

Howard County Bird Club

The First Fifty Years

1972



2022



Mission Statement



The mission of the Howard County Bird Club is to promote the knowledge, development, protection, and conservation of birdlife and other naturally occurring species and their habitats.



How It All Began



The evening of November 1, 1972, Nanine Rhinelandt gathered ~15 people in the Century Building in downtown Columbia to organize a Howard County chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society.



For five decades, the focus and efforts of the Howard County Bird Club can be summarized as follows:



- Meetings and programs
- Field trips
- Bird data collection
- Communication
- Habitat preservation
- Education and outreach
- Natural history



Meetings - Programs



The first public meeting was held in the Century Building on December 14, 1972. The speaker was noted ornithologist Chandler S. Robbins who presented "Winter Birds of Howard County." Chan continued to be a special supporter of the chapter for 45 years.



Meetings - Programs

Since then, public meetings have been held at



Swansfield Elementary School
Jan 1973-May 1979



Grempier Realty
Sep 1979-May 1981



Longfellow Elementary School
Sep 1981-May 2004



Dept of Rec & Park Headquarters
Sep 2004-Sep 2011



Robinson Nature Center Oct 2011-present
(except current meetings are held by ZOOM instead of in-person)



Meetings - Programs



Monthly meetings September through May for total of **450** on birds and various natural history topics



Travelogues, life histories, research, identification; mostly birds, but also many aspects of the natural world.



Meetings - Programs



Annual picnics and potlucks



Field Trips



First scheduled Howard County Bird Club field trip was December 16, 1972 to Sandy Point State Park and Kent Island. Leader – David Holmes



Field Trips



Since then, the club continues to hold a variety of trips:

- Half day (local),
- Day long,
- Weekend,
- Unscheduled walks, i.e., banding, Eastern Woodcock, Chimney Swifts



Field Trips



Co-sponsored field trips

- Howard County Dept of Recreation and Parks (Centennial walks, and habitat walks most popular), bus trips to Eastern Shore.
- Other MOS chapters
- Howard County Conservancy
- Robinson Nature Center

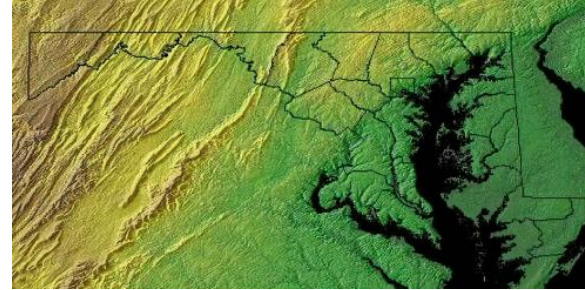


Field Trips



Natural history

- Butterfly trips for 30 years
- Numerous natural history subjects



Field Trips



In its first half century, the Howard County Bird Club has sponsored at least **1,750** field trips

Dozens of members have led these trips sharing their time, their knowledge, and their love of the natural world. Each former leader deserves our heartfelt thanks and applause.



Bird Data Collection



Individual records

- Multiple recording methods; increasing use of eBird.
- Beginning with autumn 1979, county records were compiled by Joanne Solem and, until 2018, were shared with *Maryland Birdlife*; highlights to *North American Birds*. Seasonal summaries appeared in *The Goldfinch* beginning with the autumn 1993 season.
- Annual list of county species compiled: David Holmes 1979-1986, Jane Farrell Coskren 1987-2007, Ward Ebert 2008-2011, and Joe Hanfman 2012 to present.
- 200 Club: Members who have seen 200 bird species in the county, all-time and annually.
- Big Days (official and unofficial field trips)



Bird Data Collection



Seasonal counts

- May Count – MOS initiated in 1947; Howard County Bird Club began compiling county results in 1975.
- Midwinter Count began in 1986 (first in state)
- Fall Count began in 1995
- Triadelphia Christmans Bird Count
Circle contains parts of three counties
Only Christmas Bird Count with a portion of Howard County

Counts were usually followed by a tally at a person's home or at another site.

