



# The Peregrine

## Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

Vol. 18, No. 6, November/December 2019



*EXQUISITE PORTRAIT – A Virginia Rail posed for Dave Brooke on April 29, 2019, at Harrison Hills Park in Allegheny County.*

### Look Forward to Beautiful Photos

It's a beautiful tradition. Every December we marvel at the expertise and artistry of our club's fine photographers. This year's "slide slam," as we first named these shows in the pre-digital era, will be presented at our meeting on Wednesday, December 11. (**Note: this is the second Wednesday of the month, not our usual first Wednesday.**)

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.

Photographers must pre-register with Program Director Dave Brooke by Nov. 28. Contact him at [davbrooke@gmail.com](mailto:davbrooke@gmail.com) or by phone at 724-487-3586.

Here are the guidelines:

- The first 10 photographers to respond will be able to present their shows. Because of time limitations, only 10 can be accepted.
- Each photographer will be allowed up to 6 minutes of time. If fewer than 10 photographers pre-register, the presenters' times will be adjusted upward.
- Photos MUST be in Microsoft PowerPoint format on a thumb drive. No images may be stored or downloaded from the Cloud.

## Pittsburgh Christmas Bird Count Will Be Held on Dec. 28

### By Brian Shema, Pittsburgh CBC Compiler

Please consider participating in the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania's 2019 Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 28.

Besides the fun of counting birds and socializing with other birders, you will help significantly to monitor a shocking decline of North America's birds.

A recent paper in *Science* magazine titled "Decline of the North American Avifauna" spotlighted the importance of using various monitoring methods to track populations of our birds.

Results of the study estimate that nearly three billion birds have been lost on our continent since 1970. The evidence comes from various datasets analyzed by a team of ornithologists from Cornell University and other research centers. (See this paper and explanations at [birds.cornell.edu/home/bring-birds-back](http://birds.cornell.edu/home/bring-birds-back).)

Audubon's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is an important source of data to measure long-term changes in bird populations. The data paints a picture of birds' distribution and abundance, and it helps us to understand the urgency of bird conservation.

Success of the CBC in contributing to this immense historical database relies on people like you!

Participation in the CBC is free, and experience is not necessary. New birdwatchers can be teamed up with experienced birders. It's a learning opportunity!

Counting birds at feeders is also an important part of this count, so you don't even have to leave your home! Contact your nearest leader from the list below to get started.

Additionally, the Pittsburgh CBC dinner is scheduled for December 29 at 6:00 PM at Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve in Fox Chapel. Results of the Pittsburgh count will be tallied during

this event. Please bring a covered dish, soup, salad or dessert to serve at least 10 people.

To participate in the Pittsburgh Count, please contact one of the following area leaders:

**Fox Chapel** – Brian Shema, 412-963-6100;  
[bshema@aswp.org](mailto:bshema@aswp.org)

**Franklin Park** – Stacey Widenhofer, 412-741-7536;  
[stacey.fhnc@gmail.com](mailto:stacey.fhnc@gmail.com)

**Hampton Twp.** – Brady Porter, 412-337-7397;  
[porterb@duq.edu](mailto:porterb@duq.edu)

**Indiana** – Steve Gosser, 412-855-5220;  
[smgoss@verizon.net](mailto:smgoss@verizon.net)

**Kilbuck & Ohio** – Paul Brown, 412-963-1979;  
[pmbrown1944@gmail.com](mailto:pmbrown1944@gmail.com)

**North Park** – Meg Scanlon, 724-935-2170;  
[latodami@yahoo.com](mailto:latodami@yahoo.com)

**Oakmont & Harmar** – David Yeany, 814-221-4361;  
[dyeany@paconserve.org](mailto:dyeany@paconserve.org)

**O'Hara** – Steve Thomas, 412-782-4696;  
[thomassj22@verizon.net](mailto:thomassj22@verizon.net)

**Penn Hills & Verona** – Mike Smith, 412-526-8360;  
[skeetor72@yahoo.com](mailto:skeetor72@yahoo.com)

**Frick & Highland Parks** – Mark VanderVen, 425-273-1786;  
[nevrednav@gmail.com](mailto:nevrednav@gmail.com)

**Pittsburgh (rest of city)** – Mike Fialkovich, 412-731-3581;  
[mpfial@verizon.net](mailto:mpfial@verizon.net)

**Ross & McCandless** – Bob Machesney, 412-366-7869;  
[remach@aol.com](mailto:remach@aol.com)

**Shaler** – Joyce Hoffmann, 412-487-0921;  
[ibird@juno.com](mailto:ibird@juno.com)

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

## President's Message

### Dressing for Winter Birding

By Sheree Daugherty

There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing. Don't let bad weather keep you from birding. With some common sense and planning, winter birding can be comfortable, warm, and rewarding.

The right clothing for any weather condition can be the difference between an enjoyable day of birding or a miserable day of birding. Nothing ruins an outing more than being cold or wet. But cold and wet are often the conditions that provide the best birding. Bad weather and good birds seem to go together. Seeing great birds goes a long way to take your mind off of any discomfort. But, why suffer?

Layering is key. A day of birding often starts early and can last all day, and weather conditions can bounce around throughout the day. If the day warms up, you can always remove a layer. The opposite is true if the day cools down. Consider layering when buying clothing for birding. You may want to buy a larger size to accommodate the multiple layers underneath. A little baggier fit is better than too tight. Baggier clothes trap warm air and make it easier to move freely. Remember, you are not dressing for a night on the town!

Start with a non-cotton base layer, the layer next to your skin that wicks moisture away from skin surface. Wear a tee or tank that can be tucked into your bottom base layer to avoid a gap that invites a chill. Wear synthetics that dry quickly. Cotton clothing may be more comfortable, but is to be avoided in cold temperatures. Wet cotton will stay damp and make you feel colder.

Depending on the temperature and your level of activity, the number of mid-layers will vary. A quarter zip fleece or wool sweater is a versatile option. When zipped up, it acts as a neck scarf, and if you get too warm, unzip to vent heat. Lightweight down or synthetic fiber filled jackets and vests are compact and warm.

If you are doing a strenuous hike, x-country skiing or snowshoeing to a birding spot, it is important to take off a hat, gloves or unzip your shell when you start to perspire. Damp skin is chilled skin.

People have strong feelings about hats. Many feel that they just don't look good in a hat. So what! I'm skeptical of the old adage about losing some highly unlikely percentage of heat through your head, but a hat does keep you warm. For those who wear eyeglasses, a hat with a brim will keep snow or rain off of your lenses. And, please cover your ears. Those delicate things sticking out of your head are ripe for frostbite.

Mittens are warmer than gloves, but you lose the ability to use your fingers. A thin pair of liner gloves worn under a heavier outer glove or mitten can be helpful. Take off the outer mitten and use the dexterity of your liberated but still protected fingers to adjust a scope, zip a zipper or take notes. It's a good idea to throw extra gloves into your birding pack. Gloves have a tendency to get wet. Wet gloves are worse than useless.

