

The southwest corner of the park has brushy/weedy margins along a stream and mature woods as well as a meadow. This is excellent habitat for sparrows and other skulking species. A number of rarities have been found in this area including Red-headed Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Lincoln's and Vesper sparrows, Marsh and Sedge wrens, Orange-crowned and Connecticut warblers. Lark Sparrow and Clay-colored Sparrow are two rarities that have been found here, but it is only fair to say that conditions when they were recorded were somewhat different as construction was taking place.

Soccer fields form the interior of the park. This is one of the most reliable places in the county to see Horned Larks throughout the year. This is also a good place to watch for flyovers, including nighthawks at twilight during migration. An unmown field planted with warm-season grasses is west of P 2 and can be a productive place to find field and edge birds as well as butterflies in summer. Willow Flycatcher and Savannah Sparrow have been confirmed nesting in the park. Birding is sparse during the winter: Yellow-rumped Warbler, an occasional Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Red-breasted Nuthatch, either kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Winter Wren, or American Tree Sparrow may be found, along with the permanent residents.

Seasonal Bird List: A complete seasonal bird list is on the web page, along with butterfly, dragonfly, and amphibian lists. The URL for the list is http://www.howardbirds.org/birdinghowardcounty/WesternRegional/western_regional_species_lists.htm

Compiler: Bill Hill

This material is a digest. Further information, including complete species lists and photographs, can be found at <http://www.howardbirds.org>. Click on [Birding Howard County, Maryland, Site Guides, Western Regional Park](#) (or www.howardbirds.org/birdinghowardcounty/WesternRegional/western_regional_overview.htm.)

The web-based revision of *Birding Howard County, Maryland* by Joanne K. Solem currently includes more than 30 sites guides as well as Species Accounts and the Birding Year in Howard County.

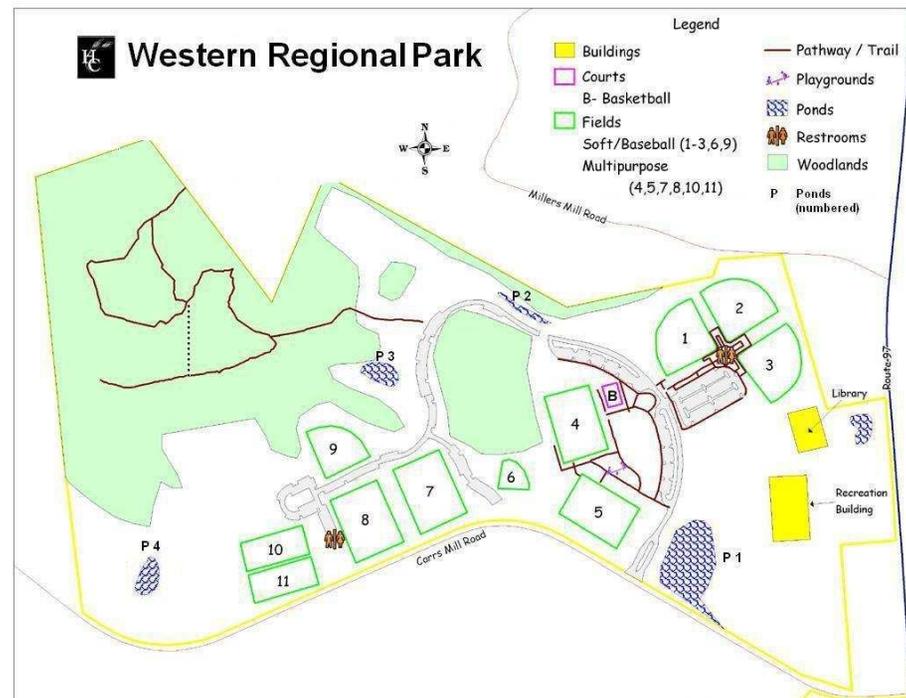
© 2008

The Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS)



Western Regional Park Site Guide



Size: 160 acres

Coverage Time: From a few minutes to check the entrance pond to several hours to cover the entire park.

Trails/Paths: All pathways, including paved areas around fields, 2.4 miles; dirt trails through the woods 1.2 miles, mowed grass adjacent to playing fields, paved walkways in vicinity of some parking lots and athletic facilities.

Notable Birds: Cackling Goose, Northern Shoveler, Redhead, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, American Golden-Plover, White-rumped Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Dunlin, Stilt Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Laughing Gull, Red-headed Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Common Raven, Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Orange-crowned Warbler, Connecticut Warbler, Summer Tanager, Clay-colored Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Dickcissel.

