



# The Peregrine

## Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

Vol. 10, No. 5, September/October 2011

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### Take Birding Trips Across U.S. at Our October 5 Meeting



*Mountain Bluebird in Colorado  
(photograph by Brian Shema)*

There's a great birding world beyond Pennsylvania, and we'll see it at the Three Rivers Birding Club meeting on Wednesday, October 5.

Our speaker will be Brian Shema, Conservation Director of the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania. His program "Traveling Birdwatching" will encourage local birders to travel outside of Pennsylvania to study North America's birds.

The meeting will be held at the Phipps Garden Center, 1059 Shady Avenue in Shadyside. Doors will open at 6:30 PM for socializing, the business meeting begins at 7:30, and the program starts at 8.

Brian has listed nearly 700 species in 27 states. He has led eight trips in the past six years in a tour program he developed for the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, finding more than 550 species.

Brian looks forward to sharing stories and photos from these trips to the Eastern Shore, Arizona twice, Oregon/northern California, the Rio Grande Valley, coastal Maine, Colorado, and central California.

He has a bachelor of science degree in wildlife biology from Penn State University, and his research has included Ruffed Grouse breeding biology and habitat preference, Louisiana Waterthrush as a bio-indicator, and nest site fidelity in Barn Owls.



*Brian Shema, our October 5 speaker  
(photograph courtesy of Brian)*

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### Local Birders Saw Four Rare Visitors

March and April 2011 brought notable rarities to our area. Pictured here are a Brown Pelican (below) in Washington County on April 13-14 and a Little Blue Heron (right) in Beaver County on April 7. Both photos are by Geoff Malosh. Geoff's website, [home.earthlink.net/~pomarine4/id6.html](http://home.earthlink.net/~pomarine4/id6.html), has details on those as well as photos and information about a Mew Gull in Beaver County on March 13 and a Snowy Egret in Allegheny County on April 13.



## President's Message

### A Member, a Friend, and a Highly Deserved Award

By Jim Valimont

Many of you know that Mike Fialkovich has been awarded the W. E. Clyde Todd Award by the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania. This award is presented to an individual who has furthered the cause of conservation in western Pennsylvania. I can't think of a more deserving person than my good friend Mike.

Mike and I have spent a lot of time together birding in Pennsylvania and beyond. However, our first scheduled trip together did not go as planned. I first met Mike at the annual members' day held by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy at Bear Run Nature Reserve. Jack and Sue Solomon and I had been planning a trip to the Chesapeake Bay, and Mike was going to join us and room with me. As the trip approached, the weather forecast turned bleak, with lots of rain expected. At the last minute, Mike decided not to go. Jack, Sue, and I went anyway and spent the rainy Saturday at the new Baltimore Aquarium. We had a great trip, though I was a little sore at Mike for having to pay the full motel cost instead of sharing it. But there were to be many more trips with Mike to many of North America's best birding spots.

I noticed on our early trips that Mike would spend quite a bit of time after each day's birding writing in a notebook. I asked him what he was doing, and he said he was writing up the day's events in his journal. Soon after, I started keeping a journal and I have never regretted it. My journals have provided very useful records for knowing what to expect at various locations at different times of the year. They provide many happy memories.

My first journal entry was for Saturday, November 3, 1990: "Went to Hawk Mountain with Mike Fialkovich. Nice warm day. Not spectacular, but a decent day. Sharpies, red tails, a few harriers, a beautiful red shoulder, a sub-adult bald eagle that flew very close, and two black vultures. Heard siskins." We continued to Bombay Hook and Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuges, Cape Henlopen State Park, Cape May, and Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge, a great four-day trip! My comments included:

"Lots of mosquitoes!" (Bombay Hook) . . . "Wave of frog noise." (Prime Hook) . . . "Fence lizard at Cape Henlopen." . . . "On ferry, saw lots of gannets." . . . "Could not find the lesser black-backed gull at Brigantine."

I might have corrected Mike on some bird identifications in our early trips, but certainly not any more! Mike has become one of those great birders who remember nearly every field mark of every species and every plumage. He amazes me with his recall.

His skill was best illustrated on a wonderful Tuesday in October 2002 when Mike found New Jersey's first record of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. I could not have identified it, but Mike did. He called Paul Hess over to confirm. Then we got someone from the Wetlands Institute to spread the word to other birders, who came from all over in minutes to see and photograph this bird before it flew out into the salt marsh, never to be seen again.

Mike really excels in leading outings. They are always popular and well attended. That's because he cares that everybody gets a chance to see every good bird. When no birds are seen, he can then draw on his knowledge of plants, trees, mammals, and bird calls. Every outing with Mike has something new for everyone.

I congratulate my good friend Mike on this award which recognizes his skills, and I hope that we have many more adventures awaiting us in the future!

## The Peregrine

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## Letter from the Editor

By Paul Hess

Three people are on my mind, and I celebrate their present and their past as I edit this issue of *The Peregrine*.

An honor in the present: Our own Mike Fialkovich, a respected Pennsylvania naturalist, has received the local Audubon Society's top award. (See Jim Valimont's message at left, the article on page 7, and the home page on our club's website, [3rbc.com](http://3rbc.com).)

Warm memories of the past:

\* Esther Allen, loved and admired by countless people for her enthusiasm and encyclopedic knowledge of wildflowers, died on June 27. (See the story on page 9, read tributes on Kate St. John's website, [tinyurl.com/3ckrzp4](http://tinyurl.com/3ckrzp4), and see Chuck Tague's Nature Observer Photo Gallery, [tinyurl.com/3se73rr](http://tinyurl.com/3se73rr).)

\* Jean Stull Cunningham, an important artist, ornithologist, and environmentalist in Erie County, died on July 30. Veteran birders in our club knew Jean for more than 40 years, chatting with her regularly while she was banding at Presque Isle with her late husband Jim and often since then. (Read an article about Jean in the *Erie Times-News*, [tinyurl.com/3tl7t6e](http://tinyurl.com/3tl7t6e).)

# The Peregrine

## Outings to Come

### This Season Includes 3RBC's Annual Picnic: Our 10th Anniversary!

By Steve Thomas, Outings Director

**Friday, August 26 – Sewickley Heights Borough Park:** In collaboration with the Fern Hollow Nature Center at the park, a series of bird walks will be led by Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694 or email [van126@comcast.net](mailto:van126@comcast.net)). The walks will begin at 8 AM starting from the upper parking lot. See the 3RBC website ([www.3rbc.org](http://www.3rbc.org)) for directions. Be prepared for muddy trails, and bring water and a lunch. We will bird the park and along Little Sewickley Creek Road. Warblers, flycatchers, thrushes, and vireos will be our targets.

**Saturday, August 27 – Allegheny Front Hawk Watch:** This early outing to the hawk watch should be near the peak migration of Bald Eagles. Meet at 10 AM at the hawk watch. For directions, see 3RBC's website, [www.3RBC.org](http://www.3RBC.org), or the Allegheny Plateau Audubon website, [www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org/hw.html](http://www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org/hw.html). Also you may contact Dick Byers [otusasio@lhtot.com](mailto:otusasio@lhtot.com) for a map. Bring a lunch. Allow two hours drive time from Pittsburgh.

**Sunday, September 4 – Boyce-Mayview Park:** Join Patti Kaminski (412-831-8041) for an outing at an increasingly popular birding location. In addition to a beautiful wetland area, there are woods and open fields. We'll begin our walk at 7:30 AM in a small parking area off of Boyce Road. Take Route 19 south past South Hills Village (on your left). Continue a few miles past Upper St. Clair High School (on your right) until you reach Boyce Road; turn right onto Boyce, go past Boyce Middle School and then about 1 mile downhill past Friendship Village (on your left). At the bottom of the hill on your right is the entrance to the parking area, adjacent to a small pizza shop.

