



Founded 1972

The Goldfinch

Newsletter of the Howard County Bird Club
A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society
www.howardbirds.website



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CLUB MEETINGS - BY MARY LOU CLARK



Thursday, March 14, 2024 “Explore the Macro World” by Bonnie Ott. Bonnie has been birding for decades and is a long-time member of MOS and the Howard County Bird Club. Bonnie is especially passionate about our native sparrows, or “LBJ’s” (Little Brown Jobs) as they are affectionately known. Over the years, she has broadened her interests to diversify as a master naturalist. Odonates, caterpillars, and spiders have become her main study subjects. Taking up the camera, Bonnie documents many subjects with her photos. Bonnie donates all her pictures and has been published in numerous books and magazines.

Thursday, April 11, 2024 "The 2023 Howard County Butterfly Survey Results" by Kevin Heffernan. For the sixth year in a row, Kevin Heffernan will update us on the status of butterflies in Howard County.



Kevin is the co-chair of the Howard County, Maryland, Butterfly Survey. He is a past president of the Howard County Bird Club and is encouraging the planting of native pollinator gardens as part of the Howard Bee City Pollinator Committee, and the Habitat Creation and Enhancement and Pesticide Reduction Subcommittees.

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

Hello all! How is your New Year’s list coming along? It may not be gangbusters yet, but the “most wonderful time of the year” is coming! No, that time is not the holidays to me, it’s when the warblers and other migrants start passing through, and most of them are singing their avian hearts out. So, even if my red-green color-poor vision prevents me from spotting some birds, I might still locate the transients by their song. There’s still the matter of my poor hearing from being around loud things earlier in my life, but with Merlin Sound ID hinting at what might be around to confirm, I should still do well finding most of, if not all, our migrants, as should we all if we choose to do so.

Meanwhile, if you attended our January 11th meeting or glanced at our Facebook page recently you may have heard the great news that we have reached a 25-year high for membership at 352! The all-time record is 370 set in 1989. Thanks to outreach by our existing members, our rolls increased by 16 percent in the last year. If you are one of those new members, welcome to the HCBC flock!

If you liked having increased access to the greater areas of the Triadelphia and T. Howard Duckett Reservoirs last year starting at the end of June, you will be happy to hear that the WSSC Reservoir manager has again granted us (and all of MOS members) that access! This year, our access starts on March 15th and runs through November 30th with the provision that we also possess a current Watershed Use Permit as we did previously. You can find the new letter by following [this link](#). The reservoir dredging is complete, so the resultant mudflats from last year are not likely to have persisted; there will continue to be significant untrammelled habitat for us to explore around the reservoirs.

Finally, we all have received information about the annual MOS convention located in the prime birding area of Ocean City in November. I’m looking forward to it. The MOS committee needs our help with finding sponsors and vendors, leading the pin design contest, selling raffle tickets, and leading field trips. Please consider how you might be able to assist and send an email to convention@mdbirds.org. Our club is known for having the highest participation rate in the state for the four yearly bird counts, so I don’t see why a few more of us can’t help with the MOS convention. If it helps make up your mind, I plan to recognize our convention volunteers with our HCBC appreciation coin.

That’s it for this edition. If you are interested in timely text updates on rare birds in Howard County, reach out to me or Joe Hanfman (sig29@aol.com or auk1844@gmail.com) with your cell phone number to be added to our Rare Birds and Bird Discussion GroupMe application text groups.

SPRING 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. 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

B W [Centennial Park](#)

March 3, Sunday, 8:00 a.m., 2-3 hours. *West end parking lot.* Easy walking around the lake on paved path. Facilities available. Waterfowl expected, early migrant passerines possible.

Leader – Russell Kovach, Russell.kovach@gmail.com

B R [Beginning Birder Watch and Walk - Birds and Beverages Mt Pleasant, Howard County Conservancy](#)

March 4, Monday, 9:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. *Meet at the barn/parking lot.* Bring your binoculars and hot chocolate. Join Woody Merkle and Val Swan as we observe and identify the birds at the feeders, then go on a short bird walk. Trails may be muddy. Limit 25; e-mail the leader to reserve a spot. Facilities available.

Leaders – Val Swan, valnjeff55@gmail.com, and Woody Merkle.

B R [Beginning Birder Watch and Walk - Birds and Beverages Mt Pleasant, Howard County Conservancy](#)

March 9, Saturday, 9:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. *See March 4 entry.*

Leaders – Val Swan, valnjeff55@gmail.com, Terri Berkheimer, and Woody Merkle.

B W [Centennial Park](#)

March 10, Sunday, 8:00 a.m., 2-3 hours. Daylight Savings Time starts (set clocks ahead). *See March 3 entry.*

Leader – Richard Peters, Richard@rrrrpeters.org

B W [Centennial Park](#)

March 17, Sunday, 8:00 a.m., 2-3 hours. *See March 3 entry.*

Leader – Dave Ziolkowski, djziolkowski@yahoo.com

B R [Beginning Birder Question and Answer Walk at Belmont Manor & Historic Park](#)

March 20, Wednesday, 9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. *Meet at the parking lot on the right, near the barn.* Slow pace through fields, along woods edges, and around a pond. Cathy Hallam and Val Swan will discuss the methods used to identify birds in a variety of habitats. Limit 12; e-mail the leader to reserve a spot and get details. Facilities available. Boots recommended.

Leaders – Val Swan, valnjeff55@gmail.com, and Cathy Hallam

B W [Centennial Park](#)

March 24, Sunday, 8:00 a.m., 2-3 hours. *See March 3 entry.*

Leader – Mary Lou Clark, doctorfx_99@yahoo.com, and John Henri Rorabeck, johnhenri14@gmail.com

[Sharps at Waterford Farm](#)

March 30, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. (half day). *Meet at farm parking area, through barns on right. Rte. 97 S. to right on Jennings Chapel Rd., 1 mile to right into farm at sign.* Moderate walking over crop stubble, farm roads, and paths on this working farm. Fields with crop residue, extensive woodlands, Cattail Creek and floodplain, three ponds, and five shallow waterfowl impoundments make for diverse habitats and good birding opportunities. Port-a-pots available. Knee-high waterproof footwear required for part of walk.

Leader – Wes Earp, wesandsue@gmail.com

B W [Centennial Park](#)

March 31, Sunday, 8:00 a.m., 2-3 hours. *See March 3 entry.*

Leader – David Sandler, detour65@gmail.com

B = Good for beginning birders **W** = Wheelchair accessible
R = Reservations Required

R [Alpha Ridge Landfill](#)

April 6, Saturday, (half day). Reservations and carpooling required. Moderate walking over hills and fields of the landfill. Vesper Sparrow and other field birds possible. Meadowlarks, kestrels, and other open country birds expected. Rarities possible. Facilities at Alpha Ridge Park.

Leader – Joe Hanfman, auk1844@gmail.com

B R [Maximizing the Magic of Merlin Bird ID App, Mt Pleasant, Howard County Conservancy](#)

April 6, Saturday, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. See the website announcement for details and to register: <https://howardbirds.website/event/getting-the-most-magic-out-of-the-merlin-bird-id-app/>

Leaders – Steve Luke and Lauren McDougale

[Belmont Manor & Historic Park](#)

April 9, Tuesday, 8:00 a.m., 2-3 hours

A walk around the fields looking for early migrants. This trip will have a special guest, Mike Bowen. Mike used to work at the property and will be able to show us around and tell stories about the history of this location.

