



Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

Founded 1972

In Memoriam:

Karen Haynie (Darcy) Heffernan (1951-2026)



Karen at Panama Canopy Tower
Feb 29, 2008



Karen birding at Rockburn Park
May 3, 2008



Karen feeding Red-billed Streamertail
in Jamaica Mar 3, 2016



Karen with Birds sign in Trinidad
Nov 24, 2004

Karen grew up in Rochester, NY. She graduated from Wellesley College where she received a BA in Chemistry in 1973. Karen married her first husband, George Darcy, in 1974 and, shortly afterwards, moved to Miami. She worked for the University of Miami for several years. She thoroughly enjoyed two six-week long field trips during consecutive summers performing tidal pool testing in Vancouver, British Columbia. Karen was an avid fly fisherman and took several vacations to Oregon to fish for salmon. She had an extensive wine collection and a large stamp collection. Karen loved playing the piano. She kept two Peach-faced Lovebirds as pets. She moved to Maryland in 1988. There she worked primarily in the Biotech field in regulatory affairs and quality assurance. Karen and her first husband divorced in 1999.

Karen also joined the Howard County Bird Club (HCBC) in 1999. She met her future husband, Kevin Heffernan, at a HCBC-sponsored weekend trip to Cape May, New Jersey in September 2000. They started dating in February 2001, moved in together in 2005, and were married on June 19, 2014. Over the years, they took 18 national and international birding trips. Karen did not have children of her own, but she did have three stepdaughters and four stepgrandchildren. She relished her role as stepmom and stepgrandmom. One of her favorite birding trips was to the Galapagos with two of her stepdaughters.

Karen was a member of the HCBC Board of Directors from 2002 – 2015 during which time she served as a State Director. She was a frequent field trip and seasonal count participant and co-leader. She was a contributor to the 2nd Maryland/DC Breeding Bird Atlas (2002 – 2006). She and Kevin attended the MOS Convention most years where they co-led bird walks. They had a long-standing tradition of hosting a party on the Friday night of the convention. There they could catch up with many birding friends from all over the state. The wine brought to the party was required to have a bird on the label.

A quiet person by nature, Karen had a sharp eye for spotting birds. Her keen hearing and knowledge of bird songs gave her an edge that made her an especially valuable field companion. Her earliest claim to fame in the county's bird records was photographing a female White-winged Crossbill at one of her feeders on January 9, 2000. May 11, 2011, was another memorable day. While birding with Emy Holdridge and Jo Solem, a stop at Race Road Wetlands established the county's second Least Tern record.

For those seven individuals who were part of the May 6, 2006, Big Day field trip (which included both Karen and Kevin), the highlight of the day came at Marriottsville when Bonnie Ott spotted a dark speck that became a Common Raven. When the identification was assured, the group broke into cheers, hugs, and high-fives. It was a county bird for everyone!

Karen retired in 2011 and that gave her more time to focus on birding. From 2011 – 2016, she consistently topped 200 species locally with a personal high of 218 in 2012.

The morning of April 6, 2014, Karen, Kevin and Howard Patterson were birding at Centennial Park when a flock of 92 Bonaparte's Gulls arrived at the lake. Karen's sharp eyes noticed that one of the birds had a dark underwing making it a Little Gull, a new county record! The bird stayed around the whole day allowing at least 40 birders from throughout the state to record it for their county list.

Karen and Kevin organized and led the three "Little Big Day" trips from 2011 to 2013. These were designed for less experienced birders to be less intense and more flexible than the Big Day trips.

Karen loved all things about nature. When on bird walks, she would notice butterflies, dragonflies, wildflowers, mushrooms, frogs, toads, the occasional fox or otter, etc. She often would point out interesting lichen patterns on tree trunks. In the mid-teens, she and Kevin became heavily involved in the Howard County Butterfly Survey where her keen eyes served her well. In 2018, they took a trip with Linda Hunt to the National Butterfly Center in Mission, Texas. Karen helped Kevin design a native plant pollinator garden in 2020. She kept many bird feeders full for years. When a squirrel would, inevitably, end up on the platform feeder, she would let out a hoot, go out on the deck and clap her hands and stamp her feet putting the fear of god into the poor squirrel. It was a morning ritual.

Due to her illness, she stopped birding in 2019. She hung up her binoculars with a county total of 278, which at this time is tied for ninth most in the county. She was very proud of the fact that she was in the top 10 in the county and tickled that she ended her birding career with two more species than Kevin.

—Kevin Heffernan