



# The Peregrine

## Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

No. 2, December 2001

### Learn of State's Rare Birds at Our January 16 Meeting

A slide show by one of the state's foremost experts in bird identification, distribution, and occurrence will highlight the Three Rivers Birding Club meeting on Wednesday, January 16. Jerry McWilliams of Erie County will present "Rare Birds of Pennsylvania," featuring photographs of unusual birds he has taken in the state. Interesting anecdotes and identification tips will accompany each slide, and this educational program will include audience participation.

The meeting will be held at the Frick Park Nature Center, opposite 1960 Beechwood Blvd., in Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill section. Doors will open at 7 p.m. for socializing, and the meeting will begin at 7:30.

Jerry (Gerald M.) is most prominently known as the senior author of *The Birds of Pennsylvania*, the first comprehensive book on the state's birds since 1890, which was published last year by Cornell University Press. It is now the standard reference work on its subject, and everyone with an interest in Pennsylvania birdlife should have it. Jerry also co-authored *The Birds of Erie County*, published in 1985.

He is the Erie County compiler for the journal *Pennsylvania Birds*, a sub-regional editor for the journal *North American Birds*, a past member of the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee and is presently Bird Records Chairman for the Presque Isle Audubon Society.

Jerry has traveled throughout the United States and the world including Trinidad, Costa Rica, Peru, Ecuador, Australia, Papua New Guinea, and Kenya in pursuit of birds and butterflies. He has photographed more than 800 species of birds worldwide, and many of his pictures have been published and won photo competitions.

This is sure to be a memorable program. Whether you are a beginning or an expert birder, come early and make new friends who have the same interests in birds as you.



**RARE VISITOR** – This Snowy Owl at Edinboro, Erie County, was photographed on February 3, 1991, by Jerry McWilliams, who will present the club's next meeting program, "Rare Birds of Pennsylvania."

### Club's Web Site Offers an Information Treasure

At only six months old, our club boasts a web site as good as most major statewide ornithological societies in the nation – and there's even more to come. The site was developed and is maintained by Julia Pahountis-Opacic, assisted by Penn Hackney and Dave Wilton. It includes... Well, see for yourself:

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

Among the extraordinary number of features that Julia has already included are capsule summaries of recent outings, a schedule of upcoming outings and club meetings, a link to this region's Rare Bird Alerts, which are sponsored by the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, information about the "PABirds" statewide e-mail discussion list and how to subscribe, and of course information about joining our club.

All of those are only the beginning of the list. Julia has set up links to 15 regional and national organizations devoted to birds and birding, 6 other bird clubs in Pennsylvania, 12 Audubon Society chapters across the state, plus three dozen more bird- and nature-oriented sites. Among the links that will especially interest many members are three online field guides to bird identification:

eNature, the Patuxent Bird ID Information Center, and Peterson Online.

The site's newest feature is a Discussion Forum where members can report bird sightings, ask and answer questions about birds, seek identification help, and post items for sale and wanted, discuss conservation issues, and post general announcements. In the works are a gallery of members' photographs, plus checklists for Important Bird Areas and other prime birding locations around southwestern Pennsylvania.

President Jack Solomon, praising Julia's efforts, said "It is our goal to create a web site that is first-class for a birding club and that will provide members and non-members information about birding. Congratulations and a big thank-you to Julia for her efforts, as well as to her committee members Penn Hackney and Dave Wilton."

Needless to say, we are proud of what Julia's expertise and enthusiasm, not to mention her valuable time, have added to the club's stature.

## What's to Come? Here's a Wish List

By Jack Solomon, President

An outing scheduled on every Saturday and Sunday plus some weekdays in the western Pennsylvania region. Birding trips to places as far away as Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania; Cape May, New Jersey; North Carolina for a day on the ocean to see pelagic birds in the Gulf Stream as far as 50 miles offshore; Reno, Nevada. That's what I'd like to see the Three Rivers Birding Club doing in a year or three. The Reno trip is actually being discussed with club member Ted Floyd, a Pittsburgh native, who is Director of the Great Basin Bird Observatory in Reno.

The rest of what I hope for are projects already in the works, as noted in some of the cases below, and others currently are just wishes. Here they are:

\* Hold a birding festival in Pittsburgh, with outings, famous speakers, informative workshops, films, displays and other activities. This is tentatively in the works for May 2, 3 and 4, 2001, in conjunction with the Frick Park Environmental Learning Center. Maybe it can be an annual event.

\* Generate publicity about the club on TV, radio, and in newspapers. Scott Shalaway mentions our club on his radio show "Birds and Nature," which airs on Saturday afternoons from 2 to 4 o'clock on 1360 AM (Pittsburgh Talk Radio), and it would be great to get more media coverage. Scott has been very nice to our club from the beginning when I posted a note on the Pabirds listserv to see if there was any interest in forming the organization.

He immediately contacted me and interviewed me on his show. Since then, we've received plenty of favorable mention. Tune in, and call in, and find out how knowledgeable and personable Scott is about birds and anything in nature.

