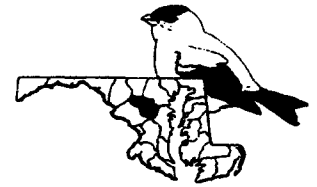




THE GOLDFINCH



A CHAPTER OF THE MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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12TH ANNUAL HOWARD COUNTY MIDWINTER BIRD COUNT - FEBRUARY 1, 1997

BY DAVID HOLMES AND JOANNE SOLEM

Where were YOU on the first of February? Would you have trouble answering that question for a man with a badge? 98 of the area's most fortunate citizens would have no difficulty whatsoever with that query. They were enjoying a wonderful balmy day outdoors counting birds. The temperature reached the low 50's and the day started calm with only an afternoon breeze. It was a lovely day to be out! So, for all of you who weren't, better luck next year!

The open water in a mild winter gave us a record 21 species of waterfowl (previous high, 19) and the presence of all that variety allowed us to tie our overall species count high of 94 which we set in 1994. And this was in a year with next to no winter finches! We also set new records for hours on foot (238.6), total party hours (238.5), and kicked up high end counts for 42 species (6 third highs, 20 second highs and 14 new high counts plus 2 more high ties). Of these "high mentions", 13 were waterfowl, 7 were for sparrows/towhee, and 9 were standard woods residents. We added White-fronted Goose to our cumulative species list (now 125), and enjoyed the Red-breasted Mergansers and Rough-legged Hawk which appeared on our count for only the third time. But, I think I'm most blown away by the numbers of Redheads, a bird which is often tough just to find in the county in any given year. We located 69 birds in 7 different locations! Last year's 9 birds were our first ever. WOW!

We were a little more puzzled by the new low counts for American Kestrel and the second low counts for Mourning Dove, Northern Flicker, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet, We've simply learned not to

expect Purple Finches (our 2 tied their second low) and apparently House Finches are still not over the effects of the conjunctivitis which rampaged through the population two winters ago. Their count of 735 was 85 under their count for our first year when we managed well under half this year's number of party hours. I'm intrigued by the apparent fluctuations in House Sparrow numbers (last 5 year's totals: 511, 965, 123, 638, and 927). Is this uneven coverage? (doubtful), inattention? (possible). Did any of you know of (or count) the flock in the line of scrub west of the old Faulkner Ridge Elementary School which has moved in this winter? And how many of you would think it worthwhile to keep track of a House Sparrow flock over a season or more! The Maryland Breeding Bird Atlas reports this as a declining species. We may rejoice but could we learn things by keeping track of how and why? How many of you have discovered that at least 2/3 of a House Sparrow flock will respond positively to spishing - at least on the first two or three occasions you try it? Enough already! Our Downy Woodpecker count plunged to pre-1944

levels but Carolina Wrens rebounded well from last winter's population drop. Our total of individuals (ca.61,831) was quite good since we found no large blackbird flocks (and how many of us are thinking - whew!).

Comparisons with Triadelphia Christmas Count are most interesting for one family in particular. What a difference a landfill makes! Our gull counts were about standard totaling 8400 birds. Triadelphia always had more gulls than Howard County when the Laytonville Landfill was still operating but this year - ? Only 170 total gulls appeared on that count with no Black-backs!

Other comparisons suggest that there was less late sparrow movement than in some years although Towhees, Field, and Fox Sparrows were lower on the Midwinter Count by 1/3 or more and Songs, White-throats, and Juncos were lower by lesser amounts. But, Am. Tree, Savannah, and White-crowned Sparrows were higher. The date difference also shows up in our lower totals for thrush relatives, kinglets, creepers, warblers, and goldfinches. The land area of a Christmas Bird Count is roughly 176.72 square miles, The land area of Howard County is 252.2 square miles or 1.43 times a CBC circle, Why then are our Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers substantially lower than on Triadelphia when our Red-bellieds are appropriately higher? Do we really have double the number of vultures in the county or are we over-counting more seriously? Or, did we find more roosts? Vultures were scant at the landfill so that is not the answer. My last printable curiosity this year is about Red-breasted

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Nuthatches. Triadelphia had 5 and we missed them completely. Obviously, it was not a flight year. 14 years of fall banding data from Appledore Is., Maine show a clear pattern of major movement every 3rd. year; 1983, 86, 89, 92-93, and 95. Granted, we have very little pine woods habitat in Howard County but our "better" numbers came in 1986, 87, best in 91, and modest in 96 (remember the year change between fall and midwinter). In all other years we spotted from 0 - 10 birds. Where have they gone and where did the 1991 birds come from? Wouldn't it be fun to have time to investigate some of these issues!!

Our 16 feeder watchers listed 37 species and to my surprise, their most numerous bird was Am. Goldfinch followed at some distance by House Finch and Mourning Dove. Then, there was a cluster of Juncos, Cardinals, Chickadees, Titmice, and White-throats. And most amazing, Canada Geese outnumbered House Sparrows at Howard County bird feeders. I just report the facts; I don't explain them.

A disappointment was the miniscule owlwing effort on such a perfect weather

morning. Our totals reflect this lack terribly appropriately.

