

The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

<https://www.3rbc.org>

Vol. 18, No. 2, March/April 2019

For Birding Excitement, We'll Visit Texas on April 3



SIMPLY SPECTACULAR – A dazzling icon of the Rio Grande Valley in Texas is the multicolored Green Jay. Mike Fialkovich will show us this and many more of his Texas photos on April 3.

Mike Fialkovich, 3RBC's new vice president, joined the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania's tour of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas last fall to see the area's famous bird and other wildlife specialties.

Mike will tell us about that exciting trip and share his beautiful photographs of birds, other wildlife, and plants at the Three Rivers Birding Club meeting on Wednesday, April 3, in the Phipps Garden Center, 1059 Shady Avenue in Shadyside. Doors open at 6:30 PM for socializing, a business meeting begins at 7:30, and the program starts at 8:00.

Our speaker scarcely needs an introduction. He is a founding member of 3RBC, outings leader, bird reports editor, and until recently the club's historian. At every meeting we are fascinated by his summaries of birds reported in Allegheny County and elsewhere in western Pennsylvania.

He is president of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology. He is a seasonal editor and the Allegheny and Fayette county compiler for the society's journal *Pennsylvania Birds*. He also serves on the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee, which evaluates identification of rare birds in the state.

Mike received the W. E. Clyde Todd Award from the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania for contributions to conservation. The award is named for one of our state's great ornithologists and conservationists, and it indicates the respect Mike has received for his knowledge and efforts. .

See more of Mike's important activities on the 3RBC website's program announcement. These range from surveying breeding birds for the U.S. government to collecting information on mammals, frogs, and many other aspects of our state's natural history and ecology.

Pittsburgh Christmas Counters Found 71 Bird Species



RARE VISITOR – A Snow Goose at the Allegheny Cemetery in Lawrenceville was a highlight of the Pittsburgh Christmas Count. (photograph by Mike Fialkovich)

By Compiler Brian Shema

The Pittsburgh Christmas Bird Count on December 29, 2018, set this count's all-time record of 228 participants. They listed 71 species in the annual 24-hour search sponsored by the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania.

The count is conducted during a 24-hour period within a 15-mile-diameter circle. The Pittsburgh circle stretches from Schenley Park in the south to North Park in the north; and from Kilbuck Township in the west to Harmar Township in the east.

Participants spent a combined 433 party-hours, traveled 267 miles on foot, and rode 314 miles by car tallying birds. A grand total of 24,877 individual birds were recorded.

The large number of participants provided a good source of data for comparing today's bird numbers with those of yesteryear. Average for this CBC has been 70 species during the past 10 years. We are edging upward; 68 was the average for many years.

Highlights of any count are unusual bird species in the area. Headliners this time were a Gadwall in a small wetland in Harmar and a Snow Goose in a cemetery in Pittsburgh. Although both

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See *The Peregrine* in beautiful color at 3rbc.org

The Peregrine

President's Message

Please Get Involved

By Sheree Daugherty

Birding is a wonderful pastime. It enriches our lives in many ways. A day spent outdoors observing birds is a good way to clear your mind, get some exercise, and learn something new about nature.

But it is so much more. From helping to evaluate trends in bird population and distribution due to climate change and understanding how humans affect the environment, birders of all levels contribute valuable data every year to increase the understanding of our world. The old "canary in the coal mine" idea is a valid point. Watching what affects birds, good or bad, gives us an early indicator of environmental health.

Any birder can collect important and much-needed data, significantly aiding bird science. You don't have to hold an advanced degree, or be a scientist or an ornithologist to contribute. Many far-reaching discoveries are made by people who simply possess patience and keen observation skills.

Some findings, such as the triple hybrid warbler found last year by Lowell Burket, a self-described "beginner birder" and a member of 3RBC, pose more questions than answers. Does this happen more frequently than thought? When we are in the woods and catch fleeting glimpses of an unusual bird, are we not realizing that it is something unique? Fortunately, Lowell is a keen observer and an accomplished photographer and was able to capture images and information that prompted the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to investigate his exceptional find. Is the bird he found a fluke? Or, as some have speculated, is it a sign of a species in trouble? Does hybridization point to a declining population that cannot find mates of the same species?

Many birders routinely collect data for personal reasons. People keep life lists, yard lists, state lists, trip lists, and I've heard of some strange lists that will not be mentioned! By recording birds seen on an outing to a particular locale, you may notice changes or trends over a span of years. Your list may not reveal any rarities, but at the very least it will give you an idea of what can be found and when it can be found. That in itself is well worth the effort. For those with a competitive streak, it can be fun to try to top a previous record, even if it's your own. Not all discoveries have to be earth shattering!

Posting your sightings, even of common birds, on eBird and various listserve collects important information that is compiled to show trends in bird populations and migration. These posts can also help fellow birders find out where and when specific birds can be seen.

There are also many local and national "citizen science" projects, each with a different focus, which invite your involvement.

The longest running project is the well-known Audubon Christmas Bird Count. This year, 2019, will be the 120th year, making it the oldest citizen-science project in the world. It has grown from 27 participants in 1900 to almost 60,000 participants in the 2015-2016 season.

Another good way to contribute is through Project FeederWatch, collecting data from the comfort of your own home. This survey runs all winter, and you may do as much or as little as you like. Check the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's website (birds.cornell.edu) for details.

BirdSafe Pittsburgh is a partnership of several local conservation groups surveying birds that are injured or killed when

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they strike windows. During spring and fall migration, volunteers check sidewalks in downtown Pittsburgh for migrating birds that have collided with windows. While a bit gruesome, the data is invaluable to finding ways to mitigate the high casualty count.

Breeding Bird Atlases catalog the breeding species in an area. Pennsylvania has conducted two five-year surveys 20 years apart. Almost 2,000 volunteers took part in the second atlas project from 2004 to 2009 and reported on 190 species nesting in the state. Volunteers canvas a given area and assign codes to the bird behaviors observed. A book of the results is published when the survey is completed. The second atlas is still available from Penn State University Press and is a wonderful addition to any birder's library.

These are just a few of the ways that you can volunteer to add to our understanding of the long-term health and status of bird populations. Not only is the data collected a great resource, it is a wonderful learning experience for those who take part.

Birds and birding have enriched my life and given me so much pleasure, I feel compelled to give back! I hope that you will join me and consider participating in a citizen science project. It will be enjoyable, you may learn something new, and at the same time benefit birds. And, you never know who will make the next big discovery. It could be you!

