



# The Peregrine

## Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

Vol. 5, No. 5, June/July 2006

### Ivory-billed Woodpecker Search Will Thrill Us July 5

Join Ron Rohrbaugh, director of Cornell's Ivory-billed Woodpecker Research Project, at the Three Rivers Birding Club meeting on Wednesday, July 5, as he takes us behind the scenes in the historic search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

This special presentation, "A Feathered Needle in a Haystack," will be held in the auditorium of the Pitt Graduate School of Public Health, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Bouquet Street in Oakland. Doors will open for seating at 7 PM. We will skip our traditional refreshments (no food and drink allowed), business meeting, bird reports, and announcements. Enter the auditorium by the Fifth Avenue entrance, which opens directly into the lobby of the auditorium. There is on-street parking (not metered after 6 PM) and a small lot across Fifth from the building.

"This the most exciting meeting 3RBC has had since our founding in 2001. It celebrates the best, most important, ornithological news I can recall in four decades of birding," Club President Jack Solomon said. "All of us connected with setting up this meeting, particularly Program Director Neil Nodelman, who spent no small amount of time and effort lining up Dr. Rohrbaugh, are proud that 3RBC is associated through this event with efforts to recover the Ivory-bill and protect its habitat."

Just when everyone thought this most regal of woodpeckers was gone for good, a persistent search revealed its existence in the Big Woods of Arkansas, to the shock and joy of ornithologists, birders, and nature lovers globally. Ron will describe the rich history and ecological saga of North America's largest woodpecker and the thrill of the search and discovery. We will hear tape recordings of the Ivory-bill's sounds and see photo images of the bird taken last year.

Criticisms of the evidence by David Sibley and others have been published in the journal *Science* and other publications. When asked if he would comment on the controversy in this talk, Ron said: "Yes, I'll show the actual video that was shot by David Luneau and describe how we (and other scientists) have analyzed

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*AUDUBON'S MASTERPIECE – John James Audubon painted these Ivory-billed Woodpeckers sometime before 1826 in Louisiana. (illustration courtesy of the Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh Library System)*

### Club's Crane Creek Trip Was Another Birding Bonanza

Early reports from the annual 3RBC trip to Ohio told of another excitingly successful year. Complete results will be announced later, including sightings at Point Pelee, Ontario, but two participants reported the initial findings.

**From Karen Parker, May 5-6:** The early bird might get the worm, but in this case, the early birder gets the Short-eared Owl. Trip co-leader Margie Kern and Joan Tague were rewarded for their early rising by a Short-eared Owl flyover as they drove to Magee Marsh at Crane Creek State Park. Margie also joyously recorded a life bird – a Yellow-headed Blackbird. Joan compiled a preliminary count of 117 birds Friday and Saturday.

Thirty birders attended the Saturday night dinner. Sixteen logged life birds. New birders Barb Schomer and Bru Randall each saw 22 lifers on the first day of their first 3RBC outing at Crane Creek.

**From Jack Solomon, through May 9:** We have 157 species so far, including 28 warbler species. Six of the best species have been King Rail, Marbled Godwit, Connecticut Warbler, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and two Lark Sparrows caught in the act of mating at Oak Openings, near Toledo. (*Editor's note: After returning, Jack and Sue Solomon reported a combined total of 179 species for the group.*)

# The Peregrine

## President's Message

### We're Having Lots of Fun; Can We Have Even More?

By Jack Solomon

The Three Rivers Birding Club will be five years old in July. We have about 225 members and generate around \$3,500 a year in dues. We hold no fund-raisers and sell nothing. Our biggest expenditures are for printing and postage for this newsletter, followed by rental of the Phipps Garden Center meeting room, speakers' fees, and the website.

Recently we've been spending about as much annually as we bring in, but we have a cushion of about a thousand dollars in the treasury, so we're OK financially. The cushion stems from the early days, when we published a smaller newsletter and from programs by generous and talented friends of 3RBC such as Mike Fialkovich, Chuck Tague, and Walt Shaffer, who gave us their presentations for free or for a nominal honorarium.

And yet, I have grand designs. I'd like to bring in national figures in birding, such as Kenn Kaufman, Debra Shearwater, Julie Zickefoose, and David Allen Sibley. They could cost from \$500 to a few thousand dollars each.

It would be great to have new features on our website that it would be unreasonable to ask our volunteer webmaster to produce: the cyber telephone tree I discussed in a previous message, a hired service to announce time-sensitive news such as a cancelled outing, and a calendar for other nature clubs to post their outings.

*The Peregrine* looks great in color. Check out the back issues on our website. It could be printed in color, but that's expensive.

We can continue going as we have been going. We're having lots of fun now. To do more, we would need to raise more money. A number of ways come to mind, which are not mutually exclusive.

We could raise dues. I estimate that it would take an increase of about 100% to do all of those things by a dues increase alone. That sort of makes me shudder and feel faint.

A fee could be charged for our programs – though it would pain me to give up our policy of free activities for both members and non-members.

We could hold fund-raisers. We usually have giveaways at our meetings, but we could charge for raffle tickets. We could hold a banquet or a bake sale.

We could see if a substantial number of members would accept *The Peregrine* by e-mail. It would be in color, and there would be savings on printing and postage.

Nothing has to be done immediately. We have our cushion, and we're doing fine. If, however, you feel the way I do, let me or the other officers know. I'd love to ride a groundswell to glory.

## Another World Series Victory!

Our club member Ross Gallardy's team won its class in New Jersey Audubon's World Series of Birding for the second straight year. The team tallied 212 species in 24 hours on May 13 to win the Zeiss Youth Birding Award in the Grades 9-12 division. Funds pledged to Ross by 3RBC and by many members aid Allegheny Front Hawkwatch and Buffalo Creek Valley IBA.

## The Peregrine

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## Letter from the Editor

By Paul Hess

An unusual wading bird at Canonsburg Lake in Washington County was the star of a major story in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* on May 10. Several area birders and 3RBC members – Geoff Malosh, Mark Vass, and your *Peregrine* editor – were featured in the article as well.

The article focused on the mysterious identity of the bird, which is suspected by some to be the first known hybrid between a Great Blue Heron and a Great Egret, but by others to be merely an abnormally white Great Blue Heron. *P-G* science writer David Templeton reported how Mark had originally reported the bird to Geoff, who then described it in detail and sent photographs to various experts for an opinion.

One of Geoff's excellent photographs accompanied the article, and the original story about the bird in the June 2004 issue of *The Peregrine* was cited. It's gratifying to see the significance of our birders' activities taken seriously in the media. Congratulations, Mark and Geoff, for making it happen.

