



The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

No. 3, February 2002

Bring Your Best Slides to our March 20 Meeting

A “slide slam” is what our treasurer, Bob Machesney, calls a party where people bring their slides to show. That will be our meeting program on Wednesday, March 20. Members are asked to bring their favorite nature slides, particularly of birds. You need not be an expert photographer. If you like your shots, the rest of us might like them too.

Doors will open for socializing at 7 PM at the Frick Park Environmental Center, Beechwood Blvd. in Squirrel Hill, and the meeting will start at 7:30.

Please call or e-mail President Jack Solomon several days in advance to discuss how many slides you might bring: 412-521-3365; solomon@3riversbirdingclub.org If you're not sure you'll be there, let Jack know to help him plan the program. And please show up at 7 to get your slides in a carousel.

Speaking of programs, Wendy Jo Shemansky is our new Program Coordinator. She's busy planning our Birding Festival (see the story below) and working on future meeting programs. She'll be glad to hear your ideas for speakers, and she'll be at the March meeting.

Wendy Jo has been a neuropsychology research technician for 12 years and is working toward her master's degree in environmental science at Duquesne University. For her internship she is studying the Hop Tree among other activities at the Environmental Center. An avid birder, she's the Data Technician for the journal *Pennsylvania Birds*, a District Captain for the Fund for Animals, a former volunteer at a bird sanctuary and wildlife rehabilitation center, and a certified Scuba diver.



THE EYES HAVE IT – Mike Fialkovich, our club's Bird Records Editor, took this striking photograph of a Northern Saw-whet Owl at Presque Isle State Park in Erie County. It is an unusually good view of how an owl's pupils can remarkably adjust to two different lighting conditions at the same time: small at left where the eye sees a bright light and extremely dilated at right when the other eye faces darkness. Mike will be one of the photographers participating in the “slide slam” at our March 20 meeting.

Big Birding Festival in May Will Be Pittsburgh's First

The Three Rivers Birding Club and Frick Park Environmental Center will sponsor Pittsburgh's first major Birding Festival on May 3, 4, and 5. The festival will be packed with outings, workshops, a wine-and-cheese reception and program by Julie Zickefoose, nationally famous natural-history writer and artist, plus an amateur art contest, and displays of binoculars and other birding equipment. All events will be in the park and the Environmental Center, Beechwood Boulevard, Squirrel Hill.

Bird outings will begin at 7:30 on Saturday and Sunday mornings during the peak of migration, when the weekend's bird list could approach 100 species. Saturday morning will also include a “Breakfast with the Artist” Stephen Leed of Lititz, PA, who will work on an original painting while you watch and munch on bagels with cream cheese and sip coffee.

Workshops by experts will cover many interesting topics about birds on Saturday at 10:30 AM and 1:30 PM, and Sunday at 10:30 AM. Workshop leaders will include Steve Hoffman, Director of Bird Conservation for the Pennsylvania Audubon Society; Ted Floyd of the Great Basin Bird Observatory in Reno Nevada, a Pittsburgh native and veteran Frick Park birder; Scott Shalaway,

nature writer whose newspaper columns and radio show are enjoyed by many of our members; Chuck Tague, publisher of the *Nature Observer News*; and our club's Program Coordinator Wendy Jo Shemansky.

The centerpiece on Saturday evening will be the program by Julie Zickefoose, whose illustrations and articles have appeared in *Bird Watcher's Digest* (edited by her husband Bill Thompson III), *The New Yorker*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, and many other publications. Activities will open Friday evening at a “Welcome and Early Bird Check-in” with remarks by festival planners and Club President Jack Solomon.

To cover basic costs, a \$10 registration fee and \$10 per workshop will be charged. Advance registration is necessary because space is limited. A complete program schedule and printable registration form will be on the club's web site, available at the Environmental Center, and mailed to members.

Wendy Jo is organizing the many festival events. For information or to volunteer your help, contact her by e-mail at pabirdsrus@adelphia.net or by phone at 412-224-3318. *We hope to see you there!*

Let's Use The Peregrine To Attract New Friends

By Jack Solomon, Club President

Our club has, as of this writing, 120 members — but nary a one of them is a “Youth/Student.” At least none of them has purchased a membership at the special low \$5.00 youth/student level.

When I order the printing of The Peregrine, I reflect on that phenomenon. For that and other reasons I get 200 copies, and I pass out the extra ones wherever I think they might do some good. Even with all the free time I have, that's not too many places. I have some copies left.

There are, I believe, lots of people — not just young people — whose lives would be enriched by knowing who we are and what we do. It's a fact that my life has been enriched by meeting and talking to birders. Another thing I'm sure of is that there are plenty of people who are new to me who have a lot to offer that will enrich birding in general, and this club's activities in particular.

I've met lots of them since this club started up last year, enjoyed their company, and appreciated what they've done for us. My (perhaps egotistical) view is that birding, one of my favorite hobbies, is good for humanity and the planet. Birders, just by having fun, care about nature as a whole, tend to support environmental causes, and live in ways that conserve resources, in rough proportion to what they've learned in pursuit of their hobby.

It's truly wonderful to have fun and save the world — or at least try to — at the same time.

So, to return to the point, if you would like me to send a complimentary copy of the first (or a later) issue of The Peregrine or you have any use for several copies, let me know. My e-mail is <solomon@3riversbirdingclub.org> and my phone number is 412-521-3365.

And let people know about our web site: www.3riversbirdingclub.org Feel free to use your e-mail program's “Options” to add a message about our web site to your automatic signature. If you don't know how to put a signature on your messages, I'll be glad to help you.

If you want to go birding, I'm up for that even more.

