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# The Peregrine

## Three Rivers Birding Club Newsletter

Vol. 24, No. 5 September/October 2025

### At our next meeting, *Peregrine* Editor, Bob Mulvihill, will recall his “Serendipitous Career in Ornithology”

Current Editor of *The Peregrine* and lifelong Pittsburgh area bird watcher Bob Mulvihill will tell us about his 45+ years in ornithology at our monthly meeting on October 8, 2025. **[PLEASE NOTE:** Due to the observance of Yom Kippur, our October meeting is being held on **Wednesday, October 8th** instead of our usual first Wednesday of the month].



Throughout his career Bob has been attracted to a wide variety of ornithological research questions, not infrequently as a result of an odd or eyebrow-raising observation made by him or told to him by others. He will review a selection of his many ornithological peregrinations, including a variety of examples when unexpected observations (his own or told to him by others) led him to notable and interesting discoveries for birders and ornithologists alike!

In 1978, while in college at the University of Pittsburgh, Bob began studying and working with birds as a volunteer at Powdermill Nature Reserve. After college he joined Powdermill’s staff, and he spent the next 28 years working there and helping band hundreds of thousands of birds. He obtained a Master’s degree at Indiana University of Pennsylvania while continuing to work full time. Bob served with the late Bob Leberman as a co-regional coordinator and species account author for the first *Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas* (1983-1989). Twenty years later he served as project coordinator and co-editor for the *Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in Pennsylvania* (2004-2010). In 2011, he joined the National Aviary as its staff ornithologist.

For information on how to attend in-person, or online, please visit [3rbc.org](https://www.3rbc.org).

**The October meeting is also our Annual Meeting. Your attendance is very important as we select those who will lead 3RBC for the next two years (2026-2027). Let's all try to be there for this important election!**

### Three New Birding Field Guides!

The Three Rivers Birding Club congratulates Pittsburgh native and charter 3RBC member, Ted Floyd, on the recent launch of three (yes, three!) new birding field guides published by National Geographic. Ted grew up in Squirrel Hill in the city’s East End, was educated in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, and was extremely active in the city’s birding community until departing for college in 1986. Close to 40 years later, Ted still gets back to Pittsburgh from time to time, enjoying trips down memory lane at his old stomping grounds, especially iconic Frick Park.

Ted wrote the entire texts for all three of the recent National Geographic volumes: *A Field Guide to the Birds of the United States and Canada—East*, second edition, published in Feb. 2025; *A Field Guide to the Birds of the United States and Canada—West*, second edition, also published in Feb. 2025; and the venerable *Field Guide to the Birds of the United States and Canada*, eighth edition, published in Sept. 2025. The texts reflect Ted’s decades of experience across the U.S. and Canada, as well as careful review and fact-checking by well over 100 expert birders.



In addition to the entirely new texts by Ted, the “NatGeo” guides feature dozens of original artworks by two brilliant young ornithological illustrators, Andrew Guttenberg and Marky Mutchler; data-driven and innovative range maps produced by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and powered by the huge eBird database; and all the many species splits, checklists shuffles, and other taxonomic changes since the time of the three books’ predecessors. Another Pittsburgh native (and 3RBC Program Committee member), Adrienne Izaguirre, served as Project Manager to the three guides, providing tremendous logistical and editorial support to “The Trilogy.”

Ted and his family have lived in Colorado for close to 25 years now, but Pittsburgh still is, and always shall be, close to Ted’s heart. In particular, Ted frequently cites birding friends, mentors, and experiences from the 1980s as lasting influences on his lifetime of bird and nature study—including all the research and writing that went into the NatGeo guides. We asked Ted to share some stories from his formative years in Pittsburgh, and we are pleased to share some of those reminiscences in “Field Guide Influences” on Page 4.

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

## President's Message

### Second Atlas Seasons

By Mike Fialkovich

As I write this message, we are in the middle of the second season of the *Pennsylvania Bird Atlas*. The first winter atlas is behind us, and that went well with observers getting into the field to document winter birds. As the atlas project progresses, participants are getting more experienced with the various protocols and methods of the project, and that makes everyone's efforts smoother. The first year was a learning experience for all involved.

This year an effort was made to conduct point counts. Last season just a few were done, and I think that was due to observers getting familiar with the project in general before getting involved with special surveys. This year, a request was sent to compilers for more point counts to be conducted, and we made an effort in Allegheny County to do as many as possible. Observers really increased their efforts, and we accomplished a lot in the county. A total of 129 point counts were completed! At Atlas Coordinator Amber Wiewel's town hall online meeting last July, she reported a statewide a total of 2,680 point counts, that were surveyed in 2025, tallying 186 species and 60,215 individual birds!

For those unfamiliar, point counts are a standard biological method of surveying wildlife. The points are designated locations, where an observer remains stationary for a specified time (six minutes for the atlas) and surveys the birds seen and heard. Points typically run in straight lines called transects, and if you look at point count maps on the atlas site, the points are laid out in a grid pattern across the state. Each has a unique number based on the atlas block number. Each block contains four point count locations. Point count surveys are to be done in the morning up to 10:00 a.m., when birds are most active.

The main challenges with the point counts are the locations. Many are on private property or otherwise inaccessible locations, noisy locations (along a busy road), or in unsafe locations. To deal with that, the atlas protocol states observers can be a maximum of 0.6



THANKS TO RIPLEY KINDERVATER FOR THIS PHOTO OF THE WILSON'S PHALAROPE BREEDING AT PRESQUE ISLE, A FIRST FOR PENNSYLVANIA. SHARP EYES WILL SPOT THE CHICK IN THE BACKGROUND.

miles away from the count location to account for access issues. If there still isn't a good location within the specified distance, observers can alert the atlas coordinator, regional, or county coordinators to make them aware. Some points simply cannot be covered.

