



The Goldfinch

Newsletter of the Howard County Bird Club
A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society
www.howardbirds.website

Founded 1972



Inside this Issue:

- [Club Meetings](#)1
- [Chirps to the Flock](#)1
- [Field Trips](#)2
- [November 2023 Rare Birds](#).....3
- [Roaming in Rome](#).....4
- [Beginner Birder’s Corner](#)5
- [Squirrel-Proofing Feeders](#)5
- [Workshop Success Story](#).....7
- [Welcome New Members](#).....7
- [Membership Renewal](#)7
- [Potluck](#)8
- [Breeding Bird Atlas 3](#)8
- [Mid-winter Count](#)9
- [In Memoriam: J. Lubitz](#)9
- [Board Meetings](#).....9
- [Birding in Italy Photos](#).....10

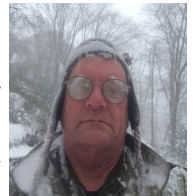
CLUB MEETINGS - BY MARY LOU CLARK



Thursday, January 11, 2024 "Finding Eagles and Owls for the Final Year of the Maryland/DC Breeding Bird Atlas 3 (BBA3)" by Sue Muller. Eagles and owls are the earliest nesters of the season. As we enter the final year of data collection for the BBA3, learn where to look for these birds, where they still need to be documented, and how to recognize courtship displays. A review of the atlas webpage will be included to show you how to find what atlas block you are in and what species still need to be documented.

Sue Muller is retired from the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks after a 40-year career in natural resources. She served as the Howard County Coordinator for the Maryland Amphibian & Reptile Atlas (2010-2014) and is currently one of the Howard County Co-coordinators for the BBA3. She is a long-time member of the bird club.

Thursday, February 8, 2024 "Miles and Miles of Texas, Hill Country, and Big Bend" by Kurt Schwarz. Kurt Schwarz, a past president of HCBC, former Conservation Chair of MOS and HCBC, will relate his trip to Texas in April 2023, visiting the Hill Country and Big Bend, to see several bird species only found there: Golden-cheeked and Colima Warblers, and Black-capped Vireo.



Club programs are presented in a hybrid format and include a brief business meeting, club announcements, and guest speaker presentation. Attendees may join either in person at the Robinson Nature Center, 6692 Cedar Lane, Columbia MD 21044, or online using Zoom. The in-person hospitality session begins, and the Zoom portal opens, at 7:00 p.m, with the meeting beginning at 7:30 p.m. Click on the "Calendar" tab on the HCBC website's Home page at the top of the page for the most recent information.

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE: CHIRPS TO THE FLOCK

BY GREGG PETERSEN

Happy New Year! It was a great fall season for club walks and for two historic finds in the county as I write this in late November. The brief sighting of a Black-legged Kittiwake and the prolonged visit by an Ash-throated Flycatcher added two new birds to our all-time county list.

With the advent of a new year, it’s often a time for resolutions. Regarding your birding, you may be hoping to add to your life list, go on a trip to a new place for new birds, or make the county 200 list.

I thought I would suggest three other bird club-related resolutions for you to consider in the new year. Some of you already follow this first suggestion: When you go birding, resolve to leave your location better than you found it. Many of the public locations that we bird in often have trash left by others. Members Meg Harris and Mary Lou Clark recently reminded me that it’s irritating to see, but we can do something about it. Carry a bag with you and backhaul some of the trash as you depart the location. Some of the worst locations that come to mind are Race Road and the Columbia Gateway and GE stormwater retention pond locations. Thanks to conscientious club members backhauling trash at the Triadelphia Reservoir since we were granted access, it is looking much better!

(Chirps continued on page 6)

WINTER FIELD TRIPS

BY [JOE HANFMAN](#)

Field trips are a great way to improve birding skills, explore new places and meet other birders. Arrive at the meeting site ready to leave at the designated time with appropriate footwear and gear. Depending on the COVID situation at the time, there may be restrictions imposed. The leader may cancel due to inclement weather/hazardous driving conditions. Directions for trips not on ADC maps are on the Club's website. Questions? Contact the trip leader or Field Trip Coordinator Joe Hanfman at auk1844@gmail.com. HCBC members receive priority on trips that are limited by number of participants. No pets. There is a listing of all previous field trips on the "Calendar" page titled [Previous Field Trips](#). The trips with links have results on a separate page.

