

The Goldfinch

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



Founded 1972

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CLUB MEETINGS

BY MARY LOU CLARK



Thursday, May 14, 2026 "Birds of the Wetlands" by Bonnie Ott. Bonnie Ott is a long-time member of MOS and the Howard County Bird Club. Over four decades of birding, Bonnie has expanded her interests to include a vast array of subjects. Bonnie started a journey into photography, documenting unusual species and behaviors. Her pictures have been published in many

field guides and have been used for educational purposes throughout the world.

Bonnie has worked on multiple projects and atlases for birds, dragonflies, herps, and everything else that she can capture with her lens. She will present a program on how to understand the birds you find in various wetland habitats throughout the seasons. Focusing on birds of central Maryland, Bonnie will explain the differences between our common species, as well as when and where to find them in our lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, and marshes. As usual with Bonnie, you can expect to see a few other inhabitants of these areas throughout the program.

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. At 7:00 p.m., the in-person hospitality session begins and the Zoom portal opens, with the meeting beginning at 7:30 p.m. Click on the [Calendar](#) tab at the HCBC website's Home page to learn more.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: CHIRPS TO THE FLOCK

BY VAL SWAN



At the conclusion of our 54th year, as the unfolding of spring migration surrounds us, with signs of breeding birds, and blossoming flowers bringing in butterflies, I reflect upon the beauty of nature and how fortunate I have been to be your president this past year. I am truly surrounded by dedicated folks with a strong commitment to caring for our natural world and sharing our fabulous hobbies: birdwatching and butterfly surveying.

Each volunteer, at every single level, is greatly appreciated. Some of you have volunteered for decades! Thank you to our new volunteers as well: Brian Moyer for leading the Mid-winter Count, Tim McGowan for volunteering to lead the Fall Count and becoming co-webmaster, Steve Luke for becoming our new Area 4 Coordinator, Jamie Lynch for becoming our newsletter editor, and Megan Bolcar our newest field trip leader.

(Continued on page 3)

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. The leader may cancel due to inclement weather/hazardous driving conditions. Directions for trips not on ADC maps are on the Club's website. Have questions? Contact the trip leader or Field Trip Coordinator Joe Hanfman at auk1844@gmail.com. **Please remember to register with the Field Trip Leader when you see the red "R" in the Field Trip Title.** 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.*

B Mullinix Mill Road

May 1, Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Meet at the parking lot on Mullinix Mill Road (39.29474N, 77.14541W).

The new mountain bike trail will head up into the forest with a nice overlook of the river at one point. Then it's down to a little meadow and back on the old horse trail along the river. Walking distance is about 2 miles. Can expect the usual woodland birds with any number of migrants passing through. Resident nesters are Louisiana Waterthrushes, Worm-eating Warblers, Ovenbirds, Common Yellowthroats, and Wood Thrushes.

Leader – Mary Prowell, Boprow@gmail.com

B Belmont Manor Historic Park

May 6, Wednesday, 8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

A walk around the fields looking for early migrants. This trip will have special guests, Mike Bowen and Anne Cianni. 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

May Count, Saturday, May 9. See page 10.

B Skywatch, Howard County Conservancy, Mt Pleasant

May 12, Tuesday, 8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Join fellow birders at the Chandler S. Robbins Skywatch at the Howard County Conservancy. You can show up and leave at any time. This is an unofficial Big Sit. We will look for flyovers and look and listen to surrounding birds. No need to sign up, just show up.

Cancelled in the event of heavy rain.

Leader – Lynn Gregg, lhg5037@gmail.com

B Western Regional Park

May 17, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Use the parking lot to the left of the Gary Arthur Senior Center (2400 MD-97, Cooksville MD), not the Western Regional Park lots.

Moderate walking along field edges and woodland trails. Opportunity for warblers, sparrows, thrushes, and flyovers. Facilities available.

Leader – Lisa Colangelo, lcolangelo@verizon.net

B Patapsco Scrubland

May 23, Saturday, 7:30 a.m. Half day.

Meet at 735 River Road (up long drive, take right-hand split and park by the house).

Starting in the scrubland, we'll look for warblers, vireos, thrushes, and other edge species. Depending on conditions, we may continue into the woods. Moderate to possibly difficult walking; steep trails with several stream crossings, so wear appropriate footwear. We will also be able to view Felicia's Chimney Swift tower. Facilities available.

Leader - Felicia Lovelett, c5nest@gmail.com

B/R Delaware Shorebird Hotspots

May 23, Saturday, All day.

An all-day trip to shorebird hotspots along the Delaware Bay in Kent and Sussex Counties, Delaware. Specific locations to be selected based on reported birds at the time - but may include Port Mahon, Ted Harvey Conservation Area, DuPont Nature Center, Marvel Salt Marsh Preserve, and Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge. Expect hot, windy, and potentially buggy conditions - but the possibility of some truly amazing shorebird action will be worth it! We will stop at Wawa (or similar) for lunch, but packed snacks and water are a good idea. Contact Russ Kovach for more information.

Leader-Russ Kovach, russell.kovach@gmail.com or 443-386-4787

B/R Linganore Creek Sanctuary

May 30, Saturday, 7:30 a.m. -11:00 a.m.

Meet at the West Friendship park-and-ride on the west side of MD 32 just north of Interstate 70 at 7:30 a.m. and carpool the 25 minutes to the potential sanctuary.

Walk the 125 acres of what is slated to become the 11th MOS sanctuary and the only one of its size in central Maryland. Expect warblers, chats, Red-headed Woodpeckers, and birds of the open fields such as Bobolinks, Field Sparrows, and American Kestrels. Be ready for wet but mowed grass and one stream crossing (with stepping stones). RSVP required.

Leader - John McKitterick, john.mckitterick@mdbirds.org

B/R Birding Unplugged – Middle Patuxent Environmental Area

May 31, Sunday, 7:30 a.m., 2-3 hours.

Meet at the South Wind Trailhead.

