

The Todd Nuthatch



Indiana, PA

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Todd Bird Club
www.toddbirdclub.org

October 2020

Meetings and Regular Outings Canceled through December

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Todd Bird Club has decided to cancel our regularly scheduled meetings and outings until we see the number of cases diminishing. The Christmas Bird Count has not been canceled.

However, we encourage our members to go out and bird on their own or with family members or close friends. We hope to resume meetings in January if the pandemic permits.

Indiana Christmas Bird Count

The Indiana Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 26. The count is conducted in a 15-mile-diameter circle centered at the intersection of Second and Grandview in Indiana. If you live within 7.5 miles of

this intersection, you are welcome to do a feeder or yard count. Otherwise, you may take responsibility for another section of the circle. Please contact Roger or Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493) if you plan to participate.

New Year's Day 2021 Birding

What will be your first bird of the new year? Will you hear a Great Horned Owl hooting at 12:01 a.m.? Or will you hear a Northern Cardinal chipping at 7:00? Or, if you've been partying the night before, will it be a House Sparrow at noon?

Whatever your first bird is, please let us know. The list of "first birds" will appear in our January issue of "The Todd Nuthatch." Either email or call with your first bird. (bcoriole@windstream.net or 724-354-3493)

January 1 Birding

One more thing to do on New Year's Day.... No matter where you are on January 1, make a list of all the birds you see. It doesn't matter if you're in Pennsylvania, New York, Arizona, Florida, Costa Rica, Timbucktu, wherever!

Let's see how many species Todd Bird Club members can compile on January 1, 2021. E-mail your bird list to bcoriole@windstream.net or call 724-354-3493.

Life Change

By Tom Glover

By now most everyone has figured out that my family and I have moved to New York. This move has been underway for a long time. We seriously put the process into motion the first of this year. We wanted to be near our daughter and her family here in Tuxedo, NY. The local community is a small village about 30 miles north of New York City. We found a house that met our basic needs only a block away from their home. But the process was slowed to a crawl with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic delayed our move for six months with the actual moving at the end of August.

The one person who prompted this move more than anyone is our one and only grandchild Phoebe. I have been sharing stories about Phoebe for more than four years. Now that we live only a block away from her, the stories are more numerous. She and her parents have been introducing my son Jud and me to their area birding venues. It is interesting to note that we now live in one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world. At first you would think that the birding would be negatively impacted by the crush of so many people, but that is not the case. Phoebe and her parents have been very active in scoping out the birding venues. In fact, for those locations within a short distance of Tuxedo, Phoebe has been our personal guide.

One of her favorite locations is the beaver pond at Sterling Forest State Park. They have dubbed this venue the beaver pond for obvious reasons. The location is an all-seasons birding spot. Last winter Phoebe could be seen wondering around the frozen pond. Needless to say, her dad took some heat from both grandmas for allowing their granddaughter to track all over the frozen pond. Birding this area has produced everything from Golden-winged Warblers to Whipper-poor-wills. Phoebe has figured out that she can be bribed with snacks. Tom ascertains that the snacks are dished out at the most distant point from the car. Phoebe often sits on a snack rock or a snack bench. The beaver pond is attractive to Phoebe as she loves wading in puddles and mud. After a good rain she splashes around the playground across the



Phoebe and Pop Pop (aka Tom Glover) bird the trail to Little Dam Lake. Phoebe said she saw a Tufted Titmouse.

Photo by Tom Fuller

street from her house.

Another location, Little Dam Lake in Sterling State Park, is frequented by Phoebe. The snack location for this site is a metal box next to the spillway. Upon our initial visit, Phoebe played “lion” in the tall grass. She pretended to stalk us as her prey. The most noted observation on this outing was a kettle of 63 high flying Broad-winged Hawks. Speaking of Broad-winged Hawks, Phoebe and her dad on Monday, September 21, took Jud and me to Hook Mountain Hawkwatch overlooking the

Hudson River. If you remember I wrote about Phoebe at this location in the January 2019 issue of “The Nuthatch.” Phoebe is now too big for Tom to carry her on his back. She walked up to the mountaintop by herself. We were on site for just over two hours and came away with Black and Turkey Vultures; Sharp-shinned, Cooper’s, Broad-winged, and Red-tailed Hawks, as well as Bald Eagles and American Kestrels. Just as we were leaving, we were treated to a Peregrine Falcon, the best bird of the day.

Phoebe and Tom introduced us to Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge, located in “Black Dirt” country in Orange County, NY. A looping trail in the Refuge winds through two states, New Jersey and New York. So the full loop around Liberty Marsh provides two lists, one for New Jersey and one for New York. The Marsh produced a list of shorebirds – Least, Pectoral, Semipalmated Sandpipers, along with both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs. We counted 18 Common Gallinules and were surprised to find two flocks of 40 and 45 Bobolinks. That is the most Bobolinks I have seen in one place. But those numbers pale to what was reported on eBird migrating over the marsh on August 23. An estimated 5,720 Bobolink were counted flying south over the marsh during a half-hour time period. That’s a lot of Bobolinks! Now Phoebe gets special treatment when her dad takes her on similar trails. He pulls her along in a cart designed to be attached to a bike. During these extended trips she is well supplied with snacks.

