



# Howard

A Chapter of the  
Maryland Ornithological Society



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Mar-Apr 1992

## BLUEBIRD PROGRAM HAS SUCCESSFUL YEAR

Mark Wallace & Joe Suess

More than 75 individuals helped to make 1991 a highly successful year for the Bird Club's bluebird program. A total of 1421 Eastern Bluebirds fledged from 2096 eggs laid in 244 boxes out of 748 monitored. We banded a total of 782 nestlings. A record 20 boxes contained three successful broods. Also, a record 51 Tree Swallows were fledged. In addition to the dozens of bluebird box monitors named below, there were numerous property owners who cooperated in allowing individuals to check boxes on their land. Our thanks to the following bluebirders who submitted reports and faithfully cared for boxes during a long, hot summer.

Anthony, Julie & Tony  
Ballentine, William R.  
Barnes, Dan  
Bogdan, Robert  
Botsai, Monika  
Bready, Frank  
Brinkley, Marilyn  
Brown, Gisela M.  
Buswell, Sue  
Colston, Kathy  
Conolley, Walt & Diane  
Conroy, Florence A.  
Cope, Regina  
Cullison, Ralph O.  
Dodd, Susan  
Erwin, John

Fisher, Rosemary  
Freas, Richard & Joanne  
Freeland, Robert H.  
French, Sandie  
Fulmer, Glenn  
Funkhouser, Sarah  
Ganbin, Barbara & Len  
Gebhart, Arthur  
Gilbert, Evelyn B.  
Grant, Lee & Carol  
Hegner, Richard  
Heller, James  
Hogue, Paul R.  
Hostetler, Eugene  
Howard, Dorothea  
Iager, Howard

Jackson, Clifton E.  
Jackson, Pat  
Keller, Tim  
Kielman, Elaine  
Kubitsky, David  
Lohr, Marie  
Lord, Margaret  
Lustbader, Sara  
Maunowski, Kimberly  
McClure, Mike & Grazina  
Muskovac, John J.  
Newkirk, Bea  
Olow, John  
Parlette, Donald  
Pearre, Robert  
Peters, Karl

Resau, James H.  
Robbins, Eleanor C.  
Rodgers, Hilde  
Serafinas, Phil  
Smith, Carolyn  
Smith, Keith L.  
Snyder, Charene  
Stanton, Hank  
Suess, Joseph  
Theis, William H.  
Thomann, Vera & Andre  
Wallace, Mark (his trail  
& others)  
Westwood, Felix  
Willett, Lisa  
Zerhusen, Peter

There are highlights in any breeding season. Dave Kubitsky watched 21 boxes at the Belmont Conference Center. Bob Bogdan fledged 52 bluebirds from 18 boxes in the vicinity of Ilchester-Landing Roads. Five of Regina Cope's 19 boxes were used by bluebirds in the far northwest part of the county; Sandie French checked eight boxes on Folly Quarter and Carroll Mill Roads; Evelyn Gilbert fledged 15 bluebirds from her eight boxes in the Highland area; and Howard Iager fledged 37 from his 13 boxes near Rocky Gorge Reservoir. Eleanor Robbins' 41 boxes in southern Howard County were highly productive, fledging 120 bluebirds. She began erecting bluebird boxes in this county about 1964. She noted a House Finch nest in a front porch wall bracket at Mrs. Hyde's that on May 16 contained four House Finch eggs, one Brown-headed Cowbird egg, and one cowbird young. On May 29, a House Finch fledged, but still in the nest were two House Finch eggs and two cowbird eggs. Carolyn Smith checked eight boxes on Triadelphia Road. Hank Stanton monitored 24 boxes near Elliott City which fledged 54 bluebirds. Felix Westwood has nine boxes in Woodbine.

