



# Howard County Bird Club

**A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society**

## **Annual Report June 2016 - May 2017**

Highlights of the 45<sup>th</sup> year of the Club from mid-spring 2016 through mid-spring 2017 included the county's second Trumpeter Swan which arrived in late May and stayed until mid-September. Other specialties were White-fronted Goose, Ross's Goose, White Ibis, Swallow-tailed Kite (second modern record and first photographed), Long-eared Owl, Snow Bunting, and Painted Bunting. A flock of 20 Sandhill Cranes and 16 Black Terns both were record highs, by far, of those species. A Clay-colored Sparrow discovered in early April 2017 was still present three weeks later for the first spring record and longest stay ever of this species.

Birders reported (on eBird) 227 species for 2016 in Howard County, one up from the 226 species in 2015.

### ***Organization***

Club membership grew to 233 voting members for the year (an increase of 24 over last year). There has been a noticeable upward trend since 2010-2011.

The eight Standing Committee Chairs were Joe Hanfman, Field Trips; Jo Solem, Ornithological Data and Records; Kurt Schwarz, Conservation; Howard Patterson, Newsletter; Bob Solem, Webmaster; Kathie Lillie, Potluck Dinner; Jane Geuder, Programs; and Jeff Friedhoffer, Seed Sale. Chapter Director Nancy McAllister completed her second year, while Woody Merkle completed his first year.

At the April business meeting, the following slate of officers was elected for the 2017-18 year: John Harris, President; Mary Lou Clark, Vice-President; Chuck Stirrat, Secretary; Cindy Albright, Treasurer; and David Sandler, our new Chapter Director.

At the state level, Robin Todd served as Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) Vice President, and Kurt Schwarz continued as MOS Conservation Chair. Karen Heffernan, John McKitterick, and Robin Todd continued as State Directors.

### ***Meetings and Programs***

Monthly club meetings were held at the Robinson Nature Center (RNC) on the second Thursday from September through May. Jane Geuder continued to recruit great speakers. Attendance averaged 62. Members provided their photographs of birds (mostly) and other wildlife, before each meeting. John McKitterick, with assistance from Kathie Lillie, ably managed the audio/video resources for our speakers.

During the Club's December business meeting, Barbara Johnson, President, MOS, spoke about MOS goals and activities, and Marion Clement and Colin Rees spoke about The Maryland Bird Conservation Initiative.

Brief descriptions of the Club's 2016-2017 programs follow.

- Thursday, September 8, 2016 "The Impact of Buildings on Birds," by Lindsay Jacks, Director of Lights Out Baltimore. This Baltimore Bird Club non-profit organization strives to make the city safe for migrating birds. Lights Out Baltimore members walk a five-mile loop downtown during migration to rescue injured birds and collect dead ones.
- Thursday, October 13, 2016 "The Messenger," a 90 minute documentary that investigates the threats to bird life that have decimated populations worldwide. Amazing secrets of the bird world come to light for the first time in this acclaimed and visually thrilling film.
- Thursday, November 10, 2016 "My Lifetime Quest for Extinct and Vanishing Birds," by Chandler Robbins. Chan began birding when declining species were very much in the news: Heath Hens were still being counted on Martha's Vineyard; unconfirmed sightings of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers were coming from southeastern states. Rather than pursue a long life list, he concentrated on the rarest birds. His presentation included pictures of some of the rarest or even (now) extinct, species he saw in a lifetime of birding the seven continents. Chan co-authored the Golden Field Guide that most of us have in our collection of bird books. His many research projects spanned decades and he received many awards and honors for his work. Over 100 members and guests enjoyed Mr. Robbins' program.
- Thursday, December 8, 2016 "Of Rice and Rails," by Greg Kearns, Naturalist, Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission. Greg began his research on Soras in 1987 at Jug Bay Wetlands. After banding more than 4,000 of these secretive marsh-dwelling rails, he and USGS biologist Mike Haramis linked the decline of rails to the increase in Canada Geese, resulting in depleting the Patuxent River marshes of wild rice. Greg provided an update on the results of a management plan begun some 20 years ago. Greg has shared natural history programs in the past as well as set up Club field trips to Jug Bay.
- Thursday, January 12, 2017 the scheduled program, "Owls in Myth and Culture: In-depth Results from a Global Study," by David H. Johnson, Director Global Owl Project was postponed. GLOW is a consortium of 450 researchers, managers and passionate owl people working on the science and conservation of owls in 65 countries. David and his teams have interviewed 7,000 people around the world to learn what societies believe about owls. Archeological and anthropological data enrich this perspective on owls. Dr. Steve Sheffield, Bowie State University faculty and a fellow collaborator of Mr. Johnson, gave an extemporaneous synopsis of what he knew of Mr. Johnson's research and his own experience with owls.

