



The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

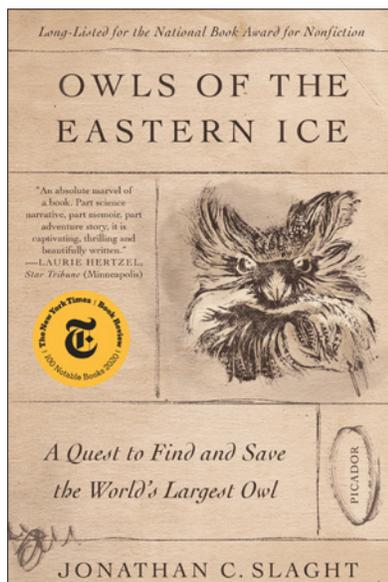
Vol. 23, No. 1 January/February 2024

Never Heard of Blakiston's Fish Owl? Dr. Jonathan Slaght Will Tell Us All About These Extraordinary, Endangered Birds

At our meeting on February 7th 2024, Dr. Slaght will join us remotely and describe his research study, including entertaining details of the many adventures and struggles that attended his doctoral research fieldwork in remote far eastern Russia. He will also tell us about ongoing conservation efforts on behalf of this endangered species that his studies have helped to inspire. Fish owls are endangered, with only 500-850 pairs in the wild.

Dr. Jonathan Slaght first encountered Blakiston's Fish Owls in Russia at age 19. From 2006-2010, Slaght studied this little known species for his doctoral degree in Wildlife Conservation at the University of Minnesota. He began working for the prestigious Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in 2011, and he currently serves as Regional Director of the organization's Temperate Asia Program. He oversees and strategically plans all WCS's activities in Russia, Mongolia, China, Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Iran. He coordinates WCS avian conservation activities along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, from the Arctic tundra to the mudflats of Southeast Asia. Dr. Slaght's writings, scientific research, and photographs have been featured by the BBC World Service, the *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, and *Audubon Magazine*.

His fascinating book, *Owls of the Eastern Ice*, was published in 2020 to much acclaim. Among many awards and accolades, it was named a *New York Times* Notable Book for 2020, and one of the Ten Best Books of 2020 by *The Wall Street Journal*. It has already been translated into several languages. Currently, Dr. Slaght is writing a second book under contract with the FSG division of Macmillan Publishers, entitled *Tigers Between Empires*, about tiger conservation in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union.



Again, this will be a Zoom meeting only. It will start at 7:00 PM ET to give everyone time to login. The business meeting will begin at 7:30 PM, and Dr. Slaght's presentation will start around 8:00 PM. Details on how to join the event, including Zoom passcodes and instructions, will be sent out a few days before the meeting. You don't want to miss this one!

3RBC Will Soon Be Recognized As A Non-Profit Organization

By Frank Moone

Just a little while ago I filed the paperwork with the IRS for the club's official, federal non-profit status for our 501(c)(3) organization. I believe everything is done! Now we wait to hear from the IRS. Not sure how long this will take. I expect to hear something official in the next month or so. Thanks again to everyone for all your invaluable contributions. I have to give the credit to my wife (and your outgoing President), Sheree. It has been her goal for a while to do this. She wanted to do everything she could to make sure the club has a long future, and this goes a long way toward that. I am glad we accomplished it under her tenure as president.

See *The Peregrine* in beautiful color at 3rbc.org

President's Message

Passing the Torch

By Sheree Daugherty

As I pen this final message as President of the Three Rivers Birding Club, waves of nostalgia and gratitude wash over me. It feels like just yesterday when I embarked on this journey with you all, but now the time has come for me to pass on the torch to new leadership.

Over the past thirteen years, I have had the honor of serving as an officer within the Three Rivers Birding Club. In 2007 I was asked to serve as Program Coordinator and have served in that role off-and-on through 2021. I served as Vice President for five years, and then I took on the role of President for these last five years. This journey has been enriched by the friendships we've forged, the adventures we've embarked upon, and the accomplishments we've achieved together.