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Fall Migration Round-up

September 26 - October 2, 2020

This year 2020 has certainly been one of challenges due to COVID-19. As an activity, birding has been relatively unscathed as social distancing is quite easy to follow in the field.

Unfortunately, the social aspect found in the birding community had to diminish as club meetings, group outings, and events were all canceled.

As an environmental educator and naturalist with the PA State Park system, we are continually adapting our programming methods to meet this pandemic – keeping group sizes small, wearing masks, and going virtual. We want to keep educating our visitors and offer experiences in our parks, all the while following guidelines and remaining safe, especially in group settings.

So as we were progressing into the summer, Bald Eagle State Park (Centre County) had a Laughing Gull reported through eBird in late June. Shortly after, while having a telephone conversation with their park's Environmental Education Specialist, Michelle Smithbauer, I jokingly asked for her to send the gull to Prince Gallitzin State Park so I could see it, too. She obviously refused, so of course I made her aware we wouldn't share our next rarity with them.

This conversation sparked the idea to hold a birding competition between the two parks to see who could round up the most bird species. Both parks offer more or less the same habitat (both centered around large reservoirs, surrounded by reclaimed forests and managed open habitat) and both relatively near one another (77 minutes apart). Granted, they are located in two different physiographic provinces of PA (PGSP on the Appalachian Plateau, BESE within the Ridge and Valley region), but this can be the factor to help set each park apart from the other.

Familiar with Rarity Round-Ups held along the Inner and Outer Banks of North Carolina each November, I thought I would base it using their format – a loose collaboration of birders working independently to achieve a goal. In their case: seeking vagrants in eastern NC. In our case: pitting park against park to see who would find the most bird species. Knowing most events were cancelled for the year, we saw this as a way to hold an event aimed at the birding community, promote birding through the parks, all



Black-bellied Plover was the highlight of the day for the Higbees.

the while following the COVID guidelines.

Our Fall Migration Round-Up was held on Saturday, September 26 through Friday, October 2, a week-long count to see which park could rack up the most species. The week offered great weather overall (only one day of rain) and fantastic birding as migration was in full swing for songbirds. We had a great start at Prince Gallitzin State Park from the first day. On Day 1, the Todd

Bird Club's very own Roger and Marg Higbee found a Black-bellied Plover, bringing us to 77 for the first day. As the week progressed, the expected birds were found, but surprises continued. Two secretive Connecticut Warblers were nice ticks to our list, and at least two vocalizing Soras in the eastern end of the park with a third easily seen individual near the main area were late for their move south. Other late migrants included a singing Yellow-throated Vireo, Barn Swallows, and two Yellow Warblers. Our resident Trumpeter Swan was a nicely held card by us, and early Ruddy Ducks, American Wigeon, and Northern Pintails rounded out our bigger finds. Come day number 7, a Greater Yellowlegs, two Green-winged Teal, and a single American Black Duck brought our total to 108 in the final hours. Some misses included Hermit Thrush, Eastern Meadowlark, and all gulls (one unidentified gull was reported).

Over at Bald Eagle State Park, they started with a slow start, with only 23 species reported after the first 24 hours. We knew this was sub-par for this park, so we expected a comeback as the event continued. On Sunday they responded with an American Golden-Plover, a great find! A few notables they found that were missed here included Philadelphia Vireo, Black Vulture, Lesser Yellowlegs, and Common Nighthawk. By the end of the week, they definitely added numbers, but not enough to claim a win – Bald Eagle State Park wrapped up with 93 species.

This was a fun event to plan and in which to participate, and we want to send our thanks to everyone who participated! This is something we would like to continue next year, possibly with additional parks included – so keep your eyes open for dates in 2021!