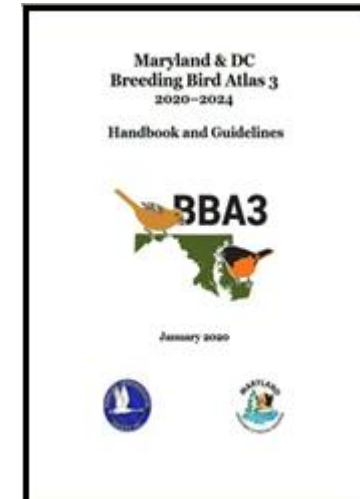
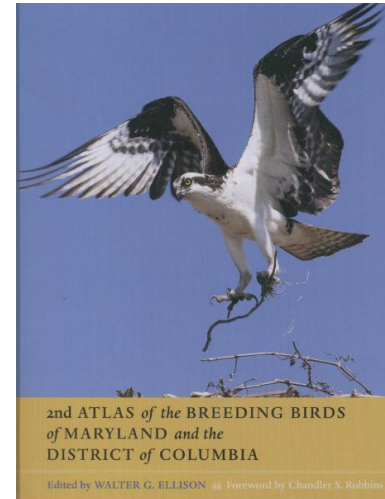
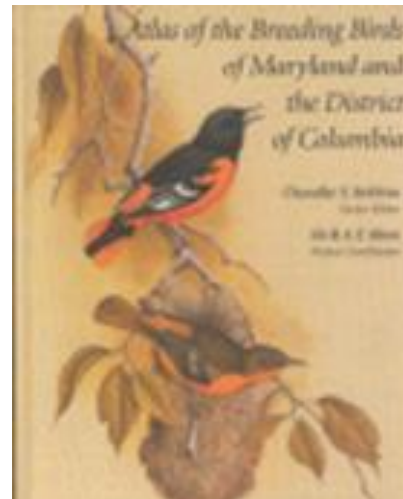


Bird Data Collection



Breeding Bird Atlases

- Prototypes: In 1971, under Chan Robbins' direction, Montgomery County undertook a three-year study (blocks). In 1973, Howard County initiated a second study (quarterblocks).
- Three statewide Breeding Bird Atlases: 1983-1987, 2002-2006, 2020-2024



Bird Data Collection



Parks Checklist Project – jointly with Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks, and the Columbia Association

- Centennial Park
- Schooley Mill Park
- Rockburn Branch Park
- Middle Patuxent Environmental Area
- Columbia Lakes



Bird Data Collection



Where are all these records compiled? They are in the *Howard County Annotated Bird Records*.

There is a link to the pdf compilation on the HCBC website under “Birding.” A summary and a graph are shown for each species.

Howard County Annotated Bird Records - Russ Ruffing

Species	Summary	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Swamp Sparrow	Casual breeder; uncommon migrant from late Mar to late May, fairly common from mid-Sep into early Nov (higher numbers occur in fall); fairly common to uncommon in winter; latest spring dates are 6/2/03 UMCF (Ott+) and 5/27/06 Bon Secours (Cullison); earliest fall dates are 9/6/03 UMCF (Ott+, possibly same as 6/2 bird from the same year) then 9/14/97 Elkhorn (D Ecker); summer records include 6/17/02 UMCF (Ott+), and singing birds on 6/22/85 at Gateway (J/R Solem/Ludwig), 6/22/08 at Race Rd (Magnusson) and 6/28/05 at Race Rd (J Solem); prefers wet meadows, marshes, damp areas; nesting was confirmed in the most recent BBA at Race Rd, a Coastal Plain location.						2			6			
Eastern Towhee	Fairly common breeder; common migrant from mid-Mar into May and mid-Sep thru Oct; fairly common to uncommon in winter; prefers dense undergrowth of deciduous and coniferous woods, wood edges, hedgerows, and brushy tangles; tends to be shy and is more often heard than seen; high of 25-30 on 4/18/04 at Rockburn (E/J Metter).												
Yellow-breasted Chat	Uncommon and very localized breeder; uncommon migrant from late Apr to mid-May, scarce Aug thru Sep; rare in winter; earliest spring arrival 4/17/06 along Frederick Rd (Colangelo), then 4/18/92 at Rockburn (Ott); otherwise it's 4/24 (mult. records); five Nov records incl. latest of 11/28/87 at Elkhorn (Chestem) and 11/15/55 Reservoir Rd (Munro); two Jan records - 1/10/16 along Gov. Warfield Pkwy (Ke/Ka Heffeman), and 1/12/91 MD 99/US 40 (Kubitsky); one Feb record - 2/15/98 Criss Cross Ct (Betts); prefers overgrown shrubby fields, deciduous thickets; Mt Pleasant, Alpha Ridge Pk, Centennial, Rockburn, and Schooley have breeding chats, though declining.	1012 ^ ^	15 ^			17						28	