We're in Good Company Among Nature Groups

The Three Rivers Birding Club joins a long list of active birding and nature-oriented organizations in western Pennsylvania. The following are only a few. More will be listed in future issues of The Peregrine:

Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, the area's largest natural history organization, is headquartered at the 134-acre Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve in Fox Chapel., where dozens of events every month include nature walks, lectures, and hands-on activities for all ages. Facilities include the Audubon Center for Native Plants, a natural history library, a Discovery Room for children, a nature store, and five miles of trails. Todd Sanctuary in Butler County has five miles of trails plus outings and educational programs in an undeveloped natural setting. Membership is \$25.00 including a bimonthly newsletter and discounts on purchases and activities. Send check to Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, 614 Dorseyville Rd., Pittsburgh, PA 15238. On the web: <http://aswp.org>

Todd Bird Club, centered in Indiana County and named for the eminent western Pennsylvania ornithologist W. E. Clyde Todd, was organized in 1982 to promote the appreciation and conservation of birds. Outings are held every Saturday at various locations

Letter from the Editor

By Paul Hess

As I'm sure most readers know, a “byline” is the standard word for the line “By...” at the beginning of an article, which names the author. The first three issues of The Peregrine have bylines naming 14 writers, a good start toward my goal of getting as many authors as possible into the newsletter. A credit line on your photograph or illustration is just as welcome. Nothing could be worse than my name and the names of a few officers and committee chairpeople appearing exclusively, over and over again.

Here are some ways members are heartily invited to participate in our newsletter:

* Submit short reports of your trips outside western Pennsylvania for what I hope will be a regular feature “Birding Away.” The first installment is on pages 7 and 8 in this issue. These need not be strictly birding trips; they can be any trip with birding in even a minor role. Tell where you went, what you did, and what you saw. You might encourage other members to take a similar trip — or you might want to discourage them because of problems you had.

* Send ideas for articles you would like to write on any subject that involves birds and birding, from an elementary topic to a contribution to scientific ornithology. Please send an idea first rather than the article, because nothing disappoints a writer more than the infamous “letter of rejection.” Perhaps I can offer suggestions in advance that might help relate the article better to our members.

* Submit photographs and drawings. The first three issues have pictures by five photographers. Many more members have the skills to contribute with a camera, pen and ink, or paintbrush. In this case of course sending ideas isn't necessary. Send your picture. It will very likely be acceptable as long as it is sharp enough to reproduce adequately in our printing process.

* Send communications as Letters to the Editor with questions or comments about the club or the newsletter.

You can send the articles to me by e-mail, phess@salsgiver.com, or by regular mail. The illustrations can come as digital e-mail attachments or as slides, prints, or drawings by regular mail. My mailing address is 1412 Hawthorne St., Natrona Heights, PA 15065.

during migration seasons, and Tuesday mornings throughout the year at Yellow Creek State Park east of the city of Indiana. Meetings are held on the first Tuesday monthly from September through April, and members receive four newsletters each year. Individual membership is \$7.50 and family membership is \$10.00. Make check payable to Todd Bird Club and mail to Gloria Lamer, Treasurer, 515 Laurel Run Road, Penn Run, PA 15765. On the web: <http://homepage.third-wave.com/birding/todd.htm>

Westmoreland Bird and Nature Club was formed in 1981 and now lists 200 members. The club's primary activities are 30 or more field trips each year focusing on birds, botany, reptiles and amphibians, butterflies and dragonflies. Meetings are held three times a year, and a newsletter is published five times per year. To join, send the annual membership fee of \$7.00 to Rose Tillmann, Box 188, New Derry, PA 15671. The club has published a “Checklist of the Birds of Westmoreland County Pennsylvania,” available for \$1.00 at the WildBird Marketplace in Westmoreland Mall near Greensburg, Wild Birds Unlimited in Monroeville, and Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve in Fox Chapel. It can be ordered for \$1.50 from Rose Tillmann. On the web: <http://www.westol.com/~towhee/wcbc.htm>

The Peregrine

Spring Outings Will Seek Land and Water Migrants

Sunday, March 3 — Pymatuning Area. Meet leader Chuck Tague (412-488-8760) of the Nature Observer News at the Pymatuning Visitors Center (Waterfowl Museum) at 8:00 AM. Depending on ice cover, plenty of waterfowl and other winter specialties should be around for this trip. Bald Eagles are almost guaranteed. Rough-legged Hawks are likely, along with the famous albino Red-tailed Hawk that has been there for several years. Other possibilities include Snow Buntings and Horned Larks. Pymatuning Lake is a man-made impoundment that was the sole location for breeding Bald Eagles in Pennsylvania throughout the DDT crisis. Hartstown and Geneva Marshes are nearby, along with farm fields managed for waterfowl and wildlife. All of this diverse habitat provides for a great variety of birds during migration. Take I-79 to the Route 6 exit at Meadville, then Route 6 to Linesville. The Visitors Center is on State Road 3011, 1.25 miles south of Linesville. In Linesville, follow the signs for the Spillway.

Sunday, March 17 — Moraine State Park. Join leader Jack Solomon (412-521-3365) for this outing to one of western Pennsylvania's best birding spots. Meet at the first parking lot in the South Shore day use area (off Route 422, 2 mi. east of I-79) at 8:30 AM. Assuming that the lake is ice-free at this time, the diving ducks should be in substantial numbers on Lake Arthur. Common Loons and Horned Grebes should also be easy to find. Some of the first returning songbirds should also be back including Red-winged and Rusty Blackbirds.

