



The Peregrine

Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

Vol. 18, No. 3, May/June 2019

Julie Zickefoose, a 3RBC Favorite, Will Return on June 5 to Show Us Baby Songbirds in Their Nests

Julie Zickefoose, artist, writer, naturalist, and author of *Baby Birds: An Artist Looks into the Nest*, will revisit the Three Rivers Birding Club on Wednesday, June 5, to share her fascinating books with us.

Her presentation will be in 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.

In 2002, Julie asked herself a question: Why and how do baby songbirds develop so quickly, some launching into flight only 11 days after hatching? In search of the answer, she began to draw and paint wild nestlings day by day, bearing witness to their swift growth.

Over the next 13 years, Julie would document the daily changes in 17 bird species from hatching to fledging. *Baby Birds*, her most recent book, describes the enchanting result, with more than 500 life studies that hop, crawl, and flutter through its pages.

In her illustrated talk, she will share her influences as well as her artistic process, a must-see for the aspiring natural history artist. Art and science blend in every Zickefoose pursuit, as the scientist's relentless curiosity joins the artist's quest for beauty. Julie writes and paints from Indigo Hill, an 80-acre wildlife sanctuary in Appalachian Ohio. She is also well known as a contributing editor to *Bird Watcher's Digest*.



Photograph by Abby Santurbane

Have Birding Fun with Ted Floyd

Ted Floyd, born and raised in Pittsburgh and an internationally recognized birding expert, will be visiting his hometown and will lead an outing for us on Saturday, May 11, at Frick Park. Meet him at 9:00 AM at the Frick Environmental Center, 2005 Beechwood Boulevard in Squirrel Hill.

His walk will be held among the park's other activities celebrating World Migratory Bird Day. (See "Outings to Come" on page 3 for details.)

Frick Park is a well-known "migrant trap," and Ted is a wizard of a birder and ornithologist, so expect to see and learn about lots of warblers and other migrants in the park where he cut his boyhood birding teeth.

After making a name for himself as a whiz kid birder here in Pittsburgh, Ted went on to get degrees at Princeton and Penn State. Living now in Colorado, he is Editor of *Birding* magazine, the award-winning flagship publication of the American Birding Association.

Ted, a 3RBC charter member, is the author of five books and more than 200 popular articles, technical papers, and book chapters on birds and nature. His books include the *Smithsonian Field Guide to the Birds of North America* and *How to Know the Birds* just published in March 2019. He will not have the new book at the outing, but bring your own copy for Ted to sign.

Ted is a frequent and popular speaker at birding festivals and ornithological society gatherings where his encyclopedic knowledge and quirky sense of humor make him a hit.

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

President's Message

Bird Anatomy

by Sheree Daugherty

Have you ever been out birding and heard someone say, "Look! Along the stream in that crooked sapling there's a brown and white bird with a white supercilium, a dark eye stripe, streaked chest and flanks and whitish under tail coverts?" If you scratched your head and thought, "what is she talking about?" it may be time to learn something about bird anatomy.

Knowing a little about avian anatomy, the physiological structure of birds' bodies, can greatly enhance your identification skills. Using the proper terminology will be helpful when making comparisons of colors and patterns on an unfamiliar bird.

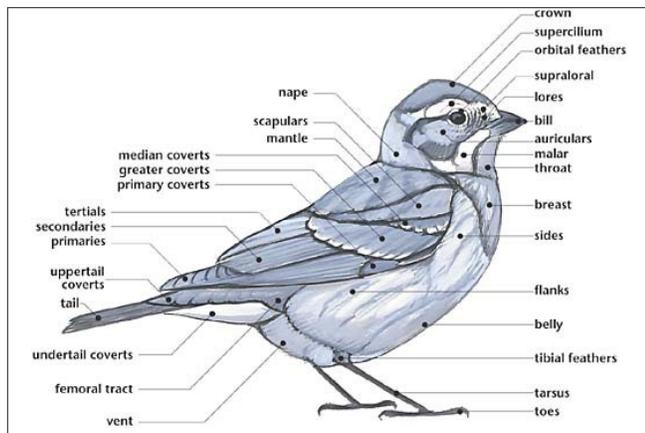
Field marks are how we identify birds; learning the correct name of each part will be more helpful than saying, "it had yellow on the face." Where was the yellow? Was it the crown, the top of the head, or the nape, the back of the head or an eye stripe? If you know the anatomical name of the part, it will nail down what you are looking at and help you to remember. Without these details, it's easy to merely recall that the color was on the face. But where? By the time you search a field guide or app it may be hard to pinpoint exactly where the yellow was located. Memory quickly fades. Naming equals remembering.

If you carry a small notebook to record your sightings, a quick sketch can be invaluable. And, no, you do not have to be an artist to jot down a quick interpretation of a shape or pattern! The act of drawing will reinforce what you see and help you to memorize the detail.

Most bird field guides offer drawings or photographs, usually in the first few pages, with the parts of a bird labeled. The terminology varies slightly from source to source. Eye stripe is the same as supercilium, upper and lower mandible equals upper and lower bill or beak, etc.

Some of the names are obvious: throat, breast, tail, etc. Others are more specific to birds: mantle, scapular, supercilium and various coverts, to name a few.

Starting with the body, the breast is a no-brainer. Flanks are the sides just below the wings. The mantle or cape is the entire back. Take note of color and markings. Is there any streaking? Is it



PARTS OF A BIRD – This illustration by David Allen Sibley from The Sibley Guide to Birds is one of the most helpful depictions of a songbird's field marks discussed in the President's Message. (copyright David Allen Sibley)

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heavy or light? Are the streaks and color only on the breast, flanks or cape or over the entire area?

Wings have primary and secondary flight feathers or remiges. These are the long stiff feathers that support the bird in flight. Primaries are the longest group starting at the wing tip. Secondaries are closer to the body. A series of coverts are at the top of the wing. Wing coverts cap the flight feathers and provide a smooth surface to cut down on wind resistance.

Wings often have distinct markings. Wing bars are common. Some birds have one, some two. Are they thin, wide or more of a patch or epaulet? Noting wing bars is especially useful for identifying warblers.

