



The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

Vol. 22, No. 6 November/December 2023

OUR PHOTOGRAPHERS WILL WOW US AT OUR NEXT MEETING!

The club's favorite annual night of photos is coming up at our next meeting on December 6 - the 'Slide Slam.' This will be a Zoom meeting only with dazzling images from club members' cameras. Our many talented photographers will be able to present their beautiful bird photos directly on your personal screens, giving you an even better viewing experience.

Photographers wishing to participate should email Dave Brooke at davbrooke@gmail.com to reserve a spot. Due to time constraints, Dave will limit the number of participant to 12, giving each about 7 minutes to present.

Relatively new members may wonder why we call this a 'Slide Slam.' Well, the Three Rivers Birding Club was founded in 2001, and our first photo show was in the ancient pre-digital year of 2003, when images were projected onto the screen from "color slides." Remember those?

>>Please note that this will only be a Zoom meeting.<<

The 'Slide Slam' meeting online will feature our regular announcements and the popular photo program on December 6, 2023 starting at 7:00 PM ET, giving you access time to log on. The business meeting will begin at 7:30 PM, and the presentation will start around 8:00 PM ET. Details on how to join the event, including Zoom passcodes and other instructions, will be supplied a few days before the meeting.



A TREASURE TO FIND – Birders visiting southeastern Arizona consider an Elegant Trogon a prize to discover. Dave Brooke found this one during a recent visit to this extraordinary area.

Letter from the Editor...

By Paul Hess

Because of suddenly serious health problems in my family, I regret to say that this issue of *The Peregrine* must be my last. I wish I'd been able to give the 3RBC leaders more notice.

What I most want to say has nothing to do with my role as an editor. It is a thank you to all of the 3RBC presidents, leaders, writers, and photographers who made our newsletter possible.

Think about it. Without them, I wouldn't have had anything to edit! I won't try to list them because I'd surely miss dozens to name. Please thank all of them as a whole.

I looked back at Vol. 1, No. 1 of the newsletter in October 2001 and saw that Jack Solomon, our inaugural president, announced me as the newsletter's editor. Jack told me recently that he knew I would reply with an enthusiastic "Yes."

Here's something I wrote in that first issue: "Come and make new friends, see old ones, report recent bird sightings and, we hope, learn something about birds and birding that you never knew before." All of you have made that come true.

...and Here's Our New One

By Sheree Daugherty

I am thrilled to introduce our new editor of *The Peregrine*. He is Bob Mulvihill, a distinguished ornithologist whose name is synonymous with expertise in our community.

In fact, Bob is also known worldwide for scientific papers he has authored and co-authored. Many of those emerged from his research at Powdermill Nature Reserve in Westmoreland County.

I have no doubt that our newsletter will continue to meet the high standards set by our previous editor, Paul Hess.

The legacy of *The Peregrine* stands as a testament to Paul's dedication, and its pages will continue to inspire bird enthusiasts for years to come under Bob's capable guidance.

See www.aviary.org/conservation/projects/meet-our-team for the impressive biography of Bob's extraordinary research and ornithological recognition. See also page 3 of this issue for Bob's important research into Saw-whet Owl migration here in Allegheny County – and how our birders young and old can truly participate in this important scientific study.

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

President's Message

Birds Inspire Us

By Sheree Daugherty

What is it about birds that have inspired people throughout the ages? They have been a source of creative expression for centuries. Countless peoples over countless years have admired their graceful flight, melodious songs, and vibrant plumage. They have captivated, inspired, and mystified artists, musicians, and poets.

In poetry, birds have served as powerful metaphors for a range of human emotions and experiences. Two of many examples come immediately to mind. Emily Dickinson's poem, "Hope is the Thing with Feathers," uses the image of a bird to represent hope's resilience and ability to sustain us in times of adversity. At the other end of the emotional spectrum, Edgar Allen Poe's, ominous poem, "The Raven," is unsettling.

Birds have played a significant role in spiritual practices around the world. In the Christian tradition, doves represent hope, peace, and the Holy Spirit. The ancient Egyptians worshipped the sky god, Horus, a falcon. In Hinduism, the peacock is associated with the goddess Saraswati, who embodies knowledge, creativity, and the arts. We may think of hummingbirds as sweet little feathered jewels, but the principal god of the Aztecs, Huitzilopochtli, (*hwit zill o POCK till*) was a hummingbird chosen because of its pugnacious warrior-like attributes.

