



The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

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Look into the Lives of Hooded Warblers at Our April 6 Meeting

We'll get a rare glimpse into the subtle behavior of Hooded Warblers at our next Three Rivers Birding Club meeting on Wednesday, April 6. Ronald L. Mumme, a biology professor at Allegheny College in Meadville, will give us a presentation with an intriguing title: "The Evolution of Contrasting Plumage Patterns in Warblers: Why It Isn't Always About Sex."

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.

Ron has conducted field research on Hooded Warblers in Crawford County since 2010, including a study of the relationship between plumage patterns of males and females. Males have slightly more white in their tail than females, and we will find out how this apparently minor difference (to human eyes) may affect differences in males' and females' success in foraging for insect food and for other behavior.

He became interested in birds, birding, and ornithology in 1973 as a sophomore at the University



KEEPING WATCH – The behavior of Hooded Warblers has been a rewarding study for Ronald L. Mumme, who will describe his research at our April 6 meeting. He photographed this incubating female in Crawford County

of South Florida. He received his B.A. in biology from USF in 1975 and his Ph.D. in zoology from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1984. He has been at Allegheny College since 1990 after studying Acorn Woodpeckers in California, Florida Scrub-Jays in Florida, and Slate-throated Redstarts in Costa Rica. If you'd like to see his tremendous variety of research and publications, see tinyurl.com/Mumme-research.

Pittsburgh Christmas Bird Counters Found 75 Species

By Compiler Brian Shema

Above-average numbers seemed to be a trend for Pittsburgh's 2015 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) held on December 26. The above-average temperatures were more comfortable than usual. After two very harsh winters, the start of this winter felt more like spring – as did the count day.

This year's total of 75 species was notably above our 10-year average of 67 species. During the same time period, we had a high count of 80 species in 2012 and a low count of 61 in 2006. In all, 41,990 individual birds were tallied on count day.

Normally, when we have an above-average year, we find a bird or two that are unusual. Surprisingly, all 75 of the species had been recorded for this CBC in the past 10 years. Therefore, not a single rare bird report form needed to be filed. Nevertheless, there are always some interesting finds and trends.

A Northern Harrier was discovered flying over Schenley Park. Although we have found several harriers in the past, I don't think anyone would have guessed Schenley Park to be a likely location.

The increasing population of Bald Eagles is obvious in the results. Seven were reported this year, compared to the previous high count of 4.

We tallied 2,981 American Robins. Remember that the next time you hear someone say "the robins are back" in the spring.

The Northern Mockingbird population continues its upward trend, with 73 listed.

A surprising find were 7 Red-winged Blackbirds. We record them every other year or so, but typically only one or two.

On the flip side, despite 100% open water on our streams, ponds, and rivers, very few waterfowl were found. In fact, excluding Mallards and Canada Geese, only 15 waterfowl were counted. Likewise, 7 Great Blue Herons was a low total, especially given the mild early-winter weather.

After several years of finding one or more Rufous Hummingbirds, that rare fall and winter wanderer from the west was absent.

Unusual for our common birds, only 477 Northern Cardinals was a very low count –perhaps because of fewer feeder-watchers.

The Pittsburgh CBC is sponsored by the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania. We thank all of the participants, especially the area leaders. Our next Pittsburgh CBC is scheduled for December 31, 2016.

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

President's Message

Having Fun with Hummingbirds

By Bob VanNewkirk

Like most birders, when the calendar page is flipped to March, my thoughts turn to northern migration and the return of spring and summer breeding birds. It won't be long before Gulf coast birders begin to post their first arrivals of hummingbirds on the website hummingbirds.net/map.

Growing up, I got a kick out of seeing one these jeweled miniature birds appear in my backyard. Their flight seemed to halt only when they hovered and checked out the blooms in my dad's garden. The Ruby-throats seemed to be especially fond of red flowers. From childhood through adulthood, the irresistible charm of hummers never lost their magical appeal to me.

When I bought a home in a wooded suburban neighborhood, I decided to try luring hummingbirds to my yard with plantings and feeders. By the end of July one year, I was filling three feeders at least twice a day. One afternoon, my family and I counted 23 hummers at one time feeding or waiting their turn for an open port.

For 32 years I have logged the arrival of my first yard Ruby-throat of the year. Amazingly, from 2000 to 2004, I had a male arrive between 5:45 and 6:00 PM on May 1. Could this have been the same one returning each year? April 24 was the earliest arrival, and May 4 was the latest first-date. They are not only predictable by the calendar, usually showing up in western Pennsylvania in mid-April, but they must also have an incredible internal GPS. I read that migratory hummers can remember to within inches the precise location and height of a sugar feeder they had frequented before migrating south.

While sharing my yard with hummers, I had opportunities to hold them when situations occurred that they needed my help. One time, a hummer flew into my garage and looked for an escape route through a glass block window. The bird exhausted itself and perched on a broom handle. I gently cupped the bird in my hands, walked it outside, and within a minute, the little captive took off.

