



# The Peregrine

## Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

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

Vol. 19, No.5 September/October 2020



SPEAKER -- Frank Izaguirre is also a birder (page 5).

### Field Guides Don't Just Identify; They Point to the Environment

What do field guides do? For a century they have helped observers to identify birds, but they have done something more. 3RBC member Frank Izaguirre will tell us how in his program "Field Guides and Environmental Thinking" at our virtual Zoom meeting online on Wednesday, October 7.

Access codes to the virtual meeting will be sent to members in the days before October 7. Access to Zoom will begin at 7:00 PM, giving you time to log on. The business meeting will begin at 7:30, featuring our regular announcements. Frank's presentation will begin at 8:00.

You can connect to the meeting by the Zoom app on your computer, tablet, or smartphone. Download a free Zoom app to your device in advance at this website: [https://zoom.us/download#client\\_4meeting](https://zoom.us/download#client_4meeting).

At least 85 people watched and/or heard Tessa Rhinehart's August program, an encouraging response during the gap in our sadly missed in-person gatherings at the Garden Center.

Frank will cover major eras of bird identification from books written by pioneering early naturalists such as Audubon to Roger Tory Peterson's neo-classic field guides to American birds.

"The guides have profoundly changed the way people think about the world, and my hope is that after this talk, you will see field guides in a new way as well," Frank says.

He is the Book and Media Reviews Editor for *Birding* magazine and a Ph.D candidate in English at West Virginia University, where his dissertation examines how field guides have influenced environmental thinking.

### We Need Not Go Far for Good Birding

"I've had a lot of great birding moments in North America, the Hawaiian Islands, Europe, and Africa, and I've drawn solid lessons from them, but this fact remains: the American Robin in my yard has much more to teach me as I sit quietly beneath a tree first thing each morning."

--Jon Young, *What the Robin Knows* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012)

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"Close to home, we can readily observe male cardinals bringing food treats to prospective mates."

--Sheree Daugherty, President's Message (page 2, this issue of *The Peregrine*).

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Those are examples of how to have fun birding at home during COVID-19 limitations. See more from 3RBC members and nonmembers on page 3.



CARDINALS "KISSING" -- A male Northern Cardinal presents a female a seed, hoping she'll choose him as a mate. Tom Moeller photographed the encounter in his Squirrel Hill yard.

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

## President's Message

# Watch Birds' Behavior Even in Your Yard. You'll Be Glad You Did!

By Sheree Daugherty

For me, one of the great joys of birding is the extraordinary variety of wonderful things to see and learn. I encourage you to go beyond merely ticking birds off your life list and take a good long look at bird behavior. Your patient observation will instill a deeper appreciation of birds.

Courting behaviors are fascinating, often amusing, and easily studied. Close to home, we can readily observe male cardinals bringing food treats to prospective mates. Ruby-throated Hummingbird males try to impress females with a rapid "U"-shaped flight displays. If you're in the field, you may be lucky enough to see other interesting behaviors. Sandhill Cranes do an elaborate courtship dance. American Woodcocks perform nocturnal acrobatics. Bald Eagles clasp talons in midair and tumble toward the earth, dramatically releasing their grasp just before hitting the ground.

Occasionally, courting behaviors can be annoying to humans. The testosterone-fueled male cardinal that is fighting a "rival" in the reflection of your bedroom window each morning at daybreak, or the woodpecker that found the perfect sounding board on your home's siding can be maddening. The cardinal is protecting territory, and the woodpecker is advertising to potential mates that he has found the best hollow tree nest site around.

Learn to know which behaviors indicate when a bird is stressed—these can be a sign of a predator nearby, or signal that you may be too close for the bird's comfort. As birders, we have an obligation to make sure that our actions are not perceived as threats by the birds we are watching. Look for subtle clues that your presence is making a bird anxious. Many species will assume a more alert upright posture, maybe with raised crests. If you notice a bird with a beak full of insects perching for an extended amount of time, it could be that you are near a nest and the bird, trying to avoid revealing the nest location, is too uneasy to feed its hungry young. Some birds can be outright hostile and dive bomb you if they feel that you are too close to a nest. (Good for them!) Always respect these signals and give the bird more space.

Bathing, wet or dry, is an entertaining behavior to watch and important for feather maintenance by removing external parasites and realigning feather barbs. It's fun to watch an enthusiastic bird splashing in a puddle, birdbath, or shallow stream. Dust baths may also help to remove excess moisture in feathers.

Anting is one of my favorite behaviors. That Northern Flicker sprawled out on the lawn with wings akimbo isn't sick or dying, it's anting! The flattened birds are allowing ants to walk through their feathers. Some think that formic acid in the ants acts as a repellent to unwanted mites and parasites. I've even seen an anting bird pick up and place an ant on a spot that needs attention.