**Sunday, September 11 – Beechwood Farms:** Steve and Sue Thomas (412-782-4696) will lead a walk through the Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve at 614 Dorseyville Road in Fox Chapel. The reserve has good habitat for migrants. We will meet at 7:30 AM. Be prepared for muddy trails. For directions, see [www.aswp.org/beechwoodDirections.html](http://www.aswp.org/beechwoodDirections.html).

**Saturday, September 17 – Harrison Hills Park:** Meet leader Jim Valimont (412-828-5338) at 8 AM at this Allegheny County park off Freeport Road between Natrona Heights and Freeport. **We will meet at a new location.** As you enter the park, bear **right** at the fork and proceed to the parking lot at the end of the road. This morning we will visit the large pond and woodlands and meadows around it, which are often a fall migrant hot spot.

**Friday, September 23 – Sewickley Heights Borough Park:** Another outing in collaboration with the Fern Hollow Nature Center at the park will be led by Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694 or email [van126@comcast.net](mailto:van126@comcast.net)). Meet at 8 AM in the upper parking lot. See the August 26 listing above for details.

**Saturday, September 24 – Allegheny Front Hawk Watch:** This is a joint outing with the Westmoreland Bird and Nature Club. The date should be near the peak of Broad-winged Hawk migration, and many other raptor species can be expected. Meet at 11 AM at the hawk watch. For directions, see the 3RBC website, [www.3RBC.org](http://www.3RBC.org), or the Allegheny Plateau Audubon site, [www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org/hw.html](http://www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org/hw.html). Also you may contact Dick Byers at [otusasio@lhtot.com](mailto:otusasio@lhtot.com) for a map. Bring a lunch and dress warmly. Be prepared for changes in the weather! Allow 2 hours driving time from Pittsburgh.

**Saturday, October 1 – Frick Park:** Join leaders Jack and Sue Solomon (412-521-3365) for a walk through this excellent migrant trap, which sometimes has a great variety of warblers. Meet at 7:30 AM at the Frick Environmental Center parking lot, 2005 Beechwood Boulevard, just north of Forbes Avenue in Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill section.

**Sunday, October 2 – Harrison Hills Park:** Meet leader Jim Valimont (412-828-5338) at 8 AM at the park off Freeport Road between Natrona Heights and Freeport. **We will again meet at the new location.** As you enter the park, bear **right** at the fork and proceed to the parking lot at the end of the road. This area around the pond has produced such species as Orange-crowned Warbler, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Swamp Sparrow in October.

**Sunday, October 16 – Pymatuning Area:** Meet leader Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694 or email [van126@comcast.net](mailto:van126@comcast.net)) at the Pymatuning Wildlife Learning Center (Waterfowl Museum) at 9 AM for this all-day outing. We should see plenty of waterfowl, Bald Eagles, and migrant songbirds. Take I-79 north to Route 6, and go west to Linesville. Turn left at the light in Linesville where the sign points toward the Pymatuning spillway. The sign for the center will be on the left, past the fish hatchery and before the spillway. Bring a lunch or join us for lunch at the Spillway Inn.

**Sunday, October 23 – Moraine State Park:** This outing will be 3RBC's 10th anniversary picnic and bird walk. We will meet at 8 AM in the park Day Use Area (South Shore) in the first parking lot on the right. After the morning walk, we will have the potluck picnic at one of the park pavilions near McDanel's Boat Launch. Please bring a dish that will serve 4-6 people. From I-79, take Route 422 east toward Butler and exit at the Moraine State Park exit. At the end of the ramp, turn left and go straight into the park until you see the first major parking area on your right. Allow one hour driving from Pittsburgh.

**Saturday, November 5 – Yellow Creek State Park:** This will be a joint outing of the 3RBC and the Todd Bird Club. Meet Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493) at 8 AM at the park office. The office is located on Route 259, just south of Route 422, east of Indiana. Allow an hour and 30 minutes driving from Pittsburgh. This park has been the prime outing location for the Todd Bird Club. It has a diversity of habitats and a large lake that attracts a wide variety of waterbirds and sometimes exciting rarities.

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*(Editor's note: You see many e-mail and Internet addresses regularly in "Outings to Come," such as those above. Our online version of The Peregrine at [www.3rbc.org](http://www.3rbc.org) has direct "hotlinks" to these, which will save you from having to type them. In fact, all such addresses in the online newsletter have the same direct links.)*

## Bird Watch

### For What It's Worth

By Chuck Tague

The Swallow-tailed Kite drifted over the tree line, exactly as I told the man it would. I was eating my lunch in the visitor center's parking lot at Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge in DeLeon Springs, Florida, but the kite-seeker was long gone. He was on his way back to Orlando to take his family to one of the "attractions."

He introduced himself to me as a birder from the UK and asked if I'd seen any Swallow-tailed Kites. I had not. Lake Woodruff NWR is a huge place (21,599 acres), and somewhere in the refuge is the second largest staging area for migrating Swallow-tailed Kites in the United States. The exact location of the roost is a secret and off-limits to the public. By mid-morning, when the thermals rise and the dragonflies cruise the treetops, the kites fan out. The British birder had called the refuge office, and they assured him that the kites were there in good numbers. Nobody, however, directed him to a good observation spot.

It was late morning when he caught up to me along the dike trail. It was only my second human encounter of the day and it was over an hour since the two hikers went by. The temperature was already over 90°F and the humidity in the marsh was steamy. I was trying to photograph dragonflies, but the insects weren't cooperating. Butterfly and dragonfly enthusiasts consider themselves mad dogs. Our obsession forces us afield when large colorful insects are most active and, according to the Noel Coward song, only "Mad Dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun."

The British birder was in obvious discomfort. He'd walked over a mile through blistering-hot marsh land and still had a half mile to go. "Bloody hot," he said, "We don't have weather like this in the UK." Sadly, he was in the wrong habitat. Swallow-tailed Kites forage over forests and wooded edges. They cruise the canopy and snag dragonflies and cicadas on the wing. They dip down and pluck katydids, tree frogs, lizards, and snakes from the high branches. I've never seen a Swallow-tailed Kite over an open marsh. I instructed the birder to keep an eye on the tree lines on his way out. An old cypress swamp dotted with oak and pine hammocks surrounded the marsh. I asked him if he had any other target species, hoping I could save his day with a Black-necked Stilt or a King Rail. He said no, he'd been to Florida many times but never when the Swallow-tails were around.

Swallow-tailed Kites are more than a check on a life list. Their colors, pattern, shape, and flight style are spectacular. Every one of my field guides and bird references describes them as striking, graceful, and elegant. Most descriptions include a string of superlative adjectives. In flight they are a combination of falcon and butterfly. In my opinion watching swallow-tails slowly drift over Live Oaks draped with Spanish Moss, then pivot their tail streamers 90 degrees to shoot straight up, twist, swoop, then disappear is breathtaking. In addition, at least statistically, they are a rare species with only about a thousand breeding pairs in the United States. All breed along the southeastern coastal plain from the Carolinas to Texas. Their population is now stable, but historically their range extended to Ohio and Minnesota.

When I stopped to examine a dragonfly perched on a shrub, the British birder kept going. There was a lone oak tree, and shade, ahead. I wished him luck and reminded him to keep an eye on the tree tops. There was still a chance he and a kite would cross paths. "It's a spectacular bird. It will be worth it."



