



# The Peregrine

## Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

Vol. 19, No. 2, March/April 2020



### Computer-based “Ears” at Pitt Can Count Birds That We Can’t

An extraordinary computerized process created at the University of Pittsburgh can survey bird species on a scale that would be impossible for field birders to achieve.

Tessa Rhinehart, a member of the Pitt research team that developed this new technology, will tell us about it at the Three Rivers Birding Club meeting on Wednesday, April 1.

Her program titled “Eavesdropping on Birds” explains how the method combines remote recording and artificial intelligence to produce biodiversity surveys. This research can be used to pinpoint birds’ preferred habitats, track changes in population, and search for rare species.

The meeting will be held at the Phipps Garden Center, 1059 Shady Avenue in Shadyside. Doors open at 6:30 PM for socializing, a business meeting begins at 7:30, and the program starts at 8:00.

Tessa is a research programmer in the Pitt Biological Sciences Department. She is pursuing a master’s degree in Pitt’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, majoring in energy and environment.

A Pennsylvania native, Tessa discovered a love for nature while growing up in the hills around Bradford. She graduated from Swarthmore College in 2017 with degrees in biology and mathematics. At Swarthmore she received the Heinrich W. Brinkmann Mathematics Prize and the Leo M. Leva Memorial Prize for her achievements in biology.

Tessa doesn’t spend all of her hours in a lab. In her free time, she is an avid birder and enjoys volunteering with the Kiwanis Club of Sheraden.

In Alex Neal’s photo at left Tessa is birding at the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge in New York

### We Have a Dazzling Visitor

“Painted Bunting!” When Brian Shema spread the word about this multi-colored visitor from the far south, birders started scrambling to watch the feeder in his O’Hara Township yard.

Brian first spotted the marvelous bird on January 20, 2020, and by mid-February he estimated that more than 400 people had come to see it – some of them more than once.

It was only the third record for Allegheny County, and fewer than 35 have been confirmed in Pennsylvania since 1993.

In her President’s Message on page 2, Sheree Daugherty tells how homeowners and birders have handled such crowd-drawing experiences with rarities like this one. Etiquette is important.

A bit of ornithology: There are two different breeding populations: one along the Atlantic coast from South Carolina to Florida and a much larger one from southern New Mexico and Texas east to southern Alabama. They are separated by a gap of 340 miles, spend winters in different areas, and differ genetically.

Some experts believe the two should be considered separate species. They look alike in plumage, so if they are ever defined as separate species we won’t know which one this is. Never mind. Just enjoy the beauty!

(photo by Steve Gosser)



See *The Peregrine* in beautiful color at [3rbc.org](http://3rbc.org)

## President's Message

### Viewing Rare Vagrants

By Sheree Daugherty

The recent arrival of a Painted Bunting at a local feeding station brings up many issues about how we as birders should behave when viewing such unusual migrants. Unlike in years gone by when our only option to spread the word of an unusual bird was to find a pay phone or rush home to use a landline, today the news travels fast via cell phone, eBird, and Facebook. Large crowds often gather.

It's a mystery why these individual birds are found so far from their normal ranges. Some suggest that it may be due to weather conditions. Maybe storms blow birds out of normal migration routes. Or could it be the bird has an illness or a genetic abnormality that affects its sense of direction? We just do not know.

We do know, however, that rare birds can send usually sedate birders and photographers into a frenzy as they rush to get a look or a great photo. But excitement over seeing an unusual migrant is no excuse to forget your manners. Always remember to show respect to the home owner and keep the welfare of the bird in mind.

Brian Shema, Operations Director at the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, was the lucky one to have the bunting show up at his feeder in O'Hara Township. Brian has enjoyed hosting his "house guest" and it has been an exciting experience for him and his family. During the first week of its visit more than 300 well-behaved people were able to enjoy this strikingly beautiful bird.

There were two similar stories of birds that strayed to western Pennsylvania in 2018 far from their usual ranges. In February a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch plopped down at a feeder in Meadville. In May a Varied Bunting made a three-day stop in Elizabeth. Both species were first records for Pennsylvania. (See more about these wanderers on the 3RBC website's "Past Research Articles & Photo Stories".)

Of course we all want to see these birds! I made the trip to see the Painted Bunting. Along with a half dozen other birder-filled cars, we parked along a suburban street curb and patiently waited to see if the bunting would make another appearance. Much to our delight, the bird reappeared. I never expected to have my best look at an adult male Painted Bunting in Western Pennsylvania!

