



Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

HOWARD COUNTY FEEDER BIRDS

All listed bird species have been recorded at or under bird feeders in Howard County. **Boldfaced** names are most likely to be seen (most are permanent residents). *Italicized* species are so infrequent at feeders that photos or a detailed description must accompany any record.

Wild Turkey	Carolina Wren	Song Sparrow
Mourning Dove	European Starling	<i>Lincoln's Sparrow</i>
<i>Mexican Violetear</i>	Gray Catbird	Swamp Sparrow
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Brown Thrasher	Eastern Towhee
<i>Rufous Hummingbird</i>	Northern Mockingbird	Yellow-breasted Chat
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Eastern Bluebird	<i>Yellow-headed Blackbird</i>
Red-headed Woodpecker	<i>Varied Thrush</i>	Eastern Meadowlark
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Hermit Thrush	Baltimore Oriole
Downy Woodpecker	Cedar Waxwing	Red-winged Blackbird
Hairy Woodpecker	Evening Grosbeak	Brown-headed Cowbird
Pileated Woodpecker	House Finch	Rusty Blackbird
Northern Flicker	Purple Finch	Common Grackle
Blue Jay	Common Redpoll	Cape May Warbler
crow species	<i>White-winged Crossbill</i>	Pine Warbler
Carolina Chickadee	Pine Siskin	Yellow-rumped Warbler
<i>Black-capped Chickadee</i>	American Goldfinch	<i>Western Tanager</i>
Tufted Titmouse	Field Sparrow	Northern Cardinal
Horned Lark	<i>American Tree Sparrow</i>	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Fox Sparrow	Blue Grosbeak
Golden-crowned Kinglet	White-crowned Sparrow	Indigo Bunting
White-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Harris's Sparrow</i>	<i>Painted Bunting</i>
Red-breasted Nuthatch	White-throated Sparrow	<i>Dickcissel</i>
Brown Creeper	<i>Vesper Sparrow</i>	Boldface – common feeder species
Winter Wren	<i>Savannah Sparrow</i>	<i>Italics</i> – rare; photo/writeup required

Species not boldfaced are less frequent at feeders for a number of reasons: some are seen only briefly spring and fall; a few may require a specialized habitat; others may be vagrants rarely recorded locally. Some listed birds are referred to as irruptives. During occasional winters, they may be widespread and common; other years, they may be seen infrequently or not at all. Irruptives include Red-breasted Nuthatch, Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Common Redpoll, White-winged Crossbill, and Pine Siskin. Wintering Eastern Bluebirds, Cedar Waxwings and Baltimore Orioles eat a significant amount of fruit. Unless chopped raisins, apple slices, orange halves, and suet are available, these species are not likely to frequent feeders. Severe weather conditions may force some lingering insect-eaters such as warblers and kinglets to sample suet. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds will come to sugar solutions. From late October into winter, there is a chance that a hummingbird from the West may stray into the county. Leaving your nectar feeders up to attract these wanderers does not affect the ability of hummingbirds to migrate.

Identification Puzzles

A number of listed species pose identification challenges. Confusing duos include Red-headed Woodpecker and Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker and Hairy Woodpecker, Carolina Chickadee and Black-capped Chickadee, Purple Finch and House Finch, White-throated Sparrow and White-crowned Sparrow. (Sparrows as a group are difficult.) Downy Woodpeckers are our smallest woodpecker and the more likely of these two to appear at feeders. The Hairy has a longer, stouter bill

and no black markings on the white outermost tail feathers. Chickadees should be assumed to be Carolinas (the local resident species). Only if you are familiar with ALL of the identifying field marks (including the song) of the Black-capped should you attempt to separate the two. White-throated Sparrows are often common under feeders, particularly in or near brushy woods. Look for the white bib and a dark bill. White-crowned Sparrows prefer the more open areas of western Howard County and are relatively infrequent. Check for their large size, pink bill, wider white crown stripe, and upright stance. In their preferred open areas, they are often associated with clumps of multiflora rose. Winter-plumaged American Goldfinches are sometimes mistakenly identified as flycatchers, vireos, or warblers—species rarely seen at feeders and unlikely in the winter. Despite the impressive tails of some males, all grackles are Common Grackles. Boat-tailed Grackles occur only east of the Bay. Crows can only be identified to species by their call. Seen up close, crows appear large and are sometimes mistaken for Common Ravens. Although the bigger ravens are similar to crows in appearance and their numbers have increased significantly in the county in the last decade, their bills are much larger than that of crows, they sport a wedge-shaped tail tip, and almost never appear at feeders.

COVER

Cover is essential as part of any healthy bird/wildlife habitat. It consists of deciduous and coniferous trees, shrubs, and vines. In addition to various plantings, constructing brush piles and grouping discarded Christmas trees can provide useful refuge. Not only does cover provide nesting sites and perches, it serves as protection from predators, and it offers shelter from chilling winds that are prime killers on long, cold, winter nights. Leave nesting boxes up to be used for roosting by cavity-nesting birds. If possible, preserve dead limbs, snags, and even dead trees with holes, if they do not pose a risk to buildings or powerlines.

WATER

Water is necessary year-round not only for drinking, but also for bathing in order to maintain feathers in peak condition for flight and insulation. It can be offered in multiple ways as still, drip, or running. Either ground-level or above-ground arrangements will be used. For a few species like Cedar Waxwings, water is more likely to be an attractant than food. In winter, specially-designed, thermostatically-controlled electric heaters can keep water thawed.

GRIT

Often overlooked is the need for grit to help digestion. Offering large sand particles, small gravel, crushed oyster shells, and other similar materials after a heavy snowfall or ice storm, when most natural sources of grit are covered, can be vital.

References

All the above material is based on decades of bird records maintained by the Howard County Bird Club. Assembled records are available as the *Howard County Annotated Bird Records*. Also, consult and download a pdf of the *Field Checklist of the Birds of Howard County, Maryland*. Both can be found on the HCBC website (under the “Birding” menu). The QR code for the website is below.

Join the Howard County Bird Club!

For more than 50 years, the HCBC has provided programs, field trips, and workshops open to the public. Its 400+ members participate in seasonal bird counts and research projects. Bird conservation, along with habitat preservation and enhancement, are a part of the club’s mission. Visit the HCBC’s extensive website, including material under the “Beginning Birders” heading.

