

The Todd Nuthatch



Indiana, PA

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

October 2021

Meetings Canceled Through December

We were hoping to resume our regular meetings this past September; but because of Covid, the September meeting was canceled. Depending upon the status of Covid and the CDC guidelines in January 2022, we plan to resume our meetings at that time. Watch our website for updates.

Once again our meetings will begin at 7:30, January through April, at Blue Spruce Lodge in Blue Spruce

County Park, located just off Route 110 east of the town of Ernest. Arrive by 7:00 to socialize, abiding by CDC guidelines.

Tuesday, January 4 – Members' Night. Please bring something to share – a story, digital images, photos, souvenirs, etc. We want to hear from *you*!

Outings

Because our outings are outdoors, we have decided to resume them with some restrictions. If you are not fully vaccinated, please wear a mask. We also request that social distancing be observed and realize that some participants may not want to share equipment.

Tuesday Outings, except for October 19, will resume until deer season **with a few changes**. **Meet shortly after dawn at the north shore gazebo** near the pavilion. Quite often lately, especially with the later sunrise, we have been birding the north shore and have encountered an interesting bird or flocks of birds; but it's 7:50, and we are supposed to be on the south shore at the park office at 8:00 a.m. We have jumped in our vehicles and rushed to the park office to find no one there. So...on Tuesdays we will continue to bird the north shore until the birds peter out. We may sometimes bird only the north shore, depending upon the bird activity. If you arrive late, please call either Roger Higbee's cell (412-309-3538) or Debbie Kalbfleisch's cell (724-651-5426) if you can't find us.

Please leave a message for Debbie, and she will return your call immediately.

Saturday, October 2 – Blue Spruce County Park. Meet in the first large parking lot just past the park office at 8:00 a.m.

Saturday, October 9 – Yellow Creek State Park. Meet at the park office at 8:00 a.m.

Saturday, October 16 – Ed Donley will host an outing on his property on Five Points Road near Shelocta. Please contact Ed for directions (hedonley@iup.edu or 724-599-5886).

Tuesday, October 19 – Hawkwatch trip to the Allegheny Front, weather permitting. Meet at the Yellow Creek State Park office if you are fully vaccinated and wish to carpool or at the hawkwatch at 9:15 a.m. For more information and to ascertain that the trip is on, contact Roger or Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493 or 412-

309-3538) the day before. Bring lunch and something to sit on and dress warmly as it is often cold and windy on the Front.

Saturday, November 6 – This joint outing with the Three Rivers Birding Club will start at the Yellow Creek State Park office, located on Route 259, just off US 422 east of Indiana. Please email (bcoriole@windstream.net) or call the Higbees (724-354-3493) if you plan to attend.

Saturday, November 20 – Blue Spruce County Park. Meet in the first large parking lot just past the park office at 8:00 a.m. Bring bird seed if you wish to hand-feed the

chickadees and titmice...and maybe even a White-breasted Nuthatch!

Monday, December 27 – Indiana Christmas Bird Count. 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 join one of the field parties or take responsibility for a section of the circle. Please contact Roger or Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493) if you plan to participate.

Everyone Loves Zinnias

By Linda Wagner

On a warm late July afternoon, iced tea in hand, I parked myself on the porch to enjoy a summer afternoon and watch the traffic in the backyard. This summer the garden is a profusion of zinnias in full bloom all standing 3'-4' tall. The flowers are all sizes and a riot of color, and they are attracting a wide variety of "zinnia lovers."

The hummingbirds are loving them along with the hummingbird clearwing moth, various butterflies, and a variety of other pollinators.

In competition for the flowers is the local American Goldfinch crew. They seem to love the zinnia seeds. Some of the flowers have been reduced to nubs as a result of the finches methodically picking off the petals one at a time and chowing down on the attached seed.

The finches were enjoying an afternoon snack, and I was loving the show. One male goldfinch landed on a particularly slim flower stem. Every time he tried to reach the flower and seeds, the stem would arch down putting



Linda Wagner photographed these two American Goldfinches feeding on her zinnias.

the flower out of his reach. Now keep in mind that there are PLENTY of other zinnias to munch but he seemed intent on this one small flower.

As I watched, he slid sideways on the stem until it started to bend. Then he pinched the thin stem in his beak, not breaking it but crimping it. Next he grabbed the stem just beyond the crimped spot and worked at bending it back and folding it against the stronger end of the stem. With his little goldfinch "feet" clenched firmly around

both stems, he held them together and inched his way back to where the flower was and enjoyed his snack! With both stems together to make a stronger perch he didn't have any trouble getting the seeds.

I was amazed! This particular goldfinch must be an Einstein among goldfinches! How did he figure the puzzle out? Where did he learn to bend a stem for his benefit? It almost seemed like rudimentary tool usage. Where there's a will there's a way as the saying goes. Will wonders never cease?!?

Thank You!!!

Special thanks to the Todd Bird Club, Tom Glover, and other members and friends who supported us in the Birding Blitz for Conservation (B4C) on June 21, 2021. We have received thank-you notes from all three of the organizations who were selected to benefit from this

venture. The amount raised by all the teams totaled \$10,645. For more information, see <https://www.breedingbirdblitz.org/>.

The Todd Towhees

Backpacking and Birding in Oregon

By Oscar Nigam

During the last week of July, my dad and I traveled out west for our annual backpacking trip. This year, we would be backpacking for a few days in Mount Hood National Forest and spending a few days doing day hikes in the Columbia River Gorge. We would begin by spending a day on the ocean with one of my dad's friends. We flew into Seattle one evening and would drive south to Oregon the following day.

