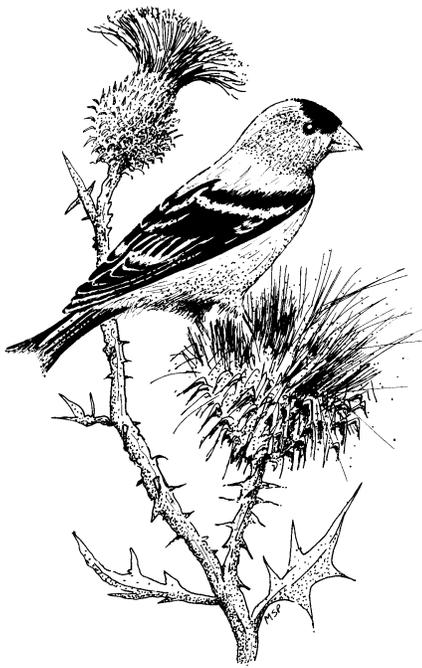


The Goldfinch

Newsletter of the Howard County Bird Club • A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society



NINETEENTH ANNUAL MIDWINTER COUNT SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2004

BY MARY-JO BETTS AND JO SOLEM

Join the Howard County Bird Club's Nineteenth Annual Midwinter Count on Saturday, February 7, 2004. **Mary-Jo Betts** (301-596-5859 or mbetts1030@aol.com) and **Jo Solem** (301-725-5037 or odenata@msn.com) are the count coordinators. You may volunteer to participate by signing up at a meeting, by calling Mary-Jo, or by contacting one of the area coordinators:

- Area 1 Mark Wallace 301-725-6370
- Area 2 Emy Holdridge 410-964-0196
- Area 3 Maureen & Dave Harvey 410-795-3117
- Area 4 Mike McClure 410-531-2780
- Area 5 Kevin Heffernan 410-418-8731
- Area 6 Bonnie Ott 410-461-3361
- Area 7 Kurt Schwarz 410-461-1643

If you have covered a particular location for many years, you may call the coordinator of the area and

indicate your desire to cover it again. If you wish to be placed with a more experienced birder, be sure to let the coordinator know. Beginning birders are always welcome, as are individuals who wish to count only for part of the day. A checklist for the count is included with this newsletter. If you wish to count only at your feeder, call Jo or Mary-Jo and request a feeder form.

A fitting and much-anticipated conclusion to the day is the evening potluck tally at **Martha and Don Waugh's** (9522 Angelina Circle, Columbia 21045; 410-381-8841). It is an opportunity to compare your special birds with those other people sighted—or to commiserate about your misses. The club furnishes the main dish. Please call the Waughs by Wednesday, February 4 to reserve

(Midwinter Count continues on page 2.)

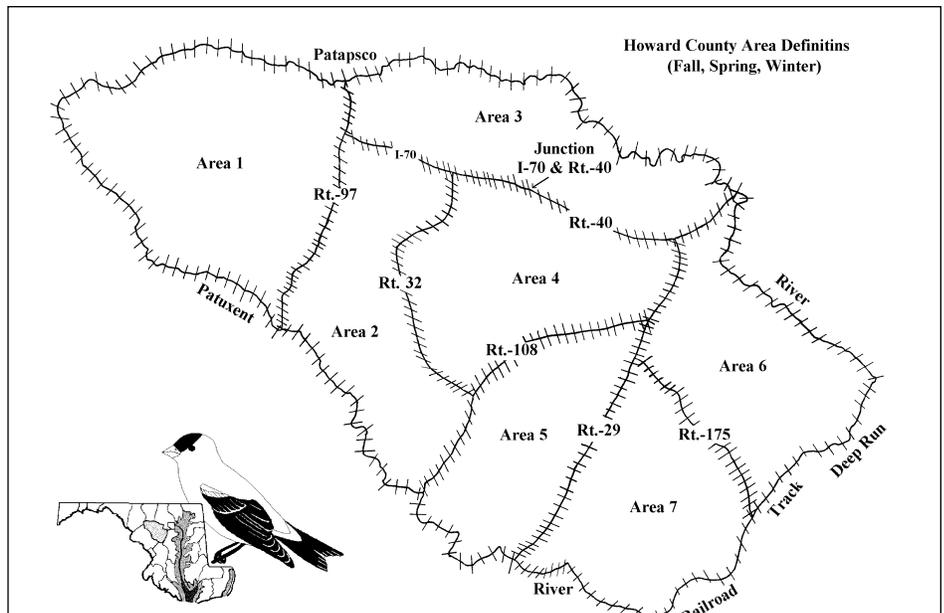
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Dave Holyoke, *Editor*
Suzanne Probst, *Graphic Artist*
Joanne Solem, *Proofreader*

