD COUNTY ANNUAL LISTS DUE JANUARY 15, 1992

A list of all the birds seen in the county during the 1991 calendar year is being compiled for the thirteenth consecutive year. Did we break any records this year? Only you can help us decide. Assemble your sightings for the year (even if the list was compiled in your neighborhood or your yard) and mail it to Jane Farrell, 6324 Sandchain Road, Columbia, MD 21045 by January 15, 1992 (or call her at 410-381-7344 to let her know if you'll be a bit late). The length of the list isn't important. All of those submitting material will receive a printout of the thirteen year compilation.

## BIRDBRAINS

BY SUE PROBST



## BIRD ARTISTS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS!

Here's your chance for a bit of fame. The Maryland/DC Breeding Bird Atlas is being prepared for publication. A color cover is planned. The committee will consider either a photograph or a painting done expressly for this book. Comprehensive sketches or duplicate slides (do not send originals) should reach John Malcolm, 10205 Kindly Court, Gaithersburg, MD 20879 on or before January 31, 1992. For size and other details, write to the above address or contact him by phone at (301) 977-5788. You can leave a message.

## CENTENNIAL PARK TRIP LEADERS

The four autumn walks at Centennial Park co-sponsored with Howard County Recreation and Parks were, as usual, popular and successful in locating a variety of species. Thanks to the following birders who each led one of the walks: Martha Chestem, Jane Farrell, Nancy Magnusson, and Jo Solem.

## NEW NEWSLETTER FEATURE

The Birding Year in Howard County by Jo Solem has been completed except for July which will be published in the May-June 1992 newsletter. With this issue we begin a several part series by Bonnie Ott called Birding by Ear. It is intended to help the individual who is just beginning to learn bird songs. Tune in to the coming spring migration by following some of Bonnie's suggestions.

## BLUEBIRD BOXES AVAILABLE

Bookstore Manager Michele Wright invites members to check the stock of bluebird boxes at one of the coming meetings or call her at (410) 465-6057. Mark Wallace, one of the chairmen of the club's Boost Bluebirds project, is now constructing the boxes because the supply of Clif's boxes has finally been exhausted. For years Clifton Grant built and donated crafted boxes for which we were most grateful. With his death in 1991, bluebirds lost a friend. Mark's carefully built boxes will carry on the tradition. If you would like more information on how you can become a part of the club's bluebird/cavity nester project either by erecting boxes on private property or by monitoring boxes on already existing trails, call Mark Wallace at (301) 725-6370 or Joe Suess at (301) 596-9561 (leave a message).

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Thanks to Sue Probst for her cartoons "BirdBrains" which we will be publishing aperiodically. The newsletter welcomes drawings, notes, articles, etc. from its readers.

## SEVENTH ANNUAL MIDWINTER COUNT SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1992

Circle February 1 on your calendar as the day to help with the Midwinter Count. People are needed in the field or watching feeders. You can choose to count for any portion or all of the day. Note that this date was chosen because it was after hunting season. In answer to our request in the last newsletter, Martha and Don Waugh have volunteered to host the tally and evening meal. The get-together in the evening is a special time. If you can't come for the meal, you may want to drop in around 7:30 p.m. for the tally. Contact Jo Solem (301) 725-5037 to volunteer. If you own five acres or more in the county and would allow birders to census it, let us know; also, if you hear owls at this time of the year, we would appreciate knowing the general location. This information will be passed along to area coordinators who will contact you.

## BIRD DISPLAY AT MEETINGS

Not only did Marty Chestem produce a special Black Scoter display at the November meeting to feature the recent sighting, but she often creates displays for each program or for highlights of the season. Be sure to take the time to look them over whenever you attend a meeting.

## GREAT BLUE HERON DINES ON MUSKRAT

Madilyn Fletcher sent a photograph she had taken at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in July of 1990. She photographed a Great Blue Heron eating a muskrat. She said the heron flew off with the feet and part of the tail still dangling from its bill which must have been a heavy load. That meal should have taken the edge off the heron's appetite!

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Anne Coren, who presented the October program about the Galapagos, donated her honorarium to *The Nature Conservancy*.

# CALENDAR OF PROGRAMS, FIELD TRIPS, SPECIAL EVENTS

Programs are held at Longfellow Elementary School, 5470 Hesperus Dr., Columbia. Meeting is cancelled if schools are closed for any reason. Hospitality session at 7:30 p.m. Meeting/program begins at 8:00 p.m. Club bookstore opens at 7:30 p.m.