Join us for a restorative, low-tech birding field trip focused on sharpening your own eyes and ears. We'll leave the apps behind—no Merlin Bird ID, no eBird—and immerse ourselves in careful observation, field marks, behavior, and birdsong. This is a chance to slow down, tune in, and experience birding the old-fashioned way: present, attentive, and unplugged. The trip leader will keep a paper list and will enter an eBird list manually to share with the group following the trip. Limit 10 people. RSVP required.

Leader - Megan Bolcar, megbolcar@gmail.com

B/W/R Lake Kittamaqundi

June 1, Monday, 7:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.

Limit 10 people. RSVP required.

Easy walk around the lake on paved path and boardwalk.

Leader - Lily Saul, ljsaul604@gmail.com

B/R Tern Raft Boat Trip in Worcester County

June 8, Monday, 8:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. with a rain date of Wednesday, June 10.

Tern Raft Boat Trip (continued)

Royal, Common, Forster's, and maybe other terns, Black Skimmers, pelicans and much more. There is a fee for the boat ride of \$100 which includes the tip and needs to be paid in advance to secure your reservation. There is a limit of 25 people. We will set up a carpool location in Howard County for those who wish to carpool.

Everyone will meet at the West Ocean City Harbor. There is plenty of free parking there. Then, a boat ride south down to South Point and then to the tern raft. That takes around an hour to ride down, we will pass the flats near Castaways (a great birding spot) and continue along the waterway between Assateague and South Point. When we ride out to the tern raft, we generally will not stay more than 30 minutes in order to protect the chicks and be sure everyone is fed, etc. We can get pretty close, but they won't want us there too long.

We can add a lunch too by Assateague Outfitters if you choose as well. They can meet us at South Point Boat ramp and we can eat the boxed lunches for the ride back. They have a good assortment of options that we could send out prior. If you don't want that option, that is fine, too. Generally, the cost is around \$20 with tip per lunch which offers a sandwich, chips, water, and a big cookie.

RSVP required. To reserve a spot, contact Joe Hanfman at auk1844@gmail.com. You will then receive details of how to pay for the boat.

Leader: Joe Hanfman, auk1844@gmail.com

B/R Meadowbrook Park

July 17, Friday, 7:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.

Facilities available

Limit 10 people. RSVP required.

Leader Lily Saul, ljsaul604@gmail.com

B = Good for beginning birders

W = Wheelchair accessible

R = Reservations required

President's Message (continued from page 1)

Special thanks to Vice President Tom Seivert for his unwavering assistance. Lily Saul and Laura Wolf were the 2024 recipients of the Rookie of the Year award, Jamie Lynch and Chen Chiu awardees for 2025, all immediately starting to volunteer after joining. Gregg Petersen received the Blood, Sweat, and Tears award for his tenacity in bringing a Motus Tower to Howard County. Richly deserving, the Valued Service Award was presented to Joe Hanfman for his 26 years of service to the club as Field Trip Chair, Mid-winter Count Coordinator, Annual Bird List Compiler, Records Committee member, and decades-long advisor for confusing and rare bird sightings. I'm proud to work with such charitable people!

I'd like to recognize Chen Chiu, our Young Birder Chair, who has significantly grown our youth program with the assistance of student field trip leaders, Vitus Li and Roshan Vignarajah. They are bringing up the next generation of birders!

Kudos to Kevin Heffernan and his strong team of assistants: Linda Hunt, Annette Allor, Kathy Litzinger, Woody Merkle and Cris Ausin for teaching four online butterfly ID classes and growing the butterfly "wing" of our club. The team has conducted the annual butterfly survey for 11 years now.

Under Habitat Chair, Sue Probst, we have had a very active year engaging in conservation projects such as installing Purple Martin houses (thank you, Russ Ruffing!), maintaining our shorebird habitat at Sharp's Farm, advising WSSC for their Osprey platform, collaborating with The Farmland Raptor Program, assisting the Howard County Conservancy with their pollinator meadow, funding the 2026 Common Tern Raft Project, and fundraising for Linganore Creek's 125-acre upkeep.

Research played a big role in our year with the activating of our Motus Wildlife Tracking Station and the purchase of radio tags for Alan Reich's Master's thesis project studying the movement of Eastern Bluebirds during the non-breeding season. Unfortunately, our Mid-winter Count was cancelled, but the Fall and May counts successfully brought together the birding community en masse to tally the birds of our county.

Education was shared through the following: our Merlin kiosks, four in-service lectures, one podcast, two workshops, and five tabling events. Bob Solem's updates to our website included sections about pollinators and how to keep your cat safe while protecting birds, and, of course, through our general meeting programs, carefully selected by Mary Lou Clark.

Wingspan and Bird Trivia kept us laughing. Social events included our annual Potluck, skillfully planned by Meghaan Lane and Connie McRill, as well as a celebration for the unveiling of the Chan Robbins mural in Laurel.

David Ziolkowski, Steve Luke, Bob Solem, Lily Saul, and Lynn Gregg brought us into the modern era with the use of QR codes to sign-in to our numerous, varied field trips which allowed for our checklists to be more easily shared with all participants. Thank you to all of our field trip leaders! You are the backbone of the club.

I look forward to seeing what next year brings. Please contact me @ valnjeff55@gmail.com with any suggestions you may have to improve our club and don't forget to renew your membership. Have a wonderful summer and I hope to see you out on the trails!

Warm regards,
Val Swan, President
Howard County Bird Club

WINTER BIRD RECORDS: DECEMBER 1, 2026-FEBRUARY 28, 2026

BY JOANNE SOLEM

December began with an unusually cold period leaving snow on the ground for several weeks; shallow water froze quickly and most lakes became ice-covered. Late 2025 and early 2026 brought a reprieve with more normal temperatures and open water. Winter's wake-up call came on 25 January with 7-11 inches of snow topped by an inch or more of ice. A polar finger of the jet stream plunged temperatures to single digits at night with daytime highs below 32°F for more than a week so that most of Triadelphia Reservoir froze. Lingering waterfowl departed, retreated to quarries, or found a few openings in local lakes. The cold and the hard, ice-covered snow persisted through February with few breaks.