Another predicament occurred when my next-door neighbor, while cutting the lawn, discovered a young hummingbird lying on the grass. He brought the bird to me, handed it over, and said, "You probably know what to do with this." I didn't really, other than keeping it warm and feeding it sugar water. That's what I did for the rest of the day. I overfed the bird, and its crop became distended. I called the National Aviary to see if they would take it. The next morning I delivered the bird in a blanket-lined shoebox. After examining the new arrival, the bird was pronounced healthy and would find a new home in the Aviary's hummingbird exhibit.

On many birding trips, I have seen a variety of hummingbirds in wonderful places. One of my favorites was a 2006 Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania trip to Arizona. One day we visited Jesse Hendrix's hummingbird ranch in Nogales. Jesse would put out 150 feeders each day using 10 gallons of solution and feeding between 7,000 to 9,000 hummers during the peak of migration. Fourteen hummingbird species have been identified on his property including Black-chinned, Magnificent, Broad-tailed, Broad-billed, Violet-crowned, Rufous, and Ruby-throated. No matter where you looked, you were sure to see dazzling hummers buzzing and whirling about the feeders like bees to a hive.

Another memorable experience happened on a 2008 Galapagos Island tour led by Scott Shalaway. After spending

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a fantastic time visiting this unique chain of islands, some of the group made a side trip to the Guango Lodge in San Isidro, Ecuador. This lodge boasts a bird list of 310 species including 18 hummer species. The hummingbird garden was the place to enjoy these stunning air acrobats such as Bronzy and Collared Inca, Tawny-bellied Hermit, Long-tailed Sylph, Tourmaline Sunangel, and Chestnut-breasted Coronet. Birders took turns having their photos taken while holding a feeder with hummers sipping nectar.

In 2015, my wife and I flew to Costa Rica to escape winter and enjoy tropical life and scenery. A highlight was a walk through the Monteverde Reserve and a visit to a souvenir store with feeders out front. Our guide called out the names of the hungry hummers – names as descriptive as the birds: Violet Sabrewing, Purple-throated Mountain-gem, Copper-headed Emerald, Green-crowned Brilliant, and Steely-vented Hummingbird.

Signs of spring will slowly be revealed: the blooming of crocuses, longer daylight hours, the calls of Red-winged Blackbirds, the dawn chorus, and my yard's first visit from a hummingbird. I can hardly wait.

Outings to Come

We'll Visit Some New Locations This Spring

By Steve Thomas, Outings Director

Sunday, March 20 – Moraine State Park: This leaderless outing will be our first of the year to Lake Arthur, a man-made lake that is the heart of the park. The lake has good (sometimes spectacular) numbers and variety of waterfowl in migration. Meet at 8:00 AM in the Day Use Area (South Shore) in the first parking lot on the right. 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 time from Pittsburgh.

Saturday, March 26 – Pymatuning Area: Meet leader Bob Van Newkirk (412-366-1694; van126@comcast.net) at 8:00 AM at the Pymatuning Wildlife Learning Center (Waterfowl Museum) for this all-day outing. Plenty of waterfowl, Bald Eagles, and perhaps Rough-legged Hawks are likely, and Horned Larks are also possible. Take I-79 north to Route 6, and go west to Linesville. Turn left at the light in Linesville where the sign points toward the Pymatuning spillway. The sign for the center will be on the left, past the fish hatchery and before the spillway. Lunch will be at the Spillway Inn for those interested.

Saturday, April 2 – Yellow Creek State Park: Meet Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493) at the park office at 8:00 AM for this joint outing of the 3RBC and the Todd Bird Club. The park office is on Route 259 just off Route 422 east of Indiana. Allow approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes to drive from Pittsburgh. This has been the prime outing location for the Todd group since the club was created. The park contains diverse habitats and a large lake that attracts a wide variety of species.

Sunday, April 17 – Riding Meadow Park (Fox Chapel): Meet Cecelia Hard (412-781-6677) inside the park entrance at 8:00 AM. Be prepared for muddy trails, wet grass, and a creek crossing. We visited this park last fall and discovered nice trails that were filled with migrants and local birds.

From Route 28 north take Exit 8 for Freeport Road. Turn left onto Fox Chapel Road (1.1 mile). Slight left onto Squaw Run Rd (1.1 mile). Turn right onto Squaw Run Road east (0.8 mile). Riding Meadow Park will be on the left. Please park in the lot on the right directly opposite the entrance.

Saturday, April 23 – Raccoon Creek State Park: This is a bird and wildflower walk and picnic with the Brooks Bird Club, which is based in West Virginia. Ryan Tomazin (412-220-9726, wwwarblers@hotmail.com) will lead the bird walk. Meet at the Roadside Picnic Area West at 9:30 AM.

We will drive to the beach and around the lake after checking out the picnic and parking lot area. Potluck lunch will be between 12:30 and 1:00. Please bring a dish to feed at least 6 to 10 people, and bring your own plates, cutlery, and drinks. There are ample picnic benches under the giant oaks. In case of inclement weather, we should be able to use the Wildflower Reserve center for lunch.

If there is interest, and if the weather holds, we can bird and botanize the Wildflower Reserve. It should be the perfect time for

wildflowers. If you have any questions, or would like to RSVP, please feel free to contact Ryan either by phone or by email.

