



The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

Vol. 16, No. 3, May/June 2017

Endangered Shorebird Will Be the Tragic Topic at Our June 7 Program

Ecosystems are being destroyed at an alarming and accelerating rate throughout the world, and among the many species at risk is a critically endangered Asian shorebird aptly named the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

John Canter, a National Audubon Society volunteer, will tell us the bird's story in an emotionally stirring, thought-provoking, and tragically revealing multi-media presentation at our Three Rivers Birding Club meeting on June 7.

The meeting will be held at 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.

John titles his program "Sands of the Sandpipers' Time," and it represents input from conservationists and avian biologists across the Asia-Pacific rim. He explores the global forces, both naturally occurring and man-made, that are transforming the Earth's environment and endangering the survival of creatures such as this tiny sandpiper. John will also describe the late-hour initiatives underway to prevent its extinction.

"The birds' annual spring and autumn migrations are legendary – up to 8,000 kilometers each way. From northern Russia's Chukotsk peninsula to southern Bangladesh, across fragile



VANISHING SPECIES – The Spoon-billed Sandpiper, its odd bill adapted to its specialized feeding habitat, will be the focus of our June 7 program. (photograph by Jan van de Kam/KoreaBirds)

and deteriorating sea and wetlands habitats, this indomitable creature's existence, rapidly plummeting from several thousand to 100 breeding pairs, stands literally on the precipice between continued viability and extinct-in-the-wild death," John says.

Signs of Spring: Waterfowl Pairs in the Breeding Season

Many waterfowl species remain paired with their mates through the winter, but they renew their pair bonds in the spring. These Green-winged Teal (left) and Wood Ducks (right) seem to be ready for the new nesting season.

Wood Ducks nest commonly in western Pennsylvania, of

course. The teal are likely to nest farther north, although there are a few confirmed nesting records in Crawford County's wetlands at the southern fringe of the usual breeding range.

Steve Gosser photographed these pairs along Redbank Creek on March 17, 2017, at New Bethlehem in Clarion County.



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

President's Message

Aspire to Inspire Young Birders

By Bob Van Newkirk

In January, ex-3RBC President Jack Solomon arranged a meeting at the Frick Environmental Center that was open to anyone interested in forming a young birders' club. The March/April 2017 *Peregrine* newsletter provided details about this gathering. Two positive results grew out of this meeting: 1. Mark VanderVen, a local birder and Matt Webb, an Urban Bird Conservation Coordinator for the Museum of Natural History have volunteered to take on the temporary leadership role of moving forth on the next courses of action. 2. Various Pittsburgh area nature organizations pledged support for the youth club.

Modern research has revealed that outdoor experiences foster long-term emotional and cognitive development in children over time. However, many children and teens today have disconnected with nature for many reasons. With summer looming on the horizon of school calendars, many kids will want to explore new interests and experience something out of the ordinary. Parents will be looking for ways to limit their child's or children's TV or other screen activities. If we as parents, grandparents, educators, naturalists, gardeners, photographers, hikers and bird watching enthusiasts want to inspire a love of nature with youth, there are many activities to choose from that are appropriate for all ages. Consider the ideas below or think of other ways you can be a mentor to children or older youths.

Invite to Excite!

Set out Bird Feeders: Attracting birds to your yard or school ground is a great way to see birds up close and to develop a familiarity and interest in learning more about them. Caring for what we cherish is a life-long mission. This activity also prompts feeder watchers to keep a list of the birds that come to their feeders or are seen in their neighborhood. Upper elementary students can act as docents for younger grades and could give presentations about the various birds that visit their classroom's feeders and school grounds.

Participate in a Citizen Science Project: A great way to introduce and involve birders of all ages is by participating in any of the six Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Citizen Science projects. Visit the Lab's web site to learn more about these exciting ways to promote conservation. Many nature centers provide one-day training sessions to demonstrate how to identify and record birds especially for Project Feeder Watch, the annual Christmas Bird Count and the Great Backyard Bird Count. Observers are often invited to participate by watching the center's feeders and reporting the data collected.

Watch a Bird Cam: Google "Bird Cams" provide opportunities to watch live camera feeds of nesting birds, such as Bald Eagle, Barred Owl, Osprey, Great Blue Heron, Peregrine Falcon, hummingbirds, and others. This is a wonderful way to learn in real-time about birds' egg laying, hatching, and feeding the chicks. Perhaps this will lead kids to watch for signs of nesting birds in their own backyards and neighborhoods.

