



The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

Vol. 14, No. 3, May/June 2015



SAME SPECIES – Rough-legged Hawks have different color “morphs”: a dark (by Steve Gosser) and a light (by Geoff Malosh).

Winter Surveys Can Tell Us Much About Raptor Behavior

A prominent Pennsylvania scientist and birder will tell us more than we ever knew about the state’s wintering raptors at our Three River Birding Club meeting on Wednesday, June 3. He is Gregory Grove, a professor in the Biological Sciences Department at Penn State University, who originated a statewide project called the annual Winter Raptor Survey that has received national attention.

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.

Greg lives in Huntingdon County and works in the DNA analysis lab at Penn State. He and wife Deb started birding as graduate students at Ohio State in 1979. His birding interests include the distribution of bird species in central Pennsylvania and methods of surveying populations.

He founded the Stone Mountain Hawk Watch, the Lake Raystown Christmas Bird Count, the Pennsylvania Winter Raptor Survey, and Breeding Bird Surveys in Rothrock State Forest. Greg is past president of the State College Bird Club and the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology and was a Regional Coordinator during the Breeding Bird Atlas. He is co-author of *Birds of Central Pennsylvania* with Nick Bolgiano.

Since 2001 the surveys have documented trends including a sharp decline in American Kestrels, as well as fluctuating numbers of raptors from the north such as Rough-legged Hawks. This year’s surveys were run in 65 of the state’s 67 counties, and the surveyors logged an overall total of 796 hours of observation.



An Astonishing First

One of the most unexpected birds ever to visit Pennsylvania was this apparent **Kelp Gull** discovered and videoed by Ben Coulter at the Pittsburgh Point on January 17, 2015. The next day at Duck Hollow on the Monongahela River, various observers studied it and Tom Moeller photographed it (*left*).

Pending acceptance by the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee, it will be the state’s first record. See Mike Fialkovich’s report on page 9. The species breeds in South America, South Africa, and Australia. Oddly, a few nested in coastal Louisiana in the 1990s where they also interbred with Herring Gulls. There are very few other North American records.

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

President's Message

Moments of "Radical Amazement"

By Bob VanNewkirk

Most birders I know keep various kinds of bird lists of sorts: backyard, county, state, country, favorite parks, years, or lifers. I even gave some thought once about making a list of birds I have seen on TV or in the movies that were programmed into the scene but do not really live in the area being filmed. For example, I heard the raucous call of a Laughing Kookaburra in a Tarzan movie. This species lives in Australia, not Africa.

Then I came across this quote by Abraham Heschel, an American rabbi and philosopher: "Our goal should be to live in radical amazement. Look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted." Inspired by this quote, I thought back to the many times I was radically amazed at birds. Searching through my memories provided the following entries on my new R.A. list.

Backyard Occurrences: the arrival of my year's first hummingbird; bluebirds drinking out of the bird bath; Carolina Wrens building a nest under the deck; the fluted calls of a Wood Thrush; the year's first warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Baltimore Oriole, or Rose-breasted Grosbeak in the trees surrounding my home; male goldfinches transforming from winter drab into breeding yellow; juvenile birds coming to the feeders; flyovers by crows, Red-tailed Hawks, Common Nighthawks, Chimney Swifts, Cedar Waxwings, and once a pair of Common Ravens.

Caught in the Act: a Snowy Owl perched on the roof of a North Side Methodist church; the buoyant flight of a Swallow-tailed Kite; a male and female Cedar Waxwing exchanging a berry; the yodel of a Common Loon; a roadrunner scooting after a lizard (Yes, I did say, "Beep beep."); Western Grebes dancing; Black Skimmers sleeping; Pygmy Nuthatches feeding young; a pair of Galapagos Penguins viewed closeup on Fernandina Island; Snow Buntings, hundreds of Horned Larks, and 24 Lapland Longspurs in the farm fields of New Wilmington during one snowy day; a California Condor soaring over the Grand Canyon; 1,000-plus Snow Geese in flight at Bosque del Apache NWR; an epic jousting of 23 Bald Eagles competing for a deer carcass at the Pymatuning Wildlife Center; the three Hays eaglets successfully fledging.

Lots of Smiles: watching a bird banding demonstration at Powdermill; leading children and adults on an outing; discovering a life bird; sharing a spotting scope view of any bird; holding a Northern Saw-whet Owl in my hand; reliving stories of bird trips with others; planning an out-of-state or out-of-country trip; having eye-level views of warblers at Magee Marsh; frequently viewing nest and feeder cams; holding my seven-month-old grandchild and looking for birds in his Virginia backyard.

Some Things I Ponder: What is it like to be a bird? Do birds ever fly for fun? How is climate change affecting birds? How can we get children interested in conservation? How do birds migrate? Why are "pigeon shoots" for fund-raisers still legal in Pennsylvania? Do western Pennsylvania eagle cam watchers know they can see many nests in state parks, especially in the state's northwestern tier? Do people realize that if they begin to watch birds in earnest, it can lead to a life-changing avocation?

Try making your own list without first looking over your trip reports or photographs. What you remember best will be the times when you were radically amazed.

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

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Letter from the Editor

By Paul Hess

Take a minute to ponder Frank Izaguirre's image of a birding trio on page 6. Jack Solomon, Ted Floyd, and Ted's son Andrew are scouting for the Pittsburgh Christmas Bird Count on December 26, the day before the CBC. The photo was published as part of a gallery in the February 2015 issue of *Birding* magazine.

This differs from the dry, hackneyed photos of people staring intently through binoculars and scopes. The impression in this case is total relaxation, chatting, just ambling along, waiting patiently and comfortably for a bird to chip, sing, or fly into the open – not concentrating intently, not merely hoping to find a "good" bird.

