



# The Peregrine

## Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

No. 4, April 2002

### There's Still Time For Registration

Don't wait! April 15 is the registration deadline to participate in Pittsburgh's first Birding Festival to be held Friday through Sunday, May 3-5, at the Frick Environmental Center and Frick Park, Beechwood Boulevard in Squirrel Hill.

The festival sponsored by the Environmental Center and the Three Rivers Birding Club will feature bird outings in the park, workshops, a bird-related art contest and display, and a program by keynote speaker Julie Zickefoose whose art (such as the example at right) and writing on natural history subjects has been published and praised widely. Also featured will be a "Breakfast with the Artist," in which Stephen Lee will create a painting as those attending watch.

Club members have received a mailing that includes a complete schedule, a list of fees, and a registration form. These are also available on our web site. Note that registration is required for the festival and for individual workshops.

Workshop leaders and their topics include: Chuck Tague, "Bird Nesting Strategies in Western Pennsylvania"; Karen Lippy, "Whoos There?"; Steve Hoffman, "Bird Conservation"; Ted Floyd, "Advanced Bird Identification: Warblers"; Wendy Jo Shemansky, "Birding 101"; and Scott Shalaway, "Natural History of Cavity-Nesting Birds."

Whether you're a beginning or advanced birder — or a nature lover in general — the festival will be fun and educational.



**LEARN THE SONG** – This delightful illustration of a Kentucky Warbler was provided to the club by internationally famous artist/writer Julie Zickefoose, who will be the keynote speaker on Saturday, May 4, at the Birding Festival. For warbler lovers, a Kentucky is among the most beautiful to watch. But as Roger Tory Peterson said memorably in his *Field Guide to the Birds*, "Learn the song; ten Kentuckys are heard for every one seen." He called the song "a rapid, rolling chant 'tory-tory-tory-tory'." Very few of us are lucky enough to hear a bird sing our name. (Drawing Copyright Julie Zickefoose)

### Watch Birds in Florida at Our May 15 Meeting

Accomplished photographer and birder Roger Higbee has trekked all over Florida shooting slides that show the state's good birds and the hotspots where they're found. At our club meeting on Wednesday, May 15, he'll present his "Focus on Florida" program.

As usual, the meeting will be held at the Frick Park Environmental Center, Beechwood Boulevard in Squirrel Hill. Doors open at 7 PM and the meeting begins at 7:30.

If you want to see sharp pictures of the Magnificent Frigatebird, Spot-breasted Oriole, Mangrove Cuckoo, Wood Stork, and other species seldom or

never seen up this way, put this program on your calendar. Roger will show us where to see them in such slices of birding paradise as the Dry Tortugas, Loxahatchee NWR, Ocala National Forest and the Everglades.

Though he stated birding as a boy, Roger had his interest jump-started when he married Margaret, a renowned birder in her own right. He has a geology degree from Pitt and now works as a consultant. Roger was formerly Program Chairman of the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, participated in ASWP's Breeding Bird Census conducted for the Bureau of Forestry at Linn Run State Park, and has led many a good outing.

Among Roger's credits are two annual awards as Indiana County Photographer of the Year. He has been an active member of our older sibling, the Todd Bird Club, since its inception.

## Pittsburgh's Ted Floyd Will Edit *Birding Magazine*

An odyssey that began with a boy of 13 watching birds in his East End neighborhood has reached a prestigious new chapter two decades later: Pittsburgh's Ted Floyd has been appointed Editor of *Birding*, the magazine of the American Birding Association. He will begin the editorship in May at the ABA headquarters in Colorado Springs.

Ted's birding passion was constant during his studies and research leading to an A.B. *cum laude* in Biology from Princeton and a Ph.D. in Ecology from Penn State University, and on through his first professional positions as Visiting Assistant Professor at Williams College and Graduate School Advisor at the University of Pennsylvania.

During the 1990s he took on a variety of duties for the magazine *Pennsylvania Birds*, which included compiling quarterly bird records from Allegheny County and editing the statewide Christmas Bird Count report. Among his articles was a historic report of the first breeding record of Herring Gull in Pennsylvania – the still thriving Allegheny River colony at the Highland Park Bridge.

## Let's Try Something New: Outings Without Leaders

By Jack Solomon, President

A birding club usually focuses on birding, and a club often exists for the fun of doing things with like-minded people. Our mission statement mentions that we gather in "fellowship," and we do a lot of that in outings and membership meetings. The more we do of it, the better I like it.

We could have more outings if we weren't so dependent on lining up formal leaders. There's actually a scarcity of that species, since many of those who are willing and able are extended to the limit, and lots of other people don't feel they've reached the bird ID skill level they feel is desirable in an outing leader. There are remedies for that problem, and they're not limited to finding more volunteer leaders.

Other bird and nature clubs have what one might call leaderless outings. They just announce that members are encouraged to turn up at specific locations on particular dates and times. The Todd Bird Club does this with outings at Yellow Creek State Park during the waterfowl migration, for example.

We'll do it, too, starting with the outings announcements in this issue of *The Peregrine*, by mentioning that on any early morning from mid-April through the end of May you're likely to find some of us who lead outings.

You're welcome to join in. If you don't find someone who can help you with ID, you might find an extra pair of eyes to find that rarity you would have otherwise missed. And you might enjoy the company.

Another way that more people might be able to go birding, especially on outings at the more distant of our favorite hot spots like Presque Isle State Park in Erie County, is if they could just get a ride. And some people would just like to find someone to bird with when there's no outing scheduled.

So I asked our webmaster, Julia Pahountis-Opacic, to set up a portion of our web site in the "Discussion Forums" section, to facilitate just that. Log on to <[www.3riversbirdingclub.org](http://www.3riversbirdingclub.org)> for details.

...See you in the meadow at Frick. The warblers are on their way.