Heads have some obvious components: napes, cheeks, crowns, throats. Male Bobolinks sport a distinctive yellow nape. Golden-crowned Kinglets have golden crowns. Sometimes it's in the name!

Faces can have many distinct features. Eye rings: They can be complete or broken. Many birds have complete eye rings. American Robins have a broken eye ring. Some, such as Painted Redstarts, have only half of an eye ring. Eye stripes: A stripe of color behind and/or in front the eye. Malar stripes can be thought of as a drooping mustache. A supercilium is an "eyebrow" of color.

The tail feathers or rectrices may have important markings.

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Outings to Come

We'll Visit New Places for Birding Excitement, Plus Our Annual Picnic

By Steve Thomas, Outings Director

Friday, May 3 – Moraine State Park – North Shore: Meet our leader Karyn Delaney (724-713-9474 for texts and calls) at McDanel's Boat Launch near the Owllet Gift Shop on the North Shore of Lake Arthur at 8:30 AM for a morning walk. We will walk a portion of the North Country Trail and/or the Butterfly Trails depending upon the bird activity. Both trails can have a variety of migrating species, including warblers. Note: Rain date will be Tuesday, May 14.

Saturday, May 4 – Deer Lakes Regional Park: Todd Hooe (hooe@verizon.net; 412-805-6909) and Oliver Lindhiem will lead this outing focusing on spring migrants (warblers, flycatchers, vireos, etc.). The outing will begin at 6:30 AM and run until about 11:30 AM. Meet at the small lot across from Wagman Observatory at these GPS coordinates: 40.625309, -79.813333. We will hike approximately 3-4 miles. Although the trails are pretty well maintained, please dress for possible wet grass, mud and rainfall.

Friday, May 10 – Presque Isle State Park: This trip to one of Pennsylvania's greatest birding locations will be led by Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; van126@comcast.net). Meet at 8:00 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 Route 832, which leads directly into the park. Allow 2.5 hours driving time. The migration is always exciting, and 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, snacks and water for this all-day outing.

Note: This date coincides with the Presque Isle Audubon



PINEY TRACT HIGHLIGHT – If you've never seen a Henslow's Sparrow, Michael Leahy's June 8 outing at the Piney Tract will be the best chance you'll ever have. (photograph by Michael Leahy)

Society's Festival of the Birds, May 10-12. The 3RBC outing is not associated with any outing or activity related to the festival. Bob Mulvihill is leading an outing here also on Saturday, May 11, for the National Aviary.

Friday, May 10 – Sewickley Heights Park: In collaboration with the Fern Hollow Nature Center, Sheree Daugherty (shereedaugherty@gmail.com) will be our leader. The walk will begin at 8:00 AM in the upper parking lot. For directions to the park, see 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, May 11 – Frick Park: Before Ted Floyd's 9:00 AM bird outing announced on the front page, 3RBC member Mark VanderVen will lead a walk designed to count numbers of each bird species along the census route.

Mark's walk will start at 7:15 AM at the Frick Environmental Center, 2005 Beechwood Boulevard in Squirrel Hill. Mark will give us an opportunity to learn about bird migration from both ornithological and conservation perspectives, and about the techniques used to census birds.

Meanwhile, beginning at 6:00 AM at the Environmental Center, experts from the Carnegie Museum of Natural History will hold bird banding demonstrations. For information about the banding or his outing, contact Mark (nevrednav@gmail.com), or just show up.

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, Carnegie Museum, and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy are sponsoring this all-day event. For details about the day's activities, see the Parks Conservancy website: www.pittsburghparks.org/park-events.

Saturday, May 11 – Cook Forest State Park: Make plans to get your spring "warbler fix" with an outing to one of the best migrating warbler traps in western Pennsylvania. Michael Leahy will be our leader. Meet him at the park office at 8:30 AM. Set your GPS to 113 River Road, Cooksburg, PA for the office.

From the office we will proceed to the Log Cabin Interpretive Center where we will begin our adventure into the "Forest Cathedral." Depending on time and group preferences, we may visit the fire tower where you can climb to the top and look for a Blackburnian Warbler and then visit Seneca Rocks overlook for spectacular views of the Clarion River and surrounding country or head over to nearby Clear Creek State Park and Bear Rocks.

There are restrooms at the office and the Log Cabin. For questions, feel free to contact Michael at 814-229-1648; mrl706@gmail.com. Bring water and a lunch, or if the weather is wet, there are several restaurants to choose from.

Located along the picturesque Clarion River, Cook Forest has some of the largest tracts of virgin forest in Pennsylvania. Classified as a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service, it is often called the "Black Forest" of Pennsylvania. The park's 11,586 acres contain some of the largest Eastern Hemlock and White Pine in all of the eastern states. At 184.7 feet tall, the "Longfellow Pine" was the tallest White Pine in the Northeastern United States and the third tallest east of the Mississippi River. Unfortunately, it was felled during a microburst in May 2018. We will visit the remains of the fallen icon.

Cook Forest, with its acres of mature evergreen and hardwood trees is a real magnet for large numbers of migrating warblers and other forest-dependent birds.

Saturday, May 18 – Harrison Hills Park: Meet leader

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Outings to Come

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Jim Valimont (412-828-5338) at 8:00 AM at this northeastern Allegheny 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 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 Birding Locations page at 3rbc.org for directions.

Saturday, June 8 – Piney Tract: Experienced birder Michael Leahy (mrl706@gmail.com) will show us some of the highlights around a very special place in Western Pennsylvania – State Game Land 330, known as the Piney Tract in Clarion County. We will meet at 8:30 AM in the game land parking area on Mt. Zion Road.

Piney Tract is a 2,300-acre reclaimed strip mine that holds arguably the densest population of Henslow's Sparrows and other grassland breeding birds in Pennsylvania. It has been designated as a Global Important Bird Area.

There are NO facilities in the area so bring water, snacks, and lunch. Although insects are seldom a problem here, insect repellent for ticks may be in order.