## Outings to Come

# We'll Go North for Species We Don't See Every Day

By Steve Thomas, Outings Director

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

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

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

**Sunday, August 20 – Shenango Reservoir:** Dave Wilton and Steve Thomas will lead this outing to what has often been one of western Pennsylvania's best locations for migrating shorebirds. Meet at 8 AM at the Golden Run Access area. Take I-79 north to the Grove City exit. At the exit turn left toward the Grove City Shops. Cross the bridge over I-79 and make an immediate right turn onto Route 258. Go approximately 9 miles to Mercer, then another 8 miles on Route 258 to the Shenango River Reservoir. Make a right at the Golden Run Access sign. The road will "T" after one-half mile. Turn right and go one-half mile to the end of the road. The parking lot is on your left. We will carpool from there. (If you miss the right turn to Golden Run Access, you will end up at Route 18 at the Tara restaurant, where you can turn around and return.) Bring lots of water, food, a wide-brimmed hat, and footwear for muddy conditions.

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Meanwhile, don't forget: This is the time to do Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas surveys. Even if you do not "own" a survey block, you can still submit data on any breeding birds you find. For more information about how to help, see the breeding bird atlas website, [www.carnegiemn.org/atlas/home.htm](http://www.carnegiemn.org/atlas/home.htm).



*EARLY WANDERER – March is unusually early for a Great Egret to wander into southwestern Pennsylvania. This one appeared at a wetland along the Allegheny River in Fox Chapel, where Dan Yagusic found it and Brian Shema photographed it on March 30. See Mike Fialkovich's bird report on page 12.*

## Briefly...

**FROM SEASON TO SEASON:** Watch the transformation from spring into summer at a Wissahickon Nature Club outing on the Butler-Freeport Trail. Esther Allen and Chuck Tague will lead the outing on Friday, June 16, at 10 AM in search of birds, flowers, butterflies, and other creatures. The trail is wheelchair accessible. Bring binoculars, field guides, lunch, snacks, and beverages. Call Susanne Varley (412-771-4737) to let the club know you're coming.

From Pittsburgh take Route 28 north to Exit 17 in Freeport, then take Route 356 north (right) for 3.6 miles. Turn right onto Sarver Road (SR 2018). After 0.7 mile, turn left into the parking lot at the trail, just after the Buffalo Township Fire Hall.

**NEW ON-LINE PHOTO GALLERY:** Another of our members has opened a website of photographs: Brian Shema's "Avian Exposures" at [www.betterphoto.com/?avianexposures](http://www.betterphoto.com/?avianexposures). You'll see subjects ranging from Prothonotary Warbler to Eastern Bluebird, from Canada Goose to Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and many more species. They include basic portraits, action shots, and artistic compositions.

Brian joins Geoff Malosh and Tom Pawlesh for a trio of members with important on-line galleries. Take a look at the sites regularly to see new photos that are added.

Geoff's site is [home.earthlink.net/~pomarine/indes.html](http://home.earthlink.net/~pomarine/indes.html).

Tom's is [www.tompawlesh.smugmug.com](http://www.tompawlesh.smugmug.com).

## Meeting Minutes

### 3RBC's Photographers Flock Beautifully into the Digital Era

By Pat and Sherron Lynch, Co-secretaries

Sixty-one 3RBC members and visitors were treated to a show of members' photographs at our April 19 meeting.

President Jack Solomon announced that Steve Thomas, the new Outings Director, has agreed to serve on the Steering Committee, which acts as our Board. Jack reported that young birders Karena Gregg, Ross Gallardy, and Patrick Susoeff have been honored. Karena received a Youth Scholarship from the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology to attend the PSO's annual meeting. Ross will receive a contribution to be donated to local birding causes in the amount of one dollar per species that his team finds in the World Series of Birding. Patrick, an avid birder who participates in the Breeding Bird Atlas and the Christmas Bird Count and has written articles about his travels for *The Peregrine*, will be sponsored at the PSO meeting by 3RBC.

Mary Beth Steisslinger, Ecology Restoration Coordinator for Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, spoke about how we can enhance biodiversity in Schenley, Frick, Riverview, and Highland Parks. Big problems are invasive species, deer, heavy use, and unleashed dogs. She thanked Mike Fialkovich, Amanda and Bob Haney, Fred and Carol McCullough, and Jack and Sue Solomon who have been very active in helping with park restoration projects.

Our show of members' photographs has evolved into a PowerPoint and slide presentation. Geoff Malosh and his wife Kristin started the show with gorgeous digital photos taken in Utah, San Diego, and closer to home. His photo of six Surf Scoters had just been shot four days previously. Donna Foyle showed a sequence of digital photos on the building of a beaver dam, and then had an assortment of Florida and backyard shots with a musical accompaniment – what a clever presentation. The kayakers at the falls at Ohiopyle were so close-up that you could sense being there yourself. Neil Nodelman, new to digital photography, has caught on fast. His birding tour around much of southern Florida included great shots of birds and butterflies. Sheila Thorpe taught us about manatees and shared some artistic shots taken on a camping trip in Florida. Sadly, she will be moving out of the area soon. Bob and Dianne Machesney showed pictures taken by Dianne at the 2005 PSO meeting in Clarion and from a trip to Florida. They ended with an exciting backyard bird, a displaying male Wild Turkey, enjoying that great habitat they have been nurturing.

Photographers shooting slide film were Mike Fialkovich, Pat Lynch, and Sherron Lynch. Mike helped us to appreciate the beauty of the wildflowers, snakes, and birds in western Pennsylvania. The Red-shouldered Hawk in flight clearly demonstrated the identifying wing crescents. Pat and Sherron showed photos taken on a recent trip to rainy Hawaii. A series of close-ups of a Laysan Albatross showed its interaction with an adorable chick. Many photos included introduced species, and a few shots demonstrated the difficulties of trying to find the few remaining endemics. (Editor's note: Sherron, ever the teacher, offered a bit of information that many of us did not know. Laysan is pronounced "LIE-sahn," not "LAY-san.")

The hour was late, but a few people stayed until the building was ready to close for the night. They didn't want to miss seeing a few more of Geoff's favorite photos.



*LEADING THE SEARCH: Ron Rohrbaugh, Cornell University's director of the historic Ivory-billed Woodpecker search, will tell us of the project's progress at our July 5 meeting. (photo from Cornell University)*

#### Ivory-billed Woodpecker

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and interpreted it. I'll also be playing numerous audio recordings that have been discussed in *Science* and in the general media."

You won't want to miss this inspiring and dynamic story.

Ron, a scientist and naturalist, continues to lead a team of researchers in the effort to find, study, and restore Ivory-bill populations in Arkansas. He is also a member of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Ivory-billed Woodpecker Recovery Team and will speak on the efforts to search for more of these elusive birds and to assure the protection of their critical habitat. Ron has been instrumental in developing and implementing the team's search strategy. He has written the search and study protocols, interpreted aerial photography, and joined the searchers in their day-to-day work. Ron is taking the lead at Cornell in developing an exhibit focused on the ecology and conservation of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

Ron has spent years studying species such as Northern Goshawks, Short-eared Owls, and Henslow's Sparrows. He did his undergraduate and graduate studies at Pennsylvania State University and has been on the staff at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology since 1996. Ron has studied the nesting ecology and habitat selection of birds, with special emphasis on impacts of habitat management and human activities. He has studied and published professional papers on American Kestrels, Northern Harriers, and several species of passerines associated with prairies and grasslands. Ron's career has also focused on engaging citizens in scientific projects to answer broad-scale biological questions.