No one likes to have cold feet. Waterproof boots are a must. Unless the snow is deep or you will be fording streams, over the ankle type hiking boots will suffice. For added protection in deep snow, gaiters are useful. When attached to your hiking boots, these waterproof sleeves keep snow off of your legs from the knee down. For wading through standing water or deeper snow, insulated knee-high "rubber" boots such as Muck Boots are great. Look for boots with a lot of tread to prevent slipping on ice and snow. Add thick

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Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter  
Published bimonthly:  
January, March, May, July, September, November

### Send articles and/or illustrations to:

Paul Hess, Editor  
[phess@salsgiver.com](mailto:phess@salsgiver.com)  
1412 Hawthorne St., Natrona Heights, PA 15065

### Send ideas or items for the website to:

Tom Moeller, Webmaster  
[thosjmoel@gmail.com](mailto:thosjmoel@gmail.com)

### Send questions and suggestions to:

Sheree Daugherty, President  
[shereedaugherty@gmail.com](mailto:shereedaugherty@gmail.com)  
522 Avery St., Pittsburgh, PA 15212

### Suggest or volunteer to lead outings to:

Steve Thomas, Outings Director  
[thomassj22@verizon.net](mailto:thomassj22@verizon.net)  
309 Center Ave., Aspinwall, PA 15215

### Report bird sightings to:

Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor  
[mpfial@verizon.net](mailto:mpfial@verizon.net)  
805 Beulah Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15235

### Membership: FREE Student-Youth, \$15 Individual, \$20 Family, \$50 Contributing, \$100 Sustaining

Send check to Three Rivers Birding Club  
c/o Thomas J. Moeller, Treasurer  
6357 Ebby St., Pittsburgh, PA 15217-3035  
[thosjmoel@gmail.com](mailto:thosjmoel@gmail.com)

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socks to the mix, and your feet will thank you.

For extreme cold or windy conditions, such as when staking out manure-covered Amish fields for Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs, a neoprene mask or balaclava can be a good addition.

To finish off the ensemble, make sure that you have a windproof shell on both top and bottom. It is useful to have an outer shell jacket with underarm zippers, "pit zips." Unzip to vent when you are climbing that hill, then zip them back up once you are not working so hard. Again, consider buying a slightly larger size so that you can wear several layers underneath.

Birders often overlook the value of wearing a pair of wind or rain pants. Even an inexpensive pair will work wonders to keep the chill off. "Breathable" fabrics such as Gore-Tex are waterproof but will also allow perspiration moisture to escape. Other less expensive fabrics can be the equivalent of wearing a big plastic bag. If your shell layer is made of a non-breathable fabric, make sure that it can be vented.

Birders have a different fashion sense. We tend to judge the merit of our clothing by function instead of fashion. I think of it as "geek chic" and I'll admit that I am often the geekiest!

See page 3 for Sheree's example of birders in their geeky winter garb on a very dark and frigid morning.

## Outings to Come

### We Will End the Year at Two Popular Lakes

By Steve Thomas, Outings Director

**Saturday, November 2 – Yellow Creek State Park:** This outing will be a joint outing of 3RBC and the Todd Bird Club. Meet Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493) at the park office at 8:00 AM.

The office is on Route 259 just off Route 422 east of Indiana. The park has diverse habitats and a large lake that attracts a wide variety of water birds and sometimes exciting rarities. Allow an hour and a half to drive from Pittsburgh.

**Saturday, November 9 – Moraine State Park:** Join Michael David again at Lake Arthur ([michaeldavid@gmail.com](mailto:michaeldavid@gmail.com)). Meet at 8:30 AM at the first parking lot on the right in the Day Use Area (South Shore). Coordinates are 40.941289, -80.092958. Waterfowl and late fall migrants make this outing a highlight of the season.

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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 on short notice. Watch the Three Rivers Birding Club on Facebook and our website for late-breaking news of outings, cancellations, and other events that couldn't make our newsletter's deadline.

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Meanwhile, a note to outing leaders: Please let other members know about your outing results. Write or ask a participant to write a short article and a complete list of species to *Peregrine* Editor Paul Hess ([phess@salsgiver.com](mailto:phess@salsgiver.com)) and to our Webmaster Tom Moeller ([thosjmoel@gmail.com](mailto:thosjmoel@gmail.com)).

As you will see at the end of this issue's Outings Revisited compilation, articles about several outings were not submitted. Other members like very much to know about all outings' results and experiences.

## More CBCs in Our Area and Elsewhere in PA

Other Christmas Bird Counts near Pittsburgh include:

**South Hills** – Nancy Page, 412-221-4795

**Buffalo Creek Valley (Butler County)** – George Reese, 724-353-9649

**Buffalo Creek (Washington County)** – Larry Helgerman, [bobolink1989@gmail.com](mailto:bobolink1989@gmail.com)

**Imperial** – Bob Mulvihill, 412-522-5729; [Robert.mulvihill@aviary.org](mailto:Robert.mulvihill@aviary.org)

**South Butler (Allegheny & Butler Counties)** – Chris Kubiak, 412-963-6100; [ckubiak@aswp.org](mailto:ckubiak@aswp.org)

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See the December PSO *Pileated* newsletter at [pabirds.org](http://pabirds.org), for a list of all CBCs and compilers' contacts in Pennsylvania. All of these compilers will welcome your participation, and many birders participate in more than one count each year.



*GOOD ADVICE* – These well-dressed birders were prepared for a frigid pre-dawn morning when they began their 2013 Christmas Bird Count at North Park. In her President's Message on page 2, Sheree Daugherty offers advice on how you, too, can stay warm enough to smile in such conditions. (photo by Donna Foyle)

## 3RBC at PSO: A Nice Turnout

Fifteen Three Rivers Birding Club members attended the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology's annual meeting in Lycoming County in September.

Most notably, Mike Fialkovich, 3RBC vice president, ended service as PSO president after two years of leadership.

Sherron Lynch again contributed one of her extraordinary annual cakes (*below*), this time depicting a Merlin on a Lycoming County map where the species has been confirmed nesting.

The main speaker was David Toews, who discussed the three-species hybrid that our member Lowell Burket discovered last year in Blair County.

Dr. Toews was honored by the American Ornithological Society this year with its Ned K. Johnson Early Investigation Award. The award recognized his advances in emerging technology used to analyze huge amounts of genetic data to study avian evolution and speciation.

He came to Penn State University in January 2019 as an assistant professor in the Biology Department, after receiving a Ph.D. from the University of British Columbia and a postdoctorate at Cornell University.



## Outings Revisited

### We Enjoyed the Peak of the Autumn Migration

**Sewickley Heights Park – August 23:** On an unseasonably cool morning in late August, Sheree Daugherty greeted birders as we arrived at Sewickley Heights Borough Park. We're not yet used to wearing long sleeves and light jackets! As we waited for late arrivals, we noted Red-bellied Woodpecker, Gray Catbird, Eastern Bluebirds, American Goldfinches, Eastern Towhee, and Northern Cardinal. A flock of Cedar Waxwings flew over, and an Eastern Wood-Pewee was calling from the woods. A Ruby-throated Hummingbird buzzed our group of 14 just before we started up the trail to the Butterfly Field.

In the meadow, we watched an Indigo Bunting sing at the top of a tree, and heard a Northern Flicker give his clear call. Walking along the trail in the meadow and listening to a Carolina Wren, we were startled to see two Common Nighthawks flying over. Fall migration has indeed started!