The next morning, after a quick breakfast at the hotel, we hit the road. We didn't have to drive far to see the first bird of the trip. We had driven approximately 20 feet when I noticed a large gull flying over the hotel parking lot. As it passed above the car, the light gray wingtips became apparent: it was a Glaucous-winged Gull. Stoked at getting a lifer so quickly, we drove off feeling great. Soon after, I got my first look at a Steller's Jay that flew across the highway, the deep blue beautifully contrasting with the black. We traveled south through grand Pacific Northwest forests and saltmarshes stretching far out into the low tide, and I took note of the various species we drove past: American Kestrels and Red-tailed Hawks flying over fields, a Greater Yellowlegs and Western Gull at a rest stop, a Pacific-slope Flycatcher calling at a stop sign. We crossed over the bridge spanning the mouth of the Columbia River – and the Washington/Oregon border – surrounded by hundreds of Double-crested Cormorants, an assortment of Larus gulls and Caspian Terns, Bald Eagles and Osprey flying low over the car, and several Great Blue Herons wading next to the road. Approaching Cannon Beach, I grew ever more excited for the many coastal species I would see.

We soon exited the highway and a fluttering Vaux's Swift welcomed us to Cannon Beach. We made it to my dad's friend's house, and as they caught up and conversed, I looked around. The view from their yard was breathtaking: the coast stretched for miles, backdropped with lush green mountains and tall cliffs; flocks of Brown Pelicans cruised past the towering sea stacks; the vast Pacific Ocean extended out as far as I could see. Fred and Micki were eager to show us around the area, so I grabbed my scope and binoculars and we made our way down to Haystack Rock, the largest sea stack in the area and the home of thousands of seabirds. As I grew closer, the

birds began to appear: countless alcids, cormorants, and gulls were flying to and from the rock in every possible direction. The sky and rock were covered with black and white dots. A cacophony of raucous seabird shrieks filled the air. In awe of the sheer amount of life on this barren



Oscar Nigam photographed this Tufted Puffin at Cannon Beach.

rock, I excitedly set up my scope to scan the habitat. Thousands of Common Murres lined the rocks, their subtle but striking plumage standing out from the gray rock in the background. Next to them were a small group of Brandt's Cormorants whose bright blue throats obviously told them apart from the far more numerous Pelagic Cormorants. I scanned the north side of the rock and quickly spotted several of my top target for Cannon Beach. Tufted Puffins! It almost didn't seem real. A pair stood next to a burrow on the rock, their bright orange bills and feet and curled, yellow tufts contrasted with their black bodies. Watching the puffins both

perched and flying to and from the rock was simply incredible. After observing the puffins for a while, I turned my eyes to the ocean. Dozens of Pigeon Guillemots dotted the water, swimming and feeding near and far, while a couple Surf Scoters drifted through my scope view. Several Heermann's Gulls, unique among North American gulls with their entirely dark gray plumage, followed flocks of Brown Pelicans, presumably with the hope of getting some of the pelicans' food. Harlequin Ducks swam close to shore, braving the rough surf and jagged rocks, while Black Oystercatchers roosted behind them. Hundreds of Western Gulls lined the shore, along with a lone California Gull and several Olympic Gulls (Western x Glaucous-winged hybrids). After walking around for a while, we headed back to the house. Wonderstruck and elated from the seabird spectacle at Haystack Rock, I noticed a Rufous Hummingbird feeding from a neighbor's cardinal flower.

After lunch, we drove twenty minutes north for a short hike at Ecola State Park. Massive Sitka spruce and western hemlocks towered over us, shading the lush fern-covered understory. Although the birds were quiet, I noticed a flyover Band-tailed Pigeon, a couple singing Swainson's Thrushes, and groups of Golden-crowned Kinglets and Red Crossbills foraging high in the trees.

Along the drive back was a solid stretch of rocky shoreline. Despite the high tide, I set out to search for a few species of shorebird that favor rocky coasts. I walked along the water for several minutes without seeing anything, until I finally saw one of my targets: a Black Turnstone. As I observed it sleeping on a rock, I noticed another. And another. And some more. The more I looked around, the more I spotted. I couldn't believe my eyes. In this small, maybe 15 square-foot area, I counted 41 Black Turnstones. I'm sure there were more as many were moving around and behind the large rocks. Among the flock of turnstones was a single Surfbird, still in breeding plumage. Thrilled at the sightings, we drove back to the house. After relaxing for the rest of the afternoon, we went out to eat at a nice Mexican restaurant. Several Eurasian Collared-Doves could be seen from the window. After dinner, walking along the water, I picked out a single Western Sandpiper from a small group of Least Sandpipers.

We would be leaving Cannon Beach for Mt. Hood the next morning, but there was still enough time to do a final couple hours of birding along the ocean. I awoke early, and as I made the walk down to Haystack Rock, the thousands of alcids flying to and from the rock came into view. It was a familiar sight from yesterday, but spectacular nevertheless. Aside from the expected alcids, cormorants, and gulls, I was surprised to see a single Bonaparte's Gull and a distant Whimbrel. Heading back to the house, I noticed a female Anna's Hummingbird perched on a branch, along with several Steller's Jays and Chestnut-backed Chickadees visiting a feeder.

After a late breakfast, my dad and I departed for Mt. Hood, ascending from sea level to 6,000 feet in just a few hours. The towering, snow-capped mountain slowly grew as we drove closer, and when we arrived – and were subsequently greeted by a flock of Brewer's Blackbirds and several Violet-green Swallows in the parking lot – it stood enormous before us. We would be starting and ending the 40-mile loop at the Timberline Lodge, a ski lodge. As we began our hike, we watched skiers descend down the snowfields high above. We hiked through gorgeous alpine meadows littered with colorful wildflowers, and numerous Common Ravens, Pine Siskins, and Red Crossbills flew overhead. I observed a pair of American Kestrels flying around what appeared to be a nesting site while Rufous Hummingbirds buzzed amid the flowers. Lincoln's Sparrows and "Oregon" Dark-eyed



Oscar digiscoped this striking alternate plumaged Surfbird at Cannon Beach.

