



THE GOLDFINCH



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THREE OWLS AND A GYRFALCON

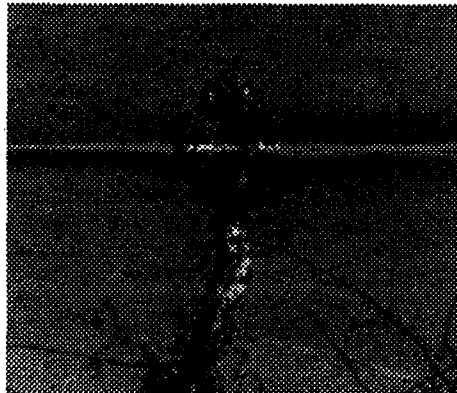
BY DARIUS ECKER

Between January 16, 1997 and January 20, 1997 my wife Paula and I traveled to three birding locations to see northern species we had little chance of seeing around our central Maryland home. The plan was to fly to Boston to see a Boreal Owl, drive our rental car to the Middlebury region of Vermont to see a Northern Hawk Owl, and bird the Northern Coastal area of Massachusetts to find Barrow's Goldeneye. We didn't spend a lot of time planning this trip, and many chatters on BIRDCHAT were helpful in the limited planning we did. We succeeded in finding two of our target species, but missed Barrow's Goldeneye even though we spent an excessive amount of time searching. As always though, we found several species we were not counting on, so it all balanced out in the end. All in all, we tallied 77 species for all three location areas, with several life birds.

We got to the Boreal Owl location at sunrise. To say that this location is unusual for a Boreal Owl is an understatement. This was in the middle of Boston, and the small yew tree the owl was roosting in was practically the only evergreen on the street. Though the tree was small and in an open location, he was still well hidden. We stayed under the tree for just a few minutes, since it's located right against the front of the houses on Commonwealth. The owl was alert. I photographed the bird, and we backed off to watch from the median strip of Commonwealth. This was a great chance to see a Boreal Owl, but I'm sure you'll agree this little owl seemed out of place. We stayed for just a short time, and then we headed off to drive to Vermont.

We arrived in Middlebury, Vermont at around 1:00 PM, drove west on Rt. 125 to West Street to begin looking for the Northern Hawk Owl. As we drove in we found nothing, and I drove in what must have been a distance of around three miles, at which point I turned around. On the way out we found a nice dark phase Rough-legged Hawk, which I stopped to photograph. I told Paula we should go get a room at the Inn, and come back to search some more. She agreed, so I continued back out West street towards Rt. 125. I hadn't driven another 50 yards when I noticed a large light brown bird in the trees on the right. It was

the Northern Hawk Owl. This bird didn't know it was supposed to be twitching its tail, as the field guides stated. Using the car as a blind I was able to get some great photos, and we observed this bird at length. Now we could relax. But I had a target species I wouldn't talk about for fear of jinxing my chances. I knew from the reports that there had been at least one Gyrfalcon in this area in the past two weeks. It had been a gray-morph bird seen along Rt. 17 near the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area, just a few miles away.



"I noticed a large light brown bird in the trees on the right. It was the Northern Hawk Owl."

We had to at least try for this bird while we were here.

We drove back into Middlebury, and got

a charming room at the Middlebury Inn, threw our suitcases in the room, and headed back out. As we drove west on Rt. 125 again we saw a flock of Horned Larks that contained at least one Snow Bunting. We headed out to Rt. 17. We were disappointed to find the parking lot at the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area had not been plowed, and there was no way my rented Chevy could drive into the foot of snow that covered the lot. I pulled off to the side for a few minutes, but finally decided it was unsafe and we moved on. At Jersey Street we found a nice adult Northern Goshawk perched in a tree back off the road. We continued to search as we drove west on 17 all the way to the New York state line, where we turned back onto Rt. 125, heading east.

As we approached Bridport and the intersection of Rt. 22A, I was about to give up. I said to Paula, "Well, I guess we've searched as much as we can. Let's drive over to find the other Northern Hawk Owl." I stopped at the intersection and turned right (the wrong way for the Hawk Owl!). As I turned the corner I looked up to see a large white falcon fly across the road, just thirty feet in front of the car! I tried to call out, but the sight of the bird had left me breathless. Finally, like someone else had said it, I heard the word "GYRFALCON!" come out. It was a white-morph Gyrfalcon, I was expecting to see a gray-morph bird. We stopped in a small bare lot off to the right. The bird was all white, with black wing tips, the top of the tail was barred, and the rump was all white. It was a large bird, the size of a large Peregrine, but as fast as a Merlin. The closest I came to a photo was to place my hand on the camera, then it was gone as quickly as it arrived. We searched the area for another half hour or so, but could

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SEED SALE THANKS BY EILEEN CLEGG

My deepest gratitude to those four hearty volunteers who braved the cruel, cold, wintry winds on January 18 to load our seed sale customers' cars. Volunteers were: *Maud Banks, Bill and Karan Blum, and John Clegg*. Many thanks again.