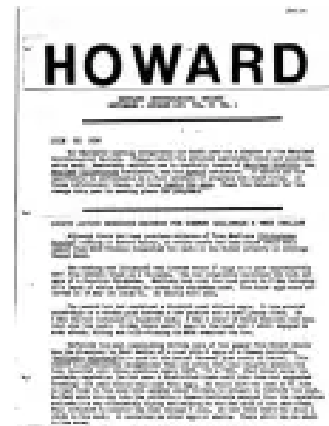
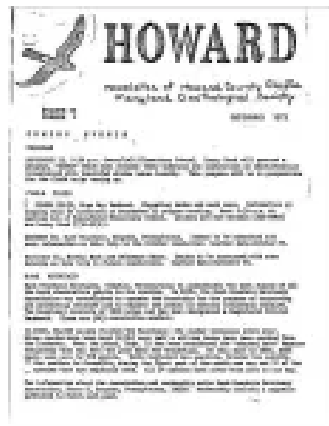


Communication



Newsletters

- First issue December 1972, Martha Chestem was initial editor; newsletters published continuously to present.
- Named *The Goldfinch* beginning with September/October 1996 issue after vote by membership.
- Over time, changed from 10 issues/year (produced on typewriters) to the current five full-color issues (produced with word-processing packages).
- Initially hard copy only; currently both hard copy and electronic (pdf) formats



Communication



Website

- “The Electronic Goldfinch” was started by Darius Ecker in December 1995 on a dedicated phone line using spare computer parts. He and his wife, Paula, were webmasters through June 2000.
- In September 2000, the website moved to the World Wide Web as “howardbirds.org” under Webmaster Bob Solem.
- Content expansion created a premier natural history reference site because it is **county** specific.
- In 2019, the board authorized the website switch to WordPress.

Programs

Butterfly Group

Field Trips

Fiftieth Anniversary

Robbins' Skywatch

Beginning Birding

Site Guides

Field Checklist
Facebook

Photo Galleries

Natural History

Herp Atlas

Breeding Bird Atlas

Habitat Preservation

YouTube

Waterford Flats

Seasonal Counts

Annotated Checklist



Communication



Email alerts

Information to members about meetings, links to download newsletters, Rare Bird Alerts, new member welcomes, special campaigns, seed sale notices, special birding news, and more.



Habitat Preservation and Conservation



Conservation activity

- Recycling: 1970s and '80s HCBC members saved bottle, cans, and newspapers hauling them to private county recyclers, designating HCBC as the recipient of the modest payments. The club received occasional \$20 to \$60 checks from the recyclers.
- Individuals and the club send letters and emails to officials concerning local, state, and federal environmental legislation.
- When necessary, HCBC conservation chairs have testified in person.
- Increasingly, the HCBC has worked with MOS and umbrella groups to increase its impact.



Habitat Preservation and Conservation



Environmental projects supported

To date, HCBC donations total more than \$100,000! Projects have ranged from expanding cloud forest habitat protection in Costa Rica, assisting staffing of River of Raptors in Mexico, and helping establish Nassawango Creek Sanctuary in Maryland, to adding to shorebird staging areas in the Delaware Bay and establishing pollinator meadows in Howard County.

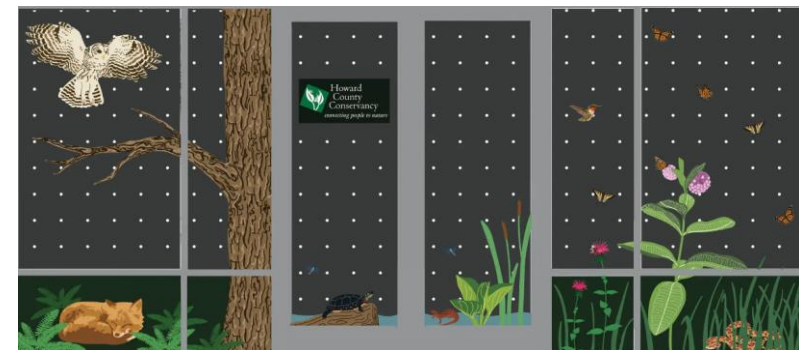
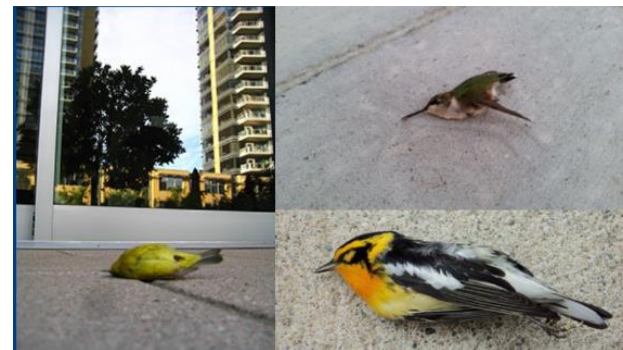