Frank's photo suggests another, intimately pleasurable, kind of birding: togetherness, relaxation, perhaps a bit of quiet talk, yet still calmly attuned to any bird that may happen to make itself known. Maybe no bird will show up. Forget the list. Just enjoy your people, your path, your surroundings, your unhurried heartbeat, and some relaxing and satisfying joy.

Outings to Come

The Peak of Migration Awaits Our Binoculars

By Steve Thomas, Outings Director

Sunday, May 3 – Frick Park: Meet leaders Sue and Jack Solomon (412-521-3365) at 8 AM at the Blue Slide park entrance at the corner of Beechwood Boulevard and Nicholson Street in Squirrel Hill. The park can be an excellent “migrant trap,” and we’re hoping for lots of warblers. Take Beechwood Boulevard 1.1 miles south from its intersection with Forbes Avenue. You will need to park on the street. This new meeting place is necessary because of construction of an environmental center at the traditional Beechwood Boulevard site.

Sunday, May 3 – Buffalo Creek IBA-80, Washington County: Larry Helgerman (bobolink3@verizon.net) will lead us on our first outing here in a few years. Meet at 7:30 AM at the S-Bridge parking area at the intersection of SR-221 and US-40. We will take a nice walk through a variety of habitats. Though our focus will be early spring migrants, we will be enjoying all aspects of nature along the way.

Thursday, May 7 (note change of date from the last issue) – Sewickley Heights Park: In collaboration with the Fern Hollow Nature Center, Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; van126@comcast.net) will lead this bird walk. Meet at 7:30 AM in the upper parking lot. See the 3RBC website (www.3rbc.org) for directions. Be prepared for muddy trails. It is also advisable to bring water and a lunch. 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.

Saturday, May 9 – Forest County: David Yeany (dyeany2@gmail.com; cell 814-221-4361) will lead us on a car trip of Forest County birding hotspots. Meet at the Sheetz in Brookville at 7AM. The Sheetz is located at 300 West Main Street, at the intersection of Route 28 and Route 322.

Sunday, May 17 – Harrison Hills Park: Meet leader Jim Valimont (412-828-5338) at 8 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 tinyurl.com/HarrisonHills for directions.

Friday, May 22 – Sewickley Heights Park: See the May 7 listing for details. The meeting time and place are the same.

Saturday, May 23 – 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 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. The migration should still be well underway, but 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 or join the group at one of the local restaurants just outside the park.

Saturday, June 13 – National Aviary: Bob Mulvihill (412-258-1148; Robert.mulvihill@aviary.org), ornithologist at the National Aviary, will lead us on an exclusive tour. We will meet at the Aviary at 10 AM. Participants will be responsible for a \$10 admission fee. Please RSVP to Steve Thomas (thomassj22@verizon.net; 412-782-4696) by Friday, June 12, so we know how many will be attending. The National Aviary is located at 700 Arch Street in Pittsburgh’s Northside.

Saturday, June 27 – Jacob’s Creek Wetlands, Fayette County: This will be the club’s first outing to this site that serves as an environmental education center. It is located outside the town of Mt. Pleasant. Meet leader Mike Fialkovich (412-303-0010) at the wetlands at 8 AM. (See the meeting place below.) The site has several small ponds, a grassland, dense brush surrounding the ponds, and numerous trails. The trails are mown grass and are generally level and dry, but as always when in the field a good pair of hiking shoes or boots is recommended.

Directions: From Pittsburgh take the Pennsylvania Turnpike to Exit 75 / New Stanton (18 miles from Monroeville). Once through the toll booth, get into the left lane following signs to Route 119 south toward Connellsville. Take Route 119 South for approximately 6 miles to the Route 31 Mt. Pleasant / Ruffs Dale exit. At the end of the exit ramp, turn left onto Route 31 east toward Mt. Pleasant. Travel 3 miles going through the town of Mt. Pleasant. Once through town continue on Route 31 east. At the bottom of a hill past the Mount Pleasant Glass Centre, look for White Bridge Road on the right, marked with a sign. It’s just past a small sign marking Brush Creek. Turn right onto White Bridge Road. Cross a one-lane bridge and park in the parking area on the left just after the bridge where we will meet. The entrance to the wetlands is across the road from this parking lot. Allow 45 minutes driving time from Monroeville.

If time permits and the group is interested, we may visit nearby Greenlick Run Lake for breeding species. Also, if the group is interested in lunch, there are a few good pub or deli style restaurants in Mt. Pleasant as well as Sandhill Berry Farm/ Greendance Winery where you can purchase a fresh piece of berry pie in the outdoor café surrounded by colorful gardens.

Walk Will Honor Ralph Bell

The Ralph K. Bell Bird Club of Greene County will hold a “Ralph Bell Memorial Walk” on Saturday, May 16, at the family farm in memory of this late beloved bird expert who hosted popular outings there for half a century. Meet at 9 AM at the farm. Bring lunch and lawn chair, and reminisce about the hospitality, humor, and knowledge of birds Ralph gave us every year.

Directions: Take I-79 south to the Ruff Creek exit. Turn left onto Route 221, drive under the interstate, continue 5 miles to a golf course, and turn left onto Route 188 toward Jefferson. In Jefferson, turn left onto Pine Street, then proceed downhill and under the railroad bridge. Go up the hill for a half-mile and turn at the “R. BELL Tree Farm” sign. Proceed up the driveway, and someone will show you where to park.

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OWL'S EYE VIEW– The crowd at 3RBC's program on April 1 had an entertaining guest on stage: Martha, a flightless Great Horned Owl, whose damaged wing could not be repaired. She lives at the Animal Rescue League Wildlife Center in Verona and appears at



many educational programs about animal care. It was amusing to watch her scan the audience and periodically swivel her head almost 180 degrees to see what might be behind her. Michelle Kienholz photographed Martha looking both ways.