"The Ivory-billed Woodpecker epitomizes the resiliency of our natural world. If recoveries of the Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon weren't enough, anyone who still doubts the efficacy of three decades of conservation need only look to the Ivory-billed Woodpecker for inspiration. I hope that the discovery and continued survival of this magnificent bird will finally galvanize Americans to become unified stewards of our world's natural resources," Ron said.

He will describe the experiences of Audubon and Alexander Wilson in the early 1800s and tell us about the last universally accepted sighting of this species in Louisiana in 1944. We will learn about the ecological plight of the Ivory-bill, the complicated history of the fight to save and study it, and the new series of intensive searches that began in 2004.

Will Ron have some up-to-the-minute, breaking good news for us about the results of this year's search for the bird of the century? Come and find out.

## Bird Watch

# LOWA 'nd Behold an Odd Discovery

By Chuck Tague

It sounded simple enough. Bob Mulvihill's requests for help always sound simple. The spring of 2001 was rapidly approaching and Bob, then a researcher at the Carnegie Museum's Avian Research Center at Powdermill, needed someone (meaning me) to hike some streams in the Laurel Highlands and look for banded Louisiana Waterthrushes.

When I found a waterthrush, which Bob always referred to by its four-letter bander's code, LOWA, all I had to do was call it in with a taped recording of LOWA songs and alarm chips. Then I would note the LOWA's location and the number, colors, and position of the bands. There would be a standard U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service aluminum band and a series of brightly colored plastic bands. Each combination of bands was unique, and he could determine when and where the LOWA was first banded without recapturing the bird.

I said, "Sure, I have plenty of spare time in the spring." Bob ignored my sarcasm. He pulled a yellow marker and a stack of worn and ratty topographic maps out of a drawer. For the next 10 minutes we sat silently; I watched Bob sketch a half dozen or so scrawny, leafless trees on the maps. The branching trees were actually the streams and their tributaries I was to census, about a hundred miles worth.

I nodded my head knowingly as he explained the size and character of streams LOWAs favored. Bob then began to explain the significance of each band color and combination. I furiously took notes. Eventually, after I'd flipped the pages of my notebook four times, Bob noticed that I was drawing fender flames on a doodle of a hot rod. "Just get as much information as you can and we'll figure it out."

As in most scientific endeavors, I was searching for an answer to a specific question. For five years, beginning in 1996, Bob banded LOWAs as part of a water quality study. His study area was two streams near Powdermill in Westmoreland County. My question was, "How often do the LOWAs hatch and banded in Bob's study area disperse and nest in adjacent watersheds?"

I started my odyssey in late April. I began with the stream I knew best, Jones Mill Run. I trudged from its confluence with Laurel Hill Creek at Laurel Hill State Park to Jones Mill Run Road. Then I drove along Jones Mill Run Road, stopping every three-tenths of a mile to play the tape. When the much-diminished stream diverged from the road I hiked up the mountain until it was just a trickle. I did the same on its every tributary. I had a great time. I found trillium, hobblebush, wood turtles, and lots of singing warblers. I found, however, a mere handful of LOWAs.

Dismayed, I called Bob. He wasn't surprised. He meant to warn me that the Jones Mill Run Watershed, one of the cleanest in western Pennsylvania, was mysteriously impoverished of waterthrushes.

Over the next three weekends I covered all but one of the other watersheds. They were loaded with LOWAs. None, however, wore Bob's bands.

I had very little free time after that, and when I did, conditions weren't suitable for slogging through mountain streams. Time was running out. On June 13, although the streams were still running fast and high, I headed for Indian Creek near Kregar, the last stretch on my list. This was the closest of my assigned streams to

Powdermill.

I decided to skip the section of the stream that ran through private property. Instead I hiked a service road through the state forest. The muddy road wound about half a mile through some high trees to the creek.

Less than a hundred yards from the parking area a sparrow-sized bird darted in front of me. It landed on a branch then bobbed like a Spotted Sandpiper. "Damn," I thought, "LOWAs aren't supposed to be this far from a stream."

I lifted my binoculars. Not only was it indeed a LOWA, its legs were bejeweled with hardware.

I noted the position of the bands and observed the LOWA for several minutes. I watched it fly into an eroded bank over a drainage ditch. It disappeared into the exposed roots. A second waterthrush dropped down with an insect. This one had no bands. The LOWAs obviously had a nest in the bank, so I quietly moved off and finished my route. There were several other LOWAs, but no more with bands. I felt a little uneasy as I splashed through the cool, clear water. I started the day satisfied that I had thoroughly covered over a hundred miles of streams. Now I wondered how many LOWAs I had missed because they nested in marginal, non-traditional habitat like a roadside ditch.

I returned to the car late in the afternoon and called Bob. He was excited, although he wished I'd called when I first discovered the bird. I heard him mumble something about an important family function in an hour. Since it was so late in the season he decided to check it out. Within minutes, Bob and Powdermill's senior bander emeritus, Bob Leberman, were on the road with mist nets, a box of bands and banding tools, a tape player, and assorted other implements. They forgot to bring extra paper bags.

When they found me I was eating my lunch. I took it with me as we ran down the mud road. It's a good thing, too. Within minutes the two Bobs had captured the banded LOWA and five fully-feathered youngsters that were hours away from fledging. My collapsible cooler was the only container we had to hold the nestlings.

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*CAN YOU FIND THEM? – Talk about camouflage! This is why Chuck Tague had to look long and hard to find and photograph these two Louisiana Waterthrush fledglings huddled in their well-hidden nest. He describes the experience in this edition of "Bird Watch."*

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## Bird Watch

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Bob Mulvihill was concerned that baby warbler droppings in my lunch box would gross me out. I reminded him I had permits to keep birds of prey for my education programs; my next task was to go home and clean up after a screech owl and a Red-tailed Hawk.

The male LOWA was one Bob had banded two years before. It was not far from its previous nest, but it had a new mate. I did get a chance to photograph the entrance to the nest before Bob captured and banded the youngsters. It took me awhile to spot it. Two

soon-to-be fledglings filled the entrance, their soft, new plumage perfectly matched to the color, texture, and pattern of the exposed soil. If it weren't for a splash of white excrement on the bank, I never would have noticed their eyes and beaks.

I had a great time that spring although I didn't help Bob much. I shed little light on the whereabouts of all the young LOWAs he had banded. The unconventional but successful nest I stumbled on only created more unanswered questions.

If you do spot a LOWA with bands on its legs, call Bob without hesitation. I'm sure he'll want to know.

To learn more about Bob Mulvihill's research on Louisiana Waterthrush go to [www.powdermill.org/research/waterthrush.htm](http://www.powdermill.org/research/waterthrush.htm).

