

# The Peregrine

## Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

Vol. 15, No. 4, July/August 2016

### Our Club Is Honored with a Major Conservation Award

*(Editor's note: Jack Solomon, our founding president, tells on page 12 how our club was organized 15 years ago.)*

The Three Rivers Birding Club will receive a prestigious award in July. It is the 2016 Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania Trustee Award recognizing our organization "for outstanding effort to further the cause of conservation in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania."

This is a significant honor for our club, which a core group of active birders organized in 2001 and has grown to a mailing list of 270 memberships. Including family memberships, Treasurer Tom Moeller estimates that we have a total of 350 members.

The club joins a list of 40 prominent recipients of the award since 1972, including the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association, Powdermill Nature Reserve, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, and the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

ASWP Executive Director Jim Bonner announced the award, which will be presented at the society's 100th annual meeting on Thursday, July 14, at St. Nicholas Church in Oakland (directly

across Forbes Avenue from the Carnegie Museums). Events begin at 5:00 PM with cocktails and light hors d'oeuvres, then dinner and the award presentation will start at 5:30.

After the meeting, David Allen Sibley, eminent ornithologist and field guide author, will present a program at 7:00 PM across Forbes Avenue at the Carnegie Lecture Hall.

Tickets are \$50 per person and \$100 per couple, including dinner, Sibley's talk, and a copy of his new book, *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America, Second Edition*.

Tickets only for the dinner are \$25; register at [aswp.org](http://aswp.org). Tickets only for Sibley's program are \$25; register at [tinyurl.com/Sibley-lecture](http://tinyurl.com/Sibley-lecture), or by phone at 412-622-8866.

Bob VanNewkirk, 3RBC president, says, "We are honored to receive the award. Over the club's 14-year history, we continually 'watch' for birds, but we also 'look out' for them by participating in numerous conservation projects. We take this responsibility seriously. Members recognize that human activity of a positive nature is absolutely necessary to protect birds now and for the future."

### See Astounding Artistry at Our August 3 Meeting

You will likely never see such exquisitely crafted and detailed bird carvings as those of Larry Barth. This amazing carver will show us and tell us about his artistry at the Three Rivers Birding Club meeting on Wednesday, August 3.

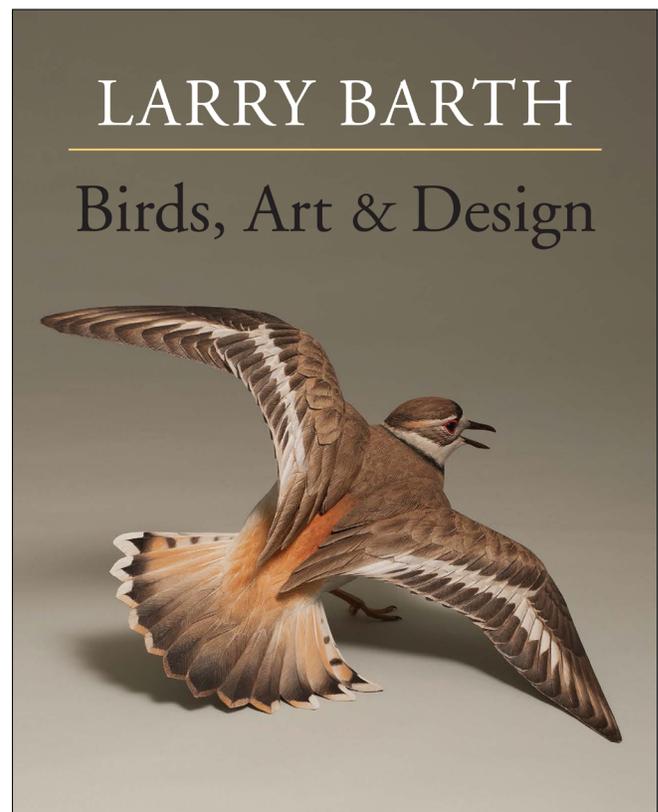
The meeting will be held at the Phipps Garden Center, 1059 Shady Avenue in Shadyside. Doors open at 6:30 PM for socializing, a business meeting begins at 7:30, and the program starts at 8:00.

Larry's program is titled "Birds, Art & Design," the title of his new book filled with illustrations of his carvings. His work is a magical blend of art, science, and craftsmanship. He combines the beauty of birds, mastery of technical skills, and exquisite sense of composition and design in an amazing body of work. He will bring copies of his book and autograph them.

Larry has won the title of Best in the World 16 times at the Ward World Championship of Wildfowl Carving, and he was the youngest ever to receive the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum's coveted Master Wildlife Artist Medallion.

His carvings are in many museums and private collections. Some are featured in a one-man show at the Ward Museum in Salisbury, Maryland, until August 21.

Larry lives in Stahlstown, Pennsylvania, with his wife, Linda. To learn more about his work, see [tinyurl.com/LarryBarth](http://tinyurl.com/LarryBarth).



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

## President's Message

### Did You Really See What You Thought You Saw?

By Bob VanNewkirk

Pete Dunne, renowned author and expert birder once wrote, "The difference between a beginning bird watcher and an experienced one is that beginners have misidentified very few birds. Experienced birders have misidentified thousands." That quote numbs some of the sting and humbling feeling I have experienced when I called out an incorrect bird sighting.

Two of the best things about being an outing leader are showing participants good places to find a variety of species and sometimes helping them to see life birds. Being the leader also suggests that you are able to identify every bird you see or hear, which adds some pressure. That has led me and other birders to make misidentifications.

It's easy to "see" a species you expect to find in a given habitat. All you need is to have seen one or two field marks for the assumed identity to fly out of your mouth before you took time to study the bird. I have reacted like this more than once when I wanted to make a good impression on other birders.

Beginning birdwatchers often rely on someone else to tell them what they saw. Then they rush to open their field guide to get a better look at what they think they just viewed. This is a natural reaction. I speak from experience.

Obstacles such as leaves and bark can lead to identification errors. How many times have you looked at leaves and thought they looked like birds? Some of my good looks at hummingbirds, songbirds, and raptors turned out to be leaf shapes in poor lighting, postured just like the birds with feathers. Sometimes even plastic bags can pose problems. I often tell birders on Pymatuning outings to look for a "golf ball" in a tree when trying to spot perched adult eagles. Occasionally the "golf balls" turn out to be white plastic bags that were blown into branches.

As a beginning birder in a Pymatuning outing, I was eager to make a good sighting. The group had just pulled into a parking lot, and as I got out of my car, I removed my eyeglasses because they began to fog. Glancing up, I saw a Red-tailed Hawk perched about 100 yards away on a tree stump. Excitedly, I called out my sighting. Before I wiped off my glasses, someone asked, "Are you kidding us?" Uh oh! My hawk was really a jagged piece of bark with very good raptor-like size and posture.

On that same outing, the leader spied a Red-headed Woodpecker at Custards, and we searched the tree to see this beautiful woody. The red head turned out to be a piece of bark dangling from a dead snag. Even a leader can make mistakes.

New York Yankee catcher and manager Yogi Berra once said, "You can observe a lot by watching." Yogi may have been a birdwatcher. Misidentifications will always be part of a birder's repertoire, but here are some good habits might reduce them:

\* Take time to watch and study. Note the bird's size, shape, posture, field marks, beak shape, vocalizations, and the habitat.

