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The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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Proofs, Posts, and Peents: An inside look at being a Bird Magazine Editor and Social Media Manager



Our presenter for the upcoming August 5th meeting is 3RBC member, Frank Izaguirre, the marketing and communications manager for the American Birding Association (ABA). Frank runs the ABA's social media, writes articles for the ABA website, and is also in charge of the *Bird of the Year* program. Frank served as an editor of *Birding* magazine, and also as its book and media reviews editor. He likes to go birding in Schenley Park with his wife, Adrienne, and daughter, Maya.

In his program Frank asks birders the question, "Ever wonder how a bird magazine comes together, or what goes into running a birding organization's social media accounts?"

In his behind-the-scenes presentation, Frank will share how editors and influencers make decisions about content, discover new voices, balance the interests of readers and contributors, and help an organization like the American Birding Association distinguish itself among a crowded field of bird organizations. He'll also discuss the challenges and opportunities of connecting birders through magazines and social media in the modern birding era.

This will be a hybrid meeting starting "live" at Beechwood Farms at 6:30 PM (ET), and as a Zoom presentation starting at 7:00 PM (ET), giving you time to log on. The business meeting will begin at 7:30 PM, and Frank's program will start around 8:00 PM. Details on how to join the Zoom event, including passcodes and other instructions, will be supplied a few days before the meeting.

Guest speaker's observation prompts unusual sighting

By Pat McShea

Subjects addressed by guest speakers at Three Rivers Birding Club meetings sometimes have immediate relevancy. Two days after our April meeting, where Dr. Scott K. Robinson discussed research into the range of resources bird migrants require, his remarks about the simultaneous threats and benefits of some invasive plant species led me to an unusual mammal sighting.

On April 10, while hiking with Amy Henrici past a dense thicket of leafed-out multiflora rose along a trail in Harrison Hills Park, I thought about how the Eastern Towhee we heard calling from deep under the bright green, thorny patch verified the professor's observations. The mere presence of the invasive rose displaced other native plants, yet the shrub created shelter for what was likely a recently arrived migrant bird. Then twelve feet deep in the greenery, but at eye level, a mouse-sized flash of bright orange fur caught my attention.



RED BAT, PHOTO BY AMY HENRICI.

In this patch of woods where the native shrubs had not yet leafed out, a male eastern red bat, another winged recently arrived migrant, also found the thicket a safe place to roost during the day. Fortunately, Amy was able to capture the beautiful creature on film.

These colorful, warm-season residents of Pennsylvania are tree bats, a term indicating the species' preference for spending daylight hours roosting within the foliage of deciduous and sometimes evergreen trees. With wings folded, they hang upside-down from the grip of a single foot, looking, to casual observers, like dead leaves or pinecones. Remarkably, on fall migration flights to southern portions of their North American range, eastern red bats have been known to cross long stretches of territory with flocks of migrating birds.

Future 3RBC Meeting Presentations

Don't forget to save the date for these upcoming speakers:

- October 7, 2026 - **Brian Shema** - "Chimney Swift Research"
- December 2, 2026- Annual **Member Slide Slam**

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

President's Message

Early Bird Recollections and an Illustration

Mike Fialkovich, President, Three Rivers Birding Club

I found something in April that I thought was long gone in the trash. After my mother passed away in January, I have been going through her things, as you do following the loss of a family member. I thought I sorted through everything, but then I came across a small box in a closet that I didn't look through.

There were several collectable keepsake items inside, including one that I thought was long gone. It was an old book I had acquired in grade school called the *Arrow Book of States*. I don't know why she had it in a box, but there it was. I have not seen the book for well over a decade. This book contained a page for all 50 states with a map showing major cities, including state capitals (I learned all of them from this book), major geographic features, and other notable locations. There was a page of text that contained information about each state and a list of state birds and flowers in the back of the book. Thinking the book was gone, I searched the internet for it in the last year or so just to see if it was out there somewhere and found it on eBay.

So, what does this have to do with birds and birding other than the state bird list? The drawing accompanying this message is one I made on the inside cover of the book when I was in grade school: a pair of American Goldfinches feeding on thistle (a bull thistle, to be exact). It was drawn with a regular pencil and colored with markers. I don't know why I drew on the inside front cover of the book. That was the other reason I was so interested in finding it. I remembered that drawing and could not understand why I would have disposed of it (I tend to hang on to these kinds of things). I thought, at least if I threw out the book, I would have kept the drawing. Little did I know all these years that it was right there in a closet in the house, and I just didn't realize it was there.

Obviously I have been interested in birds since I was a kid, as far back as I can remember. I don't know why. One of my early recollections was American Goldfinches feeding on thistles. My neighbor at the time had a somewhat untidy yard. One summer, a large (or perhaps a few) thistle that was several feet tall and wide grew next to their garage. One day I noticed a male American Goldfinch feeding on the seeds. I was thrilled to see that bright yellow bird at home.

In subsequent years I noticed goldfinches feeding on thistles. There was a large vacant lot next to my neighbor's house where a school once stood. It was overgrown in places with weeds and among them were thistles. I recall seeing goldfinches on those thistles.