## Outings Revisited

### From Waterfowl to Warblers, It Was Another Fine Spring

**Allegheny and Ohio Rivers – March 19:** A biting wind and our resident Herring Gull colony greeted 29 birders under the Highland Park Bridge for a river outing in Pittsburgh. After our introductions, Jack Solomon eagerly urged everyone to continue working and paying taxes so he can finance future trips south during the cold weather. Jack and Sue had just come back two days before from a vacation in the Southwest. They were absolutely enthralled at our early spring weather!

Carpooling was a must this day, so we quickly selected vehicles and began our trek. As we were leaving, a pair of Buffleheads landed on the water directly in front of us. Traveling up the Allegheny River, we made stops at the Fox Chapel wetlands and the townhouse development, Cove at St. Charles (Blawnox), and Deer Creek boat access. We saw several Pied-billed Grebes and one Horned Grebe. The group was able to get excellent looks at these, and a pair of Belted Kingfishers put on a nice display.

After we stopped for a much-needed bathroom and warm-up break at Mickey D's, the Harmar wetlands showed us a wary and nervous pair of Wood Ducks. They played as though hide-and-seek was their game. Our group persisted, and I believe everyone received good, although brief, glances at these marvelously decorated waterfowl.

Heading back to our starting point, some decided to call it a morning because the wind was not kind, and temperatures were still in the 20s. The rest of the group made additional stops on the Ohio River at Woods Run, McKees Rocks marina, Coraopolis, and Dashields Locks and Dam. A female Redhead at Woods Run made for an interesting and lengthy study, while the marina held only an American Coot and a few gulls. Coraopolis gave to us 13 Great Blue Herons, all tucked tightly on the opposite bank. Dashields was virtually deserted, except for a few Herring Gulls. The day's total of 29 species was low, but more importantly, many members of the group were introduced to public birding spots accessible on our waterways. **—by leader Dan Yagusic**

**Pymatuning State Park – March 25:** It was more winter-like weather (subfreezing temperatures and frequent snow showers) than spring weather that awaited six birders who were in search of waterfowl, raptors, and migrating songbirds at Pymatuning State Park. After becoming acquainted we drove to Wilson Road. The car caravan pulled off to the side of the road to check out birds perched on the power lines. We saw a pair of Eastern Meadowlarks and an American Kestrel, and we heard Eastern

Bluebirds singing. As we were getting back into our cars, Donna Foyle shouted, "Look! Sandhill Cranes in flight!" Two cranes were flying low over the field and within 50 yards of us. Although we had a sense of where the birds landed, we could not find them later.

Our next stop was at the Hartstown Wildlife Management parking lot, where 14 Tundra Swans were scattered in the pond, some preening or sleeping on shore and others foraging. Hooded Mergansers, Ring-necked Ducks, and Lesser Scaup were also present. Soaring over the tree line, a Rough-legged Hawk came into view. As we were observing Killdeer skitter about, the hawk landed on the edge of the field but was quickly chased away by a Red-tailed Hawk. Continuing to scan, we spotted two more meadowlarks and a Horned Lark.

A sudden snow squall reduced our visibility at the Miller Ponds, but we were able to identify five Wilson's Snipe probing in the mud flats. Northern Shovelers, Buffleheads, Green-winged Teal, American Black Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, and Ring-billed Gulls rounded out our sightings.

As we walked along the pathway beside Shelotoes Pond searching for songbirds, we heard Greater Yellowlegs calling. Scanning the mud flats revealed four of these shorebirds. Also found and giving us great looks were eight Green-winged Teal. Because we were cold and hungry, we made a quick stop at the spillway. Three Pied-billed Grebes were the best birds there.

After a hearty and warming lunch at the Spillway Inn, we visited the fish hatchery. Some Gadwalls, Common Mergansers, Buffleheads, and Northern Shovelers were actively feeding. When a pair of mergansers suddenly took flight, we quickly saw the reason: An adult Bald Eagle soared overhead.

Another snow squall cut down our visibility at the Wildlife Center, ruining any hope of locating active eagles' nests. However, while walking the loop trail back to the parking lot, we got glimpses of a Pileated Woodpecker and had good looks at three Eastern Bluebirds – each of them a male perched on a birdhouse.

A few remaining participants decided to check out Geneva Marsh. As we drove past Wilson Road during yet another snow shower, Tundra Swans were discovered feeding in the field. While observing the birds, Dick Nugent remarked that one of the swans was quite larger than the others. While watching through a spotting scope as this oversized swan mingled with the others, and after checking the descriptions with the Sibley guide, we knew we were looking at a Trumpeter Swan. We watched them until they took flight. The Tundras immediately formed a tight "V" formation, leaving the Trumpeter to follow. Mesmerized by the beauty and grace of these elegant birds, Dick remarked, "That's the best sighting we have had today." Nobody argued. Geneva Marsh produced

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## Outings Revisited

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our first Tree Swallows, a Belted Kingfisher, and a Great Blue Heron. Again we found a Tundra Swan, Lesser Scaup, Buffleheads, and Ring-necked Ducks.

Because it was getting late, our last stop was at Custards. We were surprised to see Mike Fialkovich doing some birding on his way home from Presque Isle. Mike told us he had counted 148 Tundra Swans and over 200 Tree Swallows in this part of the marsh. Red-winged Blackbirds by the hundreds were perching on anything that stuck out above the water. Some Redheads, American Wigeons, and Lesser Scaup, as well as the ubiquitous Ring-necked Ducks, were dispersed throughout the marsh. Two adult Bald Eagles, one flying overhead, were also observed.

March roared its wintry voice with occasional biting winds and blowing snow, but I am willing to bet that the birders on this outing will remember only the excitement of spotting the cranes and swans. **—by leader Bob VanNewkirk**

**Moraine State Park – April 1:** Nineteen birders gathered on a cloudy, windy, and cold morning in search of waterfowl and landbirds. After introductions this leader apologized profusely for the bass tournament that was under way on Lake Arthur, knowing full well what it would do to the waterfowl counts. A short walk to the maintenance area produced several Swamp Sparrows and an Eastern Phoebe carrying nesting material into the vehicle storage building.

We made four or five stops on the main part of the lake, where we were entertained by Ruddy Ducks, Red-breasted Mergansers, Pied-billed and Horned Grebes, and Ring-necked Ducks. A nice find was a Field Sparrow singing near the Pleasant Valley picnic area. Bear Run gave us a distant look at a Common Loon and good looks at an Osprey carrying a prize in its talons. At the observation deck Wood Ducks and American Coots were plentiful, along with Tree Swallows. A drive to the upper Route 528 boat launch and the Barkley Road access area produced mainly bass fishermen on the lake.

