



THE MAIL BAG

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

THE LAST WORD FROM JIM OLSEN

(Jim passed away in March, obit on page 7; this was a personal obit that he wrote years ago for when he passed.)

I think it was in my early teens when Mother and Dad took me to Oglebay for the Sunday morning nature walks led by A. B. Brooks. After the walks, we all gathered at a picnic site for a cooked breakfast and visiting. Got to know the early BBCers then... they hadn't yet organized the club. Soon I was going on trips with Chuck Conrad, Harold Bergner, Carolyn and Dorothy Conrad, Tom Shields, Leo Tighe and others that I don't remember their names. I joined the BBC after they organized the club.

During summers while in high school I worked at Oglebay for my room and board doing a variety of things. Basic duty was to maintain the nature museum, including force feeding the snakes we kept. Helped run the barn dances on Friday nights and ran the telescope and gave talks on astronomy on Saturday nights. Took kids on nature hikes for the Day Camp people. Jim Handlan, a student from WVU was my "boss." His brother, John Handlan was the PR director for Oglebay.

John and I ran the remote radio broadcast "Farm and Home News" five days a week at noon, from equipment set up in the barn. He wrote the script and did the verbals and I ran the equipment. One Sunday, John and I handled the broadcast of the US Marine Band concert held at Oglebay. We were both a little nervous.

One summer got a scholarship to the Terra Alta nature camp and went often after that. Was part of the group that started the Forays, attending all until WWII took us all. After the war, the BBC reorganized to include the various groups then operating and I was the first President of that group. I was also the Editor of *THE REDSTART* for three or four years.

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

My topic for this issue is writing about a few on-line resources available for your birding pleasure. One source of information is a mailing list called a listserv. Once you subscribe to a listserv, you will receive emails of bird sightings posted by other members. Listservs are organized by state so you will receive emails of bird sightings in only the states you specify. You can choose to receive each email individually or one email containing all of one day's postings. To subscribe, go to <http://birding.aba.org/>.

Facebook is another source of information. Although I sometimes agree with Betty White that Facebook is a waste of time, I do use it. So, if you also use Facebook, you can get interesting bird observations by joining birding groups. The Brooks Bird Club is a group you can join as well as Mountain State Birders. There are most likely others of interest to you. The website is <https://www.facebook.com/>.

A fast-growing resource that has proved to be extremely valuable is e-Bird. Birders can submit their sightings to this database and can query the database to find locations of birds. So, if you want to find out what's been seen at a specific birding location or where specific birds have been found, you can use e-bird. Here's the website: <http://ebird.org/content/ebird/>.

These are a few popular resources available on the internet; I'm sure there are many others you can find. Happy birding!

– Carol McCullough, BBC President

PROPOSED BYLAWS CHANGE

The Board of Trustees of the Brooks Bird Club approved a change in the club's Bylaws at its March 12, 2015 meeting. In order to take effect, the change needs approved by a majority of our members in attendance at a membership meeting. This meeting will be held at Bethany College on October 18, 2015 as part of the club's Annual Meeting. The change is to Article III number 6 which currently reads 'The Board of Trustees shall hold at least three meetings a year'. The change approved by the board reads 'The Board of Trustees shall hold at least two meetings a year'.

Two meetings a year is usually sufficient to conduct the business of the club. This bylaws change does not prevent the board from meeting more than twice a year but it does mandate at least two Board of Trustees meetings per calendar year.

BUFFALO CREEK MIGRATION SENSATION

On May 3rd, 6 members of the Brooks Bird Club, along with leaders Mary Grey, Larry Helgerman, and Scott Pendelton, met up with about 20 members of Three Rivers and Westmoreland Bird Clubs to explore IBA 80 in Washington Co. PA. Our goal was to visit many habitats; hoping to find returning nesters and migrants, and whatever sights and sounds Nature provided. We planned to go to stream (riparian), field, woodland, and wetland habitats. The weather was perfect with clear skies and warm temperatures.