Intrepid Howard County birders rose to winter's challenge and turned up an excellent array of species. Highlights included Ross's Goose, Snow Goose (both morphs), Greater White-fronted Goose, Northern Pintail, Long-tailed Duck, Common Goldeneye, Sandhill Crane, Laughing Gull, Iceland Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Evening Grosbeak, Lapland Longspur, Snow Bunting, Lincoln's Sparrow, Yellow-breasted Chat, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Nashville Warbler.



Ross's Goose, Dec. 9, 2025, Johns Hopkins APL Pond, by David Sandler

One immature **Snow Goose** and five **Ross's** joined the goose flock at Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab 12/8 (**SLv**; **ID-KS**) staying until 12/13; both morphs of Snows and one or two Ross's were reported from half a dozen sites west of US 29 well into Jan; Snows again mostly in late Feb.



Greater White-fronted Goose, Jan. 28, 2026, Woodmark Lake (private property), by Steve Luke

A **Greater White-fronted** was present at Warfield's Cemetery Pd 12/11 (**JHf**, ph.). The first one of the new year was at Springdale Quarry (**SDQRY**) 1/28 (**RRf**).

Cackling Geese were reported from more than a dozen locations. There were several reports of 50 or more.

HOWCO eBird reviewer, Tim Carney, has requested photographic verification when reporting these large numbers because this species is frequently misidentified. There is considerable size variability within similar-appearing species of geese requiring the enumeration of multiple field marks and the examination of *each one* of the smaller geese to pinpoint the species.

Canada Goose numbers reached an astonishingly high 4,200 at Centennial Park (**CENPK**) 12/17 (**BO**), a dawn count by 100s along the length of the lake. Dec and early Jan brought a half dozen **Tundra Swan** sightings.

Highs of **Northern Shovelers** were 20 at Brighton Dam (**BRDAM**) 12/3 (**GPn**) and 21 at Race Road Wetlands 1/11 (**S/DSk**, ph.). A count of 69 **American Black Ducks** at **SDQRY** 1/20 (**GPn**) reflects ice covering more shallow water. All five **Northern Pintail** sites held four or fewer birds. Small numbers of **Redheads** were noted all winter, most consistently at **SDQRY** with a high of 17 on 1/24 (**KS**).



Long-tailed Duck, Jan. 1, 2026, Centennial Park, by Russ Ruffing

An adult male **Long-tailed Duck** at **CENPK** 1/1 was a high point of the New Year's Day field trip (**KS**, **RVg+**); also, two small flocks were heard (**NFC** live) over Cavey 12/4 (**RRf**) and a single was seen at **SDQRY** 1/30 (**JHf**). Single digit numbers of **Common Goldeneyes** were picked out all winter from one at Warfield's Cemetery Pd 12/2 (**JHf**) to one intermittently at **GE Pd-Gateway** through 2/27 (**RRf**).

As usual, **Common Merganser** numbers at Triadelphia Reservoir swelled dramatically in Dec. The handful present the first week jumped to 300 on 12/10 (**GPn**); by the 12/20 Triadelphia Christmas Count, the combined number at dawn for both counties was 3,800 (**RM**s). A similar total of 3,200+ was noted on 1/2 (**JHf**)! By 1/24, the reservoir was largely frozen so most of the mergs had moved on. After the 1/25 storm, 50 (in two groups that joined) were caught low over Allview near dawn on 1/26 (**S/DSk**) heading directly south. At Triadelphia, a few **Red-breasted Mergansers** can usually be found among the mass of Commons. The high was four on 12/23 (**RVg**, **VLi**).

Nineteen **Wild Turkeys** at the Patapsco scrublands 2/19 (**FLv**) and 17 at Homewood Rd 1/19 (**SLk**) were the season's highs. The most entertaining turkey report was of one standing in the middle of Centennial Lane near the park's west end at 10:30 a.m. on 1/15 (**RSm**). Of course, Ryan shooed it off the road.

Coots were noted at three sites—all single digit numbers. Likely a family group of four **Sandhill Cranes** in “tight formation” flew over Rocky Gorge Res. 12/27 (SVz, desc.). More accommodating for birders were three on a HOWCO spit north of BRDAM the midafternoon of 1/24 (RVg, VLi).



Sandhill Cranes, Jan. 24, 2026, Tridelphia Reservoir, by Russ Ruffing

The display flights of **American Woodcock** are one of the surest signs of coming spring. Although the appearance of this shorebird gives the impression of having been created by an imaginative child using leftover parts, the bird is actually well-designed for its habitat. A late winter/early spring evening spent in a meadow watching the high arcs of twittering flight is memorable whether for the first or the fiftieth time. The first two reported were present the evening of 2/20 at Fulton South Area Park (KCK).

A **Laughing Gull** at BRDAM 12/20 (VLI, JW, NPr) hung around until the early morning of 12/22 (LSI, DWs). In addition to the mostly single digit numbers of expected **Great Black-backed Gulls** in the vicinity of the Jessup Trash Transfer Station, a first-cycle **Iceland Gull** there on 1/19-1/31 (RVg, VLi, ph.) and a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** on 1/31 (RVg, VLi, desc.) were exciting species. **Double-crested Cormorants** winter over only occasionally. The bird at CENPK on 1/1 (WBv) was not the last. Possibly that same bird was reported multiple times the last week of Jan at SDQRY and BRDAM with 1/31 the last sighting (m. obs.) during the lowest temperatures of the season.



Iceland Gull, Jan 21, 2026, Guilford Road, by Steve Luke

Interesting behavior between two **Bald Eagles** and hundreds of geese at CENPK was noted repeatedly on 12/17 (LSI; BO). Lily described it as follows: “When harassed by the Bald Eagles, the group closest to the open water headed to and entered it. When an eagle swooped close overhead, there was a collective ‘alarm hiss’ by the group. The hiss was quite spectacular when uttered by over a hundred geese.” The high number of eagles at BRDAM was a modest 15 on 1/14 (GPn).