Great thanks go to Jo Solem and our area leaders; Mark Wallace, Nancy Magnusson, Dave and Maureen Harvey, Mike McClure, Doug Odermatt, Bonnie Ott, and Jim Wilkinson for the people and paper organizing which make this count such a success. Chuck Stirrat did the initial data entry and printouts and Mike McClure took care of the raptor data. We are thoroughly grateful to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission and all the private landowners who have graciously provided access to their interesting birding areas. And enormous thanks go to Don and Martha Waugh for hosting our tally rally once again. That is always a perfect way to wrap up an enjoyable day and they make it seen so easy.

Now, either we find a way for me to afford retirement, or perhaps we can find a good graduate student to come play with our data. I think there's enough here to develop a decent quality Master's thesis although we might want till 20 years for a PhD. Candidate. Keep your eyes and ears open. And we'll see you all with friends next year at our lucky 13th Howard County Annual Midwinter Bird Count. *Save February 7!*

Participants in the Mid-winter count were Karen Altman, Maud Banks, Tish Bell, Mary-Jo Betts, Jim Blanchard, Rick Blom, Bill & Karan Blum, Carl O. Brudin III, Ellen & Hal Bryson, Marty Chestem, Lisa Colangelo, Dennis Coskren, Raiph & Marge Cullison, Ward Ebert, Darlus & Paula Ecker, Jane Farrell, George Gaffney, Carol Garza, Jane & Ralph Geuder, Tina Glorioso, Edwin Gould, Dave & Maureen Harvey, Dick Hegner, Don Henderson, John Hoffman, David Holmes, Paul Jung, Patsy Kennan, Michael Kerwin, Dave Kubitsky, Bill Kulp, Jr., Bill Kulp, Sr., Mike Leumas, Dennis Luck, Bob & Brigitte Lund, Nancy Magnusson, Grazina & Mike McClure, John McKitterick, Elayne & Jeff Metter, Dwight Muller, Rosamond Munro, Diane Nagengast, Carol & Paul Newman, Doug Odermatt, Daryl Olson, Richard Orr, Peter Osenton, Bonnie Ott, Dawn Parker, Jeremy Pearse, Joe Picard, Ron Polniaszek, Suzanne Probst, Ann Marie Raterman, James H. Resau, Nanine Rhineland, Chandler Robbins, Arthur Rogers, Steve Sanford, Eugene Scarpulla, Kurt Schwarz, Susan Setterberg, Jay Sheppard, Craig Sholley, Skip Skipton, Bob & Jo Solem, Hank Stanton, Lisa Stevens, Chuck Stirrat, Tom Strikwerda, Paul Sturm, Eve Sunell, Debbie Terry, David & Robin Todd, Robin & Will Tress, Mark Wallace, Don Waugh, Bill & Sue Wendell, Carol & Jim Wilkinson, Michele Wright, Helen Zeichner, Paul & Sherry Zucker.

HOWARD COUNTY MIDWINTER COUNT RESULTS - FEBRUARY 1, 1997

SPECIES	COUNT	SPECIES	COUNT	SPECIES	COUNT	SPECIES	COUNT
PIED-BILLED GREBE	2	COOPER'S HAWK	14	NORTHERN FLICKER	69	SAVANNAH SPARROW	12
GREAT BLUE HERON	8	RED-SHOULDERED HAWK	64	PILEATED WOODPECKER	45	FOX SPARROW	3
TUNDRA SWAN	25	RED-TAILED HAWK	87	EASTERN PHOEBE	2	SONG SPARROW	855
MUTE SWAN	2	ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK	1	HORNED LARK	8	SWAMP SPARROW	30
CANADA GOOSE	9939	AMERICAN KESTREL	13	BLUE JAY	531	WHITE-THROATED SPARROW	1564
GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE	1	RING-NECKED PHEASANT	1	AMERICAN CROW	3317	WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW	90
WOOD DUCK	3	WILD TURKEY	1	FISH CROW	165	DARK-EYED JUNCO	1331
GREEN-WINGED TEAL	5	AMERICAN COOT	9	CROW SPECIES	3548	RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD	1533
AMERICAN BLACK DUCK	212	KILLDEER	13	CAROLINA CHICKADEE	960	EASTERN MEADOWLARK	48
MALLARD	1008	COMMON SNIFE	2	TUFTED TITMOUSE	779	COMMON GRACKLE	7043
NORTHERN PINTAIL	18	RING-BILLED GULL	2309	WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH	190	BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD	314
GADWALL	4	HERRING GULL	5163	BROWN CREEPER	33	BLACKBIRD SPECIES	4718
AMERICAN WIGEON	63	ICELAND GULL	1	CAROLINA WREN	228	PURPLE FINCH	2
CANVASBACK	26	LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL	4	WINTER WREN	25	HOUSE FINCH	735
REDHEAD	69	GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL	412	GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET	124	AMERICAN GOLDFINCH	353
RING-NECKED DUCK	56	GULL SPECIES	562	RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET	1	HOUSE SPARROW	927
COMMON GOLDENEYE	48	ROCK DOVE	915	EASTERN BLUEBIRD	224	SPECIES TOTAL	94
BUFFLEHEAD	4	MOURNING DOVE	849	HERMIT THRUSH	14	INDIVIDUALS	61831
HOODED MERGANSER	34	EASTERN SCREECH OWL	3	AMERICAN ROBIN	54	PARTY HOURS - FOOT	238.6
COMMON MERGANSER	114	GREAT HORNED OWL	6	NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD	403	PARTY HOURS - CAR	58.1
RED-BREASTED MERGANSER	2	BARRED OWL	7	CEDAR WAXWING	271	PARTY HOURS - FEEDERS	39
RUDDY DUCK	4	BELTED KINGFISHER	24	EUROPEAN STARLING	6219	PARTY HOURS - OWLING	3.5
BLACK VULTURE	227	RED-HEADED WOODPECKER	1	YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER	15	PARTY MILES - FOOT	204.9
TURKEY VULTURE	543	RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER	289	NORTHERN CARDINAL	1156	PARTY MILES - CAR	644.9
BALD EAGLE	3	YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER	5	EASTERN TOWHEE	45	PARTY MILES - OWLING	32
NORTHERN HARRIER	1	DOWNY WOODPECKER	228	AMERICAN TREE SPARROW	124	PARTY HOURS - TOTAL	288.5
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK	19	HAIRY WOODPECKER	43	FIELD SPARROW	241		

