



# The Peregrine

## Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

Vol. 18, No. 5, September/October 2019

### We'll Watch an "Ocean in the Sky" at Our Meeting on October 2

Brian M. Wargo will present "Hawkwatching: An Ocean in the Sky" at the next meeting of the Three Rivers Birding Club on Wednesday, October 2. He is the author of *Bird! An Exploration of Hawkwatching*, which explains the lure, culture, and birders who are obsessed with staring at the sky (as he is doing at right).

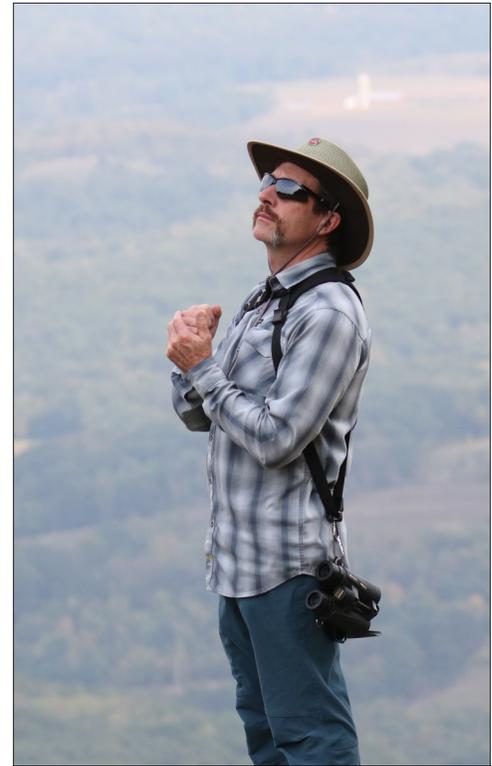
His presentation will be in the Phipps Garden Center, 1059 Shady Avenue in Shadyside. Doors open at 6:30 PM for socializing, a business meeting begins at 7:30, and the program starts at 8:00.

A director on the board of the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA), he chairs the Education and Conservation Committee as well as the Data Committee. He also is the Eastern Flyway editor for *Hawk Migration Studies*, which entails analyzing data from 88 hawk sites and compiling a state of the raptors report for both the spring and fall migration.

Brian also created the Junior Hawkwatcher Program, which is currently available to all hawkwatches through HMANA, in an effort to stimulate a love and understanding of nature in young people. For his efforts, HMANA awarded him the Counting for the Future Award at the association's 2018 conference.

He counts hawks every Saturday at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch and is president of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society. When he is not outdoors, he is a physics teacher and was just awarded the Inspiring Educator of the Year and was a Finalist for the Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year.

Brian earned his physics and biology teaching certificates from West Virginia University, his master's degree in physics at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and his Ph.D. at the University of Pittsburgh.



*COCK-OF-THE-ROCK* – A spectacular bird Sheree Daugherty saw in the Andes was this one with bright orange, pale blue, and black plumage. Sheree's illustration is painted in acrylic on Masonite. See it and the two on page 4 in color in our online edition of *The Peregrine*. You'll be glad you did.

#### President's Message

### Birding Ecuador (Part 2): a High Andes Adventure

**By Sheree Daugherty**

As our South American adventure continued, our small group of intrepid birders climbed ever higher through the Ecuadoran clouds in search of the region's iconic bird, the Andean Condor. The big birds were surprisingly easy to find at the Artisan Ecological Reserve. We looked for the "white wash" of their copious droppings on the rocky cliff faces where they roosted. We found both an adult and a juvenile. While we were admiring the majestic condors, we were buzzed by a Giant Hummingbird.

Climbing higher into the Andes, we saw vast fields of lima beans and potatoes being hand-hoed by groups of colorfully dressed Ecuadorians. A brief stop on a bridge gave us a cleverly camouflaged Band-winged Nightjar. The landscape at 12,000+ feet was not what I had expected. Rolling plains of grass and low vegetation as far as the eye could see. In the distance, snow

*continued on page 2*

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

# The Peregrine

## President's Message

*continued from page 1*

covered mountains and the volcano Antisana stood at 18,900 feet. Almost evenly spaced on the ground were Carunculated Caracaras and the very rare and declining Black-faced Ibis. Bright white flocks of Andean Gulls swirled through the air. We spotted a Variable Hawk along with Paramo Pipits. A single Black-winged Ground Dove be-bopped down the ditch along the road; an American Kestrel and an Aplomado Falcon perched on posts near the road.

Laguna Mica is a high-altitude lake at 12,841 feet. The lake is locally known as Micacocha, a hybrid of the Spanish word for mica, a shiny mineral, and the Quichuan word *cocha*, meaning body of water. Laguna Mica provides drinking water to the city of Quito. We found Andean Teal, Slate-colored Coot, Ruddy Ducks, and Silvery Grebes. According to the Helm Field Guide, *Birds of Ecuador*, the Silvery Grebes are very rare and numbered only in the hundreds in Ecuador.

Black-tailed Trainbearers, Shining Sunbeams, and Great Sapphirewing Hummingbirds shared lunchtime with us at a local restaurant. A Giant Hummingbird struck a pose for everyone to admire. A Sword-billed Hummingbird made a quick pass that was only a blur. Sorry, can't count that!

Earlier in the day Edwin, our Ecuadorian guide, had replied "no" to my question, "had he ever experienced snow?" That was soon to change. Snow had fallen earlier and looked like hailstones suspended in thick slush. Snow patches covered the road as we drove on the highway to Cayembe Coca.

We turned off the highway and started up a snow-covered dirt road. The bus clung to the side of the mountain as we climbed. A Red-rumped Bush-Tyrant, a rare bird, caused us to pause. Then a Tawny Antpitta ran up the snowy road. We were headed to the highest elevation of the trip, 14,295 feet. Cell towers adorned the peak. Everyone had five bars! Two Andean Foxes were very casual about our presence. They did not run away, but seemed curious and kept a short distance from us. Our guide and driver waded through the slush around the towers in search of a snipe. The rest of us were feeling the effect of the high altitude. We were also speculating about the safety of getting back down the mountain in a giant bus on a narrow gravel road coated with an inch of graupel (soft hail). Was this the ultimate "Snipe Hunt?" We did not see any snipe. If only someone had brought a bag...

Back to elevations of 6,000 to 7,000 feet and birding on the way to our next overnight stay at San Isidro Lodge, we found a few nice birds: the beautiful Turquoise Jay and a Hooded Mountain-Tanager.

Arriving at the lodge after dark, we spotted a San Isidro Owl before we unloaded luggage. Their calls were heard through the night. It was the perfect welcome.

In the morning we piled back into the bus to bird at several stops along the way toward Quito. At various stops we found Green Jays, Strong-billed Woodcreeper, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Mountain and Scarlet-rumped Cacique, and Russet-backed Oropendola.

We stopped on a bridge that spanned a rocky swift-flowing river. A pair of Torrent Ducks fed by diving into the rapids. A Torrent Tyrannulet and a pair of White-capped Dippers did the same.