Outings Revisited

Lucky Birders Enjoyed Great Waterfowl Migration

Sewickley Heights Park – February 14: The weather forecast didn't favor the four birders who met in the upper parking lot. A half-inch of snow had dusted the driveway and coated the trails. The snow shower reduced visibility and muted natural sounds. However, the birders shrugged off the wintry conditions and began to contribute to the Great Backyard Bird Count. For several years, 3RBC has teamed with Fern Hollow Nature Center to participate in this annual February citizen-science project.

During our first 20 minutes of trail walking, we were surprised by the lack of bird song, chips, and flight activity. Due to icy trails, we only walked the meadows, gravel path, and main road.

Near the butterfly trail, a movement in a tangle of brush turned out to be a foraging Hermit Thrush. Scanning the tree line near the meadow revealed six perched Eastern Bluebirds huddled close together possibly conserving energy. The sound of woodpeckers drumming on tree trunks helped us to locate a Red-bellied and a Hairy Woodpecker. The typical winter residents of the park – Carolina Chickadees, Northern Cardinals, Blue Jays, and American Crows – were noticeably in small numbers. Not a single Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, or sparrow was found. Only eight species made our day's list so far. It was time to move on.

Along Little Sewickley Creek Road, about 100 Canada Geese were in the Sewickley Academy's soccer field. Most of them were either foraging or resting in a large clump-like group. At Pontefract Park, pairs of White-breasted Nuthatches and Tufted Titmice were discovered near the bridge over Little Sewickley Creek, plus Blue Jays, a cardinal, and a Downy Woodpecker.

As we neared the end of the field, the unmistakable call of a

Common Raven was heard twice. The call seemed to be close to us, as it came from the Edgeworth dump which is directly across from the park and Ohio River Boulevard. While scanning the trees across the road and hoping to find the caller, we briefly caught sight of the raven as it crossed the boulevard and passed out of our sight. This was the first time any of us had heard or seen a raven in this part of Allegheny County. Perhaps the raven's presence was a result of poor food opportunities due to winter's snow cover.

The dump turned out to be the day's birdiest location. Blue Jays flitted through the sycamore trees, a Carolina Wren called, Ring-billed Gulls circled overhead, and chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches were easy to spot as they foraged through branches. We had good close-up looks at perching birds such as House Finches, Northern Mockingbirds, and European Starlings.

As we walked along the hillside by the Ohio River, an adult Bald Eagle provided us with a "wow" moment as it flew directly overhead, circled twice, and continued on its way. We spied a pair of Lesser Scaup and a Red-breasted Merganser swimming in the river. We watched the waterfowl dive underwater and were amazed at how long they seemed to stay under.

We ended our morning and went to the potluck lunch at Fern Hollow. The staff and some Cub Scouts and Girl Scouts had been monitoring the bird feeders there. The scouts tallied 13 species and 35 individual birds which included two sightings we did not have: a Ring-necked Pheasant and a Northern Flicker. Although it never stopped snowing, the wind was negligible and the temperature was not too cold or uncomfortable. We totaled 24 species; that's about our GBBC average. We quickly forgot about the weather as we sat down to enjoy hot food, good conversation, and keeping an eye on the bird feeders. –by leader **Bob VanNewkirk**

National Aviary – February 21: Because of bad weather on this horrid day, the outing had to be canceled.

Moraine State Park – March 22: Eleven people, including a 12-year-old boy, met on the South Shore and looked out onto a

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frozen tundra, otherwise known as Lake Arthur. American Robins, Northern Cardinals, and Song Sparrows were ignoring the cold and celebrating the sunshine with song. Blue Jays, Red-winged Blackbirds, and Common Grackles added to the chorus. A Great Blue Heron and a Pileated Woodpecker were nice flyovers.

Jim Valimont was enthusiastically and unanimously elected as our leader. After a walk on the Sunken Garden Trail, we set off in our cars to look for open water. On the way, we paused to admire a gorgeous male Eastern Bluebird on the top of a small tree.

The Point was completely frozen, so we continued on to the Bear Run Boat Launch. A small contingent of gulls, probably Ring-billed and Herring, were sitting on the ice. A cold, bitter wind was blowing in from the lake. An Iceland Gull would certainly have been appropriate here!

A Black-capped Chickadee welcomed us to the Waterfowl Observation Area, and we were cheered to see some open water with a variety of ducks. Our best find was a pair of Common Goldeneyes. Other waterfowl included Canada Geese, Mallards, American Wigeons, Redheads, Ring-necked Ducks, Lesser Scaup, Buffleheads, Hooded Mergansers, and a Horned Grebe.

The Route 528 Boat Launch was quiet, with only a few Rock Pigeons sitting on the ice. The Upper Route 528 Boat Launch produced a few Red-winged Blackbirds, American Robins, Song Sparrows, a Black-capped Chickadee, and a Northern Cardinal.

A Killdeer was on the ice at Barkley Road, and we wondered what he was finding to eat. A male Red-breasted Merganser dozed on the water, and we could make out his punk hairdo. A lone Bufflehead swam with some Hooded Mergansers, with more Ring-necked Ducks farther out. We were startled to count four Tree Swallows swooping low over the ice. A Northern Flicker called several times, and a Turkey Vulture floated over the horizon.

It might have been a frozen wasteland to us, but spring was definitely on the way! We had 32 species. **—by participant Debbie Kalbfleisch**

Woodcock Walk – March 25: On a very pleasant evening, 11 people showed up for what was to be an eventful night. Some participants read about the outing on our website, and others said they either heard about it on Scott Shalaway’s radio show or read about it in his newspaper column.