MAY COUNT IS SATURDAY, MAY 10, 1997

BY PAUL ZUCKER

Since 1948, the Maryland Ornithological Society has conducted an annual May Count. Everyone is urged to join in, no matter your skill level. Identification is only part of being successful; you have to spot the bird first, so every pair of eyes helps. And, it is great fun. The compiler for Howard County is Paul Zucker. Call him at (301) 279-7896 (Home) or (410) 792-5000 x4971 (Office), e-mail ZUCK-ERPA1@central.ssd.jhuapl.edu to participate in the count. Paul will pair you up with someone else if you'd like, based on your skill level, and assign you an area to cover. Special requests are honored whenever possible. Or, if you prefer, you may contact one of the following area coordinators: Mike McClure (410) 531-2780, Bonnie Ott (410) 461-3361, Jo Solem (301) 725-6037, or Chuck Stirrat (410) 531-2417. If you are interested in being an area coordinator, please contact Paul Zucker.

HOW IT WORKS: The county has been divided into seven areas (as for the Winter Count), each with an area coordinator. The area coordinators will assemble the parties and combine their results after the count. All parties however must make sure their day lists are delivered to the tally rally. Leaders are responsible for tracking party miles and time, names and addresses of the participants, and documentation for unusual sightings. Observers within talking or shouting distance of each other are considered one party. If two or more birders spend an hour together on foot, that constitutes one

party hour; however, if one member is separated from the other for ½ hour, then the total is 1½ party hours. All birds (including, ugh, Starlings, and House Sparrows) must be counted. Large flocks can be estimated. If you see something exciting outside your assigned area, make a note of the time, direction of flight, and location. The sighting can be reported to the area coordinator for that sector at the tally; and the bird may be added to the count if we are assured double counting did not take place. *Separate tally sheets and hours need to be kept for feeders and for owling.*

UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS: Any species not previously recorded in the county or listed on the checklist needs to be documented. Acceptable documentation includes the name of the person making the identification, names of all others who saw the bird, when and where it was seen, lighting conditions, optics used, behavior of the bird, time period observed, field marks, etc. Sometimes sketches help. Some examples of what is considered unusual are: *Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Glossy Ibis, Tundra Swan, Snow Goose, Green-winged Teal, American Black Duck, Northern Pintail, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Greater or Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Merlin, Wild Turkey, Virginia Rail, Sora, American*

Coot, Semipalmated Plover, Upland Sandpiper, Sanderling, White-rumped Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Long-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's Phalarope, Bonaparte's Gull, Herring Gull, Caspian Tern, Forster's Tern, Barn Owl, Chuck-will's-widow, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Alder Flycatcher, Horned Lark, Black-capped Chickadee, Winter Wren, Marsh Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Loggerhead Shrike, Philadelphia Vireo, Golden-winged Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Summer Tanager, Pine Siskin, Dickcissel, American Tree Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, or Rusty Blackbird.

THE TALLY DINNER!! Everyone who participates in the count is welcome to attend the tally pot luck. If you are unable to attend, please make arrangements with your area leader or the compiler to turn in or phone in results during the count day or early that evening. Call Jan Randle at (410) 531-6296 to let her know the number of people coming from your party and your choice of food to share. Non-cooks and all day counters can ask Jan for alternative suggestions. Dinner usually begins between 6:30 and 7:00 pm. The tally will begin at 8 pm. The Randles live in Braeburn which is on the west side of Cedar Lane in the section north of MD 32 and south of the stoplights at Owen Brown and Freetown Roads. The entrance road to the area is Braeburn Road, turn right on Lochridge and continue to first house on left after Hillbrook Drive, 6424 Lochridge Road.