Start Your Year List

January 1, 2024, Monday, start at 8:00 a.m. Half day. Meet at Mt Pleasant, Howard County Conservancy. Easy walking on woodland trails. May plan to bird several different locations to find as many species as possible. The one day of the year when every bird is new! Facilities available. Leader – Kurt Schwarz, krschwal@verizon.net

B R Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge

January 6, Saturday. All day trip. Plan to stop at the Chop-tank River Bridge for ducks and coffee. Bring lunch and drinks. Dress warmly. Entrance fee or Duck Stamp required. Email the leader to reserve a spot and get details. We will carpool. Facilities at some spots. Leader – Kurt Schwarz, krschwal@verizon.net

B Centennial Park

January 13, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m. Meet at the boat ramp, accessed from the South entrance. This trip will hopefully focus on waterfowl. Leader – To be announced. Check the [calendar](#) on the HCBC website for updates.

R Alpha Ridge Landfill

January 19, Friday. Half day. Reservations required. Carpooling is required. Moderate walking over hills and fields of the landfill. We will search for Short-eared Owls with no guarantee of finding one. Other possibilities are Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Horned Lark, American Pipit, and Eastern Meadowlark. No facilities on the landfill. Limited to a maximum of five cars. Contact trip leader to reserve a spot and get details.

Leader – Joe Hanfman, auk1844@gmail.com

B Cape Henlopen, Delaware

January 20, Saturday. Full day. Meet at the [Broken Land Park and Ride Lot West](#) at 6:00 a.m. and plan to carpool. All-day driving trip to the Delaware shore; stops to include Indian River Inlet, Cape Henlopen State Park, and Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge. Entry into Delaware State Parks is free from December through February. Target species include wintering seaducks, Great Cormorant, Northern Gannet, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Short-eared Owl, and maybe even a shot at Snowy Owl! Participants may pack a lunch, but we will also make a quick stop at Wawa. Be prepared for light to moderate hiking, especially at Cape Henlopen. There are restroom facilities at Indian River (portable toilets), Cape Henlopen, Cape May Ferry Terminal, and of course at Wawa. Leader – Russell Kovach, Russell.kovach@gmail.com

Mid-winter Count

February 3, Saturday. [See page 9](#) for details.

B W Lake Elkhorn

February 9, Friday, 8:00 a.m. 2-3 hours. Meet at Dockside parking lot. Easy walking along the lake and to Forebay Pond. Waterfowl, sparrows, and winter finches are possible. The lake can turn up interesting surprises. No facilities. Leader – Allen Lewis, allenrlewis@gmail.com

R A Search for Owls

February 17, Saturday, 9:30 a.m. Learn how to find owls by habitat and signs. Our target species are Long-eared, saw-whet, and other owls. No facilities. Please email Gregg Petersen (email address below) by 7:00 p.m., Wednesday, Feb 14 to reserve a spot and get details. Leaders – Gregg Petersen, sig29@aol.com; David Cummings, wcummings9@gmail.com

B Woodcock Search

Late February or early March, exact date to be determined based on the weather. Let leader know of your interest. Leader - Mary Lou Clark, doctorfx_99@yahoo.com

B = Good for beginning birders

W = Wheelchair accessible

R = Reservations Required



Club members attending the November 19, 2023 field trip at Centennial Park.

by Gregg Petersen

NOVEMBER 2023 RARE BIRDS

The month of November brought not one, but two exciting rarities to Howard County! Both were new county records. Following are summaries of the Black-legged Kittiwake sighting, written by Joe Hanfmann, and the Ash-throated Flycatcher sighting, written by Bonnie Ott.

Black-legged Kittiwake by Joe Hanfmann

On November 11, 2023, Joe Hanfman, John and Meg Harris, Steve Luke, and Kurt Schwarz birded Triadelphia Reservoir at Pigtail. The reservoir was covered with a fog that hung a few feet above the water. We saw a small gull and noted that it had a black hind-collar. We remarked that it looked similar to a Black-legged Kittiwake. When the bird flew, we also noted that it had a weak dark “M” pattern on its dorsal side. Not believing that it could be a kittiwake, we talked ourselves into believing that it was an unusual Bonaparte’s Gull. Adding to the confusion, a Bonaparte’s Gull with a black collar was photographed the same week in Buffalo, NY.

We should have noted that the kittiwake had a thicker bill than a Bonaparte’s Gull and the “M” pattern on the kittiwake was weaker because we were seeing it in November.

Fortunately, Kurt Schwarz and Steve Luke got photographs. Kurt did considerable research on the gull and got other opinions that confirmed it was indeed a Black-legged Kittiwake. Sadly, the kittiwake was not chaseable because, while we were still there, it flew along the Montgomery County shoreline towards the Greenbridge boat ramp and was not seen again. Other birders arrived after our group, looking for the Dunlin, which they saw, but no gulls were present.