One more hummingbird feeder stop at Brisas de Baeza was abuzz with hummers. A subspecies of the Booted Racket-tail sported peach colored pantaloons instead of the cottony white ones. White-tailed Hillstar, Violet-fronted Brilliant, and Tawny-bellied Hermit expanded the list of hummers. New passerines

## The Peregrine

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)

Copyright © Three Rivers Birding Club. All rights reserved.  
(Photographers and illustrators retain their copyrights.)

found included Yellow-browed Sparrow and Olivaceous Siskin.

We enjoyed a traditional lunch at Guango Lodge. The first course of soup was warming on this chilly, wet day. The main course was a delicious rice, chicken, and egg dish cooked in banana leaves.

Heading back toward Quito, we stopped in the Cumbaya Valley to visit the home of artist and ornithologist Juan Manuel Carrion. Juan welcomed us into his beautiful art-and-artifact-filled home. After a talk about the local culture, he serenaded us on a variety of percussion, wind, and stringed instruments. A tour of his studio was an opportunity to see some works in progress. Señor Carrion was a man of diverse interests. He took great pride in his country and was running for City Council in an attempt to focus attention on preserving Ecuador's natural resources. We later learned that he won the election!

It was a trip of a lifetime! The iconic Andean Condor and almost 40 types of hummingbirds were highlights of the more than 250 bird species we saw. The varied landscapes, from primeval cloud forests to the awe-inspiring high Andes, the warm and friendly people, the delicious exotic food, and a great group of traveling mates made for an experience that we will all remember fondly for years to come.

## Outings to Come

# New Season Beckons Us to Our Favorite Hot Spots

### By Steve Thomas, Outings Director

**Sunday, September 8 – Glade Run Lake Park:** Meet Dave Brooke (724-487-3586) at 8:00 AM at the park located along Lake Road in Valencia, which is off of Route 228 in southern Butler County. Google maps co-ordinates are 40.716229, -79.901211. We will survey the lake from the dam and boat ramp for waterfowl. Then we will walk a trail about 2 miles long out and 2 miles back. It can be muddy in places, so boots are highly recommended.

**Sunday, September 8 – Toms Run Nature Reserve:** Dave Yeany II ([dyeany@paconserve.org](mailto:dyeany@paconserve.org); 814-221-4361) will lead us starting at 8:00 AM. Meet at the parking lot at Toms Run Road, Sewickley, PA 15143 (<https://maps.app.goo.gl/fPjTYXi2gQrTFTqZ8>). The Reserve is a 369-acre property protected by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, which is currently creating a new trail system and parking access. We should see variety of migrant passerines.

**Thursday, September 12 – Sewickley Heights Park:** In collaboration with the Fern Hollow Nature Center, Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; [van126@comcast.net](mailto:van126@comcast.net)) will lead this outing. We will meet at 8:00 AM in the upper parking lot. Directions to the park can be found on the 3RBC website (<http://www.3rbc.org>). Be prepared for muddy trails. It is also advisable to bring water and a lunch. Besides birding in the park, we will drive and make stops along Little Sewickley Creek.

**Saturday, September 14 – North Park:** Meet leader Steve Denninger ([sdbirding@gmail.com](mailto:sdbirding@gmail.com)) at a new location this year: the parking lot on Bucktail Drive (40.581146, -79.979668). We will start at 7:00 AM and head out at 7:05 AM. We will be walking on both established as well as overgrown potentially muddy trails, so hiking boots would be appropriate. We will walk on the main trail through the North Park Mine Waste Field/Pine Creek area, which is an eBird hot spot. The walk would be about 1.5-2.5 hours depending on bird activity. There are no restroom facilities in this area. But they are available in other places in the park.

**Saturday, September 21 – Harrison Hills Park:** Meet leader Jim Valimont (412-828-5338) at 8:00 AM at this county park off Freeport Road between Natrona Heights and Freeport. We will meet at the Rachel Carson parking lot for a short walk down to the pond. As you enter the park, take the right fork and proceed to the parking lot at the end of the road. Dress for wet grass and mud. Previous fall outings have produced a nice variety of fall migrants, including warblers and vireos.

**Sunday, September 22 – Pymatuning Area:** Meet leader Bob VanNewkirk (412-366-1694; [van126@comcast.net](mailto:van126@comcast.net)) at 8:30 AM in the parking lot of the former site of the Pymatuning Wildlife Learning Center (Waterfowl Museum), 12590 Hartstown Rd Linesville, PA (41.635779, -80.436634) for this all-day outing. Plenty of waterfowl, lots of Bald Eagles, migrant songbirds should be around for this trip. Arrangements will be made to have lunch at Scooters by the Lake near the Ohio side of the causeway for those who are interested.

**Sunday, September 22 – Frick Park:** Jack and Sue Solomon (412) 521-3365 will lead this outing starting at 8:30 AM. We will meet at Frick Environmental Center, 2005 Beechwood Boulevard, in Squirrel Hill. Frick can be an excellent migrant trap where we hope to find lots of fall warblers.

**Tuesday, September 24 – Moraine State Park North Shore:** Meet Karyn Delaney (724-713-9474 for texts and calls) at the McDanel's Boat Launch in front of the Owlet Gift Shop on the North Shore at 9:00 AM. We will walk a 2-mile loop of the North Country Trail, which has some hills and can have some muddy areas. The walk will take approximately 3 hours. After that, we can also walk the Butterfly Trails if there is interest. The Butterfly Trails are flat and dry, and take about an hour to walk. Both trails can have a variety of migrating species, including warblers.

Please bring snacks or lunch and water if you plan to stay for the Butterfly Trails portion of the walk. We will take a break in the pavilion before starting the second portion of the walk. Note: Rain date will be Friday, September 27. If there is any doubt because of weather, feel free to send a text.

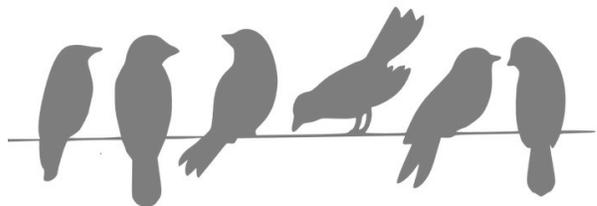
**Sunday, October 6, 2019 – Maurice K. Goddard State Park and State Game Lands 270:** Linda Croskey ([lcroskey@consolidated.net](mailto:lcroskey@consolidated.net); cell 724-612-9963) will lead us on this outing in Mercer County. Meet at 8:30 AM at the Lake Wilhelm Marina parking lot, 540 Lake Wilhelm Road, Sandy Lake. There is a sign "Marina, Boat Rental, Bait-Tackle" on the right before the causeway. Park in the lot by a tan building (restrooms). See the 3RBC Birding Locations page for directions.

This will be a three-habitat walk: Early-successional vegetation with warm-season grasses, wetlands, and mature forest. We will look for migrating waterfowl, shorebirds, warblers, sparrows, and other songbirds. Dress for ticks! Spotting scopes might be useful for looking at waterfowl on the lake. For those interested, we can have lunch at Wilhelm Winery. You may also bring your own snack or sandwich.

**Saturday, October 19 – Moraine State Park:** Meet Michael David ([michaelt david@gmail.com](mailto:michaelt david@gmail.com)) at 8:30 AM at the Route 528 Boat Launch, which is under the Route 528 bridge that crosses over the lake. Coordinates are 40.95223, -80.04084.