Once I even cut off some thistle flower heads and attached them to my fence in hopes of attracting goldfinches. It actually worked! The birds were so attracted to this plant.

I noticed a thistle plant growing in my yard one summer, and I let it grow, so it would attract the birds. It was successful. I knew the call of goldfinches as they flew, and I would hear them flying over my yard as they would swoop down to the thistle to feed. In addition to feeding on the open seed heads, I noticed the birds would also pull open the



EVIDENCE OF MIKE'S
LIFELONG INTEREST IN
OBSERVING BIRDS.

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flower heads that were faded, but not opened. Apparently, they were aware there were seeds to be found in that faded flower head. That is depicted in my illustration of the female goldfinch.

In my experience, goldfinches prefer bull thistle. I've seen them on Canada thistle, but not as regularly as I've seen them on bull thistle. Now I know both are non-native, invasive plants, something I was probably not aware of as a kid. I spend a lot of time trying to remove Canada thistle plants from my yard now. They pop up in abundance in my front yard and are difficult to eradicate. I rarely find bull thistle growing in the yard, though. As an adult, I know I can feed goldfinches using a "thistle" feeder, although the Nyjer seeds that are sold to fill it actually come from a plant similar to a wild sunflower, not a true thistle.

Letter to the Editor

Since the very first issue of this club's newsletter to the present day, I've read every President's Message of the approximately 150 3RBC ever published. It's with confidence, then, that I'd say Mike Fialkovich's *President's Message* in the May/June 2026 issue, a review of the documentary film *Listers*, is the most entertaining and best ever published in *The Peregrine*. I think Mike captured both the whimsy and the philosophy that make the film such fun to watch.

If I had never seen it, I'd be quick to go find it based on Mike's review! Although I saw the film some time ago, I plan to see it again on a bigger screen, when it's shown as part of the *Biggest Week in American Birding* festival in Ohio in May. **—By Jack Solomon**

Outings to come

Early Fall Outings August – September 2026

Friday, August 21 AND Saturday, August 22 – Sewickley Heights Borough Park. Adrian Fenton will lead these walks which are intended for beginning/inexperienced birders and each walk will be limited to six people. Email the walk leader Adrian Fenton (AF9963285@aol.com) to reserve your spot! Sewickley Heights Borough Park is an excellent location for seeing fall migrants. We will go slowly to give everyone an opportunity to see and identify birds. The starting time will be at 7:30 AM in the upper parking lot. See the [3RBC website](#) for directions. Please bring binoculars.

Friday, August 28 – North Park. Meet Adrian Fenton for a bird walk starting at 7:30 AM. He will change the meeting place to Lone Pine Field parking area along South Ridge Drive. These coordinates: [40.5880908](#), [-79.9838212](#). We'll walk the area where the Red Headed Woodpeckers nest before heading over to Round Top shelter to walk down to Mine Waste Field and take some trails through woods on our return to the parking area.

Saturday, September 5 – Harrison Hills Park. Meet leader Dave Brooke (724-487-3586) at 8:00 AM at this county park off Freeport Road between Natrona Heights and Freeport. We will gather at the Environmental Learning Center parking lot at 8:00 AM. The Environmental Learning Center coordinates: [40.6572](#), [-79.7024](#). As you enter the park stay left, then turn left at the first intersection, and go up the hill to the large parking lot. Dress for wet grass and mud. Previous fall outings have produced a nice variety of fall migrants, including warblers and vireos.

Friday, September 11 – Sewickley Heights Borough Park. Join Sheree Daugherty (shereedaugherty@gmail.com), for our fall bird walk to Sewickley starting at 8:00 AM in the upper parking lot. See the [3RBC website](#) for directions. Be prepared for muddy trails. Also be aware that there are no restroom facilities in the park.

Saturday, September 12 – Deer Lakes Park. John Vassallo (johnvassallo@yahoo.com) and Oliver Lindhiem will lead this outing focused on fall migrants including warblers, vireos, and flycatchers. The outing will begin at 7:30 AM and last approximately 4 hours. We will meet in the parking lot at these GPS coordinates: [40.618722](#), [-79.815371](#). From Creighton-Russellton Road, enter the park (Kurn Road), drive by two ponds on the right, then turn right and proceed to the last parking lot. We will hike approximately 3 miles. Although the trails are fairly well maintained, please dress for possible wet grass, mud, and rainfall.

Friday, September 18 – Hartwood Acres. Come explore the Saxonburg Blvd. Fields of Hartwood Acres with Dan Mendenhall and John Dzikiy. We will start at 8:00 AM at the Hartwood Acres Mansion parking area ([200 Hartwood Acres](#)), hiking down through the woods, around the meadow trails, and back up the hill to the mansion parking area. The terrain can be steep in areas. Dress for possible wet grass, mud, and rainfall. We will hike approximately three miles.

Please email Dan (dmendenhall@aswp.org) to register if you plan to attend, as we will cap participants at ten people, and exact meeting location is subject to change.

Saturday, September 26 -3RBC Picnic at Boyce-Mayview Park. Save the date for our annual picnic. We will have a choice of two bird walks both starting at 9:00 AM. One will be at Boyce-Mayview and the other will be at the neighboring Wingfield Pines. A bring-

our-own-lunch picnic will start at 12:00 PM. Watch for more details forthcoming.