Regular atlasing also continued this year. We had the pleasant surprise of two pairs of Red-headed Woodpeckers nesting in Allegheny

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County, the first in many years! There were later reports of another two pairs, both on private property. Kentucky Warblers were found in North Park, where they have been unreported for many years. Further afield, the first breeding confirmation of Wilson's Phalarope in Pennsylvania came from Presque Isle! Wilson's Phalarope was likely not on anyone's radar as a breeding species in the state. Hopefully, more surprises will come along as the project progresses.

As co-coordinator for Allegheny County (with Brian Shema), I would like to give a big thank you to everyone for their efforts in helping complete point count surveys this season. Great job everyone!

## Tell Us How the Outings Went

We have a lot of great outings on page 3! We encourage you to participate, and to perhaps consider submitting a brief write-up of the experience for *The Peregrine*. Simply let the outing leader know that you are willing to do so. Submissions should be brief (200 – 500 words), and include the date and location of the outing, with a description of avian (and other) highlights. Email to our editor [Robert.Mulvihill@aviary.org](mailto:Robert.Mulvihill@aviary.org), with "Outings Revisited" in the subject line.



## Outings to Come

### Fall Bird Outings 2025

By Steve Thomas

**Friday, August 29 – Sewickley Heights Park:** Join Sheree Daugherty ([shereedaugherty@gmail.com](mailto:shereedaugherty@gmail.com)), for our first bird walk this fall starting at 8:00 AM in the upper parking lot. See the 3RBC website for directions. Be prepared for muddy trails. We will look for the early fall migration birds.

**Friday, September 5 – North Park:** We will meet Adrian Fenton ([AF9963285@aol.com](mailto:AF9963285@aol.com)) for a fall birding outing at 7:30 AM at the Gold Star Pavilion in North Park on Lake Shore Drive. GPS coordinates: [40.593884](#), [-80.003844](#). We will bird Gold Star wetlands area, Marshall Lake, and if time permits, part of Latodomi Nature Center. Adrian would like participants to email to let him know you plan to attend.

**Saturday, September 6 – Harrison Hills:** Meet leader Dave Brooke (724-487-3586) at 8:00 AM at this county park off Freeport Road between Natrona Heights and Freeport. We will meet him at the Environmental Learning Center parking lot at 8:00 AM (GPS: [40.6572](#), [-79.7024](#)). As you enter the park stay left and then turn left at the first intersection and go up the hill to the large parking lot. Dress for wet grass and mud. Previous fall outings have produced a nice variety of fall migrants, including many warblers and vireos.

**Friday, September 12 – Sewickley Heights Park:** Join Sheree Daugherty ([shereedaugherty@gmail.com](mailto:shereedaugherty@gmail.com)), for our second bird walk to Sewickley this fall starting at 8:00 AM in the upper parking lot. See the 3RBC website for directions. Be prepared for muddy trails.

**Saturday, September 13 – Sewickley Heights Park:** This walk is intended for beginning/inexperienced birders and will be limited to the first seven people who email the walk leader Adrian Fenton at [AF9963285@aol.com](mailto:AF9963285@aol.com). Sewickley Heights Park is an excellent location for seeing fall migrants. We will go slowly to give everyone opportunity to see and identify birds. The starting time will be at 7:30 AM in the upper parking lot. See [3rbc.org](http://3rbc.org) for directions. Please bring binoculars.

**Saturday, September 13 – Deer Lakes Park:** John Vassallo ([johnnvassallo@yahoo.com](mailto:johnnvassallo@yahoo.com)) and Todd Hooe will lead this outing focused on fall migrants, including warblers, vireos, and flycatchers. The outing will begin at 7:30 AM and last approximately 4 hours. We will meet in the parking lot at these GPS coordinates: [40.618722](#), [-79.815371](#). From Creighton-Russellton Road, enter the park (Kurn Road), drive by two ponds on the right, then turn right and proceed to the last parking lot. We will hike approximately 3 miles. Although the trails are fairly well maintained, please dress for possible wet grass, mud, and rainfall.

**Sunday, September 14 – Wingfield Pines:** We will meet Conor Tompkins ([conorotompkins@gmail.com](mailto:conorotompkins@gmail.com)) at Wingfield Pines at 8:00 AM. We can anticipate seeing migrating warblers, ducks, lingering summer breeders, and other fall birds. If we are lucky, we will hear the resident Virginia Rail! The dirt trails can be uneven and muddy, so wear long pants and boots. The outing will last around two hours. There is limited parking in the adjacent parking lot, but there is plenty of parking up the hill by the Boyce- Mayview swimming pool. If you do not have issues with mobility, please consider parking up the hill by the pool to free up the parking closer to the entrance. There are no bathrooms or port-a-johns at the location. See “[Birding Locations](#)” on the 3RBC website for directions. GPS coordinates for starting location

are [40°20'09.8"N 80°06'41.3"W](#) ([40.336235](#), [-80.111461](#)). If there is interest, we can regroup at the Over The Bar Bicycle Cafe down the street afterwards for brunch.