Gisela Brown not only kept track of her four bluebird boxes but also watched a family of Barn Swallows that nested on her porch. Paul Hogue's concern for four baby bluebirds that hatched in 100° heat extended to rigging an awning to shade the box most of the day--they all survived. William Theis on Daisy Road fledged 14 bluebirds from only two boxes. He credits such outstanding success to installation of a 5" x 2" clear plastic container (from a cracker box) to the rear of the bluebird box lid. In it he placed mealworms and garden grubs which were especially helpful to the adult bluebirds during the cold and wet days of early spring. Vera Thomann near Clarksville noted that during the spring a Northern Parula (a warbler) visited the hummingbird feeder outside their kitchen window. Lisa Willett in West Friendship underscored the necessity for removing used bluebird nests immediately after the brood fledges since the female often begins reneesting quickly.

The *Bluebirds in the Parks* program which the club co-sponsors with the Department of Recreation and Parks produced 73 bluebirds from 18 of the 51 boxes in 15 park locations (totals included in numbers below). The most interesting report was that of a pair of House Finches using a bluebird box for two broods in David Force Park. It is the first recorded for the county.

(Continued on next page)

Snakes and other climbing predators continued to be a problem. In 1990, Mike and Sandy Meyerhoff began placing metal guards, consisting of a sandwich of two aluminum sheets, on their nest box mounting posts in Rockburn Branch Park in an attempt to reduce snake and raccoon predation. Their effort was so successful that Bill Eckert, who oversees the Rec and Parks bluebird program, intends to add the guards to poles in at least three other parks in 1992. The Bird Club is purchasing the supplies; the guards will be built and placed by park personnel. Park monitors for *Bluebirds in the Parks* in 1991 were as follows:

Julie Dunlap	Phil Jacobson	Sue Muller	Roman Stelmach
Susan Earp	Kiekebusch-Steinitz family	Mark Pendleton	Don Tharpe
Sharon Femrite	Mike Meyerhoff	Kirsten Saxe	Melanie Waters
Cliff Gross	Sandy Meyerhoff	Cathy Dunivin Schmitt	Michele Wright
Mary Ellen Hux	Jill Montgomery		

Results for the last four years for the entire county are shown for comparative purposes. The highest total number of bluebirds fledged occurred in 1988 when 1563 young were raised and 636 boxes monitored.

	<u>Boxes Monitored</u>	<u>Total Used</u>	<u>Eggs Laid</u>	<u>Eggs Lost</u>	<u>Eggs Hatched</u>	<u>Young Lost</u>	<u>Young Fledged</u>	<u>Young Banded</u>
1988	636	346	2405	586	1813	256	1563	778
1989	713	297	2383	606	1777	262	1515	838
1990	764	312	2269	470	1800	293	1507	776
1991	748	244	2096	508	1588	167	1421	782

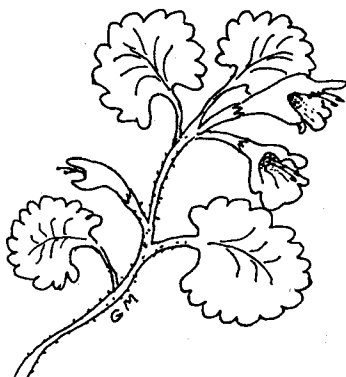
	<u>Chickadee</u>	<u>Titmouse</u>	<u>House Wren</u>	<u>Carolina Wren</u>	<u>Tree Swallow</u>	<u>Purple Martin</u>
1990	72	25	333	11	14	105
1991	48	18	491	45	51	149

Note: This was the last compilation that Joe Suess helped prepare before his death (see page 4). Mark Wallace will continue to chair the club's bluebird/cavity nester activities, but he needs and welcomes the help of individuals who would like to learn how they can play a role. To volunteer or for more information, call Mark at (301) 725-6370 or Connie at (410) 465-2063.

## FLOWER FEATURE

## GILL-OVER-THE-GROUND

Georgia Morris & Bob Solem



GILL-OVER-THE-GROUND - *Glechoma hederacea*  
(Also known as "Ground Ivy")

FAMILY - Mint (*Labiatae*)

HABITAT - Roadsides, waste ground, damp woods, and gardens

HOWARD COUNTY BLOOMING SEASON - Mid-March to mid-July

HOWARD COUNTY LOCATION - Rockburn Branch Park, Schooley Mill Park, Savage Park, Lake Elkhorn, Centennial Park, Cedar Lane Park, most roadsides and uncut areas.