Monday, March 18 — Monongahela River. Here is one of the weekday outings some members have requested. Scott Kinzey (412-766-8813) will lead this outing starting at Riverfront Park on the South Side at 9:00 AM. This is a driving outing up and down the Mon with possible stops at Duck Hollow, McKeesport, Glassport, Elizabeth, and other locations, so be prepared to carpool. The outing is timed to coincide with the usual peak of migrating waterfowl and is perfect for those who don't like to drive long distances to some of the northern hot spots. Scott will show you the best vantage points for watching waterfowl along the Monongahela River. The park is at the foot of 18th Street on the South Side. Coming from the north, cross the Mon over the Birmingham Bridge, 10th Street Bridge or Smithfield Street Bridge to East Carson Street. Take E. Carson to 18th Street, turn north on 18th for several blocks toward the river, and cross the railroad tracks into the park.

Saturday, April 6 — Moraine State Park. Join leaders Fred and Carol McCullough (412-921-6873) for this second outing to one of western Pennsylvania's best birding spots. Three weeks

By Jim Valimont, Outings Chairman

later than our first visit, diving ducks should still be present and a variety of dabbling ducks should now be in. Ospreys should also have returned as well as more migrating songbirds. Meet at the first parking lot on the south shore day use area (off Route 422, 2 mi. east of I-79) at 8:30 AM.

Sunday, April 7 — Imperial Area Woodcock Walk. Chuck Tague (412-488-8760) will lead this evening outing in search of American Woodcock, Wood Thrush, Whip-poor-will, and possibly owls. The Imperial area includes grasslands on recovered strip mines and pine plantations, which make for an interesting mix of habitats that attract a variety of species. Meet Chuck at 7:00 PM at the Game Commission parking lot near Bavington. From Pittsburgh, take Route 22/30 west. Take the Bavington exit and turn right, then immediately left (west) on Steubenville Pike. Go exactly 3.4 miles to an intersection at Haul Road. Turn left into the Game Commission parking lot.

Friday, April 26 — Imperial Area Evening Walk. Chuck Tague (412-488-8760) will lead this evening outing in search of American Woodcock, Wood Thrush, Whip-poor-will, and possibly owls. The Imperial area includes grasslands on recovered strip mines and pine plantations, which make for an interesting mix of habitats that attract a variety of species. Meet Chuck at 7:00 PM at the Game Commission parking lot near Bavington. From Pittsburgh, take Route 22/30 west. Take the Bavington exit and turn right, then immediately left (west) on Steubenville Pike. Go exactly 3.4 miles to an intersection at Haul Road. Turn left into the Game Commission parking lot.

Sunday, April 28 — Pennsy Swamp and Grove City Grasslands. Bob Machesney (412-366-7869) will lead this outing in search of waterfowl and migrants. Some lingering waterfowl migrants will likely remain besides the breeding species. But the focus of the outing will be migrant songbirds, such as warblers, vireos, Indigo Bunting, Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, and others. A short distance away are the grasslands where all the breeding sparrows, including Grasshopper, Vesper, Savannah, and Henslow's should be back. In some years, Dickcissel has bred in this area. This is also the general area where Pennsylvania's only known breeding pair of Sandhill Cranes nest. Meet at the Game Lands parking lot on #2 Mine Road at 7:30 AM. From I-79, take the Grove City exit, west on Rt. 208 to Veterans Road (first left past the light at MacDonald's), left on Brent-North Liberty Road (3-4 miles), right on #2 Mine Road (1/4 mile). Parking lot is about one-fourth of a mile on left.



RARE VISITOR – This Ross's Goose photographed by Scott Kinzey at North Park on Nov. 14, 2000, was only the second Allegheny County record. The first was in March 1999 in Marshall Township. Ross's breed on the Arctic tundra, and their population is increasing. Watch waterfowl flocks closely, and you might find the county's third. Ross's is like a miniature Snow Goose. Besides size, one of several important differences between the two is the shape of the bill. Ross's bill is a very small triangle, and the base forms a straight vertical border with the facial plumage. The base of a Snow's much larger bill curves toward the eye.

Outings Revisited: from balmy to frigid

Moraine State Park – December 2: Was this really December 2? This was our third outing of the fall to Lake Arthur, and all of them were in mild balmy weather. This Sunday we had a cloudless sky and temperatures that hit the sixties. In fact, several times observers noted butterflies — Common Sulphurs, according to Mike Fialkovich. 24 people and two dogs participated. Although waterfowl numbers were far from overwhelming, we did manage a nice variety of species with excellent looks at most. Common Loons were particularly cooperative, providing several very close views that were spectacular through a 60-power scope. We saw several flights of Tundra Swans starting with a distant flock of four birds at the South Shore day use area where we all first met. We also found Ruddy Duck, Bufflehead, Lesser Scaup, Northern Shoveler, Pied-billed Grebe, and American Coots here.

At a stop in one of the picnic areas to search for songbirds, we heard Golden-crowned Kinglet, but could not find the Red-breasted Nuthatches that we located here in October. On the way back to the cars, I heard Eastern Bluebirds calling, saw them flying towards us, and told them to stop. They obeyed and landed at the top of a nearby oak tree for all to observe leisurely.

Later, at the waterfowl observation area, we found plenty of Gadwall, a few Black Ducks, and a flock of Lesser Scaup. A flight of 52 Tundra Swans passed over too quickly for our satisfaction, but a short time later a flight of 18 came over fairly low, allowing everyone a good look. Fortunately, this flock came over twice more, but with an additional small, dark bird in formation. Most of us strained to pick up the details of the bird, but Mike did not hesitate in calling out “blue phase Snow Goose!” Sometimes, it seemed that the swans were flying just to get rid of the goose, but when the goose would turn away from the flock, the swans came back and joined it! When we reached the cars to continue on Route 528, the same flock came by for the third time. Someone noticed another flock of birds higher than the swans, which turned out to be 12 Common Loons.