Juncos darted through the shrubs, and a single Clark's Nutcracker flew by. The meadows transitioned to forests, and we found ourselves surrounded by impressive old-growth trees. A chip in the understory alerted me to the presence of a Pacific Wren as mixed flocks of Hermit, "Audubon's" Yellow-rumped, and MacGillivray's Warblers surrounded us on the trail. Higher up, a few Mountain Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Golden-crowned Kinglets, and Brown Creepers foraged in the canopy. A pair

of Empidonax flycatchers identified themselves as Dusky after giving their distinctive "whit" call. I heard a low whistle nearby, and a family group of Varied Thrushes popped into view. The male's gorgeous plumage – the brilliant orange perfectly contrasting with the dark blue – easily made it one of my favorite birds of the trip. Later in the day, I observed a young Canada Jay, surprisingly by itself, and a few Western Wood-Pewees singing from exposed branches. After a solid afternoon of hiking, we set up camp near the Sandy River, a difficult crossing that we wanted to tackle early the next morning when the water level would be lower due to less snowmelt. We pitched the tent and made dinner, rehydrated beef stroganoff. Tired from a long afternoon, we fell asleep as the sun was setting, before nine.

The next morning, we efficiently broke down camp and enjoyed a quick breakfast of oatmeal. Easily fording the Sandy River, I noticed a pair of Spotted Sandpipers then several Wilson's Warblers, quickly flitting through the riparian shrubs. We steeply climbed a ridge and were rewarded with sweeping vistas of the river valley and Mt. Hood. Across the valley, clearly visible, was a major blowdown, a result of strong windstorms from the previous winter. During a break for lunch, I picked out a single Townsend's Warbler among a larger flock of Hermit Warblers, along with a probable Hermit x Townsend's hybrid. Several Hermit Thrushes passed through, and I heard a single Black-backed Woodpecker call, although I unfortunately couldn't locate the bird. Later on, in a small clearing, I saw the trip's first and only Nashville Warbler. I recorded a calling Red Crossbill, which I was able to later identify as a western hemlock/type 3 crossbill. The trail eventually entered a recently-burned area, which was surprisingly beautiful. Wildflowers and saplings showed new signs of life and rebirth among the charred trunks. This area provided surprisingly good habitat: several Olive-sided Flycatchers sang and darted around the dead limbs, a social group of Clark's Nutcrackers landed nearby, and a family group of

Mountain Bluebirds, including one brilliant sky-blue male, flew around the dead trees. A male Western Tanager flew onto a nearby exposed branch and gave stunning views. It was easily one of the most beautiful birds I've ever seen, sporting its bright yellow body, jet-black wings, and flame-colored head. After a couple more hours of hiking, we arrived at a gorgeous campsite where wildflowers, grasses, and shrubs lined the ground, below the sparse evergreens. Looming nearby was Mt. Hood with impressive waterfalls pouring down from the glacial runoff. We dropped our packs and soaked in the view.

The next morning, as we broke down camp, a single Orange-crowned Warbler passed through the campsite. Today's hike would take us through more recently burned areas, across three difficult river fords, and up to the highest point on the trail, just below 8,500 feet in elevation. Hiking through a meadow in a recently burned area, I added two new birds: a group of Cassin's Finches foraging on the ground and a single adult Townsend's Solitaire perched on a dead snag. I loved the subtle yet intricate beauty of the gray body, rufous wing-patches, and bright white eye-ring. In the background, Rufous Hummingbirds constantly buzzed by. We slowly climbed, and as the trees began to fade, the birds changed. Mountain Chickadees surrounded us, accompanied by several flyover Horned Larks. As we neared the top of Cooper Spur, the highest point on the trail, I got a quick glimpse of a large, brown falcon zooming by low to the ground – a Prairie Falcon! I watched it ascend, its distinct flight profile silhouetted against the bright sky.

As we continued along the trail, the many new western birds that I marveled at days earlier transformed into common sightings. We pushed onwards, climbing and descending numerous ridges, and finally arrived at a campsite. Exhausted from a 17-mile day, we quickly made dinner and passed out in the tent.

We finished up our backpacking the next morning with the only new trip bird being a "Thick-billed" Fox Sparrow. Upon making it back to the car, we started the drive to the Columbia River Gorge. Along the drive, we stopped to hike up to Angel's Rest, a rock outcropping giving sweeping views of the two-mile-wide Columbia River. Taking in the view, I observed several Spotted Towhees singing from the scrubby habitat. As we continued to drive to Cascade Locks, the town where we would be staying, Ospreys cruised above the river, and as we checked into the hotel, a group of California Scrub-Jays flew across the road.

We awoke early the next morning as we had a 12-mile hike that we wanted to finish before it got too hot (the

high for the day was in the mid-90s). The Eagle Creek Trail climbed across a gorge, passing numerous waterfalls. It didn't take long for the first exciting bird of the day. Perched on a dead branch in front of me was a stunning male Lazuli Bunting. Its bright blue head and orange breast jumped out of the otherwise brown background. I was shocked to see this species here as we were not hiking through its preferred open habitat. However, this area was severely burned several years ago, so I suppose the fire opened up the habitat enough for the species to move in. I would see two other Lazuli Buntings over the duration of the hike. Several miles later, I encountered my top target for the day. Walking next to Eagle Creek, I heard a series of repeated buzzy notes. Turning towards the call, I saw three gray birds fly up the stream and land nearby. Dippers! Delighted at seeing one of my top targets for the entire trip, I watched them wade in the fast-moving stream and dip underwater to forage. Later on in the hike, I saw a brightly-colored Red-breasted Sapsucker drilling sap wells in a small tree.

Upon returning to the hotel, we checked the weather for the next day. The high was a whopping 99 degrees, so instead of spending a final day hiking in the gorge, we decided to drive to Washington to do a final hike in the Cascades.

