



THE GOLDFINCH



A CHAPTER OF THE MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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BIRDING MOROCCO

BY SUSAN SETTERBERG

Why Morocco? Well, it sounded exotic, a new culture never visited before, I had read about the beauty of the Atlas Mountains, Humphrey Bogart thought it was worth a visit, and European migrant birds were known to fly through the area. Why not? I met my fellow travelers with Field Guides at London Heathrow airport for the final legs of the journey via Royal Air Maroc. I was armed with my field guides, good hiking boots, SPF 30, bug repellent and I had had all my shots. We landed at Tangier Airport at 10:45 PM, local time, 26 hours and 15 minutes after takeoff from Philadelphia Airport on the heels of Hurricane Floyd. My first impression of Morocco was it was very, very dark.

Dawn came early, but I hopped out of bed and threw back the curtains to see a man and his donkey crossing a small bridge over the stream behind my hotel. Then a wader with bright orange legs - Common Redshank - and another that bobbed it's tail - Common Sandpiper - and a lovely little tern searching for breakfast in the stream - Little Tern. Not bad, three minutes into the morning and three life birds. Off to a breakfast of bread, apricot jam, butter and strong coffee with milk - the first of many, I was to find out. Returning to my room to get ready for the day's adventure, I noticed the sky was turning, well, muddy. The wind had kicked up and so had all the dirt in the area. We were off, moving south from Asilah along the Atlantic Coast, passing roadside stands filled with bright yellow melons for sale. But the wind was blowing stronger and the sky was getting darker. It looked like a bad, brown fog. Our destination was the mouth of the Oued (River) Loukkos and its surrounding wetlands. Our intrepid driver led us through the dust storm onto the levees of the Loukkos. Birds surrounded us as far as we could see, which was maybe 50 yards in any direction. When it seemed like the wind would die down, we stepped out of our van with scarves over our faces looking for all the world like birding bandits. Those without glasses couldn't keep their eyes open; scenes from the sandstorm in *Lawrence of Arabia* were flitting through my mind. We took refuge in the van. But the life list grew anyway, Little Stint, Western Marsh Harrier, Eurasian and Red-Knobbed Coots, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Ringed and Snowy Plover, and Black-headed Gull. And what have we in the distance? Flamingos! YES! Lunch was not possible at this point, unless we wanted it to be crunchy, so we headed for the ocean. As the river reached

the Atlantic, we found an Audouin's Gull, Sandwich Terns, and Lesser Crested Terns. Let the winds blow; there were life birds to see. And then it rained, and rained and rained all the way back to the hotel.

Our next morning dawned clear and bright as we headed north out of town, stopping to view two Little Owls off the road. An African Hoopoe delighted us in a field with its black and white striped bottom half topped by an improbably rusty head and breast. Our target was Great Bustard, a "relic population" of about twenty birds known to frequent a broad basin of farmland. Using scopes, we were able to locate seven of the magnificent birds, members of the last group in all of Africa. After breakfast we headed south again to search more of the coastal marsh areas and environs. Merdja Zerga is a very popular birding spot and is home to one of two native bird watchers of repute in Morocco. We stopped off at a campground adjoining the marsh in hopes of spotting the rare Marsh Owl. With a chocolate brown body artfully flecked with lighter beige, and a tawny facial disc surrounding soulful brown eyes, these owls have the be the most beautiful owls I have seen. Indeed, it was my favorite bird of the trip. Although hard to estimate because of the dense foliage of the trees, we saw at least ten moving in the area. We joined local bird watcher Hassan Dalil for a fresh fish lunch at a sidewalk café in the shadow of a minaret in the fishing village of Moulay Bousselhem. Well fed, we were off to Lake Barga. We tramped through ankle deep water with the cows and donkeys to get good views of Great Crested Grebe; numerous familiar ducks; Little and Gray Egret, Squacco and Black-crowned Night Heron, Eurasian Spoonbill, Cattle Egret by the hundreds, Os-

prey, Green, Curlew, Wood and Common Sandpipers; and Ruff.

