



Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

In Memoriam

Jane H. (Farrell) Coskren (1939-2022)

Jane Coskren joined the Howard County Bird Club (HCBC) in 1980 and for the 36 years she was a member was an avid lister, frequent leader, and ardent supporter of the county's birdlife. Much of her free time was spent in the field—or anticipating the next opportunity to be outside.

She had a significant role as an elected leader serving as vice-president 1981-1982, president 1982-1984, and state director 1989-90. She volunteered to head the Parks Checklist Project, working with the Howard County Dept of Recreation and Parks and the Columbia Association, to create seasonal bird lists for all the major county parks and lakes. Jane compiled the Howard County Annual List 1987-2007. She rarely missed a seasonal count—or a tally, and regularly, provided seasonal sightings.

The bird activity that won her most enthusiastic support was the breeding bird atlas. When the first statewise atlas (BBA1) was planned for the five-year period 1982-1986, she served as Howard County's co-compiler. This position provided an excuse to investigate most areas of the county and gave her a new understanding of specialized habitats. When asked to head the MOS Atlas Committee prior to BBA2, she looked on it as a great opportunity.

As chair of the nine-member Atlas Committee Editorial Board, Jane hosted monthly meetings (mostly in her home) from more than a year prior to the official beginning of the atlas on January 1, 2002 until all material for the book was delivered to Johns Hopkins Press almost a decade later. Some long-time HCBC members may still have vivid memories of being one of almost 20 people who spent a day in 2001 at Jane's home circling the dining room table for hours, picking up the dozen items needed to complete each of the 1,000+ atlas block packets. Each kraft envelope was labeled with the name of the atlas block, then placed in the correct county box. Eventually, all boxes were delivered or picked up as they made their way to county coordinators across the state.

Jane was an avid lister and, despite having a full-time job with the Inspector General's office, U. S. Army, she spent much of her free time birding. With an office on the east side of Columbia, she frequently spent her lunch hour walking around the lake at Centennial Park. It was there she found two of the three bird species she is credited with adding to the county list: Eurasian Wigeon 3/21/91 and Eared Grebe 3/30/94. (The third was a Mississippi Kite flying over Chatham Mall 5/22/92.) She set her sights on reaching 200 Howard County species, eventually topping out at 265 by 2016. She also notched 200 county species in each of three years: 1990, 1993, and 1994.

Jane had many memorable days of birding in the county. One she shared with Dennis Coskren on April 5, 1996. The Spring Bird Records article in the Sept/Oct 1996 issue of *The Goldfinch* details their experience: "Late in the day JF [Jane Farrell] called from Brighton Dam (B RDAM). She and TDC [T. Dennis Coskren] had spent the afternoon viewing Triadelphia Reservoir (TRIRS) from several locations and had caught what could only be described as a spectacular waterfowl flight! In several compact flocks they counted a minimum of 225 Horned Grebes and 1 Red-necked Grebe. . . . JF enumerated other species on TRIRS: Common Loon 30, Double-crested Cormorant 31, Wood Duck 1, American Black Duck 2, Northern Shoveler 7, Greater and Lesser Scaup 150, Oldsquaw [Long-tailed Duck] 5, White-winged Scoter 5, Bufflehead 15, Common Merganser 17, Red-breasted Merganser 12, Ruddy Duck 30, plus 1 adult Lesser Black-backed Gull and 30 Herring Gulls. Days like that come seldom to Piedmont birders."

From the late 1980s through the first decade of the 2000s, Jane was part of a rotating group of about a dozen women who were among the most avid county birders. She had an excellent ability to spot birds, but had more trouble sorting out bird sounds. She used to say that with her eyes and my ears, we made one fine birder. In Dennis Coskren, who also had keen ears, she found a birder with complimentary skills.

By the early 1990s, she was extending her listing to Maryland and, soon, even farther afield. In July 1992, a trip to Arizona initiated a period of travel that would add species to her various lists for the following 25 years. She completed a Maryland Big Year in 1994 netting 304 species, one of the first women to complete such an event in the state. After her marriage to Dennis in 1997, her travels increased as detailed below.

Jane's contributions to the HCBC and to MOS were significant, and her lists defined her birding competence. To Jane, however, lists were of secondary importance. The people she met while birding and the experiences she had were a greater source of joy.

--Joanne Solem

We met in 1994 as I drove from Oak Ridge to New Hampshire for a Christmas family visit. I helped her finish her Big Year in Maryland (we got her Loggerhead Shrike and Short-eared Owl for the year) and she finished with 304. The following year my company closed its TN office. I was offered a chance to move to El Paso, but instead came to Columbia to take a similar job in the area. Our marriage was two years later, in August 1997 (honeymoon in northernmost NH, searching for boreal birds).

Our tropical birding began with a circuit of NE Mexico in 1995, and continued with several trips to Costa Rica, Peru, and Ecuador. Two African trips (Kenya and South Africa) and two Alaska adventures (St. Lawrence Island and Attu) added very contrasting birds.

Jane was remiss in keeping her lists up to date in recent years. Her totals would be close to mine (750 ABA-US and 3,067 world). I found a record from 2007, where she had 723 ABA (US) and 1,990 world: after that date we had several more Ecuador trips, a Columbia trip, Panama, Cuba, Bahamas, Puerto Rico, Ireland, Kenya, and South Africa, so 2800 would be conservative for a world list and 740 would be a good guess for ABA.

-- Dennis Coskren