Photos of the Black-legged Kittiwake observed at Pigtail on November 11, 2023.
Left photo by Steve Luke, right photo by Kurt Schwarz

Bonaparte’s Gull observed in Buffalo, NY,
November 10, 2023, for comparison.

Photo by Shelley Seidman

Ash-throated Flycatcher by Bonnie Ott



Ash-throated Flycatcher
by Bonnie Ott

November 22nd was a delightful day, sunny and mild. I spent the day birding and looking for spider egg sacs. I decided to head to Rockburn Branch Park for the afternoon to check the beech woods. Shortly after I arrived, I spotted a *Myiarchus* flycatcher fluttering in a tree eating berries. I knew from the pale throat, light breast, and soft lemon belly it was not a Great Crested. I assumed an Ash-throated, but the bird had disappeared. I decided to put out an alert, knowing if it wasn’t Ash-throated, it was something else unusual. As I watched the area, the bird appeared again, but in a tangle of grapes with American Robins. Over the course of the next hour it would disappear into the thickets for five to ten minute periods. When it emerged it was very tame. I took some videos but did not have my bird lens. It didn’t take long for other birders to appear. The bird put on an amazing show affording everyone great looks. I was able to go home to get my lens and return for photos! A new county record and my 290th county bird!

On Thursday, November 30, the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks featured this incredible find on their Facebook page! Bonnie reached out to an employee of the Department who had stopped and asked about the bird while at Rockburn Branch Park. Bonnie was later contacted by their media director who drafted the post.

ROAMING IN ROME

BY MARY MAXEY



Left to right: Mary Maxey, Sarah Romero, and Mary Lou Clark.
by Mary Maxey

Mary Lou Clark and I travelled to visit former Columbia resident and still HCBC member, Sarah Romero, in The Eternal City (Rome) on September 13-28. After the red-eye flight, our first stop was at Parco Leonardo di Fiumicino. It was 3:00 a.m. for us (EDT), but our new time zone in Rome was 9:00 a.m. We didn't sleep much on the plane. We were told that to get acclimated to the time zone, we should not sleep until bedtime. Our first stop was near the airport. We had 19 species of birds. Three were not new to us: Mallard, Northern Shoveler, and Common Snipe. The rest included lifers for us – Black-winged Stilt, Little Grebe, Common Greenshank, Common Kingfisher, and Western House-Martin, to name a few. After a wonderful lunch at an Organic Cafe and grocery shopping, we settled in at Sarah and Rick's apartment on U.S. territory; they have government housing while Rick is stationed in Rome. After a little siesta, we birded from the apartment balcony. We had Eurasian Collared Dove, Yellow-legged Gull (which are everywhere), Rose-ringed Parakeet (they are also very common and an introduced species), Hooded Crow, and European Goldfinch (this one counted, unlike the one at Mother Nature's in January 2021).

Birding in Rome can be challenging since birds are still hunted in Italy. The birds thus tend to hide and are not very visible. The next day, we didn't have to go far from the apartment to see some good birds. One of Sarah's favorite places to bird is a short walk to a park called Villa Borghese. We saw 17 species of birds, including more Rose-ringed Parakeets and Monk Parakeets. We even found a Monk Parakeet nest! We were lucky to see Common Swift before they all migrated south. A few other highlights included Great Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Blue Tit, Great Tit, and Long-tailed Tit. Afterwards, our tour guide extraordinaire took us to her favorite art museum - Borghese Gallery and Museum, where we saw many marble art sculptures. Sarah had a great understanding and knowledge of the works of art from Bernini, Caravaggio, and Raphael. One of the most spectacular works of art by Bernini was "Rape of Proserpina," which is made of marble, where you can see the indentation of Pluto's fingers into Proserpina's side and the muscle definition on Pluto. The sculpture was executed between 1621 and 1622.

We usually traveled about an hour away from Rome to birding sites. Mostly we went to wetland sites. We were fortunate to have Sarah's three years of experience birding in and around Rome. Sarah has a membership with World Wildlife Fund, which allowed us to visit three sites. Two of them she made a reservation to visit and was given a key to gain access. These sites had blinds for us to view the birds. We had a guide for the third site, which was in Tuscany, and observed the waterbirds from blinds. Some of the birds we saw included Great Crested Grebe, Greater Flamingo, Kentish Plover, Eurasian Spoonbill, Common Pochard, and Eurasian Curlew.