**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 waterbirds 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 ([michaelt david@gmail.com](mailto:michaelt david@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.



# The Peregrine

## Two Other Exotic Examples of Sheree's Avian Artistry



*YES, THEY ARE TANAGERS – These birds' stubby bills might suggest finches. No, they are tropical tanagers, genetically different from the North American birds we call tanagers. At left is a Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager; and at right is a Flame-*



*facied Tanager. The paintings are by Sheree Daugherty, our club's president. Sheree is widely known for wildlife artistry and was the featured artist in August 2019 at the prestigious Middle Creek Wildlife Art Show in Lancaster County.*

### Outings Revisited

## May Outings Brought Us a Wealth of Coveted Birds

**Deer Lakes Regional Park – May 4:** Last year's 3RBC spring outing to this park on May 12 included 11 participants, and yielded 71 species including 18 warbler species. This year's outing was held eight days earlier on May 4, also included 11 participants, and yielded 70 species including 14 warbler species.

Despite the similarity in numbers of total species, and although the outing did not have any significant lulls in birding activity, the number of individual birds counted differed significantly from 2018 to 2019. For example, in 2018 we counted 239 individuals (including 85 warbler individuals) whereas this year we counted 195 (including 44 warbler individuals). These differences highlight the variation in birding that can occur during migration across days and weeks, and from year to year.

This spring's outing had mostly cloudy skies compared to last year's sunny weather, with many muddy trails from the plentiful rainfall during the week. These conditions made observation difficult at times, and good looks of many birds were hard to come by (e.g., Black-throated Blue Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Nashville Warbler). Although Ovenbirds were heard singing throughout the outing, as this is one of the best breeding spots in the county for the species, most in the group were able to observe only one individual over the course of the day. Early in the outing many in the group were treated to only a distant view of a Cape May Warbler.

Shortly thereafter, with some effort and determination, the group was able to spy a White-eyed Vireo singing and foraging near the upper field (see photo by Lisa Kaufman). Later in the outing, when the sun began to break through the clouds, close views of a Yellow-throated Vireo near the lower pond were a real treat before the group tackled the steep hill back to the parking lot. Along the way, we were treated to the lovely soaring and calling of Red-shouldered and Broad-winged Hawks. In addition, nearing

the top of the hill before the parking lot, we picked up our 14th warbler species: a beautiful male Northern Parula. Surprisingly absent from the day's checklist was Kentucky Warbler, a species that also breeds throughout the park. **–by leader Todd Hooe**

**Presque Isle State Park – May 10:** When scheduling a spring outing at Presque Isle, you can always count on weather playing a role. For the five birders who met on a gray, chilly morning at the south shore parking lot, we started off with fog, strong winds, and a brief light shower.

However, quite a variety of birds were present. Two Common Loons, some Buffleheads, a Wood Duck, a few Double-crested Cormorants, and a Red-breasted Merganser were swimming in the bay. A solitary Common Tern, Tree Swallows, Chimney Swifts,

*continued on page 5*



*VIREO HIGHLIGHT –Participants in Todd Hooe's May 4 outing at Deer Lakes Park watch a White-eyed Vireo, one of the outing's 70 species. (photograph by Lisa Kaufman)*

# The Peregrine



*LONG-DISTANCE LOOK –This Great Horned Owl fledging highlighted our Presque Isle outing (photographs by Rita Weryha).*

## **Outings Revisited**

*continued from page 4*

and Ring-billed Gulls coursed overhead searching for food.

In the trees surrounding the parking lot, Yellow Warblers, Warbling Vireos, and Baltimore Orioles were noted. One birder discovered a Ruby-throated Hummingbird flitting among some tree leaves.

A brief walk across the road to the woods-lined beach parking lot provided several sightings of Swainson's Thrushes, Red-winged Blackbirds, Gray Catbirds, Mourning Doves, a Red-bellied Woodpecker, a Northern Flicker, and more Yellow Warblers. A Wood Thrush was heard but not sighted. A quick check of the lake produced additional sightings of some Red-breasted Mergansers. It was so windy lakeside, that even the gulls that usually perch on the break walls were absent.

A drake and a hen Wood Duck and an Eastern Kingbird were tucked against the shoreline at Leo's Landing. A swarm of Tree Swallows patrolled the marsh, but our attention was drawn by a Great Blue Heron. The heron was observed grabbing a rather large fish around its belly and flying with it to the end of the road. While we scoped the heron after it landed, the bird dropped its prey – a catfish. The heron repeatedly picked up the fish, held it briefly and dropped it. Not once while we watched this scene did it try to turn its catch headfirst to swallow it.

The area around the ranger station was quite active. Along the road and walking path we observed three warbler species: a Cape May, a Nashville, and an American Redstart, and our first Ruby-crowned Kinglet. A Scarlet Tanager provided us with admiring looks while foraging in the open. We had a surprised sighting of a Forster's Tern as it flew over the pond and a flock of about 30 Blue Jays passing overhead. The bird feeding station was quite active with foraging White-crowned Sparrows, Chipping Sparrows, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Baltimore Orioles, a Downy Woodpecker, a Black-capped Chickadee, and Northern Cardinals. While we walked back to our cars, a Bald Eagle soared overhead.

The woods near the Niagara boat launch used to be a banding site. Although it is no longer used as one, this location can be quite productive, and it was. We added Wood Thrush, Eastern Phoebe, Hooded Warbler, Palm Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, and White-throated Sparrow to our list. As we were about to leave in our cars, one birder called out a perched Red-headed Woodpecker on a cottonwood tree. While we watched it, a second Red-headed landed on the same tree.

There was a flurry of warbler activity along the Old Gas

Well Trail as we saw our first Black-throated Blue, Magnolia, and Hooded. A Veery and an Eastern Bluebird were briefly spotted before disappearing in the vegetation. At the nearby pond we watched Purple Martins fly in and out of their colonial nest boxes, and Barn Swallows were zig-zag flying everywhere you looked.

Since we were lucky to see the woodpeckers, I hoped our luck would continue by finding the Great Horned Owl mother and her recently fledged owlet. They had nested in a snag just up the road. Lady Luck was with us due to the assistance of Rita, an avid Erie birder, who was photographing this dynamic pair. Both owls were well camouflaged and perched in a very tall pine tree. I don't think we would have been able to find them on our own.

We decided to eat lunch in our cars to save time and head next for Fry's Landing, the present banding location. The banders told us that on the day before, they had a one-day record of banding 45 species. Due to today's low temperature and cold, northerly winds, only 15 species had been caught. But our walk through the woods produced Chestnut-sided, Palm, Black-throated Blue, Black-and-white, American Redstart, Hooded, and Black-throated Green warblers. Two vireo species, a Red-eyed and a Blue-headed, were found, as well Red-breasted Nuthatches. The nuthatches were commonly found throughout the park.

At Thompson Bay we discovered a dozen swimming Buffleheads and a few cormorants. We watched an adult Bald Eagle carry a fish in its talons. We were hoping it would land within our view and show us the location of its nest, but it flew out of our sight. While heading back to our cars, a Killdeer flew into the grassy field near the bath house.