The next morning, we left Cascade Locks and slowly made our way north. Stopping at a post office in Portland to send a postcard home, I saw a male Lesser Goldfinch singing atop a small tree. Soon after, I observed a female Black-headed Grosbeak at a nearby city park. By mid-afternoon, we were in Olympia, and stopped at Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. Walking through freshwater marshes, I noticed several Wood Ducks, as Yellow Warblers and Willow Flycatchers sang in the background. On the shore of the Puget Sound, a large flock of Common Mergansers distantly passed, and Semipalmated Plovers and Least Sandpipers foraged on the mudflats. Ring-billed Gulls, the trip's sixth gull species, were everywhere, along with Barn, Bank, and Cliff Swallows. A group of harbor seals slept on the mud. On the walk back to the car, a single Bewick's Wren foraged with a flock of chickadees. After a stop for sushi in Tacoma, we drove east towards Snoqualmie Pass as the sun was setting.

On our final day, we had planned a 15-mile out-and-back hike along the Pacific Crest Trail. We hiked up to and followed a ridge, giving sweeping views of the mountains. I didn't add any new trip birds here, but a single Varied Thrush and a large flock of Townsend's Warblers were

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Birding in South Florida, Part 1

By Debbie Kalbfleisch

In 2019, Karyn Delaney, Kathy Saunders, and I planned a ten-day trip to South Florida for April of the following year through the birding tour group High Lonesome. Needless to say, it was cancelled because of Covid-19. We had the option of rescheduling the same tour for the same time in 2021, and we cheerfully agreed to this, trusting that the pandemic would be over by then. Fast forward to the beginning of this year, and Florida was blowing up with cases. The vaccines, however, were becoming more widely available, and the number of participants for the trip had shrunk to six people, plus our guide. High Lonesome was requiring everyone to get the vaccine before the trip and was taking other precautions, such as masking up in the van and anytime inside, so we decided to go for it.

Late afternoon of Sunday, April 25, found the three of us becoming acquainted with our guide, Kip Miller, and the other three participants in the lobby of the Best Western Hotel in Miami. After getting take-out from Wendy's, we drove to the nearby Miami Spring neighborhood. A couple of picnic tables were located in a traffic circle, and we were just sitting down and opening our bags of food when Kip yelled from the van that he had a Spot-breasted Oriole, one of Miami's specialties, and one of our target birds. Abandoning our food, we sprinted back to him and soon saw two adults with bright orange heads! Dinner kept getting interrupted, as a fledgling was also spotted, then a third adult, as well as a fly-over of several White Ibises, but eventually we were able to finish our meal and take a walk around the neighborhood, where we bagged several Monk Parakeets, Yellow-chevrons Parakeets, and Mitred Parakeets. I had several pet Budgerigars growing up, and it surprised me how large these wild parakeets were. Instead of going by size, we should look at the tails: parakeets tend to have long tails while parrot tails are much shorter.

Monday morning found us in another Miami neighborhood, searching for another specialty, the Red-whiskered Bulbul from Asia. Its pretty warbled song made it easy to find, and we also nabbed a couple of Blue-and-yellow Macaws, White-winged Doves, and a Loggerhead Shrike. A green basilisk lizard, also known as the Jesus Christ lizard, as it runs on water, was an interesting find, and we

saw our first zebra longwing, the state butterfly of Florida. We were close to the Baptist Hospital with their extensive grounds, and here we saw an Egyptian Goose and our first Gray Kingbirds. We laughed as we watched a couple of Common Gallinules building their nest on top of a goose statue and Muscovy Ducks paraded their young. A huge Florida soft-shelled turtle hauled itself out of one of the ponds onto the grounds, probably looking for a place to lay its eggs.



This Spot-breasted Oriole, a target species on her Florida trip, interrupted Debbie's first lunch with the tour group.

Photo by Karyn Delaney

We continued north up the Florida coast, stopping at the Wakodahatchee Wetlands. The boardwalk through this large waterbird colony was a joy to walk, and the contingent from Pittsburgh would have been happy to stay all afternoon! Nesting birds included Common Gallinule, Gray-headed Swamphen, Wood Stork, Anhinga, Double-crested Cormorants, Great Egrets, Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Cattle Egret, Green Heron, and Glossy Ibis. Yes, it was quite noisy! Purple Martins zipped through the larger birds coming and going, and we got nice views of a Least Bittern.

We stopped for lunch at Panera's and took over a corner spot with several tables where we could spread out and enjoy the a/c. Things were a bit quieter that afternoon at the Green Cay Wetlands with its boardwalk through the marsh. Here were Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Mottled Ducks, Limpkin, Solitary Sandpiper, and lots of Common Gallinules. An Anhinga in a nearby tree provided an up-close look at the black-and-white feather pattern on its back. We witnessed nature red "in tooth and claw" when a soft-shelled turtle grabbed one of the baby gallinules. Two pale Red-shouldered Hawks were trying hard to ignore the Red-winged Blackbirds who were berating them but eventually departed, escorted by the blackbirds.

Driving up the coast on Florida's Turnpike, we saw a number of Swallow-tailed Kites, a lifer for Barb from Colorado, and we also spotted a Sandhill Crane just as we exited at Port St. Lucie. As we were leaving the Holiday Inn the next morning, we were surprised by two Crested Caracaras on the service road, rooting through some discarded fast-food containers. They appeared to favor Mexican food. None of us had ever seen caracaras this close! They grudgingly made room for the van to pass.

A Great Blue Heron standing on the boardwalk railing at the Lake Marian Boat Ramp, was completely unperturbed as we walked past it. Kip quickly got a Purple Gallinule in the scope, and we also noted Black-necked Stilts, Least Sandpipers, a Long-billed Dowitcher, Spotted Sandpipers, and Greater Yellowlegs. Four American White Pelicans and a Roseate Spoonbill were nice finds, as well. Lake Marian is on the edge of the Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area, and we now drove farther into a land of scrubby fields bordered by pine woods. A nemesis bird for Karyn and me has been the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. It has eluded Karyn since 2012, and we had both missed it on a trip to Florida in 2016. We were

hopeful but prepared to be disappointed. Bachman's Sparrow is found in the same habitat, and we were cheered when this little brown bird popped up and gave everyone a good look. A Red-headed Woodpecker also seemed to be a good omen. We drove farther and got out to walk again when Kip pointed out that the Eastern Towhees we were seeing have a paler eye in Florida than other populations. Eventually, we started hearing a high squeaky call and a winged unicorn, I mean a "Red-cockaded Woodpecker," flew onto a tree close to the road, giving us great looks at its white cheek! Yes, there was much rejoicing!