We visited a grassland site - Ara della Regina - where the highlights were Lesser Kestrels, European Bee Eaters (in migration), Northern Wheatear, Short-toed Snake-Eagle, and Western Marsh Harrier. There were also archeologists working the site of the largest temple in Etruria (400-390 BCE). The Milano University has been working on the site since 1982! Just about wherever you go in Rome, there are archeologists excavating in this ancient city.

Another interesting site that we visited was LIPU (Italian League for Bird Protection). Sarah had been there before and knew the president. In the 1990s, the area was an open landfill site. In 1995, an Australian company proposed the construction of an oceanarium that would irreparably alter the ecosystem of the mouth of the Tiber. To oppose this proposal, the Ostia delegation of LIPU proposed the creation of a nature reserve. After the reclamation of the area, the oasis opened in 2001. This 20-hectare refuge with a pond in the middle creates habitat for birds and attracts photographers and birders. Some of the highlights include Little Grebe, Eurasian Moorhen, Common Ringed Plover, Spotted Redshank, and Common Greenshank. While we were in the blind, the birds all got up out of the water. We looked up to see what spooked them and it was an Osprey. Sarah took quick action and took several photos of the Osprey. It was a good thing, because on our way out we saw the president. He asked us if we saw it. It was the first time an Osprey had been spotted at that site. Sarah sent them a photo of the Osprey for their documentation. You can follow LIPU on Facebook and see the Osprey post -



Curlew Sandpiper by Sarah Romero



Greater Flamingo by Sarah Romero

[When panic strikes in Oasis... The FISHER HAWK \(Pandion haliaetus\) has arrived!](#)

BEGINNER BIRDER'S CORNER

BY MEGAN BOLCAR

Happy New Year! Do you have a birding-related New Year's resolution? Perhaps you are a brand new member who joined the club as a means to find like-minded individuals. Maybe you aren't a new member, but have set goals for yourself to improve your birding skills in 2024. Either way, I thought the start of a new year was the perfect time to gather advice from some of our more experienced birders to share with anyone aiming to improve their birding skills in the new year. I asked many of our members who have recently served as workshop and field trip leaders: what is the single most important piece of advice that you would give to beginners? I received so many responses that I will be sharing a few here and a few in our next (March/April) issue. Here's what some of them had to say.

Lauren McDougle shared the following: "My top advice would be to join a bird club, go on the field trips, and get out there with other birders as often and regularly as you can. The wealth of knowledge shared among birding communities is extensive and impressive. Take notes about what you are learning, seeing, and hearing – a majority of experienced birders have taken extensive field notes at some point in their journey. Balance birding alone and with others. You learn to trust yourself and build your skills when you're alone. You can learn from and help others when you're in a group."

This is great advice. Hopefully you are aware that our field trips are printed in this newsletter and also posted on the club website; did you also know the Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) website posts trips from other county chapters, and you can attend any? Keep an eye on both the HCBC and the MOS website calendars for birding field trip opportunities.

Mary Maxey provided a variety of great advice. "1) Participate in the field trips. 2) Find a birding buddy (mentors are also available through the club). 3) Learn bird calls and songs. Much of birding is by ear. Start off by learning the bird songs in your yard. 4) Birding in the winter is a great time to start. The leaves are off of the trees, so it is easier to find birds. There are also fewer birds in the winter than in the summer. 5) Look at the site guides on the HCBC website to find out where to go and what to see."

Gregg Petersen reiterated the importance of birding with a mentor. He shared the advice: "Bird with an experienced birder every chance you get."

Wes Earp opted to pass along advice that he received from a birder whom he says he holds in high regard – Harry Armistead. "I have had the pleasure of birding with and for him on Christmas Counts along the East Coast. Standing in the Bodie Pea Island lighthouse parking lot a number of late Decembers ago, birds started erupting from the dense foliage of the forest at the lot's north end. I casually said something like 'watch for the accipiter.' Harry's response was to query

(Beginner continued on page 6)

SQUIRREL-PROOFING FEEDERS

BY JAY SHEPPARD

We love squirrels and all wildlife. That is, until the furry critters clean out your feeder in hours and then chew up the empty feeders. Gray squirrels seem able to get to any feeder—super squirrels seem to be the norm.