Anyone is welcome to contribute articles or ideas which you think will be of interest to other birders. Copy may be mailed, or e-mailed to Dave Holyoke
3557 Conchita Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21042
david.holyoke@ssa.gov
Please visit the Club's website at www.howardbirds.org



ANNUAL POTLUCK DINNER

BY MARY-JO BETTS

The annual potluck dinner will again be held at the Owen Brown Community Center on Saturday, March 13, 2004. The social hour starts at 6:30 p.m. and the dinner starts at 7:00 p.m. All club members and their guests are invited to share in the fun, the food and the program. The club furnishes beverages, social hour snacks, rolls and eating utensils. Those attending may bring a main dish, a salad, a vegetable or a dessert. Be sure to mark your dishes and any accompanying serving implements with your name so we can get them back to the right person. If you cannot cook, other arrangements can be made. Everyone is encouraged to participate in the slide presentation so bring your nature slides.

You MUST reserve in advance so we can arrange for sufficient beverages, etc. You may sign up at either the

January or February club meeting, or contact **Mary-Jo Betts** by Friday, March 12, 2004 at 301-596-5859, or mbetts1030@aol.com. You will need to specify the number of attendees and what food you are bringing. Let Mary-Jo know if you would like to come early to help set up, help clean up afterwards or help in any other way. If you are a new member, or if you have not attended our dinner before, we strongly encourage you to come and get to know others who share your passion for birds and birding. There will be many delicious dishes, great slide presentations and prizes. So mark your calendars and come join the fun!

Directions: The Owen Brown Community Center is located on the east side of Columbia at 6800 Cradlerock Way, off Broken Land Parkway from Route 29. There is ample parking.

MEMBER APPRECIATION BY KURT SCHWARZ

At the back of virtually every Howard County Bird Club meeting, you will find a table well-populated with bird and other nature books; and behind all that, the smiling face of our long-serving book shop manager, **Ann Marie Raterman**. I frankly do not know how long Ann Marie has fulfilled this function, but it predates my membership in the club, which began in 1995. Ann Marie has managed our bookstore independently and has always had a nice selection of titles of interest to members. She has even stocked titles at the suggestion of members, some of which, alas, have not sold too well (e.g. "That Gunk on Your Windshield." We won't go into who suggested she buy that one!)

In addition to great selection and convenience, all books are sold at a discount off the list price. While the book shop is not designed to operate at a profit, on occasion it has generated a surplus. These funds have been put into the habitat fund generated by the seed sale. So Ann Marie's work has an impact at more than the local level; it's international if you take the habitat fund into account. Please stop by the book shop at a meeting; buy a book if you like, but at least say, "Hi," and "Thanks!" to Ann Marie.

MIDWINTER COUNT *(Continued from page 1.)*

space, to sign up for a vegetable, salad, or dessert, and to obtain directions. If you cannot make it to the meal, you are welcome to drop in about 7:30 p.m. for the tally.

Unfortunately, a count during this season may coincide with a major snow or ice storm. Safety is more

important than counting birds. If there is a question about the weather, we will try to make a decision the night before. Do not hesitate to call your area coordinators, **Mary-Jo** or **Jo** (between 5:00 & 6:00 a.m.) if you are unsure of the status of the count.

DO WE HAVE YOUR CORRECT E-MAIL ADDRESS?

