



The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

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Take Three Exciting Photo Tours

Join our member Cris Hamilton on her far-ranging trips to the Pacific Northwest, the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and Costa Rica at the Three Rivers Birding Club meeting on Wednesday, October 2.

The meeting will be held at the Phipps Garden Center, 1059 Shady Avenue in Shadyside. The doors will open at 6:30 PM for socializing, a business meeting will begin at 7:30, and Cris's program will start at 8.

She will share the delightful photographs and video clips of birds and other wildlife that she encountered on trips since she retired in 2007 as a teacher in the Carmichaels Area School District. One of her favorite places to visit is the Pacific Northwest, including British Columbia.

The photos at right are a teaser of what's in store. Cris is kayaking at Lac Le Jeune in British Columbia to photograph Common Loons. The result was this delightful portrait of a parent and chick. (The picture of Cris, taken by her friend Bonnie Block, is used with permission.)



Nature's Diversity: Variations Within a Species

Just as humans do, individuals within a single bird species vary considerably in physical appearance, size, and other features. Two examples: Reddish Egrets and Great Blue Herons each have a pure white color morph; some Song Sparrows in Alaska are larger than most Fox Sparrows.

The Yellow-rumped Warblers below are another example: the eastern "Myrtle" Warbler (left photo by Bob Greene) and the western "Audubon's" Warbler (right photo by Cris Hamilton). The "Myrtle's" throat is white; the "Audubon's" throat is yellow. See page 4 for more subtle differences within two other species.



President's Message

National Parks: Wildlife and More

By Jim Valimont

My wife and I have visited many of our national parks. Recently, we completed another swing that included several national parks and monuments. The excuse for the trip was to visit our daughter in Phoenix on the occasion of our grandson's first birthday. So, we headed for Arizona by way of Tennessee.

We had not been to Great Smoky Mountains National Park since 1980. I remembered Gatlinburg as a tourist trap, but words cannot describe the growth of both Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge as tourist destinations. We couldn't get through them fast enough! We took several hikes in the park, one starting at the Sugarland Visitor Center and the other to Laurel Waterfall. Common birds were Northern Parula, Black-throated Green Warbler, and Acadian Flycatcher. Laurel Waterfall was spectacular!

The next day, we drove to Clingman's Dome. As I got out of the car, I was sure that I heard a Pine Siskin calling, and I later read that Pine Siskins had nested here this year, the first time in many years. Other birds were Chestnut-sided Warblers, Dark-eyed Juncos, Least Flycatchers, and Winter Wrens. The Balsam Woolly Adelgid, an invasive insect, has caused a 95% loss of the Frazer Fir population in the park, leaving forests of dead trees around Clingman's Dome. Eastern Hemlocks are under attack by the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, but park officials have released a predatory beetle from the Pacific Northwest that feeds on the pest.

In New Mexico, we visited El Malpais National Monument, which contains 3,000-year-old lava flows, grasslands, scenic views, a natural arch, and a network of trails for visitors to explore. Western Bluebirds, Pinyon Jays, and Canyon Wrens were my favorite birds in this monument. We explored the lava beds' strange formations, tunnels, and collapsed sections. Very few plants grew in this area. The drive to Phoenix was over back roads that took us past many cinder cones from volcanic eruptions.

We took our daughter's family to Grand Canyon National Park. Words and even pictures cannot fully describe the majesty of this park! You have to see it for yourself. Finally, after many years of searching, I saw my first California Condors, introduced into the park to use some of their former habitat. I saw up to seven soaring at the same time. One was a juvenile with no wing tags to indicate that it was a released bird. The south rim of the canyon near the El Tovar Lodge is probably the easiest place to see these magnificent birds. Other species we saw include Pygmy Nuthatch, White-throated Swift, Rock Wren, and Violet-Green Swallow.

We left Arizona to go to Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico, where a rare Rufous-necked Wood-Rail, had been found and was appearing regularly in a marsh. Unfortunately, we arrived at 1 PM, during the heat of the day, and the bird had not been seen since 7 AM. We didn't see the wood-rail, but we did see a Least Bittern feeding two downy chicks. Very memorable!

We next headed for Wyoming and South Dakota, where we visited a cluster of national parks. The first was Devil's Tower National Monument in Wyoming. This formation was formed far underground as a plug to a volcano. When all of the rock above it

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eroded away, the plug remained above ground as the formation we see today. We hiked the trail around the formation, seeing very few birds. Red-breasted Nuthatches, Mountain Chickadees, Plumbeous Vireo, and Western Wood-Pewees were my best sightings here.

In South Dakota, our first visit was at Wind Cave National Park, known for its Bison herds. We signed up for a cave tour in the late afternoon and hiked Cool Creek Canyon trail in the morning. This area was known for its tall grass prairie plants. We noted several places where Bison had recently wallowed in the mud along the nearly dry stream. Lark Sparrows, Western Meadowlarks, and Red Crossbills were the best birds. Yellow-breasted Chats were singing around the visitor center as we returned for our cave hike. The cave is known for its calcite formations known as boxwork.

These are just a few of the wonderful moments that we've experienced at our national parks. I've run out of room and still have five more parks that we've visited! I hope all of you will have a chance to visit these and other national parks. With severe budget cuts, now more than ever the parks need our help. Visit the parks and donate to the many organizations that help the National Park Service maintain and improve our parks.

Outings to Come

Fun in the Fall Includes Our Annual Picnic

By Steve Thomas, Outings Director

Saturday, September 7 – Harrison Hills Park: Meet leader Jim Valimont (412-828-5338) at 8:15 AM at this county park off Freeport Road between Natrona Heights and Freeport. We will meet at the parking lot near the pond. As you enter the park, bear right and proceed to the parking lot at the end of the road. Dress for wet grass and mud.