*BEAUTY OVERHEAD – Chuck Tague photographed this Swallow-tailed Kite at Tiger Bay State Forest in Volusia County, Florida*

I saw my first Swallow-tailed Kites on July 30, 1995. Three or four swooped over the tree line across a blistering hot marsh in South Carolina's Santee Delta. The humidity was as thick as the mosquito clouds. I paid dearly for the addition to my life list, in blood, sweat, and petroleum. It took me three trips to South Carolina, 700 miles one way, but it was worth it. After my first sighting I couldn't get enough of the graceful, elegant raptors that cruise southern canopies. I've observed them several times since in the Santee River Delta. Like Lake Woodruff, this is a vast expanse of marsh intermingled with tall-tree forests. I travelled to Everglades National Park to welcome the first migrants returning from the American tropics. I explored blackwater oxbows that feed into the St. John's River in central Florida. I associated Swallow-tailed Kites with wilderness; with sweat, mosquitos, and physical discomfort. A Swallow-tailed sighting, however, was always worth it.

Three years ago, in mid April, I was in the screened-in porch of our mobile home just north of Daytona Beach. The temperature was pleasant and a Northern Parula sang in the Live Oak across the street. A Swallow-tailed swooped down, circled the oak's spreading dome then drifted into the trees on the trailer park's perimeter. When I screamed to Joan, the neighbors ran out. They thought I fell off a ladder. The kites returned every night for a week. We watched them pluck Spanish Moss from the old oak. We discovered their nest on a tall Slash Pine one street to the north. If we positioned the spotting scope just right, we could watch it from our yard.

This year we spent July in Florida for the first time. There are at least three kite pairs in the neighborhood. All through the month they cruised over the trailers. Some days we could see eight at the same time. Once a parent and two fledglings hovered and chattered over our place as they inspected the oaks for cicadas.

I didn't tell the British birder that the day before I'd spent 15 minutes watching kites work the tall pines around the local Walmart.

Swallow-tailed Kites are not wilderness birds after all. Like many raptors, they adapt well to towns and suburbs if the right combination of nest sites and prey is available. As a predictable, dependable yard bird are swallow-tails any less valuable? Are trailer park kites any less exciting? Not a bit.

## Outings Revisited

### Lark Sparrow Was Our Best Bird of the Spring

**Bell's Farm – May 14:** Ralph Bell greeted a smaller crowd than average at this year's outing. Perhaps the rain-threatening clouds played a part in diminishing the numbers, as well as local birders's trips to see migrants at Magee Marsh in Ohio and Presque Isle State Park. The numbers of birders may have been down, but not the spirit of those attending.

Ralph cheered the group by conveying the news that Bobolinks were on the farm this year. No sooner had Ralph made this pronouncement than a birder called out, "Bobolink on the wire," while pointing up to the field and the telephone wires. This beautiful black-and-white bird flew off into the high grass, turning its back to observers. Several Eastern Meadowlarks and Red-winged Blackbirds tried to steal the show, as well as the ubiquitous Purple Martins. Ralph tried to entice the Purple Martins by tossing chicken feathers into the air, but the feathers, damp from the humidity, failed to attract these chattering flyers.

As birders headed down the driveway, some carrying umbrellas, Ralph picked out a variety of bird sounds. "Do you hear the Chipping Sparrow? It sounds a lot like a junco but different." "Hear the catbird? It's happy as if it had good sense." Describing the Song Sparrow, he said it sounded like, "See, See, See, How pretty I be." Ralph asked everyone if they heard the "chip" sound of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak. On this day, the grosbeaks were a pretty sight even with the naked eye. American Redstarts and Scarlet Tanagers gave us even more beautiful birds to observe. On the walk for the day, we had more than 67 species including Black-poll Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, and Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

During the day, Ralph spiced up the walk with frequent stories and jokes. When one birder asked another, "Where's he at?" Ralph recalled an old country saying, "He's before the at." In another joke, Ralph recollected a story about a guy asking a friend, "Are you going to a mutual friend's funeral?" The friend replied, "He's not going to mine, so I'm not going to his."

After heavy rains, Ten Mile Creek was moving fast and furious. Ralph agreed that it was at the highest level ever for a Bell's Farm outing. "Hard to believe one August I was able to cross the creek without getting my feet wet," he said.

As the group came to a bend in Pollock's Mill Road near the stone house, Canada Geese were spotted. They were amusing to watch as their heads and long necks peered over the tops of the grass. From a distance, a Broad-winged Hawk was observed circling a ridge and a lone crow, mistaken initially for a raven, was perched on a distant tree. A participant noted that an Osprey had been seen in the area earlier in the week.

Near the Massillon Iron Bridge, Rough-winged Swallows danced in the skies, unfazed by the high water in the creek. One swallow was observed carrying a piece of grass in its beak. Ralph showed us the place in the stream culvert where the bird was building a nest. Several people walked the short path to the base of the culvert to see the round hole in the wall. Nobody was brave enough to look in, as one requirement would be that they step in the stream. When asked if he had ever seen Rough-winged Swallows near his house, Ralph responded that he occasionally sees them near the farm, and the young ones have a special note that is difficult to describe. An Eastern Phoebe nest was spotted under the railroad bridge culvert.

Before the return hike to the farm, the group relaxed on large rocks at the foot of the bridge. At the farm, the rain, which had been kept at bay all day, arrived with a light shower. This prevented the traditional lunch under the tuliptree. Most of the people took refuge under a garage overhang.

Afterward, Ralph led the remaining participants into the chicken barn. The barn was a showplace for Barn Swallows with over 30 nests. These swallows had the run of the coop, flying all over the place. Overall, we did not see as many nests as a typical Bell's Farm outing, perhaps due to the rainy spring.

Many wildflowers were enjoyed including Miami Mist, Dame's Rocket, Golden Alexander, Wild Phlox, Star of Bethlehem, and many others. Larry Helgerman was studying a Common Fleabane when he noticed an interesting crab spider.

As we left the chicken barn, the rain had diminished a great deal and turned into what Ralph calls a "dry drizzle." On this day, Ralph did not band American Kestrels as he does every year, as the five eggs had not yet hatched. We did have a chance to take one final look at the Bobolink. As birders departed, all were thankful for all of the wonderful birds and sights of the day and the opportunity to spend time with Ralph, a legendary naturalist and friend.  
—by participant Paul Beck

**Presque Isle State Park – May 14:** PISP is known for its diversity of habitats and birds, making it an ideal attraction for birders, especially during spring migration. It was this sense of anticipation that brought four birders from the 3RBC to the South Shore parking lot on an overcast but warm May morning. Right away, surrounded by bits of songs and glimpses of colored feathers pinballing through the canopies of cottonwood trees, we quickly identified 23 species including our first warblers: Yellow, Magnolia, and American Redstart. A quick check of the lake revealed some Red-breasted Mergansers by the Beach 1 breakers.

After an unsuccessful search for the reported Purple Gallinule at the head of the bay, the birders drove to Leo's Landing. This dirt road, bordering a cattail marsh, can be a haven for vireos, warblers, and orioles. All of those were easy finds, but the real surprise was a Lark Sparrow foraging along the road's edge among some White-crowned Sparrows. The bird's striking facial pattern and overall clean look was captivating. Fortunately for us, the sparrow was so engrossed in its search for food that it seemed indifferent to our following about 30 feet behind. Eventually it flew up to a small shrub, and then quickly launched itself into a tree out of our sight, but certainly not out of our memories.

A stop at the park office to check out the feeders produced sightings of a Pine Siskin and a Dark-eyed Junco. The woods surrounding the office provided perches for a singing pair of Willow Flycatchers, a Scarlet Tanager, and a Blue-headed Vireo. On the bay side, a black-headed gull was seen swimming close to shore. Eventually we were able to track it down and determine that the swimmer was a Bonaparte's Gull.

The banding area in back of the rest room at the Niagara boat launch provided us with our first look at a Chestnut-sided Warbler and an Ovenbird. A Wood Thrush's flute-like song also caught our attention. Just up the road near the bike rental, we watched Purple Martins bring food to their babies in their nesting boxes.