A quick stop at the 528 bridge gave us spectacular views of five Common Loons diving close by. I found a distant raptor atop a ridge perched in a tree. I thought I knew what it was, but I asked Mike to confirm it and he identified it as an immature Bald Eagle. One of the participants thought this was a great way to break in his new spotting scope! After a few more stops and a few more species (including very distant Hooded Mergansers), we broke for lunch at Eppinger’s on Route 19. I had the buckwheat pancakes and they were fantastic! I’d go out of my way for them again.

After lunch, we made one more stop, at Wilson’s dairy farm where I have seen Horned Larks and Snow Buntings in past years. This year, with the mild weather conditions, we could find nothing in the manured fields. Our 47 species for the day included 22 Common Loons, 5 Pied-billed Grebes, 1 Horned Grebe, the Snow Goose, 76 Tundra Swans, 21 Gadwalls, 4 American Wigeons, 2 American Black Ducks, 4 Northern Shovelers, 2 Ring-necked Ducks, 11 Lesser Scaup, 180 Buffleheads, 4 Hooded Mergansers, 24 Ruddy Ducks, and 1120 American Coots. —**by leader Jim Valimont**

Three Rivers — December 15: Birding on the Monongahela, Ohio and Beaver Rivers was slow on the day of our outing. The gulls that I was hoping for had not yet arrived, and duck variety was low. We started at Riverfront Park on Pittsburgh’s South Side where we saw the resident and domestic type fowl. This flock is quite large, and they get lots of handouts.

A few Ring-billed Gulls flew over and possibly a Herring Gull.

We drove to McKees Rocks and found another large collection of Mallards and tame fowl. A Pied-billed Grebe was spotted in front of Brunot Island, and five Hooded Mergansers were close to the mouth of Chartiers Creek. A Belted Kingfisher was seen and a high flyover cormorant. Dashfield’s Lock and Dam was next. This stop was slow. There were a few Herring Gulls, probably locals, and some flyover gulls that were probably recent arrivals.

From Dashfield’s we went to the Leetsdale Boat Access. This stop was interesting because Becky Smith pointed out a small birdfeeder tucked away in the bushes. House Finches, Mourning Doves, juncos and chickadees were using it. A few White-throated Sparrows were seen in the adjacent bushes. An Accipiter, probably a Sharp-shinned Hawk, flew through and a few gulls were present.

Next stop was Rochester Riverfront Park where the Beaver River enters the Ohio River. A few dozen gulls were here and a Great Blue Heron was spotted in the distance perched in a tree.

The Beaver River was next with stops at the Fish Commission Boat Access and dam near New Brighton. About 200 gulls gave good views at the dam including Ring-billed and Herring Gull. A few American Coots were by the dock at the marina.

The group was split accidentally on the way through Brady’s Run Park en route to the Ohio River at Lock 6 Landing near Vanport. We found each other there, luckily. Two more Belted Kingfishers and a few Great Blue Herons were seen. The gull count was low, only about 45. No one can know when and how many gulls will arrive in the area. This winter the major arrival came two weeks and one day after my outing. —**by leader Scott Kinzey**

Presque Isle State Park – January 13: The “Polar Bear Division” of the Three Rivers Birding Club ignored the Pittsburgh weather forecasts and braved the cold, wind, and stinging snow pellets to join Co-leader Ben Coulter at Presque Isle State Park, Erie County, for the first outing of the new year. Ben lives near PISP, and birds it frequently and capably. Our wounded and ailing co-leader, Jack Solomon (broken hand, flu) put up a good front but was finally convinced by Sue Solomon and the rest of the group to go home early.

The remaining 12 birders, left in Ben’s capable hands, drove and trekked around Perry Monument, Beach 11, Gull Point, and Sidewalk Trail to find 36 species in conditions that ran the gamut from sunny to overcast, calm to windy, clear to blinding snow.

One Glaucous Gull, a life bird for many, sat still for all to view after Joyce Hoffmann spotted it and described where the very pale gull sat in a row of gulls, on the ice, in front of the rusty shovel-shaped thing, to the right of the yellow heavy machinery. An immature Northern Harrier put on a good show by eating its unidentifiable lunch on the icy water’s edge. Anyone who tired of studying gulls could watch and listen to the Tundra Swans. Sights at Beach 11 included Ring-necked Duck, Redhead, Ruddy Duck, Bufflehead, Canvasback, Gadwall, Mallard, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, American Coot, and Greater and Lesser Scaup.

Birders who hiked to Gull Point were rewarded by the sounds of 20 to 30 Common Redpolls flying over, and a smaller flock landing closer and closer until they could be comfortably viewed without optics. The reward for the last birders to call it a day was a Red-headed Woodpecker on Sidewalk Trail, just as Ben had predicted.

Outing participants were Jack and Sue Solomon, Ben Coulter, Bernie Conley (aka Bernie the Bird Watching Bus Driver), Joyce Hoffmann, Tom (Tall Tom) and Janet Kueh, Pat and Sherron Lynch, Joe Sabo, Walt and Dana Shaffer, Chuck and Joan Tague. —**by participant Sherron Lynch**

Pittsburgh CBC Observers Find a Total of 67 Species

By Jim Valimont, CBC Compiler

This winter 119 observers took part in the Pittsburgh Christmas Bird Count on December 29. We counted 67 species and 18,695 individual birds. Our averages in the last 10 years are 67 species and 18,020 birds, so we were very close to our expected totals.

The Pittsburgh count is sponsored by the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania. A complete table of count numbers and summary will be put onto the ASWP web site, www.aswp.org.

