

# Howard County, Maryland

## Sparrow Big Days

Bonnie Ott and Joanne Solem

**Sparrow Big Day 9 October 22, 2011.** Leader: Bonnie Ott. Recorder: Joe Hanfman. Total participants: 11. Ralph Cullison, Karen Darcy Heffernan, Tom Feild, Emmalyn Holdridge, Geraldine King, Allen Lewis, Nancy Magnusson, Kurt Schwarz, Joanne Solem, Marcy Stutzman . Weather: Sun early; then overcast; sun again in p.m. Although the prediction was for a mostly sunny day, shortly after sunrise a large, black cloud approached from the west and rapidly covered the sky; it eventually passed. Time: 7:15 a.m. - 6:15 p.m., nonstop. Total sparrow species: 11. Meeting site: UMDCF. Notable bird species: Vesper Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco – UMDCF; American Bittern, Red-headed Woodpecker, Marsh Wren – Alpha Ridge Landfill; Merlin – Waterford Farm.

As usual, we met at the UMDCF, nominally at 7:15 a.m., but experienced participants knew that meant 7:00 a.m. “Bonnie-Time.” Arrive a minute or two past the announced start time and the group would be long gone. Although the forecast was for a sunny day and early sun did warm the air to assist bird activity, we could see in the west a fast-approaching dark cloud--a front with a well-defined edge. When it overspread us, the air cooled again and bird activity slowed. Although the swale did not produce a Nelson’s Sparrow, Bonnie did spot a Vesper which was unanticipated at this location. From the farm, we moved to Mt. Pleasant where we walked a short loop and then carpooled to the Alpha Ridge Landfill with Ralph, Joe, and Tom as drivers. The Grasshopper Sparrow there was a fine addition, but the best bird was an American Bittern which rose out of tall, dry grass in front of Bonnie. The group then went on to Fox Chase Wetlands, and finally, in Bonnie’s words, “Ended the day at Waterford with a zillion pumpkin pickers.”