We will walk a couple of areas, and then drive to a couple of sites nearby to look for more good birds. Other species expected are Savannah, Grasshopper, Clay-colored, and possibly Vesper Sparrows. Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Bobolink, Prairie Warbler, and Eastern Meadowlark, are fairly common. Breeding populations of Upland Sandpiper and Short-eared Owls have been documented.

For directions, see the Seneca Rocks Audubon website: <https://www.senecarocksaudubon.org/pineytract.html>.

Saturday, June 15 – Hunter's Lane in Donegal, Westmoreland County: Mike Fialkovich (412-731-3581) will lead his annual summer outing to the Laurel Mountains. Hunter's Lane. Meet Mike at the Dairy Queen parking lot off the Donegal Exit of the Pennsylvania Turnpike at 7:30 AM. We will drive a short distance to the trailhead.

Hunter's Lane is part of Forbes State Forest and features a variety of habitats including forest, a stream, a shrub marsh, and brush. This was a good location for Golden-winged Warblers in past years so we'll see if we can find any. Alder Flycatcher and a variety of warblers nest at this site. The hiking path is level. This outing even produced a Black Bear in the past!

President's Message

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Are there bands of color, like many hawks, edges of color, think junco, or a terminal band like the kingbirds' or Cedar Waxwing? Tails also have both upper and undertail coverts at the base of the tail. These groups of feathers help to make a smooth transition from the long stiff tail feathers to the body.

And, now for a test of your bird anatomy skills. Any guesses as to the identity of the bird described in the first paragraph? The habitat clue may have given you enough to identify the bird as a Louisiana Waterthrush.

Solving the puzzle of identifying an unfamiliar bird is one of the most satisfying things about birding for me. Nailing down a positive identification of a "mystery" bird by putting together field marks makes me a very happy birder!

Sunday, June 23 – Annual Picnic at Harrison Hills Park:

Mark your calendar for the annual 3RBC bird walk and picnic. This year's picnic will be at Harrison Hills Park off Freeport Road between Natrona Heights and Freeport. We will meet leader Jim Valimont for the birding walk at 8:00 AM at the Rachel Carson parking lot near the pond. As you enter the park, bear right and proceed to the parking lot at the end of the road (not all the way down to the soccer field).

After the morning outing, we will have a pot-luck lunch at the Yakaon Shelter near the Environmental Learning Center. Please bring your own beverages and a dish that will serve 6-8 people to share. Disposable plates and cutlery will be provided, but please consider bringing your own re-usable environmentally friendly picnic plates. Every little bit helps!

Outings are free and open to the public. In the event of inclement weather, call the leader in advance to confirm whether the outing is on or canceled. Call the leader, too, with other questions about weather, driving, or trail conditions.

Sometimes events occur after the newsletter is printed, so "Like" the Three Rivers Birding Club on Facebook and watch our 3rbc.org website for late-breaking news of outings, cancellations, and other events that couldn't make our newsletter's deadline.

Pennsylvania Birders Pick Favorite Species of 2018

Members of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology were asked to pick their favorite birds of last year. Results were published in the *PSO Pileated*, the society's newsletter.

Sixteen species made the list. Based on rules for choosing first, second, and third place, the combined totals listed these favorites in order:

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch
Rock Wren
Varied Bunting
Townsend's Solitaire
Sandhill Crane
Gyr Falcon
Wood Stork
Roseate Spoonbill,
Black-throated Gray Warbler
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Barrow's Goldeneye
Gull-billed Tern
Golden Eagle
Lapland Longspur
Little Gull
Brant

Western Pennsylvania hosted three of those top four megararities, and many 3RBC members traveled to see them.

Would a 3RBC member like to coordinate such a contest for our members' favorite bird of 2019? If so, contact our newsletter Editor Paul Hess (phess@salsgiver.com).

Mute Swans Create Problems

The latest edition of *Pennsylvania Birds* magazine spotlights a problem with Mute Swans in Clarion County – a problem familiar in many areas of the eastern U.S. A pair of swans was introduced a few years ago in New Bethlehem because the birds are beautiful.

But they have now raised multiple broods of cygnets, and have become aggressive to kayakers in Redbank Creek and other people who come too close. Alan Buriak, the article's author, says plans were reportedly being made to remove them.

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CHANGING OF THE SEASONS – This photograph by Dave Brooke during the March 24 outing at Lake Arthur shows an interesting contrast. The grebe at left remains in full winter plumage. The one at right is molting into breeding plumage, shown by the golden crest on its head. You'll need to see it in color on our website to understand.

Outings Revisited

Woodcocks and Waterfowl Were First for Our Outings

Woodcock Walk –March 20: It was chilly and cloudy, but six people showed up. At the meeting spot we had Mallards, Canada Geese, Red-winged Blackbirds, American Robins, Northern Cardinals, Song Sparrows, and House Sparrows. A lone Gadwall was swimming with some Mallards.

On the river island, the Great Blue Heron rookery was very visible. Some herons were flying in and out, some were roosting, and some were on the nest.

At the woodcock field, spring peepers were “going to town” vocally as we got out of our vehicles. We headed to a spot where I could show the group not only one, not two, but three praying mantis egg cases.

It did not take long for the woodcocks’ “peenting” to start, and soon the action began. As one bird was peenting, another one was taking off or landing. This action continued as we were leaving almost 40 minutes later. It was a life bird for one person, and another good outing. **–by leader Tommy Byrnes**

Moraine State Park – March 24: A dozen or so birders met at the South Shore of Lake Arthur on a fairly cold and overcast day. There was little wind for most of the morning, so the conditions were good for long-distance viewing.

We saw a good variety of ducks throughout the morning. Bufflehead, Lesser Scaup, Mallard, Wood Duck, and Hooded Merganser were seen in the South Shore cove. Out on the open lake, we saw 2 Long-tailed Ducks, 3 Ring-necked Ducks, some Common Goldeneyes, Red-breasted Mergansers, Horned Grebes, and Common Loons. Killdeer were present in the beach parking lot and a single Bonaparte’s Gull was among the Ring-billed Gulls along the lake edge.