REVIEW OF THAYER BIRDING SOFTWARE'S "BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA" CD ROM VERSION 2.0

BY JEFFREY A. FRIEDHOFFER

The Thayer "Birds of North America" Version 2.0 CD ROM appears to be very complete. It has windows for 917 birds in the US and Canada. There are from 1 to 6 different pictures of the species. When there is more than one picture it usually includes a female and immature birds. There are Range maps as well as Winter and Summer Abundance maps, but not for every species. Short video clips (about 10 sec.) are included for about 120 birds. On my system, a 120MHz Pentium with 32 Megs of Ram, a 2x CD player and a simple graphics card, it takes from 6-16 seconds to go from one bird to another. Perhaps with a faster CD and a graphics accelerator the program would be faster.

Birds can be accessed either taxonomically or alphabetically by common names or by scientific names. Specific birds are retrieved from a pull down list. Information about the size of the bird and habitat are readily available. The pictures can be zoomed and if there is enough memory, an eye can be made to take up the whole screen. However on my machine, the program crashed when I tried to zoom a picture by 100%. I had to restart Windows to get the program to run again. Zooms of 50% were fine. The resulting picture was larger than the screen and had to be scrolled to see the entire picture.

Songs are available for many of the birds. An interesting feature is that a sonogram may be generated, which was interesting to a signal processing engineer like myself. On my machine it takes 30-60 seconds to create a sonogram. Frequency and time can be measured with the cursor. A section of the sound can be selected and only that section played.

The software has a comparison feature which allows one to view two birds or two pictures of the same bird side by side. The only problem is that there is no perspective of relative size. A kinglet is the same size as a

condor, then again, why would one want to compare a kinglet and a condor. :-)

The program has an identify feature. It takes input of habitat, size, state, family and color. For example some of the habitat selections are (fields, grasslands, scrub) as a group or desert, or (city, suburbs) as a group. Size has 7 selections from smaller than a sparrow (2.5"-5") to pigeon size (12"-16") up to bigger than a goose (36"-72"). For colors there are 11 selections like white, chestnut/rufous, yellow/buff, etc. Multiple selections can be made to include all colors observed on a bird. This feature is good in narrowing down the number of birds to consider when doing identification. Once a selection has been made, the program can generate thumbnail pictures which are analogous to a 35 mm strip of pictures, for up to 12 pictures. One can then click on a thumbnail picture and get a full size picture. A deficiency of this feature is that I cannot go back directly to the thumbnail to see another bird but have to go back to the comparison and generate the thumbnails over again. All the data on my prior selection was retained but the regeneration took 13 to 47 seconds depending on the number of thumbnails generated.

You can add comments to each species including a check mark if you have observed the bird. The presence of these comments is indicated in the main species window. The program has bookmarks to make it easy to find birds that you might want to frequently reference.

There are other packages on the CD. The entire "Birders Handbook" by Ehrlich, Dobkin and Wheye is on the CD. This is directly linked from the species window and can be accessed by a click of the mouse. Related topics in the handbook are hyper linked.

There are 115 quizzes from beginner to extremely difficult. The quiz can be on sound, pictures or both. They can be multiple choice

or fill in the blank.

Finally there is the "Joy of Birding" which contains check lists for all states and the providence's of Canada, Mexico, Belize, Costa Rica and the UK. There is a list of web sites which can be accessed in conjunction with your web browser, click on the site and the browser goes there.

The software was very easy to install under Windows 95, taking about 4 minutes.

Overall I like the program and would recommend it. The list price is \$65.

The following is a list of some of the features.

Pictures

- Includes all 917 birds found in the United States and Canada
- Over 2,700 colorful photos using 16.7 million colors
- Zoom in for close-up views of each photo
- Compare two birds side-by-side
- Plus 320 birds of the world

Sounds

- Over 1,200 songs, calls and chip notes on 695 birds
- Songs from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology
- Sonograms show you a picture of each song
- Use Sonogram tool to see your own recordings!