Leader – Gregg Petersen, sig29@aol.com

B R [Beginning Birder Field Workshop: Bird Migration](#)

April 13, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. *Private residence in Howard County.* Learn about migration, and look for early migrants and resident birds in a variety of habitats. Walk one mile over wet, uneven fields with possible mud (boots recommended). Limit 10; e-mail the leader to reserve a spot and get details.

Leaders – Val Swan, valnjeff55@gmail.com, and Terri Berkheimer

[Schooley Mill Park](#)

April 15, Monday, 8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. *Meet in the back parking lot by the restrooms.* Spring migrants in open woods and fields. Facilities available.

Leader – Russel Hillsley, r4e3k2b1@verizon.net

[Mt Pleasant, Howard County Conservancy](#)

April 20, Saturday, 8:00 a.m., 2-3 hours

Earth Day Walk in conjunction with the Howard County Conservancy. *Meet at parking lot near the barn.*

Easy walking through the fields of Mt Pleasant Farm. Tree lines, hedgerows, and streams provide opportunity for non-meadow species. Great opportunity for flyovers.

Facilities available.

Leader – Gregg Petersen, sig29@aol.com

[Spring Wildflower Walk](#)

Weekday afternoon. Late April/mid-May. Date and location to be determined within a few days of the trip. If you would like to be contacted, send email to Bob and Jo Solem odenata@msn.com

[West Friendship Park](#)

May 1, Wednesday, 8:00 a.m. *Meet in front parking lot.* Moderate walking along field edges and through stream valleys. The park now has very nice meadows which were used by the meadowlarks and Grasshopper Sparrows, in addition to plenty of other types of habitat. Expect wet areas. Rustic facilities.

Leader – Lisa Colangelo, lcolangelo@verizon.net

AUTUMN BIRD RECORDS: AUGUST 1 – NOVEMBER 30, 2023

BY JOANNE SOLEM

This season deserves superlatives! Not one, but *two* new species were added to the county list. Also, autumn 2023 was the most productive single-site shorebirding season in club history, and a handful of raptor records were exceptional.

Heading the list—and justifying many birders' fondness for November birding—were two new county species. The first was a **Black-legged Kittiwake** at Pigtail (PIGTL), Triadelphia Reservoir (TRIRS) 11/11 (JHf, J/MHr, SLk, KS). Because plumage differences between Bonaparte's Gulls and kittiwakes can be subtle and the lack of a major storm system made the arrival of a mostly-pelagic species remote, the bird was initially thought to be a Bonaparte's, which was consistent with early November records. Kurt Schwarz's comparison of his photos with multiple references, along with input from several experienced birders, verified the rare kittiwake. Unfortunately, after that morning sighting, the bird was not seen again. See article in *The Goldfinch*: 52(3):3. County species: 313!

As if one new species in a season wasn't enough excitement for local birders, an **Ash-throated Flycatcher** (related to the Great Crested Flycatcher) was spotted in a stand of deciduous trees and vines just inside the Montgomery Rd entrance to Rockburn Branch Pk 11/22 (BO). This wanderer from the arid Southwest lingered through 11/30, thrilling at least 146 observers. See article in *The Goldfinch*: 52(3):3. County species: 314!

Above average temperatures and below average precipitation marked the season. Most rainfall occurred either in late Sept with the passage of Tropical Storm Ophelia, or two days before Thanksgiving, in conjunction with a weak cold front. In addition to the two previously cited headline species, birds of note included Snow Goose, Ross's Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, Cackling Goose, *Selasphorus* sp. (a hummingbird), Sandhill Crane, Black-bellied Plover, American Golden-Plover, Stilt Sandpiper, Sanderling, Dunlin, Baird's Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Little Blue Heron, Golden Eagle, Barn Owl, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Clay-colored Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler, Connecticut Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Summer Tanager, and Dickcissel.



American Golden-Plover by Tim Frye

A *blue* morph **Snow Goose** was present on a Jennings Chapel Rd pond 11/21 (JHf); the same observer picked out a *white* Snow at PIGTL 11/24—a matched set rarely recorded in the same season in this county. A **Ross's Goose** was photo'd in a flock of Canadas heading west over Gate-

way 11/19 (RKv, DZk). While checking waterfowl on a Larriland Farm pond on MD 94, a **Greater White-fronted Goose** was noted among the Canadas 11/19 (GPn, ph.). A **Cackling Goose** on Waverly Pd 11/13 (LGg, ph.) was the first of the season; some others were three on Fulton Pd 11/16 (GPn, ph.), 15 at Springdale Quarry 11/18 (JHf), and 12 at PIGTL 11/21 (JHf). Significant **Canada Goose** movement was late with most noted in late Oct and early Nov.

Tundra Swans were also slow to move through, but the last weekend of Nov they were hard to miss. There were half a dozen sightings on 11/25; the following morning a total of 88 were admired over Centennial Park (CENPK) during a field trip (DZk+); a dozen were counted over Brighton Dam (DCm); and eight were calling as they flew over PIGTL (CHm).

Ducks, in general, were scarce. After no **Blue-winged Teal** reports

since mid-Sept, a female appeared at CENPK 11/7 (KS). A drake **Northern Shoveler** at Waverly Pond 11/3 (LGg) was a first record for that location. The first two **Gadwalls** of the season were notched at PIGTL 11/7 (JHf, GPn); one was enjoyed by the birders on the CENPK field trip 11/19



Greater White-fronted Goose by Steve Luke

(DHm+); and three were at Race Road Wetlands 11/25 (JWd), with a peak of 19 at PIGTL 11/28 (JHf). An **American Wigeon** appeared on Woodmark Lake on 10/4 (SMc); one or two continued there till 11/8. Up to 16 were counted at Larriland 11/18 (DCm; GPn). Three **Northern Pintails** were at Big Branch (BIGBR) 9/25 (JHf+); then, after a nearly two-month hiatus, two appeared on TRIRS 11/22 (JHf, MLC, J/MHr, LMcD) increasing to six on 11/29 (DCm, JHf, SLk, GPn, KS). The number of **Green-winged Teal** at BIGBR rose from four on 8/27 (DSI) to a high of 39 on 10/15 (JWd). **Ring-necked Ducks** were slow to appear with one at Lake Kittamaquondi 10/22 (CKc). The year's first **Common Goldeneye** wasn't notched until 11/16 at Springdale Quarry (GPn-f.). The season's initial **Common Merganser** at PIGTL 11/21 (JHf), was a precursor of hundreds that winter at TRIRS. A few scattered appearances of **Ruddy Ducks** began with singles at CENPK 10/7 (MNT) and Meadowridge Business Pk 10/15 (YYL).

Most of the 12+ **Wild Turkey** sightings could be plotted along a roughly diagonal line from Marriottsville (SPr-2), south through Bon Secours (RCu-1), Waverly Woods (LGg-9 on 8/6 to 7 on 11/2), Sandhill Rd (JCu-11); Roxbury Rd (RVg-14), to an anchor at TRIRS (m. obs.). A flock of seven at Font Hill Wetlands Pk 11/13 (DRs) was a new species for that suburban site. The easternmost report was two birds near Guilford 8/13 (SMu).

The first **Pied-billed Grebe** appeared on a Iager Blvd Pd, Fulton 9/14 (KCK), while the first two **Horned Grebes** were tallied at PIGTL 11/10 (JHf).