PLANT - Sprawling, weak-stemmed plant that roots at joints, forming a dense mat or ground cover.

FLOWERS - Blue-violet tubular flower that grows in the leaf axil, often in threes. The tubular calyx has a five-lobed corolla--two upper lobes and three lower lobes, the lower center lobe much broader than the two outer lower lobes. There are four stamens--two prominent ones that hug the upper lobes of the flower. The style is two-lobed and the ovary is four-parted.

FRUIT - The 4-parted ovary gives rise to four single-seeded nutlets.

LEAVES - The leaves are rounded, scallop-edged with long weak petioles. The leaves remain green all winter.

SPECIAL INFORMATION - Considered a noxious weed by some, but for those who hunger for a bit of color at winter's end, Gill-over-the-ground is an early spring favorite. It is closely related to catnip as you can smell by crushing a leaf. The name *Gill* comes from the French "guiller," to ferment. In its native European habitat, Gill-over-the-ground was used to ferment beer. Tea brewed from its leaves was also used in times past as a remedy for backache.

# 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.

- MARCH 12 "BIRDING IN HAWAII" - Dave Harvey. This presentation combines two trips Thursday to three islands; mainly birding, but includes some lovely scenery too.
- APRIL 9 "NORTH DAKOTA BIRDING" - Greg Kearns, biologist at Jug Bay Natural Thursday Area. North Dakota may be the last place you had ever considered vacationing--until you learn what birds nest in the extensive refuges and prairie potholes of this sparsely populated state.
- 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 footgear & 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.
- MARCH 14 COLUMBIA LAKES. Leader: Jane Farrell (410) 381-7344. 1/2 day. Meet Saturday at concession stand at Centennial Park (south entrance) at 8:00 a.m. Visit Columbia lakes for migrating waterfowl.
- MARCH 29 CENTENNIAL PARK. Joint trip with Baltimore Bird Club. 8:00-11:00 a.m. Sunday Meet at west entrance parking lot (near tennis courts).
- APRIL 12, CENTENNIAL PARK SPRING WEEKLY WALKS. Co-sponsored with Dept of Rec and 19, 26 & Parks. Meet at parking lot at west entrance of Centennial Park off Cent. MAY 3 Lane. 8:00-11:00 a.m. Call Bonnie Ott (410) 461-3361 for info. Resident Sunday birds and migrants.
- APRIL 25 ROCKBURN BRANCH PARK. Joint trip with Baltimore Bird Club. 1/2 day. Saturday Meet at 7:30 a.m. at park office, Landing Road entrance. Early migrants.
- MAY 2 SPRING BUTTERFLY WALK AT SCHOOLEY MILL PARK. Leader: Richard Smith Saturday (410) 997-7439. 1/2 day. Meet at 9:30 a.m. in lot straight ahead at top of hill. Cancelled in case of rain; call leader if sky is overcast.
- MAY 3 SPRING WILDFLOWER WALK. Leader: Bob Solem (301) 725-5037. 2 hours. Meet Sunday at 1:00 p.m. in Cedar Lane Park off Md. 108. Paved paths through woods.
- MAY 9 MAY COUNT, 45<sup>th</sup> statewide census by MOS. More details next newsletter. Saturday Contact Paul Zucker (301) 279-7896 (H) or (301) 953-5000 x 4971 (O) for information or to volunteer.

BOARD MEETINGS: Thursday, March 26 at 7:30 p.m. Longfellow Elementary School.  
Thursday, April 23 at 7:30 p.m. Longfellow Elementary School.

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For the 1991-1992 membership year the following individuals joined the Bird Club as sustaining members or made a donation above their basic membership fee: Lois Carleton, Phil and Barbara Davis, Margo Garner, Dudley and Pat Jackson, Marjorie Mountjoy, Elise Seay, and Melinda Upp. They are to be commended for their commitment to help the Bird Club provide a wide range of services to the community.