50 YEARS OF BIRD RECORDS IN ONE FOREST

Chan Robbins will mark his fiftieth year of bird research in the Belt Woods Natural Environmental Area (NEA) this spring. This record will be commemorated by the Western Shore Conservancy, details of which were given at the April Howard Bird Club meeting. Chan has been monitoring the tract since 1947; the tract has the highest density of nesting songbirds recorded anywhere in North America according to the Western Shore Conservancy.

Belt Woods NEA has what scientists believe is the last virgin old growth hardwood forest on the Coastal Plain and is designated as a National Natural Landmark. The tract of 109 acres was part of the Seton Belt Home Farm. Now the remaining 515 acres of the Seton Belt Home Farm has been preserved through the efforts of the Western Shore Conservancy, the state of Maryland, and other conservation organizations. The Western Shore Conservancy needs additional support now, the most immediate of which of

\$80,000 in matching funds for restoration of the farm property.

The Howard Bird Club has contributed \$2,000 to the Western Shore Conservancy for this effort in the form of a challenge grant. Come to the April 1997 Howard Bird Club meeting for information. Details of the challenge grant were given to MOS at their March 21 Board meeting and will be publicized at the convention in Ocean City in May.

Chan Robbins has published details about the richness of the tract. He found that, although the numbers of neotropical migrants has declined 37-45% in recent years in many undisturbed woodlands, the Belt Woods NEA shows a decline of only 11% of the bird population. The reason, Chan said in 1991 testimony, is "The highly productive Greensand soils of the tract impart a very high carrying capacity (ability to support vegetation). Thus each acre of the SBF (Seton Belt Farm) forest conserved provides at least twice the value of forest growing on poorer soils; this

explains the exceptionally high bird population found here."

The surrounding woodlands are the lifeline to the virgin tract of forest, and together they function as an old growth forest ecosystem. These woodlands are critical to the survival of the Belt Woods NEA because the virgin tract will not be able to survive as an isolated forest island. The property contains extensive forested wetlands which are designated as Wetlands of Special State Concern. These wetlands received their designation due to the high density of forest interior dwelling birds on the property. Part of the Seton Belt Home Farm have always been forest and are believed to have never been farmed. The Home Farm contains about 350 acres of old growth and relatively mature forest and is home to at least 10 specimen trees which include several potential county and state champions (such as a 63-foot river birch and a 60-foot red maple).

WINTER BIRD RECORDS: DECEMBER 1, 1996 TO FEBRUARY 28, 1997 BY JOANNE SOLEM

This winter lacked extended periods of cold and snow cover. There were no major flights of boreal species and feeder watchers complained of little activity and generally low numbers of birds. This count period includes the midwinter count (2/1) which is summarized in a separate article; some individual sightings from the count appear in this compilation.

No loons were reported and only a single **Horned Grebe** which was seen on the Brighton Dam Road quarry pond (QUARY) 2/13 (MW,MC,HZ). **Tundra Swans** usually winter in low numbers in the county; 25 were found on midwinter count (HCMC) of which 17 were on Triadelphia Reservoir (TRIRS)(NM). **Snow Geese**, as usual, were few with the high of 3 white phase at Waterford Farm (WATFD) 2/18 (MW). A single blue phase was at the Elliott Road pond (ELLRD) 1/8 (MC) and was last reported from a pond near Daisy 2/25 (MW). Even the most casual observer is aware of the dramatic increase in **Canada Geese** in this county during the last decade. At WATFD 2/13 a total of 2250 were tallied; that location & all other ponds checked that day turned up 3686 (MW,MC,HZ). A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was reported from a pond on MD 144 on 2/1 (POs)—only the second county record.

Although many farm ponds froze completely, the weather was not severe enough to freeze all lakes and reservoirs so a good variety of waterfowl wintered. Five **Green-winged Teal** were found in two locations 2/1 (4-NM; 1-MW). **American Black Ducks** usually winter in good numbers; this year was no exception. Midwinter count found 212; 2/16 there were 155 at the QUARY and 115 on a cove at the upper end of TRIRS (JF,J&RS). Triadelphia Christmas Count (TCCT) 12/21 located **Northern Pintails** on TRIRS (RMa). HCMC had a total of 18 which is exceptionally high for this county. Mason's party walked a portion of the reservoir with a Questar which enabled them to come up with a **Eurasian Wigeon** for either the third or fourth county record and the only one in February (others are March & April). **Shovelers** and **Gadwall** were reported a few times with up to three birds. **American Wigeon** were in low numbers till 2/1 when 31 were at Brendel's on Union Chapel Road (MW). **Canvasbacks**, which often are among the most common wintering waterfowl, were