Two **Eastern Screech-Owls** roosted in boxes during the winter. The one at Hallmark (Web) was still present at the end of the season; the bird at Long Corner departed in mid-Feb (MPw). Applying information gleaned from previous annual owl field trips, whitewash on the ground in a pine grove led to a perched **Great Horned Owl** at Hugg-Thomas WMA 1/11 (VJSw). Unfortunately, this was not a significant season for **Northern Saw-whet Owls**. A wintering bird at a known location was elusive, although numerous pellets were found during the owl workshop.

Red-headed Woodpeckers were reported from at least nine sites. In addition to adults and a juvenile at known breeding locations listed in the autumn report, two ad. and a juv. were photog’d 12/20 at Mary’s Land Farm (GPn, BCs), while two to three ad. and a juv. spent the winter in the Little Patuxent floodplain near Yellowstone Ct (NPr). During the late Jan/early Feb cold spell, this juv. (now in almost adult plumage) began coming to a feeder appearing to pick peanuts out of a special seed/dried fruit mix.

Several **Fish Crows** at CENPK 1/23 (BO) swooped repeatedly on resting **Hooded Mergansers** causing them to dive. Was this a crow’s idea of fun? Two **Common Ravens** along US 29 near Hammond Branch 2/5 (SSk) were exciting. Grass in the bill of the perched bird indicated that lining was being added to the stick nest. As yet, the nest has not been located. A flock of 27 **Horned Larks** near Fulton Pd 12/14 were “foraging on sunflower seed heads half-buried in snow” (SRb). **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were heard or seen at more than three dozen locations.

A **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** at Temple Isaiah north of Fulton 12/20 (JHR, PRk, Jcm) was the latest record by more than a month [11/16/04 Lake Elkhorn, J. Wilkinson]. Multiple **Gray Catbirds** and **Brown Thrashers** were reported until the 1/25 storm.

Evening Grosbeak sightings in the state were extremely few. In this county, one heard and recorded over Cavey La 1/6 (RRf) was the best documented; two reports (12/24; 1/31 RVg, VLI) at nearby MTPLT were flyovers. **Pine Siskins** were tallied at a dozen sites, most prior to the 1/25 storm. Although a flyover flock of 24 was reported at MTPLT 1/24, supportive documentation was lacking during a winter when this irruptive was scarce and seen only in the low single digits.

Lapland Longspurs were a choice winter species in the fields of a horse farm along Old Frederick Rd after the 1/25 storm. Spotted on 1/27 (VSw), up to three hung around until at least 2/6, using exposed grassy strips between the road and snowbank edges, as well as a nearby manure pile. At least 150 people enjoyed them.



Lapland Longspur, Jan. 30, 2026, Old Frederick Road, by Lauren Crocker

The cold, snow, and ice produced another stellar species: **Snow Bunting** at two separate locations! One was with three Horned Larks along a road at the Alpha Ridge Landfill 2/6 (**RCu**) until 2/10 (**RCu, JHf+**). The second moved between a field on the west side of Underwood Rd and a nearby farm driveway along Old Frederick Rd to the west from 2/7 (**C/JJo**) until 2/8 (**CLc**). The species had been last seen in the county in 2016; it was the 16th year the species was recorded in the last 70, the first-ever in Feb, and one of just four reports in a month other than Nov or Dec.



Snow Bunting, Feb. 8, 2026, Underwood Road, by Russ Ruffing

Chipping Sparrows, which decades ago were unusual in winter, were noted at more than three dozen sites. Forty **Field Sparrows** at MTPLT 2/1 was a fine count (**VLi, RVg**). A **Lincoln's Sparrow** at MTPLT 1/1 (**RRf**) was an unusual winter species; it was still present 1/24 (**RVg, VLi**), but not after the storm. A **Yellow-breasted Chat** at Gateway 1/16 (**JW, ph.**) was a surprise and just the fourth Jan record.

Eastern Meadowlark sightings were few with a high of 14 at Alpha Ridge Landfill 12/18 (**RCu**). Two male **Baltimore Orioles** again spent the winter. The Mt Hebron bird turned up on 12/7 for the seventh winter, dining on apple jelly and peanut splits (**JCu**). The oriole at Lake Elkhorn returned on 12/14 for at least the seventh winter to eat oranges and grape jelly (**KS; PBc; GOd**). Two additional reports were females; both were eating sunflower chips: one appeared briefly at Killingworth Way 12/3 (**SPb**), and one was sporadic at Roxbury Rd from 12/15 into Jan (**KBI**). As usual, winter **Rusty Blackbirds** were scarce. A Young Birders Walk at MTPLT 12/17 notched five for a trip highlight (**RVg, VLi+**).



Orange-crowned Warbler, Jan. 11, 2026, Elkridge, by Steve Luke

Presumably, the same **Orange-crowned Warbler** returned to an Elkridge yard on 12/13 for a second winter (**M/WCr**) continuing through the season; one was also reported from Dorsey Run Rd 12/23 (**RVg, VLi**). A **Nashville** was a surprise in a Mt Hebron yard where it was photog'd on weed stalks 12/6 (**JCu**). A second Nashville spent the season at So. Trotter Rd after arriving on 12/19 (**W/SE**). It was particularly interesting since its behavior (exhibiting a preference for peanut pieces at a particular feeder) strongly suggested it was the same individual that had shown up on 3/7/25, staying for a month.



Nashville Warbler, Jan. 3, 2026, Trotter Rd, by Gregg Petersen

Still present at the end of the season, the 2026 bird easily broke the previous late record [1/30/06 Gwynn Acres Path, M. Bowen+]. Usually, a few **Pine Warblers** overwinter. In addition to those in normal pine habitat, at least six feeders were visited, mostly for suet or peanuts (**DCr, W/SE, CLm, MLm, NSm, JW**).

Acknowledgments: Many thanks for input and editing from Joe Hanfman and Russ Ruffing, as well as records clarification from eBird reviewer Tim Carney.