You may notice interesting behaviors around feeders. Chickadees may toss aside sunflower seeds until they find a heavier one with more nut meat. Some birds will take a seed and wedge it into the bark of a tree to hammer open. A few birds will fly away and cache seeds to consume later. Sharp-shinned Hawks consider a bird feeder literally as a bird feeder, a place to feed on birds.

## The Peregrine

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Sometimes you will observe completely unexpected behavior. Several years ago I watched a Great Blue Heron walk into a wooded area near a pond. I was puzzled. What was it up to? The heron was clearly intent onto something while deliberately walking in slow motion among the trees. The bird stopped, maneuvered into position, cocked its head, and patiently waited. With a quick stab of its dagger-like beak, all was revealed. The heron was waiting for a chipmunk to peek out of its burrow. When it did, the unfortunate chippy became lunch! Before swallowing the chipmunk, the heron strolled to the pond and repeatedly dipped the prey into the water. Was the heron drowning the rodent? Was a well-soaked chipmunk easier to swallow? Sometimes you are left with an amazing observation and more questions than answers.

So take the time to do a deeper dive into birding by paying close attention to what these amazing creatures are doing. You'll be a better birder by doing that!



## Outings (Not) to Come

### Be a Home-Style Watcher, and Tell Us What You See

Steve Thomas, our Outings Director, has another message of the kind he hates to deliver: We will not be scheduling fall bird outings at this time. The safety of our members and participants is paramount in our decision to cancel them. We will resume the outings when it is safe to do so.

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Meanwhile, *The Peregrine* editor has been receiving comments from 3RBC members and non-members who are delighted with bird activities they have watched at home. The following are a few examples. If you've had fascinating experiences such as these, please send a note about them to [phess@salsgiver.com](mailto:phess@salsgiver.com) for the next issue.

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**Debbie Kalbfleisch** has an enthusiastic essay titled "Birding during the Pandemic" in the August 2020 issue of *The Todd Nuthatch*, the newsletter of the Todd Bird Club. Here's what she says about her yard in Butler County: "One discovery among my birding buddies during this interesting time is how many of us are adding new yard birds! I myself added four new birds: American Pipit, White-crowned Sparrow, Common Nighthawk, and Eastern Phoebe; and I live in a well-manicured suburban community!" It's well worth reading at [toddbirdclub.org](http://toddbirdclub.org).

**Patrick and Mardelle Kopnick** were fascinated by what they've seen at their feeder in Fawn Township, Allegheny County: "Feeding the Baltimore Orioles with grape jelly produces the expected results, but it's the unexpected visitors we find entertaining. A Red-bellied Woodpecker ate from the orange. Catbirds fight the orioles for grape jelly. Even crows initially came for jelly, but their interest waned, thankfully. Who knew? Oh, and a chipmunk enjoyed grape jelly, too."

**Tom Moeller**, 3RBC's Treasurer and Webmaster, offers an anecdote from June 21 in Squirrel Hill: "Too hot to go out for long, although I did sit on the back porch to photograph our resident hummingbird. While there, a hubbub started in the neighborhood with two crows flying into trees down the way. Then more birds joined in. At first I thought the crows were chasing a hawk, but it was the crows being bad. One escaped with a robin's egg in its beak."

**Syl Zembrzusi** in Natrona Heights, Allegheny County, tells of an enjoyable experience while he sat on his back porch in Natrona Heights, Allegheny County: "I watched a Mom Robin really enjoying the apple thrown on my yard. Baby Robin stood near her chirping to be fed some apple, too – which she did."

**Jeffrey Joy**, a vice president of RBC Wealth Management in Pittsburgh, tells an especially heartfelt story. He views his stay-at-home experience "as a gift." While working online in his seventh-story apartment this spring, he watched the entire breeding season of a House Finch pair that mated and nested in a basket of hanging ferns on the porch outside his sliding glass door. He witnessed the mating and nest-building, counted five eggs in the nest, saw the chicks hatch, being fed, and monitored the growth and increased flapping of their tiny wings. He adds, "I suspect the aspiring fledglings will soon leave the nest empty, but they will leave my heart full forever."



*HARD "WORKERS" – Frick Park's Clayton Hill is overgrown with exotic invasive plants that overpower the park's native vegetation, an ecological tragedy. A consortium of environmental organizations is undertaking a clever new method of eradicating the unwanted plants: hungry goats. Read below how there is a role for birders to play in determining the success of the project. (photo courtesy of Allegheny GoatScape)*

## Birders at Frick Park Can Aid Conservation Project

Birders are needed to assist a major conservation effort to protect and restore natural habitat in Pittsburgh's Frick Park. Observers who read *The Peregrine* know very well how important this 500-acre habitat is for nesting and migrating birds amid the vast urban sprawl.