The Birder's Handbook

The Joy of Birding

- Connections to Hot New Web Sites for Birders on the Internet!
- Best 100 birding Hot Spots in North America
- Print out 63 State/Province checklist
- Reviews of binoculars and scopes
- Rare Bird Alert phone numbers
- Dozens of bird houses you can build

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not relocate the bird, which had flown off to the north over open country behind a farm west of Rt. 22A. During this search we found a nice light-phase Rough-legged Hawk, but the Gyrfalcon was nowhere to be found. Finally, just at dusk we arrived at the second Owl location. Paula found a Northern Hawk Owl perched on the weather vane atop the house at the Krawczyk Horse farm. This bird had read the field guides, and was vigorously pumping it's tail. I snapped a few photos in the failing light, and we headed back to the Inn.

In the morning, we again searched in vain

for the Gyrfalcon. We did find a nice immature Goshawk, and a flock of eight Lapland Longspur along the road (life birds for us), but none of this could compare with the sight of the white-morph Gyrfalcon. We left around 10:45 am for Newburyport. Heading south on 22A we found several large flocks of Snow Bunting, and an Eastern Bluebird near Benson.

We arrived in Newburyport, Massachusetts and we birded along the northern coast of Massachusetts for the rest of the weekend, also stopping at Ipswich and Cape Ann. We were unable to find Barrow's

Goldeneye, but found other interesting birds there, including a cooperative Snowy Owl, Iceland Gull, Glaucous Gull, Little Gull, and King Eider. The coast of Massachusetts was beautiful, and I can't wait to go back when we can spend more time there.

Even with seeing all these exciting birds in Massachusetts, our thoughts kept returning to the majestic white falcon that chose to make an appearance in front of two pie-eyed birders from Maryland in a rented Chevy. The image of this bird flying in front of our car will stay with me forever.

AUTUMN BIRD RECORDS: AUGUST 1 TO NOVEMBER 30, 1996 BY JOANNE SOLEM

The autumn reporting season is the only one that includes four months. During this extended season unusual species are always anticipated. Complete Fall Count results (9/21) appeared in the previous newsletter, some sightings on that date are included in this summary.

The loon flight over Howard County (HOWCO) was poor this season or was almost totally undetected. The earliest Pied-billed Grebe was reported from Centennial Park (CENPK) 9/11 (JF,TDC). Horned Grebe reports were few, all singles. The earliest was seen at the Stanford Blvd. Pond (STFRD) 10/2 (JF). Double-crested Cormorants lingered until the end of October. The high was 6 at CENPK (MC). The last bird of the season was spotted at Wilde Lake (WILLK) 10/29 (C&PN; DOD).

The only American Bittern was reported from Alpha Ridge Park (ALRGP) 10/1 (J&RS). Great Egrets continued their summer wandering with sightings at a number of county lakes and reservoirs. Notable was the flock of 5 flying over Schooley Mill Park (SLMLP) 8/23 (NM). The last was seen at CENPK 11/7 (JF). The latest Green Heron was also noted at CENPK 10/14 (DOD). Lake Elkhorn (LKELK) and WILLK were the places to see Black-crowned Night-Herons this fall. The last was seen at LKELK 9/30 (JF). Fore Bay Pond (FORBY) (near LKELK) continues to be attractive. The only reported Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (an immature) was spotted there 8/31 & 9/5 (J&CW).

Oddly, no flocks of Tundra Swans were reported. The only group noted was 4 at CENPK 10/27 which was also the early date (KS). Both a white phase and a blue phase Snow Goose were reported from ponds in southern HOWCO. The Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab had a white bird 10/17 (PZ) to 10/21 (WEB), while a Highland Lake had 1 of each color 11/7 (MW) for the latest report. Migrant Canada Geese moved over our area in numbers the evening of 10/8 with numerous flock heard (MW).

The largest flock of Wood Ducks (24) was reported from a pond on Ilchester Road 10/26 (JG). A Wood Duck/Mallard hybrid was noted twice at CENPK 10/29 (J&RS) & 11/7 (JF). Green-winged Teal were seen just twice: 1 at CENPK 10/26 (JF,TDC) & 2 on 11/12 at a Roxbury Road farm (MW). Mallard migration is difficult to detect but the 145 spotted at Lake Kittamaquidi (LKKIT) 11/15 (MC), which were gone the following day, may not have been local birds. This was not a year for high duck numbers despite reports of improved breeding in the prairie potholes. American