Outings to Come

Our Growing Schedule Includes Cook Forest and a Vast Grassland

By Steve Thomas, Outings Director

Wednesdays, March 20 and March 27 – Woodcock Walks:

These popular walks are back again this spring! Meet leader Tommy Byrnes (724-715-7184) at 7:00 PM in the Ladbrokes (now The Meadows) parking lot behind the Primanti Brothers restaurant off Harmar exit 11 of Route 28. We will carpool and drive a short distance to a field in Harmar Township that has produced lots of American Woodcocks in the past several years. Be prepared for a muddy walk and bring a flashlight. Before going to the field, we will check the Great Blue Heron nesting colony on an island in the Allegheny River, which in previous years was an exciting find.

Sunday, March 24 – Moraine State Park: Join Michael David (michaeldavid@gmail.com) at the Day Use area (South Shore) in the first parking lot on the right at 8:30 AM for our first visit of the year to this wonderful park. Lake Arthur, the park's centerpiece, has good (sometimes spectacular) numbers and variety of waterfowl in migration. Directions: From I-79, take Route 422 east toward Butler and exit at the Moraine State Park exit. Turn left at the end of the ramp and drive straight into the park until you see the first major parking and rest room area on your right. Waterfowl and other early spring migrants make this outing a highlight of the season. Allow one hour driving from Pittsburgh.

Sunday, March 31 – Pymatuning State Park: Meet Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; van126@comcast.net) at 8:30 AM at the former site of the Wildlife Learning Center (Waterfowl Museum) at 12590 Hartstown Road in Linesville (41.635779, -80.436634) for this all-day outing to the park and surrounding areas. We will have lunch at the Spillway Inn for anyone who would like to dine with the group.

As this is an early spring outing, please monitor the club's website or Facebook in case there needs to be a sudden cancellation due to inclement weather.

Saturday, April 6 – Yellow Creek State Park: Meet Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493) at the park office at 8:00 AM for this joint outing of the 3RBC and the Todd Bird Club. The office is on Route 259 just off Route 422 east of Indiana. Allow approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes to drive from Pittsburgh. This park has been the prime outing location for the Todd Bird Club since the club was created. The various habitats and a large lake attract a wide variety of species.

Wednesday, April 10 – Woodcock Walk: Meet leader Tommy Byrnes (724-715-7184) again at 7:00 PM in the Ladbrokes (now The Meadows) parking lot. See the March listing for details.

Saturday, April 20 – Raccoon Creek State Park: This is combination bird, wildflower walk, and picnic with the Brooks Bird Club, which is based in West Virginia. Ryan Tomazin (412-220-9726; vwwarblers@hotmail.com) will lead the bird walk. Meet at the Roadside Picnic Area West at 9:30 AM.

We will drive to the beach and around the lake after checking out the parking lot area. Lunch will be between 12:30-1:00, and will be potluck. Please bring a dish to feed 6-10 people (at least), and bring your own plates, cutlery and drinks. There are ample

picnic benches under the giant oaks.

If there is any interest, and if the weather holds, we can bird and botanize the Wildflower Reserve. It should be the perfect time for wildflowers.

If you have any questions, or would like to RSVP, please feel free to contact Ryan either by phone or by email. Hope to see you there!

Directions: From Pittsburgh take Route 22/30 and exit at Imperial. Take Route 30 west to the Raccoon Creek State Park entrance, and drive through the park to the Roadside West picnic area. In case of inclement weather, we should be able to use the center at the Wildflower Reserve for lunch.

Friday, April 26 – Sewickley Heights Park: In collaboration with the Fern Hollow Nature Center, Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694 or email at van126@comcast.net), will be our leader. Meet him at 8:00 AM in the upper parking lot. See directions at 3rbc.org. Be prepared for muddy trails. Bring a lunch or snacks and water if you wish to continue birding into the afternoon at selected places along Little Sewickley Creek Road.

Saturday, April 27 – Frick Park: Jack and Sue Solomon (412-521-3365) will lead this outing starting at 8:30 AM at the Environmental Center, 2005 Beechwood Boulevard, in Squirrel Hill, 15217. Frick can be an excellent migrant trap and, as usual, we're hoping for lots of warblers.

Sunday, April 28 – Glade Run Lake Park: Join Dave Brooke (724-487-3586) for a spring visit to this great park in southern Butler County, which Dave has recently added to our regular outing destinations. Meet Dave at 8:00 AM at the park on Lake Road, Valencia, which is a turn-off from Route 228. Google Maps coordinates are 40.716229, -79.901211.

We will survey the lake from the dam and boat ramp for waterfowl. Then we will walk a trail that is about two miles long out and back, which can be muddy in places so boots are highly recommended. Dave mentioned that he looked at an eBird list he did last year about that time, and it was the best day he ever had at that location. Maybe we'll get lucky and have another.

Saturday, May 4 – Deer Lakes Regional Park: Todd Hooe (hooe@verizon.net; 412-805-6909) and Oliver Lindhiem will lead this outing focusing on spring migrants (warblers, flycatchers, vireos, etc.). The outing will begin at 6:30 AM and run until about 11:30AM. Meet at the small lot across from Wagman Observatory at these GPS coordinates: 40.625309, -79.813333. We will hike approximately 3-4 miles. Although the trails are pretty well maintained, please dress for possible wet grass, mud and rainfall.

Friday, May 10 – Presque Isle State Park: This trip to one of Pennsylvania's greatest birding locations will be led by Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; van126@comcast.net). Meet at 8:00 AM at the first parking lot on the right after entering the park. From Pittsburgh, take I-79 North until it ends. Take the exit for Route 5 West (also called West 12th Street) and continue for about one mile. Turn right onto Route 832, which leads directly into the park. Allow 2.5 hours driving time. The migration should be well underway, but you never know what to expect here. Presque Isle has produced some of Pennsylvania's best (and only) records of some rarities. Bring a lunch, snacks and water for this all-day outing.

Note: This date coincides with the Presque Isle Audubon Society's Festival of the Birds, May 10-12. The 3RBC outing is not associated with any outing or activity related to the Festival. Bob Mulvihill is leading an outing here also on Saturday, May 11, for the National Aviary.

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Outings to Come

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Friday, May 10 – Sewickley Heights Park: In collaboration with the Fern Hollow Nature Center, Sheree Daugherty (shereedaugherty@gmail.com) will be our leader. The walk will begin at 8:00 AM in the upper parking lot. For directions to the park, see 3rbc.org. Be prepared for muddy trails. Bring water and a lunch or snack. Besides birding in the park we will drive and make stops along Little Sewickley Creek. Louisiana Waterthrush, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Warbling Vireo nest in the area.