From Pittsburgh take Route 22/30 and exit at Imperial. Take Route 30 west to the Raccoon Creek State Park entrance, and drive through the park to the Roadside West picnic area.

Sunday, April 24 – Frick Park: Jack and Sue Solomon (412-521-3365) will lead us. Meet at 8:30 AM in the “Blue Slide” park entrance at the intersection of Beechwood Boulevard and Nicholson Street in Squirrel Hill. Frick is an excellent migrant trap, and, we’re hoping for lots of warblers. Follow Beechwood Boulevard south from its intersection with Forbes Avenue, 1.1 miles to Nicholson. You will need to park on the street.

Friday, April 29 – Sewickley Heights Park: Sheree Daugherty (shereedaugherty@gmail.com) will lead this walk in collaboration with the Fern Hollow Nature Center. Meet at 7:30 AM in the upper parking lot. See www.3rbc.org for directions. Be prepared for muddy trails, and bring water and a lunch. Louisiana Waterthrush, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Warbling Vireo nest in the area.

Wednesday, May 4 – Linbrook Woodlands: Join Karyn Delaney and Bob Van Newkirk (412-366-1694; van126@comcast.net) at 8:00 AM at this recently purchased 168-acre Allegheny Land Trust property in Franklin Park Borough in northwestern Allegheny County. Features include steep wooded ravines, trails, many springs, and frontage along Big Sewickley Creek. Warblers, thrushes, flycatchers, and vireos will be targeted. Bring a lunch, snack, and water. Porta Johns are available.

From Pittsburgh, take I-279 North to the Wexford exit. Turn left onto Route 910 and go approximately one mile to the intersection where Dragun’s Nursery is on the left. At the intersection turn right onto Rochester Road. Follow Rochester Road for about 0.5 mile and turn right onto Big Sewickley Creek Road. Follow Big Sewickley Creek Road approximately 0.7 mile and turn left where you will see the park’s sign. The parking lot is on the right side bordering a ball field.

From the north, take I-279 South to the Wexford exit. Turn right onto Route 910 and go approximately one mile to the intersection where Dragun’s Nursery is on the left. At the intersection turn right onto Rochester Road. Follow Rochester Road for about 0.5 mile and turn right onto Big Sewickley Creek Road. Follow Big Sewickley Creek Road approximately 0.7 mile and turn left where you will see the park’s sign. The parking lot is on the right side bordering a ball field.

From the east, take Route 910, proceed straight through the intersection at I-79, and go approximately one mile to the intersection where Dragun’s Nursery is on the left. At the intersection turn right onto Rochester Road. Follow Rochester Road for about 0.5 mile and turn right onto Big Sewickley Creek Road. Follow Big Sewickley Creek Road approximately 0.7 mile and turn left where you will see the park’s sign. The parking lot is on the right side bordering a ball field.

Friday, May 6 – Sewickley Heights Park: In collaboration with the Fern Hollow Nature Center, Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; van126@comcast.net) will lead this outing. Meet at 7:30 AM in the upper parking lot. See the 3RBC website (3rbc.org) for directions. Be prepared for muddy trails, and bring water and a lunch. Besides birding in the park we will drive and make stops

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Outings to Come

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along Little Sewickley Creek. Louisiana Waterthrush, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Warbling Vireo nest in the area.

Thursday, May 12 – Knob Hill Community Park: Meet Karyn Delaney (724-713-9474) at 8:00 AM in the second parking lot on the left on Knob Road. Target species include Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Ovenbird, Wood Thrush, flycatchers, Hooded Warbler, and other migrants. Be prepared for possible wet grass and muddy trails. We'll bird until approximately noon. In case of inclement weather, the walk will be rescheduled for Friday, May 13.

From Pittsburgh take I-79 North to Warrendale exit 75 (formerly exit 23). At the end of the exit ramp, turn left onto Warrendale-Bayne Road. Take the first right (approximately 0.1 mile) onto Brush Creek Road. Stay on Brush Creek Road for about 1 mile and turn left at the second traffic light onto Knob Road. Then travel 0.5 mile to the parking lot on your left.

Traveling south from Butler on I-79, take Cranberry exit 78 (formerly exit 25). At the end of the exit ramp, turn right onto Route 228. At the first traffic light, turn left onto Route 19 South. Continue on 19 South to the third traffic light (at the entrance to Thorn Hill Industrial Park). Turn right at this light and go to the next traffic light. Turn left at this light, continue approximately 1 mile, and turn right at the traffic light onto Knob Road. Then go 0.5 mile to the parking lot on your left.

Saturday and Sunday, May 14-15 – Barking Slopes: Todd Hooe (hooe@verizon.net) will lead us through this area along the Allegheny River above Oakmont. At December's slide slam program, Todd showed us pictures he took at this area belonging to the Allegheny Land Trust.

Given the difficult terrain and sometimes narrow and undeveloped trails, as well as issues of parking, two separate walks are scheduled. Each will have a maximum of 12 participants. Email Todd to reserve a space for one of the two days.