Mythology features birds in many starring roles. Owls were associated with the Greek goddess of wisdom, Athena. Perhaps it's the source of the old adage "wise as an owl!" The Egyptian goddess Isis was often depicted with wings, symbolizing her association with the heavens and the afterlife. The mythical Phoenix represented renewed life by rising from the ashes after perishing by fire.

In Chinese culture, the crane is a symbol of longevity, wisdom, and immortality. Its elegant, soaring flight is believed to convey a sense of grace and transcendence.

Birds are held in such high regard that they are used as symbols for nations. The majestic Bald Eagle is the national symbol for the United States. Scotland and Mexico picked the Golden Eagle. Our modest neighbor to the north, Canada, is represented by the unassuming Canada Jay.

Many countries in the tropics opt for more flamboyant species: Peru selected the Cock of the Rock, Guatemala picked the Resplendent Quetzal, and the Flamingo is the symbol of the Bahamas. Some national birds are obvious, like New Zealand's Kiwi. Others are surprising: the somewhat drab Clay-colored Thrush was the pick for lush, tropical Costa Rica.

Birds are often used for marketing. It has been shown that using an image of a bird in association with a product increases sales and gives the customer a more favorable response to the product. Birds have been used to promote cereal, optics, publishers, insurance companies, and a now defunct social media platform. Many sports teams use bird names and logos.

My own career as a wildlife artist has been defined by birds. Birds have been the subject of most of my paintings for decades. I never tire of being inspired to create images of my favorite subject.

I realize that I'm talking to the choir when saying that birds significantly add to our quality of life. Birding allows individuals to connect with nature on a personal level. What's more, it fosters a sense of mindfulness and encourages an appreciation for the diversity of life on Earth. So, go birding. It's a good thing!

The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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AN OWL IS WISE – Sheree Daugherty reminds us that the owl represented wisdom to ancient Greeks. A widely acclaimed bird artist, she illustrates one the Greeks would have loved.



Outings to Come

Don't Miss Waterfowl at Our Next Two Walks

By Steve Thomas, Outings Director

Saturday, November 4 – Yellow Creek State Park: This is a joint outing of 3RBC and the Todd Bird Club. Meet Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493) at 8:00 AM at the park office on Route 259 just off Route 422 east of Indiana. Allow an hour and a half driving from Pittsburgh. The park's many habitats include a lake that attracts water birds and sometimes exciting rarities. *Email Margaret at bcoriole@windstream.net if you will attend.*

Saturday, November 11 – Moraine State Park: Join Michael David (michaeldavid@gmail.com) for an outing to look for waterfowl and late fall migrants. Meet him at the Pleasant Valley parking area on the south shore at 8:30 AM.

From I-79, take Route 422 east towardz Butler and exit at the Moraine State Park South Shore/ Pleasant Valley Road exit. At the end of the ramp, turn left and travel straight into the park until you see the first major parking area on your right. Allow one hour driving from Pittsburgh. *Michael would appreciate an Email if you plan to attend, but it is not required.*



"Project OwlNet" = Amazement

The National Aviary in Pittsburgh participates in a continent-wide effort to track Northern Saw-whet Owls during their migration through North America.

National Aviary ornithologist Bob Mulvihill (the upcoming editor of our Three Rivers Birding Club newsletter) operates an owl banding station at Sewickley Heights Borough Park in northern Allegheny County. In 10 years, more than 250 of these delightful, tiny migrants were banded there.

The photo of Bob in action above shows how amazing these experiences can be, even for the youngest participants.

Banding this fall will take place from dusk until midnight at the park every Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday until December 2. You can actually participate in this scientific project. See how at www.aviary.org/conservation/community-science/project-owlnet.



IT HAS A NEW NAME – This is one of several flycatchers, very rare in the East, that have been identified as "Pacific-slope Flycatchers" in Pennsylvania. Now they are named "Western Flycatchers." Cameron Rutt photographed one of these extreme rarities in Berks County in December 2015.

PA Has "Lost" a Flycatcher, Although Only by Its Name

By Ted Floyd

Wait around long enough, birders often remark, and the taxonomy of long ago will be restored. Case in point: the recent "lump," announced in July 2023, of the Cordilleran and Pacific-slope flycatchers into a single species called the Western Flycatcher.

But if you go back to the 1980s, the news went in the other direction: In 1989, the American Ornithological Society (at the time known as the American Ornithologists' Union) split the Western Flycatcher into the Cordilleran and Pacific-slope flycatchers!

The pendulum has swung back.

What does this "re-lumping" mean for Pennsylvania?