One of Ted's favorite birding haunts was always Frick Park, and he wrote the chapter covering it in *Birding in Western Pennsylvania* published by the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania in 1996. He explained what makes it a favorite place for the city's birders to congregate morning after morning in the spring: "Warblers are the real reason to visit Frick Park in spring, with huge numbers pouring through the park during the first three weeks of May."

In 1999 Ted fulfilled what he called "my teenage dream of one day 'going pro' as a birder" when he was appointed Project Coordinator at the Great Basin Bird Observatory in Reno. His main responsibility has been overseeing the Nevada Breeding Bird Atlas, for which he supervised the field work, analyzed the data, and wrote the forthcoming Atlas book. All the while, he found time to edit the Observatory's magazine *Great Basin Birds* and newsletter *GBBO News*, as well as editing the newly established Great Basin region of the journal *North American Birds*.

The opening sentence in his editorial message in last spring's *Great Basin Birds* was typical of Ted's enduring outlook: "The year 2000 was an exciting time to be a birder in the Great Basin region!" For "Great Basin," substitute the name of any place he has lived.

Lest anyone think Ted is a one-note birding fanatic (not that this would be bad), consider the following titles among his many publications: "Logit modeling and logistic regression" in *Design and Analysis of Ecological Experiments* and "Top-down impacts on creosotebush herbivores in a spatially and temporally complex environment" in the journal *Ecology*.

He is indeed a first-rank scientist. And a fine writer (see "Ornithological Nomenclature" in this issue). And a birder's birder. And an extraordinary owl-caller.

*Birding* could scarcely be served better.

## Letter from the Editor

By Paul Hess

Because of the announcement above, this issue of *The Peregrine* is exceedingly joyful to me. Ted has long been a friend of many Three Rivers Birding Club members, and I consider myself fortunate to be among them.

As the article does no more than hint, he has had an illustrious career that now moves on to one of the most prestigious and important positions – in my view THE most important — on the national birding scene.

To my great satisfaction, he has provided us with the first major essay published in *The Peregrine*, starting on page 7, a wonderful example of the literary artistry I mentioned. You'll find his name on the front page, too, as a workshop leader at our Birding Festival. Those who know him will welcome him "back home" enthusiastically on the first weekend in May. Those who haven't yet met him can look forward to a rewarding introduction.

A second gratifying feature of this issue is *The Peregrine's* first non-photographic cover illustration, which is especially welcome because it was provided by one of the nation's most prominent natural-history artists, Julie Zickefoose, who will headline the Birding Festival on May 4.

And third, my abject plea for photographs at the last club meeting is producing results. You'll see three pictures in this issue by photographers who are new to the newsletter. Please keep the photos coming.

# The Peregrine

## Outings to Come: Don't Miss the Spring Migrants

**Saturday, April 6 — Moraine State Park.** Join leaders Fred and Carol McCullough (412-921-6873) for this second outing of the spring to one of western Pennsylvania's best birding spots. It's a little later now. Diving ducks should still be present, but a variety of dabbling ducks should now be in. Ospreys should also have returned by this time along with more migrating songbirds. Meet at the first parking lot on the south shore day use area (off Route 422) at 8:30 AM.

**Dunnings Creek & Shawnee Lake.** Join Jim Pemberton (412-751-1929) of the Westmoreland Bird and Nature Club at the Jenners Crossroads Burger King on Route 30 at 8:30 for shorebirds, early passerines and waterfowl in Bedford County.

**Sunday, April 7 — Imperial Area Woodcock Walk.** Chuck Tague (412-488-8760) will lead this evening outing in search of American Woodcock and possibly owls. The Imperial area includes grasslands on recovered strip mines and pine plantations, which make for an interesting mix of habitats that attract a variety of species. Meet Chuck at 6:00 PM at the game commission parking lot near Bavington. From Pittsburgh, take Route 22/30 west. Take the Bavington exit and turn right, then immediately left (west) on Steubenville Pike. Go exactly 3.4 miles to an intersection at Haul Road. Turn left into the Game Commission parking lot.

**Sunday, April 14 — Presque Isle.** Join leader Mike Fialkovich (412-731-3581) for this trip to one of Pennsylvania's greatest birding locations. Meet at 9:00 AM at the first parking lot on the right after entering the park. From Pittsburgh, take I-79 North until it ends. Take the exit for Route 5 West (also called West 12th Street) and continue for about one mile. Turn right onto RT. 832 which leads directly into the park. Allow 2\_ hours driving time. Lots of waterfowl and early migrant songbirds are expected, but you never know what to expect here. Presque Isle has produced some of Pennsylvania's best (and only) records of some rarities. Bring a lunch with you or join the group at one of the local restaurants just outside the park.

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**Every Tuesday, April 16 through the end of May — Frick Park.** Jack and Sue Solomon (412-521-3365) will lead outings at the park, which is a great hotspot for seeing migrants. Meet at 7:00 AM at the Frick Environmental Center, Beechwood Blvd., Squirrel Hill. (Actually, there's a good chance you'll find some leader from the Three Rivers Birding Club just about every morning at Frick Park from mid-April to late May!)

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

**By Jim Valimont, Outings Chairman**

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

**Friday, May 3 through Sunday, May 5 — Frick Park.** In conjunction with the Frick Park Birding Festival, there will be a series of outings and workshops in Frick Park on Saturday and Sunday beginning at 7:30 AM and continuing through the day. Outings leaders will include Jack and Sue Solomon, Jim Valimont, and Ted Floyd. Registration for the festival and the outings and workshops will be required. There will be a flat \$10.00 fee for the birding festival, including the outings and activities, and an extra \$10.00 fee for each of the workshops. Registration deadline is April 15. Registration forms are available at the Frick Environmental Center on Beechwood Boulevard in Squirrel Hill. There is also a printable festival registration form available at the 3 Rivers Birding Club web site ([www.3riversbirdingclub.org](http://www.3riversbirdingclub.org)). For more information, call the Frick Birding Festival Information Line (412-422-6562). Frick Park is the best park in the City of Pittsburgh for birding in migration. The "meadow" and the Clayton Trail near the Frick Environmental Center have consistently been the places for unusual sightings in May, including Mourning and Worm-eating Warblers, Blue Grosbeak, Evening Grosbeak, Red-headed Woodpecker, and even Bald Eagle!