On Black Cherry Trail, we puzzled over a singing bird, until we realized that it was the alternate song of a Hooded Warbler. One of our most common nesters in the park, it also turned out to be our only warbler of the day. Most of us got a good look at a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, an early migrant.

Up at the Horse Fields, we scanned the fences and found an Eastern Phoebe and more bluebirds. At least 25 Barn Swallows were darting over the fields.

Turning back into the woods, we had a nice flurry of activity, with birds bouncing around in the treetops. Downy, Hairy, and Pileated Woodpecker were quickly added to our list. We had heard Red-eyed Vireo earlier, but now several people got a good visual on the bird. People called out Scarlet Tanager, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Baltimore Oriole. A mystery flycatcher remained an Empidonax (species?) because it never said a word to us!

Besides birds, we enjoyed looking at the many wildflowers in bloom, such as orange jewelweed, ironweed, cardinal flowers, Joe-pye weed, and coreopsis.

Unfortunately, Japanese stilt grass, once a rare invasive, now does all too well in the park. Virginia stick seed was just starting to develop the "sticks." In a couple of weeks, we will be picking it off our clothes! Back at the parking lot just before noon, we decided that it had been a perfect day for a bird walk with old and new friends. We had a total of 33 species. **—by participant Debbie Kalbfleisch**

**Sewickley Heights Park – September 12:** Seven birders met in the parking lot for a second joint fall outing with the Fern Hollow Nature Center. High temperatures with matching humidity did not diminish our expectations for finding early migratory species. While waiting for late-comers to arrive, we sighted a pair of Gray Catbirds, flyovers by several Blue Jays, a Chimney Swift, a small flock of Barn Swallows, and singing Hooded Warbler and Eastern Towhee.

Warbler activity was quickly evident as we birded the two reclaimed fields with sightings of two Black-throated Green Warblers, a Black-throated Blue Warbler, three Magnolia Warblers, and a Chestnut-sided Warbler. Scanning the trees that separate the two fields and those bordering the woods, produced a female Scarlet Tanager, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Northern Flickers, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, and an Eastern Wood-Pewee. A lone small tree in the field near where we stood gave us close looks at

a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, a Red-eyed Vireo, and a Red-bellied Woodpecker.

While walking along the Barberry Trail that parallels the pastures, we were surprised to see 44 Canada Geese foraging in the tall grass. We also discovered four Eastern Bluebirds perched separately on fence posts. In the next field we stopped briefly to admire the long-horned steers that are certainly eye-catching and photo-worthy.

Warbler activity picked up again as we intersected a spur trail leading to Waterthrush Way with sightings of a Black-throated Blue, a Bay-breasted, and two American Redstarts. One birder had a Ruby-throated Hummingbird suddenly buzz low over his head.

As we walked along Waterthrush Way, a bird suddenly popped onto the trail and appeared to be walking in a jerky motion while head-bobbing. It was an Ovenbird. Some birders thought it may have been a waterthrush. This was the first time many in the group had witnessed such behavior by this warbler. Eventually, the Ovenbird came into better light, and its identity was confirmed. A singing Hooded Warbler was heard but not sighted.

The last bird of note was a poor view of a Pileated Woodpecker spied through leaves. We were alerted to the bird's presence by its pounding on a dead tree trunk.

We concluded the outing by resting on a picnic table near the parking lot to review the bird list. Despite the heat and humidity, we netted 38 species including nine warbler species. **—by leader Bob VanNewkirk**

**Harrison Hills Park – September 21:** On a beautiful Saturday morning, 13 birders came out for fall migrants. Our first small flock of warblers was at the edge of the parking lot, where we found Magnolia and Black-throated Green Warblers among the Tufted Titmice, Red-eyed Vireos, and woodpeckers. A Hooded Warbler called but stayed out of sight.

Continuing to the pond, we heard an Eastern Phoebe, an Eastern Wood-Pewee, and a Warbling Vireo. A few of us got a quick look at a small sandpiper that flew silently out of the pond. A juvenile accipiter (probably a Sharp-shinned Hawk) perched high in a tree adjacent to the open meadow and attracted the attention of scolding Blue Jays.

Returning to the parking lot, we learned that Paul Hess had seen the day's only Scarlet Tanager and Brown Thrasher.

On the creekside trail, we encountered a large flock of American Robins. Among them was at least one Swainson's Thrush, and we heard a nearby Wood Thrush. Another flock of warblers accompanied a group of chickadees and titmice. Among them were Black-throated Green, Bay-breasted, Blackburnian, and Magnolia Warblers.

After an unproductive walk along the cliffside trail, we drove to the Environmental Learning Center. Although the lot was packed with the cars of participants in an Animal Friends event, we managed to find enough spaces to park and walked to the fields. We added several new species here including Red-tailed Hawk and Indigo Bunting. For the day, we spotted only five species of warbler, with 44 species overall. Still, it was a pleasant day with great company followed by a great lunch. **—by leader Jim Valimont**

**Pymatuning State Park – September 22:** Four birders met at the Wildlife Center expecting to find eagles, waders, and migratory passerines in the area's diverse habitats. We first spied several Chimney Swifts and Blue Jays overhead, plus a Northern Flicker, a Red-bellied Woodpecker, and a Gray Catbird.

Next we saw two juvenile Bald Eagles, each perched atop its

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*GORGEOUS FLYER* –Red-headed Woodpeckers are a regular highlight of Bob Van Newkirk's Pymatuning area outings, and Bob's outing on September 22, 2019, was no exception. It's not always possible to photograph one in flight, but outing participant Karthika Gopalakrishnan managed to do it nicely.

## Outings Revisited

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own tree. Two more juvenile eagles flew along the shore. Scanning the impoundment revealed scattered flocks of Canada Geese and Double-crested Cormorants resting on tree stumps. Mallards were everywhere.

The Linesville Fish Hatchery provided a Belted Kingfisher, three Great Egrets perched in a willow tree, three Great Blue Herons, and five Killdeer that flew overhead. Ring-billed Gulls lined the banks of the ponds.

At the Spillway we hoped to find a duck that wasn't a Mallard, or a gull that wasn't a Ring-billed. We didn't. On the lake we watched a juvenile Bald Eagle glide close by, and many Double-crested Cormorants and Ring-billed Gulls sat on the rocks. Two late-comers explained that they are new birders on their first trip to Pymatuning. Instead of binoculars, they had cameras.

Our group of six next explored the Tuttle Campground area to look for Red-headed Woodpeckers. Shortly we found them and watched them fly back and forth across the swampy inlet. Each time one would land, it seemed to be caching acorns. These were life birds for our camera-carrying pair. We counted six adults and two juveniles.

After lunch at Scooters by the Lake, we traveled to the Hartstown propagation pond hoping for Sandhill Cranes where they frequently foraged. Soon 15 came into view from behind a corn row and drew "oohs and aahs" and rapid-fire camera clicks. Two Turkey Vultures and an adult Bald Eagle flew over the trees.

Next we checked the ponds along Swamp Road, where we found a Greater Yellowlegs, three Sandhill Cranes, and a spectacular aerial show by a pair of adult Bald Eagles. The eagles coursed back and forth probably hunting, but their flights varied in elevations as they passed over the fields. What a show!

