



The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

No. 1, October 2001

Join the fun in Three Rivers Birding Club

By Jack Solomon, Club President

Downy Woodpeckers, Northern Cardinals, and Baltimore Orioles in your yard . . . Green Herons, Canvasbacks, and Kentucky Warblers elsewhere in the Pittsburgh region . . . and uncommon visitors to western Pennsylvania such as Surf Scoters, Baird's Sandpipers, and Connecticut Warblers.

Fifty-four people who like to see and hear those and other birds, gathered July 29 at the Frick Park Nature Center in Squirrel Hill. They gave the Three Rivers Birding Club its name, elected Jack Solomon president and Bob Machesney treasurer. Mike Fialkovich, who will be the club's bird reporting and recording officer, provided a memorable color slide show of — no surprise here — bird photographs, stunningly beautiful ones.

The club's founders hope to provide an opportunity for fun and learning aimed at birders of all levels of experience, from rank beginners to reincarnations of W. E. Clyde Todd (more about him in a future newsletter). New birders can meet and learn from their more knowledgeable colleagues, the experienced members can share their knowledge with each other, and everyone will be able to report their observations, talk about birds, birding and natural history subjects, enjoy each other's company, and encourage beginners and non-birders to dive right in, find out where to bird, how to do it better, and share the fun. Outings to bird-rich locations near and far will be among the club's most important activities. Jim Valimont is acting vice president and will direct the outings committee. Paul Hess is this newsletter's editor, with production and distribution by Chuck Tague, editor and owner of the highly respected Nature Observer News. Susan Sunseri is acting secretary. Other volunteers who have stepped forward are Mabel Matteson who, with help from Becky Byerly, will run the hospitality committee, and Julia Pahountis-Opacic who will head the web committee assisted by Dave Wilton. Check out Julia's web site at <www.birdnature.com>. Someday we hope to have a site approaching its quality which would include recent bird sightings, directions to and maps of good local birding areas, plus information about other local birding and natural history organizations like the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, the Todd Bird Club in Indiana County, the Westmoreland County Bird Club, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, and conservation groups.

The other article on this page has information about our first regular meeting on October 17. Come and find a new opportunity for birding fun!

You are receiving this newsletter because you attended the club's inaugural meeting, or you subscribe to Nature Observer News, or you were considered potentially interested by a club member. You can continue to receive it by joining the club. (Elsewhere in this issue, editor Hess describes the newsletter's current and planned features.)

Future issues of Nature Observer News will, from time to time, include the newsletter if the recipient is a Three Rivers Bird Club member. Members who don't subscribe to the Nature Observer News will receive the newsletter by 1st-class mail or possibly in the future by e-mail for those who choose that medium.

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Northern Pintail - Esther Allen

Our October 17 Meeting will feature waterfowl ID

Just in time for the peak waterfowl-watching season, the Three Rivers Birding Club meeting on Wednesday, October 17, will feature a color slide program on waterfowl in western Pennsylvania. The meeting will be held at the Frick Park Nature Center, opposite 1960 Beechwood Blvd., in Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill section. The doors will open at 7 p.m. for socializing, so feel free to bring something to eat or drink while you chat with other people who have the same birding interests as you. The meeting will start at 7:30.

Chuck Tague, editor and publisher of the Nature Observer News, will present a slide show including tips for identifying many species of water birds that migrate through this region. Chuck's program is especially timely because waterfowl will highlight the club's inaugural outing on Oct. 21 at Lake Arthur in Butler County. (See Page 3 for all the outings in store.)

Joanne Caine of the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy asks those attending to bring a field guide or other book of periodical about birds or birding. Joanne, who offered the Conservancy's support to the club at our organizational meeting July 29, would like to see what the Conservancy might want to obtain for its new Schenley Park facility to be completed this fall. You can take your books home — she just wants to look. Not only can you show Joanne what's out there, you can give the other members an opportunity to see good publications that are available.

Come and make new friends, see old ones, report recent bird sightings and, we hope, learn something about birds and birding that you never knew before.