**Saturday, May 11 — Migration Count.** Paul Hess (724-226-2323) is the compiler for Allegheny County for the annual North American Migration Count. This annual census takes a "snapshot" of the status of the spring migration on the second Saturday of May each year. Taken as a whole with all of the accumulated results throughout the United States and Canada, researchers can gain insight into the patterns of migration with each added year of data. This is a terrific project for "citizen scientists" to get involved and contribute valuable information. Contact Paul for information on where you can help with to the census. You can go on your own or join one of several groups counting in Allegheny County.

**Sunday, May 12 — Harrison Hills County Park.** Meet leader Jim Valimont (412-828-5338) at this county park off Freeport Road between Natrona Heights and Freeport. As you enter the park, bear left and meet at the first parking lot on the left at 8:15 AM for this morning walk in search of migrants. Dress for wet grass and mud. This county park sits on a bluff overlooking the Allegheny River and has been a consistently good spot to find migrant songbirds in the spring and fall. Last year, among our many warbler species, everyone got excellent views of Kentucky, Cerulean, and Worm-eating Warblers. The two Worm-eating

*Continued on Page 4...*

# The Peregrine

...Continued from page 3

Warblers, life birds for many in the group, were especially cooperative, feeding no more than 10 feet off the ground right over the trail for several minutes!

**Saturday, May 25 — Bell's Farm.** Join Ralph Bell (724-883-4505) at 9:00 AM for this popular outing on his farm in Greene County. Eastern Bluebirds that feed out of your hand, nesting American Kestrels up close and personal, and Summer Tanagers are typical features of this perennial outing. Summer Tanagers reach their northern range limit in southwestern Pennsylvania, and Greene County (around Ralph's farm) is one of the most dependable places to find them. Bring a lunch and spend all day. Take I-79 south to the Ruff Creek exit. Turn left onto Rt. 221 and proceed under the interstate. Continue 5 miles to a golf course and turn left onto Rt. 188 towards Jefferson. In Jefferson, make a left onto Pine St. Proceed down a hill and under the railroad crossing bridge. Go straight up the hill for 0.5 mile and turn at the sign saying "R. Bell Tree Farm." Continue back that road for 0.5 mile.

**Saturday, June 1— Imperial Area.** Chuck Tague (412-488-8760) of the Nature Observer News will lead this outing to the Imperial grasslands area. Allow 30 minutes driving time from Pittsburgh. Meet at the King's Restaurant at the Imperial exit of Route 22 at 7:30 AM. The Imperial grassland is a large area of reclaimed strip mines that has provided the only areas in Allegheny

## Outing Revisited: Pymatuning Area

Eighteen dedicated birders traveled I-79 despite a discouraging weather forecast and a steady morning rain. As we gathered at the Wildlife Learning Center, previously known as the Linesville Waterfowl Museum, the rain stopped and the clouds miraculously dissipated. From the observation deck we observed a Bald Eagle on the nest at Ford Island and another on the nest near the silos. The Ford Island male flew in and replaced its mate. Another adult eagle harassed at least five subadult eagles that were hunting in the grassy islands. We also observed Common Goldeneye and a lone Mute Swan.

Our next stop was the Fish Commission Visitors Center. Although Hooded and Common Mergansers foraged behind the center, the most interesting sighting was Jack Solomon fishing his hat out of a propagation pool.

We spotted four Ruddy Ducks and another eagle's nest from the spillway observation area. The white Red-tailed Hawk, two pair of American Wigeon and a flock of Gadwall were at Miller's Pond. We heard several Horned Larks but only a fortunate few saw them.

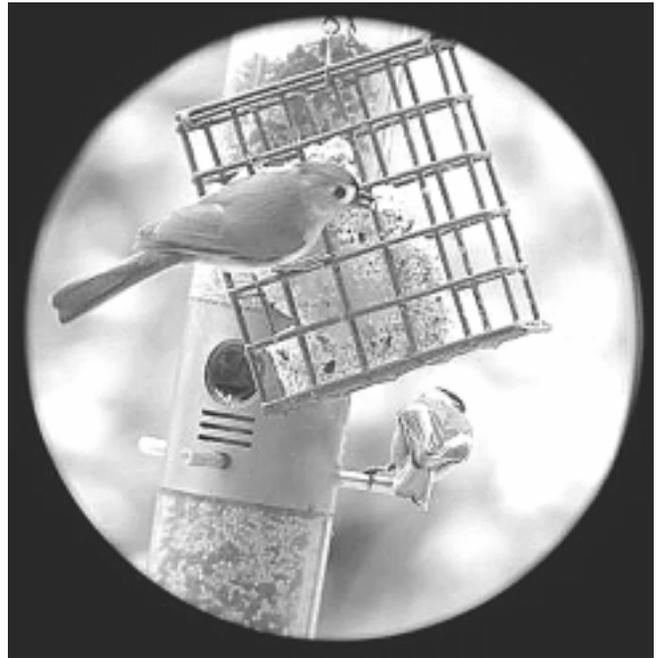
At Geneva Marsh Access #2 Skunk Cabbage and Red Maples were in bloom. We observed another eagle nest. Red-winged Blackbirds sang and Ring-necked Ducks circled the cattails. Four Wood Ducks landed in the marsh. The surprise of the trip was three very early Tree Swallows. A pair of Red-tailed Hawks used the strong winds to perform a spectacular courtship display near the eagle's nest. An eagle approached the hawks and they aggressively attacked the larger raptor.