Saturday, October 3 - Linda's Farm. Linda Croskey has invited us to visit her farm for this bird walk. We will meet at 8:00 AM at [882 Deer Creek Road, Gibsonia 15044](#). Location is northern Allegheny County in West Deer Township; there will be a sign at the end of the driveway. (Across the road is Harvest Valley Farm.) Linda's farm is comprised of a variety of natural habitats: several acres of goldenrod fields, farm fields with brushy edges, mature deciduous trees, plus several wildflower and milkweed meadows. This attracts grassland birds, warblers, and many fall migrants. Dress for ticks, and bring water and snacks. Walking is mostly level along paths with a few hills over uneven terrain. For additional directions call Linda at 724-612-9963 or email lcroskey@consolidated.net.

Outings revisited

Good Birds and Good Company

Sewickley Heights Borough Park – May 1. The Sewickley Heights outing is always popular and to prove that point, 26 people, including three under the age of 12, showed up on a cold, cloudy morning. Many birders got their first of season birds including Wood Thrush, Scarlet Tanager, Red-eyed Vireo, Indigo Bunting, Great-crested Flycatcher, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, plus, thanks to the keen eyes of our youngest birders, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird! Even with chilly temperatures and low light, we did have a couple of warbler waves. We saw or heard eight species of warblers: Ovenbird, Blue-winged, Black-and-white, Nashville, Black-throated Green, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-rumped and Hooded. Thanks to all of the hearty folks who joined the walk. I hope that they enjoyed the birds and the companionship as much as I did! –**by leader, Sheree Daugherty**

Boy's Home Park - May 2. Seven participants joined me at Boy's Home Park on May 2nd. The morning was overcast with some sun coming out later in the walk. There was plenty of bird activity throughout the hike. In the parking lot we picked up Brown Thrasher, Barn Swallow, several Baltimore Orioles, and a singing Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Yellow Warblers and an immature male Orchard Oriole were seen after we started up the trail. An eye-level Blue-headed Vireo was foraging in a patch of woods. As we approached the highest point of the trail, several Savannah Sparrows chased each other through bushes, and an Eastern Meadowlark sang from a prominent perch. At the overlook we added soaring and perched Turkey Vultures and Red-tailed Hawks. A Swamp Sparrow and Grasshopper Sparrow flushed from the trailside. On our way back we spotted a flyby Sharp-shinned Hawk and American Kestrel, before a Common Raven and Broad-winged Hawk began soaring together, both looking rather scruffy. A female Purple Martin was also seen flying with the raptors. A Yellow-throated Vireo was heard singing down in a valley, and Field Sparrows provided brief views. A very pleasant morning with great scenery and some uncommon spring migrants.—**by leader, Malcolm Kurtz**

Frick Park – May 3. Our walk in Frick on Sunday May 3rd was chilly and coincided with the Pittsburgh Marathon, but 18 attendees braved the cooler temps and road closures for a lovely morning, birding around the Frick Environmental Center and Clayton Hill. We had a total of 42 species with nine warbler species plus other migrants, starting with great looks at White-Crowned Sparrow and both oriole species (Orchard and Baltimore) singing, and later encountering Blue-Headed Vireos, Red-Breasted Nuthatches, and a Ruby-Crowned Kinglet. –**by leader, Michelle Kienholz.**

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Outings Revisited

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North Park - Friday, May 8. Ten of us met at the Gold Star Pavilion parking lot in North Park on May 8th. Things got off to a good start with a singing Common Yellowthroat and a couple of foraging Palm Warblers in the trees and bushes at the edge of the lot. The mud flat and cove contained a Spotted Sandpiper, five Solitary Sandpipers and a Greater Yellowlegs, a life bird for several of the participants. The group spent about an hour walking along habitat edge on either side of Lakeshore Drive, seeing and hearing many common species. Following this, we drove to the Ridge Drive area of the park with the specific intent of locating Red-headed Woodpeckers. Before seeing the woodpeckers, everyone got to look at an active Red-tailed Hawk nest. Two Red-headed Woodpeckers delighted us in their usual location, moving among the trees before we moved on to take a trail towards the Mine Waste Field. A few migrating warblers were around, highlighted by a vibrant Blackburnian Warbler, again a life bird for several. A noisy, immature Cooper's Hawk provided good looks, while a singing Northern Parula remained elusive for most. By the end of the outing the group had totaled up 54 species. **—by leader, Adrian Fenton**

Harrison Hills Park - May 9. The morning turned out to be chilly and wet, and only six participants showed up for the walk. Unbeknownst to me, Chris Kubiak's Warbler ID class (from ASWP) was meeting at the same place and time, so we combined groups and had over 20 people on the walk. We were able to identify 46 species, with 11 of them being warblers! The highlight of the day was three singing Worm-eating Warblers along the steep hillside on the Rachel Carson Trail. As hard as we tried, we could not get eyes on them, however. It turned out to be a fun and productive day. **—by leader, Dave Brooke.**