On the one hand, not a lot on a day-by-day basis. The Western Flycatcher is, as its name suggests, a species that normally occurs far to our west. And the names Cordilleran and Pacific-slope reinforce that geography.

However, there are multiple records of vagrants for Pennsylvania. All have been from eastern Pennsylvania, but an occurrence in the Pittsburgh area is not out of the question. Late fall and early winter seem to be the "sweet spot" for records in Pennsylvania and adjoining states.

Note that all Western Flycatcher records for the mid-Atlantic region have referred to either the Pacific-slope Flycatcher or to Pacific-slope/Cordilleran; there are no accepted records for the Cordilleran Flycatcher for anywhere in the region.

This reminds us of the fascinating and dynamic nature of avian taxonomy. The annual "checklist shuffle" results in some grumbling, but it also reflects the many thrilling advances in ornithological research in the 21st century.

It is hard to imagine that the pace of discovery will suddenly slow down. In other words, we will, in all likelihood, continue to be challenged and delighted with new knowledge about birds.

(Editor's note: Ted Floyd, born and raised in Pittsburgh, serves, along with fellow 3RBC member Frank Izaguirre, as Editor of Birding magazine.)

Outings Revisited

Fall Warblers, of Course, Were Stars of the Show

Sewickley Heights Park – August 25: The morning was overcast and pleasantly cool as 14 birders gathered around Sheree Daugherty in the parking lot. American Goldfinches twittered overhead, and a Carolina Wren was calling as we waited for stragglers.

Adrian Fenton had seen a Mourning Warbler in the park the day before, so Sheree asked him to lead us to that spot. We set off on the Black Cherry Trail and were excited when the leaders spotted an Olive-sided Flycatcher perched at the top of a dead snag, wearing his signature vest.

After admiring it for a few minutes, we stopped next to a shrubby field where the Mourning Warbler had last been seen, and spent the next hour happily watching the bird activity.

The warbler migration had begun, and Hooded, American Redstarts, Cape May, Chestnut-sided, and Black-throated Green Warblers seemed to be everywhere around us.

A Northern Flicker, an Eastern Wood-Pewee, and several Gray Catbirds were sounding off, and we noted numerous American Robins, a Red-bellied Woodpecker, and a couple of Downy Woodpeckers. A female Scarlet Tanager, a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and a Baltimore Oriole, put in brief appearances.

A flock of a dozen Cedar Waxwings flew over, and we were delighted when a Ruby-throated Hummingbird buzzed our group.

The Mourning Warbler never appeared, so we circled back to the parking lot and crossed to the Pipeline Trail.

Little birds were darting above in the trees, as we made our way slowly down the trail. People called out Least Flycatcher, Bay-breasted and Chestnut-sided Warbler. A couple of lucky people spotted a Canada Warbler.

We watched two Broad-winged Hawks lazily circling in the sky, joined by a single Turkey Vulture, and an Eastern Towhee called from a hidden spot.

Activity by small birds increased, and we halted again to call out more warblers: Blue-winged, Tennessee, Nashville, Magnolia, and Blackburnian!

Thanks to Sheree for a wonderful morning. We certainly got the fall migration season off to a good start with 42 species, including a dozen warblers. **—by participant Debbie Kalbfleisch**

Deer Lakes Park – September 2: Thirteen participants gathered on a beautiful September morning for this annual fall outing. The group, mostly seasoned birders, enjoyed beautiful blue skies and some early autumn color in the leaves.

Warblers were plentiful and mostly in their fall plumage, allowing for good practice identifying some tricky warblers. By the end of the morning, we tallied 40+ bird species including 11 warbler species: Blue-winged, Black-and-White, Tennessee, Kentucky, Hooded, American Redstart, Cape May, Magnolia, Bay-breasted, Chestnut-sided, and Black-throated Green. The Black-and-white Warbler was the highlight of the outing for most, as it foraged on tree trunks, offering long looks at this striking bird and its signature feeding behavior.

Other highlights included a shy Least Flycatcher and an emphatic Yellow-throated Vireo vocalizing loudly by the upper lake. One sharp-eyed birder briefly glimpsed a Common

Nighthawk migrating overhead.

The biggest surprise of the morning was a fly-by of vocalizing Purple Martins. The outing was also an opportunity to see old friends and make new ones, with birding and socializing in equal quantities by the time the group arrived back at the parking lot late in the morning. **—by co-leader Oliver Lindhiem**

Harrison Hills Park – September 9: Nineteen birders attended on a beautiful, early fall day. We ran into our first wave of warblers in the trees on the south side of the pond. Everyone was able to spend at least 30 minutes watching a number of Black-throated Green and Bay-breasted Warblers along with several other warbler species move about in the forest edge.