David Yeany, avian ecologist in the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy's Natural Heritage Program, asks birders to participate. The project's coalition includes the Allegheny Bird Conservation Alliance, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, and the Carnegie Museum of Natural History. It is largely funded through a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant.

The project's main purpose is to remove invasive plants such as bush honeysuckle from the Clayton Hill area to restore native habitat for birds and other wildlife. For this effort, the coalition is working with Allegheny GoatScape.

Goats will be "working" areas around Clayton Hill during summer and fall 2020 and 2021 at the job they do best: eating vegetation. After the honeysuckle has been removed, native shrubs and trees will be planted by coalition staff and volunteers.

The important role for birders is to monitor species in the Clayton Hill area and to report observations via eBird. See [alleghenybirds.org/ongoing-projects](http://alleghenybirds.org/ongoing-projects) for instructions on how to participate. Determining results of the habitat restoration requires monitoring changes in the abundance of native plants, birds, and other wildlife.

Contact David if you have questions: cell 814-221-4361; [dyeany@paconserve.org](mailto:dyeany@paconserve.org).



## Observations

### Here's the Background on a Backyard Beauty (Part 1)

By Tom Moeller

It's been a good year for observing birds out my back windows. First there were four Baltimore Orioles that I wrote about in the May/June 2020 edition of *The Peregrine* – birds that we never had at our feeders before. Now in June a pair of Cedar Waxwings appeared in a tree on the next street over – birds we had not seen in the yard since 2006! And this pair stayed and have been nesting in a tree on that next street.

I first saw a single waxwing on its perch on June 15, a nice surprise after a 14-year lapse. The perch was in several dead limbs at the top of a Norway maple, a good spot to view 360° in the area.

It is typical for a male Cedar Waxwing to have a guarding perch within eyesight of his nest. Seeing the bird again on some other days was nice too, but the best sighting came a week after the first sighting. On June 22, Nancy and I witnessed two Cedar Waxwings in the tree, and one was “mate-feeding” the other. This is part of the pair bonding of waxwings, and this showed they were building a nest nearby. The mate-feeding we witnessed was accompanied by the female doing some “wing-rowing movements,” representative of their stylized courtship behaviors.

Cedar Waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) are one of three species in the *Bombycilla* family; the other two are Bohemian Waxwings (*B. garrulus*) and Japanese Waxwings (*B. japonica*). All three species appear similar, but the Japanese Waxwing has a red band on its tail and other pink highlights, whereas the Cedar and Bohemian Waxwings' tail bands are yellow. All three are gregarious, traveling in flocks to feed and migrate. All three are frugivorous (fruit-eating) and flycatch some insects, build cup-shaped nests, produce only high-pitched sounds and trills, and sport a crest on their heads.

Cedar Waxwings wear a black eye mask, have sleek, velvety, beige body feathers with yellowish bellies and whiteish undertail coverts, show a distinctive yellow margin at the end of their tails while their wingtips are dark, and are marked by red tips on their secondary feathers. Their high-pitched calls are difficult for many (such as your author) to hear, and they have no song like most songbirds. Their legs and feet are relatively small.

Waxwings are so named for the red carotenoid (astaxanthin) deposits on the tips of their secondaries, referring to the red sealing wax used in former times to seal official documents. The Japanese Waxwing lacks these carotenoid tips. The red of these globules and the yellow of the tail margins come from carotenoids in the bird's fruit diet. With the human introduction of alien honeysuckle into landscapes, red carotenoids (rhodoxanthin) from honeysuckle berries fed to waxwing nestlings as their tail feathers grow mixes with the normal yellow carotenoids (e,e-carotene-3,3'-dione) to produce an orange tail band. Work at Powdermill Nature Reserve under Bob Mulvihill, Bob Leberman, and others (see References) has shown that almost all waxwings with this orange tail band are immature having developed their tail feathers as nestlings at the time of year when alien honeysuckle berries with their red carotenoids were ripe and collected by their parents. Adults that may have lost tail feathers when honeysuckle berries were ripe also grew orange-tipped replacement feathers due to the rhodoxanthin. During the usual waxwing molt in late summer/early fall when



*BRIGHT SPOTS* – Many birds sport red, orange, or yellow in their plumage, which are pigments they process from chemicals in plant diets rich in beta-carotene. Cedar Waxwings have two different physiological pathways, one producing red and the other producing yellow. Tom Moeller took this fine portrait at Barton Park in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in September 2013.

honeysuckle berries are no longer available, yellow-tipped tail feathers develop normally thanks to the absence of the red carotenoid rhodoxanthin.

Cedar Waxwings get their “first” name from the Eastern Redcedar, a common juniper tree, the fruits of which are favorites of the bird. Other fruits and berries in their diet include cherry, chokecherry, viburnum, pokeweed, grapes, and wild strawberries, among others. They will also hawk for insects. In the spring, the waxwings will eat the flowers of fruiting trees and bushes. Getting them to eat from a backyard feeder is very difficult. They may be attracted to raisins, currents, or chopped apples if you're lucky.