On the evening of 8/20, initial migrant **Common Nighthawks** swooped over CENPK (JHR-1) and So. Trotter Rd (W/SE-1). Most sightings were in the low single digits; larger numbers included 11 at Western Regional Pk 8/27 (PPn), 10 at Jones Rd 8/27 (SMc), and 13 at Joey Dr 9/1 (M/JCh). The high was 53 at Cedar Lane Pk 9/8 (BPI).

The first large group of **Chimney Swifts** was 80 at Race Road Wetlands 8/6 (BO); about 100 were present at dusk at Vantage Point the first week of Oct (CKc); and 157 were counted at PIGTL 9/24 (DZk). The seasonal high of 370 was recorded at BIGBR on 9/27 (DSI).

The last **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** visited salvia in an Allview yard 10/19 (JMCK). A *Selasphorus* sp. (probably a Rufous Hummingbird) tarried at flowers in a Woodmark yard 9/15-16, (M/GMcC), one-half mile from the site of 2022's two birds.

A flock of 31 **American Coots** on the shore at PIGTL 11/7 (JHf, GPn) was more than the usual handful. Two **Sandhill Cranes** flew high over Mt Pleasant (MTPLT) ~11:00 a.m. on 10/17 (JWd, desc.)

The prelude to an historic shorebird season began with a few birds at Tarbay Pd 8/12 (DCm). On 8/23, taking advantage of the extensive drawdown at TRIRS, two birders worked east from BIGBR along the shoreline. After an arduous hike, they reached a mudflat at the mouth of a tributary—and thought they had won a shorebird lottery (GPn, RRF). Among the 11 species, they counted 16 **Semipal-**

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White-rumped Sandpipers

by Dave Ziolkowski

mated Plovers, 2 **Short-billed Dowitchers**, 180 **Least Sandpipers** (an all-time high record that lasted for three days), 1 **White-rumped**, and 28 **Pectorals**. Although the variety was a notable collection for this small Piedmont county, little did the observers know it was just the beginning of a remarkable period.

Because it was easier to access the site from PIGTL, most birders began using that starting point. For weeks, unusual county species and all-time high counts were tallied. Two **Baird's Sandpipers** were picked out on 8/30 (**JHf**); 210 **Leasts** were a new high on 8/26 (**CGn**, **MMcCy**) [70 - 9/17/10 J. Hanfman]; 40 **Lesser Yellowlegs** on 8/30 (**JHf**) set a new high [31 - 5/1/14 N. Magnusson]; and three **Westerns** were added on 8/31 (**JWd**). Ten **Black-bellied Plovers** on 9/24 (**DZk**) marked an all-time high [5 - 10/3/88 M. Chestem]. An **American Golden-Plover** was logged on 9/1 (**JHf**), with a high of seven on 9/24 (**DZk**), and the last on 9/26 (**JWd**). A new high of 20 **Semipalmated Plovers** was notched on 8/28 (**RRf**) [15 - 5/21/01 N. Magnusson].

Not since 2012 had a *year's* shorebirding in the county been as exciting as this *season's* at TRIRS; however, there were major differences between the two years. Most of the 2012 birds at TRIRS were seen on the Montgomery Co side, either at Triadelphia Lake Rd or at Greenbridge. For Howard birders, those locations often required long waits until the birds took flight and, with luck, circled across the county line. Another distinction was that some of the 2012 rarities appeared at Fulton Pd and at Brown's Bridge.

A particularly dramatic visit to the TRIRS site took place the late afternoon of 9/24, as Tropical Storm Ophelia was departing, leaving showers and clearing skies in her wake. Experienced birders know that strong winds, major weather changes, and tropical storm systems can produce exciting birding. Dave Ziolkowski's patience in waiting for a precise combination of conditions was amply rewarded. His checklist is exciting reading; note the probable explanation for why there was just a single Least Sandpiper: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S151171503> The jaw-dropping, all-time high numbers of 107 White-rumped Sandpipers and 172 Pectorals seem unbelievable until one notes how carefully the counts were made. An additional interesting Pectoral observation came from MTPLT 10/8 (**JHf-1**), a first for that location.

On 11/10, four (later five) **Dunlin** added another species to the TRIRS site (**JHf**). The last one was photo'd 11/27 (**JHf**, **JCu**), establishing the second latest Dunlin date ever. The White-rumped there on 11/13 (**KS**; **RSm**) set a new late date [10/21/89 M. Chestem], while the two Pectorals the same day (**KS**) broke a 54-year record [11/8/69 D. Rauth]. Joe Hanfman noted that TRIRS sites in HOWCO produced 18 species of shorebirds this season—a total that will be hard to top.

Two **Bonaparte's Gulls** were present at PIGTL 11/7 (**JHf**, **GPn**), with a few additional Nov records. Terns were rather scarce. An inadequate view of a "large tern" at CENPK 8/24 (**DRs**) was likely a Caspian. A definite **Caspian** was logged there on 9/4 (**MNT**); the few sightings at TRIRS hit a modest peak of six on 8/29 (**JHf**, **KS**, **RVg**); while one spotted over MTPLT 9/9 (**BO**) was far from any major body of water. The last report came from PIGTL 11/26 (**CHm**).

Why is the Robbins' Skywatch (SW) at MTPLT not called a hawk-watch? You guessed it. There is so much more in the sky than raptors; for example, 204 **Double-crested Cormorants** in four flocks flew over on 11/8 (**LGg**). During all of 2023, at least 122 additional species were tallied there.

During a CENPK field trip 11/12 (**R/RnPr+**), birders watched a **Great Blue Heron** cleverly save time and energy. It stood, immobile,

on the shoreline within 15 feet of a fisherman who had two lines in the water. When the man caught and then released a fish, the heron immediately grabbed it, flying within inches of the man's boots. The Great Blue peak reached 24 at PIGTL 9/29 (**KS**), a significant number away from the two known county colonies. Five **Great Egrets** at TRIRS 8/23 were the high (**GPn**, ph.). An immature **Little Blue Heron** was noted at the west end of CENPK 8/21 (**MNT**). By the following day, the bird had moved two miles north to Font Hill Wetlands Pk (m.obs.)

The best **Black Vulture** count at the SW was 110 on 9/25 (leaderless trip; **CSt**, recorder). A high of 83 **Turkey Vultures** (**TV**) passed over the SW on 11/8 (**LGg**). A **Golden Eagle** is always an exciting sighting—this season produced two. The first, an adult on 10/6, glided from the northwest over Alpha Ridge Landfill low enough to show off its tawny nape (**RCu**). The second was a juvenile soaring with two **TVs** high over Barberry Way during a workshop there on 11/11 (**VSw**, **BCt**, **SLg**). Although most **Northern Harriers** moved in the latter part of Oct, a high-flying migrant was caught over the SW 11/22 (**LGg**). **Cooper's Hawks** were hardly unusual hanging around feeders—could you resist staying near an easy food source? Many migrant **Bald Eagles** moved over the county. Some continued their journey; others joined the local residents for the winter. The SW logged an 11-eagle day during a field trip 11/5 (**RRf**, **LGg+**), 13 (12 ad.) on 11/8 (**LGg**), and 16 on 11/9 (**DCm**, **JHf**), nicely establishing a peak period.

