



The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

Vol. 17, No. 2, March/April 2018



OUR SPEAKER – Tom Stephenson poses with his optical gear in Bhutan, where he has taught local leaders the ins and outs of leading birding tours. (photo courtesy of Tom)

An Expert Will Help Us with Warbler ID

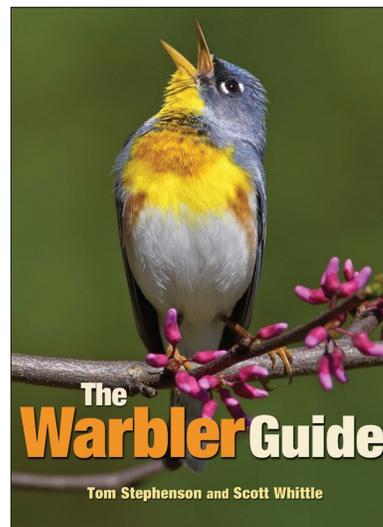
Just in time for spring migration—yes, warbler time!—we can learn how to identify warblers by recognizing their voices.

Our speaker at the Three Rivers Birding Club meeting on Wednesday, April 4, will be Tom Stephenson, a top-rank international birder and a warbler expert. His program is titled “The Warbler Guide: A New System for Identifying and Learning Vocalizations.”

Tom will explain new techniques for learning warblers’ songs based on a system outlined in his acclaimed photo-illustrated book *The Warbler Guide* (Princeton University Press 2013).

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

(See 3rbc.org for more about the program)



A TREASURE OF TIPS – Filled with photos of warblers of every age and plumage stage, this one-of-a-kind field guide is a significant advance in how to identify all of our species.

Pittsburgh Christmas Bird Counters Found 78 Species

By Brian Shema, Compiler

One hundred and twenty-five participants took to the field and 65 watched feeders to tally the birds of Pittsburgh on December 30, 2017. The annual count is hosted and coordinated by the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania and is always held on the Saturday after Christmas.

Weather was cold and snowy. Temperatures ranged from 11 to 24 degrees at the count’s geographic center in Shaler Township. An average of five inches of snow was on the ground by the end of the count, and light to moderate snowfall was recorded throughout the day. Open water was frozen, and flowing water was estimated at 10% to 20% frozen. Weather was clearly a factor for this year’s count, resulting in a 25% decrease in participants and below-normal time spent afield. These weather conditions also affect birds, making some of them harder to find.

Some numbers of species typically found afield were lower than normal. However, this likely reflects less time spent afield in the wintery weather. In other cases, obvious or easier to find birds were listed in numbers similar to their 10-year averages. Despite the poor weather and decreased effort in the field compared to previous years, 78 species were found. Our 10-year average is 72. A few species are now regularly found, pushing our 10-year average upward. These include almost annual Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Fish Crow, and Eastern Towhee. Each species was unlikely a decade ago. A higher frequency of rarities like hummingbirds,

warblers, and orioles in recent years adds further diversity to the average.

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ALLEGHENY COUNTY’S FIRST – This handsome male Bullock’s Oriole, a very rare visitor from the West, was the first ever seen in Allegheny County. It arrived on December 8, 2017, in Hampton Township and stayed for the CBC. (photo by Geoff Malosh)

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

President's Message

A Fond Reminiscence of Pymatuning State Park

By Bob VanNewkirk

One of my favorite yearly January 1 traditions is to open my new Audubon birder's calendar and note upcoming bird club meeting dates and trips. When I located the page for March 24, I noted that I would be leading my annual spring outing to Pymatuning State Park on this date; my first was on March 20, 2004. Due to the diversity of habitats in this region that provide adequate nesting sites and food sources for resident and migratory birds, the Pymatuning area is a prime destination for birders during any season. I also have sentimental reasons for visiting this park.

My dad supported his wife and four sons by working two jobs, one as a machinist for Allis-Chalmers and the other as a house painter. The little free time he had to relax was spent drowning worms in the Connoquenessing Creek or offering a gourmet dinner of nightcrawlers and dough balls to the carp and catfish while shore fishing in the Ohio River with his kids. Catching anything was great, and we kept score to see who caught the most, but that was secondary to Dad. It was the relaxation and time shared with his sons that mattered most. When fishin' got slow, he would tell stories of what it was like growing up when he was a kid living on the North Side of Pittsburgh and working part-time summer jobs on farms in Zelienople.