All three of those vagrants were spotted at feeding stations at private homes. The home where the Painted Bunting used the feeder was on a corner lot, and the bird could easily be viewed from the street. However, the Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch and the Varied Bunting were in backyards. In both of those cases someone took on the responsibility to schedule birders and limit the number of people converging on the generous home owners' time and space. The volunteers coordinating birders' visits were Shawn Collins for the Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch and Dave Wilton for the Varied Bunting.

When an unusual bird is found on public property such as a park, it's fully accessible to the general public. When the find is on private property, there are considerations affecting not only the bird, but also the property owners and their neighbors as well. Increased traffic, illegal parking and trespass can quickly change good will to bad. Always be courteous and practice good birding etiquette.

Whether you are new to birding or a veteran of decades, it's a good idea to review the fundamentals. The American Birding Association's "Code of Birding Ethics" is clear and can be found

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on the 3RBC website. Following the ABA guidelines will insure that we as birders protect birds, preserve the environment, and respect the law and the rights of others.

It's always a thrill to attract an unusual species to your feeder. Sharing the sighting with others is a gift. Thanks to those who have allowed us to share in their good fortune!

## 2019 Brought Some Nice Birds to Allegheny County Including a First Record!

Birders found 225 species in Allegheny County in 2019 including some exciting rarities. See the entire list on the 3RBC website compiled by our Bird Reports Editor Mike Fialkovich.

Highlights included the county's first record of Black-bellied Whistling-Duck: seven photographed at North Park in July.

The list also includes the second county record of Harlequin Duck photographed across the Allegheny River from Blawnox in November.

Another duck, a Black Scoter discovered on the Monongahela River off Duck Hollow, was photographed. See Tom Moeller's photo on page 8 of this issue, which is adequate to document the county's second record. A distant photo is much better than none.

## Outings to Come

### Let's Celebrate the Spring at Our Birding Hot Spots

#### By Steve Thomas, Outings Director

**Wednesday, March 18 - Woodcock Walk:** Enjoy these popular outings again this spring. Meet leader Tommy Byrnes (724-715-7184) at 7:00 PM in the Ladbroskes (now The Meadows) parking lot behind Primanti Brothers restaurant off the Harmar Exit 11 from Route 28. We will carpool and drive a short distance to a field in Harmar Township that has produced many American Woodcocks in the past several years. Be prepared for a muddy walk and bring a flashlight. Before going to the field, we will check the Great Blue Heron nesting colony across the Allegheny River, which in previous years has been an exciting feature of these outings.

**Sunday, March 29 - Pymatuning State Park:** Meet Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; [van126@comcast.net](mailto:van126@comcast.net)) at 8:30 AM at the former site of the Wildlife Learning Center (Waterfowl Museum), 12590 Hartstown Road in Linesville (41.635779, -80.436634). The outing will also cover hot spots in areas surrounding the park. Lunch will be at Scooters by the Lake just on the Ohio side of the Causeway for those who wish to attend. This will be an all-day outing.

As this is in the early spring, please monitor the club's website or Facebook in case of a sudden cancellation due to inclement weather.

**Saturday, April 4 - Yellow Creek State Park:** The walk will be led by Roger and Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493). Meet at 8:00 AM at the park office. This is the annual joint spring outing with the Todd Bird Club. The park office is on Route 259 just off Route 422 east of Indiana. Allow approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes to drive from Pittsburgh. The park has diverse habitats and a large lake that attracts a wide variety of species. The field trip will culminate with lunch at the Chinese buffet in Indiana.

**Wednesdays, April 8 and 15 - Woodcock Walks:** See the March 18 listing for details.

**Sunday, April 11 - Moraine State Park:** Join Michael David ([michaeldavid@gmail.com](mailto:michaeldavid@gmail.com)) at the Moraine State Park Day Use Area (South Shore) in the first parking lot on the right at 8:30 AM. The lake in the heart of the park hosts good (sometimes spectacular) numbers and variety of waterfowl in migration. Directions: From I-79, take Route 422 east toward Butler and exit at the Moraine State Park exit. Turn left at the end of the ramp and travel straight into the park until you see the first major parking lot and rest room on your right. Waterfowl and early spring migrants make this outing a highlight of the season. Allow one hour driving from Pittsburgh.