Our last morning destination brought us to the Long Pond Trail, which proved to be filled with energetic warblers. With discoveries of a Golden-winged, a Canada, a Wilson's, a Northern Waterthrush, a Yellow-rumped, and multiple sightings of Black-and-white, Black-throated Blue, Hooded, Common Yellowthroat, and Palm, we kept searching for more warblers like kids choos-

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## Outings Revisited

*continued from page 5*

ing treats at a candy store. Other sightings included a Swainson's Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird, and a Hairy Woodpecker. We also paused several times to listen to the songs of Marsh Wren, Swamp Sparrows, and a Veery.

After a lunch break, we headed to Fry's Landing and turned up some new warblers, such as Bay-breasted, a Blue-winged, a Northern Parula, and a Nashville. An Eastern Wood-Pewee was hawking for insects in an open clearing, while nearby two Lincoln's Sparrows padded the ground for bugs. In a day filled with surprise sightings, we had another: a Gray-cheeked Thrush that was meandering through the wooded trail.

Because Pine Tree Trail was slow, we decided to try again to find the Purple Gallinule. While we awaited its appearance, other birds caught our eyes. We saw the moorhens again, busily preening themselves, we watched two Caspian Terns as they made strafing runs over the water, and we spotted a Northern Harrier as it gained altitude flying high over the marsh. A dozen Wood Duck drakes swam close to the phragmites at the head of the bay. The gallinule turned out to be a no-show.

Eighty-five species were recorded for the outing. PISP lived up to its reputation as a prime birding location where a birder can come to thrill in the joy of discovery and consider the wonderment of migration. —by leader **Bob VanNewkirk**

**Harrison Hills Park – May 25:** On this late-May date we found only one migrant, a Least Flycatcher, while most birds were settling down to breed and raise young. Eight birders met leader Jim Valimont in the parking lot where Wood Thrushes could be heard in all directions. Scarlet Tanagers, Red-eyed Vireos, and an Eastern Wood-Pewee added to the morning songs.

We proceeded up the hill toward the Environmental Learning Center trying to find the Indigo Bunting and Rose-breasted Grosbeak that were constantly singing overhead in the tree canopy. The field by the learning center yielded Tree Swallows, Eastern Bluebirds, and an Eastern Phoebe, along with a Baltimore Oriole and a Field Sparrow. Unusual to see this far from the river (1/2 mile) was an Osprey flying northwest over the area.

We returned to the parking lot down the entrance road when a cacophony of crows told us the Great Horned Owls that had been spotted two days earlier were being harassed. We planned to check out the owls later, but now we found a Red-eyed Vireo carrying nesting material. In fact, for a bird that is often hard to find, we saw a lot of Red-eyed Vireos out in the open, some even courting with their tails fanned out. Another bird we heard was an Acadian Flycatcher, with many to follow.

On the hill overlooking the Allegheny River near the children's playground, we were able to hear Cerulean Warblers in spite of a noisy grass mower nearby. At the Watts Overlook a Carolina Wren was heard as well as a Black-and-white Warbler. We listed three more warblers in the woods past the overlook, a Kentucky, a Hooded, and an American Redstart. Jim spotted a Wood Thrush fly into its nest, and we got good looks at a brooding bird.

A non-bird discovery was a tiny shrew, not longer than two inches, that Jim noticed lying dead in the path. Great discussion followed the outing as to its species, but it was most likely a Masked Shrew. (*Editor's note: After seeing Tom Moeller's photos, Joseph F. Merritt, the author of Guide to the Mammals of Pennsylvania, agreed. However, he said that it could not be distinguished definitely from a Pygmy Shrew except by close inspection of its upper teeth.*) Collecting the specimen would have provided a posi-

tive ID, but no one wanted to take the dead critter to lunch in his/her pocket.

We all drove up to the Baneberry shelter to look for the Great Horned Owl fledglings we had heard being harassed by crows earlier. A 15-minute search found no owls, and the harassing crows were long gone. We should have gone up in the morning!

In spite of the fact that migration was winding down, we were able to find 48 bird species. We wanted to count the owls, but since we did not find them later, we passed on that idea. Still it was a good day with camaraderie, good birding, and nice weather. —by participant **Tom Moeller**

**Laurel Mountain – June 11:** A surprising number of 24 birders joined me on this outing to the summit of Laurel Mountain in Westmoreland County for a day of high-elevation birding. The elevation imparts a feeling of being in the northern forests, and the birds that nest here add to that feeling.

Before we started, a first-year male Purple Finch landed at the top of a tall pine near the parking lot and sang; a nice way to start the walk. We hiked the nearly 5.5-mile round trip out to the Wolf Rocks overlook with mosquitoes as our constant companions.

The forest contains thick undergrowth of Mountain Laurel (that was starting to bloom) providing nesting habitat for species such as Black-throated Blue and Canada Warblers and a beautiful backdrop for us. We saw the Black-throated Blues but only heard the Canadas. Chestnut-sided Warblers were numerous, and we had great looks at a pair of nervous Ovenbirds that apparently had a nest near the trail. American Redstarts were common, and we heard two Black-and-white Warblers as we neared the overlook. Hooded Warblers remained hidden, as did Black-throated Green Warblers and a Blackburnian Warbler.

An Eastern Wood-Pewee was heard singing, and I heard a Great Crested Flycatcher call once. Several Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were active, and we had nice looks at one or two and heard their unique drumming. Several Red-eyed Vireos and, surprisingly, only one Blue-headed Vireo were singing. A male Rose-breasted Grosbeak quickly flew through the forest.

While we were enjoying the view and a break from hiking at Wolf Rocks, a few Cedar Waxwings and our only Red-tailed Hawk

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**TINY ATTRACTION** – Birds aren't the only attraction on some of our club's outings. Butterflies sometimes draw attention, too, such as this Hobomok Skipper at Harrison Hills Park on May 25. (photograph by Tom Moeller)

## Mike Fialkovich Receives Top Audubon Award

To all who know him, from good friends, to professional biologists, to casual outing participants, to audience members at his nature programs, Mike Fialkovich is known widely as an expert naturalist, educator, and worker in behalf of conservation.

The Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania recognized Mike's service by presenting him ASWP's W. E. Clyde Todd Award, given to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to conservation in western Pennsylvania.

Mike received the award at the society's annual picnic on July 16 at Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve. Presenting the award, Brian Shema, ASWP Conservation Director, said, "It is not just because Mike is an accomplished birder that he is receiving this award. He has been sharing his time, knowledge and experiences with audiences since 1989 and has been a member of ASWP since 1991." Brian read a long list of Mike's accomplishments:

- \* Mike began volunteering with ASWP in the Christmas Bird Count in 1992.

- \* He was a Bird-A-Thon Pro in 1994, raising money for ASWP's education efforts.

- \* In the same year he conducted Breeding Bird Surveys at our Todd Nature Reserve and volunteered at our BirdFest program that fall.

- \* In 1995, he began compiling data on western Pennsylvania bird occurrences.

- \* Adding to his plate, Mike collected seeds for the Native Plant Nursery (a new initiative back then) to help further ASWP's efforts to provide nursery propagated native plants.

- \* During the same time period, Mike led over 40 natural history hikes throughout western Pennsylvania on topics ranging from amphibians of Todd Nature Reserve to wildflowers at the Jennings Prairie in Butler County.

- \* More recently Mike was a founding member of the Three Rivers Birding Club, and serves as Steering Committee Member, Bird Reports Editor, Club Historian, and an outing leader.

- \* He has been a member of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology since 2000, currently serves as a seasonal editor for *Pennsylvania Birds*, and is the compiler for Allegheny and Fayette Counties. He has authored four journal articles documenting population declines and invasion years. (*Editor's note: This year Mike was also elected to the PSO Board of Directors.*)

- \* Mike has provided lectures to bird clubs, environmental organizations and like-minded groups on topics ranging from the plants of Presque Isle, the flora and fauna of California, Washington State ecosystems, ecology of the U. S. East Coast from southern New Jersey to North Carolina, and "A Year in the Life" presentations on the seasonal adaptation of plants and animals.



