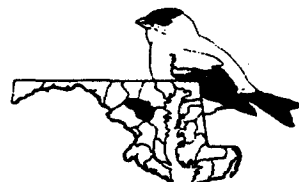




THE GOLDFINCH



A CHAPTER OF THE MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 1999

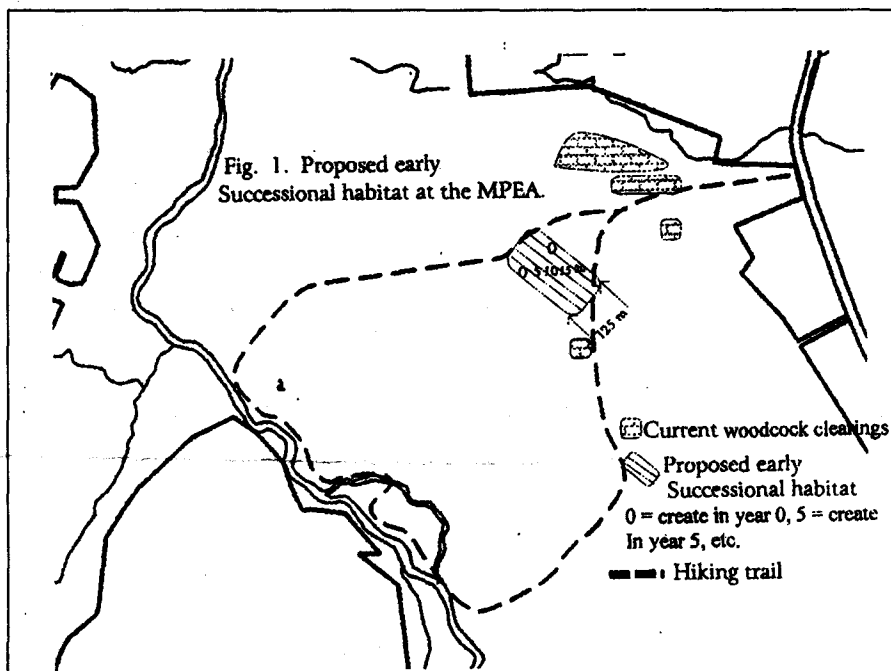
VOLUME 27, NUMBER 3

ECOLOGICAL SUCCESSION IMPACTS BIRDS AT THE MIDDLE PATUXENT ENVIRONMENTAL AREA

BY DR. JEFF DUGUAY

Preliminary data analysis on my bird surveys indicates a need to create early successional habitat at the Middle Patuxent Environmental Area (MPEA). Twenty species of birds were detected in the old fields at the MPEA this summer (mid-May to early June). What is interesting is there were more interior-edge (species that use both forest interior and forest edge) than edge (species that use early successional habitat) species in these old fields. There were seven edge species, twelve interior-edge species, and one forest-interior species detected in the old fields during my early morning surveys this summer. Further, species that were once common on the old fields are no longer present or are present only in very low numbers. Yellow-breasted Chats, for example, were, according to Al Geis, abundant in the old fields at the MPEA several years ago. This summer I detected only one chat. American Woodcock and Bobwhite Quail also used to be common at the MPEA. No woodcock and only one quail were detected this year. According to a 1972 report on the MPEA, Red-winged Blackbirds, Field Sparrows, Bobwhite Quail, and Common Yellowthroats were most numerous in the fields. This year, Red-winged Blackbirds were not detected and Field Sparrows and quail were very uncommon. The Common Yellowthroat was not abundant, but was not as uncommon as Field Sparrows and quail. Thus, there is a need to create quality habitat for these species.

My plan is to provide long-term early successional (shrubby) habitat that will benefit a variety of species. I would like to create strips 25 meters wide by approximately 125 meters long of shrubby habitat on a 5 year rotation (Figure 1). There will



be five strips. Thus, the entire area will be replaced every 20 years. During the first year (this winter) I hope to create this habitat on both ends, years 0 and 20 on Figure 1. Doing this will create much needed shrubby habitat. My intent is to create this habitat near the beginning of the hiking trail. Doing this provides many ben-

efits. As can be seen on Figure 1, this shrubby habitat will be created near existing woodcock clearings. This will result in additional woodcock singing grounds the first year or two. In addition, creation of this habitat near the woodcock clearings will provide woodcock nesting habitat near the singing grounds, which will be maintained as permanent brood and nesting habitat. In addition to woodcock, many edge species of birds, such as Yellow-breasted Chats, will benefit from this shrubby habitat. Creating this habitat near the hiking trail will provide persons interested in bird watching an opportunity to enjoy many species they otherwise may not see on their hide. Thus, birds and people will benefit from creation of shrubby habitat near the hiking trails.