Meanwhile, a Green Heron moved around the pond and gave everyone good looks at an uncommon bird at this location. This was only the fourth eBird record at the park. There was also a Solitary Sandpiper on the few feet of open shoreline, another uncommon bird for this pond. The Green Heron provided an interesting encounter when it flew up to a tree branch and chased a Red-shouldered Hawk out of the tree.

We finished walking the Creekside Trail and ran into our second wave of warblers. We finished with 43 total species and 10 warbler species for the day. **—by leader Dave Brooke**

North Park – September 15: Six of us met at Marshall Lake for the first 3RBC walk there for quite some time. The group first checked the mud flats close to ice rink where they found Killdeer and Wood Duck.

We moved across the walkway to the island in the lake where Holly Hilliard's "eagle eye" spotted (pun intended) a Spotted Sandpiper bobbing on a log. A first of the fall for most of us, a Yellow-rumped Warbler flew into a pine tree and began chipping away. Before leaving the Marshall Lake area we saw 20 species.

Our planned next stop was not possible due to road re-paving, so we "called an audible" and went to Latodami Nature Center.

We invited another birder there to join us, and we set off toward some apple trees that often hold feeding, migrating warblers. We managed to see 10 warbler species, the highlight a Wilson's Warbler. We also found a Rose-breasted Grosbeak and had the good fortune to see an adult Bald Eagle circling overhead.

The walk around Latodami brought us to a total of 41 species on a beautiful, late summer morning in good company. **—by leader Adrian Fenton**

Butler-Freeport Community Trail - September 16: The morning dawned cool and bright with a temperature of 44 degrees and brilliant sunshine while 17 birders gathered at the Sheetz Drive trailhead.

Azure skies were a delight as we birded along the trail lined with banks of Jewelweed and open fields with butterflies flitting on Goldenrod, Ironweed and Aster. We also passed ponds plus mature hardwoods to discover in the woods a family of White-breasted Nuthatches. Warbler highlights were several Black-throated Blues, Bay-breasted, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, and Tennessee. Our species total was 31.

Several birders spotted a Mourning Dove on a nest at the Deraillleur Bike Shop Cafe (which was unfortunately closed for the weekend). After the walk back to our vehicles, we enjoyed a patio lunch at nearby Field House Restaurant. It was great camaraderie and a chance to review and catch up on birding news. Thanks to all who attended at this new location along Butler County's only Rails-to-Trails trail. **— by leader Linda Croskey**

It's a "Yard" to Envy, and Its Species Total Is a Remarkable 162. (Maybe Not Bobwhite)

(I recently asked members to share their yard lists with us. I received only one – not exactly a “yard,” but an extraordinary at-home experience. See their entire list on the 3RBC website.)

By Pat and Sherron Lynch

When people ask where is our favorite place to watch birds, we often name our yard. We have a five-acre lot on a private lane in Pine Township, about a mile north of North Park as the crow flies. It is divided almost equally between lawn and woods.

To the north a 900-foot shared private lane takes us to our mail box. To the south a right-of-way passes our neighbor's large pond. Another neighbor has 20 acres which was a former horse farm and orchard. She kindly allows us to walk her 10-acre field. So we, in cowboy parlance, swing a wide loop.

Once we became birders, we built a pond with a waterfall, added a variety of fruit trees and evergreens, planted flower and vegetable gardens, and left the mowed part of the property full of clover and wildflowers, aka weeds. Trees include wild cherry, black tupelo, oaks, maples, dogwood, etc. Dead trees and snags are left standing when possible.

We provide bluebird boxes, owl boxes, etc. for nesting. A variety of bird food: black oil sunflower, mixed seed, peanuts, no mess, nyger seed, millet (in the winter), hummingbird syrup, and home-made suet entices the birds.

The two of us have marked a daily check sheet of birds at the breakfast table for over 20 years. Two species—Ring-necked Pheasant and Ruffed Grouse—were seen before we became birders.

Our present total is 162 bird species, although Northern Bobwhite is not really appropriate for a proper “wild” species list. The family with the large fields raised and released Bobwhites one year. Several came and pecked at our front door; we counted them.

We have seen 30 warbler species, 13 raptors, 10 flycatchers, 7 woodpeckers, and 6 vireos. Perhaps the most unexpected bird on our list is an American Avocet that squawked and flew directly overhead one evening.

