



# The Goldfinch

Newsletter of the Howard County Bird Club  
A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

[www.howardbirds.website](http://www.howardbirds.website)

Founded 1972

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## CLUB MEETINGS - BY MARY LOU CLARK

**Thursday, November 9, 2023** “Common Tern Raft” by Kim Abplanalp. In 2021, because of the lack of natural breeding habitat for Common Terns, a floating island, or raft, was constructed to provide breeding habitat and was placed in Chincoteague Bay near Assateague Island. By 2022, with the increase in the size of the raft, the number of nests and fledglings attracted to this raft became the largest breeding colony in Maryland.



Kim Abplanalp has a B.Sc. from the University of Delaware and a background in the behavioral study of horseshoe crabs in Lewes, DE. She pivoted her focus to the growing needs of colonial waterbirds, bird migration, and the need to restore and maintain breeding habitats. She is one of the lead researchers on the Common Tern Raft Project, a cooperative effort of Maryland Coastal Bays Program, The Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and Audubon Mid-Atlantic. An avid birder, she resides in West Ocean City, MD.



**Thursday, December 14, 2023** “The Celebration of Bird Song” by Wil Hershberger. This talk focuses on bird song through the seasons from late winter through early spring. We’ll examine some of the songs in detail by slowing them down with visual displays to help us “see” what we are hearing. We’ll explore what the birds are conveying to one another and other fascinating aspects of bird communication that are being revealed in the current literature.

Wil Hershberger has been president of the Potomac Valley Audubon Society and the Frederick chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society. He is the vice president of the Shenandoah Photographic Society and a co-founder of the Potomac Valley Nature Photographers. Wil is an avid naturalist and nature photographer. Co-author of The Songs of Insects with Lang Elliott, he has published recordings and images since 1998. He and his wife, Donna, are owners and operators of Nature Images and Sounds located in West Virginia, offering nature photography workshops for both beginner and intermediate level photographers.

*Club programs are presented in a hybrid format and include a brief business meeting, club announcements, and guest speaker presentation. Attendees may join either in person at the Robinson Nature Center, 6692 Cedar Lane, Columbia MD 21044, or online using Zoom. The in-person hospitality session begins, and the Zoom portal opens, at 7:00 p.m., with the meeting beginning at 7:30 p.m. Click on the “Calendar” tab on the HCBC website’s Home page at the top of the page for the most recent information.*

## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE: CHIRPS TO THE FLOCK

BY GREGG PETERSEN

I hope you have had some fun watching birds since the last Goldfinch, whether it was in your backyard or out walking around! Thanks to those of you who responded to the Membership Survey that we sent out. The board and I have been reading your comments with interest and responding to your requests. We have been thrilled to see your willingness to join us for our bird counts and assist with the Breeding Bird Atlas! You do not have to be an expert birder to improve our coverage and quality. Former bird club president, John Harris, explained it to me as the Patagonia Picnic Table Effect, which is essentially the more birders we have around our “table” or out in the woods, the more birds we will see and hear. You will find that the more you get out with other birders, the better your birding skills will become.

Some of the more frequent comments I read on the surveys were to have the ability to access the details to see more rare bird sightings and for more classes/bird walks.

We email out Newsgram Rare Bird Alerts, but we also use the GroupMe app that you can load on your smartphone that allows you to receive and send broadcast text messages in real time with Howard and other birders interested in Howard County birds. To use it, you must download the app on your phone and then request that an “admin” like Joe Hanfman or I ([auk1844@gmail.com](mailto:auk1844@gmail.com) or [sig29@aol.com](mailto:sig29@aol.com), respectively) add you to the group. Because it is text, it requires your cell phone number.

*(Chirps to the Flock continued on page 8)*

# FALL/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. Depending on the COVID situation at the time, there may be restrictions imposed. The leader may cancel due to inclement weather/hazardous driving conditions. Directions for trips not on ADC maps are on the Club's website. Questions? Contact the trip leader or Field Trip Coordinator Joe Hanfman at [auk1844@gmail.com](mailto:auk1844@gmail.com). HCBC members receive priority on trips that are limited by number of participants. No pets. There is a listing of all previous field trips on the "Calendar" page titled [Previous Field Trips](#). The trips with links have results on a separate page.

## [Skywatch, Mt Pleasant, Howard County Conservancy](#)

October 30, Monday, 9:30 a.m. Half day. Meet at parking lot or go directly to the Skywatch site. This trip will be a skywatch for migrating raptors and other potential flybys.

Leader – None designated. Join friends during the late migratory period.

## [B R W Centennial Park](#)

November 1, Wednesday, 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. Meet at Boat Ramp. Beginner Trip - Birds of the Lake. Learn helpful tools to assist you in identifying a variety of bird species. Bonnie and Val will explain the basics of binoculars and field guides. Easy walking on the open side of Centennial Lake. Registration required: limit 10. Please email Bonnie Ott (email address below) to reserve a spot. Leaders – Bonnie Ott, [sparrowdamsel@gmail.com](mailto:sparrowdamsel@gmail.com); Val Swan

## [B Mt Pleasant, Howard County Conservancy](#)

November 4, Saturday, 9:30 a.m. Half day. Meet at the parking lot. This trip will be strictly a sky watch for late-migrating raptors and other potential goodies. Our main target will be Golden Eagle; while not expected, early November is the best time to catch one flying over Howard County. We will watch the skies and tally the birds as long as conditions are productive. Hope for a north wind! Bring water, lunch, hat, sunscreen, light-colored sunglasses, comfortable lawn chair (recliners are best), binoculars, scope, and camera if you like. Participants can also walk the Conservancy trails if skywatching proves non-productive. Facilities available. Leader - Russ Ruffing, [russruffing@gmail.com](mailto:russruffing@gmail.com)

## [B W Centennial Park](#)

November 5, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. 2-3 hours. (Daylight Saving Time ends) West end parking lot. Easy walking on paved paths around Centennial Lake. Woodlands, fields, and water host a wide variety of species. Great view of the sky for flyovers. Early waterfowl, lingering migrants likely. Facilities available.