The Pine Tree Trail was our final stop, and we soon had a good variety of activity from warblers and other birds. We noted Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, Cape May, Yellow-rumped, a Northern Parula, and Black-throated Blue warblers, as well as an Eastern Kingbird, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and a Great Crested Flycatcher. Unfortunately, we missed seeing the only Blackburnian Warbler that another birder had reported along this trail.

Despite the chilling temperatures and overcast skies, we enjoyed our many roadside stops, each other's company, and the ever-present joy of watching birds in action. Our warbler total for the day was 15 and our total species numbered 75. **—by leader Bob VanNewkirk**

**Sewickley Heights Park – May 10:** Six birders gathered in

*continued on page 6*

# The Peregrine

## Outings Revisited

*continued from page 5*

the parking lot for 3RBC's second joint spring outing with Fern Hollow Nature Center. It looked like rain was possible at any moment, so we wasted no time and started to bird from the parking lot. A White-throated Sparrow was spotted in low bushes, and a Double-crested Cormorant flew high overhead.

A Box Turtle sat in the middle of the path near the new habitat improvement area that leads to Butterfly Field. It graciously posed in front of the new sign that showed a photo of . . . a Box Turtle! Eastern Towhees, Indigo Buntings, and American Goldfinches were found at the field's edge.

We listed 11 warbler species and had great looks at a Chestnut-sided, a Magnolia, and several Black-throated Greens. We had fleeting glimpses of Bay-breasted, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Tennessees in the poor light. Along the road we heard a Cerulean Warbler and finally found it in a towering tree, giving us a look at its white belly and throat with a thin black necklace. We heard Hooded Warblers everywhere, but they remained hidden. One warbler wasn't seen well and was later identified as a Northern Parula in a photo taken by a member of our group.

Eastern Bluebirds were having a great season with pairs inhabiting almost every nesting box. One box held white eggs instead of the usual blue, an uncommon color variation.

An Eastern Kingbird was a surprise at the longhorn cattle pasture. Elegant Barn Swallows swooped over the fields.

The rain never materialized, and our small group was able to quickly cover a good portion of the park before returning to our cars just before noon. **—by leader Sheree Daugherty**

**Cook Forest State Park – May 11:** Four 3RBC members met Mike Leahy at the new park office. It was a beautiful day to walk in the park's "forest cathedral." Mike is well-versed in the huge trees found in this virgin forest. He provided a lot of interesting and enlightening information about how trees are aged by examining "cookies" cut from downed trees and borings cut into live ones. He also talked about the logging methods used decades ago. He led us on a guided tour of logging equipment and methods on display in a park building.

We did not encounter a large variety of warblers, but quite a few Black-throated Greens, Blackburnians, and Hoodeds were seen and heard. A highlight was listening to several Winter Wrens and getting a brief glimpse of one. Blue-headed and Red-eyed Vireos were common, enabling us to notice the difference in their vocalizations. After lunch, some of us visited the fire tower and encountered Cerulean Warblers and Scarlet Tanagers. **—by participant Carol McCullough**

**Harrison Hills Park – May 18:** On a cloudy, drizzly day, 33 people showed up for the Hills walk, perhaps our largest group ever for this park! After introductions the group listened and identified several species by song, especially a vigorous Scarlet Tanager that loudly proclaimed his presence. Because of the late date, the trees were almost completely leafed out, limiting many of our species to be identified by song only.

At the pond we advanced quietly in case a duck or shorebird was present, but none were found. The new resident Virginia Rails were also quiet, so we crossed the boardwalk to the fields and woodland edges. Here we found Carolina Wren, Gray Catbird, Indigo Bunting, Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Eastern Bluebird, Chimney Swift, Northern Flicker, and numerous Eastern Towhees. A Black-billed Cuckoo called in the distance. We retraced our steps



*SPRING BEAUTY – Steve Gosser found this Common Yellowthroat at Yellow Creek Lake on May 4, 2019.*

back to the boardwalk where a Virginia Rail gave its grunting call! Unfortunately, few of our group heard it. Back at the parking lot Paul Hess reported hearing a Northern Mockingbird.

As usual, the creekside trail was excessively muddy, but provided a long, stunning look at a male Pileated Woodpecker no higher than six feet off the ground as he busily removed bark from a tree in his quest for insects. Everyone got excellent views at the woodpecker no more than 40 feet away! As we started to leave the bird gave his loud territorial call and went back to work on the tree. More towhees gave close views, including a female carrying a cicada. A Wood Thrush posed in a bare tree for a few quick observers. The cliffside trail was largely disappointing. The resident Cerulean and Worm-eating Warblers were silent on this damp, cloudy morning, but a distant Acadian Flycatcher was eventually heard by all. A Kentucky Warbler sang in his usual territory and Hooded Warblers provided close views for everyone.

At the Environmental Learning Center the different habitats and the feeders provided new species for the day. At least 23 Purple Martins were flying above the trees, feeding on some unseen (by us) insect hatch. A Purple Finch appeared at the feeder. Finally, the clouds parted and birds started singing. Yellow-throated Vireo, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Northern Parula, Tennessee Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, and Yellow Warbler were heard. A Red-tailed Hawk and a Turkey Vulture soared overhead. Orchard and Baltimore Orioles displayed their colors, and Paul Hess and a few others heard a Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

For the day, we had 56 species including 10 species of warblers. Ten of us finished the tabulation over lunch at Eat'n Park after a satisfying morning. **—by leader Jim Valimont**

## Please Write Shorter Outing Reports

As you see, the May outing reports have stretched to this issue, a four-month delay. June reports from Piney Tract, Hunter's Lane, and our picnic wouldn't appear until November, five months late. So, these from June are posted, much more timely, on our website

Shorter reports will prevent such long delays. There's no need to list every species at every stop. Just report the most interesting ones, unusual numbers, how many participants, the weather, and offer the general commentaries that our writers do so well.

From now on, please limit reports to 400 words. Your complete species lists are regularly posted on the website.

## Observations

### Bolsa Chica Wetlands: A California Treasure

By Tom Moeller

It was our last day in Southern California during a late September visit in 2015. Nancy and I had a flight out of LAX around 3:30 PM, so we had time for one more birding stop on the way. We chose Bolsa Chica Wetlands on the coast to view some shorebirds. Great choice!

Located on the Pacific Coast Highway in Huntington Beach, Bolsa Chica is separated by the highway and a beach from the Pacific Ocean. The 1,318-acre reserve includes wetlands, ponds, tidal basins, and upland habitat. There is an inlet to the ocean at the southern end. At least 186 species of birds frequent the area regularly, and 116 other species are seen infrequently, maybe once a year.

The reserve and its surrounding area were part of a Mexican land grant named *Rancho La Bolsa Chica* made in 1841 to encourage settlement. The Bolsa Chica Gun Club was formed in 1899 to encourage duck hunting in the area. The club dammed an inlet to the Pacific Ocean. Standard Oil leased mineral rights from the gun club to drill for oil on the land in 1920.

During World War II two gun turrets were constructed behind the beach for coastal defense; the remains of one are still visible. In the 1960s the land was purchased to erect a housing development, but the state of California opposed the project, and in 1970, 300 acres were set aside to form the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve.