Saturday, May 11 – Cook Forest State Park: Make plans to get your spring “warbler fix” with an outing to one the best migrating warbler traps in western Pennsylvania. Michael Leahy will be our leader. Meet him at the park office at 8:30 AM. Set your GPS to 113 River Road, Cooksburg, PA for the office.

Located along the picturesque Clarion River, Cook Forest has some of the largest tracts of virgin forest remaining in Pennsylvania. Classified as a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service, the park is often referred to as the “Black Forest” of Pennsylvania. The park’s 11,586 acres contain some of the largest specimens of Eastern Hemlock and White Pine found in all of the eastern states. At 184.7 feet tall, The “Longfellow Pine” was the tallest White Pine tree in the Northeastern United States and the third tallest east of the Mississippi River. Unfortunately, it was felled during a microburst in May 2018. We will visit the remains of the fallen icon

Cook Forest, with all of its acres of mature evergreen and hardwood trees is a real magnet for large numbers of migrating warblers and other forest-dependent birds.

From the office we will proceed to the Log Cabin Interpretive Center where we will begin our adventure into the “Forest Cathedral.” Depending on time and group preferences, we may visit the fire tower where you can climb to the top and look for a Blackburnian Warbler and then visit Seneca Rocks overlook for spectacular views of the Clarion River and surrounding country or head over to nearby Clear Creek State Park and Bear Rocks.

There are restrooms at the office and the Log Cabin. For questions, feel free to contact Michael at 814-229-1648; mrl706@gmail.com. Bring water and a lunch, or if the weather is wet, there are several restaurants to choose from.

Saturday, May 18 – Harrison Hills Park: Meet leader Jim Valimont (412-828-5338) at 8:00 AM at this northeastern Allegheny County park off Freeport Road between Natrona Heights and Freeport. As you enter the park, bear right and proceed to the parking lot at the end of the road. The lot is near the pond. Dress for wet grass and mud. Previous spring outings have produced a nice variety of warblers, Philadelphia and Yellow-throated Vireos, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and Scarlet Tanagers. See the Birding Locations page at 3rbc.org for directions.

Saturday, June 8 – Piney Tract in Clarion County: Details will be determined later for a visit led by Michael Leahy to this vast state game land in Clarion County, a marvelous hot spot for grassland species.

Sunday, June 23 – Annual Picnic at Harrison Hills Park: Details will be announced later. We have changed the annual picnic date from chilly late October to a spring day when the park’s dozens of breeding species, including coveted warblers, will be singing and easy to find.

Outings are free and open to the public. In the event of

inclement weather, call the leader in advance to confirm whether the outing is on or canceled. Call the leader, too, with other questions about weather, driving, or trail conditions.

Sometimes events occur after the newsletter is printed, so “Like” the Three Rivers Birding Club on Facebook and watch our 3rbc.org website for late-breaking news of outings, cancellations, and other events that couldn’t make our newsletter’s deadline.

Pittsburgh CBC

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species have been recorded on the count in the past, the most recent Gadwall was found in 1994. We have to rewind to 1988 to find the previous Snow Goose record.

Record high counts are normally easy to detect from year to year. Red-breasted Mergansers have been found sporadically during the last couple of decades. Most winter along sea coasts, but occur on area lakes and rivers when the water is not frozen. This year, 7 on the Allegheny River, set a record high for our count.

Turkey Vultures show a definite trend on the CBC. Just 15 years ago, they were not considered a possibility. This migrant species traditionally winters south of Pennsylvania. While most continue to migrate south, the winter range is expanding north to include southwestern Pennsylvania. This year 45 Turkey Vultures were tallied, just one individual short of tying the record.

The 17 Great Horned Owls tied the record set in 1999.

The tally of 11,126 American Crows, almost all at a roost in Oakland, was far below the CBC’s highest count of 32,913 in 2013. A separate roost elsewhere in the region could explain the significant decrease in Pittsburgh’s numbers.

Besides American Crows, Fish Crows and Common Ravens were found on count day – the sixth year in a row that we have tallied all three corvid species.

The count also marked the 10th year in a row that we have found Winter Wrens, with 4 detected.

The tremendous amount of rain in 2018 resulted in an abundance of natural food in our woodlands. This likely contributed to our impressive 576 Cedar Waxwings. Waxwings are found regularly as they feed on available fruits. Although not a record number, the total was second only to the 778 listed in 2007.

Many changes in nature happen in cyclical patterns. In some years oak acorns are abundant; in others there are few. Like oaks, conifers and birches have food cycles. When seed production is low in the north, birds such as Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, Evening Grosbeaks, and Common Redpolls depart the northern forests and move south in search of food. In early winter 2018, pine cone and birch seed shortages were reported in northern forests, so we expected that our CBC data would reflect an increase in these species. Surprisingly, that did not happen. Only 6 Pine Siskins and only 7 Purple Finches were found. These species likely found sufficient resources north of the Pittsburgh area.

The Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania extends its appreciation to everyone who participated. It is only through your time and dedication that we can contribute to the understanding of our local bird populations. We, and the birds, thank you!

Please See the 3RBC Website for a Birding Code of Ethics

Migrants are returning and nesting season is approaching. This is a perfect time to check out the American Birding Association’s “Principles of Birding Ethics,” which is newly posted on our website. The ABA code is a guide to proper birding conduct, and it is adopted by many bird clubs in and beyond North America.



MUSICAL WELCOME – Well, this Carolina Wren wasn't exactly welcoming birders to the "Dead of Winter" outing at Frick Park, but he brightened a cloudy day. These wrens sometimes sing all winter, perhaps protecting territory, maintaining year-round pair bonds with mates, or for something else we don't yet understand. Maybe something like "enjoyment"? (photo by Tom Moeller)

Outing Revisited

It Was "Dead of Winter," But Not Dead of Birds

Frick Park "Dead of Winter" – January 19: A snow storm was predicted, but not until afternoon, so the outing was held and the snow held off. A great turnout of 30 people joined me!

A small flock of Dark-eyed Juncos, a Hairy Woodpecker, and a few Northern Cardinals were at the parking lot while we were gathering. A few of us attempted to count flyby crows.

Feeders at the nature center yielded House Finches, a Downy Woodpecker, Mourning Doves, and Song and White-throated Sparrows. A Red-tailed Hawk perched nearby provided great views. Later, we had very close views of the bird.

Someone called out five ducks flying over, which turned out to be Common Mergansers. Our proximity to the Monongahela River explains their sudden appearance because they are often seen at nearby Duck Hollow.

We saw all the expected woodpeckers: Hairy, Downy, Red-bellied, Pileated, and Northern Flicker. We missed Yellow-bellied Sapsucker again this year.

A large fallen tree along South Clayton Trail provided a perch for a sprite Carolina Wren, calling as we approached. It was quite tame and allowed close approach. Down the trail we found a Cooper's Hawk perching – a male, judging by its small size.