- JAN 9 **"CASTLES OF CLAY"** - Annual movie night with popcorn, hosted by Jane Geuder. Learn about the fascinating life cycle of a species of African termite. These tiny environmental engineers are tied through ecological relationships to most of the other organisms in their community. Plants, birds, reptiles, aborigines, and other mammals all depend upon the termite mounds in some way. This film, with its amazing photography and subtle British humor, will entertain as well as educate.
- FEB 13 **"WHERE THE MONEY GOES."** - Rick Leader, Chesapeake Bay Trust Coordinator, will speak about the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund (income tax checkoff). The emphasis of his talk will be habitat preservation which has been a bird club priority for years. He has promised to bring with him an individual who will describe a bird project which has benefited from the fund.

Field trips meet as described for each trip. Carpooling is encouraged with riders' sharing the cost of gas and tolls. Dress for field work with stout, reasonably waterproof footwear & layers of clothes. Trips do not always follow paths. No pets. Leaders may cancel due to inclement weather or fewer than 3 participants. Questions? Call leader or Field Trip Chair Bonnie Ott (410) 461-3361.

- JAN 25 **WINTER SEED SALE.** Order blanks will be mailed in late December. All members automatically receive blanks. If you wish to volunteer, need extra blanks, or want information, call Eileen at (410) 730-4362.
- JAN 26 **HABITAT WALK AT GWYNN ACRES TRAIL.** Co-sponsored with Howard Co. Rec & Parks. Leader: Bill Eckert. Call Bonnie (410) 461-3361 for info. Meet in lot in front of Dorsey Hall Community Center on Columbia Road at 1:00 p.m. 1 1/2-2 hours. *B.B. Jo*
- FEB 1 **SEVENTH ANNUAL MIDWINTER BIRD COUNT.** Call Jo Solem (301) 725-5037 to volunteer. Birders welcome at feeders or in the field, part or all day. Call Don or Martha Waugh (410) 381-8841 to reserve space and to let them know what you will bring to the tally dinner.
- FEB 22 **ALPHA RIDGE LANDFILL FOR GULLS.** Leader: Nancy Magnusson. Maximum 15 people. 1/2 day. Call Bonnie Ott (410) 461-3361 to reserve.

## BOARD MEETING:

Thursday, January 23 at 7:30 p.m. Longfellow Elementary School.  
No Board of Directors meeting in February.

MARCH-APRIL 1992 NEWSLETTER MATERIAL is due Feb. 3. Call or mail to Jo Solem, 10617 Graeoch Road, Laurel, MD 20723 telephone (301) 725-5037.

**The MARYLAND  
Check-off  
Works.  
Please Give.**



Eagle habitat is being protected.



Trees are being planted.



# BIRDING BY EAR

Bonnie Ott

An exciting way to start a spring morning is to identify a couple of dozen bird species before the sun rises. Obviously, the only way to accomplish this is to identify them by sound alone. There are many advantages to learning bird songs. Some species sing at dawn but are generally silent and difficult to find during the day (such as the American Woodcock and Common Nighthawk). Then there are those which often can only be identified with complete accuracy by hearing them (*Empidonax* flycatchers). Even during daylight hours it is not always possible to obtain a good look at a bird that might be flitting in the foliage. If it is singing, identification is made easier.

A few birders sit outside at night during migration in order to count the species passing overhead. While some people may consider this activity extreme, there is great satisfaction in being able to identify birds by voice alone. During a woodland stroll, for instance, a warbler flits about in the treetops. Though you spish, squeak, and whistle like a screech-owl, you still can't tell what it is. When you are about to give up in despair (and your neck is about to snap), the bird bursts forth with a wonderful "sweet, sweet, sweet, Suzie." At last you have it--a Black-throated Green Warbler.

Why am I writing about warbler songs when the warblers are elsewhere and most birds are not singing? Winter is a good time to begin learning songs (as well as visual identifying marks if you are just beginning the captivating study of birds): 1. birds will gradually start singing in January and February so it is possible to focus on just a few species at a time, and 2. since repetition is usually necessary, it is best to start well ahead of the main migration period. ***Do not expect to learn more than a few songs initially.*** Individuals who seem to have a special aptitude for learning songs have probably been birding for a number of years, usually need to review some songs occasionally, and often have a musical "ear." The latter isn't essential, but it helps; however, even birders who can't carry a tune can learn some songs.

(To be continued)

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## HOWARD COUNTY BIRD CLUB

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- ANNUAL MOVIE NIGHT
- MIDWINTER COUNT



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