

The Todd Nuthatch



Indiana, PA

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

April 2022

Meetings May Resume in September

With the possible end in sight of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are hoping that we will be able to resume our monthly meetings in September. We will still follow all of the

recommended protocols. Details will follow in our August newsletter. Meanwhile come to our outings. See below.

Outings

Tuesday morning outings will continue till fall. For all Tuesday Yellow Creek outings, meet on the north shore near the gazebo shortly after dawn. We will spend more time on the north shore during our Tuesday outings. Everyone is welcome. If you arrive late and can't find us, please call Roger Higbee's cell (412-309-3538).

Saturday, April 16 – Blue Spruce County Park, led by Court Harding (chardinglou@gmail.com). Meet in the first large parking lot near the park office at 8:00 a.m. We will target early migrants.

Saturday, April 23 – Meet at the home of Ed Donley, 1243 Five Points Road, Indiana, at 8:00 a.m. Ed's driveway is the one with the sharp left. If you get lost, call Ed's cell (724-599-5886). Targets are early spring migrants plus there's a possibility of seeing an Eastern Screech-Owl.

Saturday, April 30 – White's Woods, led by Roger and Margaret Higbee. This is a joint outing with the Friends of White's Woods. From Philadelphia Street in Indiana, take N. 12th Street to the parking lot where we will meet at

9:00 a.m. Please wear sturdy footwear as the trails are not flat. Plan to hike uphill and down.

Saturday, May 7 – Yellow Creek State Park, led by John Taylor. Be prepared to hike. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the park office.

Saturday, May 14 – Indiana County Migration Count. Our annual Todd Bird Club Spring Migration Count is scheduled for Saturday, May 14, which is also Global Big Day. Mark your calendars now. Social distancing may still be in place, so keep in mind any other state regulations at that time. Field birders, as well as feeder/yard watchers are welcome to participate. This count is county-wide and not limited to a 15-mile-diameter circle like the Christmas Bird Count. You may either eBird your data, send it to Margaret Higbee (bcoriole@windstream.net), 3119 Creekside Road, Indiana, PA 15701, or call and dictate (724-354-3493). May is a great time to get outside and observe migrants. Many birds pass through our state on their northward journeys. It's exciting because we never know what to expect.

Trumpeter Swan Family Update

By Lisa Catarouche and Tom Glover

The last update on the Trumpeter Swan family appeared in the January 2021 issue of *The Todd Nuthatch*. Noted in that update was the loss of Z603, the female. Presently the family includes the male, Z675 and the 2018 fledged swan, presumed to be a female. The last noted 2021 eBird PA sighting was posted by Lisa on April 11 on the beaver pond near Richardsville, Jefferson County, PA. The next 2021 eBird sighting for the two swans was posted by Patty Lane on December 18 when the two were found on the private pond south of Sperryville, VA. The two swans were reported on the same pond by Douglas Ward in eBird on January 8, 2022. A little over a month later Lisa posted February 20, 2022, on eBird the two swans were back on the beaver pond outside of Richardsville, PA. The noted eBird postings represent the migration pattern between the area of the beaver pond in PA and the area of the private pond in VA. The swans have been making this noted migration over the past six years.

On January 16, 2022, Tom received an email from the owner of the private pond in VA noting the swans' presence. The owner mentioned finding information about the swans posted online, including the articles in *The Todd Nuthatch*.

Swans 603 and 675 have the distinction of being the first recorded nesting Trumpeter Swans in Pennsylvania; that event took place on the beaver pond outside of Richardsville. The 2018 nesting was featured in an article published in the April 2019 issue, Vol. 32, No. 4, of



The two swans were photographed on the beaver pond near Richardsville by Cheryl Peters.

Pennsylvania Birds. Since that nesting, other pairs of nesting Trumpeter Swans have been noted in Pennsylvania. Published in the *Pennsylvania Birds*' Summary of the Season section of the December 2020 issue, Vol. 34, No. 3, a 2020 Trumpeter Swan nesting in Cumberland County, PA, hatched one cygnet. The cygnet, last seen June 23, 2020, was thought to have succumbed to predation. Noted in the same summary was a July 27, 2020, posting of a pair of swans along with two well-grown cygnets in Pike County, PA. It is thought the swans nested nearby. The Cumberland County swans nested again in 2021 and produced three cygnets that survived; that nesting was reported in the January 2022 issue, Vol. 35, No. 3, of *Pennsylvania Birds*.

The nestings noted in Cumberland and Pike Counties took place in eastern Pennsylvania. A question arises as to the origin of the breeding stock of Trumpeter Swans noted in eastern PA. Numerous notations have been made of Ohio's efforts to establish nesting swans, and how that effort bodes for Pennsylvania; this is referenced in the January 2022 issue of *Pennsylvania Birds*. An alternative source for the breeding pairs of Trumpeter Swans must be considered – the stock of swans established by the past efforts of the "Environmental Studies of the Piedmont," a division of the Clifton Institute located near Warrenton, VA. The original nesting Trumpeter Swans, Z603 and Z675, are from Warrenton, VA, stock as this had been confirmed by their neck collar bands. The origin of other nesting Trumpeter Swans in Pennsylvania needs to be explored.

