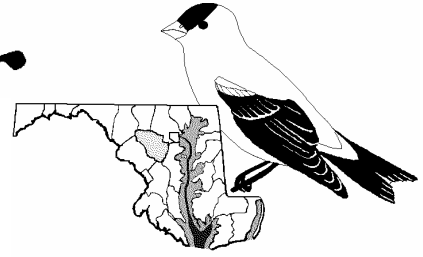




# Howard

*A Chapter of the  
Maryland Ornithological Society*



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## HOWARD COUNTY FEEDER BIRDS

The following bird species have been recorded as coming to bird feeders or suet in Howard County. Those shown in capital letters are the most likely to be seen. (The vast majority of them are permanent residents.) Some of the species in lower case letters may be quite common some winters, but they are unpredictable in numbers and location and generally are not as likely to be seen at feeders. Those species with an asterisk are rare in the county.

Ring-necked Pheasant	Golden-crowned Kinglet	Swamp Sparrow
Wild Turkey	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	WHITE-THROATED SPARROW
Northern Bobwhite	Eastern Bluebird	Harris's Sparrow*
ROCK DOVE	Hermit Thrush	White-crowned Sparrow
MOURNING DOVE	American Robin	DARK-EYED JUNCO
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Varied Thrush*	NORTHERN CARDINAL
Red-headed Woodpecker	Gray Catbird	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER	NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD	Indigo Bunting
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Brown Thrasher	Dickcissel
DOWNY WOODPECKER	EUROPEAN STARLING	RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD
Hairy Woodpecker	Cedar Waxwing	Eastern Meadowlark
NORTHERN FLICKER	Cape May Warbler	Yellow-headed Blackbird*
Pileated Woodpecker	Yellow-rumped Warbler	Rusty Blackbird
BLUE JAY	Pine Warbler	Brewer's Blackbird*
AMERICAN CROW	Yellow-breasted Chat	COMMON GRACKLE
Horned Lark	EASTERN TOWHEE	BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD
CAROLINA CHICKADEE	American Tree Sparrow	Baltimore Oriole
Black-capped Chickadee	Chipping Sparrow	Purple Finch
TUFTED TITMOUSE	FIELD SPARROW	HOUSE FINCH
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Vesper Sparrow	Common Redpoll
WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH	Savannah Sparrow	Pine Siskin
Brown Creeper	FOX SPARROW	AMERICAN GOLDFINCH
CAROLINA WREN	SONG SPARROW	Evening Grosbeak
Winter Wren	Lincoln's Sparrow	

The birds listed in lower case letters are less likely to be seen at feeders for a number of reasons. Some come to feeders in migration only (Rose-breasted Grosbeak), while others may feed in specialized habitats (Northern Bobwhite, Horned Lark). A number are geographical vagrants rarely seen locally (Varied Thrush, Dickcissel, Harris's Sparrow, Yellow-headed Blackbird). Some feeder birds are referred to as irruptive species. This means that some winters they may be widespread and common at feeders; other years they may be seen infrequently or not at all. Iruptives include Red-breasted Nuthatch, Purple Finch, Common Redpoll, Pine Siskin, and Evening Grosbeak. A few birds, like Eastern Bluebirds, Cedar Waxwings and, to some extent, Baltimore Orioles are basically fruit eaters in the winter so that unless chopped raisins, apple slices, orange halves, and suet bits as well as fruit-bearing plants are available, these species are not likely to frequent feeders. Severe weather conditions may force some lingering insect eaters to feeders (warblers and kinglets). Ruby-throated Hummingbirds will come to sugar solutions during the summer months or during migration.. Rarely, a western species of hummingbird may stray into the county during fall migration well after the late September-early October period when locals have departed.

Some species cause identification problems for inexperienced birders or people new to the county. Pairs of birds which may be confused are Red-headed Woodpecker and Red-bellied Woodpecker, Purple Finch and House Finch, Carolina Chickadee and Black-capped Chickadee, Downy Woodpecker and Hairy Woodpecker, White-throated Sparrow and White-crowned Sparrow. Red-headed Woodpeckers are seen only a few times a year in the county and seldom at feeders. Most birds identified as "Red-headed" are really Red-bellied Woodpeckers. Purple Finches and House Finches may be difficult to separate. The House Finch is a common permanent resident; the Purple Finch comes from more northern areas in the autumn and winter—and does not come in large numbers every year. Chickadees should be assumed to be Carolinas unless you are familiar with ALL of the identifying characteristics (including song) that separate the infrequent Black-capped Chickadee from the resident Carolina. Downy Woodpeckers are at least ten times more likely to appear at feeders and suet than the slightly larger Hairy Woodpecker which inhabits mature deciduous woods. The Hairy has a longer, heftier bill and no black markings on the white outermost tail feathers. White-throated Sparrows are common under feeders, particularly in or near brushy woods. Look for the white "bib" and a dark bill. The White-crowned Sparrow is less often seen in the southern and eastern parts of the county. It prefers the more open habitats of western Howard County, has a pink bill, wider white crown stripe, and more upright stance than the White-throats. Multiflora rose is often associated with wintering White-crowned Sparrows in this part of their range. Winter-plumaged American Goldfinches are sometimes mistakenly identified as warblers or vireos, species which are rarely seen at feeders and are unlikely in the winter. All local grackles are the Common Grackle. Boat-tailed Grackles occur only in marshes near the Atlantic Coast.

Any species name followed by an asterisk indicates a species which has been seen five or fewer times in this county within the last 25 years. Please document these sightings with a photograph, if at all possible. (This also applies to any species not on this list such as Boreal Chickadee or Western Tanager.) If you see one of these rarities, please call the Rare Bird Alert (either Bonnie Ott 410-461-3361 or Bob Solem 301-725-5037). Also contact someone if you see a Wild Turkey, Red-headed Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, or Dickcissel.

### COVER - WATER - GRIT

Cover and water are essential for birds and other wildlife. Cover provides protection from predators but, just as important, it offers shelter from chilling winds which are prime killers on long, cold winter nights. Brush piles, evergreen plantings, and groups of discarded Christmas trees can all provide useful refuge. Leave nesting boxes up for roosting use by cavity-nesting birds; preserve dead limbs and sound snags containing holes (which are not near buildings) for the same purpose.

Available water in freezing weather is often essential in attracting birds (sometimes unusual visitors); for some, like Cedar Waxwings, it is more important than food. It is possible to obtain small thermostatically controlled electric heaters designed to be placed in a birdbath to maintain thawed water. Water is important not only for drinking but equally necessary for bathing. Regular baths enable birds to maintain their feathers in peak condition for flight and insulation (of particular importance when temperatures drop).

Often overlooked is the need for grit to help digestion. Large sand particles, small gravel, crushed oyster shells, and other similar materials are valuable, especially after a heavy snowfall when most sources of natural grit are covered.

This sheet does not detail food preferences (request *Food Preferences of Howard County Feeder Birds* for one first class stamp: HCBC, 10617 Grae Loch Rd., Laurel, MD 20723). Anyone who feeds birds should be aware that feeding seed mixes enable the pest blackbird species and the House Sparrow to overwinter in a healthy condition. That is why the Bird Club recommends limiting foods to sunflower seed and perhaps niger (thistle).

### REFERENCES

In order to enjoy feeder watching, a standard field guide is essential. Any of the following are recommended, though the second two are a little easier for the casual watcher to use: (1) National Geographic Society. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 1983; (2) Peterson, Roger T. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern and Central North America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1983; (3) Robbins, Chandler S.; Bruun, Bertel; and Zim, Herbert S. *Birds of North America*. New York: Golden Press, 1983. The Howard County Bird Club has published *Attracting Birds in the Maryland Piedmont* as a local reference. Food, water, and plantings (especially natives) are covered. All material is based on the experiences of local observers. This book is available at any meeting or call Jo Solem 301-725-5037.