

The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

Vol. 5, No. 4, April/May 2006



“Absurdly cooperative”

We are accustomed to seeing Red-breasted Mergansers at long distances, but this one at left was extraordinarily close when Geoff Malosh photographed it at the Ambridge Reservoir in Beaver County on March 17, 2006. Geoff described it as “absurdly cooperative.”

Ambridge Reservoir has not always been considered a particularly worthwhile hotspot by many birders until Mark Vass began checking it regularly in recent years. His many reports of waterfowl there in January, February, and March 2006 included Gadwall, Canvasback, Redhead, Greater Scaup, and the best species of all, 4 Long-tailed Ducks.

See Members' Slides at Our April 19 Meeting

Slide shows of our members' photographs have been among our most popular meeting programs. We will see more of members' colorful work at our meeting on Wednesday, April 19, at the Phipps Garden Center in Shadyside.

Who will be the photographers, and what will be their subjects? This is always a pleasant surprise, not announced in advance. Join us and thrill to the images on screen at the garden center. Doors will open at 6:30 PM for socializing, and the meeting will begin at 7:30.

A meeting guest will be Mary Beth Steisslinger of the

Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, who will explain the conservancy's project to replace alien plants with natives in portions of Frick, Highland, Riverview, and Schenley Parks. She will ask birders to help by sending bird observations to her from specific areas where the plant restoration is being done. The bird records will be used in the conservancy's reports to agencies funding the project.

The Garden Center is at 1059 Shady Avenue behind the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Fifth and Shady Avenues. Parking is 25 cents an hour in a metered lot, and more is available on Shady and Beechwood Boulevard.

Note the date: Our spring meeting is traditionally held in April because May is such a busy birding month during the peak of migration.

LOOKING AHEAD: The rediscovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker will be the exciting program topic at our meeting on Wednesday, July 5. This special presentation will be held in the auditorium of the Pitt Graduate School of Public Health, Fifth Avenue and Bouquet Street in Oakland. Full details will be in the June issue of *The Peregrine* and on the 3RBC website.

The speaker will be Ron Rohrbaugh, director of the Ivory-billed Research project at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. His program was postponed from the original April date because of his commitments in leading the search.

The apparent rediscovery has recently raised a great deal of doubt from other ornithologists who question whether the bird initially photographed as proof really was an Ivory-billed and not a Pileated Woodpecker. Articles questioning the identification have been published in the prestigious journals *Auk* and *Science*. Will Ron have good news about this year's search for further evidence that the species still lives? We'll find out!

Migration Count Is May 13

By Carol and Fred McCullough

The Pennsylvania Migration Count, formerly known as the North American Migration Count, is held each year on the second Saturday in May, which this year is May 13. The count is organized by county, and each county's results along with a statewide analysis are reported in the journal *Pennsylvania Birds*.

Individual counts are similar to Christmas Bird Counts, with counters keeping tallies of bird species and numbers. Feeder watching is also a valid way to participate.

Although much of Allegheny County is urban and suburban, it has a wealth of migrant hotspots, and there is no scarcity of places to bird during the height of migration. Many areas in the county have not been covered in past years.

We are the Allegheny County compilers. If you wish to help, please contact us by phone at 412-921-6873 or by e-mail at carolmcc@juno.com and fredmcc@juno.com. Also, feel free to contact us if you would prefer to participate in another county and need to know who the compiler is.

President's Message

The Definition of Freedom: Four Seasons of Birding

By Jack Solomon

As I write these opening lines, I'm in the Roma, Texas, library in the Rio Grande Valley. Tomorrow I'll head a few miles upstream to San Ygnacio, where a jay reported to be a San Blas Jay or a Yucatan Jay is being seen regularly. As I study the two species in Peterson's *Field Guide to Mexican Birds*, I'm reflecting on how enviable my travels might seem. A brief recap of my last 13 months might let those of you who are still bound to a job or another anchor know how good it is to be a birder and free.

For six and a half weeks in January and February 2005, my wife, Sue, her mother, Mary, and our dog, Sibley, roamed Texas and Arizona, visiting as many spots in the American Birding Association site guides as we could. We got about 200 species, and our loads of lifers included the almost impossibly colorful Elegant Trogon. Next was the 3RBC Crane Creek/Point Pelee outing in May, where we stayed a week, getting the usual eye-level, short-range looks at about 26 species of Sue's beloved warblers. On the day-trip to Pelee we stood with scores of birders as a male Kirtland's Warbler cavorted in the open, so close that we couldn't focus our binoculars on him.

Over the summer I spent a week in Washington roaming the Olympic Peninsula and the Cascades with Mark VanderVen, a former Pittsburgh boy wonder. In the 1970s, when he was less than 8 years old, he submitted bird reports that were accepted for publication in the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania *Bulletin* edited by Paul Hess (who now edits *The Peregrine*). On the way home I stopped to bird for a few days near Boulder, Colorado, with Ted Floyd, another former Pittsburgher. Ted also submitted important bird records that were published in the ASWP *Bulletin*, and he could also – if he were not so charmingly modest – say that his youthful birding skills still stand as a goal for others to aim at. He got me a White-tailed Ptarmigan in Rocky Mountain National Park, just before the over-10,000-foot elevation wore me to the point of exhaustion and nausea. Too bad. I'd have gotten more good birds, but I had to get back down to where there was more air.

A trip of about a month began in August as we set out for Algonquin Provincial Park, Ontario, where in years past the calls of packs of wild wolves have thrilled us at night. This time we heard no wolves, but Black-backed Woodpecker showed up, as did Spruce Grouse, and canoeing the Madawaska River was as pleasant as ever. Gray Jays ate out of our hands. Merlins roosted and darted about. The leaves started turning about September 10, bright red maples sharply contrasting with the green spruces and pines. The only reason we headed home in mid-September was to catch Ted Floyd's 3RBC program.

In Thanksgiving week Sue and I headed to Cape May, New Jersey, and nearby hotspots for a week. A pleasant surprise occurred when we discovered that Ken Behrens, yet another youthful Pittsburgher gone off to make a name as a birder, was the official counter at the Cape May Hawk Watch. We didn't recognize him, having met him just once when he was a teenager. We struck up a conversation and were amazed to find out who he was. He sent us to the Avalon Sea Watch, where we saw many Northern Gannets and a bunch of distant sea birds that we had to rely on the official counter to identify. On Cape May ferry we watched Red-

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throated Loons and more gannets as we crossed the Delaware Bay. Then at Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge, American Avocets awaited us. The trip ended with Thanksgiving dinner at a restaurant buffet on Chincoteague Island.

I haven't even mentioned the good local food on all these trips. Chincoteague brings back memories of deliciously fresh, raw oysters and clams on the half shell – seafood galore. The Rio Grande Valley has tangy (hot, actually) Tex-Mex dishes. But the real feeding came on a Caribbean trip in January 2006 that had only a minor birding component, though it got me Masked Booby and a handful of other lifers. It was an Irish Music Cruise that Sue and I took with Chuck and Joan Tague. Suffice it to say that my famed capacity for edibles was strained with gourmet meals.

I'm finishing this message in New Mexico a few days after I began it. Back to the jay. Fifty or more birders gathered at 6:30 AM outside the San Ygnacio Bird Sanctuary. At about 7 we got it! A striking, dark blue jay landed and bossed around the nearby, smaller Green Jays. A "Wings" tour group was present and their knowledgeable leader confidently called it a San Blas Jay, rattling off a series of field marks.

Tomorrow we'll bird with Paul Hess, who is visiting a friend of his on a ranch near Silver City, New Mexico. Yes, it's good to be a birder and free.

Outings to Come

It's Migration Madness As We Swing into Spring

By Steve Thomas, Outings Chairman

Saturday, April 1 – Lake Arthur: Besides the nice variety of waterfowl expected, other species could include Eastern Bluebird, Northern Mockingbird, Cedar Waxwing, Wilson's Snipe, and Ruffed Grouse. Dan Yagusic (412-613-1534) will be our leader. Meet him in the Moraine State Park Day Use Area (South Shore) in the first parking lot on the right at 8 AM. From I-79, take Route 422 east toward Butler and exit at the Moraine State Park exit. At the end of the ramp, turn left and go straight into the park until you see the first major parking area on your right. Allow one hour driving from Pittsburgh.