When I turned 13, Dad took my uncle and me to Pymatuning Lake for a weekend of fishing and scouting. He had heard rave reviews about this fabulous fishing mecca from his A-C coworkers about the possibilities of catching bass, walleye, musky, and perch. Not having a boat, we spent all of our time fishing at various spots on both sides of the causeway that connects Espyville, Pennsylvania to Andover, Ohio.

We had a great time mostly catching carp, but we also explored all the tourist attractions: the Linesville spillway where ducks supposedly walk on fishes' backs to compete with carp for bread tossed by tourists; the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's hatchery to admire their aquarium display of freshwater fish; and the Visitors' Center (aka Wildlife Learning Center) maintained by the Game Commission. The center featured beautiful displays and real-life looking dioramas of waterfowl and mammals that called the Pymatuning region home.

Based on our delightful trip to this wonderful naturalist's haven, my family would eventually spend many a week's worth of summer vacations renting the same small cabin on North Lake Road. Our typical daily schedule featured many hours of early morning and after dinner fishing on the causeway, afternoons spent on the beach or exploring our surroundings, and playing card games until lights out.

From adolescence to adulthood, life presented many opportunities: college, a teaching job, marriage, parenthood. Trips to my favorite lake were few. But one day family friends invited me to come along with them to participate on a bird outing in March 2000. Although I had an interest in birds, I wasn't an ardent birder. But that was soon to change.

The outing's leader was Chuck Tague, a well-known Pittsburgh naturalist, writer, educator, and a great birder. How fitting that I would renew my affection for this park by connecting with 20 other birders at the Wildlife Learning Center. With Chuck's enthusiasm and leadership, binoculars in hand, and birds the lure,

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It was a great day to find raptors such as Bald Eagles, American Kestrels, a Northern Harrier, and Red-tailed Hawks. Especially appealing was the enthralling sighting of a leucistic Red-tailed Hawk resting in a tree along Swamp Road. Eleven species of waterfowl were found in various numbers swimming in the wetlands and the lake. Trying to remember the field marks for all these unfamiliar ducks and distinguishing the difference between the sexes of each species was a daunting task for this novice birder.

Nevertheless, this outing also served as my introduction to discovering some of the best birding sites in and around the area. Over the next three years, I never missed a club outing to Pymatuning. I made many solo trips there as well. I developed a growing list of life birds, but more importantly, I sharpened my ID skills and developed a familiarity for which birds could be predictably found each season in the park and in the surrounding State Game Lands.

During peak waterfowl migration, from late October to late March, the Pymatuning Reservoir is spectacularly alive. This is why I scheduled my first outing as a leader to Pymatuning in March 2004. Six birders met me at the Wildlife Learning Center. Despite incessant rain, we had multiple sightings of flying or perched eagles, kestrels, and Red-tailed Hawks, including the leucistic hawk discovered near the Miller Pond. Just like my first viewing of this enchanting bird, it produced a peaceful stillness

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Outings to Come

Are You Ready for Spring? Join These Great Walks

By Steve Thomas, Outings Director

Sunday, March 18 – Moraine State Park: This leaderless outing will be our first visit of the year to Lake Arthur, a man-made lake that is the heart of this park. The lake offers 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 major 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. Allow one hour driving from Pittsburgh.

Saturday, March 24 – Pymatuning State Park: Meet leader Bob Van Newkirk (412-366-1694; van126@comcast.net) at 8:30 AM for this all-day outing. We will meet in the parking lot of the former site of the Pymatuning Wildlife Learning Center (Waterfowl Museum) at 12590 Hartstown Road in Linesville (GPS 41.635779, -80.436634). Lunch arrangements will be made at the Spillway Inn for those who wish to dine there with the group.

Wednesdays, March 21 and March 28 – Woodcock Walk: The woodcock walks are back again this spring! Meet leader Tommy Byrnes (724-715-7184) at 6:30 PM in the Ladbrokes (now The Meadows) parking lot behind Primanti Brothers restaurant off Harmar Exit 11 of Route 28. We will carpool and drive a short distance to a field in Harmar Township that has produced lots of American Woodcock in the past several years. Be prepared for a muddy walk and bring a flashlight. Before going to the field, we will look across the Allegheny River to check the Great Blue Heron nesting rookery, which in previous years has been another highlight of this outing.

Saturday, April 7 – 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. Yellow Creek State Park has been the prime outing location for the Todd Bird Club. The park contains many different habitats and a large lake that attracts a wide variety of species.