\* Resist looking in your field guide. First, make a list of exactly what you did see while it is fresh in your mind. Looking in the guide right away may cause you to match a picture merely with what seems closest to your bird.

\* Draw a simple sketch of the bird to note what you observed. Make circles for the head, eyes, and body, lines for beak shape,

## The Peregrine

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

### Send articles and/or illustrations to:

Paul Hess, Editor  
[phess@salsgiver.com](mailto:phess@salsgiver.com)  
1412 Hawthorne St., Natrona Heights, PA 15065

### Send ideas or items for the website to:

Julia Pahountis-Opacic, Webmaster  
[3RBC.website@gmail.com](mailto:3RBC.website@gmail.com)

### Send questions and suggestions to:

Bob VanNewkirk, President  
[van126@comcast.net](mailto:van126@comcast.net)  
126 Timberlane Dr., Pittsburgh, PA 15229-1059

### Suggest or volunteer to lead outings to:

Steve Thomas, Outings Director  
[thomassj22@verizon.net](mailto:thomassj22@verizon.net)  
309 Center Ave., Aspinwall, PA 15215

### Report bird sightings to:

Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor  
[mpfial@verizon.net](mailto:mpfial@verizon.net)  
805 Beulah Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15235

### Send other correspondence to:

Sherron and Pat Lynch, Co-Secretaries  
[pmfohl@zbzoom.net](mailto:pmfohl@zbzoom.net)  
195 Hill Haven Lane, Wexford, PA 15090-8834

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

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

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

wing bars, and legs. You can use arrows to note coloration.

\* If you are birding with a friend or group, call out what you can see. Others can add their descriptions. This process of sharing information can assist in getting the identity correct.

\* If you are the only one to view the bird, spare yourself the risk of a possible misidentification by naming what you did see or hear and give an opinion on what the species might be.

Even ordinary birds deserve close inspection. While birding with youngsters who were just getting started as birdwatchers, I had instances that taught me to "really look" at common birds I took for granted. Can you tell the difference between a male and female robin or between a male and female Pileated Woodpecker? Why is a Red-bellied Woodpecker often misidentified as a Red-headed Woodpecker? Similar-looking species in your field guide require close inspection before making a positive identification.

Identifying birds is lots of fun, but to do it well requires practice, patience, skill, and dedication. It's somewhat like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. When all the ID pieces fit together, you have a beautiful picture to admire and share with others. It's like seeing birds clearly instead of imagining what they were.

# The Peregrine

## Outings to Come

### We'll Enjoy Fall Migrants and Our Annual Picnic

**By Steve Thomas, Outings Director**

**Saturday, September 3 – Harrison Hills Park:** Meet leader Jim Valimont (412-828-5338) at 8:00 AM at this county park off Freeport Road between Natrona Heights and Freeport. As you enter the park, bear right and proceed to the parking lot with the traffic circle at the end of the road. Please note, this is not the soccer field parking lot farther down. Dress for wet grass and mud. Previous fall outings have produced a nice variety of fall migrants, including warblers and vireos.

**Saturday, September 10 – Dead Man's Hollow:** David Yeany (814-221-4361) will lead our first outing at Allegheny Land Trust's Dead Man's Hollow, which is south of Port Vue in Liberty Borough, Allegheny County. Meet him at 7:30 AM in the parking area at the end of Calhoun Road in Elizabeth. We will hike several miles along the ridgeline, into the hollow, and along the Great Allegheny Passage. Here is a link to a map of the site: [tinyurl.com/deadman-hollow](http://tinyurl.com/deadman-hollow). Calhoun Road is off Liberty Way going south out of Port Vue/Liberty Borough. Google address is: 1 Calhoun Road Elizabeth, PA. GPS: 40.3115,-708465.

**Sunday, September 18 – Presque Isle State Park:** Join Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; [van126@comcast.net](mailto: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 18 – Frick Park:** Jack and Sue Solomon (412-521-3365) will lead us starting at 8:30 AM. Meet at the "Blue Slide" park entrance, corner of Beechwood Boulevard and Nicholson Street in Squirrel Hill. Frick can be an excellent fall migrant trap, and we hope for lots of warblers. Take Beechwood Boulevard south from its intersection with Forbes Avenue, 1.1 miles to Nicholson. You will need to park on the street.

**Tuesday, September 20 – Moraine State Park:** Michael Shaffer, environmental education specialist for the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (724-368-3612), invites members of the 3RBC, the Todd Bird Club, and other bird clubs to look for fall migrants. Meet at 8:00 AM in the Day Use Area (South Shore) in the first parking lot on the right. We will bird along the Sunken Garden Trail and decide from there where else in the park we would like to bird. The outing will end at about 11:00 AM. 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 into the park until you see the first major parking area on your right. Allow one hour driving from Pittsburgh.

**Sunday, September 25 – Riding Meadow Park (Fox Chapel):** Meet Cecelia Hard (412-759-9565) inside the park entrance at 8:00 AM. Be prepared for muddy trails, wet grass, and a creek crossing. Some of the trails are steep and narrow. We may encounter dogs off-leash. There are no bathroom facilities. From Pittsburgh take Route 28 North to Exit 8 for Freeport

Road, turn left onto Fox Chapel Road (1.1 miles), then take a slight left onto Squaw Run Road (1.1 miles). Turn right onto Squaw Run Road east. From the north, take Dorseyville Road and turn left onto Squaw Run Road (1.2 miles), then left (east) onto Squaw Run Road. Riding Meadow Park will be on the left (0.8 mile). Park in the lot directly opposite from the entrance. GPS coordinates: 40.523676, -79.891976.

**Sunday, October 9 – Pymatuning Area:** Meet leader Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; [van126@comcast.net](mailto:van126@comcast.net)) at the Wildlife Learning Center (Waterfowl Museum) at 8:00 AM for this all-day outing. Plenty of waterfowl, Bald Eagles, and migrant songbirds should be around. Arrangements will be made for lunch at the Spillway Inn for those who are interested.

**Sunday, October 30 – Moraine State Park Picnic:** Mark your calendar for the annual 3RBC picnic and bird walk. We will meet at 8:00 AM in the Day Use Area (South Shore) in the first parking lot on the right. After the morning outing, we will have the pot-luck picnic at a park pavilion near McDanel's Boat Launch. Please bring a dish that will serve 4-6 people. 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 into the park until you see the first major parking area on your right. Allow one hour driving from Pittsburgh.

\*\*\*

**Outings are free and open to the public. In the event of inclement weather, call the leader in advance to confirm whether the outing is on or canceled. Call the leader, too, with other questions about weather, driving, or trail conditions.**



*RARE VISITOR – Pittsburgh's rare spring migrants included this Prothonotary Warbler observed from April 25 to May 8, 2016, along the Mon River below the Homestead Grays Bridge. Many 3RBC members saw it. Todd Ladner photographed it on April 26.*

## Outings Revisited

### We Visited New Hot Spots and Had Wonderful Luck

**Riding Meadow Park—April 17:** Fourteen birders, most of whom had never visited this park, gathered on a perfect spring morning with glorious sunshine. We walked for two hours along the creek, fording the stream twice, birding the upper ridge along Lockhart Loop, then on trails between the creek and the park entrance area.