Plant/Build for Birds: This is an excellent hands-on way for teachers, home owners, and Boy and Girl Scouts to enhance habitats at home, school, and church grounds or nature centers by planting flowers, shrubs, or trees to attract birds and other

The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter
Published bimonthly:
January, March, May, July, September, November

Send articles and/or illustrations to:

Paul Hess, Editor
phess@salsgiver.com
1412 Hawthorne St., Natrona Heights, PA 15065

Send ideas or items for the website to:

Julia Pahountis-Opacic, Webmaster
3RBC.website@gmail.com

Send questions and suggestions to:

Bob VanNewkirk, President
van126@comcast.net
126 Timberlane Dr., Pittsburgh, PA 15229-1059

Suggest or volunteer to lead outings to:

Steve Thomas, Outings Director
thomassj22@verizon.net
309 Center Ave., Aspinwall, PA 15215

Report bird sightings to:

Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor
mpfial@verizon.net
805 Beulah Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15235

Membership: FREE Student-Youth, \$15 Individual, \$20 Family, \$50 Contributing, \$100 Sustaining

Send check to Three Rivers Birding Club
c/o Thomas J. Moeller, Treasurer
6357 Ebdy St., Pittsburgh, PA 15217-3035
thosjmoel@gmail.com

Copyright © Three Rivers Birding Club. All rights reserved.
(Photographers and illustrators retain their copyrights.)

wildlife. Building and erecting birdhouses offer kids another way to demonstrate their individual efforts and caregiving for nature. Bird house designs for specific birds can be found on-line.

As 3RBC members we can share our passion for birds and nature by becoming mentors to demonstrate that nature is a wonderful place for adventure that can be enjoyed by family and friends in meaningful ways. Contact your favorite nature center or county park to find out if they would support your willingness to co-lead an outing. You will be required to have a clearance check first, if you do not already have one. Be the spark that kindles kids' interest in getting outdoors.

The Fun Factor!

There are many considerations to make beforehand. Choose a location that you know well, not only for the birds you may find, but also for the ease of walking on trails. Are there bathroom facilities or a drinking fountain nearby? What age group do you feel comfortable leading? Limit your outing to a couple of hours. Some children are not used to walking for a prolonged period. Have multiple field guides handy, or perhaps you could make a laminated sheet showing the birds you might see. Do you have any extra binoculars to share with the children or their parents?

Finally the outing day has arrived, and the kids and their parents are excited to get started. Be enthusiastic. Explain how

continued on page 3

Outings to Come

Don't Miss the Exciting Peak of Spring Migration

By Steve Thomas, Outings Director

Wednesday, May 3 – Linbrook Woodlands: Join Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; van126@comcast.net) at 8:00 AM. This recently purchased 168-acre Allegheny Land Trust property is Franklin Park Borough. The features include steep wooded ravines, trails, many springs, and frontage along Big Sewickley Creek. Warblers, thrushes, flycatchers, and vireos will be targeted. Bring a lunch, snack and water. Porta-Johns are available.

From Pittsburgh – Take I-279 North to the Wexford exit. Turn left onto Route 910 and go about one mile to a “T” intersection. Dragan’s Nursery is on the left. Turn right at the “T” onto Rochester Road, go about 0.5 mile, and turn right onto Big Sewickley Creek Road. Follow this road approximately 0.75 mile and turn left into the park where you see the sign. The parking lot is on the right side bordering a ball field.

From the north – Take I-279 South to the Wexford exit. Turn right onto Route 910 and go about one mile to a “T” intersection. Dragan’s Nursery is on the left. Turn right at the “T” onto Rochester Road. Follow this road for about 0.5 mile, and turn right onto Big Sewickley Creek Road. Follow this road approximately 0.75 mile and turn left into the park where you see the sign. The parking lot is on the right side bordering a ball field.

From the east – Take Route 910, proceed straight through the intersection at I-79, and go approximately one mile to a “T” intersection. Dragan’s Nursery is on the left. Turn right at the “T” onto Rochester Road. Follow this road for about 0.5 mile and turn right onto Big Sewickley Creek Road. Follow this road for about 0.75 mile, and turn left into the park where you see the sign. The parking lot is on the right side bordering a ball field.

(Friday, May 5 – Sewickley Heights Park: This outing is rescheduled to May 12.)

Saturday and Sunday, May 6 and 7 – Barking Slopes: Todd Hooe (hooe@verizon.net; 412-805-6909) will lead us on

President's Message

continued from page 2

the kids will be involved during the walk. Will they have a bingo kind of sheet to check off the birds they see or hear? Keep a bird list and share it with everyone at the end of the walk. If the bird action slows down, what else can you draw attention to such as wildflowers, insects, or if you are near a small stream, look for salamanders or crayfish. Challenge the kids to take photos of things they find interesting along the way. Many will probably have cell phone camera capability or regular cameras. Take time to celebrate every discovery that is made by the kids and their parents. As you come to the end of the outing, take time for everyone to share their favorite sightings. What were their favorite birds or discoveries? Many of your participants will be amazed that birds such as Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Northern Orioles, Scarlet Tanagers, and a variety of colorful warblers can be found so close to their own neighborhoods.