In 1976 members of the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women formed the *Amigos de Bolsa Chica* to help protect the area from development. (You go, girls!) Threats from developers continued until 1997, when the state purchased more land to add to the reserve and separated portions for housing and natural restoration. In 2006, the inlet to the Pacific was reopened to allow sea water back into the tidal basin. More land has been acquired since, resulting in the ecological reserve of today.

We visited the Bolsa Chica Wetlands building on Warner Avenue where we could see Great Egrets in the marsh of the Bolsa Chica Outer Bay. A volunteer directed us to the south parking lot, where a footbridge crosses the Bolsa Chica Inner Bay. Another Great Egret was the first bird we saw there, but then something spectacular wandered our way – a bird formerly called the “Light-footed Clapper Rail,” but now classified as a separate species: the endangered Ridgway’s Rail (*Rallus obsoletus*). The Bolsa Chica Bird Checklist describes this bird as a “less frequently observed species.” Second bird on our list! This bird is endangered due to habitat loss and fragmentation from human development and other factors. Isolated pockets like Bolsa Chica are ideal for the bird.

As we crossed the footbridge, a tern was flying back and forth over us. Although the threatened California Least Tern has been seen here, this bird was a Forster’s Tern in non-breeding plumage. Next we saw shorebirds in the marsh. Larger birds in the group were western Willets, so we assumed they all were Willets. Close looks at my photos later showed that the group was mostly Long-billed Dowitchers – three Willets and 18 dowitchers!

At the far end of the footbridge were fenced off areas from the walking paths. One area was reserved for nesting Snowy Plovers, but late September was past breeding season. Two birds on barbed wire on top of the fence attracted our attention – a Say’s Phoebe and a Belding’s Savannah Sparrow, an endangered bird although



*ENDANGERED SPECIES* –Tom Moeller was fortunate to photograph this rare bird, an endangered Ridgway’s Rail, on his visit to a wetland in Southern California.



*UNUSUAL SPARROW* –It doesn’t look like one we see in the East, but this is a Savannah Sparrow. Endangered in California and confined to West Coast saltmarshes, it is the darkly marked “Belding’s” subspecies, which Tom photographed nicely.

it is still common at Bolsa Chica, even nesting there. This sparrow is a subspecies of Savannah Sparrow with darker markings than the other subspecies. The Belding’s is also threatened by human development. The sparrow can drink salt water, but as salt marshes are eliminated, the bird’s habitat is destroyed. The Belding’s (*Passerculus sandwichensis beldingi*) has been proposed as a separate species from other Savannah Sparrows.

Behind the next fence was a treasure trove of shorebirds! First up, a lone Marbled Godwit pecked around in the sand less than 20 feet away. Then hundreds of birds appeared as we walked down. Long-billed Curlews lounged in the sun, Western Gulls congregated by the shore of the Tidal Basin, more Marbled Godwits rested in shoreline vegetation, scores of Black-bellied Plovers in winter plumage stood about interspersed with Western Sandpipers, more Long-billed Dowitchers, and many Sanderlings.

But airplanes don’t wait, so we had to tear ourselves away. Back on the footbridge we could see some new species. Several

*continued on page 8*

# The Peregrine

## Observations

continued from page 7

Snowy Egrets preened on the edge of the Inner Bay, while a raft of 40 or so Double-crested Cormorants and a couple of Brown Pelicans floated in the middle. The Forster's Tern was still there, posing on a post for my camera, a pelican flew overhead, and one Snowy Egret stood on the bridge railing to say "good-bye."

With less than two hours, Nancy and I had only scratched the surface of the wonderful shorebird show at Bolsa Chica Wetlands. Several trails lead around the bays and ponds in the reserve. A morning outing there would be perfect, followed by a jaunt to the public beach across the highway for a dip in the Pacific.

## References:

- Bolsa Chica Conservancy. *Bolsa Chica Bird Checklist*. Huntington Beach, CA: Bolsa Chica Conservancy, 2011.
- Dena Hawes. *Trail Guide to the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve*. Huntington Beach, CA: Bolsa Chica Conservancy, 2007.
- Dave Quady. "Farewell Clapper Rail, hello Ridgway's Rail." *Golden Gate Audubon Society*. August 11, 2014. Accessed July 27, 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y4mzwlj5>
- James D. Rising. "The Many Savannah Sparrows." *Birding*. November 2010, Vol. 42 No 6, pages 44-55. Accessed July 26, 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/yxg4rkj3>
- Sacramento Fish & Wildlife Office. "Species Information: Ridgway's Rail." *U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: Sacramento Fish & Wildlife Office*. November 30, 2017. Accessed July 26, 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y3wrhmc6>
- Tucker Wildlife Sanctuary. "Belding's Savannah Sparrow." *Tucker Wildlife Sanctuary Facebook*. December 17, 2017. Accessed July 20, 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y6s3wm3r>
- Wikipedia. "Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. June 13, 2019. Accessed July 20, 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y2h4hmrw>
- Wikipedia. "Rancho La Bolsa Chica." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. April 10, 2018. Accessed July 20, 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y5b9dk4r>

See Tom's online gallery at 3rbc.org for more photos depicting the amazing avian diversity at Bolsa Chica.

## Dramatic Grackle Encounter

By Tom Moeller

I've seen male Common Grackles noisily confront each other by raising their beaks straight up in the air or puffing their feathers up to look bigger, but never had I seen them wrestle each other to the ground!

Early in May I did. Two males confronted each other under the feeders in my yard in Squirrel Hill. The usual beak-pointing and feather-puffing threats did not deter the two. So they grabbed each other by the beaks. With wings flapping, one powered the other on its side to the ground, but they both ended on the ground side by side, still holding on and struggling.

They separated but came at each other again with the same result: two on their sides on the ground. This was enough for one male, which flew off as the other flew in the opposite direction. Whether this tussle was a result of territorial rights, or for females which had also returned from migration, was uncertain. This unusual behavior was a rare but spectacular occurrence.



*SURPRISING SINGER*—How many of us have encountered a bird in full song while singing on its nest? Michelle Kienholz did, and she photographed this Warbling Vireo while it sang.

## A Warbling Vireo Sings While Sitting on Its Nest

Michelle Kienholz saw and heard an unfamiliar bit of behavior that few of us have been fortunate to observe. While birding at Duck Hollow along the Monongahela River in June 2019, she discovered a Warbling Vireo singing while incubating eggs on its nest.

At our June 3RBC meeting she described the experience to Bob Mulvihill, ornithologist at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh. He had a quick answer: Warbling Vireos routinely sing while incubating eggs on the nest, and Bob provided many references.

Both Warbling Vireo sexes may sing, according to Ted Floyd, the editor of *Birding* magazine, although references to singing on the nest typically mention only males. Male and female Warbling Vireos look alike, so we don't know the sex of Michelle's songster.

No matter which sex, some authors have noted that such singing could be detrimental, alerting predators of eggs and nestlings to a nest's location. Detrimental or not, the Warbling Vireo remains a super-abundant species.

There's a moral to this story: Always report interesting or unusual occurrences of birds' behavior. Tom Moeller's note about grackles on this page is another example. The more we learn, the better we can spread the knowledge.



# The Peregrine

## Birding in England: New Birds, Old History

By Pat and Sherron Lynch

When Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT) offered “Southern England: Birds & History,” we signed on. We couldn’t resist the opportunity of seeing the European Robin, European Goldfinch, and Blue Tit of British Christmas cards, birds of British literature, and birds with names such as wagtails, stonechat, and chiffchaff. We could also explore castles and other historic sites.