Leader – Russell Kovach, [Russell.kovach@gmail.com](mailto:Russell.kovach@gmail.com)

## [Skywatch, Mt Pleasant, Howard County Conservancy](#)

November 6, Monday, 9:30 a.m. Half day. Meet at parking lot or go directly to the Skywatch site. This trip will be a skywatch for migrating raptors and other potential flybys.

Leader – None designated. Join friends during the late migratory period.

## [Mt Pleasant, Howard County Conservancy](#)

November 8, Wednesday, 8:00 a.m. Half day. Meet at parking lot. This is an impromptu leaderless walk for an opportunity to bird with friends from the club.

Leader – None designated. Join friends for a walk at Mt. Pleasant.

## [B R Beginner Trip - Find the Clues](#)

November 11, Saturday, 8:30 - 10:30. Meeting location details to be provided to registered attendees in advance of trip. Learn to use habitat, behavior, manner of flight, etc. to assist in bird identification. Small group, slow pace over one mile of wet fields and uneven pastureland at private residence in NW Howard County. Boots recommended. Registration required: limit 5. Please email the trip leader (email address below) to reserve a spot.

Leader – Val Swan, [valnjeff55@gmail.com](mailto:valnjeff55@gmail.com)

## [B R Beginner Trip - Find the Clues](#)

November 18, Saturday  
See November 11 entry. Registration required. The trip leader (email address below) to reserve a spot.

Leader – Val Swan, [valnjeff55@gmail.com](mailto:valnjeff55@gmail.com)

## [B W Centennial Park](#)

November 12, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. 2-3 hours. West end parking lot. See November 5 entry.

Leader – Richard and Renee Peters, [Richard@rrrrpeters.org](mailto:Richard@rrrrpeters.org)

## [B W Centennial Park](#)

November 19, Sunday, 8:00 a.m., 2-3 hours. See November 5 entry.

Leader – David Holmes, [musiclbndr@gmail.com](mailto:musiclbndr@gmail.com)

## [B W Centennial Park](#)

November 26, Sunday, 8:00 a.m., 2-3 hours. See November 5 entry.

Leader – David Ziolkowski, [dziolkowski@usgs.gov](mailto:dziolkowski@usgs.gov)

## [R Triadelphia Christmas Count](#)

December 16, Saturday. For information or to volunteer to participate, contact the compiler, David Holmes, [musiclbndr@gmail.com](mailto:musiclbndr@gmail.com), 410-730-7083.

## [Start Your Year List](#)

January 1, 2024, Monday, start at 8:00 a.m. (half day) Meet at Mt Pleasant, Howard County Conservancy. Easy walking on woodland trails. May plan to bird several different locations to find as many species as possible. The one day of the year where every bird is new! Facilities available.

Leader – Kurt Schwarz, [krschwal@verizon.net](mailto:krschwal@verizon.net)

## [R Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge](#)

January 6, 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. We will carpool. Facilities at some spots.

Leader – Kurt Schwarz, [krschwal@verizon.net](mailto:krschwal@verizon.net)

**B** = Good for beginning birders

**W** = Wheelchair accessible

**R** = Reservations Required

## SUMMER BIRD RECORDS: JUNE 1 – JULY 31, 2023

BY [JOANNE SOLEM](#)



Clay-colored Sparrow by Steve Luke

There are always a few headline species no matter how short the season. The best was a real shocker—the county’s first summer Clay-colored Sparrow. Other noteworthy birds were swan (unidentified species), Bufflehead, Caspian Tern, Red-headed Woodpecker (three nests), White-throated Sparrow, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Dickcissel. Overall, summer temperatures were near normal, with rainfall continuing below normal. Smoke from

Canadian wildfires was present occasionally leading to unhealthy to hazardous air quality on several days.

A swan flying over US 29 on 6/15 (SBt) could not be identified to species. Although swan sightings are unusual in summer, they are not unprecedented.

This was an excellent year for **Wood Duck** reproduction. Multiple females with young continued to be reported into late July. A male **Bufflehead**, seen intermittently at Lake Elkhorn since 5/6, was last reported on 6/9, marking the county’s fifth summer record (MSt; KS; JHf).

**Wild Turkeys** were sighted in many parts of the county. Of the 21 reports, 16 were adults and 12 were in June.

Single **Spotted Sandpipers**, likely late migrants, appeared at Wilde Lake (WILLK) 6/3 (CKc, ph.); Hollofield 6/4 (CBt), Alpha Ridge Landfill 6/5 (RCu), and Mt Pleasant (MTPLT) 6/14 (GSk). Was the one at Centennial Pk (CENPK) 7/5 (MNT) the first fall migrant or, just as likely, a non-breeding local? Either way, it tied the county’s earliest “fall” record. The **Solitary Sandpipers** that showed up at Alpha Ridge Landfill 7/17 (RCu-1) and Tarbay Pd 7/18 (POs-3) were more definitively fall migrants.