Jeff Duguay, Ph.D., is the Manager of the Middle Patuxent Environmental Area.

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FOURTEENTH ANNUAL MIDWINTER COUNT

BY JO SOLEM

Join the Howard County Bird Club's Fourteenth Annual Midwinter Count on Saturday, February 6, 1999. Jo Solem, 301-726-6037, is the count coordinator. You may volunteer to participate by signing up at a meeting, by calling Jo, or by contacting one of the area coordinators: Area 1. Mark Wallace 301-726-6370; Area 2. Nancy Magnusson 410-480-0342; Area 3. Maureen & Dave Harvey 410-795-3117; Area 4. Mike McClure 410-531-2780; Area 5. Doug Odermatt 410-992-1812; Area 6. Bonnie Ott 410-461-3361; and Area 7. Maud Banks 410-381-3240. If you have covered a particular location for many years, call the coordinator of the area and indicate your desire to cover it again. If you wish to be placed with a more experienced birder, be sure to let the coordinator know. Beginning birders are always welcome, as are individuals who may wish to count for part of the day.

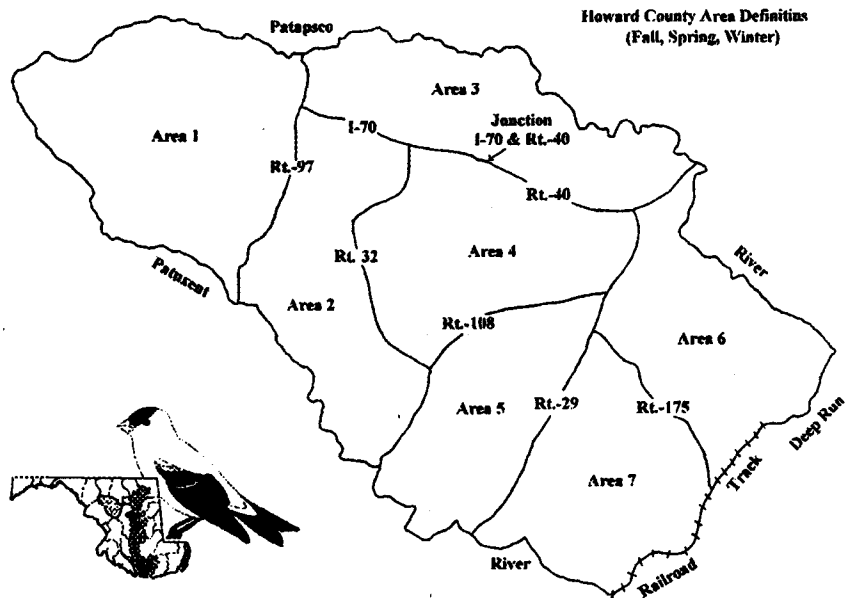
A checklist for the count is included with this newsletter; however, if you wish to count only at your feeder, call Jo and request a feeder form.

A fitting and much-anticipated conclusion to the day is the tally held in the evening at Martha and Don Waugh's, 9522 Angelina Circle, Columbia 21045; 410-381-8841. It is an opportunity to compare your special birds with those other people sighted—or to commiserate about your

misses. The club furnishes the main dish. *Please call by Wednesday, February 3 to reserve space; to sign up for a vegetable, salad, or dessert; and to obtain directions.* If you can't make it to the meal, you are welcome to drop in about 7:45 p.m. for the tally.

Unfortunately, a count during this

season may coincide with a major snow or ice storm. Safety is more important than counting birds. *If there is a question about the weather, we will try to make a decision the night before. Do not hesitate to call your area coordinator or Jo (between 5:00 & 6:00 a.m.) if you are unsure of the status of the count.*



ANNUAL POTLUCK DINNER SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1999

BY MARY-JO BETTS

The annual potluck dinner will be held for the second year at our new location at the Owen Brown Community Center on February 27, 1999. All club members and their guests are invited to share the fun, the food, and the program. The club furnishes beverages, social hour snacks, rolls and eating utensils. Those attending bring a salad, a main dish, a vegetable, or a dessert. You MUST reserve in advance so we can arrange for the proper number of beverages, etc. You may sign up at either the January or February meetings or call Mary-Jo Betts at 301-596-5859 by February 24, 1999. You will need to specify the number of attendees, and what food you are bringing. If you cannot cook, adjustments can be made.