EACH SEASON HOWARD COUNTY BIRD SIGHTINGS ARE COMPILED AND SUBMITTED TO *MARYLAND BIRDLIFE* AND *FIELD NOTES*. BECAUSE BOTH PUBLICATIONS PROVIDE OVERVIEWS FOR LARGE AREAS, ONLY A FRACTION OF HOWARD COUNTY SIGHTINGS ARE PUBLISHED. THE RECORDS ARE NOT LOST, HOWEVER, FOR THEY ARE THE BASIS FOR COUNTY RECORDS. ALL RECORDS ARE WELCOMED AND APPRECIATED. ANY INDIVIDUAL WHO TURNS IN SEASONAL SIGHTINGS RECEIVES A COPY OF THE COUNTY COMPILATION. TO REQUEST A FORM ON WHICH TO LOG DATES, PLEASE CALL (301) 725-5037. THE BOARD HAS REQUESTED THAT A DIGEST OF THE SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS APPEAR IN THE NEWSLETTER. OBSERVERS ARE REFERRED TO BY THEIR INITIALS (SEE THE LIST AT THE END OF THE ARTICLE). LOCATIONS ARE WRITTEN OUT THE FIRST TIME CITED; THEREAFTER, ABBREVIATIONS ARE USED.

Black Duck numbers were extremely low with a high of 10 at Roxbury Road 11/12 & 13 (MW). Northern Pintails are always scarce. The two reports were within a two week period; 2M at Waterford Farm on Jennings Chapel Road (WATFD) 10/22 (MW) and 1M on LKKIT 11/2 (MC). The only Blue-winged Teal were 2 reported on Fall Count (HCFC) 9/21. A female Northern Shoveler was found at CENPK 8/4 (J&EM) and hung around till 9/12 (HZ). A group of 4 (1M) was reported from Woodmark 10/6 (J&RS) & the Elliott Road pond (ELLRP) 11/28 (MW). Gadwall's were noted three times with the early date and high of 5 (2M) at WATFD 10/22 (MW) and the last 2F at CENPK (JF). American Wigeon numbers were low and reports few. The first was a F at CENPK 10/20 (HZ) and the high 2 pairs at ELLRP 11/28 (MW). Canvasbacks came in on 11/3 WILLK (1)(DOD); the high was a meager 8 (1F) at WILLK 11/24 (KS). Redheads made a brief appearance at CENPK 11/14 where 6 (3M) were carefully identified (KS).

Ring-necked Duck migration was spotty. On 8/29 a F was again picked out at CENPK (JF). A pair had been seen as late as 6/26 & the F on 6/29 & 7/21 (JF) at CENPK. The seasonal high was a low 13 at WILLK 10/29 (C&PN). There were no reports of Greater Scaup or Oldsquaws. Lesser Scaup made a cameo appearance with 2 at LKELK from 11/11 (JW) to 11/16 (JF+) for the only sightings. A Surf Scoter (M) was reported from CENPK 10/23 (R&NP) in the early afternoon. Although an effort was made to contact numerous birders, the bird was not cooperative and left by 5:00 p.m. All sightings in the last 35 years have been immatures so this was a real treat. A Black Scoter (I or F) was reported from Brighton Dam 11/16 (RB). A Common Goldeneye F was spotted at CENPK (R&JG,KS,DOD) and was last seen there 11/29 (HZ). Buffleheads arrived 10/3 with 1 at CENPK (HZ). Peak migration occurred 10/29 when 8 (1M) were seen at CENPK (J&RS), 3 (1M) on a pond on Triadelphia Mill Road & 1 at WILLK (C&PN). The first Hooded Merganser was at CENPK 10/27 (KS) with a nice group of 90 at WATFD 11/21 (MW). Common Mergansers, which can often be seen by the hundreds on the reservoirs, were in depressingly

low numbers this season. The high was a meager 5 on TRIRS 11/16 (m.obs.). The first Ruddy Duck arrived at LKELK 10/8 (JW). The high was reached 11/16 when 10 were at WILLK & 2 at CENPK (JF+).

The last Osprey was seen over CENPK 10/15 (JW). Bald Eagles are an arresting sight. Hawk watcher RG had an adult over Rockburn Branch Park (RKBPR) 9/8. Other September sightings were 9/20 Vantage Point (VANPT)(HZ) and 9/21 an adult over Stevens Road (MBk,ES). An adult was noted 10/30 over MD 32 east of US 1 (JW) and the last reported was an immature at CENPK (MC;DOD). The earliest Northern Harrier was at Mount Pleasant (MPLT) 9/21 (RyC,FR,CS) with the last 10/22 (STFRD)(JF). As is often the pattern, HOWCO had a good flight of Broad-winged Hawks. On 9/18 RG had 4 at LKELK & 86 at RKBPR. The peak came 9/21 when HCFC tallied 3,812. In north-central HOWCO in the early afternoon, at least 2,000 were counted (MK,Jr). Near Murray Hill & Vollmerhausen 980 sailed by JF & JS between 4:30 & 4:40 p.m. At SLMLP, NM counted 524 of which 516 came through at 5:00 p.m. Two Merlins were observed, both in late September: 9/22 near the Middle Patuxent River, Eden Brook (MPREB) (D&LS) & 9/30 LKELK (JW).