May 14 (7:30 AM-12:30 PM): This will be an extensive hike of approximately 5 miles. Terrain will be difficult including narrow paths, steep climbs, loose rock and gravel, dirt, grass, and possibly muddy trails.

May 15 (8:00 AM-12:00 PM): This will be approximately 3 miles of hiking on easier trails. There will be uphill climbs, but much of the time the trails will be relatively flat, wide, and with grass, gravel, or dirt surfaces. Some mud is possible.

Important reminders: Once we depart from the parking lot, we will not return to the lot until the end of the walk. There are no public restrooms. Bring water and packed food or snacks. There are ticks, poison ivy, and plants with thorns, spines, and prickles. Long pants and hiking boots are necessary.

Parking GPS Coordinates: 40.529130, -79.792003 (Coxcomb Hill Road). Todd will contact the Allegheny Land Trust to see whether we can park along the service road that connects with the parking lot on Coxcomb Hill Road. Carpool if possible, given the limited parking space.

Saturday, May 21 – 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, take the fork to the right and proceed to the parking lot on the circle at the end of the road. Dress for wet grass and

mud. Previous spring outings have produced a nice variety of migrants and resident birds in the park's many habitats. See tinyurl.com/HarrisonHills for directions.

Saturday, May 21 – Presque Isle State Park: This trip to one of Pennsylvania's greatest birding locations will be led by Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; van126@comcast.net). Meet at 8:00 AM in the first parking lot on the right after entering the park. From Pittsburgh, take I-79 North until it ends. Take the exit for Route 5 West (also called West 12th Street) and continue for about 1 mile. Turn right onto Route 832, which leads directly into the park. Allow 2.5 hours driving time from Pittsburgh. Presque Isle has produced some of Pennsylvania's best records of rarities. Bring a lunch or join us at a restaurant just outside the park.

Sunday May 22 – Frick Park: Aidan Place (724-833-0998; placea@winchesterthurston.org) will lead this walk. Meet Aidan at 8:00 AM at the "Blue Slide Park" entrance, corner of Beechwood Boulevard and Nicholson Street in Squirrel Hill. See the April 24 listing for directions.

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.

A Common Redpoll Thrilled CBC Birders

Two Christmas Bird Counts north of Pittsburgh submitted results for publication in *The Peregrine*. Here are highlights.

Buffalo Creek Valley

Redpolls are stars of any Christmas Bird Count, and the Buffalo Creek Valley CBC listed a Common Redpoll on December 19, 2015. It was among 58 species and 2,327 individuals. The count covers parts of southeastern Butler County, southwestern Armstrong County, and northeastern Allegheny County.

Other notable species compiled by George Reese were 14 American Black Ducks, 1 Common Merganser, 1 Common Loon, 1 Northern Harrier, 2 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, 3 Horned Larks, 37 Eastern Bluebirds, 18 Cedar Waxwings, 2 Brown Creepers, 3 Winter Wrens, 5 Northern Mockingbirds, 40 Red-winged Blackbirds, 200 Common Grackles, 16 Brown-headed Cowbirds, 2 Purple Finches, 4 Eastern Towhees, 32 American Tree Sparrows, 6 Swamp Sparrows, and 2 White-crowned Sparrows.

South Butler

A flyover flock of 27 Tundra Swans thrilled participants in the South Butler CBC on January 2, 2016. This CBC, compiled by Chris Kubiak, includes parts of southern Butler County and northwestern Allegheny County.

Counters listed 58 species and 10,487 individuals. Other highlights included 2 pairs of Pied-billed Grebes, 1 pair of Hooded Mergansers, 3 Turkey Vultures, and 1 each of American Black Duck, Gray Catbird, Fox Sparrow, and White-crowned Sparrow.

Meet Many Birds and Birders at Two Migrant Hotspots

Presque Isle Festival Features David Sibley

Western Pennsylvania's major annual birding event is the Presque Isle Festival of the Birds, a favorite spring gathering for many 3RBC members. This year's festival is Friday-Sunday, May 6-8, and will feature legendary field guide author and illustrator David Sibley as the keynote speaker on Saturday evening.

Sibley's topic will be "The Psychology of Bird Identification," illustrated with photos, drawings, and a few tests. He will talk about how we perceive the world around us, and how our brains both help and hinder our efforts at bird identification.

Field trips will cover the state park's hottest birding spots, and a program of educational workshops will include topics including flight adaptations in birds, waterfowl of Presque Isle, spring warbler identification, birding for beginners, grassland bird identification, and shorebird identification.

At the Tom Ridge Environmental Center a natural history museum tour will take you behind the scenes to learn about collection, preservation, and displays of the flora and fauna of northwestern Pennsylvania.

A tour of the center's native garden will enable participants to touch, smell, and even taste several plants that grow naturally in the area. Highlights will include a discussion of native, invasive, and exotic plant species as well as gardening for pollinators and attracting birds to your yard.

The festival is hosted by the Presque Isle Audubon Society and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. See complete details and reservation information at the Audubon Society's website, tinyurl.com/PISP-Festival.

Magee Marsh in Ohio Has "The Biggest Week"

By Jack Solomon

Spending a few days to nearly a month at Magee Marsh Wildlife Area in northwestern Ohio, has become a tradition for many 3RBC members. A day of 20 or more warbler species is regular, and justifies the marsh's reputation as "the warbler capital of the world."