Cedar Waxwing flocks may migrate to the southern United States in winter or even into Mexico and Central America. In a milder winter they may not migrate far at all. Waxwings pair off within the larger flocks. They initiate their bond early in the year with a formalized “side-hop display.” The male will approach a female on a branch with a berry (perhaps a flower petal or an insect) in his beak and hop sideways toward her. The female will take the berry and hop away sideways along the branch, then hop back and pass the berry back. This interaction may go on repeatedly until one of the birds eats the berry. Sometimes such an advance with a berry may be rejected by the female, so the male must move

*continued on page 5*

# The Peregrine

## Observations

*continued from page 4*

on to another more willing partner.

The Cedar Waxwing is usually a very social bird traveling in flocks much of the year. Soon after leaving their parents, fledgling waxwings form flocks of juveniles in late summer/early fall. As the parents conclude their nesting season, the adults and the juveniles may wing together in larger flocks – not family groups. The nesting season is the only time pairs break away from the flocks, but only to establish a small nesting territory, usually picked by both members with the female having more say. Yet, during the days before egg-laying occurs, the pair may join a larger flock to eat at certain spots with no conflicts between members of the larger group. Only in the nesting territory do the waxwings display aggression toward other waxwings who venture too close. Often it is the male who is most aggressive, but the female will also defend the nest. They vary their territorial instincts and their social interactions depending on the proximity to their nest.

On June 29 near 5:00 PM, three adult Cedar Waxwings sat together in the “perch” tree. The two extra visitors may have been part of a foraging group in the afternoon stopping to rest and do some grooming. Those two left about 5:00 PM, and the resident male stayed around for another eight minutes, finally flying down in his usual way. It was surprising the two extras were tolerated in the nesting area, but the perch is usually away from the actual nest.

The waxwing’s nest is located at the “v” of a horizontal branch, usually high up, but 6 to 20 feet is average. Maples and cedars are often picked to nest in, while flowering fruit trees like pear, plum and hackberry are also used. The female does most of the constructing with the male bringing building material to add, twigs, grass, stems. They may steal items from the nests of other birds. She lines the nest with rootlets, fine grass, pine needles, cobwebs, even wool. Once the nest is built, a waxwing will approach it stealthily, working up from the bottom of the tree. However, the bird will fly out from the nest straight from the tree.

Egg-laying begins right after the nest is finished; the female will lay one egg each morning to an average of four or five. The oval eggs are a pale blue with speckles of dark gray or black. The female will not start full-time incubation until the third egg arrives, and only she will incubate the eggs. Therefore, the male must feed her with regurgitated fruit either on the nest or on a perch nearby. When she is off the nest, he will stand on or near the nest to guard it. This constant attention makes cowbird parasitism a seldom thing. Incubation will last from 12 to 14 days.

Loren Putnam (*see References in Part 2*) noted that on hot days with temperatures in the 90s, the waxwings’ activities slowed down. I saw this too on July 3, 4, and 5 (a hot stretch), when no observations of the birds were made on the perch tree. I also thought that after a constant barrage of neighborhood fireworks, the waxwings would disappear. Being true urban birds and with an investment in a nest, the male was seen back on his perch on July 6 and almost every day thereafter until July 16, with many of those days being into the 90s.

See the 3RBC website for Tom’s photo gallery illustrating Cedar Waxwings’ fascinating behavior – and don’t miss Part 2 of his essay in the next issue.



*SUCCESS! – Frank and Adrienne Izaguirre found a long-awaited Boreal Owl in their most recent trip to Canada, an odyssey they have described in the last issue and this one. Frank photographed this usually hard-to-see species. (photo by Frank)*

## Frigid Canada (Part 2): Yes, a Lifer Boreal Owl!

*(Editor’s note: Part 1 of Frank’s article in the July/August issue ended with a question: “Did Frank and Adrienne finally see a Boreal Owl”? You’ll find the answer here.)*

### By Frank Izaguirre

The look of shock and consternation I was greeted with was not what I had expected, but the issue became immediately obvious: this Québécois was simply not expecting to be spoken to in English. I quickly asked Adrienne how to say “owl” in French, then turned back and asked, “*chouette?*”

Then we understood each other, and Adrienne ably continued the exchange, which eventually resulted in this kind and accommodating photographer taking us to the start of the trail and setting us down the right path. “*Bon chance!*” she said.

Within a few seconds, I saw a bird flitting along the trail. Once I had it in my bins, I realized to my delight that it was a Snow Bunting. The path entered the forest and passed a sign admonishing visitors to respect owls. We soon met other Québécois birders who offered to take us to the Boreal. *Bon chance* indeed, as it became obvious we needed to cross a frozen river to see the bird which we probably wouldn’t have figured out or risked.