HONOREE – Mike Fialkovich, here photographed by Dianne Machesney at a 3RBC outing at Moraine State Park.

- \* He served as a regional coordinator for the second Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas and authored two species accounts for the project's upcoming publication.

Brian concluded, "I'm not sure where to end with Mike's contributions to western Pennsylvania's understanding, appreciation, and conservation of birds. His incredible record-keeping ability is something that I have personally taken advantage of, and most birdwatchers in western Pennsylvania have benefitted from his natural history presentations. It is through these efforts, and many more that Mike has earned the W. E. Clyde Todd Award."

Congratulations from all of us in the Three Rivers Birding Club, Mike!

## Outings Revisited

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and Turkey Vulture of the day flew over. A Common Raven sailed over the valley. On the return walk we saw a pair of Dark-eyed Juncos.

After a lunch break at the parking lot, we took the short walk to Spruce Flats Bog where you really feel like you are in Canada. A Purple Finch, Dark-eyed Juncos, and Hermit Thrushes were all singing around the bog. Surprisingly, a female Mallard was in and around a pool of water in the middle of the bog.

Our group was interested in looking at the bog's carnivorous plants. The Pitcher Plants were in full bloom and we saw Round-leaved Sundews. Large Cranberry plants were also noted.

Also of interest was the female Dobsonfly that was perched on Jeff McDonald's—shall we say—rear upper leg. It generated discussion about the life cycle of this two-inch-long insect. Eventually, after having her photo taken, she flew off.

On the way back to the parking lot, we searched hard for a singing Blackburnian Warbler that refused to come into view until after half the group gave up and moved on. The bird showed itself to those who endured playing the waiting game. —by leader Mike Fialkovich

## Birding Away

# Bizarre Birding in Belize

(Part 1 of 2)

By Kathleen B. Siebert

At first, we thought it was a lone bird possessed by demons playing a weird kind of Russian roulette. But when his compatriots started throwing themselves in front of our truck tires, it became an all-out war between the birds and us. Chaos ensued in the pre-dawn light, as our quiet trek down a claustrophobic jungle road morphed into a frantic collision course with fast-moving avian targets hurling at us from every direction.

The culprits were dozens of kamikaze Wood Thrushes sabotaging our birding excursion to Mayflower Bocawina National Park in Belize. The thrushes would dive down from the trees and land inches from our front bumper, scarfing up bugs stirred up by the tires. It wasn't Russian roulette, though. The deranged birds were playing a game of chicken, taunting the truck and daring it to flatten them!

But my husband, Steve, refused to be an accessory to Wood Thrush suicide, braking every couple of seconds, sparing the birds' lives. Finally, after 20 minutes of non-stop madness, we reached the parking lot where the birds backed off, retreating to the roadside thickets, waiting to ambush the next patsy trespassing on their territory.

The feckless feeding behavior of the daredevil thrushes was just one of many bizarre observations we made of familiar birds engaged in unfamiliar practices in an unfamiliar country.

Every year, in lieu of superfluous Christmas gifts, my husband, Steve, and I treat ourselves to a mid-December birding trip to the tropics. Instead of visions of sugarplums, we have visions of flashy, tropical birds dancing in our heads. We trade snow-flocked, lit-up pine trees for swaying, sun-kissed palms decorated with colorful parrots, cuckoos and hummingbirds.

Central America always fills the bill, especially in mid-December. The hurricane season is over, temperatures hover around 80 degrees, and hotels are cheaper and less crowded.

This past Christmas, we got more than we bargained for with a trip to Belize and neighboring Guatemala. We found 189 species, including 37 lifers, but we also made some interesting observations of migratory birds we thought we knew – Kentucky Warblers foraging in wide-open patches of grass inches from where we walked, Gray Catbirds inside supermarkets pilfering grapes from store shelves, and not-so-secretive Yellow-breasted Chats preening their plumage out in the open. And of course, there were the dive-bombing Wood Thrushes.

Situated south of Mexico, Belize is the only English-speaking country in Central America. Roughly the size of Massachusetts, it's famous for its ancient Mayan ruins and outstanding diving opportunities from its offshore cays. A strong conservation ethic and lack of development make Belize a great birding destination.

But the lack of development can also prove challenging for DIY birders like us. Satisfactory hotels are scarce, and there are no McDonald's or Starbucks. And unless you rent a car, you probably won't experience the "real" Belize. That said, on the positive side, we found the people friendly, disarming, and helpful. The driving was easy, given that the main roads are well marked and in good condition. Driving off the beaten path, though, requires a four-wheel-drive vehicle as side roads are composed of dirt, gravel, ruts, and potholes, resulting in slow, bumpy, and sometimes treacherous conditions.



*UP CLOSE AND COLORFUL – Kathleen Siebert photographed this Emerald Toucanet during an exciting trip to Belize, when it came close to the breakfast table at the San Ignacio Resort Hotel.*

At first glance, Belize looks like any other tropical locale with a mixture of habitats. But its terrain is mostly sprawling, flat coastal plains with a few low-lying mountains in the south and northwest. We focused on three main areas of the country to get a good mixture of birds: the Cayo District, southwest of Belize City, which protects an astonishing 880,000 acres of land; Stann Creek, to the southeast, located along the Caribbean Coast; and the Belize District, which afforded us opportunities for convenient day trips from Belize City. Our first stop was the town of San Ignacio, gateway to the Mountain Pine Ridge Area in the Belizean Highlands, a scenic 90-minute drive from Belize City.

Our base for the next three days, the San Ignacio Resort Hotel, exceeded our expectations with its lovely hilltop location overlooking the rainforest. An outdoor pool and sitting area is the hotel's most alluring feature where guests gather throughout the day beneath a 100-foot-tall cecropia tree that towers over and shades an al fresco dining deck.

Every morning at daybreak, we sat and watched a dazzling parade of fancy birds in outrageous costumes arrive for breakfast like Keel-billed Toucans, Collared Aracaris and Yellow-throated Euphonias. Along with Yellow-winged, Palm and Blue-gray Tanagers, they all came to feed for hours on the sticky fruits of the cecropia. Just a few feet from our table, a pair of Emerald Toucanets took center stage every morning, so close they practically dared us to reach out and touch them. These beautiful birds aren't really emerald, they're bright grass green, with a dark blue throat, chestnut tail and a huge yellow and black bill. While we sipped

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## Birding Away

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our coffee, we watched, mesmerized, as they sat completely still, and then stretched their necks upwards to snatch pieces of fruit, as if to sneak up on them.

We stared in amazement at quiescent Black-headed Trogons that used similarly sly hunting techniques to pluck bugs from midair. In between bites of our breakfast burritos, we identified a lively assortment of warblers gleaning insects from the undersides of leaves – Magnolia, American Redstart, and Black-and-white, and a slew of White-eyed Vireos. From our front row seats, we could hear the familiar alarm call of a Wood Thrush echoing from the nearby jungle. What a show! The scene, entirely provided by nature, rivaled that of any elaborately stocked feeding station at bird-themed lodges we have visited in other countries.

We took a full day to explore the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve, the only true pine forest in Central America. A tree-sized shrub with pink flowers that resemble bursting fireworks lined much of the roadway en route to the reserve and attracted a hodgepodge of vibrantly colored birds fighting over the plant's sweet nectar, including Lesser Greenlets, Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers, Olive-backed Euphonias, and Baltimore, Black-cowled and Yellow-tailed Orioles.