At Custards strong winds, snow flurries and rumors of an approaching lake effect storm ended the outing. We did see a large mixed flock of wigeons, Buffleheads and Ring-necked Ducks plus another eagle nest and five more eagles. For the day that made 24 eagles and 6 nests. The day's total was 42 species of birds.

— **Chuck and Joan Tague**

County where one can reliably find grassland species such as Grasshopper, Savannah, Henslow's, and Vesper Sparrows, along with Eastern Meadowlarks, Bobolinks, Northern Harrier, and Short-eared Owls. In addition, the ponds have produced good shorebird sightings and the entire area has seen its share of rarities. A visit to this area at any time of year can produce some surprising sightings.

**Saturday, June 8 — Laurel Mountain.** Meet leader Mike Fialkovich (412-731-3581) at the Dairy Queen off the Donegal exit off the Pennsylvania Turnpike at 7:30 AM. After passing through the toll booths, turn left onto RT. 31 East. Proceed about 1/4 mile and the Dairy Queen will be on the left. Allow one hour driving time from Pittsburgh. The focus of a trip to Laurel Mountain at this time of year will be on the breeding species, including many of Pennsylvania's most spectacular warblers, such as Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Canada, Black-throated Blue, and Hooded. No outing to Laurel Mountain would be complete without a walk on Spruce Flat Bog, where there are carnivorous plants such as Pitcher Plant and Sundew, and where we can possibly hear the beautiful song of the Hermit Thrush. Wear good hiking shoes and bring a drink and snacks for an extended hike along Wolf Rocks Trail, which is level but a little rocky. Bring a lunch so that we can all eat lunch at the picnic area and watch birds as we eat.



**IT PAYS TO LOOK TWICE** – Dan Weeks took this photograph of a titmouse and a chickadee on December 28, 2001, at his feeder in Squirrel Hill. At first glance everything seems as it should be, but a second look shows that the chickadee has bright white edges on the secondary wing feathers and an area of bright white on the greater wing coverts. Those are the field marks of a Black-capped Chickadee, which is no longer the usual species expected in Squirrel Hill. The Carolina Chickadee expanded its range northward in the early 1980s and quickly replaced Black-capped as the resident breeding species in the city. Nevertheless, Black-caps do migrate south into the Carolina range in some winters when their food supply in the far north is insufficient. A moderate Black-capped influx occurred throughout southwestern Pennsylvania during the winter of 2001-2002. (Dan held his Canon PowerShot digital camera up to a Bushnell Spacemaster telescope set at 15-power.)

## Birds in the Three Rivers Area: January-February

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

Highlights this period include reports of several species that normally are not present during the winter, and a few rarities for the region.

**Double-crested Cormorants** are normally gone by October and return in April, however they were seen throughout January at McKees Rocks, Emsworth, and at other points along the Ohio River (SK, PB, MF, DR).

A **Turkey Vulture** was seen 1/27 at Leetsdale (BS), which is the earliest record I know of since I have been collecting data for Allegheny County. This could have been a bird that spent the winter here. On 2/3, single birds were seen at Creighton, Neville Island, and along I-279 (MF, SK, BM respectively). These were probably early migrants. Continuing this early trend, single birds were seen 2/11 at Shaler Twp., and 2/12 in Ross Twp. (JH, BM, respectively). Finally one was in Sewickley 2/15 (CK).

Rare for the county, a **Black-crowned Night-Heron** was found on 1/3 at the mouth of Chartiers Creek where it empties into the Ohio River at McKees Rocks (DW). It was found roosting in a fallen tree at the water's edge and remained at least until 1/6. The bird was not easy to see as it perched still in the trees along the edge of the river. It could have been (or may still be) in the area after 1/6 as there are a lot of places it can hide. This is a rare migrant in Allegheny and not expected in January!

Waterfowl highlights include two **Common Goldeneye** on 1/2, and six **Bufflehead** on 1/7 on the Ohio River (PB). Ten **Hooded Mergansers** were there 1/10 (PB), and two **Common Mergansers** 1/29 (PB). A **Ruddy Duck** was seen at McKees Rocks 1/5 (SK).

A **Brant** was found at a small park in the town of Boston on 1/1 (JP). This is an extreme rarity in Western PA, and one of the few records for Allegheny County. The bird remained for a week at that location. Another rare bird for Allegheny County and Western PA was a single **Snow Goose** seen 1/31 in Jefferson Borough at a small farm pond (SSN). Not as rare as a Brant, Snow Geese occur annually in Western PA, but the sight of one in Allegheny County is a rare event. Despite searches the following day, the bird could not be relocated. A flock of **Tundra Swans** were heard on 1/7 flying over Pittsburgh after dark (KSJ).

A **Northern Goshawk** flew over Natrona Heights on 2/16 (DH, PH). **Merlins** continued to be seen at the Schenley Park Golf Course in January and February. A maximum of three birds were seen 1/27 (DR).

Unusual were **Killdeer** wintering in the area. Two continued at North Park from December at least up to 1/14 (PL, SL). Two were in Boston (with the Brant) in early January (CT, JT, et al.), and by the end of February, returning migrants were seen in Jefferson Borough (SSN) and Leetsdale (BS).

An oddly colored **Herring Gull** was seen at the Highland Park Bridge on 2/16 (DW, JH, PL, SL). The bird's bill and iris were black. Normally the bill is yellow with a red spot on the lower mandible, and the iris is light.