But soon enough, we were staring at Adrienne’s lifer Boreal Owl and only my second ever, the first being a 2005 encounter on Amherst Island. And not long after that, we were basking in the glow of a low-perched Northern Saw-whet as well, doing our best to converse with the many Québécois enjoying these special birds.

*continued on page 6*

# The Peregrine

## Frigid Canada

*continued from page 5*

After enjoying our fill of these emissaries of the north woods, we started back, and soon it was our turn to be the guides: A young woman asked me, in English, about owls, to which I responded: “Do you want the Boreal or the saw-whet?”

Almost before I could finish, she replied, “Boreal!” with the kind of energy that meant she was a through-and-true birder. So we doubled back and got her on the bird, which was her first encounter with a Boreal not at a banding station, and then we looped around for the saw-whet. We learned that Sarah was a graduate student studying mercury poisoning in Indonesian birds and had travelled all over the world.

“Do you guys know about the Northern Hawk Owl?” she asked. “It’s only about 25 minutes from here.” Our adventure with Sarah continued, and after a refueling stop at a gas station, we were off to search for our newest quarry. Of perhaps some amusement to 3RBC members, on the way to this new spot, we passed by the fairly large city (population 137,000) of Trois-Rivières, or Three Rivers! I of course checked later to see if Trois-Rivières had a bird club and they do: Club d’ornithologie de Trois-Rivières. So, there is also a Three Rivers Birding Club in Quebec!

At Parc écologique de l’Anse du Port, we made our way down the boardwalk in the frigid cold, occasionally stopping to enjoy the White-breasted Nuthatches and Black-capped Chickadees at extremely close range as they ate along rails strewn with sunflower seeds. When we reached the end of the boardwalk with no sign of the Northern Hawk Owl and only the windy St. Lawrence River (one of the three rivers) before us, we backtracked and noticed some steps that led off the boardwalk and into a snow path. Soon we encountered a couple Québécois trudging toward us from their recent owl-encounter, and then we had it, an inquisitive, high-perched Northern Hawk Owl, my first lifer of the trip and my last remaining northern owl species. After bidding farewell to our owl squad-mate Sarah, we continued to Ottawa.

With a full day to bird in the Canadian capital city, we focused our efforts on finding Gray Partridges, an introduced species which we learned was once widespread throughout the area but is now barely hanging on in one not-so-reliable spot. We tried in both the morning and the afternoon, driving slowly and scanning carefully, at times joined by a local birder, trying to make each gray rock and smudge into a Gray Partridge but never quite pulling off the feat. In the late afternoon, we went to meet a Canadian friend to enjoy yet another Northern Hawk Owl (new for my Ontario list!), which we quickly found. We then went to a spot with dozens of Snow Buntings and a dramatically posed Snowy Owl, a Canadian flag waving in the distance behind it. Before departing the region the next day, we checked for the Gray Partridge again. This time, five gray blobs with red heads were ambling along the snow fields.

When we visited Algonquin in 2017, we stayed on the west side of the park in Dwight, but as we were coming from the east, we stayed in Whitney. This is slightly farther from Pittsburgh, but conveniently stationed us much closer to the visitor center. The next day, the park was glorious: a nice big flock of at least 19 Evening Grosbeaks paid a morning visit to the visitor center feeders. Seeing them had been one of our goals, and our early arrival was also rewarded by the presence of a Ruffed Grouse, which soon disappeared beneath the spruce trees. Both of those were new Canadian encounters for me, as were the Pine Siskins that popped in that morning.

We also saw good numbers of both crossbill species, which were scattered throughout the park and especially along the main highway. It wasn’t a priority, but we got skunked on all the boreal



*SNOOZING – Among the owls Frank and Adrienne saw in Quebec was this Northern Saw-whet Owl blissfully ignoring their presence. It’s unscientific to say “cute,” but what the heck? (photo by Frank)*

specialties. We walked the Spruce Bog Trail twice and found next to nothing besides an exceptionally large Common Raven, despite my looking carefully for a Spruce Grouse. The day, while not cold for the area (around 20° F), was a little on the yucky side with nasty sleet coming down, which might have been a factor in missing this grouse. With more time, I would’ve liked to go someplace deeper into the habitat that we weren’t able to visit. Eventually we just ran out of daylight. No American marten for us either, so we’ll have to try again!

Sometimes observations of common birds can unexpectedly be the most noteworthy event of a birding trip. So it was here: I was astonished by the sheer number of Blue Jays throughout the park and especially at the visitor center. They were absolutely everywhere and the most common or most conspicuous bird in the park. There were conservatively 65 around the visitor center, and our day’s total surely exceeded 100 individual Blue Jays.