A **Broad-winged Hawk** was photo'd over the SW 8/30 (**LGg**). Each Sept, raptor enthusiasts visit well-known locations hoping to catch thousands of Broad-wings migrating. Seldom do local birders enjoy such flights in their home county—even less often are there significant numbers on multiple days. This year more than 1,000 were tallied on three dates: 9/16 Fall Count 1,230 (770 at Rockburn Branch Pk-**BO**); 9/21 SW at least 2,007 (**JHf**, **LGg**), as well as 390 over So. Trotter Rd 9:50-10:20 a.m. (**W/SE**); and 9/22 SW 1,648 (**LGg**, **MKw**, **DCm**). As usual, migrant **Red-tails** were still moving in mid-Nov; 10 at the SW 11/8 was the season's high (**LGg**). Thanks to Lynn Gregg and others who spent many hours at the SW this season.

A **Barn Owl** called multiple times as it flew past two birders at TRIRS on 9/24 (**GPn**, **RRf**); the bird's distinctive "scream" was heard as it flew along the shoreline in a northerly direction. Clearly, this bird was a migrant probably hoping to take an easy meal of the many shorebirds present at that location. An owl box at Hallmark is again serving as a screech-owl roost site. As of 10/18 a "brownish" **Eastern Screech-Owl** has returned, at least sporadically (**WEb**).

Red-headed Woodpeckers were tallied at a minimum of 10 sites. The immature bird spotted at the Middle Patuxent Environmental Area (**GPn**) during an 11/4 workshop (**JHr**) contributed to a seldom-notched seven-woodpecker day (all locally-occurring species seen). Gregg matched that feat at Annapolis Rock on 11/16. A **Red-bellied Woodpecker** at Stone Hill Dr 10/18 impaled a lanternfly on a small dead branch. Eventually, it picked up the insect and flew off with it (**KLz**).

Merlins were reported at a dozen locations. This small, agile falcon's reputation as a bird with a chip-on-its-shoulder was verified at Cavey La on 10/28 when one "Buzzed Blue Jays and flickers for 30+ minutes seemingly just to agitate them....making steep, rapid dives at everything that moved." (**RRf**). **Peregrine Falcons** were spotted in all fall months at half a dozen sites, with a high of three at MTPLT in a two-hour walk on 10/26 (**JWd**). They were most consistently present at TRIRS, with two on several occasions. On 11/15, one was observed there making four unsuccessful attempts to nab a **Belted Kingfisher**. The kingfisher successfully evaded each of the falcon's attacks by diving into the water (**JHf**).

Thirty-two **Eastern Kingbirds** at BIGBR 8/23 were a surprise (**RRf**,

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GPn). **Olive-sided Flycatchers** at MTPLT 8/15-16 (**BO**; m.obs.) and at Cavey La 8/24-26 (**RRf**) were well-documented. Because **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** are among the trickiest identifications, any sighting must be supported with photos/excellent details. There were two that qualified this season, one at Cavey La 9/11 (**RRf**) and the other at Rockburn Branch Pk 9/16 (**BO**). **Least Flycatchers** were reported from more than a dozen sites, with a high of three at Cavey La 9/11 (**RRf**). *Thanks to the many careful observers who provided details or photos to verify their sightings of this species!*

The last **Blue-headed Vireo** was noted on the Patuxent Branch Trail 10/30 (**KCK**). More **Philadelphia Vireos** were reported than were accepted, as this is a frequently misidentified “little green bird.” Accepted records were well documented. One at MTPLT the morning of 9/27 (**JHf**) was seen and photo’d multiple times.

A probable family group of six **Common Ravens** was noted twice in southern HOWCO: Gorman Farm Pd 9/16 (**KCK**) and Water Fall Dr 11/6 (**DRb**). Thirty **Horned Larks** were counted in fields at W. Friendship Pk 11/10 (**LCg**) and 29 at Alpha Ridge Landfill 11/20 (**RCu**).

A movement of 200 **Tree Swallows** in three flocks over 30 minutes was detected at So. Trotter Rd mid-morning on 8/31 (**W/SE**). Following an insect hatch, 60 **Purple Martins** were counted at Cavey La in two hours on 8/8 (**RRf**). Sixty **Cliff Swallows** at BIGBR 8/28 (**SLk**, **LMcD**, **GPn**, **RRf**) were the season’s peak.

A **Cedar Waxwing** nest at Barberry Way 8/6 was an excellent atlas record (**VSw**). A handful of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were picked up, mostly from late Aug to late Sept. Two appeared in a Roxbury Mill Rd yard 9/15 (**ATp**).

Winter Wrens were widely noted, with the overwhelming majority from late Oct through Nov. Twenty-four **Carolina Wrens** at CENPK on 9/16 (**SLk**) were a fine count. An adult Carolina was feeding a fledgling at Stone Hill Dr 9/6 (**KLz**). **Marsh Wrens** were spotted at five sites from 9/24 at Fulton in the south (**TFy**) to 10/26 at Barberry Way in the north (**VSw**). At least one was present at MTPLT on multiple dates from late Sept to mid-Oct (m. obs.).

Eastern Bluebirds were still feeding a nestling in a box at Woodbine 9/8 (**PPn**). Thrushes, in general, were few; however, a **Gray-cheeked** on the Elkhorn Branch Trail 10/23 (**BMy**) set a new late date [10/18/13 – N. Magnusson].

A flock of 60 **American Pipits** was noted at PIGTL 11/10 (**JHf**)—that number swelled to 90 on 11/12 (**JHf**) and to 125 on 11/13 (**RSm**). A flock of 40 was noted in a recently plowed field along Florence Rd 11/25 (**MPw**). To date, **Purple Finch** and **Pine Siskin** numbers have been unimpressive.

Two hundred **Chipping Sparrows** at BIGBR 8/23 was a new all-time high count (**RRf**, **GPn**) [150 on 10/25/98 B. Ott, D. Ecker+]. A Chippy, all-white with black primary edging and a black bill, at Cavey La 10/26 (**RRf**) was attractive. A **Clay-colored Sparrow** was photo’d at MTPLT 8/20 (**MKw**). **Vespers** were picked out at five sites: Carrie Way stream restoration 10/15 (**VLi**), Alpha Ridge Landfill, (**RCu-2**), Alpha Ridge Pk (**J/MHR-1**), W. Friendship Pk (**JW-1**), and MTPLT from 10/18 (**BO-1**) to 11/9 (**JHf-1**). A dozen **Savannahs** were a nice count at Schooley Mill Pk 10/15 (**TFy**). HOWCO has a reputation for reporting large numbers of **Lincoln’s Sparrows**; this year’s high was 12 in six hours at MTPLT 10/4 (**BO**). Is this county really the state’s migratory hotspot for this species? Unlikely. But, thanks to Bonnie Ott’s infectious sparrow interest, local birders’ awareness is high, so the species is well-reported. Fifty-five **Swamp Sparrows** were counted at PIGTL 10/15 (**JWd**). A **Yellow-breasted Chat** at Joey Dr 10/5 (**M/JCh**, desc.) was an unexpected yard bird.

Who could have predicted that four **Bobolinks** at MTPLT 9/21 (**JHf**)

would be fall’s high count? Peak **Eastern Meadowlark** numbers were 22 at Alpha Ridge Landfill 11/13 (**RCu**) and 21 at MTPLT 10/13 (**CHm**). An additional ten were seen at W. Friendship Pk 11/26 (**LCg**). Probably, the same **Baltimore Oriole** that has wintered at Thornbrook Dr since 2019, turned up on 11/30 (**JCu**), barely ahead of the winter season. Species hosting **Brown-headed Cowbirds** included **Northern Cardinal** 8/4 (**KOS**) and **Red-eyed Vireo** 8/6 (**MPw**). **Rusty Blackbirds** were detected at five sites. The first four birds were at Barberry Way on 10/13 (**VSw**); all other sightings were in Nov.