A couple of times, flocks of Olive-throated Parakeets would screech overhead while Roadside Hawks lurked on telephone poles, causing commotion wherever they landed to rest or search for food. We could hear their angry-sounding “kree-yurr” minutes before other birds, especially families of noisy Brown Jays, began mobbing them.

As we climbed higher into the mountains, tall, skinny pine trees jutting into the sky carpeted much of the terrain. The pine-scented air reminded me of a drive through Pennsylvania's Laurel Highlands. Surprisingly, the warblers working the pines were the very ones we see in Ligonier in May – Black-throated Green, Yellow-throated, and Blue-winged. The Mountain Pine Ridge is truly unspoiled – a natural wonderland of pristine rivers, endless hiking trails and picturesque waterfalls, including the spectacular Thousand Foot Falls. The forest surrounding the 1,400-foot waterfall provides perfect habitat for rare Orange-breasted Falcons, usually seen from the observation deck soaring over the canopy.

We birded some lodges in the area, picking up a stunning Blue-crowned Motmot, Double-toothed Kite, and Violaceous Trogon at Macaw Bank Lodge. We also found another lifer, a gorgeous Royal Flycatcher, hunting near a ravine in the woods. Though the bird rarely flashes his spectacular fan-shaped, violet-tipped red crest, illustrated as a gaudy headdress in the field guide, it was clearly visible, folded and sticking out of the back of his head.

At Five Sisters Lodge around lunchtime, we strolled the beautifully landscaped grounds and scored a woodpecker trifecta with Golden-olive, Acorn and Golden-fronted. We ended the day at Francis Ford Coppola's Blancaneaux Lodge where Wood Thrushes and Northern and Louisiana Waterthrushes were so abundant that we were practically stepping on them. As sunset approached, we watched and listened as hundreds of Melodious Blackbirds came to their evening roost in the marshes encircling the lodge parking lot. The “black beauties” called back and forth to one another, pole-vaulting among the tall grasses, their clear, resonant whistles becoming almost deafening as more birds arrived. Then suddenly, as if someone flipped a switch, the birds were silent and had settled in for the night.

*(Continued in the next issue)*



*ALWAYS TEACHING – Esther Allen often used her walking stick to point out wildflowers during her many educational outings. (photograph by Chuck Tague)*

## Esther Allen: A Life to Celebrate

*(Editor's note: Esther Allen, who died on June 27, 2011, was loved and esteemed by many 3RBC members. Loree Speedy, who wrote this beautiful tribute to Esther, is field trip chair of the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania.)*

**By Loree Speedy**

“Well, I started to get interested in wildflowers, and hiked around on my own, and then I met Esther.” This is an oft-repeated phrase we have heard many times when meeting up with a fellow wildflower enthusiast.

Mrs. Esther Allen, one of the area's most talented and beloved naturalists, became a mentor to almost everyone who set foot with her on the hiking trail. Her love of the wildflowers was obvious, but what struck many was her keen eye for detail and beauty. Even the smallest flower, the tiniest insect, the most distinctive leaf shape, the most unusual gall, was for Esther a way to get others, adults and children, enthralled with what nature can offer. With her southern Ohio drawl and wit, she made everything in nature a story.

For over 35 years, Esther played a pivotal role in leading nature hikes for the Botanical Society, the Wissahickon Nature Club, garden clubs, community colleges, environmental organizations, and informally, for a vast number of friends and admirers. Her specialty was wildflowers – she learned the flora of this region with determination and pleasure. With her admiring husband Dave at the wheel, they traveled the countryside, visiting favorite wildflower haunts. One of her favorite tools to teach others was her stunning wildflower photography. Esther is a major contributor of photographs to the society's book *Wildflowers of Pennsylvania* by Haywood and Monk.

These photographic slides also served as material for her many nature programs. With slide projector at her side, Esther presented hundreds of nature programs. One of her favorites, as well as the favorite of her female friends, was an inspiring program about her mother, “Grandma Gatewood,” the first woman to hike the Appalachian Trail at the age of 67. Many would remark that

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# The Peregrine

## Allegheny County Migration Count Produces 119 Species

Birders found 119 species in Allegheny County for this year's Pennsylvania Migration Count, including all five of the eastern vireo species and an excellent total of 24 warbler species.

Shawn Collins, who compiled the May 14 count, was able to organize participation by 11 birders, despite the large number of local birders who were away at Magee Marsh in Ohio that day.

The areas covered were Boyce-Mayview Park, Wingfield Pines, Harrison Hills Park, Sewickley Heights Park, Edgeworth Dump/Pontefac Park, Walker Park, Imperial area, Downtown area (including rivers), Settler's Cabin Park, and North Park area.

Results for all participating counties will be published in the Pennsylvania Ornithological Society's journal *Pennsylvania Birds*. Here are the species and their numbers:

Canada Goose 48	Belted Kingfisher 5	House Wren 18	Worm-eating Warbler 2
Wood Duck 11	Red-bellied Woodpecker 35	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 4	Northern Waterthrush 1
Mallard 33	Downy Woodpecker 27	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 5	Louisiana Waterthrush 5
Hooded Merganser 4	Hairy Woodpecker 11	Eastern Bluebird 18	Kentucky Warbler 4
Wild Turkey 18	Northern Flicker 14	Veery 4	Common Yellowthroat 7
Pied-billed Grebe 1	Pileated Woodpecker 11	Gray-cheeked Thrush 1	Hooded Warbler 15
Double-crested Cormorant 4	Eastern Wood-Pewee 10	Hermit Thrush 3	Wilson's Warbler 1
Great Blue Heron 18	Acadian Flycatcher 3	Wood Thrush 30	Yellow-breasted Chat 2
Green Heron 7	Willow Flycatcher 6	American Robin 74	Eastern Towhee 27
Turkey Vulture 33	Least Flycatcher 11	Gray Catbird 33	Chipping Sparrow 14
Sharp-shinned Hawk 4	Eastern Phoebe 15	Northern Mockingbird 22	Field Sparrow 11
Cooper's Hawk 7	Great Crested Flycatcher 2	Brown Thrasher 7	Savannah Sparrow 3
Red-shouldered Hawk 2	Eastern Kingbird 7	European Starling 44	Grasshopper Sparrow 5
Broad-winged Hawk 4	White-eyed Vireo 11	Cedar Waxwing 4	Song Sparrow 26
Red-tailed Hawk 8	Yellow-throated Vireo 8	Blue-winged Warbler 2	Lincoln's Sparrow 1
American Kestrel 2	Warbling Vireo 19	Northern Parula 1	Swamp Sparrow 2
Peregrine Falcon 1	Philadelphia Vireo 4	Yellow Warbler 10	White-throated Sparrow 2
Killdeer 7	Red-eyed Vireo 76	Chestnut-sided Warbler 2	Scarlet Tanager 34
Spotted Sandpiper 4	Blue Jay 32	Magnolia Warbler 3	Northern Cardinal 38
Solitary Sandpiper 5	American Crow 18	Black-throated Blue Warbler 1	Rose-breasted Grosbeak 27
Ring-billed Gull 10	Tree Swallow 24	Yellow-rumped Warbler 11	Indigo Bunting 16
Herring Gull 4	N. Rough-winged Swallow 21	Black-throated Green Warbler 2	Red-winged Blackbird 44
Rock Pigeon 82	Barn Swallow 26	Yellow-throated Warbler 4	Eastern Meadowlark 2
Mourning Dove 38	Carolina Chickadee 8	Prairie Warbler 7	Common Grackle 27
Yellow-billed Cuckoo 1	Black-capped Chickadee 18	Palm Warbler 5	Brown-headed Cowbird 18
Black-billed Cuckoo 7	(Chickadee species 7)	Bay-breasted Warbler 2	Orchard Oriole 6
Eastern Screech-Owl 1	Tufted Titmouse 42	Blackpoll Warbler 5	Baltimore Oriole 17
Great Horned Owl 1	White-breasted Nuthatch 6	Cerulean Warbler 4	House Finch 10
Chimney Swift 33	Brown Creeper 1	Black-and-white Warbler 8	American Goldfinch 22
Ruby-throated Hummingbird 9	Carolina Wren 7	American Redstart 14	House Sparrow 37

## Esther Allen

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Esther certainly had her mother's genes and gumption. Esther was hiking at North Park, remarking on the pink of Mountain Laurel, the day before she suffered a stroke at the age of 93.