A Brown Creeper was a nice find. It called a few times, providing a lesson on how this species sounds like a Golden-crowned Kinglet, but with a single syllable.

One participant mentioned seeing two Great Horned Owls recently in the park, and we spotted one roosting in a tree. Across the trail, a Pileated Woodpecker was working on a snag. A short distance later a Cooper's Hawk flew in and perched atop a snag, giving us a better look than the earlier bird.

It was a great walk and good to get out in the winter before the day's weather became unpleasant. **–by leader Mike Fialkovich**

We Are Facing a Temporary New Location for Meetings

By President Sheree Daugherty

Some of you may have heard that the Phipps Garden Center is scheduled for a major remodeling and renovation project. This is true, and the project will have a major impact on 3RBC.

We have been in negotiations with Phipps, and for the duration of the construction project, the club will meet at Phipps's Botany Hall facility in Oakland, on the campus of the Phipps Conservatory.

The club has met at this location before, so it is not a complete unknown. We will probably move our meetings to the Botany Hall location beginning with the October 2019 meeting, depending on when the construction project starts.

What's more, we will likely be in the new location for about one year, maybe a little more or less, also depending on the progress of the construction. We expect to return to a brand new, fully renovated Garden Center in 2021. We are working on a plan that will make the move as easy as possible, and are looking at various options to accomplish this.

Please check *The Peregrine*, Facebook, and our website for details as we move forward.



BRIGHT WINGS – We usually get only a quick glimpse of a Pine Siskin's bright yellow wing bars in flight. Tom Moeller's fast camera work gives us a leisurely look at one at his feeder in Pittsburgh on November 3, 2018.

Pine Siskins Disappointed Us

Last fall, a poor season of cone crops in northeastern Canada indicated that we might expect an invasion of Pine Siskins in southwestern Pennsylvania. No significant irruption occurred.

No more than two or three showed up at most feeders, although Karyn Delaney had up to 16 in her yard in Economy, Beaver County, and 10 were reported feeding at North Park.

Northwestern Pennsylvania had better luck. An amazing 125 were regular at a feeding station in Edinboro, Erie County.

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A Very High Adventure: Birding to 15,000 Feet in Argentina's Andes

By Claire Staples

Growing up in Maine, my favorite place was Mount Katahdin. At 5,269 feet and 45.9 degrees N latitude, and rising from only 1,200 feet, it meant that in one day I could climb 4,000 feet in elevation and go from the temperate mixed forest through boreal forests to the tundra and beyond above the tree line. It was like traveling a thousand miles in a day.

Perhaps this is why a birding trip to Northwest Argentina was so appealing. The names of the regions were different: the *yungas* rainforest, the cactus-studded Andean deserts, the puna highlands, montane scrub, the high *altiplano*, the high Andean peaks. But this was another place to experience many ecosystems through elevational changes, and I knew it was my kind of place.

So I signed on for Tropical Birding's 15-day Northwest Argentina tour. With just four participants and our guide Andrés Vásquez, we began a wonderful adventure.

Although I had been to Ecuador in the northern Andes several times, there were many new birds in Argentina's Andes with interesting names like earthcreepers, miners, brushrunners, *cachalotes*, and *gallitos*.

The number of new finches and their kin were mind-boggling. We saw five species each of Yellow-Finches, Warbling-Finches, and Sierra-Finches, plus Seed-Finches, a Great Pampa-Finch, the Common Diura-Finch, and numerous other finch species.

For 12 days we traveled only 4.7 degrees of latitude, or about 325 miles as the crow flies, but we put 1,600 miles on our rental van. We started at 1,300 feet in the city of Tucuman and spent 12 days traveling up and down many winding mountain roads. We ended at the Abra del Lizoite Pass over the Santa Victoria Mountains to our highest elevation of 15,000 feet where we found

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TAWNY-THROATED DOTTEREL – This statuesque member of the “shorebird” family in South America is similar to North America’s Mountain Plover in its breeding habitat, dry grasslands. But a notable difference is that the plover’s plumage is dull and the dotterel’s is elegant. (photograph by Andrés Vásquez) Another shorebird species Claire saw was the Diademed Sandpiper-Plover, rare in Argentina and severely declining throughout its South American range. Expert guides such as Claire’s are important for birders who want to see such species.



*BLACK SISKIN – Claire mentions the “mind-boggling” variety of finch species she saw in Argentina. This high-elevation species is a fairly close relative of our North American Pine Siskin – both are in the same genus named *Spinus*. (photograph by John Turner)*



BLACK-HOODED SIERRA-FINCH – As its Sierra name indicates, this is another high-elevation species, and it is not in the finch family we know. It is a member of the huge, remarkably diverse family of tropical tanagers. (photograph by Andrés Vasquez)

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CBC Rarity

This Townsend's Solitaire, a rare visitor to Pennsylvania from the West, was spotted at Yellow Creek State Park on December 26, 2018, during the Indiana Christmas Bird Count. It stayed at least to December 31, so many birders could observe and photograph it. Michael David offers us a back view (at left), and Dave Brooke shows us its front (at right).



A Very High Adventure

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our highest bird, the Black-fronted Ground-tyrant. Just over the pass at about 14,000 feet we got possibly our rarest bird. After walking about five minutes in very thin air, we had 10 minutes of great looks at the Diademed Sandpiper-Plover as it pranced around on a tiny, lush, green alpine bog among the steep rocky slopes. Although it looked like a sandpiper, it has recently been declared to be a plover closely related to the dotterels.

We saw many other rarities like the Tawny-throated Dotterel. Sixteen species of hummingbirds of which seven were lifers for me. We saw a herd of 17 Puna Rheas. We saw thousands of Flamingos (three species). We saw many Andean Condors including a kettle of 15 circling up to catch a thermal. We saw three species of tinamous including the Elegant Tinamou running about, kicking up dust. It was more like the cartoon roadrunner than any roadrunner I've seen. There were no good pictures because we were laughing so hard.

Oh, and not to forget, but the scenery in this region may even top the birding. After traveling about in the beautiful and thrilling Andes, we flew on to the Iguazu Falls in the Atlantic forest region for a few relaxing and bird-filled days.

Even birders will stop occasionally for brief cultural experiences. We did a quick tour of a small winery and had excellent local wines with dinner every evening. We also visited the Quilmes Ruins, home to a fierce indigenous tribe that had managed to resist Incan conquest but eventually fell to the Spanish in 1667. Then again, I suspect that we may have just gone down that road to get great looks at the White-fronted Woodpecker on the 12-to-15-foot saguaro-like cacti where they make their nests.