Sunday, April 8 – Glade Run Lake Park: Join Dave Brooke (724-487-3586) for this first time 3RBC outing to Glade Run Lake Park in southern Butler County. Meet at 8:00 AM at the park located at Lake Road, near Valencia, which is a turn off of Route 228. Google maps coordinates are 40.716229, -79.901211. We will survey the lake from the dam and boat ramp for waterfowl. Then we will walk a trail about 2 miles long out and back. It can be muddy in places, so boots are highly recommended.

Wednesday, April 11 – Woodcock Walk: Meeting time for this outing will be 7:00 PM. Other details will be the same as in the March listing.

Saturday, April 21 – Raccoon Creek State Park: This is a combination bird and wildflower outing and picnic with the Brooks Bird Club, which is based in West Virginia. Ryan Tomazin

(412-220-9726; vwwarblers@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 parking lot area. Lunch will be between 12:30 and 1:00, and will be potluck. Please bring a dish to feed at least 6-10 people, and bring your own plates, cutlery and drinks. There are ample picnic benches there under the giant oaks.

If there is any interest, and if the weather holds, we can bird and botanize the Wildflower Reserve. If you have any questions, or would like to RSVP, please feel free to contact Ryan either by phone or by email.

Directions: 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. In case of inclement weather, we should be able to have lunch in the center at the Wildflower Reserve.

Sunday, April 29 – Frick Park: Jack and Sue Solomon (412-521-3365) will lead this walk starting at 8:30 AM. We will meet at Frick Environmental Center, 2005 Beechwood Boulevard in Squirrel Hill. Frick can be an excellent migrant trap and, as usual, we're hoping for lots of warblers.

Sunday, April 29 – Schenley Park: Join our leader Kate St. John (kstjohn001@yahoo.com) for this morning bird walk. Meet at 8:00 AM in front of the Schenley Park Cafe & Visitors Center, 101 Panther Hollow Road. The walk will end at 10:00 AM. For directions, see www.pittsburghparks.org/schenleyparkcafe.

Friday, May 4 – Sewickley Heights Park: In collaboration with the Fern Hollow Nature Center, Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; van126@comcast.net), will lead this bird walk starting at 8:00 AM in the upper parking lot. See the 3RBC website for directions. Be prepared for muddy trails. Bring a lunch or snacks and water if you wish to continue birding in the afternoon at selected places along Little Sewickley Creek Road.

Saturday, May 5 – 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 at the end of the road. The parking lot is near the pond. Dress for wet grass and mud. Previous spring outings have produced a nice variety of warblers, Philadelphia and Yellow-throated Vireos, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and Scarlet Tanagers. See 3RBC website for directions.

Friday, May 11 – Presque Isle: 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 at 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 one mile. Turn right onto Route 832, which leads directly into the park. Allow 2.5 hours driving time from Pittsburgh. The migration will be well underway, and you never know what to expect here. Presque Isle has produced some of Pennsylvania's best (and only) records of some rarities. Bring a lunch, snacks, and water for this all-day outing.

Friday, May 11 – Sewickley Heights Park: In collaboration with the Fern Hollow Nature Center, Sheree Daugherty (shereedaugherty@gmail.com) will lead this starting at 8:00 AM

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Outings to Come

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in the upper parking lot. See the 3RBC website for directions. Besides birding in the park, we will drive and make stops along Little Sewickley Creek. Louisiana Waterthrush, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Warbling Vireo nest in the area. Be prepared for muddy trails, and bring water and a lunch if you wish.

Saturday, May 12 – Deer Lakes Park: Leaders Todd Hooe (hooe@verizon.net; 412-805-6909) and Oliver Lindhiem will take us on a walk at this Allegheny County Regional Park, focusing on spring migrants. The outing will begin at 6:30 AM and end at about 11:30 AM. We will meet at the small lot across from Wagman Observatory at these GPS coordinates: 40.625309, -79.813333. We will hike approximately 3-4 miles. Although the trails are fairly well maintained, please dress for possible wet grass, mud, and rainfall.

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, and driving or trail conditions.

Sometimes events are announced on short notice. So, “like” the Three Rivers Birding Club on Facebook and watch our website for late-breaking news of outings, cancellations, and other events that couldn’t make our newsletter’s deadline.

President’s Message

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among the group. We also took pleasure at our other various stops to look at Tundra Swan, Common Goldeneye, Canvasback, Bufflehead, Redhead, American Wigeon, Horned Grebe, and other waterfowl species. The calls of Red-winged Blackbirds and Rusty Blackbirds filled the marshes as if announcing spring’s arrival.