At her small home in Ross Township, Esther tended a plant sanctuary, a collection of interesting native trees, plants and ferns, in a backyard that was once a shaley slope. She predated the "native plant" movement by decades, demonstrating to many how planting with natives can transform a boring and barren landscape into a beautiful low-maintenance garden.

In 2000, the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania presented Esther with the W. E. Clyde Todd Award for teaching others about native plants. Soon after, a hiking trail was named in her honor at Raccoon Creek Wildflower Reserve, positioning her with O. E. Jennings and Max Henrici.

Esther Gatewood Allen grew up on a farm near Gallipolis, Ohio, where she learned to work hard while developing a love of nature and wildflowers. She met her husband Dave Allen at a college in Ohio and moved with him to the North Hills area of Pittsburgh, where she raised two sons, David and Nelson. Esther

was a legal secretary and office manager, serving as a family breadwinner at a time when women were expected to stay at home and keep house.

After her retirement, Esther dedicated her life to the study of natural history. Field trips with Esther taught us to slow down, to look, and to treasure the flowers on bike trails, hiking trails, lakesides, and meadows. In the words of birder and limericist Jack Solomon:

There's a wondrous naturalist named Esther,  
And at botany no one can best 'er,  
In height she is small,  
But her knowledge is tall,  
For the Spirit of Nature has blessed 'er.

We are fortunate to have learned about and experienced the natural world with such a gifted and charming woman.

## Birds in the Three Rivers Area

### First Snowy Egret Led the April-May 2011 List

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

April and May were quite rainy with severe thunderstorms in the area, particularly in May, preventing birders from getting into the field at times. Only in the final week of May did we see some dry weather, and the last few days were quite summer-like with near record high temperatures and humid conditions.

A **Mallard x American Black Duck** hybrid was at Dashields 4/11 (GM, DW, MV), and Black Duck reports include 2 at Wingfield Pines 4/10 (CD, LM) and one at Dashields 4/11 (GM, DW, MV, MF). A **Gadwall** was at Wingfield Pines 4/2 (GG), and 8 **Northern Shovelers** were there 4/19 (AF). Single **Ruddy Ducks** were at Edgeworth 4/7 (SD, BVN), North Park 4/12 (PL, SL), and Moody Road in Findlay Township 4/20-24 (MV).

**Ruffed Grouse** reports are very spotty these days, so sightings are especially welcome. One was at South Park 5/11 (GF), and one was crossing a street in Natrona Heights 5/12 (DH, PH).

A **Red-throated Loon** was on the Ohio River at Dashields 4/10 (GG), and one migrated past that location 4/12 (GM, MV). There are only a handful of county records of this species. There were few reports of **Common Loon** this spring. One was at Dashields 4/8 (GM), 4 flew past that site 4/12 (GM, MV), one was at Harrison Hills Park 4/23 (AH, PM), and a late migrant was spotted in flight over Imperial 5/27 (BC).

The high count of **Pied-billed Grebes** was 5 at Duck Hollow 4/7 (TM, NM), and 8 **Horned Grebes** there 4/7 (TM, NM) was the maximum. The high count of migrant **Double-crested Cormorants** at Dashields was 209 on 4/5 (GM, MV).

A **Great Blue Heron** nest was found at North Park 5/15 (MV). **Great Egret** reports include one at Dashields 4/5 (GM, MV), 2 at Boyce-Mayview Park 4/7 (DW, ST), 2 at Dashields 4/11 (GM, DW, MV), one there 4/13 (GM), one at Wingfield Pines 4/17 (JM), and one at North Park 5/20 (POB). A nice count of 4 were at North Park 5/29 (SK). A **Snowy Egret** was a fantastic find at Wingfield Pines 4/13 (AF), furnishing the first county record. The bird fed along Chartiers Creek the entire day, and many birders had the opportunity to see it and take photographs. Less rare but very notable in the county, a **Black-crowned Night-Heron** was flushed from a stream at Pontefrac Park in Sewickley 4/18 (SD, BVN).

An **Osprey** pair was discovered at a nest on Neville Island 4/27 (RC, *fide* PB), probably a first record of breeding in the county. The nest was on the property of Neville Chemical Company, where employees monitored through closed circuit television and took measures not to disturb it (PB). There were two rather late dates for Ospreys: one at Dashields on the Ohio River 5/22 (MV), where they are usually seen after migration and are probably the birds that breed just downriver in Beaver County; and one at Harrison Hills Park 5/26 (PH, JV et al.). Other Ospreys were reported at various locations along all three of the major rivers.

Last year a **Bald Eagle** nest was discovered in Crescent Township (the first confirmed in Allegheny County), and made the local news following the breeding season. That nesting was unsuccessful, but the pair was trying again this spring. A female **Peregrine Falcon** was observed at the Tarentum Bridge this season (RP, SG et al.). Observers monitored the scene, hoping a pair would nest on the bridge, but only a single bird was observed. A **Merlin** was spotted at Imperial 4/20 (MV, BS).



*FIRST FOR ALLEGHENY COUNTY – This Snowy Egret was a great addition to the county's bird list when it visited Wingfield Pines on April 13, 2011. (photograph by Jeff McDonald)*

A **Sora** was at Imperial in the small marshy pond along Bald Knob Road 5/12 (DW, ST), the first in the county since 2005, although one was found dead in 2007. A brief view of a **Common Gallinule** was had at Wingfield Pines 5/14 (JM), Allegheny County's first since 2007. (*Editor's note: Effective in July 2011, the American Ornithologists' Union has changed the official name of the Common Moorhen to Common Gallinule.*)

The season's most exciting shorebird was a **Whimbrel**, which dropped in at Imperial 5/27 (GM) following a thunderstorm, providing the third county record. As sunset approached, the bird appeared restless and began calling. At sunset it took off to continue migrating.

North Park Lake was still nearly empty this spring as restoration continued, and shorebirds were attracted to the extensive mud flats. Three **Semipalmated Plovers** were at North Park 5/23 (MV). Good numbers of **Solitary Sandpipers** were at Wingfield Pines 4/28-5/4 with a maximum of 23 on 4/30 (DW, ST, GG, DN, SC). Nine **Semipalmated Sandpipers** were at North Park 5/23 and 15 were there 5/26 (MV). Three were at Imperial 5/27 (GM) and 2 continued on 5/30 (MF). **Least Sandpipers** were reported at Wingfield Pines and North Park with a high of 14 at North Park 5/13 (MV).

An adult **Laughing Gull** was at Duck Hollow 5/11 (KS), the third Allegheny County record (the last was in 2006). Fortunately, it was photographed, but unfortunately it didn't linger. In a late afternoon and evening search, several birders failed to find it. **Bonaparte's Gulls** were tallied at Dashields in April, and numbers were lower than in previous years. Observers conducted the spring migration watch from 4/2 to 4/16. High counts were 97 on 4/7 (MV), 172 on 4/9 (GM, DW, MF), and 98 on 4/12 (GM, MV). An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** spent the evening of 4/12 at Dashields (GM, MV), another first for the migration watch. It was still present at dawn 4/13 but departed soon after (GM).