Join Todd Bird Club

You are invited to join Todd Bird Club by sending your dues to Gloria Lamer, 515 Laurel Run Road, Penn Run, PA 15765. Please specify whether you want an electronic or hard copy of the newsletter.

Student Membership \$5

Individual Membership \$10

Family Membership \$15

Winter Raptor Surveys

by Roger Higbee

One of the citizen science projects in which birders can participate is the Winter Raptor Survey (WRS). This project was designed by Dr. Gregory Grove, now retired from Penn State University. The basic idea is to travel by vehicle, a predetermined route to identify raptors wintering in a specific area. Routes are designed by the participants and run annually during the period of mid January to mid February. The exact dates are set yearly by Dr. Grove. He has established specific guidelines to try to make the routes somewhat uniform. Some of these are: the route should stay in one county, the route should not be longer than 100 miles, and the route should be run when the weather is as good as possible. A complete list may be found in *Pennsylvania Birds*, Volume 20, Number 1, on the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) website, www.pabirds.org. We have been conducting two of these surveys in Indiana County for 21 years and another for 13.

In addition, we also have routes in Armstrong and Cambria Counties we have run for 11 and three years, respectively. A map showing all the WRS routes in Pennsylvania can be found on the PSO website. We began conducting the WRS routes by ourselves but soon realized that the more eyes looking, the more birds that are seen, providing a more accurate count. Our best long-time helper has been Gloria Lamer who has been counting with us for nine years. Many other people have also helped over the years. We always try to have four observers in the vehicle. Our routes were established by trying to find open areas of farmland, pasture, or fallow ground which offer raptors an opportunity to hunt for prey, but the surrounding habitat requires woodlands for roosting and nesting as some of the wintering Red-tailed Hawks seem to have territories already established with mates and nests. The best roads are the less traveled back roads which allow for a slower pace and therefore the opportunity to stop at times to better scan for any raptors in the area. High traffic areas do not afford the time to scan and are dangerous to a slow-moving vehicle and therefore avoided when possible.

Our two oldest routes cover central and northern Indiana County. These two routes, while good, do not produce the number of Red-tails and American Kestrels that our southwestern Indiana County WRS does. The southern route seems to have more and larger open areas and more active farms. This year, in 2022, Routes No. 1 and 2 in the north produced 29 and 32 Red-tails respectively and 7 and 5 kestrels respectively. WRS No. 3, the southern route, produced 46 and 9 Red-tails and kestrels respectively.

Over the years this has held true as Routes No.1 and 2 have averaged 29.9 and 32.8 Red-tails respectively and 4.3 and 4.5 Kestrels respectively. Route No.3 has averaged 38.2 Red-tails and 9.3 Kestrels covering similar distances. Although the averages may seem a little high, the highs and lows for any given year may be widespread. For instance Red-tailed Hawks have varied from highs of 62, 69, and 56 to lows of 12, 15, and 23 on Routes 1, 2, and 3 respectively. Some of this variability can be attributed to weather, snow cover, and the date on which the route was run but not always. Sometimes there just seems to be no reason that very few raptors are present. Kestrels have ranged from a high of 9, 10, and 18 to a low of 1, 0, and 2 respectively. Our observations and general feelings are that if there is a deeper snow cover, fewer kestrels are present owing to the fact that hunting is generally more difficult so they move out to areas of easier hunting.

Other raptors that are present on Routes 1, 2, and 3 and average number (0, 0, 0) include Cooper's Hawk (1.1, 0.8, 1.2), Red-shouldered Hawk (0.8, 0.4, 0.1), Rough-legged Hawk (0.4, 0.4, 0.2), Northern Harrier (0.6, 0.6, 1.2), Bald Eagle (0.2, 0.6, 1.2), and Sharp-shinned Hawk (0.1, 0.5, 0.1). Although the numbers give a rough idea of the times a species has been seen, it does not give the whole picture. None of these species listed has been seen every year on a particular route. It is interesting to note that Red-shouldered and Rough-legged Hawks seem to be more likely to be seen in northern Indiana County while Northern Harriers and Bald Eagles, more likely in the south. It is possible that Red-shoulders prefer the more heavily wooded areas to the north and Rough-legs come only as far south as necessary to hunt during the winter. Northern Harriers prefer larger open fields which are more common in the south. Bald Eagles are relative newcomers to the raptor surveys as they first appeared 10 years ago on Routes 1 and 3 and 8 years ago on Route 2 and are not seen every year. An increase in population and local nesting of Bald Eagles is most likely the reason.

All raptors are plotted on topographic maps every year so that over the years locations favored by the birds stand out. Most of the concentrations are in open areas, but more unusually they can be in more wooded areas. Also, there are areas where the sightings are linear along a stream valley; this may indicate a single bird or a pair occupying the valley.

The Armstrong County route is similar to the Indiana routes with an average of 35.0 Red-tailed Hawks and 3.6

American Kestrels per year. Also, Bald Eagles first showed up seven years ago. Mapping of the raptors has a slightly different look as they are more strung out rather than concentrated. The deeper valleys on this route may be the cause.

The Cambria County route is somewhat of an enigma at this time. After spotting 45 Red-tails the first year, we

found only 19 and 16 the next two years. Weather conditions were good but we saw few birds. Hopefully, it will improve next year.

It has been interesting to see the variations and changes in the routes over the years. It is disheartening when the number of birds is below normal, but in the end it is an interesting and fun experience for all of us.

