



Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

In Memoriam

Nancy Magnusson (1951–2019)



Outstanding birder, talented naturalist, and long-time bird club member, Nancy Magnusson died July 26, 2019, in hospice care in Fayetteville, Pennsylvania, at the home of a lifelong friend.

Nancy was one of those individuals whose interest in the natural world began at an early age and was nurtured by summers at Camp Furnace Hills in Pennsylvania and time at her parents' cabin in Maine. An excellent birder, her ABA list totaled 675 species, Maryland's was 380, and Howard County's 282. She served a term on the MD/DC Records Committee 2013-16. Although she was involved in many local bird sightings, the two she remembered most vividly were a Brewster's Warbler at Schooley Mill Park 5/4-5/9/92 and a juvenile Red Knot at Triadelphia/Pigtail 8/27-8/30/88. The knot remains the county's only record and a choice bird for the Piedmont. It wasn't enough to make a check mark in a book next to a bird's name; Nancy hungered for more information. This led her to a volunteer stint at Adventure Sanctuary's bird banding station.

Among her favorite local birding haunts were Daniels and Henryton along the Patapsco River, any part of Triadelphia Reservoir, and, especially, Schooley Mill Park, which she visited regularly from the time it was established. She participated in local seasonal bird counts for more than 30 years. Compilers knew that she would cover her assigned area from pre-dawn owling until late afternoon. She served as the Howard County Bird Club's (HCBC) treasurer from 1989 to 1993, compiled the site guide for Schooley Mill Park, and co-compiled the

guide for Brighton Dam. Besides submitting seasonal bird records for decades, her eye for detail made her a natural for helping to proofread seasonal bird articles in *The Goldfinch*. She also was a proofreader/editor for the *Howard County Annotated Bird Records*.

Like many lifelong voracious readers, she accumulated an impressive and eclectic library with an emphasis on natural history. In order to further widen her horizons, she completed a multi-year certification in the Natural History Field Studies Program jointly sponsored by the Audubon Naturalist Society and the Graduate School USA. She also completed four years of training to become a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner.

Although birds were her primary interest, she investigated numerous aspects of the natural world. Nancy participated in the HCBC's wildflower project, joined several county butterfly counts, was a regular for the 12 years of the county's dragonfly count, and was a herp atlas volunteer. When moths became her focus, she left an outside light on, rose in the middle of the night to capture interesting specimens in a container, released them in her bathroom, waited for them to settle onto a surface, photographed them, and returned them outside. Then she went back to bed. She amassed hundred of photos in this way.

Nanc was comfortable in woods and fields, but water had a special magnetism. She remembered that in her early teens she was upset because, on a trip to California, her parents would not allow her to haul a 12-foot length of kelp, salvaged at the beach, back to Pennsylvania. On the opposite coast, she became a frequent participant in pelagic trips where the marine mammals and sea turtles were as exciting as the rare birds. For years, she rented a stake at Triadelphia Lake Road at which to tie her canoe. Before retirement, she used the time on the water as a refuge from the heat. After retirement, she retreated to Maine for much of the summer. Warm weather dragonfly trips to the Patapsco River were an excuse to wade and explore.

Nancy's quiet competence, dry wit, sharp eyes, and joy in new discoveries made her an ideal field companion. No outing remained focused solely on birds—or herps—or fungi. The beautiful and the bizarre were equally intriguing. A new flower, an odd mushroom, or a rediscovered fern were as likely to end up listed in her omnipresent small notebook as were unusual birds. Her conservation ethic was strong (she was one of the few birders I know who purchased carbon credits for trees to be planted in order to offset her airline flights), and she was a

consistent supporter of habitat preservation. Her personal philosophy was succinctly summarized in the bumper sticker on her beloved truck: **Co-Exist!**

In retirement, she not only spent more time in the field, she also pursued a growing interest in the Maryland Biodiversity Project. Her B. S. degree in biology, her decades of natural history experience in Maryland, and her professional experience at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory (during which time she also earned a degree in computer science) provided an ideal background for major and ongoing contributions to this statewide effort. As the project expanded, so did her volunteer commitment. In recent years, the majority of her time was spent entering data and photographs.

With Nancy Magnusson's death, the HCBC not only lost a long-time active member as well as one of its preeminent birders and naturalists, but all who knew her lost a cherished friend, an enthusiastic field companion, and a generous mentor.

--Joanne Solem

It was Nancy's wish that the following excerpt from the poem "She Let Go" by Rev. Safire Rose be published.

*"Like a leaf falling from a tree, she just let go.
There was no effort.
There was no struggle.
It wasn't good and it wasn't bad.
It was what it was, and it is just that.
In the space of letting go, she let it all be.
A small smile came over her face.
A light breeze blew through her.
And the sun and the moon shone forevermore. . ."*