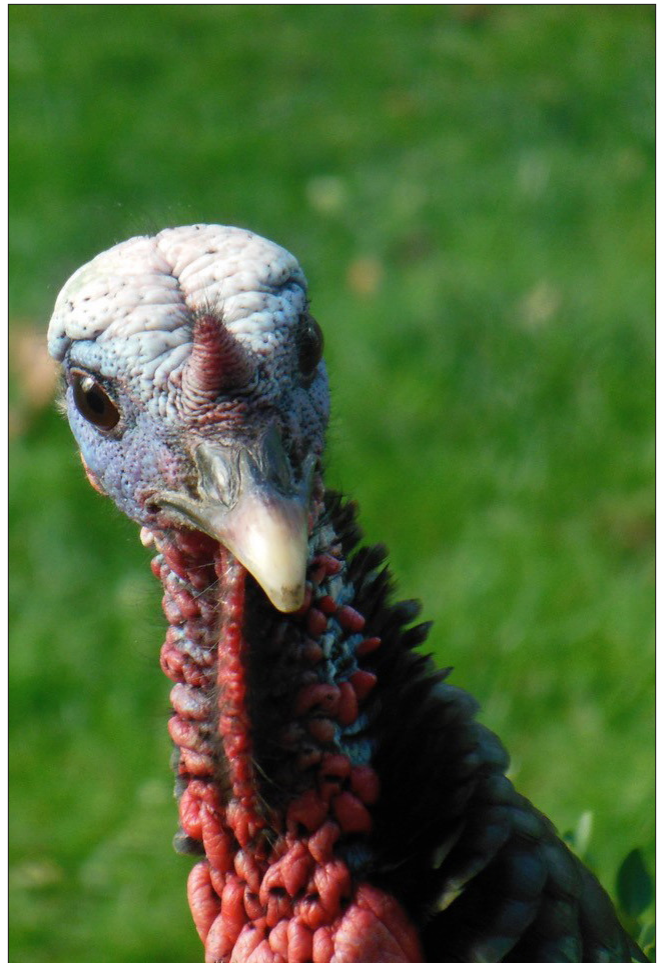
Over the years, changes have occurred. Carolina Chickadees have replaced or interbred with our beloved Black-capped Chickadees. Turkeys appeared, made themselves at home under the feeders, fought, mated, and sometimes followed us.

Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles now come almost every month.

Large numbers of Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins haven't appeared since the long line of hemlocks across the lane died. The neighbor's 10-acre field is now overgrown with olive trees. Fewer hawks now patrol it.

The new neighbor with the large pond does not feed ducks and geese, so we no longer see waterfowl such as Northern Pintail and Hooded Merganser. Urbanization has created habitat loss for Yellow-breasted Chats and warblers. We, too, have changed. We now usually bird within our five acres, rather than patrolling the extra areas.

Nevertheless, it seems that every day something occurs that makes us smile.



HOW ARE YOU? Not the rarest species, but clearly one of the most friendly visitors in Pat and Sherron Lynches' yard was this Wild Turkey. (photo by Sherron)

Birds' Songs Revisited

Research recognized worldwide continues to emerge from the University of Pittsburgh's Department of Biological Sciences.

The latest is a paper published in 2023 in *Ibis, the International Journal of Avian Science* (vol. 165, pp. 1047-1053). It is titled “When birds sing at the same pitch, they avoid singing at the same time.”

The authors are Lauren M. Chronister, Tessa A. Rhinehart, and Justin Kitzes. (Incidentally, Tessa has become one of 3RBC's expert outing leaders.)

Using their pioneering remote audio-based system for recording vocalizations among species, the authors found evidence that some species adjust the timing of their songs so as not to overlap the songs of other species. These subtle aspects of birds' vocal behavior were previously unknown.



Observations

Song Sparrows Mean More Than Their Song

By Tom Moeller

I was halfway through mowing the lawn when I noticed a Song Sparrow in the part I had just mowed. She was gathering cut grass to line her nest. Another time a Song Sparrow was in a dish feeder when a cardinal landed on the edge. The smaller bird confronted the larger one and drove it off. Just two examples of how bold a little Song Sparrow can be!

The Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) is aptly named. This bird will sing at times throughout the year, not just the spring. The song is used to establish and maintain a territory, but a better (maybe younger) singer can push another male out of its territory with his superior melodies. The male's song begins with three or four introductory whistles, followed by a short tune of sweet notes, ending in a buzzy trill. The song is innate, not learned from listening to a parent, but it may be modified after hearing other adults sing, adding an individual variation. Hundreds of such "dialects" have been created. A male may have 20 songs in his repertoire; 2,000 different melodies have been recorded over the wide range. Although the male sings a vast range of songs to establish and defend his territory, he can also sing outside of the breeding season from the exuberance caused by a sunny day in winter.

Where is sparrow found? To date, 31 subspecies of *Melospiza melodia* have been identified ranging from the Aleutian Islands across Canada to the Atlantic, south to Florida, west to Baja, California, and back up the Pacific Coast to Alaska – all the mainland U.S. and most of Canada.

Appearance and size vary in those locales. The Eastern Song Sparrow here in Pennsylvania has chestnut upper parts with streaks of gray and black. The wings have two minor white wing bars. The head has a chestnut crown with a gray stripe over each eye. The face is gray with a dark brown eye. The throat is white with a black moustache. Breast and underparts are white, streaked with dark brown stripes. A large central spot is accentuated by two smaller spots along those streaks. The tail is long and rounded, again colored in chestnut. Northern birds are larger, often twice the size of southern birds, and much darker in color. Song Sparrows in the desert southwest are much lighter in color and are the smallest. One complete feather molt begins in August and is done by the end of September.

Many Song Sparrows migrate, especially those that breed in central Canada. They travel south to the Gulf Coast, leapfrogging over resident populations that may only move incrementally south. Older adults often remain year-round as permanent residents, even into Vermont and Maine or the Pacific Coast of Alaska. Permanent residents can establish the best breeding territories in the spring.

Male and female sparrows appear identical, but how do they recognize each other? Behavior. Birds do recognize their neighbors, but a male Song Sparrow will "pounce" at a strange bird it encounters. If that bird flies away, it is another male, but a female remains unmoved and will give a trill-call. This is often how a pair meets: she shows up in his territory, he tolerates her presence, and they eventually become mates. They communicate through "chimp" calls, which could change to deeper, louder calls or even growl-like calls to indicate danger. The male will try to dominate his mate by pouncing to keep her within his territory and



A FAVORITE SONGSTER – Tom Moeller photographed this Song Sparrow in his back yard on April 19, 2018. The image's dark and light composition resembles a classic artistic style named chiaroscuro.

not stray to another male.

However, genetic studies have found that this is not always effective, since a female's offspring might have different fathers. Plus, there are other times she may dominate. It could take a week for a female to learn her mate's territory (about 2/3 acre), but if in that time she builds her nest outside that territory, the male will have to readjust his boundaries. Also, he must take over caring for their first fledglings as she goes off to begin a second brood.

The female alone builds the nest out of grasses, weeds, bark, and rootlets. The cup can be lined with finer grasses, rootlets, and hair. Most nests are built right on the ground by birds that do not migrate. Of course, the female moves secretly to achieve this.

Returning migrants and young birds often have to build in low bushes. One year a "late" Song Sparrow nest was in the middle of a bayberry bush in my yard. The male helps by supplying nesting material, but he spends much of this time singing more vigorously to defend his territory. Unfortunately, ground nests are often predated by snakes, rats, cats, dogs, or violent storms. Up to two-thirds of first nests are destroyed. The parents just pick up and start again.

The female may lay 3-5 ovoid eggs, light green to light blue speckled in dark brown. She alone broods the eggs for about two weeks, taking breaks every 20-30 minutes for about eight minutes. The nestlings are altricial (helpless in the nest and needing constant feeding) with yellow skin and dark brown down. The female will brood them for about six days, and both parents will attend to them. Nestlings are fed insects to boost their growth since they leave the nest in ten days. The chicks establish a "pecking order" in line with their hatch dates, and this order continues into adulthood. After 17 days they can fly.

Song Sparrows are a favorite target of Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism, resulting in the loss of one of the Song Sparrow chicks for each cowbird egg. As above, overlapping broods occur between a first, second, third, or even a fourth nesting.

Feeding is mostly done on the ground. Seeds and grains are its main diet, with nuts and insects eaten too. The sparrows use a

continued on page 8

Birds in the Three Rivers Area

An Amazing Hummingbird Highlighted June-July 2023

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

The season was warm to hot with a lack of rain for a three-week period from 5/21- 6/10. Smoke from the massive wildfires in Canada gave us several days of hazy conditions. A number of late migrants were reported in early June.