We spotted Canada Goose, Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Mourning Dove, Eastern Towhee, chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, Northern Cardinal, American Goldfinch, Carolina Wren, Song Sparrow, and European Starling. Heard but not seen were Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, and White-throated Sparrow.

Seven birders crossed the road into the fields of Shadyside Academy where we saw Red-winged Blackbird, Swamp Sparrow, and Louisiana Waterthrush. Heard among the cattails and along the stream were a Virginia Rail, a Chipping Sparrow, and a Field Sparrow.

Highlights were Ruby-crowned Kinglets flitting about at eye level and flashing their red crests, the waterthrush singing and the calling Virginia Rail. Total species: 28. **—by leader Cecelia Hard**

**Raccoon Creek State Park—April 23:** Another year, another weather anomaly for this annual outing – this time being the temps, which were beautifully warm all week, followed by a cold front and a cool, breezy morning. It warmed up eventually, but someday, we'll have a 70-degree day when we visit this park.

The front did not bring us much in the way of warblers, though much of the region had terrific lists. We ended the day with 49 species, which included: Wood Thrush, Blue-headed Vireo (4+), Yellow-throated Vireo, Scarlet Tanager, Osprey (2 at the nesting area near the beach), and Bald Eagle (1 adult, 1 immature). We also noted Cooper's, Red-shouldered, and Red-tailed Hawks; Common Merganser (female) and Spotted Sandpiper at the spillway; Golden-crowned Kinglet (2-3 at the Wildflower Reserve); and Yellow-rumped, Yellow, and Yellow-throated Warblers, Ovenbirds, and a Louisiana Waterthrush.

We had a record 23 participants, making for a terrific potluck lunch. We had members of the Three Rivers Birding Club, the Brooks Bird Club, the Todd Bird Club, and even one Clarion County birder. After a wonderful melange of dishes, hors d'oeuvres and desserts, everyone left full of good food and communal cheer. **—by leader Ryan Tomazin**

**Frick Park—April 24:** When about 17 birders assembled at the park entrance, there was a chill in the air, but also anticipation to locate spring migrants. It was relatively quiet with only the regular robins, cardinals, Chipping Sparrows, and White-throated Sparrows singing. Next, a distinct call enabled us to locate a Blue-headed Vireo, which lingered briefly at the top of a tree.

Jack Solomon, our ever-kind and self-deprecating leader, spotted a Northern Flicker, which gave everyone good views. A flock of Chimney Swifts flew overhead before we left the main

entrance lawn. Yellow-rumped Warblers were spotted at the top of a tree, and they stayed in view for much longer than the vireo.

Near the dog run, Ruby-crowned Kinglets were hopping among the trees, while a pair of Red-tailed Hawks circled overhead – perhaps the park's nesting pair. The nest was located on the Riverview Trail on a horizontal branch in the distance. We could confirm an adult Red-tailed Hawk on the nest. Farther along the trail, more Ruby-crowned Kinglets and a dancing Blue-gray Gnatcatcher were seen. A herd of deer was observed feeding in this thickly vegetated part of the trail. As the morning warmed up, the bird activity slowed down.

Since Duck Hollow had been productive during the past few days, including Bonaparte's Gulls, the group decided to meet there and then go across the river to view the Great Horned Owl nest. At the parking lot at Duck Hollow, three beautiful terns had deeply forked tails, red legs, black bills, and partially black heads: Forster's Terns.

The group decided to go across the Mon River to view the Great Horned Owl nest on the Homestead Grays Bridge. A nestling slightly covered with down stood still. Even an interested biker stopped to get a better look at this "tiger of the sky" through a scope. Along the trail, lighting conditions perfectly lit a Yellow-throated Warbler and a Yellow Warbler. At this point, it was time for lunch, and it was fitting that the owls chose to nest so close to the popular burger joint, Red Robin. A win-win situation. **—by participant Morgan Pfeiffer**

**Sewickley Heights Park—April 29:** Eleven birders gathered on a damp, chilly, overcast morning ready to search for early spring migrants. While we gathered around on the lawn by the parking lot waiting for late-comers to arrive, we noted lots of bird activity. A pair of Eastern Bluebirds perched briefly near their nest box. Chipping Sparrows hopped along the ground feeding on dandelion seeds. As we listened to White-throated Sparrows and an Eastern Towhee sing along the woody edges near the path, our first warbler, a Hooded, sounded off from farther down the driveway. Unexpectedly, a pair of Mallards flew overhead. While we headed out with expectations for more discoveries, a Hairy Woodpecker swept low and landed close by on a tree, giving us a good look.

At the entrance to the Butterfly Meadow, a Black-throated Green Warbler and a Yellow-rumped Warbler flitted through a small leafy tree. Usually this area is very birdy, but whether it was the cool air or the gray skies, only an American Goldfinch, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and a Scarlet Tanager were heard.

We headed back toward the parking lot on the Pipeline Trail, which is wider and more open than the surrounding wooded trails. It was quickly apparent that birding by ear might be the norm for the day. A Wood Thrush, Carolina Chickadees, a Red-bellied Woodpecker, a Carolina Wren, and more Hooded Warblers made their presence known through their songs or calls. As we got closer to the gravel road near the top of the park's driveway, another familiar warbler call rang out – a Kentucky. Although we heard it three more times, we never did manage to get a glimpse of it.

A bit farther down the road, we entered Chestnut Path. Tall oaks, black cherry, and beech trees dominate the habitat along this winding pathway. With leaves beginning to bud open, this is where the birds were drawn to find caterpillars or insects to their liking. And to our liking, we quickly discovered two male Scarlet Tanagers and two Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, fresh in their breeding plumage. American Redstarts darted about in the high branches

*continued on page 5*

# The Peregrine

## Outings Revisited

*continued from page 4*

overhead, and Yellow-rumped Warblers seemed to be everywhere we looked. A fast-flying Pileated Woodpecker provided just a brief glimpse as it moved down the hillside. We got much better looks at Hooded Warblers, the most numerous breeding warbler in the park, singing from low hanging vines.

We took the Bridle Trail leading to the horse pastures and soon heard a Northern Mockingbird briefly going through its repertoire. Bluebirds used post railings to scan for food below, while Red-winged Blackbirds walked over the grassy fields. A Red-tailed Hawk sailed overhead and out of sight.

As we followed the Waterthrush Trail back to the parking lot, some new-for-the-day birds appeared or were heard. A Sharp-shinned Hawk flew through the woods. The thin whistle-like call of a Broad-winged Hawk was audible, as was the gobble of a Wild Turkey. Nearing the parking lot, we located a Brown Thrasher singing from a high treetop perch. The cry of a Broad-winged Hawk again alerted us to its presence as it flew right over us. Broad-wings used to nest in the park. Perhaps this will be the year a pair will nest here again.

The group traveled to Sneed's, also known as Creek Trail, where a Louisiana Waterthrush greeted us with its song. A Turkey Vulture and some Chimney Swifts passed overhead. An Eastern Phoebe, a Cerulean Warbler, an Ovenbird, more Yellow-rumps, and American Redstarts moved about in the branches along the creek's sycamore trees. A calling Red-eyed Vireo was spotted before it flew off. We watched a pair of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers attend to their nest on the end of a branch about 20 feet off the ground, and photographers in the group happily snapped away.