A **Caspian Tern**, unusual in summer and the county’s first-ever June record, was photog’d at CENPK 6/9 (LGg) and last seen 6/11 (JGn).

**Green Herons** were widely reported and had an exceptionally successful breeding season. As a sample, at Warfield’s Pond Pk, two adults were feeding four fledglings on 6/13 (BHi). WILLK hosted multiple nests. On 6/23, an adult there was seen standing on the edge of a nest containing three nestlings: “It was dark and rainy. When it started to rain harder and thunder a bit, the parent bird got one of its big feet and pushed all three down way into the nest and sat on them. It was hilarious.” (AAI). The same observer watched a recently fledged young bird at the same location on 7/29 carefully stalk and strike—a dead leaf! On 7/1, another WILLK nest contained five young (LMcD, GDiR). (Three to five is the normal clutch.) **Black-crowned Night-Herons** were reported

at the following locations: CENPK (MNT), Hollofield (CBt), Fulton (TFy; RHI), Lake Kittamaquundi (m. obs.), and MTPLT (MKw).

For some time, large numbers of **Black Vultures** had been roosting on two cell towers near MD 40, west of Pine Orchard. When passing the location in early June, Kristin Trouton noticed two vultures hanging from the tower. She contacted the towers’ owners who told her the birds were plastic and had been recently installed to deter roosting birds. The fake dead vultures worked. More than a month later, just one vulture was perched on one tower—and several not-so-clever crows were attacking one of the plastic birds.

**Red-headed Woodpeckers** can be expected to turn heads. Thanks to atlasing efforts, it was a memorable summer for the species. For the first time in 70+ years of records, successful nesting occurred in three different county locations in one year. A pair nested at a farm on Jennings Chapel Rd in June (KCK); a second nest was confirmed along Duval Rd in early July (SMu). The third confirmation was the most frustrating to establish. On 6/22, two adults were reported at Howard Chapel Rd/Patuxent River (ACn, ph.); copulation was photog’d on 6/25 (TFy). Numerous other observations there were almost all single adults until an adult and an immature were finally spotted on 7/15 (GPn, ph.). Also exciting at the same location was the report on 6/24, not only of the parking lot pair, but of a second pair farther upstream (JHf). Single adults were seen at other sites including Brown’s Bridge, A. E. Mullinix Rd, MTPLT, Larriland Farm on MD 94, and Fulton—a decided upswing in summer numbers for this species.

An **Eastern Kingbird** was a surprising visitor photog’d eating at a peanut butter suet feeder in a Dorsey Search yard 6/10 (AAI). Nice to have a camera handy!

An adult and two begging **Common Ravens** on a cell tower on Mission Rd confirmed the species in a new atlas block 6/2 (DZk). A family group of five was seen and heard at Howard Chapel Rd 6/26 (VLi).

The **Purple Martin** complex at MTPLT, erected in 2022 by the HCBC, attracted five pairs of martins—a great beginning after just one year. Unfortunately, this story had a sad ending. One or more black rat snakes predated the eggs and young in all the nests (RRf). The supporting pole now has an adequate guard to deter climbing predators. We look forward to the 2024 nesting season, sadder but wiser.

Interestingly, one pair of **Tree Swallows** successfully raised young in one compartment of the same martin house (RRf). The nesting martins scarcely took note of those usurpers. Also unusual was a nest with well-feathered young in a natural cavity at MTPLT on 6/18 (KMt). Tree Swallows only rarely use natural cavities, seeming to have a stronger preference for boxes than do bluebirds. By chance, good photos were obtained of the location along the Davis Branch (<https://howardbirds.website/photo-galleries/bird-photo-gallery/tree-swallow/>). Four laggard **Bank Swallows** were reported from

(Records continued on page 4)



(Records continued from page 3)

Lake Kittamaqundi 6/15 (**GDg**). Banks, as a breeding species, are rare in the county, so any sightings after late spring migrants are notable. Unfortunately, many summer reports of this species are likely to be **Barn Swallows**. Before dismissing that as unlikely because the adults of the two species are so different, note that young Barns have a dusky band on the upper breast, a short forked tail, and are a brownish color! Two juvenile Barns were photog'd at MTPLT 6/26 (**TCn**) which nicely illustrated the ID problem. (<https://howardbirds.website/photo-galleries/bird-photo-gallery/barn-swallow/>). The **Cliff Swallow** colony under the MD 32 bridge near Sykesville had 15+ active nests and a count of 22 birds on 7/2 (**FLv**).

Eggs of unusual shapes, sizes, and colors are occasionally reported. Frequently, such oddities lack embryos so they never hatch. Success for two local **Eastern Bluebird** pairs with aberrant eggs was welcome news. Very occasionally, a clutch contains an egg that is decidedly smaller than the rest. When a family that had nested in a natural cavity appeared at a Dorsey Hall mealworm feeder on 7/3 (**AAI**), it was apparent that one of the three fledglings was markedly smaller than the rest. Nicknamed "Peanut," it was easy to keep track of this miniature bird. After its larger siblings were on their own, the adult male continued to feed the small bird. Slowly, it grew to a more normal size; by mid-July, it was difficult to tell which of the fledglings was Peanut. In the second instance, for the third year in a row, a pair of bluebirds successfully raised a brood from entirely pink-colored eggs in a Cavey La nest box (**RRf**). This aberration is known to occur very rarely in bluebirds (**RRf**). A late **Swainson's Thrush** was spotted at Madison Ave, No. Laurel 6/2 (**DZk**) for one of the county's few June records.