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If you haven't joined yet, now is a good time. In fact, one of the membership classes will close after the October 17 meeting. You'll find a membership application form on Page 2. Dues will pay for speakers, meeting room fees if necessary, publication and distribution of the newsletter, and other activities and projects.

The membership year runs from each October through the end of the next September. The dues for our four classes of membership are:

1. Individual: annual dues for one person \$12.00.
2. Family: annual dues for 2 or more persons living at one address \$15.00.
3. Youth: annual dues for those who are either under age 19 or full-time students \$5.00.
4. Founding Members: This is a one-time opportunity for individuals to pay an additional \$28.00 and for families to pay another \$25.00. In either case, individual or family, Founding Members pay a total of \$40.00 for their first year's dues. (No obligation is incurred to pay these higher dues in subsequent years.) \$40.00.

Founding Members will receive recognition in a coming newsletter as people who support the purposes and activities of the club above and beyond the requirements of basic membership. Goals such as bringing in speakers from across the state or even farther, and starting up a first-class web site, will probably be attained in direct proportion to the help of founding members.

The "Comments" box in the form is for you to mention anything you'd like to bring to the attention of the officers — particularly any willingness to help the club with time, energy and skills.

Birds can't be separated from the rest of nature, and most if not all of us have an interest in other animals, plants, and other aspects of the natural world. That said, we'll provide birders an organization that focuses on birding, learning about birds, and sharing our love and knowledge of birds with others.

Good fellowship and good birding are what you'll find in the Three Rivers Birding Club.

Letter from the Editor

By Paul Hess, Newsletter Editor

Welcome to the inaugural issue of The Peregrine, Newsletter of the Three Rivers Birding Club, which is named for Pittsburgh's most spectacular resident bird. Articles that will be regular features of the Newsletter include:

- * the date, place, and program for the next meeting
- * a list of club outings scheduled in each season
- * a message from the President including news, plans, and discussion about the club
- * "Birds in the Three Rivers Region," a roundup of recent sightings in the Allegheny County area
- * "Outings Revisited" — a roundup of short reports about recent club events
- * a report of the last club meeting, and periodic treasurer's reports

As space permits, future issues will include:

- * "Birding Away" — brief reports telling about birds seen on trips away from western Pennsylvania.
- **"Birding Resources" — helpful publications, web sites, and e-mail discussion groups.
- * tips for identifying difficult species
- *detailed descriptions of good birding locations in the Pittsburgh region
- * a Q&A column to answer members' questions about birds other stories that members may want to suggest

The club's officers and I invite your questions and comments not only about Newsletter articles but also about activities and any other aspects of the club. Send them to me at <pjhess@salsgiver.com>

THREE RIVERS BIRDING CLUB

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

DATE _____

CIRCLE ONE

SINGLE: \$12

FAMILY: \$15

STUDENT/YOUTH: \$5

FOUNDING MEMBER: \$40

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

PHONE (H) _____

PHONE (W) _____

E-MAIL _____

remit to:

Three Rivers Birding Club

105 Lindley Lane

Pittsburgh, PA 15237

Comments:

Fall Outings: Waterfowl, Hawks, and Much More

By Jim Valimont, Outings Chairman

Here is the schedule of Three Rivers Birding Club fall outings. They are open to members and non-members, and all are free. Beginning birders are especially welcome to come and learn from the experts on hand.

Sunday, October 21 — Lake Arthur. Bob Machesney (412-366-7869, remach@aol.com) will lead this inaugural outing of the Three Rivers Birding Club to Lake Arthur in search of early waterfowl and songbird migrants. Two years ago, a Brewer's Blackbird was found. Besides the nice variety of waterfowl expected, other species could include Eastern Bluebird, Northern Mockingbird, Cedar Waxwing, Osprey, Common Snipe, American Woodcock, and Ruffed Grouse. Lake Arthur is a man-made lake that is the heart of Moraine State Park. Although it is heavily fished, waterfowl are more comfortable with the fishermen than they are with hunters. Therefore, the lake gets good (sometimes spectacular) numbers and variety of waterfowl in migration. Meet in the Moraine State Park day use area (south shore) in the first parking lot on the right at 8:00 AM. From I-79, take Route 422 east toward Butler and exit at the Moraine State Park exit. At the end of the ramp, turn left and go straight into the park until you see the first major parking area on your right. This is where we will meet. If enough people are interested at the October 17 meeting, perhaps we can organize a picnic lunch in the day use area.