Tony DeSantis
Environmental Education Specialist
Prince Gallitzin State Park

Prince Gallitzin State Park's 2020 Fall Migration Round-Up Species List

Trumpeter Swan	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	House Finch
Canada Goose	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Purple Finch
Wood Duck	Downy Woodpecker	American Goldfinch
Blue-winged Teal	Hairy Woodpecker	Chipping Sparrow
Northern Shoveler	Pileated Woodpecker	Field Sparrow
American Wigeon	Northern Flicker	Dark-eyed Junco
Mallard	American Kestrel	White-throated Sparrow
American Black Duck	Merlin	Song Sparrow
Northern Pintail	Eastern Wood-Pewee	Lincoln's Sparrow
Green-winged Teal	Eastern Phoebe	Swamp Sparrow
Ruddy Duck	Yellow-throated Vireo	Eastern Towhee
Ruffed Grouse	Blue-headed Vireo	Red-winged Blackbird
Wild Turkey	Red-eyed Vireo	Ovenbird
Pied-billed Grebe	Blue Jay	Black-and-white Warbler
Mourning Dove	American Crow	Tennessee Warbler
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Common Raven	Common Yellowthroat
Chimney Swift	Black-capped Chickadee	Hooded Warbler
Sora	Tufted Titmouse	American Redstart
Killdeer	Tree Swallow	Cape May Warbler
Black-bellied Plover	Barn Swallow	Northern Parula
Wilson's Snipe	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Yellow Warbler
Greater Yellowlegs	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Connecticut Warbler
Double-crested Cormorant	White-breasted Nuthatch	Magnolia Warbler
Great Blue Heron	Brown Creeper	Bay-breasted Warbler
Great Egret	House Wren	Blackpoll Warbler
Green Heron	Winter Wren	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Turkey Vulture	Carolina Wren	Palm Warbler
Osprey	European Starling	Pine Warbler
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Gray Catbird	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Cooper's Hawk	Brown Thrasher	Black-throated Green Warbler
Bald Eagle	Eastern Bluebird	Wilson's Warbler
Red-shouldered Hawk	Swainson's Thrush	Scarlet Tanager
Red-tailed Hawk	Wood Thrush	Northern Cardinal
Great Horned Owl	American Robin	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Barred Owl	Cedar Waxwing	Indigo Bunting
Belted Kingfisher	American Pipit	

Life Change (continued from page 2)

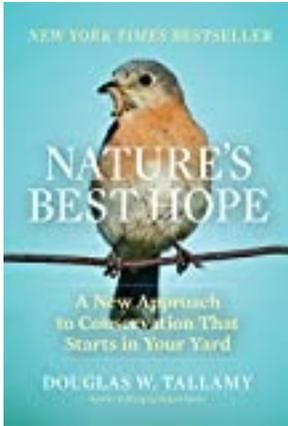
We have been here in our new home for almost six weeks. I have to admit we are suffering from a bit of culture shock. Yes, Tuxedo is a small, somewhat sleepy village; but if you go farther north or south, you bump up against

that worldly metropolitan area. It will take a while to get used to so many people. But with Phoebe just a block away our future is bright! Yep, there is a lot of birding in that future.

A Reminder from Lee Carnahan

It's important to put out water in this dry weather. I use old cake pans, add a stone to each, then fill them with water. The birds use them constantly.

Book Review



“Nature’s Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard,” by Douglas Tallamy, 2020.

Douglas Tallamy’s latest book Nature’s Best Hope (2020) opened my eyes as to how our landscape has changed for the worse for insects and birds and how we can each be stewards to help reverse the trend. Tallamy clearly explains the role that native plants (perennial flowers, shrubs, and

trees) play in the food web and how that ultimately affects us human beings. He is very convincing that we should be more mindful and deliberate in what we plant in our outdoor spaces. He contends that each individual action to plant more native species and restore habitat can be increasingly powerful if multiplied by neighbors and others. His hope is that we can create a “Homegrown National Park” in our backyards. He couldn’t have anticipated how wonderful a backyard national park would be right now in this time of isolation.

Tallamy is a long-time professor in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware. He earned his B.S Biology at Allegheny College. Tallamy speaks from personal experience with his own 10-acre farm in Pennsylvania which, when purchased, was overgrown with invasive species. He and his wife removed the invasive plants and replaced them with native species. As an entomologist, his original focus might have been on providing natural habitat for insects (about 90% of plant-eating insects require specific native

plants), but he recognizes how critical insects are to the entire food web, birds included. In the book, he shares research that supports his hypothesis that areas with native plants are simply better for the birds. For instance, in a suburban D.C. study, his grad student compared yards dominated by introduced (non-native) plants and yards with primarily native landscapes. She found that the non-native landscapes provided 75% less caterpillar biomass (which means less baby bird food) and were 60% less likely to have breeding chickadees. Tallamy also provides numerous inspiring examples of individuals transforming their yards, no matter how small, with native plants and attracting an amazing number of bird species as a result.

The last chapter, “What Each of Us Can Do,” provides a helpful blueprint of steps, including a link to a native plant finder by the National Wildlife Federation. The National Audubon Society also encourages native plants for birds. Audubon’s website has excellent articles on bird-friendly yards and a Native Plant Database which will provide a list of the best plants for birds for your ZIP code area. Finally, while I hope you read the book, you can also watch Doug Tallamy speak about his book on You Tube. Look for “Nature’s Best Hope by Doug Tallamy: March 3, 2020,” or click <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHURaRv78QY>. I promise you will find him both informative and entertaining.

