

Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society



In Memoriam

Richard H. (Dick) Smith, Jr.
1944 – 2016)



Leading a butterfly trip Sept 5, 2009 at Meadowbrook Park (R. Orr)

It would be hard to overstate Richard Smith's stature as a lepidopterist in the state or in the Mid-Atlantic region. His accomplishments in these areas will be described by other organizations. Here we highlight how he affected the knowledge of butterflies in his home county.

Dick studied Howard County butterflies for more than 40 years. His records are particularly valuable because many predate the period of most intense local development. His connection to the Howard County Bird Club (HCBC) dates to the early 1990s. At that time, there were no publications or web information for local butterflies, so Jo Solem asked Dick if, by using his records, he could compile a simple handout for the HCBC. The two-sided 8½ x 11" sheet he designed was a model of efficiency: *The Butterflies of Howard County, Maryland: a Biological Summary and Checklist* first published in May 1993, contained not only a list of the species found locally, but also their occurrence levels, flight period, habitat, nectaring plants, and larval host plants. He revised it regularly. After almost 25 years, it continues to be an extremely valuable reference

Dick presented occasional programs to the HCBC; the earliest was in April 1997. Beginning in late August of 2003 he led an annual butterfly walk. Over the years, these field trips have been held at Meadowbrook Park, and most recently at the Elkhorn Garden Plots.

Widespread digital photography was a turning point for butterfly enthusiasts. Now many of the most frequently encountered species could be captured easily as an image and identified by the knowledgeable. The appearance of Butterfly Gallery on the HCBC's website in April 2011 sparked a local interest in butterflies that caught Dick by surprise. The results of 2012's searches in the county resulted in such an astonishing array of photographed rarities that he built a program around them. He began summarizing county butterfly activity in a column in *The Goldfinch* with the one in 2013 covering that intriguing 2012 year.

In the early spring of 2013, he designed a butterfly study that he anticipated would run a minimum of five years. He hoped that repeated surveys of designated plots would not only establish the status of species to be expected locally but also provide brood timing, unusual species incursions, and specific Piedmont habitat information. He anticipated that it would be 2016 before he could start to draw some conclusions from the survey results; he felt that prior to three full years the data would have less scientific validity. The surveys began in May 2013 with a handful of dedicated individuals. Linda Hunt agreed to co-chair the project, organizing the volunteers, planning training sessions, and leading field trips. At the end of the first year, methodology was tweaked so that at the beginning of the 2014 season a core group of sites had been assigned. Dick served as the "go to" expert who enjoyed identifying the many photos forwarded to him for identification. The bonus for the photographer was that Dick was well-known for his careful and thorough replies to any questions. An unusual butterfly, an odd nectaring plant, a beautiful caterpillar—any and all might elicit several paragraphs based on his fund of knowledge.

When the HCBC became involved in promoting pollinator plots in 2014 and 2015, Dick was part of the initial group that met with representatives from Howard County Recreation and Parks. He designed the seed mix of native nectaring and larval host plants that would be best for local weather, soil conditions, and butterfly species. That mix was used in the current plantings at Centennial Park and Daisy Road.

Near the Elkhorn Garden Plots, butterfly habitat was created along BG&E rights-of-way in 2014. Dick conducted surveys there, led field trips, and helped to plan and obtain signage from the HCBC.

He was also eager to add to his own knowledge. Unravelling the mystery of the Harvester butterfly locally (which involved aphids, a fungus, and a tree species) was especially satisfying.



Soldiers Delight (R. Orr)



Gambrill State Park (R. Orr)