\* Add a feature to our website that would allow members, and only members, to:

1. post a request to arrange a carpool with other members to one of our outings, or just to go birding informally when and where there is no officially scheduled outing;

2. have e-mail addresses ending with [@3riversbirdingclub.org](mailto:@3riversbirdingclub.org). I already have that benefit, so you can send me e-mail at [solomon@3riversbirdingclub.org](mailto:solomon@3riversbirdingclub.org) right now. And with just a little luck, by the time you receive this, you will be able to get that benefit too, as a service of the outfit where we rent our web space. Watch our web site for further details.

\* Erect and maintain a Purple Martin apartment house at Washington's Landing on the Allegheny River. This is in the works, too, tentatively.

\* Participate in breeding bird surveys, special area projects at locations known to be important for birds, and other ornithological research and service, wherever club members can be of help.

\* Set up a speakers' forum, establish a cash prize for the best local high school essay on birds or birding, hold special programs for city kids, and otherwise encourage young people to bird.

\* Publish a checklist of birds for Frick Park, which should be completed by the time you read this, and update and publish the checklist for Allegheny County that Ted Floyd authored in the journal *Pennsylvania Birds*. We're starting the county checklist project now.

## We Can Achieve Them

We can do all those things. It just takes time and effort. Many of us would have fun doing them. None could do all of them. Perhaps you know the techniques of public relations, or you can lead an outing, help on a research project, help our webmaster maintain our site, write an article for *The Peregrine*, or do any of the things I've listed or something cool I never thought of. Let an officer of the club know what you can do, what you'd like to do, or what the club should do.

We are the club. We pay people a little bit to do programs, and we pay the printer and the post office, and we pay a bit for the space our web site is on. That pretty much eats up our revenue. To help make possible many of the additional programs I listed, the club's steering committee has established two new membership classes: Contributing at \$50 and Sustaining at \$100, both including a single or a family membership. We will recognize the significant additional support of these members in future issues of *The Peregrine*. (See the coupon on page 8.)

Just about everything else we do is done by volunteers. Thank them if you like what they're doing. And, if you'd like to, volunteer to do something. The success of this club — its ability to do the kinds of things described in this message — will be directly proportional to what members step forward to do.

## Our Busy Volunteers

Here's what some members are doing so far. If what you're doing isn't mentioned, let me know. First the officers:

\* **Jim Valimont** is Vice President, arranges our outings, and is the Pittsburgh Christmas Bird Count organizer and compiler for the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania (in which our club participates). <[valimont@bellatlantic.net](mailto:valimont@bellatlantic.net)>

\* **Suzanne Sunseri** is Secretary, keeps minutes of our meetings, and corresponds with new and prospective members. <[cinderella51@att.net](mailto:cinderella51@att.net)>

\* **Bob Machesney** is Treasurer, collects dues, writes the checks, creates and manages the membership list. <[remach@aol.com](mailto:remach@aol.com)>

**The Steering Committee** consists of those officers plus committee leaders, and a few others I've appointed. They meet from time to time to make major policy decisions such as setting the dues levels, deciding on meeting locations and times, accepting the Birdwatchers' Digest Subscription program, which is announced elsewhere in this issue, and similar policy matters. Here are Committee members and their activities:

\* **Paul Hess** edits *The Peregrine*. Write if you have ideas for articles. <[pjhess@salsgiver.com](mailto:pjhess@salsgiver.com)>

\* **Julia Pahountis-Opacic** is our webmaster, with help from Penn Hackney and Dave Wilton. As of this writing she's just about solely responsible for constructing our entire site, <http://www.3riversbirdingclub.org>. Write to her at

<[birdnature@birdnature.com](mailto:birdnature@birdnature.com)> if you have suggestions for the web site content. And check out Julia's very well done personal site, Nutty Birdwatcher, <http://www.nuthatch.birdnature.com>

\* **Wendy Jo Shemansky** heads the Program Committee. <[pabirdsrus@adelphia.net](mailto:pabirdsrus@adelphia.net)> Write if you have suggestions for programs.

\* **Mabel Matteson** runs the Hospitality Committee, with help from Becky Byerly.

\* **Chuck and Joan Tague** do layout and distribution for *The Peregrine*.

\* **Eric Marchbein** and **Clare Staples** are working on the Martin House project, and they host Steering Committee meetings and out-of-town speakers.

# The Peregrine

\* **Mike Fialkovich** is the club's Bird Reporting and Recording Officer, and a font of natural history and scientific knowledge.

\* **Susanne Varley** works on production and distribution of *The Peregrine*.

\* **Pam Ferkett, Joyce Hoffman, Carol McCullough, Fred McCullough, Dave Rieger, and Margie Kern** are the other Steering Committee members.

## Club Members Can Help Christmas Bird Counts

By Jim Valimont,  
Pittsburgh CBC Compiler

By participating in the annual Pittsburgh Christmas Bird Count, the Three Rivers Birding Club can assist the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, which sponsors this annual event. Many of our members who are also ASWP members have participated in this census for many years. For those of you who have never participated in a Christmas Bird Count (CBC), the idea is just to go out and count and identify as many birds as possible on the designated date, no matter what the weather. If you are not skilled in bird identification, you can join a group leader and contribute by adding an extra set of eyes to find the birds.