Habitat Preservation and Conservation



Millions of birds die annually flying into glass or as a result of becoming disoriented by light at night. The HCBC supports methods to make migration safer. These include the following:

- Reduce night sky light pollution
- Through cooperation with Safe Skies Maryland, improve design and construction of commercial and government buildings and retrofit existing buildings.
- Encourage homeowners to utilize methods to mitigate window strikes
- *Window treatment demonstration project, co-sponsored with the Howard County Conservancy, has been installed at the Gudelsky Environmental Education Center at Mount Pleasant.*



Habitat Preservation and Conservation



Howard County Projects

Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks

- Middle Patuxent Environmental Area – Clegg Meadow and American Woodcock habitat improvement
- Pollinator meadows – including Emy's Meadow at Centennial Park

Howard County Conservancy – multiple projects in an ongoing partnership

Howard Community College - portion of a pollinator garden



Habitat Preservation and Conservation



Private landowners – The Howard County Bird Club works with private landowners to increase specific types of habitats

- Lease of Underwood Road field in 2017 and 2018: Dickcissels
- Waterford Flats 2021: shorebirds and other waterbirds



Habitat Preservation and Conservation



How have all these projects been funded?

- Seed sales 1979 – 2021
- Bookstore profits
- Generous gifts by individual members
- Bequests



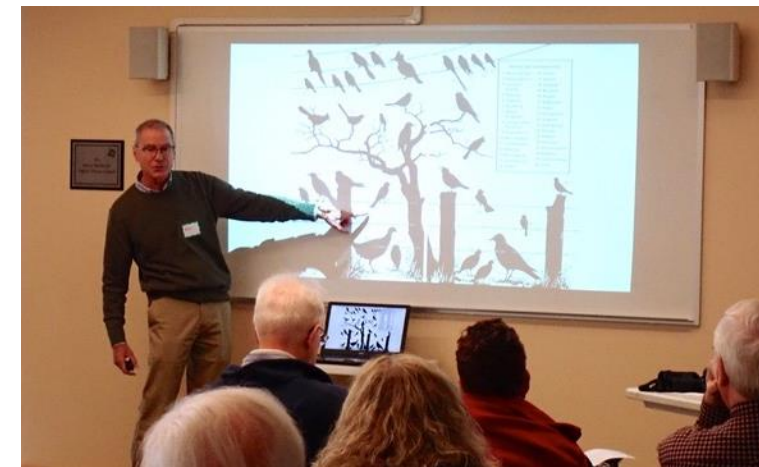
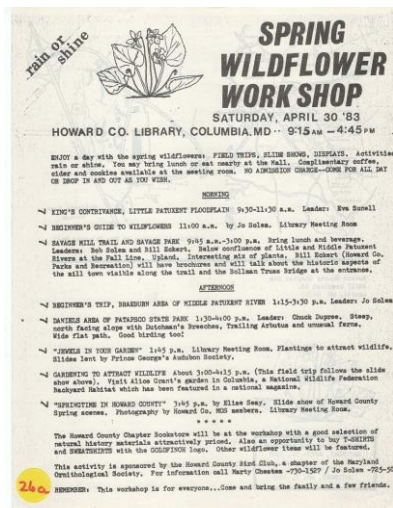


Education and Outreach

Education

Many types of education have been offered, most available to the public as well as to members.

- Workshops: Combination of indoor presentations and field trips; birds and wildflowers.
- Classes: Often multi-week; in cooperation with Howard County Dept of Recreation and Parks, Howard Community College, and Howard County Conservancy.