During our lunch stop at McDanel's boat launch, the now-small group of birders had superb views of a Common Loon. Four Ospreys near the nest platform enthralled several of us who waited for a disturbance among them, which didn't occur. A walk along Butterfly Trail yielded only a Song Sparrow, and on that note our group decided to call it a day. Our species total was 45, not bad considering the cold, the stiff breeze, and the overabundance of anglers. **—by leader Dan Yagusic**

**Pymatuning Area – April 8:** Got Eagles? We sure did on this 3RBC outing. The day started gloomy and overcast, and the wind was wicked, with temperatures all day only in the 30s. The sun finally broke through and the blue sky provided a vivid backdrop for the great birds we saw. We had 15 species of ducks for the day, with Ring-necked Ducks being the most abundant.

Scouting before the outing, leader Bob VanNewkirk and I had two Northern Pintail drakes and one hen at Geneva Marsh. A large number of Double-crested Cormorants were at Custards.

On Wilson Road near Miller Ponds we spotted a lone Sandhill Crane in the field, possibly the same bird that Randi and Sarah Gerrish saw flying over the ponds a short time later. At the ponds we also found at least 20 Greater Yellowlegs and a Dunlin. Purple Martins were at Geneva Marsh and Hartstown Wildlife Management Station, and we saw Rusty Blackbirds at Geneva Marsh.

At the spillway we saw Bonaparte's Gulls with the black

heads of their breeding plumage. Sparrow species were limited only to Song, possibly because of the brutal winds. The most thrilling moments came when light-morph Rough-legged Hawks flew over the group at Hartstown and on Wilson Road.

And then there were the Bald Eagles. How many did we see altogether? Who really knows for sure? Maybe a dozen. We had juvenile and adult eagles all day long nearly everywhere we went. Five juveniles entertained us by flying overhead at Hartstown and engaging in interaction with talons and tumbling. What a breathtaking show!

Our species total for the day was 56. The 12 participants were in agreement that this was a great outing. **—by participant Margie Kern**

**Nine Mile Run Watershed / Frick Park – April 29:** The outing was slow from the viewpoint of an experienced birder, but lots of the participants were new to birding. So when an immature Red-tailed Hawk landed on a snag about 35 feet away, the group was enthralled by its majesty.

Some of the more experienced people broke off and went to the meadow to hunt for warblers, but the rest of us stayed in the valley and thrilled to common birds. It's wonderful to see people react to their first look at a Red-bellied Woodpecker or a Rose-breasted Grosbeak. It brought back memories of my own initiation to those birds 36 years ago.

No outing is really slow when Chuck Tague is a co-leader. Every aspect of nature was covered: flowers, trees, insects. You name it, and Chuck taught us something about it that we never knew before. **—by co-leader Jack Solomon**

**...and a perspective from Marijke Hecht, Executive Director of the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association:** The advanced and aspiring birders skirted along the banks of Nine Mile Run, alternately focusing their attention on birds and the stream itself, which is undergoing the largest urban stream restoration in

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**CAUGHT IN THE ACT** – Pictured as if floating in mid-air, this female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker darts out from a Pignut Hickory trunk. A male sapsucker (peering from behind the tree) chased her away from his sap ring. Chuck Tague took the photograph at Mt. Washington, Pittsburgh, on April 11, 2006.

# The Peregrine

## Outings Revisited

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the nation. The run flows for just over two miles through Frick Park from Braddock Avenue to the Monongahela River and is the longest free-flowing stream in the East End of Pittsburgh. Like so many streams in the region, Nine Mile Run suffers from pollution and excessive storm water. Because of its incredible value as a natural resource for so many urbanites (including the fish and birds that make their way here), Nine Mile Run is undergoing a major restoration which will improve the habitat in and around the stream.

The \$7.7 million project, co-sponsored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the City of Pittsburgh, is nearly complete. It includes rerouting the run into a new meandering channel to slow water down during wet weather and allowing the stream to overflow its banks onto newly planted wetlands filled with native grasses, shrubs, and trees. To learn more about the stream restoration project or to find out the date of the next Nine Mile Run Watershed Association Restoration Tour, please see our website at [www.ninemilerun.org](http://www.ninemilerun.org).

**Frick Park – April 30:** What a difference a day makes! I attended the Nine Mile Run Watershed outing on Saturday, April 29, at Frick Park and enjoyed the performances of the Red-tailed Hawk and numerous woodpeckers, but I was concerned that we had seen so few warblers and migrants to date at the park. The walk through the same park on Sunday morning was a very different story.

Our group gathered in the parking lot at 7:30 under gloomy skies, and we were greeted by Jack and Sue Solomon. Sue had arrived around 6:30 and had already seen 5 to 7 species of warblers. Wasting no time, we eagerly walked up to the meadow and were immediately stopped by the *bee-buzz* of the Blue-winged Warbler and then by a Hooded Warbler over the hillside. A Black-throated Green Warbler sang overhead. A Black-throated Blue called from the shrubs.

The quality of a Frick Park walk for birders is inversely proportional to the distance covered. The more birds there are, the less ground you cover. We got nowhere. The meadow and the lower path yielded Black-and-white Warblers, Northern Parulas, Nashville and Blackburnian Warblers. American Redstarts hopped in the bushes while Ovenbirds called below them. Some sharp eyes spotted a Worm-eating Warbler. A Green Heron and a Herring Gull flew overhead. A Veery crossed our path. Hermit Thrushes watched us from the thickets.

As the morning wound down, we went behind the old education building to spy on the Cooper's Hawk nest. At this point some of the group led by Jack proceeded to the gully down the hill and were rewarded for the effort with a Northern Waterthrush.

Good day! In all, 25 participants tallied over 40 species, with a total of 16 warblers in that bunch. **–by participant Joan Tague**

**Panhandle Trail – May 3:** Twelve 3RBC members led by Carol and Fred McCullough explored a “new” outing area, the Panhandle Trail. Located west of I-79 in Allegheny County, the heavily wooded trail parallels Robinson Run and is a popular hiking/biking trail. Surrounded by constant bird song, the group took four hours to complete the easy 2+ mile walk.

The walk yielded 49 species including 9 warblers: Blue-winged, Nashville, Yellow, Yellow-throated, Black-and-white, Ovenbird, Kentucky, Common Yellowthroat, and Hooded. See the 3RBC website for our complete species list.

Some of the participants returned on foot and some were

shuttled back to the starting point where we enjoyed our lunch under the eyes of a nesting American Robin. **–by co-leader Fred McCullough**

**Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve – May 5:** A beautiful morning was the setting for the spring's first outing at Beechwood. As 12 participants met in the parking lot, Baltimore Orioles, House Wrens, and a slew of woodpeckers were in chorus. Our first mixed flock was in the tall aspen trees in the meadow. Nashville Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, American Goldfinches, a female Purple Finch, and a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak flitted through the trees devouring insects.

As we crossed the upper fields and made our way to the Meadow View area, Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, American Redstarts, and a Hooded Warbler were singing nearby. On Meadow View trail we found a large group of birds in the tree-tops. Blackburnian, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green, Magnolia, and a single Palm Warbler formed a nice warbler montage. Indigo Buntings added a bit of their own color. A Prairie Warbler sang but avoided showing itself.