A Ring-necked Pheasant was walking on a sod farm on Hardy Road 9/14 (D&PE,CS+). Three Wild Turkeys were seen crossing Lime Kiln Road from one corn field to another 11/14 (RM). Another individual told JS that he had seen 3 gobblers in a corn field on MD 216 just west of US 29 in early December. Five immature birds visited DN's neighbor 11/25 on Foxmoor Drive. American Coots showed up 10/14 (1) at CENPK (DOD) and some stayed through the period with a high of 20 on 11/7 (JF).

Shorebirding in the county was as bad as any in this reporter's memory. The exceptionally wet year kept lakes & reservoirs full. Without mudflats or extensive edge there was little attractive shorebird habitat. On HCFC there was a single Solitary Sandpiper and one Least Sandpiper. Other than Killdeer, those were the only shorebirds on the count. How depressing! This fall there were no Lesser

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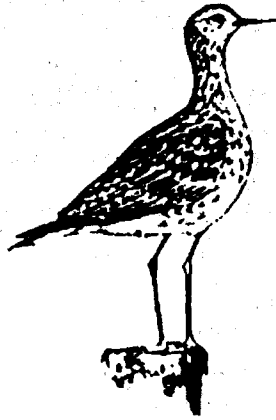
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Yellowlegs, Black-bellied Plovers, or Semipalmated Sandpipers reported, only 2 Greater Yellowlegs, no more than 1 Solitary Sandpiper at any one time & a high of 5 Spotted Sandpipers 8/10 Fulton (FULPD)(J&RS). As gloomy as the shorebirding was, there were a few bright spots. On 9/14 J&CW searched sod farms & spotted a juvenile American Golden Plover on Hardy Road. When several birders visited the location the following day, the plover was gone but an Upland Sandpiper made the trip worthwhile (D&PE,CS,HZ,MC).

Gull watching during the fall was not notable. At least 100 Laughing Gulls were seen on 3 occasions: 8/6 FULPD 100+ (RM), 8/11 ALRGP 200 (NM,J&RS), 10/17 CENPK 115 (JW), the only Bonaparte's Gulls were a flock of 20 that visited CENPK 10/13 (HZ,MC). There were scattered reports of Caspian Terns until 9/22 LKKIT (2)(JW). The high was 8 on Triadelphia Reservoir (TRIRS) 9/6 during a storm (J&JSh). Another storm sighting was the fifth definite county record for Common Tern 10/8 LKELK (JW). HCFC turned up 3 Black-billed Cuckoos which were the only fall reports. On 10/20, 200 Mourning Doves lined the transmission lines on Gorman Road (JS). In late October a number of birders were treated to seeing and hearing Great Horned Owls near Murray Hill Road (KG+). Common Nighthawks moved through from 8/17 CENPK where JW had 1 to HCFC which tallied 7. On 8/29 CS had 30 along MD 32 & MM had 12 along Sheppard Lane & another dozen at Woodmark. The high by a single observer was 60 on 9/8 at Hunt Ridge (CS). Chimney Swifts were seen in good numbers with 100 on 9/2 at the Green Manor Turf Farm (J&CW). The last Ruby-throated Hummingbird was noted 10/5 in e. Columbia (FR).

Two Red-headed Woodpeckers were reported: 10/6 SLMLP 1(im) (NM+) & 10/12 ALRGP 1(adult) (JW,DOLFR+). The first Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was spotted 9/21 in e. Columbia (J&CW). The only Olive-sided Flycatcher of the year was seen 9/13 MPRED (DS). Likewise, the year's only Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was logged 9/25 in e. Columbia (JW). Five Horned Larks were watched 9/14 on Hardy Road (J&CW) & 12 at Univ. MD Central Farm (UMDCF) 11/13 (WEp,RS). At least 275 Fish Crows flew over ALRGP as they left the landfill 10/17 calling loudly. A short time later 45 American Crows flew over heading in a different direction (J&RS).

The first Brown Creeper was seen 10/12 WILLK (HZ). The last House Wren was present at LKELK 10/23 (DE). A Winter Wren showed up at the Oakland Mills Garden Plots 10/7 (JW). HCFC turned up two Marsh Wrens: US 29 & MD 100 (BL,AP) & MT-



PLT (RyC,CS,FR). The first Golden-crowned Kinglet was noted at Hallmark (HALMK) 10/9 (Web) and the first Ruby-crowned Kinglet 9/12 on Sandchain (JF). Thrush numbers were low this fall with few reports. Gray-checked Thrushes went undetected. HCFC had 2 Veeries and 8 Swainson's Thrushes (6 of which were along the Patapsco River at Daniels & Hollofield-RyC,CS,FR). Although HCFC turned up 440 American Robins, only 81 Eastern Bluebirds could be found. A few Gray Catbirds normally linger until extremely cold weather. There was still 1 in Allview (ALLVW) 11/30 (ES) & a Brown Thrasher at SLMLP 11/11 (Dol). American Pipits were extremely early with 3 at UMDCF 9/21 (M&GM,CR,RSm); 15 on Underwood Road 11/11 were at a more expected time.