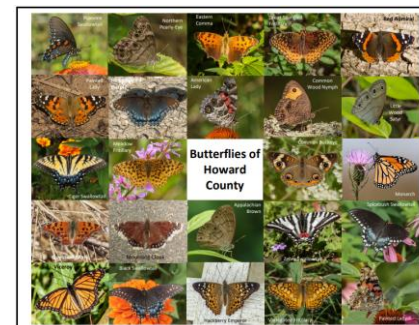
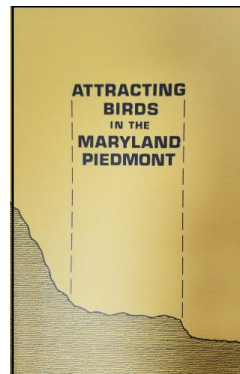
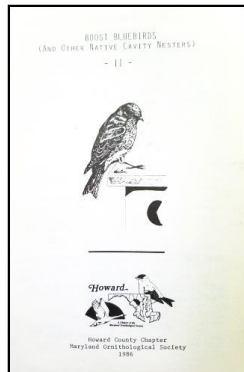


Education and Outreach

Education

Print publications (some publications are still available on HCBC website)

- Wildflower survey summaries
- Bluebird booklets, I and II
- *Field Checklist of Birds of Howard County, Maryland* (updated regularly)
- *Attracting Birds in the Maryland Piedmont*, 87 pages (out of print)
- *Birding Howard County, Maryland*, 133 pages (now converted to pages on the HCBC website)
- Butterflies: More than a dozen identification aids and county-based references.

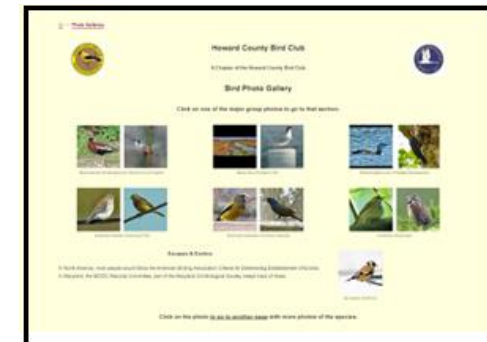


Education and Outreach



Education

- Web-based
 - Beginning Birding: Extensive reference material for new and less-experienced birders
 - Photo galleries: Birds, butterflies, dragonflies/damselflies, amphibians/reptiles, and fungi; most contain county and species-specific information in addition to photographs.
 - *Lichens* (64-page pdf) and *Mosses/Liverworts* (5-page pdf) combine photos and identification material
 - *Bees of Howard County* (2-page pdf)
 - *Howard County Annotated Bird Records* (updated regularly)
- Facebook: Kelsey Wellons, coordinator.



Education and Outreach



Outreach

- Slide programs: a high priority during the first decade. Presented by volunteers to a wide variety of county organizations and classes.
- Mounted bird collection: About 100 taxidermied specimens were amassed between 1977 and 2000. They were used for dozens of presentations and displays each year, and were seen by many thousands of people at Columbia Mall events and at the Howard County Fair. In 2000, because the HCBC lacked public display space, the Dept of the Interior required that the collection be given away. The birds were transferred temporarily to Howard County Dept of Recreation and Parks and eventually given permanently to the Robinson Nature Center where they reside today.
- Information board at Centennial Park – Jeff Culler
- Trifold display
- Brochures, rack cards, business cards