BY BOB SOLEM

In January 1, the Howard County Bird Club will send a special e-mail to all members who have provided e-mail addresses. This special message is to verify that we have your correct e-mail address in our files. A separate e-mail will go to members who are on the Rare Bird Alert to verify their e-mail addresses. Periodically we send out a special e-mail to verify the addresses you provide. If the e-mail is returned because of delivery failure, we remove your e-mail address from the system.

If you receive the e-mail(s), you need do nothing; the system works. But if you want to receive e-mail from the club and did not receive the January verification message, send an e-mail to ODENATA@MSN.COM and ask to have your e-mail address added (or corrected). Remember, this service is only available to members.

CALENDAR OF PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS

PROGRAMS are held at **Longfellow Elementary School**, 5470 Hesperus Drive, Columbia. Meeting is cancelled if schools are closed for any reason. Hospitality session and bookstore begin at 7:30 p.m. Meeting/program begins at 8:00 p.m. For further information, call **Kurt Schwarz** at 410-461-1643.

Thursday, January 8 "Little Brown Birds: Identifying the Sparrows," by Walter Ellison. Our speaker will help sort out some of the common and less common sparrows of the Mid-Atlantic region.

Thursday, February 12 "The Usual Suspects: An Unusual Display of Central Maryland Birds," by Greg Futral. Greg has been a member of the Baltimore Bird Club and has joined our club for numerous field trips. His photos are from Conowingo, Hart-Miller Island, Aberdeen Proving Ground and other familiar local areas.

FIELD TRIPS are a great way to improve birding skills, explore new places and meet other birders. Plan to arrive at the meeting area with enough time to be prepared to begin birding at the designated time. Carpooling is encouraged. Come prepared with appropriate footwear and gear (the trip description will offer advice). The leader has the option to cancel due to inclement weather. Directions for trips not on ADC maps may be found on the howardbirds.org website. If you have questions, call or e-mail the trip leader at the number/address listed in the trip description, or field trip coordinator, **Bonnie Ott, 410-461-3361** or bonnieott@verizon.net

To help make trips successful please stay behind the leader, keep talking to a minimum and stay with the group. Don't hesitate to ask questions or alert the leader to something you've spotted. Howard Bird Club members will be given priority on trips that are limited by number of participants. No pets.

START YOUR 2004 BIRD LIST

**Jan. 1, Thursday. Half to Full Day.
8:00 a.m.**

Meet at the Centennial Park boat ramp. (Call Bonnie for information 410-461-3361.) We'll spend the morning searching the county for as many species as possible. The trip will focus on the Columbia lakes with easy walking. If the weather and birding co-operate we will stop for lunch at a local restaurant and head out to Triadelphia reservoir for the afternoon. Facilities available.

MARTIN LUTHER KING WEEKEND

Jan. 17-19, Saturday to Monday
3-day Maryland Eastern Shore birding extravaganza. All Maryland birding trip: Ocean City, E. Vaughn and Assateague. Plus a trip to the *Sea Breeze* for lunch and the Kelp Gull. Limit of 16

MIDWINTER COUNT AND POTLUCK TALLY

Feb. 7, Saturday.
(See article on page 1.)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

Board meetings are held the *fourth* Thursday of the month at 7:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted, at the home of the board member listed. If directions are required, please call the hosting board member.

December: No board meeting

January 22, Thursday

Kevin Heffernan
9775 Diversified Lane
Ellicott City, 21042 • 410-418-8731

February 26, Thursday

Jo Solem
10617 Graeloch Road
Laurel, 20723 • 301-725-5037

WINTER ATLAS MEETINGS

January 25, Sunday

OR

February 28, Saturday

(See article on page 4.)

 **BIRDS OF WINTER AT BON SECOURS
Feb. 29, Sunday. 1.5 hours. 9:00 a.m.**

Meet at the visitor's parking lot.
Leaders—Michele Wright, 410-465-6057
and Eva Sunell, 410-995-0029.

Easy walking on the grounds of this lovely spiritual center. Look for sounds and sights of the season. Mature woodlands, fields and field edges host an assortment of our resident winter species. Open sky for flyovers. Facilities available.