Sunday, April 2 – Lower Buffalo Creek Watershed (Washington County): Outings to this area continue to produce impressive lists of species. Mary Grey will be our leader. From Pittsburgh take I-79 south to I-70. Take I-70 west to the Taylorstown exit. At the stop sign turn left. At the next stop sign turn right. After about one mile you will come to a blinking red light. Proceed straight through this light and meet in the parking area about 200 yards on the left. If you get lost, ask for directions to the S-bridge, which is a well-known local landmark at this intersection. Meet at 8 AM. Be prepared for muddy trails and pack a lunch to stay into the afternoon.

Saturday, April 8 – Pymatuning Area: Meet leader Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694) at the Pymatuning Wildlife Learning Center (Waterfowl Museum) at 9 AM. Plenty of waterfowl, lots of Bald Eagles, and Rough-legged Hawks are likely, as well as the area's albino Red-tailed Hawk. 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 spillway. The center's lot will be on the left, past the fish hatchery and before the spillway. Bring lunch.

Wednesday, April 12 – Woodcock Walk: Meet leader Tommy Byrnes (412-828-4539) for a second look this spring at the strange display of the Timberdoodle. Meet at 7 PM in front of the old Ames store in the Ames/Giant Eagle parking lot just off the Harmar exit of Route 28. We will carpool and drive a short distance to a field in Harmar Township that produced lots of American Woodcock last year. Be prepared for a muddy walk and bring a flashlight.

Sunday, April 23 – Lower Buffalo Creek Watershed (Washington County): Larry Helgerman (412-531-9273) will lead us at this area which can produce an impressive list of species. Meet at 8 AM. Be prepared for muddy trails and pack a lunch to stay into the afternoon. See April 2 for directions.

Saturday, April 29 – Nine Mile Run Watershed (Lower Frick Park): Chuck Tague and Jack Solomon (412-521-3365) will be our leaders. Meet at 7:30 AM at the lower parking lot at the Center for Creative Play, the last driveway on the right (east side of Braddock Avenue as you're going south, just before (north of) the entrance to the Parkway. We will bird the Nine Mile Run (NMR) valley and see and learn about the ecological restoration efforts going on in the southern end of Frick Park. Neotropical

migrants should be out in force. Yellow-throated Warbler has been showing up here, and shorebirds are beginning to use the newly created wetlands. This will be a joint outing with the NMR Watershed Association. A late brunch at Kazansky's is in the cards whenever we tire or the birds slow down.

Sunday, April 30 – Frick Park: Meet Jack Solomon (412-521-3365) at 7:30 AM at the Frick Environmental Center parking lot, off Beechwood Blvd. just north of Forbes Avenue in Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill section for a bird walk starting farther north in Frick than we will on April 29. Brunch at Kazansky's.

Sunday, April 30 – Moraine State Park: For this outing Bob Machesney (412-366-7869) will help us to explore a more remote area of the park. This all-morning hike will take us to Muddy Creek, the main source of water to Lake Arthur and an abandoned railroad bed that once serviced the valley. Though we may find some water birds in the flooded area on either side of the railroad bed, our main focus will be passerines in the Frank Preston Conservation Area. Bring plenty of water, lunch, and proper footwear for the muddy trails and raingear. (It always rains on Bob's outings!) You should be in good physical condition. Though most of the trail is fairly level, we will probably take a bridal trail up to the top of the hill. At the farthest point we may be over 2 miles from the parking lot. Meet in the parking lot under the Route 528 bridge at 7 AM. This area has a comfort station, but none will be available during the hike. We will caravan about 3 miles to the trailhead. From I-79 take Route 422 east toward Butler, then Route 528 north several miles. At the north end of the high bridge over Lake Arthur, make an immediate right turn into the boat launch area.

Wednesday, May 3 – Panhandle Trail: Carol and Fred McCullough (412-921-6873) will lead this outing. It will begin at the Walker's Mill entrance to the Panhandle Trail 1.5 miles from the Carnegie exit of I-79. From Pittsburgh take I-79 south to the Carnegie exit. From the exit ramp, turn right onto Noblestown Road. Turn left onto Walker's Mill Road at a stop sign. Very soon you will see clearly marked parking lots for the trail on each side of Walker's Mill Road. Meet at 7:30 AM at the shelter at the beginning of the trail. Bring lunch to eat along the trail.

Friday-Friday, May 5-12 – Crane Creek/ Magee Marsh, Ohio: Co-leaders Margie Kern (412-369-0592) and Jack Solomon (412-521-3365) will lead this annual trip to see warblers and other migrants that swarm there. Past trips to Crane Creek have blessed us with up to 150 species, many seen at arm's length along the Magee Marsh boardwalk! Our headquarters will be the Best Budget Inn, 1735 East Perry Street, Port Clinton, OH 43452 (419-734-5633). Ask for the Birder's Discount when you make your reservations. Gather in the Best Budget lobby Friday evening, May 5, at 7 PM for a pre-outing get-together where we will firm up our plans. We will repeat our Jet Express Birdwatching Excursion to Point Pelee National Park in Canada. This year the excursion is scheduled for May 11. For reservations call Jet Express at 1-800-245-1538. Visit the following website for other birding areas along Lake Erie which we will try to explore if time permits: <http://www.coastalohio.com>. Bring binoculars, spotting scopes, walkie-talkies, Ohio maps and gazetteers. Come for the whole week or just for a few days. We guarantee you will have a great time. Contact Margie (veery553@yahoo.com) or Jack (snaggle719@yahoo.com) by e-mail to let us know you will be joining us. Please provide your cell phone number in your e-mail.

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Outings to Come

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Friday, May 5 – Beechwood Farms: Brian Shema will lead this walk through the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania's nature reserve at the peak of the landbird migration. Last year 24 species of warblers were observed in one day. Brian will show us the birding hot spots where Mourning Warbler and Gray-cheeked Thrush have been seen. Meet at 8 AM in the parking lot at 614 Dorseyville Road, Fox Chapel. Take Route 8 north to Harts Run Road, turn right (east), go to the "T" at Dorseyville Road and turn right (south). Beechwood is a few tenths of a mile on your right.

Sunday, May 7 – Boyce Park: Joe Walko will lead us through this often-overlooked park in search of migrants. From Pittsburgh take the Parkway East (Route 376), and bear left onto Route 22 toward Murrysville. Exit Route 22 onto the Route 286 ramp on the right. At the third light (about 3 miles), turn left onto Frankstown Road. After about 2 miles bear right onto Pierson Run Road. Continuing a half-mile, bear right at the "Y" intersection, staying on Pierson Run Road. Continue another half-mile to the top of the hill and turn right at a sign for the soccer fields. Meet in the soccer fields parking area at 8 AM.

Wednesday, May 10 – Harrison Hills Park: Meet leader Jim Valimont at this county park off Freeport Road between Natrona Heights and Freeport. As you enter the park, bear left and meet in the first parking lot on the left at 8:15 AM for this morning walk in search of migrants. Dress for wet grass and mud. Previous spring outings have produced a nice variety of warblers (including Cape May and Wilson's), Philadelphia and Yellow-throated Vireos, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and Scarlet Tanagers.

Wednesday, May 10 – Woodcock Walk: Meet leader Tommy Byrnes (412-828-4539) at 7:30 PM in front of the old Ames store in the Ames/Giant Eagle parking lot just off the Harmar exit of Route 28. We will carpool and drive a short distance to a field in Harmar Township that produced lots of American Woodcock last year. Be prepared for mud and bring a flashlight to witness the strange display of the Timberdoodle.

Friday, May 12 – Beechwood Farms: We will again visit the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania's nature reserve with host Brian Shema. Meet at 8 AM in the parking lot at 614 Dorseyville Road, Fox Chapel. See May 5 for directions.

Saturday, May 13 – Frick Park: Join leaders Jack and Sue Solomon for the traditional outing on Pennsylvania Migration Count day. The park is an excellent migrant trap that can sometimes have a great variety of warblers. Meet at the Frick Environmental Center parking lot off Beechwood Boulevard at 7:30 AM.

Sunday, May 14 – Lower Buffalo Creek Watershed (Washington County): Larry Helgerman (412-531-9273) will again be the leader. Meet at 7:30 AM (originally listed as 8 AM). Be prepared for muddy trails and pack a lunch to stay into the afternoon. See April 2 for directions.