Tuesday, October 23 – Allegheny Front Hawk Watch. Bill Judd (412-571-2057) and Che Mincone will lead this outing to one of the most reliable locations to observe Golden Eagle and Northern Goshawk in migration. October is best to see the greatest variety of hawks. The Allegheny Front is one of the closest hawk watches to western Pennsylvania that reliably produces good numbers of migrating hawks (weather permitting). It saves driving the long distances that are required for some of the more famous hawk watches farther east. Parking is limited, however, so it is necessary to meet at a remote location to make sure we don't exceed the capacity. Take the turnpike east to the Somerset exit, then Route 281 north to Stoystown, and Route 30 east to Reels Corner. Meet at Poppy's Restaurant at the intersection of Routes 30 and 160 at 9:30 AM. Bring a lunch and dress warmly. Be prepared for changes in the weather!

Thursday, October 25 – Allegheny Front Hawk Watch. Bill Judd (412-571-2057) and Che Mincone lead another hawk watch outing. Bring a lunch and dress warmly.

Sunday, November 4 – Pymatuning Area. Meet leader Mike Fialkovich (412-731-3581, mpfial@sgi.net) at either the Denny's Restaurant in Cranberry Township (just north of the Turnpike) at 7:30 AM or at the Pymatuning Visitors Center (Waterfowl Museum or whatever they call it these days) at 9:00 AM for this all-day outing. Bring a lunch or join the group at the Driftwood Restaurant for lunch. The outing will continue in the afternoon. The Visitors Center is on State Road 3011, 1.25 miles south of Linesville. In Linesville, follow the signs for the Spillway. Plenty of Bald Eagles, waterfowl such as Hooded Mergansers, Northern Shovelers, Blue-winged Teal, and Ruddy Ducks, late migrant songbirds, and winter species such as Rough-legged Hawks should be around for this trip. For the past few years, an albino Red-tailed Hawk has been present as well. 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 variety of habitat provides for a great variety of birds during migration.

Saturday, November 10 – Allegheny River Waterfowl. Meet leader Scott Kinzey (412-766-8813, blackburnian@yahoo.com) at the park just above the locks at the Highland Park Dam at 8:00 AM. Entry to this park is at the intersection of Allegheny River Blvd. and Washington Blvd. After crossing the tracks, bear left and continue to the parking area. This outing will traverse sections of the Allegheny River between the Highland Park Dam and possibly up to Tarentum in search of waterfowl and gulls. Carpooling would help greatly, but Scott will have directions printed for each stop. This local outing 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 Allegheny.

Sunday, November 11 – Lake Arthur. Jack Solomon (412-521-3365, snaggle719@yahoo.com) will lead this outing to Lake Arthur in search of waterfowl. Meet in the Moraine State Park day use area (south shore) in the first parking lot on the right at 8:00 AM (directions above in Oct. 21 listing). By this time, the diving ducks should be in substantial numbers. Common Loons and Horned Grebes should also be easy to find. This is the second of three scheduled outings, each three weeks apart, to Lake Arthur this fall. It will be interesting to compare lists and numbers of the species that we find.

Sunday, November 18 – Imperial Area. Chuck Tague (412-488-8760, bluejay@city-net.com) will lead this outing through the grasslands and pine plantations of the Imperial area. Some possible species include Red-breasted Nuthatch, Northern Harrier, Short-eared Owl, roosting blackbirds, Horned Larks, and other migrants. Most of these areas are recovered strip mines that have produced some unexpected surprises in the past. Meet at 2:00 PM at the King's Restaurant off the Imperial Exit of US Route 22 West.