It was only a short distance to a Polk County park, Coleman Landing at the Shady Oaks Recreation Area, on the banks of Kissimmee Lake; here we commandeered a large shelter to have our lunch. Large oak trees were covered in Spanish moss and provided welcome shade. A small island just offshore was crowded with nesting Anhingas, Double-crested Cormorants, Great Egrets, Little Blue Herons, Cattle Egrets, and White and Glossy Ibises. A pair of Swallow-tailed Kites must have had a nest nearby, and an Osprey peered at us from above. We were thrilled to see Snail Kites and counted six of them in the air at once.

We continued working our way westward toward Tampa and stopped at Lettuce Lake County Park, a fresh water wetland named for the floating plants on it, including spatterdock and water lilies. A boardwalk winds through a lovely wooded area where we got wonderful looks at a pair of Barred Owls. A quick flurry of warbler activity here yielded half a dozen Northern Parulas and Black-and-white, Prothonotary, and Yellow-throated Warblers. A busily foraging Limpkin ignored us as we passed within a few feet.

The following day, Wednesday, we headed south out of Tampa, past St. Petersburg to the Pinellas County Fort De Sota Park at the mouth of Tampa Bay. We made a



Karyn Delaney photographed this Burrowing Owl colony in Florida suburbia.

beeline to the North Beach where we found a quiet spot away from the beach goers. Before the day was over, we had racked up American Oystercatcher, Black-bellied Plover, Snowy Plover, Wilson's Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Piping Plover, Marbled Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, Dunlin, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Willet, Herring Gull, Least Tern, Royal Tern, Sandwich Tern, Black Skimmer, Brown Pelican, Snowy Egret, and Reddish Egret. We also saw our only

Nanday Parakeets with their black hoods and noted a few warblers – Ovenbird, Cape May, and Blackpoll.

Donna Foyle was also in South Florida and had made several trips with Kip, and after checking with him, was able to join us at Fort De Sota Park. It was great to see a familiar face from Pittsburgh, and we enjoyed catching up with her and exchanging birding notes. We spent most of the day here with a picnic lunch at one of the shelters before once again getting on the road. That evening, we enjoyed a seafood dinner on the Sarasota waterfront, polished off by Key lime pie.

Thursday, Day 5, started with an early morning visit to the Celery Fields. Again, we got very good looks at several Least Bitterns, as well as our first sighting of marsh rabbits wading through standing water. Unlike our cottontails, they are strong swimmers. Common Gallinules were feeding their very tiny babies close to the boardwalk, and we noticed that the odd-looking wings on the bald youngsters looked very much like hands with tiny fingers!

Just before we arrived at the Oscar Scherer State Park, some of us glimpsed a Black-crowned Night-Heron. Our goal at this park was Florida Scrub-Jay, and we were extremely pleased when four individuals made their appearance and came to check us out! A very bright Eastern Meadowlark atop a large pine was an unexpected bonus. We headed to Cape Coral, going ever more deeply into the subdivisions, until we came to the Pelican Boulevard Baseball Complex. Here, in the middle of suburbia, we were delighted to find a tiny town of Burrowing Owls. Their human neighbors had thoughtfully provided low perches for them, and at least a dozen individuals, including young, were standing guard or

peering from their burrows. One homeowner was busy making improvements with the dirt flying as the owl excavated. Monk Parakeets had found the tall lights surrounding the field irresistible and were also making improvements to their immense stick nests with separate entrances for each pair.

After lunch, we walked the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park in the Everglades, finding Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Northern Parula, and Blackpoll, Black-throated

Blue, and Black-throated Green Warblers. The preserve was originally a logging site, but the boardwalk winds through the only area that was spared the axe. Some of the trees are 200 years old and many grow next to Royal Palm trees, an unusual occurrence.

We continued driving south and stopped in Florida City at the Holiday Inn Express, our base for the next two nights. We saw our first Common Mynas here, conveniently nesting close to the roof!

To be continued in January's *Nuthatch*

Backpacking and Birding in Oregon

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nice highlights. The best highlight, however, wasn't even a bird. Hiking across rocky slopes, we saw several pikas. Pikas are small, adorable mammals; they look like a miniature rabbit but with mouse ears. They gave a repeated high-pitched "eep!" call as they sat on the rocks. We finished the hike early afternoon and drove to Seattle.

We'd spend the night by the airport and fly out the following morning. I compiled the trip list back at the hotel. Over the course of the week, I logged 113 species. Since I had never birded out west before, 47 of those species were lifers! It was a fantastic trip, and a great way to decompress and reflect before heading off to college.



Oscar Nigam digiscoped this pika along the Pacific Crest Trail.

Birding Blitz for Conservation Revisited

By Margaret Higbee

In the March 2020 issue of "The PSO Pileated," the newsletter for the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology, a plan was put forth to sponsor a June birding competition to help raise funds to support organizations that acquire land necessary for saving birds at risk. This was called the B4C, or Birding for Conservation. The target species selected were Northern Harrier and Wood Thrush, and the organizations chosen to benefit from our fund-raising efforts were Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association, the Manada Conservancy, and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

At our March 2020 Todd Bird Club meeting, the group voted to sponsor a team of birders – the Todd Towhees – by donating \$100 to our effort. The Todd Towhees

included Carol Guba, Gloria Lamer, Roger Higbee, and me. Then Covid-19 hit, and everything was canceled.