**Saturday, September 20 – Raccoon Creek State Park:** Meet Malcolm Kurtz at Raccoon Creek SP at 8:30 AM. We will gather at the Lake and Valley Trail Parking Lot, which is on Raccoon Park Road, GPS coordinates: [40.5016868](#), [-80.42241937](#). The Lake trail is very productive; we will look for fall migrating birds

**Friday, October 3 – Hartwood Acres:** Come explore the Saxonburg Blvd. fields of Hartwood Acres with Dan Mendenhall ([dmendenhall@aswp.org](mailto:dmendenhall@aswp.org)) and John Dzikiy. We will start at 8:00 AM at the Hartwood Acres Mansion parking area (200 Hartwood Acres), hiking down through the woods, around the meadow trails, and back up the hill to the mansion parking area. The terrain can be steep in areas, and dress for possible wet grass, mud, and rainfall. We will hike approximately 3 miles. Please email Dan to register if you plan to attend, as we will cap participants at ten people.

**Saturday, October 4 – Linda’s Farm:** Linda Croskey has invited us to visit her farm for this bird walk. We will meet at 8:00 AM at 882 Deer Creek Road, Gibsonia 15044. Location is northern Allegheny County in West Deer Township; there will be a sign at the end of the driveway. (Across the road is Harvest Valley Farm). Linda’s farm is comprised of a variety of natural habitats: several acres of goldenrod fields, farm fields with brushy edges, mature deciduous trees, plus several wildflower and milkweed meadows. This attracts grassland birds, warblers, and many fall migrants. Dress for ticks, and bring water and snacks. Walking is mostly level along paths with a few hills over uneven terrain. For additional directions call Linda at 724-612-9963 or email [lcroskey@consolidated.net](mailto:lcroskey@consolidated.net)

**Sunday, October 5 – Frick Park:** Meet Michelle Kienholz ([mlkienholz@aol.com](mailto:mlkienholz@aol.com)) at 8:00 AM at the Frick Park Environmental Center, located at 2005 Beechwood Blvd, in Squirrel Hill, 15217, for a morning bird walk in Frick Park. Frick Park is an excellent location for the fall migration, and we’re hoping for lots of warblers, other migrants, and local birds.

**Saturday, October 18 – Frick Park Family-oriented Bird Walk:** Join young birder Ezra White on Saturday, October 18 at 9:30 AM, for a family-oriented birding walk at Frick Park. Families are welcome on this day to learn about birding, view the many birds that call Frick home, and enjoy the beautiful fall color. We’ll meet on the bridge to the Environmental Center, where we’ll enjoy and learn to identify Frick Park’s many bird species—ranging from feeder birds, like cardinals, chickadees, and woodpeckers, to fall visitors like migratory warblers, tiny kinglets, and maybe even an owl! The walk meets at the Frick Environmental Center (2005 Beechwood Blvd, Pittsburgh, PA 15217) and will continue for 2 to 3 hours; however, participants are welcome to leave early. Participation is limited to 15 individuals, so please contact Ezra at [ezradavidwhite@icloud.com](mailto:ezradavidwhite@icloud.com) to register.

**Saturday, November 1 – Yellow Creek State Park:** This outing will be a joint outing of the 3RBC and the Todd Bird Club. Meet Roger and Margaret Higbee at the park office at 8:00 AM. The Park office is located on Route 259, just off Route 422 east of Indiana. Allow an hour and a half to drive from Pittsburgh. The Park has a wide variety of habitats and a large lake that attracts a wide variety of waterbirds, and sometimes exciting rarities. Please contact Margaret (724-354-3493) or Roger (cell: 412-309-3538) if you plan to go.

## Field Guide Influences: It Takes a 'Burgh

By Ted Floyd



THE AUTHOR GIVES AN IMPROMPTU FIELD ORNITHOLOGY LESSON UPON DISCOVERING A ROAD-KILLED JUVENILE KILLDEER.

Print field guides typically have an author or authors, but there's more to the story. That's because every field guide author will tell you that their words are a distillation of the knowledge and wisdom of scores or hundreds of birding friends. Or, if you've been in this business as long as I have, literally thousands. Read the acknowledgments to the forthcoming eighth edition of National Geographic's *Field Guide to the Birds of the United States and Canada*, attributed to Yours Truly, to get a sneak peek at the galaxy of birders who informed every species account and practically every sentence in the book.

Something I didn't have room for in the book's acknowledgments section was reflection on the "intangibles," the role of folks who didn't perhaps contribute directly to the book's content, but who nevertheless have powerfully influenced my understanding and appreciation of birds and nature. Pittsburghers are impressively represented in that august company. Here are some extremely brief reminiscences.

**Jack Solomon** was one of the very first birders I ever met in the field, at an Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania field trip in the Pittsburgh suburbs early in 1983. Jack showed me a Pied-billed Grebe and other "lifers" on that field trip, but what really impressed me was Jack's ability to discourse about anything; I still remember conversations from that glorious day of birding about chemistry, logarithms, the U.S.S.R. (kids, Google it), and the legal doctrine of adverse possession (Google that, too). As much as any formal teacher or professor in my life, Jack has taught me about the value of a well-rounded education.

Toward the end of 1983, I met up with **Mark VanderVen** for one of the city parks sectors of the Pittsburgh Christmas Bird Count. Hunger, physical exertion, and sleep deprivation were no match for Mark's internal perpetual motion machine of nonstop enthusiasm for every bird—common or uncommon—that crossed our path. I'm not sure that I'd ever seen birding for the sheer joy of it the way Mark did it. And well over four decades later, it's always exhilarating to get together with Mark to revel in objectively "common" but still marvelous bird species. And, *always*, for spirited conversation about

anything.