They are not flying squirrels, but they are great jumpers. Remember these numbers: 5, 8, and 11. Those are the maximum jump distances in feet from the ground, side and overhead for 99% of the squirrels. So our goal is to separate our feeders from all potential launch points OR get feeders that are totally metal and close when a squirrel reaches them. I have seen squirrels lie on the roof of a "squirrel-proof" feeder and reach down to consume all the sunflower seeds they want. I prefer countering these crafty rodents by keeping the feeders out of their reach.

My optimum setup is a pole or post that is placed at or beyond those jump distances. Do not ignore roofs or power lines. I have a 4x4" post sunk in the ground with 20" wide aluminum flashing wrapped around the middle. An easy alternative is two sections of 5" stove pipe with the bottom piece inserted into the upper section—no seam for them to grab. The top of the post has four large shelf/pot brackets high enough off the ground to keep the bottoms of all feeders out of reach of our furry friends.

An alternative to the brackets might be to run a heavy wire either from the post to either another post or to a sturdy tree or building. I like to use aluminum clothesline wire; it's easy to use and remnants make long hooks for feeders. Lengthy hooks are very useful. The wire should be at least 9' high to allow passage of anyone carrying a ladder, etc. If attached to a tree, it should be given sufficient slack to allow for swaying in high winds. If a squirrel ever figures out how to hang on the wire and reach the feeders, slip a 2' section of 2" PVC pipe half way out to the feeders.

Squirrels still will have ample food. Wind and bird activity will scatter plenty of seed on the ground. Before I squirrel-proofed all my feeders, I live-trapped and transported over 60 squirrels in four months. All were marked with a small dab of paint and moved at least three miles to large forests. I never saw a marked squirrel back in my yard. I now see no more than four in my yard.

One can also provide a dedicated squirrel-feeding station. An all-metal feeder hanging from a tree or fence will do. We hang corn on the cob ("deer corn" in some stores) on a large screw eye hanging from a low branch. Whatever you do, enjoy the wildlife.



Squirrel-proof feeders
by Jay Sheppard

(Chirps continued from page 1)

If you are new to birding and want to improve your skills, my second recommendation is that you resolve to participate in one or more of our four counts during the year (Mid-winter, May, Fall, and Christmas). We will place you with a veteran birder and one sure way for you to accelerate improvement of your birding skills is to accompany an experienced birder. In addition, your presence on a count team gives us an extra set of eyes and ears which results in better coverage for your assigned area and for the county overall.

Third, if you are a more experienced birder, we would love for you to resolve to lead one or more walks at an area of your choice in 2024. The main administrative requirement to lead a walk is to record the participants and share the eBird list with them and our webmaster upon completion. While you are expected to spot birds as a leader, invariably you will have other experienced birders on your walk to help you. Another option open to you is to co-lead a walk. Email Joe Hanfman (auk1844@gmail.com) and let him know when and where you would like to conduct a walk.

As for me, I have resolved to see about making more Howard County Bird Club logo wear available to club members in the new year. We have our 50th anniversary shirts, but we could use some more wearable advertising and I am working on that. We made our first purchase of our orange club hats in November, and I am coordinating with a custom embroidery clothing and equipment provider in Frederick for an HCBC site before the new year: shirts, hats, pullovers, backpacks, and a cooler are initially planned because of a referral provided by Mary Lou Clark.

That's it for this edition. I hope to see you out birding and I wish you good luck on your resolutions!



Mary Lou Clark, left, and Meg Harris, right, collecting trash while birding Triadelphia Reservoir on November 22, 2023.

Photo by John Harris

(Rome continued from page 4)

We birded everywhere, even in the city of Rome. We took the subway to the Colosseum and birded in and around there, as well as on our tour of Palatine Hill, the Forum, and from the best view of the city: atop the Monument to Victor Emmanuel II. We even took our binoculars and had an eBird list while touring the gardens of the Vatican. Birds are everywhere. That is why it is so much fun to watch them.

Italy is divided into "states" as opposed to counties in eBird. Rome is in Lazio. We also traveled to Umbria, Tuscany, and another country – The Vatican, Vatican City (Holy See). We observed 114 species on 37 checklists in 15 days. Ninety birds were lifers for me. One lifer, according to eBird, was the European Starling! I suppose this was because I was in Europe. Another interesting fact is their Italian Sparrow looks just like our House Sparrow.



It was an amazing trip. It started off as a visit to see Sarah and ended up being mostly a birding trip with a little tour of Rome on the side. Sarah is a wonderful host and tour guide. She will be there until February 2025. Thank you so much, Sarah, for being such a wonderful host!

See more [photos](#) from Mary Lou Clark and Mary Maxey's journey to Italy on page 10.