Sunday, September 8 – Boyce-Mayview: Join Patti Kaminski for this outing to a popular park in the South Hills. This location has become a very active bird area in the fall. Meet in the parking area at 7:30 AM. Directions: Take Route 19 south past South Hills Village (on your left); continue past Upper St. Clair High School and turn right onto Boyce Road. Go past Boyce Middle School and then, about 1 mile downhill, past Friendship Village (on your left). The entrance to the parking area is on your right at the bottom of the hill, adjacent to a small pizza shop.

Friday, September 13 – Sewickley Heights Park: In collaboration with Fern Hollow Nature Center at the park, this bird walk will be led by Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; e-mail van126@comcast.net). Meet at 8 AM in the park's upper parking lot. The walk will start at the parking lot, not at the Nature Center. See the 3RBC website www.3rbc.org for directions. Be prepared for muddy trails. It is also advisable to bring water and a lunch. We will bird the park and along Little Sewickley Creek Road.

Friday, September 20 – Allegheny Front: This is our annual outing to the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch, which should be near the peak of Broad-winged Hawk migration, and many other raptor species can be expected. Meet at 11 AM at the Hawk Watch. See www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org/hawk-watch.php for directions. Bring a lunch and dress warmly. Be prepared for changes in the weather! Allow 2 hours drive time from Pittsburgh. The best migrations occur when there is an east wind: for Broad-wings the range is September 10-25. If you cannot make our outing on the 20th, check the forecast for an east wind and head to the watch.

Saturday, September 21 – Presque Isle State Park: Join Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; e-mail van126@comcast.net) at one of the state's prime locations for seeing fall migrants. Meet at 8:30 AM in the first parking lot (Vista 1) on the right as you enter the park. The park is at the north end of Route 832 just west of the city of Erie. Bring a lunch.

Sunday, September 22 – Frick Park: Join co-leaders Jack Solomon (412-521-3365) and Frank Izaguirre at this excellent "migrant trap" that can sometimes have a great variety of warblers and other fall migrants. Meet at 8 AM in the Frick Environmental Center parking lot, 2005 Beechwood Boulevard. It is just north of Forbes Avenue in Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill section.

Saturday September 28 – Wingfield Pines: Meet Aidan Place (724-833-0998; placea@winchesterthurston.org) at 7 AM. The park has a series of ponds, open fields and forest trails.



SURPRISE VISITOR – A Pine Warbler isn't a common feeder visitor in this area. Karyn Delaney enjoyed this one at her suet feeder in Economy, Beaver County, from April 1-3, where she photographed it on the last day of its visit.

We should see plenty of migrating and the usual resident birds. Directions: From Pittsburgh take Route 19 south onto West Liberty Avenue; go straight onto Washington Road; turn right (west) onto Boyce Road; turn right on Mayview Road and travel approximately 1.2 miles to the Boyce-Mayview REEC. We will meet in the parking lot at the top of the hill in front of the main recreation building. Wingfield Pines is directly across the street.

Sunday, October 6 – Pymatuning Area (note the changed date and time from the previous listing): Meet leader Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; van126@comcast.net) at the Pymatuning Wildlife Learning Center (Waterfowl Museum) at 8 AM for this all-day outing. Arrangements will be made to have lunch at the Spillway Inn.

Sunday, October 27 – Moraine State Park: This will be our 12th annual 3RBC picnic and bird walk. Meet at 8 AM in the Day Use Area (South Shore) in the first parking lot on the right. After the morning outing, we will have a potluck picnic at a pavilion near McDanel's boat launch. Please bring a dish to serve 4-6 people. Directions: From I-79, take Route 422 east toward Butler and exit at the Moraine State Park exit. At the end of the ramp, turn left and go straight until you see the first major parking area on your right. Allow one hour driving from Pittsburgh.

Saturday, November 2 – Yellow Creek State Park: This will be a joint outing of the 3RBC and the Todd Bird Club. Meet Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493) at the park office at 8 AM. The office is on Route 259 just off Route 422 east of Indiana. Allow an hour and 30 minutes to drive from Pittsburgh.

Wednesday morning walks at Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve: Beechwood (412-963-6100) will have nature walks every Wednesday at 9 AM, led by a Beechwood staff member. This Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania reserve is located at 614 Dorseyville Road in Fox Chapel.

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A Sparrow and a Sandpiper Show Variety in Species

The two warblers on page 1 are so different in throat color and face pattern that they were classified as separate species until 1973 when the American Ornithologists' Union merged them as one species because they hybridize in the Pacific Northwest.

The strikingly different Savannah Sparrows above have never been classified as separate species, despite their conspicuous contrast in plumage. The individual at left, with extremely dark streaking, may be a bird that breeds in Labrador or surrounding areas of Canada. The paler individual at right may be from our own region's familiar breeding population.

The two Semipalmated Sandpipers below have never been classified as separate species, despite their extreme difference in bill length. The bird at left, with a short and stubby bill, is typical of birds that breed in northern Alaska and northwestern and north-central Canada. The bird at right, with the much longer and thinner bill, is typical of

breeding populations in northeastern Canada.

Most birders are content to identify differing birds like these simply at the species level, and let it go at that. That's quite appropriate, of course, but experienced birders are becoming more and more interested in the conspicuous variations within species. A caveat: Don't try too hard to pin down an individual's subspecies. Interbreeding may produce intergrades that are unassignable to a definite subspecies. In fact, it takes careful study even to ascertain that an apparent "Audubon's" Warbler with its yellow throat isn't a hybrid that had one "Myrtle" Warbler parent. More details than the throat color – especially facial pattern – are necessary.

(All four of these photos were taken at the Bald Knob pond near Imperial: top left, Jeff McDonald, April 27, 2013; top right, Geoff Malosh, May 11, 2013; bottom left, Geoff Malosh, May 23, 2013; bottom right, Geoff Malosh, May 24, 2013.)