Southern Indiana County Winter Raptor Survey 2022

By Margaret Higbee

The date was January 21, 2022, and Gloria Lamer, Ed Donley, Roger, and I had planned to run one of our three Indiana Winter Raptor Survey Routes (WRS) this cold morning. Although it was 10 degrees F with five inches of snow cover, the winds were calm, and we estimated the cloud cover at 30 percent. Since we ride around with our windows open much of the time, our van's heater was set on high. Gloria and Ed had arrived before 9:00, our starting time, and both Ed and Gloria informed us that they'd already seen Red-tails en route. By the time we reached Five Points Road, it was 9:03 a.m. We don't usually see much on Five Points, but today was different as we immediately spotted two soaring Red-tailed Hawks. We were off to an encouraging start.

This route heads west on US 422 before turning left onto South Ridge Road in Shelocta. US 422 and South Ridge amazingly produced our third and fourth Red-tails. We felt that we were off to a great start. We usually drive up Bash Road for a panoramic view of the surrounding skies, but Bash Road had other ideas as it had not yet been plowed. After a brief backward slide, we had to turn around and continue onto Walker Road and South Ridge where we saw a flock of 15 juncos. Another right turn onto Sportsman Club Road yielded two Northern Flickers, not a raptor but nice none-the-less. Our good luck continued onto Lytle Road when Ed spotted an adult Red-shouldered Hawk. Wow! He was brilliantly colored! After several minutes of enjoying the "shoulder," and allowing Roger time to plot him on the map, we moved on to McCreight Road that seldom disappoints. A flock of 10 White-crowned Sparrows was the non-raptor highlight, but we also added an American Kestrel and two more Red-tails. Craig Road and Old Route 56 each added another pair of Red-tails. It was 10:04, and we'd already listed 10 Red-tails, one Red-shoulder, and one kestrel.

Then came the unexpected lull. We drove for 36 minutes without sighting one raptor. Finally at 10:40 on Hilltop

Road we spotted a Red-tail. Old Rt. 56 produced two more as did Rustic Lodge Road. The bonus on Rustic Lodge was a male kestrel. Smith Road yielded our last Red-tail before another lull during which we spotted 39 Horned Larks in a manured field, the day's first Northern Mockingbird, and another flicker. The rest of the morning picked up with sightings of eight more Red-tails, a single American Tree Sparrow, which have not been numerous this winter, more White-throated Sparrows, and seven additional White-crowned Sparrows before we headed south on US 19 toward Blairsville.

At 12:27 we pulled off in the Blairsville park-and-ride lot, a spot that has always yielded a nice selection of birds. Today we spotted a pair of kestrels on the wires, a Red-tailed Hawk overhead, and best of all, a female Northern Harrier flying by. While we were eating takeout lunch from Subway, Roger checked our count. So far pre-lunch we'd listed 25 Red-tailed Hawks, one Red-shouldered Hawk, 4 American Kestrels, and one Northern Harrier. Wow! Had we quit right now, our count would have been respectable.

We finished eating lunch by 1:18 and headed north of US 119. Within five minutes we had logged our first after-noon Red-tail, and in less than an hour we'd listed six more Red-tails and one kestrel. We pulled off at the Conemaugh Floodlands at 2:07. In the next 12 minutes from our parking spot we had listed two Red-tailed Hawks, one adult Bald Eagle, one female Northern Harrier, and a male American Kestrel. Moving along Clarksburg Road we spotted our first Cooper's Hawk, an immature, and another Red-tail.

During our afternoon pit stop at Conemaugh Dam we found another mockingbird, seven Eastern Bluebirds, a flock of 12 White-throated Sparrows, and a single Yellow-rumped Warbler, besides various other passerines, but not one raptor. Marshall Road provided our next

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In Praise of Grasses

By Ed Donley

On our Todd Bird Club outing to Yellow Creek State Park on January 29, Trent Millum spotted two sparrows in the open area next to the Yellow Creek inlet to the lake. Court Harding captured some nice photos of one of them, an American Tree Sparrow, feeding on a seed stalk of Broomsedge. I love to watch winter sparrows feeding on grasses poking up through the snow. Their rhythm is soothing to me. They alight on a grass stem and walk up the stem toward the seed heads. Their weight pushes the stems horizontally, sometimes pinning them to the snow surface. The sparrows stand comfortably on the stems while they pick off the seeds. They cannot reach the entire seed head from one spot, so they do a little sideways shuffle along the stems to reach the rest of the seeds. When they are done with one seed head, they fly to another grass stem and start the process all over again.



Court Harding photographed this American Tree Sparrow on Broomsedge at Yellow Creek State Park, Indiana County.



Indian Grass stays erect during most of the winter in the Donley meadow.

A few winters ago, I was entertained by a flock of about 30 Dark-eyed Juncos in my meadow.

They were feeding on Indian Grass seed heads. Many of the wildflower stalks had been smashed down by previous snowstorms or had already dispersed their seeds. But my Indian Grass is about six feet tall, and it was standing erect with intact seed heads. About eight to twelve inches of snow covered the ground, so the juncos had no access to food on the ground. Each bird flew almost vertically into the air and came down on an Indian Grass stem. After walking up the stem and eating the seeds, the bird flew up again to go to another nearby stem. It was like watching a flock of jack-in-the-boxes. I'm not even sure how many juncos there were. They kept popping up from random locations in the meadow.