Down the road, a Blue-winged Warbler and a Baltimore Oriole were singing and spotted at Walker Park. Another gnatcatcher nest was found, and a Nashville Warbler was observed getting a drink in a small puddle along the creek.

A few people walked to the Edgeworth Dump to view the Ohio River. We observed Tree Swallows, Northern Rough-winged Swallows, and Barn Swallows hawking after insects as they dipped and zipped in pursuit of their prey. A Great Blue Heron flew toward the Dashields Lock and Dam, and a few seconds later, an adult Bald Eagle headed in the opposite direction. The show continued when a fast-moving Common Loon flew over the dam. Seven Double-crested Cormorants rested on a buoy.

Our last stop was at the Beaver Dam, observable from Little Sewickley Creek Road. Here we hoped to find Wood Ducks or a Green Heron, but we settled for a Gray Catbird and a terrific look at a beaver pausing to rest under some tree roots along the bank.

The walk started under rain-threatening skies, but ended with sunshine and a list of 62 species. **—by leader Bob VanNewkirk**

**Linbrook Park and Woodlands – May 4:** It was wonderful to have 16 people, including two new birders, join Bob VanNewkirk and me in the inaugural outing at this location. I have birded the Wildflower Trail area over the years, and was introduced last fall to the adjacent 178 acres that the Allegheny Land Trust had hoped to purchase. The acquisition was successful, and we can explore the additional acreage regularly.

After assembling in the parking area and observing quite a few species including a pair of Northern Rough-winged Swallows that breed there, we made our way to the Wildflower



*NEW ADVENTURE – The first-ever 3RBC outings at the Barking Slopes overlooking the Allegheny River in northeastern Allegheny County, brought participants less than optimal weather. Nevertheless, those who joined Todd Hooe for two days of birding tallied a nice species total. Todd photographed the May 15 group.*

Trail. Although not a long trail, the grounds and hillside are filled with wildflowers depending upon the time of year. Trillium were blooming, there were a few lingering patches of Dutchman's Breeches, and some violets and phlox. Trout Lily had finished its beautiful bloom.

This trail parallels Big Sewickley Creek and provides habitat for the Eastern Phoebes and Wood Ducks, which we saw. Additionally, we discovered a nesting pair of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, a Louisiana Waterthrush, Yellow Warblers, a Warbling Vireo, a Belted Kingfisher, and the usual Red-winged Blackbirds, Black-capped Chickadees, Song Sparrows, and Northern Cardinals. Most surprising was a Solitary Sandpiper foraging in standing water – a first sighting for this trail.

We then drove to the top of the park to access the trail into the new Woodlands section. This area had been timbered previously, so it was easy to bird along the existing dirt road after walking a trail through a ravine into the area. We were thrilled to find a singing Ovenbird, Scarlet Tanagers, Indigo Buntings, a Pileated Woodpecker, Wood Thrush, many Eastern Towhees, Hooded Warblers, and two Blue-winged Warblers which may nest there because the habitat seems to be appropriate.

Not far from this park is a Great Blue Heron rookery, and we did see seven herons flying overhead. What was surprising was the sight of a Red-tailed Hawk chasing a heron in flight. Shortly after, three Great Blues were discovered riding a thermal. None of us had ever witnessed that behavior.

We had 42 species on our four-hour walk and repeatedly heard comments like “I didn’t know this park was here” and “I’ll have to come back.” It certainly justifies the exploration of this lovely property preserved by the Allegheny Land Trust. **—by co-leader Karyn Delaney**

**Sewickley Heights Park – May 6:** Weather reports can be fickle. What was predicted to be a cool, wet day turned out to be sunny and mild – perfect for nest building activity. A pair

*continued on page 6*

# The Peregrine

## Outings Revisited

*continued from page 5*

of Eastern Bluebirds had claimed one of the nest boxes near the parking area, and a busy pair of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were putting the finishing touches onto their little nest in a maple tree.

Even though the sun was shining and the weather was ideal for nest-building, the usual warbler hot spots were strangely quiet. Not to be daunted (birders never are!), we tried the horse pasture trail. No luck. It was not a good day for migrants.

We did have a few highlights. Usually secretive, a Kentucky Warbler flew onto a high bare branch giving everyone time to study the distinctive black and yellow facial markings. A Blackburnian Warbler's bright orange throat was stunning against the bright green new leaves. Well hidden, Cerulean and Black-throated Green Warblers were only heard. We did see resident male Hooded Warblers, which were actively and loudly defending territories. At times they seemed to be everywhere.

It was a day of few birds, but many we found were brightly colored: a Yellow-throated Vireo, Indigo Buntings, Baltimore Orioles, American Redstarts, and pairs of Scarlet Tanagers.

Even though the birding was slow, it was an excellent opportunity to leisurely study the birds and discuss field marks and the natural history of the ones that did make an appearance. —**by leader Sheree Daugherty**

**Barking Slopes – May 14-15:** Challenging weather conditions ushered in 3RBC's first outings to Allegheny Land Trust's Barking Slopes on Saturday and Sunday. Steady rain interrupted a dry first-hour of birding on Saturday, and a sunny, cold, and windy day (10-20 mph) gave way to overcast skies and even a brief snow shower on Sunday. Despite these conditions, seven birders turned out for Saturday and 15 for Sunday.

Saturday began with some distant looks at the resident American Kestrel. We climbed the steep hill from the parking lot and made our way to Yellow-breasted Chat territory. We had nice looks at an Eastern Kingbird perched closed to the ground as we began to hear the chat calling on the slope below us. Only one person in the group was able to observe the chat, as it stayed low and deep in the bushes and thicket.

We enjoyed a nice view of the Allegheny River as we made our way down the slope toward the forested portion of the property. We found a juvenile Broad-winged Hawk perched on top of a transmission tower and had good looks at Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, while Yellow Warblers sang around us.

As we entered the wooded portion to search for warblers, the rain began. For shelter, we took a narrow path along a creek that runs through the forest down to and then along Black's Run. Along this trail, we had Wood Thrush and heard the alarm chips of a Louisiana Waterthrush. We exited the forest, and took the steep grass/dirt trail back up to the ridge trail, and along the way heard a Black-and-white Warbler and a Kentucky Warbler singing nearby. The rain had picked up, and unfortunately we were not able to locate either bird. Other warblers heard along the way included Hooded, Magnolia, and Tennessee.

Scarlet Tanagers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks serenaded us as we walked back to the parking lot. Overall, we had 43 species (including 8 warbler species) on this mostly rainy day.

Sunday greeted the 15 birders with sunshine but cold temps and strong winds. A Baltimore Oriole and a Scarlet Tanager greeted us, and we made our way along the western side of the

substation to seek shelter from the wind. Along this trail, we had an Eastern Kingbird, Barn Swallows, more Baltimore Orioles, and a female Orchard Oriole. Along the edge of the forest, we found a Black-throated Green and a Bay-breasted Warbler. We searched for a Yellow-breasted Chat at its usual spot and heard chats calling from both sides of the road. The chats did not give us good looks, but some birders saw one of them briefly in flight.

As we entered the woods, we had Tennessee, Magnolia, and Hooded Warblers, as well as Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoos. Along the trail leading down to Black's Run, warblers were active but out of sight. We heard Kentucky, Bay-breasted, Blackburnian, and Tennessee Warblers.