Dawn, day four, we stood on the Asilah harbor breakwater with the 15th Century Portuguese city wall fortifications behind us, and watched flashes of white from the wings of Cory's Shearwaters at the deep blue Atlantic horizon, while Black Terns rested on rocks in the shelter of the harbor. Next, we traveled to Rabat, a bustling city of multistoried, white plaster buildings, drivers who love their horns, and the smell of diesel fuel hanging in the air. Before entering the city we took a side trip to the coastal cliffs of Sale where Eleonora's Falcons nest. We were treated to two pair of birds, with one dark morph, flying on the air currents along the cliffs and their not yet fledged young, still clinging to the sheer cliff face. While enjoying the splendor of their flight, three young men approached, and seeing we were interested in the birds, proudly produced from a cloth sack, a young Eleonora's Falcon they had just plucked from a cliff. There was a momentary clash of cultures. They said it would make be a pet; though it was more likely to be sold. We, of course, tried to convince them to let it go; but it would not have been possible to put it back on the sheer cliffs from which it had not yet learned to fly.

From Rabat we visited the Royal Cork Oak Forests, still harvested for cork today; Sidi Bou Rhaba, a fresh water lake within a wildlife preserve; and the Zaers, a scrubby hill forest. The latter, at dawn, produced sightings of one of Morocco's rarest inhabitants, the Double-spurred Francolin. We were also entertained by the quick rear view of Barbary Partridge, a bird that was to tease us with calls throughout the trip, but never give us a good look. Common Wood Pigeon and Stock Doves kept us company and we got great looks at a resting Common (Eurasian) Nightjar. Raucous in their greetings were the Eurasian Jay and Black-crowned Tchagra (aka Bush Shrike). Whinchat, Northern Wheatear, Garden Bulbul, Wood and Sardinian Warblers, Great and Blue Tit, Chaffinch, European Greenfinch, and Great Spotted and Levaillant's Woodpecker were among the migrants spotted in the scrub and forests.

The next leg of our journey took us across the middle Atlas Mountains to Erfoud at the edge of the Sahara Desert. Sparse Helm Oak forests graced westerly slopes of the mountains. Parking under the trees, our traditional in-the-

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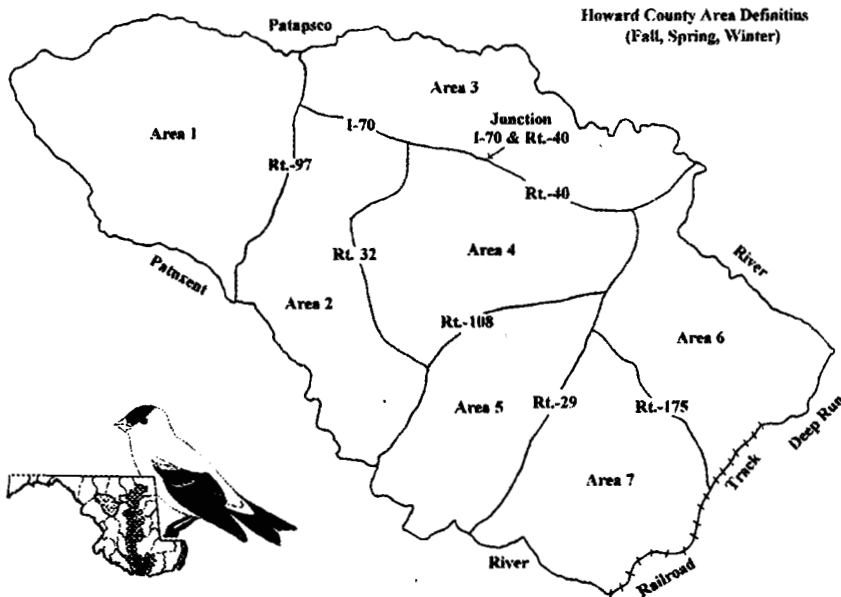
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FIFTEENTH ANNUAL MIDWINTER COUNT BY JO SOLEM AND MARY-JO BETTS

Join the Howard County Bird Club's Fifteenth Annual Midwinter Count on **Saturday, February 5, 2000**. Jo Solem, 301-725-6037 and Mary-Jo Betts, 301-596-5859, are the count coordinators. You may volunteer to participate by signing up at a meeting, by calling Jo or Mary-Jo, or by contacting one of the area coordinators: **Area 1. Mark Wallace 301-725-6370; 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 Odematt 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 or Mary-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 2** 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 7:30 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, Jo, or Mary-Jo (between 5:00 & 6:30 a.m.) if you are unsure of the status of the count.