EACH SEASON HOWARD COUNTY BIRD SIGHTINGS ARE COMPILED AND SUBMITTED TO **MARYLAND BIRDLIFE** AND **FIELD NOTES**. BECAUSE BOTH PUBLICATIONS PROVIDE OVERVIEWS FOR LARGE AREAS, ONLY A FRACTION OF HOWARD COUNTY SIGHTINGS ARE PUBLISHED. THE RECORDS ARE NOT LOST, HOWEVER, FOR THEY ARE THE BASIS FOR COUNTY RECORDS. ALL RECORDS ARE WELCOMED AND APPRECIATED. ANY INDIVIDUAL WHO TURNS IN SEASONAL SIGHTINGS RECEIVES A COPY OF THE COUNTY COMPILATION. TO REQUEST A FORM ON WHICH TO LOG DATES, PLEASE CALL (301) 725-5037. THE BOARD HAS REQUESTED THAT A DIGEST OF THE SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS APPEAR IN THE NEWSLETTER. OBSERVERS ARE REFERRED TO BY THEIR INITIALS (SEE THE LIST AT THE END OF THE ARTICLE). LOCATIONS ARE WRITTEN OUT THE FIRST TIME CITED; THEREAFTER, ABBREVIATIONS ARE USED.

reported from the Columbia lakes and Centennial (CENPK) but 15 on 1/3 at Wilde Lake (WILLK)(C&PN) and 17 on 12/29 at Lake Elkhorn (LKELK)(J&CW) were hardly exceptional numbers. On the other hand, **Redheads**, which have been a special sighting in the county for as long as this observer can remember, became one of the most common wintering ducks this year with reports from almost a dozen locations. This was part of a larger geographic pattern which we can only hope will continue. HCMC turned up 69 including one flock of 39 on a pond on MD 144 (MK). This was far more than any flock ever before recorded in the county. By 2/20 presumably the same birds had rearranged themselves slightly in other locations so that the QUARY had 45 and Clark's farm on Roxbury Road had 25 (MW). Early in the winter period on 12/14 WILLK had 34 **Ring-necked Ducks** (DOD), but numbers were not really concentrated until the beginning of migration in late February when on 2/21 at ELLRP there were 140 (MW). **Greater Scaup** were reported from two locations: 1/23 CENPK 1 female (HZ) and 2/2 pond on MD 144 1 male (D&MH). **Lesser Scaup** were in extremely low numbers with the high a mere 3 on 2/3 at the Stanford Blvd. pond (JF). One of the special waterfowl treats this winter was an immature female **Surf Scoter** on 1/4 CENPK (RO) for the fourth county record. Unfortunately, she fed busily the short time she was present and by the time other observers arrived she had departed—a not uncommon occurrence with this species. **Common Goldeneyes** are usually seen in low numbers—any number over five is noteworthy here. The HCMC total was 48 of which an eye-popping 42 were on the QUARY (DH). **Bufflehead** were present in scattered locations but in low numbers. They could often be seen at CENPK where on 1/12 there were 5 (KS). The high for the winter was 12 at WATFD on 12/31 (MW). For most birders who have become accustomed to the pan-handling Mallards at the local lakes, it is a pleasant surprise to run across the wary

wild birds who avoid human contact. On 2/16 on a cove at the upper end of TRIRS 150 **Mallards** and 115 **American Black Ducks** roared from cover when observers came in sight (JF,J&RS). Magnusson has noted this is often the case with these species at the north end of the reservoir where human traffic is low. **Hooded Mergansers** are not frequent in the winter until the beginning of spring migration. On 12/15 at the University of Maryland Central Farm (UMDCF) there were still 15 (M&GM); on the same date there were 10 on the pond on Marriottsville Road (DE). **Common Mergansers** usually live up to their name in this county in the winter. Seeing them on TRIRS, especially if the area behind Brighton Dam (BRDAM) is frozen, is the trick. The high count this winter was tallied on 2/21 BRDAM with 220 (MW). **Red-breasted Mergansers** were much harder to find. There were 3 at BRDAM 2/16 (JF,J&RS) and 3 at LKELK 2/17 (J&CW) for seasonal highs. **Ruddy Ducks** were reported in a few locations, usually 1 or 2. The high was 5 on 12/8 WILLK (KS).

~~The Bald Eagles are again on the nest at TRIRS. An adult was spotted at CENPK 2/20 (JF,TDC). Northern Harriers are seen in small numbers in winter. This season there were three reports: southern Howard county (HOWCO) 12/6 (WEb), CENPK 1/4 (RO), and 2/1 HCMC (D&MH). As is usual there were wintering Sharp-shinned Hawks and Cooper's Hawks reported throughout the period. The most interesting accipiter was a Northern Goshawk on 12/21 at Clark's (MW). Wallace had this male at the front of the farm and a Cooper's near the back edge. An immature Rough-legged Hawk was watched at Alpha Ridge landfill (ALRGL) 2/1 (GS,RB,RC) and was still present on 2/22 when a club field trip found it again (NM+).~~

The only two **Wild Turkeys** seen were on 2/1 & 2/27 at WATFD (MD) although WSSC officers report hearing them in the vicinity of MD 97. The only **Ring-necked Pheasants**

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were 2 on 2/1 (HCMC). No Northern Bobwhites were reported.

American Coots could be easily seen this winter by anyone walking around CENPK. On 12/1 8 were seen (JS) and on 2/28 6 were reported (JF, TDC).