– Alice Thureau
Seneca Rocks Audubon

Odd Bird Behavior

by Lee Carnahan



One day in early October while cutting up a tree with my chain saw, I got sawdust on my shoes. After finishing up sawing, I sat down on my lawn chair to clean off the sawdust. While removing my shoe, suddenly KAPOW! Something hit me on the head, almost knocking my hat off. Then in front of my eyes I saw a small bird do a

somersault in the air then flutter to the ground. After a few seconds it flew up and lit on the hedge and glared at me. To my surprise it was a Red-breasted Nuthatch. I glared back. It then flew straight to a feeder where it grabbed a seed and flew away.

Don’t ask me why. Was it an accident or intentional?

(These little guys can certainly be feisty at the bird feeder, chasing much larger birds away so they can grab a seed and go!)

2020 First Annual Fall Migration Count

Canada Goose	250	Merlin	3	House Sparrow	73
Wood Duck	38	Great Crested Flycatcher	1	House Finch	58
Blue-winged Teal	10	Eastern Wood-Pewee	4	Purple Finch	5
Mallard	22	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	1	American Goldfinch	227
Green-winged Teal	3	Acadian Flycatcher	1	Chipping Sparrow	53
Wild Turkey	31	Least Flycatcher	1	Field Sparrow	13
Ruffed Grouse	1	Eastern Phoebe	31	Song Sparrow	23
Pied-billed Grebe	7	Philadelphia Vireo	1	Lincoln's Sparrow	1
Rock Pigeon	61	Warbling Vireo	2	Eastern Towhee	30
Mourning Dove	98	Red-eyed Vireo	38	Red-winged Blackbird	26
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	1	Blue Jay	163	Common Grackle	497
Chimney Swift	42	American Crow	211	Ovenbird	4
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	17	crow sp	17	Blue-winged Warbler	1
Killdeer	56	Common Raven	9	Black-and-white Warbler	3
Least Sandpiper	1	chickadee sp	2	Tennessee Warbler	6
Semipalmated Sandpiper	1	Black-capped Chickadee	88	Nashville Warbler	4
Double-crested Cormorant	1	Tufted Titmouse	56	Common Yellowthroat	6
Great Blue Heron	11	Barn Swallow	25	Hooded Warbler	5
Turkey Vulture	51	Red-breasted Nuthatch	3	American Redstart	3
Osprey	2	White-breasted Nuthatch	54	Cape May Warbler	3
Cooper's Hawk	6	Brown Creeper	2	Magnolia Warbler	7
Bald Eagle	3	House Wren	1	Bay-breasted Warbler	2
Broad-winged Hawk	5	Carolina Wren	28	Blackburnian Warbler	4
Red-shouldered Hawk	1	European Starling	254	Chestnut-sided Warbler	4
Red-tailed Hawk	12	Gray Catbird	59	Blackpoll Warbler	1
Eastern Screech-Owl	1	Brown Thrasher	4	Black-throated Blue Warbler	1
Great Horned Owl	2	Eastern Bluebird	30	Yellow-rumped Warbler	2
Belted Kingfisher	3	Veery	1	Black-throated Green Warbler	12
Red-bellied Woodpecker	27	Swainson's Thrush	7	Canada Warbler	1
Downy Woodpecker	28	Hermit Thrush	2	Wilson's Warbler	1
Hairy Woodpecker	9	Wood Thrush	6	Scarlet Tanager	7
Pileated Woodpecker	19	American Robin	137	Northern Cardinal	77
Northern Flicker	31	Cedar Waxwing	498	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	6
American Kestrel	9			Indigo Bunting	2

Total Species = 101
Total Individuals = 3,768

Observers

Tom Betts
Lee Carnahan
Marcy Cunkelman
Ed Donley
Gary Ferrence
Margaret Higbee
Roger Higbee
Gloria Lamer
Mary A. Little

Frank Logue
Lynda Logue
Flo McGuire
Jim McGuire
Marilyn Moore
Joseph Pumford
Bob Ramsey
Cindy Rogers

Henry Rummel
Nancy Smeltzer
Linda Stormer
Rodger Stormer
Mark Strittmatter
John Taylor
Wil Taylor
Mary Lu Tucker
Ray Winstead

First Indiana County Fall Migration Count

Saturday, September 12, 2020

Because of the pandemic and cancellation of all our outings and meetings, several of us discussed a way to keep the bird club alive and going. We hit upon the idea of a fall migration count. By the time we came up with the idea, little time was left to advertise it. Multiple emails and a few phone calls later, we ended with 26 participants who were available to bird on Saturday, September 12.

For many participants birding was very slow. The morning had not produced a noticeable fall-out, and the windy conditions in parts of the county exacerbated the situation. This was not a scientific study – it was just a reason for birders to get outside to do what birders do! While some saw few birds, for others, the birding was fair to excellent. Location! Location!!! Location!!!! The southern portion of the county seemed more productive than the northern.