Observers: **PBc** – Paul Bacich, **WBv** – Wiley Beevers, **KBI** – Karan Blum, **KCK** – Ken Clark, **JCm** – Jonathan Comeau, **DCr** – Donna Corolla, **BCs** – Ben Costell, **MCr** – Melissa Crew, **WCr** – William Crew, **JCu** – Jeff Culler, **RCu** – Ralph Cullison III, **SE** – Sue Earp, **WE** – Wes Earp, **WEb** – Ward Ebert, **JHf** – Joe Hanfman, **CJo** – Celyn Jones, **JJo** – Josh Jones, **CLc** – Carrie Lancos, **CLm** – Connie Lemon, **MLm** – Mike Leumas, **SLv** – Samantha Levy, **VLi** – Vitus Li, **FLv** – Felicia Lovelett, **SLk** – Steve Luke, **RM** – Rich Mason, **BO** – Bonnie Ott, **GOd** – Gretchen Overdurff, **GPn** – Gregg Petersen, **NPr** – Nathan Pressler, **SPb** – Sue Probst, **MPw** – Mary Prowell, **SRb** – Shauna Rasband, **PRk** – Pam Rasking, **JHR** – John Henri Rorabeck, **RRf** – Russ Ruffing, **RSm** – Ryan Salsman, **NSm** – Nigel Samaroo, **LSI** – Lily Saul, **KS** – Kurt Schwarz, **DSk** – Dan Skalos, **SSk** – Shannon Skalos, **JSw** – Jeff Swan, **VSw** – Val Swan, **RVg** – Roshan Vignarajah, **SVz** – Steven Vozzo, **JWr** – Jayden Ward, **DWs** – Doug Wassman, **JW** – Jim Wilkinson.

Wanted: Havens for Wildlife Articles

How have you improved your location to attract wildlife, whether it is the deck of a condominium, a townhouse, a suburban lot, or multi-acres. Summarize your efforts in a maximum of 500 words and a few photos and email to goldfinch@mdbirds.org.

Your experience could be invaluable!

WEATHER 101 FOR BIRDERS: LET IT RAIN, SNOW OR BLOW

Storms are accompanied by varied precipitation and can occur at any time of the year. Because rainstorms and snowstorms usually produce different birding conditions, each will be treated separately. There are transition periods both spring and fall that can produce combinations of rain, snow, sleet, or freezing rain. Whatever the precipitation, birders should always consider storms (or their aftermath) as opportunities.

Rain

Light showers may actually increase bird activity while steady downpours usually bring it to a halt (not to mention making it difficult to keep binoculars and scopes dry). Late afternoon showers in May have excellent potential. By the time a rainbow appears, passerine flocks may already be engaged in a burst of feeding activity before their evening flight. Occasionally, during migration periods, in the late afternoon after a day of rain, it is possible to encounter feeding flocks of 10-15 (or more) warbler species.

Extended periods of rain in spring may prevent migrants from moving on; at the same time, other migrants may continue to move into the same area behind the front swelling the number of birds waiting for a change in the weather. Under such conditions, counts of a single species may increase substantially. After multiple rainy days, May 7-8, 2022 produced eight Rose-breasted Grosbeaks at one feeder and six at two others.

From October to April if it's too rainy to walk around outside, bird by car checking flooded fields for geese, ducks, and gulls.

During rainy migration periods, don't limit your search for shorebirds solely to mudflats. Check local sod farms and flooded fields for shallow puddles where a variety of species may collect.

Snow, Sleet, and Freezing Rain

Stormy conditions with major temperature changes in March/April may produce a few choice waterfowl sightings, as well as astonishingly large fallouts on Triadelphia Reservoir. Snowstorms in March can often produce an amazing fallout of some early migrants such as Fox Sparrows. Merely by driving rural roads, it is possible to encounter dozens of this species desperately trying to forage along the sides of roads, especially if plowing has exposed some dirt and grass.

Snowstorms are usually preceded by a substantial drop in barometric pressure. Feeder watchers use increased feeding activity as a warning of an on-coming storm. Heavy snowfalls and extended ice storms can cover or encase food supplies forcing birds into unusual locations as they become increasingly desperate for food and water.

Generally, snowstorms do not cover all surfaces equally. Winds across open expanses create conditions attractive to field species such as Horned Larks, American Pipits, and Eastern Meadowlarks. If the windswept acres expose bare soil or scattered sparse vegetation, there are opportunities for rarities such as Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting.

After a snowfall, when salt solutions are used to treat roads, watch for birds along the edges of melting snow. They may be utilizing the salt solution as well as picking up grit to aid their digestion. The exposed grassy edges can be a magnet for field species such as Horned Larks, Savannah Sparrows and the aforementioned Fox Sparrows.

When precipitation falls as sleet or at temperatures in which cold rain freezes on contact, migrants may become disoriented by light-reflective surfaces that are mistaken for water. Loons and grebes, for example, can end up on the tops of flat-roofed buildings, in ice-glazed parking lots, or on ponds too small from which to take off. Such species may need to be rescued so they can be moved to large bodies of open water.

Winds / Hurricanes

Hurricanes are tropical cyclones (counterclockwise systems of rotating winds around a low barometric center). Some work their way north along the Atlantic Coast; others move inland from the Gulf of Mexico. The severity of hurricane-force winds drops dramatically by the time such systems reach Howard County, although we may still receive many inches of rain over a several day period. Because of the county's inland location, we are fortunate in never receiving the direct hit that coastal areas do; however, wind and rain are still capable of extensive damage. Trees and branches falling on powerlines and roadways along with gale-force winds can make driving during any storm extremely risky. Wait for the calm after the storm before venturing out.

Hurricanes often pick up birds that take advantage of the relative calm near the center, sometimes moving individuals or small flocks hundreds of miles. When the storm is spent, winds drop and/or swing to a different compass point, leaving some birds many miles from their normal range. Generally, birders have only a small window in which to observe such storm-waifs before they reverse course. For example, on October 30, 2012, after Hurricane Sandy passed by, Howard County had records of some more "seafaring" species such as Brant and Black Scoter. A few days later, a White-winged Scoter was found.

Gulls may move many miles to avoid high coastal winds. These same winds may occasionally pick up or assist pelagic species in moving far inland, much to the delight of local birders.