So, why are birds focused on grass seeds in the winter? As best as I could determine from some background

reading, it is for three reasons. If I am wrong, please let me know.

1) Most grass and sedge seeds don't need cold stratification, so, unlike most wildflower seeds, they don't have to be on the moist ground all winter to germinate. If they fall to the ground when they ripen in the fall, they will sprout immediately and the tender seedlings may die during the winter.

2) Grass seeds may not be a preferred food for many seed-eating animals because their outer covering has a high concentration of silica phytoliths. Phytoliths are microscopic stones created by many plants and stored between living cells. The phytoliths give the leaves and seeds of grasses a grainy roughness that discourages animals from eating them. Consequently, the seeds are not consumed immediately in the fall, and they are available to birds in the winter.

3) Warm season grasses, such as Indian Grass, Big Bluestem, and Switchgrass grow during the warm months of summer. Cool season grasses, such as lawn grasses, grow mostly in the spring and fall. Warm season grass stems stay erect during most of the winter because their cellulose concentration increases throughout the growing season and because the stems are hollow. These characteristics keep the stems rigid, so that they stay above the snow cover. The high cellulose content also makes the grasses less palatable to plant-eating animals, such as deer and rabbits. Consequently, the seeds are available to birds during the winter.

Another reason to appreciate native bunch grasses is that North American grasses are host plants for over 100 species of butterflies and moths, including 42 species that feed exclusively on grasses. So in the coming spring, these plants can supply caterpillars for next year's

Photo by Ed Donley

grassland bird nestlings. Additionally, the bases of bunch grasses provide refuges for some butterflies and moths. You may have noticed birds investigating the bases of bunch grasses, searching for tasty morsels.

So, the next time you see a grassy meadow, be thankful for the grasses' contributions to birds.

Nuthatch Behavior

By Ray Winstead

On February 14 while feeding the birds out of my hand at Blue Spruce Park, I observed something I had not seen before. (It was 19 degrees, and I highly recommend good, heated gloves; they are expensive at \$140 but worth it if you are out in the cold for a while.) A White-breasted Nuthatch took a peanut from my hand and flew to a nearby tree with shaggy bark and banged the peanut into a crevice in the bark. I have seen both the nuthatches and chickadees do this regularly.

What I saw next, though, is the new observation. The nuthatch then moved several inches away, broke off another piece of bark, returned to the original cache site while carrying the piece of bark in its beak, and then

banged the piece of bark over the cached peanut! The piece of bark was about twice the length of the peanut and about the same width.

I have searched the internet for similar behavior and found the following about nuthatch behavior: "They often store seeds, one at a time, under the loose bark of a tree, typically hiding their cache with a piece of bark, lichen, moss, or snow."

For more information about this behavior and more, see:

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/four-nuthatches-four-ways-to-make-it-through-a-cold-winter/>

Southern Indiana County Winter Raptor Survey

(continued from page 4)

"hotspot" with the addition of three more Red-tails, a pair of kestrels, and our first-of-the-year Eastern Towhee. It was now after 4:00 p.m., and activity had considerably slowed down. We ended our route on Blacklick Road at 4:52 with 46 Red-tailed Hawks, one Red-shouldered Hawk, nine American Kestrels, two Northern Harriers, three Cooper's Hawks, and one Bald Eagle.

This is the 13th year that we have run this WRS. The 46 Red-tail count is above the previous average of 38; kestrels, harriers, and the single eagle are average; but it was the first time we've had Red-shouldered Hawk on this route.

How Many Seeds Do Feeder Birds Remove from a Feeder?

By Vernon Blystone

After filling our window bird feeder every morning *before my breakfast* then watching the birds either fly off with the first seed they select or pick through the pile, rejecting seed after seed, looking for the best one, I started wondering how many seeds disappear from our feeder on a typical day. Just recently I counted the number of black oil sunflower seeds that fit in the cup that I usually use to fill the feeder. It was 1400; but I put four containers of seed into the feeder every morning. By 3:00 p.m. it is empty.

That means 5600 seeds have been devoured, cached, dropped, carried away, or eaten by our ground feeders, mostly juncos. The feeder we use is a rectangular wooden feeder that we've attached to our kitchen window and positioned so that we can see birds feeding on both sides.

Since I wasn't sure of the capacity of the cup, Jeanne measured it. It held a full measuring cup of liquid, about 8 ounces. Fifty-six hundred is a lot of seeds!

A Warbler Treat in January

By Debbie Kalbfleisch

We all look forward to the coming of warblers here in western Pennsylvania, especially after a long winter, but in January I heard that Kate St. John had seen an Orange-crowned Warbler in Pittsburgh! A birding couple, Frank and Adrienne Izaguirre, were hosting this delightful bird, an uncommon visitor even during migration. They had been keeping a sharp eye on their feeders for the city's Christmas Bird Count on January 1 and had a mild shock when the warbler flew in to sample their jelly feeder! Kate put several of us in touch with Frank, and he and his wife graciously extended an invitation to visit their yard.