The Pittsburgh CBC will be held on the first Saturday after Christmas, December 29, this year. This CBC is limited to a geographical area defined by a 15-mile-diameter circle centered in Glenshaw. The area includes most of the City of Pittsburgh, most of the northern suburbs, and parts of all three rivers. For those who are not able to venture out into the field on count day, you can still contribute by watching and counting the birds that come to your feeding stations.

You are all invited to attend the CBC tally meeting and dinner on Sunday evening, December 30, 6:00 PM, at Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve on Dorseyville Road in Fox Chapel. Bring a covered dish that serves at least 10 (or contribute to the cost of the ham) and enjoy the sighting reports, count details, and comments of the leaders.

Consider making the Pittsburgh CBC part of your holiday traditions and contribute by contacting one of the leaders listed below in an area where you would be interested in helping. If you cannot fit the Pittsburgh CBC into your schedule, the dates of other western Pennsylvania CBCs are listed below.

### **Pittsburgh Count Groups and Leaders**

**Fox Chapel Boro:** Betsey Owens, 412-963-9605

**Franklin Park & Ohio Twp. (N):** John Orndorff, 412-741-2021

**Hampton Twp.:** Fred Rimmel, 412-487-8180

**Indiana Twp. (W):** David Geis, 724-443-5447

**Kilbuck Twp. & Ohio Twp.:** Paul Brown, 412-734-1624

**North Park:** Mary Ann Thomas, 412-821-6044

**Oakmont Boro & Harmar Twp.:** Sam Sinderson, 412-653-3073

**O'Hara Twp.:** Scott Kinzey, 412-766-8813

**Penn Hills:** Ron Byrom, 412-363-0409

**Pittsburgh city:** Jack Solomon, 412-521-3365

(including Frick and Highland Parks and East End)

**Pittsburgh city:** Mike Fialkovich, 412-731-3581

(rest of the city)

**Ross & McCandless Twps.:** Bob Machesney, 412-366-7869

**Shaler Twp.:** Joyce Hoffman, 412-487-0921

### **Other Western Pennsylvania Counts and Leaders**

Saturday, December 15

**Butler:** Suzanne Butcher, 330-759-1945

**Erie:** Joan Howlett, 814-734-1765

**Warren:** Michael Toole, 814-723-4714

**Washington:** Roy Ickes, 724-228-3532 (H), 724-223-6118 (W)

Sunday, December 16

**Linesville:** Ron Harrell, 814-337-5445

**Rector:** Robert Mulvihill, 724-593-7521

Saturday, December 22

**Beaver:** John Cruzan, 724-847-6726 (W), 724-846-5342 (H)

**Buffalo Creek Valley:** George Reese, 724-353-9649

**Pittsburgh South Hills:** Bill Judd, 412-571-2057

**Ryerson:** Marjorie Howard, 724-499-5642

Sunday, December 23

**Bushy Run State Park:** Dick Byers, 724-593-3543

Wednesday, December 26

**Indiana:** Roger and Margaret Higbee, 724-354-3493

Thursday, December 27

**Raccoon Creek State Park:** Bill Smith, 724-375-9613

Saturday, December 29

**Clarion:** Margaret Buckwalter, 814-782-3925

**Clarksville:** Ralph Bell, 724-883-4505

**Pittsburgh:** See area leaders listed above.

Sunday, December 30

**Pleasantville:** Russ States, 814-676-6320

## Pittsburgh South Hills CBC Is Newest in Pennsylvania

The Pittsburgh Christmas Bird Count, strong and lively at the age of 41 in its present circle, has an enthusiastic 1-year-old companion in Allegheny County. It's the Pittsburgh South Hills CBC, the newest count location in Pennsylvania.

Last year's inaugural effort fielded 40 observers plus 10 feeder watchers, who tallied a fine total of 59 species including a Wood Duck (rare here in winter), 2 Northern Harriers, a Merlin, 3 Winter Wrens, a Hermit Thrush, 5 Yellow-rumped Warblers, 6 White-crowned Sparrows, and 2 out-of-season Brown-headed Cowbirds.

With that kind of start, compiler Nancy Page and coordinator Bill Judd are justifiably looking forward eagerly to this year's event on December 22, and hoping for even more participants to increase coverage throughout the standard 15-mile-diameter CBC circle. Contact Bill if you'd like to participate: 412-571-2057.

Bill will lead a workshop to help prepare participants on December 18 at 7 p.m. in the Multi-Purpose Room #2, Upper St. Clair Municipal Building, McLaughlin Run Road.

As usual for CBCs everywhere, a \$5 participation fee, to be collected in advance, is required from each field participant. This fee goes to the National Audubon Society to help defray costs of publishing the huge annual report of results from thousands of CBCs in North, Central, and South America.

After this year's count a potluck dinner will be held to compile the results and, in Nancy's words, "share war stories of the experiences of the day."

## Subscription to BWD Will Help Our Club

By Pam Ferkett

If you're not a subscriber to *Bird Watcher's Digest*, you have a chance to help yourself and our club at the same time. With every new subscription or gift subscription our club will receive 50% of the subscription fee.