A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** remained at North Park in January (PL, SL) and **Northern Flickers** were reported in January and February in Pine Township and Jefferson Borough (PL, SL, MF, SSN). Most flickers move south during the winter, however a few birds are reported every winter. **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were reported in North Park 1/1-1/13 (PL, SL, SK), in Sewickley 1/5-1/24 (CK), and at feeders in Churchill (WS, DS), and Harmar Township (JV) throughout Jan. and Feb. **Brown Creepers** were

also reported at North Park 1/1-13 (PL, SL), in Sewickley 1/5 through February (BS, CK), at Allegheny Cemetery in Lawrenceville 1/8 (PB), and Natrona Heights 2/6 (PH). **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were found in Sewickley 1/3 - 2/12 (CK) and in Jefferson Borough 2/6 (SSN).

Three **Common Ravens** were seen and heard in Jefferson Borough on 2/13 (SSN). Very unusual for the county, this species is rarely reported away from the high elevations in Western PA.

A **Hermit Thrush** was a nice find at Sewickley Heights Park 1/1 (CK). A single **Yellow-rumped Warbler** was found at Sewickley Heights Park 2/25 (CK).

An **Eastern Towhee** 2/7 at Sewickley was unusual for the winter (CK). **White-crowned** and **American Tree Sparrows** continued to be seen in the Imperial area (SK, MF, WS, DS) during the period. The first **Red-winged Blackbird** was reported 2/9 at Sewickley (CK), two were seen at Harmar Township 2/16 (DW, JH, PL, SL) at the same location where eight were seen in late December. Four birds appearing to be returning migrants were seen in Jefferson Borough 2/25 (SSN). A **Brown-headed Cowbird** was seen at a feeder in Pine Township on 1/1 (MF, PL, SL) which is unusual, and three were there 1/8 (PL, SL). **Purple Finches** were nice feeder visitors in Pine Township throughout the period (PL, SL).

A male **House Finch** with a deformed bill was observed at the feeders in Pine Twp. (PL, SL) The bird's lower mandible was much longer than the upper (which was shorter than normal). The lower mandible was long and straight, and the upper was so stout, it resembled a parrot's beak. The bird fed on the ground and would pick up seeds by tilting its head to the side, and opening the bill to grab a seed. It could break the seeds open and feed once it got them into its mouth.

**Pine Siskins** continued to visit feeders in Pine Township and at Sewickley Heights Park (PL, SL, CK). High counts were 17 at Sewickley 1/10, and 5 at Pine Township 1/1. The birds continued to visit the feeders at these locations through February.

**Observers:** Paul Brown, Mike Fialkovich, Deborah Hess, Paul Hess, Joyce Hoffmann, Scott Kinzey, Chris Knoll, Pat & Sherron Lynch, Bob Machesney, Jim Pemberton, Dave Rieger, Dana & Walt Shaffer, Sam Sinderson (SSN), Becky Smith, Jim Valimont, Dave Wilton



**WINTER HIGHLIGHT** – This Brant found by Jim Pemberton on Jan. 1 at the Monongahela River boat ramp at Boston was Allegheny County's rarest bird of the winter. It stayed for about a week. (Photograph by Mark McConaughy)

# The Peregrine

## County's List for 2001 Has 204 Bird Species

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

Do 204 species of birds reported last year in Allegheny County seem a surprisingly high total? It is good but not really surprising. The county's annual list has regularly topped 200 in recent years, and the yearly average for 1997-2000 was 209.

These totals come mainly from reports submitted to me as county compiler for the magazine Pennsylvania Birds, posted on the Pabirds e-mail listserv, or sent to our club's web site. Report your sightings to the web by going to "Discussion Forums" at <http://www.3riversbirdingclub.org>

Here is the county list for 2001:

Common Loon	Spotted Sandpiper	American Crow	Cerulean Warbler
Pied-billed Grebe	Sanderling	Horned Lark	Black-and-white Warbler
Horned Grebe	Semipalmated Sandpiper	Purple Martin	American Redstart
Double-crested Cormorant	Least Sandpiper	Tree Swallow	Worm-eating Warbler
Great Blue Heron	White-rumped Sandpiper	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	Ovenbird
Great Egret	Pectoral Sandpiper	Bank Swallow	Northern Waterthrush
Green Heron	Dunlin	Barn Swallow	Louisiana Waterthrush
Black-crowned Night-Heron	Common Snipe	Black-capped Chickadee	Kentucky Warbler
Turkey Vulture	American Woodcock	Carolina Chickadee	Mourning Warbler
Canada Goose	Bonaparte's Gull	Tufted Titmouse	Common Yellowthroat
Wood Duck	Ring-billed Gull	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Hooded Warbler
Green-winged Teal	Herring Gull	White-breasted Nuthatch	Wilson's Warbler
American Black Duck	Great Black-backed Gull	Brown Creeper	Canada Warbler
Mallard	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Carolina Wren	Yellow-breasted Chat
Northern Pintail	Caspian Tern	House Wren	Summer Tanager
Blue-winged Teal	Rock Dove	Winter Wren	Scarlet Tanager
Northern Shoveler	Mourning Dove	Golden-crowned Kinglet	Northern Cardinal
Gadwall	Black-billed Cuckoo	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
American Wigeon	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Indigo Bunting
Canvasback	Eastern Screech-Owl	Eastern Bluebird	Eastern Towhee
Ring-necked Duck	Great Horned Owl	Veery	American Tree Sparrow
Greater Scaup	Short-eared Owl	Gray-cheeked Thrush	Chipping Sparrow
Lesser Scaup	Northern Saw-whet Owl	Swainson's Thrush	Clay-colored Sparrow
Common Goldeneye	Common Nighthawk	Hermit Thrush	Field Sparrow
Bufflehead	Whip-poor-will	Wood Thrush	Vesper Sparrow
Hooded Merganser	Chimney Swift	American Robin	Savannah Sparrow
Common Merganser	Ruby-throated Humminbird	Gray Catbird	Grasshopper Sparrow
Red-breasted Merganser	Belted Kingfisher	Northern Mockingbird	Henslow's Sparrow
Ruddy Duck	Red-headed Woodpecker	Brown Thrasher	Fox Sparrow
Osprey	Red-bellied Woodpecker	European Starling	Song Sparrow
Bald Eagle	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	American Pipit	Lincoln's Sparrow
Northern Harrier	Downy Woodpecker	Cedar Waxwing	Swamp Sparrow
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Hairy Woodpecker	Blue-winged Warbler	White-throated Sparrow
Cooper's Hawk	Northern Flicker	Tennessee Warbler	White-crowned Sparrow
Red-shouldered Hawk	Pileated Woodpecker	Orange-crowned Warbler	Dark-eyed Junco
Broad-winged Hawk	Eastern Wood-Pewee	Nashville Warbler	Snow Bunting
Red-tailed Hawk	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	Northern Parula	Bobolink
American Kestrel	Acadian Flycatcher	Yellow Warbler	Red-winged Blackbird
Merlin	Willow Flycatcher	Chestnut-sided Warbler	Eastern Meadowlark
Peregrine Falcon	Least Flycatcher	Magnolia Warbler	Rusty Blackbird
Ring-necked Pheasant	Eastern Phoebe	Cape May Warbler	Common Grackle
Ruffed Grouse	Great Crested Flycatcher	Black-throated Blue Warbler	Brown-headed Cowbird
Wild Turkey	Eastern Kingbird	Yellow-rumped Warbler	Orchard Oriole
Virginia Rail	Northern Shrike	Black-throated Green Warbler	Baltimore Oriole
Sora	White-eyed Vireo	Blackburnian Warbler	Purple Finch
American Coot	Blue-headed Vireo	Yellow-throated Warbler	House Finch
American Golden-Plover	Yellow-throated Vireo	Pine Warbler	Pine Siskin
Semipalmated Plover	Warbling Vireo	Prairie Warbler	American Goldfinch
Killdeer	Philadelphia Vireo	Palm Warbler	Evening Grosbeak
Greater Yellowlegs	Red-eyed Vireo	Bay-breasted Warbler	House Sparrow
Lesser Yellowlegs	Blue Jay	Blackpoll Warbler	
Solitary Sandpiper			

# The Peregrine

## Ornithological Nomenclature

an essay by Ted Floyd

Here is an e-mail message that I posted to the National Birding Hotline Cooperative ("BirdChat"). I was responding to a somewhat crotchety note from Ed Fingerhood.

Date: Sat, 24 Oct 1998 11:18:49 PDT  
Reply-To: tedfloyd@hotmail.com  
Sender: birdchat@listserv.arizona.edu  
From: Ted Floyd  
Subject: ORNITHOLOGICAL NOMENCLATURE

Ed Fingerhood says:

> I think often of the contrast of the ornithologists compared to the  
> astronomers and physicists. Where is the ornithological equivalent of  
> "black hole", "quark", "meson", and their like? We've no guts, it appears.  
~~~~~

Heh!

> An inferiority complex, who knows?

No need for Physics Envy, Ed! Why, the lowly botanists and entomologists have us beat, hands down. To wit:

Cross-shaped Evening-Primrose      Comma  
Sparrow's-Egg Lady's-Slipper      Punkie  
Starry False Solomon's Seal      Viceroy  
Dwarf Rattlesnake-Plantain      Dog Face  
Night-flowering Catch-Fly      Long Dash  
New England Blazing Star      Whirlabout  
Nodding Ladies'-Tresses      Red Admiral  
Enchanter's Nightshade      Painted Lady  
Great Saint Johnswort      Question Mark  
Spring Forget-Me-Not      Mourning Cloak  
Swollen Bladderwort      Swarthy Skipper  
Jack-in-the-Pulpit      Inornate Ringlet  
Sneezeweed Yarrow      Pleasing Lacewing  
Bastard Toadflax      Death Watch Beetle  
Blessed Thistle      Confused Cloudywing  
False Gromwell      Pipevine Swallowtail  
Spring Beauty      Cramer's Eighty-Eight  
Sea-Lavender      Handsome Fungus Beetle  
Indian Pipe      Eastern Fatal Metalmark  
Pipsissewa      Cobblestone Tiger Beetle  
Puttyroot      Great Spangled Fritillary  
Fireweed      Bromeliad Scrub Hairstreak  
Cowbane      Bicolored Honey Locust Moth  
Ox-eye      Mountain Mahogany Hairstreak  
Pyxie      Orange-edged Roadside Skipper  
Rape      Little Grey Ghost of the Dunes

"Little Grey Ghost of the Dunes" is darn-near poetic! What could be more evocative than "Pipsissewa" or "Pyxie"? And can you get any more charmingly quirky than "Cramer's Eighty-Eight" or "Confused Cloudywing"?

Ed, I agree with you 100%.

Ted Floyd  
Philadelphia PA  
tedfloyd@hotmail.com

Continued on page 8...

# The Peregrine

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...Continued from page 7

As an aside, I note that GUTS, in physics lingo, stands for GRAND UNIFIED THEORIES. As Ed pointed out, ornithologists have no guts. We are, however, sometimes said to suffer from “physics envy”.

\* \* \*

Ed’s next e-mail message to me was a personal (“off-line”) note, as follows:

```
Date: Fri, 30 Oct 1998 18:41:22 EST
Sender: fingerhoo@aol.com
From: Ed Fingerhood
Subject: LONG-TAILED DUCK [ sic]
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No, I didn't say anything about a Long-tailed Duck. What I told you
was that I saw three Oldsquaws. They were way out in the Delaware River,
across from the Pennypack Creek outflow. They were on the New Jersey
side, but they might swim over to the Philadelphia side. Remember,
you can't count them unless they're on the Philadelphia side.
```

```
It's worth going for them.
```

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Ed
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```
P.s. What are you up to now? I got #200 (King Rail) on Oct. 28th, 1996.
```

A bit of background: In 1998 I was doing a Philadelphia “Big Year”, and I didn’t yet have long-tailed duck on my list.