Every few years we get some reports of released **Northern Bobwhites**. This year single birds were at North Park 6/8 (JE), Allison Park 6/12 (BP), and in Elizabeth Twp. 6/19 (eBird).

A **Broad-billed Hummingbird** was photographed at a feeder in Franklin Park 7/11 (AVA) providing an astonishing first county and first state record. Unfortunately the bird only visited the feeder once and was not seen again.

The pair of **Virginia Rails** reported in spring at Wingfield Pines continued through the season (DH, TC). Breeding was not confirmed.

There are always a few late-spring or early-fall shorebirds this season, and sometimes it's difficult to know which direction they're headed. An early **Semipalmated Plover** was at Imperial 7/27 (MV, SN). A late spring migrant **Least Sandpiper** was at Dashields Dam 6/2 (MV). The first of the fall migrants were at Imperial 7/7-27 (m.ob.). One was at North Park 7/19-20 (DBe, AF). Two **Semipalmated Sandpipers** were at Imperial 6/14 (AF) and two were at Dashields Dam 6/16 (MV), apparently late spring migrants. Two were at Imperial 7/19 (DNe). Four **Short-billed Dowitchers** were at Imperial 7/9 (AF, JC). Up to 2 **Solitary Sandpipers** were at Imperial 7/19-29 (m.ob.), 1 was at a small wetland in Harmar Twp. 7/16-22 (RBu, JF), and one was at North Park 7/11-27 (AF). Single **Lesser Yellowlegs** were at Imperial 7/27 (MV) and North Park 7/15-16 (DK).

The **Herring Gull** colony at the Emsworth Dam was monitored this season. The maximum number of adults was 38, and 11 chicks were tallied (PB). A late **Common** or **Forster's Tern** was at Chapel Harbor 6/10 (PB).

A late **Common Loon** continued from May at Chapel Harbor to 6/10 (m.ob.).

An out-of-season **Great Egret** was at North Park 6/29-7/9 (JJ, m.ob.). An adult **Black-crowned Night-Heron** was at a small marsh in Harmar Twp. 7/15-22 (MF, m.ob.). An immature **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** was photographed at Peter's Creek in Jefferson Borough 7/23-25 (CG, m.ob.) providing the third county record. (*See photos of these two night-herons on page 8.*)

A **Black Vulture** was at Beechwood Farms 6/4 (DM).

An **Osprey** nest in Emsworth contained 3 young 7/6 (at Duquesne Light) and another nest nearby on Neville Island held 2 or 3 young 7/15 (PB).

A **Merlin** was present near last year's breeding site 6/11-12. Two were there 7/3 but breeding was not confirmed this year (MKu). Another **Merlin** was photographed in Wexford 7/24 (eBird).

Alder Flycatcher is a rare migrant here and is unheard of in June. Two apparent late migrants were found early in the month: 1 at Boyce-Mayview Park 6/1 (ST) and 1 at North Park 6/5 (DN).

Two **Blue-headed Vireo** reports were unusual (but not unheard of) for June: 1 was at Walker Park in Sewickley 6/6 (DNe) and 1 at North Park 6/11 (LS).

High counts of **Fish Crow** included 35 on 7/4 and 20 on 7/6

in Squirrel Hill (MKu). A surprising count of 12 **Common Ravens** were at Imperial 7/23 (MV).

Two **Bank Swallows** were at North Park 6/10 (EH), and up to 2 **Cliff Swallows** were at North Park through June (BMu, AH, TC). Two were photographed gathering mud for nests 6/16 (AH). Both species are the least common swallows in the county and are rare breeders.

Veery continues at North Park and nearby areas as the only regular breeding location in the county. One was at Walker Park in Sewickley 6/3-12 (LG, DNe, NN). A late migrant **Swainson's Thrush** was in Indiana Twp. 6/9 (DYe).

A pair of **Purple Finches** were in Pine Twp. during the season, the only location in the county that this species is consistently present in summer (PL, SL).

A very late **Dark-eyed Junco** was photographed visiting a feeder in South Park Twp. up to 6/12 (PS). **Savannah, Grasshopper, and Henslow's Sparrows** were all present at Imperial during the season (m.ob.). They are restricted to the few remaining grassland areas that have not been developed.

Three **Yellow-breasted Chats** were at two sites at Imperial in June and July (m.ob.). One was at Barking Slopes 6/3 (AH), a reliable location in recent years. Chats are rare breeders in the county.