I hope that you will be able to provide many “awe”-some moments. One of these feathered beauties might be the spark that ignites a special attraction to bird watching.

an outing to Barking Slopes along the Allegheny River above Oakmont. Given the difficult terrain and sometimes narrow and undeveloped trails in parts of Barking Slopes, as well as limited parking, two separate walks are scheduled, each with 12-15 participants. Please email or text-message Todd with your interest in either walk.

Expect 40-60 species including American Kestrel, Common Raven, Yellow-breasted Chat, and various warblers, flycatchers, sparrows, thrushes, and vireos, Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, Scarlet Tanager, Indigo Bunting, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

Saturday (7:00 AM-12:00 PM): This will be an extensive exploration (approximately 5 miles of hiking) of the upper portion of the property. We will be hiking through potentially difficult terrain including narrow paths, steep climbs, loose rock and gravel, dirt, grass, and possibly muddy trails. We will bird for up to 5 hours depending upon weather and conditions.

Sunday (7:30 AM-11:30 AM): This walk will be an exploration (approximately 3 miles of hiking) of the easier trails of the upper portion of the property. There will be some uphill climbs, but much of the time the trails will be relatively flat, wide, and with grass, gravel, or dirt surfaces. Some mud is possible depending upon rainfall amounts. We will bird for up to 4 hours depending upon weather and conditions.

Important reminders: Once we depart from the parking lot, we will not return until the end of the walk. There are no public restrooms. Bring water and packed food/snack items. There are ticks, poison ivy, and plants with thorns, spines, and prickles. Dress appropriate for the weather. Long pants and hiking boots/shoes are necessary.

GPS: 40.529130, -79.792003 (Coxcomb Hill Road).

Sunday, May 7 – Tom's Run Nature Reserve: David Yeany (814-221-4361) will lead us at this nature reserve of 317 acres in Kilbuck and Ohio Townships acquired by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) in several parcels between 1977 and 1991. Meet Dave at 6:30 AM, which is earlier than usual for our outings. He does not want us to miss the “dawn chorus” of many species singing. We should be able to find a variety of migrant songbirds – warblers, thrushes, vireos and more.

The property has some rough trails, which WPC staff is working to improve, and includes some nice oak and northern hardwoods forest as well as some forest which has been heavily impacted by invasive understory shrubs like multiflora rose.

Parking is located along Tom's Run Road, just east of I-79 and northwest of Emsworth in Allegheny County. Go north on Route 65 past Emsworth and before the entrance to I-79 where Tom's Run Road is on the right. Take Tom's Run Road just past Duff Road to enter the parking lot. GPS: 40.5223963,-80.1099652.

Friday, May 12 (rescheduled from May 5): In collaboration with the Fern Hollow Nature Center, Sheree Daugherty (shereedaugherty@gmail.com) will lead this walk. Meet at 7:30 AM in the upper parking lot. Directions are on the 3RBC website. Be prepared for muddy trails. It is also advisable to bring water and a lunch. 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 13 – Harrison Hills Park: Meet leader Jim Valimont (412-828-5338) at 8:00 AM at this county park off Freeport Road between Natrona Heights and Freeport. As you enter the park, bear right and proceed to the parking area at the end (not all the way down to the soccer field). The parking lot is near

continued on page 4

The Peregrine

Outings to Come

continued from page 3

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 tinyurl.com/HarrisonHills for directions.

Saturday, May 20 – 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 still be well underway, but you never know what to expect. Presque Isle has produced some of Pennsylvania’s best (and only) records of rarities. Please bring a lunch.

Saturday, May 20 – Breeding Birds of Crawford County: We will visit several of Shawn Collins’s favorite spots around Game Lands 213. Directions to the meeting place are below. Meet Shawn there at 9:00 AM. These locations have always turned up great birds on territory. Our targets will be Virginia Rail, Sora, Marsh Wren, Common Gallinule, Red-headed Woodpecker, Cerulean Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, American Redstart, Hooded Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, plus various vireos, swallows, flycatchers, waterfowl, and Sandhill Cranes.