If you want to participate in the slide presentation, bring a dozen or so nature slides. (If you bring more, they will be shown if time allows.) Social hour starts at 6:30 pm and dinner at 7:00 pm. Mark your dishes and any accompanying serving implements with your name so we can get them back to the right person. Let Mary-Jo know if you would like to help in any way or come early to help set up.

If you are a new member or if you have not attended our dinner before, we strongly encourage you to come and get to know the others that share your mutual love for birding.

There will be many delicious dishes, great slide presentations, and prizes. So mark your calendars and come join the fun.

Directions: The Owen Brown Community Center is located on the east side of Columbia at 6800 Cradlerock Way, off Broken Land Parkway from Route 29. There is ample parking available.

1999 MOS ANNUAL CONFERENCE ANNOUNCED

The 1999 MOS Annual Conference will be held May 14-16 at the Solomon's Island Holiday Inn Conference Center in Calvert County. The timing and location of this conference will allow birders to take advantage of a variety of interesting locations and habitats. There will be many exciting activities and field trips planned by the conference committee. Detailed information will be mailed to you early in 1999.

HOWARD COUNTY ODONATE UPDATE BY BOB & JO SOLEM

The third year of the survey of Howard County dragonflies and damselflies continued to produce interesting sightings, date extensions, and new locations for species. Two new dragonflies species and one damselfly were added to the county total: Golden-winged Skimmer (*Libellula auripennis*), Yellow-sided Skimmer (*Libellula flavida*), and Sphagnum Sprite (*Nehalennia gracilis*). The county list now stands at 82 species. Additions were also made to the Centennial Park and Font Hill Wetland Park lists.

Individuals who contributed data in 1998 included Bob & Jo Solem, Nancy Magnusson, Richard Orr, Jay Sheppard, Carol Newman, Mike Kerwin, Lynn and Charles Guiley, and Sue Mueller. Sue, who heads the Howard Co.

Dept. of Recreation and Parks water quality monitoring program, has been helpful in providing larvae and locations of high quality larval sites. We will miss Phil Norman, former biologist for Rec and Parks, whose tips on vegetation relating to potential sites was always welcome. Special thanks to Richard Orr who compiles state odonate data, serves as resident expert, and annually leads a field trip to Centennial Park.

In 1999, we are looking forward to the publication of Sidney Dunkle's field guide to North American dragonflies which will emphasize identification through binoculars. It should give a major assist to birders who would like to learn more about these fascinating insects.

HARRIS' SPARROW AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND CENTRAL FARM

BY DARIUS ECKER

Harris' Sparrow nests in north-central Canada at the edge of the tundra. It winters on the southern plains of the US in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and Nebraska. It's a large elegant looking sparrow with a large pink bill. It's seen infrequently in Maryland and the Maryland/DC Records committee lists it as a review species. Two previous Howard County sightings are listed, each of two birds. The first in 1956, the last in 1965. It was last seen in Howard County in April of 1965. So, you can imagine our excitement when a search of the University of Maryland Central Farm on Sunday morning, October 25, 1998, turned up a first winter Harris' Sparrow.

Mary-Jo Betts, Helen Zeichner, Dot Gustafson and myself had joined Bonnie Ott to accompany her on her Sunday morning Sparrow Survey of the Farm. The farm was a familiar place to me since I'd attended field trips that had visited there before, but this morning was special since I was hoping to learn more about sparrow chip notes from Bonnie. I was hoping to see a Vesper Sparrow, a bird I had only seen once before. Bonnie had seen one here last week. As we began to walk the first field it became obvious the number of sparrows present was staggering. Bonnie called out "Song Sparrow hear that, there, like the bark of a tiny dog". And it was. We heard and saw Song Sparrows, Swamp Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows, Field Sparrows and Savannah Sparrows. In a second field we found over 100 Chipping Sparrows. In the low lying field Bonnie had named the "swale field" there were more Savannah Sparrows in one spot than I had ever seen before. By just standing still and letting the birds move around us we got incredibly close looks. A few Common Snipe



"I believe we may have an immature Harris' Sparrow"

flew up to add to the excitement.