Solitary Vireos are normally the latest departing vireo species. This year there were two November reports: 11/3 HALMK (Web) & 11/10 Belmont (MB). Two Philadelphia Vireos were counted 9/21: RKBWP (BO) & property near SLMLP (NM). Golden-winged Warblers were noted with 2 at MPRED 9/14 (POs) & 9/21 near SLMLP (NM). Tennessee Warblers arrived 9/1 HALMK (Web) & departed 9/21 (HCFC) 2. Nashville Warblers came on 9/14 VANPT 1 (HZ) and left on 9/21 so. HOWCO (JF,JS). The last 2 Yellow Warblers were noted 9/21 (MK,JFr). Chestnut-sided Warblers could be seen from 8/17 HALMK 1 (Web) to 9/28 LKELK 1 (JW). Magnolia Warblers likewise could be observed for a long period with the first arrivals 8/25 HALMK 1 (Web) & 1 WILLK (Dol) until 10/5, 1 WILLK (Dol; C&PN). The first Cape May Warbler was detected 9/13 MPRED (DS) & the last 9/28 WILLK 1 (Dol). The only Bay-breasted Warbler was caught 9/21 in so. HOWCO (JF). There were no reports of Blackpoll Warblers. The last Cerulean Warbler was seen 9/15 on a field trip to Henryton (D&PE+) & the last Worm-eating Warbler was at Savage 9/21 (RO). There were no fall reports of Louisiana Waterthrushes; the last Northern Waterthrush was reported 9/21 in central HOWCO (K&BB,SS,MV). The only Mourning War-

bler was seen 9/15 VANPT (HZ). Two Connecticut Warblers were described 9/21 at WAITFD (MW). Two Orange-crowned Warblers were noted: 9/21 RKBWP (BO) and 10/3 LKELK (DE). A Brewster's Warbler hybrid was a special find on 9/21 WILLK (C&PN). From 2 to 5 (im or F) Rose-breasted Grosbeaks hung around a Dunloggin yard from 9/29 to 10/5 (KS). The last Blue Grosbeak was observed 10/13 ALRGP where they nested (HZ,MC).

The first 3 American Tree Sparrows were counted on a field trip to CENPK 11/24 (R&JG,KS+). Chipping Sparrows were still hanging on till almost mid-November: 11/13 ALLVW (ES) & 11/14 Talbot's Landing (RG). On 10/20 there were 2 Vesper Sparrows at UMDCF (BO+). On 10/14 JW & JS had 25 Savannah Sparrows, the last Grasshopper Sparrow, and 40 Song Sparrows at Gateway Business Park (GATWY). The first Fox Sparrow was 11/3 ELLRP (HZ). Lincoln's Sparrows continue to make a good showing, perhaps because several members make an effort to search for them. They were seen from 9/21 HCFC to 10/23 LKELK (DE). Individuals reporting them were JW,C&PN,NM,JS,AMR. The high was 2 SLMLP (NM).

Bobolinks were first seen (1) at FULPD 8/24 (JW) to 10/7 1(im) at WILLK (HZ). The high was 10 on Pfefferkorn Road 9/2 (J&CW). A single Rusty Blackbird was spotted 10/15 CENPK (JW).

While there was a lone Pine Siskin reported at an Oakland Mills feeder 11/11 (MJB), Purple Finch reports were scattered, though hardly numerous, with the first showing up 11/2 ALLVW (ES). Almost all reports were fewer than 5 birds. The only consistent flock was 12(1M) 11/11-11/27 at Dunloggin (KS). Other individuals seeing Purple Finches were R&JG,RM,JW,JF,MB. Two Red Crossbills were reported from Patuxent River State Park on the extremely early date of 10/12 (JSh). There were no Evening Grosbeak reports.