**Saturday, April 18 - Raccoon Creek State Park:** This is a combination bird, wildflower walk, and picnic with the Brooks Bird Club, which is based in West Virginia. Ryan Tomazin (412-220-9726, [vwwarblers@hotmail.com](mailto:vwwarblers@hotmail.com)) will lead the bird walk. Meet at the Roadside Picnic Area West at 9:30 AM.

We will drive to the beach and around the lake after checking out the picnic parking lot area. Lunch will be between 12:30 and 1:00, and will be potluck. Please bring a dish to feed 6-10 people

(at least), and bring your own plates, cutlery, and drinks. There are ample picnic benches under the giant oaks. If there is any interest, and if the weather holds, we can bird and botanize the Wildflower Reserve. It should be the perfect time for wildflowers.

If you have any questions, or would like to RSVP, please feel free to contact Ryan either by phone or by email.

Directions: From Pittsburgh take Route 22/30 and exit at Imperial. Take Route 30 west to the Raccoon Creek State Park entrance, and drive through the park to the Roadside West picnic area. In case of inclement weather, we should be able to use the center at the Wildflower Reserve for lunch.

#### Friday, April 24 - Sewickley Heights Borough Park:

In collaboration with the Fern Hollow Nature Center, Sheree Daugherty ([shereedaugherty@gmail.com](mailto:shereedaugherty@gmail.com)) will lead this bird walk starting at 8:00 AM in the upper parking lot. Directions to the park can be found on the 3RBC website (3rbc.org). Be prepared for muddy trails. Bring water and a lunch or snack. Besides birding in the park we will drive and make stops along Little Sewickley Creek. Louisiana Waterthrush, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Warbling Vireo nest in the area.

**Saturday, April 25 - Frick Park:** Susie Solomon (412-521-3365) will lead this annual spring outing. We will meet at 8:30 AM at the Frick Environmental Center, 2005 Beechwood Boulevard in Squirrel Hill. Frick can be an excellent migrant trap and, as usual, we're hoping for lots of warblers.

#### Sunday, April 26 - Glade Run Lake Park:

Join Dave Brooke (724-487-3586) for a spring visit to Glade Run Lake Park. Meet at 8:00 AM at the park located on Lake Road in Valencia, Butler County, which is a turn off of Route 228. Google maps coordinates are 40.716229, -79.901211. We will survey the lake from the dam and boat ramp for waterfowl. Then we will walk a trail that is about 2 miles long out and back. The trail can be muddy in places, so boots are highly recommended. Dave mentioned that this is the same weekend we visited last spring when we found a Virginia Rail and a Sora.

#### Friday, May 1 - Sewickley Heights Borough Park:

In collaboration with the Fern Hollow Nature Center, Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; [van126@comcast.net](mailto:van126@comcast.net)), will lead this bird walk starting at 8:00 AM in the upper parking lot. Directions to the park are on the 3RBC website (3rbc.org). Be prepared for muddy trails. Bring a lunch or snacks and water if you wish to continue birding into the afternoon at selected places along Little Sewickley Creek Road.

#### Saturday, May 2 - Harrison Hills Park:

Meet leader Jim Valimont (412-828-5338) at 8:00 AM at this county park off Freeport Road between Natrona Heights and Freeport. As you enter the park, bear right and proceed to the parking lot at the end of the road. The parking lot is near the pond. Dress for wet grass and mud. Previous spring outings have produced a nice variety of warblers, Philadelphia and Yellow-throated Vireos, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and Scarlet Tanagers. See the 3rbc.org birding locations page for directions to the park.

**Sunday, May 3 - Frick Park:** Susie Solomon (412) 521-3365 will lead a second spring outing starting at 8:30 AM. We will meet at Frick Environmental Center located at 2005 Beechwood Boulevard in Squirrel Hill. Frick can be an excellent migrant trap and, as usual, we're hoping for lots of warblers.

## Outings to Come

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### Sunday, May 17 - State Game Lands 95 - Glade Dam

**Lake:** Linda Croskey ([lcroskey@consolidated.net](mailto:lcroskey@consolidated.net); cell 724-612-9963) will lead us at a new club location: State Game Lands 95 - Glade Dam Lake in Butler County. Meet at 8:00 AM at Moniteau High School, 1810 West Sunbury Road, West Sunbury 16061 (Google coordinates: 41.0587556,-79.897439). Directions to the high school: Take Route 8 North through Butler to Route 308 (also known as West Sunbury Road). Follow Route 308 for about 12 miles, and the school will be on your right.