We met the two other birders and tour leader Phil Jones in London, and headed to the Mercure Maidstone Great Danes Hotel, our base of operations for the tour in Kent, the “Garden of England.” Anyone who has been on a tour would appreciate the option of staying in one location rather than frequently packing and unpacking. The hotel offered the traditional full English breakfast – sausages, bacon, fried eggs, baked beans, fried bread, black pudding, and other choices at the morning buffet.

The two of us, especially Sherron, would bird the vast hotel lawns before breakfast and then report our findings during breakfast. Among its many birds were robins, goldfinches, four species of tit, Eurasian Magpie, Rook, Eurasian Jackdaw, Eurasian Blackbird, Mistle Thrush, White Wagtail, and Great Spotted Woodpecker. Sherron saw the trip’s only Eurasian Nuthatch.

We had been forewarned about the changeability of English weather and the likelihood of some rain. If you change “a dark and stormy night” to “days of rain, wind, and cold, with occasional sunshine,” you would appreciate what we encountered. There were even two hail storms. Phil juggled our schedules to maximize our chances to see specialty birds and avoid the rainiest hours.

VENT organized this tour from May 2 to May 12 so birders could see many migratory birds. Of course, the timing meant that we would miss many of our brightly-colored warblers and other migrants at home. Instead, we had mostly drab warblers: Reed, Sedge, Marsh, Willow, Whitethroat, etc. (Eurasian “warblers” are in a scientific family unrelated to our New World “warblers.” Many are difficult to identify without a careful look by experienced birders.) The more colorful Dartford Warbler, however, did provide us with an excellent look.

We were in Kent during the early migration of shorebirds. A Bar-tailed Godwit slept on a sandbar, probably just after arriving from Africa. Within two hours, more than a hundred others joined



*DOWN THE HATCH? – Sherron Lynch photographed this Great Crested Grebe, one of England’s signature species, when it had just caught a fish. Did it manage to swallow it down? Yes.*



*CAN YOU AVOID A SMILE? – Sherron asked about her photo of a Eurasian Coot chick. “Do you think this young Eurasian Coot is cute?” We’ll leave you to decide, hoping you’ll say yes.*

it. Many Black-tailed Godwits were at a different site. Pat’s favorite, the striking Northern Lapwing, seemed to be everywhere. Pied Avocets were eye-catching. Eurasian Curlew, Common Redshank, and Common Ringed Plover were new shorebirds for us. A Little Ringed Plover nesting was a positive sight amidst the news of international trouble for shorebirds.

Tufted Ducks were as common as Mallards are in the U.S. Common Shelducks and Common Pochards were often seen. We had our first looks at Graylag and Egyptian Geese. For gull lovers, there were Black-headed, Mediterranean, Mew, European Herring, Lesser Black-backed, and Great Black-backed.

Eurasian Marsh Harriers (more colorful than our harrier), Eurasian Sparrowhawks, Common Buzzards, Eurasian Kestrels, and Eurasian Hobbies soared overhead. One cooperative Hobby sat in a tree to be scoped. The two of us also saw the impressive Red Kite before the tour started.

We did get to see Linnet, Common Chaffinch, European Stonechat, Western Yellow Wagtail, Gray Wagtail, Reed Bunting, Eurasian Treecreeper, Common Skylark, the spectacular Bearded Reedling, and many other birds. Sherron was especially pleased to see a Green Woodpecker. It supposedly is easily found on lawns, but we only got quick looks at it in a brushy area. We often heard the Common Cuckoo and saw it several times.

Seeing our birding friends, Ian and Margaret Haigh, was a special treat. The Haighs had lived and birded in Pittsburgh for over eight years before returning to England. They rearranged their schedule to leave the Isle of Wight, bird locally on their own, and then meet with us for several dinners at the hotel to discuss the days’ birding and other news. Ian and Margaret are very fond of Pittsburgh and send greetings to their local birding friends.

Visiting many historic sites provided us with a greater appreciation of the land and its history. The castles also had beautiful gardens, lawns, and water features, providing us with additional birding opportunities. The group, for example, saw Barnacle Geese only at Leeds Castle.

Altogether, we observed 117 species, including 75 life birds for Sherron and 73 for Pat. This was a lower number of species than usually seen on the tour; we’ll blame it on the weather.

Cheerio!

See two more of Sherron’s fine photos and a longer version of this article in “Trip Reports” on our website.

## An Electrifying Downpour of Warblers in Pittsburgh

By Ted Floyd

Certain groups of birds, I think it's fair to say, hold special appeal for birders. Gulls. Tubenoses. Warblers of course. And within those special groups, I think there are extra-special subgroups. Talk to Geoff Malosh about "white-winged" gulls. Or get Paul Hess going on the matter of "gadfly" petrels.

Among the warblers, I myself have long been fascinated by the spruce budworm specialists: Tennessee, Cape May, and Bay-breasted. This trio attracted the notice of academic ornithologists in the mid-20th century due mainly to the research of the prolific ecologist Robert MacArthur (1930–1972). The birding community soon caught wind of MacArthur's research, and, by the time I was a birder in the early 1980s, the "spruce budworm warblers" were the stuff of legend.

There was just one problem. The spruce budworm warblers are famously episodic, given to population busts and booms. It had been several years since a good spring flight of spruce budworm warblers through the Pittsburgh region. "Just wait a while longer," my birding elders counseled. And so I did. I waited. And waited. Eventually, I moved out West, where I've lived for close to half my life now – and where spruce budworm warblers do not occur except as vagrants. At some point, I became resigned to the reality that I would never live to see a spring flight of spruce budworm warblers. Cue Jack Solomon...and his notorious G. O. D. theorem, namely, that everything was better in the good old days.

\*\*\*

I found myself in Pittsburgh in mid-May of this year. With my daughter Hannah I returned to my boyhood home on the occasion of my mother's 80th birthday. Hannah and I spent a lot of time in Frick Park, where a lot of things were different: new trails, a new environmental center, and, felicitously, new birders. Some of the great birders at Frick Park last month were born well after I'd left the city for good. There were new birds, too: Pileated and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Fish Crows, Wild Turkeys, and more. Those species were rare at best in the good old days. And now for the truly electrifying new thing: spruce budworm warblers!

Oh, sure, I'd seen Cape Mays, Bay-breasts, and Tennessees before in Frick Park, including Tennessees on occasion in double digits. But this was different. This was new. This was wondrous. This was the real deal, with spruce budworm warblers dripping



*AN EXPERT LEADER – Ted Floyd, a Pittsburgh native and the editor of American Birding Association's prestigious Birding magazine, led an outing for birders at Frick Park on May 11.*



*ONE DROP IN A DOWNPOUR – Tennessee Warblers aren't the most colorful warblers, as Aidan Place's photo in Oakland demonstrates. But the species excited Ted Floyd for a good reason when he visited Pittsburgh in May. He tells why in this report.*

from the trees. On Friday afternoon, hazy and warm, Hannah Floyd and I heard Tennessee Warblers—and not much else—on a scouting trip at the park. On a Saturday morning bird walk, all three species were plentiful. But the real story, for me, played out on Sunday morning.