At the meeting spot, there were a few Mallards and a couple of Canada Geese. Killdeer were calling and flying overhead. On the day before, I had two males and a female Hooded Merganser.

ONE SPECIES, TWO “MORPHS” – Participants in our March 28 outing at Pymatuning had a rare surprise: a flock of 29 Snow Geese and even better, 27 of them were of the “blue” morph – dark on the body and white only on the upper neck and head. In this photo by Stacey Widenhofer, a white-morph Snow Goose is flanked by blues. The two color morphs are so different that they were formerly considered to be separate species. White and blue geese interbreed, and their offspring can be of either morph, depending on their genetic composition.



One participant set up a scope and was able to focus it on the Harmar Township Bald Eagle nest. We saw one of the adults sitting in the nest, and we would see the other adult later. After setting up to carpool, we headed to the Great Blue Heron rookery.

At the rookery, we saw a few adults sitting in nests, perching on branches, or flying around. Once again, through a scope, we got some very good views of the birds. After a while, about a dozen herons took off and flew toward us overhead. It was pretty neat!

A couple more herons took off, and then we watched an adult Bald Eagle land in a heron nest in the middle of the rookery. We counted 18–20 herons flying around while the eagle was in the nest. The eagle appeared to be eating something. Its head moved up and down for 10 minutes or more, then the eagle took off. So we got to see both adults—one in the Harmar nest and one in the heron nest. We packed up to head to the woodcock site.

The field was not as muddy as I had expected after the rainy day. As the sun was setting, the skies were clearing, the temperature was mild, and there was very little wind – a perfect spring evening. After I explained what to listen for, we could hear and see robins, cardinals, and Song Sparrows. After a while, we could also hear one of the Eastern Towhees we have been finding there in the last couple of years.

It didn’t take long for the first “peeting” to start. At first, the woodcocks’ calls were a couple of minutes apart, then closer together, and then multiple birds called at the same time. Next came the main event, first one bird taking off, then another, then a couple at the same time. Two birds flew far up in sync, then separated to go their own ways. Birds were flying just feet over our heads, in front of us, and behind us. Some of folks couldn’t believe that the birds didn’t fear us and just went on about their business. It was a very successful outing. **—by leader Tommy Byrnes**

Pymatuning Area – March 28: Word has spread about Bob VanNewkirk’s famous 3RBC outings to Pymatuning, and, in spite of freezing cold and wind, 25 intrepid souls turned up at the Nature Center. We were happy to welcome a number of beginning birders and hope they will join us on many more outings.

Our first exciting find was not a bird, but two coyotes on the ice! Bald Eagles are always guaranteed on this outing, and we started off the day with three. By the end of the afternoon, we would tally 22 eagles, both adult and immature. In addition to the American Robins, Black-capped Chickadees, American Tree and Song Sparrows, and a Red-bellied Woodpecker, an Eastern Phoebe was unearthed here. For most of us, this was our first phoebe of the year and a welcome sight.

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At the Spillway, three Common Loons and a couple of Common Goldeneyes were among the Canada Geese, Mallards, Redheads, Ring-necked Ducks, Buffleheads, Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, and Ruddy Ducks crowded together on the open water. Bob picked out a Greater Scaup among all the Lessers, and we also added a Horned Grebe. We noted that American Coots are just starting to arrive. Of course, Ring-billed Gulls were plentiful.

As most birders know, Snow Geese, both white and blue morphs, are uncommonly found in small flocks in northwestern Pennsylvania. So we were ecstatic when we piled out of our cars at the Hartstown Project and found a flock of 29 Snow Geese, including 27 blue morphs! One dark juvenile blue was also in the flock. Everyone got great looks through the scopes. Some of the beginners were puzzled as the geese looked dark brown to them and not “blue.” Welcome to the wonderful world of bird names. Good luck finding the ring on a Ring-necked Duck or the crests on a Double-crested Cormorant! If you’re very fortunate, you might one day see the faint red on the belly of a Red-bellied Woodpecker and a bit of orange on the top of an Orange-crowned Warbler.

At least 30 Tundra Swans were at Hartstown, as well as Gadwall, American Wigeon, and Green-winged Teal. When we could tear our eyes away from the Snow Geese, we delighted in a light-morph Rough-legged Hawk kiting over the field. At least two Horned Larks were in the parking lot, and Killdeer were also noted. An Eastern Meadowlark found earlier in the day was not relocated. As we were leaving Hartstown, a couple of birders spied an American Pipit darting across the road into a field.

We encountered many more Tundra Swans at the Miller Ponds, and we added Northern Pintail, Northern Harrier, and Red-tailed Hawk to our list. Another Rough-legged Hawk, this one a dark morph, was hunting over the fields. We were happy to detect five Greater Yellowlegs and four Wilson’s Snipe in the mud near the small pond, and three Bonaparte’s Gulls were also observed.

Many Wood Ducks, Hooded and Common Mergansers were at the Fish Hatchery, as well as more Gadwalls, American Wigeons, Redheads, Ring-necked Ducks, and Buffleheads, plus two Horned Grebes, one almost in breeding plumage.

It was nice to warm up and relax over a hot lunch at the Spillway Inn. About half of the group left afterward, but a dozen of us headed out to search for Red-headed Woodpeckers. As we birded from the car, a Turkey Vulture and Herring Gull were seen near the Spillway. An Eastern Bluebird was also spotted on the way. We were able to turn up two Red-headed Woodpeckers near the Tuttle Campground, along with a pair of Bald Eagles.

Six Rusty Blackbirds were perched in the trees at McMichael Road, but many more were squawking deep in the marsh. A muskrat entertained us as Red-winged Blackbirds sped out of sight. Pied-billed Grebe and Great Blue Heron were added to our list.