Bright and not too early on Thursday, January 6, I met Melissa Little, and we drove into Pittsburgh. We easily found a parking spot in front of the house, and Frank immediately came out to chat with us. When I grilled him on the type of jelly he was using to lure the warbler in, he replied that he had been using strawberry jam but had run out and had switched to mixed fruit that morning. Ah, I said, so the bird isn't particular? Frank said nope, it was 30 degrees and the bird wasn't particular at all! Melissa went around the side of the house to the back to reconnoiter and had the privilege of seeing the bird first. Judy Schryer arrived soon after, and we eagerly joined Melissa in the back yard where Frank and Adrienne had thoughtfully put out chairs for us.

Years ago, I went to see my life Rufous Hummingbird in December in another Pittsburgh neighborhood. While driving to the house, I had fun imagining what sort of yard would attract such a rare hummer. Surely, the house and yard must be huge! Wrong! The yard was the size of a postage stamp, plastered on the side of a steep hillside. While the garden was bare in winter, it was clear that the homeowner was a wonderful gardener as plants and trees were taking up every spare inch of space in the backyard with just a tiny walkway providing access. The Izaguirre yard was very much in the same vein — a tiny space (level this time) with lots of slumbering plants and several different types of bird feeders, including a very small jelly feeder. The three of us huddled together in the cold, and Melissa whispered that the bird had come in twice before, from the right. Only a short wait of maybe 15 minutes, and Oranjito appeared, right on schedule! The bird posed for only a short while, but we were thrilled as it delicately sampled the jam and looked about. An Orange-crowned

Warbler is a drab-looking bird, even in breeding plumage, but we thought it was gorgeous. A warbler in January! Life is good!

With mission accomplished, we continued to Oakland where we hoped to find a Peregrine Falcon or two at the Cathedral of Learning where they nest. We texted Kate our location, and just a few minutes later we saw a familiar figure across the grounds. While we walked toward each other, she suddenly started waving her arms and shouting. We looked to our right and were in time to see a Peregrine diving on an immature Cooper's Hawk! The Coop was beating a hasty retreat, only inches from the ground when the Peregrine pulled up. Amazingly, we were only about 15 feet away from the action! The immature Cooper's Hawk, older now and perhaps wiser, managed to make it across the street and disappeared. We certainly were not expecting the Peregrines to put on a show for us! Kate told us that the youngster made a mistake flying too high, above the trees. The resident Red-tailed Hawks have been coexisting with the Peregrine Falcons for some years, but they are careful to fly low. Anything above tree level signals a possible threat to the Peregrines' own young, so they keep the air space around the Cathedral of Learning clear of raptors year round. They don't hesitate to go after a Bald Eagle, a bird much larger than themselves, and escort it from their territory!

While we watched both Peregrines doing victory laps high above us, Kate added that the bodies of Cooper's Hawks are occasionally found on and around the Cathedral of Learning. While Red-tailed Hawks are known to eat smaller hawks, and large owls routinely eat smaller owls, Peregrine Falcons simply kill the smaller Coops but do not eat them. One is reminded of the old joke — why don't sharks eat lawyers? Professional courtesy!

Thanks to Frank and Adrienne for opening your yard to us and for giving us a warbler treat in winter that we will always remember! Thanks also to Kate, for facilitating our visit. While we're pretty sure Kate didn't orchestrate the performance, she alerted us to the action that we might have missed. A very satisfying way to spend a day in Pittsburgh!



Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology Announces Second Annual Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) will host its Second Annual Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation from June 17-20, 2022. Last year Todd Bird Club sponsored a team, The Todd Towhees, by donating \$100. (The motion to donate had been made and passed at our March 3, 2020, meeting pre-Covid as the Blitz was supposed to take place in June 2020.) Members of the team were Carol Guba, Gloria Lamer, and Roger and Margaret Higbee who tallied 101 species and raised a total of \$325 for conservation. Thanks to all who donated.

Last year's target species that monetarily benefited from the Blitz were Wood Thrush and Northern Harrier. This year the targets are Piping Plover, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and Golden-winged Warbler.

Once again this year the Todd Towhees are planning to participate. It would be great if Todd Bird Club members could form more than one team.

Birders are invited to join the Blitz by forming a team, raising funds, and completing one or more "big days" to document birds during the nesting season. Teams will enlist their friends to support their efforts with a donation to support three critical bird conservation projects. Bird-lovers of all ages and skill levels are invited to visit www.breedingbirdblitz.org to learn more about the event, to form and register a team, or to make a donation.

In 2021, the Inaugural Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation engaged twenty-two teams across the state and raised \$10,645 in support of bird conservation projects. Birders documented 152 species during the four-day event and contributed to the 4,500 complete eBird checklists submitted in Pennsylvania during the third week of June, a 9% increase over the same period the previous year.

The goals of the 2022 Blitz are to include even more teams of birders and to raise \$15,000 to support the following bird conservation organizations and projects:

- Erie Bird Observatory, Erie County:
Conservation-focused monitoring of bird migration in the Lake Erie Coastal Zone.
- Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art, Dauphin County:
habitat restoration to support forest birds, including Cerulean and Golden-winged Warblers.
- Willistown Conservation Trust, Chester County:
scrub-shrub habitat restoration at Rushton Woods Preserve to improve nesting and migrant stopover habitat.

Teams of two or more birders can register through the website – www.breedingbirdblitz.org – and decide to cover a single county or a region of the state.