Left to right: Mary Maxey, Mary Lou Clark, and Sarah Romero bushwacking in Italy.

Photo by Mary Maxey

(Beginner continued from page 5)

if I had read Jon Young's *What the Robin Knows*. Interpreting the behavior of the natural world's inhabitants is foreign to most of us, no matter how much anthropomorphizing we do. And, we can never know the minds of birds. Mr. Young's observations are, for the most part, accurate and his advice helpful. He is a bit defensive due to a lack of scientific research upon which to base his conclusions, but if you're lacking birding experience, there is something to be gleaned from his words. My advice is to read *What the Robin Knows*."

Kurt Schwarz emphasized the life-long nature of learning to bird; he shared, "Never stop learning, and always try to enjoy seeing our birds." Kurt also followed up later with "Always question." This was in response to an observation at Pigtail that was initially noted as a gull, but Kurt's instincts kicked in as something didn't seem quite right. He investigated further with field guides, and was able to confirm the first county record for Howard County, second county record for Montgomery County for the Black-legged Kittiwake. For more on this rare find, see the article "November 2023 Rare Birds" on [page 3](#).

I hope you were able to pick up at least one or two things that perhaps you hadn't thought of before in your birding journey. Stay tuned for more words of wisdom in our next issue!



GIVE THE GIFT OF MEMBERSHIP



A gift membership in the HCBC is always welcome for a birthday, thank you, or special occasion. Given to a young person, it may spark a lifelong interest!

<https://mdbirds.org/gift-membership/>

THE 2023 BEGINNER AND ADVANCED BEGINNER FIELD WORKSHOPS' SUCCESS STORY

BY VAL SWAN

In early 2023, Bonnie Ott generously decided to share some of her vast birding knowledge with beginners. The goal was to teach newer birders the nuances of binocular use and how to better find birds at a slow pace. With everyone at the same skill level, we hoped to create an atmosphere conducive to asking questions. Coincidentally, John and Meg Harris were designing a workshop to address advanced beginning/intermediate birder skills. Lauren McDougle, a music teacher and fellow birder, stated the obvious, "If you want to improve, take private lessons!" This idea sparked conversation among the Howard County Bird Club's (HCBC) Education Subcommittee, leading to the creation of the Mentorship Walk, i.e., a private lesson. Any HCBC member that had attended a Beginner Walk was offered a one-time mentorship outing with a skilled member of the club. This one-on-one format allowed new birders to address their individual needs. Meanwhile, Steve Luke and Lauren McDougle, with their combined technology talent, volunteered to create a PowerPoint presentation on the use of the Merlin App to improve bird identification, followed by a walk using the technology. We had ideas and volunteers to execute them! But was there interest?

Yes! The nine Beginner/Advanced Beginner Field Workshops were booked to capacity. Habitat themes included "Woodland Birds," "Birds of Second-Growth Forest," and "Birds of the Lake." Education trips included several birding skills workshops, as well as trips focusing on bird families, identification clues, and birds in flight. Eleven individuals signed up for a mentorship walk. Steve and Lauren presented the first Merlin App class at the Robinson Nature Center (RNC) to a full house. They have plans to repeat the workshop in April in collaboration with the Howard County Conservancy (HCC). Stay tuned!

The greatest accomplishment of the 2023 program, however, was the creation of group camaraderie and enthusiasm among the newer birders. There were quite a few people that attended more than one workshop. Because we kept the workshops small, people were allotted personal attention. Friendships ensued, skills were improved, questions were asked, knowledge was shared, and yes, we had fun. John and I also noted that we benefited, as we both had learned new information as we prepared for our walks. The downside of the small groups was that we were unable to accommodate all those seeking registration. Moving forward, we will try to meet the demand of the club membership. With such positive feedback, 2024 plans are now, "under wing." If you have suggestions for any Beginner, Intermediate, or Advanced Bird Walks or would like to volunteer as a leader, co-leader or Mentorship Walk volunteer, please email Val at valnjeff55@gmail.com.

Special thanks to the leaders: John Harris, Steve Luke, Lauren McDougle, and Bonnie Ott. Thanks also to co-leaders Ben Costello, Meg Harris, Gregg Petersen, Ryan Salsman, and Kurt Schwarz. Thank you to all of the Mentorship Walk volunteers: Lisa Colangelo, Cathy Hallam, Steve Luke, Mary Maxey, Lauren McDougle, David Sandler, and Cathy Staropoli. Many thanks to the Merlin ID Class team: Steve Luke, Lauren McDougle, John Harris, and Gregg Petersen. Also, thanks to RNC and HCC for hosting the course.

