



# The Goldfinch

Newsletter of the Howard County Bird Club  
 A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society  
[www.howardbirds.website](http://www.howardbirds.website)



## CLUB MEETINGS - BY MARY LOU CLARKE

Thursday, January 13, 2022 "Pocket Habitats: The 2021 Howard County Butterfly Survey," by Kevin Heffernan and Linda Hunt. Kevin is a past president of the Howard County Bird Club and is interested in gardening and encouraging the planting of native pollinator gardens through Bee City. Linda is a Master Naturalist interested in native pollinator habitat preservation and gardening. Kevin and Linda co-chair the HCBC's Butterfly Group.

Thursday, February 10, 2022 "USGS North American Breeding Bird Survey," by Dave Ziolkowski, The United States Geological Survey's North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is the primary source for critical quantitative data to evaluate the status of continental bird species. Each year thousands of citizen scientists skilled in avian identification collect data on BBS routes throughout North America, allowing us to better understand bird population changes and manage them. Dave will discuss how the survey works and what it has revealed about changes in bird numbers and ranges.

Dave is a Wildlife Biologist with the Eastern Ecological Science Center (formerly Patuxent Wildlife Research Center). He has been actively involved in wildlife research for over 30 years, both in the U.S. and abroad, and has worked on myriad topics spanning the fields of ecology, evolutionary biology, biogeography, toxicology, and population monitoring. He is the acting chief of the BBS.

**Please note:** Club programs will be held on-line using Google Meet. See the [Club Programs and Field Trips](#) page on the HCBC website for details and registration procedures.

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### SEEKING EDITOR FOR THE GOLDFINCH

The May-June 2022 issue of *The Goldfinch* will be Howard Patterson's last as editor. The club's Board of Directors is seeking a club member willing to take on the job.

Preparation of the newsletter requires a few hours time for each of five bimonthly issues. There is no issue for July-August.

All that is needed is willingness to contribute to the club and basic computer skills, including some experience with Microsoft Word or another word processing software. Everything else can be learned during production of the first couple of issues. Howard will provide written directions and guidance, hands-on training, and assistance for as long as the new editor requires. Contact Howard at [howard21042@verizon.net](mailto:howard21042@verizon.net) for details.

## HCBC CELEBRATES 50 YEARS IN 2022

BY JOANNE SOLEM

The Howard County Bird Club (HCBC) was founded in late 1972. To plan a celebration of its first half century for the year 2022, the HCBC's Board of Directors established a 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee almost two years ago. Consisting of Mary Lou Clark, David Holmes, Mary Maxey, David Sandler, Kristin Trouton, Kelsey Wellons, and Joanne Solem, chair, the committee has met regularly via Zoom since March 2020.

Celebratory events will continue through 2022. Some activities will be virtual, and there will be a number of outdoor options. Finally, we are anticipating a special event in the Gudelsky Environmental Education Center at Mount Pleasant, Howard County Conservancy on Sunday, October 30, 2022. The day will begin with a field trip in the morning. In the afternoon, activities will move indoors with

*(50th Anniversary continued on page 3)*

# WINTER FIELD TRIPS

BY [JOE HANFMAN](#)

Field trips are a great way to improve birding skills, explore new places and meet other birders. Arrive at the meeting site ready to leave at the designated time with appropriate footwear and gear. **Because of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, field trip leaders may limit the number of participants, require masks, or impose other conditions. For the latest information, please check with the leader or the [Club Programs and Field Trips](#) page on the Howard County Bird Club website shortly before the date of the trip.**

## START YOUR YEAR LIST

January 1, 2022, Saturday. Start at 8:00 a.m. (half day). Meet at the Howard County Conservancy – Mount Pleasant Farm. Easy walking on woodland trails. Plan to bird several locations to find as many species as possible The one day of the year when every bird is new! Facilities available at some locations.

Leader: Kurt Schwarz, [kschwal@verizon.net](mailto:kschwal@verizon.net), 410-461-1643

## BLACKWATER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

January 8, Saturday, all day trip. Plan to stop at the Choptank River Bridge for ducks and coffee. Bring lunch and drinks. Dress warmly. Entrance fee or Duck Stamp required. Email the leader to reserve a spot and get details. Facilities at some spots.