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Thanks to Ralph Geuder and Margie Kupiec for the attractive flyer which they designed to advertise the club's nineteenth annual potluck on Feb. 29.

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Send winter bird sightings by March 7 to Jo Solem, 10617 Graeoch Road, Laurel, MD 20723, tel. (301) 725-5037. Compilation sheets for spring migration are available at any meeting or call the above number. Submit material for May-June 1992 newsletter to the above address by March 20.

## GRAY CATBIRD DINES ON BUMBLEBEES

During July 1990 Grazina McClure watched a Gray Catbird in her yard eating bumblebees that were attracted to the milkweed blossoms. The catbird would fly to a milkweed flower, knock a bee to the ground, then quickly drop down to pick up the insect. It appeared to swallow them immediately.

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Chesapeake Wildlife Sanctuary in Bowie is holding a fund raiser/dance on April 25. For further info, call the sanctuary at (301) 390-7010. Locally, contact Pam at (410) 799-0682.

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The Bird Club thanks member David Kirkwood who will do our printing at his company, Croatoan Publishing, Inc., at very attractive prices. We appreciate his willingness to support the club.

## IN MEMORIAM: Joseph H. Suess, 1929-1992



Joe Suess served as co-coordinator (with Mark Wallace) of the club's *Boost Bluebirds* program from 1988 until his death on January 14, 1992. With enthusiasm and concern for the declining Eastern Bluebird, he spent uncounted hours in recruiting individuals, monitoring nesting boxes, banding young, and keeping records. His cheerful personality made friends for the bluebird in all parts of the county. One of our members has written the following reminiscence of the bluebird activities of Joe, Mark, and Frances Ehlers (who died in 1990). They were an extraordinarily committed trio. Joe and Frances cannot be replaced; they can, however, serve as a continuing inspiration to others who are or will become part of this conservation effort. To honor them, the Board of Directors will dedicate the club's bluebird publications to their memory when the booklets are reissued.

Joe first appeared in my life many years ago when he was monitoring Fran's nesting boxes while she was away on a trip. At that time I think he was a novice, newly bitten by the bluebird preservation bug. It was not long, however, before the triumvirate of Mark, Joe and Frances was operating in high gear. Their activities seemed endless: nesting box monitoring from March through August, often into September. On the hottest days of summer, they'd all be out on their trails checking their boxes. For Joe, as well as Frances, this was often in defiance of doctors' orders.

When they were not out monitoring, there would be continuous telephoning to compare notes, to discuss problems, to relate odd adventures, or to propose new measures to control their nemesis, the House Sparrow (details of the latter best forgotten). Often, too, there were frantic calls to locate a certain-age brood in which to house an orphan bluebird or two.

In fall and winter, they were still at it--comparing and compiling data for Joe and Mark to computerize, filling out reports for various data-collecting groups, repairing and repainting nesting boxes, and eternally seeking new nesting box locations. In his spare time, Joe also kept Frances supplied with raccoon guards and other weapons to ward off the enemies--every effort for the bluebirds!

Regardless of what else was happening in the world, nesting box monitoring and related bluebird activities were always top priorities for those three bluebirders. Frequently, I had to shake my head in wonder and exasperation, but I always had to admire their persistence, dedication, and unswerving commitment.

I fully realize that there are many other dedicated individuals monitoring nesting boxes in Howard County. I just don't know them as I did Joe, Fran and Mark. Even now, I can see Joe and Frances in some bluebird heaven comfortably settled in and compiling their lifetime totals of clutches, bandings, fledglings, losses, and unused boxes. At the same time, I see them checking on Mark, needing him to get going on his trail monitoring and bugging him to find equally dedicated recruits to take over their trails.