Deer Lakes Park - May 16. A clear morning awaited excited birders at Deer Lakes Regional Park's upper parking lot on Saturday, May 16th. One by one, the cars rolled in, swelling the group to 20 strong. After a quick introduction, they walked up the access road experiencing less activity than previous years but were soon treated to a Broad-winged Hawk soaring high overhead. Additional raptors like Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks were seen later in the morning, as well as an Osprey, flying while clutching a fish in its talons. Scarlet Tanagers, Bay-breasted Warblers, and Cape May Warblers welcomed the group as they continued down the road. As the sun came out, and the morning grew warm, more birds flew into view and sang from the newly-leafed trees. Tennessee Warblers sang all morning, and several Blue-winged Warblers continued to make themselves known by their distinctive buzz without allowing the bunch any views. A brilliant Blackburnian darted deep into the forest and Ovenbirds' loud, ascending notes tantalized the group, until they finally spotted one skulking along the forest floor. The excitement rose when a sharp-eyed member spotted an Olive-sided Flycatcher facing away from the onlookers on top of a snag across the road's final field. It was happily relocated facing the patrons, who were pleased to see its dapper, dark vest. Kentucky Warblers sang in the distance along with a Great-crested Flycatcher, Black-throated Greens and Hoodeds as the crew stretched through the wooded trails and back to their fleet of vehicles. Before disbanding, the party circled the lower lakes enjoying Warbling Vireos on nests, Baltimore and Orchard Orioles singing, and Eastern Kingbirds hunting. A later date, overcast early skies, and the previous night's migration may have led to a seemingly slower start, but in the end the group saw 66 species, including a Least Flycatcher and a handful of speeding Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. While the handsome Olive-sided Flycatcher may have been the highlight of the morning, experiencing spring migration with this great collection of birders made for a truly beautiful mid-May day. **—by leader, John Vassallo**

Frick Park – May 19. Co-leader Charity Kleshgi asked the group to start our day by each sharing a bird we were interested to see. Some of the picks were Indigo Bunting, Cedar Waxwing, Hooded Warbler, either Yellow- or Black-billed Cuckoo, Lincoln's Sparrow, or any warbler. We came in at the Blue Slide entrance to the park and passed a large group of starlings and robins busy trying to feed their newly fledged young. Then, we perked up our ears for some Blackpoll Warbler songs along with Chipping Sparrows. A sort of in-between sized woodpecker had us scratching our heads as we discussed the differences in plumage, beak-size, and overall sizes between Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers. We walked away with the impression that it was a Hairy Woodpecker, but also knowing next time to look for either the presence or absence of a continuous black line from the crown of the head back towards the nape among other more subtle field marks. Hairies have the continuous line and Downies do not! As we neared the alley of trees on Riverview, we got our



IMMATURE COOPER'S HAWK PHOTO BY RON BURKERT

first Indigo Bunting song drifting to us through the trees. As we passed the open fields with robins, Chipping Sparrows, Common Grackle, a Northern Flicker, we found our first opportunity for good looks at an adult male Cape May Warbler in breeding plumage, a Red-eyed Vireo, a male Indigo Bunting, and Cedar Waxwings. Near the dog park we found some more singers waiting for us: more Red-eyed Vireos and an Eastern Wood-Pewee. To our amazement a Yellow-billed Cuckoo delighted us with a viewing, first obscured by leaves and then out in the open on a walnut that had not yet leafed in fully! We cut down from Riverview to Trough Trail for a look at a young Cooper's Hawk giving Blue Jays and chipmunks something to sound the alarm about. We were delighted by a singing Wood Thrush and a female Scarlet Tanager foraging low in some bushes. We ended the morning passing by a dueling pair a male Orchard Orioles, and finally trying to get our eyes on the Blackpoll Warbler, still singing in the same area we had passed on our way into the park. **—by co-leaders Charity Keshghi and Kate St. John**



FEMALE SCARLET TANAGER, PHOTO BY RON CHAN

Reports from Two Migration Hotspots This Spring

Festival of the Birds at Presque Isle

By Mike Fialkovich

Nicknamed “Best Little Festival in the East,” this event was held May 15-17, 2026, which was the fifteenth year it has been held. It is headquartered at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center just outside of Presque Isle. Field trips to see birds are, of course, the focus, and numerous field trips are held all day to different areas of Presque Isle State Park, as well as some locations outside the park, such as Erie Bluffs State Park. This was my third year leading field trips that included Gull Point, Fry’s Landing, and a Pontoon Boat tour of the marshes and lagoons. Former club members Dave Wilton and Shannon Thompson also led field trips, and some club members were in attendance. I met birders from different parts of the state as well as Rochester, NY, Baltimore, MD and North Carolina.

There are also presentations in the afternoon on all three days ranging from the history of Presque Isle to Mammals to birding as

part of good health. There is a keynote speaker on Saturday evening. This year’s speaker was gull expert Amar Ayyash, author of the recently published *The Gull Guide*. His presentation was a mixture of identification techniques and quizzes injected with humor in a laid-back manner. He leads the Gull Frolic in Chicago every winter to get people out to see gulls. He has even looked for gulls here in Pittsburgh. You can also visit the banding station to see what has been caught during the weekend.