Continuing around the South Shore loop, and looking out toward the North Shore, we added rather distant Gadwall, a Redhead, Ruddy Ducks, and a Bald Eagle. More distant scaup

went unidentified, but I did not see any Greater among the birds that were close enough. The trip highlight for me was a Red-necked Grebe that had been present on previous days, and I relocated it from this vantage point. At the Bear Run boat launch, we added a Pied-billed Grebe, a Common Merganser, and 2 early Tree Swallows.

Some of us drove over to the waterfowl observation deck where we found the only Canvasback of the day and had more individuals and closer looks at some other species, particularly Redhead, Lesser Scaup, and Ring-necked Duck. No fewer than 4 Ospreys were seen simultaneously from here as well, with one perched on a nest on the tower. We ended the outing at the deck at 12:30.

Altogether I noted 46 species, which are on the following eBird checklists:

<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S54173041>

<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S54173394>

Thanks everyone for joining me! **–by leader Michael David**

Woodcock Walk – March 27: It was warmer and clearer than last week, and 16 people showed up. As I headed up to the meeting place, I spotted a Great Blue Heron on the far shoreline. It was hunting, and as I got out of my truck, I saw it snag a catfish. As the heron tried to arrange the fish headfirst to swallow it, the heron would drop the fish into a small puddle and stab at it. After a while, the heron was able to position the fish as it wanted and swallowed it. When the heron stretched its neck and head, I could see the bulge travel down its throat.

Participants began to arrive at the meeting place, so we headed up to see the herons and whatever else might be present. Besides what we saw in the previous week, we found a Carolina Wren, and the Gadwall was still present on the creek.

The heron was still hunting, and we saw it grab a perch-like fish that it had no problem swallowing. At the rookery, the herons were “doing their thing,” flying in and out, roosting on branches, and sitting in nests.

The Spring Peepers were still calling at the woodcock field. They never seem to cease.

As we headed to the woodcock spot, we already heard

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A DIFFERENT GREBE – A Red-necked Grebe on Michael David’s March 24 outing was too far out to photograph, but Dave Brooke found one very close on the Allegheny River at Tarentum in Allegheny County on March 11, 2019.

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Outings Revisited

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woodcocks “peenting,” and once we reached the viewing spot, a woodcock landed just a few yards away. The peenting and display flights were frequent.

I showed the group the praying mantis egg cases, and with a clear sky we could see Mars. It was another good outing. –**by leader Tommy Byrnes**

Pymatuning Area –March 31: Fourteen birders met at the Wildlife Center with great expectations for discovering waterfowl, raptors, and migratory songbirds. Everyone dressed in layers to deal with the cold temperatures that hovered near freezing. While waiting for late-comers to arrive, a flock of 12 Cedar Waxwings pin-balled through the trees along the parking lot. Six Brown-headed Cowbird males also appeared.

From the viewing area, adult and juvenile Bald Eagles seemed to be everywhere. Some were perched in trees while others flew from all directions over the marsh. It was difficult to total them accurately without double-counting individuals. We heard the rattling calls of Sandhill Cranes, but we couldn’t locate their whereabouts. On the water we enjoyed our first looks at a Common Loon, Horned Grebes, and Bufflehead.

As we continued our walk along the path back to the parking lot, bird activity began to pick up in the shrubs and trees. An Eastern Phoebe flitted about in search of insects. A female Eastern Bluebird was admired briefly as it sat on a low branch. Other birds were a White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers, a Song Sparrow, and the ubiquitous Red-winged Blackbirds.

Gorgeously colored waterfowl, the males in their breeding finery, provided us with wonderful close-up views at the Fish Hatchery of Northern Shovelers, Gadwall, Lesser Scaup, Hooded and Common Mergansers, Ring-necked Ducks, Buffleheads, and two Pied-billed Grebes. Two Herring Gulls were taking turns pecking at a half-eaten catfish – gross to watch for sure, but it was interesting behavior. Three Bald Eagles sat quietly in a tree seemingly content to watch the ducks swimming below, while Tree Swallows coursed over the water in their swirling style of flight in search of insects.

It was quiet at the Spillway. We found a Bonaparte’s Gull flying among a few Ring-billed Gulls. We briefly followed the flight of four Bald Eagles as they circled above the tree line. A group of Canada Geese seemed to be upset, as several were squawking and hissing loudly at one another. Two ganders charged each other and locked their bills like a tug-of-war. Eventually the combatants backed off and swam away from each other. We tracked a pair of Common Loons with scopes as they fished. It was amazing how long they stayed underwater. A raft of Ruddy Ducks was also discovered, resting and floating together like it was just another day at the beach.

As we headed to the Hartstown pond, three American Kestrels were discovered perching on power lines along the highway. A pair of Killdeer gave way for our cars as we pulled into the parking lot. Eight Sandhill Cranes provided excitement as they walked slowly along a corn row. We also had our first sightings of Redheads and Green-winged Teal as they mingled with Hooded Mergansers, Gadwalls, Ring-necked Ducks, and Mallards.

A driver pulled into the parking lot and told us he had just seen a Red-necked Grebe on the Ohio side of the causeway. We quickly jumped into our cars and made our way there. A blustery wind churned up the water and made viewing difficult. We found only Horned Grebes. At that point we decided to warm up and dine

at Scooters by the Lake just a minute’s drive away.

Our first destination after lunch was the old Tuttle Campground to search for Red-headed Woodpeckers. We instantly found two them as they flew around the marsh and landed briefly on snags. They put on a good show and allowed us to admire their beauty and observe their behavior. A Red-tailed Hawk provided an additional thrill as it flew through the marsh.

At the small pond on Swamp Road, better known as the Miller Pond, we had good looks at Northern Shovelers, Gadwalls, Hooded Mergansers, and four Bald Eagles that soared over the surrounding trees. When a male Northern Harrier arrived on the scene, things really got interesting. As the raptor approached low over the pond, it flushed flocks of eight Wilson’s Snipe and 14 Greater Yellowlegs that had been hidden from our view by the pond’s vegetation. The ducks also took off to escape. Luckily for us, the snipe and yellowlegs hid in the vegetation along the shoreline closer to our position, providing us with good viewing. The harrier did not seem to be successful in catching any prey.