Birders are sometimes too quick to identify a bird by sound alone. A recent experience underscored the value of taking the necessary time to visually verify the species. "Today [7/27] while walking the dog along the paved road at West Friendship Park, I kept hearing the zeet/chatter that meadowlarks do, but I couldn't see any. Finally, I realized it was the [**Northern**] **Mockingbirds** on the telephone wire overhead. Since they created the meadow at WFP, the meadowlarks and mockingbirds have been sharing the wire, and I guess the mockingbirds learned a new song. Pretty amazing. It sure fooled me" (**LCg**).

On 6/9, two pairs of **House Finches** built nests in the two hanging baskets on a porch along Green Clover Dr (**RTd**). Eventually, one nest fledged three; the other (which at one point had had four finch eggs and one cowbird egg) fledged a single House Finch!

A **Clay-colored Sparrow** was an unexpected discovery at MTPLT on 6/26 (**BO**, ph.), a first-ever record for the summer season. Although elusive, it was seen by half a dozen other birders throughout that day. Two summer **White-throated Sparrows** were reported: one at Henryton 6/5 (**JHf**), the other in an Ellicott City yard 6/18 (**VLi**).

**Brown-headed Cowbird** fledglings were reportedly being fed by the following: **Red-eyed Vireo** 6/28 (**SGz**), **Chipping Sparrow** 6/24 and 7/26 (**VSw**), **Common Yellowthroat** 7/10 (**SMu**), and **No. Cardinal** 6/27 (**SMu**) and 7/22 (**BCt**). A cowbird egg

was reported with four House Finch eggs. Interestingly only one House Finch fledged from the nest—no cowbirds (**RTd**). A cowbird egg was in another House Finch nest (**SMu**).

A few warbler migrants spilled over into summer. As expected, multiple **American Redstarts** were still in transit in June, as was a **Blackpoll** on 6/5 (**VSw**). Although there was no evidence of breeding, a **Blue-winged Warbler** spotted at MTPLT 6/26 (**TCn**) was a rare summer record for that location. **Northern Parulas** take a sharp eye—and luck—to confirm. One carrying food was seen in the Davis Branch area of MTPLT 6/20 (**J/MHr**). At Howard Chapel Rd on 6/23 an adult was feeding young (**KS**); a month later there, on 7/22, an adult was observed carrying food (**YYL**).

The breeding season can be counted on to produce exciting behavioral observations. At 8:40 a.m. on 6/13, Cheryl Farfaras was walking through Clegg Meadow at the Middle Patuxent Environmental Area when she noted a male **Indigo Bunting's** seldom-seen pre-copulatory display and described it as follows: "Male flew off singing perch (straight at me like a blue bullet), flew past me to land on the trail in a small (~15") round bare soil patch. He danced with his chest pressed down, feathers fluffed, wings half-open and twitching, tail swishing back and forth, and moving about a quarter circle one direction, then the other and again. I noticed the female in the tall grass next to the trail. She landed on the ground near him and they copulated. He danced again. They copulated again and they repeated this several times." What a special experience!

The last **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, a singing male, was detected at Woodbine on 6/4 (**PPn**, rec.). The lone male **Dickeissel** at Bowling Green Farm, Underwood Rd continued to hold territory through July. Despite more than a dozen trips to the location, no evidence of breeding could be established (**VSw**). (Many thanks to the Jones family for permission to access the bird's territory.) It appears that the small breeding colony has winked out.

**Bonus:** In early June, Mary Lou Clark passed along a photo taken by someone of a Black Bear along Marriottsville Rd. (Wandering young males are becoming annual in the county.)



Dickeissel

by Hsiao Shyong

*Acknowledgments:* Joe Hanfman and Russ Ruffing provided essential advice, edits, and additions to this season's records and this article.

**Observers:** **AAI** – Annette Allor, **SbT** – Simon Best, **CBt** – Crystal Butler, **TCn** – Tim Carney, **KCK** – Ken Clark, **LCg** – Lisa Colangelo, **BCt** – Ben Costello, **ACn** – Andy Connelly, **RCu** – Ralph Cullison III, **GDg** – Gabriel Diggs, **GDiR** – Guy DiRoma, **TFy** – Tim Frye, **JGn** – Jim Green, **LGg** – Lynn Gregg, **SGz** – Scott Guzewish, **JHf** – Joe Hanfman, **BHi** – Bill Hill, **RHI** – Russell Hillsley, **MKw** – Mike Kerwin, **CKc** – Clayton Koonce, **YYL** – Yi-Ying Lee, **VLi** – Vitus Li, **FLv** – Felicia Lovelett, **KMt** – Kassy Mattingly, **LMcD** – Lauren McDougale, **SMu** – Sue Muller, **POs** – Peter Osenton, **BO** Bonnie Ott, **PPn** – Pam Perna, **GPn** – Gregg Petersen, **RRf** – Russ Ruffing, **KS** – Kurt Schwarz, **MSt** – Michelle Stewart, **VSw** – Val Swan. **MNT** – MarkNhu Tewell, **RTd** – Robin Todd, **MYg** – Marc Young, **DZk** – Dave Ziolkowski.