Killdeer were still present in good numbers well into December, on 12/14 at Fulton Pond (FULPD) there were 46 (JS). During the coldest portion of the season numbers always drop so that on 2/1 there were 13 countywide (HCMC). By late February they had begun returning in numbers and were once more being spotted at numerous locations. On 12/8 at Woodmark Lake on Carroll Mill Road, a Spotted Sandpiper was watched picking along the edge (M&GM). Most of the county late dates are mid-October. A December bird is unusual in the state. Common Snipe usually winter sparingly where the ground doesn't freeze. This year 2 were present on 2/1 at two different locations (JF, JS; JSh, RP). An American Woodcock was courting on a warm 2/19 at GATWY (JS); by the following evening 3 were present (JF, TDC).

The only Laughing Gull reported was 12/14 FULPD (JS). Likewise, there was a single Bonaparte's Gull report, a flock of 11 on 1/12 at CENPK (KS). HCMC found the gull watchers at ALRGL rewarded with an Iceland Gull and 4 Lesser Black-backed Gulls among the 1500 Ring-billed Gulls, 5000 Herring Gulls, and 400 Black-backed Gulls (the latter number extremely high for that species in this county) (GS, RC, RB). A club trip 2/22 to the landfill turned up a Glaucous Gull and an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull, along with a Rough-legged Hawk—a decent reward for a morning spent at the “dump.”

In severe winters Belted Kingfishers retreat from this area. Since 24 were located on 2/1 (HCMC), one can judge that there was reasonable fishing available. A Red-headed Woodpecker was reported on 2/1 (HCMC) (MW). Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, as usual, were present in low numbers; interestingly, there were no January reports. Eastern Phoebes sometimes winter, this year there were 2 on HCMC, both in western HOWCO (POs; PJ). The only Horned Larks were 8 on 2/1 at WATFD (MW). A pair of White-breasted Nuthatches courted near a cavity in the Timberleigh area (DN) during late January & February. The only Red-breasted Nuthatch was 1 on 12/21 at Klein's, on Roxbury Road (MW). Several observers commented on an apparent scarcity of Brown Creepers; HCMC tallied 33. Winter Wrens are often as secretive as mice, but 25 were

detected on HCMC. Two Ruby-crowned Kinglets were found during the winter, 1 on 12/21 at Sharp's on Sharp Road (MW) and 1 at LKELK 2/1 (J&CW). Each year the bird club's bluebird program fledges at least 1500 young. They disperse and only occasionally are large numbers located. On 12/21 at Schooley Mill Park 31 Eastern Bluebirds were located (NM), while HCMC showed a total of 224. Hermit Thrushes winter in small numbers. On 2/1 there were 14 found within the county. American Robins did not appear to winter in large numbers; HCMC observers could locate only 54. No catbirds were detected wintering and a single Brown Thrasher was reported—on 12/30 WILLK (MC). Although several people visited favorite sites looking for American Pipits, the only ones reported were the 12 from the UMDCF 1/19 on a bird club field trip (BO, KS). Cedar Waxwings were not seen in unusual concentrations. The largest single flock was at the beginning of the period: 12/1 CENPK 59 (JS). The HCMC total was 271.

Warblers do not usually constitute a significant group of species during this season. Scattered Yellow-rumped Warbler reports were received; the most consistent were at CENPK intermittently from 12/8 to 1/22 during which time KS had up to 2 birds. Only 15 were located throughout the county on 2/1. One of the more hardy warblers, a Common Yellowthroat, lingered at CENPK till 1/5 (KS).

Eastern Towhees did well with 44 counted on HCMC. Twelve of these were in one territory in the extreme southern part of the county (JF, JS). American Tree Sparrows are being more widely reported than they were a decade ago. This year's HCMC found 125. An amazing 40 of that total were counted with several other species of sparrows in some attractive habitat along the south side of the Middle Patuxent River not far from Murray Hill Road (JM). Savannah Sparrows are not easy to see so tend to be undercounted. HCMC noted 12 of which 9 were at the ALRGL (GS, RC, RB). Fox Sparrows numbers dropped during the most severe part of the winter. On 12/21 J&RS had 3 in one large scrubby field near I-95 & MD 216, and on 1/19 at UMDCF BO & KS found 5. On 2/1 only 3 were found countywide! The White-crowned Sparrow count on 2/1 was 90 for the county; 57 of those birds were located on one farm on Roxbury Road which had the short grass and isolated multiflora rose bushes that seem to be a local attractant for this wintering species.

Eastern Meadowlarks have become a

LATE BREAKING NEWS FROM WASHINGTON SUBURBAN SANITARY COMMISSION (WSSC)

We have just received word from a representative of WSSC (owners of Brighton Dam and the land surrounding Triadelphia Reservoir), that they have implemented a new policy which impacts upon birders. Effective immediately, birders do not need day use permits or a season pass for access to certain areas. Birders are now allowed access anywhere shore fishing is allowed. Areas marked “No Trespassing” remain off limits. Specific areas where access is now granted are Big Branch, Pigtail, Green Bridge, Brown's Bridge, and the Triadelphia Lake Road area.

