

Howard County Bird Club, Annual Report, June 2009 - May 2010

The 38th year of the Howard County Bird Club was notable for a record high calendar-year bird species count, a cancelled Midwinter Count due to February snows, and an attempt to revive our seed sale as means of funding habitat preservation.

Organization

Voting membership dropped to 206, the lowest in decades. In November, President Tom Miller stepped down from his position for personal reasons and was replaced by Vice-president Ward Ebert.

Meetings and Programs

Regular meetings were held on the second Thursday of each month except for February when we were forced to cancel because of the closure of the Howard County Recreation and Parks headquarters building where we normally meet. Average attendance for the seven meetings through April was 55 persons. The high was 70 and the low was 43.

In March, the club held its annual Potluck dinner which was very successful with approximately 35 participants and many stunning photos.

Field Trips and Annual Counts

There were a total of 30 field trips during the year not including counts and unadvertised responses to rare bird alerts – all trip reports are posted on our website with species seen and the occasional photograph. We held all-day trips to Blackwater NWR and the Delaware shore. Two “Big Days” were held, one in October (sparrows) and one in May. There was also a special bird-photography outing.

The long record of chapter bird counts continued with the 16th annual Fall Count and the annual May count (whose origins predate the club), however what would have been the 25th annual Midwinter Count was cancelled by consensus that residual snow would make for safety issues and inability to access many areas. Data would not have been comparable to that of other midwinter counts and would be relatively meaningless.

The annual compilation of seasonal ornithological records was again performed by Jo Solem. The compilation of the annual species count for the county was resumed and historical records were computerized by Ward Ebert. A web page added last year shows several decades of records, and of note is the total of 241 species reported for calendar 2009 far surpassed the previous record of 236 species.

The 4th annual odonate count was held in July, coordinated by June Tveekrem. The club has actively supported the Maryland Department of Natural Resources as it begins a five-year Maryland Amphibian & Reptile Atlas (MARA) effort by hosting and maintaining web pages for Howard County. Club member Sue Muller is the county coordinator.

Fund-raising, Conservation, and Habitat Preservation

Last year's contribution of \$1,800 to the American Bird Conservancy's Thick-Billed Parrot Habitat Preservation Effort appears to have been well spent based on ABC published reports of successful breeding in provided nest boxes.

Our fund-raiser bird seed sale was held in the early fall this year (2009) after a one-year hiatus. A total of \$1,420 from the seed sale, bookstore profits, and individual contributions was distributed to three worthy causes. A donation of \$420 was made to support American Woodcock habitat restoration in the Middle Patuxent Environmental Area in response to a proposal from the Howard County Recreation and Parks managers of the MPEA; \$200 was given to support All Creatures Great and Small, a local wildlife rehabilitation facility in the county; lastly, a contribution of \$800 was made to the American Bird Conservancy for Cerulean Warbler habitat preservation.

Once again, our very active Conservation Committee Chairman, Kurt Schwarz, wrote numerous letters supporting conservation issues all over the country to the appropriate authorities.

Youth Birding

For the YMOS backpack program we again held an essay contest (My favorite Bird Watching Experience). Participation was less than hoped, but we had a winner honored at our March club meeting. We decided to strike a slightly different course in hopes of improved response by replacing the essay contest with an art contest. Advertising of the prizes of backpacks for two winners has begun, with the project set to conclude in October. By moving the contest to the summer we hope to have less conflict with school activities.

Publications and Web Site

Our web site continues to be changed and improved by our webmaster, Bob Solem. The previously published book, Birding Howard County, Maryland, by Joanne K. Solem, is now established on the website and is continually updated. Our website has drawn many kudos from across the state for content and presentation. Recent additions include many excellent photographs of birds taken by club members in Howard County. The site, as previously noted, also hosts current data on the DNR amphibian and reptile atlas.

The club newsletter, The Goldfinch, is published five times a year; field trips and programs are publicized on the website. Archives of all issues dating back to the first issue (December 1972) are available on line.

External Relations and Outreach

Last year we were approached by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) folks about starting periodic (annual) bird walks for the public. We advised on dates, location, and provided leaders for the walks in the springs of 2009 and 2010. WSSC allows MOS access for our seasonal counts and we place them on distribution for the Goldfinch in which results are reported.

We have been actively supporting the Maryland DNR atlasing efforts as noted above under Field Trips and Counts.

The American Bird Conservancy has been a beneficiary of our recent monetary donations, which support both local and continental projects.

Sue Muller, a club member and Howard County Recreation and Parks employee, was the recipient of a MOS Eleanor Robbins scholarship to attend the Joy of Birding workshop on Hog Island, Maine, this June.

We support local wildlife rehabilitators, All Creatures Great and Small, in several ways: first, our website directs appropriate traffic to their website; second, we provide modest financial support from our charitable contributions each year; third, we provided a letter of recommendation in support of their application for more significant funding from a charitable trust.

Occasionally, we receive requests for talks at local schools. When these are within the county we try to find folks to match the needs. At least two of our members have volunteered this year for talks to children about hawks, backyard birds, dragonflies, and butterflies.

Lastly, we have supported two other county activities. A local "Greenfest" is held annually at Howard Community College in Columbia and we take the opportunity to display mounted birds, photos, and literature to attract interested citizens to learn about the club. We also support Earth Day in April by leading a bird walk at Mt. Pleasant that is coordinated by organizers at the Howard County Conservancy.

Respectfully submitted,

Ward Ebert
President, Howard County Bird Club