Together we have faced some challenges, most notably the Covid 19 pandemic starting in 2020. Adapting to the "new normal," we embraced technology and utilized the Zoom platform. Our virtual meetings allowed us to stay connected, share knowledge, and continue our birding discussions despite our physical separation. The resilience and enthusiasm displayed by our members throughout this period were nothing short of inspiring—membership even grew during that time, which was so gratifying to see during my tenure. Together, we've made significant strides in conservation and bird science, contributing to the preservation of these delicate ecosystems. Our membership numbers are higher than ever before, a testament to the thriving community of Pittsburgh area birders that we've built.

Financial stability is the bedrock of any organization, and I'm proud to say that our club remains financially solvent. We've not only sustained ourselves but also expanded our horizons, daring to dream bigger and strive for more impactful endeavors. A significant milestone that we've achieved together is our journey toward becoming a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. After months of work by the club's steering committee, we've taken the monumental step of drafting by-laws and securing *pro bono* legal services from Pittsburgh's top law firm, Reed Smith LLP. This move will not only enhance our credibility but also open up important new avenues for funding and collaboration.

Our roster of guest speakers has been nothing short of remarkable. These experts have ignited our curiosity and expanded our perspectives, and enriched our understanding of birds and their habitats, ensuring that our club remains a hub of learning and growth.

As I take my leave from the role of President, I am filled with immense pride in what we have accomplished. The connections we've formed, the knowledge we've shared, and the impact we've had on bird conservation and science will forever be etched in my heart. The club's future is bright and I have every confidence that under the guidance of new leadership, it will continue to soar to even greater heights.

Thank you for allowing me to take part in leading this remarkable organization of ours. Moving forward our paths may diverge, but the bond we've created through our shared passion for birds will forever keep us connected. I have learned so much and had remarkable experiences by being an active member of 3RBC, and I encourage everyone to consider becoming more involved in the club in the future. Wishing you all happy (birding) trails, cheerful bird songs, and endless joy discovering new avian wonders.

With heartfelt gratitude,
Sheree Daugherty
Outgoing President, Three Rivers Birding Club

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Thank you, Sheree!

By Paul Hess

I am only one member, but every 3RBC member owes special thanks to Sheree Daugherty, our retiring president. She has presided during one of the most awfully difficult times our club has ever faced. One was finding a way to keep us a healthy distance from one another during the Covid-19 mess, thanks to help from our online master, Tom Moeller, who enabled our remote Zoom meetings. Importantly, too, her efforts guided us through the difficult transition from our perfect long-term meeting place at the Pittsburgh Garden Center to the best available new location, the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania's auditorium. Further, she enabled experts to raise our club to a full-fledged nonprofit organization with all the attendant legal benefits that status confers. Sheree didn't do all this by herself, of course. A good leader seeks help from those who work in the trenches, and she did. It may seem a little silly, but I sent a personal message to Sheree. Knowing her love for the birds of southeastern Arizona, I wrote, "Without permission, I forwarded your President's Message to a species you've seen in se. AZ. They tweeted a memorable reply: "*Muchas gracias también de parte de los pájaros.*"

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Outings to Come We Will Enliven Winter

Saturday, January 20 – Frick Park: Continuing our tradition of offering a “Dead of Winter” bird walk, explore winter birds at Frick Park with leader Mike Fialkovich. Meet at the Environmental Center parking lot (located at 2005 Beechwood Blvd, Pittsburgh 15217) at 8:00am. We will first check the feeders at the Environmental Center and then walk the trails to look for more winter birds. *Note:* if the outing has to be canceled due to bad weather or poor trail conditions, we will post a notice on the 3rbc.org web page and the Three Rivers Birding Club Facebook page.

If you have any questions, you can contact Mike at 412-731-3581.

Outings Revisited Tundra Swans and the *Month of Mud* Provided Excitement

Yellow Creek State Park—November 4: As it was my first time leading an outing, I was both excited and a little nervous. Despite the chilly start to the morning, 27 people attended. The group was comprised of members from the Todd Bird Club in Indiana, Pennsylvania and the Three Rivers Birding Club.