Donations can be made via PayPal, credit card, or check; details are found on the website. After the event, teams will submit their results, primarily through the eBird website. The teams that raise the most funds and document the most species will receive special recognition from PSO. There are also dedicated categories for teams with youth birders and "green" birding teams, who use only non-motorized transportation.

PSO is hosting a webinar on the event on March 28 at 7:00 pm. Visit the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology Facebook page (www.facebook.com/pabirds) to register for the webinar. A recording will be available afterwards through PSO's YouTube channel.

Visit www.breedingbirdblitz.org for updates on the event and all the details and stories from last year's Blitz.

Flo McGuire

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of our good friend Flo McGuire who died at home on March 15 in Tionesta. Flo, an active birder, was a member of the Todd Bird Club, had served as VP for PSO, and was the editor of Seneca Rocks Audubon's newsletter, "The Drummer." Many of you may remember the program that she and Jim presented to Todd Bird Club about their trip to Cuba.

For many years before Flo moved to Tionesta, she was one of my birding companions. We atlased together

during both the first and second atlases. She attended many of our Todd Bird Club outings.

Since May 2015 Roger and I have accompanied Flo and her husband Jim on weekly (in good weather) hikes along the various rails-to-trails between Tionesta and Indiana and beyond. I miss her calm personality, her good heart, and her friendship.

We extend our sincere condolences to Jim and their family.

– Margaret Higbee

Indiana - Armstrong - Cambria County

Winter Report 2021-2022

Abbreviations: Allegheny River (AR), Armstrong Trail (AT), Indiana (IN), Keystone Reservoir (KR), Kittanning (KT), Lock & Dan (L&D), Prince Gallitzin State Park (PG), Rosston (RT), White's Woods (WW), Shelocta (SH), Worthington (WT), Yellow Creek State Park (YC).

Unusual were the many reports of single **Snow Geese** received this winter. An adult was sighted 12/10 (DL, MH, RH) sw of IN; *Armstrong* yielded an immature at Crooked Creek Park 12/3 (TR) through 12/23 (DBr), and an immature in the Parks Bend area 1/4-11 (MVT); an immature Snow was seen at YC 1/15 (AM, TRh). Often Snow Geese do not even appear in this report. A blue morph **Ross's Goose** was photographed along the Cowanshannock Trail 12/22 (MS); blue morph Ross's Geese are very rare. Geoff Malosh comments, "I don't see any real concern with calling this a Ross's. It's definitely not a pure Snow. I suppose one could quibble about the size of the bill being a little too big for Ross's and that the white stripe along the coverts is not fully complete on either side of the bird, but neither of these seem so far out of bounds for Ross's as to worry much about the possibility of a hybrid. It may well have a Snow Goose ancestor a few generations ago, but if I had seen this myself I'd count it as a Ross's and move on."

A **Trumpeter Swan** was noted near Loretto 12/25 (KL). Top **Tundra Swan** tallies included 13 at PG 12/9 (VC) and 102 at YC 1/11 (CH, MH, RH); 12 in a flooded field near Creekside 2/4 (MH, RH) were a surprise.

Two **Wood Ducks** were still present at WW 1/12 (HR) while one lingered along the AT north of L&D 8 on 12/29 (TR); one reappeared at the latter location 2/2 (TR). Probable returnees included 2 that arrived near Marion Center 2/23 (SN), 2 at RT 2/24 (TR), and 2 at Creek Road 2/26 (MVT). Two **Northern Shovelers** were photographed at YC 12/14 (CH), the latest Dec. date on record since 2001 when 2 were found on the IN CBC 12/26 (BF, TF).

Gadwalls lingered till 1/15 both at YC (AM, TRh) and at PG (TA); first returnees showed up at KT 2/26 (ED, CG, CH, WH, MH, RH, TM). Last **American Wigeons** remained at PG 12/9 (VC) and at YC 12/16 (HR) while early returning wigeons included 4 at KT 2/12 (TR) and 2 at Burnhead Grazings 2/18 (MB). Last **Northern Pintails** included 2 at PG 12/2 (VC) and 5 at YC 12/28 (CH, MH, RH, DK). Twelve



This adult Snow Goose was photographed southwest of Indiana 12/10 by Margaret Higbee.



Mark Strittmatter photographed this blue morph Ross's Goose along the Cowanshannock Trail 12/22.

Green-winged Teal continued at YC through 12/14 (ED, CH, MH, RH, DK) while WW still harbored 2 on 12/12 (HR); one of the 2 lingered at WW 12/17 (HR).

First returning Green-winged Teal was spotted at KT 2/12 (TR).

Limited open water at YC yielded a variety of ducks through 1/11 (CH, MH, RH) – single **Canvasback**, **Redhead**, **Bufflehead**, and **Ruddy Duck** as well as 2 **Ring-necked Ducks** and a high count of 40 **Hooded Mergansers**. After 1/15 (TR), freeze-up occurred until 2/22 (SD) when a small patch of open water in Little Yellow Cove at YC yielded one Ring-necked Duck and 4 Hooded Mergansers.

Last noted at PG 1/15 (TA) were 2 **Canvasbacks**, 2 **Greater Scaup**, 8 **Buffleheads**, and one **Common Goldeneye**. Lingering through the following day 1/16 (AM, TRh) were 4 **Redheads**, 35 **Ring-necked Ducks**, and 12 **Lesser Scaup**.