In the spring of 1984, I had an intense and indelible encounter with **Paul Hess**. I was a participant on a well-attended, indeed arguably over-subscribed, migration bird walk. I mumbled something about hearing a White-eyed Vireo, a low-grade rarity at the time for the location, and I'll never forget how the sole focus of Paul's attention instantly became the kid claiming the vireo. Within seconds, Paul was go

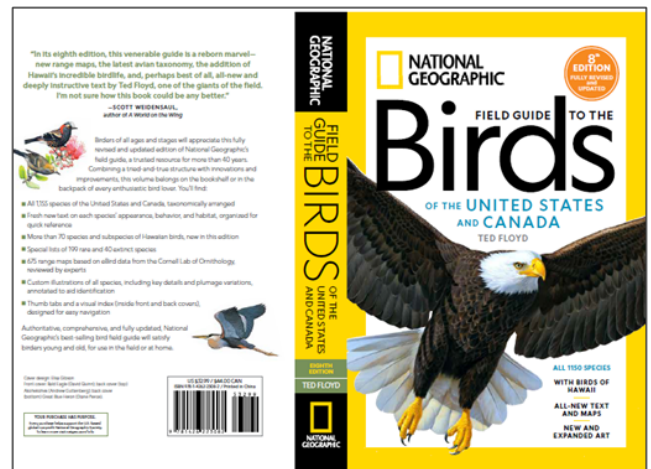
ing off about the northward expansion of the Carolinian avifauna in Allegheny County, and I was enthralled by the experience of having a private audience with the famous "Mr. Hess" himself. Paul was never an "official" teacher of mine, but I have learned so much from him about science and, even more so, journalism.

Another formative early influence on me was **Mike Fialkovich**. I remember a late-summer jaunt with Mike, Mark, and another birding friend, Vickie, to Shenango River Reservoir, north of Pittsburgh, in the mid-1980s; and what was so cool about Mike was his evident interest in anything at all that contained protoplasm. We saw great birds that long day afield, notably some rare shorebirds; but what I particularly remember were Mike's extemporaneous and friendly field tutorials on everything from fritillary identification to jewelweed anatomy. To this day, I am hopelessly fascinated by anything that, well, contains protoplasm, and Mike is a continuing inspiration for me in that regard.

Jack, Mark, Paul, and Mike: Don't let this get to your head. There have been many, many others. I could just as well have shared anecdotes from the 1980s about Pittsburgh-area birders **Joyce Hoffmann**, **Bill Fink**, **Ed Kwater**, **Vickie Dziadosz**, **Lester Olson**, and especially the late **Nathan Hall**. And so many later friends and influences from the Pittsburgh region: **Michelle Kienholz**, **Bob Mulvihill**, **Aidan Place**, **Tessa Rhinehart**, **Adrienne Izaguirre**, and countless others.

If there's a turn of phrase, a nugget of wisdom, a cold hard fact, or even a glimpse into a worldview on the pages of National Geographic's *Field Guide to the Birds of the United States and Canada* that makes you smile or otherwise meets with your approval, there's an outside chance it originated with someone in the enumeration above. Especially Adrienne, because she was the hardworking and supremely competent Project Manager for the book!

Add in my many rewarding years associated with the brilliant birding communities in and around State College and Philadelphia, and the Pennsylvania influence in the *Field Guide* trilogy is indeed pervasive. Thank you all for a lifetime of birding friendship—and, whether or not you knew it at the time, for coauthoring this field guide with me!



COVERS OF THE NEW NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FIELD GUIDE TO BIRDS, BY TED FLOYD



# The Peregrine

## Osprey (a.k.a., Fish Hawk)—An Exceptionally Adept Fisherman

Article and photos by Tom Moeller



OSPREY FLYING WITH A FISH AT SAN JOUGUIN MARSH, IVINE, CA—SEPT. 2015.

Through evolution, the Osprey has developed a very unusual specialty amongst raptors – it eats mainly fish, which it gets by diving into water to catch a meal. The Bald Eagle may pluck a fish, whether alive or dead, from the surface of a lake or river, but the Osprey plunges talons first onto its prey, diving deep into the water to grasp a fish. Bald Eagles may catch other non-aquatic prey or even feed on carrion, but the Osprey dines mainly on live-caught fish, eschewing dead carcasses. (Small birds or mammals, frogs, and other amphibians may be caught when fish are scarce.)

Due to their piscine (fish) diet, Ospreys are found near bodies of water – the ocean, lakes, rivers, large ponds, or streams. They are ‘cosmopolitan,’ meaning found on every continent except in Antarctica. Osprey is so unique, it is the only bird found in the family *Pandionidae*; its genus/species is *Pandion haliaetus*, and it is further subdivided into five races around the world. In North America we have *Pandion haliaetus carolinensis*, and its breeding range covers all of the lower United States and the southern halves of Canada and Alaska. All worldwide Ospreys look similar (with some plumage variations) and follow similar life styles.

Our Ospreys are large raptors with an average wingspan just over five feet, a length of 23 inches, a weight of 3.5 pounds, and wear distinctive plumage. Its back and wings are a rich, chocolate brown; its neck, belly, and undertail coverts are white. The underside of the wings is light and dark with a noticeable dark patch at the wrists. They

often fly with their wings bent at these wrists, although they can soar with outstretched wings. The white neck feathers are sprinkled with darker feathers, and the females often have a dark necklace across the top of their breasts. The Osprey’s tail is dark with lighter stripes on the upper side and white with dark stripes on the underside. The face bears a distinctive black-brown mask from the yellow eyes to the back of the head, which is also chocolate brown. Some biologists liken the eye stripe to football players’ black eye stripes, used to cut down on glare. Although a raptor, the Osprey does not have a supraocular ridge above its eyes, therefore, lacking the mean look of most other raptors. Its sharp, hooked beak is dark, and the bird’s long legs are half-pantalooned with white feathers ending in blue-gray scaled legs and feet. The feet display four large, curved talons for grasping fish, and these are aided by sharp spicules along the bottoms of the feet to better hold its slippery prey. A further adaptation in the feet is a movable outside toe that can switch backwards, like owls, to make a four-toed claw (two in front, two in back) to better grasp a fish.