This year the Black Swamp Bird Observatory announced that May 6-15 are the dates of its "Biggest Week in American Birding" (biggestweekinamericanbirding.com).

I find it easier to see warblers, cuckoos, and vireos there than anywhere else. It's the only place north of the Mason-Dixon Line where I've seen more than a few Gray-cheeked Thrushes and Lincoln's Sparrows.

Speakers, guided tours, and availability of free professional guides to help find and identify birds make it a birding paradise.

Rooms sell out early at the lodge at Maumee Bay State Park (where many festival activities take place) and at nearby motels, including those in Port Clinton. Reserve a room soon.

I will try to arrange a group dinner for us at a location in or near Port Clinton or Oregon, Ohio (a suburb of Toledo). Keep an eye on the 3RBC Facebook page in early May for details.



DON'T MISS IT – Seeing migrant warblers closely at eye level is an unforgettable experience at Magee Marsh along Lake Erie in Ohio. Frank Izaguirre photographed this Chestnut-sided Warbler there in May 2015. The excitement goes beyond the opportunity to see these warblers up close. There's a slightly better chance than we normally have for seeing a rarity such as a Kirtland's Warbler or a Connecticut Warbler as well as even more unexpected birds such as Scarlet Tanager and Blue Grosbeak. Chatting with birders from across the nation and around the world is another plus.

The 2016 "Biggest Week" will feature dozens of guided trips to birding hotspots in the northwestern Ohio area. Programs by prominent speakers will cover topics such as the endangered Kirtland's Warbler, owl biology (presented by Pennsylvania's Scott Weidensaul), and rare vagrant birds of North America.

If you've been to the Magee boardwalk, as have more than 60 club members every spring, you know that part of it has recently been repaired. But obviously, much more is needed.

In many places, the wood is warped, old, and near the end of its life. Some spots are worse. If you've been there when a Connecticut Warbler shows up, or some other uncommon or rare bird, you've seen people cramming together in a horde, climbing on the railing, and generally being as enthusiastic as only birders can be about a bird. The strain on the structure is enormous, so it has to be super-sturdy. Repairs are expensive.

It's a state facility, and as usual, state funding is scarce – nonexistent, actually. In April 2014 Kenn Kaufman used his blog to ask birders who visit the boardwalk to help. He wrote that the Friends of Magee Marsh, a private local group, is leading the restoration. As of his blog post, the Friends had donated \$25,000. Estimates for a complete job are about \$494,000.

Kenn and his wife, Kimberly, are life members of the Friends. Both of them are key to operating the Black Swamp Bird Observatory (BSBO), which organizes "The Biggest Week in American Birding" centered on the boardwalk.

I've seen thousands of birders, including countless new ones, who could find no better place to see warblers closely at eye level. In most other places, we often strain to see these tiny birds high in trees. If a stroll on the boardwalk in May doesn't spark and set ablaze a love of birds and birding, I wonder what would.

You can donate to the repair project via PayPal at friendsofmageemarsh.org.

New Frick Park Center Is Well on the Way to Completion

By Jack Solomon

The new Frick Environmental Center, birthplace of 3RBC, is well on its way, as pictured above. It is slated by the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy to open in 2016. The opening date is expected to be set soon. Watch pittsburghparks.org/frick for the latest news.

In a previous article in *The Peregrine*, I commented that the cost seemed to be a huge and difficult challenge, but Marijke Hecht, the project manager, predicted that it would be successful. Indeed, it is nearing completion as the photograph shows.

Marijke told *The Peregrine* that the cost, including planning, design, and construction, is \$19 million. Funding comes from various sources including private foundations, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Frick Park Trust Fund (established by Henry Clay Frick) via the City of Pittsburgh, and individuals. To contribute, go to pittsburghparks.org/environmentalcenter.

Birders and everyone interested in nature will find the Center a great resource.



COMING SOON – Construction of the new environmental center at Pittsburgh's Frick Park is progressing well. This was how it looked in December 2015. (photograph by Scott Roller for the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy)

Let's Be Careful How We Change Our World

By Rachel Handel

"Right now, in the amazing moment that to us counts as the present, we are deciding, without quite meaning to, which evolutionary pathways will remain open and which will forever be closed. No other creature has ever managed this." – Elizabeth Kolbert

On November 16, 2015, author Elizabeth Kolbert visited Pittsburgh to discuss her Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*. The book is noted as one of The New York Times Book Review's 10 best books of the year, is a New York Times bestseller, and a National Books Critics Circle Award finalist.

The Sixth Extinction discusses Earth's five mass extinctions that have taken place over the last half-billion years. These extinctions have suddenly and dramatically impacted the diversity of life on our planet. Now, Kolbert and scientists are monitoring what they define as the "sixth extinction," predicted to be the most devastating extinction event since the asteroid impact that wiped out the dinosaurs.