Saturday, May 27 – Bell's Farm: Join Ralph Bell at 9 AM at his farm in Greene County. Eastern Bluebirds that feed out of your hand, nesting American Kestrels up close and personal, and possible Summer Tanagers are features of the perennially favorite

outing. Bring lunch and spend all day. Take I-79 south to the Ruff Creek exit. Turn left onto Route 221, drive under the interstate, continue 5 mile 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 straight up the hill for 0.5 mile and turn at the "R. BELL Tree Farm" sign. Park 0.5 mile down the road.

Sunday, May 28 – Lower Buffalo Creek Watershed (Washington County): Larry Helgerman (412-531-9273) will lead another visit to this exceptional birding area. Meet at 7:30 AM (originally listed as 8 AM). Be prepared for muddy trails and pack a lunch to stay into the afternoon. See April 2 for directions.

Sunday, June 4 – Buttermilk Hill Nature Sanctuary: This sanctuary is a 460-acre, predominantly wooded area owned by Jerry Stanley and his wife, Kathie Goodblood, who have offered to host this field trip. At least 20 species of warblers have presumably nested at BHNS, and there are usually 5 to 10 singing Cerulean Warblers on territory. Other possibilities are Yellow-throated Warbler, Yellow-throated Vireo, Louisiana Waterthrush, both cuckoos, Alder Flycatcher, Great Crested Flycatcher, and 9 species of diurnal raptors and owls. Later migrants such as Mourning Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, and Olive-sided Flycatcher are not unusual. Meet at 7:30 AM.

Directions from the south via I-79: Take exit 121 (Route 62 / Mercer). Turn right onto Route 62 and follow 62 into Sandy Lake. In Sandy Lake go north on Route 173 for 4.4 miles and turn right onto Georgetown Road. Drive about 3.5 miles to a sign pointing to the left for Utica. Take this road into the little town of Utica. Cross the bridge in Utica (over French Creek). Drive 1.2 miles and turn right onto Buttermilk Hill Road. Drive 1.2 miles and turn right onto Keith Lane, the lane to the sanctuary. Please drive slowly down the lane through a gate for about 1 mile. Our hosts' log house is on the right.

Saturday, June 17 – Clarion Area: Mourning Warblers and other woodland breeding birds will be featured in the morning half of this all-day outing. After lunch we will head to the local reclaimed strip mine areas to find Clay-colored, Henslow's, and Grasshopper Sparrows, and possibly Upland Sandpipers, Northern Harriers, Bobolinks, and other grassland specialties. Mike Leahy (814-797-2287), who knows just about every corner of the county, will be our leader. Meet at 9 AM at the Country Fair convenience store at the intersection of Route 66 and Route 322, approximately 3 miles north of Exit 60 (Shippenville & Cook Forest) on I-80.

Two Coming Events

BIRD WALKS: Our club will have a tent at the opening day of Meadowcroft Village on May 7, where the oldest archaeological site in North America will be open to the public from 1 to 5 PM. Bird walks will be among the events. Contact Bonnie Sanford for details at 724-587-3412.

LAND FOR WILDLIFE: Pennsylvania Game Commission will host a workshop on April 8 at the Chartiers Township Municipal Building for landowners who would like to manage their property for wildlife. A field trip in the afternoon will visit State Gamelands 232 in the Lower Buffalo Creek Watershed Important Bird Area. Contact Tammy Colt, Wildlife Diversity Biologist for the game commission, at tcolt@state.pa.us or 724-238-4064.

Bird Watch

Gnatcatcher Spring Down South and at Home

By Chuck Tague

First sunlight shone through the cluster of palm fronds. Each morning the glow moved uncomfortably northward.

The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher felt uneasy as he left the palm for the sprawling live oak and the familiar security of the foraging songbirds. He felt an almost irresistible urge to fly, to put the sunrise in its proper place, but instead he followed the whistled *cedar-cedar* of the Tufted Titmouse and the chatter of the titmouse's extended family. The titmice met the sun's first rays on top of a leafless Sweet Gum then glided through the sparse leaves of the Laurel Oaks. The sun stirred a breeze and oval oak leaves floated down to the sandy clearing. Twin-seeded Red Maple samara twirled over the brushy understory of hollies, palmettos and sparkleberry. Some landed on the dark, amber-tinged surface of the Tomoka River in Florida.

Yellow-rumped Warblers were by far the most numerous birds in the rag-tag band of insectivores. Their incessant *chiht, chiht* surrounded the gnatcatcher as he hopped from the tip of one twig to another. As the flock moved west with the sunlight, it expanded and contracted as caterpillars stirred and midges swarmed. The gnatcatcher heard the loud *chick* of the flock's single Yellow-throated Warbler as the warbler explored the fan-shaped palmetto fronds. The sun's rays spotlighted the male cardinal on top of a slash pine. As the cardinal sang, the cadence of the flock increased. The energetic Ruby-crowned Kinglets bounced through the understory like a troupe of acrobats. The gnatcatcher followed them. He hovered under the fresh, lime-green leaves of a Red Maple. He flashed his wings and fanned his white-edged tail until a beige moth no larger than his own tiny beak fluttered out. He sallied into the clearing and snapped the moth from the air. His wings never missed a beat.

The gnatcatcher swung toward the tap of a Downy Woodpecker. He hopped through an aerial forest of Resurrection Ferns then probed some Spanish Moss near the branch's tip. He heard the *zee-zee* of one of the other gnatcatchers that foraged with the flock. The sound again stirred the strange feelings of uncertainty and confusion. The only release was to sing. His nasal wheezy song, however, was weak and unconvincing.

The gnatcatcher snapped a spider from beneath an oak bud scale. He plucked a strand of spider silk and carried it to a horizontal branch about two-thirds to the top of a Red Maple. Again he sang, this time with more authority. None of the other gnatcatchers challenged him.

A new bird and a new sound joined the flock. The Northern Parula fluttered down from a dangling twig into a smoke-gray tangle of Spanish Moss. As he probed he sang a wistful *zee-zee-zee-ZIP*. The song triggered memories in the gnatcatcher, memories of a distant place, a different season, a distant forest, a different river. The gnatcatcher sang.

Again the attraction of the familiar flock and sudden abundance of insect prey overwhelmed the northward pull of his mysterious urge. This would be the last morning it would.

Peezsh, peezsh, peezsh. A harsh sound interrupted the gentle harmony of the flock's chips, trills and taps. The dominant titmouse dropped from high in the oak and fearlessly scolded the over-sized, two-legged intruders.



HANGING AROUND – This acrobatic gnatcatcher photographed by Chuck Tague in Florida inspired his reminiscence of the delightful species there and in southwestern Pennsylvania.

The flock contracted on the two strangers and their loud strange sounds. Yellow-rumped Warblers swarmed, swiftly, aggressively from all angles. Their chips were louder and more frantic. Curious, the gnatcatcher moved closer. The kinglets approached closest. The smallest members of the flock continued to hover under the evergreen Yaupon Holly leaves. The kinglets were almost close enough for the man in the straw hat to touch. The Carolina Wren that sometimes accompanied the flock cackled angrily from a tangle of fallen pine branches. The new bird fluttered down to examine the strange creatures and their disruptive sounds. As he dropped, he sang his buzzy *zee-zee-zee-ZIP*.

"That's the first Northern Parula this year," the woman said, "They're always back in Florida by the end of February."

"February's almost over," the man in a straw hat commented. "In a month or so we'll be back home."

"I'm glad we came to Florida for the winter. Life's easier, but we can't miss spring in Pennsylvania," she replied.

The gnatcatcher snapped a fat green caterpillar from a leaf.

Raccoon Creek was murky, the color of coffee with too much cream. The man and woman walked through the leafless oaks, maples and hickories. The trail was wet, the dark mud thick. High overhead a Yellow-throated Warbler sang in a leafless

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Bird Watch

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Sycamore. Violets and Spring Beauties poked through the germination green on the moist floodplain. Vernal pools reflected the first green of Skunk Cabbage leaves. A Trout Lily opened its yellow head as if to smile at the bumblebee exploring the fallen oak leaves. The first tiny Red Maple samaras hung like children's mittens on a string.

The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher probed the bark on a White Oak. He sang his song with strength and conviction as he flicked his high-cocked tail, an impressive tail that made up almost half of his four and a half inches. His mate hopped beside him. No other songbirds were around as they bounced to the next tree. The male swished his tail and sang his high-pitched, wheezy song.

"There it is, on the branch over the trail."

"Got it," the man in the straw hat answered as he lifted his binoculars.

The gnatcatcher sang then dropped from the end of the

Slippery Elm twig to a Hop Hornbeam below. As he cocked his tail square with his back, the white on the outer tail feathers flashed. His mate dropped to join him and together they probed the tree's flaky bark.