We began the outing at Dragonfly Pond, where we immediately spotted four (possibly immature) Buffleheads. Across the road on



Yellow Creek Lake, we had an exciting find – Tundra Swans! We counted 29, but we heard an unknown number calling from the skies overhead. These birds were the highlight of the outing for many in our group. Other birds spotted included Ruddy Ducks, Common Loons, Pied-billed Grebes, American Wigeons, Canada Geese, Double-crested Cormorants, Great Blue Herons, and Dunlins.

Further inland on the south shore of the lake, we found two Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers moving around in a group of pine trees. At the same time, members also spotted a Pine Siskin, which happened to be a lifer for me! From the Bird Observatory Trail, we added American Black Ducks, Gadwalls, Lesser Scaup, American Coots, Mallards, Wood Ducks, Black-capped Chickadees, and Swamp Sparrows. Our day ended on the north shore, where we spotted a Bald Eagle perched high in a tree across the lake. In addition to those already mentioned, we tallied another 29 species of birds. Overall, it was a very successful day, and I had a great experience leading the outing and making many new friends from both birding groups. —by leader **Matthew St. Clair**

Davis Hollow Marina, Moraine State Park—October 15: The downpours of the previous day ended and the skies cleared for our walk at Davis Hollow on the North Shore of Moraine State Park. Eleven birders joined me for a walk in anticipation of some fall

newcomers and some lingering migrants. What we did not anticipate was a mountain bike race held on this usually quiet and uncrowded trail! We shared the trail with 125 bikers of the *Month of Mud* club, which provided some excitement during the quiet bird moments. In addition to the year-round species, we found a Towhee, Swamp Sparrow and some Red-winged Blackbirds. We welcomed both Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Dark-eyed Juncos, and White-throated Sparrows. The fall foliage didn’t disappoint nor did our views of the area before it was closed for the season by the park service on October 31. I enjoyed our fall walk, meeting new birders and seeing some birding friends.—by leader **Karyn Delaney**

Belated Report: A Bonanza of Rare Gulls at Lake Wilhelm in April 2022

By **Dave Brooke**

On a Sunday evening, Linda Croskey and other birders planned to go to Lake Wilhelm on the following Monday, April 4 in hope of finding the Little Gull seen there on Saturday and Sunday. Late Sunday evening came a report that Shannon Thompson and Dave Wilson had found a Black-headed Gull in the same area, and this was amidst big flocks of hungry Bonaparte’s Gulls.

At Lake Wilhelm we ran into Ron Burkert, Malcolm Hartman, and others, all of whom were there for the same reason—to see two rare gulls! By 4pm, we hadn’t found either of them but decided to take one last check of the area northeast of the dam along the bike



Plunge-diving Bonaparte's Gull by Dave Brooke

trail, which is where one of them was originally found. As we were scanning the lake, Ron and Malcolm ran up the trail excited to say the Margaret and Roger Higbee had just found the Black-headed a few hundred yards up the trail from where we were. But that wasn’t all.

At the Marina we identified a Lesser Black-backed Gull, and later that evening, Malcolm sent me a text saying that when he was reviewing his photos from our outing, he found a Franklin’s Gull (also reported earlier) mixed in with a group of Bonaparte’s that he had a photographed to compare with the Black-headed Gull in the same frame. None of my own photos showed the Franklin’s, but there it was! Lake Wilhelm was a bird watcher’s dream that day, with three dozen Bald Eagles in view at one time and up to a hundred Common Loons, many in beautiful spring plumage.

Our complete checklist (of 44 species and 869 individuals!) from April 4, 2022 (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S106305364>), includes many photos of the gull rarities and other birds, like Bald Eagles, Red-breasted Mergansers, and Common Loons that we were fortunate to see that day. The great diversity and abundance of fish-eating birds at Lake Wilhelm that early spring apparently was triggered, in part, by a massive die-off of shad in the lake.