The CBC is conducted within a 15-mile diameter circle that is centered at the intersection of Anderson and Hahn Roads near Glenshaw. The circle encompasses most of the City of Pittsburgh, parts of all three rivers, and most of the northern suburbs. The circle is divided into 11 different areas, each coordinated by a single leader, who assigns areas of responsibility, collects the names and addresses of participants and compiles the results. We always conduct the Pittsburgh CBC on the Saturday after Christmas, even if it falls on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day. Because of the large number of participants, it takes a lot of work to compile the data for each sector, so we don't have the count tally meeting and dinner until the next evening.

Here are some highlights:

* 81 Tundra Swans were totally unexpected. Three were sighted by Mark VanderVen flying over Pittsburgh, and 78 were sighted flying over North Park by Shirley Mutz, and Bill and Karen Parker.

* Merlins were found for the fifth year in a row. Two were found at their usual roost in Schenley Park, but one was also found in a cemetery in Shaler Township by Joyce Hoffmann and Dave Wilton.

* For the first time since the count circle was established in 1959, no Ring-necked Pheasant was found on the Pittsburgh CBC.

* The single Ruffed Grouse was flushed by Sam Sinderson, Samuel Karas, and Glen Davis near the Harmar Township water tower.

* Three Killdeer lingered in the area, two in North Park seen by multiple observers and one at Duck Hollow on the Mon River.

* Eight Bonaparte's Gulls were a nice find, marking their appearance for the second year in a row. These were spotted by Jack and Sue Solomon and Mark VanderVen at Duck Hollow.

* Two Barred Owls heard calling in Fox Chapel by Marge Bakkila were a good find.

* 206 Red-bellied Woodpeckers are a new record, topping the 202 counted two years ago.

* The only Hermit Thrush was found by Paul Brown in Kilbuck Township.

* 22 Northern Mockingbirds set another new record. The previous record was 18 set in 1997.

* Two Yellow-rumped Warblers were found by John Orndorff in Franklin Park.

* Two Dark-eyed Juncos possibly of the Oregon subspecies were found in Indiana Township by Chuck Jennewine and Sherrie Reuter. There is some controversy as to whether many past "Oregon" records (primarily birds not described in detail as adult males) might instead have been the *cismontanus* form, which is either a separate subspecies or perhaps a hybrid, depending on the authority consulted. Paul Hess informed me of this distinction, so without a fully detailed description of the birds, we are forced to call these individuals just "Dark-eyed Juncos (form?)".

* A single Brown-headed Cowbird was found in Shaler Township.

* The count's only Purple Finch was also found in Shaler Township.

* Count period species that could not be found on count day included Red-winged Blackbirds in Harmar Township, a Ring-necked Duck below the Highland Park Dam, and a Red-shouldered Hawk in Hampton Township.

(The count period is a standard reporting category from three days before to three days after count day, in this case December 26 to January 1.)

Thanks again to all of the participants who braved the frigid weather, and thanks to the count leaders for another job well done! Special thanks to Mike Fialkovich and Jack Solomon, who organized and compiled the City of Pittsburgh portion of the count, which by itself is larger than most Christmas Bird Counts.

2nd South Hills CBC Sets Three Records

The second South Hills Christmas Bird Count on December 22, 2001, topped the inaugural count in 2000 in three departments. Two of them were notable improvements. The 61 species, including a new "chickadee sp." category for unidentified chickadee species, are two more than the previous year's total. The 71 observers (67 in the field and 4 feeder watchers) easily top the previous 50 participants (40 in the field and 10 watching feeders).

The third one was perhaps less gratifying: The total of 11,065 individual birds was up substantially up from the previous 8,064 – but the increase was made up primarily of European Starlings.

Bill Judd is the CBC's coordinator and Nancy Page is the compiler. Here are the complete totals:

Pied-billed Grebe 3	Black-capped Chickadee 2
Great Blue Heron 15	Carolina Chickadee 160
Canada Goose 265	chickadee sp. 355
Mute Swan 1	Tufted Titmouse 268
Am. Black Duck 3	Red-breasted Nuthatch 7
Mallard 512	White-breasted Nuthatch 135
Common Merganser 4	Brown Creeper 5
Northern Harrier 1	Carolina Wren 106
Sharp-shinned Hawk 3	Golden-crowned Kinglet 24
Cooper's Hawk 5	Eastern Bluebird 108
Red-shouldered Hawk 14	American Robin 528
Red-tailed Hawk 53	Northern Mockingbird 43
American Kestrel 7	Cedar Waxwing 31
Peregrine Hawk 1	European Starling 4,688
Ring-necked Pheasant 6	Yellow-rumped Warbler 4
Wild Turkey 112	Northern Cardinal 395
American Coot 1	Eastern Towhee 1
Herring Gull 2	American Tree Sparrow 23
Rock Dove 125	Chipping Sparrow 5
Mourning Dove 536	Field Sparrow 2
E. Screech Owl 15	Fox Sparrow 3
Great Horned Owl 6	Song Sparrow 101
Belted Kingfisher 8	Swamp Sparrow 1
Red-bellied Woodpecker 88	White-throated Sparrow 57
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 3	Dark-eyed Junco (Slate-colored.) 390
Downy Woodpecker 114	Red-winged Blackbird 1
Hairy Woodpecker 15	Common Grackle 5
Northern Flicker 37	House Finch 255
Pileated Woodpecker 20	American Goldfinch 128
Blue Jay 221	House Sparrow 621
American Crow 417	

Birds in the Three Rivers Area: Oct. to Dec. 2001

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

The end of October brought a treat for birders, a movement of northern finches. These are species that breed in the coniferous forests of Canada and the northern U.S. including crossbills, Pine Siskins, Evening Grosbeaks and Common Redpolls. Many of these birds passed through the area on their way south in search of food. According to scientists at Cornell University, this movement occurs about every two years (differing from an invasion year, which occurs less frequently). After moving through Pennsylvania, they continue south to the highest elevations in the Appalachian Mountains where they spend the winter.