Our 26 observers spent 84 hours, 25 minutes covering 280.79 miles. Because eBird does not differentiate between miles hiked and miles driven and since much of the data was entered and retrieved on eBird, it was not possible to determine separate mileages. We encouraged all to enter his or her data on eBird, but not everyone did that. Below are a few of the day's high points.

Joseph Pumford found the lone Veery at Blue Spruce and one of only two Great Horned Owls. The other was found at Yellow Creek by eBirder Henry Rummel, an unwitting participant in our count. Henry also added the count's 10 Blue-winged Teal.

Acadian Flycatcher and Red-breasted Nuthatch were only two of the highlights on Marilyn Moore's list south of Smicksburg. Near Shelocta, Bob Ramsey noted the only Eastern Screech-Owl as well as the two Hermit Thrushes. Lynda and Frank Logue spotted two Cooper's Hawks in

their yard near Trim Tree Road besides a nice list of other species.

After birding Blue Spruce in the morning and spotting a great list of species including the one and only Great Crested Flycatcher, Ray Winstead upped our Chimney Swift count by heading into Indiana to watch the birds flying into chimney roosts.

Nolo yielded three Purple Finches and one of the Red-breasted Nuthatches for Gloria Lamer.

Near Lewisville Marcy Cunkelman came up with a great yard list, including Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Indigo Bunting.

In the northern part of the county, Flo and Jim McGuire noted the only Red-shouldered Hawk and three warbler species. The highlight for Roger and me was the sighting of a Ruffed Grouse at the eastern edge of the county.

By far the most warblers were listed by the Taylor crew – Ed Donley, Mark Strittmatter, John Taylor, and Wil Taylor – who birded Blacklick Valley Natural Area (BVNA) where they found 17 species of warblers, including the count's only Blue-winged, all six of the Tennessees, and the only Blackpoll, Black-throated Blue, Canada, and Wilson's Warblers. Wow! BVNA was the place to be! In addition, they also listed the only Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Lincoln's Sparrow. Another birding stop along Climax Road yielded for the group the only Philadelphia Vireo and the only Yellow-bellied Flycatcher sighted on the 12th. Location plus sharp eyes!

Now that we have the 2020 Fall Migration Count behind us, the club needs to decide whether we want to do it again next year. Special thanks to all who participated in this trial run of a fall count.

– Margaret Higbee

Purple Finch Sighting

A bright red Purple Finch, lacking any semblance of the usual raspberry coloration, was observed at the home of Janice Dembosky on July 19, 2020. The bird was seen by Carol Guba and Roger and Margaret Higbee, as well as Janice Dembosky. After seeing the photos, Bob Mulvihill writes: "It might qualify as being erythristic, i.e., excessively pigmented with carotenoids."



Birding Backpacks

by Nancy Van Cott

Editor's Note: *Is this something that Todd Bird Club members would be interested in doing here in Indiana County? Read the article, think about it, then we'll discuss it at our next meeting.*

Looking at birds through binoculars is second nature to most birders. However, not everyone – especially a beginning birder – has access to a pair of optics. Now, some Pennsylvania libraries are making binoculars available for their patrons to borrow by adding Birding Backpacks to their collections.

A group of birders in Susquehanna County recently raised funds to supply their four county libraries with backpacks filled with birding essentials. Each pack contains two pairs of binoculars (to encourage an adult and a child to go birding together), a field guide, a list of local birding spots, a county bird checklist, and information about how to use and care for binoculars, along with a small notebook for the borrower to keep where they can list the birds they see or make field notes. Even though the pandemic cancelled plans



for a public kick-off program at the main county library, the backpacks have already been popular there and at the three branch libraries.

For many birders, their love of birds was sparked by studying the intricate beauty and fascinating behavior of birds through binoculars. The aim of the Susquehanna County birders in starting this program was to inspire this same love in the next generation of

birders, and they hope that the idea of Birding Backpacks for libraries will spread across Pennsylvania, and in turn, light that spark in young birders across the state!

If you are interested in learning more about the Birding Backpack program in Susquehanna County, contact Nancy VanCott at nancy.vancott@gmail.com.

Red-breasted Nuthatch Irruptive Migration 2020

by Doug Gross

This year has had many challenges and is a year to forget overall, but it is going to be the year of the little charmers, the Red-breasted Nuthatches. An irruption of Red-breasted Nuthatches is certainly taking place throughout the East including here in Pennsylvania. It is no longer a rumor or a prediction. It is really happening on a grand scale. These little fellows are not just feeder birds. They are conifer lovers and can be found in a variety of forests, often easily reached along roads and trails. The eBird maps show an extensive migration across the Eastern states with Red-breasted Nuthatches traveling into southern New Jersey and other places in high numbers.