“The Glades” consists of several large ponds, deciduous and early successional forests, hemlock stands, marsh, and stream areas. Migrating warblers, waterfowl, Virginia Rail, Sora, Eastern Screech-Owl are all possible. There are over 9,000 acres to explore. Dress for ticks, pack a snack or lunch, and bring plenty of water for this new adventure! A spotting scope would be useful.

Optional for early-birders who want to try for Eastern Whip-poor-wills, we will meet at 5:00 AM at the high school and drive to a part of the State Game Lands 95 near Hilliards for these birds of the night. Please RSVP to Linda at [lcroskey@consolidated.net](mailto:lcroskey@consolidated.net) if you are interested in attending this early option.

### Sunday, June 14 - 3RBC Picnic at Harrison Hills Park:

Mark your calendar for our club’s annual bird walk and picnic. The picnic will be at the Yakaon Shelter near the Environmental Learning Center in the park off Freeport Road between Natrona Heights and Freeport. Details will be forthcoming.



## Outing Revisited

### Winter Wasn't Quite Dead

**Frick Park “Dead of Winter” – January 25:** A good turnout of 17 people joined me on this dreary but relatively mild day. Fortunately, any rain was limited to some drizzle.

This year I decided to explore the wetlands in lower Frick Park, an area I enjoy visiting. Our species list included the expected winter residents, but they offered interest and excitement.

A Red-tailed Hawk was perched in one of the old sycamores and eventually flew off and landed on a nest. Just before that, a few participants had been discussing the potential of a nearby nest. Later we saw another pair of Red-tails perched in a tree behind the Irish Centre of Pittsburgh on Commercial Street. A Cooper’s Hawk flew but disappeared into the trees before everyone could see it.

American Goldfinches dressed in their dull winter plumage were feeding on the seed heads of the sycamores.

Two Pileated Woodpeckers were vocal, and one flew over us and perched in a dead tree for all to view. The same tree held a Northern Flicker. I explained to the group that years ago the sight of a Pileated Woodpecker in the park was extremely rare.

Carolina Wrens were singing, always nice on a winter outing, and one of the few species that sing in winter. We also heard their loud chattering and rattling calls. Song Sparrows and Northern Cardinals were also singing. –by leader Mike Fialkovich

## 73 Species Were Listed on the Pittsburgh CBC

### By Brian Shema, Pittsburgh CBC Compiler

The 228 participants in the Pittsburgh Christmas Bird Count listed an above-average 73 species on December 28, 2019. The annual count is hosted and coordinated by the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania.

Weather on count day was cloudy and mild with temperatures from 38 to 46 degrees at the count’s geographic center in Shaler Township. Water was completely open on all lakes, rivers and streams because temperatures were consistently mild during the days surrounding the count.

The weather was not ideal for a bird count. Birds were seemingly capable of finding plenty of natural food sources, and feeder count numbers were low. Nevertheless, the number of species was one more than the ten-year average of 72.

A few species are now found regularly, which pushes our 10-year average upward. These include almost annual Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Common Raven, Fish Crow, and Eastern Towhee.

A total of 28,061 birds were counted on count day. For the most part, numbers of individual species fluctuated around their 10-year averages. A few species were found in record high numbers for the history of the count. These included Pileated Woodpecker (51), Blue Jay (870), Common Raven (7), and Carolina Wren (431).

After two mild winters, the weather may have influenced some of the findings. Many participants commented on the large flights of American Robins they saw during the count. Although the robins seemed to be abundant, their numbers were actually about average. Robins were most likely concentrated in areas with ample winter fruit, making them seem plentiful.

However, when combined with species such as Hermit Thrush, Brown Thrasher, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Eastern Towhee, and Red-winged Blackbird, all of which were found this year, it would seem that our woodlots are supporting a larger than normal diversity of wintering birds.

The Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania would like to thank each of the 228 participants that contributed to the count. We are thankful that you joined us! We also give a special thank you to the area leaders who help compile bird numbers and participant information. Their work makes compiling the data for the count much, much easier, and undoubtedly more accurate.

## “Biggest Week” Is a Birding Magnet

### By Jack Solomon

Black Swamp Bird Observatory’s annual festival in northwestern Ohio, known as the “Biggest Week in American Birding,” is set for May 8-17, 2020. The main attraction is birding at Magee Marsh, aptly titled “the warbler capital of the world.”