White-winged Crossbills were reported at feeders in Erie, Indiana, Westmoreland and Clarion Counties. **Evening Grosbeaks** and **Pine Siskins** were also noted in those counties plus Allegheny and Butler. Most moved on after a few days, but some siskins and grosbeaks remained in Western Pennsylvania through December. A flock of **Common Redpolls** remained at Presque Isle State Park in Erie from late October through December.

Evening Grosbeaks were first reported 10/31 at Sewickley Heights Park, with a high of 18 on 11/1 (CN). They were also seen at Pine Township on 11/1 (SL, PL). The first **Pine Siskin** was reported 10/16 at a feeder in Harmar Township (JV). They continued to visit area feeders regularly through the first week of November. Most moved on, but up to 22 persisted through December at a feeder in Pine Township (SL, PL).

A **Gadwall** at Turtle Creek 10/30 highlighted the few waterfowl this quarter. Six **Green-winged Teal** at North Park were a nice find 10/28 (SL, PL). On 11/12, 20 **Tundra Swans** were seen in flight over Oakland (KSJ) and others were heard flying over Greentree 12/9 (LS). A very late **American Woodcock** was flushed from a bike trail in Bethel Park 12/3 (RK, DW).

A **Northern Saw-whet Owl** was calling on private property at Imperial during the Raccoon Creek Christmas Count 12/27 (CT, KSJ, LS, DF, BW). **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were in good numbers with reports from feeders in Harmar Township, Churchill, Penn Hills, Green Tree, Natrona Heights, and Verona (JV, WS, DS, MF, LS, PH, JOP), as well as in North Park (PL, SL), Frick Park (JS, SS), Kilbuck Township (PB), and in Pleasant Hills (SSN).

The **Merlins** returned to Schenley Park and were first seen

10/22 (JS, SS). A single **Merlin** was found at a cemetery in Shaler Township 12/29 (JH, DW). Whether it was one of the Schenley Park birds is unknown. In addition to downtown Pittsburgh, **Peregrine Falcons** are now regularly seen in Oakland (KSJ).

A **leucistic Blue Jay**, all white except for a pale gray crest, visited a feeder in the Lawrenceville section of Pittsburgh late December-early January (CB, AB). A **Northern Shrike** was an excellent find at Imperial 12/24 (CT). It was searched for in the following days, but could not be relocated. This is the first Northern Shrike report in the county for many years! Uncommon in the county, an **Orange-crowned Warbler** was seen on the late date of 10/28 at Harrison Hills Park (PH).

A few late **Red-winged Blackbirds** were reported, including one in Harmar Township 11/10 (SK) and 9 there 12/27 (JV, MF). An estimated 1,000 **Common Grackles** were observed leaving a roost on Brunot's Island on the Ohio River 10/18 (DW).

Fox Sparrows were reported in Sewickley Heights Park 10/23-24 (CN) and Harmar Township 11/6-12/2 (JV). **White-crowned Sparrows** were found in the Imperial area in November and December (WS, DS, MF). Normally, this species is found only during migration, but they have been seen in the Imperial area in the winter the past few years. 18 **Snow Buntings** were spotted 11/18 at Imperial, a rare find in Allegheny County (CT, SV). See the upcoming Christmas Bird Count results at www.aswp.org for other interesting December reports.

Observers: Carole and Al Borek, Paul Brown, Mike Fialkovich, Donna Foyle, Paul Hess, Ron Kean, Pat and Sherron Lynch, Chris Knoll, Julie Pahountis-Opacic (JOP), Kate St. John, Walt & Dana Shaffer, Sam Sinderson (SSN), Linda Sporrer, Chuck Tague, Jim Valimont, Susanne Varley, Brady Wassum, Dave Wilton.

What is "leucistic"?

The leucistic Blue Jay described above, discovered by Carole and Al Borek at their feeder in Lawrenceville, proves that some abnormal conditions can be quite beautiful. The word "leucism" is oddly imprecise for a scientific term, referring to various kinds of pale plumage aberrations depending on who is using it. For an explanation of three different definitions of leucism, see the Three Rivers Birding Club web site and go to Discussion Forum, to Sightings, to December's Posts, and finally to the replies to Carole and Al's Dec. 3 message "Leucistic Jay." No matter which definition is applied, the Boreks have been using the term appropriately. — *by Paul Hess, Editor*

THREE RIVERS BIRDING CLUB MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION Date _____

Remit to: Three Rivers Birding Club, 105 Lindley Lane, Pittsburgh, PA 15237

NAME		Applicant's Comments: (ideas, questions, skills you can offer)
ADDRESS		
ADDRESS		
CITY		
STATE		
ZIP		
PHONE (H)		
PHONE (W)		
E-MAIL		

All dues are annual. Membership runs October 1 to September 1

CIRCLE ONE: **SINGLE: \$12** **FAMILY: \$15** (two or more people at the same address)

STUDENT/YOUTH: \$5 (under age 19 or full-time student) **CONTRIBUTING MEMBER: \$50** **SUSTAINING: \$100**

Birding Away: Tough Lifer Plus Some Envable Lists

(Editor's note: This is the first of what I hope will be frequent feature in The Peregrine highlighting local birders' trips outside western Pennsylvania. I encourage members to submit short articles like these to describe their trips for other members' enjoyment, envy, and perhaps doing it themselves sometime.)