--Lois Carleton

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### ACTIVE NEST RECORDS NEEDED

For those among our readers who spend time in the field during the breeding season, there are opportunities to further knowledge of Howard County birds. There are a number of species that breed in this county for which there are no active nest records: Whip-poor-will, Fish Crow, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-winged Warbler, Pine Warbler, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Vesper Sparrow. In some cases courtship, adults with nest materials, or feeding of fledged young have been observed, but what is still needed are observations of a nest with egg, nest with young, or an incubating bird. A photograph or an observation by a second experienced individual is necessary. If you locate a nest of any of the above species in the county, contact Nancy Magnusson (410) 461-8912, Marty Chestem (410) 730-1527, David Holmes (410) 730-7083, Jane Farrell (410) 381-7344, or Jo Solem (301) 725-5037.

### RICE AT WEDDINGS IS FOR BIRDS

With the usual summer weddings coming soon, it is worth a reminder that you need not be concerned about throwing rice--instant or regular--at the bride and groom. Some misguided soul started the rumor that rice would swell in birds' stomachs and kill them. In 1985, a bill was even introduced in the Connecticut legislature which would have banned instant rice at weddings! Rice in any form needs boiling water to swell; the temperature in any bird's stomach does not approach that. Steven Sibley of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology says we can all "toss away." Unfortunately, this bit of folk biology will be as difficult to stamp out as the frequently heard statement that birds will desert their nests if a human touches eggs or nestlings--that at least has the virtue of deterring some children from bothering nesting birds.

## BIRDING BY EAR, II Bonnie Ott

It may seem a daunting task to learn more than 200 songs. (At this point we won't even mention call notes.) With patience and practice it is possible to build a base of songs with which you feel confident. You can add to these at your leisure. Some songs are very simple. Others are more complex or confusingly similar to ones you already know. I like to divide most songs into five basic categories:

1. name-sayers,
2. songs that relate to words or phrases,
3. trillers,
4. songs that have no apparent association with anything (but which you try to learn anyway),
5. songs that sound like a specific thing (non-bird--often not at all musical).

1. The name-sayers are the most simple. They include the following: *Killdeer*, *Whip-poor-will*, *Chuck-will's-widow*, *Northern Bobwhite*, *Carolina Chickadee*, *Eastern Wood Pewee*, *Eastern Phoebe*, *American Pipit*, and *Blue Jay*.

2. Songs that are easily linked to words include the following:

- Barred Owl - Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you-all?
- Olive-sided Flycatcher - Quick; three beers! Hic; three beers!
- Tufted Titmouse - Peter, Peter, Peter
- Carolina Wren - Tea-kettle, tea-kettle, tea-kettle
- White-eyed Vireo - Quick, give me the rain check.
- Warbling Vireo - When I sees it, I will seize it, then I'll squeeze it till it squirts.
- Yellow Warbler - Sweet, sweet, I'm so sweet.
- Chestnut-sided Warbler - Please, please, pleased to meet you!
- Ovenbird - Teacher, teacher, teacher
- Common Yellowthroat - Witchity, witchity, witchity
- Eastern Meadowlark - Spring of the year
- Rufous-sided Towhee - Drink your tea.
- White-throated Sparrow - Old Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody or Oh, sweet Canada, Canada, Canada
- American Goldfinch - Potato chip or per-chick-o-ree

3. Trillers can pose a problem, but habitat can help. A trill from high in a stand of conifers is most likely a Pine Warbler. Marshy areas usually host ~~Swamp Sparrows~~ ~~Suburban area trillers~~ are most often ~~Dark-eyed Juncos~~ (fall through spring) or Chipping Sparrows (spring through fall). Worm-eating Warblers and Field Sparrows both stay close to the ground, but look for Field Sparrows in open areas and Worm-eating Warblers on brushy wooded hillsides. There are subtle differences in the tone and speed of trills. Visual verification is usually a necessity.