Hannah and I, along with Mark VanderVen and Frank Izaguirre, birded Homewood Cemetery, adjacent to and directly north of Frick Park. We were greeted by a downpour, of the sort that might put the kibosh on any ordinary bird walk. But this was no ordinary bird walk. We were in search of spruce budworm warblers. I was amazed that we could hear high-pitched Cape Mays above the deluge. And the Tennessees! I was reminded of that passage in *Job* where the animals laugh at adversity and take delight in the world around them. Anyhow, the Tennessees were *Singin' in the Rain*, and then some.

\*\*\*

That jaunt to the cemetery was, in some sense, as plain and pedestrian as can be. The same old cemetery, the same old tombstones, the same old Mark VanderVen. Frank and Hannah are a bit newer, but, still, they're pretty familiar. And warblers, birds I have known so well and for so long. But not like this. Not whipped up in a frenzy, singing from the tops of their syrinxes, proclaiming to all who cared to listen that a spruce budworm flight was underway.

It occurs to me that I may never enjoy another spruce budworm warbler flight. It was the first such flight in my nearly forty years' experience as a birder. Do the math. And on top of the problem of basic human life expectancy, there is the distressing matter of sustained population declines in all three of the spruce budworm warblers. I'm not especially sanguine about my prospects for ever again witnessing the phenomenon.

But I'm grateful to have been at the right place at the right time a little earlier this year. At the end of the Saturday field trip, I snuck off for a bit of "me time." Well, me and the Bay-breasts. I'd never audio-recorded the species, and, to tell the truth, I'd more or less forgotten the song. (A shout-out to earbirder Charity Khesghi for the primer of Bay-breast songs, a few hours earlier, during the field trip proper.) It took a bit of work – because the Tennessees just wouldn't shut up – but I finally succeeded in procuring a clean recording of a single Bay-breast song. It was a bittersweet accomplishment. I wonder if it was my last.

## Birds in the Three Rivers Area

### April-May 2019 Brought Us Some Exceptional Rarities

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

The main migration month of May was very wet with breaks between showers for just a few days. Despite the soggy conditions, the rain brought some notable migrants. A few rarities and less common species generated excitement among birders.

Some notable waterfowl lingered into April and May. Two **Northern Shovelers** were at Duck Hollow 4/9 (JS, SS) and 4/29 (SI, DM). One was at Janoski's Farm 5/12-16 (MV). Two **Long-tailed Ducks** were in Findlay Twp. 4/5 (MV). Two **Surf Scoters** were at Dashields Dam 4/5 (MV et al.). Two **Ruddy Ducks** were on the Allegheny River at Lawrenceville 4/22 (CB, AB), and rather late birds included 7 on 5/5 (MV, JM) and 2 on 5/16 (MV) at Imperial.

A good count of 4 **Common Loons** were at Duck Hollow 4/15 (AP), and 1 was there 5/7 (LK) and heard calling. Rare here, a **Black-crowned Night-Heron** was a great find at Harmar Twp. 4/7 (eBird) and remained 4/8 (v.o.).

Allegheny was one of a few counties in the southwest where **Willetts** were grounded by bad weather. A flock of 11 were at Brunots Island on the Ohio River 4/25 (MJ) providing the eighth county record. A flock of 13 were at the same location 4/30 (MJ) providing the ninth county record. Could this have been the same flock? Nine were at Duck Hollow 5/2 (JF et al.) providing the tenth county record. Amazingly one was at Dashields Dam on the Ohio River 5/10 (MV), the eleventh record and the location of the first county record in 2004. A single bird was back at Brunots Island 5/16-20 (MJ et al.). This invasion was unprecedented. The flock at Brunots Island present for multiple days was very unusual. The only other bird that remained in the county for more than one day was 1 at Imperial in 2009 that lingered for five days.

Seven **Semipalmated Plovers** were downriver from Dashields Dam 5/3 (MV). Two were at Janoski's Farm in Findlay Twp. 5/12 (MV, JHa), 1 was at Imperial 5/17 (MV), and 1 was at Chapel Harbor 5/25-27 (TH et al.). A nice count of 12 **Semipalmated Sandpipers** were at Duck Hollow 5/29 (MJ) following a storm. Two **Least Sandpipers** were at Imperial 5/5 (MV) and again 5/16 (MV). Two were at North Park 5/20 (MJ). Unusual in spring, a flock of 10 **Short-billed Dowitchers** were at Imperial 5/12 (JHa et al.). A late **Wilson's Snipe** was at Imperial 5/3-5 (RG et al.).

Unfavorable weather and, more importantly, the lack of coverage at Dashields Dam this spring resulted in poor numbers of migrant gulls and terns reported. Very small numbers of **Bonaparte's Gulls** were observed at Dashields Dam for most of April. Six *Sterna* sp. terns were at Dashields Dam 5/23. Due to lighting and distance not all could be identified, but there was at least 1 **Forster's Tern** and 1 **Common Tern** in the group (JM, MD, MV). Other Forster's Tern reports included 5 at Brunots Island 4/25 (MJ), 1 at Duck Hollow 4/15 (JHa), 3 there on 4/30 (TRa), and 4 there on 5/3 (JF, LF, MD). There was only one **Caspian Tern** report this spring: a bird at Dashields Dam 5/23 (MV).

Two **Virginia Rails** were discovered at a small wetland in Frick Park 4/18 (AP), a first for the park. The birds were heard and seen almost daily and were last reported 4/25 (v.o. Another was discovered at a small wetland in Harrison Hills Park 4/22 (DB), a first for this park as well. Eventually 2 were observed there,

and the pair was observed copulating on 5/3 (eBird). The birds were present through the season but successful nesting was not confirmed. Two **Soras** were heard at Wingfield Pines 4/27 (MJ), and 4 were heard there 4/30 (ST). Observers planned to monitor to determine whether they remained to breed. Virginia Rails bred at this site a few years ago.

A **Common Moorhen** was a great find at a small wetland along the Allegheny River at Chapel Harbor 5/25 through the end of May (TH, v.o.), a riverside complex of condominiums and single-family homes. This provided the eighth record in the county and the first since 2011. This wetland has produced a variety of marsh birds over the years and was formed during the remnants of Hurricane Ivan. The downpour swelled the stream that emptied into the river with such force that it deposited a large amount of mud creating the wetland.

Rare in the county, an **American Bittern** was a great find in an unusual place 4/5 (reported to BMu). Normally found in small wetlands in the county, this bird was resting atop a garage in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of Pittsburgh! It stood on the peak of the roof perfectly still for nearly an entire day. Single **Great Egrets** were on Moody Road in Findlay Twp. 4/7 (MJ, JHa), Wingfield Pines 5/9 (FK), Brunots Island 5/17 (MJ), and Chapel Harbor 5/26 (DN).

An **Osprey** nest at Duquesne that has been present for a few years was removed from a tower by the power company that owned the tower. Fortunately, the birds remained in the area and used another location for a nest.

There were two reports of **Eastern Whip-poor-will**: 1 heard in Plum 4/18 (AH) and 1 at Boyce-Mayview Park 5/1 (ST). A **Red-headed Woodpecker** was a nice surprise at Frick Park 5/2 (AP). This species is an occasional spring migrant in the county.