Up on a Mountain...

By Joe Walko

Every life bird added to your list has a story, some more interesting than others. The amount of work you do to add that life bird, however, usually contributes directly to the nostalgic treatment of that sighting. I can't imagine that the memories of adding a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch to my life list will ever fade. I can honestly say that I have never worked harder for a life bird than I did for that finch.

Mountain birds hold a dear place in my heart. Perhaps it's their beauty amidst the ruggedness of mountain scenery, or maybe it's the relative solitude the species enjoy among the high places. Somehow I feel they appreciate the beauty and challenge of such an environment as much as I do. This passion found me on Mount Rainier in 1998. The plan was to climb to the top. I was vastly unprepared and under-trained. At 13,500 feet I gave out. I had never been so cold, so exhausted and so sick in my life. I was suffering from acute mountain sickness, complete with headache and vomiting.

As I stumbled back down the mountain, my physical condition improved the lower I got, but my mental condition remained bleak. I just wanted to be down off the mountain. All the dreams that went into this trip seemed but a distant and unimportant memory.

It was in this low state, while on a rest break at around 11,000 feet, that the mountain birds once again reminded me of why I admire them so much. Sitting on a glacier with my head between my knees, I heard a chattering of birds. Up to this point, I was focused solely on climbing; I had noticed the flocks of sparrow like birds dancing around the snowfields before, but had not the time to spend studying them. I looked up now to see a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch perched on my ice axe, not more than three feet away! A life bird at 11,000 feet on the Ingraham glacier on Mount Rainier, while I was in the midst of the most agonizing physical strain I had ever experienced. It was too serendipitous! My mood brightened immensely as the little bird searched for handouts and crumbs at the popular rest spot. I couldn't help but be impressed that these birds can survive in such conditions. The life bird buoyed my spirits enough to give me the inspiration I needed to get down off the mountain. They also gave me a life bird I'll never forget.

Cape May adventure...

By Pat and Sherron Lynch

Late September is the best time for species diversity at Cape May so we traveled the eight hours from Pittsburgh on September 27. We were not disappointed! In the remaining hours of daylight at Cape May Point we found 25 species including two large groups of Black Skimmers.

Cape May Bird Observatory offers daily walks, workshops, and guides for hire to birders of all skill levels. For novice birders

these services were invaluable. Information is available on their website at www.njaudubon.org. We had arranged to have Michael O'Brien as a guide for Friday, September 28, and what a perfect day it was. There could not have been better weather, winds, timing, or a better guide than Michael. We saw 109 species from Cape May to Brigantine. We stood still and the birds came to us by the dozens. Highlights included Least Bittern, Brant, 10 species of raptors, and 22 warbler species. The Connecticut Warbler did a quick fly-by, the Northern Waterthrush was cooperative, and the Dicksissel was heard but not seen.

Michael's wife, Louise Zemaitis, called on the cell phone at 4:30 pm to say that she needed help counting the Monarchs which were congregating in trees — just like the photos from Mexico. We went to the Hawk Watch and were overwhelmed by the sight of 4,880 butterflies arriving and clinging to two sassafras trees.

The following day was sunny but the winds had shifted and we only recorded 56 species. In The Meadows a Sora and a Green Heron were within two feet of each other at the same time that an American Bittern was on the opposite side of the trail.

In the rain on Sunday we covered Higbee Beach, Avalon Seawatch, Wetlands Institute, Stone Harbor Landfill, and Tuckahoe (McNamara) for a total of 62 species. Black Scoter was new for our life list, but we missed the Gannet at the seawatch. On Monday morning Pete Dunne led our group on a soggy hike through The Meadows where we had our first Great Cormorant and three White-rumped Sandpipers.

The sun came out again and we took the 70-minute ferry ride to Lewes, Delaware, on October 2. The gulls were very entertaining, but we missed the Gannet again. Cape Henlopen State Park and Prime Hook added the Saltmarsh

Sharp-tailed Sparrow as one of the 52 species for the day. The last day of birding included Bombay Hook and mosquitos, Little Creek and wasps, and Port Mahon and stink bugs. Marbled and Hudsonian Godwits, a large group of American Avocets, five Black-crowned Night-Herons, and thousands of Snow Geese completed our birding adventure with 147 species and eight lifers.

Beauty in Beijing...

By Sam Sinderson

My wife Dorothy and I toured Beijing, China, Nov. 11-18 with an AARP tour group from Upper St. Clair. We saw the most interesting tourist sites, including the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, the Great Wall and much more. It was a thoroughly enjoyable trip, except for the 13-hour flight to and from Chicago. Of course, I birded whenever I could.

First, let me say that Beijing has the reputation of being devoid of birds. As our guide said, at least in southern China, they eat everything there that flies except airplanes. Actually, there are lots of birds in Beijing. Unfortunately most of them are Eurasian Tree Sparrows. Yes, this is the same species found around St. Louis. One also sees flocks of feral Rock Doves. I only identified 19 species overall, not including the Rock Dove, of which 10 were new to me. The life birds were Little Grebe, Light-vented Bulbul, Dusky Thrush, Pere David's Laughingthrush, Azure-winged Magpie, Blue Magpie, Eurasian Magpie, Daurian Jackdaw, Large-billed Crow and White-cheeked Starling. Others that I had previously seen were Black-crowned Night-Heron, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Common Merganser, Eurasian Kestrel, Hoopoe, Coal Tit, Carrion Crow and Eurasian Tree Sparrow.