We will have lunch at a nice picnic area at Ernst Trail (Geneva location). Please bring a lunch. We will bird around the grassland and large pond after lunch. This area hosts many sparrows, Wood Ducks, Blue-winged Warblers, and other specialties. After lunch we will continue on the other side of the game lands. If anyone wants to visit the Miller Ponds area afterwards, we can search for the Upland Sandpipers that call Route 285 their home.

From Pittsburgh, take I-79 North to the Geneva/Cochran exit. After the exit, turn left. There will be a flashing red light. Go straight past the light, and on the left there is a gravel park-and-ride lot. We will meet there and carpool. For questions, email Shawn at pabirder1974@gmail.com or text/call 412-721-2526. Rain date will be Saturday, June 3.

Saturday, June 24 – Ohiopyle State Park: Come to the Laurel Highlands to enjoy birds of the mountain forests with leader Mike Fialkovich. We will explore the shores of the Youghiogheny River, forests, and meadows of this scenic state park. Expect to see various warblers, Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, a Barn Swallow and Cliff Swallow nesting colony and more.

We will meet at the Dairy Queen at the Donegal Exit (#91) of the Pennsylvania Turnpike at 7:00 AM. The park is 20 miles from the meeting place. Allow 45 minutes driving time from the Monroeville Exit of the turnpike to the meeting location at Donegal. If you are familiar with the park, you can meet the group at the Fern Cliff Peninsula parking lot at 7:30 AM.

From the Pittsburgh area, take the Pennsylvania Turnpike East to Exit #91 Donegal. Once through the toll booths, turn left onto Route 31 East and travel a short distance to the Dairy Queen on the left. Restrooms are available at a McDonald’s and the gas station across from the Dairy Queen. Bring lunch.

See www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks/findapark/ohiopyle for a map and other information about this beautiful park.



GULL EXCITEMENT – Two rarities visited western Pennsylvania this past winter. The Black-headed Gull (above; photo by Steve Gosser) was at Lake Arthur in Butler County in December. The Slaty-backed Gull (below; photo by Jerry McWilliams) was at Erie in January and February. This was the fifth Black-headed Gull seen at that precise location since 1998. The Slaty-backed Gull was only the third ever documented in the state.



Birding in Greene County

The Ralph K. Bell Bird Club will host major events this spring at two Greene County locations that have been favorites of many western Pennsylvania birders for decades.

First, the Enlow Fork Wildflower Walk will be Sunday, April 30, and will include a bird walk starting at 8:00 AM. The club will provide breakfast sandwiches and coffee for the birders! “We hope some of the Three Rivers Birding Club members will make the drive down,” says club President Marjorie Howard.

Second, a Memorial Walk will be held at the Bell Farm on Saturday, May 20, at 9:00 AM. The club will dedicate a plaque in memory of Ralph, who was a pioneer in bird banding in Greene County and West Virginia. Marjorie says, “We would love to have members join us for this event. Bring a bag lunch and join us after the walk for lunch in the yard.”

See the 3RBC website for directions to both locations.

The Peregrine

Observations

Birds from the Dark Side

By Tom Moeller

My last column was about leucism, a genetic mutation which is found in many forms in many birds. The opposite of leucism is melanism, another mutation in which an overabundance of melanin occurs in a bird's feathers. This causes unusually dark birds. Scientists believe melanism, like leucism, is hereditary, but this conclusion is not definitive. Melanism occurs much more rarely than leucism.

Melanistic, or melanic, birds come in two varieties. Excess melanin may only show in normally dark areas of a bird's plumage; e.g., hood, eye stripe, or wing bars. Such birds are not exactly "right" looking – sometimes appearing darker than normal in the dark areas; sometimes with bleeding of the dark areas into surrounding feathers. Often this variety is not noticeable to the average birder. The second variety is much more noticeable with the entire bird appearing dark brown or black, showing little of its normal coloring. These birds, however, still retain normal beak, leg, and eye color. Most birders will know that this bird is rather odd.

Excess melanin in feathers causes them to be stiffer than normal feathers, therefore, weak and prone to breakage. Also, some research has shown a connection between melanism and aggressive behavior in birds, which might be advantageous on small islands where competition for breeding territory is severe, and melanic birds may also have a survival advantage in being less detectable. Yet, melanic birds can absorb heat better, which is useful for body temperature regulation in cold regions. Genetic studies also suggest that melanism is linked to a better immune system in birds showing this condition. Likewise, melanistic feathers have been found to be more resistant to bacterial infestation, especially in humid conditions. These beneficial qualities of melanism are thought to be the basis of dark morphs in certain adult birds.