I ended the trip with 346 well seen birds, of which 157 were lifers. Also seen were many of the common mammals, plus both the Crab-eating and Patagonian foxes, a herd of Guanaco, and more Vicuñas than I could possibly count. We also had to slow or stop in the road many times to avoid every possible domesticated farm animal species including pigs and llamas.

My biggest takeaway is this, don't just consider the popular birding spots with ecotourism infrastructure, but go to the places you love whether they are the rainforest or the ocean or mountaintops. There are great birds to see everywhere, and with a great guide you will find them.

A full trip report is available on Tropical Birding's website: <https://goo.gl/XudLjJ>.

See the 3RBC website for a photo gallery of more birds plus scenery from Claire's tour of Argentina. One highlight is a Great Dusky Swift, a species that builds its nest in large colonies on rocky vertical cliffs behind waterfalls—unusual behavior similar to that of our Black Swift in North America.

“Biggest Week” Is a Big Magnet for Our Members

By Jack Solomon

Black Swamp Bird Observatory's annual festival in northwestern Ohio, known as the “Biggest Week in American Birding,” is set for May 3-12, 2019. The main attraction is birding at Magee Marsh, aptly titled “the warbler capital of the world.”

Magee Marsh is a tiny parcel of wetlands with a boardwalk half a mile long, where an amazing variety and numbers of warblers stop to feed and rest every May. And not just warblers: Vireos, tanagers, flycatchers, kinglets, and other neotropical migrants in great numbers are astonishingly easy to see there, often so close that it doesn't pay to use binoculars.

This event and the birding before, during, and after the festival, typically draw more than 50 members of 3RBC and other clubs in the Pittsburgh region. Many of them register for the festival's field trips, special evening lectures and events, and workshops.

If you're there, watch the 3RBC Facebook page. We may organize a group dinner for Pittsburgh region's folks at a local restaurant.

The festival will feature programs, workshops, and field trips with, among other experts, Kenn Kaufman and David Sibley. General information about the festival and the area, including lodging, is available at BSBO.org.

Rare Birds in Pennsylvania

A total of 438 species of birds have been found in Pennsylvania, according to the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee. The committee's report in *Pennsylvania Birds*, authored by 3RBC's Mike Fialkovich, includes the first record of “Black Brant,” a subspecies from the Northwest.

The Peregrine

Observations

Keeping Warm in the Winter

By Tom Moeller

Someone recently asked me if our local birds grew extra feathers in the winter to keep warm. The answer is “Yes (sort of), plus they do have many other ways to keep warm.”

Feathers are a bird’s first line of defense against winter temperatures. Non-migrating birds which remain in the north all year complete their annual molt by the fall, so they have new plumage with 25% to 30% more feathers when winter arrives.

There are four types of feathers: Flight feathers of the wings and tail are stiff and tightly packed, with an asymmetrical design for aerodynamic efficiency. Contour feathers, symmetrical on each side of the feather, have interlocking barbs and barbules which result in a uniform “shell” on a bird’s body. Down feathers, the insulating feathers with many barbules, are beneath the contour feathers close to a bird’s skin. A fourth type, the light, fluffy semiplume, is found between the down and the contour feathers. *(These are shown in Mya Thompson’s article in the references.)*

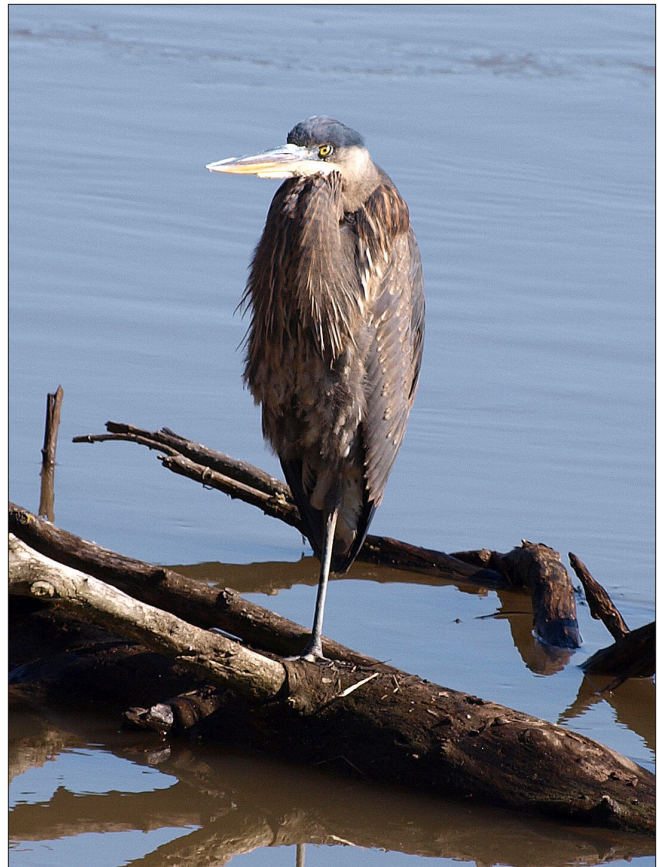
The vast majority of plumage are the down feathers. Their barbules trap and hold heated air resulting in a warm layer under the contour feathers. Flight and contour feathers are waterproofed during preening. The bird obtains “diester” waxes in oily secretions from its uropygial gland at the base of the tail. These waxes and the interlocking structure of the outer feathers help guard the bird from rain, snow, and submerging in water, thus protecting the semiplume and down feathers below. When a bird “puffs up” in the cold, it allows warm air to build up under its contour feathers. This arrangement is akin to us wearing a down jacket under an outer GORE-TEX shell.

Air trapped in the semiplume and down feathers is heated by the bird’s core temperature, which may be 106° F. Birds maintain their core temperature with a winter layer of fat, perhaps 10% of their body weight. Eating fatty foods such as sunflower seeds, peanuts or peanut butter, or suet at feeders contributes to this fat layer and the high body temperature. Plus, there are more strategies a bird can use to keep its core temperature warm.

Hiding from the cold in a hollow in a tree, between rocks, or in dense foliage reduces exposure to cold. Birds of a feather may huddle together drawing warmth from each other. Tucking in body parts by retracting a long neck or hiding the head under a wing, standing on one foot to warm the other up in the feathers, or shivering to retain heat are ways to keep warm. Shivering in birds differs from mammals. Birds’ “shivering” is not observable. They smoothly contract muscles to produce heat, unlike the noticeable tremors of mammals, which actually increase heat loss. However, this activity uses energy requiring the birds to get more food.