Peezsh, peezsh, peezsh.

The man waited a minute or two then pushed again. The birds were too intent on the contents of the hornbeam crevices, and themselves, to respond.

"What are the odds that this is one of the gnatcatchers we saw in Florida," the man in the straw hat pondered.

The gnatcatcher yanked a strip of hornbeam bark with his beak. He carried it to a horizontal branch not quite two-thirds the way to the top of a nearby White Oak.

His wife shrugged her shoulders, "Astronomical, but you never know."

"Cackling Goose" Name Causes Some Confusion

By Paul Hess

Ever since the Canada Goose was split into two species – a large form retaining the name Canada Goose and a small form named Cackling Goose – some confusion has arisen for birders using the most popular field guides.

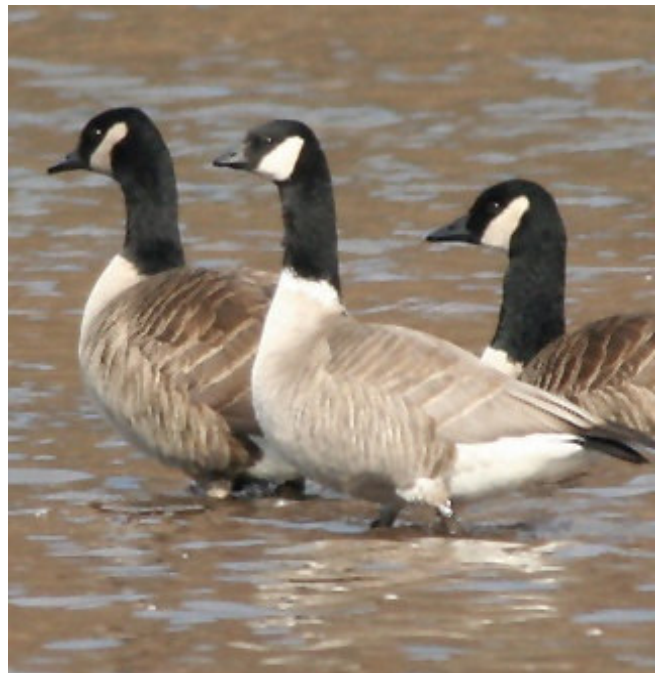
The question is: Does a Cackling Goose have a dark breast (as depicted in the field guides), or does it have a pale breast (as shown in photographs of these small geese in Pennsylvania)? The answer is: A Cackling Goose may have either a dark or a pale breast, depending on which geographic population it represents.

Check your *Sibley Guide to Birds* on page 75 and your *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* fourth edition on page 72. You will see the "Cackling" form illustrated only with a dark breast.

The problem is that both guides were published before the split was made in 2004. When they were written, the name "Cackling" Goose was restricted to a dark-breasted subspecies (*minima*) that breeds in Alaska and winters south to California. But the name Cackling Goose now represents an entire, wide-ranging, species separate from Canada Goose. This new species includes *minima* plus four other subspecies.

One of the four is the pale-breasted "Richardson's" subspecies (*hutchinsii*), which breeds on the high Arctic tundra and migrates primarily through the Great Plains to its winter range in Texas and Mexico. Some Richardson's wander eastward from the main flyway to the mid-Atlantic states. These are the small Cackling Geese reported and photographed in Pennsylvania, which are illustrated in the field guides as well.

It is unfortunate that the American Ornithologists' Union chose the name Cackling Goose for the new species. Some authorities had unsuccessfully suggested Tundra Goose, which would have been an appropriate name because many of these



PALE CACKLER – This Cackling Goose photographed by Dustin Welch at Green Lane Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, on February 21, 2006, has a very pale breast. So what? Well, the "Cackling Goose" pictured in current field guides has a very dark breast. The accompanying article explains what the confusing discrepancy is all about.

small birds nest on tundra. It would also have avoided the confusion.

Revised editions of both the Sibley and the National Geographic guides eventually will resolve the difficulty. Meanwhile, David Sibley's website has a good feature on Canada and Cackling Goose identification: www.sibleyguides.com.

Outings Revisited

Winter Birds and Waterfowl Open the New Birding Year

Lawrence County Farm Country – January 28: Could all the heat generated from the excitement of the Steelers going to the Super Bowl explain the 55-degree temperature on January 28? Normal high for the day is 35, and Jim Valimont's expedition a year ago enjoyed 27 degrees and snow. So, his dedicated group of eight birders this year had to suffer with blue skies and warm sunshine while looking for winter birds.

After meeting in Cranberry and dividing into two car groups, we drove to the Slippery Rock exit with hopes of finding our target birds. It turned out to be a beautiful day for raptors. A female Northern Harrier was our first bird of the day, gliding low over the field and our vehicles. Later we found the handsome male with his clean white wings tipped with black. A Cooper's Hawk decided to show off, too. We saw many American Kestrels, some in treetops and on fence posts, bobbing their tails, and others hovering like big hummingbirds. Needless to say, we saw lots of Red tailed Hawks, often Mr. and Mrs. sitting side by side. Thanks to Steve Carbol, we learned that a big, dark raptor passing was a second-year Bald Eagle.

The farmlands in the Grove City area are picturesque. After driving past miles of fields with cut corn stalks, we heard only a few Horned Larks and saw only one clearly – not very good for a bird that is usually seen in flocks. Nor were any of the larks' usual companions, Snow Buntings or Lapland Longspurs, anywhere in sight.

Other birds were a little more cooperative. The sun complemented the azure of many bluebirds. The sparrow family had a reunion for us of American Tree, White-throated, Song, and House. A Northern Flicker, a Downy Woodpecker or two, a few Northern Mockingbirds, White-breasted Nuthatches, Tufted Titmice, Mourning Doves, Common Grackles, European Starlings, and a few Brown-headed Cowbirds kept us entertained. We also had a lovely drive through the quaint town of Volant.

We came to the Black Swamp area around 3:15 PM and were greeted by birder friends who had heard that the Sandhill Cranes usually arrive around 3:30. Jim said the birds had been there around 2 PM the week before. Well, they weren't on any schedule, so we drove around hoping to spot Short-eared Owls or Red-headed Woodpeckers – but no such luck. Around 5 PM, Jim and I saw the cranes flying in the opposite direction, so both cars began a chase around the swamps, communicating by walkie-talkie, as we searched from hilltop viewpoints for the place where the birds landed. We saw a flying formation of Canada Geese, but not our cranes. Finally, a tip from the driver of a passing car gave us their location. With the last orange-pink streaks of light on the horizon, thru scopes, we located the elegant silhouettes of about 20 cranes settling down for the night.

Since it was twilight we drove once more in search of Short-eared Owls. Thank goodness, one obliged, flying low over its hunting grounds, but it quickly dipped too soon behind a ridge. Unfortunately, only our carload saw it.

Hopefully, winter will cooperate better next time, Jim!
Thanks for an enjoyable outing. **–by participant Sheila Thorpe**

Cook Forest and Piney Tract – February 18: Driving to Cook Forest State Park, we ran into a moderate snow squall and snow-covered roads. Upon our arrival, the temperature was about

12 degrees. This is winter in Pennsylvania, and the perfect setting for this winter outing.

We met leader Mike Leahy at the park office where we began the outing (thankfully) indoors for an overview of Cook Forest's old-growth ecosystem, record tall trees, and outing destinations. Dale Luthringer (an environmental education specialist at the park) co-led as we began with a hike to learn the characteristics of this forest type and to observe some of the tallest trees in the northeastern U.S. The forest took on even more beauty with the fresh snow lying on the branches of the hemlocks. We found a feeding flock of Black-capped Chickadees, a White-breasted Nuthatch, and several Golden-crowned Kinglets, including a stunning male flashing his orange/yellow crown in response to Mike's pishing.

At several points Dale explained the characteristics used to determine the general age of trees such as bark structure and branching. We saw the tallest White Pine in the northeastern U.S., which measures just over an impressive 180 feet. We visited a fallen Cucumber Magnolia tree that was several hundred years old. The remaining stump stands over 10 feet tall and is large enough to stand in, as Mike Leahy demonstrated. Dale knows this forest well and was eager to share his vast knowledge with us.

After our interesting but frigid hike, we drove on back roads, checking the fields and woods, and found another feeding flock of Black-capped Chickadees with two Tufted Titmice.

