



The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

Vol. 22, No. 3 May/June 2023

Ivory-Billed Woodpecker: Does It Still Exist? See Our Exciting Program on June 7

One of our most intriguing topics about birds is whether the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is extinct, or is it simply hidden away from us somewhere in a vast southern swamp.

Dr. Steven C. Latta, Director of Conservation and Field Research at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, believes it does survive. He will tell why at our 3RBC meeting on Wednesday, June 7, at Beechwood Farms, 614 Dorseyville Road, Fox Chapel.

He titles his program "No Fool's Errand: A Search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Louisiana." Dr. Latta led a team of researchers from 2012 to 2021 in bottomland hardwood forests, which are likely sites to find out whether a population still exists.

Drawing on 10 years of research, the team reports multiple lines of evidence that the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is present at their study site.

As announced in the last issue of our newsletter and on our website, this will be a *hybrid meeting* starting at 6:30 PM ET: in-person at Beechwood Farms auditorium (6:30 PM) and a Zoom meeting (7:00 PM) for those who cannot attend. The business meeting will begin at 7:30 PM, and Dr. Latta's presentation will start around 8:00 PM. Details on how to join the event, including Zoom passcodes and other instructions, will be supplied a few days before the meeting.



HOPING FOR SUCCESS – Steven Latta searches a Louisiana woodland for good evidence of an Ivory-Billed Woodpecker.



You Can't Imagine What You Can See on a 3RBC Outing

Let us know if you've ever seen a Red-shouldered Hawk carrying lunch as this one participants saw on Ken Knapp's outing in the Pymatuning area on March 26, 2023. Dave Brooke photographed this remarkable spectacle they saw.

In this case, its lunch was a small snake. Red-shouldered Hawks treat themselves to one of the most varied menus of any raptor.

Ornithologist Arthur Cleveland Bent listed the following in his 1937 *Life Histories of North American Birds of Prey*: small rodents, birds, snakes, frogs, fish, insects, centipedes, spiders, crawfish, earthworms, and snails.

Meanwhile, take a look on page 4 at the Common Loon that Craig Jansen photographed on Linda Kroskey's outing at Goddard State Park on April 2, 2023.

The *Peregrine* editor welcomes photos to illustrate the "Outings Revisited" roundup in each issue. All may not be used because of space available, but give it a try.

See *The Peregrine* in beautiful color at [3rbc.org](https://www.3rbc.org)

President's Message

A New Birding Flight Around the World

By Sheree Daugherty

How many of us have dreamed of doing a birding "Big Year?" Some of us have done our own versions of big years: all the birds seen in Pennsylvania, the United States, or maybe our own backyard.

Few have the means or stamina to attempt an ambitious wide-ranging effort. Fortunately, we can enjoy an armchair world-wide big year by reading *The (Big) Year That Flew By: Twelve Months, Six Continents, and the Ultimate Birding Record* by Arjan Dwarshuis.

The author, a birder from the Netherlands, set off in 2016 to break the global big year record that was set by Noah Strycker in the previous year.

With an extra day (2016 was a leap year), and learning from and guided by Noah's experience, he accomplished that goal with an impressive total of 6,852 bird species, nearly three quarters of the world's roughly 10,700 species.

The (Big) Year That Flew By, not only takes the reader on a whirlwind journey of over 140,000 kilometers to 41 countries on six continents, but stresses the importance of conservation to preserve rapidly disappearing habitats.

The story bounces back and forth between Arjan's earlier experiences with birding and the Big Year of 2016. He grew up near Amsterdam with an obsession for birds. His parents encouraged their only child's quirky interest, and traveled with him to birding hot spots. As a young adult, Arjan traveled to bird in far off countries — Indonesia and South America. This background provided the perfect framework to attempt a big year.

His big year starts in the Netherlands, a refuge for wintering waders and waterfowl, with a goal of kicking off the journey by seeing 100 species on January 1. Then, accompanied by his friend, Max, the real travel begins.

Noting the complicated logistics, unpredictable weather, and the fatigue of constant travel, Arjan shares the highlights of finding rare birds and the lows of missed species. He had the good fortune of staying healthy, having excellent guides, and the companionship of friends and family throughout his year-long odyssey.

After his incredible experience, today Arjan continues to promote birding and conservation. He acknowledges that the carbon footprint of a year of traveling the globe may sound counter to preserving the environment, but hopes that by telling his story it will bolster the concept of eco-tourism and encourage others to care more about conservation.

He worked closely with the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Program during his big year, raising nearly \$50,000 for them. He is also a professional bird guide and continues to write and lecture on the importance of protecting birds globally.

Arjan's publisher, Chelsea Green Publishing, has offered 3RBC members a 35% special discount. Visit their site at the link below and enter the discount code **EVEN35** at checkout to get the special price! <https://www.chelseagreen.com/product/the-big-year-that-flew-by>.

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THE (BIG) YEAR THAT FLEW BY

Twelve Months

Six Continents

and the

Ultimate Birding Record

ARJAN DWARSHUIS

FOREWORD BY MARK OBMASCIK

Outings to Come

You'll See a Great Array of Birding Locations on Our Spring Menu

By Steve Thomas, Outings Director

"It is our intention to follow the CDC and local county guidelines that are in place during this 2023 spring. We request that social distancing still be observed, and encourage people not to share equipment. The leader may have other restrictions in place and can end a walk if an uncomfortable situation arises."

Saturday, May 13 -- Deer Lakes County Park: Meet John Vassallo (johnnvassallo@yahoo.com) at 8:30 AM in the parking lot at these GPS coordinates: 40.618722, -79.815371. From Creighton-Russelton Road, enter the park (Kurn Road), drive by two ponds on the right, then make a right turn and proceed to the last parking lot. Although the trails are pretty well maintained, please dress for possible wet grass, mud and rainfall.

Saturday, May 20 -- Hartwood Acres County Park: Malcolm Kurtz (malcolmgardener101@gmail.com) will lead us on this bird walk starting at 8:00 AM. We will meet at the Mansion Parking Lot off Saxonburg Blvd. in Indiana Township. The parking lot address is 200 Hartwood Acres (40.5687, -79.9090).

Malcolm is limiting the number of participants to 15. Please email him at malcolmgardener101@gmail.com to register.

Sunday, May 21 -- Glade Run Lake Park: Join Dave Brooke (724-487-3586) at 8:00 AM at this park at Lake Road in Valencia, which is off Route 228 in southern Butler County. Google maps co-ordinates are 40.716229, -79.901211. We will survey the lake from the dam and the boat ramp for waterfowl. Then we will walk a trail about 2 miles out and 2 miles back. It can be muddy in places, so boots are highly recommended.

Saturday, June 10 -- Picnic at Harrison Hills Park: We will hold our annual 3RBC picnic at this popular Allegheny County Park in Natrona Heights in northeastern Allegheny County. It will be a bring-your-own-lunch picnic starting at noon at the Yakaon Pavilion. The pavilion is across from the environmental center. As you enter the park, take the left fork of the road, then turn left at the first intersection and go up the hill to the large parking lot.

Prior to the picnic we will have a bird walk starting at 9:00 AM. This walk will start at the Rachel Carson parking lot near the pond. For this walk, as you enter the park, take the right fork of the road and proceed to the parking lot at the end of the road.

Saturday, June 17 -- Wolf Rocks Trail at Forbes State Forest/Laurel Summit State Park: Mike Fialkovich (412-303-0010 cell) will return to the top of Laurel Mountain to search for high-elevation forest species including a variety of warblers, vireos, sapsuckers, juncos, Hermit Thrushes and more.

We will begin with a visit to the Spruce Flats Bog to listen for Hermit Thrushes. On the way to the bog we should find several warblers including Blackburnian and perhaps Dark-eyed Juncos and Purple Finches. The bog features carnivorous plants including Pitcher Plants and Round-leaved Sundew.

We will then hike out to Wolf Rocks. Be aware this is a longer hike through the forest with a round trip distance of about 2.5

Look for These on Our Next Outings



Broad-winged Hawk – Harrison Hills Park (photo by Mike Fialkovich, May 21, 2022)



Baltimore Oriole female feeding young – Harrison Hills Park (photo by Dave Brooke, June 17, 2022)



Worm-eating Warbler – Harrison Hills Park (photo by Steve Gosser, May 12, 2018)

miles. The trail is level with scattered rocky areas, so a sturdy pair of hiking shoes or boots is recommended, and you may want to bring water or something to snack on. The last time on this outing we found a porcupine sleeping in a tree.

If you like, you can bring a lunch and we can eat at the picnic area next to the parking lot upon our return.

Note this new meeting time and location: We will meet at 7:00 AM at the Sheetz off the Donegal exit of the Pennsylvania Turnpike. From the exit, turn left onto Route 31 East and proceed a short distance to the Sheetz, which will be on the right. This will give us better access to restrooms and food if needed, and we won't have to cross traffic like we did in the past when we met at the Dairy Queen.

Outings Revisited

Woodcocks to Waterfowl: We Had a Good Season

Woodcock Walk, March 22: Two participants came to our new meeting spot on a cloudy, chilly evening. Access to the marsh area was limited due to an active new business, and another one going up. We had well over three dozen Mallards, both male and female, and a Canada Goose on the water.

In the parking area we had the usual urban suspects: House Sparrows, European Starlings, Rock Pigeons, Northern Cardinals, American Robins, Mourning Doves, and a Killdeer calling as it flew overhead.

At the Great Blue Heron nesting rookery across the Allegheny River, we were quickly able to spot the nests in the Sycamore trees, and then the birds themselves, flying about.

Walking through the American Woodcock fields later, we heard the woodcocks' courtship "peeting" calls as we moved into the denser brush. After few minutes, we heard one taking off. We were able to watch him climb, but lost him high up.

Once we got in tune to hearing them take off, we were usually able to watch them do their entire display, even seeing them land.

There was so much action that as one or two of the males were calling, another was taking off nearby. As we heard a bird taking off, he went right over our heads. The "peeting" continued as we headed out.

As we left the field, we ran into the two 3RBC members who had come earlier. It was Tom's second visit and Cynthia's first. The woodcocks were pretty much done for the night, with periodic calls as the birds were slowing down. In the field parking spot, Spring Peepers were very noisy over the hillside down toward the creek.
—by leader Tom Byrnes

Pymatuning Area, March 26: Ken Knapp, Ray Morris, Julie Jansen, and Dave Brooke led the outing, where we were joined by 11 others. It was a windy, cold, but clear morning. We started at the causeway and eventually visited five different areas.

In all, we saw 50 species. We had a good mix of water birds. Raptors, including plenty of Bald Eagles, were abundant, including several perched American Kestrels and a Red-shouldered Hawk flying off with an unfortunate snake.

The Miller Ponds were teeming with activity including Blue-winged Teals and a Greater Yellowlegs. We were excited to spot an Eastern Meadowlark across the street before he dropped out of sight.

We searched hard in two different locations for the elusive Red-headed Woodpecker to no avail. Another great day of birding. —by co-leader Ken Knapp

Woodcock walk, March 29: Two club members, Judy and Paul, showed up on a cloudy, rainy, windy day. There were still about three dozen mallards (male and female) in the water, along with a pair of Canada geese. House Sparrows were flitting in and out of the bushes and three ducks flew overhead. That was the only activity due to the weather.

At the Great Blue Heron rookery site the wind was blowing so hard that we had to stand in front of a building to block it. The birds were having to deal with the wind themselves, flying in and out of the nests. There was nothing else around in the water, on the ground, or in the air.

Highlights from Our Outings



Common Loon at Goddard State Park (photo by Craig Jansen)



Sub-adult Bald Eagle in Pymatuning area (photo by Dave Brooke)



American Kestrel in Pymatuning area (photo by Dave Brooke)

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Outings Revisited

continued from page 4

Up at the field, it seemed a little less windy, but still cold and damp. A few robins were singing, and eventually we heard the resident towhee off in the brush. Once we got to the viewing area, Carolina Wrens very vocal, and Judy was able to hear a Fox Sparrow off in the distance.

As it got darker, we were treated to a rainy/snowy, windy type of weather. Robins were still chirping, and so was the wren. Judy was able to pick up a White-throated Sparrow that we would hear off and on.

Eventually, we heard our first peet. Who would have thought they would come out in weather like this, but they did! We would catch glimpses of them flying up, hear them peeting in the distance, and it was apparent we had a few males doing their thing.

Why in this weather? Were these guys first-year males, just eager to get started?

As we headed back out, the peeting was dying out. Spring peepers were heard off in the distance. We heard one last call that sounded like the towhee. Why was he up so late? --by leader Tom Byrnes

Maurice K. Goddard State Park and State Game Lands 270, April 2: Azure blue skies with crisp cool air and bright sunshine greeted 13 birders at the Lake Wilhelm Marina. Recent storms and winds not only brought back winter temperatures but also many downed trees along the way.

In addition to a soaring Bald Eagle and an Osprey, we were delighted to see 22 Common Loons, at least 145 Ring-billed Gulls, and a Great Blue Heron near the docks.

Our next stop was the nearby Wildlife Observation Deck located by the Wilhelm Causeway. Abundant Red-winged Blackbirds, Buffleheads, and Tree Swallows were easily viewed with binoculars and spotting scopes; also providing photography opportunities.

We then trekked across the causeway to view 25 American Coots and stopped at Boat Launch No.3. Several large flocks of Double-crested Cormorants skimmed across the sparkling water; we also saw Hooded Mergansers and Horned Grebe.

Our group then traveled to adjacent State Game Lands 270 to two different areas. Many species of ducks delighted us: Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Ring-necked, Hooded, and Common Merganser-- plus Golden Crowned Kinglets, a Swamp Sparrow and an American Tree Sparrow. A stunning sight was 8 Bonaparte's Gulls flying and circling overhead, shimmering white against a crystal clear blue sky.

By this time we were ready to enjoy lunch with cheese/snack trays at Wilhelm Winery. Their lawn was brightly colored with eggs for an Easter Egg Hunt, and we shared bird stories at our own upstairs balcony dining room.

As usual, some of us "Birded On" and drove to the end of the lake by the dam. We were treated to more Common Loons, Bald Eagles, and waterfowl to end a spectacular day at this Mercer County hot spot.

Interesting fact: It was Maurice K. Goddard who set the goal of having a state park within 25 miles of every resident of Pennsylvania. --by leaders Linda Croskey and Dave Brooke



TWO MEMORABLE DAYS, TWO MEMORABLE BIRDS – Linda Croskey tells us why December 17 gave her a gift of two grosbeaks.

A Grosbeak for Gram

by Linda Croskey

December 17th is no ordinary day. It is the day my grandmother, Grace Violet Croskey, was born in 1890. We called her "Gram" -- a woman with true grit who raised nine children (my dad one of them) in a Gibsonia farmhouse on 100 acres in Allegheny County. She lived to be 95 years of age.

Decades ago, probably in the late '70s or '80s, we saw a small flock of Evening Grosbeaks at a bird feeder my father built. This was quite an exciting sight in the front yard of the farm where I now live in West Deer Township. I still can recall the vivid yellow, white, and black colors of the males as they gorged themselves that evening.

Many years later on December 17, 2020, I was thinking of Gram on her birthday, as I always do. This was the pandemic year, so I was really enjoying feeding yard birds. As I stepped out the front door to fill the simple wooden platform feeder, I knew a different bird was perched by the feeder in the crabapple tree -- a female Evening Grosbeak! I slowly came back into the house and was able to observe and photograph her for half an hour. She called a few times, fed, and then moved on. I was ecstatic.

This past winter, my entire back deck became a big bird feeder. I converted a window planter tray to hold bird seed, plus I moved the wooden platform feeder that was in the front to the back patio area right below the deck. I fed the birds early in the morning on December 17, 2022 and was sitting at my dining room table by the deck. Of course I was thinking of Gram Croskey when (you guessed it) a female Evening Grosbeak hopped through the deck rail onto the deck six feet from me!

Wow, I got photos and observed her feeding on black oil sunflower seeds on the platform feeder, the deck tray feeder, and the deck. What an elegant bird with gorgeous silvery gray color tinged with yellow, stunning black with white wing markings, and that massive bill. It would fly to tree tops in the yard and call. Unlike the one in 2020, this beautiful bird visited for three days!

I sent photos from 2020 and 2022 to my good friend and Evening Grosbeak expert David Yeany II. He told me there is weak evidence for individual Evening Grosbeak site fidelity, and from the photos the birds appeared not to be the same individual. There were probably two different female Evening Grosbeaks on December 17th of 2020 and 2022.

God's gift of the female Evening Grosbeaks is both a mystery and exciting. Happy Birthday Gram!



Observations

If You're an Urban Birder, Watch for Mammals, Too. You Might Be Surprised

By Tom Moeller

As I walked toward my house well after dark, a tall figure stood on the sidewalk ahead of me. It was facing me straight on, so it looked human, but its big ears told me it was a deer. I started to make noise, and it turned to walk across the street to where two more deer were standing. The three entered the front yards of my house and my neighbor. They then ran down between the houses to the back. I went inside and turned on the back lights. The three deer filled my postage-stamp yard, and one was sniffing at a bird feeder. The lights made them leave through the back of the yard.

As a bit of a departure from observing birds, I'm writing about observing more and more "forest" animals appearing in urban neighborhoods like mine. At the height of the Covid pandemic with fewer humans out and about, animals worldwide were moving into deserted streets and spaces in towns and cities. Maybe it was more noticeable during the pandemic, but animals have been living amongst us for much longer than that.

Deer have been coming into towns for years, leaving evidence with tracks in mud or snow or with piles of their feces. That night was not the first time I've seen three deer fill up my small backyard. During rutting season, daylight is not a deterrent to male deer chasing females through our streets. Last summer, a family of five, two adults and three yearlings, were romping about one night. Another night, the three kids were gathered around a neighbor's birdbath just getting their snouts high enough for a drink.

Eastern Gray Squirrels are ubiquitous in urban areas. They along with Chipmunks like our birdfeeders and peanuts too. Seems they think the peanuts are exclusively for them. In our area Fox Squirrels with their reddish coats can be found. Both squirrel species have a melanistic subgroup of "black" squirrels. All are so common, we barely notice them.

Many smaller animals have squatted in human buildings. When I first moved into my house, the neighbor's garage behind me had a family of raccoons living there. Soon, the garage was repaired, and the raccoons were evicted. Driving after dark one time, I almost hit a raccoon crossing Shady Avenue near Forbes. Pigeons and starlings also like to get into attics without permission. One early evening years ago, two bats flew out of someone's attic and over my yard.

Even the iconic groundhog (think Punxsutawney Phil) lives among us. For almost a year, we spotted a groundhog in the yard out our back window. I finally found its burrow in our neighbor's trash heap behind their garage (where the raccoons once lived) and filled it up with dirt and rocks. Never saw it there again, but they live in "wild areas" like Duck Hollow, Frick Park, and Homewood Cemetery.

Homewood Cemetery has also been the home of Red Foxes. I know of two den locations there. Squirrels, turkeys, and groundhogs were on their menu. Others have heard Coyotes howling in the cemetery, too.

Closer to home, there are critters who enjoy our garbage. Rats and mice, of course, but one night, I photographed an opossum munching on tidbits in another neighbor's garbage. My camera caught one more trying to hide in a cinder block wall in my backyard. A few weeks back, I found tracks in the snow that



NOT VERY WILD – Foxes aren't usually considered to be urbanites, but Tom Moeller is familiar with this one in Homewood Cemetery. What might be next? Maybe a coyote? While eating breakfast one morning, 3RBC members Jim and Dorothy Valimont saw one in their back yard in their suburban Allegheny County neighborhood in Indiana Township. Why not downtown Pittsburgh? At least one visited midtown Manhattan.

looked like raccoon prints, but the dragging, hairless tail track told me it was an opossum.

Rabbits (Eastern Cottontails) have also been in my neighborhood for years. They usually come out after dark, but they can also be seen in the daytime. They have a tendency to freeze when they move away from pursuit. One evening, a rabbit that ran from me froze next to a little rabbit statue in a garden. "Nobody here but us statues."

The smallest creature I've seen in my yard is a vole, a little, dark brown mammal that looks like a mouse. It would gather bird seeds or raisins and dash back into its home in a stone wall.

The latest addition to my list is a skunk - in Squirrel Hill! Several times, its strong odor was prevalent in the air. I spotted it late one night lumbering along way ahead of me. I wasn't sure it was a skunk until I got close enough to smell it. This was the first time in my life I actually saw a wild skunk rather than just smell it! A couple of days later, driving in a back alley, the skunk ran across the alley, and in my headlights I could see its white cap and stripe on its side. Unfortunately, that skunk died, and Animal Control took it away. Now, a couple of months later, another skunk has taken up residence in my neighborhood. Again, I smelled its presence before I saw it. My close encounter with that skunk came as I walked up a hill in the alley. Out of the corner of my left eye, what do I see running up in the grass at the edge of the pavement? A black and white animal with a white cap on its head less than 10 feet away – the Striped Skunk! Luckily, it disappeared into a hole in the fence.

Just after I originally finished this article, I had to stop the car in the street as I left my house one night to wait for a big, adult raccoon to cross in front of me. My urban neighborhood is a wild place too.

See Tom's gallery on the 3RBC website for more of the urban mammals he photographed in Pittsburgh.

Birds in the Three Rivers Area

Waterfowl and Sparrows Led Dec.-Jan. 2022-2023

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

It was a mild winter with very little snow and cold. There was a brief cold snap in December, but lakes and rivers were open during the entire season. Waterfowl were in short supply with open water to the north, so few birds were pushed south into the county.

A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was the highlight of the Pittsburgh CBC 12/31. An immature bird was with a flock of Canada Geese at Calvary Cemetery in the Greenfield section of Pittsburgh (MKu). The bird provided the sixth county record and I believe the first juvenile reported in the county. It didn't stay more than about two hours before flying off, never to be relocated. (Malcolm Kurtz's photo was on the cover of the last issue.)

Tundra Swans were in the area in late December, late migrants perhaps? A flock of 120 flew over Gibsonia 12/26 (KP), 13 flew over Dashields Dam 12/27 (DBo, TB), 25 flew over West Deer Twp. 12/27 (LC), and 24 flew over Lock and Dam No. 4 on the Allegheny River at Natrona 12/27 (TR). Six were on the Allegheny River at Blawnox 12/28 (AH, PM), and 4 flew over Plum Borough 12/29 (AH, PM).

A **Northern Shoveler** was in Harmar Twp. 12/25 (AH, PM). Two **Gadwalls** were at Imperial nearly the entire month of December (MV), 2 were at Wingfield Pines 12/21 (DNe, m.ob.), 1 was at Lock and Dam No. 3 in Harmar Twp. 12/26 (AH, PM), 8 were on the Allegheny River near Oakmont 12/27 (AH, PM), 1 was on the Ohio River at Brunots Island 1/7-25 (DNe, m.ob.), and several were present at a small wetland in Harmar Twp. 1/19 through the end of January (LK, m.ob.). **American Wigeon** is an uncommon migrant and winter visitor, but there were quite a few reports this season: 1 at Findlay Twp. 12/26 (MV), 1 on the Ohio River at Brunots Island 1/1 (DBe), 1 at Boyce-Mayview Park 1/5 (JF, JSa), and 1 at Wingfield Pines 1/16 (JF). Five **Surf Scoters** were on the Allegheny River at Aspinwall 1/9 (NB, m.ob.). A large raft of 65 **Common Mergansers** was at Lock and Dam No. 3 in Harmar Twp. 12/25 (AH, PM). **Ruddy Ducks** were reported most of the season: 1 at Dashields Dam on the Ohio River 12/26 (MV), 2 there 12/27 (DBo, TB), 7 at the Emsworth Dam 12/30-1/1 (JF, LF, m.ob.), and 2 were at Brunots Island 12/29-1/9 (SN, m.ob.).

Horned Grebe is irregular in winter, but 8 were at Brunots Island 12/22 (DBe), 1 was at Dashields Dam 12/26 and 1/3 (MV, m.ob.), and 1 was at Duck Hollow 12/28 (JV).a).

Large numbers of **Mourning Doves** were at the feeders at the Nature Center at Frick Park. High counts include 104 on 12/20 (ON), 165 on 12/31 (SB), and 120 on 1/8 (KSJ, CK).

Killdeer lingered at South Park in December. Counts included 22 on 12/9, 19 on 12/12, and 16 on 12/14 (JF). This has become a regular gathering site in fall and early winter.

A third-winter **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was at the Point in Pittsburgh 12/26 (BC) during a brief period of cold weather that brings uncommon gulls to the area. This was the only report of the unusual species for us due to the mild winter.

Single **Common Loons** were on the Ohio River at Dashields Dam (TB, DBo) and on the Monongahela River at Duck Hollow (JC), both 12/27.

Two **Black Vultures** were in Richland Twp. 1/18 (TC). **Merlins** were reported from at least a dozen locations. They are still at the traditional location at Schenley Park where a roost was first noted in the 1990s, but now they are expected and widespread

winter residents in the county.

The **American Crow** roost was located in the Hill District part of Pittsburgh. Counts included 5,000 on 12/15, 2,000 on 12/18 (KSJ), and 2,000 on 1/6 (EH). **Fish Crow** high counts included 100 in Squirrel Hill 12/9 (MKu) and 21 at Duck Hollow 1/11 (TC).

Ruby-crowned Kinglet is very rare in winter here, but this season there were several reports, perhaps due to the milder than normal weather. Singles were at Carnegie Mellon University 12/4 (JFR), Hartwood Acres 12/30 (JK), in Bethel Park 12/30 (JP), in Sewickley 1/5 (AK), and in Fox Chapel 1/16 (LK).

The **Marsh Wren** reported in the fall at Hartwood Acres continued through the reporting period (m.ob.).

An out-of-season **Gray Catbird** was a nice find at Emmerling Park in Indiana Twp. 12/31 during the Pittsburgh CBC (AH, PM). It was seen again 1/14 (AH, PM).

Hermit Thrushes were reported through the season at several locations including South Park, North Park, Hartwood Acres, Frick Park, Boyce Park, and Imperial.

Surprisingly, there was a small push of **Evening Grosbeaks** in mid-December. A female was in West Deer Twp. 12/17-19 (LC), and a male visited a feeder in Gibsonia 12/18-26 (KP). **Purple Finch** is always a nice find here: 9 were at Harrison Hills Park 12/11 (AH, PM), 1 at North Park 12/14 (AF), 5 at Indiana Twp. 12/24 (DYe), and singles at Wingfield Pines 1/16-20 (m.ob.). A **Pine Siskin** visited a feeder in Hampton Twp. 12/10 (DN).

Out-of-season sparrow reports were numerous. Rare in winter, 4 **Chipping Sparrows** visited a feeder in Hampton Twp. 1/15, and 5 were there 1/16 (DN). **Field Sparrows** are sometimes found in winter, but in small numbers and very localized. Reports included 2 at South Taylor Environmental Center in West Mifflin 1/15-23 (JF) and 3 at Harrison Hills Park 1/18 (AH, PM). Late **Fox Sparrows** lingered into December: singles at North Park the entire month (JJ, TC, SD), Boyce Park 12/7 (EH) and South Fayette Twp. 12/25 (DNe). Two were at Frick Park 1/15 (ON), 1 at Duck Hollow 2/12 (Molly Toth), 1 at South Park 2/16 (JF), and 1 continued at North Park 2/26 (SD). Fox Sparrows typically don't winter in the county. A **Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow** spent the season at a feeder in West Deer Twp. (LC). This is only the second record of this western subspecies in the county that I'm aware of. This and the previous one were both documented with photographs. (See Linda's photo on page 8.)

An out-of-season female **Brown-headed Cowbird** visited a feeder in Pine Twp. 12/20 and 12/30-31 (PL, SL). A female was photographed at the feeders at Frick Park 12/29 (eBird), 2 were in Plum Borough 12/31 (AH, PM), and 1 was in Oakmont 1/5 (RBu). There are a number of other reports in eBird for the season.

Observers: David Bennett (DBe), Dick Bondi (DBo), Trip Bondi, Nathaniel Bowler, Stephen Bucklin, Ron Burkert (RBu), Thomas Connor, Ben Coulter, Linda Croskey, Steve Denninger, Adrian Fenton, Leslie Ferree, John Flannagan, Jonathan Frantz (JFr), Eric Hall, Amy Henrici, Julia Janson, Charity Khesghi, Andrew Kingfisher, Lucy Klimko, Justin Kolakowski, Malcolm Kurtz (MKu), Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Pat McShea, Dean Newhouse (DNe), Oscar Nigam, Steve Northrop, Dick Nugent, Joe Papp, Kevin Parsons, Theo Rickert, Kate St. John, James Saracco (JSa), Molly Toth, Mark Vass, John Vassallo (JV), David Yeany II (DYe), m.ob. (many observers).



The Peregrine



A Long Look at a Sparrow We Rarely See in Western PA

Linda Croskey enjoyed an extraordinary experience in her West Deer Township yard. It was a White-crowned Sparrow of the “Gambel’s” subspecies, which breeds and spends the winter abundantly in western North America.

It rarely wanders eastward to spend a winter in the east. Mike Fialkovich, our 3RBC compiler, tells us on page 7 of this issue that he knows of only one “Gambel’s” previously documented in Allegheny County.

To identify a “Gambel’s” focus on the small plumage area from the bill to just above the eye. In the usual White-crowned we

see in our area, the birds have a narrow dark stripe between the eye and the bill. The bird in Linda’s photos lacks the stripe, and she noticed that difference.

This isn’t the end of the story. It was also an immature bird lingering here after its first winter. Linda was able to watch it molt from drab immature plumage (above right) to bright adult plumage (above left) during the late winter and early spring.

Few of us in Pennsylvania can expect to see such a transition from young to adult plumage such as this one in the western White-crowned subspecies.



BEAUTIFUL LADY – Most photographers want you to see the spot of red on a male Downy Woodpecker’s crown. Susan Miller shows us here that a female has its own kind of beauty. Susan is a new addition to our newsletter, and we’ll welcome more of her photos.

Mabel Matteson Retires as Our Hospitality Director

One of our club’s original officials is stepping down, after having served since 3RBC was formed in 2001.

If you ever attended a meeting you probably stopped at the table where Mabel greeted everyone, and picked up a name badge.

Chances are you also filled out a slip she prepared and used one of her pens to enter the raffle for a door prize.

Mabel always brought something good to eat or drink for the treat table, and set it up.

Notes About Our Birders

Ronald F. Leberman, 87, of Meadville died at home on April 11, 2023. Along with his brother Bob Leberman, he began bird banding, primarily at Presque Isle and Pymatuning. Ron eventually banded more than 75,000 birds and 100 different species in Pennsylvania. See Ron’s obituary at tinyurl.com/4fwvnzj9.

Timothy Vechter, 68, died on March 17, 2023. Tim was long respected for his knowledge of nature, and he was a past president of the Westmoreland County Bird and Nature Club. In 2015, Tim carried out an extensive cleanup of Loyalhanna Creek in Latrobe, earning him the nickname “the caretaker of the Loyalhanna.”

See Tim’s obituary at tinyurl.com/2p93zcyr.