Sharing sightings with others is absolutely uplifting. On each return spring and fall outing to this wonderful state park, my primary goal is to try to lead people to make their own observations and to experience a “Wow Moment.” That is, a sighting of any common or uncommon bird that provides the birder with a smile and a sense of joy in the discovery. A sample of my own Wow discoveries over many years include Hudsonian Godwit, American White Pelican, American Avocet, Red-throated Loon, Sandhill Crane, Ross’s Goose, Glossy Ibis, blue-morph Snow Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, Wood Duck, Black-bellied Plover, Rough-legged Hawk, Long-tailed Duck, Snow Bunting, Rusty Blackbird, Red-headed Woodpecker, and Bald Eagle.

I can thank my parents for fostering my love of the outdoors and for providing my brothers and me with abundant opportunities to play and explore natural places. As my first mentors, they instilled in me that beauty and contentment can be found in the natural landscapes at Pymatuning State Park.

Briefly...

CORRECTION: An article in the last issue about Kate St. John’s Audubon award said that she had urged the Urban Redevelopment Authority to convey an area of Hays Woods to the city of Pittsburgh. The URA had already planned to do that.

YOUNG BIRDERS OUTING: See the 3RBC website for information about a free Young Birders Club outing planned for March 24 at Pymatuning State Park.



BEAUTIFUL DUO – Amanda and Bob Haney first reported this beautiful Northern Pintail and American Black Duck in mid-December 2017 at Carnegie Lake in Highland Park, enabling many birders to see them. (photos by Bob on December 19)



Pittsburgh Christmas Counts

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Three gull species at the Pittsburgh Point are normally not found on count day: Great Black-backed, common on the Atlantic coast but less common inland; Iceland, an arctic breeder that normally winters in Newfoundland and along the Atlantic coast; and Lesser Black-backed, a European species that is increasingly found at Pittsburgh in winter. These roost at the Point with thousands of Ring-billed Gulls and about a hundred Herring Gulls.

An extraordinary rarity was a Bullock’s Oriole. A western species that typically winters in western Mexico, it had been present in Hampton Township since December 8. The homeowner had been offering fresh fruit, seed, and mealworms at his feeders, keeping the oriole fueled and happy. This is not only a Christmas Bird Count first, but also represents Allegheny County’s first record.

A total of 27,209 birds were counted on count day. Numbers fluctuated around the 10-year averages. Red-tailed Hawk, for example, was found well below the 10-year average of 82. We tallied only 61 this year. Only 23 Eastern Bluebirds were found; the 10-year average is 59. In contrast, 590 Northern Cardinals would be expected, but we found 803, and 737 Dark-eyed Juncos this year far exceeded the 549 that might have been expected based on historical averages.

Outing Revisited

“Dead of Winter” Offers a Fine List of Live Birds

Dead of Winter Walk – Frick Park, January 27: We were lucky to have a relatively mild winter day. Rain was forecast but fortunately held off until well after the outing. I was surprised to have 25 birders present. Some participants were on their first outing!

From the parking lot, I heard a Fish Crow calling and saw it flying across Forbes Avenue. A Northern Flicker, and a few American Robins and Red-bellied Woodpeckers were in the vicinity.

We started by watching the feeders at the nature center for a few minutes while discussing hybrid chickadees and the differences between Carolina and Black-capped Chickadees. As we watched a House Finch feeding, someone asked how to identify House and Purple Finches. I tried my best to explain the differences. We even talked about the introduction of the House Finch to the eastern U.S., sold as “Hollywood Finches.” A few White-throated Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos were feeding below the feeders.

Next we headed toward the meadow where we saw the remains of an old fountain that until recently had been buried under the soil. The area is in restoration but it’s unclear whether that includes the fountain or just the natural area. A pair of Pileated Woodpeckers gave us fantastic views for several minutes. While we watched the pair, another was heard calling in the distance. A few White-throated Sparrows were calling, and Sheree Daugherty spotted a Raccoon curled up in a ball sleeping in a tree.

We continued down South Clayton Trail where we were treated to a Golden-crowned Kinglet and a Brown Creeper. A Red-tailed Hawk was perched but flew off shortly after we saw it.



“DEAD OF WINTER” – Mike Fialkovich leads a group of eager participants upward from the meadow on January 27 at Frick Park. They had a nice species list. (photo by Tom Moeller)

I stopped by a familiar American Basswood tree to show the trunk ringed with Yellow-bellied Sapsucker wells. Unfortunately, we were unable to see one during the outing. Red-bellied Woodpeckers were very numerous.