Wind direction and intensity both matter. Few birds care to waste precious energy fighting headwinds. During spring and fall migration, adverse winds may cause large numbers of certain species to drop onto the closest water or into a woodlot waiting until the winds drop or change direction. Often this change in wind comes near dawn, so at first light migrants are likely to move on. If, however, strong gusts continue for several days and the food supply is good, some of those drop-in migrants may remain a little longer.

While headwinds can stall migrants, tailwinds, which are light breezes in the direction of migration, may encourage movement.

In spring, when birds are intent on reaching breeding locations, there may be days when southerly winds drop multiples of several species; these choice days may also be ideal for major flights of swans, geese, and various raptors.

Raptors (especially buteos and vultures) are well-known for taking advantage of winds from particular directions, as well as using updrafts which are columns of sun-warmed air. Howard County has no major topographic features that consistently direct winds. Major river systems may be the most important local features used by migrants.

In addition to watching the local weather, it also pays to follow migration at regional sites. Even if you have no plans to visit Cape May or a hawkwatch site in Pennsylvania or Virginia, the variation (and sometimes the similarity) in species and timing can be astonishing. The same is often true of locations within Maryland as varied in distance or topography as Turkey Point or Dan's Rock.

Although birders are used to rising early for maximum activity at dawn, there are exceptions worth noting. Birds that feed predominantly on flying insects or that use warmed air are not "early birds." Chances for flocks of swallows, terns, and gulls are much better from midmorning through midafternoon. Large flights of hawks are most likely in late morning into midafternoon. During Broad-winged Hawk migration (especially in the second and third weeks of September), a "lift-off" of Broad-wings as the thermals begin rising around 9-10:00 a.m. can produce a staggering tally of several hundred birds that suddenly just appear above a forested area where they had roosted for the night. Early spring and midfall when night temperatures drop substantially, the key to finding passerines early in the day is to seek wood edges where the sun is warming the vegetation and insects are active.

Clouds / Fog

Skies may range from entirely cloudless to totally overcast; clouds may be as low as ground level (fog) to thousands of feet in the atmosphere. The types of clouds present and the amount of sky coverage are essential aspects of current weather. Clouds appear in many shapes, sizes, and colors defining not only current conditions but they may be helpful indicators of coming weather—from what will occur in the next few minutes to signals for the next few days.

Fog can be localized in river valleys or it may extend over large areas. Often ephemeral, there is likely to be increased bird activity when the fog begins to lift as the sun warms the air.

Fog that occurs at night during migration may cause the same disorientation of migrants that icing does, dropping birds in unexpected place.

Fog is more prevalent in autumn and may hang over fields and pastures for several morning hours. Over water, it can reduce views dramatically and is likely to be present longer than over land. In September, rushing to a reservoir at dawn may produce relatively few identifiable birds.

Warm, calm, misty mornings that are neither exactly fog nor rain can be extremely productive, especially if they last for hours.

Drought

The absence of precipitation may be as important as too much. Extended periods without rain usually drop water levels in lakes, ponds, and reservoirs. In this county, those conditions occur most often midsummer to midfall. This drop in water levels can create a variety of situations attractive to various species of waterbirds. Herons and egrets, for instance, are quick to take advantage of these smaller, more shallow areas where fish and amphibians are concentrated.

For species that nest in and around emergent vegetation at pond edges, a midsummer drop in the water level may occur at a time that allows small young to move freely on mud or in very shallow water, enabling them to remain near the protective base of cattails, horsetails, and other plants.

The rise and fall of water levels, altered mainly by intermittent storms or showers, produce the required mudflats most shorebirds need for food and rest. This variation in water levels has two benefits: by covering the mudflats regularly, seeds do not have a chance to sprout as vegetation, keeping the ground muddy and increasing the value of the habitat for shorebirds; secondly, occasional showers keep at least portions of the area at a consistency that encourages the presence of a variety of macroinvertebrates that are essential to multiple shorebird species.

Flying insects and the birds that eat them can be used as a rough barometer. On humid days or when there are numerous hatches of insects rising from the water's surface, swallows will be coursing over the area at a rather low altitude. On warm, sunny days, insects rise higher and the same species may be foraging hundreds of feet in the air.

Temperature

In early spring, leaf emergence varies within the county not only from south to north but also from east to west; it is also affected by how directly the sun reaches a site. A river valley's orientation or the direction a slope faces as well as its angle can produce an astonishing variation in leaf growth, along with the presence of associated insects. A south-facing slope at Savage Park in late April along the Little Patuxent River may well contain more migrants than a northeast-facing slope at Daniels on the Patapsco. Likewise, the position of a site like Mt Pleasant on an open, sunny ridge is likely to be more productive than a cool, shaded river valley just a few miles away, although the species would not be identical because of habitat differences.

Weather and how it affects birds in any location can only be generalized, as each year and each season's conditions are unique. Seemingly identical weather may not be duplicated for decades. For a waterfowl fallout in this county, April 5, 1996 has few equals. After early morning rain, a cold front moved in with clearing skies and blustery winds. Two Horned Grebes appeared at Wilde Lake in the late a.m.; a mid-afternoon check of Centennial Lake netted 14 Horned Grebes, along with two Common Loons and two Red-necked Grebes, a new species for the park.

Much more exciting were the birds at Triadelphia Reservoir. Two experienced birders spent the afternoon viewing the water from multiple locations. Their totals included the following: 1 Wood Duck, 7 Northern Shovelers, 2 American Black Ducks, 150 Greater and Lesser Scaup, 5 White-winged Scoters, 5 Long-tailed Ducks, 15 Buffleheads, 17 Common Mergansers, 12 Red-breasted Mergansers, 30 Ruddy Ducks, 1 Pied-billed Grebe, 225 Horned Grebes, 1 Red-necked Grebe, 30 Common Loons, 31 Double-crested Cormorants, 1 Lesser Black-backed Gull, and 30 American Herring Gulls! Truly, a day to remember.