Sunday, December 2 – Lake Arthur. Jim Valimont (412-828-5338, valimont@bellatlantic.net) will lead this final outing to Lake Arthur in search of waterfowl. This is the first time that we've ever tried an outing to Lake Arthur in December. Depending on the weather, we might get some spectacular collections of waterfowl, based on past Butler County Christmas Bird Counts. Meet in the Moraine State Park day use area (south shore) in the first parking lot on the right at 8:00 AM (directions above in Oct. 21 listing).

Saturday, December 15 – Pittsburgh Waterfowl and Gulls. Scott Kinzey (412-766-8813, blackburnian@yahoo.com) will lead this outing in search of waterfowl and gulls on the Mon and Ohio Rivers. This is close to the peak of the gull migration through western Pennsylvania. Scott has found a Black-headed Gull in the McKee's Rocks area in two of the last three years in early December. Meet Scott at Riverfront Park on the South Side at 8:00 AM.

Mid-week outings: There have been requests for outings during the week rather than just on weekends. I am perfectly willing to schedule such outings, such as the two Bill Judd is leading to the Allegheny Front, but I need volunteers to lead those outings. Most of the people who lead outings for the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania and thus the Three Rivers Birding Club work during the week. If you are willing to lead mid-week outings, please let me know: Jim Valimont, 412-828-5338, <valimont@bellatlantic.net>

Coming in December: Christmas Bird Counts. The Pittsburgh CBC will be held on December 29, 2001.

Outings Revisited

Frick Park - September 8: We had a great attendance of about 30 people. Our focus was fall migrants, particularly warblers, but due to warm, calm weather, the birds were not numerous and coupled with the dense growth of late summer, many were difficult to see. Our focus was the meadow area of the park which is usually the best location for migrants. We had nice views of large numbers of Cedar Waxwings including many streaked juveniles, and American Robins constantly flew over as we gathered in the parking lot. Both species appear in the park in large numbers at this time of year to feed on ripening grapes and black cherries.

The large (now dead) American elm in the meadow held most of the birds. A Black-throated Green, Magnolia, Blackburnian, and Wilson's Warbler appeared in the tree several times. A Great Crested Flycatcher was seen, and later heard calling. An Empidonax flycatcher (probably a Least) was seen catching insects around the dead elm. Summer residents such as Chimney Swifts, House Wrens, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and a Gray Catbird were seen. A cuckoo species flew into the meadow and despite my best efforts to imitate a Black-billed Cuckoo's call, it did not show itself. Two female Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were observed feeding on the fruits of a hackberry tree, and a Veery was heard calling. — **by leader Mike Fialkovich**

Harrison Hills Park – September 15: Led by Jim Valimont, two dozen people worked hard to see migrants amid thick foliage at this good birding location in northeastern Allegheny County, and their efforts were well rewarded. A Philadelphia Vireo gave most of us a leisurely look at eye level from 15 feet away. Ten warbler species (most of them in a one slowly-passing wave) were led by a beautiful male Cape May studied well by everyone while it preened in the open and a Wilson's that unfortunately only a few managed to see. The most frequent warbler was Black-throated Green, with 14 counted. Nice heard-only birds were a Black-billed Cuckoo, a Pileated Woodpecker, and three Yellow-throated Vireos. A skittish Winter Wren appeared for only a moment before disappearing, but most of us had better luck seeing four Ruby-crowned Kinglets that were the first reported at the park this fall and a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher that was later than usual. No significant thrush movement was evident, with only two Swainson's and a Wood listed, but eight cooperative Scarlet Tanagers and three Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were fine compensation. Under a stunning blue sky on the season's coolest morning so far, it was a perfect outing. — **by participant Paul Hess**

Birds in the Three Rivers Area: Spring 2001

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

The spring migration is always something birders look forward to with great anticipation. This spring was somewhat slow by migration standards. There weren't fallouts where the trees were filled with migrants, or any "big days," but the bird reports included some species uncommon in the county.