Observers. Thanks to all who submitted records. Observers cited by initials: Maud Banks (MB), Mary-Jo Betts (MJB), Karan & Bill Blum (K&BB), Michael Bowen (MB), Rod Burley (RB), Martha Chestam (MC), Randy Crook (RyC), T. Dennis Coakren (TDC), Wes Earp (WEp), Ward Ebert (WEb), Dennis & Paula Ecker (D&PE), Jane Ferrell (JF), Jeff Friedhoffer (JFr), Jane & Ralph Gauder (J&RG), Kim Garrett (KG), Howard County (HOWCO), Howard County Fall Court (HCFC), Mike Kerwin (MK), Brigitte Lund (BL), Nancy Magnusson (NM), many observers (m.obs.), Mike & Grazina McCure (M&GM), Jeff & Elyse Motter (J&EM), Rosamond Munro (RM), Diane Nagergast (DN), Carol & Paul Newman (C&PN), Doug Odor-matt (Dol), Daryl Olson (DO), Richard Orr (RO), Peter Osenton (POs), Bonnie Ott (BO), Anita Picco (AP), Ray & Norma Petersen (R&NP), Ann Marie Reisman (AMR), Frank Reilly (FR), Clyde Robinson (CR), Kurt Schwarz (KS), Susan Satterberg (SS), Jay Sheppard (JSh), Romayne Smith (RSm), Dan & Linda Southworth (D&LS), Jo & Bob Solem (J&BS), Chuck Strat (CS), Eve Sunell (ES), Marilyn Veck (MV), Mark Wallace (MW), Jim & Carol Wild-son (J&CW), Helen Zeichner (HZ), Paul Zucker (PZ).

CALENDAR OF PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS

Programs are held at Longfellow Elementary School, 5470 Hesperus Dr., Columbia. Meeting is cancelled if schools are closed for any reason. Hospitality session at 7:30 pm. Meeting/program begins at 8:00 pm. Club bookstore opens at 7:30 pm.

- March 13, Thursday** "Sights and Sounds of Early Migration," by David Holmes. David, our local expert on bird identification, will begin the birding year with the sights and sounds of early migrants, such as sparrows and early warblers.
- April 10, Thursday** "Butterflies for Birders," by Richard Smith. Our local butterfly expert will discuss butterfly identification using binoculars and get us thinking about warmer weather.

Field trips meet as described for each trip. Carpooling is encouraged; riders share the cost of gas and tolls. Dress for the field trip with stout, reasonably waterproof footgear and layers of clothes. Trips do not always follow paths. NO pets. Leaders may cancel due to inclement weather or fewer than three participants. FOR INFORMATION, CALL BONNIE OTT, at (410) 461-3361.

- March 1, Saturday** Annual Potluck Dinner - See details below.
- March 3, Monday** Deadline for Submission of 1996 Annual Lists - Please mail as soon as possible to Jane Farrell, 6324 Sandchain Road, Columbia, MD 21045.
- March 8, Saturday** Waterfowl in Howard County - Meet at 8:00 am at the Centennial Park concession stand for this half day trip. Leader: Jane Farrell. Join Jane to search the ponds and lakes of Howard County for ducks, grebes, and other waterfowl. Call Bonnie if more information is needed. Jo led for Tom
- March 23, Sunday** Birding by Ear - Meet at 8:00 am at Alpha Ridge Park. Leader: David Holmes. Resident birds will be singing, so this is the best time to learn their songs. Call Bonnie if more information is needed.
- April 5, Saturday** University of Maryland Central Farm - Meet at 8:00 am at the Howard County Board of Education Building on 108 to carpool to the farm. Leader: Bonnie Ott. Vespers, other sparrows and pipits possible. Call Bonnie if more information is needed. Jo led for Bonnie
- April 6, 13, 20, 27, Sunday** April Sundays at Centennial Park - Meet at 8:00 am at the west end parking lot. Leaders: TBD. Many species possible including a variety of waterfowl, egrets, herons, terns, warblers, sparrows and swallows. Call Bonnie if more information is needed.

- April 19, Saturday** Beginner Bird Walk at Wilde Lake - Meet at 9:00 am at the boat dock. Leader: Mike McClure. Wide variety of species possible and a great way to learn new facts about birds. Call Bonnie if more information is needed.
- April 26, Saturday** Schooley Mill Park - Meet at 8:00 am at the upper parking lot. Leader: Jim Wilkinson. Combine a variety of habitats with migration and what do you get? Join us to find out. Paths may be muddy. Call Bonnie if more information is needed.
- May 2 - 4, Friday - Sunday** Maryland Ornithological Society 1997 Annual Conference - Details will be mailed to you by the MOS.
- May 10, Saturday** May Count - Mark your calendar. Details will be in the next issue of the newsletter.

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

- March 27, Thursday** Elayne Metter, 1301 North Rolling Road, Baltimore, MD 21228, phone (410) 788-4877.