Leader: Kurt Schwarz, [kschwal@verizon.net](mailto:kschwal@verizon.net), 410-461-1643

## MID-WINTER COUNT

February 5, Saturday. See page 6 for details.

## HOW TO FIND AN OWL





February 19, Saturday, 9:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., possibility of birding at dusk for owls and early woodcocks for those in the afternoon group. Learn how to find owls by habitat and signs. Jay is an expert at finding owls and will share his skills and knowledge as to how to find different species. Contact Jay to sign up so participants can be advised of weather-related changes and where to meet. Group size is limited and RSVP required. Our target species are Long-eared, Northern Saw-whet, and other owls. No facilities.

Leader: Jay Sheppard, [jaymsheppard95@gmail.com](mailto:jaymsheppard95@gmail.com) (preferred), 301-725-5559

## WOODCOCKS

The date will be mid to late February and announced by Newsgram, email, or on the club's website.

Leader: Mary Lou Clark, [doctorfx\\_99@yahoo.com](mailto:doctorfx_99@yahoo.com)

-  = Reservations required
-  = Fee for this trip
-  = Great for beginning birders
-  = Wheelchair Accessible

## IN MEMORIAM JANE GEUDER 1939-2021

Long-time member Jane Geuder died November 28, 2021, as a result of complications from Parkinson's Disease. Because of Covid-19 there was no formal service.

Jane was best known to many members for her competence and enthusiasm in serving as program chair for a quarter century. She and her husband, Ralph, were ardent hawk enthusiasts and were instrumental in searching for a county hawkwatch site.

For those wishing to remember Jane with a donation, consider the Parkinson's Foundation of the National Capital Area (PFNCA), 3570 Olney Laytonsville Rd #490, Olney, MD 20830.

A longer tribute can be found on the In Memoriam webpage: [In Memoriam | Howard County Bird Club \(howardbirds.website\)](#) .

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

If you have not yet renewed your membership for 2021-22, go to the HCBC website: <https://www.howardbirds.website/> and click on "Join Us" at the top of the home page.

## Northern Saw-Whet Owl



© Kevin J. Heffernan

Photo by Kevin Heffernan  
from a 2015 "How to Find an Owl" trip.

(50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary continued from page 1)

displays, prizes, and a program. **Save that date!**

Responses to a questionnaire indicated members wanted a commemorative tee-shirt. A design contest, limited to members, was held in the fall of 2021. Sue Probst submitted the winning design (by coincidence she had also designed the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary shirt). All the submissions were excellent; in fact, the committee was so impressed with one by Pam Perna that it, too, will be used during the year. A 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary page on the website will appear on January 1, 2022, and Pam's design will be the header on that page. Our warmest congratulations to both of these talented artists!

New material will constantly be added to the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary page on the HCBC website. A November 2021 NEWS-GRAM described a major project requesting memories from club members in either written or oral form. We look forward to receiving many. Each will be posted on the web page in the course of the year.

The committee has been working with Field Trip Chair Joe Hanfman planning a variety of trips, both in-county and out. This will likely be an opportunity to revive some trips that have not been offered for years.

Program Chair Mary Lou Clark is planning some special programs. For now, they will continue to be conducted virtually, but we hope that in-person meetings will be possible before the celebration ends.

In keeping with the pandemic's necessity for minimal social contact, members will soon be able to accept the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Challenge requiring completion of a series of activities designed for all skill levels to be completed at your own pace. Do join the fun.

Be a part of this year-long celebration as individually and together we remember the achievements of the past 50 years, enjoy the present activities, and anticipate the next half century.

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## Site Guide

Included with this issue is the site guide for Wilde Lake. [Guides](#) to other birding spots are available on the club's website.

Anyone is welcome to contribute articles or ideas which you think will be of interest to other birders. Copy may be sent to:

Howard Patterson  
4209 Hermitage Drive  
Ellicott City, MD 21042-6235  
[howard21042@verizon.net](mailto:howard21042@verizon.net)

**The Goldfinch**, newsletter of the Howard County Bird Club, is published five times per year. Copy deadline for the March/April 2022 issue is January 25, 2022.