Juvenile Ospreys look like adults except that their darker feathers are outlined in white, giving them a scaly look. Plus, they have a thin, white fringe on their tails and pale tips along their wings. The eyes are a reddish orange. They reach full adult plumage in a year and a half.

To catch fish, the Ospreys patrol over water searching for prey. The raptors’ eyes are eight times more acute than humans, and they see in color. With large eyes so sharp, they cannot move in their sockets, so the bird is constantly looking back and forth, maybe hundreds of feet in the air. When a fish is spotted, the bird will hover as it determines a dive, fold back its wings, and begin its descent. It keeps its eyes locked on its target, using its nictitating eyelids to protect them, closing cartilage flaps inside its nostrils to keep out water, adjusting for refraction in the water, and either putting out its grasping feet in the dive or right before contact with the water. Wham! The Osprey may immerse itself fully as it closes its talons on its prey, and then use its strong wings to flap up and out of the water. Once airborne again, the Osprey will adjust the fish in its talons with the head pointing forward to be more aerodynamic in flight.

Two other adaptations that help the Fish Hawk in diving for fish are (1) the lack of down under its outer feathers, which would become soaked and make the bird too heavy to lift out of the water, and (2) waterproof oil from a gland near its tail that it spreads over all its feathers.

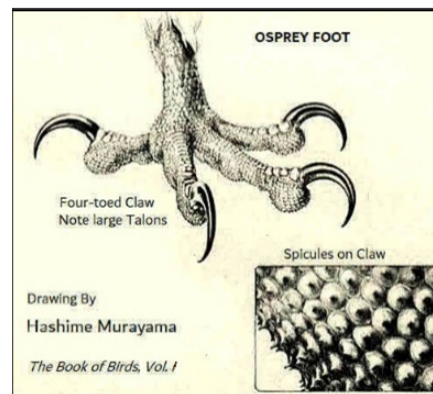


ILLUSTRATION SHOWING THE OSPREY'S HIGHLY CURVED TALONS, AND THE BARBED TOE PADS, BOTH ADAPTATIONS FOR CATCHING FISH. DRAWING BY HASHIME MURAYAMA.

the sea, getting into small organisms, which were eaten by small fish. The chemical was stored in fat cells of these fish, which were eaten

Unfortunately, we almost wiped out this magnificent bird as well as the Bald Eagle with DDT. This chemical was formulated in 1874, but its use as an insecticide was discovered only in 1939. In the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s DDT was extensively sprayed by farmers to control pests. This evil organochloride was also sprayed in marshes to control mosquitoes. DDT was then washed by rain down into streams, rivers, and

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## Osprey

*continued from page 5*

by larger fish, and up the food chain to piscivorous birds like eagles and Ospreys. The chemical interfered with egg shell development in these birds, resulting in weak shells, which adult birds would break as they incubated them. Populations of fish-eating birds plummeted, until Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* drew attention to the DDT problem, leading to its all-out ban in 1972. Since then, Bald Eagles and Ospreys have slowly recovered to the point that both birds have had successful nests on the Monongahela River here in Pittsburgh.

Ospreys meet mates and bond through various actions. Ospreys usual return from migration in early spring to the area near where they were born, males first, followed by females. To attract a female, a male will perform a sky dance, wherein he flies quickly up hundreds of feet in the air and hovers, dangling his legs, then swoops down, stops, and flies rapidly up to hover again, then repeating the dance. He may do this with a fish or a stick in his talons. The sky dance is done over the territory he has picked for a nest. And the dance is performed often until eggs are being incubated.

Once accepted by a female, the pair will fly in circles together or dive at each other. They then work on a nest "together," that is, he gathers material (sticks and other items), while she arranges the nest. The site of the nest may be a rocky crag, a tall tree, or a man-made platform. Mating is done in the nest. When the female is receptive, the male will mount her with his talons in a tight fist, so as not to hurt her. Such mating will be done many times before egg laying.

Established pairs of Ospreys will return separately to their previous year's nest and reclaim it. They are more attached to this nest site than to each other, although they are a mated pair. The nest binds them together. These older pairs go through the same sky dance rituals to rekindle their bonds, and they refurbish the nest each year, making it bigger as they add to it. Many odd items can be added – rags, cardboard, seaweed, boards, plastic bags, shells, even a Barbie doll.

Ospreys are known to build their nests in loose colonies. They have no terrestrial hunting areas to protect, so nearby nests are tolerated. Even humans are tolerated to a point: little toleration is shown when humans get too close to a nest full of eggs or nestlings.

Being open to the sky on a prominent base, the nest must be constantly guarded. The female spends most of her time at the nest as the male brings her fish. He often perches nearby when not out catching food. If really threatened, she will call him for help, either from hunting or from his perch. Threats do come from other Fish Hawks that try to usurp a nest, or from Bald Eagles and Great Horned

Owls that can prey on Osprey eggs, chicks, and even adults. Some inexperienced Ospreys may build a nest on a low mound (an old muskrat lodge) or on the ground, but these are very vulnerable to raids by raccoons, snakes, foxes, etc. Few of these ill-placed nests survive the breeding season.