The preliminary species count for the festival was 172! Highlights included a Wilson’s Phalarope, that may be a returning, breeding bird after last year’s discovery of the first confirmed breeding in Pennsylvania! The breeding Piping Plovers were seen during the field trips to Gull Point, a late Purple Sandpiper, a Connecticut Warbler, and an Eastern Screech Owl perched holding an Eastern Chipmunk that Shannon and Dave spotted. This is a really nice festival that is growing, but still small enough to not get lost in the crowd.

Magee Marsh Visit (Personal Trip Report), May 3-23, 2026

By Jack Solomon (photos by Dan Mendenhall)

Some years ago, I realized that Magee Marsh Wildlife Area on the shore of Lake Erie, east of Toledo Ohio, had brought birding into the mainstream of sports. For half my 20-day long visit, the Biggest Week in American Birding took place. It’s a 10-day long birding festival that began in 2010. The organizer, Black Swamp Bird Observatory, publicized and popularized birding in the area (which rightfully calls itself *The Warbler Capital of the World*) and realized enormous success. The result was that visitation in May by birders started rising to the tens of thousands, not all of whom register for the festival. Driving to my motel, I saw that the local striptease club changed its sign to reflect the presence of a potential audience of birdwatchers as well as boaters. Local businesses, even strippers, had noticed us. Birders had arrived!

Though it’s no longer an official 3RBC outing, plenty of our members show up annually to bird Magee Marsh, adjacent Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, and other nearby areas. I no longer keep a count, but once I tallied 60+ people I recognized from SW PA who

were there, while I was. Years earlier I began visiting the area on the recommendation of Carol McCullough (presently 3RBC’s Program Director) whose stories about the swarms of Neotropical migrants easily visible there, notably warblers, seemed too good to be true. The stories were true. Really true. On good days, a one hour walk on the famous boardwalk got me 20+ species -- and I’m not talking neck-straining glimpses of distant, leaf-covered birds. Quite often they were 4 - 5 feet away. And often lots of them.

On a few past magic moments, a Black-throated Green Warbler stood inches away from my boot as I stood, transfixed. This year, a Prothonotary Warbler, a strikingly egg-yolk colored gold and black tiny cutie, attempted to nest in a rotting post on the boardwalk. Part of the walkway at the post was cordoned off and protected by a “Do Not Enter” tape, but I could easily look into the hole and see the bird an arm’s length away. Later, two male Magnolia Warblers landed on a branch in the open, at eye level, five feet away, and interacted aggressively with each other.

Many birding tour companies attend during the 10-day birding festival, lead outings, give programs, and roam around along with BSBO volunteer guides, finding good birds, and assisting with identification questions, whether or not the person asking is registered for the festival. Susie Solomon and I keep a joint list. This year we saw



PROTHONOTARY WARBLER



KIRTLAND'S WARBLER

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Magee Marsh

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“only” 28 warbler species and “only” 146 total species for our 3 week visit. Some cold weather that rode in on north winds for several days and advancing age (I’m 84) combined to keep our totals below our typical annual count (158 in 2023). The quality of our visit, however, was, as usual, magnificent. Though we’re cyber-challenged and don’t use much social media beyond Facebook, old-fashioned word of mouth (kudos to 3RBC’s Clare Staples and Bobby Greene) got us info on the whereabouts of the hot sightings.

Thus informed, we hauled over to the Visitor Center to get a look, along with scores of other birders, at a very cooperative Kirtland’s Warbler. The bird would periodically step into an open area, at which time I could hear the gasps, oohs, and ahhs of my fellow birders, plus a rapid, machine-gun-like clicking of multiple cameras held by excited birders, and a scattered murmuring of “lifer.” We then walked 100



BLANDING'S TURTLE

yards, stepped across the roadway to join a smaller (but still large) group that had seen a Golden-winged and a Mourning Warbler. Susie saw the Mourning. Alas, I missed it while indulging in my other favorite birding activity -- stopping to make small talk with birders. We both missed a Connecticut Warbler, though I stood adjacent to a few people, when they could see it, but the little skulker evaded my weak old eyes. Herper (herpetologist) that I am, I always watch for snakes and turtles. Another tip of the hat to Bob Greene for telling me where to see the delightfully decorated orange and brown colored Fox Snake, one of two reptiles I’ve seen no place except in that region. The other is Blanding’s Turtle, easier to find sunning with its glistening, smooth, high dome of a carapace, and sail-yellow throat. They’re an annual bonus to the trip.