On the trails behind the nature center we had another Golden-crowned Kinglet at very close range, allowing us to admire this beautiful and active species. There was a lot of activity here with Blue Jays, chickadees, House Finches, and three Carolina Wrens. The activity ceased as a Cooper’s Hawk flew over, but in a few minutes the birds came out of hiding. An unexpected Common Grackle was perched and calling in a tree.

Northern Cardinals and Song Sparrows were singing, a nice treat in the middle of winter and a bit of a sign of spring. –by leader **Mike Fialkovich**

3RBC’s Aidan Place Joins “Champions” Birding Team

Aidan Place, one of our club’s expert young birders, is part of a team that will try to list the most bird species in an international competition called “Champions of the Flyway.”

The team’s goal is not only to list the most species but also to raise funds for conservation of birds facing horrific slaughter in the Mediterranean Basin.

His team, sponsored by the American Birding Association and the optical company Leica, is named the ABA-Leica Subadult Wheatears. (If “wheatear” is unfamiliar, check your field guide for this rare visitor to North America.) Find out about the competition at tinyurl.com/ABA-Leica.

Now age 19, Aidan has already impressed many of our members with his identification skills by leading three club



AIDAN PLACE, YOUNG EXPERT

outings, two at Wingfield Pines and one at Frick Park.

He and two other young team members—Marquette Muchler from Louisiana State University and Johanna Beam from St. Olaf College in Minnesota—are all experienced birders.

International teams will compete on March 26 to list the most bird species within 24 hours in a specified area of southern Israel. The location at the tip of the Red Sea is on a major migration flyway for millions of birds.

The competition is part of the annual Eilat Birds Festival, a major European event organized by the Israel Ornithological Center.

Each team is raising money this year to help BirdLife International’s conservation efforts in his beloved Balkan Peninsula not far from Aidan’s current home in Bosnia. Contribute to Aidan’s team at tinyurl.com/help-wheatears. At the time this is written, the wheatears have reached nearly half of their \$5,000 goal.

Aidan says, “Our team is buckling down to an intense fundraising campaign and can use all the help we can get to reach our goal. Please consider taking a moment to donate. Both we and the birds would greatly appreciate it! All donations go to BirdLife Croatia and BirdLife Serbia, two organizations doing excellent work with bird conservation on the Balkan Peninsula.”

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Observations

Cavity Nesting Birds Use Many Kinds of Architecture

By Tom Moeller

Birds raise their young in nests, which take many forms, from simple scrapes in the sand to mud and grass bowls to elaborate woven baskets hanging from limbs. Cavity nests are also used for laying eggs. These nests provide shelter from predators as well as from the weather, reducing the energy expended by the parent birds incubating and hatching their broods.

Because these nests are “prime real estate,” they are prized and vulnerable to being usurped by others. There are primary cavity nesters, which dig their own nest holes whether in a tree or in the ground, and secondary cavity nesters, which use abandoned holes left by primary cavity nesters, subterranean living animals, or naturally occurring hollows in trees or rocks.

Birders are familiar with the most common primary cavity nesters – woodpeckers. Each cavity consists of an entrance hole and an egg chamber. Pileated and Hairy Woodpeckers dig new cavities each year; sapsuckers may use the same tree but a new hole annually, and most other woodpeckers may use a new hole or an abandoned cavity. Both woodpecker mates excavate the nest holes with the male doing the majority of the work. Dead wood in tree trunks, limbs, or telephone poles is the usual location of holes.

Northern Flickers prefer rotting wood because their beaks are not that strong. Gila Woodpeckers of the Southwest burrow into Saguaro cactuses for their nests. Eggs are usually laid at the bottom of a nesting chamber with little nesting material added. Cavity nester eggs are usually white because there is no need for camouflage as with open nesting birds.

A Central American bird that digs a nest hole in trees is the Resplendent Quetzal. This bird does not have a sharp, pointy beak; therefore, it chooses dead, rotting trees as a nest site and bites or gouges out the softened wood to form a comma-shaped niche. Both sexes dig the nest holes, and the usual two eggs are not pigmented. Both parents incubate the eggs, but with a tail sometimes over three feet long, the male’s tail often hangs out the nest hole as it broods.

Belted Kingfishers dig their cavity nests into banks of streams or rivers. A kingfisher’s long, pointy beak is ideal for digging into sandy soil, and loosened dirt is kicked out by both mates as they excavate. The two-inch to three-inch diameter entrance tunnel may be three to six feet long (or longer) sloping up to a round egg chamber of about a foot in diameter. Both sexes dig the burrow. With constant entering and exiting, two grooves are worn along the bottom of the tunnel by the kingfishers’ feet. Both parents take turns brooding their 5 to 7 eggs. The female usually incubates overnight. Both feed the young with the male doing the majority of the feeding.