Simply fill out the form enclosed in this issue of *The Peregrine* and send it with your payment to Bird Watcher's Digest. They will then reimburse half of your subscription price to our club along with your name. It's that easy! Just remember to make sure the Three Rivers Birding Club name is on the line at the bottom of the form. Or subscribe on line at the club's web site, <http://www.3riversbirdingclub.org>

This terrific little magazine is packed with great information. A featured bird species in each issue is depicted in original artwork on the cover. Other articles include practical information for the amateur to advanced birder on topics such as optics, bird gardening, birding hot spots, birdfeeding tips, and glimpses into avian life, as well as a chance to share the birding experiences of such noted contributing editors as Pete Dunne and Kenn Kaufman. There is something for everyone from the backyard birder to those that migrate as far and wide as the birds themselves to find that elusive lifer.

So why not support our new birding club and treat yourself or a friend to the adventures of birding all year long. This just might be the perfect holiday gift for the bird lover on your list.

Happy Holidays and Happy Birding!

## Founders Assist Club With Special Support

Our Three Rivers Birding Club has received extra help from 63 individuals, couples, and organizations who subscribed as Founding Members at \$40.00 before the membership category expired. The Founders are a substantial proportion of the club's present total of 110 members (including both individual and family). Their special contributions helped the club make a quick start with its web site, newsletter, and bimonthly meeting programs. Treasurer Bob Machesney announced the following Founders:

Carol & Gari Ann Banks  
Tingle Barnes  
Charles & Janis Bennett  
George R. Bereik  
Carol & Al Borek  
Becky Byerly  
Thomas Byrnes  
Cheryl Carr  
Timothy Collins & Reiko Goto  
David & Marian Crossman  
Pam Ferkett  
Edwin & Mary Floyd  
Ted Floyd  
Frick Park Nature Center  
Warren Gardner  
Randi & Sarah Gerrish  
Betty A. Guidish  
Katherine Hackney  
Nathan Hall & Shelly Lukon  
Paul & Deborah Hess  
Nancy Hirko  
Kathy Homrok  
Allen & Phyllis Janis  
William R. & Vicky Judd  
Judy Kemp  
Margie Kern  
Don & Judy Koch

Lydia Konecky  
George Kruth  
Thomas & Janet Kuehl  
Sherron & Pat Lynch  
Bob Machesney  
Eric Marchbein & Claire Staples  
Mabel & Glenn Matteson  
Fred & Carol McCullough  
John & Kathy Murphy  
Richard M. Nugent  
Frederick W. Okie  
Julia Pahountis-Opacic  
Guy & Sheryn Peters  
Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy  
Charles & Betsy Prine  
Martha Raak  
Joyce A. Rabinovitz  
Dave Rieger  
Fred Rimmel  
Marty Seltman  
Walt & Dana Shaffer  
Scott Shalaway  
Wendy Jo Shemansky  
Sam Sinderson  
Paul & Carol Smith  
Jack & Sue Solomon  
Linda Sporrer

Katherine St. John  
Linda Stafford  
Suzanne Sunseri  
Chuck & Joan Tague  
Beverly Loy Taylor  
Stephen Thomas  
Jim Valimont  
Robert Van NewKirk  
David Wilton

## A Motto? Trying Is Good, but Succeeding Is Better

By Paul Hess

Those of us who remember our high school Latin class (meaning those of us who aren't shy to admit we're so old that we *had* a Latin class) may appreciate a suggestion by Steering Committee member Eric Marchbein. He believes that our club should have a Latin motto. Seriously.

To support his idea, he presented to the Committee an interesting report from an expert in the Classics: "As you may, know the Romans were themselves great birdwatchers, not for pleasure, but in order to predict the future. There was a special College of Priests called Augurs, or 'birdwatchers,' who studied the flight of birds, and their craft was called *auspicium* or 'birdwatching,' which gives us the word 'auspices.'

"Also Roman admirals kept a cage of chickens on board their flagship, and the decision to join battle was made only if the birds ate enthusiastically. One Roman admiral, angry when the chickens refused to eat, said 'If they won't eat, then let them drink' and drowned the lot. He lost the battle!"

Having got our attention with the anecdote, the helpful Classicist offered two suggestions for a motto:

1. *Avibus spectandis, audiendis, recte appellare conando* – To see birds, to hear birds, to try to call them by their correct name.

2. *Avibus spectandis, audiendis, recte appellandis* – To see birds, to hear birds, to call them by their correct name.

The eagle-eyed reader will notice the difference. In the first case, we would be merely *trying* to name the birds. In the second, which as the classicist remarked, reads more elegantly, we would be *doing* the naming correctly.

If this comes up for a vote at the January 16 meeting, which President Jack Solomon assures me that it will, your Editor takes his editing prerogative to jump the gun and vote right now. My vote is for the second alternative. Let it never be said that this humble Editor just *tried* to identify a bird correctly – he *did* it!

## Schenley Center Opens

The Schenley Park Visitor Center opens on December 1 after a two-year restoration. An open house from noon to 4 p.m. on Dec. 1 and 2 will feature carriage rides, nature walks, raptor shows, live music and holiday treats.

Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy rescued the building, which was near collapse, gave it environmentally sensitive heating and cooling, and restored the eroded surrounding landscape, according to Meg Cheever, Conservancy president. Joanne Cain is the center's director.

Visitors can enjoy "Schenley Park Blend" coffee, espresso, cappuccino and latte; have a lunch of sandwich, soup or salad; relax on a balcony, and stop at a gift shop featuring nature-themed items.

Educational signs describe the park's flora, fauna and history. Trail maps and brochures are available. A kiosk has a trip planner for outings in the park, a calendar of events, and a survey to provide information about park usage. Three bathrooms are handicapped accessible/ADA compliant, have diaper-changing facilities, and hooks to enable runners to easily change their clothing.

## Outings Revisited: We Had an Active Fall

**Presque Isle – October 14:** Eight birders joined Jack and Sue Solomon at Presque Isle State Park on a warm, cloudy, blustery day a week before the club's first sponsored outing. There was only a slight drizzle in the morning, but the wind was gusting up to what must have been 35 miles an hour or more, making it hard to hear people talking nearby, let alone hear birds. Our list of 29 species included Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Mute Swan, Ruddy Duck, American Coot, Greater Yellowlegs, dowitcher (species?), Bonaparte's, Ring-billed, and Great Black-backed Gulls, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Yellow-rumped Warbler.

The day was helped by the presence of some new birders for whom several of the above were lifers. Presque Isle is always biologically interesting, though. Mullein was in bloom, Sue Solomon told us the deciduous tree with cones on it we were puzzling over was an Alder. We found a friendly little Brown Snake on Pine Tree Trail. I picked it up and excitedly called it a DeKay, its former name. The confused looks I got from the others made me correct the call as fast as I could. Still, someone asked: "Decayed?"

Bob Lucas and Liz Barrow found some Shaggy Mane mushrooms at Leo's Landing where we searched for (and found no) Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows. They had been reported there earlier in the month, and, according to the man at the nature center, were there (of course) the day before our outing. Bob's photograph of the interesting mushrooms accompanies this report. — **by leader Jack Solomon**

**Moraine State Park – October 21:** The Three Rivers Birding Club had its inaugural outing at this popular birding location in Butler County. Thirty-three people showed up along with 53 bird species. Highlights for Janine Brannon were two life birds, a Bald Eagle and Common Snipe. (See her essay about the outing elsewhere in this issue.) Some of the other neat birds seen were a Common Loon, 45 Pied-billed Grebes, six waterfowl species including Northern Shovelers, a Greater Yellowlegs at the Lake Arthur dam, 6 Red-breasted Nuthatches in a pine grove on the hilltop of South Shore Drive, and a Purple Finch.

The biggest faux pas were two Field Sparrows that turned out to be first-year White-crowned Sparrows. Eagle-eye Mike Fialkovich caught our mistake.

Master chef Jim Valimont cooked up some foot-long franks for the group. Others brought salads, fruit and drinks for a pleasant, relaxing lunch. A great turnout on a beautiful, sunny 70-degree day. — **by leader Bob Machesney**

**Pymatuning area — November 4:** Waterfowl, fall migrants, and arriving winter residents were the focus of this outing. Due to recent mild weather, winter birds had not yet arrived in numbers. Waterfowl and winter resident numbers were low, but our group of 15 participants managed to find a nice variety of birds.

Our first stop was the Waterfowl Museum, now called the Wildlife Learning Center. We saw three Bald Eagles from this point: two immatures perched on stumps in the water, and an adult perched in a tree. An American Pipit and a Horned Lark flew over, but we did not get good views. A raft of around 100 Hooded Mergansers were present as well as a few Double-crested Cormorants.

Our next stop was the Fish Hatchery. Three Pied-billed Grebes blended in remarkably well with the marsh vegetation while we watched them feeding. A nice group of Wood Ducks perched on low branches of a tree over the water were well spotted by Linda Stafford. A few Gadwalls, Northern Shovelers, and Common Mergansers were seen also.

Near the spillway, a small raft of winter plumaged Ruddy Ducks were present, a group of 10 American Coots, at least 20 Common Loons, and a few Canvasback were observed. Bonaparte's Gulls recently began to move into the area from the north, and around 60 were seen with the numerous Ring-billed Gulls.

At the Miller Ponds, the resident albino Red-tailed Hawk made an appearance. This unusual bird has been present for the past few years and has been a regular feature of outings at this spot. We also got nice looks at American Wigeons, Green-winged Teal, Ruddy Ducks, and Gadwalls here. A Northern Harrier flew low over the fields giving nice views.

A check of an area planted with pines and spruces did not produce any of the northern finches we were hoping for, however a Golden-crowned Kinglet, a Brown Creeper, Dark-eyed Juncos and a Chipping Sparrow were added to our list.

After a filling and inexpensive lunch at the Driftwood Restaurant (with a statue of Elvis for company) we headed for Geneva Marsh. Large flocks of migrating Rusty Blackbirds were

*...continued on page 6*



**HARDY HIKERS** – This lineup plus photographer Sherron Lynch were late-afternoon remnants of 33 birders who started the club's inaugural outing on October 21 at Moraine State Park in Butler County.