After multiple Zoom PSO board meetings, the decision was made to go ahead with the B4C in 2021. All four of us have participated in various Big Days, so we knew we had to plan. Years ago, Gloria, Georgette Syster, and I did yearly Big Days covering parts of Indiana, Cambria, and Armstrong counties. We always started at Yellow Creek State Park, so we originally decided that's what we would do. Our previous Big Days have always taken place in May, the month when migrants are numerous. This competition had to be scheduled between June 18 and the 21st. Few migrants would be present; we would be looking for breeding birds.

We started by making a list of all the possible birds we might find breeding in our tri-county area. We came up with 158 possibilities; but when we checked eBird for recent sightings, the number was reduced to 118 species. Roger and I started birding various areas and “staking out” birds. We found nesting Golden-crowned Kinglets in the northeastern part of Indiana County, Henslow’s and Grasshopper Sparrows near Gipsy, singing Hermit Thrushes near Commodore, Peregrine Falcon and Herring Gulls near Kittanning, Hooded Mergansers and Common Loon at Prince Gallitzin S.P., etc. The Swainson’s Warbler along the West Penn Trail near MM 9 was another option. The travel distance was becoming too great as we would lose too much time driving and not birding. So we started scratching off locations – SGL 174 in the northeast corner of Indiana would be too far to drive as would Gipsy. The Swainson’s Warbler would require a hike of almost two miles, not a long distance, but rough on one of us with a bad ankle. Scratch those species, too, unless we’d get lucky elsewhere. After much discussion, the four of us decided to start at Prince Gallitzin as we were certain that would be our best chance to list multiple species and possibly add water birds. We would start at the park before dawn with the hope of hearing an owl or a rail. By starting at our farthest point east, we could do the first part of the trip in the dark.

June 21 was the day we selected. Carol drove to our house, jumped in with us, and we headed to Gloria’s where we picked her up. We arrived at Prince Gallitzin at 4:56 a.m. Our very first birds were Willow Flycatchers. Killbuck Marsh yielded no rails or owls, but we did pick up Swamp Sparrows and Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Other highlights at the park included 12 of our target Wood Thrushes as well as Double-crested Cormorant, Bald Eagles, Great Crested Flycatcher, Purple Martins, Black-throated Blue Warbler, and Northern Parula. We left the park with a list of 60 species at 7:28 a.m. We were doing well time-wise until we reached Patton – road construction!!! We sat and we sat.... Fortunately, as we waited for our turn to move, we started adding species – Chimney Swifts circling overhead were new! Then we first heard then spotted Killdeer, another addition. A Blue Jay screamed and a Carolina Wren burst forth in song, and we realized we hadn’t seen or heard either at Prince Gallitzin. After we finally started moving again, we picked up Rock Pigeons, bringing our Cambria total to 65 species.

Our next destination was Mt. Zion Road where Gloria thought we might pick up Henslow’s Sparrow. We did! And we added our first Wild Turkeys and Turkey Vultures as well. Roger and I had staked out two Hermit Thrushes which had been singing along Alder Road on June 19, so we continued to the designated spots where

they had been. No luck. Instead a Wood Thrush and three Black-throated Green Warblers were there. Instead of “wasting time” on one species, we headed to Yellow Creek where our target species were Wood Duck, Alder Flycatcher, Yellow-breasted Chat, Orchard Oriole, and Pine Warbler. Amazingly we spotted all five plus a bonus Baltimore Oriole. Our list totaled 75 when we left Yellow Creek at 11:02.

We next took the back road to Allen Bridge where our target was Cliff Swallow, and once again we spotted our target as well as Northern Rough-winged Swallow, another bird new for our list.

Since it was nearing noon and we had all been up since 3:00 a.m., we headed into Indiana to go through a drive-through for fish sandwiches for lunch. But first we stopped at Christ Episcopal Church for the Fish Crows that had been nest building in the tree behind the church on June 19. It took only a few minutes before one of the Fish Crows arrived carrying more nesting material into the same tree.

After lunch we cruised around Indiana picking up Northern Mockingbird at Oakland Cemetery and Mallards at both McCreary’s Pond and the VFW; we’d been hoping to snag a Great Egret at the latter location as one had been there earlier in the week, but that didn’t happen. Our next destination was another stakeout on Brown Road, a Vesper Sparrow. As we pulled up to the site, we waited less than two minutes before the Vesper sang, and we all heard it. It was foraging in an agricultural field. A House Finch on the same road brought us to 82 species, and it was not yet 1:00 p.m.

Heading south on Route 286, we drove to Stuchell Road to listen for Grasshopper Sparrow, and once again we were successful with all four of us hearing its insectlike sound – “pick-tup-zee.”

Returning to Route 286 we continued to Jacksonville where we turned off onto Aultman Run Road which landed us an additional seven species including three raptors, a Yellow-throated Vireo, and Blue-winged and Prairie Warblers. Thanks to Carol’s sharp ears, we were superbly surprised to hear a Worm-eating Warbler which we had never heard or seen on this road before. Roger was able to record the song on his phone. What a true bonus bird! We left Aultman Run Road with a species total of 90 at 2:25. Things were really looking up at this point.

A stop at the Auen Road access to the West Penn Trail for Kentucky Warbler fizzled, but we did hear our first Pileated Woodpecker. Continuing to Conemaugh Dam,

we again missed two of our targets – Kentucky and Cerulean Warblers; but all was not lost as we snagged White-eyed Vireo and Yellow-throated Warbler. It was only 4:15, time to head to Armstrong County which we knew held a plethora of possibilities for us.

Unfortunately, the rains started putting a crimp in our birding. To get to Polka Hollow, we crossed the Conemaugh River at Tunnelton into Westmoreland County where we saw no birds...just heavy rain, but it was still raining when we crossed the Kiski River at Vandergrift into Armstrong County. By the time we reached Polka Hollow just before 5:00 p.m., the rain had abated for a bit. Our target here was Louisiana Waterthrush. It took only two minutes for us to locate the waterthrush. Another success despite the rain! A quick jaunt up Robb's Fording Road yielded eight Bobolinks, another Grasshopper Sparrow, and another Louisiana Waterthrush. Yes!!! It was still raining and rumbling, but the birds cooperated.

