

Howard County, Maryland

May 5, 2001, Third Unofficial Big Day

Joanne Solem

Leaders: Bonnie Ott, Ralph Cullison, and Joanne Solem. Total participants: 15. Andy Aguilera, Dianne Dupuy, Kate Tufts, Mary-Jo Betts, (all names not available). Weather: Predicted cold front did not arrive until late afternoon so much of day in upper 70s and low 80s; drove through a shower in early evening heading to Hipsley Mill Road. Time: 6:00 a.m. - 8:30 p.m. Total species: 111. Meeting site: Rockburn Elementary School. Notable species: 17 warbler species total (few migrant species). Northern Bobwhite and Prothonotary Warbler – Rockburn Branch Park; American Black Duck and Swamp Sparrow – Daniels; we missed Yellow-throated and Cerulean warblers at Henryton because they were not on the Howard County side of the river; Mute Swan, Horned Grebe, and American Pipit – Lake Elkhorn; Black-crowned Night-Heron – Lake Kittamaqundi; Semipalmated Plover and Bobolink (no rails or bitterns) – UMDCF; Eastern Whip-poor-will (no woodcock or owls) – Hipsley Mill Rd. The lack of woodcock or owls meant settling for 111 species for the second consecutive year.

Kate Tufts summarized the day with the following article for the September/October 2001 issue of *The Goldfinch*.

“When the description of a field trip in *The Goldfinch* states, ‘Intensive all-day search. . .’, believe it. Better yet, consider it to be understated. The Big Day 2001 was intensive, grueling, hot, long, and you name it. Even the Energizer Bunny would have been put to the test.

On May 5, fifteen stalwart birders proved they were up to the challenge. The group met at Rockburn Elementary School’s parking lot in the eastern part of the county at 5:45 a.m. Then it was immediately off to adjacent Rockburn Branch Park for the first birds of the day. There was no dallying over favorite birds on the Big Day. The idea is to see how many birds can be seen or heard by the group during the day. At least three people, including one of the trip leaders must have seen or heard the bird for it to make the list. Most birds called were counted although a few were not for lack of sufficient verification.

Thanks to careful planning, the listers methodically worked their way from the eastern to the western part of the county. Fourteen sites were visited to include the lakes in Columbia, trails along the Patapsco, the University of Maryland Central Farm and Brighton Dam. The day was not without comic relief, thanks to two snakes visiting reptile lover, Mary-Jo Betts. She is certain one fell right off of Ralph Cullison’s scope. Andy Aguilera and Dianne Dupuy gave an amazing demonstration of how to stand in a huge patch of poison ivy and never get an itch. We were not without sustenance as there was a small bit of time allowed for lunch at the very marge of the beautiful Alpha Ridge Landfill.

A passing cold front toward late afternoon boosted spirits and the re-energized birders continued their trek towards the west. The day officially ended at 8:45 p.m. on Hipsley Mill Road to the lovely sounds of whip-poor-wills, the day’s 111th bird. That was a tie with 2000’s record.

Well, there’s always next year. We know the hummingbirds are out there somewhere.”