Outings Revisited

We Birded from the Spring into the Breeding Season

Peters Creek – April 28: The sun seemed to have disappeared entirely and rain was threatening, but we had a fruitful morning in this area. The calls of Eastern Towhees, Wood Thrushes, and an early Eastern Wood-Pewee were heard throughout the hike. A Pileated Woodpecker was spotted high in a Sycamore. Our first stop near a marshy area off Peters Creek Road gave us a good look at male Red-winged Blackbirds and a nesting female.

As we moved farther into the woods along the creek, several Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were identified, and a Yellow-throated Warbler that was seen a few days previously made a reappearance for our enjoyment. Mallards swam along beside us as well, and a male Wood Duck was seen.

Both male and female Yellow Warblers, an American Goldfinch, and a lone Song Sparrow were identified, as well as a male Downy Woodpecker. We watched Barn Swallows and Northern Rough-winged Swallows gliding over the lake area. A Spotted Sandpiper was also seen at the water's edge.

A solitary Turkey Vulture circled overhead, and we were treated to the sight of a Canada Goose carefully guarding her nest, always facing toward the sounds of potential intruders. Rain eventually started to fall steadily as promised, and we quickly returned to our vehicles accompanied by the calls of cardinals, robins, and chickadees. –by leader **Patti Kaminski**

Sewickley Heights Park – May 3: On a beautiful, sunny spring morning, 12 birders met with the hope of finding early migrants. Even before we finished with the usual introductions, Wood Thrush, an Eastern Bluebird, House Wren, Eastern Towhee, and seven other passerines were noted. We hoped this level of activity was the beginning of a very successful outing.

The butterfly meadow yielded good sightings of a Nashville and a Blackburnian Warbler, plus a Rose-breasted Grosbeak and a Baltimore Oriole. A flyover by a Great Blue Heron surprised us.

As we entered the woodlands on Chestnut Path, we heard a variety of songs, and we strained our necks trying to find the singers. With patience and a lot of finger pointing to give directions, we identified a Red-eyed Vireo, 2 Black-throated Green Warblers, and 2 Scarlet Tanagers. Farther along the trail, we briefly glimpsed a Hooded Warbler. Although we heard several of them in various places, they stayed well hidden from view.

As we headed back toward the parking lot on Black Cherry Trail, a Blue-winged Warbler was heard and eventually lured into view with a recording. Farther along, the call of an Ovenbird gave away his perch, and a Yellow-rumped Warbler was spotted nearby.

Kentucky Warblers nest in the park, and one of the best places to find one is at the first gate at the top of the driveway. Sure enough, we heard one calling as we walked along the Pipeline Trail. The bird called continuously but eluded us. Along the main road, we did get to hear and see a Cerulean Warbler. We also spied a Pileated Woodpecker hammering on a tree. A Veery foraging along the road let us get very close. Our last park warbler was an American Redstart near the parking lot.

On the caravan to Walker Park, we heard a Louisiana

Waterthrush, and another birder caught the emphatic pee-tsup call of an Acadian Flycatcher. After lunch at Walker Park, we birded along Little Sewickley Creek. A pair of Red-tailed Hawks spiraled overhead riding on a thermal. An Eastern Phoebe, a Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, a Yellow-throated Warbler, and a Cerulean Warbler announced their presence. An interesting discovery was a Brown Creeper pair bringing nesting material to the trunk of a dead tree with strands of loose bark.

We moved on to Pontefract Park and found a Warbling Vireo, a House Finch, a Dark-eyed Junco, and a Yellow Warbler. At our last stop, the Edgeworth Dump, we added Gray Catbird and our first swallows of the day: Northern Rough-winged and Barn.

A scan of the Ohio River turned up an immature Common Loon, four Ring-billed Gulls, two Double-crested Cormorants perched on a buoy above the Dashields Dam, and two Common Mergansers along the shore. The last bird of the day was a Broad-winged Hawk flying high over Pontefract Park. We totaled 62 species for the day, including a “Birder’s Dozen” of warblers – 13. As expected, the morning’s bird chorus did foreshadow a successful day of migrant hunting. –by leader **Bob VanNewkirk**

Harrison Hills Park – May 19: Nineteen birders arrived for our annual May outing. Red-eyed Vireos, Hooded Warblers, and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were singing at the parking lot. After introductions, our walk down to the pond started with futile chases for singing Blue-winged Warblers. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and Eastern Towhees were more cooperative, perching on open snags and allowing everyone a good look.

In the field beyond the pond, we had Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Eastern Bluebird, Tree and Northern Rough-winged Swallows, Indigo Buntings, a Common Yellowthroat, a Yellow Warbler, and two cooperative Black-billed Cuckoos, spotted by Sheree Daugherty. Tennessee and Blackpoll Warblers were heard.

The streamside trail produced nothing of note except a Song Sparrow with a strange, hoarse song. At the cliff top trail, we heard the only Acadian Flycatcher of the day in the distance. Cerulean Warblers were singing all along the cliff but stayed out of sight. A Kentucky Warbler also stayed out of sight, but Hooded and Black-and-white Warblers were more cooperative.

A visit at the nature center produced our only White-eyed Vireos of the day, but what a cooperative couple they were, moving right at the edge of the woods for everyone to see. For the day, we totaled 53 species, mostly breeding birds. A lot of birds had not arrived yet, as noted by the small numbers of Scarlet Tanagers and Acadian Flycatchers. –by leader **Jim Valimont**

Sewickley Heights Park – May 31: Bird song filled the air at 7:30 AM in the still cool morning as seven birders arrived at the parking area. We hoped to get as much birding in as early as possible to avoid the predicted near 90-degree afternoon temperature. The warbler migration was nearly over and the goal was to find signs of nesting resident birds.