Following a warm and inviting lunch, we continued searching the area away from the forest. Mike's sharp eyes spotted a light-morph Rough-legged Hawk perched in a small apple tree in a field just outside Cook Forest. We observed the bird for a few minutes and watched it fly to the border of the field, where it almost disappeared in a large tree.

We moved on to open pastures at the Amish farms in the area to search for open-country birds, which included another light-morph Rough-legged Hawk flying over the fields and a male American Kestrel perched on a small building. A few Horned Larks flew out of a field but could not be relocated; however, we found a flock of 50-100 in a nearby field. In the flock were three Lapland Longspurs, a life bird for some in the group. We had mind-blowing views of the longspurs as they moved closer to us. They were molting into breeding plumage, showing rusty color on their napes.

Our final destination was the Piney Tract. Windy conditions may have been responsible for the lack of birds there, but we were rewarded with the sight of a Ruffed Grouse perched low in an aspen along the road. Paul Hess spotted it, and we used our two-way radios to alert the group. The bird remained perched for about half a minute, then burst into flight and zoomed back into the pines.

Although our species list (only 19) and the temperatures were low, the 10 participants enjoyed this trip and learned a lot.
–by participant Mike Fialkovich

Moraine State Park – March 12: Thirteen birders met for Jim Valimont's outing. Jim briefly considered relinquishing his leadership to Bob Machesney because it was raining, and everyone knows it nearly always rains on Bob's outings. Thankfully, the rain soon stopped. It must have been Paul Hess's magic "good luck" cookies that did the trick!

There was not much to see until we got to the Bear Run boat launch, where Jim heard Tundra Swans overhead and we spotted some Buffleheads and Hooded Mergansers. Unfortunately, the fog was rolling in fast and soon obscured the lake.

Birds at the maintenance building feeder included two

Outings Revisited

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American Tree Sparrows. At the Route 528 observation deck the water level was very low and we saw Northern Shovelers, Blue-winged and Green-winged Teals, Killdeer, and six Pectoral Sandpipers. Large rafts of ducks at the nearby boat launch area included Hooded Mergansers, American Wigeons, Ring-necked Ducks, Buffleheads, and some nice Horned Grebes.

An early Great Egret with beautiful plume feathers was seen at the upper Route 528 boat launch. A most interesting leucistic buteo with a pale gray head was spotted there by Bob and caused a lively discussion among the group. Ron Becker trained his powerful Tele-vue scope on the bird, and the consensus was that it was probably either a Red-tailed or Red-shouldered Hawk.

A very large number of Ring-necked Ducks were at Barkley Road, along with several Redheads and one drake Northern Pintail, my favorite duck. A real treat was hearing and then seeing two Brown Creepers foraging on the tree trunks. Other highlights of this outing for me and Bob were 28 Wild Turkeys seen on our approach to the park and three Eastern Meadowlarks in a grassy area along the South Shore. How great it was to see a yellow bird!

Lunch at the newly renovated Eppinger's (with new restrooms!) was our last stop. We're glad that the restaurant is still here for us, because lunch there has become a 3RBC tradition. A total of 54 species was seen on the outing. I'll add one more, an immature Bald Eagle seen by Paul and me along Route 528 as we drove to the upper boat launch. Highest waterfowl totals included 290 Ring-necked Ducks, 63 Hooded Mergansers, and 21 Horned Grebes. The complete list of species is posted on the 3RBC website. All in all, this was a very pleasant outing. **—by participant Margie Kern**

Woodcock Walk – March 15: Tommy Byrnes led our group of 11 participants to look for American Woodcocks. It was a chilly, windy dusk. As we walked up into the field, we heard robins voicing their calls, while three Canada geese flew over head. We soon heard one woodcock call, then another. We waited in anticipation for their lofty flights, but alas, only a few would fly. They only flew a few feet off the ground, then quickly settled in another location. We estimated by hearing them that at least six woodcocks were in the field. We left when the chill turned to cold and darkness fell. Thanks, Tommy. We will try again in April. **—by participant Steve Thomas**

Hawk Watching at Erie Bluffs

Spend Saturday, April 15, watching hawks in the sky and up close in a rehabilitation center at a free day of activities at our newest state park: Erie Bluffs. Presque Isle Audubon and Presque Isle State Park will sponsor the event from 9 AM to 2 PM. Meet at the Route 5 access to Erie Bluffs, approximately 2.5 miles west of Lake City.

"Come to watch the raptors migrating north over Erie Bluffs, get up close to live birds of prey from the Tamarack Wildlife Rehab Center, take a walk along the bluff and old forest trails, or participate in children's activities," the sponsors said. Naturalists will lead hikes throughout the day, and experts with binoculars and spotting scopes will be on hand to identify hawks and other migrants. Bring binoculars and lawn chairs. For details, call 814-835-8069, Ext. 102, or email ssmith@lea.earthforce.org.

Meeting Minutes

Members Learn of Factors Causing Vagrancy in Birds

By Mike Fialkovich

President Jack Solomon was unable to attend, so Vice President Jim Valimont conducted the meeting on March 1, with 52 members present.

Kerry Morsek from Venture Outdoors spoke briefly to alert members about their forthcoming website which will include a comprehensive list of outings by nature groups in western Pennsylvania. There will be a link to the Venture Outdoors website on our club's website, and vice versa. Kerry also asked members to supply information about birding locations in the area. She provided forms for members to fill out, and the results will be included on the Venture Outdoors website.

Jim introduced the speaker, Anthony Bledsoe, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh. Tony's informative program, "Rarity and Vagrancy of Birds," was divided into three subtopics: Why birds are rare or vagrant in certain areas; the importance and biology of vagrancy; and the implications of vagrancy for conservation.

Tony used many examples to illustrate the concepts and shared his personal experiences chasing rare birds while attending school in California and later in the northeast. He explained the biology of rarity in terms of the density of individuals, the degree to which they are specialized, and the extent of their geographic range. A prime example is the Kirtland's Warbler, which is rare due to its small population, restricted range, and habitat-specific requirements.

He covered the question of vagrancy by using the example of spring migrants that overshoot their normal range, such as the Swainson's Warbler. Fall migrants may go off course because they are young birds engaged in their first migration. Irruptive migrants move out of their core range in winter in search of food resources that may be depleted or unavailable. Tony concluded with recommendations on how to search for information about birds, primarily by using the internet.

Opportunities for Young Birders

The American Birding Association will offer two events this summer designed especially for young birders.

The ABA's annual convention in Bangor, Maine, June 21-26 will offer a "young birder track" for those ages 12-18. Leaders will include Ted Floyd, the editor of *Birding* magazine and a Pittsburgh native. Participants will attend educational workshops, visit the rugged coastline, sandy beaches, deciduous woodlands, and boreal forest, and take a boat trip to view Atlantic Puffins, Razorbills, and Arctic and Roseate Terns.

A young birders' conference in Fort Collins, Colorado, June 30-July 5 for those ages 14-18 will include workshops taught by world-famous bird experts, and tour destinations including Rocky Mountain National Park, ponderosa pine forests, canyons in the foothills, bird-rich habitats along waterways, and the famous Pawnee National Grasslands.

See the ABA website, <http://www.americanbirding.org>, contact Lori Fujimoto, ABA education manager, at 719-578-9703 ext. 237, or e-mail edcon@aba.org, for details.



BIG-BILLED HIGHLIGHT – Among the exciting birds Sam and Dorothy Sinderson saw on a natural history trip was this Black-mandibled Toucan photographed by their trip guide.

Birding Away

Natural History and Birding Offer Thrills in Costa Rica

By Sam Sinderson

In October 2005 my wife, Dorothy, and I participated in a tour that concentrated on the natural heritage of Costa Rica. This was a tour from Odysseys Unlimited, a company that specializes in small groups. We expected up to 20 persons, but, to our surprise, only two others signed up. Thus, we toured Costa Rica in a 24-seat minibus with two other tourists, both birders, a bus driver who was also a birder, and a trained naturalist guide who was very knowledgeable in most phases of natural history, including birds. Oliver, the guide, could tell us the plate number and bird number on that plate in the field guide for all the common birds. The bus driver, who spoke little English, was always eager to point out new birds for us that he found.