At Geneva Marsh, we discovered our first Northern Shovelers of the day. On the way to Custards, two Sandhill Cranes were seen grazing in a cornfield. Two birders saw a Eurasian Wigeon in a flock of American Wigeons, but by the time the rest of us rushed over, the birds had flown into the hazy distance. There were, however, lots of waterfowl left to examine on the open water. With happy smiles on our frozen faces, we declared the day a great success! We had 56 species. —by participant **Debbie Kalbfleisch**



A RELAXING WAY TO BIRD – Jack Solomon, Andrew Floyd, and Ted Floyd (left to right) take advantage of a sunny December 26, 2014, to scout Frick Park for the next day’s Pittsburgh Christmas Bird Count. Frank Izaguirre, who accompanied them, stopped to photograph the trio. See the Letter from the Editor on page 2 for a commentary on the birding style.

Send Chuck Tague a Note

By Jack Solomon

At 3 o’clock on Christmas morning, Chuck Tague suffered a severe stroke due to a blocked carotid artery. His wife, Joan, rushed him from their home, near Daytona Beach, Florida, to a hospital, where he spent a precarious and difficult period before being moved to a rehabilitation center. There he received the aggressive therapy he desires. Currently, he is at home, learning to walk with a walker, but his left arm is still immobile. He can receive emails and Facebook messages, but prefers not to be contacted by phone.

Chuck was famous throughout the western Pennsylvania birding and natural history community as the editor of the former *Nature Observer News* newsletter. He continued after his move to Florida by actively participating in a local Audubon Chapter, leading bird, butterfly and other walks locally and at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, presenting programs, and making his name known across a wide swath of his new home state.

Chuck enjoys receiving cards, which can be sent to his home address, 22 Creek Bluff Way, Ormond Beach, FL 32174.

How Many Redpoll Species?

The Hoary Redpoll is a Holy Grail to birders who crave one for their life list. Will that craving not matter someday?

A recent paper published in the journal *Molecular Ecology* suggests that the Common and Hoary Redpolls should be classified as one species. Nicholas Mason and Scott Taylor at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology found that the two species’ DNA do not differ across much of their genomes.

It may be a long time before birders might face losing one redpoll from their list. Nothing will happen officially until the American Ornithologists’ Union decides whether the merger has merit. Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/how-many-redpolls>.

"Birding Valhalla" with Julie Zickefoose in West Virginia

By Debbie Kalbfleisch

In August 2014, I traveled to West Virginia to attend a *Bird Watcher's Digest* Reader Rendezvous weekend called "Birding Valhalla with Julie Zickefoose." Julie, of course, is a gifted wildlife artist, writer, and naturalist. Her two books, *Letters From Eden* and *The Bluebird Effect*, are wonderful stories about birds lavishly illustrated with watercolors and field sketches. Her husband, Bill Thompson III, is Editor and Co-publisher of *Bird Watcher's Digest*.

North Bend State Park is less than three hours from Pittsburgh, so it's especially good for a weekend getaway. As I opened the door to my room at the lodge that Friday afternoon, I saw that the opposite "wall" was a very large picture window that bumped against the forest canopy. Something small was flitting about in the branches. I grabbed my binoculars and inched forward to see a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher at close quarters. A Blue-winged Warbler suddenly came into view, making its way through the treetops. Other woodland birds came and went, including a Pine Warbler and an Eastern Wood-Pewee.

After a couple of hours of birding from the bed, I took my binoculars next door to the deck of the lodge where the social hour for the Birding Valhalla was just getting started. For birders who have never been to a birding event, especially novices, I highly recommend the experience. Don't be shy about traveling by yourself. It's impossible to stand anywhere watching birds without falling into conversation with the people around you.

After a picnic dinner on the deck, we moved inside to hear



WONDERFUL WOODPECKERS – Have you ever seen at least 34 Red-headed Woodpeckers in one place? Debbie Kalbfleisch did, and on this page she tells about such experiences during a birding tour in West Virginia. (photograph by Dawn Hewitt, Managing Editor of *Bird Watcher's Digest*)

Julie speak on "Situational Awareness, or the Art of Paying Attention to Your Surroundings." She urged us to be more alert when we're outdoors and try to figure out what is really going on around us and why.

Sometimes you find magic. Bill Thompson III and Wendy Clark then joined Julie with their guitar and keyboard. They are part of a band called The Rain Crows, and it was a delight to listen to them sing traditional and original songs.

On Saturday morning, we carpooled to the Coakley Boat House just down the road. We divided into three groups, some to kayak and canoe, others to walk the trails, and a third to travel by pontoon. I was in the pontoon group and was pleased to see that Bill of the Birds and Wendy were our guides. Captain Doug had trouble getting the engine started, and finally gave up and operated the battery by foot power. We didn't travel as far, but we traveled quietly. Because the lake is fairly shallow, averaging about 12 feet deep, only engines of 10 horsepower or less are allowed. This makes for a quiet, peaceful environment. Well, not that peaceful – a baby Red-tailed Hawk was screaming for attention as we left the dock.

So why was this weekend billed as a Birding Valhalla? Red-headed Woodpeckers. Lots and lots of Red-headed Woodpeckers! The park was established in 1951, but it wasn't until 2003 that the North Fork of the Hughes River was dammed, creating a 304-acre lake. Since the valley was heavily forested, the trees drowned and became, as Julie says, a nursery for cavity-loving birds, not just woodpeckers, but swallows, flycatchers, bluebirds, and kestrels. This Valhalla will be short-lived, of course, as the snags rot and fall into the water.