If birders have any questions regarding the access requirements to any specific area, please feel free to check with the Officers in the WSSC office located on Brighton Dam Road.

The Howard County Bird Club wishes to express their sincerest appreciation to WSSC for their implementation of this new policy, and we encourage all birders to make every effort to assure compliance with this new policy at all times.

source of concern as county meadows decrease in extent so several wintering flocks were cause for celebration: 12/21 Brown's on Howard Road held 9 (MW); on 2/1 28 were counted at UMDCF (M&GM) & 7 at ALRGL (GS, RC, RB). The only Rusty Blackbird was detected on New Year's Day on Johns Hopkins Road (WEb). Purple Finch numbers were scanty with 2 birds reported in December (J&RS; NM), 1 in January (MW), and 2 on HCMC in February. There were no Evening Grosbeaks and the 1 possible Pine Siskin lacked sufficient details in a non-invasion year. The Howard County bird, the American Goldfinch bypassed many feeders, but 60 were reported on 1/14 at a yard in Timberleigh (DN).

Thanks to all who submitted records. Observers cited by initials: Rick Blom (RB), Martha Chestem (MC), T. Dennis Coskran (TDC), Ralph Cullison (RC), Ward Ebert (WEb), Darlus Ecker (DE), Jane Farrell (JF), Dave & Maureen Harvey (D&MH), Donald Henderson (DH), Paul Jung (PJ), Rick Mason (RMa), Mike Kerwin (MK), Nancy Magnusson (NM), Mike & Grazina McCure (M&GM), John McKittrick (JM), Rosamond Murro (RM), Diane Negerigast (DN), Carol & Paul Newman (C&PN), Doug Odematt (DOd), Richard Orr (RO), Peter Osenton (POs), Bonnie Ott (BO), Ron Polinaszek (RP), Gene Scarpulla (GS), Kurt Schwarz (KS), Jay Sheppard (JSh), Jo Solem (JS), Robert Solem (RS), Mark Wallace (MW), Don Waugh (DW), Carol Wilkinson (CW), Jim Wilkinson (JW), Michele Wright (MWt), Helen Zeichner (HZ).

CALENDAR OF PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS

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 pm. Meeting/program begins at 8:00 pm. Club bookstore opens at 7:30 pm.

- May 8, Thursday "Safari to Kruger National Park, South Africa," by Dave Harvey. Join us on a trip to this exotic location, without ever leaving our seats.
- Field Trips meet as described for each trip. Carpooling is encouraged; riders share the cost of gas and tolls. Dress for the field trip with stout, reasonably waterproof footwear and layers of clothes. Trips do not always follow paths. NO pets. *Leaders may cancel due to inclement weather or fewer than three participants.* FOR INFORMATION, CALL BONNIE OTT, at (410) 461-3361.
- May 10, Saturday Migratory Bird and May Count Day - For additional information, see page 4 of this newsletter.
- May 18, Sunday Lake Elkhorn - Meet at 8:00 am at the Broken Land Parkway parking lot. Leaders: Darius and Paula Ecker. Walk around the lake on a paved path searching out warblers, waterbirds and sparrows.
- May 24, Saturday Wildflower Walk at Henryton - Meet at 9:30 am at the Route 29 and 108 park and ride. Leader: Bob Solem. Walk the woodlands in search of wildflowers.
- May 25, Sunday Rockburn Branch Park - Meet at 8:00 am at the park office off Landing Road. Leader: Bonnie Ott. Nesting Hooded and Kentucky Warblers possible. Paths may be muddy.
- June 3, Tuesday Spring Migration Bird Records Due - Mail to Jo Solem, 10617 Graeoch Road, Laurel, MD 20723.
- June 8, Sunday Mushroom Meander - Meet at 9:30 am at the Route 29 and 108 park and ride. Leader: Bill Newman. Join us in this search for different mushrooms, and learn to identify different types.
- June 21, Saturday Patuxent North Tract - Meet at 8:00 am at the gate off Route 198. Leaders: Darius and Paula Ecker. Possible Summer Tanager and Prothonotary Warbler.
- July 12, Saturday Little Patuxent Oxbow Sanctuary - Meet at 8:00 am at the Route 32 and Broken Land Parkway park and ride to carpool to Laurel. Leader will be provided by the Nature Conservancy. Join us on our first trip to this unique and ecologically important site. See article below. For information call Paula and Darius Ecker, (410) 312-9165
- July 20, Sunday See What's Around Howard County - Meet at 8:00 am at the Route 29 and 108 park and ride. Leader: Bonnie Ott. We'll search for some summer surprises.
- August 3, Sunday Summer Bird Records Due - Mail to Jo Solem, 10617 Graeoch Road, Laurel, MD 20723.
- August 16, Saturday Dragonfly Walk - Meet at 9:30 am at the west end parking lot at Centennial Park. Leader: Richard Orr. Join Richard, our local dragonfly expert, to learn identification of our resident dragonflies and damselflies.
- September 20, Saturday Howard County Fall Count - Reserve this date on your calendar. Details will be in the next issue of the newsletter.