A bit more background: Ed Fingerhood was bent out of shape about the AOU’s recent decree that the name of the oldsquaw be changed to long-tailed duck.

He had a point. I mean, it doesn’t take a registered aesthete to determine that oldsquaw is a lovely name. Or that long-tailed duck is drop-dead boring. You can tell by looking at any field guide that *Clangula hyemalis* is a long-tailed duck; the new name is wholly unedifying. The old name, in contrast, is a capsule summary, succinct and powerfully informative, of the otherwise indescribable *je nais se quoi* of the species.

The long-tailed duck is fifty-three centimeters long, weighs seven hundred and forty grams, and is distinguished by its black and white plumage. The oldsquaw is salt spray and pounding surf; tossing winds and white caps; and beyond the breakers, the amiable chatter of sea ducks.

So why has the AOU downgraded the oldsquaw to the long-tailed duck?

The *official* reason is to bring the AOU “standard English name” into conformity with British usage. The real reason, many people suspect, is political correctness: oldsquaw is sexist and racist, but long-tailed duck is so bland as to be offensive to nobody.

There is a delicious irony here, though.

A little while ago, the journal *Birding* carried a confrontational essay (“The female is duller”) by Margaret Van de Pitte. The basic argument was that bird names are sexist. We say “indigo bunting” (the female is brown), “purple martin” (the female is gray), and “scarlet tanager” (the female is green).

And now we say “long-tailed duck”.

The female has a short tail.

\* \* \*

The next day I went looking for the long-tailed ducks. I parked the car under a scraggly bois d’arc and – *WHAM!* – a softball-sized osage orange bounced off the hood. I got out to survey the damage (just another dink, as it turned out) and to chuckle at the whimsical vulgate for *Maclura pomifera* and its giant green fruiting bodies.

I kicked the osage orange aside and in so doing very nearly snuffed out the life of a passing wooly bear (a common caterpillar with a quaint name; not some urban ursinid). As fortune would have it, the wooly bear’s life – and my conscience – were spared by a last-minute carom that sent the osage orange toward a curbside copse of staghorn sumac.

I chased down my prize, which came to rest a few feet short of the sumac stand. (Meanwhile, the wooly bear – who wasn’t having a good day – reversed course and was heading straight for a flock of gulls at the far end of the parking lot.) I picked up the osage orange and brushed off a daddy longlegs.

Continued on page 9...

# The Peregrine

...Continued from page 8

I thought about the name “daddy longlegs”. Queer. Quirky. Delightfully offbeat. But I wonder if “long-legged arthropod” is in the offing.

Back at the car, a beautiful tar-and-crimson-colored bug was waiting for me on the door handle. It was *Leptocoris trivittatus*, whose vernacular name is a lovely little poetic fragment:

## box elder bug

Note the alliteration and the hint of meter. And the perfect symmetry, almost to the point of being palindromic. It is compact and informative, like a haiku.

\* \* \*

I turned my attention to the gulls. Just a bunch of ringers and herrings. No Boney’s; but, then again, they’re not really into the parking lot scene.

Ordinary gulls with uninspired names. I guess I’d give “herring gull” a passing mark – maybe a “C-minus” – since the name provides an oblique glimpse into its behavioral ecology. “Bonaparte’s gull” gets a “D”. At least they didn’t call it “Sam’s gull” or “Bob’s gull”. And “ring-billed gull” gets a big red “F” for accomplishing nothing more than pointing out the obvious.

I’m convinced the AOU is determined to stamp out any trace of charm in the standard English names of American birds. Fortunately, though, there is little the AOU can do about scientific names (“Latin binomials”). That’s because of certain inviolable international conventions of “priority”. That is to say, you can’t go around messing with someone else’s name just because you don’t like it.

The long-tailed duck is still *Clangula hyemalis* – which is a backdoor way of saying oldsquaw. And if the AOU ever gets around to changing “ruff” to “orange-legged brown bird”, it shall still be *Philomachus pugnax*. Go ahead and mess with “whip-poor-will”! You still can’t touch *Caprimulgus vociferus*.

Same thing with the gulls. Call them “yellow-billed gull”, “black-billed gull”, and, ah, “ring-billed gull”, if you like. They’re still *Larus argentatus smithsonianus*, *L. philadelphia*, and *L. delawarensis*. Together, they’re still a tribute to ornithology in the mid-Atlantic region.

\* \* \*

The gulls were all riled up about something. (Maybe they were squabbling over the remains of a black-and-brown caterpillar.) The flock picked up, arced around the parking lot, and then put down again in the same place. The birds were more widely spaced now, though, and I was able to give them a good looking over: more than a hundred ring-bills, about twenty herrings, and one that I missed earlier. It was a lone laughing gull (decent name, by the way). A little bit late in the season.

\* \* \*

In the end, everything equals out, I guess. “Laughing gull” gets pretty high marks – a “B-plus”, say – but its scientific name, *viz.*, *L. atricilla*, does not. There is, however, an interesting if slightly obscure tidbit about *L. atricilla*. It dawned on me a few years ago.

I was at Point Lookout – just a few miles east of Queens but a great place for seabirds: gannets, scoters, purple sandpipers, you name it. My quest was black-headed gull (one had been reported on the New York City rare bird alert).

The inlet was swarming with gulls, and I set about the task of sorting through all the Boney’s for a lone black-headed. As it turns out, I went away with nothing more than eyestrain, three hundred (plus or minus) Bonaparte’s gulls, and a lone laughing gull.