The day's best bird was a Black-billed Cuckoo heard at a distance. A Field Sparrow was Beechwood's first of the year. Rounding out the morning, a group of Least Flycatchers sang, and one cooperated by perching on overhead branches. We listed 53 species of birds. **–by leader Brian Shema**

**Harrison Hills Park - May 10:** It was a perfect sunny spring morning at Harrison Hills county park, where 14 birders led by Jim Valimont eagerly gathered to search for migrants and nesting birds. Jim commented that the group was a considerable size since it was a weekday, and a few people replied that they had taken the day off. A Baltimore Oriole immediately made its presence known by singing and showing us its brilliant colors while we waited in the parking area for everyone to arrive.

Jim decided to start by driving to the pond area. Very quickly it became clear that this would be a good opportunity to improve one's identification skills by sound. At first the area was quiet. A Mallard was seen in the tall grass. A Tufted Titmouse, Black-capped Chickadees, and European Starlings were moving about. As we approached a meadow, a Broad-winged Hawk flew by. The best birds in the pond area were a Blue-winged Warbler and a Yellow-breasted Chat.

As we walked along the road beside a parking lot, a pair of Eastern Phoebes were sighted on a bare branch near a comfort facility. Paul Hess commented that they were nesting all through the park at the comfort stations. We chuckled.

It continued to be quiet until we reached the bluff area overlooking the river, where most of the action took place along the cliff-top trail. Once again we all listened intently to bird songs for identification. The trees were leafed out so much that we commented on how much easier it would have been if the leaves were smaller. A special treat that we enjoyed many times was seeing Scarlet Tanagers flitting about. There was an extensive discussion about the sighting of a Palm Warbler high up in the canopy. We had a hard time getting a good view and debated about which species it was. The doubt arose mostly because it was unusual for a Palm Warbler to be high up in the canopy.

Some of our 66 species (including 17 warbler species) were Acadian Flycatcher, Great Crested Flycatcher, White-breasted Nuthatch, White-eyed Vireo, Cerulean Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, American Redstart, Blackburnian Warbler, and Indigo Bunting. Once again Harrison Hills provided a rewarding and challenging morning of birding. **–by participant Judy Schryer**

## Pelagic Birding: A Member Tells of Excitement at Sea

By Geoff Malosh

Pelagic birding. It's a phrase with many connotations – two words that can at once conjure up feelings of electrifying anticipation and bone-chilling dread in the heart of a birder. For a hardy few, lifetimes and livelihoods have been built around looking for birds at sea. For others, the thought of getting on a boat and sailing dozens or even hundreds of nautical miles offshore just to see a few birds is about as unthinkable as hopping on a rocket ship to Saturn.

Some birders who are driven to sail the high seas are lucky and feel no effects of *mal de mer*. These lucky types can stop reading now, and I wish them luck on their next trip! Others birders are so susceptible that they cannot bring themselves to even look at a boat tied up in harbor on a windy day, let alone voluntarily board one for 12 hours. I suppose these people can also stop reading. But I think the majority of birders who like to travel to see birds live somewhere between these two extremes, where the thrill we derive from seeing new and interesting pelagic birds is counterbalanced by the expectation of a day of (not insurmountable) endurance spent staring at the horizon and thinking positive thoughts.

I personally fall well within this latter group of people who love pelagic birding but have been known to feel a little queasy when circumstances are less than ideal. Admittedly, pelagic birding can seem daunting and perhaps even scary for anyone who aspires to see pelagic birds but is not immune to motion sickness. But with the right preparations and the right attitude, a pelagic trip can be very rewarding and memorable.

Pelagic birding can also be a wonderful and unique opportunity for photography, if that is your game. Seabirds are not like warblers and sparrows, staying tucked away in high canopy or impossibly dense wet meadows. They're on the open sea. They live in a harsh environment and usually are not very shy, and many of them respond immediately to "chumming," the practice of dumping odiferous food and animal oils into the sea to attract their attention and get them to come close to the boat. Anybody with a telephoto lens can usually get at least one or two "WOW!" type pictures on a pelagic trip, and of course there is always that chance that your trip will be the first to record that mega-mega-rarity, with you as the only one on board with a camera.

If you have the time and inclination to try something new, or if you have tried before and had a less-than-thrilling experience, I highly recommend taking a pelagic trip off the Atlantic coast. Excellent trips are annually organized in all seasons from Massachusetts to Florida. For the truly intrepid who happen to be in the area, there are excellent, established trips available off the entire Pacific coast as well.

While my pelagic experience is not exactly vast, I have taken a few trips off both coasts of North America. My personal favorites are the ones organized by Brian Patteson of North Carolina ([www.patteson.com](http://www.patteson.com)), who offers frequent trips off the Carolina coast. His trips make a relatively short run to the Gulf Stream, where, in season, such birds as Cory's and Audubon's Shearwaters, Black-capped Petrels, Wilson's and Band-rumped Storm-Petrels, and Bridled and Sooty Terns are common and seen virtually every trip in spring, summer, and early fall.

These trips also offer just about the best chance you will have at seeing such wonders as White-tailed and Red-billed Tropicbirds, Bermuda, Herald, and Fea's Petrels, and even White-faced Storm-



*ALMOST SHEARING THE WATER* – The wing tips of this Cory's Shearwater almost slice the Atlantic Ocean's surface – hence the bird's name. Geoff Malosh took the gorgeous portrait during a pelagic trip off Hatteras, North Carolina, on July 30, 2005.

Petrel, within the ABA checklist area. He also provides trips in the winter off Virginia Beach, which offer some of the best opportunities to see and photograph many North Atlantic species (away from their sometimes difficult-to-reach breeding grounds) such as Great Skua, Dovekie, and Common and Thick-billed Murres.

As an example, in July 2005, my wife Kristin and I took a summer pelagic trip with Brian off Hatteras, North Carolina. We recorded the following (larger numbers estimated): 130 Black-capped Petrels, 150 Audubon's Shearwaters, 250 Cory's Shearwaters, 13 Greater Shearwaters, 400 Wilson's Storm-Petrels, 20 Band-rumped Storm-Petrels, 65 Sooty Terns, 12 Bridled Terns, and one juvenile Red-billed Tropicbird. At least one of every species came inside of 25 feet from the boat at least once, except the tropicbird, which came to within 150 feet. Some, like the Cory's and Greater Shearwaters, were very approachable and offered astounding, extended, close-range views.

But Brian's are not the only pelagic tours available to a vacationing birder looking for a trip within driving distance of western Pennsylvania. There are several others, all offering something a little different depending on where they go and what time of year they sail. Most pelagic tour companies stay in business because they deliver results and don't make a habit of sending away disappointed customers. Invest a little time for research to make sure you are signing up with a tour that provides consistent and

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## Pelagic Birding

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reliable boats and leaders, and which have a good track record of being fair and up-front with customers. A reliable company that offers trips out of New Jersey, Delaware, and New York is See Life Paulagics owned by Paul Guris of Green Lane, Pennsylvania ([www.paulagics.com](http://www.paulagics.com)).