The marsh is a small wetland with a boardwalk where an amazing variety of warblers and other migrants stop to feed. It typically attracts more than 50 members of 3RBC. Many register for the festival’s field trips, evening lectures, and workshops.

The festival will feature programs, workshops, and field trips with Kenn Kaufman and other experts. Information about the festival and the area, including lodging, is available at [BSBO.org](http://BSBO.org).

If you have any questions about the area or the festival, feel free to send me a note at [snaggle719@yahoo.com](mailto:snaggle719@yahoo.com).

## Observations

### Visit Machias Seal Island to Experience Puffins

By Tom Moeller

Puffins! Atlantic Puffins can be found in the North Atlantic from the United States and Canada to Greenland, Iceland, the British Isles, and northern Europe, including Russia. Seeing and photographing Atlantic Puffins along the coast is one thing, but if you really want to *experience* them, you should visit Machias Seal Island.

This 18-acre island lies about 10 miles off the coast of Maine between the Gulf of Maine and the Bay of Fundy. Nearby is its smaller companion North Rock, a low, rocky island of about three acres. Machias Seal Island is dominated by a lighthouse and its outbuildings. Also present are a number of observation huts to view the seabirds which gather and nest on the island. These birds are Atlantic Puffins, Razorbills, Common Murres, Leach's Storm-Petrels, eiders, and terns. Savannah Sparrows are known to nest there, too.

The backstory of Machias Seal Island is interesting: It has been a point of contention between the United States and Canada since the American Revolution. The Treaty of Paris signed in 1783 gave the United States all islands within 20 leagues (60 nautical miles) of the coast of Maine, except Machias Seal Island's large neighbor Grand Manan Island, part of New Brunswick.

However, Canada also claims Machias Seal Island based on a 1621 land grant to Sir William Alexander, founder of Nova Scotia, although the land grant is not exact as to that tiny island. In 1832, the British built a lighthouse on the island to bolster their claim to it. The lighthouse has been maintained ever since by a pair of Canadian Coast Guard lighthouse keepers, even though the light has been automated for decades – again to back up their claim. Oddly, the United States refuses to recognize the existence of that lighthouse!

Most minor disputes along the U.S.-Canada border were resolved by the International Court of Justice at The Hague in 1984, except Machias Seal Island and the waters around it, which are productive lobster fisheries, again claimed by both countries. With recent increased border patrolling for illegal aliens, Canadian fishing vessels have been stopped by U.S. Border Patrol agents in the waters claimed by the Americans. Yet on the whole, access to the island's bird sanctuary is still unrestricted.

Many tour groups in Maine and Grand Manan Island in New Brunswick provide trips to visit Machias Seal Island. We took such a trip on an Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania eco-tour led by Brian Shema in July 2009 out of Jonesport, Maine. In addition to visiting the puffins on the island, the boat trip out to the island was filled with seabirds.

We boarded the *Chief* (a boat deeply involved in the U.S.-Canada dispute over Machias Seal Island\*) on a gray morning for the 75-minute voyage and sailed east out of Jonesport past Nipple Island, which was strewn with sleeping Harbor Seals, and pine-covered Mark Island into the open Gulf of Maine.

Near the coast were Wilson's Storm-Petrels, our first seabirds. Farther out, larger birds were attracted to our boat. First, a Great Shearwater came up to the stern, then followed along on our starboard side, and finally veered away. Next, a Sooty Shearwater was spotted off to starboard. Another storm-petrel flew by. Later a Northern Fulmar approached astern and followed us for several minutes until we were distracted by our target bird, an Atlantic



*CLASSIC PORTRAIT* – All three of North America's puffin species have spectacular bills; the Atlantic Puffin is the only one that can boast a combination of three colors. Tom Moeller photographed this one in a classic pose during his visit to Machias Seal Island.

Puffin flying out from the island to greet us.

Now we could see the "nonexistent" lighthouse on Machias Seal Island. Closer to the island we could see puffins, Razorbills, and Common Murres swimming in and flying over the waters. The *Chief* anchored, and the skiff we had towed from Jonesport was pulled alongside. Our group divided into two and was ferried ashore to a rocky ramp up to the island. We climbed the ramp to one of the outbuildings of the lighthouse, were greeted and given instructions, then divided into smaller groups to enter the observation huts, where we would spend the fastest 60 minutes on record.