A little bit early in the season.

The black-headed had probably moved on by now. I walked back toward the car and reflected on the irony that *atricilla* means “black-headed” and that *ridibundus* means “laughing”.

In the end, everything equals out.

\* \* \*

I got to the car and prepared to make one last scan of the gull flock. But something else caught my eye: my first piping plover of the year. Great name! “A-minus”. Alliterative, trochaic, evocative, informative. Peterson put it beautifully when he said of the species that it is “as pallid as a beach flea or sand crab, the color of dry sand”.

Farther up the beach: a little flock of sanderlings, “chas[ing] the retreating waves like a clockwork toy” (another Petersonism).

Peterson is dead now, so he’s an easy target. He was savaged by Van de Pitte in her polemic against ornitho-sexism, and he is excoriated by the modern field guide intelligentsia for simplicity that borders on artlessness. But who among us hasn’t smiled at his memorable one-liners: the purple finch is “like a sparrow dipped in raspberry juice”; the Smith’s longspur sounds like “the winding of a cheap watch”; the reddish egret “lurches about and often acts quite drunk”.

The piping plover put into flight and landed a short distance away on the windward side of a sandy hillock. A little grey ghost of the dunes.

## Birding Away: It's Easy on Trinidad & Tobago

By Dave Rieger

Nineteen life birds...before breakfast. When was the last time you could say that?

The first weekend in January, my fiancée Claire and I joined the BirdTrek outing to Trinidad and Tobago. This was the third trip we've taken to the tropics and we hope it won't be our last. Sitting on the famous veranda at the Asa Wright Nature Centre is certainly a nice respite from the snow and cold in Pittsburgh.

For those interested in birding the tropics, there are two approaches. The first is to bird the less birdy countries (it's all relative) that are English speaking and tourist-friendly. The prime locations are Belize and Trinidad. Our trip list for Belize last year was around 300 birds in 12 days. This allows you to learn the new family groups at a more leisurely pace. The other approach is to dive in headfirst and go to Costa Rica, Ecuador or one of the other Amazonian countries. You'll pick up 500-600 birds in two weeks but risk being overwhelmed.

Trinidad and Tobago is an island nation seven miles off the coast of Venezuela. Although politically associated with the West Indies, ecologically it is more similar to South America. The two islands' total area is roughly equivalent to Delaware in size but being 8 degrees north of the equator, 85 degree days in January are typical.

Our trip lasted nine days. The first five nights were spent at Asa Wright Nature Centre, considered by some to be one of the top birding eco-lodges in the world. An old citrus-cocoa-coffee plantation, the lodge sits on 1,000 acres of first and second growth rain forest. The veranda alone is worth the trip. Overlooking a row of table and hummingbird feeders, the birds come in non-stop. White-necked Jacobins feed at the feeders hung from the eaves within reach. Little Hermits and Copper-rumped Hummingbirds use the feeders below. Yellow Orioles, Chestnut Woodpeckers, Purple and Green Honeycreepers, and the ubiquitous Bananaquits feed off the fruit placed on the table feeders. In the trees surrounding the veranda, Lilac-tailed Parrotlets, Crested Oropendolas and Channel-billed Toucans roost. All this while we sipped our coffee before breakfast.

The grounds were also home to many other birds but two in particular were notable, Bellbirds and Oilbirds. Bellbirds are large white birds with brown markings that roost in open branches, have a very distinctive loud call, but are still very difficult to locate because of the ventriloquistic quality of their song that really does sound like a bell (or more specifically a gong). The Oilbirds are nocturnal, fruit-eating birds that roost only in caves. They navigate by echo-location and can fly up to 75 miles a night in search of food. Dunston Cave at Asa Wright is considered the most accessible Oilbird cave in the world.

One other avian spectacle we witnessed on Trinidad was the Scarlet Ibis returning to the roost in the Caroni Swamp. After boating into the interior of this west coast swamp, we tied off on the far side of a lake about a quarter-mile from an island. Egrets and Herons were flying in first, but then we saw the first Ibis. Nothing can prepare you for just how scarlet these birds are. At first the groups were small, three or four at a time. Then it became 10, then 20, then 50. When we left, we estimated there had to be at least 1,500. On a day-trip to the Nariva Swamp we sipped rum punch as we watched Red-bellied Macaws fly into their roost trees at sunset.

The rest of our time was spent at the Blue Waters Inn on the north coast of Tobago. On our way to the lodge from the airport, we made a brief stop at a sewage treatment plant (great bird habitat, by the way), where we found Eared Dove, White-cheeked Pintails and a Western Reef-Heron, an accidental species native to Africa. At our lodge, 100 feet from the Atlantic Ocean on its own protected bay, we could see (and would later visit) Little Tobago Island, a wildlife sanctuary where Red-billed Tropicbirds and Brown and Red-footed Boobies nested.

In eight days the group saw or heard 195 species, and I added 98 birds to my life list. More importantly, however, were the memories and friendships I can keep forever.



**GREAT AND EASY BIRDING** – *This is the scene club member Dave Rieger photographed at the Asa Wright Nature Centre on Trinidad, one of the top birding eco-lodges in the world. Species? How about Lilac-tailed Parrotlets, Channel-billed Toucans, and Crested Oropendolas – all easily seen in the trees surrounding this veranda.*

## Nature Observer News Celebrates Its 10th Year

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In nine years, it has grown from a 4-page newsletter to a 16-page publication. The cost is \$30.00 for 1 year, 15 issues. To subscribe send a check to: Nature Observer News, 432 Olympia Road, Pittsburgh, Pa. 15211. For more information call Susanne Varley at (412)771-4737 or email Chuck Tague, <bluejay@city-net.com>