ANNUAL POTLUCK DINNER SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2000

BY MARY-JO BETTS

The annual potluck dinner will again be held at the Owen Brown Community Center on Saturday, February 26, 2000. 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 may 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 23, 2000. 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.

HOWARD COUNTY BIRD CLUB PARTICIPATES IN THE BIG SIT!

Thanks to the coordination efforts and enthusiasm of Kurt Schwarz, the Howard County Bird Club participated for the first time in the 7th Annual Big Sit! The event was held at Centennial Park on October 17 from 7:10 am until 4:00 pm. As required by the guidelines, we sat within a 17 foot circle and counted all birds seen or heard from within the circumference of the circle. We accumulated a grand total of 46 species. Undoubtedly the best bird of the day was the Sora Rail conjured up by Mike Kerwin.

Thanks to all who participated, even in the sometimes pouring down rain. We look forward to beating our record next year.

2000 MOS ANNUAL CONFERENCE ANNOUNCED

The 1999 MOS Annual Conference will be held May 19-21 Hagerstown, Washington 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 2000.

SCHOLARSHIP WINNER BY MONIKA BOTSAI

I would like to thank the MOS for awarding me a scholarship to the Connecticut Ecology Camp. Mike Kerwin and Jo Solem encouraged me to apply and wrote favorable recommendations. Thank you Jo and Mike! The week in July at the Audubon camp in Greenwich with ten other teachers from seven US states was a wonderful experience. We all learned a lot, and also had a lot of fun. Unfortunately, it was a very hot week with no air-conditioning in our bedrooms. But we all survived and have planned a get-together next year.

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field lunch of fresh and canned vegetables, locally baked flat bread and canned sardines followed by desert of Snickers bars was prepared while we scouted around for birds. We were rewarded with excellent views of Firecrest, a bird not unlike our Ruby-crowned Kinglet in habit and look, but with a spectacular patch of fiery color they are not so shy to show off in the sun. Pied Flycatcher, Nuthatch, Mistle Thrush, Common Swift, Long-legged Buzzard and Coal Tit were added to our list. We were coming in contact with the Berbers and their small villages now. Colorfully dressed, the women carried babies slung over their backs. The most common method of transportation is the donkey; sometimes ridden and other times led when carrying freshly harvested goods back home. One cool night in the mountains and a lake tour then through a giant, fragrant cedar forest and down the slopes to the desert. We happened upon a group of Barbary apes on the mountain roads and stopped to take pictures while we fed them our bananas. Black Wheatear, Craig Martins and Tristram's Warbler, a plum-chested Sylvia restricted to north-west Africa, were found. Our guide, Arnould van der Berg, has had a great deal of experience in Morocco and knows exactly where to find these isolated species.

The Sahara greeted us with a rising wind. Again, strains of the theme song from *Lawrence of Arabia* danced through my head. We were to have two four wheel drive vehicles meet us for the drive to Erg Chebbi, an island of towering red sand dunes near the remote desert settlement (a couple of buildings supplying shelter and refreshment) of Merzouga. However, the Tuareg drivers (these are the fierce nomads of desert fame who have turned in their horses for 4WD vehicles) showed up with one vehicle at more than twice the price. Undaunted, we took our van. In the desert, we found camels waiting for tourists to arrive, but we were there to find the Dessert Sparrow that feeds on the flies attracted to camel dung. Everything has a purpose, planned or accidental. Blowing sand made early birding difficult, but upon return to an oasis on the road to Erg Chebbi, the wind had settled down and so had the migrants. Our day in the desert produced striking views of Brown-necked Raven, Common Redstart, Spotted Flycatcher, White-tailed, Black and Desert Wheatear, Eurasian Reed-Warbler, Olivaceous, Melodious, and Dessert Warbler, Bar-tailed, Greater Hoopoe, and Crested Lark, Fulvous Chatterer and Dessert Sparrow. Vegetation was sparse in this unrelieved, hot, dry land; but birds were plentiful in small oases.

Leaving Erfoud and heading westerly, we skirted the southern edge of the High Atlas Mountains as we worked our way up into the high plains of the Jbel Sarhro. We stopped at the Hubara Bustard Research Center, which was built by the Saudi royalty to determine how the Hubara Bustard population could be restored to the area. The bustards had been hunted to near extinction by the Saudi using falcons for the hunt. So far, they have been

successful with the breeding but not with the releases.