The Turquoise-browed Motmot of Central America is another cavity builder in river banks. It is the same size as a Belted Kingfisher, but the motmot builds a slightly larger diameter nest burrow with a larger entrance hole. The tunnel is also about three to five feet long, and it ends in an egg chamber, but the tunnel will turn to one side as it deepens. Kingfisher burrows turn only if they run into an obstruction. Here, too, both sexes dig the cavity, incubate the eggs, and feed the nestlings.

Two species of swallow construct their own cavity nests: Bank Swallows and Cliff Swallows. Both species live in crowded colonies. Like kingfishers and motmots, Bank Swallows dig



SURPRISING NEST SITE –It may seem odd for Atlantic Puffins to nest deep in a rock crevice, but this is a typical example of their cavity preference. (Photo by Tom Moeller on Machias Seal Island in the Gulf of Maine)

into river banks. Their burrows are smaller in diameter than kingfishers’, but the kingfisher nests alone whereas the swallow’s nest hole may be four inches from its neighbor. Both parents dig the hole, incubate the 4 to 5 eggs, and provide for their nestlings.

Cliff Swallows build their own cavities under cliffs (rarely now), eaves of building, bridges, and culverts. The nest is constructed of mud pellets placed by both sexes. It is in a gourd shape with an opening at the end facing downward. Usually the nest consists of 900 to 1,200 pellets. The chamber is about seven inches long with a two-inch round entrance. Both mates incubate the 3 to 6 eggs, and both care for the young. Unlike kingfishers and motmots, Bank and Cliff Swallows line their cavities with grass and feathers. All four of those species may reuse the same nests year after year; some may be usurped by other birds.

Cliff Swallow nests may be subject to brood parasitism, where another female swallow in a colony may enter a neighbor’s chamber and either carry in one of her eggs or lay one quickly while there. She might even toss out one of the original owner’s eggs. The average number of eggs in a clutch is 4, but larger numbers are possibly due to parasitism. Ornithologists are not sure why this happens.

Like Cliff Swallows, Chimney Swifts have adapted to live with human structures. These birds spend most of their day on the wing, and originally they roosted inside a hollow tree or cave at night, which they still do occasionally. Most swifts now use chimneys as their roosts and nesting spots. Both mates in a pair build the nest deep inside a chimney or hollow away from light. Twigs for the nest are gathered on the wing; a swift will break off a dead stick from a tree with its feet as it flies. The bird will secrete a “glue” from its mouth to attach the twigs to the vertical sides of its chosen structure— for example, a silo, well, or attic. The nest is a half-round of about three by four inches. Four or five eggs are laid in the nest when it is only half finished. Completion of the nest is done as both parents incubate the eggs. The nestlings are also incubated and fed by both parents. Swifts may return to the same nesting site each season.

All three species of puffins—Atlantic, Horned, and Tufted—dig burrows for nesting in large colonies whether in the ground or in niches between or under rocks. The Atlantic Puffin male does most of the digging; both sexes of the other two species dig the burrow. The Atlantic Puffin has the shortest burrow of two to four feet; the

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Observations

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other two species may dig deeper, even six or ten feet. The Atlantic female usually incubates her single egg, while both sexes of the others incubate their single eggs. Both parents feed and care for the nestling in all three species. Several other species in the auk family also dig cavity nests: Cassin's and Rhinoceros Auklets and Ancient Murrelets.

Another seabird that builds underground nests is the Wedge-tailed Shearwater, a pelagic species found in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. These birds burrow into the sand or soil of low islands or beaches. The breeding pair both dig the burrow, which has a downward sloping entrance ending in an egg chamber. The nest is three to seven feet deep. Both birds incubate their single egg, and both tend to the chick. At first the chick is fed nutritious oil from the stomachs of the parents; later it is fed fish.

Owls may use the nests of other raptors as their nests or find suitable hollows in trees, often broken off tops of a trunk or limb. Burrowing Owls, however, are capable of digging their own burrows in the ground. Florida Burrowing Owls usually dig their own cavities in the soft, sandy soil with their strong legs and claws but may, on occasion, take over abandoned tortoise burrows.