LARK AND PIPIT SEARCH ON UNDERWOOD ROAD

March 6, Saturday. 3 hours. 8:00 a.m.
Meet at 32/70 park-and-ride.

Leader—Ralph Cullison, 410-442-2181.
We will walk country roads in search of pipits and larks. It's always possible a rarity may be among them. Great view of the sky for flyovers. Scopes useful. No facilities.

POTLUCK DINNER

March 13, Saturday.
(See article on page 2.)

 =Great for beginning birders



Seed Sale Thanks

By Eileen Clegg

The bird club had another successful seed sale this fall. I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to the following club members who gave of their time and efforts:

Mary-Jo Betts
Bill and Karan Blum
Martha Chestem
John Finedore
Christina Glorioso
Shiras Guion
Mike Long
Carol Newman
Suzanne Probst
Don and Jan Randle
Ann Marie Raterman
Kurt Schwarz
Bob and Jo Solem
Chuck Stirrat
Eva Sunell
Mark Wallace

Thanks to their contributions, the day was a big success.

A special thanks also to everyone who purchased seed. Your generous purchase will enable the club to make much needed monetary donations to worthwhile conservation efforts. We continue to look for ways to increase seed sales, and I challenge all club members to try to get one extra person (non-member) to buy seed next year! Thanks again for your support. I hope to see you at next fall's seed sale.

2004 MOS CONFERENCE

BY MARY-JO BETTS

The 2004 Annual MOS Conference will be held **June 11, 12 and 13 at Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland.** Mark your calendar now to join us for a great long weekend of birding. There will be many exciting activities and field trips planned by the conference committee. Detailed information will be mailed at a later date.

Winter Atlas Meetings

By Jo Solem and Bonnie Ott

Howard County Coordinators

In anticipation of the third field season of the Maryland Breeding Bird Atlas Project, Howard County coordinators are again scheduling two identical winter afternoon meetings for all block coordinators and field workers. Summary of data from the first two successful years and habitats to search for missing species will be part of the agenda. Bob Schaefer's nesting Red-headed Woodpecker video will be shown. **Jay Sheppard** will assist in the presentation.

Plan to attend one (not both) of the following: Sunday, January 25 *or* Saturday, February 28, 2004 from 1:15 to 4:00 p.m. Sessions will be held in the meeting room of the Miller Branch library on Frederick Rd. The capacity of the room is 50 so it is necessary to register with Bonnie at 410-461-3361 (leave a message). This will also enable us to reach you in case of weather-related cancellation. A make-up session will be held in the event of a cancellation.

Anyone new to the area or to the atlas concept is invited to contact Bonnie for more information. Atlasing is an exciting means of expanding birding skills while learning about the behavior of breeding birds through direct observation. There are opportunities to help with this research project in Howard County as well as in other parts of the state.

2003 ANNUAL LISTS DUE

BY JANE COSKREN

A list of all the birds seen in the county during the 2003 calendar year is being compiled for the 24th consecutive year. Did we break any records this year? Only you can help us decide. Assemble your sightings for the year (even if the list was compiled in your neighborhood or your yard) and mail to **Jane Coskren**, 6324 Sandchain Road, Columbia MD 21045 any time after December 31, but not later than March 3, 2004. The length of the list isn't important because your list may contain the bird that will make 2003 a year for the record books.



A bag of suet may entice a hungry Downy Woodpecker to stop and dine in your backyard.

Howard County Department of Recreation & Parks Offering National Wildlife Federation's Habitat Stewards™ Training

By Brenda Belensky



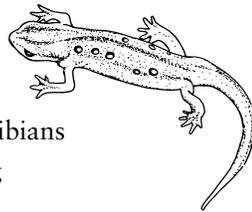
To help individuals and communities create and enhance wildlife habitat, **Howard County Recreation & Parks, the National Wildlife Federation and Wild Birds Unlimited** will be offering Habitat Stewards™ training in spring, 2004.

A Habitat Stewards™ Volunteer is:

Someone who is interested in wildlife, ecology, gardening and habitat conservation, and believes in hands-on, experiential learning. A Habitat Steward is also someone who is available to assist members of their community to create an environment that is beneficial for humans and for wildlife by helping others develop and restore wildlife habitat in backyards, schoolyards, and other private and public areas.