Our last stop at the Geneva marsh provided good looks at a Northern Harrier gliding over the cattails and many Red-winged Blackbirds flying around. We totaled 29 species. It was a wonderful day of pleasant weather, lots of smiles, some unforgettable surprise sightings, and I hope, lots of great photos. –by leader **Bob VanNewkirk**

**Frick Park – September 22 (Group 1):** Perspective is important in birding. Your physical position in relation to a bird's position can make or break an identification. In a larger sense,

where we stand on the planet also affects how we see things. That's why we travel to shake up our bird complacency. So I went to the outing at Frick Park looking forward to a beautiful autumn morning for migrants and reconnecting with some old friends.

Jack and Sue Solomon greeted the large group at the Nature Center, including 3RBC folks and Pitt Birding Club members. We went over the hill, based on reports of warbler sightings. Deciding that the group was too big to be effective, we split into two separate bird walks. I went off with the older crowd.

I live in Florida now, and I guess I have become more Floridian than I thought. On this visit to Pittsburgh, I was lost in things that the "locals" take for granted.

First, the participation of the Pitt birders was a fantastic surprise. Seeing the students join our group on a Saturday morning, choosing birding over a thousand other diversions, was thrilling. I was disappointed when we split up. I would have loved to learn how they got interested. I envied that they were starting their adventure so much younger than I did.

Western Pennsylvania has impossible blue skies in the fall, after the sun is withheld for so many days. Autumn is the reward. The smell of rotting, discarded leaves underfoot is terrific. I kicked piles of leaves whenever I came across them just to breathe in a forgotten sensation.

The color green in Florida is a bit monotonous at times. Here in Frick Park, the early stages of autumn yield a yellow sun-filtered glow to the understory as the leaves lose chlorophyll. And I miss the Pittsburgh hills. Plus, there were the birds. For me, the outing was a rousing success. –by participant **Joan Tague**

**Frick Park (Group 2) – September 22:** After the initial group split into "under 30" and "over 30" subgroups, Tessa Rhinehart and Aidan Place led the under-30 gathering, which included a mix of Three Rivers Birding Club, Pitt Birding Club, and others up to the meadow. The Clayton Trail was mostly quiet besides the occasional Blue Jay passing over and a small group of Carolina Chickadees. A few others such as White-breasted Nuthatch could be heard in the distance, and one birder caught sight of a Magnolia Warbler.

Farther down the trail, just as everyone was beginning to think it would turn out to be a quiet morning, we caught a wonderful view of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, two Scarlet Tanagers, and a White-breasted Nuthatch in a bare walnut tree. Two Red-bellied Woodpeckers were among the fray, chasing the sapsucker in a circle around the clearing. We watched this activity for a few minutes before moving into more dense woods where we heard a cacophony of Tufted Titmice.

Almost at the end of the loop, the group voted to decide whether to press on. Most continued following Tessa and Aidan to another spot up the trail. The heat was beginning to be oppressive by this late in the morning but we were rewarded with another wonderful hotspot of bird activity. Among more bare walnut trees, we saw yet another Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a Red-bellied Woodpecker, a Black-throated Green Warbler, a Magnolia Warbler, an American Redstart, and an Indigo Bunting. A Swainson's Thrush could be heard from somewhere in the undergrowth and we witnessed a Tufted Titmouse giving a call none of us had heard before. Despite interludes of quiet, it turned out to be a wonderful walk and was a great first experience for several in the group who had never been birding before. –by participant **Lauren Chronister**

**Moraine State Park North Shore – September 24:** A beautiful morning greeted us for our third club walk of the North

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*HIGHLIGHT AT MORaine* –Participants on Karyn Delaney’s outing at Moraine State Park on September 24, 2009, saw five Brown Thrashers including this one. The five were Karyn’s record number of Brown Thrashers for one morning in the park. (photo by Ronald P. Burkert)

## Outings Revisited

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Country Trail and Butterfly Trails. Among the 13 who attended, it was nice to see familiar faces and also three who had never walked the trails.

As we headed for the North Country Trail, a Red-Shouldered Hawk flew low across the road. The North Country Trail Association maintains the portion of the trail through Moraine State Park. It is well maintained and cared for by the association, and the section we walked has two benches for rest and views of the dam and lake.

As expected, our warblers came in waves in several different areas along the Trail. Our most common warblers were Magnolia and Black-throated Green, followed by Cape May, Palm, Hooded, Yellow-rumped, Black-and-white, and Bay-breasted. Single views of Tennessee, Nashville, Blackburnian, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Wilson’s, and Mourning added to our species list. While viewing the dam, we noticed a Spotted Sandpiper feeding on the edge. We also had our first-of-season views of several Swainson’s Thrushes, a Philadelphia Vireo, and a record number of five Brown Thrashers. We listed 45 species as we covered the two-mile loop.

After lunch at the picnic area, six of us walked the Butterfly Trails, which can be accessed behind the pavilion and are maintained by the Moraine Preservation Fund. I was thrilled to see that the large tree downed from storm damage had been removed and that the wetlands section of the trails is now accessible.

While we did not have large numbers of migrants on the trails, we did see a juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk fly down a trail in front of us. New warblers for the day were Black-throated Blue, Common Yellowthroat, and Northern Parula.

We listed 18 species during our one-hour walk. (Editor’s note: This is the largest total of warbler species reported for our outings this fall. Congratulations to Karyn and her participants.)

Thank you for all who attended and helped locate and identify our birds. I enjoyed walking the trails with you! –**by leader Karyn Delaney**

## Kirtland’s Warbler Success: It’s No Longer Endangered

Thanks to extensive recovery efforts, Kirtland’s Warbler populations have surged over the last 40 years. This resurgence led to the species’ removal from the U.S. endangered species list.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced the official delisting on October 8, 2019.

“The delisting of the Kirtland’s Warbler is cause for celebration and proof that the Endangered Species Act works,” said Shawn Graff, Vice President of American Bird Conservancy’s Great Lakes program. He noted that the warbler is still among the rarest, most range-restricted migratory songbirds in North America and that continued management efforts are imperative.

Kirtland’s was among the first species listed when the Endangered Species Act was enacted in 1967. At that time, it was found only in a few isolated areas of Michigan’s Lower Peninsula during the breeding season. During the 1970s and 1980s, the population totaled fewer than 200 singing males.

It continues to do well in that stronghold and has expanded its breeding range into Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, Wisconsin, and Canada. Kirtland’s now has more than 2,300 breeding pairs.

Saving the species from extinction in its restricted breeding habitat of young jack pine woodland has required an immense conservation effort including habitat protection and extermination of the nest-parasitic Brown-headed Cowbird.

The official de-listing rule states that threats are eliminated or reduced to the point that the species has recovered and no longer meets the definition of endangered or threatened under the ESA. The de-listing also includes recommendations for continuing conservation efforts to maintain the population.

See the American Bird Conservancy’s news release on the 3RBC website for commentary. If you want to see the USFWS’s formal scientific publication, it’s at [tinyurl.com/Kirtlands-rule](https://www.tinyurl.com/Kirtlands-rule). Be prepared for extreme details.



*CLASSIC SYMBOL* –This female Kirtland’s Warbler carrying nesting material represents perfectly the species’ recovery from near-extinction. Karyn Delaney photographed it at Kirtland’s traditional stronghold in Grayling, Michigan, on June 14, 2017.