Jays, chickadees, woodpeckers, and others cache seeds in tree bark, leaf litter, and other places against the winter’s scarcity. To remember where they have stored their “hoard,” the hippocampus in these birds’ brains may grow by 30%. Some of their hidden seeds may be discovered by other birds or animals, some buried in snow, and some just forgotten, but there should be enough left to survive the winter. In spring when the need for brain power diminishes, the bird’s hippocampus will revert to its normal size.

Ruffed Grouse dig holes under the snow to hide from wind, cold, and predators. These birds can break through the ice formed if snow may melt and refreeze over their heads. Smaller birds would be trapped. Normally ground feeders, grouse find food in a snow-covered landscape: buds in trees. Grouse fly up into aspens, poplars, or birches, stuff their crops with enough food to digest for



COLD COMFORT – Tom Moeller explains three ways this Great Blue Heron keeps warm: Its neck is retracted, only one leg is exposed to the cold, and it folds its wing as a cozy cloak. Tom photographed it at Duck Hollow on March 7, 2011.



SNUG QUARTERS – The Red-bellied Woodpecker uses a carefully constructed hole for its winter home. It digs the hole downward in the trunk for winter protection. Tom photographed it in Squirrel Hill on December 14, 2016.

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The Peregrine

Observations

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extended periods in their snow burrows. They spend much of the time under the snow because their brown coloring would make them an easy target for predators in that snowy landscape.

Northern birds follow Bergmann's Rule that an organism's body size increases with latitude. Canadian cardinals are larger than Mississippi cardinals. The larger northern birds can build up and retain heat longer than their smaller cousins.

To reduce heat loss from legs and feet, gulls and waterfowl have a network of fine arteries and veins next to each other in their legs resulting in a countercurrent heat exchange. Heated blood in the arteries loses heat to the colder venous blood as each passes the other. The cooled arterial blood provides oxygen and nutrients to the feet and heat loss at the extremities is minimized. As the cooled blood returns in the veins, it absorbs heat from the arteries to maintain the bird's core temperature when it re-enters the body.

Long winter nights can be difficult for staying warm. Seed eaters like finches can stuff their crop before sleeping and digest the food through the night to maintain their energy. Many birds from chickadees to Red-tailed Hawks can enter a torpid state, lowering their metabolism, heart rate, and body temperature. In winter torpor requires too much energy to return to normal, so the birds go into a regulated hypothermia, less deep than full torpor.

Despite these strategies, young birds are most susceptible to frosty weather and paucity of food. Exposure and starvation are the main causes of mortality in first-year birds during winter. They have not learned to cope with the harshness of that cruel season.

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See the 3RBC website for Tom's gallery of photos illustrating how more birds keep warm in the winter.



Jamaican Tody by Ricardo Miller

TINY AND DAZZLING – An avian icon on Jamaica, the little multicolored Jamaican Tody is endemic to this island; that is, you will not find one anywhere else in the Caribbean. (photograph courtesy of Ricardo Miller)

Jamaican Birding Adventures

By Pat and Sherron Lynch

To escape the wintery Pittsburgh weather we visited Jamaica from January 16 to 23. Aside from its warmth (the 60s to the 80s) during the winter, it offers 29 Jamaican endemics as well as Caribbean endemics.

Instead of trying our hand at exploring and driving on the left, we used the excellent guiding services of Ricardo Miller, owner of the local Arrowhead Birding (named for Jamaica's endemic warbler). Ricardo is an accomplished birder, a biologist, works as an ecologist for the Jamaican government, and has attended international conferences. Arrowhead Birding specializes in tours for two to four persons, but will lead larger birding groups. Having our personal guide allowed us to go at a more relaxed pace, although Ricardo certainly kept us busy. He has an engaging personality and impressed us with his broad knowledge concerning Jamaican history, nature, and culture, as well as world affairs.

Ricardo met us at the airport in Kingston and drove us to the nearby Knutsford Court Hotel. Because Ricardo resides in Kingston, his tours usually cover the eastern section of the island including the picturesque Blue Mountains. On the hotel's property we found a variety of birds, including two hummingbirds: the incredible Red-billed Streamtail and the Vervain Hummingbird, the world's second smallest bird.

He took us to Hellshire Hills, which gave us several endemics including the stunning Jamaican Mango, Jamaican Vireo, Stolid Flycatcher, and Jamaican Oriole (a Caribbean endemic). We also had our first of several glimpses of mongooses. Greater Portmore provided ducks and waders, including the Northern Jacana. After an afternoon rest, we birded beautiful Hope Gardens. Among the many birds were the endemic Black-billed and Yellow-billed Parrots, Jamaican Woodpecker, and Jamaican Euphonia. Loggerhead Kingbirds seemed to be everywhere. We saw 16 warbler species during the tour, with the Prairie Warbler, Cape May

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The Peregrine



BLACK-BILLED PARROT – Like the Jamaican Tody, this species is endemic to the island. (photograph by Michael David)

Jamaican Birding

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Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, and American Redstart appearing frequently.

We arose early the next day and saw the Jamaican Owl and the Great Potoo, a strange-looking, large bird that blends in well as it perches in a tree. We next birded in the Blue Mountains for two days. The famous Blue Mountain Coffee is grown here. The mountain roads are narrow with many hairpin curves. The Jamaicans are accustomed to driving these narrow roads and beep their horns before entering a particularly bad curve.

During our stay at the Starlight Chalet, which the owners are attempting to make into the most birder-friendly hotel in Jamaica, the alpha Red-billed Streamertail kept attempting to drive other streamertails away from his feeders as they maneuvered to drink. We often were within a few feet of these beautiful birds.

We were also thrilled to see Jamaican Spindalis, Crested Quail-Dove, Arrowhead Warbler, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Jamaican Tody, Jamaican Becard, White-eyed Thrush, the ubiquitous White-chinned Thrush, Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo, and Yellow-shouldered Grassquit, among others. Watching a beautifully feathered Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo scale a tree was definitely special since we had previously missed seeing a lizard cuckoo in the Bahamas despite searching intensely for it.

Lyndon Johnson, who resides in the Blue Mountains and often guides for Arrowhead Birding, was excellent at finding our first cuckoos and the grassquit. When the adorable Jamaican Tody began to show up in small numbers, Pat coined the expression “treasure of todies” for the collective noun. Ricardo liked it so well that he plans to campaign to have it used just like a “murder of crows.” We hope it catches on!

After leaving the mountains, we birded along the way to Port Antonio and stayed at Bay View Eco Resort for two nights. We added Magnificent Frigatebird, Green-rumped Parrotlet, Jamaican Parakeet (formerly Olive-sided Parakeet), White-tailed Tropicbird, Black-billed Streamertail, the rare Jamaican Crow, and the Cuban race of American Kestrel. The area has beautiful scenery including the famous Blue Lagoon. To maintain one of Sherron’s vacation traditions, the three of us walked along the sand and got our feet wet at Winnifred Beach.