The rain continued, but so did we. A stop at Crooked Creek added Common Raven and Cerulean Warbler, bringing us to 97. Manorville and Kittanning were next on our list. Peregrine Falcons nest under the Graff Bridge at Manorville. Even though we had not spotted them lately, we were sure that we'd be able to add one to our list. We donned our rain gear and walked the Armstrong Trail to the bridge where we carefully studied possible Peregrine perches, but luck eluded us. Fortunately, an Osprey circling over the river then perching in a tree on the opposite shore was an unexpected substitute for the Peregrine. In addition, a Warbling Vireo was singing along the trail. We hurriedly returned to the van and headed to Lock & Dam 7 at Kittanning where a pair of Herring Gulls had built a nest, laid eggs, and raised three young. The chicks had been running around on the structure when we had checked on them this past week. We pulled into the parking area and were dismayed to see no gulls – no adults, no young. Nevertheless, I set up my scope and started scanning the river. Suddenly below us the two adults began constant, agitated calls as they flew

back and forth in front of us. It was definitely a distraction display so the chicks were probably right below us where we couldn't see them from our vantage point. We left at 6:47. Herring Gull was No. 100.

We started planning the rest of our day, but by now the rain had increased in intensity and the skies were loudly rumbling. Our next stop at Keystone Reservoir yielded 14 species that we already had but no unexpected water birds. An American Kestrel along Route 422 en route to our house was a new species for Armstrong for the day. Amazingly our yard produced only seven species, but one of them was a Purple Finch, No. 101. We left our house at 8:16 and headed into Indiana where another friend had told us we might find a Merlin. The storms continued but the Merlin did not appear. But we were not yet finished...at least we thought we weren't finished.

We drove to West Lebanon in the rain, hoping to add Savannah Sparrow and Eastern Whip-poor-will. It was overcast with storm clouds, so it was darker than it should have been. The Savannahs were not in sight nor could we hear them. We decided that we'd just wait for the Whips, so we drove to the location and sat patiently in the van until 10:00 p.m. The wind was whipping but the Whips weren't calling. We had yet another option, a young Great Horned Owl that had been frequenting the same area near Homer City. We'd been stuck at 101 since 8:16, but the weather had not improved. It was extremely windy and it was still raining. After much discussion, we decided to pack it in and head home.

The four of us have been talking about doing this again next year but birding only Indiana County. We probably won't do as well, but we think it's worth trying.

On June 21, 2021, we had listed 80 species in Indiana, 65 in Cambria, and 45 in Armstrong for a final total of 101 in the tri-county area.. The Todd Towhees took first place in southwestern PA for the number of Wood Thrushes tallied (18), the highest number of species counted (101), and the largest amount of money raised (\$375).

Indiana, Armstrong, Cambria County Summer 2021

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: Birding Blitz for Conservation (B4C), Conemaugh Dam (CD), Prince Gallitzin State Park (PG), West Penn Trail (WPT), Yellow Creek State Park (YC).

Two immature **Hooded Mergansers** were present at CD 6/7 (CB); on 6/14 (MH, RH) a hen was noted with 6 young

at PG. Summer **Common Merganser** observations continue to increase in our region; 2 were sighted along

the WPT 6/9 (RB); 6 were listed at Mahoning Creek Lake 6/11 (AK, JK); and 2 were found at CD 6/16 (DBe).

A young **Ruffed Grouse**, accompanied by a hen, was seen along the Ghost Town Trail 6/1 (SD); the only other reports, both singletons in separate areas of SGL 108, *Cambria*, occurred 7/3 (JC) and 7/5 (TA).

A **Pied-billed Grebe** was photographed at PG 6/13 (TA); this was the region's lone report.

One **Eastern Whip-poor-will** was heard at West Lebanon 6/9 (MH, RH)..

A single **American Woodcock** was flushed along a trail at YC 6/5 (MH, RH). First fall **Solitary Sandpipers** were 5 that appeared at YC 7/31 (MO, AO).

On 7/18 (HR) YC hosted 6 **Ring-billed Gulls**, the only ones noted in the region. The nesting **Herring Gulls** at Kittanning had 3 small chicks on the structure in the river on 6/11 (MH, RH); on 6/21 (CG, MH, RH, GL) the chicks were apparently in the water below out of our line of sight as the adults were performing noisy distraction displays; on 6/23 (TR) only 2 chicks were photographed with the two adults. A single **Caspian Tern** at YC 6/7 (DK) and 5 at Keystone Reservoir 6/16 (MH, RH) were also the lone reports. PG yielded a single **Common Tern** 6/2 (MD) which was joined by a second the following day (MD).

A summering **Common Loon** was spotted at PG 6/3 (MD) and 6/14 (MH, RH). Single **Double-crested Cormorants** were listed at PG 6/2 (MD) and 6/21 (CG, MH, RH, GL); at Kittanning 7/1 (TR); and at YC 7/13 (ED, MH, RH).

Numerous **Great Egret** sightings included single birds at the VFW in Indiana 6/19 (MH, RH) and 7/9, 16, 19 (CL, GL) and at YC, both 7/13 (ED, MH, RH, DK, KT) and 7/27 (JP). Two were noted at YC 7/31 (MO, AO). In *Cambria* one was at Loretto 7/30 (SVH).

Ospreys appeared at CD 6/5 (JT) and at YC 7/13 (ED, MH, RH, DK, KT) while 3 were listed 7/18 (HR) at YC where one was again sighted 7/24 (JP). There are no known nests near YC. Four each were reported in both *Armstrong* and *Cambria*. The region's only **Northern Harrier** was eBirded at the Babcock Mine area of Gallitzin SF 6/17 (LG) and 6/19 (JH).

Two **Eastern Screech-Owls** and one **Great Horned Owl** were respectively found in *Armstrong* south of New Bethlehem 7/22 (BR) and 7/24 (BR). **Barred Owl** sightings included 2 near Loretto 6/3 (SVH), one to 2 at Nolo 6/11 - 7/15 (AB, DB) and one at PG 7/5 (DP, KP).