After exiting the forest, we headed up the steep trail to the ridge trail, when we began to hear a dirt bike. Shortly, the bike came zipping up the trail and was politely stopped by the outing leader, who informed the driver that motor vehicles are prohibited on Allegheny Land Trust property (the game commission has recently begun giving citations to dirt bike and ATV riders at Barking Slopes). He turned around and apologized.

A light drizzle began as we walked along the ridge trail to the scenic overlook, where a Black-and-white Warbler sang briefly, as the group rested and took in the view of Springdale and the Allegheny River. After a short break, we continued along the ridge trail, where we had some of our best looks at birds all day, including a very cooperative Eastern Wood-Pewee, three Scarlet Tanagers, Red-eyed Vireos, and a Yellow-rumped Warbler.

As we began to walk back toward the Duquesne Light substation, a brief snow/sleet shower hinted that it was time for a group photo. We then headed back to the parking lot, capping an excellent day of birding. Although many birds were difficult to see given the wind and already dense foliage, we were able to identify 50 species, including 10 warbler species. —**by leader Todd Hoce**

**Harrison Hills Park – May 21:** The forecast was for rain most of the morning, and it was correct. Only one birder (Steve Thomas) arrived for the annual May outing. We had some light showers for the first two hours, but then the rain stopped.

Our walk to the pond yielded Hooded Warblers, Orchard Oriole, Wood Ducks, Canada Geese, and Great Blue Heron. A Tennessee Warbler sang from a snag, giving us great looks at this often heard and hard-to-see warbler. Field Sparrows and Gray Catbirds were heard singing, but the majority of birds we expected were silent in the light rain.

The Creekside Trail was mostly unproductive, but we heard a Great Crested Flycatcher calling from the ridge above, probably our best bird of the day. An Acadian Flycatcher sang a few times.

Along the Cliff Trail, we failed to hear a single Cerulean Warbler, but it was still raining lightly and they may have been quiet at their usual nesting location. A Yellow-throated Vireo was more cooperative. A Kentucky Warbler sang persistently, but remained hidden from view.

By the time we got to the Nature Center, the rain had stopped, the sun appeared, and the birds began to sing. We were able to quickly add Eastern Phoebe, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Tree Swallow, Purple Martin, Wood Thrush, Blue-winged Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Baltimore Oriole, and American Goldfinch to our list. Considering the weather, we had a respectable 47 species for the day. —**by leader Jim Valimont**

## Words of Wisdom from David Sibley

By Michelle Kienholz

“Your Life Lists Are Junk.”

We all laughed nervously when David Allen Sibley declared this during his talk, “The Psychology of Bird Identification...or How to Mistake an Egret for a Shrike,” at Presque Isle Audubon’s Festival of the Birds in May 2016. Indeed, David had just walked us through how he had made exactly that improbable mistake, so we each knew we had been guilty of making similar erroneous assumptions during our birding adventures.

David arrived at that aptly illustrative anecdote after reviewing a fascinating series of psychology studies designed to measure ambiguity and illustrate perceptual incongruity—for example, how judging size is all about judging distance correctly.

He demonstrated that the context in which we perceive something is huge, admitting that he and a friend twice mistook the same bit of red plastic on a barbed wire fence for a Vermilion Flycatcher. He explained that the human brain recognizes faces and birds holistically (versus by considering features individually), like seeing “faces” in toast or knowing that a robin just flew in front of your car without really seeing a specific “robin” feature.

He gave the example of a novice birder seeing a female Red-winged Blackbird at a feeder for the first time. This person would go through the features individually (bill, stripes, body shape, etc.) but come up empty in the sparrow listings. The observer might think something exotic had arrived until being told by a friend what it really was. After checking the guide to confirm, the person would thereafter readily recognize the bird holistically as such, without needing to run through the features again.

David further explained that our brains are primed to identify birds in the context of what we anticipate seeing, or in other words, “I wouldn’t have seen it if I hadn’t believed it.” He presented evidence from a clever 1949 study that used manipulated playing cards to show that we humans have difficulty adjusting our initial impression even with the addition of new contradictory and corrective information. Our brains take shortcuts to interpret incoming information to make it fit our expectations.

His birding examples included a Dunlin mistaken for a Curlew Sandpiper in Tallahassee, Florida, when two birders at a sewage treatment facility sent out an alert that they had either a Dunlin with some atypical features or possibly a Curlew Sandpiper. Soon, experts confidently declared that it was a Curlew Sandpiper—until photos showed that the bird was indeed a Dunlin because it lacked white all the way across its rump.

David also told us about the mistaken identification of a Eurasian Skylark at Point Reyes, California, for a Smith’s Longspur and, of course, the “Ivory-billed Woodpecker” in Arkansas, which David firmly believes was a Pileated Woodpecker. He explained his evidence for that conclusion.

Finally, he provided his own example of “seeing” what he expected and believed to see. In August 1981, he biked over to the Cape May South Meadow after a cold front passed through, fully anticipating the arrival of a Loggerhead Shrike, which had appeared every year at that time in that place and under those conditions. Fairly quickly, he spotted his target bird on a post, which he illustrated with a field drawing. Then he explained that he wanted to get a different and closer angle of the bird to confirm his sighting and take photos. But upon adjusting his position, he could not relocate the bird. He looked everywhere, thinking the

bird had flown, and finally retraced his steps to check the original sighting location. However, now he could not even find the post—or anything like a post—in the area. After walking to where he had been sure he had seen the post, he spotted a Great Egret and realized (and illustrated for us with two additional drawings) that the head of the hunting egret had become the body of the shrike on a “post,” which was in fact the egret’s neck.

Humbling admission: The morning after David’s talk, he joined Shawn Collins’s outing at Dead Pond Trail, which, sadly, was true to its name that morning in terms of bird species. We were desperate for birds and had minutes earlier seen a Sharp-shinned Hawk zip low overhead and aerodynamically weave through the trees, quickly disappearing from sight. Not long after, a festival attendee called out “gull—no, maybe a raptor—just above the trees.” I caught sight briefly and said, “Yes, I think a raptor—long tail and fast, probably the sharpie again, but he dove out of sight.” Then David quietly said a Mourning Dove had just landed in the tree beyond where I last saw the “sharpie.” Smiling, he put his scope on it. After a moment of disbelief, I was sure this would become an anecdote in David’s next talk.

In his festival presentation, David introduced us to his two newest guides, *Sibley Birds East* and *Sibley Birds West*, published this year, and gave us a brief illustrated history of how he began birding. As the son of an ornithologist who lived 25 miles from Roger Tory Peterson, he thought writing field guides was a normal career path.

He showed us his earliest bird drawing, a “Duck Hawk,” made at age 7 and patterned after Audubon’s painting of a Peregrine Falcon. (David looked to his father’s books for inspiration.) When he was at a hawk watch at age 12 or 13, the leaders identified birds based on their knowledge, saying to ignore the field guide because the illustrations did not show important identification features. He realized the need to create better field

*continued on page 8*



*GREAT BIRDING COMPANION—3RBC member Michelle Kienholz had a special surprise at the Presque Isle Festival of Birding in May: an opportunity to bird with the festival’s star, field guide author David Sibley. They paused long enough for a selfie. Meanwhile, our active birder Shannon Thompson also birded with Sibley. We should all be so fortunate!*

## Our Local Birders Are Honored With Statewide Recognition

Mike Fialkovich, Bob Mulvihill, Geoff Malosh, and Matt Webb were in a spotlight of honors and presentations at the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology annual meeting in May. The weekend of events based in Somerset County included many outings, short educational programs, and a banquet with awards.