Western Burrowing Owls often take prairie dog, ground squirrel, or armadillo burrows for themselves or else dig their own. The owls kick out dirt from the hole to form a mound in front of the entrance from where they can observe the area around the nest. The owls deposit animal dung around the nest and under their 5 or 6 eggs to attract insects for feeding their young.

Secondary cavity nesters use cavities abandoned by woodpeckers and mammals or rotted depressions in trees or in man-made bird houses. Chickadees, wrens, titmice, bluebirds, nuthatches, and some ducks build their own nests inside cavities. Cavity nesting ducks include Wood Ducks, Bufflehead, Hooded and Common Mergansers, and both Goldeneye species. Tree Swallows naturally use a hole in a tree to nest. Northern Rough-winged Swallows may use man-made structures, such as the weep holes in a retaining wall or an open standpipe on a building. The three American vultures (Black, Turkey, and California Condor) may "nest" in caves or rock recesses, but none of them actually build a nest for their eggs.

Secondary cavity nesters benefit from man-made nest boxes. The dying and dead trees that woodpeckers often drill into are considered nuisances and removed by land owners. Competition over the remaining cavity nests in trees can be alleviated as bluebirds, tree swallows, wrens, Purple Martins, owls, and other birds find nest boxes set up for their use. Even underground boxes for Burrowing Owls have proved effective. Consider adding a nest box to your property for your favorite cavity nester.

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WOW, JUST WOW! – This Turquoise-browed Motmot's long tail doesn't seem logical for a cavity nester, but both the male and the female manage to fit inside without breaking the tail. Tom Moeller spotted this one at its nest hole in Rio Tarcoles, Costa Rica.

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See Tom Moeller's "Observations" gallery of photographs at 3rbc.org for many more examples of bird species and their variety of nest cavities.

Birds in the Three Rivers Area

Owls Made Headlines During Oct.-Nov. 2017

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

Tundra Swans arrived in early November. Two flocks were heard flying over Boyce Mayview Park 11/3 and 11/8 (GG), 10 flew over Plum Borough 11/8 (PM), a flock was heard over Moon Twp. 11/8 (GM), 100 flew over Natrona Heights (RP) and 42 over Pine Twp. (OM) 11/18. Nine were noted over Greenfield 11/10 (KSJ). Flocks flew over Plum Borough during a snow shower 11/18 (PM, AH). A single bird was on the Moody Road ponds in Findlay Twp. 11/17-18 (MV), a flock of 200 flew over Hampton Twp. 11/19 (DN), and 12 were over Harmar Twp. 11/25 (SK).

A **Ross's Goose** was a nice find at Allegheny Cemetery in the Lawrenceville section of Pittsburgh 11/18-19 (AH, PM, many observers). One, and another one believed to be a hybrid with Snow Goose, had visited the same location in 2014.

An **American Wigeon** was at Janoski's Farm 11/17 and 2 were at the Moody Road ponds nearby 11/18 (MV). Four **Green-winged Teal** were at Imperial 10/8 (MV) and 1 was at Duck Hollow 11/14 (TM, NM). Six **Ruddy Ducks** were at the Moody Road ponds 10/26 (MV). Ten **Red-breasted Mergansers** were at Duck Hollow 11/19 (JS, SS).

Two **Ruffed Grouse** were reported on eBird at Sewickley 11/12 (SM). **Turkey Vultures** were regularly seen in November, perhaps lingering due to the persistent warm weather. A **Merlin** was observed in Schenley Park 10/6 (KSJ, JK) and 11/6 (SA).

Two **Virginia Rails** were a nice find at Wingfield Pines 10/30 (JM). A **White-rumped Sandpiper** was detected by nocturnal flight calls at Moon Twp. 10/31 (GM). A **Greater Yellowlegs** and a **Pectoral Sandpiper** were at Imperial 10/8 (MV), and a **Dunlin** and a **Wilson's Snipe** were there 10/20 (MV).

Three **Bonaparte's Gulls** were on the Ohio River downstream from Dashields Dam 10/28 (MV), 1 was at Duck Hollow 11/19 (MW), and 3 were there 11/20 (JS, SS).

A **Barn Owl** was detected by a recording device in Moon Twp. During the night of 10/20 (GM). This is the second recording from that location following one last May. Two **Barred Owls** were reported in Indiana Twp. 11/2 (DYE) and 1 in Franklin Park 11/21 (OM). Bob Mulvihill continued his banding of **Northern Saw-whet Owls** at Sewickley with 11 captured as of 11/23.