JAMAICAN SPINDALIS –As its name suggests, this is another endemic bird the Lynches saw. (photograph by Michael David)

The day before our departure, we returned to Kingston. Ricardo picked up his pretty five-year-old daughter from school, and we all enjoyed ice cream cones for lunch at her favorite eatery. Since we had a late morning flight on the 23rd, Ricardo took us birding and sightseeing at Port Royal. Once the home of infamous pirates, it had the reputation of being the richest and most notorious city in the world before Henry Morgan took control. About two-thirds of it slipped into the bay during an earthquake and resulting tsunami in 1692.

Thanks to Ricardo’s expertise, we saw 111 species including all 29 Jamaican endemics and 10 other life birds.



READY FOR TOUCH-DOWN – On a cloudy day and with calm water on the Mon River at Duck Hollow, a Ring-billed Gull prepares to land. Note how the outer primaries curve downward, just as a pilot lowers an airliner’s flaps, to slow the bird carefully for a soft landing. (photograph by Dan Weeks)

Birds in the Three Rivers Area

Hummingbirds Led the List in October–November 2018

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

The first **Tundra Swan** report came from Verona, where a flock of 48 flew over on 11/13 (SK). Several flocks were noted 11/14 including eBird reports of 100 that flew over Oakmont, 253 over Beechwood Farms (JL), an unknown number over Schenley Park (SA), 40 over Greenfield (KSJ), and two flocks totaling 207 over Pine Twp. (PL, SL). Rounding out the reports, 10 flew over Gibsonia 11/20 (KP).

Uncommon here (and unusual to have two separate reports the same day), a white morph **Snow Goose** was at Janoski's Farm in Findlay Twp. 11/25 (MV) and another was at North Park the same day (MJ). The bird at North Park remained until 11/26 (MJ).

Other waterfowl reports were scant. Two **Gadwalls** were in Findlay Twp. 11/11 (MV). A **Northern Pintail** was at Janoski's Farm in Findlay Twp. 11/2 (MV) and 2 were there 11/25 (MV). A **Greater Scaup** was on the Ohio River at Brunots Island 11/25 (LF, JF). An adult male **Canvasback** was a surprise on the Highland Park reservoir in Pittsburgh 11/25 (AHa, BH). A bit early, 9 **Buffleheads** were at Imperial 10/21 (MV), 3 were at Brunots Island 11/22 (JF) and one was on the Allegheny River at Blawnox 11/25 (AH). A nice raft of 33 **Common Mergansers** were on the Allegheny River visible from the bluff at Harrison Hills Park 11/25 (DB). Two **Ruddy Ducks** were at North Park 11/1 (OM).

Somewhat tardy **Yellow-billed Cuckoos** were at Frick Park 10/14 (MF) and 10/18 at South Park (JF). A few **Northern Saw-whet Owls** were banded at the banding stations in early November at Sewickley Heights Park and Boyce-Mayview Park (BMu, GG). There was an eBird report of more than 300 **Chimney Swifts** at a roost in Bethel Park 10/8-10.

A late **Common Tern** was a surprising discovery at Point State Park in Pittsburgh 10/22 (DK). The bird was approachable and photographed by the observer. Also on the late-date theme, a **Great Egret** was reported at Duck Hollow 11/10 with a photograph in eBird (DK).

An immature male **Rufous Hummingbird** visited a feeder in Brentwood 11/1-11/3 and was banded (DF, BMu), providing the 14th Allegheny County record and the first since 2016. Another hummingbird at a feeder in Coraopolis in November was banded by Bob Mulvihill 11/18 and was determined to be a late **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**. The only other November record in the county was in 2006.

A late **Greater Yellowlegs** was at North Park 11/1 (OM). A **Dunlin** was at Imperial 10/23 (MJ); the most reliable location in the county to find this species.

Merlins were reported in Pine Twp. 10/9 (PL, SL), at the PennDot Wetlands near Wingfield Pines 10/15 (ST), Shaler Twp. 10/30 (JH), Brentwood 10/31 (DF), Jefferson Borough 11/11 (JHA), and Schenley Park (SA) and Homewood Cemetery (TL), both 11/20.

A late **Olive-sided Flycatcher** was at Schenley Park 10/8-9 (SA). A **Common Raven** was at Harrison Hills Park 10/9 (DB) and 1 was observed chasing a crow in Mount Lebanon 11/28 (RT). The **American Crow** roost was once again centered around the Cathedral of Learning in Oakland this fall.

As at many other locations across the state, **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were widely reported in Allegheny County. A **Gray-cheeked Thrush** was at Beechwood Farms 10/23 (BSh).

Up to 5 **Purple Finches** were in Pine Twp. in October and 2 in November (PL, SL). They were present at Harrison Hills Park 10/6-18 (AH, JL, CK, DB) with a high count of 7 on 10/11 (TRh, AP). Singles were seen at Beechwood Farms 10/3 (BSh) and 10/10 (STh, LC, SV), South Park 10/18 (JF), Shaler Twp. 10/23 (JH), Natrona Heights 10/25 (PH), and 2 at another feeder in Natrona Heights 11/3-8 (DB).

Small numbers of **Pine Siskins** were reported in various locations. The high count was 10 in an eBird report (with a photo) from Bethel Park 11/16. A minor influx of **Evening Grosbeaks** in the state began in mid-November with a few Allegheny County reports. Four visited a feeder in Gibsonia 11/15 (eBird with photos) and 4 were in West Deer Twp. 11/22 (eBird with photos).

Three **American Tree Sparrows** at North Park 11/17 (AP) and 1 in Findlay Twp. 11/24 (TRh) were the first reports. A **Chipping Sparrow** lingered in Pine Twp. through November (PL, SL). **Fox Sparrow** reports included single birds 11/10 at North Park (SD) and 11/17 in Marshall Twp. (JHz). A **Lincoln's**

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Hummingbird Wanderers Visit Us in Fall

Hummingbirds from western North America appear often in the east in fall and winter. The visitors occur at feeders kept filled into November and December, which nourish them before they turn southward into their usual migratory direction.

Rufous Hummingbirds are by far the most frequent species that wander toward the northeast. At least 140 have been reported in Pennsylvania since 1992.

Geoff Malosh photographed Allegheny County's most recent Rufous (at right) on November 4, 2018, in Brentwood. It was the 14th record for the county.