# The Peregrine

## Observations

### Is It a Symphony of Warbles, Chirps, Croaks, and Clucks?

### Is It Attacking a Cat, a Dog, or You?

### Then It's a Mockingbird.

*TOUGH CUSTOMER* –Tom Moeller took this fine portrait in his Squirrel Hill backyard in March 2014.

#### By Tom Moeller

While in a large mall parking lot, I heard a Carolina Wren call. "Wait a minute! There are no shrubs here and sparsely separated trees. This is not wren habitat." Then I heard a more familiar phrase. A Northern Mockingbird had been singing a perfect rendition of the Carolina Wren but went on to its familiar own song of warbles, trills, and other lyrical notes. A real trickster.

Most everyone knows that the Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) is an expert mimic of the songs of other birds. It is one of the Mimidae family of birds including the seven thrasher species and the Gray Catbird in North America. Unlike any other bird except the Brown Thrasher, the mockingbird collects the songs of others all its life and reproduces them skillfully, weaving them into a long, complex yet melodious refrain. Why? Some theorize that it copies jays, robins, and cardinals to warn them to keep out of the mocker's territory, but that does not explain adding kingfisher rattles or hawk calls, among others, to his collection, birds that would not invade his territory.

A first-year male mockingbird may only sing a limited number of borrowed songs, while an older, experienced bird has a wide range of imitations in his repertoire. The birds collect many of these bird songs during the late winter when others begin to warble. Not only songs are collected, but noises heard, such as a siren, a saw, cricket chirps, frog croaks, or chicken clucks. The youngster is less likely to get a mate than the older singer. Female mockingbirds hear something in the songs – duration, singing quality, or quantity of phrases – that may indicate experience, ability to survive, or potential to defend a territory. Acceptance by a mate seems to drive the incessant collection of sounds for the mockingbird's inventory. The more phrases added, the more impressive a singer may be.

Of course, the mockingbird male's singing is first used to establish a territory in the spring. He will serenade from two or three high perches in his area. Singing starts low and intermittently and builds over time to loud and long tunes that can last all day. The birds may have up to 250 songs at their command. When a phrase



or borrowed call is ended in the song, there is a slight pause before beginning the next part. Each phrase is repeated three, four, up to six times, then a pause and a new tune is started. On and on, all day, starting before sunrise and continuing past sundown until a territory is secure. But territorial boundaries are made with physical confrontations too. Aggressive chasing of other males away, threats with tail pumping and harsh "tshaks," raised wings showing the white spots are all weapons used to establish a territory.

#### Next Steps: Mating, Pair Bonding, and Nesting

Physical displays to attract females include flying up from his high perch as he sings and looping back down to his spot, or flying about slowly exposing as much white on his wings and tail as he can. Once a female enters his domain, he will chase her about but not out of his territory. Naturally, he will sing to his intended, but once she accepts him, the singing will lessen.

Some mockingbirds have been heard singing well into the night. I heard one in Arizona long after sunset. These birds are usually bachelors with a territory but no mate. They are still trying to lure a female in, whether she is unattached or part of a pair. Maybe he has something in his night song that can attract a girl? After all, there are records of polyandrous females and polygynous males (having more than one mate) among mockingbirds.

Once a secure pair bond has been established, nest building and breeding will begin. Mockingbirds nest from three to ten feet off the ground in shrubs, hedges, or small trees. They prefer building in horticultural shrubs near structures because of the cleared ground near them. The male builds on several sites with heavier twigs, stems, string, rags, etc. The female will choose one she prefers and finish the inner cup with fine rootlets, mosses, and grasses. (For once, the male does the bulk of the nest building.) Sometimes the male will burst into song during this period, it is believed, to stimulate the nesting urge in the female. He still does sing on territory to other birds, but this may also be in part mate-guarding songs against those crooning bachelors.

Egg laying may start in February in the South or April in the North. The female lays one egg per day until she reaches a 3-5 egg total. Six eggs are rare. When all are laid, she incubates them exclusively for around two weeks. The eggs are elliptical, smooth, and glossy, colored pale blue to green-blue with red-brown splotches. The nestlings are altricial (lacking feathers, helpless, and needing care) with gray down and a yellow gape flange on their beaks. Nestlings open their eyes from three to five days after hatching. They will be fed by both parents, usually with insects or fruit. Fledging occurs in another two weeks. The fledglings are fed mainly by the male. During this period, the parents may start a second brood with a new nest. Two broods are common, while three are possible. The juveniles look much like their parents but with faint breast spotting. When old enough, the young mockingbirds disperse –

*continued on page 8*

# The Peregrine

## Observations

*continued from page 7*

some nearby, some miles away.

During the nesting period the aggressive behavior of the mockingbird intensifies. He and she become fearless in diving at other birds, cats, dogs, snakes, and humans whom they consider a threat. Calvin Simonds, in his book *Private Lives of Garden Birds*, describes a coordinated attack by a pair of mockingbirds on a cat that was sleeping in *their* territory. One bird landed in front of the cat, raised its wings threateningly, and danced from one foot to the other toward the cat face-on. Just as the cat was ready to strike, the second bird swooped down behind and pecked at it from behind. After a couple of these attacks, the cat decided to sleep elsewhere. I witnessed a male mockingbird attack a Red-tailed Hawk that was near his nest. (See “The Score: Mockingbird 1, Red-tail 0” on page 6 of the Vol. 7, No. 5 Sept/Oct 2008 edition of *The Peregrine*.) Mockingbirds have even been seen purposely driving other birds into window panes to cause injury or death.

### The Diet: Insects, to Berries, to Peanut Butter

Raising the wings by mockingbirds is mainly an aggressive behavior toward others. Yet, it has a secondary purpose – getting food. Mockingbirds haltingly raise their wings in the grass or other vegetation, exposing their white spots to scare up insects. It’s a ploy that often works. (See “Mockingbirds Show Us How to Scare Up a Meal” on page 8 of the Vol. 15, No. 5 Sept/Oct 2016 edition of *The Peregrine*.)

What do mockingbirds eat? Insects and fruits are their main diet. Mockingbirds usually feed close to or on the ground. Berries, grapes and raisins, figs, bananas, suet, cheese, and peanut butter are foods one can use in feeding stations for mockers. Holly berries, crab apples, and rose hips left on these plants may help them through the winter. They will not eat seeds or grains.

### Winter Brings New Territories

Mockingbirds and chickadees are two bird species that have a winter territory. The chickadees form a flock (with a definite “pecking order”) in a certain feeding area. The mocker singly defends the area around a food source, such as a tree with dried but edible fruits. It is much easier to claim a certain “larder” to defend than to forage for food daily. Males and females will set up their own individual territories in winter, which are smaller than nesting areas. These are proclaimed with song by both the males and the females. Once established, each defends the territory as vigorously as they do at nesting time. The main defenses are harsh “tshaks,” “chits,” and “chrrrs,” along with aggressive chasing.

Mockingbirds take on whole flocks of birds successfully. Just as a mocker confronted a Red-tailed Hawk near its nest, I have a photo of a mockingbird probably in its winter territory in December harassing a Rough-legged Hawk, whose wing span is almost four times wider than the mockingbird’s. One feisty bird!

