



howard county
BIRD CLUB
50th ANNIVERSARY • 1972 – 2022

MEMBERS' MEMORIES

Nancy Magnusson

I remember when –

I knew the location of every pay phone within miles of Daniels, Pigtail, and Schooley Mill Parks. When I found a good bird, I ran for the car and drove to the nearest phone to call Bob Solem (I called him “Mission Control”). If it was a rarity, he started the Rare Bird Alert telephone tree; if it was just a good county bird, he knew where to find Jo if she was birding.

The hillsides at Daniels and Henryton were dominated by mature oaks and the floor was a mix of ferns, wildflowers, and leaf litter. I even remember when the floodplain along the Patapsco was not dominated by Lesser Celandine and Garlic Mustard, and deer were few. Then came the Gypsy Moths. They were everywhere. Bits of leaves and frass rained down, and the oaks were stripped bare. In time, dead trees gradually fell in storms, and then came Japanese Stilt-grass and Wavy-leaved Basketgrass. Those areas still attract some good birds, but they have never recovered.

I could spend hours at MPEA or Schooley and not run into another birder.

Spring migrations produced lots and lots of warblers. I could spend six to eight hours at Schooley birding the whole park slowly because there was so much to see. There were still nesting Grasshopper Sparrows in the front section, but that was before most of the ballfields and horse-related items were in place.

I found a Brewster’s Warbler at Schooley and the challenge it was to help people refind it. Thank goodness the bird stayed a couple of days. [5/4-5/9, 1992].

Jane Farrell Coskren, Jo, and I agreed we would try to help each other all reach 200 species in the county one year (probably the 90s). it was tough to do then because of the lack of easy communication. I don’t even recall whether we were successful, but I do remember how much was fun it was.

I canoed for hours after work and weekends at the north end of Triadelphia Reservoir checking coves and exposed areas for shorebirds, lingering waterfowl, and special birds like Snow Buntings or pipits.

I found a juvenile Red Knot at Pigtail [8/27/88]. That was one frustrating bird. Even though it stayed through 8/30, it would disappear for long stretches. I practically lived out there trying to keep track of it. It would appear, I’d run to a phone, and by the time people arrived it would have disappeared again. I think most of the people (at least the locals) who wanted to see it eventually were successful, but it often required multiple trips. [Note: This is the county’s only record for this species and is a major rarity inland in Maryland.]

(Written in May 2019 a few months before her death.)