Our trip started in San Jose, the capital, which is in a highland valley. Most of the rest of the trip was at lower altitudes in the lowland rainforests, so there were birds that might not be available in other places we were to go. Much of the area is developed and full of urban sprawl, but we stayed in a hotel in a suburban area that had five to 10 acres of beautiful gardens full of new birds. We were to spend two nights there at the start of the tour and one more at the end, so we had essentially part of three afternoons and a couple of mornings to bird here. I first saw 32 species here, including 15 life birds. Rufous-collared Sparrows and Clay-colored Robins (the national bird of Costa Rica) were everywhere on the lawns. The most spectacular bird there was the Blue-crowned Motmot. We had long and close views of a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl before dinner on the second day. Flyovers of White-tailed Kites on the last day were a highlight. We identified three species of hummingbirds, though I'm sure there must have been many more. They seemed to be everywhere among the flowering shrubs.

We spent one day touring in the San Jose area doing mostly the touristy things. The next day we were off to Tortuguero, a very small village on the northeast coast, reached only by boat or

Explore Enlow Fork IBA at Ecology Extravaganza

An "Ecology Extravaganza" at the Enlow Fork Important Bird Area in Greene County on April 30 will feature a picnic and a variety of outings to explore the area's flora and fauna.

Sponsors are the Three Rivers Birding Club, Wheeling Creek Watershed Conservation, Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, Westmoreland Bird & Nature Club, Brooks Bird Club, Schrader Environmental Center, Western Pennsylvania Botanical Society, and Pennsylvania Nature Conservancy.

Activities will begin at 7:30 AM with birding, and walks will continue throughout the day to study wildflowers, trees, butterflies, dragonflies, streams, amphibians and snakes, geology, and watershed conservation. Leaders will include Ralph Bell and Margie Howard for birds; Mary Joy Haywood and Loree Speedy Bowers for flowers; Walt and Dana Shaffer for butterflies; EPA fish biologist Lou Reynolds; Christy Meredith for stream study and watershed conservation; and naturalist Bill Beatty.

Each organization will be responsible for organizing its own picnic. Contact Larry Helgerman for details (412-531-9273). Further information will also be posted on the 3RBC website.

Directions: From I-70 take the Claysville exit 6. Take SR-40 east to Claysville. In town turn right on SR-231 south. Follow SR-231 south approximately 3 miles to a "Y" and bear right toward West Finley on SR-3035. Go approximately 7.5 miles to a "T" and turn left on SR-3037. At approximately 2 miles turn right and cross the iron bridge on Walker Hill Road. Go approximately 1.5 miles and turn right on Smokey Row Road. This is the entrance to Enlow. Drive down the hill to the parking area on the left. The entrance tents are a short distance away.

PSO's Annual Meeting Is Filled with Activities

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology will hold its annual meeting Friday-Sunday, May 19-21, at the Ramada Inn in Ligonier, with an array of outings and workshops, plus a banquet program featuring the search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

Outings will go to Keystone State Park, 981 Strips, Linn Run State Park, Hunter's Lane, Laurelville Reclaimed Strips, Roaring Run Natural Area, New Alex-Loyalhanna Game Lands, Spruce Flats Bog, Wolf Rock Trail, and Dunning's Creek Wetlands.

Workshop topics will include wind turbines, damage by the hemlock woolly adelgid, threatened raptors, the breeding bird atlas, bioacoustic monitoring research, and Powdermill's history of bird study. At the banquet Mike Lanzone of Powdermill will give a first-hand account of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker search.

Another banquet highlight will be the presentation of the PSO's prestigious Earl L. Poole Award to Margaret Higbee for outstanding contributions to ornithology in Pennsylvania. Margaret is a PSO board member, editor of the *PSO Pileated* (the society's newsletter), one of Pennsylvania's most active and knowledgeable birders, and a leader of the Todd Bird Club in Indiana County.

The PSO's Conservation Award will go to Tom Dick of Somerset County, who created the Dunning's Creek Wetlands and purchased the site of the Allegheny Front Hawkwatch.

For full information and a registration form, see the "PSO annual meeting" link on the Society's website, www.pabirds.org.

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Birding Away

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small aircraft. The surrounding area is a rainforest swamp. Getting to the dock south of Tortuguero involved a 30-mile ride over a rough dirt and gravel road through banana-growing country. We stopped several times to see birds spotted by the guide or the driver. Along the way we saw Bat Falcons and had our first looks, of many, at Passerini's Tanager. The boat trip into Tortuguero is about two hours along rivers and canals. The lodge we stayed in was across the river from the village and was very modern. The area around the housing units was lush with tropical vegetation, and the birds were everywhere. We sat in chairs on the deck watching birds constantly coming and going. Howler monkeys awakened us each morning. I was surprised, but shouldn't have been, to see so many North American species that were wintering or migrating. Chestnut-sided Warblers seemed to be everywhere we went. We took several boat rides through the canals searching for wildlife. I was able to identify 69 species of birds in the area, of which 26 were life birds. Yellow-crowned Night-Herons were everywhere along the canals. One of the rarest species we saw was Sungrebe, which we saw twice. We saw several Northern Jacanas among the lily pads. Nine species of herons and egrets were seen, including Bare-throated Tiger-Heron and Boat-billed Heron. A Laughing Falcon perched in a dead tree near the dining room thrilled us. The area is famous for its nesting green turtles. Though we chose not to take the nighttime walk with the National Park naturalist to see the turtles because it was supposed to rain, we were able to observe newly-hatched turtles on the beach making their way to the sea.

We left Tortuguero the way we came, by boat and rough road, on our way to a one-night stay at La Quinta country hotel near Sarapiquí. The hotel is located in the bend of a river and has extensive grounds that were good birding. Most of the surrounding area was composed of pineapple farms. While there, I observed 22 species of birds, of which seven were life birds. The Gray-necked Wood-Rails were very tame, allowing fairly close approaches. Also new here were Bananaquit, Orange-billed Sparrow, Buff-throated Saltator, Short-billed Pigeon, and Ruddy Ground-Dove.

The next morning we visited Tirimbina, a private biological preserve, where we saw three species of bats and more birds. New here were Fasciated Tiger-Heron and Melodious Blackbird, a recent invasive species from the north. Amazon and Green Kingfishers were in view at the same time. Our objective for the day was Chachagua Rain Forest Lodge near the town of La Fortuna. Along the way we stopped to see a spectacular display of wild iguanas at a gift shop and restaurant where they are fed and very tame. As we approached La Fortuna, the very active Arenal Volcano loomed into view. Later we were to observe spectacular lava flows as we stood near the base of the mountain after dark.

Chachagua was several miles off the main road up a very rough track to the very edge of the rain forest. We were there four nights, and it wasn't until the last day that another group joined us for dinner. We had the place to ourselves. Every morning was a thrill as we could sit on the front porch of our cabin and observe birds. Each morning a Cocoa Woodcreeper worked a wooden light pole for insects that were attracted there the night before by the light. A Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher fluttered virtually at our feet gathering insects from the floorboards of our porch. We observed Keel-billed and Black-mandibled Toucans, and Collared Aracaris might be seen at any time. Great Kiskadees, Social

Flycatchers, Tropical Kingbirds, Tropical Pewees and Streaked Flycatchers were observed here, as were Golden-hooded Tanagers, Black-striped Sparrows, Variable Seedeaters, and Yellow-faced Grassquit. The open-sided dining building provided close views of several species of honeycreepers, euphonias, and tanagers (and the local chicken) at the fresh-fruit feeding station. In the evening I heard what I think was a Pauraque, which I never could see and identify for sure, and early in the morning, an owl that was probably the Black-and-white Owl. This was a spectacular place from which we took side trips.

One day we had lunch at a local bed-and-breakfast where there were fruit feeders. We could hardly eat our lunch for the new birds that kept appearing. Green Honeycreepers and Red-legged Honeycreepers were numerous. Lineated and Hoffman's Woodpeckers were present. Blue-gray Tanagers were present almost everywhere we went. A Yellow-throated Euphonia was special. Our stay here ended all too soon, because we were to spend the afternoon at the Arenal Hanging Bridges some distance away. This is a sometimes-steep two-mile walk through the rainforest along a mountainside, crossing 15 bridges, often looking down on the forest canopy. Here we saw perhaps the bird of the trip, a Rufus-tailed Jacamar. Also spectacular were dozens of Black-crested Coquettes, hummingbirds with long black crests. Red-lore Parrots and a Lineated Woodpecker were present in the same tree near the end of the walk. Around the parking lot were dozens and dozens of migrating Baltimore Orioles. Band-backed Wrens, Palm Tanagers and Tawny-capped Euphonias were other interesting birds. That evening we observed the lava flows at the Arenal volcano and bathed in a hot spring before a late dinner.