The full foliage of late spring hid several birds. We relied on our ears to identify many that were never seen: Veery, Wood Thrush, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and Ovenbird. A beautiful male Indigo Bunting sang from its perch near the first field.

Instead of the usual route to the horse pastures, leader Bob VanNewkirk, wisely guided the group through the shady woods on Chestnut Trail. The sharp “Pee-zah” call of the Acadian Flycatcher

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Outings Revisited

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caught our attention, and eventually the bird allowed us to see him. An unidentified large owl, either a Barred or a Great Horned, was surprised from its perch and silently flew away.

We circled back and crossed the road onto the gravel path. Melissa Little spotted what looked like a turtle ahead on the trail. It was an Eastern Box Turtle! Earlier, when Melissa arrived at the park, she helped another turtle cross the road. Two rarely seen box turtles in one day!

Bird song slowed as the day heated. We headed to Walker Park and found the untidy nest of an Acadian Flycatcher hanging from a sapling over Little Sewickley Creek. Next, we found a Louisiana Waterthrush gathering small insects and invertebrates along the creek edge. Once its bill was filled, it flew up to feed nestlings in a well-hidden nest under exposed roots a few feet above the water. A Carolina Chickadee surprised us when it flew from a tiny horizontal opening in a dead tree trunk. It was hard to believe that a bird could fit into such a small hole.

Three birders continued on to Pontefract Park and the Edgeworth Dump. We were greeted with an adult Bald Eagle soaring over the Ohio River. It was becoming increasingly uncomfortable in the heat, but we were able to add a dozen new species to make the day's total of 56. **—by participant, Sheree Daugherty**

Ohiopyle State Park – June 15: It was pure luck that the weather was beautiful for this outing, which was framed by days of rain. A nice turnout of 14 people participated. Each June, I try to lead an outing somewhere in the Laurel Mountains to enjoy birds of the high-elevation forests as well as the scenery.

We started at the Ferncliff Peninsula area to look at the Barn Swallow/Cliff Swallow colony on the bridge over the Youghiogheny River. We also had the pleasure of watching a female Common Merganser with seven young resting on a boulder in the river. They soon took to the water and swam right past us. Common Mergansers are fairly recent breeders along the Youghiogheny River. A Yellow-throated Vireo and American Redstart were singing in the nearby forest, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was calling, Cedar Waxwings were flying around, and an Indigo Bunting was spotted.

Next we hiked the cross-country ski trails near the campground on top of the mountain. This was formerly a good location for Golden-winged, Blue-winged, and Prairie Warblers and Yellow-breasted Chats, but due to habitat change, they are no longer found there. Less habitat-fussy birds still nest at the site. We found a Black-billed Cuckoo and heard a Yellow-billed Cuckoo. A White-eyed Vireo was singing, a Brown Thrasher perched in a tree, an Eastern Bluebird family was active, and Eastern Towhees were numerous. A male Indigo Bunting was seen singing in a distant tree. Birds in the nearby forest included Hooded Warbler, and we had close views of two American Redstarts. A few Scarlet Tanagers were cooperative. A Broad-winged Hawk was soaring over and calling.

Four Wild Turkeys were walking along the trail, and we flushed a group of young turkeys that were small, but able to fly. They flew into the nearby trees and disappeared. Only one was visible perched in the tree.

A trip to nearby Deer Lake outside the park yielded singing

Swamp Sparrows, Red-winged Blackbirds, and a Willow Flycatcher that called only once.

A grassy field just outside the park gave us some open-country birds including a Grasshopper Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlarks, and Bobolinks. The birds perched on the powerlines, and I was able to put my scope on them for better views.

Our final stop was Cucumber Run Picnic Area where a Louisiana Waterthrush was chipping, an Acadian Flycatcher called, and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak was singing. **—by leader Mike Fialkovich**

Todd Nature Reserve – June 22: This was our club's first outing to this property owned by the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania. It's a beautiful place close to Pittsburgh, but it has the look and feel of the Laurel Mountains or Cook Forest with hemlock-lined ravines flowing with cool streams.

While the 12 participants were gathering in the parking lot, we heard our first Ovenbird singing. Several more were heard throughout the morning.

We had a look at a Hooded Warbler high in a tree carrying food, then dropping like a stone to the forest floor where it presumably had a nest low to the ground.

Near the pond, we heard an Eastern Kingbird calling but never saw it. Two Wood Ducks flew out of the pond as we approached. We then saw a Northern Watersnake resting on shore with a wound on its neck. It eventually entered the water and swam around, and appeared to be okay. Many Bullfrogs and Green Frogs were easily seen. We heard an Indigo Bunting and Scarlet Tanager and eventually saw both in nearby trees. We enjoyed a family group of Black-capped Chickadees with several young begging food from a parent.

Returning to the trail, we came across a singing Kentucky Warbler that was out of sight in the forest undergrowth. Continuing on, we saw and heard several Eastern Towhees. A Broad-winged Hawk called and flew over.

We heard our second Yellow-billed Cuckoo of the day, and most of the group was able to see this one before it moved off. Shortly afterward, a Kentucky Warbler flew into our view and perched long enough for the group to see. Another one was singing nearby. This was a life bird for several participants. In past years, Kentucky Warblers were more numerous and easy to see at Todd, but I was happy that we found three.

Descending to the stream valley, we heard an Acadian Flycatcher calling. Two Black-throated Green Warblers were counter-singing in the hemlocks.

We ended at the cabin, where we did a tick inspection. The leader had the most. **—by leader Mike Fialkovich**

A Night to Remember

A crowd of 104 members and visitors gathered for 3RBC's August 7 meeting to hear Scott Weidensaul speak about "Messing Around with Birds...for Fun and Science." His lively, and often humorous, stories and pictures did not disappoint.