One species with a dark morph is the Snow Goose. Lesser Snow Geese have a "blue morph" with dark feathers on most of the body except its head and tail and under its wings. The ratio of dark morph Snow Geese to white birds is about 1 in 100 in Pennsylvania. This "Blue Goose" may be a reversion to an ancestor related to Snow Geese and Emperor Geese, which had dark feathers in most of its plumage similar to the Emperor Goose. This reversion to an earlier form is called atavism. The continuation of dark morph birds is due to assortive mating choices based on parental colors. If your parent is dark, you will probably pick a dark mate. Ross's Goose has a dark morph similar to the Snow Goose. Other dark morph birds are the Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk (which may or may not be truly a Red-tailed Hawk – subject for a doctoral dissertation) and the dark morph of the Rough-legged Hawk.

Dark morph birds are easier to find than completely melanic birds. If you do find a melanistic bird, I hope you have a camera handy!

References:

- Mike Cerutti. "Melanistic or Dark Morph?" March 29, 2012. *World Bird Sanctuary*. Accessed January 20, 2017. <http://tinyurl.com/jaob24h>
- Alfred O. Gross, "Melanism in North American Birds," *Bird*



EXTRA MELANIN – The unusually dark brown House Sparrow above is a good example of Tom Moeller's "Observations" theme: melanism. The dark Mourning Dove below is also a striking contrast with the typical one at its side. He photographed these examples in his yard in Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill neighborhood.



Banding Vol. 36, No. 4 (October 1965): pages 240-242. Accessed January 8, 2017. <http://tinyurl.com/kc2rb25>

GrrlScientist. "Mystery bird: Harlan's red-tailed hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis harlani*." February 22, 2012. *The Guardian*. Accessed March 3, 2017. <http://tinyurl.com/heq8jq9>

Melissa Mayntz. "Bird Melanism – Dark Birds." February 29, 2016. *The Spruce, Birding Basics*. Accessed November 6, 2016. <http://tinyurl.com/joh5arh>

Nicholas I. Mundy. "A window on the genetics of evolution: MC1R and plumage colouration in birds." July 14, 2005. *The Royal Society Publishing*. Accessed January 8, 2017. <http://tinyurl.com/hlgo05c>

P. J. Reilly. "5 cool facts about snow geese." March 16, 2015. *Lancaster Online*. Accessed March 3, 2017. <http://tinyurl.com/z523fw8>

Matthew D. Shawkey and Geoffrey E. Hill, "Feathers at a Fine Scale." *The Auk* Vol. 121, No. 3 (July 2004): pages 652-655. Accessed January 24, 2017. <http://tinyurl.com/mtu4j52>

See more of Tom's melanistic birds in his gallery of photos at 3rbc.org.

The Peregrine

Outings Revisited

We Moved Out of Winter to the Waterfowl of Spring

Sewickley Heights Park – February 18: For several years, 3RBC has teamed with the Fern Hollow Nature Center to participate in the annual Great Backyard Bird Count. Fifteen birders met at the center, and our first sighting was a pair of Eastern Bluebirds checking out a nesting box in the field. We began our walk on the Pipeline Trail and found the typical winter residents: Song Sparrows, American Goldfinches, Tufted Titmice, Northern Cardinals, a Carolina Wren, Blue Jays, and crows.

Next we walked along the gravel road and observed a pair of Red-tailed Hawks soaring overhead, and a Cooper's Hawk sped by and disappeared over the tree line. Our first Turkey Vulture was the only other notable bird. As we headed back to the parking lot, we spied a few White-throated Sparrows, a Carolina Wren, a pair of Tufted Titmice, and a Blue Jay all foraging low to the ground.

The horse pastures along the Bayberry Trail turned out to be the birdiest section of the park. A pair of bluebirds was observed using fence posts as lookouts for insects. Dark-eyed Juncos were discovered foraging along the fence lines. A trio of Northern Mockingbirds was found, each centered in its own separate tangle of multiflora rose bush and probably guarding the last of their rose hips. We watched a flock of 25 European Starlings quickly padding over the ground in search of food. As we searched the fields and trees near us, calls of a Red-bellied Woodpecker, a Northern Flicker, a White-breasted Nuthatch, and a Killdeer were noted. While scanning a hillside, an immature Red-tailed Hawk and a Turkey Vulture flew by.

Heading back to the parking lot by near Waterthrush Way, we found a flock of 15 Cedar Waxwings. Some were quietly perched in a grape vine or sitting on nearby tree branches. The birds seemed to be taking turns flying back and forth to and from the ground. A loud drumming sound also caught our attention. Obviously it was a woodpecker, but which one? When one of the birders played recordings of drumming woodpeckers on her cell phone, we agreed that the musician was a Pileated Woodpecker.