As we drifted along, listening to bird songs and calls, we were soon surrounded by our target bird, some of them quite young. It appears that Red-headed Woodpeckers are double- and perhaps triple-brooding every year. We were out for three hours, and in that time, counted at least 34 Red-headed Woodpeckers. Red-bellied, Downy, and Hairy Woodpeckers and Northern Flickers were also flying about. A Great Blue Heron still with its breeding plumes let us get quite close. A flock of about 30 birds passed overhead, and Bill identified them as migrating Eastern Kingbirds. As they travel south, they attract more kingbirds and the flock keeps growing.

That evening, Julie talked more about her experiences as a wild bird rehabilitator and showed slides of some of her former patients. A video of three baby bluebirds learning to pick up mealworms at their feet had everyone laughing as the babies were a bit slow to get the idea. Cute cat videos, look out!

On Sunday morning, Bill of the Birds led another pontoon ride. A Spotted Sandpiper foraged on the shore and we watched a Green Heron fly in. A disturbance in the water proved to be two large snapping turtles squaring off. It's a bit disconcerting to see a snapper at close quarters open his mouth and lunge. They continued their fighting under water and we moved off. Bill suddenly shouted "Rain crows!" and pointed toward the shore. Two Yellow-billed Cuckoos were bouncing around in the trees and we got good looks at both of them. Another mystery solved.

Leaving the Lodge at North Bend State Park on an old country road, I almost ran over a box turtle. One of the songs we heard over the weekend was one Julie wrote, which she called "Little Soldier," about 22 box turtles she once came across while she was driving to Memphis. She was able to save only two of them. I pulled over and was out of the car when another vehicle came down the road, fortunately also missing the turtle. The driver may have been trying to avoid the crazy lady waving her arms. I ran over, picked it up, and carried it across the road. Maybe this turtle would live to a ripe old age.

Birds in the Three Rivers Area

Geese and Gulls Were Great in Dec. 2014–Jan. 2015

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

December was uneventful weather-wise, but by mid-January we had our first winter weather. Surprisingly, we had another gull invasion that started in early January, earlier than the previous invasions and without much ice on the rivers.

I think we had the most goose news I have ever written about in the county. Three **Greater White-fronted Geese** landed for a short time at the Bald Knob Pond at Imperial 12/1 (MV) furnishing the fourth county record. The possible juvenile **Ross's Goose x Snow Goose** hybrid that was reported in November was seen again in Allegheny Cemetery in Lawrenceville 12/3 (fide BC). It remained at the cemetery to at least 1/3 (v.o.). There is still disagreement whether or not it was a pure Ross's Goose. Another bird that was certainly an adult **Ross's Goose** was seen at Dashields Dam 12/7 (GM), the sixth record for the county (if you don't count the possible hybrid). Another adult Ross's (or the same one seen at Dashields?) was, unbelievably, at Allegheny Cemetery 12/27-28 (MW, TH, DYe) – clearly a different bird from the one mentioned above based on photographs and age. Three **Cackling Geese** at Neville Island 12/7 (MV) provided the sixth county record. They continued in the area through January (v.o.).

Two **Mute Swans** were on the Ohio River at Brunots Island 2/11-22 (PB et al.). A **Tundra Swan** was with the Mute Swan at Duck Hollow 1/17 (MJ et al.). Two **Tundra Swans** were on the Ohio River at the McKees Rocks boat dock 1/13 (MJ, JHa, DWe, TH). A flock of 100 flew over Bellevue 1/14 (KC).

Three **Gadwalls** were at Wingfield Pines 1/9 (MJ) where they remained through the end of January (ST). An **American Wigeon** was in Findlay Twp. on a small pond at Janoski's Farm 12/14 (MV), and 4 were at Duck Hollow 12/31 (KSJ, DWe). **American Black Ducks** are regular winter residents here. The first report was at Pine Twp. 12/7 (PL, SL), 10 were at Janoski's Farm 12/19 (MV), 12 were at the nearby Moody Road ponds 1/1 (MF), one was at Duck Hollow 1/11 through the month (MF et al.), and one was at Wingfield Pines 1/24 (ST). A **Northern Shoveler** was at Wingfield Pines 1/15-17 (ST, JHa). Two **Northern Pintails** were at Wingfield Pines 12/6 (AP), 3 were there 12/13 (ST) and remained through January (v.o.), and one was at Janoski's Farm in Findlay Twp. 12/19 (MV). Up to 6 **Green-winged Teal** were at Wingfield Pines 12/9 (AP) through January (v.o.).

A **Ring-necked Duck** found at Duck Hollow 12/17 (JHa, JS, SS) remained through January (v.o.). **Greater Scaup** were first noted 1/10 at Blawnox with 6 birds present (AH, PM). This species remained at various locations through January. A few **Lesser Scaup** were reported starting with a single bird at Emsworth 1/19 (MV) and a high of 5 at Blawnox 1/25 (AH, PM). The first **Bufflehead** was at Woods Run 12/12 (PB) and small numbers remained in the area through January. **Common Goldeneyes** were present starting with 5 at Brunots Island 1/9 (JHa) with a maximum count of 9 at Duck Hollow 1/19 (GM). All three merganser species were present most of the period. A high count of 25 **Common Mergansers** were at Sharpsburg 1/31 (DYe). A few **Canvasbacks** and **Redheads** were found in January. Twelve **Redheads**, a good count, were at Woods Run 1/28 (PB). A **Long-tailed Duck** was



DUCK HOLLOW HIGHLIGHT – The past winter's invasion of waterfowl on Pittsburgh's rivers included this immature male Surf Scoter at Duck Hollow on the Monongahela River. (photograph by Michelle Kienholz)

at Dashields 12/31-1/1 (MV et al.), a female was at Duck Hollow 1/13 (MJ), and a male was at Blawnox 1/24 (DY). An immature male **Surf Scoter** was on the Allegheny River at Sharpsburg 1/23-27 (MVF et al.), and an immature male was on the Monongahela River at Duck Hollow 1/29-31 (MJ et al.). An adult male **White-winged Scoter** was at Duck Hollow 1/24 (MF), a female was found at Sharpsburg 1/24 (MJ, JHa, TH), and 2 were nearby in Fox Chapel that day (DY).