Down in the cup of the nest lined with fine materials and grasses, the female Osprey lays usually three eggs, creamy colored with dark red or brown splotches. Both parents incubate the eggs for 32-35 days, mostly by the female with short stints by her mate. He will bring her fish to eat. When the chicks hatch, his work is increased significantly as they grow. The chicks are covered in mottled brown down on their backs, and creamy white below. They can eat food presented to them, not needing it stuffed down their throats. The female tears pieces of meat with her large, hooked beak and gently feeds her young. They hatch 1-3 days apart so there is a size difference among them. The older and larger nestlings get a lot of food, while the runt may not get enough. Some do die from starvation in lean times but not from being killed by siblings. When food is needed, the female will call repeatedly to get her mate to feed his family.

Male Ospreys do have their favorite fishing spots. Just off of Hog Island in Maine, there is a stone islet called Hog Island Ledge. A rock underwater shelf connects this islet to the main island. Since the water is shallow here, a Fish Hawk has staked it out as his own hunting ground. A lobster boat working in this area kept getting too close to the trees where an Osprey perched, but it only flew a short distance to another tree as it waited for the boat to leave, so it could dive in the shallow water between Hog Island and the ledge.

As the chicks grow, they develop plumage that looks similar to their parents with minor differences. The female may brood them for a few weeks after hatching, but she soon leaves the nest more and more. The young become more capable of feeding themselves and fighting for a portion of the fish dropped by their father. After four weeks the nestlings begin to flap their wings, building up flight muscles. They may fledge at seven or eight weeks, but they are still fed by their parents and return to the nest at night for about a month. Without training the fledglings instinctively begin to catch fish on their own at about three or four months.

Immature Ospreys begin their long migration in August; most adults leave in September. Remembering that Fish Hawks do not have thick down for warmth explains their early migration timing. They fly south to the Caribbean, Central America, or into South America down to northern Argentina. Ospreys from the northern parts of North America may leapfrog over southern birds, flying far down into South America, while the southern birds take shorter migration flights. Some



OSPREY ON CONSTRUCTED NEST POLE AT CAPE MAY, NJ – APRIL 2009



OSPREY WITH FOOD LANDING ON NEST PLATFORM ON RANKIN RIVER, BRUCE PENINSULA, ONTARIO, CANADA – JUNE 2011.

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# The Peregrine

## Osprey

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Ospreys do stay in Florida year round.

First-year birds do not make a return migration north in the following spring. They stay in their wintering areas for another year, which is unique among raptors. These young birds may form small groups or pair up with a mate. When they return as two-year-olds, they come back near to the area where they fledged but remain unattached. Ospreys do not mate until their third year.

An Osprey is a most unique raptor as its lifestyle shows. It possesses many adaptations developed over eons to perfect its fish-eating ways, its migration schedule, its tolerance of other Ospreys, and its loyalty to a nesting site more than to a mate. It's a shame we almost exterminated this bird with DDT, and it is still threatened in various ways, but not of high concern. We've tried to help it by eliminating DDT and building nesting platforms, yet, it is still listed in the Imperiled Species Management Plan. Let us hope the best for this awesome bird.



OSPREY IN FLIGHT OVER  
CANOE CREEK STATE PARK,  
BLAIR COUNTY, PA – APRIL  
2013

## Birds in the Three Rivers Area

### April – May 2025

#### By Mike Fialkovich, Bird Reports Editor

The **Barnacle Goose** remained in the East Deer Recreational Facility to 4/11 feeding on the lawn. It went missing for two days and was relocated a few miles downriver at Highland Park 4/13 (JL). It didn't remain there for more than a day but was photographed nearby in Blawnox at RIDC Industrial Park 4/15 where it did not linger. It was observed flying in and landing on the Monongahela River at Duck Hollow 4/19 (MVV, EH). So the bird was restless and moving around quite a lot near the end of its stay.

A flock of 13 **Tundra Swan** were observed flying over Brighton Heights 4/3 (BP).

A pair of **Blue-winged Teal** were photographed at NP 5/24 (SP, AMP). It's getting late for them, so the potential for a breeding pair should be monitored. **Northern Shoveler** sightings continued from March with three at Sharpsburg 4/10 (DM). There were several reports from North Park, including one 4/13 (LG) and a nice count of seven 4/15 (SD, HH, AF, AP). One was at the PennDot Wetlands in Upper St. Clair 4/6 (JSa, JF), one was at Chapel Harbor on the Allegheny River 4/10 (AH, PM), and a nice count of eight were on the Allegheny River at Verona 4/12 (AP). Two **Surf Scoters** were on the Allegheny River at Chapel Harbor 4/10 (DBe, m.ob.). A late male **Bufflehead** was on the Ohio River near The Point 5/5-6 (CC, PLi), and a male was at Emsworth 5/19 through the end of May (JF, et al.).

A **Northern Bobwhite** was in Swisshelm Park 5/18 (JO), and one was at North Park 5/20 (KE). The origin of these released birds is always a mystery.

A **Virginia Rail** that wintered at Winfield Pines continued into May, with two observed and heard calling. A **Sora** was a nice find at

a pond at Janoski's Farm in Findlay Twp 4/4-7 (API, TR, SA, GA, WVH). Two were there 4/29 (MV). One was heard at Wingfield Pines 5/8 (TC).

Five **Sandhill Cranes** were observed flying over Gibsonia 4/1 (KP), and two were photographed flying over North Park 5/25 (BK).