A little after 9:00 am we arrived back at the cars. There was one more field we wanted to cover. I tossed my scope in the truck, thinking we had seen the best, and it would be one less thing to carry. As we walked up a dirt farm road that followed along the edge of a woods a large sparrow flushed up to the top of a brush pile. What is that! We knew we were looking at something different. In less than thirty seconds Bonnie said "I believe we may have an immature Harris' Sparrow". We tried to think of an alternative to Bonnie's identification, but there was none. It had to be a Harris'. "There look at that, it's bigger than the White-crowned Sparrow next to it", someone called out. After we all had formed a good mental picture of the bird, I volunteered to go back to my truck to get the scope and my camera. Although a Mockingbird threatened to chase the Harris' Sparrow away several times while I was gone, it remained at the base of the brush pile. When I returned we all had a chance to study the bird at length through the scope, and I photographed

it with my camera and 500mm lens. Later that day, and the next day the Harris' Sparrow was relocated and seen by other birders, but by Tuesday of the next week it was gone and not seen again despite attempts to find it. The Harris' Sparrow was a life bird to many who got to see it, including Bonnie, Mary-Jo, Helen and myself.

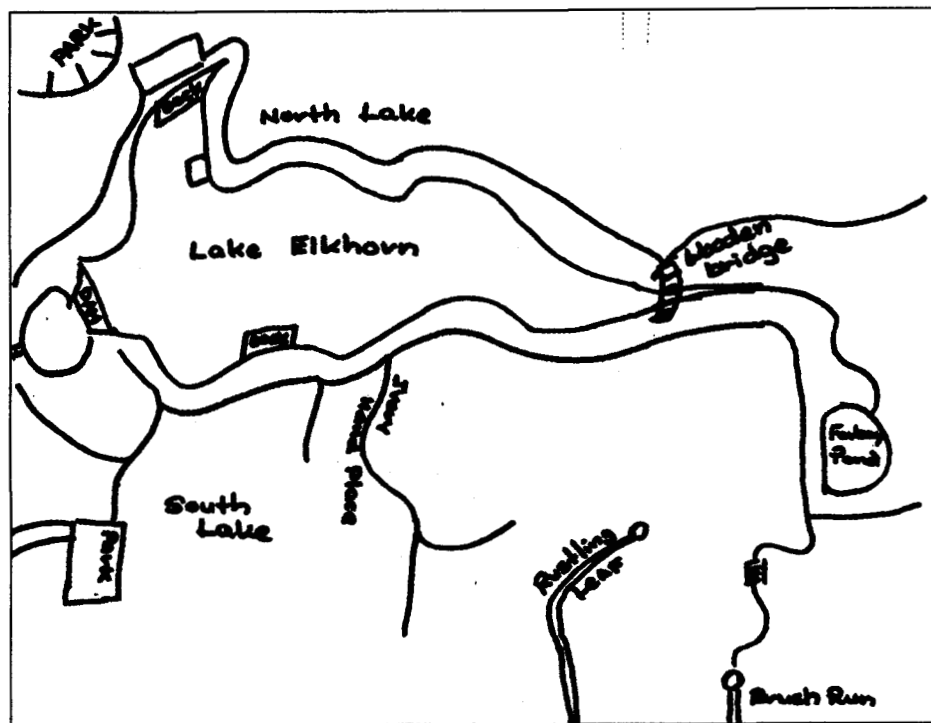
One should spend some time to focus on the University of Maryland Central Farm in general. The farm is located in central Howard County just west of Columbia. It's one of the few places in the county to find many infrequently seen birds. American Pipit, Horned Lark and Eastern Meadowlark have all been seen. Red-headed Woodpeckers have wintered here and the small ponds are sometimes filled with Wood Ducks. Northern Harrier is sometimes found. A Short-eared Owl turned up one morning a few years back. While the farm is not open to the public, you can visit it by attending one of the scheduled field trips the bird club plans. Don't pass it up. You never know what you might find.

AN ADOPTED YARD LIST AT LAKE ELKHORN

BY DARIUS ECKER

As beginning birders, each new field trip is filled with wonder. Life birds abound. But at some point we run out of new birds to see. Of course, you can always take a trip to another area, but there are ways to observe new things in your area. I think one of the most fascinating things in the bird world is the study of migration. In central Maryland, we're located right in the middle of the Atlantic flyway. What better place to study migration? So, how do we go about this? To get a true sense of migration you have to regularly bird the same area. When I say regularly, I mean daily. You don't have to quit your job. Just set aside an hour in the morning. Find an area convenient to your home and adopt it. For Columbia residents, the habitat around any of the lakes is great. Bird it daily and keep track of the birds you see and hear.