# The Peregrine



**SHAGGY MANES** – Bob Lucas found and photographed these Shaggy Mane mushrooms, *Coprinus comatus*, during the October 14 outing at Presque Isle State Park.

*...continued from page 5*

at the marsh and we got really nice looks at them. Three Fox Sparrows were spotted by Jim Valimont, and the entire group was fortunate to get good views of them. This was certainly one of the highlights of the outing. A single American Tree Sparrow was spotted only by a few members of the group.

We saw a total of 15 Bald Eagles during the trip, including two which sent large flocks of American Wigeons, Mallards, Gadwalls and Black Ducks into the air at Geneva Marsh. This is one of the best places in Pennsylvania to observe eagles. – **by leader Mike Fialkovich**

**Allegheny River – November 10:** About 17 birders met near the Highland Park Bridge on the Allegheny River for a morning of river birding. The weather was nice and everyone was excited about learning where to look for

birds on the river. While we waited for starting time at 8:00 we watched the Herring Gulls that have been resident at this site for at least seven years. There was a Great Blue Heron in the distance on Six-mile Island.

We didn't see any migrant water birds, but we had many more stops along the river to make and I was hopeful that we'd find some. Our next stops were the mouth of Quigley Run in Verona and a small playground in Verona where one can view the river to Oakmont. Two shorebirds chased each other in the distance at the mouth of Plum Creek. They proved to be Killdeer. This was nice considering that it is toward the end of the season for Killdeer. Moments later eight more joined them. There was a trilling Carolina Wren, and some enjoyed a Red-tailed Hawk across the river, but still no migrant waterbirds.

We proceeded upriver to Riverside Park in Oakmont, where the only bird that I remember was a brief glimpse of a Great Blue Heron. There used to be over 100 Mallards and Canada Geese here, but a local ordinance banning bird feeding here has greatly reduced their numbers. Migrant waterbirds attracted to the activity of the residents used to make this stop worthwhile. Still no good waterbirds.

The PA Fish Commission Boat Access property at the mouth of Deer Creek in Harmar gave us views of a Belted Kingfisher. By

now I could tell that today wasn't a great day to be looking for migrants on the Allegheny. Rachel Carson Park in Springdale yielded us another Belted Kingfisher and a collection of about 11 Great Blue Herons on 14-mile Island. Great Blues gather like this along our rivers in the fall through winter. Sometimes there are more than 25 together.

We decided to end the trip by checking out a small pond behind the big shopping center in Harmarville. We were greeted by a Red-winged Blackbird that stayed and called for us many times. There was one American Black Duck with the many Mallards in the pond. We were able to examine the differences between it and the female Mallards next to it.

The weather was great and the group was friendly. I had a nice time. Not one migrant swimming waterbird of note was seen, so with this I was disappointed. Perhaps this was due to the many days of uneventful weather we had. I am looking forward to the next river outing in December, which will touch the Mon, Ohio and Beaver Rivers. Gulls should be plentiful. –**by leader Scott Kinzey**

**Moraine State Park – November 11:** The day started on a personal high note — I ate my life Krispy Kreme donuts, courtesy of Claire Staples who passed them out to the whole group — and the weather at Lake Arthur was real nice for my November 11 waterfowl outing at Lake Arthur. Too nice, as it turned out, since we got a respectable but not earth-shattering 42 species, 14 of which were waterfowl. Big waterfowl numbers and variety are all too correlated in my mind with cold, bone-numbing winds, sleet, or worse.

The Eastern Bluebirds at the end of the outing near the McDaniels Boat Launch were really the highlight of the day for me. I can't look at a Bluebird without smiling. A Common Loon found by Margie Kern at the Bear Run Boat Launch was fun to see, too.

The best waterfowling was accomplished at the blind on Old Route 422, near the Regional Headquarters, where many American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal and Gadwall, a few spectacular male Hooded Mergansers, a Ring-necked Duck, a Scaup (sorry, I have a guess as to the species, but I've been burned too often on this one) and a single Wood Duck, rewarded us for getting out and about.

At one stop a spirited discussion broke out as to the ID of a small duck about 20 yards away. The light was just too bright, and the bird was backlit. After hearing a few (incorrect) calls I said: "female Ruddy Duck." That's what it decidedly was seen to be, as it turned about and gave us a better view. That vindicated me, as far as I'm concerned, for calling a gull an Osprey on the club's inaugural outing a few weeks ago. —**by leader Jack Solomon**

**Imperial Area-November 18:** Forty-two enthusiastic birders showed up to search for grassland birds, Short-eared Owls, Red-breasted Nuthatches and other winter irruptives.

Our first stop was Game Commission Special Area 432 in Washington County. We walked a loop through a plantation of Red, White and Pitch Pines. Red-breasted Nuthatches were vocal and active but the only finches were two American Goldfinches. The highlight was a drumming Ruffed Grouse.

At Bald Knob we watched an immature Northern Harrier hunt the grasslands.