(To be concluded)

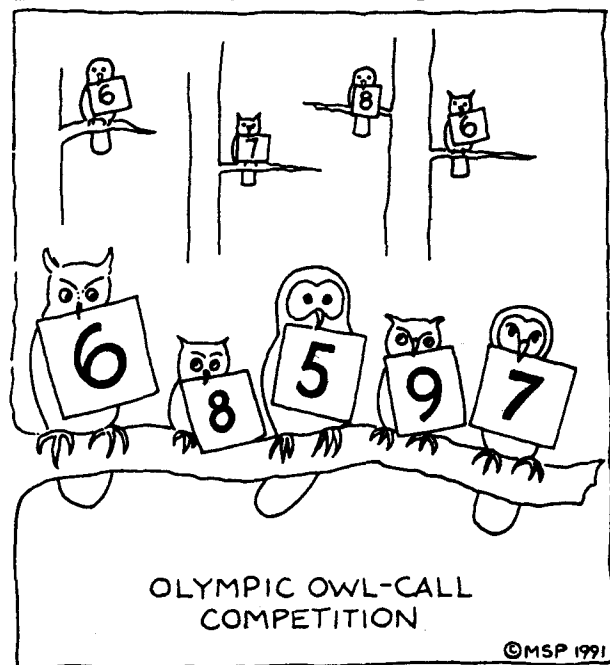
### THANKS FOR SEED SALE HELP!

I was grateful for all the efficient help during the Bird Club's winter seed sale on Saturday, January 25. The friendliness and enthusiasm of those helping makes the day pleasant. Working outside were Bob Dettner, Tim Keller, Warren Drell, Tina Fiester, Mark Marden, P. Esfandiari, Mike Bockstie, Mark Wallace, Don Kyle, Connie Bockstie, Mary Coffey, Jane Farrell, Bob Solem, John Greer, John Clegg, Steve Koziol, and Dave Kubitsky. Working at the desk or in the bookstore were Helen Zeichner, Jo Solem, Linda Hammil, Linda McDaniel, Julie Kubitsky, Sue Probst, Nancy Magnusson, and Michele Wright (bookstore manager). Marty Chestem stocked and staffed the special conservation table. A tasty array of baked goods was provided by Romayne Smith, Phyllis Jovich, Eileen Clegg, Carol Newman, Linda Hammil, and Mary Force. The individuals who contributed to rainforest conservation over and above their seed order will be listed in a future newsletter when the club's total contribution this year is announced.

-Eileen Clegg

### BIRDBRAINS

BY SUE PROBST



# CONSERVATION REPORT

Bob Solem

Motor vehicles are one of the principal causes of air pollution (nearly 60%) in the Baltimore-Washington region. The sun reacts with ozone causing pollutants (primarily nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds) to cause SMOG. As much as 30% of the nitrogen oxides entering the Chesapeake Bay come from the air. These oxides cause rapid algae blooms blocking sunlight from bay grasses and depleting oxygen.

In Maryland, two "Clean Car" bills (SB 284 and HB 549) would mandate phasing in cleaner cars, known as Low Emission Vehicles (LEVs) that would produce 50% less ozone-causing pollutants than at present. The LEVs will cost about \$70 to \$170 more per car--less than the cost of power windows or fancy hubcaps. An alternative is more restrictive controls on industrial air pollution sources. To gain the equivalent advantage of the LEV program, air pollution amounting to 13 Bethlehem Steels or 470 Heileman breweries would have to be eliminated. Or, Marylanders would have to reduce the number of miles driven by 25 million miles per day!

The Chickadee Check-off must be reauthorized this year. Senate Bill 135 repeals the 1992 termination date for voluntary donations on the state income tax form to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund and makes the provision permanent. The bill seems to be favorably received, but follow its progress closely. You did remember to contribute this year when you prepared your Maryland tax return, didn't you?

Later this year we have to work to ensure reauthorization of the federal Endangered Species Act. The act provides for the conservation of endangered and threatened species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. This act has helped the Whooping Crane, the Brown Pelican, the Peregrine Falcon, and the California Condor. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service lists a species for protection after a scientific review. Listing is followed by a protection and recovery plan. The Endangered Species Act should be strengthened to provide greater protection for ecosystems, not just individual species.

Locally, are you wondering what to do with your used motor oil, anti-freeze and batteries? Take them to the Alpha Ridge Landfill Customer Service Center for safe collection and recycling.

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## HOWARD COUNTY BIRD CLUB

Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society  
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- BLUEBIRD RESULTS
- BIRDING BY EAR (II)