Feeding stations help mockingbirds survive winter if appropriate food is supplied. Be careful, however, given the mocker’s penchant for winter territories, a feeding station may be usurped when a mockingbird chases other birds away from it.

Young males and others who have no territory in winter may band together in “gangs” to raid established food sources, with some being successful in obtaining food. The owners of such territories may also band together to drive the marauders away, protecting all their caches. This is probably the only time mockingbirds band together in flocks.



*WINTER FEAST* – In seasons when insects and other food are absent, Northern Mockingbirds rely on delicacies such as these rose hips for survival. Tom Moeller photographed this one during the North Park Christmas Bird Count on December 27, 2014.

### Range Expansion and Abundance

The gray and white mockingbird was originally a southern bird, but since the time of John James Audubon it has expanded its range up to Canada in the East and up to but not into the northern tier of states west of the Great Lakes. The main catalysts for this expansion were human clearing of the land, planting fruit-bearing shrubs and trees, and feeding the birds with scraps from the table. Bread, pie crusts, and cake left-overs were enjoyed by mockers too. Severe winters cause some mockingbirds to migrate south from the northernmost regions of their expansion, but others die from the cold. The Northern Mockingbird population has declined from 1966 to 2015 by 21% and is of slight conservation concern because it still is common and widespread.

Mockingbirds have even been introduced to Hawaii. In 1928 some birds were released on Oahu, and they have since been seen on all the major islands. We saw one on Kauai. Unfortunately, mockingbirds are known as nest predators on the islands.

### ...and Such Beauty and Enjoyment!

This lovely singer, who skillfully copies the songs of other birds and diverse sounds, then melodiously weaves them into extended, mesmerizing compositions, proves to be a bellicose defender of its nest and its winter hoard, fearing little from other birds, cats, even humans. Try to help them, if you dare, by putting out raisins, apple slices, or dried fruit so they can make it through the winter.

Don't miss Tom's photo gallery on the 3RBC website, which illustrates mockingbirds' remarkable behaviors.

You'll also find an extensive array of references Tom uses in developing this article.

## Arizona Doesn't Fail Us for a Montezuma Quail

By Jim Valimont

The Arizona birding tour with the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania and leader Brian Shema was meant to start on Friday, August 30, 2019, traveling from Pittsburgh to Tucson. However, a severe weather system over the Dallas area caused the cancellation of both of our flights. Fortunately, we were rescheduled for the following morning, flying through Chicago to reach Tucson by noon, allowing for a half day of birding.

The first place to go in southeast Arizona for birding is Madera Canyon. Soon, we were finding the specialties, like Elegant Trogon, Arizona Woodpecker, Western Wood-Pewee, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Hutton's Vireo, Bridled Titmouse, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Painted Redstart, and Hepatic Tanager.

At the feeders at Santa Rita Lodge, we got our first looks at the amazing hummingbirds, including the spectacular Rivoli's. It was also our first look at Mexican Jays, regular companions at many locations on this trip. Almost disappearing behind us was a Coatiundi, locally known as "Al." He is an old coati, with recognizable facial scars.

The next day, we drove to Box Canyon to seek the Five-striped Sparrows that bred there this year. Along the way, we ran into a familiar birder, Casey Weissburg, the same birder who took the pictures of the gray-backed subspecies of the Dark-eyed Junco that I spotted on Brian's Texas trip last November! She joined us in our search for the sparrow, and was the first to spot it. It was sitting on an agave branch not 50 feet from the road, preening after bathing. We all got great looks, and it was a life bird for almost every one of us. More great sightings here included Golden Eagle, Greater Roadrunner, Vermilion Flycatcher, Rock Wren, Cactus Wren, Phainopepla, and Botteri's and Cassin's Sparrows.

Back at Madera Canyon, we missed Montezuma Quail, though some got to see a brown blur as it burst into flight at Joan Schoff's feet. That evening, we returned to Madera Canyon to hear Whiskered Screech-Owl and Elf Owl. Thanks to Casey's directions, we found a small group of Pallid Bats and finished a memorable evening by getting great scope looks at both Jupiter and Saturn and their moons.

At the De Anza Trail near Tubac on Monday, we searched in vain for the Rose-throated Becards that had nested there. We had to "settle" for birds like Gray Hawk, Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, Gilded Flicker, Black Phoebe, Lucy's Warbler, Summer Tanager, and three kingbirds on one wire (Tropical, Cassin's, and Western).

At Patagonia Lake State Park, we saw our only Mexican Duck, Yellow-breasted Chat, Great-tailed Grackle, and Marsh Wren. Late afternoon found us at the Paton Center for Hummingbirds, now run and maintained by Tucson Audubon. The best bird here was Violet-crowned Hummingbird, but the gardens and meadow had a great variety of butterflies.

Tuesday, we skipped breakfast at the hotel to drive to Ramsay Canyon Preserve. We had a gourmet breakfast that none of us will ever forget at the Ramsay Canyon Bed and Breakfast. Here we relaxed and watched the Blue-throated Mountain-gems dominate the hummingbird feeders.

A grueling hike up Miller Canyon the next day in search of the Rufous-capped Warbler was unsuccessful, but we did find Steller's Jay, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Yellow-eyed Junco, Bronzed



*ARIZONA GOODIES – A birding tour of Arizona sponsored by the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania in September 2019 offered a long species list. It included the highlight, a Montezuma Quail (above) photographed by leader Brian Shema. Much more common out west, but a pleasure for eastern birders to see is this immature Anna's Hummingbird photographed by Mike Fialkovich.*



Cowbird, Townsend's Warbler, Hermit Warbler, and the spectacular Red-faced Warbler.

Next, at Cave Creek Canyon we found Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Hairy Woodpecker, Plumbeous Vireo, Canyon Wren, and Green-tailed Towhee. Before lunch at the Southwestern Research Station, we found the rare Berylline Hummingbird coming to the feeding stations. At East Turkey Creek Road, we found White-throated Swifts, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, Mexican Chickadee, and Grace's Warbler.

We were traveling back down the mountain when Brian stopped the lead van to watch a solitary bird cross the road. It was a Montezuma Quail! For nearly 10 minutes, this bird stopped traffic in both directions as it walked slowly into the grass beside the road. Finally, when too many people got too close, it recrossed the road and vanished into high grass.

We finished the trip the next day with a hike up a trail to find the White-eared Hummingbirds that had nested there this year. Sharp-eyed Brian spotted one of the fledglings. Everyone watched this bird until one of the parents came to feed minutes later. At a feeding station in Portal, we saw Gambel's Quail, Curve-billed Thrashers, and Black-throated Sparrows.

It was a great trip for me. I saw or heard 132 species, two of which were life birds (Five-striped Sparrow and Montezuma Quail). The birds were cooperative, and the scenery was fantastic. Southeastern Arizona remains an area that I never tire of exploring.

## An Oriole in Distress

By Dave Brooke

As I walked back from the upper meadow at Harrison Hills Park on the evening of May 14, I heard the excited chatter of many birds in the locust trees at the edge of the parking lot. When I got close enough to see them in my binoculars, I realized there were five Baltimore Orioles together in the upper reaches of those trees. Four were males and the fifth was either a female or first-summer bird.