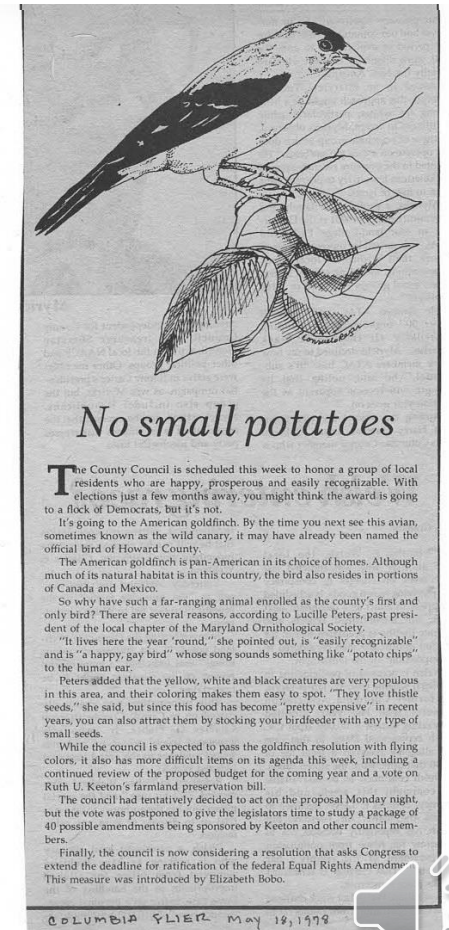


Education and Outreach



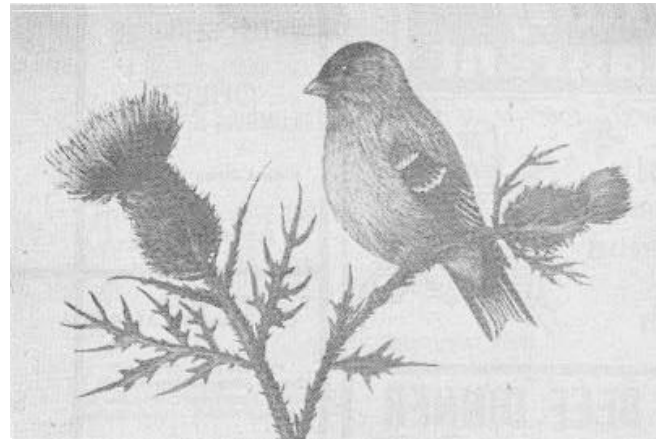
American Goldfinch named Howard County's Official Bird

- In 1977, Howard County's executive branch asked the HCBC to suggest a species to be the county bird.
- At the September 1977 meeting, bird species were suggested. Carolina Wren and American Goldfinch received the most votes, with the latter bird winning in a run-off.
- At the October meeting, members commissioned county artist, Jo Dye, to paint a watercolor portrait of the goldfinch to be hung in the Howard County office building in Ellicott City.
- The Howard County Council adopted the American Goldfinch as the official Howard County Bird at their May 1978 meeting.



The American goldfinch was unanimously approved by the County Council Monday night as the county's official bird. The selection of the bird, which is found here year-round, was proposed by the county chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society. A water-color painting of two finches was presented to the government and will hang in the county office building. — Detail from painting by Jo Dye, wildlife artist

May 24, 1978 *Howard County Times*



Natural History



Although birds are the Howard County Bird Club's primary focus, they constitute just one part of the diverse, fascinating, and interconnected natural world.

From the beginning, members explored related biological interests—and knowledgeable fellow members assisted them. During the last 25 years, mentorship has been aided by digital cameras, web-based resources, and smartphones with apps.



Natural History



Members were leaders or participants in the following major projects:

- Wildflower Survey – late 1970s to mid 1990s
Chuck Dupree, Joanne and Bob Solem, organizers
- Odonates (dragonflies and damselflies) – early 1990s, continuing
 - Howard County species list (as part of Maryland effort) – Richard Orr
 - 12 annual countywide counts, 2006 - 2017 (with Howard Co Dept Recreation and Parks) – June Tveekrem
- Maryland Amphibian and Reptile Atlas - 2010-2015 (part of statewide effort).
Howard County Coordinator - Sue Muller
- Maryland Biodiversity Project – 2012, continuing
- Butterfly/Pollinator Group - continuing



Natural History



Butterflies and Pollinators

- There were a few butterfly field trips in the 1980s; beginning in May 1990, Richard Smith began leading at least one trip annually.
- In early 1993, Joanne Solem asked Dick to design a one-page county butterfly reference. Within weeks he had completed a rough draft of *The Butterflies of Howard County: a Biological Summary and Checklist*. Its layout was a model of conciseness and readability. This unique reference is periodically updated and remains an essential county tool.
- In April 2011, the Butterfly Photo Gallery was created on the HCBC website. It is updated as necessary.