Although an identical situation has not occurred at that precise time again, March 13, 2026, was also a similarly memorable day. Not only does it demonstrate the role of weather during migration, but it also illustrates how small a window birders may have for observation. After five days of record-setting warmth, winter returned overnight with a dramatic drop in temperature. Much of 13 March was overcast with rain, sleet, and several inches of wet snow. Despite the challenging conditions, a few birders ventured out checking local lakes in hopes of a pleasant surprise. A stop at Brighton Dam at 10:45 a.m. netted a grand total of four Common Mergansers; central lakes in the late morning and early afternoon offered nothing unusual and a limited number of waterfowl species. By midafternoon, the precipitation was ending and the temperature began to rise slowly. Two birders checking Triadelphia Reservoir around 6:00 p.m. and another birder there at 7:00 p.m. found Gadwall, Mallard, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Ducks, flocks of both scaup, Hooded, Common, and Red-breasted Mergansers, Pied-billed and Horned Grebes, as many as four Red-necked Grebes, as well as an Osprey, Bald Eagles, and a Common Raven. The viewing was from Brighton Dam only because the reservoir was not yet open to the public; there could have been many more birds out of sight on the main reservoir. By late in the day, the skies began to clear. At 8:00 a.m. the following morning, four birders scanned from the dam. They netted 1 Mallard, 2 Canvasbacks, 2 Greater Scaup, 1 Lesser Scaup, 1 Pied-billed Grebe and 4 Bald Eagles. As is often typical, most of the waterfowl present the evening before had left overnight.

Many experienced birders have become amateur meteorologists understanding how success in the field at any time is related directly to weather conditions. Make this the year that you, too, become a weather watcher!

Weather References

The following are weather information sites that birders use: RainCrow, National Weather Service, Accuweather, WeatherBug, Weather Underground, and Windy

Howard County Records Committee: Joanne Solem, Joe Hanfman, Russ Ruffing; Howard County eBird reviewer: Tim Carney.

2026 POTLUCK REVIEW

The 2026 Howard County Bird Club Potluck Dinner was again a well-attended success! The food and company are never disappointing, and we had great photo presentations from members featuring Howard County birds, baby birds, raptor migration in Taiwan, travels to the Philippines, as well as other exotic locations that gave us all the travel bug!

There were 50 attendees, including special guests; Chuck and Denise Sharp of Sharp's Farm, MJ Whalen and Sarah Richards of Wild Birds Unlimited, as well as Sue Hobby and Ellie Smith from the Howard County Conservancy.

The raffle was again an exciting portion of the evening, and special thanks goes out to those who donated to this year's raffle: Kevin Cassidy of The Wildlife Authority, Brian Lockwood of Wild Birds Unlimited, Sun Nurseries, Farm and Home Service in Sykesville, HCBC Members; Val Swan, Connie McRill, Lynn Gregg, as well as the HCBC Board of Directors.

The evening couldn't have gone as smoothly without the following volunteers: Val Swan and Tom Seivert for their support through planning, Matt Lusting for running our Slideshow Presentation smoothly, the setup and cleanup volunteers who are too many to name, and, of course, the staff at Robinson Nature Center, who without them this event could not happen!

Connie McRill also deserves special recognition for stepping up to the co-chair role this year. She is an absolute pleasure to work with and is already full of great ideas for next year's potluck. She also dove headlong into the donations for door prizes with great additions from new local vendors.

If you have any ideas on how to make things bigger and better for next year, send us your thoughts at meghaanlane@gmail.com. See you in 2027!

Meghaan Lane and Connie McRill
Annual Potluck Committee

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Susan Bishop
Ellen Blackwell
Brittany and Donald Dooley
Katherine Feldman
Aatif, Nadia and Sonia Hayat
Sarah Nelson
Alan Rein
Amy Seitz
Craig Sholley and Lisa Stevens
Roxanne Stone
Sara Sukumar
Margaret Theis
Elizabeth & Thomas Varga

MAY COUNT IS SATURDAY, MAY 9, 2026

BY GREGG PETERSEN

Hello everyone! We are in the early stages of migration. We will see more and more species in the coming weeks until the peak in early May. May Count, which is always the second Saturday in May, is on May 9th this year.

For beginning birders, this is an excellent opportunity to be paired with more experienced birders in order to see and hear many residents and spring migrants. Think warblers, vireos, thrushes, shorebirds, etc. The spring migrants are passing through headed north, the summer residents are back, and some of the winter migrants are still around. Over the last 10 years across the county, we have tallied an average of 138 species during the May Count. The total for both 2024 and 2025 was 143.

For the count, Howard County is divided up into seven areas, see map below. Each area has an Area Coordinator (name and phone number listed below) who communicates with the counters, assigns territories, and compiles area results. *If you are a beginner, ask to be teamed with a more experienced birder.* Since the point is to tally every individual bird, your extra eyes and ears are helpful. If time allows this year, I request that counters and coordinators *pay special attention to roadside birding within their respective areas.* This is not a new recommendation, but often some teams only focus on hot spots within their respective areas. And, as always, I recommend teams consider owling before dawn. Roadside birding and owling can both be very rewarding experiences!

If you want to see a particular species, give me a call (202-256-8166), or send an email to sig29@aol.com and I will try to place you in a location where you would have a good chance of seeing that bird. If your time is not predictable for the Count, I encourage you to join a team or count as an individual in your yard or neighborhood for some time that day. If you decide to pursue this approach, please let me know of your intent and what constitutes your neighborhood.

Area 1	Bill Hill	410-599-9493/ gandb2000-02@yahoo.com
Area 2	Russ Kovach	443-386-4787/ russell.kovach@gmail.com
Area 3	Chuck Stirrat	443-462-8234/ stirrcl@gmail.com
Area 4	Steve Luke	240-938-6485/ steve.luke@gmail.com
Area 5	Tim McGowan	443-514-8923/ timmcgowan@gmail.com
Area 6	Brian Moyer	410-441-9901/ bmoyer0@gmail.com
Area 7	Meghaan Lane	410-829-6192/ meghaanlane@gmail.com

At the end of the day, all our counters are invited to a tally rally to share what was seen and come up with the county totals. This year's tally rally will be preceded by a one-hour in-person potluck starting at 6 p.m. at my house. Unless you are still in the field, please try to submit your checklist to your Area Coordinator by the start of the tally rally at 7 p.m. It's a great opportunity to swap stories of the day and find out what everyone else has seen, especially some of the rarities of the day. The goal is for the completed checklists to be turned into Area Coordinators by the time of the tally rally. I will also provide a Zoom link for those counters that are interested in that option.