I was puzzled by this behavior because some would fly out then back in repeatedly. When I was closer to the tree, I realized what was going on. The oriole's leg was tangled in string that was stretched over several branches. The bird was frantically pulling at the string. At least one of the male orioles tried to hover and peck at the string, but with little effect. All the while, the four males continued to squawk and fly in and out of the tree.

What to do? It was getting dark and the bird was 25 feet or more up in a tree that couldn't be climbed. I called my wife, Kathy, and asked her to bring my telescoping pruner with the hope I could cut a lower branch and get it down. Unfortunately my 14-foot trimmer didn't come close to reaching.

Out of options and out of time, we went home saddened that this bird would probably not make it through the night. The next morning I went back expecting the worst, but was surprised to see it still fighting to get free (with vocal support from the four males). Now there was hope.

The maintenance guys were cutting grass, so I asked Greg if they had a chainsaw pruner. They did, but it was out of commission and waiting for parts. He asked whether I wanted him to cut the tree down because that was the only way we would get to it.

He got his chainsaw and made a cut through the back of the six-inch trunk with the hope that it would fall slowly. Well, it came down a little harder than I had hoped, but the oriole never hit the ground. Its foot was tangled in a ball of plastic, fibrous string.



*FORTUNATE RESCUE – Dave Brooke photographed this Baltimore Oriole helplessly tangled in a tree at Harrison Hills Park in Allegheny County on May 19, 2019. You'll need to look carefully to see the white string confining it to a branch. Dave's article tells us how it was rescued.*

I held the bird while we broke the small twig it was attached to, because we couldn't get its foot out of what was now a ball of fibers. Then we placed it in a brown paper bag (part of my Birdsafe Pittsburgh kit that is always in my car).

I thanked the guys for helping the oriole. I then headed to Verona to get her to the bird rehab center hoping they could save it. The bird was very feisty in the bag the whole way there, so my hope is that the bleeding on its leg was a superficial wound and that it could be released. The Animal Rescue League Wildlife Center doesn't provide updates or outcomes, so we'll never know.

## In Memoriam: Dr. Anthony Bledsoe, Revered Biologist at Pitt

By Paul Hess

Any educator would appreciate such accolades as these:

\*\*\* "I attribute much of my scientific worldview, knowledge of fundamentals and first principles, and enthusiasm for biology to Tony Bledsoe. I am grateful for his mentorship during my years at Pitt, and I am certain he will be missed by many former students like me. –**Lukas Musher, founder of the Pitt Birding Club in 2008, now a PhD candidate in evolutionary biology and ornithology at the American Museum of Natural History.**

\*\*\* "I was immediately struck by his teaching style – such a passionate man! I always loved going to that class. When he was teaching, it was on a different level. His knowledge of the avian world was boundless, and it was clear that sharing that knowledge with interested young people meant as much to him as the birds." –**Matt Criteanu, an alumnus inspired to study endangered species including the Black-capped Vireo, Golden-cheeked Warbler, and Mexican Spotted Owl.**

\*\*\* "Many students who had taken his field course at the Pymatuning Laboratory of Ecology in Crawford County might have had little interest in birds but jumped at the chance to study ornithology with him simply to experience his teaching." –**Lauren Chronister, current president of the Pitt Birding Club.**

They are praising Dr. Anthony ("Tony") Bledsoe, an expert

in avian biology at the University of Pittsburgh, who died on September 14, 2019, at the lamentably young age of 62.

Few Three Rivers Birding Club members knew him or about his importance, but his meeting program for our club in 2006 taught us a lot about birds' vagrancy far from their normal range.

Tony's scientific expertise included pioneering genetic studies such as "Nuclear DNA evolution and phylogeny of the New World nine-primaried oscines." Those arcane laboratory investigations contributed notably to an understanding of avian evolution.

But Tony's influence on his students surely was his most valuable legacy. He inspired new generations of biologists who will be crucial guides to Earth's ecological future.

Those three testimonials above from students are only a tiny capsule of his respect. If Tony's name and achievements are unknown to you, learn more at the following resources:

- Kate St. John's essay in her "Outside My Window" blog <https://tinyurl.com/Bledsoe-by-Kate>. She includes a link to a four-minute video of one of his classroom lectures. I wish I could have been there in those days.
- *The Pitt University Times* remembrance posted at <https://www.utimes.pitt.edu/passings/biology-lecturer>.
- Tony's obituary at <https://tinyurl.com/Bledsoe-obituary>.

## Timothy J. Manka: Lively Educator, Naturalist, Ranger, and Adventurer

By Paul Hess

Most 3RBC members probably know Tim Manka as the fellow in the front row at many of our meetings who often offered us enthusiastic bits of his wide knowledge of natural history, his experiences as a park ranger and traveler.

Tim died on September 4, 2019, at age 73, and he leaves an extraordinary legacy of learning, teaching, and adventure. He was appropriately known as “Ranger Tim” for his long service at national parks.

Let’s start with botany. Bonnie Isaac is Co-Chair of Collections and Collection Manager in the Section of Botany at Carnegie Museum of Natural History. She is also president of the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvanian and says:

“Tim was an integral part of the Botanical Society, serving as its president from 1981 to 1983. He was an ever-present force at the society’s meetings – sometimes as a presenter, sometimes just as an observer, but always willing to share his knowledge on whatever subject was at hand. He was very generous with his time and resources. We could always count on Tim if the society or its members needed something. Tim’s presence at our meetings will certainly be missed. There will be an empty chair in the front row.”

The society’s website offers a special tribute, noting that Tim “was always ready and raring to share his passion for knowledge with natural history organizations.” He told members stories about worldwide travels for nature study.

Tim graduated from Clarion University with a degree in biology and a teaching certificate in earth and space science. He taught science at Shaler Area Middle School until retirement. Tim was active in many other organizations, including the Wissahickon Nature Club and Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh. He provided a generous donation in honor of his parents to the association to purchase a telescope for the Wagman Observatory.

For more than 45 years, he served the Boy Scouts of America, teaching botany, forestry, astronomy, and other topics for scouts’ merit badges. The Boy Scouts of America, acting through the National Court of Honor, awarded Tim the Silver Beaver Award for “distinguished service of exceptional character to youth.”

Tim was a long-time member and past president of the Wissahickon Nature Club. Speaking for the club, Dianne Machesney comments: “He will be remembered for his love of science and nature. His stories from past park ranger jobs, Boy Scouts, and years of teaching at Shaler added interest to our meetings. His absence at our meetings will be felt by all.”

Former Wissahickon officer Susanne Varley adds, “Tim spent his summers as a volunteer ranger for a variety of parks. He referred to himself as ‘Ranger Tim’ and always dressed the part. He never missed a meeting or outing and always had a story or an anecdote to share. His enthusiastic passion for nature and science was overwhelming and catchy.”

3RBC members Glenn and Mabel Matteson, who knew Tim for a long time, comment, “He loved his students at Shaler and did all kinds of extra things with and for them – for example, taking some to the annual ‘Welcome Back the Buzzards’ on March 15 in Hinckley, Ohio. He loved to spend his summers working as a ranger naturalist in the National Park system and was able to visit many different parks. He shared his experiences in programs for the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania (ASWP). We will miss him.”