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# The Peregrine

## Birds in the Three Rivers Area

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Terns are also tallied in the watch at Dashields. **Caspian Terns** passed in small numbers, with 6 on 4/11 (GM, MV) the high count. **Common Tern** is always found in small numbers, and one on 4/12 (GM) was the only record for the entire spring season. **Forster's Tern** is the most numerous tern species to pass the dam and was recorded in a rather tight time frame in April with a high of 17 on 4/11 (GM, MV).

An adult and a fledgling **Eastern Screech-Owl** were roosting at Schenley Park 5/11 (KSJ). Two **Great Horned Owl** chicks were found huddled together at Harrison Hills Park 4/30 (SG et al.). A **Barred Owl** was noted at Sewickley Heights Park 5/2 (BVN, TM, NM), one of the county's few known breeding sites.

A **Red-headed Woodpecker** was found near McKeesport 4/23 (*fide* JS), and one was seen flying over Gibsonia 5/30 (BM). **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** were reported as usual, but with one exception. Two birds were noted clinging to the UPMC Building in downtown Pittsburgh outside the 39th floor 4/4 (BG)! They were able to cling to the steel skin of the tallest building in Pittsburgh. BG had his camera and was able to photograph them.

There were two reports of **Olive-sided Flycatcher**: one at the Edgeworth Dump next to Pontefrac Park in Sewickley 5/4 (BVN) and one at Beechwood Farms 5/22 (STh).

**Philadelphia Vireo** was reported on only three days: singles at Pine Township 5/11 (PL, SL), Harrison Hills Park (PH), Settler's Cabin Park (SC), and North Park (PAMC), all on 5/14, and Beechwood Farms 5/15 (STh).

**Fish Crows** were found at several locations. One bird was in Homestead across the river from Duck Hollow 4/3 (KSJ), one was in Greenfield 4/16 (KSJ), 3 were in Frick Park 4/26 (RM) and one was there 5/1 (DWe). Two **Common Ravens** were at Wingfield Pines 4/2 (GG) and one was at Imperial 5/30 (MF).

All three of the county's least common swallows were noted at Wingfield Pines: 2 **Purple Martins** 4/4 (DW, ST); 2 **Bank Swallows** 4/24 (DW, ST), and a **Cliff Swallow** 4/5 and 4/24 (ST).

Single **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were found at Imperial 4/24 (MV), Frick Park 5/1 (JS, SS) and 5/4 (RF), Penn Hills 5/6 (MH), and Frick Park 5/8 (PK). A **Marsh Wren** was a good find at Harrison Hills Park 4/10 (PH), the 4th record for that location.

All the *Catharus* thrushes were reported, with **Veery** and **Gray-cheeked Thrush** the least numerous. A Gray-cheeked at North Park 5/28 was studied closely and showed characteristics of **Bicknell's Thrush** (POB), but it was scared off by a passerby.

A total of 34 species of warblers were tallied this spring. A well-described **Golden-winged Warbler** was seen in Squirrel Hill 4/9, which is rather early (reported on the eBird website). An **Orange-crowned Warbler** was at Boyce-Mayview Park 5/10 (DW, ST). A **Cape May Warbler** at Frick Park 4/26 (JS, SS) was the only report. Single **Pine Warblers** were found at Frick Park 4/17 and 4/24 (JS, SS), Knob Hill Park 4/18 (KD), and up to 5 were at Boyce-Mayview Park/Wingfield Pines 4/17-25 (*v.o.*). Another was seen in Pine Township 5/11 (PL, SL). One to 3 **Palm Warblers** were at Boyce-Mayview Park/Wingfield Pines from 4/15-5/5 (*v.o.*), one was at Knob Hill Park 4/26 (KD), one was at Frick Park 5/1 (JS, SS) followed by 2 on 5/3 (DWe), and one was at North Park 5/8 (SC). Just 3 **Bay-breasted Warblers** were reported: Harrison Hills Park 5/1 (AH, PM), Boyce-Mayview Park 5/10 (DW, ST), and North Park 5/12 (POB).

A **Worm-eating Warbler** was at Frick Park 4/30 (JS, SS), one was at Harrison Hills Park 5/1-14 (AH, PM, PH, DN), where they breed; one was at Walker Park in Sewickley 5/14 (SC), a past or possibly continuing breeding location; and one in Forest Hills 5/28-29 (TBI) in unsuitable breeding habitat was thought to be a late migrant. **Northern Waterthrush** reports include singles at East Liberty 4/22 (DY), Frick Park 4/28 (SS) and 5/4 (DWe), and Harrison Hills Park 5/14 (PH).

**Kentucky Warblers** returned to Sewickley Heights Park 5/2 (BVN, TM, NM), one was at Harrison Hills Park 5/8 (SG) and 2 were there 5/22 (PH). They breed at both parks. One was heard singing at Boyce Park in Plum 5/12 (MF). A **Mourning Warbler** was at Boyce-Mayview Park 5/7 (SC) and one was at Sewickley Heights Park 5/13 (MF). Single **Wilson's Warblers** were noted at Frick Park 5/9 (PK) and Sewickley Heights Park 5/14 (PAMC). Single **Canada Warblers** were in Pine Township 5/10 and 5/12 (PL, SL), Boyce Park 5/12 (MF), Schenley Park 5/17 (KSJ), and Squirrel Hill 5/21 (KSJ).

A male **Summer Tanager** was photographed at Frick Park 5/9 (*fide* SC), the first in Allegheny County for several years.

**Fox Sparrow** high counts include 9 at Boyce-Mayview Park 4/7 (SC, DW, ST) and 9 at North Park 4/9 (POB).

A well-described male **Painted Bunting** visited a feeder in Oakland 4/27 (CM), providing the second county record as far as I'm aware (the first was in 1995). Strong storm systems from the south in late April may have pushed it into the area.

**Rusty Blackbirds** were at Boyce-Mayview Park/Wingfield Pines in March and April (*v.o.*), where the high count was 20 on 4/2 (JM). One was in Findlay Township 4/4 (GG).

**Purple Finch** reports spanned the season from 12 locations. Up to 7 were visiting feeders in Pine Township (PL, SL) and Har-mar Township (JV) in mid-April, representing the high counts.

Northern finches continued at several places. The **Common Redpoll** visiting a feeder in Pine Township remained to 4/11 (PL, SL). A few **Pine Siskins** continued with 2 in Har-mar Township remaining to 5/22 (JV). They were still present in Pine Township with a high count of 6 on 5/1 (PL, SL), and singles were in Moon Township 4/20 (GM) and Hampton Township 5/10 (DN).

*Observers: Tony Bledsoe (TBI), Paul Brown, Shawn Collins, Red Combs, Ben Coulter, Sheree Daugherty, Karyn Delaney, Cory DeStein, Georgia Feild, Al Fleckenstein, Mike Fialkovich, Ryan Ford, Gigi Gerben, Steve Gosser, Bob Greene, Amy Henrici, Deborah Hess, Paul Hess, Maureen Homba, Peter Keyel, Scott Kinzey, Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Ryan McDermott, Jeff McDonald, Christopher McNamara, Pat McShea, Bob Machesney, Geoff Malosh, Nancy Moeller, Tom Moeller, Lukas Musher, Dick Nugent, Philip O'Brien (POB), Pennsylvania Migration Count (PAMC), Rob Protz, Kate St. John, Kathy Saunders, Becky Smith, Jack Solomon, Sue Solomon, Steve Thomas (STh), Shannon Thompson, Jim Valimont, Bob VanNewkirk (BVN), Mark Vass, Dan Weeks (DWe), Dave Wilton, Dan Yagusic, various observers (v.o.).*

## August Meeting Featured Eagles

Fifty-four members and visitors at the Three Rivers Birding Club meeting on August 3 learned about "Conservation and Ecology of Eagles Around the World." (See the 3RBC website for meeting minutes by Co-secretaries Pat and Sherron Lynch.)