The next day, we needed to return to Pittsburgh, but on the way, we tried for one more bird: the staked out Varied Thrush, faithfully attending a Bark Lake feeder not too far out of our way. For a time, crossbills of both species were still visible along the highway that carried us south from the boreal wonderland. When we got to the thrush spot, we waited with a bit of the nervous calculation about how long a window we were willing to give ourselves for this bird. We were quickly interrupted by the star itself, a stunner surrounded by throngs of American red squirrels and many, many Blue Jays. We later learned that it was an exceptional year for Blue Jays in central Ontario. With three great lifers in the books, a fourth lifer for Adrienne, and many other wonderful birds encountered, we headed home warm and contented from the winter wonders of the North.



## Birds in the Three Rivers Area

### Rarities Offered a Bit of Joy in Our Tragic 2020 Spring

By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

We had a very memorable spring! It alternated between warm dry periods and cold wet periods in April and May. When the weather finally stabilized, some rare and uncommon birds arrived, and it was a great season despite our COVID-19 limitations.

A late **Tundra Swan** was at Brunots Island in the Ohio River 5/11-12 (MJ, JP, JF). A nice count for Allegheny County, 13 **Blue-winged Teal** were at Duck Hollow 4/14 (JS, SS, various observers). Smaller numbers were present in the county during most of March and April. A late **Gadwall** was at North Park 5/4-7 (ME, LS, DN, and others). A number of **Buffleheads** were in the area 4/5, a sort of mini-fallout: 20 were on the Allegheny River at the Highland Park Dam, 11 were upriver at Verona (AH), and 57 were at Duck Hollow (LC, RC, FI, eBird reports).

**Common Merganser** was confirmed breeding when a female with 9 ducklings were found at Wingfield Pines in mid-May (JHo, JP). Up to 15 **Red-breasted Mergansers** were at Dashields Dam on the Ohio River 4/18 (MV), and reports on eBird came from eight more locations. **Ruddy Ducks** were reported on 4/18 at four locations: 6 at Duck Hollow (MF), 6 at Dashields Dam (MV), 13 on the Allegheny River at Blawnox (DY), 2 at Imperial (MV, et al.), and 5 on the Allegheny River at Creighton (AH, PM).

Several **Northern Bobwhites** were reported. One appeared at a backyard feeding station in Verona 4/7 (RDe), 1 was heard in O'Hara Twp. 4/25 (eBird), and 1 was in a backyard in Hampton Twp. 5/11-14 (DN). Someone was releasing captive birds.

An **Eastern Whip-poor-will** was calling in Frick Park 4/24-25 (MK, AP, TRh) and was initially heard by a non-birder a few days prior, according to MK.

A **Sora** was at Wingfield Pines 5/12 (AP) and 5/13 (FI, ST). A dead **Virginia Rail** was found in downtown Pittsburgh 4/8 (TR), an unfortunate victim of a window strike. It was found during a Birdsafe Pittsburgh survey to collect data on window strikes. On a happier note, a pair of **Virginia Rails** returned to Harrison Hills Park for the second consecutive year and were confirmed breeding. A chick was seen in early May (RB, DB). Other Virginias were 1 in Marshall Twp. 4/29 (JHz) and 2 at Wingfield Pines 4/30 to at least 5/12 (JM, various other observers). A **Common Gallinule** was a nice find at Imperial 5/13 (RMc, photo on eBird) by a visiting birder from North Carolina. Other observers saw it until at least 5/24, providing the third record for Imperial.

Mudflats at North Park attracted shorebirds in good numbers. High counts were 10 **Semipalmated Plovers** 5/10 (SD), 25 Lesser Yellowlegs 5/11 (MD), 17 **Solitary Sandpipers** 5/23 (AP), and 20 **Least Sandpipers** 5/11 (MD). Rare in spring, 4 **Short-billed Dowitchers** were at Imperial 5/16 (MV, various observers). Twenty-three **Wilson's Snipe** were at Imperial 4/18 (FI). Three **American Woodcocks** were heard at Sewickley Heights Park 5/1 (eBird), and one was heard just outside Schenley Park, through 4/3 (FI), a first for the location. A male **Wilson's Phalarope** appeared briefly at Imperial 5/17 (MV), the eighth record there.

The gull and tern migration at Dashields Dam suffered from poor weather conditions and lack of birding coverage. High count of **Herring Gulls** at the Highland Park Bridge colony was 95 on 4/18 (SK), and 42 were at the Emsworth Dam 4/23 (PB). An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was a great find at Emsworth

Dam on the Ohio River 5/5 (PB). **Bonaparte's Gulls** appeared at several locations. High counts included 20 at Emsworth Dam 4/1 (PB), 15 at the Highland Park Dam 4/5 (AH), 15 at Dashields Dam 5/6 (ST), and 20 at Brunots Island 5/11 (MJ). An unusually large flock of 27 **Caspian Terns** were at Imperial 4/18 (MV and others), 2 were at Dashields Dam 4/18 (MV), 1 was at Brunots Island 5/6 (MJ), and 4 were at Oakmont 5/10 (MD). **Common Terns** included 6 at Duck Hollow 5/15 (AP), 2 at Brunots Island 5/6 (MJ) and 3 on 5/11 (AP), and at Dashields Dam 5/26 (MV). **Forster's Terns** were reported from 4/18 to 5/6. May 6 produced good numbers on the Ohio River including 12 at Brunots Island (MJ, AP) and 14 at Dashields Dam (DW, ST).