Strangely, a **Wild Turkey** landed in the Monongahela River at Duck Hollow where it died 1/17 (v.o.). A **Common Loon** was at Dashields Dam 12/1 (MV), the only report of the season.

Merlin reports include single birds in Point Breeze 12/7 (JC), Shaler Twp. 12/8-27 (JH), Homewood Cemetery 12/13 through January (MF et al.) and Schenley Park 1/24 (JHa). A late **Killdeer** was seen in Hampton Twp. 12/27 (Pittsburgh CBC), and an early or overwintering bird was in Natrona Heights 1/16 (DH). Out of season, 4 **Bonaparte's Gulls** were seen on the Allegheny River at Sharpsburg 12/28 (DYe).

For the second consecutive winter, the Pittsburgh area experienced a gull invasion. As usual, the birds gathered at dusk to roost at the conjunction of the three rivers at The Point in Pittsburgh. With nearly daily reports, it is impossible to list details in this report, so highlights follow. More highlights will come in my next report.

Ring-billed Gull and **Herring Gull** estimated high counts during the season include 5,000 on 1/28 (GM) and 1,000 on 1/30 (GM, DYe) respectively. A first-cycle **Thayer's Gull** was at The Point 1/28 - 31 (BC, GM, et al.). The first **Iceland Gull**, a first-cycle bird, was found 1/9 (GM); the highest count in January was at Duck Hollow 1/30 (GM) where 3 first-cycle and two second-cycle birds were seen.

An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was found at The Point 1/14 (BC); an adult was at Duck Hollow 1/17 (JHa, DWe, TH), and an adult and 2 second-cycle birds were at The Point 1/27-30 (BC, ST, GM et al.).

The first **Glaucous Gull** was a first-cycle bird at The Point 1/10 (BC). This species appeared in record numbers with a high count of 6 at The Point 1/30 (GM): 2 first-cycle, one second-cycle,

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and 3 adults. Two first-winter birds were photographed on the Allegheny River at Chapel Harbor 1/25 (LF, JF).

Great Black-backed Gulls appeared in unprecedented numbers. A first-cycle bird at The Point 1/10 (BC, ST) was the first seen. The high count at The Point in January was 26 on 1/29 (ST). A third-winter bird with an injured foot was at Duck Hollow 1/20 (ST, MF, MVV, LF). This distinctive individual was seen here several times and at The Point.

The most amazing find was an adult **Kelp Gull** first identified and photographed at The Point 1/17 (BC). The bird was resting on an ice floe and its structure, wing pattern, and particularly the leg color were all noted. It was seen again the following morning (GM). It appeared once again at Duck Hollow 1/18 late in the afternoon where it was seen at close range and photographed (DWe, MVV, TM, NM). A gull, probably this bird, was present that evening back at The Point, but the bird rested on the water so the legs were not visible, and with distance and fading light, details were not easily seen (v.o.). Despite persistent searches in the following days, it was never relocated much to the disappointment of many. Pending review by the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee, this is a first record for the state.

Barred Owl is a local resident in the county and reports are sparse. One was in Fox Chapel 12/27 (BSh) and one flew across a road during the day in West Deer Twp. 1/24 (AH, PM). Two **Northern Saw-whet Owls** were at Wingfield Pines 11/14 (fide ST), two were heard calling in Jefferson Hills 12/20 (JHa, BMu) and one was at Settler's Cabin Park 1/4 (ST). A **Short-eared Owl** was seen in the fields surrounding the Moody Road Ponds in Findlay Twp. 12/1 (GM).

A real surprise was an immature or female **Selasphorus Hummingbird** that was found in Phipps Conservatory 12/27 (HF). Apparently it had entered through vents used to regulate temperatures in the conservatory, where it found a lush, warm indoor forest with food in the form of flowering plants. It frequented the flowers of a Red Powder Puff Tree (*Calliandra haematocephala*) in the Stove Room, and was photographed by several people. The spread tail was captured in the photos, and details of the tail feathers indicated that it was likely a Rufous Hummingbird. The conservatory staff was aware of the bird and hung a feeder near the tree, although it was not observed visiting the feeder. Hopes were that the bird could be banded, but that never came to be. It eventually made its way to the Victoria Room in the conservatory where it remained for a few days. According to the conservatory staff, it left the building on 1/19 (fide GM). This bird provided the 12th county record.

The immature **Red-headed Woodpecker** continued at Homewood Cemetery through January (v.o.). A late **Eastern Phoebe** was at Wingfield Pines 12/16 (ST). The **Northern Shrike** reported in November stayed through January at Imperial (v.o.).

The **American Crow** roost in Pittsburgh still brings delight and wonder. During the Pittsburgh CBC more than 19,000 were estimated. **Fish Crows** continue to be seen regularly, mainly at Duck Hollow (v.o.), including 17 there on 1/18 (TH, ST). **Common Ravens** also continue to be reported regularly from various locations.

There were scattered reports of **Winter Wren**, **Brown Creeper** and **Golden-crowned Kinglet** from various locations



RECORD-SETTING VISITORS—The 2015 incursion of Great Black-backed Gulls gave Allegheny County its record numbers of this species. The record count of 26 birds in Mike Fialkovich's January report was topped on March 6 by 73 on the Allegheny River from Sixth Street to the Fort Duquesne Bridge. Geoff Malosh photographed this adult on that astonishing March day.

through the season (v.o.). **Marsh Wrens** continued from the fall at Wingfield Pines. A single bird was seen in January (ST et al.) with the exception of 1/11 when two were seen (ST). Would at least one spend the entire winter? Stay tuned.