At least one **Orange-crowned Warbler** was reported multiple times at MTPLT between 10/12 (**MKw**) and 11/3 (**KS**). Four well-documented **Connecticuts** were reported: 9/14 PIGTL (**RSm**), 9/22 Cavey La (**RRf**), 10/3 MTPLT (**JHf**), and 10/5 Dorsey’s Search (**MRg**). Five **Mourning**s were noted: a male at Cavey La 9/16 was photo’d (**RRf**); three others included details. Nine **Cape Mays** at Cavey La 9/17 may have been a substantial undercount (**RRf**, **KS**, **VSw**). **Palms** are among the latest migrants. The last (a Yellow) was spotted at PIGTL 11/15 (**JHf**). **Pines** sometimes winter in small numbers: one was seen at Crest Lawn Memorial Gardens 11/19 (**JCu**); one showed up at a Long Corner feeder 11/22 (**MPw**, ph.); and one came to Graeloch Rd suet 11/29 (**KOS**). The **Black-throated Green** at CENPK 10/28 was late (**JMy**). A **Canada** at Red Rain Path 8/1 (**KCK**) was record early [8/4/90 B. Ott].

A **Summer Tanager** appeared briefly at a W. Friendship feeder 8/10 (**RCu**, desc.), quickly leaving without eating. A female was photo’d at Cavey La 8/26 (**RRf**).

Fifty-eight **Northern Cardinals** were counted in a circuit of CENPK 9/16 (**SLk**). Lastly, a female **Dickcissel** was photo’d at MTPLT 8/19 (**C/ChMr**).

Appreciation – Of the yearly birding seasons, autumn is the longest and often the most complex. For this astonishingly productive season, Joe Hanfman’s and Russ Ruffing’s comments, contributions, and edits were invaluable. I am indebted to both of them.

Bonus: A Coyote visited Cavey La on 10/16 (**RRf**).

Observers: **JCh** – Jane Chandler, **MCh** – Mark Chandler, **KCK** – Ken Clark, **MLC** – Mary Lou Clark, **LCg** – Lisa Colangelo, **BCt** – Ben Costello, **JCu** – Jeff Culler, **RCu** – Ralph Cullison III, **DCm** – David Cummings, **SE** – Sue Earp, **WE** – Wes Earp, **Web** – Ward Ebert, **TFy** – Tim Frye, **CGn** – Corina Giron, **LCg** – Lynn Gregg, **CHm** – Catherine Hallam, **JHf** – Joe Hanfman, **JHR** – John Harris, **MHR** – Meg Harris, **DHM** – David Holmes, **MHS** – Mei Hsiao, **MKw** – Mike Kerwin, **CKc** – Clayton Koonce, **RKv** – Russell Kovach, **YYL** – Yi-Ying Lee, **SLg** – Shashi Lengade, **VLi** – Vitus Li, **KLz** – Kathy Litzinger, **SLk** – Steve Luke, **SMc** – Sarah Macri, **JMy** – John Maynard, **MMcCy** – Michael McCloy, **GMcC** – Grazina McClure, **MMcC** – Mike McClure, **JMcK** – John McKitterick, **ChMr** – Cherie Miller, **CMr** – Chris Miller, **BMy** – Brian Moyer, **KOS** – Karen O’Steen, **BO** – Bonnie Ott, **SPr** – Steve Parr, **PPn** – Pam Perna, **RnPr** – Renee Peters, **RPr** – Richard Peters, **GPn** – Gregg Petersen, **BPI** – Bud Poole, **MPw** – Mary Prowell, **DRb** – Dan Reuben, **DRs** – David Richardson, **MRg** – Matt Rogosky, **JHR** John Henri Rohrabek, **RRf** – Russ Ruffing, **RSm** – Ryan Salsman, **KS** – Kurt Schwarz, **WSy** – Wen Shyong, **DSI** – Daniel Sloan, **CSt** – Chuck Stirrat, **VSw** – Val Swan, **MNT** – MarkNhu Tewell, **ATp** – Ashley Tipton, **RVg** – Roshan Vignarajah, **JWd** – Joshua Ward, **DZk** – Dave Ziolkowski. HOWCO – Howard County, m. obs. – many observers.

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

Megan Bolcar
12136 Gray Star Way
Columbia, MD 21044
howardbirdclub@mdbirds.org

The **Goldfinch**, newsletter of the Howard County Bird Club, is published five times per year. Copy deadline for the May/June 2024 issue is March 25, 2024.

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

2023 ANNUAL LIST FOR HOWARD COUNTY

BY JOE HANFMAN

Birders reported a total of 239 species for Howard County in 2023. This total was the third highest total in the last 45 years. The top county birds of the year were a Black-legged Kittiwake and an Ash-throated Flycatcher, which were both first county records. 2023 was only the second year for Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, the third year for Anhinga, and the fourth year for Yellow-headed Blackbird.

Other highlights were 20 different species of shorebirds. Many of these shorebirds were seen at Pigtail and Big Branch, thanks to WSSC allowing MOS members access with watershed permits and the MOS permission letter.

The biggest misses were Laughing Gull, which has been seen in 37 of the last 45 years; Forster's Tern, seen in 28 years; Western Cattle Egret, seen in 29 years; Golden-winged Warbler, seen in 32 years; and, sadly, Cerulean Warbler, seen in 44 years.

167 of the 314 species that have been seen in the county have been seen in each of the last 45 years. 219 of the 314 species that have been seen in the county have been seen 22 or more times in the last 45 years.

Examine the complete list at <https://howardbirds.website/birding/howard-county-annual-bird-list/>

Thanks, and congratulations to all those who spent many hours scouring the county, finding birds, and sharing their sightings.

MARYLAND/DC BREEDING BIRD

ATLAS 3, 2020-2024

BY SUE MULLER

The final year of the Maryland/DC Breeding Bird Atlas is well underway! The excitement is certainly all about owls, with Great Horned Owl and Barred Owl now both in safe breeding dates. If you see or hear these owls, please be sure to submit an eBird checklist through the MD/DC Breeding Bird Atlas portal. If you are asking yourself, "What is a portal?," please contact your county coordinators (Sue and Dave - howard@mdbirds.org), and we will get you on track! Your observations are important. Also in safe breeding dates now are the Rock Pigeon and House Sparrow. Even though Bald Eagles are not in safe breeding dates until April, you may see them carrying nest material now, which is a confirmation of breeding and should be coded as such in your eBird checklist. You can also help by reaching out to friends and family in other counties and ask them if they see or hear owls in their yard! If you want to participate in atlasing trips, contact Sue and Dave and get on the atlas email list!

HOWARD COUNTY BIRD CLUB'S ANNUAL POTLUCK DINNER

Saturday March 23, 2024 at The Robinson Nature Center.
Time: 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

You may RSVP, or volunteer for setup or cleanup, at the March club meeting, or by contacting Sherry Tomlinson by Friday, March 22, 2024 at 425-214-6000 or stbirder@yahoo.com.

For more details, please see "Annual Potluck 2024" in the January/February 2004 issue of The Goldfinch.

HOWARD BIRDERS – PALM WARBLER

SUBSPECIES REQUESTED

Attempting to distinguish subspecies for any bird is usually neither encouraged nor needed; however, Palm Warblers are an exception. Whenever possible, please specify either Western Palm or Yellow Palm Warbler and the number of each on any list.