Mike was inaugurated as president, evidence of his stature as an ornithologist and leader. He writes the spring-season summary and Allegheny County and Fayette County summaries for the journal *Pennsylvania Birds*. We in 3RBC also know him as our bird reports editor, expert birder, and wonderful outing leader.

Bob, staff ornithologist at the National Aviary, received the prestigious Earl Poole Award for significant contributions to ornithology in Pennsylvania. His research has included important studies of Louisiana Waterthrush ecology and birds' patterns of distribution and abundance resulting from the bird banding program at Powdermill Nature Reserve. In his PSO banquet presentation, he described the aviary's history, scientific research, and conservation activities.

Geoff received a special recognition award for nine years as editor-in-chief of *Pennsylvania Birds*, among the nation's most respected state journals. His ornithological knowledge and effort during that time-consuming tenure were major PSO assets. We also know him for his expert photography, documentation of rarities, and exciting 3RBC programs.

Matt, leader of BirdSafe Pittsburgh and the Allegheny Bird Conservation Alliance, described research focused especially on reducing bird/window collisions. Partners are the Powdermill Nature Reserve, the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, and the American Bird Conservancy. Many 3RBC members participate in the studies, particularly by collecting birds killed by collisions.

Continuing a delicious tradition, Sherron Lynch, our club's co-secretary, baked a bird-themed cake for the banquet featuring a Golden Eagle, the PSO's "bird of the year."



*WELL-DESERVED HONOR – Outgoing PSO President Mike Lanzone presents a special recognition award to Geoff Malosh for nine years as editor-in-chief of Pennsylvania Birds. Below is Sherron Lynch's 2016 cake for the banquet.*



### **Words of Wisdom**

*continued from page 7*

guides and had already been taking notes and doing sketches.

David explained that he uses a pencil in the field to create sketches, which he takes back to his studio along with photos to capture the quintessential shape, proportions, colors, and patterns. His slides included many candid photos of his work and his working environment. Creating the two regional guides published this year involved much more work than simply copying material from his comprehensive North American field guide.

Of course, he was asked about his favorite bird, to which he gave a wonderful answer: the wood-warblers as a group, because they burst on the scene all at once after a quiet winter. (He lives in Concord, Massachusetts amid a highly anticipated and beautiful profusion of color and song and activity in the spring.)

I additionally had the great honor and pleasure of dining with David and birding with him. He is a gracious, modest, soft-spoken, thoughtful, insightful gentleman – definitely no ego anywhere in sight. He gave us a delightful lesson on tree identification when the birds didn't cooperate, and he never bragged about any sighting or accomplishment.

For anyone who has not registered for the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania Banquet on July 14, 2016, in Pittsburgh to hear and meet David Sibley, I highly recommend doing so. (See [aswp.org](http://aswp.org) for details.)

David, I still remember how to distinguish an American Birch from a European Birch. Also the raspy call of a Bank Swallow.

## My First Spring Birding Days at Magee Marsh

By Donna Collett

I have been to Magee Marsh twice in the fall for the Midwest Birding Symposium and the fall migration, and the festival did not disappoint. At the urging of fellow birders like Jack Solomon who said, “You haven’t lived until you go to Magee in the spring,” I made the trip May 16-19, 2016.

My tour guides were Debbie Kalbfleisch and Gerylun Pundzak, who graciously took me under their wings, showing me important birding areas and just as importantly, where to eat. It was great to have birding buddies, and I also found that there are many “buddies” to be had along the way. We ran into many of the 3RBC contingent who were eager to share their sightings or help with the current ID. Even strangers were comrades in binoculars. Pleased, pleased, pleased to meet cha!

As we drove into Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, we watched the graceful beauty of the Snowy, Great, and Cattle Egrets performing their ballet. That was the opening act. Entering the Magee Marsh boardwalk area, I was thrilled to see two nesting Bald Eagles presiding over the show. The first warblers sighted were a beautiful flaming pair of nesting Prothonotary: Sweet, sweet, sweet! I thought, “It can’t get any better than this.” Wait...

Each day I made a wish for a target warbler: my favorite, Blackburnian, next Cape May, and how about Bay-breasted, thinking I would see a few. Well, I was like a kid in a candy store! So much to see...the targets arrived plus Chestnut-sided, Blackpolls, American Redstarts, and four different vireos. So colorful: Magnolias, Northern Parulas, Black-throated Blues, Baltimore Orioles, and an unexpected Red-headed Woodpecker. So close... American Woodcocks, six different thrush species, Canada Warblers. A Green Heron foraging right in front of me, emerald green, blue, and chestnut, stalking and catching a meal. No binocs needed! And all so unfazed by our presence, unaware we were gobbling them up. So many choices. Each day a new variety was on the shelf. Which one to pick next to put in your bag? I can honestly say when finished, that I was fed, I was sated.



*A BEAUTIFUL FAVORITE – Donna Collett’s wish came true one day at Magee Marsh one morning when she found her top-priority “target warbler,” a Blackburnian. Bob Greene photographed this one at Magee Marsh on May 15, 2016.*

As the days flew by I was so totally immersed in the joy of abundance that I had to ask, “What day is this?” I counted 91 species, including 24 warbler species, in just a walk around the block!

A few “lifers” were six cygnets with two adult Trumpeter Swans, and of the four nightjar individuals seen, the life bird being a Common Nighthawk chased off its perch by a much smaller unidentified competitor. It looked like an F-16 Fighting Falcon on a sortie. Maybe I will see a skulking Connecticut Warbler next year.

I have Lived!



## “The Biggest Week” Included a True Rarity

One of the rarest birds ever seen during “The Biggest Week in American Birding” in Ohio was this beautiful Curlew Sandpiper in full breeding plumage, which spent part of the week in a wet field near Toledo.

The social media grapevine enabled some Three Rivers Birding Club members to see it, but others missed it by a day or two before or after it appeared. Bob Greene was one of the lucky ones, and took this photograph on May 13.

Curlew Sandpipers breed primarily in northern Siberia. Wanderers turn up rarely but regularly along the U.S. Atlantic and Pacific coasts. Nearly all are single birds, although Peregrine editor Paul Hess saw two together in August 1995 at Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, North Carolina.

Occurrences inland in North America are very few, so our members were exceedingly fortunate.

## Magee Memories: Another Great May

By Sue Solomon

Jack and I travel to Magee Wildlife Area in Ohio each May with great anticipation. What will we see, and who will we see? Will the Kirtland's Warbler show up? When will the Connecticut arrive? What rarity will one among thousands of birders discover? We met more than 30 club members (half of the 2015 total), as well as friends from Canada and Florida.

"Big Year" celebrities Greg Miller, Kenn Kaufman, Noah Strycker, and Gabriel Mapel made special memories for us. Jovial Greg Miller helped our elderly friends from Sanibel, Florida, locate the "K-bird" after the crowd subsided, as the bird hid in dense buttonbush shrubs.