The high plains provided striking scenery. With very little vegetation, the birds are well dispersed in a landscape of red, brown and beige rock. The colors of the birds blend very well into the land and it is only profound patience that makes for success. Awakened by the local Mullah's call to prayer across the canyon of Boumalne at 4:18 am, we had no trouble being out in the field before sunrise for the best opportunity to see birds. We found Red-rumped Wheatear, Trumpeter Finch, Horned Lark, Thekla Lark, Tawny Pipit, Cream-colored Courser and Long-legged Buzzard. We moved on to the Todra Gorge, a favorite stop for tourists, but also a must for birders. Deep in a valley created along a massive fault line and whose colors change with the moving sun, we craned our necks to view the rim, close to a 1000 feet up, as we ate our kabob lunch. Bonelli's Eagles flew by almost as if on schedule and perched on the sheer cliffs to give us a great view.

Leaving the high plains, we headed toward Agadir, a coastal city noted for fine beaches and good nightlife for the European traveler. Even though Common Kestrels nested on the high ledges of our hotel, the city did not have much to offer. But south and north of the city we were treated to fine river basins and wildlife preserves with good birding. With very crude but effective sluices, water is transported to productive agriculture fields. We stood on a bridge with bins and scopes pointing down river while donkey rush hour paraded behind us. Women swathed in colorful scarves and dresses covering all but their smiling eyes rode by on donkeys with large woven baskets that carry the days harvest. Great Cormorant, Marbled Teal, Flamingo, White Stork, Black-shouldered Kite, more gulls, terns and waders, Laughing Dove and the lovely Mousier's Redstart were among the birds seen in the area. Most surprising and a real treat was hunting down a Wryneck. Difficult to see because of its habit of hunkering down on limbs, we heard the bird and were able to search it out. We topped off the day with Red-necked Nighthawks viewed in the night lights surrounding a royal compound at the edge of the city.

Moving north along the coast on our way to Marrakesh, we headed for the Tamri River, which stops just short of the ocean, and offers a glimpse at fresh and salt water species from the road above the wide river valley. Anxiously, we scanned the fresh water basin for the Bald Ibis, or Waldrapp. There are less than 200 of these birds in the world. On the brink of extinction, it would be a wonderful find. After almost an hour of looking, we decide to load into our van and drive about 30 minutes north to an area where they had breeding colonies in the past. Searching the sparse fields along the Atlantic Coast, we came up empty. Not to be outdone, we went back to the river valley and decided to perch on the overlooking road and wait. Twenty minutes into our vigil there was a tittering noise above our heads as, in a formation the Navy's Blue Angels would admire, came 44 Waldrapp descending into the valley below us. Whoops

and hollers arose. Eventually moving closer to get good looks at the birds preening on a sand spit, we could see their characteristic bald face and straggling mane. Not a pretty face, but one it was a pleasure to see.

On to Marrakesh, a red walled city of exquisite beauty. Squeezing in a little night life, we toured the Djermaa el-Fna, a great square where one can be entertained, find cures for what ails you, or sup at food stalls serving roast lamb or snail soup under gas lantern light. After traversing through dark alleys, we participated in the traditional rug buying "ceremony" - two hours passed as rugs were unrolled for our perusal while drinking hot mint tea and then bargaining for price.

Our final day of birding was a trip into the high Atlas Mountains to almost 9,000 feet. Large flocks of Red-billed and Yellow-billed (Alpine) Coughs were circling the air currents on the slopes. Finds of the day included Blue Rock-Thrush, and Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush, Black Redstart and Mousier's Redstart, and the Seebohm's subspecies of the Northern Wheatear. A nice flock of Eurasian Linnet gave us good looks. At the very top of our ascent, we finally found the Crimson-winged Finch. And to top off the day, we found a Peregrine Falcon clinging to the high rock face. Although familiar to all of us, it was a treat to have such a good look and contrast it with our other falcon species seen earlier in the trip. Our decent was just as exciting as we kept our eyes glued to a mountain stream in hopes of a White-throated Dipper. True to form, Arnould spotted one and we spent several delightful minutes following it back up stream to get great scope views of this fanciful bird. It was particularly exciting for me as it was my third dipper species on as many continents.