Two **Olive-sided Flycatchers** were photographed at North Park 5/11 (eBird) and one was at Frick Park 5/26 (MvV, JS). Two **Alder Flycatchers** were reported this spring: 1 at Barking Slopes 5/17 (MD) and 1 at Imperial 5/30 (MF). This species is a very rare migrant in the county.

**Fish Crows** were present in Verona (a new location) during the entire season (SK). They were also present at Sharpsburg (JH). Both locations are along the Allegheny River, which was devoid of reports while the Monongahela River Valley has had regular reports for years.

The only **Gray-cheeked Thrush** report was one in Pleasant Hills 5/27 (BMu). An **American Pipit** was at Wingfield Pines 4/11 (MJ, JF, JP), the only report this spring.

Amazingly there were three **Blue Grosbeak** sightings this spring. The first was photographed at a feeder in Gibsonia 4/21 (reported to BMu) where it remained to 4/23. For the second spring in a row, one was discovered at Frick Park 5/1 (LK). It visited the feeders at the Environmental Center in the evening and was not relocated the following day. The third was singing in a neighborhood in Natrona Heights 5/4 (PH). Like the Frick Park bird, this one was not relocated.

**Pine Siskins** continued from the winter visiting feeders at North Park (v.o.), Bethel Park (JP), and Wexford (eBird). The high count was 12 at North Park. The top count at Bethel Park was 9 on 4/19 (JP). Other reports included 3 at Beechwood Farms 4/3 (JL), 1 in Frick Park 4/18 (AP) and 2 there on 5/2 (SA, AP), 7 in South Park 4/23 (JP), 1 in Natrona Heights 4/30 (DB), 3 in Brentwood 5/11 (DF), and 2 in Mount Lebanon 5/12 (JM).

A total of 32 species of warblers were reported this spring. **Worm-eating Warbler** returned to Harrison Hills Park, first heard 5/2 (v.o.). This has been a reliable breeding site for several years. One was found at Frick Park 5/2 (JF, JP) and 5/10 (TF), and 1

# The Peregrine

## Birds in the Three Rivers

*continued from page 11*

was at Barking Slopes 5/16 (MD). A **Northern Waterthrush** was heard at Brunots Island 4/25 (AP) and 1 was found in Schenley Park 5/8 (FI). A **Golden-winged Warbler** was at Bethel Park 4/30 (JP) and 1 was found at Frick Park 5/2 (AP).

**Cape May Warblers** were widespread again this spring with reports from 16 locations in eBird. A **Mourning Warbler** was at North Park 5/4 (SD) and 1 was at South Park 5/10 (JF), the only reports this spring. **Pine Warblers** included single birds at Wingfield Pines 4/10-24 (MJ et al.), Jefferson Borough (JHa), Boyce-Mayview Park (FK) 4/20, and South Park 4/29 (JF, JP). A **Prairie Warbler** was found in Frick Park 4/21 (AH, PM, TH), 1 was at Boyce-Mayview Park 4/22 (LN), and 2 were at Hays Woods 4/21 (SA). This species is rarely found during migration; they seem to just appear suddenly on their territories.

**Cerulean Warblers** returned to the Sewickley area, where they are reliable: 1 at Frick Park 5/4-6 (v.o.), 1 at Beechwood Farms 5/7 (JCo), 2 at Barking Slopes 5/14 (SM, PF), and 1 at Schenley Park 4/27-5/4 (JF, LF, JP). **Canada Warbler** reports included single birds at Gibsonia 5/12 (KP), North Park 5/19 (SD), and Schenley Park 5/19 (KSJ). There was an eBird report of 1 at Frick Park 5/7. Two **Wilson's Warblers** were at Deer Lakes Park 4/30 (JCo), and 1 was at Imperial 5/27 (KD, PF, RS, KSJ, DK).

*Observers: Sameer Apte, Al Borek, Carole Borek, Dave Brooke, Jeff Cohen (JCo), Michael David, Karyn Delaney, Steve Denninger, Leslee Ferree, Patience Fisher, John Flannigan, Ted Floyd, Donna Foyle, Ross Gallardy, Jim Hausman (JHa), Amy Henrici, Paul Hess, Joyce Hoffmann, Todd Hooe, Sally Ingraham, Frank Izaguirre, Matthew Juskowich, Fred Kachmarik, Debbie Kalbfleish, Lisa Kaufman, Scott Kinzey, Judy Lesso, Jeff McDonald, Pat McShea, Steve Manns, Daniel Muller, Bob Mulvihill (BMu), Lauren Nagoda, Dick Nugent, Joe Papp, Kevin Parsons, Aidan Place, Trinidad Regaspi (TRa), Kate St. John, Ramona Sahni, Jack Solomon, Sue Solomon, Shannon Thompson, Mark VanderVen (MVV), Mark Vass, v.o. (various observers)*



*NICE TO SEE YOU – Birders have found that the cliff trail at Harrison Hills Park is a good location in northeastern Allegheny County to see a Worm-eating Warbler. Jeff Cohen photographed one of them on May 31, 2019.*



*UNEXPECTED PLUMAGE – Tom and Nancy Moeller found this not-quite-right Scarlet Tanager in Schenley Park. Based on Tom's photo, ornithologist Bob Mulvihill explains it for us.*

## An Odd Scarlet Tanager

**By Paul Hess**

Birding in Pittsburgh's Schenley Park on May 14, 2019, Tom and Nancy Moeller discovered a male Scarlet Tanager with an unexpected plumage. Tom wondered whether it might be a classic "orange variant" Scarlet Tanager. Apparently not, but it is nonetheless fascinating. Tom's photo is educational for all of us.

Tom and others had spotted a true "orange variant" male Scarlet Tanager in May 2005 during a 3RBC outing at Boyce Park, but this Schenley Park bird Tom photographed wasn't quite right. A search of the Internet shows many such birds incorrectly identified as true orange variants. (Beware of what the un-edited Internet says!)

In a true orange variant, all of the bright red is replaced with all bright orange because of a genetic aberration in deposition of the normal plumage chemical. Mike Fialkovich, Jim Valimont, and I vividly recall seeing one at Magee Marsh in Ohio some years ago.

I asked Bob Mulvihill what he thinks about the new Schenley Park bird. Bob, an ornithologist at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, and a long-time expert in plumage variations after many years of banding research at the Powdermill Nature Reserve in Westmoreland County, replied:

"The Scarlet Tanager in the photo you sent is indeed a second-year bird; therefore, it is not technically an orange "variant" because it is not orange in its definitive alternate plumage. An adult that was orange would perhaps be indicative of a gene-based variation affecting synthesis or deposition of red carotenoid pigments. The orange plumage and the amount of retained yellow "winter" plumage are both indications that this individual had limited access to food resources needed for 1) completing its molt and 2) producing high-quality feathers."

In that connection, Tom commented to me that Internet photos judged to be true orange variants actually depict similar birds to his with large splotches of yellow. I looked and saw the same thing. "Those are probably suffering from undernourished feather development, too," Tom says. He adds an interesting comment about this Schenley Park bird: "Although the second-year male may have been malnourished, the odd coloring makes the bird look more tropical, as a tanager should be." How true!