

The aquatic habitat consists of a sediment pond, an old beaver-created wetland (now deserted by the beavers), and two small tributaries to the Patuxent River that wind through much of the perimeter of the park. Schooley Mill Park's proximity to the Patuxent River sometimes produces flyovers such as loons, cormorants, gulls, and waterfowl moving to or from Duckett (Rocky Gorge) Reservoir and Triadelphia Reservoir.

The sediment pond also regularly attracts breeding Tree Swallows as well as Barn Swallows—any swallow is possible, however. Occasional Green Herons and Great Blue Herons show up here as well. Spotted Sandpipers and Solitary Sandpipers stop along the edges during migration, and it is a summer home for Red-winged Blackbirds. King Rail and Marsh Wren also have been found in and around this pond.

The wetland created by the beavers (TM 10) was "terraced" into several levels – it was truly an architectural marvel. The dam is falling apart, and the beavers have moved on. However, the habitat is still good. The area includes large swaths of cattails and smaller amounts of Phragmites, and dead trees and snags. Small streams run through the area and trickles of water seeping through the dams are ideal for bathing birds. Great Blue Herons and Green Herons are regular during the appropriate seasons. Swamp Sparrows frequent the area during migration and the winter months. There is a good view of the sky here so watch for flyovers (e.g., Common Raven!). Some of the other quality birds that have been found in this wetland are Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Virginia Rail, Sora, and Olive-sided Flycatcher.

**Deer Hunts:** Note that controlled deer hunts are held on a few days in fall and winter. Check specific dates on the HCBC website.

**Seasonal Bird List:** A complete seasonal bird list is on the HCBC's Schooley Mill web page. There are also butterfly, dragonfly, mammal, amphibian and reptile lists. 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, Schooley Mill Park.

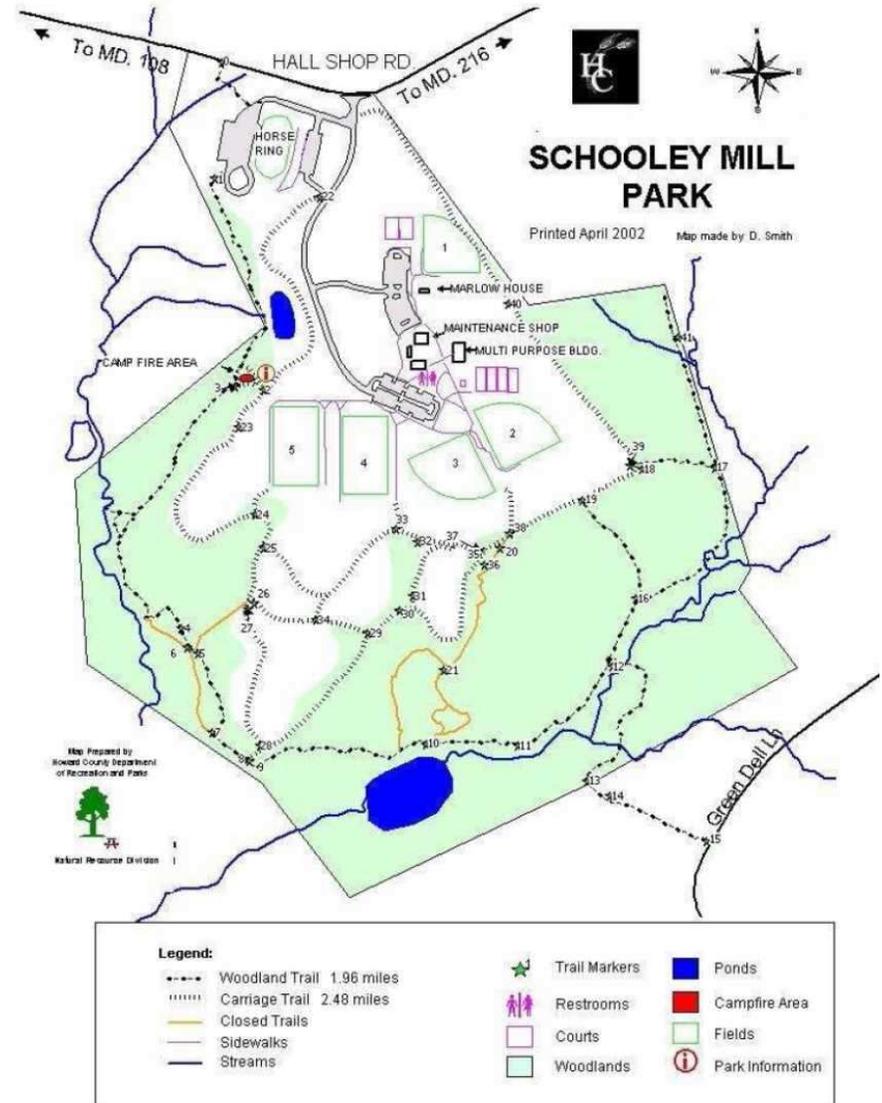
**Compilers:** Nancy Magnusson and Joanne Solem

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.

# Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS)

## Schooley Mill Park Site Guide



Encompassing an area of 192 acres, Schooley Mill Park has a certain charm because of its modest size and its variety of habitats. It's small enough to sample all of its habitats over the course of a morning, but large enough not to feel repetitive. The trails through the woods and fields are appropriate for those on foot or horseback, are lightly used, and are, therefore, highly conducive to leisurely nature study. At least 193 species of birds (plus two warbler hybrids) have been observed in and over the park.

**Size:** 192 acres

**Best Time to Visit:** Spring and fall.

**Coverage Time:** 1½ to 4 hours.

**Trails/Paths:** Mulched trails through the woods (1.96 miles), mowed paths around and through the open fields (2.48 miles), paved walkways to the athletic fields.

**Notable Birds:** Cackling Goose, Northern Bobwhite, Yellow-crowned Night-Herron, Rough-legged Hawk, Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, King Rail, Virginia Rail, Sora, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Alder Flycatcher, Common Raven, Northern Shrike, Philadelphia Vireo, Golden-winged Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Connecticut Warbler, Summer Tanager, Clay-colored Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow.

**Amenities:** Restrooms, portable toilets adjacent to the riding ring. Tot lot, horseback-riding ring, equestrian jumping field, tennis and basketball courts, baseball, soccer and football fields, picnic facilities.

**Operation and Hours:** Howard County park; 7:00 a.m. to dusk (or as posted).

**Habitat:** Wooded stream valley along the perimeter, open fields in the interior beyond the soccer fields, remains of a large beaver pond, sediment pond.

**Layout:** Most human activity centers around the athletic fields and courts and the buildings in the center of the park. Activity in the remainder of the park tends to be walkers, joggers, horseback riders, and those interested in natural history. Wooded stream valleys form most of the outer boundary. The central section is primarily open field; those between the athletic fields and the entrance are grass, but the areas beyond the soccer and baseball fields are brushy open fields with an abundance of goldenrod, spreading dogbane, milkweed, and some warm season grasses. Shrubby areas and honeysuckle/multiflora rose thickets are scattered along the edge of the woods. A sediment pond is on the right just past the riding ring;

two other small ponds (both on private property – one in the woods below the campfire area and one close to the riding ring – are visible from the park in the winter.

Trails wind through the woods along the streams bordering the park. There are three major entrances to the main trail through the woods if you want to circle the park from within. These are shown as Trail Markers (TMs) 1, 2, and 18 on the map. Or you can just walk along the edge of the woods until you find a trail leading in. Secondary trails lead off the main trails; these either loop back, dead-end at private property, or lead you to the open fields in the center of the park. Although the woodland trails are mulched, there may be some muddy areas after heavy rains.

In addition to the wooded trails, wide mowed paths border the perimeter of the woods and crisscross the fields. These provide access to extensive edge and open field habitat. TMs 2, 22, and 40 are good access points as are the paths leading out beyond the soccer and baseball fields.

**Handicapped Access:** Paved access to sports fields and buildings.

**Birding:** Wooded deciduous stream valleys form the perimeter of the park. Breeding birds include Pileated Woodpecker, Acadian Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Hooded and Kentucky warblers, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Ovenbird. Migrant warblers, vireos, and thrushes could include almost any regularly-occurring county species. The three county-breeding owls have all occurred here (Great Horned Owls have nested), although they have become less predictable in recent years.

Open unmown fields form the interior area of the park beyond the ball fields; the areas around the buildings and the equestrian jumping field are mowed grass. The unmown interior fields (TM 23 through TM 34) can be very productive – here you can find field birds and edge birds, and it's a great place to watch for flyovers of all sorts (one of the county's major Broad-winged Hawk flights was caught here). Breeding birds include Eastern Bluebird, Willow Flycatcher, White-eyed Vireo, Prairie Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Blue Grosbeak, and Orchard Oriole. Northern Bobwhite used to be regular but the species has disappeared from Schooley Mill, echoing the decline of this species throughout Howard County and much of the region. Migrating Lincoln's Sparrows and wintering sparrows are most commonly found in this area of the park. Rarities have included Clay-colored Sparrow, Northern Shrike, Rough-legged Hawk, Golden Eagle, Alder Flycatcher, and Summer Tanager. Migrants can include Least Flycatcher, Blue-winged Warbler, and Lincoln's Sparrow.