Speaking for myself, I knew Tim for nearly 50 years, first when I edited the ASWP Bulletin and wrote summaries of bird sightings reported by ASWP members. I looked back through



“Ranger Tim” Manka: 1945–2019

issues in the 1970s and found many mentions of his sightings. Two stand out in particular:

\*\*\*In September 1971 he enjoyed a once-in-a-lifetime observation at Presque Isle State Park: a Northern Goshawk being mobbed by two Northern Harriers.

\*\*\*In 1974 when he was a ranger at Everglades National Park, among his life birds was a Bananaquit, a very rare visitor to Florida from the Caribbean. No matter what his responsibilities as a ranger were, he always kept a sharp eye on birds.

Jack Solomon, founding president of 3RBC, recalls walks Tim led in the 1970s and 1980s at ASWP’s annual Deer Valley Weekend, where Tim interpreted the boreal flora of Mt. Davis in Somerset County. In addition, Jack says, “He frequently appeared on bird walks I led at Frick Park, helpfully carrying a field guide to show novices picture of birds we were looking at.”

Accolades also have come from afar. The Glacier National Park Foundation saluted Tim for helping to develop the talents and the character of thousands of young men in the Boy Scouts, volunteered with many scientific organizations, and offered his time, skills, and knowledge as a naturalist.

Tim’s brother Dan notes Tim’s service as a ranger in many national parks. He was never assigned to Glacier, but Jeff Mow, the park’s superintendent, decreed that Tim will be an Honorary Ranger Naturalist for the park. Mow said, “Tim will have achieved his life’s goal, not in his lifetime, but in his death. Ranger Tim’s service with the National Park Service as a park naturalist throughout his career, from Everglades to Mt. Rainier, and from Cape Cod to the Grand Canyon, has influenced many lives.”

Dan adds, “Tim will make many Pittsburghers proud even in his death. They will see that it may never be too late to reach one’s goal. The lives of thousands of students and Boy Scouts of Southwestern Pennsylvania have been enriched by their beloved Ranger Tim in the past 58 years.”



# The Peregrine

## Birds in the Three Rivers Area

# June–July 2019 Brought Allegheny County's First Record of Whistling-Ducks

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

The summer report typically features breeding birds and few if any notable rarities. This report features a few surprises including a new Allegheny County record, a few rarities, and some late spring migrants of interest. It was another wet season with regular thunderstorms and heavy rain almost weekly.

A flock of 7 **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** appeared at North Park during stormy weather 7/19 (DP). A photograph was posted on the Friends of North Park Facebook page; however, nobody in our club was aware of the sighting until the following day when the birds were gone. This was a first county record.

Two **Common Mergansers** were on the Monongahela River at Duck Hollow 6/3 and 6/24 (LK). Two were also on the Ohio River at Brunots Island 7/25 (MJ).

The pair of **Virginia Rails** that appeared to settle in at Harrison Hills Park in May were last detected 6/27 (DN). As the cattails and other vegetation grew thicker, the birds were difficult to see, and they became quiet as the summer progressed. It remains unknown whether they produced young. The **Common Gallinule** discovered at Chapel Harbor in May lingered until 6/9 (TH).

Amazingly, along with the whistling-ducks were 3 **American Avocets**. They were also photographed, posted on the same Facebook page, and were gone the following day. This was the eighth county record. A late **Lesser Yellowlegs** was at Imperial 6/15 (JHa). A **Solitary Sandpiper** was at North Park 7/26 and 5 were at Imperial 7/28 (MV). Another county rarity, a late migrant **Ruddy Turnstone** was photographed along the shore of the Ohio River in downtown Pittsburgh 6/2 (MB). This provided the seventh



*BREEDING SURPRISE – Purple Finches had never been confirmed breeding in northeastern Allegheny County, but Dave Brooke saw and photographed the first record – a juvenile in his Natrona Heights yard on July 9, 2019. An adult pair had been present in the yard into mid-June, so he was watching closely for results.*

county record and the first since 2009. The 2009 occurrence was at this same general location, where the shore of the river is paved and has a heavily used walking and biking trail in the city. A **Short-billed Dowitcher** was at Imperial 7/13-14 (MV and others).

A visit to the **Herring Gull** colony at the Highland Park Bridge on the Allegheny River 6/23 yielded 47 birds including 11 chicks (MV). After only a single **Caspian Tern** in April and May when they normally migrate through, early June brought 2 late migrants: 1 at Dashields Dam 6/1 (GM) and 1 photographed at Duck Hollow 6/16 (JPu).

Unusual in June, a **Great Egret** was at Boyce-Mayview Park 6/16 (ST). **Northern Harrier** continues to hang on at Imperial, where 1 was seen 7/14 (FI, LK). With continued development at the site, their future is tenuous. A **Barred Owl** was heard at Boyce-Mayview Park 6/13 (ST).

Single **Red-headed Woodpeckers** visited backyards in Pleasant Hills 6/1 (HF) and Pine Twp. 7/16 (PL, SL). This rarity is always a nice find in the county.

A **Bank Swallow** colony was discovered in a bank along the Allegheny River at Chapel Harbor in O'Hara Twp. 6/7 (TH, AH). The colony was enjoyed by many birders in June with a high count of 12 birds. The only other colony in recent years was in a quarry in the western part of the county. Three birds were noted at Dashields Dam 6/16 and 2 on 7/29 (MV). This is near the quarry, so that colony may still be active. Unusual for summer, 3 **Cliff Swallows** were observed with a Barn Swallow colony at Imperial 7/10 (JF, JP). Cliff Swallow is a rare breeder in the county and recently the only breeding site known was at North Park, so these birds bear watching.

A **Brown Thrasher** was discovered at Homewood Cemetery in the east end of Pittsburgh in mid-June through the end of the month (MVV). This species is not known to nest at the cemetery. Only one bird was seen, and breeding was never confirmed.

**Purple Finch** is a resident in Pine Twp. in the northern part of the county and is not known to breed at other sites. That changed this year with confirmed breeding at Natrona Heights 6/16 where a juvenile visited a feeder with its parents (DB). This species has been noted in nearby Harrison Hills Park during the summer in past years but was never confirmed breeding. A single bird visited a feeder in Hampton Twp. 6/2 (DN).

**Grasshopper, Savannah, and Henslow's Sparrows** were still in the Imperial area this summer even as the habitat dwindles.

**Worm-eating Warblers** were present during the season at the usual location in Harrison Hills Park (v.o.), as well as **Black-and-white Warblers** (v.o.). Both breed in only a few locations in the county. **Cerulean Warblers** can still be found at Sewickley Heights Park; 1 was there 6/18 (PB). A somewhat late **Blackpoll Warbler** was at a park in Monroeville 6/2 (SM). Up to 3 **Prairie Warblers** were found at Imperial during the season (v.o.).

**Correction:** The Vesper Sparrows listed in the February-March report from Pine Township were an error on my part.

*Observers: Dave Brooke, Montgomery Brown, Paul Brown, Holly Ferkett, John Flannigan, Jim Hausman (JHa), Amy Henrici, Todd Hooe, Frank Izaguirre, Matthew Juskowich, Lisa Kauffman, Pat Lynch, Sherron Lynch, Geoff Malosh, Scott Kinzey, Steve Manns, Dick Nugent, Joe Papp, David Prentice, James Pumford (JPu), Shannon Thompson, Mark VanderVen (MVV), Mark Vass, v.o. (various observers).*