- Thursday, February 9, 2017 "Making Conservation Work for America," by Rachel Joiner, Major Gifts Officer, the Conservation Fund. This non-profit organization balances environmental sustainability and economic development to protect land, water and wildlife while generating jobs and making communities more vibrant. Rachel discussed projects in Maryland and other East Coast areas.
- Thursday, March 9, 2017 "Mom's Big Year," by Nancy McAllister. This ambitious mother with three children, husband and two unexpected jobs spent 2016 trying to list as many birds as possible. Nancy traveled to U. S. hotspots from coast to coast. Returning to her life-long passion for nature and travel proved to be both exhausting and exhilarating for this club member, as she encountered beautiful birds and fascinating people along the way.
- Thursday, May 11, 2017 "Three Decades of Birding Howard County," by Bonnie Ott. Bonnie described how the birds have changed along with changes in Howard County. Bonnie told us how and where to find birds in suburbia. Bonnie drew on years of leading field trips for our club and her extensive personal birding to show us some of her "hot spots".

### ***Annual Potluck Dinner***

Kathie Lillie ran our annual March Potluck at the Robinson Nature Center (RNC) with her usual expertise. Thirty-one members and guests, plus two RNC staff, attended and enjoyed excellent food. Door prizes were awarded to the delight of several lucky members. After dinner, several members shared some excellent photographs from places such as Alaska, Finland, Costa Rica, Namibia, and more. In addition, there were photos from the ever-surprising backyards and feeders, and in commemoration of the late Chan Robbins, a mention of his favorite bird, the House Wren.

### ***Mom's Big Year***

One of our members, Nancy McAllister did an ABA Big Year in 2016 - and it was a Big Year with a twist! Nancy has three young children, two jobs, a husband and all the associated time constraints and challenges that go along with them.

Nancy reported late in 2016 that following trips to Florida, Ohio, Texas, Maine, Southeastern Arizona, Southern California, and New Jersey, that she was excited to report that her goal of 500 was within reach! After a run to North Point State Park, MD for the Snow Buntings in late November, Nancy hit 498 species. At that time she wrote: "Will I make it over 500? Will I squeeze in any more trips? What will Maryland turn up in terms of exciting chases to wrap up the year? What will my final birds for 2016 be?"

Well, Nancy did hit 500 in 2016, and then some! She closed out 2016 with bird number 526, a Saltmarsh Sparrow in South Carolina, on December 18. Nancy shared her inspirational big-year story at our March club meeting and she will take it on the road for presentations at bird clubs and several birding festivals.

### ***Club Field Trips and Annual Counts***

Over 400 Howard County Bird Club members and guests enjoyed 34 field trips in 2016-2017 and 168 species were observed (during the period of May 2016 – April 2017). Each field trip was recorded in eBird and the lists were shared with those with eBird accounts, Species and count listings of each trip, often with group photographs and pictures of notable birds, were posted on the Club's web-site. Joe Hanfman coordinated these field trips and the following members served as trip leaders: Jeff Culler, Ralph Cullison, Warren Cummings, Wes Earp, Joe Hanfman, Kevin & Karen Heffernan, Mike Kerwin, Allen Lewis, Bonnie Ott, Richard, Renee, and Ryan Peters, Russ Ruffing, Kurt Schwarz, Jay Sheppard, Linda Smith, Robin Todd, Anthony VanSchoor.

Howard County Bird Club conducted three annual bird counts:

- 69<sup>th</sup> May Count (2016)
  - 148 species
  - Compiler: Kevin Heffernan
- 22nd Fall Count (2016)
  - 125 species
  - Compilers: Mike McClure and Chuck Stirrat
- 31st Midwinter Count (2017)
  - 88 species
  - Compiler: Joe Hanfman

Each count concluded with a potluck dinner and tally-rally.

Members also participated in the National Audubon Society Triadelphia Christmas Count, which includes Howard County locations, compiled by David Holmes.