A New Top 100 Birding Hotspot in Allegheny County

By Dave Bennett and John Dzikki

Recently, the Allegheny Land Trust acquired and now protects “Girty’s Woods,” a 155-acre green space located in Millvale, near Shaler and Reserve townships. Fellow birder, John Dzikki, and I wondered if together we could realize the full birding potential of Girty’s Woods and make it a top 100 birding location in Allegheny County!

There is a trail network through Girty’s Woods that was developed by dirt bikers back before the acquisition by Allegheny Land Trust. The bike trails are steep and challenging for anybody who simply wants to walk slowly and watch birds. So, in the past year we instead started our birding from the top of the property, parking on Irwin Lane, and we found the trails there are much less physically challenging. Irwin Lane provides a small parking area (Note: Hikers are asked not to block the gate). The other trailhead is on Siegel Street, where the parking is on-street, but other trailheads are in the works. Regular trail maintenance volunteer days have greatly improved the existing trails in this up-and-coming birding hotspot.

One reason why Girty’s Woods attract birds likely is its high elevation (1190 ft. at the peak). We have found several migrant species that likely stopped there because of its topographical prominence and its proximity to the Allegheny River. Just outside of the Irwin Lane entrance are several radio towers that have made this site attractive to a nesting pair of American Kestrels this past year. Chimney Swifts, Common Nighthawks and raptors all can be viewed from this vantage point. Entering Girty’s Woods from the Irwin Lane entrance, you encounter a small meadow area where sparrows, Red-winged Blackbirds, and wrens often are abundant. One morning in particular, John and I were able to see a nice mix of migrating wood warblers in the surrounding trees. As you proceed on the trail, there are several places where the trail approaches the powerline cut, and there we often have seen Red-tailed, Cooper’s, Broad-winged, and Sharp-Shinned hawks. Throughout this new green space there are many vistas and outlooks that potentially could give great views of soaring raptors.

All five of the resident woodpeckers inhabit Girty’s with a notable number of Northern Flickers and Hairy Woodpeckers. The dense undergrowth along the trails is a constant along the trails and provides cover for breeding White-eyed Vireo and Gray Catbird in the summer, as well as migrating warblers and thrushes.

Recently, we reached our goal of 92 species (thanks to a beautiful Palm Warbler and a Philadelphia Vireo), which finally puts Girty’s in the top 100 Allegheny County Hotspots. Our next goal is for area birders to help us break the 100 species mark!

Observations

Owls We Have Seen

Story and photos by Tom Moeller

After Halloween, with its eerie witches, bats, and owls flying through the sky, we quickly have a return to standard time with dusk falling sooner. Now we stay up in the early darkness and have more chances to hear and see one “creature of the night” – an owl.

A distinct sound in the night – an eerie whinny – tells of the Eastern Screech-Owl. This sound may come out of the dark in your backyard. If you have an owl box, a screech-owl may inhabit it. I’ve heard this owl in the middle of the night, but on an early, standard-time



Eastern Screech-Owl.

evening, I was surprised to hear the whinny very soon after darkness. I’ve played the call on my phone to be answered by a “live” call from the trees. Frick Park and Schenley Park are reliable places to find Eastern Screech-Owls. They often are found in tree hollows in town, including one across the street from the old Garden Center.

In North Park, a certain area near the Latodami Nature Center is reliable for finding Barred Owls. One Mother’s Day we got a call from Meg Scanlon telling us to come up to see a pair of Barred Owl owlets in the park. Sure enough, the pair were there staring down at us as we stared up at them. After a while of silent observation, the calm was broken when a parent loudly called “who-cooks-for you” from up the valley. I have been back more than once to find adult Barred Owls in the daytime. Usually the adults stare down in curiosity much as the pair of young did.

A deep, resonating “Hoo-Hoo” is the call of a Great Horned Owl. I heard this once in mid-day down in the Buffalo Creek watershed. In 2010, an abandoned Red-tailed Hawk nest near Imperial was the home of a pair of owlets. We observed the two youngsters in the nest for a while before we finally noticed the mother perched far down on the tree behind thick branches. She really made her presence known when a Red-tailed Hawk came to “collect rent” for use of its nest. The hawk did not stay long with her around.

Frick Park also was the site of a pair of Great Horned Owls one winter. Many observers including me came to see them. They, also, tried to use an old hawk’s nest to breed, but may not have had success. Yet another Great Horned Owl successfully used a hawk’s nest on the



Barred Owl (left) and Great Horned Owl (right).

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Observations

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Long-eared Owl (left) and Snowy Owl (right) are much less common finds and always exciting

Homestead Grays Bridge in 2016.

Northern Saw-whet Owls are banded in Sewickley Heights Borough Park in late fall as they migrate through. Bob Mulvihill sets up a continuous recorded call to lure the tiny owls in, trapping quite a number of them in his line of mist nets. He displays a captured Saw-whet to an adoring crowd, takes measurements, bands it, and then allows an appreciative onlooker to release the bird. We've also traveled up to the ice-cold Allegheny Front on a November night, where Dave Darney also bands Saw-whet Owls, and we had the pleasure of releasing owls there ourselves.

We had just traveled to Cambria County in early February 2009 to see a Snowy Owl there, a two-hour trip by car. We found the bird and took great photos of it. Less than two months later, a Snowy Owl showed up in Pittsburgh! On March 31, 2009, an owl landed on the Calvary United Methodist Church on the North Side. We only had to travel a short distance downtown to see this owl.

Out in the Imperial grasslands west of the Pittsburgh International Airport, Short-eared Owls can be found in the winter. At dusk one may fly about hunting small rodents in the tall grass. Also, to the north in Lawrence County, and near Cadiz, Ohio, we have seen several Short-eared Owls, along with Northern Harriers, searching for rodents over the snowless fields..

Another trip into Ohio brought us up close to a pair of Long-eared Owls. The owls had been reported near Mosquito Lake. Our group of Pittsburghers parked and walked down Townline Road searching. I spotted them first, perched low in trees by the road. They were very aware of us gawkers, but they did not move. Two of us moved around to the back of the trees to get a better look and photographs. The two owls stared at us, but, again, did not move. It was an awesome first-time experience with these seldom-seen birds!

A trip in 2015 to Sax-Zim Bog in Minnesota brought two more owl encounters. On our first day before the event, we tracked down a Northern Hawk Owl near Duluth. During the festival, we all got our life Great Gray Owl, as well as a second look at a different Northern Hawk Owl. As we left at the end of the festival, we spotted one more Great Gray Owl by the road. Our stopped car attracted another group of birders who also had a close look at this majestic owl.

These "creatures of the night" (and sometimes day) are very different from the colorful warblers and other daytime songbirds we all enjoy so much, but they are just as interesting and challenging to find and identify, if not more so!



A trip farther afield is required to see these two northern species. Tom travelled to Minnesota to see the Great Gray Owl (above) and the Northern Hawk Owl (below).



See a photo gallery on the 3RBC website depicting more owls from Tom's article.



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Quacking the Case of an International Duck Drama in Allison Park

By Joe Lee and Bob Mulvihill

The humble Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) arguably is the quintessential duck. The male with his shiny all-green head, thin white collar, dark brown chest, bright yellow bill and curly-cue tail is known to just about everyone, birder and non-birder alike. The female with her head to tail pattern of cryptic dark brown, buff, and gray patterned feathers, set off by a partly orange bill and bright orange legs and feet is known primarily because of her continual association with the iconic male.

All of us see Mallards here, we see them there—in fact, we see them just about anywhere there is a bit of water, an expanse of grass, and a little shrub cover. We rarely give them much thought, because they are so seemingly ubiquitous. However, a fascinating story unfolded recently when long-time Gibsonia residents and passionate nature-lovers, Joe and Gerry Lee, along with their next door neighbor, Janet, spotted a Mallard that clearly was different from all the rest.

In April 2012 Joe and Gerry had no idea that the Mallards that graced the headwaters of Crouse Run at the edge of their property would one day be integral to a study begun in 2022 to discover possible reasons for a concerning 36% reduction in the Northeastern U.S. Mallard population over the last 20 years. In fact, at one point in time while working in his office on the second floor of the Lee's house overlooking the stream, Joe counted the Mallards swimming downstream past the window: one, two, . . . , fifty-one, fifty-two—quite the parade of paddling ducks! The population of Mallards on their stretch of Crouse Run certainly seemed quite healthy.

The Lees enjoyed calling the ducks up from the stream and tossing cracked corn to them. Each spring they enjoyed it when one Mama Mallard would parade her recently hatched ducklings across their front yard, while Papa Mallard stood proudly to the side admiring his work. The Lees named them Mr. & Mrs. Quackers (subsequently, there was a Mr. & Mrs. Quackers 2). The first Mrs. Quackers had a distinguishing feature, a small chip in her bill that identified her.

On May 5, 2022 Joe noticed that a female Mallard perched on his home's roof wore a numbered band on her left leg. None of the Lee's other Mallards wore bands. Three weeks later, the Lee's neighbor, Janet, called and said, "Come over quick, we have a man with some sort of huge antenna and a Mallard hen wearing some kind of a backpack." Incredibly, an international, multi-agency, multi-million-dollar study had landed right in their suburban backyards!

According to Nathaniel Huck, Conservation Wildlife Biologist and Waterfowl Program Specialist for the Pennsylvania Game Commission's Bureau of Wildlife Management, Mallards are in serious decline across the Northeast and the whole Atlantic Flyway. In fact, the Pennsylvania Game Commission recently began collaborating with 22 other state, federal, and non-governmental organizations to study eastern Canadian and U.S. populations of Mallard across their range in North America using high-tech tracking devices. The project aims to learn more about Mallard habitat use, breeding success, and survival, and the interactions among these factors.

In early 2022, researchers deployed 338 transmitters in 14 U.S. states and two Canadian Provinces. Luke, a field technician working for the *Wildlife Futures Program Mallard Tracking* study, was actively tracking Mrs. Quackers 2 (MQ2) when he showed up in their neighbor's yard; later he filled the Lees in on the whole story.

MQ2 had returned to her nesting grounds near them from a wintering spot along the coast of Lake Erie in New York State, about 180 miles to the NNE. Originally caught at that location, she was given a leg band and a backpack GSM (Global System for Mobile



Mrs. Quackers 2 (MQ2), shown sporting a leg band and a backpack GSM transmitter. One of many notable mallards that have visited Joe and Gerry Lee's suburban backyard over the years. MQ2 heralded their introduction to some fascinating international Mallard research. She also caused some local drama by nesting in the landscaping of a nearby car wash. Photos: Joe Lee.

Communication) tracking device in February 2022 when she was judged to be at least two years old.

He was able to show a map that pinpointed MQ2's travels in May while residing in Allison Park. Besides traveling through the Lee's and their neighbor's properties repeatedly, she visited the nearby car wash, where she built a nest and laid eight eggs among the adjacent ornamental shrubbery. He contacted the car wash and asked personnel there to be careful to not disturb the nest. A week later her eggs hatched, but the ducklings unfortunately made their way *into a car wash bay* that was undergoing renovations. The car wash staff spent the morning corralling all the ducklings, and they finally rounded them up and placed them in a laundry basket.

Game officers transported the ducklings to a local wildlife rehabilitation facility for care and later release. Several days later MQ2 returned to Crouse Run, but in June 2022, without any young to care for, her GPS unit revealed that she flew back up to her non-breeding grounds on Lake Erie in upstate New York.

The next year, an additional 307 transmitters were deployed in 14 states and three Canadian provinces. In April 2023 MQ2 again returned to Allison Park, and she nested at the same car wash, laying nine eggs this time. On May 23rd she and her mate were seen escorting a single duckling. A predator likely destroyed her nest, leaving only one surviving duckling. The PA Game Commission notified the

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Quacking the Case

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In 2022 and 2023, MQ2 nested in the ornamental landscaping in front of a car wash (top photo). MQ2, her mate, and their one surviving duckling in the stream by the Lee's house (bottom photo). Photos: Joe Lee.

Lees that the surviving duckling also disappeared a short time later. Beautiful as she is, Joe and Gerry realized, Mother Nature sure does have her harsh side.

The Lees nevertheless look forward to next nesting season in hopes that MQ2 will return and try her luck again nesting somewhere in the neighborhood of Crouse Run in Gibsonia. They say they will never look at suburban Mallards the same way—they are not necessarily all semi-tame ducks living on handouts and staying year-round in the area. They can have an extraordinary and challenging natural ecology, undertaking a reverse migration *northward for winter*, and returning south to breed each spring in a surprisingly busy location in the northern suburbs of Pittsburgh. Biologists plan to deploy more transmitters for the study in 2024-2025, so area birders should

probably always give any seemingly ordinary Mallards a second look! We are grateful to Pennsylvania Game Commission waterfowl specialist, Nathaniel Huck, who provided some of the information for this story.

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An Unusual Chickadee Sighting

Look closely at this photo below taken by 3RBC member, Dave Brooke, at Harrison Hills County Part as he walked back towards some of the park's Bluebird boxes on August 4.

Dave says, "I didn't even notice the bill through my binos. It was once I got home and looked at my photos on the computer that I saw the deformity. I never saw the bird again, even though I purposely looked over the next couple of days."

A new picornavirus causes the deformity through its effects on keratin growth, and researchers named it *Poecivirus* because of its prevalence in chickadees in Alaska, where the condition first appeared in the late 1990s. Called Avian Keratin Disorder (AKD), researchers have been tracking its spread from Alaska through the Pacific Northwest and beyond. Dave reported all of the details and sent his photo to the USGS Alaska Research Center's "Beak Deformities and Banded Bird Observation Report." If you ever spot a similar deformity in a chickadee or any other bird, you should also report it at: https://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/landbirds/beak_deformity/observerreport.php



Keep an eye out for beak deformities in chickadees. Photo by Dave Brooke.

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Birds in the Three Rivers Area

August – September 2023 Brought Surprises

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

A few *surprises* were found this season. An out of season *Greater Scaup* that appeared to have an injured wing was near Dashields Dam 8/5 to at least 8/16 (MV, et al.).

Common Nighthawk high counts were quite low this fall. Peak tallies included just 21 at North Park 8/21 (CKo), 36 on 8/22 at Frick Park (EH) and 57 at Hartwood Acres 8/25 (TB).

A **Least Sandpiper** was at Dashields Dam 8/6 (MV) and up to three were at Imperial 8/6-11 (MV). A **White-rumped Sandpiper** was a great find there 9/7 (JK); a photograph is in eBird. A **Pectoral Sandpiper** was there 8/18 through September (JK, m.ob.). Two were there 9/28 (RBu). A **Semipalmated Sandpiper** was at Dashields Dam 8/6 (MV) and one was at Imperial 8/11 (MM). A **Short-billed Dowitcher** was at Imperial 8/18-9/8 (MV, m.ob.) and a **Lesser Yellowlegs** there 8/11 (MV) was the only report. A **Greater Yellowlegs** was there 8/13-9/16 (MV, m.ob.). Two were noted 9/2-3 (DNe, NN, AF).

An out of season adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was at the Highland Park Bridge 8/14 (AH, PM). It was seen again 8/18 (JK). This species is typically seen here in winter.

Three **Caspian Terns** (two adults, one juvenile) were at Duck Hollow 9/1 (FI).

A **Night-Heron species** was observed flying at Boyce-Mayview Park at dusk 8/9. It was too dark to positively identify it (JF, JP). Two **Great Egrets** were at Boyce-Mayview Park 8/9-14 (JF, JP) and one was in nearby Bridgeville 9/13 (JO).