This is how to experience puffins and the other Alcids! The huts were rectangular, plywood structures with flat roofs and sliding panels to open and watch the seabirds. The puffins, murres, and Razorbills provided quite a show for us. They flew in and out, brought in fish or nesting material, groomed, bickered with each other, crawled into their den-like nests, called (grunted), flapped their wings, nuzzled one another, and graciously posed for photos. A wonderful sound in the huts was the pitter-patter of little feet on the roof from the Alcids. Farther out on the rocks we could see gulls: Herring and Great Black-backed to be exact.

All too soon a knock came on our door meaning that our hour was up, and we had to leave. This was a seabird preserve, and exposure to human observers was minimized. As we left, we

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*BIG STRETCH – Many seabirds have sharp bills to help grab food, the Razorbill is especially honored with its name. Tom Moeller photographed this one dynamically in a wing stretch.*

## **Observations**

*continued from page 5*

saw that Savannah Sparrows were also on the island. Plus, we had to avoid stepping on a Common Tern's egg that may have rolled out of a hidden nest near the walkway. Again, we ferried out to the *Chief* in two groups, giving us in the second group a few more minutes to watch and photograph the puffins.

Naturally, the return trip to Jonesport was less exciting. A new bird, a Manx Shearwater, was spotted, but the excitement of being on Machias Seal Island lingered all the way back into port.

\*The *Chief* was originally owned by Barna Norton, who had a colorful history over ownership of Machias Seal Island. Read the article "This strange, lobster-fueled border dispute off Maine has been simmering long before Trump" in the references below.

## **References:**

Nik DeCosta-Klipa. "This strange, lobster-fueled border dispute off Maine has been simmering long before Trump." *Boston.com*. July 22, 2018. Accessed January 29, 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/t22lgfp>

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See Tom's photo gallery on the 3RBC website for many more of his images from Machias Seal Island.



## **George Bercik, 1936-2019: a Naturalist Loved by Many**

"I remember George as an all-round good naturalist. He knew birds, flowers, mushrooms, and insects. He was interested in everything and patiently shared his knowledge with the rest of us."

That is how Dianne Machesney, treasurer of the Wissahickon Nature Club, remembers George Bercik, who died on December 29, 2019. He was a longtime member of the club, which recently voted to install him as a Lifetime Honorary Member. "He was very active, attending every meeting, picnic and field trip until the last couple of years when ill health slowed him down," Dianne said.

Countless other lovers of nature have similarly fond memories, including many members of the Three Rivers Birding Club who recall sharing joyful outings led by this kind and caring man.

Jack Solomon, 3RBC's founding president, recalls that when he was asked to lead an Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania outing to Hawk Mountain, he agreed only if George would be co-leader because he knew the area better and was much better at identifying hawks in flight: "He had a commanding presence and exuded confidence and competence. George didn't fail me."

The memorial remembrances in George's obituary included such reminiscences as this: "It was always a better outing if he was participating."

The photo below by Monica Miller shows George with his trusty hiking pole leading a Wissahickon outing at Jennings Nature Reserve. To anyone who knew George, that smile was a treasure.



## A Trip to Peru: Great Birds and Fabulous Inca Ruins

By Jim Valimont

The Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania organized a trip to Peru in 2019 with Jim Bonner and Rachel Handel escorting the group of 10 participants with the assistance of local leaders.

On our first morning in Lima we rode by bus to the fishing village of Pucusana where we boarded two boats for a trip around Isla Pucusana. Hundreds of Inca Terns and Peruvian Boobies perched on the rocky cliffs, with a few Neotropic, Red-legged, and Guanay Cormorants, Blackish Oystercatchers, Belcher's and Kelp Gulls, and Peruvian Pelicans. But the best birds of the morning were a group of about nine Humboldt Penguins. We returned to Lima where we made a brief stop at Villa Marsh just south of the city. Here we had our first looks at White-cheeked Pintail, Andean Duck, Slate-colored Coot, and Gray-hooded Gull.

We flew to Cusco and boarded a bus to our hotel in the Sacred Valley. In the morning we started our trip to the Andes. We stopped briefly at a roadside pull-off and found Spot-winged Pigeon, Shining Sunbeam (a hummingbird), Stripe-headed Antpitta, and Red-crested Cotinga.