A great count of 35 **Eastern Bluebirds** was tallied in North Park during the Pittsburgh CBC 12/27 (v.o.). **Hermit Thrushes** probably winter in the county annually; however, reports are usually few or lacking. One was found in Fox Chapel 12/7 (CH) and 2 were in Frick Park 12/27 (TF, FI). An out-of-season **Gray Catbird** was at Settler's Cabin Park 1/4 (ST). Another great count at North Park from the Pittsburgh CBC 12/27 was 23 **Northern Mockingbirds**. Three **Yellow-rumped Warblers** were in Penn Hills 12/27 (Pittsburgh CBC).

Eastern Towhees are uncommon in winter here, but a good number were reported this season. For the Pittsburgh CBC, 3 were at Frick Park (TF, FI), and 2 were at North Park (v.o.). A male in Findlay Twp. 1/10 (MF) was seen again 1/30 (MV); 2 were present at the feeders at Latodomi Nature Center in North Park 1/12 (KD). A **Chipping Sparrow** visited a feeder in Pleasant Hills 1/11 (BMu), another was in that area 1/25-31 (MH), and 2 were photographed at a feeder in Sewickley 1/31 (JT). Two **Field Sparrows** were at Wingfield Pines 12/13 (ST). Several **Swamp Sparrows** were at Wingfield Pines during the period (ST et al.). **White-crowned Sparrow** reports are one at Imperial 1/10 (MF) and 6 there 1/11 (AP). Up to 6 were at the traditional wintering site at a farm in Findlay Twp. 1/23 through the period (MF et al.).

Late **Red-winged Blackbirds** include singles at Wingfield Pines 12/23 (JHa) and Indiana Twp. 12/27 (SG). A surprising count of 11 visited a feeder in Pine Twp. 1/18 (PL, SL). **Eastern Meadowlarks** have been seen at Imperial late in the fall in previous years, and they were possibly wintering at the site. Two were there 12/27 (FK, AKa), and birds continued through January with a high count of 6 on 1/24 (TH). Out of season, 7 **Common Grackles** were in Forest Hills 1/11 (TBl). Also out of season, 4

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Brown-headed Cowbirds visited a feeder in Pine Twp. 1/18 (PL, SL). A female **Baltimore Oriole** visited a feeder in O'Hara Twp. 12/24 (JL ph., fide BSh). It was last reported 1/8 (fide BSh) but might have spent the entire winter.

A female or immature male plumaged **Purple Finch** was in Pine Twp. 12/28 (PL, SL). A lone **Common Redpoll** visited a feeder in Hampton Twp. 12/27 through January (JA). We had a fairly good invasion of **Pine Siskins** this winter with reports from many locations, mainly at feeders. The highest count was 12 in Hampton Twp. 1/23 (JA).

Observers: JoAnne Albert, Tony Bledsoe (TBl), Paul Brown, Kyle Carlson, Jack Chaillet, Ben Coulter, Karyn Delaney, Leslie Ferree, Mike Fialkovich, John Flannigan, Hannah Floyd, Ted Floyd, Steve Gosser, Malcolm Harter, Jim Hausman (JHa), Any Henrici, Deborah Hess, Joyce Hoffmann, Todd Hooe, Frank Izaguirre, Matthew Juskowich, Fred Kachmarik, Alyssa Karmann (AKa), JoAnne Lightner, Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Pat McShea, Geoff Malosh, Nancy Moeller, Tom Moeller, Bob Mulvihill (BMu), Aidan Place, Kate St. John (KSJ), Brian Shema (BSh), Jack Solomon, Sue Solomon, Julia Tebbets, Shannon Thompson, Mark VanderVen (MvV), Mark Vass, Matt Webb, Dan Weeks (DWe), Dan Yagusic, David Yeany (DYe), various observers (v.o.).

You Can Help to Study Bird Collisions at Home

By Matt Webb

For birders, the onset of spring brings excitement! Spring migration brings new birds every day in their beautiful breeding plumage, giving us an extra jolt of bright colors to break us from the winter doldrums.

This time of year may be exciting as birds migrate through the region, but it also can be sobering as millions of birds are killed when they encounter our windows. In a 2014 study published in the Cooper Ornithological Society's journal *The Condor*, authors Scott Loss, Tom Will, and Pete Marra estimated that an average of 599 million birds are killed every year from colliding with windows. This includes 56% killed at commercial buildings and 44% killed on residences.

In 2014, BirdSafe Pittsburgh began monitoring downtown Pittsburgh to research the extent of the problem in that area. Through the spring and fall migrations, we found 233 birds: 169 dead and 64 alive. We were able to rehabilitate and release the majority of the 64 live birds found. The dead birds will become study specimens at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History.

This year, we'd like to collect information about the extent of the problem at the windows of residences in Pittsburgh and the surrounding region, even in farm areas. This is where you come in. It's easy to take a moment and look below the windows on your house to see if you can see any birds that may have hit them. Even if you don't find a bird, take a careful look at the outside of your windows. Usually when a bird collides, tiny feathers or even a "ghost" imprint of the bird may be left behind.

We need all of the help we can get to learn more about window collisions in Pittsburgh. If you'd like to participate, please email us at BirdSafePGH@gmail.com.



CBC TREATS – Harrison Hills Park in northeastern Allegheny County is part of the Buffalo Creek Valley Christmas Bird Count circle. Birders' best find there on count day, December 20, was a mammal: two River Otters on the park pond – the first documented in Allegheny County in eight years. Steve Gosser photographed them and this delightful Eastern Bluebird pair during the CBC.