Our last stop was a reclaimed strip mine in northern Washington County. Shortly after sundown at least six Short-eared Owls popped out of the grass and fluttered over the fields. On the horizon a flock of Wild Turkeys hopped into the trees to roost for the night. As we were about leave an owl flew across the road and circled through the last patch of red sky. –**by leader Chuck Tague**

## New Birder Reflects on Our First Outing

By Janine Brannon

I have always been interested in being outdoors, and observing and identifying plants and animals, with a special fondness toward birds. I've had backyard feeders and enjoyed watching and identifying the species that came to visit. Then, with the purchase of a Golden Retriever puppy who needed lots of exercise, I took to hiking the woods at a local park, where I spotted my first Rose-breasted Grosbeak and my first male Scarlet Tanager in breeding plumage. Sadie the Golden was true to her bird-dog roots and flushed a flock of Wild Turkeys.

It was fun, but I felt that I was missing much by not having an experienced person from whom to learn, so I went in search of kindred spirits. I enjoy listening to Scott Shalaway's radio program "Birds and Nature." He mentioned the PAbirds internet mailing list, so I signed up.

My other hobby is motorcycling, and I've met some great people on the Honda Sabre/Magna mailing list, and learned quite a bit from them. Well, thought I, if that worked, so will signing up to the PAbirds list. By coincidence, during my first week on the list, Three Rivers Birding Club President Jack Solomon announced that the first meeting of the club was to be held on October 17th at the Frick Park Nature Center. Here was my chance to find a birding buddy!

At the meeting, I picked up a newsletter and saw that events were scheduled for practically every weekend. This was great! Not only would I be learning new things, I would be enlarging my circle of friends. Everyone I met at the meeting was friendly and made every attempt to make me feel comfortable.

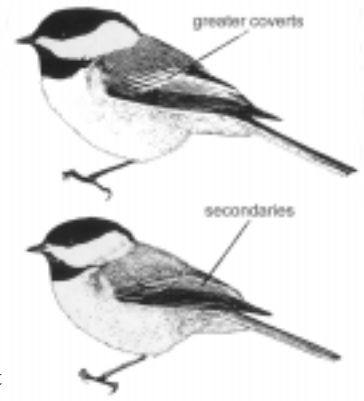
The first outing was scheduled for the following Sunday at Moraine State Park. It was the perfect autumn morning. A friend asked if he could join me. He's not much into birds, his motto being "Any Excuse for a Ride", so off we flew to Moraine. When we met up with the large group of club members, we got some odd looks as we climbed off of our bikes and out of our gear. Jack Solomon later told me that it was a day of firsts, the first ever motorcyclists at the first ever club outing! The strangeness quickly wore off, and we were offered looks through scopes and help in identifying what we were seeing.

My friend quickly grew bored and decided to ride off on his own. I stayed with the group, and was taken to places I never knew existed around Lake Arthur. We saw Great Blue Herons, loads of Canada Geese, Common Snipes, beautiful Wood Ducks. A special treat was a Common Loon, as I had just seen and heard this bird for the first time during a summertime visit to friends in Maine this year. I got a good chuckle when Jack Solomon pointed to a bird in the sky and said "Osprey!" and someone else said, "Uh, Jack, that's a Ring-billed Gull" "Oh my!" President Jack said, "I may be impeached!"

There was a lot of raptor activity, as it was a sunny, mild day. A black speck appeared in the sky, and I heard someone quietly say "It's an eagle...a Golden Eagle? No...a Bald Eagle! Look!" Look I did, and was treated to my first glimpse of this magnificent bird, an immature Bald Eagle. It was thrilling, something I will not soon forget.

Many thanks to the good folks of the Three Rivers Birding Club. Learning is growth, and there is much potential for growth as I continue with the group. I hope that more people will take advantage of this generous gift that is so freely given.

**WHAT TO LOOK FOR** – In fresh plumage, as they are in early winter, our two chickadee species have differences evident with a good look. In order of importance, here are the features to look for: 1. The Black-capped Chickadee (top) has bright white edges on the greater coverts, which form conspicuous white "shoulder" patch. The coverts of the Carolina (bottom) are edged in pale gray, contrasting little if at all with the surrounding gray tones. 2. The edges of the Black-capped's secondaries, which are interior wing feathers, are brightly white like the coverts. The Carolina's secondaries are edged with dull whitish which is much less distinct. 3. The edges of Black-capped outer tail feathers are prominently white. The Carolina's tail edges are pale but not distinctly white.



## A Plea to CBC Counters: Check Your Chickadees

By Paul Hess

The Carolina Chickadee and the Black-capped Chickadee are the most misidentified pair of species on Christmas Bird Counts in Allegheny County. A few observers have known this for at least 20 years, but the problem has persisted and is strongly relevant to this month's Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh-South Hills CBCs.

The Carolina's southern range and the Black-capped northern range meet along a mutual boundary from Kansas to New Jersey, and the boundary crosses through the Pittsburgh CBC circle.

During recent decades while almost no one was looking, the Carolina range advanced gradually northward and the Black-capped correspondingly retreated. Most observers in southern Allegheny County habitually called all their local birds Black-capped, when many were Carolinas that had moved in from the south.

Pittsburgh CBC compiler Jim Valimont urges participants to check chickadees carefully. Especially, don't guess that they are Black-capped in the northern suburbs merely because that has always been the usual species. And the situation works both ways. A modest migration of Black-caps into our region from northeastern Canada this fall brought some of them south into our Carolina range for the winter. So don't automatically assume all your chickadees are Carolinas either.