I think we all agree, birding is too good of a hobby not to share! Happy birding to all of you, and I am looking forward to an exciting 2024.



Attendees of the October 18, 2023 Beginner Field Workshop gather at the Skywatch, Mt. Pleasant, Howard County Conservancy, with leader Bonnie Ott (left).

Photo by Gregg Petersen

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Everett Behr
Kathleen Hayes
Susan Horowitz
Elizabeth & Michael Loryman
Michael Oberman
David & Anne Richardson
Nigel Samaroo

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

If you have not yet renewed your membership for 2023-24, go to the HCBC website: <https://www.howardbirds.website/> and click on "Join Us" at the top of the home page.

Anyone is welcome to contribute articles or ideas which you think will be of interest to other birders. Copy may be sent to the following address:

Megan Bolcar
12136 Gray Star Way
Columbia, MD 21044
howardbirdclub@mdbirds.org

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Megan Bolcar, *Editor*
Joanne Solem, *Proofreader*

ANNUAL POTLUCK 2024

BY SHERRY TOMLINSON AND MAGHAAN LANE

The 2024 Howard County Bird Club's annual potluck dinner is fast approaching and will be here before we know it! Whether you are new to birding, or have been birding for years, you won't want to miss this wonderful event. The Howard County Bird Club kindly invites all club members and their guests to share in the fun, food, and the evening's program.

Annual Potluck Dinner: Saturday, March 23, 2024

Where: Robinson Nature Center (there is no entrance fee charged by the RNC for this event)

Time: 6-10 p.m.

Doors open: 6:00 p.m. for room setup

Snacks and socializing: start at 6:30 p.m.

Dinner: starts at 7:00 p.m.

Please bring a main dish, hors d'oeuvres, a salad, a vegetable dish, or a dessert. (To assist those with food allergies, it is suggested that you include a card with the list of ingredients to display with your dish.) The bird club furnishes water and eating utensils. (You may want to mark your dishes and any accompanying serving implements with your name so we can make sure they return with you!) You can bring beer and wine (bring an opener if your bottle(s) require one).

There will be a wonderful after-dinner "slide show," so bring your nature photos. Once again, please note that due to time limitations we limit images to no more than **15 photos per person**. You can bring digital photos or a PowerPoint presentation on a CD or USB thumb drive, and the group will provide a laptop for projection of the photos onto the wall screen.

Please let us know in advance that you will be attending so we can arrange for enough seating, beverages, etc. You may sign up at the January, February, and March club meetings, or contact Sherry Tomlinson by Friday, March 22, 2024 at 425-214-6000 or stbirder@yahoo.com.

If you'd like to help with set up or clean up, we would love your help! It doesn't take long, and is greatly appreciated. For set up, please arrive at 6:00 p.m. Clean up will be after the program, at 9:00 p.m.

This event is a highlight for so many of us birders, and especially for our new members. If you have not attended the potluck dinner before, we encourage you to come and get to know others who share your interests in birds, bird photography, nature, other creatures, and more.

So one and all, mark your calendars and come join in the fun!

Directions: The Robinson Nature Center is located at 6692 Cedar Lane, Columbia, MD 21044. Route 32 exit 17 takes you to Cedar Lane. There is ample parking available. The RNC's phone number is 410-313-0400.

MARYLAND/DC BREEDING BIRD ATLAS 3, 2020-2024

BY SUE MULLER

As I write this in late November, we are rapidly approaching the end of our fourth year of data collection in the MD/DC Breeding Bird Atlas. Over the past four years, we have confirmed breeding of 100 species in Howard County. Of those 100 species, 19% of the them have been confirmed breeding in all 24 blocks assigned to Howard County. There is only one more year of data collection left and we have a lot of work ahead!

The only bird that is currently in "safe dates" is the Rock Pigeon. Do you have Rock Pigeons nesting on your property in barns, silos, etc.? If so, please contact your County Coordinators (Dave & Sue) and let them know (howard@mdbirds.org). Many of these birds breed on private property that atlasers don't have access to.

Are you new to atlasing? It is never too late to start! Contact your County Coordinators and they will get you started. You may choose to survey only in your yard, adopt a specific site, or be assigned to focus on a bird not confirmed breeding in a specific block. The possibilities to get involved are endless!

Come December 15th, the Rock Pigeon will no longer be alone in "safe dates." The Great Horned Owl will then be in "safe dates." Please listen for them. If you hear any and don't know how to submit them to the atlas, again contact your County Coordinators. You can listen to their calls here: <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/great-horned-owl>.