The trip was a wonderful experience for the birds, the people and the landscape. Although we moved around a lot, all of us remarked how easy it was. The trip total was 207 birds and I had 117 life species. Our guide was splendid and we never had a disappointing day. For folks who have not birded Europe extensively, as I have not, you will get a high life list count. We had birders on the trip with over 4000 on their life lists and they still came away with satisfying new life birds. Bird watching opportunities are well described in the Lonely Planet tourbook series on Morocco. Besides Arabic and Berber, French is spoken extensively in the country and many have some facility with limited English. Food was excellent and although a few people were somewhat disadvantaged with GI problems, I remained healthy throughout the trip. I recommend it if you are looking for something different. If you want more information on the birding or the country, feel free to e-mail me at smsetterberg@cs.com, or write to me at the address listed on the bird club roster.

HOWARD COUNTY ODONATE UPDATE

BY JO AND BOB SOLEM

The fourth year of the survey of Howard County dragonflies and damselflies (odonates) produced some excellent records. There is still much to learn about the occurrence, location, and timing of these fascinating insects.

Four new dragonflies and one damselfly were added to the Howard County list. What was notable was that two of the dragonflies were new to Maryland. Both the Hyacinth Glider (*Miathyria marcella*) and the Roseate Skimmer (*Orthemis ferruginea*) normally occur south and west of the state. Was the extended drought in some way responsible for the presence here of both these species? Another new species, the Red-mantled Glider (*Tramea omusta*), found in early October, was the latest of the half dozen state records for that species. Lilypad Forktail (*Ischnura kellicotti*) and Banded Pennant (*Celithemis fasciata*) rounded out the five new county species. Interestingly, the two new state records occurred within a 10-day period in mid-July. (The Hyacinth Glider on 9 July at Lake Elkhorn and the Roseate Skimmer on 16 July at Font Hill Wet-

land Park. On 19 July a second Roseate Skimmer was located and photographed; this one appeared at Lake Elkhorn.)

The county list now stands at 87 species. Additions were also made to the Font Hill Wetland Park and Centennial Park odonate checklists, which we keep for Howard County Recreation and Parks Department. Very slowly we are beginning to build a picture of county distribution. Not only has all of the odonate data been computerized, but it is now possible to map any species showing all known Howard County locations.

The following people contributed to the data base in 1999: Jo and Bob Solem, Nancy Magnusson, Sue Muller, Richard Orr, Kurt Schwarz, Sue Neri, Jeff Duguay, and Jay Sheppard. Carol Newman, Diane and Bud Earley, and Jim and Toni Johns found larvae or exuviae as part of Rec. and Parks water quality monitoring program headed by Sue Muller. Sue's interest in odonates has really been sparked. In 1999 she contributed two dozen records and told us of many locations in the county that should be

good for odonates. For 2000 she is ready to hit the ground running (or wading). Dave Czaplak was especially helpful with field work on two of the county's new species. Richard Orr, who keeps the state records, is mentor, resident expert, and cheerleader for this project. He leads an annual odonate trip to Centennial Park. Watershed Protection Supervisor Larry Lager has provided permission to survey WSSC property, for which we are grateful. Unfortunately, the low water levels in 1999 produced no new species for the reservoirs.

The list of Howard County odonates and the list of Maryland odonates is available on the Howard County Bird Club Web page <<http://pages.prodigy.net/eckerd/birding.htm>>. We are looking forward to the publication of a North American field guide to dragonflies by Scientific Publishers which will emphasize identification through binoculars; this is by the same author that produced the guides for Florida. With this new guide, interested birders should be able to contribute data to the Howard County survey.

1998 SEED SALE CONTRIBUTIONS DONATED

Conservation contributions from the 1998 seed sale were recently contributed to the River of Raptors project, in Veracruz, Mexico. The program is based at the Veracruz Bird Observatory which lies at a key migration bottleneck for thousands of wading birds and millions of hawks (including the declining Swain-

son's Hawk). In total, 465 bird species, including 220 neotropical migrants have been recorded in the area, yet much of the native habitat has already been converted to agriculture. The project is conducting long-term monitoring of hawks and wading birds, developing community outreach and environmental educa-

tion, identifying and protecting migrant stop-over habitat, and promoting sustainable ecotourism.

What made this project of particular interest to the Club was that the funds raised for this project were matched by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Therefore, the \$1,500 contributed by the Club equated to \$3,000 in total donations to this worthwhile project.