Howard Patterson, *Editor*  
Joanne Solem, *Proofreader*

## White-throated Sparrow Update

Club member Lynn Gregg photographed a nearly all-white sparrow in an Ellicott City neighborhood on 19 February 2021. A photo was included in the May-June 2021 issue of *The Goldfinch*, identifying the bird as a leucistic White-Throated Sparrow. We got the species correct, but not the specific genetic abnormality.



W. Scott Young and Lynn published an article in the Fall 2021 Issue of *Maryland Birdlife*, "A White-Throated Sparrow, *Zonotrichia albicollis*, with Probable Progressive Graying," that describes several types of genetic coloration disorders and explains how the most likely disorder was identified. *Maryland Birdlife* is sent to all MOS members.

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## [eBird Status and Trends - eBird Science](#)

If you have not done so, take time to look at the eBird Science section. The November 2021 update includes several new and improved features that provide detailed insights into the abundance and distribution of more than 1,000 species. A summary of the updates can be found [here](#).

One feature, [Abundance Animations](#), (examples can be seen in the link) is an animated display of species abundance throughout the calendar year. This provides much more information than is displayed in a field guide.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

The January 27 and February 24 board meetings will be held by teleconference or videoconference. If you have input or questions, please send an email to Mary Maxey at [maxeymom11998@gmail.com](mailto:maxeymom11998@gmail.com).



## EASTERN SCREECH-OWL BOXES

BY WARD EBERT

Our first Eastern Screech-Owl box was erected as an Eagle Scout project by Owen Deitz, his father, and Jay Sheppard on 27 March 2004, during the 2002-2006 Breeding Bird Atlas period. The box was provided free of charge, but I made a donation to the project via Jay Sheppard. Jay selected a small Tulip Poplar and sawed off the top about 15 feet off the ground to keep squirrels from jumping to it from other trees.

At Jay's suggestion I wrapped the tree with a band of aluminum flashing to keep squirrels from climbing the tree. That didn't work, so I consulted Jay and added a second band to make it about 18 inches high. That didn't work either and I wound up adding a cone of flashing at the top of the two wraps. That worked. Jay had seen the wrap alone succeed, but I suspect the small diameter of this tree made the additional cone necessary.

By mid-June, Great Crested Flycatchers were seen investigating the box and young subsequently fledged circa 20 July 2004.

On 19 December 2004 a rufous phase Eastern Screech-Owl was seen in the box and appeared daily through the end of the year and then at least every other day in early January 2005, last seen on the 19<sup>th</sup>. There was a sighting on 18 February and on 4 March that appeared to be a different individual. There were no further sightings until 28 and 29 November 2005, none the rest of the year.

The first successful nesting was in 2006, the last year of the atlas period. First seen was a rufous or intermediate phase owl in the box on the 2nd of April, and daily that week, more-or-less daily thereafter for a while and sporadically until mid-May when sightings picked up at dusk with earlier hunting forays. There was one occasion, 23 April, when one owl spent the day perched in a low bush near the house. My notes indicate the young appeared to have fledged on 5/31 or 6/1.

The next sighting was 7 October 2006. It was 29 October when I first remarked in my records of the sighting of a gray-phase owl. Sightings were frequent through to 4 March of 2007, but none thereafter.

The second nesting was in 2007, and several photographs were made including one showing a parent perched on a limb looking back at the box where two fledglings were in the box opening. That year one of the young was found dead in a neighbor's yard shortly after fledging. The third and last nesting in the original box was in 2009, with young first visible in the box on May 16th and last seen May 23rd although they may have not fledged until the 25th.

Sometime after that, a branch fell on the box, breaking off a corner. As the box was affixed to a now dead poplar there

was no safe way to repair the box and eventually the tree fell over.

We had no box for many years until I built and erected the new one on 26 September 2015. This one was designed to identical dimensions but made of outdoor-tolerant hardwoods (mahogany and redwood). It is mounted on a hinge on a pivoting post that allows easy lowering and raising for cleaning and repair. I located it closer to the house and in view of many windows. It was occupied by flying squirrels mostly until autumn 2020.