Single **Common Loons** were at Duck Hollow 4/14 (JS, SS) and Imperial 4/18 (MV), an uncommon visitor to the latter location. A late one was at Dashields Dam 5/20 (MV).

A **Great Egret** was at Emsworth Dam 4/23 (PB). An **American Bittern** was perched atop a well-groomed shrub next to a house in Mount Washington 4/5 (reported to MV). The observer posted a photo on Facebook, asking what kind of bird it was. One was at Wingfield Pines 5/12 (JP) and another was seen in flight at Deer Lakes Park 5/17 (DYe). An adult **Black-crowned Night-Heron** was a nice find at Wingfield Pines 5/12-18 (JP and others).

Two **Black Vultures** were perched in a tree in Fox Chapel 4/5 (CH), 1 with a red wing tag labeled H73. They were photographed the next day at nearby Beechwood Farms 4/6 (MB). **Ospreys** returned to established nest sites at Leetsdale and Neville Island (MV, PB). Kettles of 57 **Broad-winged Hawks** flew over Squirrel Hill 4/23 (MK) and 53 over Sewickley 4/29 (KD, BG, KS).

Several **Red-headed Woodpeckers** were a rare treat. The immature that wintered in Allegheny Cemetery in Lawrenceville was reported to 5/4 (eBird). One was at Beechwood Farms 4/22 (MT) and another was nearby at a Fox Chapel residence 5/11 (BSh), 1 was in Frick Park 5/15 (various observers) and again 5/18 (AP), and 1 visited a feeder in Swissvale 5/30 (eBird).

A **Merlin** was at Beechwood Farms 4/29 (BSh), and 2 late birds were at Frick Park 5/3 (JC) and Dashields Dam 5/7 (ST). May records are rare.

**Olive-sided Flycatchers** included singles at Deer Lakes Park 5/16 (AH) and Frick Park 5/20 (MS, EH). **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** are more often reported in the fall, so spring birds were unexpected: singles at Deer Lakes Park 5/17 (DYe, AH) and 5/23 (AH), Frick Park 5/19 (ST) and 5/25 (NH); and Chatham University in Squirrel Hill 5/30 (MKu). **Alder Flycatcher** is a rare migrant here. Singles were at Frick Park 5/19 (AP, various others), 5/20 at North Park (DN), and 5/28 at Wingfield Pines (NL, eBird with vocal recording).

An early **Blue-headed Vireo** was at Frick Park 4/7 (JS, SS). **Philadelphia Vireos** had a good showing this spring: singles were seen at Barking Slopes 5/9 (MD) and South Park 5/19 (JF). Reports came from Frick Park 5/15-22 with a high of 3 on 5/15 (various observers).

**Common Ravens** continued regularly in Bridgeville, a new location (RT). A **Marsh Wren** carrying cattail down at Wingfield Pines 5/7 (JM) indicated nest building, but breeding was not confirmed. It was seen into mid-May (various observers).

A **Clay-colored Sparrow** was feeding on a mowed lawn at Chatham College 5/2 (MKu, various other observers). A "**Gambel's**" **White-crowned Sparrow** visited a backyard in McCandless Twp. in early May (SG). I don't know whether this subspecies has previously been recorded in Allegheny County.

Too many **Purple Finch** reports were received in eBird to list here. Late birds included 1 in Penn Hills 5/18 (MF) and 1 in Natrona Heights 5/28 (PH).

# The Peregrine

## Birds in the Three Rivers

*continued from page 7*

Warblers were well represented, especially because large numbers of birders covered Frick Park daily. **Worm-eating Warbler** is a rare migrant and local breeder here. Two were at Harrison Hills Park 5/3 (SM), a reliable breeding location, and singles were at Frick Park 5/7 (MK) and 5/13 (AP), and Sewickley Heights Park 5/7 (MT, CD, ST). **Northern Waterthrushes** began to appear earlier than usual in April. Singles were at Frick Park 4/25 to 5/23 (JC, various observers), Wingfield Pines 4/30 (JM) and 5/4 (JF, JP), Dashields Dam 5/3 (MV), Schenley Park 5/13 (OL), and Harrison Hills Park 5/13 (DN).