As usual, the Black-necked Stilt pair was at nearby Howard Marsh. Either their progeny or friends had shown up. We counted five this year -- in the past, only two. Howard Marsh is a few miles west of Magee, one of several very nice Toledo Metroparks in the region. Howard was designed for birds and birders, with major input from BSBO. It has plenty of top-notch shore bird habitat, so birders peering through their scopes line the road through it. On that stop at Howard I once again learned that serendipity is among my greatest allies in birding. We were passing by that park on the way back to our room when Susie pulled in just to use the rest room. While waiting for her, I ambled down towards the water to inspect the reeds, hoping for a rail. An unusual shorebird popped out of the vegetation onto the mudflat. I couldn’t immediately identify it. Turned out to be a Red-necked Phalarope. Almost all the other phalaropes I’ve ever seen were doing their usual spinning in the shallows, so it took me an agonizing while to figure out what it was. It hung around until Susie and a few others got to see it. Just the day before, we were thrilled to observe a male and more brightly colored female Wilson’s Phalarope, foraging on a mowed lawn. As I observed one of them with my scope, a Yellow-headed Blackbird female entered my field of view -- more serendipity! Perhaps most astonishingly, we got word of a Northern Saw-whet Owl on the boardwalk. As with all the (small number) of Saw-whets I’ve seen, it was tolerant of the proximity of humans, and there were plenty

of us, staring, talking, and assiduously clicking cameras at eye level, two feet away.

The festival sponsors a plethora of guided outings and great programs, several of which are annually performed by Kenn Kaufman. We attended those, one by Julie Zickefoose, and one or two other programs each day of the 10 day festival. Tessa Rhinehart, 3RBC’s own expert on designing computer algorithms for identification of species in recordings of bird vocalizations, gave a superb, well-attended talk. It was so good that Susie immediately recommended Tessa as a speaker to a friend of ours, who’s an administrator for a festival in Texas. I think we might see Tessa there this fall.



NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL

Extra! Extra!! More Warbler Pics from Magee Marsh



MALE BAY-BREASTED WARBLER, PHOTO BY DAVE BROOKE



MALE BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER, PHOTO BY MIKE FIALKOVICH

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Observations

The Green Heron: A Clever, Small Heron That's Amusing to Watch

Story and photos by Tom Moeller

The Green Heron is an excellent fisherman (or -woman), rivaling many human anglers. The bird will use a lure – a feather, an insect, or crust of bread – to catch fish. It places the bait on the surface and waits for a small fish to “take the bait,” suddenly snatching that fish in its long beak. Its beak has serrations along the end to better catch a slippery minnow.

Most of the time, however, the Green Heron will slowly and purposefully stalk up to the water's edge and wait motionless for prey to appear – whether a minnow, water insects or their larvae, a tadpole, a crawfish, even a frog. It may use one leg to stir up bottom mud to reveal prey. On land the heron may catch crickets, grasshoppers, earth worms, snakes, or even a small mammal. Generally, the heron creeps around with its neck pulled in close to its body, but when lunging for prey, the neck can stretch out 18 inches, doubling its size. This maneuver can also be used when threatened, along with flared neck feathers, so that the bird appears larger and more formidable.

Other defenses the Green Heron uses are freezing in place when detected, its loud squawk (*Skeow!*) when startled, and lastly, a massive expulsion of feces as it takes off. The latter two usually confuse a predator or bathe them in unwanted excrement. The last defense has given the Green Heron the folk names of “chalk-line” and “shitpoke.”

The Green Heron (once Green-backed Heron) is about one-third the size of its cousin the Great Blue Heron. This football-shaped heron is about 18 inches long with a wingspan of 25 inches. Its crown, back, and wings are dark green. The rest of the head and neck are deep chestnut with lighter streaks. The beak is green with a lighter lower mandible, its legs are yellow, and its eyes are bright yellow. There is little difference between male and female Green Herons other than size; he's bigger.

Mating involves a dance by a male to impress a female (see May/June 2026 *Observations*). Singing is not an attribute of the Green Heron, which only squawks or grunts. The female watches from a hidden spot as the male hops on one foot and then the other, jumps forward and backwards, and spins in place. He'll raise his crown feathers, tilt his head, and flap his short tail up and down. Because of the hidden female, a casual observer may think this dance is comical, and the heron is just amusing himself.

After mating, the next order of business is nest building. Most often Green Herons construct their nests ten to twenty feet up in trees, usually near water, although some are far away from water. Fewer nests are built in low bushes or right on the ground in tall grasses. The herons build single nests, but they may build in small colonies of a few nests or in mixed colonies with other herons. In the past, large colonies of Green Herons were noted, but no longer. The male may begin a



GREEN HERON, DUCK HOLLOW

nest, but the female will finish (refurbish) it. However, the result is still a flimsy, interwoven pile of twigs around ten inches in diameter, barely able to hold the four to six eggs laid. There is no cup or thin lining to hold the eggs. In fact, one can see the eggs through the bottom of the nest up in a tree.

Both parents incubate the eggs for about three weeks. The one-and-a-half inch eggs are pale bluish-green. The nestlings are gray down covered, and they can climb on branches within a week of hatching. Both parents tend to the nestlings. They can fledge at three weeks. The fledglings are on their own in about thirty days. Juvenile Green Herons appear similar to adults, but their feathers are paler and white-tipped, and their red coloring is browner.

The range of Eastern Green Herons is from lower Canada down to the Gulf Coast and east of the Mississippi River (with some spillover west). They migrate south in September to Texas and Florida, the Caribbean islands, and to Central and South America. They return north in March.