Distinguishing the two species is usually impossible without a good look. With a good look, unless the bird is an intermediate hybrid (which occur here), the differences can be reasonably clear. See the illustration above.

Don't rely entirely on field guides. The lower edge of the black bib is not always sharp in Carolina, and not always ragged in Black-capped. Vocalizations are not diagnostic. Either species at the contact zone may sing the other species' *fee-bee* or *fee-bee-fee-bay* song, both species' songs, or an abnormal song. Their *tsick-a-dee-dee-dee* calls are not always distinctive either.

If you don't see a chickadee well, or if the species is not obvious, put it down as "chickadee species." But please try to identify it, so we can find out which chickadee is where.

## Birds in the Three Rivers Area: July to Sept. 2001

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

These three months are typically highly variable with bird activity. July is the time to continue enjoying breeding birds, bird song, and observing parents with fledglings. August is fairly quiet as most birds have completed their breeding cycles and are in the process of molt; however the first southbound migrants can be found the second half of the month, and shorebird migration is well underway. September brings warblers, thrushes, vireos and other migrants moving south in the peak of the landbird migration.

Early **Double-crested Cormorants** were at Dashields on the Ohio River 8/12-18 (SK). A **Caspian Tern** was seen 8/20 at the Highland Park Bridge (SK), an uncommon bird in the county. Unusual were two **Black-crowned Night-Herons** at Barati's Farm in Jefferson Borough 8/14 (SS), and as unusual as this species is in the county, it is interesting to note that the same observer saw individuals at this location on 8/2 and 8/7, 2000.

A **Sanderling** was seen at Imperial 8/5 (DW). This is only the third county record; the last record (*fide* PH) was in 1931! An **American Golden Plover** was found at IMP 9/14 (CT, SV) and was still present on 9/16 (DW). This was a fourth county record. Other shorebirds reported at Imperial included **Least Sandpiper**, **Semipalmated Sandpiper**, **Solitary Sandpiper**, **Greater Yellowlegs**, **Lesser Yellowlegs**, **Spotted Sandpiper**, **Pectoral Sandpiper** and **Killdeer**.

On 7/4, a **Blue-winged Teal** with 7 young was seen at IMP (BM). This is only the second breeding record for the county (the first was April 1995 at the same location).

**Ospreys** were well reported in September. Four were seen along the Youghiogheny River at Buena Vista 9/10 (J Valimont), 1 was seen 9/22 at the Dashields Dam on the Ohio River, and another was seen 9/25 along the Allegheny River at Verona (SK).

A **Philadelphia Vireo** was seen at Sewickley Heights Park 9/9, 9/17-18 (SK), and singles were seen 9/11 (PH) and 9/15 (PH, MF, JV) at Harrison Hills Park. Four **Yellow-throated Vireos** were singing at Harrison Hills Park 9/11 (PH, MF, et al.).

A high count of 200 **Chimney Swifts** were at the Highland Park Bridge 8/14 (SK). Two **American Pipits** were at Imperial 9/14 (CT, SV). A **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** at Harrison Hills Park 9/15 was a bit late (PH, et al.).



A small colony of **Purple Martins** persist at Butler's Golf Course in Elizabeth Township (W Hammond, M Fialkovich). At least 10 birds were seen there 7/8 (MF). This is the only known colony in the county.

We recorded 22 species of **warblers** this quarter including breeding and migrant species. Highlights were **Wilson's** and **Cape May**.

The Imperial area is still good for breeding **Savannah**, **Grasshopper**, **Vesper** and **Henslow's Sparrows**. Many observers noted that Henslow's were not as numerous this year as in previous years.

**Orchard Orioles** were noted at Jefferson Borough during the period, with a maximum of three seen 7/23 (SS), and they also continued to be found at Imperial.

**Observers:** Mike Fialkovich, Paul Hess, Scott Kinzey, Bob Machesney, Sam Sinderson, Chuck Tague, Jim Valimont, Susanne Varley, Dave Wilton.

## Presque Isle Outing Jan. 13

Meet co-leaders Ben Coulter and Jack Solomon on Sunday, January 13, at 8:30 AM in the first parking lot on the right after entering the park. Bring a lunch or join the indoor diners at a nearby restaurant. Lingering waterfowl and an outside chance at Redpoll, Snowy Owl and Bohemian Waxwing are our targets. Dress very warmly, in layers — a ski mask will help — the wind off the lake can be painful. The park is at the north end of Rt. 832 in Erie County, west of the City of Erie. Distance from Pittsburgh is about 130 miles; estimated driving time 2.5 hours.

### THREE RIVERS BIRDING CLUB

#### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

CIRCLE ONE

SINGLE: \$12

FAMILY: \$15

SUSTAINING: \$100

STUDENT/YOUTH: \$5

CONTRIBUTING MEMBER: \$50

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 PHONE (W) \_\_\_\_\_  
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remit to:  
 Three Rivers Birding Club  
 105 Lindley Lane  
 Pittsburgh, PA 15237

Comments: