



THE MAIL BAG

A PUBLICATION OF THE BROOKS BIRD CLUB OF WEST VIRGINIA
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RYAN TOMAZIN - EDITOR

Editor's Note

It's still winter, but it is not too early to start thinking about Foray. The dues notice mistakenly listed the Foray as being in Pocahontas County, but it is indeed in Preston County. This is a really good location, with upland birds all around, but territory that encompasses some lovely lower elevations, as well as lakes, swampland and virgin forest. The Foray notice should be hitting your mailbox in April, so pencil in the date and join us for what will surely be a great time in the mountains.



There has been a Gull-a-palooza on the Ohio River north of Wheeling in the last month or so. Pretty historic numbers of at least six species of gulls have spent the recent winter on the water, and when that froze, on the ice. Estimates from time to time indicated 3,000 to 5,000 gulls on any given night, maybe more. While the vast majority were Ring-bills and Herrings, record numbers of Great Black-backs counted for a few dozen birds in various plumages. Lesser Black-backs were in, well, lesser numbers, and at least two each of Glaucous and Iceland Gulls were viewed by many observers. This led to more Bald Eagles being seen strafing the gulls, and as time passed, goldeneyes, Greater Scaup, all three mergansers and even a Long-tailed Duck moved in for an extended stay. Add those to the 30-odd-thousand crows just downstream, and the 900+ Canada Geese roosting nearby, and it has been a very birdy winter!



NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

This month, I'm writing again about citizen science. We are approaching the time of year when many citizen science projects could use our participation. Most of these projects are concerned with migration and nesting. The second Saturday in May is International Migratory Bird Day which is May 9 this year. Bird counts similar to Christmas Bird Counts are held around the globe. The Brooks Bird Club used to call this the Century Count. Many states no longer publish this data but Pennsylvania still does. The count is coordinated and published by the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology, www.pabirds.org.

Breeding bird projects have long been a major part of our club's activities. Member Chandler Robbins is the founder of the Breeding Bird Survey. He developed the protocol and organized the first surveys in 1966. The database from this survey and the Christmas Bird Counts are probably the most important databases we have regarding birds. Coordinated by USGS, BBS participants monitor bird populations not only in North America but internationally as well. Surveys are conducted along established routes, usually in June, to monitor breeding bird populations. This website can tell you how you can get involved, www.pwrc.usgs.gov. Member Tom Fox coordinates the routes in WV and he usually has several routes that need a birder to conduct a survey. Modified breeding bird surveys are conducted at our annual Foray. The official routes have 50 stops and ours have 20 so we can get back to camp in time for breakfast.

Other breeding bird studies conducted at Foray are Singing Male Censuses, often called study plots. The plots are laid out at the beginning of Foray; data is gathered while walking the plot. These studies have occurred at Foray longer than the breeding bird surveys. Since Foray sites are repeated every few years and the same study plot sites are used, comparisons can be made over a period of time.

The club's Foray studies have contributed to knowledge of WV's natural history for decades and the results are recorded in the club's scientific publication, *The Redstart*. It is rewarding and fun to be part of this effort. Please come to Foray this year. It will be held in Terra Alta at Camp Galilee June 5-13. The Foray registration form will be in your mailbox in a few weeks. You can also find it on our website, <http://brooksbirdclub.org/>.

– Carol McCullough, BBC President

BILL HIGBEE PASSES

William V. "Bill" Higbee, 90, of Finleyville, PA, died Thursday, February 12, 2015, in the emergency room of Jefferson Regional Medical Center in Jefferson Hills Borough.

He was born December 8, 1924, in Gastonville; a son of Newton William and Mary Lavina Wardle Higbee.

Mr. Higbee was retired as a design draftsman with the former McGraw-Edison Corporation in Canonsburg.

He served in the 485th Bomb Squadron of the U.S. Army Air Corps during WWII and was a member of Wright's United Methodist Church in Venetia, American Legion Post 613 in Finleyville, Henry M. Phillips Lodge 337 F & AM in Monongahela, Peters Creek Historical Society and Brooks Bird Club of Wheeling.

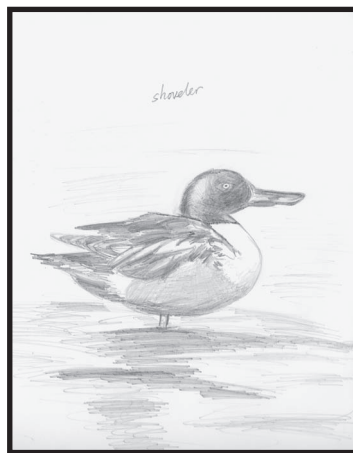
Surviving are his wife, Eileen Lewis Higbee; two sons, Roger Higbee and his wife Margaret of Indiana, PA and Brian Higbee and his wife Kathy of Springfield, VA; a daughter, Aimee Earley and her husband Steve of Parkersburg, WV; four grandchildren, Robert and Jon Higbee and David and Ashley Earley; and four great grandchildren, Jocelynn, Ella, Chase and Penny Higbee.



*Bill Higbee (center), flanked by Norris Gluck and Ed Ilgenfritz at the 1975 Raleigh County Foray
– Photo by Eileen Higbee*

“...AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT...”

Well, we're out of content for this issue, so please enjoy a few sketches of what is here now, what will be shortly, and what will return when all you warm weather types get your way! – Ed.



Sketches by Yan Tomazin, Mrs. Ed.

CONTACT THE EDITOR

Have an interesting story about the nature around your neck of the woods? Want to contribute an article or travelogue? Have a nature-related event that you'd like to tell the Club about? Please contact me by mail, email or phone:

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CORRESPONDENCE

We would love to hear from members of the BBC. What have you been doing? Have you taken recent trips? What interesting birds or plants have you seen in your locality or backyard?

The Club looks forward to little notes on Christmas cards and dues notices, but feel free to get in touch with us at other times of the year too. Even just a line or two would be of interest to our readers, especially if we haven't seen or heard from you in a while.

Correspondence may be mailed to: Juanita Slater, Corresponding Secretary, c/o BBC, PO Box 4077, Wheeling, WV 26003.

For those of you who prefer email, correspondences may be sent to: gusind@stratuswave.net

2014-2015 WEST VIRGINIA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT HIGHLIGHTS

Eleven observers in the field, and 14 at feeders, worked very hard to find 59 species of birds on Dec. 16 during the Pendleton County CBC. Several factors seemed to contribute to the lower than usual species count, and the lower than usual totals for several species. The rainy morning made it difficult to find passerines when they are usually most active. The raptors did not get airborne until after noon so there may have been some present that we did not see. Finally, local birders suggested that the early cold snap drove birds like kinglets and Yellow-rumped warblers south, but since then it warmed up and hadn't been cold enough to drive some of the more typical winter birds south to us, or to the feeders, such as Golden Eagles, Purple Finches and others. There also seemed to be very few berries available for waxwings and robins. Despite that, we added two new species for the count, Canvasback and House Wren, and tallied new high counts for 10 species.

Significant misses included Ruffed Grouse, Golden Eagle, Cooper's Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Towhee, Red-winged Blackbird, and Pine Siskin. This count has been run 37 times.

– Fred Atwood, Cabins, WV, 12/19/14

Bibbee Nature Club & guests (15 participants) conducted the 43rd Pipestem Area Christmas Bird Count on Dec. 20, 2014. 65 species were found for the day with record numbers of Bald Eagles, Common Mergansers and Northern Flickers. A Northern Saw-whet Owl heard in the Bluestone Wildlife Management Area was new to the count.

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV, 12/21/14

Yesterday we had four teams conduct the 2nd Trail Tygart Lake CBC. Overall, it was a fairly slow day of birding with 60 species and 4010 individual birds. Last year we had 69 species for comparison. American Crow was by far the most abundant species. Our big misses for the day included Ring-billed Gull, Common Loon, Double-crested Cormorant, Gadwall, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Turkey Vulture, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and White-crowned Sparrow. The lack of waterfowl or uncommon sparrows really hurt the count this year.

Dave Daniels and I were both commenting that based on habitat 80+ species should be possible in this count if the species show up, but you never know from year to year. Hopefully we can make this count a permanent part of the WV Holiday Season.

– Ross Brittain, Philippi, WV, 12/23/14

The Mountaineer Audubon CBC was held on 12/20/14. Thanks to each of you who participated and to those who could not make, I know your hearts were with us. The bird numbers seemed low as we were in the field, but thanks to dedicated birders' effort and expertise we were able to identify 84 species on count day, an additional 7 count week birds, and total 6301 species on count day. New birds for the count are Rufous Hummingbird (at Mike Slaven's house. BTW, he welcomes visitors) and the Northern Saw-whet Owl. The Saw-whets were found by Derek Courtney at Coopers Rock and Ross Brittan in sector 4. Derek also had a new bird for the count during count week, a Snow Goose at Cheat Lake Park.

– LeJay Graffious, Bruceton Mills, WV, 12/23/14

The Kanawha-Charleston CBC took place last Saturday, December 20th, with ten teams searching for species throughout our designated circle. Twenty-five volunteers participated in count activities and among us, we found 61 species of birds. The weather was very cloudy and much colder than the previous week. Temperatures ranged from 27 to 40 degrees for the day. These conditions may have resulted in lower numbers of many of the common species. Three new species were added to our list this year: Ross's Goose, Bald Eagle, and Rufous Hummingbird. We also had a record number of Rusty Blackbirds (200) and matched high counts for Merlins (2) and Pied-billed Grebes (24).

– Doren Burrell, Mink Shoals, WV, 12/24/14

The Hardy County CBC started out with a bang at the Moorefield sewage treatment pond with an immature Tundra Swan, 31 Ring-billed Gulls and 3 Bonapartes! We got excited! 10 people participated with 2 others at feeders. Other highlights included 15 Bald Eagles, 54 Black Vultures, 3 species of Owls (Barn, Screech and Short-eared), and a count week Ross's goose. Strange shortage of robins... only had 4... and NO blackbirds other than starlings and crows. It was a beautiful day and a wonderful end to a great year of birding in Hardy.

– Kathy King, Moorefield, WV, 12/30/14

We held the Canaan Valley CBC on December 14. A miserable day of fog, wind, drizzle and near-freezing temperatures yielded low numbers both of species and individuals. Thanks for their great efforts in tough circumstances to our intrepid observers. We found only 39 species, plus 5 more during count week, far fewer than our average of the mid-50s. Notably, Rodney Bartgis, Andrea Brandon and Kris Hennig found 26 Rusty Blackbirds.

– Casey Rucker, Dry Fork, WV, 1/3/15

Wheeling had a great count, especially when factoring in the weather. It went from freezing rain to cold constant rain with very few and short reprieves. As I was driving to my area, I watched the salt truck slide sideways down the hill in front of me and knew my bird watching hobby had crossed the line into mental illness. Confirmed when I continued on in spite of this. The reward was a snipe as the first bird of the day! Common Yellowthroat is a good winter bird that is probably more common than realized in our larger cattail swamps. (Cont. Page 3)

(CBC Highlights Cont.)

The Ignace feeder count shows a good count in a good area can net quite a few species, including one of only two Coops. A Pine Siskin was found at an Elm Grove feeder. Every bit helps. Surprisingly, we blew by the highest count in the last 20 years, at 67 species, and beat the ten year average by 15 species. Partly because of more count week effort but removing those we did very well count day because of the numbers of observers. The day ended with an estimated 36,000 crows in Martin's Ferry, Ohio, a lower-than-average estimate.

– Scott Pendleton, Cadiz, OH, 1/9/15

Posting for the Pocahontas CBC, we had 62 species. Highlights included a mature Golden Eagle, Common Merganser, Black Vulture (26), Red-Shouldered Hawk (4), Killdeer, Wilson's Snipe (2), Eastern Phoebe, Loggerhead Shrike (2), Winter Wren (8), Hermit Thrush (5), Northern Mockingbird (5), Eastern Towhee (18), Swamp Sparrow (4), White-Crowned Sparrow (62), Eastern Meadowlark (16), and Pine Siskin 26.

– Rich Bailey, WVDNR, 1/15/15



*Bewick's Wren and nest
– photo by P.C. Bibbee*

GARAGE GLEANINGS

Prior to my recent retirement, several co-workers, friends and even family members quizzed me as to what I would do to keep from getting bored if I weren't working. My standard answer concerned increased use of my mountain bike and kayak as well as more time for hiking and birding. Little did I realize that my first task would be that of cleaning out our two-car garage. While there had not been a good garage cleaning in some 20 years, we could still move enough junk around to get both vehicles under cover in the event of a storm. A more orderly structure was in our future. After recycling what materials we could, donating furniture to the local Loaves & Fishes thrift store and finding homes for books and such we took nearly half a ton of stuff to the local landfill. I made enough trips to even create a landfill e-bird list. Going through long forgotten boxes and cabinets turned up some interesting natural history related re-discoveries. One particular container had notes and photographs that belonged to Dr. P.C. Bibbee for whom the Bibbee Nature Club is named.

Dr. Bibbee taught biology at Concord College (now Concord University) in Athens, Mercer County, West Virginia for 32 years. According to his notes, he was concerned that West Virginia didn't have an official state bird and to a lesser degree of concern a state tree. In April, 1949, he took a vote from his students to remedy the situation. The state bird vote was as follows: Tufted Titmouse---429, Cardinal---156, Downy Woodpecker---36, Song Sparrow---15, Ruffed Grouse---1, Crow---1. Of course, they were out voted by the rest of the state and the cardinal became our state bird. As for the state tree, White Oak came in first with 465 votes followed by Tulip Poplar with 156 and Spruce Pine with 1 vote. As they say, the rest is history.

Dr. Bibbee's photographs proved to be interesting for several reasons. Quite a few depict the countryside around Athens as it appeared 80-90 years ago when it wasn't so forested. Also, he took many pictures of Bewick's Wren, its nest and nesting habitat. Not documented in the area for decades, this species was quite common in his day. The wren was the subject of his Ph.D. work from Cornell University. One particular picture shows a bird house on a pole. It was made to look like a log cabin. When I first started working at Pipestem State Park in the early 1980's, I found such a house on one of the trails near an old homestead. It is exciting to think that that particular farm may have been part of Dr. Bibbee's study area. I have talked to folks who grew up in the area and remember him coming to their farm to check nest boxes.

Another interesting discovery was my copy of **Southern Odyssey: Memories of Paul Cecil Bibbee** written by his wife Clarice C. Bibbee. It was published in 1981 by Carlton Press, Inc. New York, New York. She chronicles her 42 year marriage to Dr. Bibbee. He was state taxidermist for West Virginia University and mammal preparator for Carnegie Museum at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, PA. His publications included "Birds of West Virginia" and "Bird Life Histories and Behaviors". I never met Dr. Bibbee. He passed away shortly before the formation of the nature club named in his honor. Mrs. Bibbee usually attended the annual dinner of the club. Both are buried in Athens. I recall two stories shared by club members. One involved Bibbee presenting a bag of bones to one of his classes. Their task was to assemble a bobcat from the bones. Another story involved Dr. Bibbee offering an ornithology class for public school teachers. Our club member accompanied his aunt to the class in case she had car trouble along the road. Since he was not old enough to take the class, he waited in the car for her. When Dr. Bibbee discovered the situation, he insisted on the youngster joining the class. Ever since that time, that fellow has kept a natural history record for Monroe County.

– Contributed by Jim Phillips

SCREECH OWL CHRONICLES FROM A JEFFERSON COUNTY YARD

From a WVBIRD LISTSERV post by member Joette Borzik

On November 6, 2014, we were happy that a red morph Eastern screech-owl decided to occupy one of our nest boxes in the back yard. It's such a comforting feeling knowing that we are providing habitat for these magnificent creatures. We've had success of some sort every year since we put the boxes up in the fall of 2011. What started out as a one box operation morphed (no pun intended) to three boxes today. We've been serious box watchers ever since, except for short periods where our timing was off or we were not home.

It's a great spectator sport, and there is never a dull moment—like the time a nuthatch ran up, down and around the box hole. Out pops a fluffy head with big eyes, and the nuthatch was no where to be found again. Other times curious chickadees check out the occupant during the heat of the day when the tenant is sound asleep, or supposedly asleep. One brave chickadee sat briefly on the box hole edge looking inside, but only long enough to pop its head inside the box. Was it some kind of chickadee dare-you-to-do-it game? In 2012, two owls changed box locations 9 different times throughout the mating season. We were only able to discover this because one was a gray morph and the other was a red morph.

We've gathered pages of data on the buggers, and can claim one year where 3 owlets fledged during a cold May rainstorm. I thought the little ones would freeze to death, but they might have been trying to avoid predators by fledging in bad weather. Who knows their intentions? Who knows if the residents today are the owlets of past years? The whole process has enriched the quality of our lives and the quality of habitat in our yard and neighborhood.

Last evening, hubby thought there was something in all three boxes. One was confirmed to be a squirrel this afternoon. In the 70 degree heat of the sun today, our red morph owl sat in the hole of its box at 3:27 PM and soaked up the sun until it left for the evening hunt at 5:12 PM. Prior to that, the third box hole was empty. I continued vigil through my scope after our red owl departed, and then at 5:16 PM, I could see a set of eyes inside the box, near the hole, but not in full view position. The eyes shifted back and forth inside the box and when the occupant sensed "the coast was clear," out pops a replica of the first red morph owl. It left the box at 5:20 PM when one could barely see.

Two reds are definitely better than one.

•••

We continue to watch the Eastern screech-owl activity in our backyard nest boxes. It's been lots of fun, as the other yard birds have been slow right now with only the usual suspects coming to the feeders and suet. Tis the season to switch boxes, fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la. We think that's what occurred at least once during the last two weeks.

Anthropomorphism runs rampant in our household these days, with my hubby quickly naming both owls. I had nothing to do with name selection, as I would have chosen something more scientific. But I need to keep harmony in the household, especially during the holiday season, so the owls retain his nomenclature.

It's going to be tougher figuring out the screech-owl soap opera this year since they are both red morphs, but its amazing how you can make guesses, or conjure up crazy stories, just by observing their behaviors. We've guessed at which one

is male and which one is female, and we have to make educated guesses as to who is who. Fuzz Butt, the first owl to take up residence this winter, proved true to "his" name, as two nights ago, just after I observed "him" leaving "his" box, "he" flew over to the other box occupied by Lil Red. I was surprised when "he" first clung to the outside of the box, then crawled half way inside while "she" was still in the box. This could be trouble brewing! "His" fuzzy butt was hanging half way out of the box, which made me laugh. It was the first time I could remember ever seeing the bottom of a screech-owl. I believe "he" was feeding "her" or getting "his" face pecked as a result of "his" actions. This activity lasted about one minute, which is a long time if you are getting your face pecked by another owl.

Tonight, Lil Red was only visible with head sticking out of the box for a total of 4 minutes. That's not much time, but we know when to expect them to appear, so we nailed the timing. Fuzz Butt is the owl that pops its head out of the box hole at least 45 minutes before it departs for the evening hunt. And of course, two reds are better than none!

– BIRDMOM and Owl Dad
Jefferson County, WV



*Eastern Screech-Owl in Jefferson, Co.
– photo by Matt Orsie from wvbirder.org*

BIRDSAFE PITTSBURGH STUDYING BUILDING STRIKES BY BIRDS

This is an interesting new project that has been undertaken in Pittsburgh, PA, within the last year, to research the number of bird strikes in downtown Pittsburgh, to help birds that can recover easily, and to develop new methods to reduce bird strikes and mortality. – Ed.

I'm writing to give you all a long anticipated update about BirdSafe Pittsburgh's efforts this fall. From September 7 to November 1, a total of 22 volunteers spent 195.5 hours looking for birds that had collided with windows in the Golden Triangle area of downtown Pittsburgh. A grand total of 164 birds from 45 different species were found, 115 dead and 49 live.

We also found one live Little Brown Bat at the bottom of a window. The live birds (and bat!) were taken to the Animal Rescue League's Wildlife Center for rehabilitation and eventual release. The dead birds were collected and will become part of the collection at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History.

The top five birds found were Ovenbird (23), White-throated Sparrow (16), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (11), Common Yellowthroat (9), and Tennessee Warbler (8). We found 4 birds that are listed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as Birds of Conservation Concern; Bay-breasted Warbler, Wood Thrush, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

Here is a complete list of birds found:

American Redstart (1)
 American Robin (2)
 Bay-breasted Warbler (1)
 Blackpoll Warbler (4)
 Black-throated Green Warbler (2)
 Blue Jay (1)
 Brown Creeper (6)
 Carolina Chickadee (2)
 Cedar Waxwing (1)
 Common Grackle (1)
 Common Yellowthroat (9)
 Connecticut Warbler (3)
 Eastern Wood Pewee (1)
 European Starling (2)
 Field Sparrow (1)
 Golden-crowned Kinglet (1)
 Gray Catbird (6)
 Gray-cheeked Thrush (3)
 House Sparrow (4)
 Little Brown Bat (1)
 Magnolia Warbler (3)
 Mourning Dove (1)
 Mourning Warbler (2)
 Nashville Warbler (2)

(cont. pg 7)

WINGS OVER THE MOUNTAINS NOW AVAILABLE

J. Lawrence Smith's final writings have been printed as he envisioned in the tome *Wings Over the Mountains*. A wonderful read, Smith's writing offers vignettes of many of our favorite West Virginia birds, locations and birders. The prose is light and interesting, and it gives us more insight as to the past and present of regional birds and birding. With chapters such as Mountain Spring, Winter Wanderers and Fading Wings, Smith reminisces and reminds us of where we have come from as birders. It is a wonderful read, and it is available through either the Headquarters Chapter store, or through the Handlan Chapter of the BBC in Charleston. It makes a great inexpensive gift for your friends and nestlings! \$10.00, plus \$3.50 shipping, & 6% tax for West Virginia residents.



BIRDSAFE PITTSBURGH (CON.)

Ovenbird (23)
 Red-eyed Vireo (1)
 Rock Pigeon (4)
 Rose-breasted Grosbeak (1)
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet (1)
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird (3)
 Savannah Sparrow (1)
 Scarlet Tanager (1)
 Song Sparrow (3)
 Swainson's Thrush (3)
 Swamp Sparrow (1)
 Tennessee Warbler (8)
 Tufted Titmouse (1)
 Unknown Sparrow species (1)
 Unknown species (5)
 Unknown Warbler species (11)
 Veery (1)
 White-throated Sparrow (16)
 Winter Wren (1)
 Wood Thrush (2)
 Yellow Warbler (1)
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (11)
 Yellow-billed Cuckoo (1)
 Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle) (3)
 Yellow-throated Warbler (1)

If you would like to learn more about BirdSafe Pittsburgh, or would like to get involved with our efforts in the coming year, please visit our website at birdsafepgh.org. Thanks for your support in all that we do!

Matt Webb
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**BIRDING TALES FROM FT. MYERS, FL**

I visited my son and his family in Fort Myers, FL from January 22 to February 5. We got to the Slough, a wetland area in Fort Myers with a mile-long boardwalk; and Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, "a 500-year-old forest of bald cypress trees, saved from destruction by the Audubon Society in 1954" and wet prairie, 13,000 acres in all, with a 2.25 mile boardwalk, on the northwest fringe of the Everglades.

Good birding both places--the usual water birds, egrets, ibis, wood storks, herons, anhingas, cormorants, etc. In the Slough we also got black-and-white, pine and palm warblers and a solitary vireo. At Corkscrew the highlight was the painted bunting, a life bird for me. There are three feeders at the Visitors Center and after a short wait we got three males and a female, spectacularly colorful birds. Earlier another lifer for me, a zebra butterfly, narrow wings, black with yellow stripes, or the other way around. Beautiful. Also same warblers as the Slough, plus yellow-throated, black-throated green and prairie.

A scope set up on the boardwalk was focused on a lovely ghost orchid, which blooms in the swamp this time of year. And a roseate spoonbill landed on a limb about 30 feet from us, giving us a good look at his pink raiment and his unique beak. Lots of blue-gray gnatcatchers and red-shouldered hawks at both places, and a 15-foot alligator at Corkscrew, sunning himself on a hillock.

We also checked out an eagle's nest, which was about 200 feet off a four-lane highway in North Fort Myers. There were an adult and an eaglet at the nest and as we watched the adult flew away briefly, landed, and then came back, maybe with a mouse

for the young, we couldn't be sure. We spent a rewarding half-hour there.

We got 46 species in the two weeks, some enjoyable winter birding far from the snowy north.

– *Contributed by Bob Rine*

CORRESPONDENCE

We are having a banded Carolina chickadee coming to our feeders at the house. It most likely was banded by Judy's parents as they used to band here and at the Pipestem nature center which is only about a mile and a half from here. The interesting thing is that they haven't banded for at least 7-8 years.

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV

1ST 2015 EAGLE SURVEY RESULTS

Our 10th southern WV eagle survey was held Saturday, January 10, 2015. Thirty-one participants located a record 56 Bald Eagles and two Golden Eagles. Observations were made at five sites along the New River, one along the Bluestone River and one along Indian Creek. Bald Eagles were seen at all sites and Golden Eagles were seen at two of the sites. This is a record number of eagles for the survey. This was also the coldest count day to date. Temperatures ranged from 9-26 degrees with clear skies and 0-3 mph winds.

The totals were as follows: 56 Bald Eagles – 8 adult, 23 1st year, 6 2nd year, 3 3rd year, 6 4th year & 10 immatures of undetermined age. 2 Golden Eagles - 1 immature, 1 sub-adult.

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS AROUND THE STATE

Will a Cooper's Hawk eat a duck? Until yesterday my answer to this question would have been, "I doubt it". But Nov. 9 around 11:00 AM at a tiny farm pond near Cabins, I was flabbergasted to see it happen in front of me. When I pulled over next to the pond, 2 male Gadwalls and a female Blue-winged Teal, both new birds for my Cabins area ebird "patch", flushed up a little and then settled back down in the water. I quietly and slowly got out of the car to get a better look at them and after a few minutes they had enough of me and started to take off, leaving the mallards behind. As they slowly circled low (no more than 20 feet high) over the pond, a shape suddenly dropped in from the nearby trees, and grabbed the blue-winged teal which was a little bit higher than the gadwalls. This Cooper's Hawk, which I had not been aware of when I pulled up, but which I am guessing the ducks were aware of, hence their original decision to stay put, carried the still flapping teal over to the ground ten yards away in the woods. It was mostly obscured by a tree trunk so I couldn't see how the hawk incapacitated the teal, but it was all very quiet and without any noticeable fluttering, and no feathers flying, for at least 5 minutes. Then, the hawk flew deeper into the woods with the lifeless teal where I could not see it. Definitely a rare and remarkable sight.

– Fred Atwood, Cabins, WV, 11/10/14

Regarding the Northern Saw-whet Owls, I had been banding NSWOs in Indiana since 2002 and been looking to start a new station in WV since moving here in 2012. I think I finally have my station. On only five nights of banding at Watters Smith we have captured 19 NSWOs, including one which was a foreign recapture but I am still waiting to find out where it was originally banded. Our best night so far was this past Wednesday, when we had 7 owls, including one local recapture and the foreign recaptured owl. I hope to be able to expand my research of NSWOs to the highland breeding population here in WV in the future and hopefully expand our knowledge base of this isolated population of a highly secretive species.

– Ross Brittain, Philippi, WV, 11/14/14

Pretty cold this am with temps around 13 and winds gusting to 30mph+. Takes a special kind of crazy to stand around outside when it gets like that. I was pleasantly surprised with bird numbers as, despite the low temps, the winds weren't stellar for big movement. Report in a second, but first the drama... from the 68 bridge the birds were unusually agitated and flighty. There was an adult Bald eagle hunting the rafts. It managed to separate a juvenile coot from its raft and proceeded to hunt it at which point the coot did something I had never seen. It took flight, and not low along the water but decided it was going to out-manuever the eagle in flight. I figured this wouldn't end well for the coot as it was rather ungainly in flight but it climbed and dodged and did an impressive job of giving the eagle the slip. That is until, Katie's Peregrine came barreling down in full stoop and just obliterated the young coot. The coot fell about 75 feet to the water in a cloud feathers, but the eagle was still in chase and circled and snatched the coot from the Lake before the Peregrine could get it. Then the Peregrine got angry that he wouldn't enjoy the spoils of his kill and set out to harass the eagle. The eagle dropped the coot a couple of times but always managed to reclaim it. This went on until both raptors were out of sight to the north. All we needed was an up tempo soundtrack and some special effects explosions and Michael Bay could have made another movie.

– Derek Courtney, Morgantown, WV, 11/18/14

As I was walking south along the trail at Cheat Lake Park, I saw a large brown bird take off from the opposite side of the lake in a slow flapping, low glide. It made a large splash in the middle of the lake and continued on toward my side. I thought to myself, "Cool, a young eagle caught a fish." I raised my bins up only to see that it was, in fact, a Wild Turkey. What the heck? I was once on the hawkwatch platform at Cape May with Pete Dunne when we watched a pigeon circle and land in Bunker Pond, presumably to cool off, for a moment. But this was much stranger in my opinion. This turkey... what was he (gotta be a male; seems like a guy thing to do) thinking? Was he confused by the stillness of the lake and mistook it for land? Drunk on fermented acorns and berries? Or did he simply say "Screw it! This seems like a fun idea." One of the myriad things in this world that I will never understand. I like to think it is the latter though if only because it makes me smile.

– Derek Courtney, Morgantown, WV, 11/27/14

I thought I was going to town for a haircut and a trip to the grocery store today but the waterfowl distracted me. At various places ended up with 37 unidentified ducks. 20 species & 594 individuals. Just call me shaggy. The barber will still be there when the ducks aren't.

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV, 12/02/14

This year, I did a monthly bird species count within a circle of 15 miles radius around Harman, including Cabins, Riverton, Bowden, Parsons, and Thomas (a bit of a stretch). I ended up with 153 total species. Birds seen monthly include Red-tailed Hawk, Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, European Starling, Northern Cardinal, American Goldfinch and House Sparrow. Birds that missed it by a month include Canada Goose, American Robin and Song Sparrow.

– Herb Myers, Harman, WV, 12/27/14



Snow Bunting in Jefferson, Co.
– photo by N. Wade Snyder

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS (con.)

My wife Nancy and I, on this beautiful day, decided to do something different; we went to a place we'd never been before: Cedar Creek State Park in Gilmer County. As we were climbing the northern end of the Park View Trail up to a ridge, a very large raptor appeared from the valley to the east and glided over. It could only be an Eagle, and I immediately called it a first-year Bald Eagle. It then circled a couple of times, and I was astounded to see large white patches near the end of the wings and a wide white band on the upper part of the tail. Wow! a juvenile/immature GOLDEN EAGLE! Finally, on Dec. 27, my first-of-the-year. After a couple of more circles, it glided off down the valley towards the north and the Little Kanawha River west of Glenville.

Since the vast majority of Golden Eagle sightings in WV are in the mountains, I checked eBird to see if there were any other records for the area, and found that this is only the second Golden Eagle record for Gilmer County. The first, on Feb. 15, 1976, was a bird caught in a fox trap near Horn Creek north of Glenville. It was rescued, turned over to the DNR, and later released.

– Terry Bronson, Morgantown, WV, 12/27/14

Yesterday afternoon, we were sitting on our covered porch watching the woods. We live in a hollow in Doddridge County, really down between closely space hills. A Pileated Woodpecker was on a log that was laying on the ground, sticking it's head into a crack. Meanwhile, three squirrels were running around chasing each other. Pretty soon, one of the squirrels got onto the woodpecker's log and started up toward the bird. The woodpecker flared it's wings and the squirrel got off the log, detouring around the deadly woodpecker. My wife remarked that the bird was not afraid of the squirrel to which I replied "he is not a bird hunter". She said, do you think a hawk would go after that woodpecker. I said the bird is pretty big but if the right hawk came along and got a chance, I was pretty sure that they would take advantage of that.

As if to prove me correct, within five minutes, a Cooper's Hawk swooped in after the Pileated! The bird let out a huge alarm call and managed to escape. We were pretty excited to watch that interaction. Lots of drama for a Sunday afternoon.

– Peter McDonald, Doddridge Co., WV, 12/29/14

It was already dark when we finished dinner tonight. I decided I wanted to carry the compost bucket out to the bin at the edge of our woods rather than leave it in the house all night. I had a flashlight as I walked out the door onto the back porch, where the cold outside air met the warm air from my house. I started down the steps, listening to them creak slightly from the cold weather. Holy you know what! I gave out a decent sized girlish scream, as if I just saw a mouse in the house. At the base of the stairs, a standing object appeared to be peering into the basement window. It was under my back porch deck, about 1 foot from the edge of the house. I directed the flashlight on it, and could see small glowing eyes and a big pointed projection coming out of its head. Evening monster? After realizing it was a rather large beak, I watched the tall legged creature slowly waltz across my patio and into the wild part of the yard. It never flew away.

This shouldn't have been a big surprise, as our Great Blue Heron, affectionately named Grizelda by my husband, was here most of the day today. It proudly stood on one leg waiting for the pond ice to melt. Most of the time she appeared to be asleep. She never caught anything to my knowledge. Two days ago, she was able to bag 4 decent sized goldfish in an hour, while we cheered her on as we watched through the window photographing the action. I guess she decided that it wasn't worth flying to wherever she supposedly goes at night. Why not just roost in the backyard on the patio so it's there in striking position when the sun comes up? Or maybe it will hunt at night if the fish get dumb enough to come out from under the rocks. Never a dull moment around here.

– BIRDMOM, Jefferson County, WV, 1/15/15

Today, along 817 South, I saw a light morph Rough-legged Hawk gliding over a harvested corn field. A little further along, I noticed a small group of blackbirds fly across the road and light in the top of a tree at the edge of the harvested corn field. I was expecting to see Red-winged Blackbirds, but when I looked at them with my 10x binoculars, I couldn't see any red on the wings. So, I put the scope on them and low and behold - 23 Brewer's Blackbirds! They were mostly males, and the yellow eyes of the males and dark eyes of the females was easily seen.

After my excitement died down, I could hear a flock of mostly starlings calling from trees behind me and across the road. As I scanned the flock with my scope I could see several more Brewer's - both males and females. The flock of about 200 birds flew across the road to the corn stubble and began to feed with a large flock of American Crows. I watched the birds with binoculars and my scope as they flew nervously around the field in front of me. Overall, I would estimate at least 50 Brewer's Blackbirds were present and at least two Brown-headed Cowbirds were also mixed in with the Starlings. Surprisingly, there weren't any Red-winged Blackbirds in the flock. As I continued along 817 South, I saw more flocks of Starlings and Crows, but no other blackbirds.

– Gary Rankin, Lavalette, WV, 1/18/15

After three years of passing by great field habitat and being disappointed by the lack of raptors it finally paid off. I was staring at what appeared to be a first year Snowy Owl (definitely an owl the age/sex are up for debate since it could be an older female) in the fields along US 50 in Taylor County at the junction of Meadland Rd/Berry Run Road along US 50 about 4 miles or so east of Bridgeport. The owl was perched on a utility pole and was being harassed by the occasional crow. Great way to start a day!

– Ross Brittain, Bridgeport, WV, 1/22/15

– **Sightings taken from
WVBird ListServ**

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CHAPTER HAPPENINGS

BIBBEE CHAPTER

March 14, 2015 – 10:00- 2:00 pm.
Spring Eagle Survey. Locations along
Bluestone Lake, New River and Greenbri-
er River. Contact Jim Phillips at jimand-
judyphillips@gmail.com for information.

April 26, 2015 – 2:30 pm. Meet at
Pipestem State Park tower parking lot.
Travel to Brush Creek Falls for wild-
flowers. Possibly a trip to B. Reeder's for
porch birding after wildflowers. Contact
Betsy Reeder at ereeder44@msn.com for
information.

May 2, 2015 – All day event. Century
Day Bird Count. We count total species
for the day in the Pipestem CBC Circle.
Contact Jim Phillips at jimandjudyphil-
lips@gmail.com for information.

HANDLAN CHAPTER

March 16, 2015 – 6:30 pm. Meeting at
South Charleston Library. Whitney Bai-
ley, DNR Biologist will discuss the State
Wildlife Action Plan.

April 20, 2015 – 6:30 pm. Meeting at
South Charleston Library. Jim Triplett
will talk about Magee Marsh.

May – Century Count Week. A week in
May. Details and date to be announced.

Four weekends in May – Spring Hill
Cemetery Walks. Sundays at 8:00 am.
Dates to be announced.

May 18, 2015 – 6:00 pm. Annual Spring
Potluck Picnic at Coonskin Park, Shelter 19.

See www.kvbirdclub.org for more info.

HEADQUARTERS CHAPTER

Mar 17, 2015 – 6:30. Costa Rica, pre-
sented by Sandie Lee Meyers.

Apr 21, 2015 – 6:30. Tanzania, present-
ed by Penny Miller.

May 3, 2015 – Field Trip to IBA-80
Migration Sensation. Mary Grey, Larry
Helgerman and Scott Pendleton. We
will meet at the S-Bridge parking area at
the intersection of SR-221 and US-40 in
Washington Co., PA.

Meetings at Oglebay's Schrader Center

MOUNTWOOD CHAPTER

March Coordinator: Shirley Radcliffe
(304-428-8520)

March 5, 2015 – Sandy Creek Backwater & area, 9:00 am. First parking lot, Northwest Drive.

March 19, 2015 – Middle Island area, 8:00 am. Burger King, Rt. 68 & I-77, bring lunch.

March 26, 2015 – Sandy Creek Backwater & area, 8:30 am. First parking lot, Northwest Drive.

April Coordinator: Jeanette Esker
(304-863-8765)

April 2, 2015 – Elberfeld's Farm, 8:00 am. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339/Rt. 7; bring lunch.

April 9, 2015 – Ohio River Islands NWR, 8:00 am. ORINWR Parking lot.

April 16, 2015 – McDonough Wildlife Refuge, 8:00 am. McDonough parking lot.

April 23, 2015 – Johnson T Janes Park, 8:00 am. Parking lot, east end of 27th Street, Parkersburg.

April 30, 2015 – Birds & Flowers, Newell's Run, 8:00 am. WV Welcome Center, Williamstown, bring lunch.

May Coordinator: Nina Ott (304-863-6020)

May 7, 2015 – McDonough Wildlife Refuge, 8:00 am. McDonough parking lot.

May 9, 2015 – North American Migration Count.

May 14, 2015 – DuPont Nature Trail & area, 8:00 am. DuPont Nature Trail parking lot.

May 16, 2015 – Pat Collins farm, 8:00 am. WV Welcome Center, Williamstown.

May 21, 2015 – Ohio Birding Route Trail, 8:00 am. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339/Rt. 7; bring lunch.

May 28, 2015 – Hocking Hills, 7:00 am. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339 / Rt. 7; bring lunch.

June Coordinator: Jon Benedetti
(304-295-8945)

June 4, 2015 – “The Wilds”, Ohio, all-day trip, 7:00 am. WV Welcome Center, Williamstown, bring lunch.

June 6, 2015 – Birds & Breakfast, 7:00 am. McDonough Log Cabin “A”, bring finger food and drink.

NATURE HAPPENINGS AROUND THE STATE

POTOMAC VALLEY AUDUBON

March 15, 2015 – Spring Bird Walk at Stauffer's Marsh Nature Preserve, Berkeley County, 8:00 am, Stauffer's Marsh is a beautiful place to enjoy some spring birding! Join Steve Hartman as he explores Stauffer's Marsh on Sunday, March 15.

The event is free and anyone with an interest is welcome, regardless of their birding skills. For planning purposes, pre-registration is strongly encouraged. Participants will meet in the parking area at the north end of the Marsh at 8:00 am.

March 25th 2015 – Please join Deb Hale as she leads a bird walk in the South Schoolhouse Ridge Battlefield section of the Harpers Ferry National Park. The walk will last two to three hours and involve about 3 miles of walking through woods and fields, with some hilly terrain. Likely species include lingering winter visitors, early migrants and year-round birds like woodpeckers and raptors. Meet at 8:00 a.m. the South Schoolhouse Ridge parking area.

March 31, 2015 – Join Jim Farley on a birding trip to the Shannondale Springs Wildlife Management Area on the east bank of the Shenandoah River in Jefferson County. The trip is free and anyone with an interest is welcome to come along, regardless of their birding skills. Children are welcome. Pre-registration is strongly encouraged but not required.

Participants should plan to meet at 7:30 AM at the WMA parking area by the boat launch site, off Mission Road.

April 2015 - Natural History Workshop: Birding 101. See <http://www.potomacaudubon.org/event-1833317> for details.

CANAAN VALLEY STATE PARK

March 14, 2015 – 10 am. Early Spring Migration Birdwalk. Join us for this birdwalk for beginning and intermediate birders. Meet at the Refuge Visitor Center.

June 4-7, 2015 – The Canaan Valley Birding Festival welcomes all levels of birders and nature lovers. Canaan Valley, WV, because of its diverse high elevation boreal habitats, is fortunate to be the breeding ground for many neo-tropical birds, but it also has beautiful grasslands and boggy wetlands. Come join us; see and hear birds while enjoying our cool summers, memorable mountains, grasslands and wetlands.

The schedule will have 3 all-day walks on Friday and Saturday which will bring you back to the lodge in time to relax or explore the area before the evening key note and evening sounds walk. We will also have half-day walks, starting Thursday afternoon, including some afternoon nature walks. Half-day beginner walks will meet at 8 am. A birding photography strand will be a new addition this year. Our volunteer leaders would love to share their passion for our birds with you.

WV STATE PARK ACTIVITIES

April 18, 2015 – Spring Bird Walk, Prickett's Fort State Park.

April 25, 2015 – Spring Bird Walk, Prickett's Fort State Park.

May 1-3, 2015 – Bird Banding Weekend w/ Joey Herron. Whether you are a novice or seasoned birder, come out and have a fantastic birding experience. Activities open to day visitors. Overnight packages also available. Three days of birding activities. Leader Joey Herron will show us, by sight and sound, many of the birds in the area. Some birds will be traveling through, others will be here to stay for the summer.

Call about lodging and meal specials. “Bird” rate discount, as available.

May 2, 2015 – Spring Bird Walk, Prickett's Fort State Park.

May 9, 2015 – Spring Bird Walk, Waters Smith Memorial State Park.



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**Somebody's watching from
the Early Spring Meeting,
but who???**

*By the time you get this,
we'll've been there and
back again!*

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