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers are regular migrants and winter residents, usually seen alone. This fall 3 were together in one tree (with a **Hairy Woodpecker**, a **Downy Woodpecker**, and 2 **Pileated Woodpeckers**) at Frick Park 10/5 (TRBC, NS) and 2 were together near Dashields Dam 10/14 (MV).

A rather late **Blue-headed Vireo** was in Indiana Twp. 11/2 (DYE). A **Marsh Wren** returned to Wingfield Pines 10/3 and was noted to 10/13 (JM, many observers). Two were reported 10/12 (MS) and 1 continued through October. A bird wintered at this location in 2014-2015.

Gray-cheeked Thrush reports included 1 at Harrison Hills Park 10/1 (AH) and 1 at Dead Man's Hollow 10/7 (DYE). Single **Hermit Thrushes** were seen at Frick Park 10/12 (JS, SS) and Indiana Twp. 11/4 (DYE).

A **Northern Waterthrush** was a surprising find in downtown Pittsburgh 10/8 (MVV). The only **Orange-crowned Warbler** reports came from Barking Slopes 10/13 (DYE) and Schenley Park 10/23 (KSJ). A **Cape May Warbler** was found in Pine Twp. 10/8

(PL, SL). **Palm Warbler** reports included 1 at Boyce-Mayview Park 10/4 (JM), 6 there 10/11 (ST), and 2 on 10/12 (JM); 1 at Wingfield Pines 10/10 (JM), 1 at Schenley Park 10/13 (KSJ), and 1 at Homewood Cemetery 10/16 (MVV). Two "**Yellow**" **Palm Warblers** (the eastern subspecies that is rare here) were found this fall: 1 at North Park 10/4 (JM) and 1 at Dead Man's Hollow 10/7 (DYE, MF).

A **Chipping Sparrow** was observed at the feeders at Beechwood Farms 11/26 (STh, SuT) and two visited a feeder in Pine Twp. 11/22 (PL, SL), rather late for this area. A **White-crowned Sparrow** was at Boyce-Mayview Park 10/12 (JM). They were also present in Pine Twp. 10/30-31 (PL, SL). Perhaps due to the warm weather, **Dark-eyed Juncos** and **White-throated Sparrows** arrived a bit later than normal and in small numbers. By the middle of October they were still not widely reported.

Some **Red-winged Blackbirds** lingered into November with a high count of 11 in Pine Twp. 11/13 (PL, SL). A nice count of 18 **Eastern Meadowlarks** were at Imperial 10/8 (MV). A large flock of more than 100 **Common Grackles** were at Dead Man's Hollow 10/7 (DYE, TRBC). They were moving through the woods apparently searching for acorns and other mast. Their activities created a sound like a piece of machinery. A flock of several hundred flew over the Pennsylvania Turnpike just east of Monroeville 10/20 (MF). Late birds lingered in Pine Twp. until late November (PL, SL).

A **Pine Siskin** was heard flying over the Troy Hill section of Pittsburgh 11/10 (MS) and 1 visited a feeder in Harmar Twp. 11/18 (JV).

Observers: Sameer Apte, Mike Fialkovich, Gigi Gerben, Amy Henrici, Jay Kadane, Scott Kinzey, Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Jeff McDonald, Pat McShea, Geoff Malosh, Oscar Miller, Nancy Moeller, Tom Moeller, Susie Moffett, Dick Nugent, Rob Protz, Kate St. John, Matt Sabatine, Jack Solomon, Sue Solomon, Noah Strycker, Steve Thomas (STh), Sue Thomas (SuT), TRBC (Three Rivers Birding Club group), Jim Valimont, Mark VanderVen (MVV), Mark Vass, Matt Webb, David Yeany (DYE).

Don't Miss "Biggest Week in American Birding": It's a Migration Spectacle

By Jack Solomon

Magee Marsh in Ohio has been a Mecca in May for scores of Pittsburgh area birders for many years. A 20-species warbler day there is common, with plenty of individual birds, many close enough to render binoculars superfluous.

There are usually swarms of shorebirds, other migrants, and scarce rarities like Connecticut and Kirtland's Warblers.

Susie Solomon and I spend several weeks there annually, including "The Biggest Week in American Birding" – this year May 4-13. We hope to revive the tradition of group dinners for members and friends. Watch the 3RBC Facebook page for news.

The festival includes outstanding speakers, terrific guided tours, and experts along the famous boardwalk to help you see and identify the birds. This event is where Susie and I met Noah Strycker and recruited him as a speaker for 3RBC.

See www.biggestweekinamericanbirding.com for information about "The Biggest Week." It's always a great experience.