I've done this at Lake Elkhorn for the past 4 years. For the past two years, daily between April 1st through June 31st and September 1st through October 31st. The results are really interesting. Of the 207 species listed for Lake Elkhorn on the Columbia Lakes Bird Checklist, I've listed 168 of these species on my adopted yard list for Lake Elkhorn. This is based on an hour of birding each morning in one of the three sections of the lake's habitat, since I don't have time to cover the entire lake each morning. I'll call these sections "North Lake" (a walk that starts at Docksider lane parking lot walking east along the north side of the lake to the wooden bridge), "South Lake" (a walk that starts at the Broken Land Parkway Parking lot walking east along the south side of the lake down the path to Ivory Hand Place) and "Brush Run" (a walk that starts at the path at the end of Brush Run traveling north to Forbay Pond and then on



to the wooden bridge).

The warbler list is fantastic, listing 32 species of warblers. Still missing are Orange-crowned, Yellow-throated and Connecticut, though Orange-crowned is on the Columbia Lakes Checklist. The South Lake walk is usually best for warblers, with the area along the path to Ivory Hand Place sometimes the only place any birds were found this fall. This same path has produced Black-billed Cuckoo the last two years and a Least Flycatcher this year. Other good warbler spots are the north path, both east and west of the wooden bridge, and the area in between Brush Run and Forbay Pond. Parking is limited at the Brush Run location (I usually take my bike). There is usually only room for one or two cars. Early morning is best, a mid-day walk is likely to get you nothing but exercise.

Some other memorable birds that have made appearances are a Yellow-crowned Night Heron that showed up

at Forbay pond. Northern Shoveler has also been seen at Forbay as well as American Bittern. A Merlin made a quick "fly by" at the wooden bridge this year, and an Eastern Meadowlark was once seen flying up the middle of the lake. A Willow Flycatcher was singing one June day from the power lines over the stream to the east of the wooden bridge and a Philadelphia Vireo fed in the tree next to the South Lake dock. During a spring rain storm a Savannah Sparrow sat in the grass next to the dam. An early summer tern still has me wondering what it was. The rewards are endless.

So, I encourage you to "adopt" an area of Howard County and start your own Adopted Yard List. Of course, be sure to send your records to Jo Solem so they can become part the County's historical bird records, and to Jane Coskren so they can become part of the Howard County annual list. However, the top priority is to have fun.

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.

January 14, Thursday
(cancelled due to storm) "The Birds of Namibia in Southwestern Africa," by Hank Kaestner. Join us for an entertaining, interesting and informative evening listening to the tales of a birding spice buyer.

✓ February 11, Thursday "The Yellow Book and How to Use It," by Bob Ringler. Bring your copy of "Field List of the Birds of Maryland", or buy one at our bookstore before the meeting.

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.

✓ January 1, Friday Start Your New Year List - Meet at 8:30 am at the Broken Land Parkway parking lot at Lake Elkhorn. Leaders: Darius and Paula Ecker. This half day field trip will tour Howard County in search of birds for our year lists.

January 16 - 18, Saturday - Monday Birding the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel - See article on page 3 of the November-December 1998 Goldfinch. Please pre-register for this trip so we can coordinate carpools and permission letters.

✓ February 6, Saturday Midwinter Count - See article on page 2 for details.

✓ February 27, Saturday Annual Pot Luck Dinner - See details on page 2 of this newsletter.

✓ February 28, Sunday Deadline for Submission of 1998 Annual Lists - See details below.

March 3, Wednesday Winter (December 1 - February 28) Bird Records Due - Mail to Jo Solem, 10617 Graeloch Rd., Laurel, MD 20723

May 14-16, Friday-Sunday Maryland Ornithological Society 1999 Annual Conference - Mark your calendar. Details will be mailed to you by the MOS.

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.

✓ January 28, Thursday Elayne Metter, 4626 Live Oak Ct., Ellicott City, MD 21043, 410-480-9169

✓ February 25, Thursday Bob & Jo Solem, 10617 Graeloch Rd., Laurel, MD 20723, 301-725-5037

MARCH - APRIL 1999 NEWSLETTER MATERIAL IS DUE JANUARY 22, 1999. 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>.

HOWARD COUNTY ANNUAL LISTS DUE FEBRUARY 28, 1999

A list of all the birds seen in the county during the 1998 calendar year is being compiled for the 20th 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 to Jane Coskren, 6324 Sandchain Road, Columbia MD 21045 by February 28, 1999. The length of the list isn't important, because your list may contain the bird that will make 1998 a year for the record books.

