

species, sometimes in large numbers. Be sure to pause near post 14 on the Wildlife Loop Trail for migrants seem to favor this location. In the fall, check openings where grapes, bittersweet, and other fruit-bearing trees and vines abound.

Because the MPEA has no large open areas of water, it does not offer much opportunity for the variety of waterfowl or shorebirds that may be seen in some other county locations. The Middle Patuxent River does attract a few herons, ducks, and kingfishers; Louisiana Waterthrushes are present in good numbers along the river and its numerous tributaries.

Special Attractions: A prime county location for migrant passerines (particularly warblers and thrushes). Displaying American Woodcock in late winter and early spring. Forty species of butterflies and 53 species of dragonflies have been recorded.

Deer Hunts: Managed deer hunts are held on a few days in fall and winter. Dates are posted at trail entrances and on the Howard County Bird Club (HCBC) website.

Seasonal Bird List: A complete seasonal bird list is on the HCBC's web page. There are also butterfly, dragonfly, mammal, amphibian, reptile, and aquatic wildlife lists. The URL for these lists is http://www.howardbirds.org/birdinghowardcounty/MPEA/MPEA_species_lists.htm.

Compiler: Ward Ebert

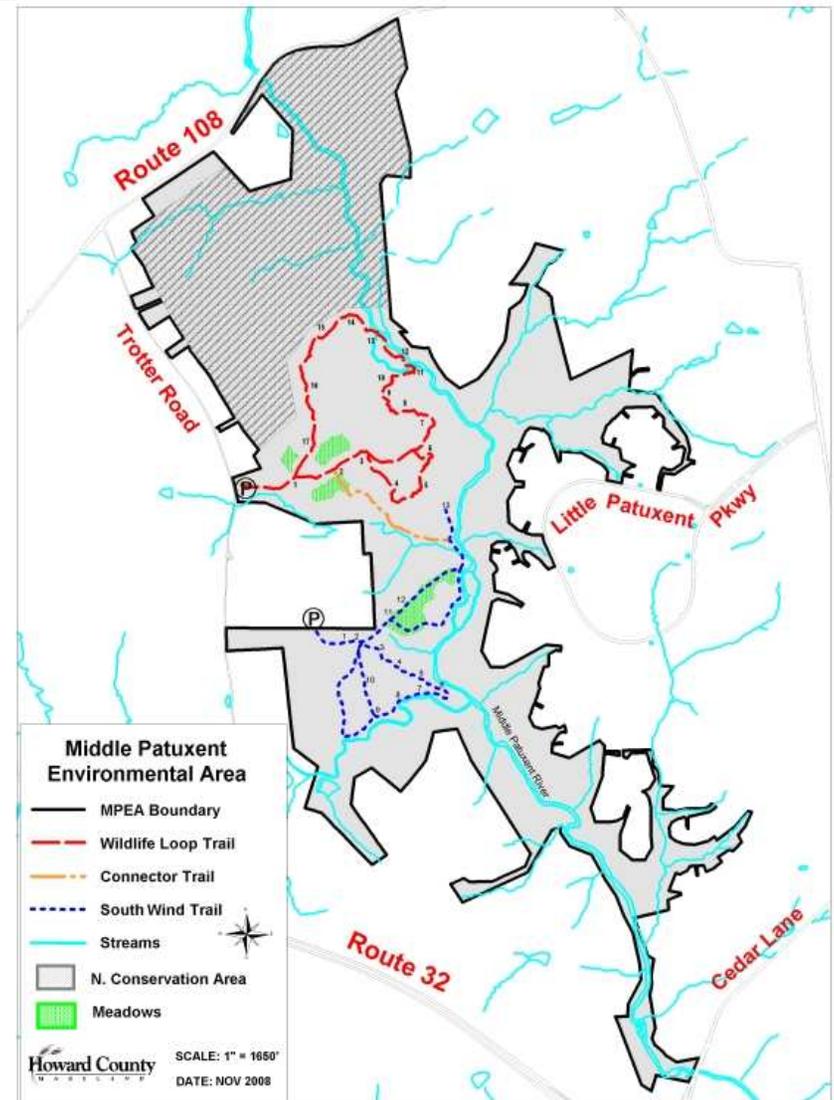
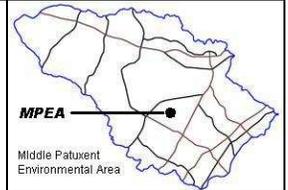
For complete species lists, photographs, directions, and additional information, check the following website: <http://www.howardbirds.org>. Click on Birding Howard County, Maryland, Site Guides, Middle Patuxent Environmental Area.