Scott's topic for the evening concerned his field research, focusing on hummingbirds and Northern Saw-whet Owls. See the 3RBC website for a full report of his presentation and the complete meeting minutes by our Co-secretaries Pat and Sherron Lynch.

Beechwood Outing Series Wraps Up with a Surprise

By Brian Shema

On the heels of a fantastic migration at Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve last fall, I offered to lead a series of four outings this spring. My intention was to share the location's ability to produce excellent birding opportunities, but I actually found myself comparing the addition of new birds each week to document the progression of the migration period.

April 25 – It was a cool morning at Beechwood with few leaves and many Blackburnian Warblers. In fact, Blackburnian Warbler was the first and last bird to be seen by the group of participants. The first were found on Upper Fields Trail singing and foraging at the treetops, in typical fashion. A Black-throated Green Warbler and a few Black-and-white Warblers were sprinkled along the trail. At the “treetop” along Spring Hollow Trail, we were treated to outstanding views of more Blackburnian Warblers. One gleaned insects from branches just above our heads – no binoculars needed.

May 4 – Decent conditions existed for migration in the previous few days, and the trees had leafed out considerably more. Black-throated Green Warblers made a push and were obvious along Upper Fields Trail. A Nashville Warbler arrived, along with a Blue-winged Warbler and American Redstarts. Unfortunately, we only heard most of these new arrivals. Black-and-white Warbler was the most abundant migrant this week. Red-eyed and Blue-headed Vireos were singing, providing a nice opportunity to compare their songs. We enjoyed Baltimore Orioles and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks as they searched the treetops for food. But the bird of the day was a stunning male Tennessee Warbler leisurely feeding among the branches of an apple tree – a life bird for two participants.

May 11 – High pressure in the northeast and weather in the south seemed to have stalled migration. The usual suspects were present, but in fairly small numbers. This week, we added a few new birds to the list, including Bay-breasted and Chestnut-sided Warblers, Indigo Bunting, and Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Nashville Warbler replaced Black-and-white Warbler as the most abundant bird, but Blackburnian Warbler and American Redstart also increased in numbers. A singing Northern Parula and Hooded Warbler concluded our list for the day.

May 16 – Weather patterns continued to produce a rather dull migration show across much of the Northeast. As in the previous



OUT IN THE OPEN – American Bitterns are usually camouflaged in vegetation, but this one at Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve wasn't hidden when Tom Moeller photographed it. The bird was flushed at Beechwood's pond on May 16 and again May 23.

four weeks, we started along Goldenrod Trail, a trail at the base of an east-facing slope, which often serves as an indicator of how many birds are on the reserve. The reserve was generally quiet, until we reached the pond. As we approached, I heard the call of a bird that I certainly did not expect: American Bittern! The bird flushed as we approached, producing the unmistakable squawk that I heard. As I called out the bird to the group, it banked along the upper side of the pond and landed in the open field. After making a quick loop for migrants, we returned to the field with my spotting scope to enjoy the much-unexpected visitor. A wonderful ending to a series of outings at Beechwood.

A Hallowed Tradition Continues at Bell's Farm

By Paul Beck

On the sunny morning of May 18, at least 70 people gathered for this annual classic Bell's Farm bird outing. All were happy to see Ralph Bell, whose joking and fun were in top form.

I have attended Ralph's outing for many years, and every year the event is unique. But almost every year has its “givens,” such as the Purple Martins diving in and out of their nesting gourds, the haunting sound of the Eastern Meadowlark in the fields, and a great number of warblers. This day would prove no different, with 78 species recorded (just shy of the record of 80). The group had just started the walk when a close-by Yellow-billed Cuckoo called out, and soon a Great Crested Flycatcher that gave us its “wheep”

call was close enough for all to see.

Down the road, Ralph directed attention to a grove of pine trees, which once had Summer Tanagers. On this day, he found none, but he noted the sound of a Yellow-throated Vireo. Ralph's ears would prove very useful throughout the day in directing us to a number of bird species.

In addition to Ralph, our group had the fortune to be guided by other outstanding birders, including Bill Beatty, who helped us to hear many a bird sound and identify many a flower species, and Larry Helgerman, who used his scope to show us an American Redstart nest. Ralph commented that it was always nice to have Larry along, and proof of this came again assisted by his scope. I

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managed to put my eye in the center of the scope and observed the head and tail of the redstart on its nest.

With the help of these master birders, I was able to hear the sound of warblers such as the Kentucky, Cerulean, Blackpoll, Northern Parula, and Hooded. I especially liked the Hooded's sound, "tweet, tweet, tweeteo," or "come here, come here right now." Ralph told us that two Hooded Warbler pairs nested on the farm property. We also had outstanding sightings of Baltimore Orioles, Scarlet Tanagers, Indigo Buntings, and raptors such as Broad-winged, Red-tailed, and Cooper's Hawks.

Helping to make this a special day was Ralph's daughter Joannie, who always adds spice to this annual walk with her observations and skill. She gave us several ways to remember the sound of an Acadian Flycatcher, such as, "pizza," hiccup, and the partially unprintable "spit-hit."

Recognizing a bird song is always a challenge, and Ralph continues to amaze us with his skill in identifying birds by sound, often by a mere peep. My mother told me that she remembers Ralph telling her on one of his outings that individual birds of the same species have their own "voices." Additionally, I remember Joannie's husband, Don, sharing with me his observation that the same bird species may sound quite differently in different regions.

Birders added color to my walk down the road, especially one who kept me riveted with a story of her spring feeding of Baltimore Orioles with dollar-store grape jelly from a tray and providing them with dental floss for their nest.