Oh yeah, about that motion sickness thing...

If you do happen to fall into the same category as I do, where seeing the birds of the Gulf Stream or even the deep Pacific sounds thrilling, but being trapped on a boat for 10 or more hours sounds excruciating, there are some things you can do. What works for one person will not necessarily work for another, but some common techniques are known to work well for most people who do not wish for the day to degenerate into a bout with last night's dinner.

First and foremost, being well-rested is vital. Make sure you get a full night's sleep before showing up at the dock. Eat a good breakfast that does not include anything excessively greasy. And above all, keep your head up and stay on the deck where the air is fresh. When the sea is getting the better of you, sitting inside the cabin can be the worst of all places. Stay where you can watch the horizon and breathe fresh, clean air, and your chances of enjoying yourself will improve immensely. Try not to do anything that requires detailed concentration on something right in front of you, like reading or working with a PDA. The birds aren't going to be in your hands anyway. Do your book-studying before you depart, not on the boat.

Bringing and consuming plenty of salty (but not greasy) snacks, like crackers, as well as drinking water, can help. But for others, avoiding eating and drinking altogether while on the boat is the key. If you opt for the latter strategy, be aware of the effects of dehydration, which can lead to headaches and fatigue, both of which exacerbate the effects of seasickness.

Over-the-counter medication also helps immensely. I never sail anymore without taking Dramamine. In fact, unless you have some pre-existing condition that dictates otherwise, taking Dramamine never hurts on a pelagic trip, even if you are not normally susceptible to motion sickness. (For instance, I never get motion sickness in a car or on an airplane, but a boat really is a different matter.) Other people use a scopolamine patch to combat seasickness. Heed the warnings on the labels, but don't be afraid of them. Using one or the other can be the difference between sheer misery and a pleasant day.



*BLACK-AND-WHITE BEAUTY – Sooty Terns are abundant residents of tropical and subtropical oceans around the world. Geoff Malosh photographed this one off Hatteras, North Carolina, on July 30, 2005.*

If you have never been on a pelagic before, try to get onto the biggest boat possible for your first. While big boats rock and roll in high swells just like small boats, they're more stable in calmer seas, especially during high-speed transit, than a smaller boat. The birds may be more reluctant to come close to a larger boat, but they will still be close enough for very satisfying views and pictures.

Don't be disappointed if you don't have the best trip in terms of birds, but try to arrange to increase your likelihood for a good trip for your first one. Pelagics are like any other type of birding – sometimes the birds cooperate and sometimes they don't. Do some research and pick a time and place with a history of producing good results. Seeing good birds and lots of them is a great remedy for seasickness.

Perhaps most importantly, a good attitude and a willingness to try can be the most effective. Your first pelagic trip may not be the most pleasant of all and maybe you will learn that you will never want to get on a boat again. Hopefully, though, you will learn an appreciation for the fascinating avifauna of the open seas, and a thing or two about yourself that will make your next adventure even better. So get out there and try it!



*A NEAR-RECORD CROWD – These 16 migrating Willets stopped to rest along the Allegheny River at the Fox Chapel Yacht Club on May 5, 2006. Dan Yagusic discovered them and Brian Shema photographed them. It was one of the largest flocks ever recorded in western Pennsylvania (17 were observed in Venango County in May 2004). The Fox Chapel birds came exactly two years after Allegheny County's first Willet record, 5 along the Ohio River at Dashields Dam on May 5, 2004.*

## Little Gulls Flock to Erie, and So Do Our Birders

By Paul Hess

Little Gulls visited Presque Isle in exciting numbers from late January to early April 2006, and many 3RBC members traveled north to see them. For some members, it was their first sighting of this rare but regular species in Pennsylvania.

Jerry McWilliams, an expert on the birds of Erie County, was asked to place the influx in perspective for *The Peregrine*. "Since Lake Erie did not freeze this winter there were more Bonaparte's Gulls wintering in the area than usual, and, of course, where there are Bonaparte's there are usually Little Gulls. I suspect that is why we had so many Little Gulls this season," he said.

This year's first birds at Presque Isle were two adults on January 25, and then two adults were present on February 15. Sightings started to become daily beginning on March 9, and birds were present until April 8. "It is difficult to say how many different birds were actually here, since the adults looked identical to one another, but a fairly accurate single-day count was six adults and one immature," Jerry reported.

Exciting though they were, the numbers could not compare with some previous numbers of Little Gulls at Presque Isle. Jerry offered a brief, three-part history of the largest numbers recorded over a period of several days or in a single day:

\* "The highest one-day count ever at Presque Isle occurred on January 8, 1983, when Sam Stull, Don Snyder, and I counted 13 different birds, which included 11 adults and two immatures. We actually had 11 birds in view at once in Presque Isle Bay just east of Lily Pond. Funny thing is, the Little Gulls were with fewer than 100 Bonaparte's Gulls."

\* "Between the period of October 18 and November 23, 1994, I estimated a total of 20 different Little Gulls based upon many plumage differences."

\* "On February 5, 1995, there were nine Little Gulls at Presque Isle, which included eight adults and one immature."

The Little Gull is aptly named, because it is the world's smallest gull. Primarily a Eurasian species, it has also been known to breed on a few isolated occasions in Manitoba, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ontario, and Quebec. Little Gulls winter regularly on the Great Lakes, especially Erie and Ontario, and along the Atlantic coast from Newfoundland to Virginia. There are rare records as far south as Florida.

Presque Isle was not the only western Pennsylvania location where Little Gulls made news this year. Margaret Higbee and other birders saw two at Yellow Creek State Park, Indiana County, on April 18 – a remarkable inland record for this region.

Extraordinary as well was a Little Gull found dead at Beaver Run Reservoir, Westmoreland County, in June 1996, which had been banded in Sweden in July 1995.

There is an old sight-record for Allegheny County: a bird reported by David B. Freeland at the Pittsburgh Point on November 16, 1973.

## Correction for 2005 Bird List

Prairie Warbler was among the 236 species found in Allegheny County in 2005. This species was accidentally omitted from the year's list published in the February issue of *The Peregrine*. The error was your newsletter editor's—not the fault of Bird Reports Editor Mike Fialkovich, who had submitted the list correctly.



*THE SMALLEST GULL* – These Little Gulls were among the winter and spring highlights at Presque Isle in early 2006. Geoff Malosh photographed the adult, above, on April 1. Note its entirely black underwings, the classic field mark of an adult. Scott Kinzey photographed the first-winter bird, below, on March 28. Note the very dark carpal bar on its upperwing.



## Birds in the Three Rivers Area

### Feb.-March 2006 Season Brings an Early Great Egret

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

This period is a time of transition with reports of returning spring migrants and the continuation of winter residents.