We totaled 24 species and 132 individual birds, which is about our usual GBBC average for the park. The day ended as it began, with everyone energized by the mild weather and our fun searching for birds. A few of us went on to the Fern Hollow Nature Center to enjoy a potluck luncheon and to hear the results of the feeder watchers. —by leader **Bob VanNewkirk**

Pymatuning Area – March 26: In spite of the threat of rain, 25 people, many from Chris Kubiak's Master Birding Class offered by the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, met at the former Wildlife Learning Center. Because of state funding cuts, the center has been closed for many years and was torn down this past winter. We had more than a dozen species while we waited in the parking lot: We could hear Canada Geese, Sandhill Cranes, Eastern Phoebes, Blue Jays, American Crows, American Robins, Northern Cardinals, Song Sparrows, and Red-winged Blackbirds. A Great Blue Heron, Mourning Doves, and European Starlings flew over, while Tree Swallows swooped above us. Some of us caught a glimpse of an American Tree Sparrow.

Leader Bob VanNewkirk told us that he had made four scouting trips (i.e., excuses for birding) to Pymatuning in the

previous week and a half, every one of them different. Someone interrupted him: A large "V" of Tundra Swans was rapidly disappearing out of sight! We explained to the new birders that it is always socially acceptable to interrupt someone to point out a bird!

We next made our way uphill to look for eagles and waterfowl. An adult Bald Eagle in a tree provided us with a "wow" moment in the scopes while two immatures loitered on the ground of Ford Island. A Sandhill Crane was also on the island. Back toward the parking lot we added a Hairy Woodpecker, a Black-capped Chickadee, and a Golden-crowned Kinglet to our list.

We carpoled to the Spillway where a distant "loon" proved on closer inspection to be a Double-crested Cormorant. We had nice looks at two Red-breasted Mergansers and a pair of Horned Grebe. An immature Herring Gull stood head and shoulders above the many Ring-billed Gulls. Bob got his scope on a Bald Eagle nest, and we could see that an adult was on the nest.

Our next stop was the parking area off Route 285, overlooking fields and a pond. An Eastern Meadowlark was on the telephone wire, and we watched a Northern Harrier looping low over the fields. A Rough-legged Hawk was spotted, and we were able to get the scopes on it when it landed, letting everyone see this uncommon raptor. A Red-tailed Hawk and more Bald Eagles were also in the vicinity. We observed several Gadwalls, American Wigeons, Buffleheads, and Hooded Mergansers on the pond. At least two Killdeer were calling and flying about.

A dozen Pectoral Sandpipers foraged at the smaller Miller Pond. We were happy to see that a Short-billed Dowitcher was still there, along with two Greater Yellowlegs. It's difficult to distinguish between the two dowitcher species, but another birder had heard the Short-billed's unique call a few days earlier. Several Green-winged Teal were on the pond. An Eastern Phoebe was calling from a brush pile next to a maintenance building, and we were able to get good looks. Of course, we had more Bald Eagles at this location! As we left, several Turkey Vultures were circling in the sky, and an American Kestrel was perched on a wire.

A nice variety of ducks in breeding plumage greeted us at the Hartstown Project, including Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Bufflehead, Northern Shoveler, and Hooded Merganser. We were able to put a scope on an Eastern Meadowlark, and everyone got an excellent look at this welcome spring migrant. Raptors included Bald Eagles, a Red-tailed Hawk, and a Turkey Vulture.

Most people stayed for lunch at the Spillway Inn, and then 14 of us continued to the Fish Hatchery where we added Lesser Scaup and Common Merganser to our list. A Belted Kingfisher flashed by us, hugging the shoreline.

The group elected to hunt for Red-headed Woodpeckers at the Tuttle Campground. We could not locate any, but we found Northern Flicker, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Golden-crowned Kinglet.

Next, at McMichael Road we were treated to a Bald Eagle sitting close to us on a snag. Although we had seen Bald Eagles almost everywhere, few people were tired of looking at them. Among the many Red-winged Blackbirds, we were able to pick out some Rusty Blackbirds. A Northern Pintail circled overhead and eventually landed next to several others of its kind. Rain, which had held off all day, finally began under a now-darkening sky.

Our last stop was at Custards, where we observed Ring-necked Ducks as far as the eye could see, as well as a few American Wigeons, Green-winged Teal, Redheads, and Greater Scaup. We had 60 species, including 20 Bald Eagles. —by participant **Debbie Kalbfleisch**

Birds in the Three Rivers Area

7 Merlins Were Highlights in Dec. 2016–Jan. 2017

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

After a mild fall, mid-December weather included brief storms, snow, and freezing rain but for the most part the season remained calm. The mild conditions resulted in a late movement of Tundra Swans after none had been found during the typical fall migration time of mid-November. We saw fewer than normal southbound migrants. The remainder of this reporting period featured mild weather and little precipitation.