DID YOU GET YOUR E-MAIL?

Do you want your e-mail address in the Club's directory? We have your e-mail address as it will appear in the directory IF you received an e-mail notice from the Club on or after January 3, 1999. If you did not receive the e-mail notice AND want your e-mail address in the Club's directory, send a message to <ODENATA@MSN.COM> The e-mail alert was very useful when the Club had to change the location of the November meeting on short notice.

Are you also interested in any special birds that are seen in Howard County? Did you remember to answer the questions about the HOWARD COUNTY RARE BIRD ALERT NETWORK? Send a message to <ODENATA@MSN.COM> and you will be added to the e-mail alert section. The RARE BIRD ALERT was used when the Harris's Sparrow appeared and when a special trip was arranged to see a Red-headed Woodpecker in November.

SUCCESSFUL SEED SALE BY EILEEN CLEGG

Again this fall the Bird Club had a wonderfully successful seed sale. I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to everyone who gave of their time and efforts and contributed to making this day happen.

Most of all, a special thanks goes out to everyone who purchased seed. Your generous purchase will enable the club to make much needed monetary donations to a variety of worthwhile conservation efforts. Again, thank you and I hope to see you at next fall's seed sale.

HOWARD COUNTY BIRD CLUB

Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society
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NEW FEDERAL FUNDS PROPOSED FOR WILDLIFE AND LAND CONSERVATION BY BOB SOLEM

Two bills were introduced in Congress on October 7th, collectively known as the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (H.R. 4717 and S. 2566). They propose long-term, consistent annual funding for wildlife habitat conservation; for purchase of additional land for conservation, preservation of wildlife, or outdoor recreation; and for support of wildlife educational, conservation, and recreation programs. The funds proposed are for programs primarily at the state level. Funding for wildlife programs at the state level is long overdue, and this bill will provide significant ongoing revenues for wildlife conservation.

Funds will come from revenues currently being received by the US. General Treasury for off-shore oil and gas leases. The General Treasury receives a royalty share of all oil and gas leases on federal property. The new bills propose a permanent re-allocation of revenues from off-shore oil and gas production to the new bills for the purposes described above.

The bills are broken up into three distinct parts called Title I, Title II, and Title III.

Title I-Outer Shelf Impact Assistance Provides funds for environmental mitigation projects for all coastal states including those along the Great Lakes. (Estimated \$1 Billion annually).

Title II-Land-Based Conservation and Recreation Provides nearly full, permanent

funding for the Land and Water Conservation Act of 1965 and the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Act of 1978. These programs purchase lands for conservation and recreation purposes, and have never received full funding. All states would receive funds as could Federal conservation and recreation land acquisitions. (Estimated \$900 Million annually).

Title III-Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Provides funds for state fish and wildlife agencies to conserve and manage wildlife, for wildlife-related environmental education and wildlife-related recreation. All states would receive funding. (Estimated \$350-400 Million Annually).

This bill is being tracked closely by Teaming With Wildlife (TWW), a coalition of some 3,000 conservation and business groups who initially tried to get a new tax levied on outdoor recreational equipment to fund state fish and wildlife programs. TWW was told new tax funding would not happen in the current Congressional climate. The current bills make no attempt to increase offshore oil or gas leases which are currently under a moratorium for approximately ten more years.

It's not a perfect bill, but the TWW Coalition is working closely with Congress to make it most advantageous for wildlife and the environment. These bills go far beyond anything available today for fish and wildlife conserva-

tion, land acquisition programs, and coastal restoration programs. Since this Act does not require any new taxes be levied, which would be unacceptable in the current Congressional environment, it has a good chance of passing. It appears to be our best chance to fund wildlife programs at the state level—which so desperately need funding. It's also a situation of "use it, or lose it". These revenues will continue flowing into the Federal Treasury if this bill is not approved. They just won't benefit wildlife.

The Maryland TWW Coalition produces a monthly update of events surrounding the need for fish and wildlife program funding, and the Congressional and political responses to this need. Over the next few months, the October 7th bills will evolve in response to constituent comments concerning them. The Maryland TWW Coalition Update can keep you apprised of these developments. If you would like to receive the update or have questions about the new bill or the Coalition, contact Edith Thompson, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife & Heritage Division, 580 Taylor Ave. E-1, Annapolis, MD 21401 or call (410) 260-8555 or e-mail <ethompson@dnr.state.md.us>