A **Semipalmated Plover** was at the Sharpsburg Docks 5/22 (JDz). Four **Least Sandpipers** were at Imperial 5/3 (MF), 15 were there 5/11 (MV), and three 5/21 (MV). One was at North Park 5/14-21 (m.ob.). Two **Semipalmated Sandpipers** were at Imperial 5/21 (MV), and six were there 5/23 (AF). **Solitary Sandpipers** were widely reported during the season. **Lesser Yellowlegs** were reported at Imperial 4/16-5/7 with a high count of four (m.ob.). Up to two were at North Park 4/16-5/10 (eBird), and one was at Sharpsburg 4/25 (DM). A **Greater Yellowlegs** was at Boyce-Mayview Park 5/3 (eBird). One was at North Park up to 5/11 (m.ob.), one was at Imperial from the end of March to 5/4, with four there 4/13 (m.ob.), and two were there 5/18 (MV). One was at Sharpsburg 4/26-5/3 (JDz, et al.).

Small numbers of **Bonaparte's Gulls** were reported early in the season. A high count of 40 were at the Highland Park Bridge 4/2 (JDz). An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was at Dashields Dam 4/14 (AF).

**Caspian Tern** reports include one at North Park 4/6 (EH), two at Duck Hollow 4/19 (EH, MVV), and one there 4/21 (JPu). A **Black Tern** was at Imperial 5/30-31 (MV, m.ob.) delighting many observers during its stay. Two **Common Terns** were at Sharpsburg 5/22 (SD). **Forster's Tern** is our most common migrant tern. One was at Sharpsburg 4/4 (RBu, DBe), two were at Creighton 4/14 (EPH), two were at Dashields Dam 4/14 and 4/18 (AF), one was at Sharpsburg 4/25 (AH, PM), and one was at Creighton 4/26 (AP).

We had a three loon spring this year, a first for the county. A **Red-throated Loon** was found at Rachel Carson Riverfront Park in Cheswick 4/12 (EM, m.ob.) and remained the following day. An immature **Pacific Loon** was quite a surprise on the Monongahela River at Duck Hollow 4/19 (EH, MVV, m.ob.). It was seen by numerous observers the remainder of the day and continued to early evening the following day, when it was observed flying off to the east around 6:30 pm. Observers continued searching the remainder of the day in case it returned, but it was never relocated. During its stay it was at times very difficult to find because it was constantly diving and moving up or down river. This provided a very exciting first county record. **Common Loon** reports include three in flight over Chatham College Eden Hall Campus in Richland Twp. 4/6 (EW), one on the Allegheny River at Bell Harbor Marina in Blawnox 4/21 (RBu, m.ob.), four at SB Marina 4/2 (DM, RBu, m.ob.), and one in that general area up to Aspinwall 4/25 (AH, PM, et al.).

**Great Egret** reports include one at Hamar Twp. 4/12 (RBu), four flying over McCandless Twp. 4/14 (SD), one at Duck Hollow 4/19 (m.ob.), and one at North Park 5/5 (RBu).

**Black Vultures** were reported from various locations throughout the season.

A fledgling **Barred Owl** was a cute addition to the list during a Three Rivers Bird Club outing 5/10 (m.ob.). Two fledglings were at Frick Park at the end of May, where they have been breeding for the past few years.

The two **Red-headed Woodpeckers** that wintered at North Park continued through May (m.ob.). A **Red-headed Woodpecker** was spotted in South Park 4/26 (JHa), and one was photographed at Highland Park 5/11 (NA).

Two **Merlin** were in Squirrel Hill 4/30 and through May (AD) near the same location as last year, so they are potentially breeding in the area again.

**Olive-sided Flycatcher** reports include one at Frick Park

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# The Peregrine

## Birds in the Three Rivers

*continued from page 7*

5/21-27 (m.ob.), one at Boyce Park 5/24 (EH), and one at Hampton Twp. Community Park 5/29 (DN). **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** is rare in spring here, but there were quite a few reports. Single birds were at Frick Park 5/18-31 (AD, SN, m.ob.), Schenley Park 5/20-24 (CK, m.ob.), Fox Chapel across the road from Beechwood Farms 5/21 (DM), at Beechwood Farms 5/21-25 (EPH, DM), Boyce Park 5/24 (EH), Allison Park near Crouse Run 5/26 (DN), and one was in a backyard in Oakmont 5/29 (RBU). **Alder Flycatcher** is rare here and seldom found during migration. One was at Deer Lakes Park 5/24 (AH, PM), and one was at The Point in Pittsburgh 5/29 (PLi).

**Philadelphia Vireo** is uncommon to rare in spring, but there were a few reports including single birds in Upper St. Clair 5/15 (ST), Emmerling Park 5/14 (DN), South Park 5/25 (DMe), and Gibsonia 5/25 (KP).

**Fish Crow** continues to be widely reported in eBird.

Up to five **Horned Larks** were at Imperial the entire reporting period (m.ob.). Two were at the Allegheny County Airport in West Mifflin 4/28 (KB, RJ).

The **Marsh Wren** continued from the winter at Wingfield Pines, and a pair was discovered in late April, and one was observed gathering cattail down and taking it to a specific location repeatedly in the marsh 4/24-26 (TC, et al.), so this is a potential first breeding in the county!

**Gray-checked Thrush** is the least common migrant thrush here. One was at Schenley Park 5/19-24 (FI, m.ob.), and one was reported at Frick Park most of the month of May (m.ob.). It's unknown if it was a single bird or several coming and going. A leucistic **American Robin** was seen along Route 8 in Richland Twp. 5/5 (SK).

A flock of 12 **American Pipits** were at Imperial 4/26-27 (MV, et al), three were there 5/3 (MV), and one 5/4 (AF).