There were only two reports of **Tundra Swans**: two flocks flying over the Greenfield section of Pittsburgh after dark 12/14 (KSJ) and 3 birds at Duck Hollow 12/20 (JS, SS). A white morph **Snow Goose** was a surprising sight flying low over Schenley Park 1/21 (MVV, MF).

A **Gadwall** was at Imperial 12/3 (MV) and 2 were in Harmar Twp. 1/23 (AB). Eight **American Black Ducks** were at the Moody Road ponds in Findlay Twp. 12/11 (MV), 1 was at Duck Hollow 12/29 (SS, PH, AP), 2 were at Emsworth 12/31 (PB), and 6 were at Brunots Island 12/31 (JG, OM). A **Northern Shoveler** was a nice find at Duck Hollow 12/9 (JF). Single **Northern Pintails** were at Wingfield Pines 12/10 (JF) and South Park 1/10 (JF, MJ). Three **Green-winged Teal** were at the Moody Road ponds in Findlay Twp. 12/11 (MV) and 1 was nearby at Janoski's Farm 12/23 (GM). Two **Redheads** were at the Moody Road Ponds 12/16 and likely the same birds were at a retention pond at Imperial 12/18 (MV). A **Canvasback** was at Emsworth Dam on the Ohio River 12/16-31 (PB et al.). A **Surf Scoter** was a nice find at the Highland Park Dam on the Allegheny River 12/22-28 (AH et al.). Six **Red-breasted Mergansers** at Brunots Island on the Ohio River 12/31 (JG, OM) was the only report.

A **Common Loon** was at the Highland Park Dam 12/22-23 (AH et al.) and 1 was around Brunots Island on the Ohio River 1/18-29 (AB et al.). A **Horned Grebe** was at Duck Hollow 12/19-25 (DWe, JS, SS). Up to 27 **Double-crested Cormorants** were at Emsworth Dam on the Ohio River during January (PB).

Seven **Merlins** set a new high count for the Pittsburgh CBC. There were quite a few reports of **Turkey Vultures** during the period, most likely due to the mild winter. A flock of 54 **Wild Turkeys** were in Upper St. Clair 12/18 (ST).

Seven late **Killdeer** were at Imperial 12/3 (MV), and a **Wilson's Snipe** was there 12/3 (MV). A **Killdeer** was in Oakland 12/31 (MK) and 1 was in Homewood Cemetery 1/14 (MVV).

An adult and a first-cycle **Lesser Black-backed Gull** were at The Point in Pittsburgh 12/9 (ST). The first-cycle bird was seen again 12/11 (SA) and an adult was there 12/19 (GM). **Bonaparte's Gulls** are very uncommon here in winter. One was at Duck Hollow (DWe), 2 were at McKees Rocks 12/19 (JHa), and 2 were at The Point 1/6 (GM, ST).

The **Rufous Hummingbird** banded in late November in Brookline was last reported 12/11 (DWe). An **Eastern Phoebe** at Imperial 12/23 (MV) was either very late or a wintering bird. This is the third winter record from the Imperial Area (previous records: 1/16/1999 and 2/11/2013).

The **American Crow** roost in Pittsburgh was located in Oakland this winter at the University of Pittsburgh campus. The CBC total was 14,690, down from previous years; however, the location made counting difficult because buildings blocked views of incoming birds. Crows staged in nearby Schenley Park before

going to roost; thousands gathered in trees around the golf course.

A total of 20 **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were tallied during the Pittsburgh CBC 12/31 (BSh), and birds continued from various locations during the period. A **Hermit Thrush** was at Beechwood Farms for a few days around 1/22 (CK). A late or lingering **Gray Catbird** visited a feeding station in South Park Twp. 12/18 (JF).

Eastern Towhee reports included single birds in Findlay Twp. 1/6 (MV) and Brentwood 1/8-9 (JN). This species is uncommon here in winter. Other uncommon winter sparrows were found during this milder than normal season. A **Chipping Sparrow** visited a feeder at Frick Park 12/31-1/8 (TF, FI, DWe). Up to 4 **Field Sparrows** were in Pine Twp. in January (PL, SL). **Fox Sparrows** lingered later than usual. One was at Frick Park up to 12/2 (DWe) and single birds were at Findlay Twp. (MV) and Beechwood Farms (BSh) 12/16. One remained at Frick Park to at least 1/1 (SS). **White-crowned Sparrows** wintered at their usual location in Findlay Twp. (v.o.).