## BEWARE OF MUD!

BY [JOANNE SOLEM](#)

Fall migration in 2023 produced shorebirding at Triadelphia Reservoir unlike any seen in the county in years. Unfortunately, emergent mudflats, exposed by low water in order to dredge portions of the reservoir, inadvertently created conditions leading to the induction of a few new members into the Muddy Sock Society (MSS). This exclusive group consists of anyone who has lost, or nearly lost, foot-gear in mud. Although birders of all ages and experience levels are eligible, there are a few precautions you can take so you never join.



*Photo by Megan Bolcar*

At best, sinking into mud is messy; at worst, it is frightening and even dangerous. Mud of varying depths can be present at the edges of ponds, rivers, lakes, and reservoirs at any time of the year. The most treacherous locations are large unvegetated stretches, especially at or near the mouths of tributaries. At such locations, the sediment layer may be several feet deep. Any scattered annual vegetation is likely to have only a minimal root system offering little support. The surface of such expanses may appear dry; however, like a thin crust on deep snow, appearances can be extremely deceiving. Unexpectedly going into mud up to one's ankles in flooded wooded areas or at the edges of large mudflats is messy, but not often dangerous because the mud layer is normally quite shallow. In such situations, it is usually possible to get out with a little care and effort—with or without one's shoes/boots. On the other hand, plunging into deep, gooey mud up to one's calf or knee is a more frightening experience, made more so if the second foot goes in, too. It takes patience, time, and a good deal of effort to extricate oneself. By the time you are free, you are almost certainly going to be exhausted and mud-covered.

An experience while dragonflying more than 25 years ago taught me the following. These tips may help you avoid becoming a member of the MSS.

1. Avoid birding alone near water.
2. Always carry a stout pole or hiking stick. In areas of questionable substrate, use the pole to test where you intend to step. (A hiking stick can also be an invaluable tool if you do become stuck.)
3. Always look for sand or gravel on which to step or walk. A substrate with basketball-sized rocks can be almost as treacherous as silt. Even in knee-high boots or waders, never walk in shallow water with a muddy bottom without careful testing of where you step. The stirred silt can hide trash, holes, drop-offs, submerged logs and branches, slanted slippery rocks, or even old animal traps.
4. Carry waterproof sealable bags for electronics and camera equipment. When not in use or when crossing any questionable substrates, make sure all valuables are sealed and stowed.
5. Do not wear any attire you wouldn't want to see covered with mud.
6. If there are multiple options to reach a destination near a muddy expanse, taking the long way around may ultimately save time.
7. If you *do* find yourself stuck in more than a few inches of mud, be aware that it can be a long, very slow process to extricate yourself.
8. Carry old towels and plastic bags in your vehicle. You may have to crawl out across the mud, and there may not be any way to rinse yourself off.
9. Yes, your phone can be invaluable, but depending on where and how deep you have gone in, where your phone is stored, and whether your hands can be cleaned, using a phone may be the ultimate challenge. Keep in mind that cell coverage is spotty in parts of the county.

These suggestions are not intended to frighten or deter you from enjoying your time in the field. Fortunately, membership in the MSS is low and few people wish to join. By taking a few precautions, you will have only pleasant birding memories—and your socks will remain mud-free!

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## MARYLAND/DC BREEDING BIRD ATLAS 3, 2020-2024

BY SUE MULLER

As we near the end of our fourth year of breeding bird surveys, Howard County has confirmed 100 species breeding in Howard County, with 19% of them found breeding in all 24 survey blocks. As we approach the end of the year, I remind everyone that the Great Horned Owl comes into "safe dates" on December 15th, and the Barred Owl on January 15th. Please take note if you see or hear either of these owls anywhere in the state. Report them to your County Coordinators at [Howard@mdbirds.org](mailto:Howard@mdbirds.org), or submit them through eBird in the Atlas portal. If you are new to atlasing, just reach out to your County Coordinators to get started!

## SUMMARY OF THE 2023 HOWARD COUNTY FALL COUNT

BY MIKE MCCLURE AND CHUCK STIRRAT

The thirtieth annual Howard County Fall Count was conducted on Sept. 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023 with the count data shown in the table below. This count has turned out to be slightly above average with numbers for the total birds up, but down for warblers. The total number of bird species was up five from last year while the number of individuals was up 840. For the warblers, the species count was up two while the number of individual warblers was down 110. The most notable feature was the significant number and species of shorebirds not normally found on fall count. This is almost exclusively due to the mudflats on the Triadelphia Reservoir due to it being drained for dredging.

The number of participants, parties, and the overall effort as measured by the hours and miles continued to remain strong with increased counters and parties. Effort showed a slight decrease in hours and a significant decrease in miles for the count (primarily in car mileage).