Thanks to everyone who contributes to conservation efforts through the seed sale process.

BEGINNER'S CORNER - CHOOSING BINOCULARS

Q. What should I look for in binoculars for birding?

A. There are special features that are important when choosing binoculars suitable for birding.

- Close and fast focus (time is limited, it is important to focus on the bird quickly)
- Field of view (the width of an area you can see at 1000 yards)
- Brightness (fully multi-coated optics can increase brightness by more than 50%)
- Depth of field (the distance seen near to far, generally lower magnifications offer greater depth of field)
- Eye relief (the distance the binocs can be held away from the eye and still present the full field of view. Long eye relief is very important for those who wear glasses)
- Resolution (the ability of the binocs to distinguish fine detail)
- Weatherproofness (optics should be sealed against dust, pollen and moisture. Some glasses are waterproof and others are water resistant)

Most birders find that 7-8 power magnifi-

cation is the most suitable for birding. 10 power magnification sometimes sacrifices some of the resolution and can be harder to hold steady. The larger the field of view and the more light gathering ability the better for birding. It is best to try looking through a number of different binoculars and see which style suits you best.

Q. How much do you need to spend for good binoculars?

A. Optics have come a long way in recent years. Many companies have realized birders are their primary market. There are now very good "starter" binoculars that average \$125.00-4300.00. They are designed for birding and have all the features needed to carry you through a number of years before you might want to upgrade. People that are using poor quality optics often give up in frustration so it is wise to get the best quality you can afford. There are many brands and price ranges out there. When people commit to birding it is not uncommon to spend \$1000.00 for the highest quality optics.

BIRDWATCHER'S GUIDE TO DELMARVA

1999 [56 pages] This full-color book lists the best birdwatching spots in the Delmarva Peninsula, as well as the optimum times to see various species at the public places listed. The bird life of Delmarva ranges from waterfowl to colorful woodland warblers. The book, which is not a guide to bird identification, lists the species seen at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Assateague Island, Kiptopeke State Park, Bombay Hook, Pocomoke River State Park, Pickering Creek and other sanctuaries. The guide was compiled by a coalition of 34 members representing Maryland, Delaware, Virginia and the federal government. It costs \$6.95 and is available at local stores, the above refuges, or by calling Maryland Department of Natural Resources at 410-543-6594 or Delmarva Advisory Council at 410-742-9271.

CALENDAR OF PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS

Programs are held at Longfellow Elementary School, 5470 Hesperus Dr., Columbia. Meeting is canceled 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.

Thursday, January 13 "Landbird Survey at Aberdeen Proving Grounds," by Jim McCann, Maryland DNR.

Thursday, February 10 "Rare Birds of Maryland," by Mark Hoffman.

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 or e-mail bott@erols.com.

January 1, Saturday, Start your Millennium List (1/2 day) Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the concession stand of Centennial park. Leader: Bonnie Ott. We will carpool to different county locations to find as many species as possible. Easy walking, facilities available. Call 410-461-3361. Pg.5.

January 8, Saturday, Gulls at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center (1/2 day) Leaders: Kurt Schwarz and Nancy Magnusson. This will be a combo of indoor and outdoor birding focusing on gulls. Minimal walking, facilities available and gift shop too! This trip will have a limit of 20 people so please call Kurt to reserve a spot; 410-461-1643 between 4:00-8:30 p.m.

January 15-17, Saturday, Sunday and Monday, Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel. Please call Jeff Friedhoffer for reservation info about this 3 day birding bonanza at the CBET. Expect sea ducks and plenty of interesting waterfowl at the tunnel. Other land birding will be included in the trip.

February 5, Saturday Fifteenth Howard County Midwinter Count. (See article elsewhere in this newsletter.) To volunteer, contact Mary-Jo Betts 301-596-5859 or Jo Solem 301-725-5037.

February 13, Sunday Smithsonian (Natural History Museum) (all day) We will carpool down to the metro and head into DC. We will spend the morning looking at the exhibits with emphasis on the hall of birds. Plan to break for lunch at the cafe in the Smithsonian. Call Bonnie for details on time and meeting place, 410-461-3361.

February 20, Sunday American Tree Sparrow Search (1/2 day) Leader: Bonnie Ott. Meet at Rt 100 park and ride. We will either walk the Meadowbrook area or carpool to the most likely spot for winter sparrows. Walking may be difficult and boots a must. Call Bonnie for info. 410-461-3361.