Amenities: Restrooms May–Sept, portable toilets all year in several parking lots. Tot lot, soccer and baseball fields, a few picnic tables in central recreation area. Park facilities are still being developed.

Handicapped Access: Paved access to sports fields and buildings.

Operation and Hours: Howard County park, 7:00 a.m. to dusk except later when games are being played under lights.

Western Regional Park opened in 2006 making it the county's newest regional park and one of the few parks in western Howard County. Although its varied habitats are of interest much of the year, the shallow entrance pond and the short-grass ballfields make it a particularly attractive birding destination from mid-summer through early fall.

Habitat: This park is the only county park with attractive shorebird habitat for those species usually found on mudflats and those preferring short-grass situations. The shallow pond at the entrance to the park (P 1) fills with every substantial rain, but drops quickly in hot weather. When the drops coincide with shorebird migration periods, the pond becomes a destination for birders. During droughts, the mud hardens and vegetation begins to grow. In the fall, this can produce ideal conditions for a variety of sparrows. Although heavily used during league play, the extensive short-grass, unfenced soccer fields are attractive to "grasspipers." The park also contains a nice chunk of mature woodlands, a warm-season grass meadow, and streamside brushy areas. There are excellent views of the sky. Several small ponds with adjacent annual vegetation provide habitat for amphibians, dragonflies, and butterflies. There will be some changes as the park develops more completely, but birders can hope that there will be a minimum number of changes and plantings in the vicinity of P 1 and the soccer fields.

Best Time to Visit: Early to mid-morning in the spring and fall are best, while mornings in summer produce the best passerine and flyover results. Any time of the day is good for shorebirds; twilight is best for nighthawks during migration periods. A full schedule of organized sports is played here on the weekends (except in the winter) and on summer evenings. At peak playing times, parking can be difficult; be sure to honor parking restrictions.

Birding: There have been 180 species of birds (plus a warbler hybrid, a domestic, and an exotic species) observed on or over the park. The best time to bird here is during spring and fall migration. Many rarities have already been found during this period and the potential exists for something special to show up anytime.

The shallow sediment pond (P 1) at the entrance to the park has elevated this park to one of the best shorebird locations in the county. So far, its mudflats have attracted 17 species of shorebirds! Shorebird migration is protracted, with the northbound trip starting in March and continuing into June, while the southbound flights start in July and may

last until November. Highlights include American Golden-Plover, White-rumped Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Dunlin, Stilt Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, and Short-billed Dowitcher. Least, Pectoral, Semipalmated, Solitary and Spotted sandpipers, Greater and Lesser yellowlegs, Semipalmated Plover, Wilson's Snipe, and Killdeer are seen on an annual basis. Morning is an excellent time to check the pond since the park tends to be quiet and parking isn't a problem. At that time of day, however, the sun creates a lot of glare when viewing the pond from the west side. It is best to work your way around to the southeast corner of the pond by walking outside of the rail fence to minimize any chance of spooking the birds. The shorebird numbers fluctuate throughout the day so midday or afternoon can also be productive often producing different numbers/species than were seen earlier in the day. Storms can force birds down, sometimes only briefly. The water level in P 1 can fluctuate dramatically. During extended dry periods, the water may evaporate entirely; on the other hand, the pond may refill quickly after heavy rains. Both situations negatively impact the shorebird habitat. While a Buff-breasted Sandpiper has been seen at this pond on several occasions, the majority of sightings of this species have been on the short-grass soccer fields. Late morning through early afternoon during early September have been most productive. Check the Species Accounts for the best times to find other rarities. The pond attracts other species as well. Tree and Barn swallows are seen frequently while Northern Rough-winged, Bank, and Cliff swallows, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Redhead, Common Goldeneye, Merlin, Caspian Tern, and Laughing, Bonaparte's and Herring gulls have been seen occasionally during migration. Grasshopper and Savannah sparrows have also been detected near the pond. Occasional Green Herons and Great Blue Herons show up here as well.

The northwest section of the park contains a mature oak forest. This section can be birded by walking around the perimeter (east to south) of the forest or walking the trails that go through it. If you opt to walk the outside treeline early in the morning, going clockwise helps to keep the sun at your back. The main entry point to the woods is on the hill above (north) of P 3. The entry area can be productive during migration, as is the interior. A variety of warblers including Tennessee, Nashville, Blackburnian, Cape May, and Worm-eating, as well as Veery, Gray-cheeked and Swainson's thrushes have been detected during migration. During the summer, Ovenbird, American Redstart, Wood Thrush, and Scarlet Tanager can be found along with the normal permanent residents, including Hairy and Pileated woodpeckers.