Board of Directors meetings are held the fourth Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm, unless otherwise noted, at the home of the board member listed. If directions are required, please call the hosting board member.

May 22, Thursday Jane Farrell, 6324 Sandchain Road, Columbia, MD 21045, phone (410) 381-7344. This will be a joint meeting of the incoming and outgoing board members.

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 1997 NEWSLETTER MATERIAL IS DUE JULY 18, 1997. Anyone is welcome to contribute articles or ideas which you think will be of interest to other birders. Call or mail to Paula and Darius Ecker, 9270 Crazyquilt Court, Columbia, MD 21045, Phone (410) 312-9165 or e-mail to Paulae2156@aol.com. Also, please visit the club's site on the World Wide Web, at <http://www.abs.net/~darius/birding.html>.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO STAFF THE BIRD CLUB BOOTH AT THE HOWARD COUNTY FAIR

The Howard County Bird Club needs volunteers to staff our booth at the Howard County Fair from August 9 - 16. This is an opportunity to meet and greet many neighbors who stop by our booth to find out what the Howard County Bird Club is all about. You hear many interesting stories from people, and everyone is impressed with our many informative displays.

If you have a few hours during the day or evening that you can donate to this worthy cause, please call *Darius or Paula Ecker, (410) 312-9165* to reserve your favorite time slot.

\$750 DONATION TO LITTLE PATUXENT OXBOW SANCTUARY, LOCATED IN LAUREL, MARYLAND

In helping to support the preservation of Natural areas in the State of Maryland, the Howard County Bird Club has donated \$750.00 to The Nature Conservancy of Maryland and DC. The donation was made to their Stewardship Endowment Fund, which goes to support continued operation of preserves across Maryland. This will help ensure preserves, such as the Patuxent Oxbow Sanctuary near Laurel stay open and protected from the surrounding urban expansion.

An oxbow is a body of standing water resulting from the cutoff of the river channel.

Little Patuxent Oxbow, an impoundment of the Little Patuxent River, was created over hundreds of years by beaver activity. The Maryland/DC Chapter helped the State of Maryland acquire this important area which is home to the popular wildflowers blue-flag and yellow-flag iris and cardinal flower.

The club will visit the Little Patuxent Oxbow Sanctuary for a morning field trip on July 12, 1997. The Nature Conservancy will provide a trip leader familiar with Little Patuxent Oxbow and its history, and we'll seek out the birds that live there.

CONSERVATION COLUMN

BY BOB SOLEM

"Brownfields" do not sound like something that birders should want to know much about, but they affect preserving good birding habitat. "Brownfields" are unused or abandoned contaminated or potentially contaminated industrial sites. Revitalizing these problem properties is an important priority for economic development and urban renewal. Because of unknown financial liability because of the contamination, many businesses go to uncontaminated "greenfields" in the suburbs and beyond--taking farmland, forest, and good birding habitat, as well as contributing to sprawl.

This year Maryland passed legislation satisfying the concerns of the environmental community and the business interests, after the legislature was unable to agree on a bill during the 1996 session. The bill, signed by the governor in February, protects human health and the environment while granting liability assurances to innocent purchasers of a "brownfield" property

for redevelopment. The bill preserves the "polluter pays" principle, offers liability relief after a site is cleaned up, and provides financial incentives to stimulate "brownfield" redevelopment.

Since this column is being written before the end of the 1997 Legislative Session, the final status of the Wildlands proposal has not been determined. One important to us is additional acreage for **Patuxent River Wildlands on both sides of the river in Howard and Montgomery Counties.** The additional 755 acres would round out the sharply incised boundaries downstream from Hipsley Mill Road and give added protection upstream, providing a total of 1579 acres. Inclusion of this site was opposed by M.O.R.E., a Mid-Atlantic mountain bike organization, at the February 6 House hearing, which said the group likes the idea of Wildlands but cannot support them if they exclude mountain bikes.

\$200 EDUCATION GRANT TO HOWARD COUNTY ENVIROTHON

The Howard Bird Club notified the Howard Soil Conservation District that an MOS Education Committee grant of \$200 has been approved and received. The money will be used for the 1997 Envirothon in Howard County. According to Ms. Patricia Murphy, Howard Soil Conservation District planner who is in charge of the Howard County Envirothon, this year the high school team (with five members and one alternate, from Howard, River Hill and St. Joseph's High Schools) will compete in four "stations": aquatics, soils, wildlife, and forestry. There will be subject experts at each station who will test the participants' ability to identify specimens, solve practical problems, and address management questions. Immediately after the 25-minute exam at each station, the experts will critique the answers provided by the participants so there is feedback. The high school team will participate in the state Envirothon. In addition there are middle school teams of 4-6 members each from Dunloggin, Elkridge Landing, Ellicott Mills, and Mount View Middle Schools. (There is no state competition for middle school students.) Carl Brudin III gave workshops to the participants on bird identification and natural history issues. Thanks, Carl, for your multiple presentations, using the bird club's specimens and slides.

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 RECYCLED PAPER

HOWARD COUNTY BIRD CLUB

Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

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