This material is a digest taken from the revised version of *Birding Howard County, Maryland* by Joanne K. Solem. More than 40 sites are available at the above website.

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The Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS)
Middle Patuxent Environmental Area (MPEA)
Site Guide



Established in 1996, the MPEA is a prime birding site stretching along the Middle Patuxent River from MD 108 to Cedar Lane.

Size: 1,021 acres

Coverage Time: From an hour or two to a long half day.

Trails/Paths: Marked trails begin from either a small gravel parking lot on the east side of Trotter Road or from an information board on South Wind Circle (from the traffic circle on Trotter Rd, go east on South Wind Cir. 0.1 m. to a right turn; trail entrance is 0.4 m. on right; on-street parking). Established trails are marked by round metal markers attached to posts or trees: Wildlife Loop Trail (2.5 miles - red metal markers), South Wind Trail (2.3 miles - blue), and the Connector Trail (0.6 mile - orange).

Notable Birds: Merlin, Virginia Rail, American Woodcock, Long-eared Owl, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Alder Flycatcher, Philadelphia Vireo, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Bicknell's Thrush, Golden-winged Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Connecticut Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Summer Tanager, Vesper Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Red-Crossbill, Pine Siskin.

Amenities: A few widely scattered benches along the trails. No restrooms.

Handicapped Access: Most of the MPEA is not handicapped-accessible, although a short section at the entrance to each of the two main trails is level and is either grass or gravel. All trails contain slopes (some steep) as well as rough or wet sections. Portions of the Columbia Association's (CA) paved path system on both the east and west sides of the river run near or into parts of this site. For access points, consult a CA path system map.

Operation and Hours: Howard County parkland; dawn to dusk or as posted.

Habitat: Upland, steep slopes, and floodplain; deciduous woods, edge, second-growth, warm-season grass meadow, river, streams, ponds, wooded wetlands, and a few pines. American Woodcock management is a major focus. Although much of the native understory has been destroyed by white-tailed deer and extensive sections consist largely of non-native plants, annual managed hunts have stabilized deer numbers to some degree and volunteers endeavor to remove invasive plant species.

Best Time to Visit: Spring and fall migrants: early to mid-morning and late afternoon (on cool mornings activity along the river often improves after the sun rises above the trees); thrushes can be best in overcast or rainy weather—late afternoon and early evening are as rewarding as early morning; breeding birds: early mornings in late

spring and early summer. Butterflies and dragonflies: mid-morning through late afternoon from mid-spring through late summer.

Birding: More than 170 species of birds have been documented at this site.

Breeding birds include Wood Duck, Belted Kingfisher, Pileated Woodpecker, Acadian Flycatcher, White-eyed, Yellow-throated, and Red-eyed vireos, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Wood Thrush, Northern Parula, Black-and-white Warbler, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Kentucky Warbler. Veeries and Yellow-billed Cuckoos are relatively plentiful. The three owls that breed in the county all occur here with Barred Owls the most conspicuous. Understandably, species diversity is highest during peak migration periods when almost any county passerine may occur here and a variety of waterfowl, long-legged waders, hawks, and gulls are possible overhead.

Clegg's Meadow (off South Wind Circle entrance) can be very productive with good views of the sky, considerable edge habitat, and close proximity to the river. Breeding birds in the vicinity include Tree Swallow (usually found in the Purple Martin gourds visible from any vantage), White-eyed Vireo, Eastern Bluebird (a monitored nesting box trail in suitable locations produces a variety of cavity-nesting species annually), Common Yellowthroat, Indigo Bunting, and Baltimore Oriole. On cool spring or fall mornings, initially bird the trees and undergrowth on the left (north) side where the sun warms the vegetation first. Black-billed Cuckoos have been spotted on several spring mornings. Fall brings sparrows to the warm-season grasses. Although numbers are not always high, a fine variety has been recorded including Savannah and Grasshopper. Field, Song, and White-throated can be counted on with an occasional Fox, Lincoln's, Swamp, and White-crowned.

Among the best areas year-round are the trails adjacent to the river. This is particularly true in less-than-perfect weather. Exceptions are the breeding season preferences of the field and wood-edge species such as Eastern Bluebird, Field Sparrow, Indigo Bunting, Baltimore Oriole, etc., and the flyover sighting opportunities for water birds, hawks, gulls, Cedar Waxwings, and finches. On chilly mornings during migration, delay walking the shaded floodplain trails. Areas along the river do not receive early sunlight. Once the sun warms insects, any opening containing mature trees, dense understory, and food-bearing vines can be a pocket of activity. A few consecutive days of rain or fog during thrush migration may ground one or more