A **Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow** was photographed in West Deer Twp. 4/28-30 (LC). A late **White-throated Sparrow** was at Frick Park 5/26 (MF). A **Vesper Sparrow** was at Imperial through May (AF), where they continue to decline due to development, and five were on private property in West Deer Twp. 4/4-7 (LC, m.ob.). The unobtrusive **Lincoln's Sparrow** is always a welcome sight during migration. One at Frick Park 5/2 gave observers outstanding views and was also singing (m.ob.), and one was at Sewickely Heights Park 5/7 (SD, EPH). A **Spotted X Eastern Towhee** continued from February at Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve to early April (m.ob.).

**Rusty Blackbirds** were present at Winfield Pines up to 4/22 with a high count of six (m.ob.). Up to 15 were at the PennDot Wetlands 4/1-4/26 (m.ob.). Reports at North Park include four 4/1 (DBe), and one 4/16 (AH, PM). One was in Allegheny Cemetery in Lawrenceville 4/1 (CB), three were on Strouss Road in Findlay Twp. 4/4 (SA, GA, WVH), and one was in Bridgeville 5/8 (JO).

A total of 35 species of warblers were reported this spring. A **Worm-eating Warbler** was a nice find at Tom's Run 5/4-14 (KS, m.ob.). Up to three were at Harrison Hills Park from 5/3 (TH, JVa, OL) through the season (m.ob.), a known breeding site. One was at Frick Park 5/13 (MK), and one in Schenley Park 5/4 (EY). **Northern Waterthrush** arrived early with one at the Fox Chapel Marina 4/24 (DN), with one nearby at Sharpsburg 4/26 (DM). A very cooperative bird that showed well was at a small vernal pond at Frick Park 4/26-5/9 (CC, m.ob.). Single birds were at six other locations through mid-May. A **Golden-winged Warbler** was a nice find at Richland Twp. Community Park 5/5 (SK), where it continued 5/6 (TC). One was banded at Hays Woods 5/7 (NL), and one was at Frick Park 5/18 (AP). A **Prothonotary Warbler** was a nice find at Crouse Run in Allison Park 4/26-27 (NB). Another **Prothonotary Warbler** was at Duck

Hollow 5/2 (Corvus). **Orange-crowned Warbler** is rare in spring (and just slightly more expected in fall), so one at Harrison Hills Park 4/25 (MG) and another at Schenley Park 5/10 (WB, AP) were notable. A **Connecticut Warbler** was a great find at Bellevue Memorial Park 5/18 (CL). This is a small park which has an overgrown slope between a dog run and a baseball field. The bird was in the thick vegetation on this slope up to 5/25 (m.ob.). This was a very cooperative Connecticut, singing loudly throughout the day and often perching in the open allowing a lot of birders to enjoy good views and photo opportunities of this secretive species. **Mourning Warbler** reports include one at Frick Park 5/8 (WF), 5/15 (SD), 5/18 (AP), and 5/26 (JSH, CF, TN). One was in Gibsonia 5/18 (KP), one was in Fox Chapel along the Eliza Fox Trail 5/20 (BSh), one was in Upper St. Clair 5/24 (AZ), and one was in North Park 5/31 (KE). **Cerulean Warbler** is still reliably found in the Sewickley area, the only regular location for this species. One was photographed at South Park 4/27 (JB), one was at Frick Park 5/1 (SD, HH, EPH), one was at Hartwood Acres 5/18 (DN), and one was at Boyce Park 5/24 (EH). An early **Palm Warbler** was in Gibsonia 4/3 (KP). There were two reports of the eastern (yellow) **Palm Warbler** in the county. One was at Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve 4/13 (DM), and one was in Plum Borough 4/19 (AH, PM). **Prairie Warbler** is rarely encountered on migration, so any reports of migrants are notable. One was at Duck Hollow 4/29 (DM), one was at Hays Woods 4/27 (WB) and 5/14 (SB). A bird singing in a powerline cut at Preservation Park in Oakdale 5/5 was a bird on territory (JSA). This area has a population of breeding Prairie Warblers.

*Observers: Nicky Agate, Gautam Apte, Sameer Apte, James Baker, Ken Behrens, David Bennett (DBe), W. Biggs, Carole Borek, Nathaniel Bowler, Stephen Bucklin, Ron Burkert (RBU), Thomas Connor, Corvus, Linda Croskey, Chapin Czarnecki, Sofia Di Gennaro, Ankur Dave, John Dzikij (JDz), Kevin Evilsizor, Wiltrud Fassbinder, Adrian Fenton, Mike Fialkovich, John Flannigan, Cameala Freed, Lynn Goldbach, Maggie Griffith, Eric Hall, James Hausman (JHa), Amy Henrici, William Von Herff, Holly Hilliard, Elizabeth Pagel-Hogan, Todd Hooe, Frank Izaguirre, Rojo Johnarson, Brian Kaldorf, Charity Kheshgi, Michelle Kienholz, Scott Kinzey, Nick Liadis, Judy Lesso, Oliver Lindhiem, Patrick Lister (PLi), Chris Lituma, Pat McShea, David Medler (DMe), Dan Mendenhall, Ted Nichols II, Steve Northrop, Dick Nugent, Jim Offhaus, Kevin Parsons, Brad Peroney, Amber Pertz, Amelia Mathews-Pett, Aidan Place (APl), Seth Pulver, Joseph Pumford (JPu), Tessa Rhinehart, James Saracco (JSa), Kathy Saunders, Brian Shema (BSh), Judy Shimm (JSh), Shannon Thompson, Mark VanderVen, Mark Vass, John Vassallo (JV), Ezra White, Erick Yanyo, Anna Zizak, m.ob. (many observers).*



LESSER YELLOWLEGS SEEN IN SHARPSBURG IN APRIL. PHOTO BY DAN MENDENHALL.