...continued on page 8

The Peregrine

...continued from page 7

Although Tree Sparrows were probably most numerous, the Azure-winged Magpie (Gray Happy Bird, as the Chinese call it) was the most visible bird in the Beijing area besides the Crows. Eurasian Magpies, which look identical to our Black-billed Magpie, are also very visible and fairly numerous. The Blue Magpie (Blue Happy Bird), of which I only saw one small flock at the Summer Palace, were truly spectacular with a long flowing tail and a deep blue color. There was no really birdy place, but the various parks, especially the Summer Palace, at the right time contain numbers of birds. It is just that the crowds of people are so dense that the birds are not about. One must get to less inhabited parts of the parks to see more birds. I didn't have time to do much of that. Of course, there are lots of free flying birds at the zoo around the large pond, but one isn't sure which species are escapees. For instance, at the zoo I saw a flock of a kind of Myna that is not in my new China guide and I still have not identified. It could have been an exotic zoo bird which has escaped, bred and become feral.

Beijing is an interesting city with lots of history to be absorbed. However, it has very dirty air (though apparently improved recently). Over 13 million people live in Beijing. Their daily living and their comings and goings produce much of the smog. Even though the government has moved the steel mills from the city (to pollute somewhere else, I suppose) and they are beginning to use electricity instead of coal to heat, after the first day, when we had a light snow accompanying a cold front, the smog was obvious. Don't miss a chance to see this city now that the government is anxious to make a good impression in preparation for the Olympics. However, if you want to see many birds, book a birding tour if that is possible.

Washington in August...

By Mike Fialkovich

I took a family vacation Aug. 8-17, 2001, to visit my brother, who lives in Richland in southeastern Washington. Since this was a family trip, I did not have the entire time to bird, but I got out every morning around my brother's place and looked for birds in the sagebrush desert around the area. It is quite arid in the southeastern part of the state—high temperatures were 95-102 every day, so the afternoons were not a good time to be out in the field.

At McNary National Wildlife Refuge near Richland the ponds and marshes attract a variety of birds. I saw at least 12 White Pelicans, Cinnamon Teal, Ruddy Duck, Caspian Tern, Virginia Rail (heard), Black-crowned Night-Herons, a Swainson's Hawk, Western Kingbirds, Bewick's Wrens, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Brewer's Sparrows, many American Coots, and a very close Striped Skunk.

I also visited an area called Rock Creek Road, which I read about in the book on bird-finding in Washington. It is near the Washington/Oregon border and is a riparian area lush with trees in the middle of the desert. The book stated Lewis's Woodpeckers are abundant here, and I saw three of them, a life bird for me. I also saw two Rock Wrens and a Canyon Wren, Say's Phoebe, Western Wood-Pewee, a Black-crowned Night-Heron, an American Avocet, Great Blue Heron, an Osprey, two Lazuli Buntings and Eastern Kingbirds. A coyote ran across the road.

I saw Burrowing Owls at a golf course in Richland and at the Hanford Nuclear site. These were the first I've seen since 1987! In my brother's backyard Black-billed Magpies and California Quails were daily visitors.

We visited Mt. St. Helens, which is recovering surprisingly well from the 1980 eruption. The wildflowers were great! There were few birds including an Orange-crowned Warbler, Rufous Hummingbirds, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Mt. Rainier National Park is breathtaking. Many Red Crossbills were flying over, Winter Wren, Clark's Nutcracker, Gray and Steller's Jays, Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, Violet-green Swallows, and "Oregon" Juncos were all seen. The wildflowers above timberline were spectacular.

Our final destination was Seattle and Olympic National Park. In downtown Seattle, I got my second life bird, the abundant Glaucous-winged Gull. The ferry ride across Puget Sound produced three Pigeon Guillemots. In the Olympic Mountains, Red Crossbills were often heard flying over. Since the forests grow right to the coast, a flock came into the Sitka Spruce trees on the beach. I saw a single Band-tailed Pigeon flying over and got close to some Common Ravens. A treat at Hurricane Ridge was close looks at four Blue Grouse. This is the place I got my life Blue Grouse back in 1987. An Olympic marmot and snowshoe hare were new mammals added to my list. Northwestern Crows were common and can only be found on the Olympic Peninsula.

Seeing a wide variety of habitats, some the best scenery in the U.S., and great birds made this trip to the Pacific northwest one of my most memorable vacations.

Big Day in Poland...

By Bill Hintze

On June 25 Steve Gaulin and I did a Big Day in north-central Poland in the vicinity of the city of Torun on the Vistula River, where I had been living since October. Steve had noticed that there was no ABA record for Poland so we thought we'd get the ball rolling — and stake our claim to instant fame.

The result was in the reasonable range for a first try without a test run by car: 108 species, despite many misses. Here are our best hits: Corncrake, Spotted Redshank (migrating south!), Black Stork, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Ortolan Bunting, Stonechat, Bearded Reedling, Bittern, Middle and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, and Quail. Our most frustrating misses: Serin, Pied Flycatcher, Green and Black Woodpeckers, Barred Warbler, and Common Merganser.

Next year, with better planning and more sleep (so we can make all our stops this time!) and an earlier date we hope for 125+. Anybody want to join us? And bring your tourist hat, too, as Torun is on the UNESCO list of world heritage sites because of its beautiful and well-preserved medieval town center!

The Voice of a Ghost

How would you like to hear the only recording ever made of an Ivory-billed Woodpecker, that magnificent phantom of every birder's dreams? You'll find the ghostly voice, recorded in 1935, on the Three Rivers Birding Club web site. It is in a wonderful package of articles and interviews, "The Search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker," compiled by our webmaster Julia Pahountis-Opacic. A team of six birder-explorers has been searching an immense swamp in Louisiana since January 17, hoping to discover that this great bird is not extinct after all. Let's hope with them.