A **Northern Waterthrush** was at Highland Park 7/24-25 (MCO). This is the time either species of waterthrush may be present, but the description and habitat seemed to fit Northern. There were a number of late migrant warblers. Single **Magnolia Warblers** were in Upper St. Clair 6/3 (ST), at Beechwood Farms 6/4 (STh), and at North Park 6/4 (AF). A **Blackburnian Warbler** was at Barking Slopes 6/3 (AH, PM), single **Chestnut-sided Warblers** were at Beechwood Farms 6/8 (DM) and Frick Park 6/16 (DM), a **Black-throated Blue Warbler** was at Mount Washington 6/4 (LM) Single **Black-throated Green Warblers** were at Beechwood Farms 6/2 (JK), Mount Lebanon 6/4 (JSa), and Tom's Run Nature Reserve 6/4 (SN).

Ovenbird is a local breeder in County despite their widespread occurrence in neighboring counties. Several were at Deer Lakes Park where they are regular breeders. One was heard at Boyce Park 7/10 (SM) and one was heard at SGL 203 in Wexford 6/7 (KP). **Worm-eating Warbler** continued from May at Harrison Hills Park (m.ob.). **Cerulean Warbler** is reliable only in the Sewickley area where it continues to breed. **Prairie Warbler** has been most reliable at Imperial until the development progressed there, but I was holding on in the same location as last year where it was observed regularly during the season (m.ob.).

A pair of **Blue Grosbeaks** continued from May at Imperial this summer. As habitat continues to dwindle, we wonder how long they will remain in the area.

Observers: David Bennett (DBe), Paul Brown, Ron Burkert (RBu), Jeff Cieslak, Thomas Connor, Jeff Evans, Joe Fedor, Adrian Fenton, Mike Fialkovich, Connie Gallagher, Lynn Goldbach, Eric Hall, Amy Henrici, Dan Hinnebusch, Julie Jansen, Debbie Kalbfleisch, Justin Kowlakowski, Malcolm Kurtz (MKu), Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Pat McShea, Lori Maggio, Steve Manns, Dan Mendenhall, Bob Mulvihill (BMu), Dean Newhouse (DNe), Norma Newhouse, Steve Northrop, Dick Nugent, MC O'Neill, Kevin Parsons, Brandon Pass, James Saracco (JSa), Liz Spence, Paul Smith, Steve Thomas (STh), Shannon Thompson, Alicia Van Arsdale, Mark Vass, David Yeany II (DYe).

The Peregrine



TWO RELATED SPECIES VISITED US – Seldom seen in western Pennsylvania, a Black-crowned Night-Heron (left) and a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (right) came to Allegheny County in July



2023. Mike Fialkovich photographed the Black-crowned, and Connie Gallagher photographed the Yellow-crowned. See Mike's report on page 7 for details.

Observations

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“double-scratch” method of foraging. In a small hop upward, the bird's feet move forward, scratch the ground back revealing what may be beneath, and then return to the original standing position as it comes back down. This method is used in dirt, in leaves, or in snow.

Flocking for protection and food gathering by the sparrows is prevalent in winter with older males dominant in single-species groups or larger birds dominant in mixed-species groups.

Our popular feeding of birds in the winter helps Song Sparrows and others survive the cold. In winter, spread seeds for the ground-feeders. Song Sparrows do use feeders too, especially platform or dish feeders which resemble eating on the ground. The availability of water is also important for Song Sparrows year-round.

The three, clear introductory notes of a Song Sparrow should be very familiar in your neighborhood. Enjoy this favorite entertainer throughout the year.

See the 3RBC website for Tom's references and more photos of this welcome visitor in our yards.

Don't Forget the Pittsburgh CBC

The Pittsburgh Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 30, 2023.

The count circle will be divided among about a dozen area leaders, who help to coordinate individuals and small groups throughout the count circle.

If you are interested in participating, contact aswp.org for a list of the area leaders and their respective contact information. If you are unsure of where or how to participate, contact Compiler Brian Shema at bshema@aswp.org for more information.

Our Most Weird Program

Jon Dunn is the author of seven editions of the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (and an updated eighth edition to be published soon). An old friend, he reminisced with Paul Hess recently about our remarkable 3RBC program on December 7, 2011:

“I will long remember that wild evening presenting to the Three Rivers Bird Club a decade or so in Claire Staples' basement after it was discovered that the Garden Center had had been double booked. Three Rivers did not have ‘priority,’ but Claire stepped up, and seemingly a good time was had by all!”

The photo below shows Jon and the audience packed into Claire's makeshift auditorium. His topic was identification of sparrows, and he did it with color slides. We learned a lot.