### ***Conservation***

The Howard County Bird Club was part of a coalition that defeated a bill that would open 1600+ acres of farmland to massive development. HCBC Conservation Chair Kurt Schwarz drafted a letter, signed by HCBC President John Harris, and assembled a coalition of Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Sierra Club, and 1,0000 Friends of Maryland to testify against it before the County Council in February. The Bill was defeated 3 to 2.

A subsequent bill, which would permit farmers to recover lost land value as a result of restrictive zoning, was supported by HCBC, with Kurt again drafting a letter signed also by John, and testifying before the Council in March. This time he only succeeded in mobilizing the Sierra Club, which also testified in favor. All parties testifying at the March hearing supported the bill. The bill was passed by the Council on April 3, 2017.

Lastly, HCBC intervened when the Department of Natural Resources opened Maryland's last remaining broadleaf old growth forest, Belt Woods, to general hunting. The DNR plan would increase human impact over 400 times. HCBC joined an MOS letter to DNR protesting this

change, and seeking restoration of more-tailored hunting to control deer over-browsing. A dialog is in place now between MOS, HCBC, and DNR.

### ***Publications, Web Site and Facebook***

Howard Patterson continued his excellent work as editor of “The Goldfinch”, producing the five issues (September, November, January, March, and May) of Volume 45. Each Goldfinch issue includes:

- A description of upcoming club meetings, provided by Jane Geuder
- Bird records for the previous period, including notable sightings by Club members, compiled by Joanne Solem
- Seasonal count summaries, provided by the compilers of the three counts
- New member welcome
- Notice of upcoming Board meetings
- Other articles on topics of interest to Club members.

Bob Solem’s frequent “NewsGrams,” sent to Club member’s e-mail accounts, provided late-breaking news items and needed reminders.

Bob Solem continued to manage and refine the Club website ([howardbirds.org](http://howardbirds.org)) with his customary rigor. The website is a valuable source of information for members and the general public. The website includes information about club activities and birds, butterflies, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, fungi, lichens, odonates, mosses, and bees. This information-rich resource contains many photographs and the site is now “mobile-friendly”, making it easier to use on iPhone and Android devices. The site also includes:

- Directions to important birding sites in Howard County and detailed descriptions of these sites
- Back-issues of The Goldfinch publication
- Results of Fall, Mid-Winter, and May Counts
- Results of field trips.

Anthony VanSchoor continued to manage the Club’s Facebook page, a valuable means for Club outreach. Anthony continually assesses various approaches to generating “likes,” visits, and comments. He has found that posts with new video of local and familiar birds generate the most traffic. For example, a short video featuring a Pileated Woodpecker reached 996 people, up 100% from recent posts, and 153 people engaged in these posts in some way by liking, commenting, sharing or staying on the page to see and find out more about the HCBC. In the last year, the most popular post was about the Club’s "How to Find an Owl" event, led by Jay Sheppard. Word of this event spread quickly through the Facebook birding community to surrounding counties and even nearby states. The total traffic was over 2,000.

As of this writing, the statistics for the HCBC Facebook page are as follows:

Total likes and following: 408

New likes in the last year: 102

### ***2016 Butterfly-related Activities***

The general purpose the Howard County Butterfly Survey initiated in 2013 as a joint project of the Howard County Bird Club and the Howard County [Recreation and Parks is to gather information about the status of species historic to Howard County. Activities in 2016 suggest that the survey is also providing a framework for an increasing number of butterfly enthusiasts to become more knowledgeable and provide information about butterflies from diverse county-wide locations.

Bob Solem created a new on-line “Incidental Butterfly Survey” form for the 2016 season. This enabled casual observers to document more than 244 random sightings from more than 35 locations in addition to the nine participants who completed formal surveys at 17 locations. Twenty-eight home owners also submitted reports of butterflies in their gardens. Over 110 people participated in counting butterflies during six field trips and the annual Dragonfly and Fall Bird Counts. More than 60 people attended seminars on butterfly identification and gardening. Approximately 175 people, an increase of 42 since 2015, received periodic emails regarding butterfly-related information and activities. In addition, members of the Howard County Bird Club and Howard County Recreation and Parks continue to monitor and help maintain the new butterfly/pollinator meadows at Centennial Park and Daisy Road.