From the Firemen’s Beach parking lot at Conneaut Lake, we had our first looks at Red-breasted Mergansers and more good views of Buffleheads, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Ducks, Common Loons, and Hooded Mergansers. While observing a pair of flying Bald Eagles, we thought about how common it has become to view these majestic birds and know they are thriving in the state. Many Tree Swallows were whirling around. How were they finding food in such cold weather?

Moving on to Geneva Marsh, the wind suddenly picked up and snowflakes blew into our faces. Looking through scopes and binoculars was fruitless, so we headed to Custards, our last stop.

Our first bird there was a flyover Bald Eagle, and soon we heard a pair of Sandhill Cranes calling as they passed over the marsh. Ring-necked Ducks were in large numbers. American Wigeons were soon spotted, but we really hoped to see Long-tailed Ducks that birders had discovered earlier. As luck would have it, a pair was discovered right in front of us. Getting everyone to see these ducks wasn’t easy, as they kept diving quickly and changing their location slightly after returning to the surface.

A sudden snow squall swept over the marsh and quickly put an end to the outing. But as one birder once told me, “As long as I am seeing birds, I don’t think about the weather.” With 51 species totaled for the day, they provided us with plenty of smiling faces and warming thoughts. –**by leader Bob VanNewkirk**

Be Careful Identifying Cackling Geese

The small Cackling Goose, now classified as a species separate from Canada Goose, shows up regularly in eastern Pennsylvania during the nonbreeding season. For some reason, it visits western Pennsylvania much less often, and a careful look is needed to make sure you are not seeing a small “Lesser” subspecies of the Canada Goose.

David Sibley offers advice about how to distinguish the two on his Sibley Guides website: tinyurl.com/Small-Goose-ID. In a related post linked from the website, he emphasizes the size of the bill as a key to the correct identification.

Observations

Cowbird Parasitism: An Effective Way to Nest

By Tom Moeller

The Brown-headed Cowbird is one migratory bird that birders have ambivalent feelings about because it is an obligate brood parasite. Its early evolution as a brood parasite may have originated because an advantage spread after an unknown South American blackbird ancestor began to lay its eggs in the nest of another of its kind. The bird improved reproductive success by not having to incubate and raise its own offspring.

This adaptation expanded to include four other closely related cowbird species with similar breeding cycles, nesting times, and diet as their ancestral bird, probably in South America. Some of these species gradually spread northward through Central America, and the Brown-headed advanced farthest into much of North America.

Most of the parasitic birds favored grasslands, although some parasitized nests in tropical forests. The Brown-headed Cowbird was known as a “Buffalo Bird” through its association with the bison of our grasslands. That association stemmed from the easy availability of food (insects and seeds) stirred up by the buffaloes’ hooves when grazing. Cowbirds also congregated around cattle herds for the same reason, thus the name “cowbird.”

How does the female cowbird get her eggs into the nests of others? Her nest-building skills have been replaced by observation skills mixed with cunning. The female has her own nesting territory – an area of host nests into which she will deposit her eggs, up to five in a cycle. She is prolific, producing up to 40 eggs in a season! She has three strategies to find target nests: 1) perch at the tops of trees to observe possible surrogate parents, 2) skulk about areas where nest builders are active, or 3) fly into a bushy area noisily and flap about to scare up birds on their nests.

Once a suitable foster parent is found, the cowbird will quietly watch her target(s) and synchronize her ovulation cycle to that of her intended victim. Then she will visit a group of males that congregate in one area (much like a “lek”) and choose a mate. Male cowbirds often mate with several females. As the host nest is built and the first eggs are laid, the cowbird makes ready. Her own egg has formed inside her, developing and incubating inside her body; thereby getting a head start on the surrogate’s eggs, which are not incubated until the entire clutch is laid.

The female cowbird will first move into an unguarded nest, pierce, and remove to eat one of the host eggs. The next morning, the cowbird will slip into the nest again and lay her developing egg to replace the one she removed. This procedure averages about 20 seconds to accomplish. If female cowbirds’ nesting territories overlap, more than one egg can be deposited in one host’s nest. The foster mother completes her normal clutch size, which now includes the cowbird egg(s), and begins incubation.

With its “head start,” the cowbird egg develops more quickly than the host eggs. Being slightly larger, it receives more heat during incubation than the other eggs, also furthering quicker development. The cowbird egg will hatch a day or two earlier than the surrogate’s eggs, and the hatchling will double its weight in each of its first two days of life. It has a loud, persistent call for food, which the foster parents cannot ignore. Its wide mouth often is fed before the others.

The cowbird hatchling will leave the nest earlier than the others, but it will still demand food from its hosts or even beg from



THE WORK OF A NEST PARASITE – This a Brown-headed Cowbird’s egg in an Eastern Phoebe’s nest. When the cowbird hatches it will out-compete the phoebe’s young for food and survival. (photograph from Wikimedia Common, licensed at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/legalcode>)

other birds. However, with all these advantages, the success rate of cowbird hatchings is small – only two or three out of the 40 eggs laid by a cowbird will lay reach maturity.

Choosing the correct host is one key to success. The cowbird young are altricial, covered only with down and helpless, and must be fed insects for days or weeks by their parents. The young of precocial species, such as shorebirds, quickly leave the nest after hatching – not good candidates for cowbirds.

The cowbird egg is white with brown patterns, similar to Yellow Warbler and Song Sparrow eggs only larger. Most birds do not recognize their own eggs. Once having laid eggs, there is a hormonally driven instinct to brood regardless of what is in the nest.

Some of the most frequently parasitized nests are those of Veery, Wood Thrush, Red-eyed and Warbling Vireos, Ovenbird, Red-winged Blackbird, Indigo Bunting, Eastern Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, and Song Sparrow. The Song Sparrow is most often parasitized by cowbirds..

Robins, catbirds, and wrens do recognize their own eggs and will dispose of cowbird eggs. Cardinals will abandon a nest with a cowbird egg. Small birds such as redstarts, Yellow Warblers, and Red-eyed Vireos rarely are successful in raising a cowbird baby along with their own young. Soon this large hatchling fills the small nest, denying the host’s young food from the parents and physically crowding them out, leaving only the cowbird to raise. Yellow Warblers and Eastern Phoebes have learned to “floor over” nests that have cowbird eggs because these birds are too small to remove the offending egg. They build a new nest on top of the old one, covering their earlier eggs too.