The Peregrine

Birds in the Three Rivers

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Sparrow was at Beechwood Farms 10/3 (BSh), 3 were at Harrison Hills Park 10/6 (AH), and single birds were at Frick Park that day (JS, SS), at Boyce-Mayview Park (ST), North Park (AH) and Round Hill Park (JHA) 10/7, at Pine Twp. 10/10-18 (PL, SL), Shaler Twp. 10/14 (JH), South Park 10/22 (JF) and at Pine Twp. 11/14 (PL, SL). **White-crowned Sparrow** reports included singles at North Park 10/7 (AH), Boyce-Mayview Park 10/17 (ST), Hampton Twp. 10/23 (DN), Duck Hollow 10/30 (KSJ), and Pine Twp. 11/1 (PL, SL). Two were at Harrison Hills Park 10/30 (DB).

An estimated 2,000 **Common Grackles** were at Schenley Park 10/15 (KJS). **Rusty Blackbirds** were heard in a flock of Common Grackles in Forest Hills 10/15 (TBI).

A very late **Black-and-white Warbler** was in Plum Borough 11/2 (AH). Single **Orange-crowned Warblers** were reported from eight locations in October including an eBird report of a late bird 11/12 on the North Side of Pittsburgh. **Cape May Warblers** continued into October with single birds at Frick Park 10/5 (JS, SS), Beechwood Farms 10/5 (AH), Natrona Heights 10/7 (PH), Oakland 10/11 (AP), Schenley Park 10/12 (SA), and Churchill 11/10 (WS). A **Wilson's Warbler** was at Beechwood Farms 10/3 (BSh).

A late **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was photographed at a feeder in Monroeville 10/20 (RH).

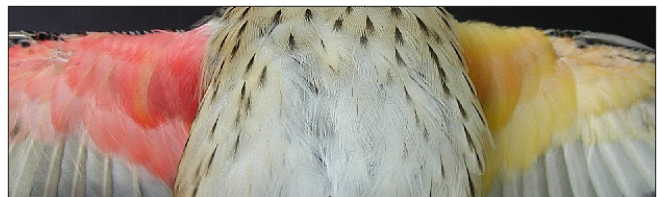
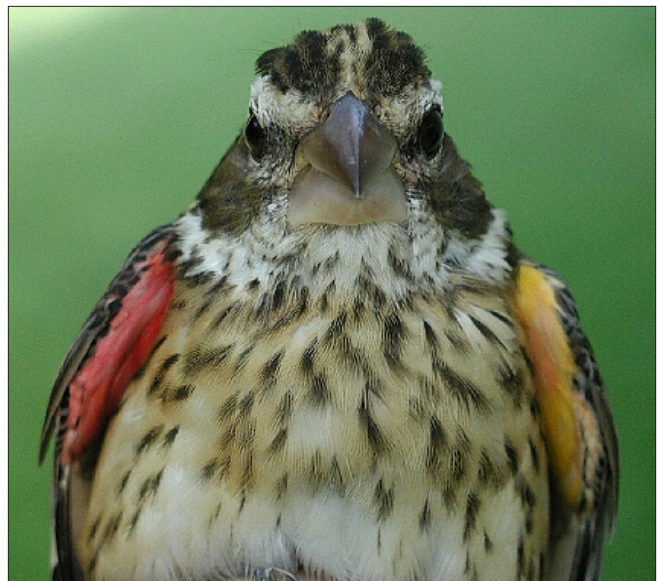
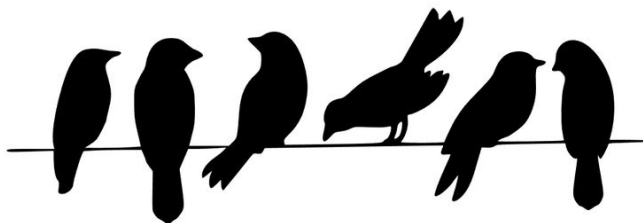
Observers: Sameer Apte, Tony Bledsoe (TBI), Dave Brooke, Linda Croskey, Steve Denninger, Leslie Ferree, Mike Fialkovich, John Flannigan, Donna Foyle, Gigi Gerben, Amanda Haney (AHa), Bob Haney, Rebecca Hart, Jim Hausman (JHa), Janet Heintz (JHz), Amy Henrici, Paul Hess, Joyce Hoffmann, Matthew Juskowich, Scott Kinzey, David Kirk, Chris Kubiak, Todd Ladner, Judy Lesso, Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Oscar Miller, Bob Mulvihill (BMu), Dick Nugent, Kevin Parsons, Aidan Place, Tessa Rhinehart (TRh), Kate St. John, Walt Shaffer, Brian Shema (BSh), Jack Solomon, Sue Solomon, Ryan Tomazin, Steve Thomas (STh), Shannon Thompson, Steve Valasek, Mark Vass.

Allegheny County's 2018 Birds

Mike Fialkovich, our club's bird reports editor, compiles a list of bird species reported in Allegheny County each year. See the complete list of 226(!) species at a link on 3RBC's website.

Leading the list was Pennsylvania's first-ever record of a Varied Bunting – a species with only a few U.S. occurrences anywhere outside of its very limited range in the Southwest.

Other rarities included Ross's Goose, Red-necked Grebe, Rufous Hummingbird, American Avocet, Laughing Gull, Brown Pelican (the county's first record), Snowy Owl, Lapland Longspur, and Blue Grosbeak.



One Bird, Two Plumage Sexes

By Paul Hess

An extraordinary Northern Cardinal in Erie, Pennsylvania, attracted newsworthy attention far and wide this winter. See National Geographic's online coverage in a January 31 post on the 3RBC Facebook.

Pictured above, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak banded at Powdermill Nature Reserve in Westmoreland County is another beautiful example, although it received far less publicity.

These birds are bilateral gynandromorphs – female plumage on one side of the body and male plumage on the other. The term is rooted in Greek words for female, male, and appearance, and the cause is an aberration of the bird's sex chromosomes.

Four gynandromorphs have been banded at Powdermill since its historic banding program began in the 1960s. I vaguely recalled reading about them and asked Bob Mulvihill, a long-term bander at Powdermill and now an ornithologist at the National Aviary, for some information.

The grosbeak in the photographs above (credited to Bob Mulvihill and Adrienne Leppold) was netted at Powdermill in October 2005. Its underwing coverts were rose male on one side and yellow female on the other side. You'll need to see *The Peregrine* online, of course, for the colors.

Besides that bird, Powdermill's records include an Eastern Towhee, a Northern Cardinal, and an Evening Grosbeak.

A few 3RBC members active at the Allegheny Front Migration Observatory in West Virginia may recall a gynandromorphic Black-throated Blue Warbler banded there in 2005.