Western and Yellow Palms are two distinct populations. Westerns breed roughly west of Ottawa, Ontario and winter along the southeastern US coast and in the West Indies, while Yellows breed east of Ottawa and winter along the Gulf Coast. Migration timing and pathways are different for both subspecies, but both migration routes and wintering grounds overlap somewhat.

Identification - In Yellow Palms, underparts (throat, breast, belly, undertail coverts) are bright yellow; in Western Palms, only the undertail coverts or the throat and undertail coverts are strongly yellow, in contrast to a whitish or pale yellow breast and belly.

Tim Carney, an eBird reviewer, cautions that care in distinguishing the two forms is necessary as illustrated by the accompanying photos. The images illustrate how different the same Western Palm Warbler appears depending on whether the photograph was taken (or an observation made) in shade or sunlight. Help to make all Palm Warbler records more accurate by providing photos/subspecies identification whenever possible. To encourage such reporting, keep in mind that it is possible that these two subspecies may be split into two separate species someday. If that were to happen, it would be good to have accurate records for both subspecies accumulated over as long a time as possible. *Howard County Records Committee: Joe Hanfman, Russ Ruffing, Joanne Solem.*



Western Palm Warbler photo taken in sunlight (left) and shade (right). by Tim Carney

MAY COUNT

Join the fun! The May Count will take place Saturday, May 11, 2024. All levels welcome. Details to come in the May/June issue of *The Goldfinch*.

Coordinator: Gregg Petersen sig29@aol.com



BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

The March 28 and April 25 board meetings will be held in a hybrid format. All members are welcome to attend in person or virtually. If you have input, questions, or would like to attend, please email Gregg Petersen at sig29@aol.com.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Cris Ausin; Susan Buningh; Evelyn Marren; Tom, Mirtneah, & Thomas Moriarty; and Carson Wargo. Welcome, and happy birding!

Howard County
GreenFest 2024
Save The Date!
Saturday, April 13 • 10:00am – 3:00pm
Howard Community College, SET Building
HCGreenfest.org

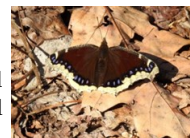
2023 HOWARD COUNTY BUTTERFLY YEAR

BY KEVIN HEFFERNAN

Last year we completed the tenth year of the Howard County Butterfly Survey. Every survey has key participants who spend the most time and effort in the field, and this one was no different. This year, however, several of the key participants spent less time in the field due to family reasons, health reasons, etc. As a result, we had only ~75% of the surveys (878), field minutes (48,536), and number of butterflies (19,548) reported from the peak year of 2021. Due primarily to the seven butterfly walks, we had the largest number of participants (113) ever. For the year, we found 70 species including a species new to the survey, the Northern Oak Hairstreak. We now have a total of 81 species and 215,464 individual butterflies seen in the ten years of the survey. The 437,471 minutes in the field = 7,291 hours or 182 40-hour work weeks, equivalent to 3.5 years of effort.

A project of this size does not succeed without a lot of help and dedication. So, some big thank yous are in order, particularly to the contributors. The following people submitted 10 or more butterfly reports this year: Clayton Koonce (212), Linda Hunt (109), Kathy Litzinger (104), Jim Wilkinson (57), Annette Allor (44), Woody Merkle (43), Pam Perna (26), Bill Hill (25), Kevin Heffernan (22), Susan Tucker (22), Kate Reilly (19), Barbara White (18), Janet Lydon (17), David Ryan (16), Mike Riley (16), Sharon Smith (15), Cris Ausin (13), Karyn Dulaney (13), Kaytlin Powell (12), Kurt Schwarz (11), Tina Grot (11), and Robyn Evans (10). Thank you also to the other 91 contributors as well. An extra big thank you to Clayton Koonce, who submitted 212 reports, 100 more than the second place contributor. Big thank yous also go to the walk leaders: Woody Merkle, Linda Hunt, Kathy Litzinger, and Annette Allor, and to Bob Solem for providing the tools to get the data from emails to a spreadsheet where it can be analyzed, maintaining the photo gallery, and posting trip reports. Finally, a huge thank you to Kathy Litzinger for co-chairing the survey and for helping organize all of the data from the year which is a large and time-consuming task.

Early Season: The first date that a butterfly was seen last spring was February 15th. Annette Allor found a Mourning Cloak at Wincopin Trail. It was the third earliest date that the first identified butterfly of the year was seen during the survey. *A total of 19 butterflies (five Mourning Cloaks, six Eastern Commas and eight Cabbage Whites) were seen in February, including a whopping 14 seen on February 23rd! The previous high number of butterflies seen in the entire month of February during the survey was three.*



Mourning Cloak
Annette Allor

By the end of February, three species were recorded: Mourning Cloak (Allor 2/15), Cabbage White (Koonce 2/20), and Eastern Comma (many 2/23). By the end of March, two additional species were recorded: Azure species (Koonce 3/2), and Orange Sulphur (Allor 3/22). By April 18th, 19 additional species were recorded including Clouded Sulphur (Litzinger 4/1), Sleepy Orange (Koonce 4/4), Falcate Orangetip (Wilkinson 4/4), Meadow Fritillary (Hunt 4/5), Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (Heffernan 4/5), Eastern Tailed-Blue (Litzinger 4/6), Question Mark (Litzinger 4/6), Zebra Swallowtail (Buxton 4/8), Juvenal's Duskywing (Koonce 4/11), Wild Indigo Duskywing (Koonce 4/12), Pearl Crescent (Koonce 4/12), Variegated Fritillary (Reilly 4/12), Juniper Hairstreak (Heffernan 4/12), Black Swallowtail (Hunt 4/13), Spicebush Swallowtail (Litzinger 4/13), American Lady (Reilly 4/13), Silver-spotted Skipper (S. Smith 4/16), Horace's Duskywing (Litzinger 4/16), and Red-banded Hairstreak (Wilkinson 4/17).

We did miss Dusted Skipper for the fifth year in a row and Eastern Pine Elfyn for the third year in a row. We also missed Spring Azure and Henry's Elfyn, each of which have only been seen in one year of the survey.

New Species for the Survey: During the first nine years of the survey, we had a total of 80 species seen. The last (two) new species were in 2019: Brazilian Skipper and Dainty Sulphur. There were three species that were seen in the precursor years of the survey, 2012 or 2013, that had not been seen during the survey itself. Those were Northern Oak Hairstreak, Striped Hairstreak, and Baltimore Checkerspot. Kathy Litzinger found a Northern Oak Hairstreak on June 12, 2023 at Ilchester Elementary School. To give you an idea of the enormity of this sighting, Northern Oak Hairstreak was found in the 1970s and then, not again, until Kathy found one in her yard in 2012. It was then not seen again for 11 years until she found the one on June 12th. Amazingly, a second one was found (but reported later) on June 4th in Mount Airy by Bonnie Bezila. Unfortunately, that individual was found deceased shortly after the house was sprayed for insects (not Bonnie's idea). See Facebook post for details. (<https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=northern%20oak%20hairstreak>).



Northern Oak
Hairstreak



Northern Oak
Hairstreak
Bonnie Bezila

Another potential new species to look out for: On May 24th, Annette Allor was hiking at Wincopin and found a "very white male Azure." Quoting Annette, "I sent the photo to Harry (Pavulaan) and he thinks it probably is an Appalachian Azure. We cannot say this with 100% certainty though without more investigation and photos of more butterflies. Harry said they can have temporary colonies that come and go." We did not count this sighting at Annette's request. If it is found to be true, it would be the 82nd species found in the survey. To give an idea of the enormity of this sighting, Appalachian Azure was considered rare in 1993 and 2000, and extirpated in 2012. This species uses Black Cohosh as a host plant.