In the nest, a cowbird hatchling is not aggressive toward its fellow nestlings, unlike the Common Cuckoo in Europe. That cuckoo hatchling will push out unhatched eggs and other nestlings from a nest to be the sole occupant. Brown-headed Cowbird nest mates can be successfully raised by their parents along with the cowbird. However, the cowbird egg has taken the place of one of the host eggs. The female cowbird has not lost sight of her offspring. She still has her territory to patrol, and if her egg is missing, she will wreck the whole nest. Once the hatchling appears, she will disappear from its life.

How does the juvenile cowbird “learn” to be a cowbird? Its

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Observations

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deep instinctive behavior prevents it from imprinting on its hosts. It does not learn the host's songs or calls. The surrogate is just there to provide the nestling with food until it can leave the nest. The juvenile cowbird will fledge before its foster siblings and go off on its own soon afterwards. The juvenile may then flock with House Sparrows, later with blackbirds, until it finally joins up with other cowbirds.

The Bronzed Cowbird found in the Southwest is larger than the Brown-headed Cowbird. The Bronzed Cowbird has distinct red eyes. It was once separated into two species, the Bronzed and the Red-eyed, but now it is just the Bronzed. It is a brood parasite like the Brown-headed Cowbird. A rare treat I had was photographing a Bronzed and a Brown-headed Cowbird together at a feeder in Madera Canyon in Arizona.

Our two cowbirds are federally protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Their parasitism does threaten certain birds, including the endangered Kirtland's Warbler. Steps have been taken to protect that warbler by erecting cowbird traps in the warbler's breeding area. One may not like the cowbird's way of life, but the cowbird's unique life cycle has evolved over a long time. We can only accept it.

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See the 3RBC website for Tom's photo gallery depicting some of these least favorite - yet fascinating - birds



MEMORABLE PROGRAM – Birder, guitarist, and songster Bill Thompson III entertained us marvelously with his 2008 program for our club. (photograph by Dallas DiLeo)

We Lost a Beloved Birder, Editor -- and Entertainer

"Mamas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowbirds."

Three Rivers Birding Club members at our meeting on October 1, 2008, will never forget that song. The composer and singer was Bill Thompson III, co-publisher and editor of *Bird Watcher's Digest*, who died on March 25, 2019, of pancreatic cancer.

Pat and Sherron Lynch, our Co-secretaries, described his comical, guitar-strumming program in the meeting minutes:

"Bill's highly entertaining talk, 'The Perils and Pitfalls of Birding,' consisted mainly of funny stories about things that happened to him or to his friends while birding. One hilarious story concerned his supposed ability to identify a bird by the taste of the bird dropping on his shirt.

"Another story told how birding can lead one to unfamiliar places, including sensitive areas guarded by zealous security forces; one such encounter was scary for Bill but became comical in the retelling. Bill's father played a practical joke with his very special and expensive binoculars; you'll want Bill to tell you that story, too. We don't want to list all of his funny stories here; it might lessen their impact on future audience members.

"Bill did praise British birders for their abilities and for not overdoing pishing. He then conducted us in a group pish.

"He acknowledged the iPod as being a great birding tool and urged people to use it in moderation. Often the bird will quickly respond to the call and perhaps appear next to the caller's foot.

"Bill then listed a liturgy of physical ailments for birders ranging from warbler neck to snakebites. Our speaker ended his talk by leading us in singing 'Mamas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowbirds.' We firmly believe that Bill established a record for the most and loudest laughing of a 3RBC audience during a presentation."

Bill's wife, author and artist Julie Zickefoose, has spoken twice to 3RBC, and we will see her again at our June meeting.

The Peregrine

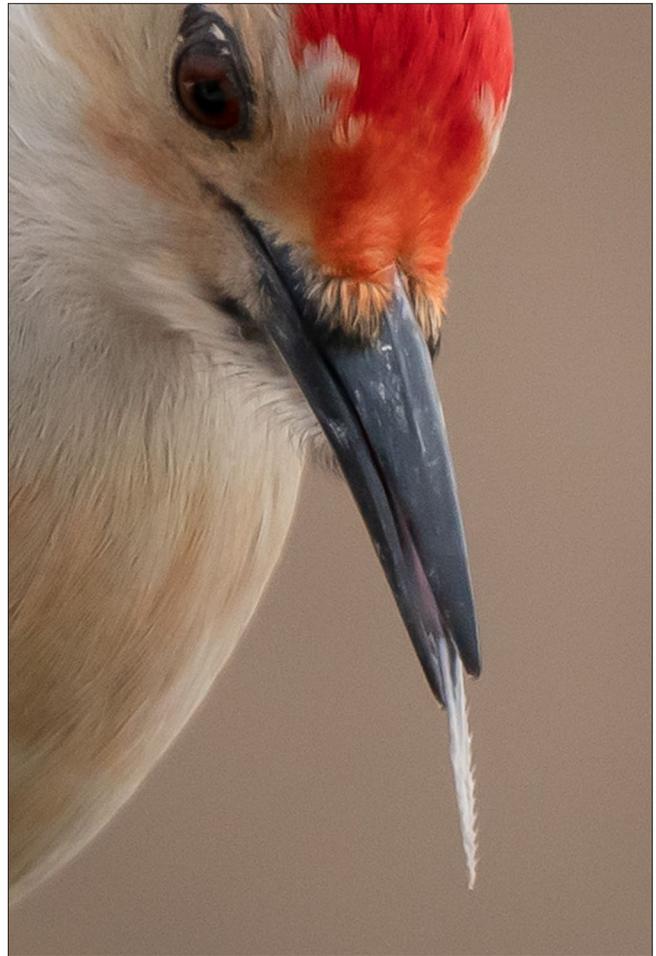


Here's How a Woodpecker Feeds

It is intuitive to think that a woodpecker's long bill is the key to its feeding success. But that's not the whole story. The long, thin, white projection from the Red-bellied Woodpecker's bill above is its long tongue. That's the key, but there's more.