A "**Cassiar**" **Dark-eyed Junco** (subspecies *cismontanus*) visited the feeders at Beechwood Farms in December and January (BSh). This is an intergrade of "Oregon" and "Slate-colored" Dark-eyed Junco that breeds in central Yukon, north-central and eastern British Columbia, and west-central Alberta.

Red-winged Blackbirds are rare here after November. A bird visited a feeder in Fawn Twp. 12/11 (PK) and 5 were at Imperial 12/18 (MV); 6 visited a feeder in Pine Twp. 12/26, and 3 were there 12/27 (PL, SL); sightings at the feeder continued well into February. Single birds visited feeders in Crafton 1/16 (LA) and again in Pine Twp. 1/23 (PL, SL). Thirteen were found in Homewood Cemetery 1/24 (fide MVV). Two **Common Grackles** were in Squirrel Hill in December (JS, SS) and 1 visited a feeder in Hampton Twp. 1/22 (DN). Grackles are rare in winter in western Pennsylvania.

continued on page 8



DELIGHTFUL INVADER – Red-breasted Nuthatches moved down from the north in moderate numbers to spend the past winter in Pennsylvania. Mike Fialkovich was one of the fortunate Allegheny County birders who hosted one. He photographed it on January, 22, 2017.

The Peregrine

Birds in the Three Rivers

continued from page 7

Four **Brown-headed Cowbirds** (3 males, 1 female) visited a feeder in Pine Twp. 12/14 (PL, SL), 2 females stopped at a feeder in Natrona Heights 12/15 (PH); 4 were at the feeder in Pine Twp. again 12/20 (all females) and next on 1/9 (1 female and 5 males) (PL, SL). It seems almost every year a few stop by a feeder somewhere in the county, usually just for a brief time.

A **Purple Finch** visited a feeder in Plum 1/3 (AH, PM), and a Pine Siskin visited a feeder in Natrona Heights 12/12 (PH).

Observers: Sameer Apte, Lorraine Asturino, Paul Brown, Alan Buriak, Mike Fialkovich, John Flannigan, Ted Floyd, Jim Gray, Jim Hausman (JHa), Amy Henrici, Paul Hess, Frank Izaguirre, Kate St. John, Matthew Juskowich, Michelle Kienholz, Patrick Kopnicky, Chris Kubiak, Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Geoff Malosh, Oscar Miller, Jennifer Nail, Dick Nugent, Aidan Place, Brian Shema (BSh), Jack Solomon, Sue Solomon, Shannon Thompson, Mark VanderVen (MVV), Mark Vass, (MV), Diane Walkowski (DWa), Dan Weeks (DWe), various observers (v.o.).

Groups Fight Wind Farm Along Lake Erie in Ohio

Three Rivers Birding Club members who relish the spring birding spectacle at Magee Marsh in Ohio will find this announcement of great interest.

The American Bird Conservancy (ABC) and the Black Swamp Bird Observatory have filed a lawsuit against the Ohio Air National Guard over its plans to build and operate a wind turbine at its Camp Perry facility.

Located in Port Clinton, Ohio, on the shore of Lake Erie, Camp Perry lies in a major bird migration corridor, close to numerous Bald Eagle nests. The project is likely to kill species protected under the Endangered Species Act such as Kirtland's Warbler and Piping Plover. The proposed site is close to the Magee Marsh area and the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge.

The suit contends that the project violates the Endangered Species Act and other federal laws protecting wildlife and the environment. A recent [radar study](#) by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service found excessively high risks to birds and bats from wind turbines placed along the shores of the Great Lakes.

The groups ask the federal court to halt the project and to require proper permitting and environmental impact assessments.

"We have many peer-reviewed studies documenting the impact of wind energy on birds and bats. And yet it takes a lawsuit to protect one of the most important migratory bird stopover habitats in the Western Hemisphere," said Kimberly Kaufman, Executive Director of Black Swamp Bird Observatory. "It's another sad commentary on the lack of wind energy regulations in this country."

"The Great Lakes region is perhaps the worst possible place for wind energy development," said Michael Hutchins, director of ABC's [Bird-Smart Wind Energy Program](#). This would be a disaster for our ecologically and economically important birds, as well as bats."



*GOOD SEASON FOR RED-HEADS –Birders had an uncommon treat this winter at Crooked Creek State Park in Armstrong County. Adult and first-winter immature Red-headed Woodpeckers were both present. Dave Brooke photographed these two in January 2017. If you look closely at the young bird on the website edition of *The Peregrine*, you may see a few feathers that are the first vestiges of an adult's red head.*