An irruption of Red-breasted Nuthatches is taking place throughout the East.

Photo by Doug Gross

Purple Finches also may be staging an irruption with some crossbills possibly in the mix. Red Crossbills have been reported in New York State, so they are not far away.

These little songbirds are looking for food, mostly small seeds and insects. This year there are slim pickings for cone seeds. The hemlocks are mostly bare. The little cones of hemlocks house many seeds and are very easy to open if you have an awl-like bill.

Hemlock cones are like "candy" for crossbills and other conifer specialists. But, there are very few to feed the many conifer birds. In the mountains, the red spruce cones also are few this year. Even large red spruces that generally produce seed cones are bare. But, this year

eastern white pines are producing an abundant seed crop. Even small nuthatches can forage on these big, sappy cones. White pine is also a food source for Red Crossbills (mostly Type 1 birds), chickadees, goldfinches, and others. I have seen many Red-breasted Nuthatches foraging on white pines, especially the large trees with limbs drooping from the weight of hundreds of seed cones. They often will hover-glean the seeds out of the open cones rather than land on the sappy cone, avoiding getting the sticky sap on their little feet. Red-breasted Nuthatches are omnivorous, not seed-specialists, so they also forage on a wide variety of insects on tree bark and will do some flycatching while they are invading the forests around here.

In my experiences, Red-breasted Nuthatches can be fairly common breeders in mature red spruce and eastern hemlock forests one year and then absent or rare in others. I have seen this phenomenon in boreal conifers and lower elevation evergreen conifer patches including old Christmas tree farms and ornamental or erosion-control

plantings. The same may be true with pines. I wonder if Red-breasted Nuthatches also will visit other conifers during this irruption event that may be overlooked by birders. In some places, jack pine, Virginia (scrub) pine, red pine, pitch pine, and scots pine could offer seed cones that nuthatches and other birds might forage. I remember one incident in the early 1980s when a big cone crop of Virginia pines occurred in a Luzerne County forest that Red-breasted Nuthatches had visited in the fall and continued to feed on through the winter. The nuthatches stayed the following spring and nested there with an adequate cone crop to provide them with food. This kind of follow-up nesting might occur in a variety of locations, including pine barrens and conifer evergreen plantings far from other nesting areas. For that reason, it would be interesting for birders to explore some scrub barrens and pine groves this fall, winter, and early spring as well as the "big pine stands." They could discover high densities of nuthatches and perhaps witness breeding activity in new places. And, who knows if the Purple Finches and crossbills also will follow.

Indiana, Armstrong, Cambria County - Summer 2020

Please send your bird reports at the end of each month to Margaret Higbee at bcoriole@windstream.net or mail to 3119 Creekside Road, Indiana, PA 15701.

Abbreviations: Armstrong Trail (AT), Keystone Reservoir (KR), Lock & Dam (L&D), Murphy's Bottom (MB), Prince Gallitzin SP (PG), West Penn Trail (WPT), Yellow Creek SP (YC).



Tony DeSantis photographed these Ring-necked Ducks at PG 7/20.

A **Mute Swan** along the AT n. of L&D 8 was an unusual find 7/24 (TR). The **Trumpeter Swan** at PG, first found 5/13 (TD), was present through the end of the summer. A **Green-winged Teal** across the river from New Bethlehem in *Armstrong* was

sighted 7/6 (AK, JK). Three **Ring-necked Ducks** 6/20 (TD) and a single **Ruddy Duck** 6/5 (TD) were late visitors at PG.

Two **Common Nighthawks** at South Fork 7/30 (SB) were the only ones noted in the region.

Two **American Avocets** were photographed along the WPT near the tunnel on the morning of 7/24 (MB, CE, MK, EZ); they were still present that evening (RH, SM). This is the seventh county record but only the third "summer" report. First 2 **Least Sandpipers** appeared at YC 7/7 (LC, MH, RH), followed by the first at KR 7/11 (MH, RH). Early June brought 3 **Semipalmated Sandpipers** to YC on the 2nd (LC, PF, MH, RH, TR) and one to PG on the 3rd (TD). The WPT yielded an **American Woodcock** near MP 9, the Swainson's Warbler stakeout spot, 6/25 (ST) and one along the Dick Mayer section 7/8 (MH, RH); another was photographed (TA) near PG 6/27 (TA, SVH). A **Wilson's Snipe** at YC 7/25 (MH, RH) was the region's lone report. KR hosted the first 3 **Solitary Sandpipers** 7/11 (MH, RH) while 7/24 yielded the first at PG (TD) and 2 at YC (MH, RH). A **Greater Yellowlegs** 7/26



Rebecca Hart photographed these two American Avocets along the West Penn Trail 7/24.



This adult Peregrine was photographed at the Graff Bridge on 6/19/2020 by Roger Higbee.