The woodpecker's tongue is adapted with tiny barbs to pull larvae out of crevices in bark. We seldom see the tongue because it is out of sight in the crevice.

Cris Hamilton's photo shows the tongue, and when enlarged, it shows the serrated barbs – although you need to look very closely to see the serrations. They project slightly backward. So, the tongue is not only a spear; it drags the prey out like a rake.



Have a Hard Time Finding a Grouse? You're Not Alone



RARE EXPERIENCE – Geoff Malosh's encounter with this Ruffed Grouse in Fayette County will become less and less likely in Pennsylvania if the species continues its severe population decline. Geoff photographed it in May 2016.

Christmas Bird Counts and Breeding Bird Surveys show a severe decline in Pennsylvania's State Bird the Ruffed Grouse.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission is studying the decline, and recent comments by Lisa Williams, the Commission's grouse biologist are depressing.

Reporting for triblive.com, Outdoors Writer Bob Frye learned from game managers in Pennsylvania and neighboring states that West Nile Virus may be an important culprit in the decline.

Williams said that, according to the Pennsylvania Departments of Environmental Protection and Health, 2018 was the worst ever for the mosquito-borne disease.

The steepest declines were in the state's southern tier, but West Nile was found on every state game land that was surveyed. The virus has also been suggested as a major factor in other states.

Habitat loss remains a major concern. Frye said that although the state is heavily wooded, too little of it is the young-forest stage grouse need. Data from hunters document where they shot grouse, so this habitat can be identified and protected. Further limiting of the grouse hunting season is being considered as well.

The Peregrine

Frank Izaguirre Is Named *Birding* Book Review Editor



Three Rivers Birding Club member Frank Izaguirre has been appointed Book Review Editor of the American Birding Association's *Birding* magazine, effective in June 2019. In connection with his graduate studies at West Virginia University, Frank recently completed a stint as the magazine's Editorial Intern. "When the book review editor position became available, Frank was the clear front-runner for the job," Editor Ted Floyd says.

The position was previously held by Rick Wright and the late Eric Salzman, both major figures in contemporary birding. So Frank has big shoes to fill. "But Frank is quickly establishing himself as an authority on the diverse textual traditions that inform birding today," Ted says, adding that he'll be excited to see how Frank handles the ongoing diversification of the ornithological literature in the "new media" age of apps, blogs, and podcasts.

Please tell Frank what you think about bird books and reviews at the present time. His ABA email is fizaguirre@aba.org.

Both he and Ted will be at Frick Park for a special 3RBC bird walk on Saturday, May 11. See page 1 for details.

Winter Moves into Spring

Common Mergansers: February 25, 2019, Duck Hollow on the Monongahela River in Pittsburgh. The female is at top, the male is below. Duck Hollow is a magnet for waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, and other water birds. (photographs by Tom Moeller)

Eastern Meadowlark: March 23, 2019, Worthington, in Armstrong County. This area is notable for various grassland bird species. (photograph by Steve Gosser).



Birding Southwest Florida: Where to Go and What to See

By Dave Brooke

Birding in Florida is almost too easy what with White Ibis feeding in your lawn, Little Blue Herons, Great Egrets, and Tri-colored Herons in roadside drainage ditches, and Palm and Yellow-rumped warblers in every tree.

My wife, Kathy, and I have visited the Fort Myers area a number of times over the past decade and have come to love Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, where you are sure to see Painted Buntings, and Six Mile Cypress Slough only 10 minutes from the Fort Myers airport.

Ding Darling on Sanibel and Celery Fields in Sarasota are also must-see birding destinations. Cape Coral is home to more than 3,000 Burrowing Owls, which can be seen from your car window as you drive through suburban streets.

But there are other spots not as well known (plus many I've not discovered) that I recommend to anyone spending time in the area.

Harns Marsh Preserve in suburban Fort Myers is known as a good place to find Snail and Swallow-tailed Kite, Limpkin, Tri-colored Heron, Purple and Common Gallinule, and many other wading birds and ducks. This is a 500+ acre storm water control facility with a five-mile walking trail along the dikes. I've not seen more than four cars parked there, so you feel like you have the place to yourself.

Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area (not Babcock Ranch) is perhaps my new favorite location. It is just off I-75 at Punta Gorda. This 70,000-acre wilderness is a managed slash pine flatwood preserve that hosts three species that require an open pine flatwood habitat: the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Bachman's Sparrow.

Managers use methods such as roller chopping and controlled burns to maintain an open mid-story, free of hardwood and invasive plants. For the Red-cockaded, they have installed artificial nest cavities which are identified by painted white rings around the base of the tree. Because this woodpecker requires a mature pine forest of longleaf/slash/loblolly so they can excavate the soft interior of live trees infected with "red heart fungus," human intervention was required to help restore a population that had plunged by 99%.

This habitat also supports a population of Northern Bobwhites (which are hunted here) as well as Snail Kites, Wood Storks, Short-tailed Hawks, Loggerhead Shrikes, Pine and Prairie Warblers, Chuck-will's-widows, King Rails, American and Least Bitterns, and many others. A look at eBird lists will frequently show totals of 45 to 55 species.

When you are ready to escape our northern winter, these wonderful natural areas are within an hour's drive from the Fort Myers area.

(The three photos are Dave's)



SNAIL KITE – Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area



REDDISH EGRET – Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge
(spreading its wings as a canopy to somehow attract prey)



PAINTED BUNTING – Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

Birds in the Three Rivers Area

Dec. 2018-Jan. 2019 Had Some Notable Winterers

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

The winter season was rather calm with only a brief period of frigid weather and no major snowfalls. The lack of an extended cold spell did not allow the local rivers or lakes to the north to completely freeze or remain frozen for an extended time. The result was a lack of rare gulls and waterfowl on our rivers. A minor invasion of Pine Siskins occurred in small numbers.

Five **Tundra Swans** flew over the Greenfield section of Pittsburgh 12/5 (KSJ). A flock was heard flying over Duck Hollow but not seen 1/30 (JE).

A white-morph **Snow Goose** was in Hampton Twp. 12/12-13 (DN). What was thought to be the same bird was relocated at Allegheny Cemetery in the Lawrenceville section of Pittsburgh 12/21 (LS) where it remained until at least 1/19 and many observers saw it. (Mike's photograph appeared in the March/April issue of *The Peregrine*.) It was also noted on the nearby Allegheny River 1/25 (JVas, OL, TH).

A **Gadwall** was in Findlay Twp. 12/15 (MV) and up to 3 were in Harmar Twp. from late December through January (v.o.). Seven **American Black Ducks** in Findlay Twp. 12/9 were the high count for the season (MV). A **Northern Pintail** was a nice find in Findlay Twp. 12/9-13 (MV). **Redheads** were seen at various locations 1/31: 1 at Cheswick (AP, SA), 5 at Six Mile Island (AP, SA), 1 at The Point, and 1 at Woods Run (AP, JHa). Five Canvasbacks were at Woods Run 1/31 (AP). Two **Ring-necked Ducks** were at Woods Run 1/31 (AP, m.ob.), and 7 **Scaup** were there in late January (LF, JF, AP) that could not be identified to species due to distant views. A **Red-breasted Merganser** was at Duck Hollow 1/1 (JHa). Single **Ruddy Ducks** were at Findlay Twp. 1/11 (JF, JP) and East Deer Recreational Park 1/21 (AH). Six **Horned Grebes** were at Duck Hollow 12/6 (RT).

A late **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** first discovered at a feeder in Coraopolis in November remained through 12/16 (MV). A flock of up to 25 late **Killdeer** were at South Park 12/31-1/5 (MJ, JP, m.ob.) – a high count for this time of year when only single birds are typically found lingering in the county.

Wintering **Turkey Vultures** have been noted here in recent years, and this year they were reported regularly from a number of locations and in high numbers for Allegheny County. Top counts included 36 in Jefferson Borough 12/22 (JHa) and 27 in Franklin Park 12/29 (OM). A light-morph **Rough-legged Hawk** was seen in Findlay Twp. 1/19 to at least 1/26 (MV, many observers). Two were there 1/22 (JP, JF).

Northern Saw-whet Owls were banded at Sewickley Heights Park in the fall with a total of 28 birds captured (BMu). Two **Short-eared Owls** were at Imperial 12/5 (JF) and a single bird was reported into early January (v.o.). Single **Barred Owls** were at Franklin Park 12/18 (OM) and Fox Chapel 12/29 (CBC).

Two **Merlins** were at Schenley Park 12/8 (KSJ) and remained through the reporting period. A late **Eastern Phoebe** was at Boyce-Mayview Park 12/13 (AN, FK).

Fish Crows were daily visitors in a Verona neighborhood during the entire reporting period (SK) – a new location for this local species.

The numbers of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** observed in the fall appeared to indicate that they would be widespread during the winter, but that turned out not to be the case. Only a few remained

at feeding stations through the season.

Winter Wrens were found during the CBC 12/29 in Fox Chapel, Kilbuck Twp., and North Park. **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** are not normally winter residents here so 1 in Harmar Twp. 12/29 (CBC) was unusual.

Single **Hermit Thrushes** were reported in Mount Lebanon 12/23 (DH) and at Beechwood Farms 1/23 (LC). A rare winter Gray Catbird was in Monroeville 1/13 (RH).

Purple Finches were found during the CBC at Fox Chapel (1) and Indiana Twp. (5); and 2 were at North Park during this reporting period. Pine Siskins visited feeders in small numbers; the highest count was 12 at North Park (v.o.).

Eastern Towhees are uncommon in winter, but a number were reported including 3 at Harrison Hills Park 12/13 (SG), and 4 in various locations during the CBC 12/29. **Field Sparrows** are uncommon in winter. Up to 2 were in Pine Twp. most of December (PL, SL), a great count of 8 were in Indiana Twp. 12/29 (CBC), 1 was at Frick Park 12/29 (CBC), 2 were in Jefferson Borough 12/15-1/6 (JHa), and 2 were at North Park 1/6 (AH). A **Swamp Sparrow** was found during the CBC in Fox Chapel 12/29 (BSh). Four **White-crowned Sparrows** were at Imperial 12/8 (TRh). The local wintering spot on Strauss Road in Findlay Twp. hosted this species again (m.ob.) with up to 8 on 1/1 (AP).

Unusual for December, 5 **Red-winged Blackbirds** were in Pine Twp. 12/25 (PL, SL).

Amazingly, 2 **Cape May Warblers** were reported this season. One visited a feeder in Upper St. Clair 11/2 and 12/4-8 (KM). It was photographed, confirming the identification. Another was photographed at a feeder in O'Hara Twp. 12/17-18 (fide BSh). The only **Yellow-rumped Warbler** report came from the Point in Pittsburgh 12/28 (eBird).

Observers: Sameer Apte, CBC (Pittsburgh Christmas Bird Count), Linda Croskey, John English, Leslie Ferree, John Flannigan, Steve Gosser, Rebecca Hart, Jim Hausman (JHa), Amy Henrici, Todd Hooe, Don Hopey, Matthew Juskowich, Fred Kachmarik, Scott Kinzey, Oliver Lindhiem, Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Karen Meley, Oscar Miller, Bob Mulvihill (BMu), Alyssa Nees, Dick Nugent, Joe Papp, Aidan Place, Tessa Rhinehart (TRh), Kate St. John, Brian Shema (BSh), Liz Spence, Ryan Tomazin, Mark Vass, John Vassallo (JVas), many observers (m.ob.), various observers (v.o.).



New Research for Piping Plovers

Historic nesting of Piping Plovers at Presque Isle has been reported several times recently in *The Peregrine*.

Now there is a new chapter. Mary Birdsong (that's her real name) is one of the leading researchers in the breeding season. She writes about her research during the nonbreeding season in the April 2019 issue of *Birding* magazine.

She studied plovers on their wintering ground in the Bahamas, and summed up her experience this way: "Having a front row seat for the nesting of endangered birds and censusing the same birds in winter are two of the biggest birding joys of my life"