Three other subspecies of Green Herons are Frazier's Green Heron, Anthony's Green Heron, and the Bahamian Green Heron. Frazier's is a darker bird than the eastern *virescens* species. It is a resident (non-migratory) of Baja, Mexico. Anthony's is a lighter variation of *virescens*, living in southern California, southern Nevada, and western Arizona. They will migrate south into Mexico in the winter. The Bahamian Green Heron is a resident on those islands. Locally known as “Poor Joe,” this bird is threatened by habitat loss, pollution, invasive species, and climate change.

Green Herons are fun to see in action as they stalk fish, crustaceans, or insects, and whenever they use bait to attract unsuspecting prey to the surface. Thankfully, except for the Bahamian Green Heron, this small heron is not endangered.



HOW MANY EGGS IN THIS MAGEE MARSH NEST? VISIT TOM'S OBSERVATIONS GALLERY AT 3RBC.org FOR A NEST UPDATE!

Birds in the Three Rivers Area

December 2025-January 2026

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

December was cold for the most part with some snow and frigid temperatures around the holidays. A winter storm the third weekend of January dropped about a foot of snow in the county, accompanied by frigid temperatures.

Snow Goose reports were numerous for the area in December. We don't often get immature birds here, so an immature blue morph at North Park 12/2 (SG) and an immature white morph at Creighton 12/3 to the end of the month (DB, m.ob.) were notable. An adult blue morph was at Aspinwall Riverfront Park 12/6 (EM). Another

The Peregrine

Birds in the Three Rivers

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immature white morph was at Moody Road in Findlay Twp. 12/12 (MV), an adult blue morph was in Schenley Park 12/29 (*fide* AP), and a flock of 30 was spotted flying over McCandless Twp. 12/31 (SD). A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was at Duck Hollow 1/27 (EH, TC) and again 1/29 (eBird). Three **Cackling Geese** were at the mouth of Flaugherty Run near Dashields Dam 1/25 (MV, m.ob.), and they moved around the local area after the initial discovery. **Tundra Swans** were numerous in early December. Immature **Tundra** and **Mute Swan** continued at Duck Hollow 12/6 (m.ob.).

Northern Shoveler reports were numerous this season. One was at Duck Hollow 12/20 (CC) and again 1/5-20 (BB, m.ob.). Two were at Emmerling Park in Indiana Twp. 12/27 (SV), and one was at North Park 2/14 (eBird). An **American Wigeon** was at Winfield Pines 12/5-1/2 (JF), one was at the Flaugherty Run Mouth near Dashields Dam 12/11-13 (MV), and one was at Emsworth Dam 1/30 (GH). Two **Northern Pintails** were at Duck Hollow 12/30 (MKu). A female was in South Park Twp. 12/31 (JF) with Mallards, a male was at Wingfield Pines 1/7 (RS), two females were there 1/8 (DBe), and one female continued to 1/10 (m.ob.). A male was in Elizabeth 1/21 (JF), and a female was at Oakmont 1/27 (RBU). The frozen lakes to the north and the frozen rivers locally concentrated waterfowl in the county. A group of 14 **Canvasback** and ten **Redhead** were on the Monongahela River at Duck Hollow 1/27 (EH, m.ob.). A great count of 35 **Canvasback** was at the Emsworth Dam on the Ohio River 1/28 (AF). A **White-winged Scoter** was on the Ohio River near Dashields Dam 12/8 (MV), and perhaps the same bird was on the Allegheny River at Blawnox 12/9 (AH, PM). One was at Sharpsburg 1/27-31 (DM, m.ob.). An adult male was at Duck Hollow 1/28-29 (MK, et al.). A flock of 17 **Long-tailed Ducks** were photographed flying along the Allegheny River at Six Mile Island 1/30 (SGr). Three were at Duck Hollow 1/30 (MKu, VS). A great count of 75 **Common Goldeneye** were at the Natrona Dam on the Allegheny River 1/27 (DB), and 45 continued there on 1/28 (DB). Another good count of 80 goldeneyes were at the Emsworth Dam 1/31 (AF). The churning water flowing over the dams kept a small area of water from freezing, thus concentrating the ducks. **Common Mergansers** were in great numbers on the rivers. A count of 92 were at the Braddock Public Boat Ramp on the Monongahela River 1/28 (EH). Two **Red-breasted Mergansers** were at Sharpsburg 1/27 (JDz, m.ob.), and two were at Natrona Heights 1/30 (AH, PM).

A high count of 105 **Mourning Doves** were at Homewood Cemetery 12/27 (MK). There have been large numbers just across the road at Frick Park visiting the feeders in recent years. The female **Rufous Hummingbird** continued from last season at Oakmont up to 12/9 (RBU).

Two **Virginia Rails** were at Wingfield Pines 12/1 (CC), and one was seen 12/26 and 12/28 (AW, et al.). A flock of 30 **Sandhill Cranes** was spotted flying over Gibsonia 12/11 (KP). An amazing movement of **Sandhill Cranes** occurred 1/1-2. On 1/1 flocks were seen flying over Beechwood Farms in Fox Chapel, McCandless Twp., Allison Park, and near the Highland Park Bridge. The highest count was 160 over McCandless Twp. (SG). On 1/2, birds were over West Deer Twp., Aspinwall, Squirrel Hill, Frick Park, Homewood Cemetery and Duck Hollow. The high count was 130 over Frick Park (EM). It was thought the cold weather to the north drove the birds south to find better feeding areas. In recent years, there have been irregular movements of Sandhill Cranes over Allegheny County in December, but not in these numbers.