Possible Appalachian
Azure -
Annette Allor

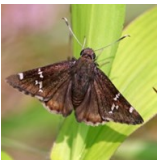
Peak Years: Seven species had ten-year high counts for the survey: Sachem (6,037), Mulberry Wing (10), Dun Skipper (70), Mourning Cloak (47), Juniper Hairstreak (36), Harvester (15) and Northern Oak Hairstreak (2). Two species had the second highest count in the ten years: Broad-winged Skipper (16) and Red Admiral (113). Overall, for 12.8% of the 70 species, 2023 was the peak or second highest count year.

The 6,037 Sachems was the highest count for any species for any year during the survey. The Cabbage White count was 6,032 in 2021. Twenty-nine Juniper Hairstreaks were recorded from the spring brood and only seven from the June/July brood. The 15 Harvesters follow last year's total of 14, which is two very strong years in a row. Seventy-one Silvery Checkerspots were found which is three strong years in a row.

(Continued on [page 8](#))

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Low counts: The following nine species had ten-year low counts for the survey: Southern Cloudywing (6), Clouded Skipper (0), Least Skipper (196), Peck's Skipper (287), Tawny-edged Skipper (15), Orange Sulphur (774), American Copper (9), Great Spangled Fritillary (23), and Common Buckeye (145).



Southern Cloudywing
Linda Hunt

An additional ten species had their second lowest count during the survey. These include Juvenal's Duskywing (4), Common Checkered-Skipper (14), Swarthy Skipper (3), Zebra Swallowtail (10), Black Swallowtail (52), Variegated Fritillary (238), Question Mark (8), American Lady (23), Red-spotted Purple (36), Common Wood-Nymph (3), and Monarch (374).

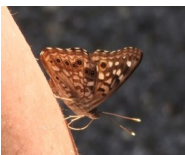
Overall, 28.6% of the 70 species found had their lowest or second lowest count during the survey. Clouded Skipper was missed for only the second time during the survey, the last was in 2014. For Giant Swallowtail and Tawny Emperor, only a single individual was found.



Juniper Hairstreak
Kathy Litzinger

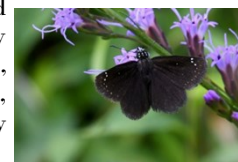
Howard County Watch List: Common Checkered-Skipper numbers had dropped for five years in a row from a peak of 331 in 2017 to 14 in 2022. In 2023, they rebounded slightly to 20, but this number is still historically low. These are found in higher numbers in the western part of the county where fewer people survey. Their conservation status is S5 (secure) in Maryland, but they are on this county's watch list. American Copper numbers have dropped for six out of the last seven years. This year only nine were counted, down from a peak of 86 in 2016. In the last four years, Great Spangled Fritillary numbers have dropped from 168 in 2018 to 39 (2019), 45 (2020), 32 (2021), and a low of 23 in both 2022 and 2023. These numbers reflect regional trends and could be global-warming related (disrupted timing of caterpillar emerging from diapause and violet emergence). Tawny-edged Skipper numbers averaged 139 individuals reported each year during the first five years of the survey to 49 individuals each year in the last five years. In 2023, the number reported was 15. Monarch numbers averaged 959 individuals counted per year between 2016 and 2021. The number reported was 374 in 2023. This is only one year so it is not a real concern yet, but, because it is the Monarch, it is worth pointing out.

Of the 70 species found this year, 18 (~26%) had <10 individuals reported. These include American Copper (9), Question Mark (8), *Hackberry Emperor* (8), White M Hairstreak (7), Pipevine Swallowtail (6), American Snout (6), Southern Cloudywing (6), Northern Cloudywing (5), *Crossline Skipper* (5), *Northern Broken-Dash* (5), *Common Sootywing* (4), *Swarthy Skipper* (3), *Common Wood-Nymph* (3), Juvenal's Duskywing (3), **Northern Oak Hairstreak (2)**, *Long-tailed Skipper* (2), *Giant Swallowtail* (1), and *Tawny Emperor* (1). Nine of these (*italics*) were also on last year's <10 individuals reported list. One in bold was not seen last year. The other eight were not on last year's list.



Hackberry Emperor
Kurt Schwarz

New Early and Late Dates: There were eleven new early dates established this year. These were Sleepy Orange (4/4), Meadow Fritillary (4/5), Red-banded Hairstreak (4/17), Northern Cloudywing (5/14), Hobomok Skipper (5/15), Viceroy (5/18), Common Sootywing (5/19), Northern Pearly-Eye (5/21), Harvester (5/22), Dun Skipper (5/25) and Northern Oak Hairstreak (6/4). There were also eleven new late dates recorded this year. They were: Northern Oak Hairstreak (6/10), Appalachian Brown (9/2), Southern Broken-Dash (9/15), Broad-winged Skipper (9/19), Great-spangled Fritillary (10/3), Wild Indigo Duskywing (10/26), Zabulon Skipper (10/26), Silver-spotted Skipper (10/28), Black Swallowtail (11/4), Painted Lady (11/13), and Monarch (11/22). The Early – Late date spreadsheet will be updated this winter.



Common Sootywing
Pam Perna

Notes from the year:

- One new species was seen this year, Northern Oak Hairstreak. That brings the species count for the survey to 81.
- The 15 Harvester butterflies seen this year exceed the total seen during the seven years between 2015 and 2021.
- The Sleepy Orange found by Clayton Koonce on April 8th was the winter form indicating that it had overwintered in the county.
- On March 26th, Annette Allor found eight Eastern Commas in a single tree. Amazing.
- Annette also found 16 Juniper Hairstreaks at Mt Pleasant on April 17th.
- Andrea Cochran found a Monarch ovipositing on milkweed on April 24th which is interesting because the milkweed is barely out of the ground at that time.
- The single Giant Swallowtail was seen by John McKitterick. They seem to be very attracted to the lantana in his yard.
- We have all been told that Monarch caterpillars only eat the leaves of milkweed plants. Annette Allor, however, has seen them eating milkweed flowers and was able to get a video to prove it. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_b5Ue6eO9g.
- Annette Allor found a Gray Hairstreak caterpillar on Partridge Pea at the Shrine of Saint Anthony's on October 4th. This, to my knowledge, is a first for the survey.
- Monarch numbers dropped from 928 in 2022 to 374 in 2023. This is the second lowest number in the ten-year survey and is worth watching going forward.
- We again conducted seven butterfly walks this year, six at Mt Pleasant and one at the Elkhorn Garden Plots.
- The top ten contributors (out of 113) accounted for ~66% of the surveys submitted.
- See the presentation to be given at the April Howard County Bird Club (HCBC) meeting for more information about the 2023 butterfly year.
- Banded Hairstreak dropped from 51 in 2022 to 11 in 2023.
- Spotted Lanternflies were found in numbers in the county for the first time this year.
- Harvester is always a tough butterfly to find. Sometimes they find you. This one found Heidi Osterman's hand (see photo on [p. 9](#)).