Natural History



Butterflies and Pollinators

- To capture the enthusiasm generated by the request for county butterfly photos, Dick designed a five-year project to verify current county species and establish their flight times.
- 2013 was the prototype year; the formal survey began in 2014, with Linda Hunt assisting Dick as co-chair.
- In 2014 and 2015, when the HCBC began establishing pollinator meadows in conjunction with Howard County Dept of Recreation and Parks, Dick designed a seed mix containing larval host plants and nectaring sources.
- Dick's untimely death in August 2016, just as the data was beginning to show promise, was a major blow.
- Linda, with Kevin Heffernan as co-chair, stepped in to continue the survey. When the five-year project was completed, it was extended. 2022 marked the eighth year.



Natural History



Butterflies and Pollinators

- Early HCBC efforts to provide habitat for pollinators began with Emy's Meadow at Centennial Park in 2015. Additional plots in other parts of the county followed.
- By 2020, the Howard County government had become involved in the sustainability of natural ecosystems by publicizing, funding, and encouraging pollinator interest. Information about their efforts is accessible from the "Butterflies/Pollinators" page under Natural History on the HCBC website. Kevin Heffernan is the HCBC's representative on Howard County's Bee City Committee.
- Kevin Heffernan and Linda Hunt have produced multiple references specific to the butterflies of Howard County (see the Butterfly Resources webpage). The Pollinator Resources page has local tips (including gardening), with links to additional information.
- The original small group of HCBC butterfly enthusiasts who participated in the first survey has expanded to include almost 300 people in the Butterfly/Pollinator Group.





Conclusion

As we look back on the first 50 years, each member may take pride in being part of an organization that consistently combines data collection with education, habitat preservation with outreach, and advocacy with enjoyment.

The group that met at Century Plaza that November evening in 1972 could not have imagined what they were creating, and the impact the organization would have--any more than we, gathered here today, can predict what the next 50 years holds. We can only hope that in 2072, when the Howard County Bird Club's first century is celebrated, those present can look back with satisfaction knowing they built on the foundation of the first 50 years, that they continued to monitor, advocate for, and, most of all, *enjoy* the birds—and the butterflies—and the rest of the natural world.

Happy Fiftieth Anniversary Howard County Bird Club! On to 100!





Acknowledgments

Our profound thanks to the following individuals for permission to use their photographs.

- Annette Allor - Tawny Emperor, Halloween Pennant, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Black Swallowtail caterpillar
- Mary Lou Clark - Field Trips (5), Gudelsky Center
- Kevin Crocetti - Northern Scarletsnake
- Jeff Culler - American Kestrel, Dickcissel
- Ralph Cullison III - Black-bellied Plover
- Sue Earp - On the Trail, Glossy Ibis, Bald Eagle, Merlin, Cedar Waxwing, White-winged Crossbill
- Wes Earp - Question Mark caterpillar
- Cheryl Farfaras - Monarch
- John Harris - Trumpeter Swan, Dickcissel
- Kevin Heffernan – Wood Duck, Red-headed Woodpecker, Horned Lark, Snow Bunting, Hooded Warbler, Dickcissel, Habkberry Emperor, Monarch chrysalis



- Bill Hill - Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Little Gull
- Kathy Litzinger - Northern Shoveler, Long-tailed Skipper
- Barry Miller - Eastern Bluebird
- Richard Orr - Tundra Swan, Osprey, American Copper, American Toad
- Bonnie Ott - Mallard, Mississippi Kite, Song Sparrow, Dickcissel, Spicebush Swallowtail caterpillar
- Howard Patterson - Redhead
- Gregg Petersen - Meet and Greet
- Safe Skies Maryland - website and dead birds
- Bob Solem – picnics/potlucks, Powder-scale Pholiota, Perfoliate Bellwort
- Joanne Solem – Century Plaza building, meetings/programs buildings, Emy's Meadow, bird classes, trifold display, Red-spotted Newt (Red Eft)
- Chuck Stirrat - Caspian Tern
- Kristin Trouton - Monarch caterpillar
- Anthony VanSchoor – American Woodcock, Yellow-throated Warbler
- Gerald Winegrad - Expedition to the Kingdom of the Ice Bear



Acknowledgments

50th Anniversary shirt logo by Sue Probst



Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration
Presented by
Fiftieth Anniversary Committee

Joanne Solem, Chair
Mary Lou Clark
David Holmes

Mary Maxey
David Sandler

Kristin Trouton
Kelsey Wellons
Bob Solem, Webmaster



Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society



A 501(c)3 organization whose mission is to promote the knowledge, development, protection, and conservation of bird life and other naturally occurring species and their habitats.