Many birds were spotted with nests, including Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Eastern Phoebe. Ralph made sure to show participants the carefully tucked-away phoebe nest under a rocky outcrop.

When we came to the bridge over South Ten Mile Creek, a Carolina Chickadee was feeding its young at a nest in a hole of a fallen tree. It made repeated trips to the nest with green caterpillars. Remarking about the resourcefulness of chickadees in their nesting behavior, Ralph mentioned seeing a chickadee use a nest in a post only a foot above the ground.

Ralph walked across the Massillon Iron Bridge to take birders to the site of a Northern Rough-winged Swallow nest under the railway culvert. Larry Helgerman was inside the culvert standing on a rock in the stream when a swallow flew out of a hole in the wall. He promptly identified it as a Rough-winged. Because of the speed of the bird's exit, my brother, Joe, expressed skepticism that Larry had time to make a proper identification, but Ralph assured him that Larry was correct. This hole in the wall has proven to be a



AN ANNUAL TREAT – The Purple Martin colony is a traditional highlight of the Bell's Farm outing, and this year's event on May 18 gave participants their usual close-up look. (photograph by Amy Feinstein)

favorite nesting spot for this species for many years.

Before we left the bridge, a Belted Kingfisher flew right over Ralph's head as if to give a flying salute to our birding leader. At this point, Ralph asked if anyone saw the bluebirds going to the box in the nearby field. No one responded, because two Mallards and a Blue Jay flying up stream diverted the group's attention.

Only a handful of people remained from the original group, because many birders had made their way back to the farmhouse and the shade of a grand old Tuliptree to enjoy lunch. Here, the day's designated counter, a birder named Lee Jay compared notes with other birders to create an official checklist. Ralph did not think the usual American Kestrel chicks were ready for banding, so we did not see them this year, but several birders observed a kestrel in the area.

While eating lunch, I remarked to one of the birders how impressed I was with the number of young birders at the outing, including Aidan Place. The adult birder joked that if they study hard enough, they will all become "bird brains."

We were grateful for the opportunity to spend time with Ralph and tap his knowledge of birds. He was described to me by one longtime birder and admirer as unpretentious, enthusiastic, witty, and always willing to share his knowledge and appreciation of nature.

Thanks so much, Ralph, for a great day. If you see that 98-year-old birder on the farm, tell him that he's amazing!

Notes from Mike Fialkovich

Ever heard of an Indian Hen? You may have come across nicknames given to several different birds, but have you ever heard of this one? A co-worker who lives in the Laurel Mountains in Fayette County told me his dad (and other locals) refer to the Pileated Woodpecker as the "Indian Hen." That was a new one to me. A Google search revealed that name is also used for the American Bittern.

News on the World's Oldest Bird: You may be aware of Wisdom, the female Laysan Albatross that is the oldest known living bird in the world, because this extraordinary individual makes headlines. She hatched a chick on Midway Atoll at 62 years of age! Read about her at www.birdingwire.com/releases/279496.

The Oldest Known Red Knot: If you have never been to the Delaware Bay in spring to see the spectacular migration of Red Knots and Ruddy Turnstones, make plans to experience it someday. The eastern population of the Red Knot has been in serious decline for many years. An amazing individual banded 20 years ago continues to provide scientists with knowledge about this species that may contribute to its recovery.

The Starling's Expansion: The introduction and expansion of the European Starling across North America is described interestingly in a paper published in 1928. At that point, the species' range extended only as far west as the Mississippi River in the U.S. and to Nova Scotia and Ontario in Canada after it was introduced in New York City in 1890. To learn more, read the paper online at tinyurl.com/StarlingExpansion.

Birds in the Three Rivers Area

Clay-colored Sparrow Topped April-May 2013

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

Three **Gadwalls** were in Findlay Township 4/14 (JS, SS, MV). Maximum count of **Blue-winged Teal** was 9 at Wingfield Pines 4/13 (ST). A **Northern Shoveler** was at North Park 4/6 (PL, SL). Two were at Dashields Dam on the Ohio River 4/10 (GM). A **Northern Pintail** was at North Park 4/6 (PL, SL). The **Green-winged Teal** maximum was 14 at Imperial 4/14 (GM). Up to 2 **Ruddy Ducks** continued from March at Brunots Island up to 4/28 (BMu, JHa, ST, et al.). Two were at Duck Hollow 4/17 (TM, NM) and one was at Wingfield Pines 4/30 (RT, JHa).

A **Common Loon** at North Park continued from the last reporting period at least to 5/23 (v.o.); one at Dashields 5/5 (MV) remained to 5/23, and one was seen flying over Schenley Park in Pittsburgh 5/11 (KSJ).

A **Great Egret** was at Dashields 4/10 (GM) followed by 2 there 4/14 (GM), one was at Brunots Island 4/12 (MV) and one at North Park 5/30 (SK). **American Bittern** is rarely found in the county, so three reports this spring were exceptional. One was at the wetlands in Boyce-Mayview Park 4/8 (FK), one was at Imperial 4/14 (JM, ST), and one was flushed from a small pond at Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve in Fox Chapel 5/16 (BSh) and again 5/23 (BSh). A **Black-crowned Night-Heron** was photographed along the Monongahela River at the waterfront shopping center in Homestead 4/29 (fide DW).

In mid-April, a pair of **Ospreys** were building a nest in Leetsdale (GM) for the second year in a row. One was seen flying over Imperial daily 4/18-20 (GM, MV, PK), then again 4/27 (MV). One was perched on a powerline tower at Brunots Island 5/5 (MV). Two **Peregrine Falcons** were seen perched on a water tower in Greentree in May (fide KSJ) and photographed 5/18 (ST). The **Bald Eagles** in Hays nested successfully (BMu et al.). The other new nest in Harmar Township was originally built by Red-tailed Hawks, so there were disputes between the hawks and eagles. As of this writing, the eagles apparently have not nested there. The nest that has been in Crescent Township for several years was also active (MV et al.).