Unusual was a **Common Loon** 6/26 at the Dashfield Dam along the Ohio River (SK). This species is a rare migrant in Allegheny County, and a June record is unprecedented. A **Great Egret** was seen 4/3 at the Mayview Wetlands (VJ). Although this species has been reported annually in the county the past few years, it is still a rare find. Rails are rarely reported in the county, so a **Virginia** 5/1 (BJ) and a **Sora** 5/5 (VJ) at Mayview Wetlands

were notable.

The **Herring Gull** colony at the Highland Park Bridge on the Allegheny River remains active with 8 nestlings observed, and later several fledglings perched on the bridge (PB, SK, MF). This was the first nesting location of Herring Gulls in Pennsylvania (in the past two years, some have been found nesting in Erie). You can see them from the small park at the lock and dam near the bridge. A group of 10 **Caspian Terns** was in the area of the Highland Park Bridge 4/21 (SK). The **Peregrine Falcons** in Pittsburgh produced 4 chicks this year. Peregrines continue to be observed in Oakland also. It is not known if this is the pair in Pittsburgh, or another pair.

Shorebird reports came from Imperial, basically the only habitat for them in the county. **Semipalmated Sandpiper**, **Least Sandpiper**, **Solitary Sandpiper**, **Spotted Sandpiper** (breeds), **Pectoral Sandpiper**, **Common Snipe**, **American Woodcock** (breeds), **Dunlin**, both **Yellowlegs**, **White-rumped Sandpiper**, **Killdeer** (breeds), and **Semipalmated Plover** were all reported from Imperial. An **American Woodcock** was seen 4/4 in a small patch of greenery along an office building downtown Pittsburgh (JT).

Short-eared Owls were probably breeding this year at Imperial as a bird was seen hunting in the morning 6/2 (DW). A **Red-headed Woodpecker** 4/27 at Frick Park (FP) was unusual for the county (SS, JS). A **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** was found at FP 5/20 (TF). A **Bank Swallow** was seen at Imperial 5/21 (DW, MF) which is uncommon here. A small colony of **Purple Martins** persist at Butler's Golf Course in Elizabeth Township (WH, MF), probably the only location in the county where this species breeds. Seventeen **American Pipits** were seen at Imperial 4/5 (CT, SV).

A **Northern Waterthrush** at Harrison Hills Park (HHP) 4/14 was very early (PH). Other warbler highlights include an **Orange-crowned** at FP 4/23 (NH, JS, SS, BM, DW), **Worm-eating** at FP 4/23 - 5/18 (v.o.) and two at HHP 5/6 (v.o.), 6 **Wilson's** 5/18 at FP (TF, JS, SS), **Cape May** at FP 4/30, 5/3, 5/5 (JS, SS) and **Mourning** at Boyce Park and FP (v.o.).

Unusual was a **Summer Tanager** at Frick Park 5/1 (NH). Surprisingly, another was found at Schenley Park 5/12 (MF, JV). This species is rarely reported outside Greene County, the only county in Pennsylvania where there is a small breeding population.

A **Clay-colored Sparrow** was seen and heard at Frick Park 4/29 (NH, JH, DR, DW, JS, SS). This species has been previously reported in the county only at Imperial. Furthermore, the habitat was a wooded clearing. Clearly a migrant, the bird could not be located the following day. Two **Pine Siskins** appeared at a feeder in Pine Township 4/26 (PL, SL) and two also appeared at a feeder in Natrona Heights 4/29 (PH).

Observers: *Paul Brown, Mike Fialkovich, Ted Floyd, Nathan Hall, Walter Hammond, Paul Hess, Joyce Hoffmann, Bill Judd, Vicky Judd, Scott Kinzey, Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Bob Machesney, Dave Rieger, Jack Solomon, Sue Solomon, Chuck Tague, Joan Tague, Jim Valimont, Susanne Varley, Dave Wilton, v.o. (various observers).*