Do you have photos of owlets or owls on a nest since 2020? If so, contact your County Coordinators to enter them into the atlas database.

Finally, there is an email list for the Breeding Bird Atlas! You will get one or two emails per week with tips on what birds to be looking for and where, and announcements about field classes to attend to learn how to conduct a breeding bird survey. Again, email howard@mdbirds.org to be added to the list.

ANNUAL MID-WINTER COUNT

BY JOE HANFMAN

Join the Howard County Bird Club's Thirty-ninth Annual Mid-winter Count on Saturday, February 3, 2024. Joe Hanfman (auk1844@gmail.com) is the count coordinator. You may volunteer to participate by contacting one of the area coordinators listed below:

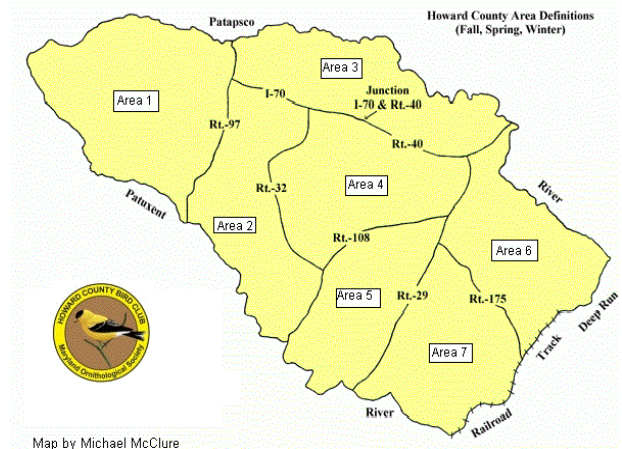
Area 1	Wes Earp	wesandsue@gmail.com
Area 2	Russ Kovach	Russell.kovach@gmail.com
Area 3	Chuck Stirrat	Stirrerr1@gmail.com
Area 4	Mike McClure	Michael.mcclure@jhuapl.edu
Area 5	Tom Seivert	tomseivert@verizon.net
Area 6	John Harris	Jaybee.harris@gmail.com
Area 7	Kurt Schwarz	krschwal@verizon.net

Beginning birders are always welcome, as are individuals who wish to count only for part of the day. If you wish to count only at your feeder email Joe H. and request a feeder form.

The evening potluck tally will be at John and Meg Harris's home 6400 Ripe Apple Ln, Columbia. Please contact the Harris's at mctharris@gmail.com by Tuesday, January 30th, to sign up for a vegetable, salad, or dessert, and to obtain directions. Dinner will be served at 6:45 p.m. If you cannot make the meal, you are welcome to drop in about 7:30 p.m. for the tally.

Park anywhere on the street, avoiding blocking fire hydrants and other driveways.

If there is a question about the weather, we will try to make a decision the night before. Contact your area coordinator if you are unsure of the status of the count.



IN MEMORIAM

JAMES (JIM) LUBITZ (1944-2023)

Jim and his wife, Rosa, joined the Howard County Bird Club in 2002. Jim served as a Chapter Director from 2010-2012.

A detailed tribute can be found on the Howard County Bird Club's Website at <https://howardbirds.website/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/James-Lubitz-2.pdf>.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

The January 25 and February 22 board meetings will be held in a hybrid format. All members are welcome to attend in person or virtually.

If you have input, questions, or would like to attend, please email Gregg Petersen at sig29@aol.com.



HOWARD COUNTY BIRD CLUB

Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

P.O. Box 1323

Columbia, MD 21044-1323

January/February 2023 - Inside this Issue

Club Meetings	Welcome New Members
Chirps to the Flock	Membership Renewal
Field Trips	Potluck
November 2023 Rare Birds	Breeding Bird Atlas 3
Roaming in Rome	Mid-winter Count
Beginner Birder's Corner	In Memoriam
Squirrel-Proofing Feeders	Board Meetings
Workshop Success Story	Birding in Italy Photos

BIRDING IN ITALY

PHOTOS BY SARAH ROMERO



Clockwise from top left: Eurasian Spoonbill (large white bird centered); Northern Wheatear; club members Mary Maxey (left) and Mary Lou Clark (right) with Rome in the background; and Little Stint. To read about club members Mary Maxey, Mary Lou Clark, and Sarah Romero birding in Italy, see the article "[Roaming in Rome](#)" by Mary Maxey, beginning on page 4.