High in the mountains we hiked the Royal Cinclodes Trail in the Abra Malaga preserve. The Royal Cinclodes is an extremely endangered bird that exists only in the disappearing polylepis forest. Only about 250 birds are left. This section of forest has been preserved and is being expanded with help from several international organizations. The trail was grueling to traverse because of the high elevation.

We did not see the Royal Cinclodes, but we did find several other species dependent on this polylepis forest including White-browed Tit-Spintail and Ash-breasted Tit-Tyrant. Other birds seen here included Andean Gull, Andean Goose, Mountain Caracara, and Mitred Parakeet. (Mitred Parakeet was surprising to me because of the high elevation.) We returned to the bus, crossed the pass and encountered new birds on several high-elevation ponds, including Yellow-billed Teal, Puna Ibis, and Andean Lapwing.

Finally we came to the day I had anticipated the most, our trip to Machu Picchu, the Inca city built high on a mountain near the Sacred Valley. We rode by train to the town of Machu Picchu, then by bus to the protected ruins. Our local guides took us on the grand tour of the ruins, describing the features of the city, including the temples, work areas, open plazas, quarries, and housing.

There was a steady drizzle almost the entire time at this Inca site, but I don't think anyone in our party was disappointed. Only 40% of the site has been reclaimed from the cloud forest. Most of the unrestored area is on the steep slopes on both sides of the city. Restoring all of the famous terraces on the steep slopes would be a monumental task. I recorded only five species here, but one was the incredibly beautiful Rust-and-yellow Tanager.

We stopped at a small property owned by a family who had transformed their land with feeders, plants, and shrubs to attract birds. Here we saw eight species of hummingbirds including the Giant Hummingbird and the fabulous Sword-billed Hummingbird.

We traveled the Sacred Valley to Cusco to Port Maldonado to our lodge in the Peruvian rainforest. On a boat ride up the Tambopata River, we spotted a Capybara on the river bank, with two Giant Cowbirds and a Black Caracara catching insects on the Capybara's fur. On a hike to an oxbow lake, we were escorted by Elmer, the too-friendly Collared Peccary, which constantly wanted to nuzzle in everyone's crotch. This is unsettling when you remember the razor-sharp tusks in its mouth!



*CONTRAST AND CAMOUFLAGE – This Collared Inca (above) was a gorgeous hummingbird found on a trip to Peru. What a difference from the birds in the photo (in color) below! These Humboldt Penguins barely contrast with the rocks – perhaps for protection from predators? (photos by Linda Schmidt)*



On the oxbow lake we spotted Black Caiman, a family group of five Giant River Otters, and many new birds, including Horned Screamer, Greater Ani, Hoatzin, Sungrebe, Striated Heron, and the curiously named Black-capped Donacobius. A morning trip to a canopy tower produced Greater Yellow-headed Vulture, Rufous Motmot, Bluish-fronted Jacamar, Golden-collared Toucanet, Channel-billed Toucan, and numerous parrots.

On a trip to a riverbank clay-lick we saw Red-and-green Macaws and the spectacular Cream-colored Woodpecker. On a night hike near the lodge, we found Pale-winged Trumpeters, Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl, and Screaming Piha. We also found tarantulas, a tailless scorpion, and a poison dart frog.

Alas, our trip was almost over. We returned to Lima from the rainforest and spent a morning perusing some of Lima's historical structures and had lunch at the site of pre-Inca archeological site, where I saw my last life bird of the trip, Croaking Ground Dove.

For the trip I recorded 213 species of which 127 were life birds. We saw 18 species of hummingbirds, 12 species of parakeets, parrots, and macaws, and 14 species of tanagers.



# The Peregrine

## Birds in the Three Rivers Area

### Harlequin Duck Was Best in October-November 2019

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

**Tundra Swans** were noted flying over in November: 30 over the northern part of the county 11/8 (LC), 70 over Gibsonia 11/12 and 36 on 11/13 (KP), and 20 over nearby Hampton Twp. 11/13 (LS). A flock flew over Boyce-Mayview Park after dark 11/15 (DW, GG, AN, JP) and again 11/26 (JP).

An **American Wigeon** was at Janoski's Farm in Findlay Twp. 11/8 (JHa, MV). Three **Lesser Scaup** were at Woods Run 10/17 (JF). Three **Buffleheads** were at Duck Hollow 11/24 (AH, RT, TRh, AP).