A **Gadwall** was on the Ohio River at Coraopolis 3/12 (MV). Six **Blue-winged Teal** were found at Imperial 3/29 (MV). A **Northern Shoveler** was on a pond on Moody Road in Findlay Township 3/12 (MV), and 3 were on the Allegheny River at Blawnox 3/25 (DY). A **Northern Pintail** was at Imperial 3/12 (MV) and a **Green-winged Teal** was there 2/4 (MV). The latter species was present again at Imperial from mid-March through the end of the month with a high of 14 on 3/12 (MV). Two **Redheads** were at the pond on Moody Road at Findlay Township 3/4-25 (DY, MV), and 1 was at Wood's Run near the Western Penitentiary on the Ohio River 3/18 (MV). Three **Greater Scaup** were on the Ohio River at Coraopolis 3/12 (MV). A great count of 21 **Common Mergansers** were at Harrison Township 3/3 and 10 were there 3/30 (DY). **Red-breasted Mergansers** were in the area through March with nice counts of 10 on the Allegheny River at O'Hara Township 3/24 (PB) and 20 at Fox Chapel 3/23-25 (DY). Two **Ruddy Ducks** were on the Ohio River at Emsworth 3/12 (MV). Other reports included **Wood Duck**, **American Wigeon**, **American Black Duck**, **Ring-necked Duck**, **Lesser Scaup**, **Bufflehead**, **Common Goldeneye**, and **Hooded Merganser**.

A **Common Loon** was on the Allegheny River at Tarentum 3/25 (DY). **Pied-billed Grebes** were found in the area through February and March. A group of 4 remained on the Allegheny River at O'Hara Township 2/11-3/27 (PB). **Horned Grebes** were found in ones and twos through March in Etna, Harmar Township, the Point in Pittsburgh, Woods Run (DY), McKees Rocks, Leetsdale (MV), O'Hara Township (PB), and Fox Chapel (DY).

A **Great Egret** was a nice find at a small wetland along the Allegheny River in Fox Chapel 3/30 (DY). This bird may have been present since the first week of March, according to local residents (*vide* BS). [See the photograph on page 3.]

Two **Bald Eagles** were observed performing a courtship display along the Allegheny River in Natrona Heights 2/12 (DY). One was also seen in Harrison Township 3/3 (DY). Both color morphs of **Rough-legged Hawks** continued at Imperial, with the last bird seen 3/16 (MV). The last **Merlin** report at Schenley Park was 2/16 (MFO, EFO).

Four **Killdeer** at Findlay Township 2/19 were the first reported this spring (MV, KSJ). A **Greater Yellowlegs** at Fox Chapel 3/28 (BS) and a **Lesser Yellowlegs** at Imperial 3/29 (MV) were the first reports of those species. Four **Wilson's Snipe** were at Clinton, Findlay Township 3/12 (MV), and 19 on 3/25 and 26 on 3/29 at Imperial signaled the migration of this species through the area (MV). An **American Woodcock** was found in Findlay Township 2/19 (KSJ).

**Ring-billed Gull** numbers increased in early March as they began to move through the area, with top counts of 130 on the Allegheny River at Harrison Township 3/3 (DY) and 200 at Dashields Dam on the Ohio River 3/4 (DY). A few **Bonaparte's Gulls** were found in late March: 1 at Dashields Dam on the Ohio River 3/29 (MV), and a total of four on the Allegheny River—2 at Cheswick and 2 at Tarentum 3/30 (DY). The first migrant **Forster's Tern** passed Leetsdale on the Ohio River 3/31 (GM), which was a bit early.

**Short-eared Owls** continued to winter at Imperial with 5 seen on 3/7 and 2 on 3/23 (DY). **Common Raven** sightings continued. The bird in the vicinity of the McKees Rocks boat dock and Brunot's Island was reported regularly; 2 were seen just downriver at Neville Island 3/26 (MV); and, interestingly, a pair was seen around the slag piles at Century III Mall in February and March (RS).

A few **Red-breasted Nuthatches** remained in the area. Two continued from last season to visit the feeders at Beechwood Farms (BS), 1 visited a feeder in Harmar Township through February (JV), 1 came to a feeder in Pleasant Hills 2/11 (SS), 2 were in Sewickley 2/18 (BVN), 1 was at Imperial 2/18 (MV), and 1 visited a feeder in Natrona Heights 3/27 (PH). The first **Tree Swallow** was reported at Etna 3/14 (DY). Rather early was a **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** at Snowden Wetlands in South Park Township 3/31 (SS). The first **Brown Thrasher** was reported at Sewickley 3/29 (BVN). A **Hermit Thrush** was found at Sewickley Heights Park 2/18 (BVN). Five **Pine Warblers** at Beechwood Farms 3/29 (BS) were rather early.

The first report of **Chipping Sparrows** came from Pine Township 3/31 (PL, SL). A **Swamp Sparrow** was found at Imperial 3/12 (MV). The first migrant **Fox Sparrow** was noted at a feeder in Franklin Park 3/21 (OM). **Eastern Meadowlarks** were first noted at Imperial 3/10 (MV) where they are expected, but a bird found along the Allegheny River at Fox Chapel away from the usual habitat was certainly a surprise 3/25 (DY). Early March brought **Red-winged Blackbirds** back. Reports included flocks of over 20 in Brentwood 3/3 (BS), 87 at McKees Rocks 3/6, and 80 at Imperial 3/7 (DY). Two **Rusty Blackbirds** were found with the Red-winged Blackbirds at Imperial 3/7 (DY).

A **Purple Finch** and a **Pine Siskin** were seen at a feeder in Marshall Township 2/5 (MV). A **Purple Finch** visited a feeder in Pine Township 3/18 and 3/31 (PL, SL), and two **Pine Siskins** visited a feeder in Natrona Heights 3/18 (PH).

*Observers: Paul Brown, Evelyn Fowles (EFO), Mike Fowles (MFO), Paul Hess, Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Geoff Malosh, Oscar Miller, Kate St. John, Brian Shema, Sam Sinderson, Renee Slis, Bob VanNewkirk (BVN), Jim Valimont, Mark Vass, Dan Yagusic.*

## Our Canada Geese Come from Widespread Places

By Mike Fialkovich

On March 18, 2006, I was checking the rivers around Pittsburgh for waterfowl and stopped at Riverfront Park on the Southside where I noticed a Canada Goose with a leg band. Looking through the flock, I found several birds with bands and managed to obtain the numbers from three of them. I contacted the USGS Bird Banding Lab and provided the band numbers, date, location, and other information that was requested. In return, I received a banding report and a certificate of appreciation.

Two of the birds were banded before they were old enough to fly. One was banded June 23, 2005, in Indiana, Pennsylvania, and was a female. The other was a male, banded June 28, 2005, in Irondale, Ohio, which is just west of East Liverpool. The third bird (a male) was hatched in 2003 or earlier and was banded June 21, 2004, at Wexford in Allegheny County.

The implications are interesting. I thought the flock might have been from the same general area traveling as a group, but these were birds associating with each other here that had originated from different locations. Perhaps the wintering flocks in the area contain birds from farther distances as well.