In her talk at Carnegie Music Hall in Oakland, an Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania special event, Kolbert explained that the next extinction won't be caused by asteroids. It will be caused by people. With both humor and seriousness, she discussed her travels around the world – trips where she watched as humans tried to right the wrongs they'd created through deforestation and industrialization leading to climate change. Insects, mammals, birds, and trees were listed as the victims of human intervention.

"Though it might be nice to imagine there once was a time when man lived in harmony with nature, it's not clear that he ever really did," Kolbert said.

She recounted a climb down a steep mountain, where trees had become so specialized to the rugged environment that some grew in areas only yards wide. As the global temperature changed, these growing areas were becoming inhospitable to the trees that had called them home for centuries. As the trees struggled to adapt

– often losing – other inhabitants of the forest that relied on the trees for food and shelter were negatively impacted.

Kolbert asserted that this sixth extinction may be mankind's enduring legacy. Through her research, assertions, and words, she encouraged us to think carefully about how we as humans are forever changing the future of our world.

Her three-part series on global warming, "The Climate of Man," was published in *The New Yorker* in 2005. It won the 2006 National Magazine Award for Public Interest, the 2005 American Association for the Advancement of Science Journalism Award, and the 2006 National Academies Communication Award.

Editor's note: Elizabeth Kolbert's "The Climate of Man" series is available online at tinyurl.com/6pajjx.

Local Researcher Honored for Waterthrush Study

Studies of Louisiana Waterthrush ecology in Pennsylvania have made important contributions to science, and a Duquesne University graduate student is adding to the knowledge. Brian K. Trevelline has received an American Ornithologists' Union Research Award to study the diet of this declining species.

Previous studies have shown that stream pollution has reduced abundance of aquatic insects, a key component of waterthrush diet. Trevelline analyzed prey DNA from fecal sacs of nestlings collected from 32 nests in Pennsylvania and Arkansas. Mayfly DNA was present in 94% of the fecal samples – new evidence of these aquatic insects' importance.

With his award support, Trevelline will use DNA data to show whether birds along polluted streams supplement their diet with terrestrial insects such as moths and caterpillars. He bases his work at Powdermill Nature Reserve, the scene of pioneering waterthrush research dating back many years.

Birds in the Three Rivers Area

Waterfowl Fallout Led Reports in Oct.-Nov. 2015

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

Mild weather was the story this fall, meaning that waterfowl migration was slower than usual, although we did have a fallout at the end of November that featured numerous Buffleheads.

Tundra Swans appeared in early November right on schedule. The largest flocks include at least 187 flying over Franklin Park 11/14 (OM) and 228 over Imperial 11/22 (MV).

Six **Gadwalls** were at Imperial 11/1 (MV), 2 were in nearby Findlay Twp. 11/1 (MV), and 1 was at Imperial 11/20 (MV). An **American Wigeon** was photographed at Imperial 10/4 (JT). Two **Northern Pintails** were at Duck Hollow 10/25 (MF) and 2 were at Wingfield Pines in the first half of November (ST). A **Green-winged Teal** was at Duck Hollow 11/21 (JS, SS). Six **Buffleheads** were at Woods Run on the Ohio River 11/9 (MJ). Two **Hooded Mergansers** were at Boyce-Mayview Park 11/11 (FK), a **Common Merganser** was at Dashields Dam 10/1 (MV), and a female **Red-breasted Merganser** was at Duck Hollow 11/19 (MJ).

An unexpected fallout of waterfowl occurred on our rivers 11/29. It was an overcast day, but without the heavy rains that normally produce fallouts; however, the passage of a front could have been the contributing factor. **Buffleheads** were the most numerous species with a total of 694 tallied from various locations (ST, MV, BP, RC, AH). Other waterfowl that day included 14 **Greater Scaup** and 10 **Lesser Scaup** at Duck Hollow (ST, JHa), 93 **Hooded Mergansers** on all the rivers (RC, ST, AH), an early **Common Goldeneye** at Duck Hollow (ST, JHa) along with 3 **Surf Scoters** and a **Canvasback** (ST, JHa). Also that day, 8 **Redheads** and 3 **Long-tailed Ducks** were on the Ohio River (MV, ST) and a **Ruddy Duck** was at Woods Run (MV). Perhaps a holdover from the fallout, a **Long-tailed Duck** was on the Allegheny River in Sharpsburg 11/30 (JH).