Back at Chachagua on our last afternoon on a walk down the road paralleling a stream, we saw three species of woodpeckers: Black-cheeked, Smoky-brown, and Cinnamon. Though not present here, the Hoffman's Woodpecker, much like our Red-bellied Woodpecker, was probably the most numerous woodpecker elsewhere.

Our next destination was Tamarindo on the west coast in the province of Guanacaste. But first we stopped for a rubber-raft trip down a class-two river where we saw crocodiles and more birds. Wood Storks flew overhead. Spotted Sandpipers were along the stream. An Osprey flew over, as did Neotropic Cormorants. We saw Rufous-naped Wrens and a Squirrel Cuckoo. On a side-trip to an Indian village, we spotted a Harris's Hawk, Crested Caracaras, Jabirus and Double-striped Thick-knees. In the village we had White-fronted Parrot and Masked Tityra. One morning on a walk along the beach to an estuary, we identified an Agami Heron. Along the beach were Whimbrels, Royal Terns, Spotted Sandpipers, and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks. All around the "cabins" where we stayed and around the open dining area at the Hotel Cana Luna were White-throated Magpie-Jays. Given a chance, they would steal food from your plate. A trip into the mangrove estuary yielded Mangrove Black-Hawk, King Culture, Tri-colored Heron, and Black-headed Trogon among others.

On the way back to San Jose, where our trip would end, we stopped at Sarchi for lunch. There we saw White-crowned Parrots and Brown Jays. The Montezuma Oropendolas, large birds of the blackbird family, were spectacular. Back at the same hotel where we started near San Jose, we spent our last hours with our new trip friends, birding until dark. It was here late in the evening when White-tailed Kites swooped overhead, and we had last-light views of the Blue-crowned Motmot.

My total count of birds for the eleven days in Costa Rica was 177 species, of which 101 were life birds. Needless to say, this was a trip that we will long remember.

The Peregrine

236 Bird Species Were Listed in Allegheny County in 2005

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

Birders found 236 species plus one hybrid Brewster's Warbler in Allegheny County in 2005, the second highest total since this list was first generated in 1991. Highlights include the first record of Greater White-fronted Goose since 1895, and the first county records of Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Laughing Gull, and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. The county also had its third record of Iceland Gull, fifth record of Lesser Black-backed Gull, eighth and ninth records of American Golden-Plover, and fifth record of Western Sandpiper. Other rarities included Common Moorhen, Red Phalarope, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Fish Crow, Prothonotary Warbler, Dickcissel, and Brewer's Blackbird. The year's species were:

Greater White-fronted Goose	Semipalmated Plover	Least Flycatcher	Blackburnian Warbler
Snow Goose	Killdeer	Eastern Phoebe	Yellow-throated Warbler
Canada Goose	Greater Yellowlegs	Great Crested Flycatcher	Pine Warbler
Mute Swan	Lesser Yellowlegs	Eastern Kingbird	Palm Warbler
Tundra Swan	Solitary Sandpiper	White-eyed Vireo	Bay-breasted Warbler
Wood Duck	Spotted Sandpiper	Yellow-throated Vireo	Blackpoll Warbler
Gadwall	Upland Sandpiper	Blue-headed Vireo	Cerulean Warbler
American Wigeon	Ruddy Turnstone	Warbling Vireo	Black-and-white Warbler
American Black Duck	Semipalmated Sandpiper	Philadelphia Vireo	American Redstart
Mallard	Western Sandpiper	Red-eyed Vireo	Prothonotary Warbler
Blue-winged Teal	Least Sandpiper	Blue Jay	Worm-eating Warbler
Northern Shoveler	White-rumped Sandpiper	American Crow	Ovenbird
Northern Pintail	Baird's Sandpiper	Fish Crow	Northern Waterthrush
Green-winged Teal	Pectoral Sandpiper	Common Raven	Louisiana Waterthrush
Canvasback	Dunlin	Horned Lark	Kentucky Warbler
Redhead	Stilt Sandpiper	Purple Martin	Connecticut Warbler
Ring-necked Duck	Buff-breasted Sandpiper	Tree Swallow	Mourning Warbler
Greater Scaup	Short-billed Dowitcher	N. Rough-winged Swallow	Common Yellowthroat
Lesser Scaup	Wilson's Snipe	Bank Swallow	Hooded Warbler
Surf Scoter	American Woodcock	Cliff Swallow	Wilson's Warbler
Long-tailed Duck	Red Phalarope	Barn Swallow	Canada Warbler
Bufflehead	Laughing Gull	Carolina Chickadee	Yellow-breasted Chat
Common Goldeneye	Bonaparte's Gull	Black-capped Chickadee	Scarlet Tanager
Hooded Merganser	Ring-billed Gull	Tufted Titmouse	Eastern Towhee
Common Merganser	Herring Gull	Red-breasted Nuthatch	American Tree Sparrow
Red-breasted Merganser	Iceland Gull	White-breasted Nuthatch	Chipping Sparrow
Ruddy Duck	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Brown Creeper	Field Sparrow
Ring-necked Pheasant	Great Black-backed Gull	Carolina Wren	Vesper Sparrow
Ruffed Grouse	Caspian Tern	House Wren	Savannah Sparrow
Wild Turkey	Common Tern	Winter Wren	Grasshopper Sparrow
Common Loon	Forster's Tern	Golden-crowned Kinglet	Henslow's Sparrow
Pied-billed Grebe	Black Tern	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow
Horned Grebe	Rock Pigeon	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Fox Sparrow
Red-necked Grebe	Mourning Dove	Eastern Bluebird	Song Sparrow
Double-crested Cormorant	Black-billed Cuckoo	Veery	Lincoln's Sparrow
Great Blue Heron	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Gray-cheeked Thrush	Swamp Sparrow
Great Egret	Eastern Screech-Owl	Swainson's Thrush	White-throated Sparrow
Green Heron	Great Horned Owl	Hermit Thrush	White-crowned Sparrow
Turkey Vulture	Barred Owl	Wood Thrush	Dark-eyed Junco
Osprey	Short-eared Owl	American Robin	Northern Cardinal
Bald Eagle	Northern Saw-whet Owl	Gray Catbird	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Northern Harrier	Common Nighthawk	Northern Mockingbird	Indigo Bunting
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Whip-poor-will	Brown Thrasher	Dickcissel
Cooper's Hawk	Chimney Swift	European Starling	Bobolink
Northern Goshawk	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	American Pipit	Red-winged Blackbird
Red-shouldered Hawk	Belted Kingfisher	Cedar Waxwing	Eastern Meadowlark
Broad-winged Hawk	Red-headed Woodpecker	Blue-winged Warbler	Rusty Blackbird
Red-tailed Hawk	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Golden-winged Warbler	Brewer's Blackbird
Rough-legged Hawk	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Tennessee Warbler	Common Grackle
American Kestrel	Downy Woodpecker	Orange-crowned Warbler	Brown-headed Cowbird
Merlin	Hairy Woodpecker	Nashville Warbler	Orchard Oriole
Peregrine Falcon	Northern Flicker	Northern Parula	Baltimore Oriole
Virginia Rail	Pileated Woodpecker	Yellow Warbler	Purple Finch
Sora	Olive-sided Flycatcher	Chestnut-sided Warbler	House Finch
Common Moorhen	Eastern Wood-Pewee	Magnolia Warbler	Common Redpoll
American Coot	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	Cape May Warbler	Pine Siskin
Sandhill Crane	Acadian Flycatcher	Black-throated Blue Warbler	American Goldfinch
Black-bellied Plover	Alder Flycatcher	Yellow-rumped Warbler	House Sparrow
American Golden-Plover	Willow Flycatcher	Black-throated Green Warbler	

Birds in the Three Rivers Area

Brewer's Blackbird Leads Dec. 2005 - Jan. 2006 List

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

Despite the extreme cold in December, a variety of species normally gone by that time lingered in the area.

A flock of 28 **Tundra Swans** flew over East Liberty 12/12 (DY). Three **Mute Swans** were on the Ohio River at Neville Island 12/22 (MV). A **Northern Pintail** was a great find during the Pittsburgh CBC 12/31 in Shaler Township (JH) where it remained until 1/7 (v.o.). Two **Surf Scoters** and a **Long-tailed Duck** were on the Ohio River at Sewickley 12/4 (MV). A Common Loon was at the Emsworth Dam on the Ohio River 12/11 (MV). A good variety of waterfowl appeared at various locations including **Wood Duck**, **American Wigeon**, **American Black Duck**, **Green-winged Teal**, **Canvasback**, **Ring-necked Duck**, **Lesser Scaup**, **Bufflehead**, **Common Goldeneye**, **Hooded Merganser**, **Common Merganser**, and **Ruddy Duck**.