**Golden-winged Warbler** is always notable, and there were multiple reports this spring. Single birds were at Frick Park 5/3 (AH, PM) and 5/9-11 (AP, various observers), and 5/17 (NH); Beechwood Farms 5/6 (JF), Barking Slopes 5/9 (MD), and North Park 5/14 (eBird). A **“Brewster’s” Warbler** hybrid singing a **Blue-winged Warbler** song was at Frick Park 4/30 (SL). A **“Lawrence’s” Warbler** hybrid was found at Deer Lakes Park 5/16 (AH) where it remained through the season (various observers). What appeared to be a **Blue-winged Warbler** with a small pale black auricular patch just below the eye was photographed at Frick Park 5/16 (CK). This may have been a hybrid, but it did not match the appearance of typical hybrids.

**Prothonotary Warbler** is a very rare migrant, so three reports were exceptional. The first was at Frick Park 4/29 (NH) where it remained until 5/7 giving birders the opportunity to observe this golden beauty at close range. One was at North Park 5/3 (SD) and another was at Boyce-Mayview Park 5/19 (JSa) where it remained through the season (various observers). Another rare migrant, a **Swainson’s Warbler** was tragically found in downtown Pittsburgh stunned from a window strike 5/14 (TR). It appeared somewhat alert so it was captured and taken to Schenley Park where it was released. We can only hope it made a full recovery. This was the fifth Allegheny County record and first since 2007.

**Orange-crowned Warbler** is also a rare migrant, particularly in spring, so six reports were unusual: singles at Sewickley Heights Park 5/8 (ST), Hartwood Acres 5/9 (MKu, DYe), Schenley Park 5/9 (eBird), Natrona Heights 5/14 (DB), Schenley Park 5/15 (KSJ), and Frick Park 5/16 (CK). The much sought-after **Mourning Warbler** was at Frick Park 5/13-24 (DYe, various observers), Indiana Twp. 5/13 (DYe), North Park 5/15 (SD), Deer Lakes Park 5/16-18 (DYe) and again there 5/23 (AH). **Wilson’s Warbler** is an uncommon migrant. One was at Frick Park 5/8-19 (MT, RSe, MK, MH, AP, CK), 2 were at Duck Hollow 5/15 (FI), 1 at North Park 5/17 (DN), and 1 in Pleasant Hills 5/16 (SSn).

Amazingly, 2 **Summer Tanagers** were reported this spring, the first sightings in six years. A female fed on bees at a farm in Gibsonia 5/5 (KP). The owners welcomed birders, and Shannon Thompson provided it with mealworms to divert its appetite from the bees, a gesture of thanks to the homeowner. It was last seen 5/11 (KP). A second-year male was in Frick Park 5/17 (KSJ, AP).

The male **Painted Bunting** that spent the winter at a feeder in O’Hara Twp. was last seen 4/20 (BSh). There was a point of concern when the bird disappeared for a few days and then appeared to be ill or injured another day, but it seemed to recover.

A **Dickcissel** was detected flying over Indiana Twp. by a nocturnal flight call recorder 5/14 (DYe).

*Observers: Michael Barney, Dave Brooke, Paul Brown, Ron Burkert, Rich Carlson, Jack Chaillet, Laurel Chiappetta, Michael David, Casey Davidson, Karyn Delaney, Steve Denninger, Roger*



*A TREASURE AND AN ERROR – A Prothonotary Warbler (above) is a species rarely seen during migration through Allegheny County. Charity Kheshgi photographed this beauty in Frick Park on May 5, 2020. Meanwhile, your editor misidentified the bird below on a page of her warbler photos in the last issue. It is not a Pine Warbler. It is an Orange-crowned Warbler, as confirmed by Bob Mulvihill at the National Aviary and by Jon L. Dunn, co-author of A Field Guide to Warblers of North America. The tiny bill should have “pointed” me to the identification.*



*Desy (RDe), Mary Eyman, Mike Fialkovich, John Flannigan, Steve Gosser, Barbara Griffith, Eric Hall, Nathan Hall, Cecelia Hard, Janet Heintz (JHz), Amy Henrici, Paul Hess, Jessica Hoffman (JHo), Frank Izaguirre, Matthew Juskowich, Charity Kheshgi, Michelle Kienholz, Scott Kinzey, Malcolm Kurtz (MKu), Samuel Lapp, Nick Liadis, Oliver Lindhiem, Randall McCarthy (RMc), Jeff McDonald, Pat McShea, Steve Manns, Dick Nugent, Joe Papp, Aidan Place, Trinidad Regaspi, Tessa Rhinehart (TRh), James Saracco (JSa), Kathy Saunders, Brian Shema (BSh), Mike Smith, Jack Solomon, Sue Solomon, Liz Spence, Shannon Thompson, Ryan Tomazin, Molly Toth, Mark Vass, Dave Wilton, Dan Yagusic, David Yeany (DYe).*