The owl history for this new box started on 2 November 2020, with an owl appearing to roost in the box, followed by a pair nesting in the spring of 2021, and young (at least two) fledging around the middle of May 2021. The pair was first seen in the box together on 12 February 2021. On 26 February I watched one owl head-butt the other owl out of the opening so it could perch there. The first owl perched in a nearby holly tree. The first sighting of a nestling was on 12 May, and two were seen together on 14 May. Young were last seen on 16 May and no owls were seen thereafter in the first half of 2021.

Flying squirrels were seen in the box on a few occasions in the summer.

Since then an owl first appeared on 3 November this fall (2021) and has been seen daily to date (12/9/2021) usually at dawn and dusk, occasionally sunning itself during the day. It has usually perched in the opening but, on one occasion a few days ago, it appeared to be sleeping prone with the tip of its beak over the lip of the opening and its back visible. This owl has the same coloration as the two last winter and I cannot tell them apart.



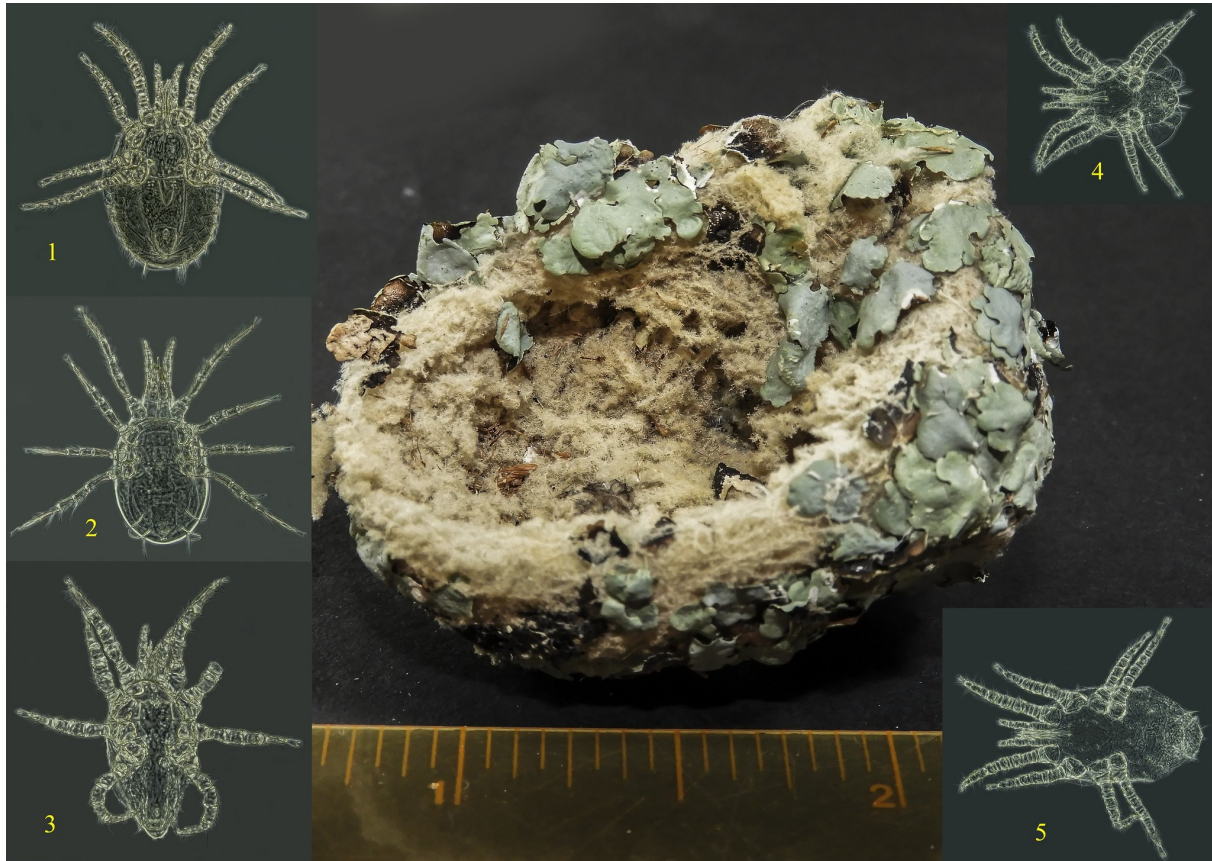
Eastern Screech-Owl in Box, November 2020

## HUMMINGBIRD NEST MITES

BY RICHARD ORR

This Ruby-throated Hummingbird nest was closely watched by Bonnie Ott and other members of the Howard County Bird Club as the parents raised three healthy chicks. I asked Bonnie if she would loan me the nest after the young had left.