Sleepy Orange
Clayton Koonce



Gray Hairstreak caterpillar
Annette Allor

(Continued on [page 9](#))

(Continued from [page 8](#))

Butterfly of the Year: Each year we award a “Butterfly of the Year” to a species that had an outstanding year. This year the award goes to the Northern Oak Hairstreak, the new species for the survey. Two of these butterflies were found, only the second and third individuals of this species recorded since the 1970s. Congratulations to Kathy Litzinger and Bonnie Bezila for these finds. Details of these sightings are given above.

Last Butterfly of the Year Contest: We again had the “Last Butterfly of the Year” contest with the winner receiving a *Butterflies of the Mid-Atlantic* field guide. The winner this year was Jim Wilkinson, who sent in a photo of an Orange Sulphur seen at Meadowbrook Park on December 8th. Congratulations Jim.

Photos and Videos from participants: This year we, once again, have received many excellent photos of butterflies. Some of the photos are proof of a sighting; others are to request help with an ID which we enjoy receiving. Please do not hesitate to reach out with a request for an ID. Some of the photos we receive are simply eye-popping. Many of these photos will be in the PowerPoint presentation given at the April HCBC meeting.

New Data / Tools for the Butterfly Survey: In the ten years that the butterfly survey has been taking place, you surveyors have reported more than 215,000 butterflies. With this vast amount of data, we were able to publish flight times, early and late dates, and overwintering strategies for each of the 81 species that have been found. These are all on the HCBC website. They are in pdf format and can be downloaded to your phone for use in the field.

What you can do to help butterflies:

- Provide a Pocket Habitat for butterflies.
- Plant a native plant pollinator garden and landscape for caterpillars.
- Leave the leaves.
- Reduce the size of your lawn (or mow less frequently).
- Reduce mosquito spray and insecticide usage.
- Get rid of invasive plants.
- Embrace the wild in your garden.

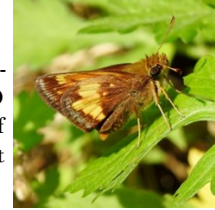
Another big thanks to all of you for another very successful year for the Howard County Butterfly Survey. Keep your eyes open. By the time that this newsletter is sent out in late February, we likely will have already seen the first butterfly of 2024.



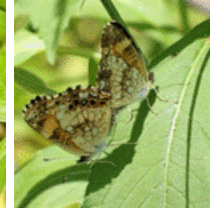
Orange Sulphur
Jim Wilkinson



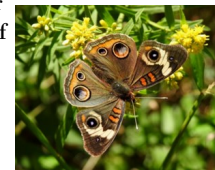
Harvester
Heidi Osterman



Hobomok Skipper
Annette Allor



Silvery Checkerspot
Kathy Litzinger



Common Buckeye
Annette Allor



Clouded Sulphur
Annette Allor

STRANDED LOON SAVED BY TWO SWANS

BY VAL SWAN AND RUSS RUFFING



Common Loon on January 16, 2024,
with ice-free area shrinking.

by Stan Smith

Between January 15th and 16th, the first major winter storm of the season brought five inches of snow and howling winds to Howard County. Birds were putting down in any open water that they could find in the county. This included a Common Loon, which had the misfortune to select a small waterbody in northern Howard County. Ryan Salsman was the first to spot the loon on the 16th, and he put out the word that the bird was holed up in a 30-foot-wide area of open water in what was otherwise an entirely frozen pond. The bird was even calling periodically, a vocalization not normally heard in Howard County! Several birders showed up soon after to tick the bird; most expressed concern that the loon would be unable to move on because loons require open water to be able to skitter across before getting enough lift to take off. And with bitter cold temperatures forecast for the next week, if the open water area froze over, the bird would be stranded on the ice.

Kurt Schwarz called the DNR Wildlife Service, and Mary Lou Clark checked with Frisky’s, a local wildlife rehabber, to see if the loon could be rescued. Frisky’s would gladly take the loon if it could be captured, but the DNR would not commit to taking action. Over the next week, an additional five inches of snow fell as nighttime temperatures hovered in the ‘teens. Russ Ruffing made daily checks on the loon, and surprisingly, the open water area did not freeze over entirely even though each day it shrank in size. The loon’s diving and feeding activity seemed to provide just enough agitation to prevent the hole from closing in. By Sunday the 21st, the pool was down to only about three feet in diameter. Would the hole in the ice stay open through another night of forecasted 14-degree temperatures?

No. Russ’ check on Monday morning (the 22nd) confirmed that the loon was now stranded on the ice and floundering around periodically. At this point, all we could hope for was for the warmer temperatures in the forecast to thaw out a portion of the pond so that the loon could once again forage and evade predators until it could eventually depart. Otherwise, it was a sitting duck out on the ice.

Unbeknownst to anyone, Jeff Swan, club member Val Swan’s husband and a member of the Loon Fan Club, sprang into action. At 9 a.m., the two Swans set out to save one loon! After a brief discussion with a resident, the Swans decided to make a rescue try. Fortunately, by this time the loon had made its way to the pond’s edge and was resting along the shoreline. If not for that development, no rescue attempt could be made, as walking out onto the ice was unsafe. Carefully approaching the loon, the Swans tried to toss a Corvette car cover – basically a soft net - over the bird in a failed first attempt as the loon scuttled about eight feet out onto the frozen pond, yodeling its displeasure at the Swans.

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HOWARD COUNTY BIRD CLUB

Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

P.O. Box 1323

Columbia, MD 21044-1323

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BEGINNER BIRDER'S CORNER

BY MEGAN BOLCAR

Hopefully, your 2024 birding year is off to a great start. In the January/February issue of *The Goldfinch*, I shared some advice that was gathered from a few of our field trip and workshop leaders. I would like to continue sharing some of those words-of-wisdom here.

“The most valuable thing a birder can practice is something we all innately did when we first lifted binoculars: bird *every* bird. Nature presents us with individuals, not mere abstractions of species, and each one shares with us looks and sounds of a unique life lived, and sometimes of a provenance far away.” ~Dave Ziolkowski

“Get comfortable using binoculars! Locate a bird with your naked eye. Do not move your head or take your eyes off of the bird as you bring the binoculars up to your eyes. The great satisfaction of ‘getting on the bird’ far outweighs the practice required to learn this skill.” ~Val Swan

“Make every effort to bird with people better than yourself. You can learn so much from being around other birders, some of the nuances you can’t get from field guides.” ~Anonymous

Stay tuned for more words of wisdom in our next issue!

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Rescued Common Loon
after release.

by Gregg Petersen

Jeff then held the cover up and hid behind it, and to the Swans’ great surprise, the loon turned around and scurried right up to them, allowing Jeff to gently drape the net over it and place the heavy waterbird into a large plastic bin.

The bird appeared to be in good shape, and a quick decision was made to transport the bird to some open water elsewhere in the county and release it there. Russ suggested Triadelphia Reservoir, but while enroute, Gregg Petersen suggested the deeper Springdale Quarry, as the reservoir was also beginning to ice over.

In minutes, the Swans and Gregg were at the water’s edge, loon in tow. As the lid of the bin was lifted, the grateful loon leapt out onto the water, and did something it hadn’t done in a week – skitter across the water in typical loon fashion, yodeling with joy as if to say a heartfelt “thank you” to the Swans! What a completely satisfying end to a gallant rescue effort made by the Swans!

See a video of the release on the Howard County Bird Club [Facebook page](#). Thanks to John and Meg Harris for monitoring the loon after its successful release, and to all those that shared in monitoring the loon’s seven-day saga. As Dave Ziolkowski said, “It’s a special thing to be in a community of folks who hold the well-being of our shared affections so highly.”