Two **Virginia Rails** were at Imperial 4/14 (GM). They were relocated 5/18 (CD) and were still present 5/25 (JM). A **Sora** was also found there 4/14 (GM) and remained well into May (CD, JM, GM).

A **Semipalmated Plover** was at Imperial 5/12 (GM), followed by two 5/13-15 (GM, JHa). One was there again 5/28 (GM). The high count of **Greater Yellowlegs** was 4 on 4/21 at Imperial (AP, AH, PM), and **Lesser Yellowlegs** maxed at 3 there on 5/8 (GM). **Solitary Sandpipers** were present at Wingfield Pines, Imperial, Harrison Hills Park, North Park, and Boyce-Mayview Park. Maximum count was 3 at Imperial 5/3 (MV) and North Park 5/15 (POB). **Semipalmated Sandpipers** put on a show this spring at Imperial. Normally found in small numbers, a flock of 77 was there 5/28 (GM), the highest total ever recorded in the county that I'm aware of, and certainly the highest at Imperial. Other nice-size flocks there included 17 on 5/23 (ST, GM), 12 on 5/24 (MV) and 11 on 5/30 (GM). **Least Sandpipers** were there 5/3-18 (v.o.) with a maximum of 10 on 5/7 (GM) and 5/11 (GM, MV). **Short-billed Dowitcher** is uncommon in spring, so 5 at Imperial 5/12 (GM) were unexpected. **Wilson's Snipe**



NOT THIS TIME – One of these years, Clay-colored Sparrows are going to nest somewhere around the Imperial grasslands. It didn't happen in 2013, but this singer spent May 20 to May 29 trying unsuccessfully to attract a mate. (photograph by Geoff Malosh)

were at Imperial up to 5/5 with up to 9 counted on 4/19 (MV). Development seemed to cease at the site, and the cleared area is growing up in grass again, but the potential for development continues.

The **Bonaparte's Gull** migration at Dashields Dam was lackluster this year with small numbers of birds passing through. The max count was 41 on 4/7 (GM). Three were at the Highland Park Dam 4/14 (MF). The top **Ring-billed Gull** count at Dashields was 95 on 3/30 (GM). **Caspian Terns** were tallied there 4/7-13 with high counts of 4 on the first and last dates they were observed (GN). Amazingly, only one **Forster's Tern** was seen there on 4/14 (GM).

Two **Barred Owls** were calling at North Park 4/10 (DN), one was at Sewickley Heights Park 4/27 (GM, JM), and a pair was at Boyce-Mayview Park 5/4 (FK). A **Northern Saw-whet Owl** called briefly at SGL 203 in Marshall Township 4/26 (GM).

Common Nighthawk reports include one in O'Hara Township 5/8 (PB), one at Schenley Park 5/15 (KSJ), and one in Squirrel Hill 5/16 (DWe). One flying over Penn Hills 5/17 (MF) may have been a migrant because the habitat is not suitable for breeding nighthawks. An **Eastern Whip-poor-will** was heard calling at SGL 203 in Marshall Township 5/9 through the month (GM et al.). This site has been supporting whips for many years and hopefully will remain a breeding site for them.

There were two reports of **Red-headed Woodpecker** this spring. One visited a feeder in Natrona Heights 4/13 (DH) and one was photographed at a feeder in Fox Chapel 5/23 (BO). Two **Willow Flycatchers** were at Boyce-Mayview Park 5/11 (FK), one was at Frick Park 5/13 (DWe), and the species was back at Imperial 5/14 (GM). A **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** was seen and heard in Sewickley 5/18 (POB). A **Philadelphia Vireo** was in Moon Township 5/14 (GM).

A **Purple Martin** was at Imperial 5/28 (GM). There are a few colonies in the county, but birds are rarely seen away from them. Three **Bank Swallows** were at Dashields Dam 4/13 (GM, JM, ST). Two **Bank Swallows** and a **Cliff Swallow** were there 5/7 (GM). A **Bank Swallow** and a **Cliff Swallow** were at McKees Rocks 5/14 (MV). The **Northern Shrike** that wintered at Imperial was seen regularly up to 4/2 (v.o.).

The pair of **Common Ravens** nesting at Imperial fledged four young. Unfortunately two of the juveniles were found dead near

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The Peregrine

Birds in the Three Rivers Area

continued from page 9

the nest site in early May (MV, JM), but 2 were observed begging food from an adult 5/11 (GM). **Fish Crow** reports include one in Squirrel Hill 4/11 (SS), 2 at Brunots Island 4/12 (MV), one at Wingfield Pines 4/13 (ST) and 2 at Harrison Hills Park 4/20 (PH, JS, SS, FI, AB), a first for that location.

A **Brown Creeper** was observed building a nest in Sewickley 4/26 (DN) and into early May. This species is a rare breeder in the county.

Migrant thrushes were scarce this spring. Single **Veeries** were found in only four locations and one of those, North Park, is a breeding site. The only **Gray-cheeked Thrush** report came from North Park 5/15 (POB). Few **Swainson's Thrushes** were found, and the highest count was made 5/16 where an estimated 20 flight calls were heard at dawn in Moon Township (GM). **Hermit Thrush** reports were regular through the period to mid-May. Since **Wood Thrushes** breed in many locations, it's difficult to determine whether migrants or arriving summer residents are being detected. A large flock of 80 **American Pipits** were at Imperial 5/11-14 (GM, MV), the largest number reported since I've been the county's compiler.