2023 Count Data					
	Observed Birds Countywide		Observed Warblers Countywide		Statistics
	Species	Birds	Species	Birds	
Numbers	130	16,088	25	443	
Historical High:Low	140 : 108	26,651 : 9,293	30 : 13	1,004 : 130	
Year 's of High : Low	2010 : 2004	1994 : 2004	1994 : 2004	1994 : 2004	
Averages for Birds & Species	124.53	15,093.90	23.07	430.01	
Counters : Parties					73:55
Counters : Parties Averages					55.9 : 36.7
Counters Hours : Miles					253.2 : 509.9
Counters Hours : Miles Averages					201.4: 436.7

Saturday's temperature started in the low 50s [dew point 49 °F] at 6:00 a.m. with an almost totally clear sky. The temperature rose to 78 °F [dew point 53 °F] in late afternoon. Winds were light to nonexistent from morning until early evening. The day could be described as a beautifully enjoyable Fall day.

Bird count participants were Peter Ashley, Debbie Belchis, Karan Blum, Jim & Marilyn Brinkley, Jane & Mark Chandler, Chen Chiu, Ken Clark, Lisa Colangelo, Dennis Coskren, Ben Costello, Jeff Culler, Ralph Cullison III, Susan & Wes Earp (Area 1 Co-coordinator), Tiffany Fisk, Lynn Gregg, Cathy Hallam, Joe Hanfman, Meg & John Harris (Area 6 Coordinator), Bill & Gayle Hill, Steve Jones, Michael Kerwin, Clayton Koonce, Russell Kovach (Area 2 Coordinator), Patrick & Meghaan Lane (Area 7 Coordinator), Shashi Lengade, Vitus Li, Kathie Lillie, Felicia Lovelett, Sabrina Lovell, Steve Luke, Brigitte Lund, Janet Lydon, Jamie Lynch, Mike McClure (Area 4 & County Co-coordinator), Lauren McDougle, Karlyn McPartland, Woody Merkle, Kent Middlekauff, Katie Moore, Brian Moyer, Sue Muller, Sue Neri, Ben Newton, Bonnie Ott, Steve Parr, Pam Perna, Gregg Petersen (Area 3 Coordinator), Suzanne Probst, Mary Prowell, John Henri Rorabeck, Collon Routh, Russ Ruffing, Kurt Schwarz (Area 5 Coordinator), Clare Sebok, Thomas Seivert, Hsiao (Mei) Shyong, Wen-Jong Shyong, Jo Solem, Chuck Stirrat (County-Co-coordinator), Valerie Swan, Tim Thompson, Ashley Tipton, Robin Todd, Sherry Tomlinson, Lisa Troutman, Mark Wallace (Area 1 Co-coordinator), Hillary Yarmus. A special thanks to Shirley Reddoch and Gregg Petersen who stepped in to host the in-person portion of the tally rally.

Plan now to join us on a future seasonal count and, if possible, attend the tally rally as well. Next year the 2023 Fall Count will be held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of September, which will be the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Individual species table is on [page 7](#). A full report of the results will be available at the Seasonal Counts Results page on the club's web site shortly. Due to newsletter deadlines, final decisions on all write-in species were not able to be made. As a result, there could be a few changes.

### MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

If you have not yet renewed your membership for 2022-23, go to the HCBC website at <https://www.howardbirds.website> and click on "Join Us" at the top of the home page.

### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Mary Jo Betts	Frank Morgan
Paul Biederman	David & Anne Richardson
Pam Franks	Hayden Rinner
Sabrina Lovell	Kelly Vogelpohl
Robert, Marilyn, & Aiden Luke	Jayden Ward
Kathryn, Peter, Owen, Theo, & Elliot Moore	Carson Wargo