At the completion of the 2016 season surveyors had tallied over 21,695 individual butterflies of 74 species (including 626 Monarch adults). Surveyors documented the existence of over a dozen rare/unusual species, including Checkered White (previously recorded in 2008), Tawny Emperor (“third all-time sighting in the county,” Dick Smith), Giant Swallowtail, Harvester, Little Yellow, Dusted Skipper, and Long-tailed Skipper. In October, Bonnie Ott photographed a species considered by some to be a candidate for extirpation in Howard and all surrounding counties, the Bronze Copper, last recorded in 1996. Only Hayhurst’s Scallopwing, Baltimore Checkerspot and five skippers of unknown status were not reported.

Dick Smith was especially interested in documenting the status of species historic to the various regions of Maryland. In Howard County he initiated the butterfly survey, constantly prodding us to “keep an eye out” for certain butterflies unseen for many years. With Dick Smith’s sudden death in August, finally documenting all these species in one year is bittersweet.

### ***External Relations and Outreach***

As in previous years, Club members gave a lot of their time by staffing the Club’s table exhibit. Members staffed the display at the RNC annual Fall open house in September. Club members also led several walks for the Robinson Nature Center.

GreenFest 2017 – HCBC members participated in the Howard County GreenFest at Howard County Community College on April 22, 2017. Members staffed a booth and distributed materials and information about the club, Linda Hunt presented a program on backyard butterflies, and jointly, with Howard County Recreation and Parks, the documentary *The Messenger* was shown.

MOS Retreat – HCBC members Mary Lou Clark, Vice President, Sue Muller, Kurt Schwarz, Conservation Chair and Robin Todd, Vice President, MOS, participated in the MOS retreat held in Baltimore on January 28, 2017.

Members John Harris, Kevin and Karen Heffernan and Woody Merkle conducted a joint program at Mt. Pleasant (10524 Old Frederick Rd, Woodstock, MD) with the Howard County Conservancy entitled “Birding by Ear.” The program was well attended and several participants joined HCBC after the event.

Members John Harris and Woody Merkle conducted a joint program with Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks and the Howard County Master Gardeners at the Middle Patuxent Environmental Area (MPEA). Both adults and children enjoyed a walk around the Wildlife Loop which included sightings of Wood Ducks and other birds and comments about the natural features of the area provided by Recreation and Park’s Jeff Claffy and Cheryl Farfaras.

#### ‘SkyWatch’ Completed for HCC’s Mount Pleasant Property

The Howard County Bird Club and the Howard County Conservancy (HCC) agreed on a joint initiative to create a SkyWatch site at Mt. Pleasant Farm. Initially conceived as a hawk-watch area at a favorite location of Howard County raptor enthusiasts, the site can also be used for observation of other wildlife, astronomy, and HCC educational programs. The site is a simple flat area with a wood chip surface that has 360° horizon views for good viewing during both spring and fall migration. Basic construction was completed by September 2016. Benches have been installed and signage will follow. HCBC will fund and coordinate maintenance of the site. Special thanks to Mike Kerwin, the HCBC lead, and to Woody Merkel, HCBC member and HCC volunteer, who acted as key liaison between the club and the conservancy throughout the planning and coordination processes. More than 2,500 migrating Broad-winged Hawks were observed from the sky-watch in September, along with small numbers of other hawks, falcons, and eagles. The site will be named the "Chandler S. Robbins SkyWatch" in honor of the late Chandler Robbins.

***Fund-raising, Conservation, and Habitat Preservation***

Regular contributions of \$ 3,128 came in from members throughout the year including \$750 from the bird seed sale. Using those funds, plus retained earnings from previous years, HCBC was able to make substantial donations to the following:

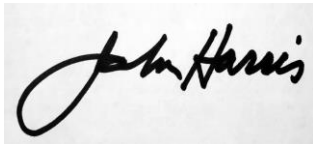
Howard County Conservancy	\$5,000
SkyWatch installation	\$4,054
Meadow intern + expenses	\$1,300
Middle Patuxent Environmental Area trees in woodcock area	\$1,170
Dick Smith Memorial tree purchase	<u>\$ 155</u>
Total	\$11,679

The total funds donated to habitat conservation over **40** years are now just over \$84,000.

**Financial activity**

The treasurer, Cindy Albright, with the assistance of Bob Solem, the webmaster, continued to refine online payment options for memberships and donations. Checks received from members (that aren't made online) are scanned from the treasurer's cell phone to the bank. These are all tracked in an updated 2017 non-profit version of QuickBooks purchased for \$50 from Tech Soup.

Respectfully submitted,



John B. Harris  
President, Howard County Bird Club