Noah set an all-time worldwide "Big Year" record in 2015 by listing 6,042 bird species. Kenn introduced him with references to Scott Robinson, a brilliant young Fox Chapel native, who set a temporary North American "Big Year" total of 657 species in 1976. Kenn said a "Big Year" total is "just a number" and is trivial compared to Scott's later contributions to ornithology and avian conservation. Scott is now an eminent scholar and professor of ecosystem conservation at the University of Florida.

Gabriel gave a "Junior Big Year" presentation at last year's festival. He was the youngest guide for Wildside Nature Tours for two years. At age 10 he published the book *Oh No, Gertrude!* about a "bad" black bear. The proceeds from sales of the book were donated to the Black Swamp Bird Observatory in Ohio for educational programs.

We birded with Noah on his May 10 benefit walk. His keen eyes and ears helped the group see 10 warbler species and well-hidden American Woodcocks. A Canada Warbler wowed the group at our last stop on the Estuary Trail. Being socially inclined, I invited Noah to lunch with us at the Blackberry Corners restaurant, a preferred stop by birders for perch and pie.

Jim Valimont and Mike Fialkovich joined us for interesting bird and travel discussions. After lunch, Jim, Mike, Noah, and I drove the Ottawa National Wildlife Drive searching for waterfowl and shorebirds. I got to carry the Leica scope that Noah used during his "Big Year" in which he listed the most species ever seen in a 12-month period around the world. An Osprey flew in as we scoped for Dunlin and yellowlegs in the mud clumps. Later, Noah and I looked for the rufous-morph Eastern Screech-Owl at the Maumee boardwalk but it was hiding in its box. We toasted the 90-species day with a beverage at the bar.

On May 13, Noah presented his "Biggest Year" program with entertaining and thoughtful commentary. It was an after-dinner show, but no one fell asleep. More than 200 birders gave him a standing ovation. Be sure to read his already-published books, *The Thing with Feathers* and *Among Penguins*, while awaiting his "Big Year" book. Noah is following in the footsteps of such bird conservation and education leaders as Roger Tory Peterson, Kenn Kaufman, and Pittsburgh's favorite, Chuck Tague.

Jack and I enjoyed talks by Scott Weidensaul (owls), Katie Fallon (Cerulean Warbler decline), and Mideast Flyway Conservation (vultures shot for sport by 10-year-olds; warblers netted for appetizers – five on one plate). Many talks focused on educating young people to promote bird and habitat conservation.

Back on the boardwalk: Connecticut Warblers arrived after the festival ended, and Claire Staples caught a glimpse of one skulker with help from Tropical Birding guides. Far afield, a



*BIRDING WITH A WINNER – Mike Fialkovich, left, and Sue Solomon, right, were enviably able to bird with champion birder Noah Strycker, who set the record in 2015 for the most species listed worldwide in a single year. Noah will present a program for 3RBC in 2017 describing his successful quest.*

Curlew Sandpiper, a Eurasian species super-rare in the U.S., drew dozens of birders to a flooded field west of Toledo. The same field hosted a pair of Wilson's Phalaropes and two White-rumped Sandpipers.

Prevailing north winds kept bird numbers low, and we celebrated only two 20-warbler days. Matt Webb and Dave Yeany tent-camped during the coldest days (May 16 had sleet and 35-degree temperatures). They recorded 159 species including 29 warbler species in three days. The cold winds kept birds low, and Dave captured some amazing shots that he posted on Facebook.

On our last day at Magee, we drove to Maumee Bay to see the Mourning Warbler reported earlier. Jack got impatient waiting and left for his afternoon snooze. As soon as he did, the bird hopped up to eye level in the vines for "killer" looks. I then hiked along the dike. A cloud of shorebirds rose out of the marsh, and I saw a Peregrine Falcon chasing a Black Tern out of the swirling mass.

I'll relish the Mourning sighting and the tern's escape for a long time. Other things I will relish are Yellow Warblers, the displaying Prothonotary Warbler, and not one but two Bald Eagle nests with hungry chicks at Magee.

## Briefly...

A WELL-TOLD TALE: Frank Izaguirre has an article in the May/June 2016 issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest* intriguingly titled "Henslow's Sparrows, NBSes and the Theory of Evolution." The subtitle is "Birding Western Pennsylvania's Bavington Gamelands in May," in which he tells of showing life birds to a visiting birder. Frank is a doctoral student at West Virginia University.

PHOTO AWARD WINNER: Cris Hamilton, one our club's finest photographers, is among the National Audubon Society's top 100 photo award winners in 2016. Her shot of a Magellanic Penguin was selected from nearly 1,700 pictures entered.

# The Peregrine

## Birds in the Three Rivers Area

### Geese Stole the Show in February-March 2016

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

Allegheny County was part of the highly unusual **Greater White-fronted Goose** invasion in early February. With large numbers appearing in the surrounding area, it was likely that this rare species would appear here, east of its usual migration range. Ten were at a small farm pond at Janoski's Farm in Findlay Twp. 2/6 (MV) representing the fifth county record. They remained the following day, and then a single bird remained up to 3/20 (MV et al.) and likely the same bird was at nearby Imperial 2/24 (GM) to 3/22 (SD, AB, JHA). A white-morph **Snow Goose** at Wingfield Pines in January remained at least to mid-February (v.o.). Snow Geese also invaded the entire western part of the state and eastern Ohio in February. A **Cackling Goose** was at Janoski's Farm 2/13 (MV), the seventh county record.

Waterfowl highlights included 4 **Gadwall** at Duck Hollow 3/2 (TM, NM) and 2 at Imperial 3/18-19 (GM et al.). An **American Wigeon** was at Tarentum 3/6-9 (RP). Four **Northern Shovelers** were at Imperial 3/18 (GM). Three **Northern Pintails** were at Wingfield Pines from January to at least 2/13 (VO); 4 were at North Park 3/2-16 (BM et al.). Four **Redheads** were at Creighton 2/14 (TH) and one was at Imperial 2/21 (GM, MV). A **Greater Scaup** was at Cheswick 2/14 (TH), a Lesser Scaup was there 2/24 (TH). **Bufflehead** were reported at eight locations 3/19. The high count was 48 at Oakmont (AH, PM). A **Ruddy Duck** was at Duck Hollow 3/2-19 (TM, NM, et al.).

A **Rough-legged Hawk** was at Imperial 3/22 (AB, JHA). This species was scarce in the state this winter. Single **Merlins** were in Shaler Twp. 2/22 (JH) and Schenley Park 2/28 (MF). The female **Peregrine Falcon** that formerly nested at the Tarentum Bridge was seen there 2/8 (SK). She moved to the Cathedral of Learning in Oakland and apparently replaced the female that had nested there for many years and is presumed to be dead. Two **Black Vultures** were seen in the Monongahela River Valley at Clairton 3/11 (TJ); one was nearby in Dravosburg 3/12 (JHA).

First shorebird migrants were a **Greater Yellowlegs** at Duck Hollow 3/25 (JS, SS), 15 **Wilson's Snipes** at Imperial 3/19 (MD), and single **American Woodcocks** at Wingfield Pines 2/23 (JM) and Plum Borough 2/24 (AH, PM).

Single adult **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** continued at The Point through 2/13 (v.o.). Two adults and a third-cycle were seen 2/14 (ST, DW), and an adult was noted 3/7 (PF). Two **Great Black-backed Gulls** (adult and first-cycle) were seen 12/19 (GM), and 2 first-winter individuals were there 2/14 (DW, ST).