## HOWARD COUNTY FALL COUNT RESULTS - SEPTEMBER 16, 2023

Totals		Totals		Totals	
Canada Goose	1,521	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	1	Savannah Sparrow	8
Wood Duck	29	Acadian Flycatcher	5	Song Sparrow	55
Mallard	103	<i>Traill's Flycatcher</i> <sup>1</sup>	1	Lincoln's Sparrow	2
Wild Turkey	6	Least Flycatcher	3	Eastern Towhee	49
Rock Pigeon	153	<i>Empidonax species</i>	12	Eastern Meadowlark	5
Mourning Dove	571	Eastern Phoebe	69	Red-winged Blackbird	34
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	12	White-eyed Vireo	25	Brown-headed Cowbird	62
Chimney Swift	259	Yellow-throated Vireo	6	Common Grackle	8
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	86	Blue-headed Vireo	4	<i>unidentified blackbird</i>	39
<i>Selasphorus species</i> <sup>1,2</sup>	1	Philadelphia Vireo	1	Ovenbird	8
Killdeer	50	Warbling Vireo	4	Blue-winged Warbler	2
Semipalmated Plover	6	Red-eyed Vireo	80	Black-&-white Warbler	29
Least Sandpiper	8	Blue Jay	646	Tennessee Warbler	11
Pectoral Sandpiper	12	American Crow	615	Nashville Warbler	2
Semipalmated Sandpiper	8	Fish Crow	299	Connecticut Warbler	4
Spotted Sandpiper	5	<i>crow species</i>	84	Mourning Warbler	2
Solitary Sandpiper	4	Common Raven	25	Common Yellowthroat	52
Lesser Yellowlegs	2	Carolina Chickadee	316	American Redstart	66
Greater Yellowlegs	7	Tufted Titmouse	269	Cape May Warbler	10
Herring Gull	2	Horned Lark	12	Northern Parula	38
Double-crested Cormorant	26	Tree Swallow	7	Magnolia Warbler	59
Great Blue Heron	68	N. Rough-winged Swallow	7	Bay-breasted Warbler	7
Great Egret	4	Barn Swallow	8	Blackburnian Warbler	9
Green Heron	13	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	4	Yellow Warbler	1
Black-crowned Night-Heron	2	Cedar Waxwing	222	Chestnut-sided Warbler	20
Black Vulture	251	White-breasted Nuthatch	176	Blackpoll Warbler	7
Turkey Vulture	416	Brown Creeper	1	Blk.-thrt'd. Blue Warbler	7
Sharp-shinned Hawk	6	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	16	Palm Warbler	18
Cooper's Hawk	19	Carolina Wren	411	Pine Warbler	10
<i>accipiter species</i>	10	House Wren	40	Yel.-rump'd (Myrtle) Warbler	5
Bald Eagle	30	Gray Catbird	391	Prairie Warbler	4
Red-shouldered Hawk	97	Brown Thrasher	30	Blk.-thrt'd. Green Warbler	41
Broad-winged Hawk	1,230	Northern Mockingbird	180	Canada Warbler	1
Red-tailed Hawk	25	European Starling	2,992	Wilson's Warbler	3
Eastern Screech-Owl	8	Eastern Bluebird	345	<i>unidentified warbler</i>	38
Great Horned Owl	9	Veery	6	Scarlet Tanager	11
Barred Owl	9	Gray-cheeked Thrush	2	Northern Cardinal	557
Belted Kingfisher	29	Swainson's Thrush	23	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	14
Red-headed Woodpecker	2	Hermit Thrush	1	Blue Grosbeak	10
Red-bellied Woodpecker	245	Wood Thrush	11	Indigo Bunting	55
Downy Woodpecker	144	American Robin	305	Dickcissel	12
Hairy Woodpecker	27	House Sparrow	308		
Northern Flicker	116	American Pipit	1		
Pileated Woodpecker	57	House Finch	264	<sup>1</sup> counted as species	
American Kestrel	12	American Goldfinch	480	<sup>2</sup> most likely Rufous Hummingbird	
Great Crested Flycatcher	6	Chipping Sparrow	180	Yellow denotes write-in	
Eastern Wood-Pewee	110	Field Sparrow	9	<b>Total Birds:</b>	<b>16,088</b>
				<b>Total Species:</b>	<b>130</b>



## BEGINNER BIRDER'S CORNER

BY MEGAN BOLCAR

While the Howard County Bird Club (HCBC) offers several field trips each month, many birders also enjoy birding in their own back yard. When I ask fellow HCBC members how they started with the hobby of birding, I often hear that they began by watching birds at feeders. Some share memories of watching feeders with their parents or grandparents when they were young, while others started hanging feeders more recently, when they suddenly found themselves with additional time at home in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are many benefits to birding close to home. Birding in your back yard (or neighborhood) can provide you, as a new birder, the opportunity to make observations about many common species in our region, and to start to develop identification skills through those observations. In addition, you don't have to travel far (or at all!) and can spend as little or as much time observing as you would like.

There are many types of feeders available for backyard-birders. A few that are great for beginner birders include tube feeders, suet feeders, nectar feeders, and window feeders. Tube feeders consist of a tube (typically a transparent plastic material) that can be filled with a seed mix, and contain multiple openings and perches from which the birds can feed. Tube feeders tend to attract several species of birds, including different finches, chickadees and titmice. Suet feeders consist of a basket designed to hold a suet cake—a dense block of fats, seeds, nuts, and other bird food. Suet feeders are ideal for attracting some of our local woodpecker species, among other birds. Nectar feeders are great for attracting hummingbirds and come in a variety of designs. Choose a nectar feeder with red color; use of an ant guard to keep ants away is also recommended. Window feeders are feeders that can be filled with seed and attach to a window with suction cups. These are great for close-up views of birds, and are a good option for those with smaller yards or apartment-dwellers, where other types of feeders may not be feasible.

Additional types of feeders, as well as types of food, are discussed in the “Beginning Birding” section of the HCBC website (go to <https://howardbirds.website/beginning-birding/> and click on “Backyard Birding” under “Resources”). There are many places that feeders can be purchased, including some of our local wildlife stores. One of the great perks of being a HCBC member is that you can receive a 10% discount at two local bird supply stores: Mother Nature's and The Wildlife Authority.

**Note: To help avoid the risk of disease transmission, it is important to regularly clean your feeders. The HCBC recommends scrubbing feeders with soap and water followed by a soak for ten minutes in a diluted bleach solution.**

*Do you have a question you've always wanted to ask as a beginner birder, or a topic on which you would like more information? Feel free to send it to [howardbirdclub@mdbirds.org](mailto:howardbirdclub@mdbirds.org) and we will consider it for future editions of Beginner Birder's Corner! All submissions will remain anonymous.*

## WINTER FINCH FORECAST

Tyler Hoar of the Finch Research Network has prepared the 2022-2023 Winter Finch Forecast. The forecast for the upcoming winter season can be found here: <https://finchnetwork.org/winter-finch-forecast-2023>

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

Megan Bolcar  
12136 Gray Star Way  
Columbia, MD 21044  
[howardbirdclub@mdbirds.org](mailto:howardbirdclub@mdbirds.org)

**The Goldfinch**, newsletter of the Howard County Bird Club, is published five times per year. Copy deadline for the January/February 2024 issue is November 25, 2023.