One mite of Type “3”: Mesostigmata – unable to identify to family – single ventral plate. Likely a mite predator or bird parasite.



Hummingbird Nest Mites

by Richard Orr

The nest was surprisingly tiny (the measurement unit is inches in the above photo). It was hard to believe that it held three nestlings. The nest was made mostly out of lichens and something that to me resembled drier lint. Once I got the nest, I put it upside down in a Berlese Funnel and ran it for 24 hours.

At the end of the 24-hour run, I had collected 15 mites, an early instar Psocoptera and an early instar larval Coleoptera (possible Carabidae). I was most interested in the mites, so I discarded the young beetle and barklouse.

Of the 15 mites collected I believe that I had 5 different types:

Seven Mites of Type “1”: Mesostigmata --Macronyssidae – *Ornithonyssus sylviarum* (Northern fowl mite) – these were feeding on the blood of the nestlings.

Two Mites of Type “2”: Mesostigmata -- Laelapidae – *An-drolaelaps* sp. – these were either feeding on the blood of the nestlings or were predatory on those mites that were feeding on the nestlings. These mites had three distinct ventral plates.

Two mites of Type “4”: Trombidiformes – unable to identify to family – mites with mouthparts deeply retracted and body covered with fan-like coverings. Judging from the needle-like mouthparts they were likely feeding on the nestlings.

Three mites of Type “5”: Trombidiformes – unable to identify to family – mites with mouthparts deeply retracted and body not covered with fan-like coverings. Judging from the needle-like mouthparts they were likely feeding on the nestlings. Except for the presence or absence of the fan-like coverings, Type “4” and Type “5” mites are very similar and possibly the same genus or species.

I am a neophyte when it comes to mite identification and realize my limitations. Any help with the identification of these mites is greatly appreciated. I have the mites on microscope slides and photographs at higher resolution upon request.

The hummingbird nest was located in Ellicott City, Howard County, Maryland.

*Member Richard Orr is not only an entomologist by profession, but is also a skilled birder and naturalist. His special interest is odonates; he annually compiles statewide dragonfly and damselfly sightings by county.*



## HOWARD COUNTY BIRD CLUB

*Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society*

**P.O. Box 1323**

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## THIRTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL MID-WINTER COUNT

BY JOE HANFMAN

Join the Howard County Bird Club's Thirty-seventh Annual Mid-winter Count on Saturday, February 5, 2022. Joe Hanfman (410-772-8424) / auk1844@gmail.com is the count coordinator. You may volunteer to participate by contacting one of the area coordinators.

Area 1	Wes Earp	410-531-3197	<a href="mailto:the_earps@verizon.net">the_earps@verizon.net</a>
Area 2	Brian Moyer		<a href="mailto:Bmoyer36@yahoo.com">Bmoyer36@yahoo.com</a>
Area 3	Chuck Stirrat	443-462-8234	<a href="mailto:Stirrcl@gmail.com">Stirrcl@gmail.com</a>
Area 4	Mike McClure	410-531-2780	<a href="mailto:michael.mcclure@jhuapl.edu">michael.mcclure@jhuapl.edu</a>
Area 5	Allen Lewis	443-774-4210	<a href="mailto:allenlewis@gmail.com">allenlewis@gmail.com</a>
Area 6	John Harris	240-755-0183	<a href="mailto:Jaybee.harris@gmail.com">Jaybee.harris@gmail.com</a>
Area 7	Kurt Schwarz	410-461-1643	<a href="mailto:krschwal@verizon.net">krschwal@verizon.net</a>

Beginning birders are always welcome, as are individuals who wish to count only for part of the day. If you wish to count only at your feeder email Joe H. and request a feeder form.

If a virtual tally is held, details will be provided later.

If there is a question about the weather, we will try to make a decision the night before. Contact your area coordinator if you are unsure of the status of the count.



Map by Michael McClure