Lingering **Killdeer** were reported well into December. This is a difficult species to determine if birds are overwintering (as it appears some were with reports in January). A **Wilson's Snipe** was at Imperial 12/21 (TB). Two **Bonaparte's Gulls**, rare here in winter, were at

Brunots Island 1/31 (JSa). A **Herring Gull** at the mouth of Flaugherty Run on the Ohio River near Dashields Dam 12/24 was banded. The band number was reported, and the bird had been banded in Sandusky, OH on 7/3/2025 (MV). We had a minor gull invasion due to the freezing of the Great Lakes starting late January, following a major snow storm. An **Iceland Gull** was at Duck Hollow 1/8 (BMc), one was described well at Emsworth Lock and Dam 1/10 (eBird), and two were at Duck Hollow 1/30-31 (MKu, VS). An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was a nice find at Duck Hollow 12/6 (CC, m.ob.); two were at the Point in Pittsburgh 1/22 (ST), one was there 1/30 (JLa), and one was at Duck Hollow 1/31 (MKu, m.ob.). Two **Great Black-backed Gulls** were at Duck Hollow on 1/30 (MKu, VS, m.ob.).

A **Common Loon** was on the Allegheny River at Oakmont 1/3-20 (DM, m.ob.). Four **Black Vultures** were seen during the Mon Valley Christmas Bird Count 12/21 at Round Hill Park, and 13 were over South Park Twp. that day (KB). One was seen in Monroeville 1/4 (JP), and two were at Calvary Cemetery in Greenfield 1/5 (MKu).

Red-headed Woodpeckers continued at North Park, with regular reports of two adults and two juveniles (m.ob.). **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** is rare here in winter, but one at Harrison Hills Park 12/20 (MF, JV) is noteworthy. A **Brown Thrasher** at Duck Hollow 12/8 was unexpected (TF). A leucistic **American Robin** was at Riding Meadow Park in Fox Chapel 1/5 (SGr). Two **American Pipits** were at Duck Hollow 12/2 (DBe), three were there 12/5 (MKu), two were at Dashields Dam 12/4 and one on 12/6 (MV), two were at Sharpsburg 12/4 (JDz), five were at Wingfield Pines 12/6 (eBird) with one still there 12/7 (JF), and one was at North Park 12/5 (AF). Reports of this species are getting more regular during winter.

A large flock of 66 **American Goldfinch** was in Hampton Twp. 12/27 (EM). A late **Chipping Sparrow** visited the feeders at Frick Environmental Center 12/15 (ZV). One was visiting a feeder in Lawrenceville 1/8 – 16 (CBo, ABo). There were numerous reports of **Fox Sparrows** throughout December. Typically they have moved through by this time, so some may have been late migrants. **Rusty Blackbird** is not usually reported during winter, but there were several this season. Two were at West Deer Twp. 12/3 (LC), one was at the mouth of Flaugherty Run near Dashields Dam 12/9 (AZ), and one was at Wingfield Pines 12/15-1/2 (JF, m.ob.).

An **Orange-crowned Warbler** was photographed at a feeder in Greenfield 12/30 – 1/4 (BMc). A leucistic female **Northern Cardinal** in Indiana Twp. 1/24 was described as having a mostly white head (BSh), and another leucistic bird was photographed in Squirrel Hill during the period (*fide* JS). A photograph of a male **Painted Bunting** at a feeder in Squirrel Hill 12/16 was discovered on *iNaturalist* (*fide* TC). The homeowners were contacted, and they allowed viewing from the street and their driveway. A neighbor also allowed birders to view the bird from her porch and front yard. The bird was seen daily and remained to the end of the reporting period, providing the fourth county record. Surprisingly, a female was photographed at a feeder in Hampton Twp. 12/28 (AC) providing the fifth record, but she was only seen on a single day.

Observers: *Ken Behrens, David Bennett (DBe), Brian Bishop, Trip Bondi, Al Borek (ABo), Carole Borek (CBo), Dave Brooke, Ron Burkert (Rbu), Alice Coleman, Thomas Connor, Linda Croskey, Chapin Czarniecki, Sofia D, John Dzikiy (JDz), Adrian Fenton, Mike Fialkovich, John Flannigan, Ted Floyd, Steve Gosser, Sarah Grey (SGr), Eric Hall, Gene Henderson, Amy Henrici, Michelle Kienholz, Malcolm Kurtz (MKu), Ed McKaveney, Ben McNealy (BMc), Pat McShea, Dan Mendenhall, Dean Newhouse (DNe), Kevin Parsons, Amber Pertz, Joseph Pumford, James Saracco (JSa), Brian Shema (BSh), Jack Solomon, Victoria Streeton, Radford Swent, Shannon Thompson, Steve Valasek, Jim Valimont, Mark Vass, Zachery Vaughan, Andrew Wood, Anna Zizak.*