Megan Bolcar, *Editor*  
Joanne Solem, *Proofreader*

*(Chirps to the Flock continued from page 1)*

Birders receive rapid updates on bird sightings of interest, share their observations, ask questions, and link up quickly with other birders using the app. We have two groups on the app: *Howard Bird Discussion* and *Howard County Rare Birds*. The bird discussion group is a great forum for any questions or observations you may have about birding in the county, whereas the rare bird group is focused on rare and hard to find birds overall in the county.

Regarding beginner and intermediate field trips, Joe Hanfman has been working with John Harris, Bonnie Ott, and Val Swan to add more of these events to our club field trip list. These trips have been super popular and are rapidly booked up. John, Bonnie, and Val's time is limited but they are recruiting and training other club members to teach these classes to increase their frequency. In the meantime, if you cannot get into these classes, I encourage you to attend our open trips. In my brief time in the club, I have always found our more experienced birders willing to share their expertise and advice on these walks.

Finally, the Merlin app is very popular and powerful for birding but has some limitations. Please see the Recommendations for Reliable Reporting later in this letter. Club member Steve Luke has developed a class to help us use the app more effectively along the reliable reporting guidelines and has conducted a class at Robinson Nature Center in October and has one coming up at Howard County Conservancy next April. Look for the announcements and information for registration in the New Year for this and other classes! Like our beginner and intermediate classes, we plan to qualify other instructors to increase our Merlin class availability.

That's all for now. I look forward to visiting with you about your latest sightings out birding or at the next club meeting!



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RELIABLE REPORTING

BY JOE HANFMAN, RUSS RUFFING, AND JOANNE SOLEM  
HCBC RECORDS COMMITTEE

As many Howard County Bird Club (HCBC) members are aware, the authors Joe Hanfman, Russ Ruffing, and Jo Solem collaborate with eBird reviewers to maintain accurate and up-to-date Howard County bird records. This is not an easy task; unfortunately, it is becoming more difficult with each passing season. Why? Because woefully few birders take the time to provide good field notes for unusual sightings or for species easily misidentified, especially for those records not accompanied by photos or recordings.

Decades from now, you are unlikely to be remembered by new generations of birders or, more importantly, by researchers. Your publicly available records (i.e., eBird records in most cases) will be all that support the species you claimed. How you document your Cackling Goose, white goose, swan, scaup, yellowlegs, flycatcher, American Tree Sparrow, etc., or out-of-season birds like winter thrashers and catbirds will be the only way to judge the accuracy of your observations.

Birding has changed dramatically since sightings depended almost entirely on written records. Digital photography and phone recordings verify a substantial number of records. A caution about electronic tools and references, however. They can be marvelous, but they can also provide a false sense of security. Merlin, for example, makes a lot of mistakes, and few references – either web-based or print – fully disclose how difficult certain identifications are, which impacts whether they should be made at all. There are some birds like chickadees that should not be identified by sound alone, since chickadees learn their songs.

Even if eBird doesn't flag certain species, good field notes are essential for Howard County because it is a small geographic area and often registers just a few sightings of a species in a season. For instance, out of a dozen county Philadelphia Vireo reports in a given fall season, if four have no details and might be mistaken identifications, that is a substantial percentage of possible errors.

Please carefully examine each bird you add to a list no matter who reported it, and document any which could easily be misidentified, especially if you are unable to add photos. If uncertain of an identity, take time to do research or ask another birder for advice. If you have any uncertainty, it is best to leave it off your list altogether. Do not guess! Every bird cannot always be identified as distance, atmospheric conditions, angle, light, your optics, experience, listing bias, and more can all impact how accurately you identify a bird.

If you see the same unusual species multiple times, is it necessary to repeat the same notes? No, not if the bird is in the same general area. Under those circumstance, refer to your original sighting; however, if it is the same species but in a different location, field notes *are* necessary. A few short phrases may be sufficient. Sometimes mentioning what you couldn't see and why may be just as valuable as those aspects you observed.

One final request. *Please do not take offense if you are asked for additional details for any record.* Such a request or even a suggestion of an alternative ID is simply part of our effort to maintain accurate records. It is not a slight to you as a birder. Learning from each other is one of the advantages of being part of a community of birders. All of us make mistakes. Remember the old adage, "A beginning birder has misidentified hundreds of birds; an experienced birder has misidentified thousands!"

Our thanks to those birders who take a careful and extremely conservative attitude toward identification of the easily misidentified species. Only with concerted effort and by continuing to work together will we be able to maintain Howard County's bird records as a model of accuracy.



## HOWARD COUNTY BIRD CLUB

*Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society*

PO Box 1323

Columbia, MD 21044

### November/December 2023 - Inside this Issue

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## FALL 2023 BIRD CLUB HAPPENINGS



Birding at mudflats at Triadelphia Reservoir on September 25. *by Gregg Petersen*



HCBC President Gregg Petersen talks with attendees of Robinson Nature Center's 12th anniversary open house on September 30. *by Val Swan*



HCBC President Gregg Petersen (far right) and Vice President Val Swan (far left) present Delegate Terri Hill and Senator Clarence Lam with appreciation coins on September 30 for introducing and supporting the passing of Safe Skies legislation. *by Mary Klett*



Birders gather at the Robbins' Skywatch, Mt Pleasant, Howard County Conservancy, on September 30. *by Val Swan*