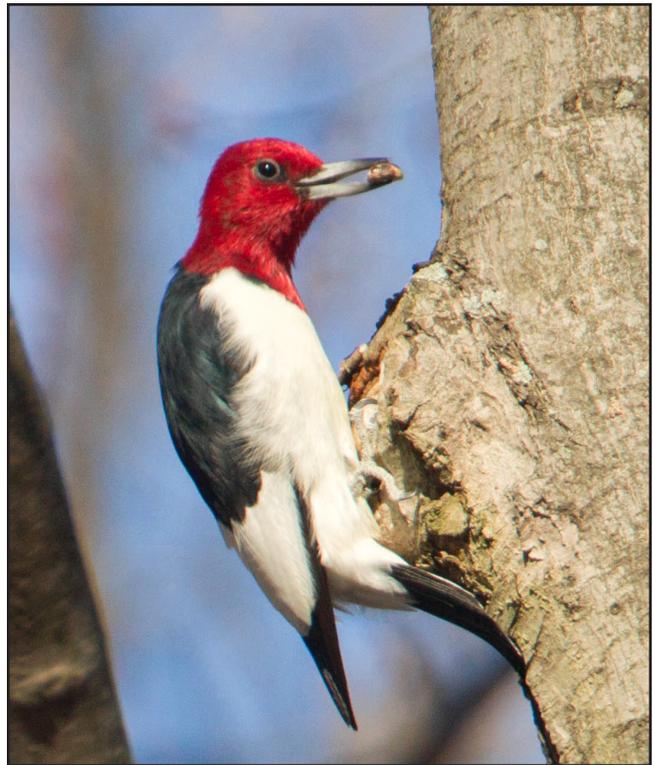
Three **Common Loons** flew over Imperial 10/31 (MV) and one was at Duck Hollow 11/24 (JS, SS). Six were on the Ohio River around Brunots Island 11/29 (MV, ST). A **Green Heron** at Wingfield Pines 10/6 was a bit late (MJ).

A flock of 87 **Turkey Vultures** appeared at Dashields Dam 10/19 (MV). Two **Black Vultures** were a surprise in Jefferson Hills 10/17 (JHa).

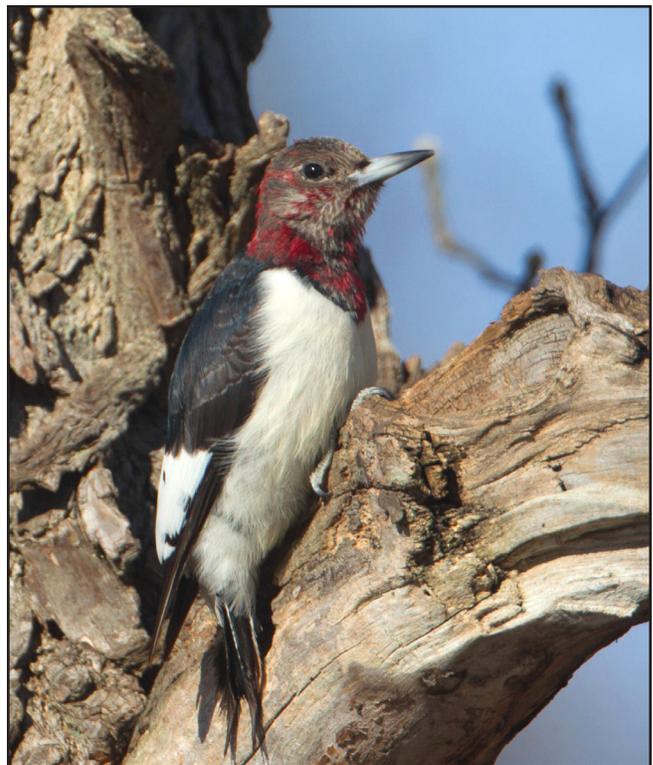
A dark-morph **Rough-legged Hawk** at Imperial 11/26 (MV) furnished the first report of the season. The last **Osprey** migrant was reported at Harrison Hills Park 10/4 (AH, PM). A **Merlin** was at Duck Hollow 10/27 (KSJ, JE), a fairly reliable winter location for this species during the past few years, and one was observed flying over Frick Park 11/23 (JC).

A few **Killdeer** remained through November as mild weather continued. A late **Solitary Sandpiper** was photographed at Imperial 10/11 (JT). Amazingly, there was only a single report of **Greater Yellowlegs**: one at Imperial 10/31 (MV). Janoski's Farm pond in Findlay Twp. hosted a late **Pectoral Sandpiper** 10/8 (MV), and a **Dunlin** was there 10/11 (MV). A **Wilson's Snipe** was at Imperial 11/21 (MV), and an **American Woodcock** was flushed at Barking Slopes 10/25 (TH) providing a rare fall migrant record.

A **Barred Owl** was calling at North Park 10/25 (STi) at a location where they have been present in the past. Once again, Bob Mulvihill set up a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** banding operation at Sewickley Heights Park and generously invited people to visit the



EXCITING VISITORS – An adult (top) and an immature (bottom) Red-headed Woodpecker thrilled birders at North Park since November 2015, and remained at least into late January. Jeff McDonald photographed both shortly after they arrived for their winter stay. Red-headed Woodpeckers are becoming harder to find in Pennsylvania during recent decades. They were confirmed breeding in 39% fewer survey blocks in the second breeding bird atlas in 2004-2009 compared to the first atlas in 1983-1989.



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The Peregrine

Birds in the Three Rivers Area

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site during the banding sessions. One bird was banded 10/17 and 2 on 11/7.

Three **Common Nighthawks** flying over Moon Twp. 10/6 were a bit late (GM). The last **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** was reported in Verona 10/12 (SK).

An adult and an immature **Red-headed Woodpecker** were great finds at North Park 11/20 (KS, BM). They were gathering acorns and caching them in a small area of the park. Both remained through the season. Interestingly, that is very close to the site where several birds were discovered in the summer of 2012.