Black Vulture sightings continue. One was in O'hara Twp. 8/8 (RBu), one was at Beechwood Farms 8/18-19 (DK, MK), one was at Barking Slopes in Plum 8/29 (RBu) and three were over the Montour Trail near South Park 9/30 (JF, JP).

Unusual for North Park, a **Northern Harrier** was photographed in the upper fields 8/25 (ZV).

Olive-sided Flycatchers were reported from mid-August to mid-September in various locations. **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** followed the same pattern of occurrence and were recorded in 16 locations. **Great Crested Flycatchers** are not always reported widely in fall but there were numerous reports this fall. One was at Boyce-Mayview Park 8/10 (JF), one 8/15 at North Park (TC), two at Sewickley Heights Park 8/18 (AF) and one 8/24-9/3 (m.ob.), one in West Deer Twp. 8/20 (LC), one at Beechwood Farms 8/24 (KSJ) and 8/27 (JV), one at Deer Lakes Park 8/24 (DB), one at Bridgeville 9/6 (JO) and single birds reported at Frick Park from 8/15-9/3 (m.ob.).

American Crows began to gather and stage in Oakland in late September. A total of 1630 were counted 9/30 (KSJ). **Fish Crows** totaled 100 in Oakland 8/26 (KSJ).

Horned Larks were reported at Imperial 8/21-9/4 (m.ob.).

Two **Purple Martins** at Deer Lakes Park 9/2 were late (MF, m.ob.).

A **Sedge Wren** was an excellent find at North Park 8/15 (ZV) providing the 4th county record.

Two **American Pipits** were at the PennDot Wetlands in Upper St. Clair 9/16 (ST).

A **Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow** was in West Deer Twp. 9/30 (LC), interestingly at the same location one spent last winter.

A **Bobolink** was in the upper fields at North Park 8/25 (ZV); a very productive site this fall. The only regular location for this species

in the county is the Imperial area. Finding migrants of this species is extremely rare.

The only report of **Northern Waterthrush** was a bird at Duck Hollow 8/5 (MF). A **Golden-winged Warbler** was in Hays Woods 9/22 (TC). A **Blue-winged X Golden-winged Warbler** was at Beechwood Farms 9/13 (DM). The face was the only part of the bird seen and it was thought to be a **Lawrence's Warbler**. An **Orange-crowned Warbler** was at North Park 9/27 (DN). There were two reports in *eBird* of **Connecticut Warblers** that were described well. One was at Sewickley Heights Park 9/22 (HL) and one at North Park 9/28 (DB). A **Mourning Warbler** was at Beechwood Farms 8/27-28 (DM) and one was at Sewickley Heights Park 9/20 (AF). A **Prairie Warbler** was a good find at Sewickley Heights Park 9/16 (KSJ, CK). This species is rarely encountered during migration.

Blue Grosbeak was regularly reported at Imperial, continuing from the last reporting period up to 8/21 (m.ob.).

Another excellent find at North Park this fall was a **Dickcissel** 8/15 (ZV), the same day and same location as the Sedge Wren mentioned above! This provided the eleventh county record. Both birds were well documented with photographs.

Observers: David Bennett (DBe), Dave Brooke, Ron Burkert (RBu), Trip Bondi, Thomas Connor, Linda Croskey, Adrian Fenton, Mike Fialkovich, John Flannigan, Eric Hall, Amy Henrici, Frank Izaguirre, Debbie Kalbfleisch, Michelle Kienholz, Charity Kheshgi, Justin Kolakowski, Charles Kollar (CKo), Hayley Lapen, Pat McShea, Dan Mendenhall, Dean Newhouse (DNe), Norma Newhouse, Dick Nugent, Jim Offhaus, Joe Papp, Kate St. Johh, Shannon Thompson, Mark Vass, Zachary Vaughan (ZV), John Vassallo (JV), m.ob. (many observers).



The Sedge Wren above was an exceptional find photographed by Zachary Vaughan in the Upper Fields at North Park in mid-August, and that wasn't all; Zachary also found and photographed the Dickcissel below on the same day!