A total of 33 species of warblers were reported. A **Worm-eating Warbler** was found at Harrison Hills Park 5/2 (AH) where it continued through May (v.o.). Steep slopes along the Allegheny River at this park provides good nesting habitat for this rare breeder in the county. **Northern Waterthrush** reports include one at Etna 4/30 (BC), one at Bridgeville 5/14 (DW), and one at Harrison Hills Park 5/18 (GM). Now rare here, a **Golden-winged Warbler** was found at Walker Park in Sewickley 5/4 (ST). The only report of **Mourning Warbler** also came from Walker Park 5/4 (GM, ST, JM). There were only two reports of **Cape May Warbler**: one at Sewickley Heights Park 5/17 (GM) and one at Imperial 5/19 (GM).

Kentucky Warblers returned to breeding sites at Sewickley Heights Park by 5/1 (GM), Harrison Hills Park 5/5 (PH, FI, AB) and the Imperial area 5/7 (GM). One was at the future Pittsburgh Botanic Garden site 5/5 (BMu) and one was at Boyce Park in Plum Borough 5/12 (AH, PM). **Northern Parula** reports include one at Harrison Hills Park 5/12 (MF), one at Schenley Park 5/13 (KSJ), one at Sewickley Heights Park 5/17 (GM), one near Walker Park 5/18 (MF), and one in Frick Park 5/26 (JS, SS). **Palm Warbler** is less common in spring than fall in the county. Reports this season from six locations were higher than normal.

A **Pine Warbler** was at Beechwood Farms 4/12-14 (BSh, MF), and singles were at Sewickley Heights Park 4/15 (GM), Jefferson Hills 4/19 (ST), Frick Park 4/22 (SS), Walker Park in Sewickley 4/28 (GM), and Sewickley Heights Park 5/4 (GM, ST, JM). The only **Canada Warbler** report was from Frick Park 5/11 (MF), and the only **Wilson's Warbler** report was from Schenley Park 5/16 (KSJ). **Yellow-breasted Chat** was first heard at Imperial 5/13 (GM), and continued through the end of May. One was at Knob Hill Park in Marshall Township 5/16 (KD) and one was at Boyce-Mayview Park 5/27 (AP).

A **Clay-colored Sparrow** was discovered at Imperial 5/20 and remained to 5/29 (JM et al.). Apparently it was a lone male singing and setting up a territory. Although recorded a few times in other locations in the county over the years, this was the first one at the Imperial Grasslands since May 2004. A leucistic **Chipping Sparrow** with a small brown cap, brown tail, white patches in the wings and a white body was in Pine Township 4/11 (PL, SL). **Fox Sparrow** reports include single birds in Schenley Park 4/4

and 4/8 (FI) with 2 there 4/9 (KSJ), one in Frick Park 4/5 and 4/7 (LK, SS) and again 4/11 (DWe), several at North Park 4/7 (POB), one in Homewood Cemetery 4/13 (MF) and one in Pine Township 4/15 (PL, SL). Single **Lincoln's Sparrows** were reported in Pine Township 5/17 (PL, SL) and North Park 5/18 (POB).

Five **Rusty Blackbirds** were at Imperial 4/10 (GM) and one was at Jefferson Hills 4/19 (ST).

An **American Goldfinch** was on a nest in Pleasant Hills on the extremely early date of 4/28 (BMu). Up to 6 **Purple Finches** were in Pine Township in April (PL, SL), one was in Natrona Heights in mid-April (PH), one was in Pleasant Hills 4/13 (BMu), and 2 were at Frick Park 4/25 (JS, SS). Single birds were in Sewickley Heights Park 5/1 and Moon Township 5/15 (GM), at Harrison Hills Park 5/5 (PH), and 2 remained in Pine Township up to 5/27 (PL, SL).

Northern finches continued into spring. **Common Redpolls** lingered in Pine Township to 4/8 (PL, SL). A flock of 60 **White-winged Crossbills** were in Fox Chapel 4/6 (BSh). **Pine Siskins** were the most numerous and widespread northern finches this spring. Small numbers continued in Pine Township (PL, SL), last reported 4/6 (PL, SL), and at Sewickley Cemetery to 4/13 (TF, ST); 2 were in Pleasant Hills 4/27 (BMu) and 10 were in Wexford 4/28 (BMu). May reports included 2 at a feeder in Penn Hills 5/3 (MH), 9 in Squirrel Hill 5/10 (MH), and 13 at a feeder there 5/11 (MHa). A flock of 20 were at Boyce Park 5/12 (AH, PM), 5 were in a tree on Phillips Avenue in Squirrel Hill 5/13 (DWe), 6 were photographed at a feeder in Plum 5/15 (BB), several were in Pine Township 5/25 (PL, SL), and 6 were photographed at a feeder in Elizabeth Township 5/28 (EC).

Observers: Adrienne Block, Bill Brown, Paul Brown, Elizabeth Cain, Ben Coulter, Karyn Delaney, Cory DeStein, Mike Fialkovich, Todd Frantz, Malcolm Harter (MHa), Jim Hausman (JHa), Amy Henrici, Deborah Hess, Paul Hess, Maureen Hobma, Frank Izaguirre, Fred Kachmarik, Peter Keyel, Scott Kinzey, Lydia Konecky, Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Geoff Malosh, Jeff McDonald, Pat McShea, Nancy Moeller, Tom Moeller, Bob Mulvihill (BMu), Dick Nugent, Philip O'Brien, Betsey Owens, Aidan Place, Kate St. John, Brian Shema (BSh), Jack Solomon, Sue Solomon, Shannon Thompson, Ryan Tomazin, Mark Vass, Dan Weeks (DWe), Dave Wilton, various observers (v.o.).



PARK SPECIALTY – Worm-eating Warblers have populated the Harrison Hills Park cliffside in Allegheny County for at least 40 years, but nests are rarely found. This year at least one spent most of May at the traditional site, but no nest was located. Steve Gosser photographed it beautifully.