Early **Great Egrets** were single birds at Dashields Dam (GM), Duck Hollow (JS, SS, DaK), and Fox Chapel (AH) 3/25. The **Great Blue Heron** rookery at Kirwan Heights had 10-12 active nests 3/16 (RT).

A **Barred Owl** was at Sewickley Heights Park 2/21 (GM). There was a second-hand report of a **Snowy Owl** at the Pittsburgh Airport 2/12 (DR, PA Birds Listserv). A **Great Horned Owl** nest containing one chick was discovered on the Homestead Grays Bridge 3/27 (JE). The birds were using an old Red-tailed Hawk nest that has been on the bridge for years.

The adult and immature **Red-headed Woodpeckers**

continued through the period from the fall at North Park (v.o.). The only **Red-breasted Nuthatch** noted was at Hampton Twp. 2/26 (DN). A **Winter Wren** was at Knob Hill Park 3/26 (KD).

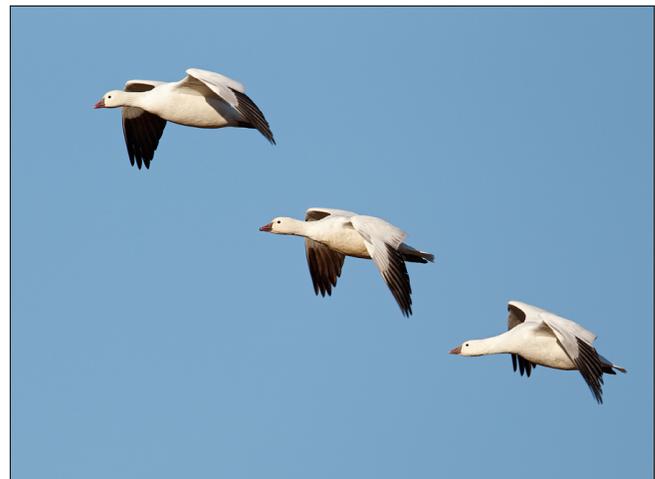
**Hermit Thrushes** probably winter every year in small numbers. Singles were at Sewickley Heights Park 2/12 (SD, BVN) and North Park 2/27 (DN). A leucistic **American Robin** with white patches in its plumage was at Strouss Farm in Findlay Twp. 2/26 (MV). A **Gray Catbird** continued in riverside brush in the city of Pittsburgh and was last reported 2/14 (PLI, DP).

**Chipping Sparrow** is rare in winter. The 3 birds reported in Sewickley in January were last reported 2/14 (JT); 2 were in Marshall Twp. 2/23 (JHe). **Field Sparrow** is uncommon here in winter, so having 3 at North Park 2/27 (AB) was unusual. A **Vesper Sparrow** was an unusual find at Boyce-Mayview Park 3/26 (JM) and one of the few reports away from Imperial. Two **Fox Sparrows** in Pleasant Hills in January remained through February (MH); 1 was in Plum Borough 2/14 (AH, PM), 3 were in Findlay Twp. 2/19 (MV), and 2 were in Sewickley Heights Park 2/21 (GM). A leucistic female **Northern Cardinal** continued through the entire period in Swissvale (RB).

*continued on page 12*



*UNUSUAL INVADERS*—The Greater White-fronted Geese, above, on February 5, 2016, at Muse in Washington County, were very rare migrants through western Pennsylvania. The Ross's Geese, below, at New Beaver in Lawrence County on February 6, 2016, were fairly rare visitors, and typically occur only as single birds. This time, there were five. (Both photos are by Geoff Malosh.)



# The Peregrine

## **Birds in the Three Rivers**

*continued from page 11*

Five **Red-winged Blackbirds** in Natrona Heights 2/8 (PH) may have been early migrants, but this species ordinarily does not return until late February at the earliest. **Common Grackles** may have been following the same pattern. Usually not seen in numbers until early March with the earliest arrivals in late February, single birds were in Greenfield 2/2 (KSJ), Bethel Park 2/20 (MJ), and Shaler Twp. 2/28 (STi). A **Rusty Blackbird** was at Homewood Cemetery 3/9 (JC) followed by 4 on 3/12 (TH).

**Pine Siskins** at a feeding station in Sewickley continued through March and maxed at 43 birds 2/27 (JT). The only other report in February was 2 at North Park 2/20 (OL, TH). Sightings in March include 2 in McCandless Twp. 3/13 (eBird), 1 in Gibsonia 3/16 (KP), and 2 in Pine Twp. 3/26 (PL, SL).

*Observers: Roy Bires, Alan Buriak, Jack Chaillet, Sheree Daugherty, Michael David, Steve Denninger, John English, Patience Fisher, Malcolm Harter, Jim Hausman (JHA), Janet Heintz (JHe), Amy Henrici, Paul Hess, Joyce Hoffmann, Todd Hooe, Tim Johnson, Matthew Juskowich, Dave Kerr (DaK), Scott Kinzey, Oliver Lindhiem, Patrick Lister (PLi), Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Jeff McDonald, Pat McShea, Geoff Malosh, Nancy Moeller, Tom Moeller, Dick Nugent, Kevin Parsons, David Poortinga, Rob Protz, Dan Richards, Kate St. John, Jack Solomon, Sue Solomon, Julia Tebbets, Shannon Thompson, Steve Tirone (STi), Bob VanNewkirk, Mark Vass, Dave Wilton, various observers (v.o.).*

## **Here Is How 3RBC Began**

*(Editor's note: Jack Solomon, founding president, suggested to some local hard-core birders that we should form a birding club in our region. His email invitation below led to our birth.)*

**Date: Thu, 21 Jun 2001 From: Jack Erwin Solomon**  
**Subject: Bird Club Party and Organizing Meeting**

I've reserved the Frick Park Nature Center for Sunday, July 29, 7:00 PM for a slide party, and I'd like to talk about starting a new bird club for the Pittsburgh area. Everyone in the world's invited.

Mike Fialkovich will show slides, and anyone who wants to bring some is welcome to be part of the evening's entertainment. I'll pick up some pop and chips, and anyone who wants to bring anything else in the way of food and drink is welcome to do so.

My ideas about a club are far from cast in concrete, but what I envision would be a lot like the Todd and Westmoreland bird clubs: lots of outings; a few meetings; and a newsletter, with low (5 or 10 dollars) annual dues.

I'd want all our outings to be joint with ASWP [the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania] assuming that's OK with them, and I intend to continue to be a member of and support ASWP. I just think some of us want a club more closely focused on birds and ornithology.

Chuck Tague said he'd put something in the *Nature Observer News* about all this, and is supportive of the idea.

Mike has said he'll be the bird report compiler, and Paul Hess said he'd do some of the newsletter work. There are, however, lots of glory-filled positions left for the rest of us. (I nominate me for \*Great Gray Eminence\*.)



*HIGHLIGHTS IN MARCH—Long-billed Dowitchers are rare at any season in western Pennsylvania, and this one found by Shawn Collins at the Miller Ponds in Crawford County was especially early in the year. Geoff Malosh photographed this dramatic pose on March 20, 2016. Rusty Blackbirds are always a coveted species for a western Pennsylvania list, and Conneaut Marsh in Crawford County is among the most reliable places to find them. Geoff photographed this one at the marsh on March 19, 2016.*