February 26, Saturday Alpha Ridge Landfill (1/2 day) Leader: Ralph Cullison. Meet at the landfill, outside the gate at 8:00 a.m. We will walk the landfill looking for winter species. Although the gulls are minimal, who knows what else will turn up? Boots are recommended. No facilities. Call Bonnie for info, 410-461-3361.

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

February 24, Thursday Bob & Jo Solem, 10617 Graeloch Rd., Laurel, MD 20723, 301-725-5037

MARCH - APRIL 2000 NEWSLETTER MATERIAL IS DUE JANUARY 28, 2000. 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://pages.prodigy.net/eckerd/birding.htm>.

HOWARD COUNTY ANNUAL LISTS DUE FEBRUARY 29, 2000

A list of all the birds seen in the county during the 1999 calendar year is being compiled for the 21th 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 29, 2000. The length of the list isn't important, because your list may contain the bird that will make 1999 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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CONSERVATION COLUMN

BY BOB SOLEM

A new EDF study, *On the Road to Recovery*, found that a wide variety of endangered species are slowly recovering, thanks to protective measures taken under the Endangered Species Act.

Among the most celebrated recovering species is the gray wolf. Since the Endangered Species Act was signed into law in 1973, gray wolf populations in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have increased dramatically. In the Northern Rocky Mountains, two "experimental populations" of gray wolves have fared extremely well since reintroduction to Yellowstone and central Idaho began in 1995, although the continued well-being of these populations depends on the appeal of a court decision ordering their removal. By fall of 1998, well over 100 wolves in each of these locations were reshaping ecosystems in historic habitats from which they had been eliminated more than half a century ago.

Another dramatic rebound has been the rising number of Kemp's ridley sea turtles nesting in the Gulf of Mexico following their near-extinction in the 1970's. The Endangered Species Act has greatly reduced accidental drownings of Kemp's ridley and other endangered sea turtles by requiring shrimp boats to equip their nets with turtle excluder devices, or TED's. Protection of turtle nesting beaches has also contributed to increased numbers.

The California sea otter was once thought extinct, a victim of the fur trade, but discovery of a colony of surviving otters gave this animal a second chance. Despite significant, unexplained declines since 1995, otter numbers in spring 1998 were still 57% higher than in 1982. If the recent declines continue, however, the apparent progress of the past two decades could be erased. The cautionary lesson here is that it is necessary to remain vigilant, even after a species has apparently made good progress toward recovery.

The U.S. Atlantic Coast population of piping plovers has nearly doubled since 1986, thanks to conservation efforts such as limiting human access to nesting beaches and controlling predators. These diminutive shorebirds disappeared from much of their range after wild beaches gave way to development, recreation, and shore stabilization projects.

In Texas, two populations of black-capped vireos have increased dramatically as a result of habitat management measures. If similar efforts are carried out throughout this songbird's range, its recovery is clearly attainable. The Kirtland's warbler, a migratory songbird that nests almost entirely in young jack pine stands in Michigan, has also increased, thanks to active management of its unique habitat and a program to control cowbirds, common birds that lay their eggs in warbler nests to the detri-

ment of the warblers' young.

Half a century ago, fewer than 20 stately white whooping cranes remained. Thanks to an extraordinary effort to rescue this tall marshland bird from extinction, the number of whooping cranes living in the wild is over 250, likely more than at any time this century.

State and Federal officials worked with sportsmen to ban shooting of Aleutian Canada geese along the Pacific Coast during the hunting season. This action and the elimination of arctic foxes from the Aleutian Islands (where they were introduced in the 1830's) have led to a significant increase in the birds' numbers.

Plants are also coming back. A rare alpine wildflower called Robbins' cinquefoil has increased in its small range in New Hampshire's White Mountains. Efforts to stem the plant's decline, including re-routing hiking trails and improving transplant techniques, helped the cinquefoil more than double its population over the last 15 years. It is currently being considered for downlisting from endangered to threatened status.

Despite this progress, these species are not safe yet. "Unfortunately," said attorney Michael Bean, who heads EDF's wildlife program, "much of this progress is overlooked by those who want to judge the Act only by the number of species that have fully recovered. Full recovery will come in time, but gradual progress must come first."