(MM) and a **Lesser Yellowlegs** 7/11 (MH, RH), both at KR, were the only ones noted. The **Herring Gulls** were on nest at Kittanning 6/4 (MH, RH). Two **Caspian Terns** stopped at YC 6/9 (MH, RH) while four **Forster's Terns** visited PG 7/26 (TD).

Summer **Common Loon** reports included sightings in all three counties – 2 at PG 6/3 (TD) and 7/14 (PW, RW); one at YC 6/7 (JH); and one at KR 7/26 (MM).

An **American Bittern** flew over the WPT on 6/29 (BO); this is only the second summer record for this species in the county. PG boasted the only **Great Egret** sightings with reports of 1-2 on five dates between 7/14 (PW, RW) and 7/26 (TD).

Two **Black Vultures** at Blairsville were county birds for the observers 6/7 (MH, RH); another was seen near Homer City

6/27 (JD). The Babcock Mine area of Gallitzin SF harbored single Northern Harrier 6/1, 13 (TD) and 2 on 6/6 (JKu, TK).

Six reports of **Eastern Screech-Owl** were received, but the only **Great Horned Owl** mentioned was one at Apollo 7/31 (SD). **Barred Owls** were noted at six locations but the most consistent was Nolo where two were heard 6/20 (DB) and again 7/30 (AB, DB) with multiple reports of single birds between.

The Indiana **Fish Crows** fledged at least 2 young again this year; the adults were seen carrying food into a conifer where the young were hidden by branches on 6/4 (MH, RH).

Unusual was the continuing reports of a **Red-headed Woodpecker** near Jacksonville 6/13, 20 (BM, KM) at the same location one had been observed 5/13 (MH, RH). Singletons appeared at Loretto 6/3 (SVH) and in a yard near Two Lick Reservoir 6/14 (CG).

Merlins nesting at an undisclosed area of the region had fledged 2 young by 6/13 (DL); a Merlin was near South Fork 6/8 (SB). Three of the Graff Bridge **Peregrine Falcons** were sighted 6/18 (MH, RH) – 2 adults and one juvenile – and again 6/19 (FM, JM).

An **Alder Flycatcher** singing at SGL 262 near Rochester Mills on 6/1 (MH, RH) was found again in the same area 7/1 (AS); singletons were also found in *Cambria* at Wilmore Reservoir 7/12 (TA) and near PG at SGL 108 - Dugan's Marsh on 7/17 (TBu). **Least Flycatchers** continue in short supply with the only reports including single birds at PG 6/9 (JV), at MB 6/14 (ABu), and at Blue Spruce Co. Park where they previously nested 6/24 (JP).

White-eyed Vireos were well reported in *Armstrong* (m.ob); in *Indiana* sightings were concentrated in the Blairsville-Homer City area; but *Cambria* yielded only one report 7/8 (TD) at PG. **Yellow-throated Vireos** were most common in *Armstrong* with at least 3 present along the AT n. of L&D 8 between 6/16 & 7/9 (TR); singletons were noted at nine other *Armstrong* locations with 2 at Crooked Creek 6/8 & 7/15 (TR). The *Indiana* section of the WPT consistently yielded one to 2 between 6/24 (MH, RH, DL) and 7/26 (MH, RH). Two **Blue-headed Vireos** at Mahoning Creek Lake 6/15 (AK, JK) were suggestive of breeding. Blue-headed Vireo hotspots in *Indiana* included SGL 174 in the northeastern corner of the county on 6/28 (MH, RH) and East Creek Road along the Little Mahoning 6/24, 28 (MH, RH). Three were present at YC 6/2 (LC, PF, BF, MH, RH, TR) and remained into the next quarter. In *Cambria* sightings were concentrated around PG and SGL 108 (v.o). Single **Warbling Vireos** were noted on three BBS routes – SH 6/6, Parkwood 6/7, and Kittanning 6/10 (all MH, RH); near Slate Lick 6/7-9 (GM), and at MB 6/14 (ABu), showing they were well distributed in the western part of the region; but the bulk of the sightings were on

various sections of the WPT 6/7 - 7/8 (v.o.). One at PG 7/8 (TD) and 2 at South Fork were *Cambria's* only reports.



Tina Alianiello photographed this Yellow-breasted Chat at Fallentimber on 6/27.



Dennis Lauffer found this Swainson's Warbler along the West Penn Trail on 6/9.

Photo by Adam Jackson

Golden-crowned Kinglet reports were limited to 2 at PG 6/27 (TD), 3 at SGL 174 on 6/28 (MH, RH), and 2 at Wilmore Reservoir 7/12 (TA). One **Red-breasted Nuthatch** and a **Brown Creeper** at Allegheny Portage Railroad NHS on 7/4 (TA) were the lone reports for these two species. A **Swainson's Thrush** along the WPT 6/28 (LG) was unusual as they have not been known to nest in *Indiana*.