April - NONE

MAY - JUNE 1997 NEWSLETTER MATERIAL IS DUE MARCH 28, 1997. Anyone is welcome to contribute articles or ideas which you think will be of interest to other birders. Call or mail to Paula and Darius Ecker, 9270 Crazyquilt Court, Columbia, MD 21045, Phone (410) 312-9165 or upload to the Electronic Goldfinch at (301) 596-2167. Also, please visit the club's site on the World Wide Web at <http://www.abs.net/~dariuse.birding.html>.

ANNUAL POTLUCK DINNER IS SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 1997

The annual potluck dinner will be at the Florence Bain Senior Center on Saturday, March 1, 1997. Club members and their guests are invited to share the fun, food, and program. Bring a salad, main dish, vegetable or dessert. The club furnishes the beverages, social hour snacks, rolls, and eating utensils. You MUST reserve in advance so we can arrange for the proper amount of condiments and beverages. Sign up at the February meeting or call

Mary-Jo Betts at (301) 596-5859 by February 24, 1997. You will need to specify the number of attendees and what food you are bringing. If you can't cook, adjustments can be made.

If you want to participate in the slide presentation, bring a dozen nature slides. (If you bring more, they will be shown if time allows.)

Social hour starts at 6:30 pm and dinner starts at 7:00 pm. Mark dishes and any accompanying serving utensils with your name so we

can return them to you. Let Mary-Jo know if you can come early to help set up.

Directions: The Florence Bain Senior Center is located on the west side of Columbia at 5470 Beaverkill Road, off Harper's Farm Road, one block east of Cedar Lane behind the shopping center. There is ample parking available.

CONSERVATION COLUMN BY BOB SOLEM

Dr. David Wilcove, EDF ecologist, has some pertinent information on the January 1997 *EDF Newsletter* in the article "Toward a More Effective Endangered Species Act" on ways to improve the Act:

"First, landowners should be rewarded for good stewardship of their property. In particular, changes in the Federal tax code are needed. To pay Federal estate taxes, the inheritors of large land holdings are often forced to sell or develop the property, causing the loss of wildlife habitat... Also, as currently written, the Federal tax code seldom allows landowners to deduct the costs associated with maintaining or restoring endangered species habitats.

"Second, the Fish and Wildlife Service must insist upon more substantive and effective mitigation when landowners seek permission to destroy the habitats of endangered species... The Act is so vague about mitigation, however, that the Service is often unwilling to require that landowners do much of anything to compensate for destroying habitat.

"Third, the Service must act more quickly to protect vanishing plants and animals... One way to solve this problem is to list species earlier... Another way would be to make it easier

for landowners to protect species before they are listed as endangered or threatened. Many landowners are reluctant to help these species for fear of incurring additional regulatory restrictions on the use of their property in the event the species are subsequently listed.

"Fourth, landowners need more clarity about their obligations. For only a few species has the government developed detailed, readily understandable guidelines on what landowners can or cannot do with their property. The government must develop clear guidelines for more species, particularly those affected by farming, ranching, and forestry operations.

"Finally, the Endangered species Act should provide a mechanism to protect, restore, and enhance entire ecosystems, rather than dealing only with individual species. The Fish and Wildlife Service has tried to squeeze this approach into the current law... Unfortunately, the current law offers little guidance on designing and evaluating an ecosystem plan.

"After nearly a quarter-century, the Endangered Species Act has achieved many important successes, but it has fallen well short of what is needed to stem the increase in vanishing species. Strengthening the law is critical to improving its record of success."

CALLING ALL DRAGONFLY ENTHUSIASTS

A few Howard County birders have begun a multi-year project surveying the county's odonates (dragonflies and damselflies). These colorful insects, like birds, are important indicators of the health of the environment. In order to make future comparisons, accurate baseline data is essential. Richard Orr has compiled information on the Odonates of Maryland that appears on the Bird Club's WEB page.

Birders find that their observational skills and binoculars are equally valuable when looking at birds, dragonflies and butterflies. Unfortunately, many odonates are not identifiable on the wing, but some of the common and attractive species are. To provide an introduction, Bob & Jo Solem have prepared a handout entitled "Some Common Howard County Odonates." It contains drawings and identification tips for 15 odonates that can be found on local lakes and ponds. There is also a list of the Howard County odonates seen through 1996.

You can obtain a copy at the March or April Bird Club meeting, or by sending a first class stamp (no envelope) along with your name & address to *Bob & Jo Solem, 10817 Grae-loch Road, Laurel, MD 20723*. If you are unsure about your interest in the subject, watch for a Bird Club field trip for odonates, usually in August, led by Richard Orr.

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HOWARD COUNTY BIRD CLUB

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