The AR between Manorville (KSJ) and KT (TR) yielded 4 returning **Canvasbacks** 2/12. Other *Armstrong* firsts, all at RT, included 5 **Redheads** and 26 **Ring-necked Ducks** on 2/17 (TR); 2 **Lesser Scaup** on 2/26 (ED, CG, CH *et al*); and 2 **Buffleheads** on 2/13 (MH, RH). **Common Goldeneyes** that winter on the AR were well reported throughout the season (v.o.) in *Armstrong*.

Freeze-up at PG occurred sometime after 1/15 (TA) when 12 **Hooded Mergansers** and 2 **Common Mergansers** were still present; open water harbored the first 2 Hooded returnees on 2/26 (TA) and the first 2 Common Mergs 2/27 (TA). High tally of Hooded Mergs was 18 at RT 2/17 (TR). Common Mergansers, on the other hand, peaked in *Armstrong* at Crooked Creek Park with counts of 265 on 12/9 (DBr) and 53 at RT 2/27 (TR). **Red-breasted Mergansers**, formerly numerous in migration at YC, are no longer occurring in huge flocks. The only reports mentioned 3 at Duman Lake 12/18 (TA) and one along the Kiski near Leechburg 2/13 (MVT). Top **Ruddy Duck** counts included 110 at PG 12/2 (VC), 21 at YC 12/16 (HR), and 2 at KT 1/12 (TR).

A **Ruffed Grouse** near Cameron's Bottom 12/5 (DB) and another near Nolo, spotted by one of the township supervisors 2/7 (EM), were the only two reports.

Two **Pied-billed Grebes** were last noted 12/27 at Two Lick (LC) while one was spotted the same day at YC (GL); PG's last occurred 1/15 (TA). Five **Horned Grebes** at YC 12/16 (HR) and one at PG 12/5 (JC) were last; a singleton reappeared at PG



A single Least Sandpiper found on the beach at Yellow Creek during a Tuesday morning outing was a first December record for Indiana County.

Photo by Roger Higbee

2/27 (TA, RH, SM). High **American Coot** tally was 45 at YC on 12/14 (CH) while last lingering singleton there was observed 1/11 (CH, MH, RH); PG's last was sighted 12/12 (TA).

A late **Killdeer** was observed at YC 1/11 (CH, MH, RH); first returnee was found near YC 2/10 (SD). Unusual was the appearance of a **Least Sandpiper** on the beach at YC 12/21 (SD, CH, MH, RH, DK), a first Dec. record for this species. First 2 **American Woodcocks** were displaying at Conemaugh Floodlands 2/20 (DL); one was noted n.e. of KT 2/21 (MW); another was heard near SH 2/22 (BR). Six **Bonaparte's Gulls** at Colver Reservoir were last on 12/18 (TA). Earliest 2 **Ring-billed Gulls** arrived 2/10 (SD) at YC and 16 were at PG 2/12 (JC); along the AR numbers peaked 2/12 (TR) when 19 were at KT and 2/13 (MH, RH) with counts of 149 at RT, 26 at Clinton, and 18 at Schenley. **Herring Gulls** were noted only along the AR with top counts of 2 at RT 2/9, 17 (TR) and 5 at KT 2/12 (TR); the nesting pair was present on the nesting structure 2/26 (ED, CG, CH, WH, MH, RH, TM).

The only **Common Loons** reported were 2 at PG 12/9 (VC). One **Double-crested Cormorant** at PG 12/4, 19 (PI, WI) was the only one noted.

An early **Turkey Vulture** flew over a yard near Lewisville 2/9 (MC); other early Feb. reports mentioned single vultures at PG 2/12 (JC), near North Buffalo 2/16 (TR), near Adrian 2/20 (TR), and at WW 2/21 (HR). It was a great year for **Rough-legged Hawks** in our region with the WT area serving as the hotspot with as many as 5 individuals

reported – on 1/26 (DBr) one dark morph and 4 light morph were noted; Rough-legs were listed through 2/14 (DBr); one was found at PG 2/13 (TA); a light morph sighted 2/18 (MH, RH) near West Lebanon was still present the following day (MD).

Well reported in the *Indiana-Armstrong* area, 2 **Eastern Screech-Owls**, one small male, gray morph, and a much larger female, red morph, roosted in separate nest boxes near SH from late Nov. through the end of the period (ED). A **Snowy Owl** was photographed by a non-birder at the Keystone Power Plant near Elderton 12/16 (RS). **Barred Owls** continue regularly in the Nolo area (DB). A single **Short-eared Owl** was found near WT 12/23 (DBr), on 2/8 (DBr) 2 were spotted in the same area.

Single **Merlins** were noted at IUP 12/27 (MS, JT) and in IN 2/11 (JP). A **Peregrine** was a nice find east of Brush Valley 12/18 (CH); unfortunately there had been no reports of the Graff Bridge nesting Peregrines until mid-March.

After a winter's absence, the first **Fish Crows** reappeared in IN 2/18 (DL) and were subsequently seen in other sections of IN (GL).

A **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** at IUP 2/19 (JT) was a nice find and the only report. **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were noted at 9 *Indiana*, 4 *Cambria*, and 5 *Armstrong* locations this winter with the most consistent near SH (MH, RH). **Brown Creepers** were noted at 18 locations; 3 creepers repeatedly visited a feeder near Homer City through the winter (LC). A



This is a dark morph Rough-legged Hawk photographed near Worthington by Dave Brooke 2/5.