An **Olive-sided Flycatcher** was a nice surprise during a stroll in Frick Park 10/5 (MD). The last **Eastern Phoebe** reports included one at Homewood Cemetery (MF) and 1 at Barking Slopes (TH), both on 10/25.

Common Raven reports continue from new areas. One was in Harmar Twp. 11/18 (JV) and 1 was in Hampton Twp. for the first time 10/14 (DN). Two **Fish Crows** were at Duck Hollow 11/26 (JS, SS), the first report since July. A **Marsh Wren** continued its lengthy stay at Wingfield Pines and was observed 10/14 (FK).

A few straggling warblers were noted. A late **Common Yellowthroat** was at Barking Slopes 11/8 (TH). A **Cape May Warbler** was at Beechwood Farms 10/3 (TH, OL), 3 were at Harrison Hills Park 10/5 (PH, JS, SS), and singles were at Natrona Heights 10/5 (PH) and Gibsonia 10/6 (KP). The last **Northern Parula** report came from Frick Park 10/7 (JS, SS). A **Wilson's Warbler** was found at Harrison Hills Park 10/1 (PH).

The first **American Tree Sparrows** arrived at Beechwood Farms 11/19 (CK). **Fox Sparrows** are always a welcome sight: 3 were at Homewood Cemetery in the East End of Pittsburgh 11/2 (JC), a reliable location for many years. One was at Barking Slopes 11/8 (TH), 2 were at Imperial 11/15 (MV), and 1 was at Knob Hill Park 11/24 (KD). The only Lincoln's Sparrow reports came from Sewickley Heights Park 10/5 (BVN) and Harrison Hills Park 10/18 (TH). White-crowned Sparrows passed through in October with reports from Forest Hills 10/3 (TBI), Harrison Hills Park 10/4 (AH, PM), and Homewood Cemetery 10/5 (MF) and 11/2 (JC).

A leucistic **Northern Cardinal** visited a yard in Swissvale during the reporting period and was photographed. The body was white but other parts of the bird were nearly normal in color (RB).

Up to 50 **Red-winged Blackbirds** were at Wingfield Pines 10/14 (FK). **Eastern Meadowlarks** were still at Imperial 10/11 (JT), where they may winter unless conditions change as development progresses at the grasslands. There were no reports of large **Common Grackle** flocks; normally, observers encounter scattered flocks in fields or woodlands during this time.

A few **Purple Finch** reports included 1 in Natrona Heights 10/21 (PH) and 2 visiting a bird bath in Harmar Twp. 11/19 (JV). A few **Pine Siskins** were reported in seven locations in the county in October and November.

Observers: Roy Bires, Tony Bledsoe (TBI), Jack Chaillet, Ralph Crewe, Michael David, Karyn Delaney, John English, Mike Fialkovich, Jim Hausman (JHa), Amy Henrici, Paul Hess, Joyce Hoffmann, Todd Hooe, Matthew Juskowich, Fred Kachmarik, Scott Kinzey, Oliver Lindhiem, Pat McShea, Bob Machesney, Geoff Malosh, Oscar Miller, Dick Nugent, Kevin Parsons, Brad Peroney, Kate St. John (KSJ), Kathy Saunders, Jack Solomon, Sue Solomon, Julia Tebbets, Steve Tirone (STi), Shannon Thompson, Jim Valimont, Bob VanNewkirk (BVN), Mark Vass.



SUBTLE BEAUTY – Discovering a Lincoln's Sparrow is always a treat in southwestern Pennsylvania. Todd Hooe found this one at Harrison Hills Park in Allegheny County on October 18, 2015.

Briefly...

No More Woodcock Walks: Tommy Byrnes has led popular spring outings in Harmar Township for many years to watch American Woodcocks in mating-season display flights. Sadly, he announced that there will be no more. The site has been closed for building development—an unfortunate loss of perfect woodcock habitat. A participant in one of last year's outings borrowed binoculars from another birder, but forgot to give them back after the outing. Please call Tommy (724-715-7184) to return them.

Member's Article Online: Debbie Kalbfleisch, one of 3RBC's most prolific writers, had an article published online in the *Birdwatcher's Digest* website in 2015. It describes her recent birding trip to the magazine's "Reader Rendezvous" in West Virginia. A version of the article titled "Birding Valhalla" appeared in the May/June 2015 issue of *The Peregrine*.

Pittsburgh's Gull Extravaganza: 3RBC members Mike Fialkovich and Geoff Malosh published a major paper in the July 2015 issue of the Pennsylvania Society of Ornithology's magazine *Pennsylvania Birds*. It analyzes the extraordinary invasion of gulls at the Pittsburgh Point and other local river hot spots during the 2014 and 2015 winters.

Eagle cams: The Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania and PixController, Inc. are collaborating on two live streams of two local Bald Eagle nests: the one in Pittsburgh's Hays district and the one in Harmar Township across from the Oakmont Bridge. Watch the pairs' activities at eagles.aswp.org.

See Steve's photos: Steve Gosser traditionally puts together a slide show of his favorite bird photos among those he took in the past year. His 2015 highlights runs nearly eight minutes with almost 150 pictures. See them at tinyurl.com/yearly-show.