A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** 6/21 (MeC) was an unusual find along the WPT as sapsuckers are uncommon nesters in our area.

Single **Alder Flycatchers** were reported at PG 6/2 (JC) and along the WPT 6/6 (TA); another was singing on territory at YC 6/5 (MH, RH) through 7/13 (ED, MH, RH,

DK, KT). Only 4 **Least Flycatchers** were noted in the region – 2 at SGL 26 on 6/7 (MH, RH) and lone birds at PG 6/13 (TA) and at YC 6/25 (HR).

A pair of **Fish Crows** was observed carrying nesting material into the tree behind the Episcopal Church in Indiana 6/19 (MH, RH); two days later they were still nest building (CG, MH, RH, GL). Two in Loretto 7/22 (SVH) were the only other ones reported.

Two **Horned Larks** near Mayport 7/19 (BR) were amazingly the only ones noted in the region.

YC yielded 20 **Purple Martins** 7/24 (JP); 2 were still present 7/27 (MH, RH, DK, KT). Sixty-one pairs at Penn Run fledged 200 young (RA). Two **Bank Swallows** appeared at YC 6/8 (PF) while one was observed 7/27 (MH, RH, DK, KT); there are no known nearby colonies.

One to 3 **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were present 6/30 - 7/30 (MH, RH) near Shelocta where two were seen pulling off pieces of suet and flying behind the garage. Nesting was considered fairly certain as at least 3 were sighted on 7/14 (MH, RH). An adult **Brown Creeper** was observed with two fledglings at YC 6/15 (ED, PF, MH).

Away from *Cambria* with its numerous **Veery** reports, the lone *Indiana* and *Armstrong* sightings occurred along the WPT 6/26 (MeC) and 7/3 (MC, MK) and east of Putneyville 6/3 (DM). **Hermit Thrushes**, too, were difficult to find away from *Cambria*; in *Indiana* the only report mentioned 2 singing s. of SGL 185 on 6/19 (MH, RH), but neither bird could be relocated 6/21 (CG, MH, RH, GL); in *Armstrong* one near Putneyville 6/3 (DM) and one at Rattling Run 7/10 (DR) were the only reports.

SGL 262 was the hotspot for 3 **Grasshopper Sparrows** and 5 **Henslow's Sparrows** 6/3 (MH, RH). Grasshoppers were also noted on the Patton BBS 6/5 (MH, RH), near Blacklick 6/13 (MH, RH), both near Jacksonville and near Robb's Fording 6/21 (CG, MH, RH, GL), and at Robb's Fording again 6/26 (RHa, SM). Two Henslow's were found at the Babcock Mine area of Gallitzin SF while one was present near Alverda 6/21 (CG, MH, RH, GL) and again 6/26 (MH, RH). Two **Vesper Sparrows** were present 6/10 (DP) at Gallitzin SF while 2 continued 6/11 (MH, RH) near Indiana where only one could be located for the B4C on 6/21 (CG, MH, RH, GL).

More **Yellow-breasted Chats** were noted this summer in *Indiana* than during the past several years. Conemaugh Floodlands yielded one 6/2 (JT); the Gipsy strips, one on 6/3 (MH, RH); YC, one on 6/5 (MH, RH) through 7/13 (ED, MH, RH, DK, KT); the Shelocta BBS one on 6/6 (MH, RH); and Aultmans Run, 2 on 6/17 (MH, RH) and 7/5 (MD). Strangely, none were noted in either *Armstrong* or *Cambria*.

Dry Knob near Smicksburg and Robbs Fording were the hotspots for **Bobolinks** with respective top counts of 5 on 6/1 (MH, RH) and 8 on 6/21 (CG, MH, RH, GL)

The Armstrong Trail north of L&D 8 yielded a **Worm-**

eating Warbler 6/12 (TR) while the B4C produced a new location for Worm-eating Warbler near Jacksonville 6/21 (CG, MH, RH, GL). The YC **Golden-winged Warbler** found last quarter was last seen 6/6 (DW). The WPT **Swainson's Warbler** continued through the end of summer (DL). The presence of a **Canada Warbler** 6/18 (LG) at the Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site suggests breeding. A late **Wilson's Warbler** was sighted at YC 6/1 (SD, ED, DK, TR, JT, WT, KT).

Observers: Tina Alianiello, Ron Alsop, Colin Bashline, Alice Beatty, Dave Beatty, David Bennett (DBe), Ron Burkert, Lee Carnahan, John Carter, Megan Cunningham (MeC), Michael David, Sue Dickson, Ed Donley, Patience Fisher, Linda Greble, Carol Guba, Rebecca Hart (ReH), Margaret Higbee, Roger Higbee, Josh Houck, Debbie Kalbfleisch, Avis Keener, John Keener, David Keith, Michelle Kienholz, Clayton Lamer, Gloria Lamer, Dennis Lauffer, Steve Manns, Daniel Markowicz, Mariam Ohanjanyan, Araks Ohanyan, Dale Plumley, Karen Plumley, Joseph Pumford, Bill Reddinger, Dan Richards, Theo Rickert, Henry Rummel, John Taylor, Wil Taylor, Theo Rickert, Ken Truitt, Stewart Van Horn (SVH), Ding Wang.

This newsletter is produced four times a year by the Todd Bird Club.

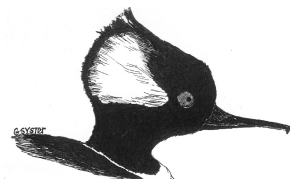
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Dues Reminder

Todd Bird Club dues are due on January 1 each year. If you haven't already paid, please submit your \$15 family, \$10 individual, or \$5 student membership to:

Gloria Lamer, Treasurer
515 Laurel Run Road
Penn Run, PA 15765

And please indicate whether you prefer a hard copy or the electronic version. Thanks!



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