Turkey Vultures were seen in December in Moon Township and Sewickley (MF, MV, GM). In recent years this species has become regular, but local, in winter. Single **Red-shouldered Hawks** were reported at North Park (BVN, LS) and Beechwood Farms 12/10 (BSh, MF), and through December and January in Pine Township (PL, SL). An albino **Red-tailed Hawk** was seen along Carson Street, upriver from the South Side (JF). This bird was reported a few years ago, but is not often seen. The open grasslands at Imperial continued to attract **Rough-legged Hawks**, where four were present in December including two dark morphs (MV). A **Merlin** was at Frick Park 12/5 (SS), and the season's first report at the roost site in Schenley Park was a single bird 12/23 (JS, SS).

Three late **Killdeer** were found in Findlay Township 12/4 (MV). The **American Crow** roost in the East End of Pittsburgh continued this winter. An estimated 5,000 birds were present in Homewood Cemetery 12/31 (MF). The **Common Raven** in the vicinity of Brunot's Island along the Ohio River in Pittsburgh continued into January (v.o.). On 12/21 it was observed carrying a Norway Rat to the island (OM).

Barred Owls were found 1/27 in Franklin Park (OM, JG) and Sewickley (DW). A **Short-eared Owl** was seen at Imperial in December (MV) and up to 3 were there during January (MV). A **Northern Saw-whet Owl** was calling at Imperial 12/30 (GM).

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were found in East Liberty 12/1-8 (DY), Penn Hills 12/10-21 (MF), Beechwood Farms through December (BSh), North Park 12/10 (BM), and Homewood Cemetery 12/31 (JS). Eight **Northern Flickers** at Harrison Hills Park 12/17 (PH) was a good count for this time of year.

Red-breasted Nuthatches were welcome visitors to feeders in the area this season: 2 at Beechwood Farms (BSh), two in Harmar Township (JV), and two in Churchill (WS, DS) through the period. A bird at North Park 12/10 was the only one not reported at a feeder (BVN, LS, BM). Nineteen were recorded on the Pittsburgh CBC, including 10 in North Park (JV). Winter Wren is irregular in winter, but there were many reports in December. Two were at North Park 12/3 (MV) and one was there 12/17 and 12/31 (BVN). During the Pittsburgh CBC 12/31 they were found at Kilbuck Township (PB), Shaler Township (JH), Beechwood Farms (BSh), and Schenley Park (MF). Single **Hermit Thrushes** were found in North Park 12/10 (BM) and in Sewickley Heights Park 12/22 (PB). Five **Cedar Waxwings** were

in East Liberty 12/8 (DY), the only report. The only **Yellow-rumped Warbler** report came from Frick Park 12/4 (SS).

A male **Brewer's Blackbird** visited the feeding station at Beechwood Farms 12/8 (BSh). Despite repeated searches, the bird was not seen again. It appeared just before a large snow and ice storm, which may have been a factor in its visit. This was the third county record. Normally gone by this time, a few **Red-winged Blackbirds**, **Common Grackles**, and **Brown-headed Cowbirds** were reported into December, mainly at feeders. Up to 4 **Brown-headed Cowbirds** visited a feeder in Pine Township in early January (PL, SL). Two late **Eastern Meadowlarks** were at Imperial 12/22 (MV).

Eastern Towhees were reported in seven locations during December; a good showing for a species not always found here in winter. A single towhee was in East Liberty 1/27 (DY). Late **Chipping Sparrows** visited feeders in Pine Township 12/1-3 (PL, SL), Harmar Township 12/23 (JV), and Plum Borough 1/21-22 (JW). **Field Sparrows** also lingered into December with 3 in North Park 12/3 (BVN), 4 in Ohio Township 12/8 and 12/21 (PB), and singles in Findlay Township 12/9 (MV), and at Beechwood Farms 12/13 (BSh). Single **Fox Sparrows** were found in Findlay Township 12/11 (MV), at a feeder in Shaler Township 12/22 (JH), and in East Liberty 12/31 (DY). A **Swamp Sparrow** was present in Fox Chapel 12/31 (BSh) at a small wetland where they have been regular in winter. **White-crowned Sparrows** continue to be regular winter residents along Strouss Road in Findlay Township (v.o.).

A **Common Redpoll** made a brief stop at a feeder in Moon Township during heavy snow showers 1/25 (GM). A **Pine Siskin** visited the feeders at Beechwood Farms 12/6 (BSh), several were in Mount Lebanon 12/8-10 (BJ), and one visited a feeder in Indiana Township 12/31 (TB, DG).

Observers: Tingle Barnes, Paul Brown, Joe Fedor, Mike Fialkovich, David Geis, Jim Gray, Paul Hess, Joyce Hoffmann, Bill Judd, Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Bob Machesney, Geoff Malosh, Oscar Miller, Dana Shaffer, Walt Shaffer, Brian Shema (BSh), Jack Solomon, Sue Solomon, Linda Sporrer, Bob VanNewkirk (BVN), Jim Valimont, Mark Vass, Joe Walko, Dave Wilton, Dan Yagusic, v.o. (various observers).

News and Notes

MEMBER IN THE NEWS: Our own Dave Wilton and fellow Pennsylvania birder Kevin George made news in the *Albuquerque Tribune* in New Mexico when columnist Melissa Birks interviewed Dave at the scene of a super-rare vagrant from south of the border, a Yellow Grosbeak. Melissa wrote of how Dave and Kevin drove 1,750 miles from Pennsylvania to add it to their life lists. Their car, she said, had "pillows in the back, trunk stocked with Honey Bunches of Oats and other nonperishables." Wilton called it "the best bird in the U. S. right now." As this note is written, how long the article will be remain on the newspaper's website is unknown, but try: www.abqtrib.com/albq/nw_local/article/0,2564,ALBQ_19858_4527581,00.html.

PENNSYLVANIA BIRD POPULATIONS: Thanks to Nick Bolgiano of the State College Bird Club, the club's website contains a remarkable set of maps depicting avian population trends. The maps compare numbers of 133 species found on U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird Surveys in 1983-89 and numbers found in the 1998-2004 period. The maps are well worth studying at: <http://www.scbirdcl.org/regionalbbsdata.html>.

Let's Help Ross to Raise Funds in World Series

Three Rivers Birding Club member Ross Gallardy will participate on May 13, 2006, in the World Series of Birding – a world-class competition and an important fund-raising event to benefit conservation organizations. The event, sponsored by New Jersey Audubon Society, is endorsed by the American Birding Association and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

A team's goal is to find as many bird species as possible in New Jersey during a 24-hour period. By soliciting pledge amounts per species, participants raise money for their favorite environmental causes. As he did last year, Ross has chosen to donate the money he raises to two prime birding and conservation areas in western Pennsylvania: the Allegheny Front Hawkwatch and the Buffalo Creek Valley Important Bird Area (IBA No. 22) in Butler and Armstrong Counties.

Ross and his teammates, Tom Johnson, Andy Bankert, and new team member Chris Jacobs will compete for their third straight year. Last year Ross's team took first place in the youth division with 212 species. They broke the old youth record by 20 species and placed fourth overall, beating teams such as Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Over the last two years Ross's team has raised nearly \$15,000 for various conservation organizations. Once again the team will be sponsored by Dixie Crossroads (a great seafood restaurant in Florida) and Nikon. The team's goals for this year include a species count over 200 again and raising \$10,000. They need your help!

There are different ways to contribute. Many people pledge a certain amount per species, but any donation is appreciated. After the event, everyone who has sent a pledge form will receive a summary of the competition and a list of the birds seen. Jack Solomon, 3RBC president, asked members to join in supporting Ross. Use the form below to help Ross and his team raise funds for the hawkwatch and the IBA.

World Series of Birding Pledge Form

Check one: Buffalo Creek IBA (Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania)
 Allegheny Front Hawkwatch (Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Amount pledging per species (make checks payable to A.S.W.P or A.P.A.S.):

\$.05 .10 .15 .20 Other or Single Donation \$ _____

Please mail form by May 10, 2006, to:

Ross Gallardy

109 Chestnut Ct.

Canonsburg, PA 15317