Training Topics Include:

- Discovering Native Plants
- Local Natural History
- Butterflies & Insects
- Birds, Mammals & Amphibians
- Site Inventory & Mapping
- Gardening for Wildlife
- Water Features in the Garden



Training Series Schedule:

The series will be offered at Recreation & Parks Headquarters on the following dates in 2004*:

- Tuesday, March 16, 5:30—8:30 p.m.
- Thursday, March 18, 5:30—8:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, March 23, 5:30—8:30 p.m.
- Thursday, March 25, 5:30—8:30 p.m.
- Saturday, March 27, 8:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, March 30, 5:30—8:30 p.m.
- Thursday, April 1, 5:30—8:30 p.m.

* Participants must be able to attend all workshops to qualify.

Workshop Details

The program fee is \$35.00 and includes all workshop training materials.

Please bring a bag meal for evening sessions and a bag lunch for the Saturday session.

As a part of the training, Habitat Stewards are asked to contribute 50 volunteer hours and assist with at least one certification of a backyard or schoolyard within a year of completing the training to retain their certification.

As a Certified Habitat Steward™ you will have:

- The opportunity to serve as a resource for the community by enhancing your personal knowledge about wildlife and their habitats.
- The opportunity to assist people who want to create a landscape that is wildlife-friendly and good for the environment.
- The opportunity to teach neighbors how to have their yards certified as official Backyard Wildlife Habitat sites.

How to Apply:

Contact **Brenda Belensky** 410-313-4724 or e-mail bbelensky@co.ho.md.us for an application.





HOWARD COUNTY BIRD CLUB
Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society
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CONSERVATION COLUMN "INVASIVE PLANTS SERIES" BY BOB SOLEM

An excellent source book, from which this column is taken, is *Plant Invaders of the Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas* (J. Swearingen, K. Reschelittoff, B. Slattery, and S. Zwicker. 2002. National Park Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service).

Japanese Stilt Grass

(*Microstegium vimineum*)

Japanese Stilt Grass is currently established in 16 eastern states from New York to Florida. It occurs on stream banks, river bluffs, floodplains, emergent and forested wetlands, moist woodlands, early successional fields, uplands, thickets, roadside ditches, gas and power-line corridors, lawns and gardens. Japanese Stilt Grass threatens native understory vegetation in full sun to deep shade. Stilt grass readily invades disturbed shaded areas, like floodplains, that are prone to natural scouring, and areas subject to mowing, tilling and other soil-disturbing activities, including white-tailed deer

traffic. It spreads opportunistically, following disturbance, to form dense patches, displacing native wetland and forest vegetation as the patch expands. Japanese Stilt Grass appears to be associated with moist, acidic to neutral soils that are high in nitrogen.

Description: An annual in the grass family resembling a small, delicate bamboo. Leaves are pale green, lance-shaped, about 3 inches in length, with a distinctive silvery stripe of reflective hairs down the middle of the upper leaf surface. It has delicate spikes of flowers that emerge from slender tips in late summer and early fall. Fruits are produced shortly after flowering and then the entire plant dies. It also spreads vegetatively by rooting at joints along the stem (a new plant can emerge from each node), and by seed. A single plant can produce 100 to 1,000 seeds that remain viable in the soil for at least three years. Stilt grass germinates readily following soil

disturbance. Although dispersal is not fully understood, seeds are probably carried in surface runoff, streams, floodwaters, hay and soil. Seeds are also dispersed on the feet of animals and people.

Prevention and Control: Because it is similar in appearance to several native grasses, it is important to know how to recognize and differentiate stilt grass from look-alikes. The silver stripe of hairs on the midrib of stilt grass is a handy diagnostic character. Early attention to new infestations should be a priority. Because it is shallow-rooted, stilt grass may be pulled by hand at any time. Flowering plants can be cut back using a mower or weed whip prior to seed production. For extensive infestations, contact and systemic herbicides may be more practical and effective. Pre-emergent herbicides have also been successful.