A female/immature **Harlequin Duck** was quite a surprise on the Allegheny River at Blawnox 11/16 (OL, TH, JVa, and many other observers) – only the second Allegheny County record. It was observed on only one day and was documented with photographs. The first record of this species was on the Ohio River in the spring of 1987.

A female/immature **Black Scoter** was at Duck Hollow 11/24 (MJ, many observers). Two **Red-breasted Mergansers** were on the Allegheny River at Sharpsburg 11/16 (OL, TH, JVa). Four **Ruddy Ducks** were at Duck Hollow 11/24 (MJ, AH, RT, TRh, AP).

A **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** lingered in Brentwood to 10/15 (DF). A female **Rufous Hummingbird** was banded in Monroeville 11/21 (BMu) providing the 17th Allegheny County record. It was discovered in early October, and the last eBird report was 11/29.

A **Wilson's Snipe** was at Imperial 10/20 (MV). Uncommon in fall, 2 **Bonaparte's Gulls** were at Duck Hollow 11/1 (TM, NM).

A **Northern Shrike** was found near the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport 11/24 (MW).

A **Red-breasted Nuthatch** was at Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve 10/18 (BSh). A **Marsh Wren** was found again in the wetlands at Wingfield Pines 10/8 (JMc) and remained through the



*PLEASANT SURPRISE – An Orange-crowned Warbler is always an uncommon migrant to see in southwestern Pennsylvania. The species is most often found in late October and early November. Dave Brooke photographed this one at Harrison Hills Park on November 10, 2019.*

season. Another was found at Harrison Hills Park 11/17 (AH, PM).

Four **American Pipits** were at Boyce-Mayview Park 11/13 (ST) and 4 were at an unusual location in the city of Pittsburgh 11/14 (OL) – in an empty lot. The observer noticed them and recorded their calls while he was waiting for a bus.

A great count of 3 **Gray-cheeked Thrushes** were at Beechwood Farms 10/5 (AP) and 1 was at Boyce Park 10/5 (AH, PM). A female **Purple Finch** visited a feeder in O'Hara Twp. 10/7-8 (BSh).

A late **Savannah Sparrow** was a nice find at Janoski's Farm in Findlay Twp. 11/2 (JF, JP, MM). A late **Fox Sparrow** was at Harrison Hills Park 11/16 (MF). **Lincoln's Sparrows** were reported through October, and a late bird was at Harrison Hills Park 11/14 (DB). Several **Swamp Sparrows** remained through November at Wingfield Pines (many observers). An interesting leucistic **White-throated Sparrow** visited a feeder in a backyard in Pleasant Hills 11/4 (MH). The bird was completely white with the exception of a brown tail and yellow lores. It was present for about a week. (A photo of this sparrow appeared in the January/February 2020 issue of *The Peregrine*.)

Twenty-three species of warblers were reported during the period. Highlights included an **Orange-crowned Warbler** at Peter's Creek in Jefferson Borough 10/8 (JHa) and 10/10 (JP), and another one was photographed at Harrison Hills Park 11/10 (DB).

Five **Rusty Blackbirds** were at Frick Park 10/9 (JS, SS), 1 was at the Penn Dot Wetlands in Boyce-Mayview Park 11/1 (LN), and 2 were photographed in Marshall Twp. 11/16 (JHz).

*Observers: Dave Brooke, Linda Croskey, Mike Fialkovich, John Flannigan, Donna Foyle, Gigi Gerben, Malcolm Harter, Jim Hausman (JHa), Janet Heintz (JHz), Amy Henrici, Todd Hooe, Matthew Juskowich, Fred Kachmarik, Oliver Lindhiem, Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Jeff McDonald (JMc), Pat McShea, Michelle Mannella, Tom Moeller, Nancy Moeller, Bob Mulvihill (BMU), Lauren Nagoda, Alyssa Nees, Dick Nugent, Kevin Parsons, Joe Papp, Aidan Place, Tessa Rhinehart (TRh), Brian Shema (BSh), Jack Solomon, Sue Solomon, Liz Spence, Shannon Thompson, Ryan Tomazin, Mark Vass, John Vassallo (JVA), Dave Wilton.*



*RARE VISITOR – Tom Moeller's photo of this Black Scoter on the Monongahela River from Duck Hollow on November 24, 2009, isn't one of Tom's usual fine pictures. But it demonstrates an important point: the image is sufficient to document the presence of an uncommon species. Perfection isn't always important.*