Come join us! This is a great chance for beginning birders to see many new and beautiful species of birds in their spring plumage.



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY- PROOFREADER FOR THE GOLDFINCH NEWSLETTER

Do you have an eagle eye for mistakes in print? Do you have strong English skills and some birding background? Would you enjoy helping to produce five issues of the HCBC newsletter each year? Are you ready to make a difference in this essential role to the benefit of the club members? If so, you might be the right person to volunteer as the **Proofreader** for the Goldfinch newsletter.

Time commitment: ~20 hours per issue, usually during the middle two weeks of August, October, December, February, and April, working at times of your choice. The start date is mid-August to prepare the September/October 2026 issue. Our current proofreader will provide assistance on this first issue and after that, as needed.

Position responsibilities: Proofread all text correcting spelling, grammar, and word use; verify correct names of birds and butterflies cited; double-check spelling of people's names; review newsletter layout for accuracy, appearance, and consistency; and provide advice and occasional ideas as requested by the editor.

If you are interested or have any questions, please email Goldfinch Editor Jamie Lynch at goldfinch@mdbirds.org

I NEED YOUR HELP TO COMPLETE THE LINGANORE CREEK SANCTUARY CHALLENGE

A Message from the HCBC President Val Swan



Join us for a [field trip](#) led by John McKitterick to Linganore Creek on May 30th and fall in love with the property. Hello everyone! You are likely aware of the Howard County Bird Club's \$150,000 gift toward MOS' future 125-acre sanctuary, Linganore Creek (LCS), located in nearby Frederick County. This \$150,000 HCBC matching campaign donation is intended to help generate half of a \$300,000 self-sustaining endowment for the LCS with the remaining half donated by our collective MOS membership. If you are not familiar with endowment terminology, the \$300k held in escrow is expected to generate at least 4% in gains per year to provide sustainment funds for the LCS in perpetuity without tapping into the base amount. The donated endowment is a gift that will keep on giving for years of habitat preservation to be enjoyed by generations of birders. Annual field trips will begin this May.

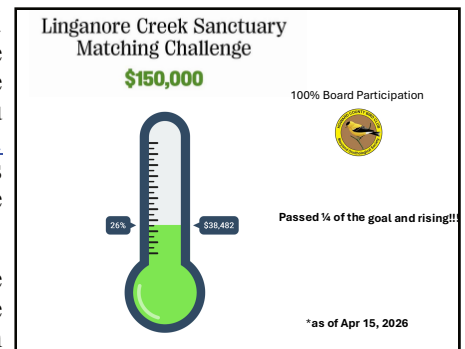
In the HCBC, our responsibility does not end with the \$150k gift from our treasury. It will take the enthusiastic charity of many individual members to reach the \$150k matching number. With that thought in mind, 100% of our HCBC board has given to the LCS matching challenge to set an example for our club members and the other 14 state chapters.

Today, I am asking each of you in our membership to consider making a special donation for the LCS endowment. I set a goal to reach 25% participation by our 500 members. We are not asking for a specific amount, we are just asking that folks give what they can to help establish and bolster a self-sustaining fund for this new sanctuary treasure. Again, each dollar you give will set the foundation for enduring grasslands, shrublands, and early successional habitat for years to come. Unless you say otherwise, each person or family donating will be listed on our [HCBC site](#) which will be updated monthly until we meet our goal.

Individuals donating \$5,000 or more will be listed on the site in the Tundra Swan tier. Those donating \$1000 or more will be listed in the American Goldfinch tier. And any donations from \$1-999 will be recognized in the Red-headed Woodpecker tier. Those that give at the Tundra Swan and American Goldfinch levels will also be listed on a permanent sign prominently posted at the sanctuary. If we can hit 25% or more participation for HCBC members (125+), that will also be noted on the sign.

I know that we in the HCBC chapter will not get to the \$150k matching goal alone. I have issued this same challenge to each of the other 14 chapters and their respective presidents and boards. Which chapter will have the highest participation rate? I like to think it will be us. Please help me make the LCS endowment fund a reality. You can do it right now before you forget. Go to the dedicated LCS donation: mdbirds.org/donate-linganore-creek-sanctuary to make your contribution. This page also has instructions for how to send a check if you prefer. Please remember to say in the memo of the check that it is for the LCS Fund.

If you are aware of local supporting businesses, let them know that for those businesses that donate \$1000 or more, their logo will also be displayed on the campaign completion board. As of April 15th, with over \$38,000 in donations from MOS supporters, we have achieved over 25% of our goal. Thanks in advance for your consideration of my request. I'm looking forward to enjoying our teamwork and mutual success on this challenge and securing reliable long-term stewardship of the flora and fauna of the LCS for MOS members for many, many years to come. Let us, together, act to preserve this bird paradise.



Warm regards,
Val Swan, President
Howard County Bird Club

Interested in Howard County Bird Club MERCHANDISE? Shop for hats, T-shirts, polos, jackets and more. Wear the logo!



Shop here:

<https://howardcountymbirdclub.itemorder.com/shop/home/>

Submissions to the Goldfinch

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

The Goldfinch, newsletter of the Howard County Bird Club, is published five times per year. Copy deadline for the September/October issue is July 25, 2026.

Jamie Lynch, Editor
Joanne Solem, Proofreader

Howard County Bird Club
P.O. Box 13230
Columbia, MD 21044-1323

2026 Young Birder's Backpack Essay Contest Results

Congratulations to Leighton (far left), HCBC's grand prize winner of the annual K-12 Backpack Essay Contest. The backpack contained binoculars, field guide, and more. Hats off to our six runners-up as well! Each was awarded a pair of binoculars and may well be the next generation of Howard County birders! *(Photo by Mary Lou Clark)*