Dave Brooke photographed this light morph Rough-legged Hawk near Worthington 2/5.



Not observed by any birders, this Snowy Owl spent several days at the Keystone Power Plant in mid-December.

Photo by Robert Shellhammer

Winter Wren remained at the Waterworks Conservation Area from 12/5 (SD, CH) through 2/24 (SD) while another was present along the AT n. of L&D 8 on six dates bracketed by 12/1 (TR) and 2/7 (MH, RH, TR).

A **Gray Catbird** paused briefly in a crabapple near North Buffalo 12/28 (TR) but didn't hang around for a photo. Single **Hermit Thrushes** were spotted at YC on three dates – 1/4 (SD), 1/11 (CH, MH, RH), and 1/29 (ED, CH, MH, RH, TM); other sightings included one near KR 2/5 (CG, MH, RH, GL) and 2 near Rural Valley the same day (CG, MH, RH, GL) as well as one along the AT n. of L&D 8 on 2/7 (MH, RH, TR). YC hosted 29 **American Pipits** 12/5 (MH, RH), the region's lone report. **Snow Buntings**, listed only in the WT area, included one to 2 between 1/27 (RB) and 1/31 (DBr, ABu)

A **Chipping Sparrow** remained in an IN woodlot 12/2 (HR) and at WW 12/5-6 (HR). A yard near SH yielded 3 Chipping Sparrows 1/24 (MH, RH); between 1/28 and 2/8 (MH, RH) one to 2 were noted; another showed up near Leechburg 2/5 (MVT). Although absent in *Cambria*, **Field Sparrows** were especially well reported in *Armstrong* and *Indiana* with 4 counted near WT 1/2 (TR) and 12 noted in *Indiana* at Burnhead Grazings 2/17 (MB); among other reports 2 were at Forest Manor 2/20 (SD). A **Fox Sparrow** visited a feeder area near SH between 12/4 - 2/19 (MH, RH); PG hosted one 12/28 (TA) while another was nearby at SGL 108 - Dugan's Marsh 2/27 (TA). *Armstrong* yielded one along the AT 12/2 (MH, RH) and one as SGL 247 on

1/13 (TR). **White-crowned Sparrow** highs included 8 near WT 1/21 (DBr) and 7 s. of Cowansville 1/31 (TR). An *Indiana* Winter Raptor Survey (WRS) yielded 10 White-crowned Sparrows s. of SH and 7 n. of Blacklick 1/21 (ED, MH, RH, GL). One at PG 12/26 (KL) was *Cambria*'s lone report. Last *Indiana* **Swamp Sparrows**, listed 12/27, included 10 at YC (JP) and one near Homer City (CW, PW); last dates respectively in *Armstrong* and *Cambria* were 1/13 (TR) at SGL 247 and 1/15 (TA) at SGL 108 - Fallentimber. **Eastern Towhees** were widespread this winter with at least 16 reports (v.o.).

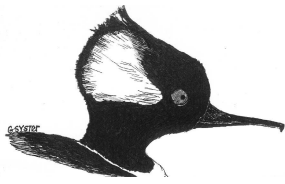
A WRS 1/20 (ED, MH, RH, GL) yielded a flock of four **Eastern Meadowlarks** n. of Marion Center while 9 were listed near WT the following day (DBr). First arriving **Red-winged Blackbirds** included one near Lewisville 1/22 (MC), 2 at Vandergrift 2/2 (RE), and 2 in IN 2/4 (MS). A **Rusty Blackbird** was listed at Vandergrift 1/26 (RE) while 2 appeared 2/19 (MH, RH) at a feeder near SH where the next morning (MH, RH) 3 were present. The first **Common Grackles** included 2 at Vandergrift 1/26 (RE), one at Patton 2/9 (RL), and 6 in IN 2/21 (JP).

A **Common Yellowthroat**, photographed at YC 12/28 (LC, CH, MH, RH, DK) was the first Dec. record for *Indiana*. Six was the top **Yellow-rumped Warbler** count 12/10 (MC) near Lewisville.



Court Harding spotted and photographed this Common Yellowthroat on the north shore of Yellow Creek 12/28.

Observers: Tina Alianiello, Moire Bridges, Dave Beatty, Dave Brooke (DBr), Alan Buriak (ABu), Ron Burkert, Lee Carnahan, John Carter, Marcy Cunkelman, Vinny Curtis, Michael David, Sue Dickson, Ed Donley, Ryan Endlish, Betsy Fetterman, Tom Fetterman, Carol Guba, Warren Hancock, Court Harding, Rebecca Hart (RH), Margaret Higbee, Roger Higbee, Pam Illig, Winnie Illig, Debbie Kalbfleisch, Gloria Lamer, Dennis Laufer, Renee Lubert, Karen Lucas, Steve Manns, Andrew Marden, Ed Mihoerck, Trent Millum, Sandra Newell, Joseph Pumford, Bob Ramsey, Tessa Rhinehart (TRh), Theo Rickert, Henry Rummel, Kate St. John, Robert Shellhammer, Mark Strittmatter, John Taylor, Marge Van Tassel, Misti West, Chris Williams, Paula Williams.



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