Two **Purple Finches** were present at Nolo (GL) throughout the summer; a pair near Shelocta was observed feeding young 6/17 (MH, RH). A probable erythristic Purple Finch was noted near Marion Center 6/19 (JD, CG, MH, RH). See photo bottom of page 7.

Previously common on reclaimed strip mines which are now overgrown, the 2 singing **Grasshopper Sparrows** counted at SGL 262 on 6/24 (MH, RH), 5 at SGL 276

on 6/29 (MH, RH), and 2 at SGL 108 - Bellwood on 7/19 (TA) were good finds. **Vesper Sparrows** continue in very low numbers with the only reports of one near Patton 6/14 (MH, RH) and 2 near Worthington 7/1 (LCr). Four **Henslow's Sparrows** including a pair on nest were observed at SGL 262 on 6/24 (MH, RH); this was the only report in the region. **Savannah Sparrows** were found at only three locations in the region – one at Robb's Fording 6/7 (MVT), 2 northwest of Yatesboro 6/10 (MH, RH), and one near Patton 6/14 (MH, RH).

Yellow-breasted Chat reports were a tad more numerous this summer with 3 *Armstrong* (ABu, TR), 5 *Indiana* (TB, MH, RH, JT), and 2 *Cambria* locations (TA, TD, DG, GG, SVH)

The summer report of a **Worm-eating Warbler** near Saltsburg 7/17 (PW, RW) in good breeding habitat was the first in years. On 6/9 (DL) a **Swainson's Warbler** was first heard in *Indiana* along the West Penn Trail halfway between Bow Ridge and Livermore; the bird was still present through the end of the period. This was a second county record with the first seen at YC on 5/19/1989 (EH, NH). A late **Blackpoll Warbler** lingered at YC 6/2 (LC, PF, BF, MH, RH). **Kentucky Warbler** reports were more numerous this summer than last (v.o.) with reports in all three counties. **Cerulean Warblers** were found along the WPT with the high counts of 3 on 6/25 (DY) and 4 along the Dick Mayer section of the WPT 7/5, 8 (MH, RH); one to 3 were also noted along the AT n. of L&D 8 between 6/16 (TR) and 7/24 (TR). A **Black-throated Blue Warbler**, seen along the WPT on four dates bracketed by 6/26 (JKe) and 7/3 (VP), was unusual. Along a 2.65-mile section of the WPT near Saltsburg, 5 singing male **Yellow-throated Warblers** were counted 7/6 (MH, RH); in *Armstrong* one was along CC 6/6 (MH, RH) and another at MB 6/14 (ABu). Two late **Yellow-rumped Warblers** were singing at SGL 262 on 6/1 (MH, RH); they could not be relocated on 6/24 (MH, RH).

Observers: Tina Alianiello, Michael Barney, Alice Beatty, Dave Beatty, Tony Bruno, Thomas Buehl, Jr (TBu), Alan Buriak (ABu), Seth Burnosky, Lee Carnahan, Linda Croskey (LCr), Jonathan DeBalko, Janice Dembosky, Tony DeSantis, Sarah Dunmire, Carl Engstrom, Patience Fisher, Barb Fletcher, Linda Greble, Deb Grove, Greg Grove, Carol Guba, Eric Hall, Nathan Hall, Rebecca Hart (RH), Margaret Higbee, Roger Higbee, Jesse Hines, Avis Keener, John Keener, James Kellam (JKe), Mike Kello, Jan Kuehl (JKu), Tom Kuehl, Gloria Lamer, Dennis Lauffer, Michele Mannella, Steve Manns, Beth Marshall, Ken Marshall, Gregory McDermott, Flo McGuire, Jim McGuire, Bill Oyler, Vince Pantanella, Joseph Pumford, Theo Rickert, Andrew Spencer, John Taylor, Shannon Thompson, Stewart Van Horn (SVH), Marge Van Tassel (MVT), Joe Verica, Pat Williams, Richard Williams, David Yeany, Eric Zawatski.



Swainson's Warbler, the summer's best bird, was present along the West Penn Trail 6/9 through 8/7. Pam Illig photographed it on 6/26.

Pine Siskins Are Here!

Be sure to watch your feeders for Red-breasted Nuthatches, Pine Siskins, Evening Grosbeaks, and other northern finches! Purple Finches are already moving south, and Red Crossbills and Common Redpolls are possible. Evening Grosbeaks have already been reported in PA. Both crossbill species have been sighted in Onondaga County, NY. It could be an interesting winter!

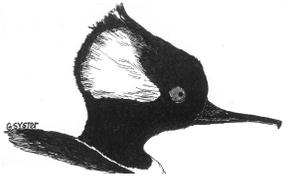
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Pine Siskins have arrived en masse! Note the American Goldfinch in the center.

Photo by Margaret Higbee



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