We started at Walker Bridge and got the usual riparian species there: Baltimore Oriole, Yellow-throated Warblers, Warbling Vireos, and many Yellow Warblers. We also watched a Mourning Dove building a nest. We heard a Ring-necked Pheasant calling and had a flyover Common Merganser.

We then worked our way to a shrubby field territory, and most got wonderful looks at an Orchard Oriole feeding and singing in a flowering fruit tree. It was a beautiful sight! We picked up a Blue-winged Warbler there, but the usual Yellow-breasted Chat wasn't there; hopefully just not arrived from southern grounds yet.

Next, we walked Buck Run Road and looked at blooming wildflowers and birds in a more wooded habitat. We hadn't walked far until we heard our first Cerulean Warbler. We had several on this walk, which is always reassuring due to their decreasing numbers. Louisiana Waterthrush are common along this run, and many saw them bouncing along the streambed. The

highlight of this part of the trip was when we came upon a pair of mating Black Racer snakes. They were quite surprised to be interrupted by tall strangers, and separated. One slithered over Tom Moeller's foot and up a shrub. He was able to get some amazing shots of the snake! Thanks to Scott Pendleton for identifying it as a Black Racer because of its white throat.



Black Racer
— photo by Tom Moeller

We then moved onto Green-cove wetlands for lunch at the picnic tables, and to look for different species there. Larry and I had scouted there the night before. We spooked an American Bittern and had two Sora walking in the reeds very near our feet, so we hoped to share this with the participants. The Soras were heard calling, and the bittern heard earlier by another participant, but none seen. We did hear and see another reclusive rail though: a pair of Virginia Rails in an adjacent wetland.

After lunch, several of us walked the road over the covered bridge hoping for some activity, but it was quiet, so we called it a day.

In all, we had 77 species and a wonderful day in the great outdoors!

— *Contributed by Mary Grey*

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

MAY 2015 WEST VIRGINIA BIG DAY HIGHLIGHTS

It simply doesn't get much better than being outside among good birds and good friends on an early May morning in WV. Terry Bronson is doing a big day around Cooper's Rock so I am sure he will post later (below). The Morgantown Migratory Bird Day event is still going on until later this afternoon and I encourage anybody interested to stop in and visit. The birds were as nice as the weather this morning. Almost 70 species seen so far that I am aware of. There were lots of cuckoos of both species moving around this morning. Almost a dozen warbler species and five thrush species. Swainson's Thrush seen early this morning was an excellent find. Cerulean Warblers on territory are always special as well.

– Derek Courtney, Morgantown, WV

My results for my Big Day effort were disappointing--only 55 species in the 13 hours I birded. I guess you could call it a Medium Day. Birds included: American Woodcock (2); Eastern Whip-poor-will – 5 birds at 3 locations along Chestnut Ridge Road; and 11 species of warblers. 21 birds on Derek Courtney's list that I missed. For some of them I was present, but just couldn't hear the bird, so there were at least 76 species at Cooper's Rock today.

Thanks to Derek and Mike Slaven for joining me for portions of the day. Thanks to Derek, Ian Batterman, and Caden Haines for leading the other portions of the guided bird walk. And thanks to the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia for making Morgantown Migratory Bird Day possible.

– One very weary Terry Bronson, Morgantown, WV

I had the pleasure to bird with a group of participant front the Blackwater Falls Wildflower Pilgrimage in the Fernow Forest. Thanks to Sandra Farkas to being the recorder and sharing the eBird list. One group reported a Barred Owl while traveling between wildflower viewing stations. During the two days for the Pilgrimage the groups have tallied 124 species of birds on the field trips.

– LeJay Graffious, Preston County

Mike Griffith, Matt Orsie, Gary Rankin and did another WV Big Day on May 9th and were able to get 147 species, which is the second all time in WV with the record being 148 species set by our group in May 2014. We logged 401 miles and started at 3:45 am, ending at 11:45 pm, at which time we heard our last species from my cabin in Hillsboro, WV, being a Barred Owl. We able to see 30 warblers, which included a Swainson's Warbler near the confluence of the Cherry and Gauley River, along with 3 migrants, which included Bay-breasted, Tennessee and Blackpoll Warblers.

We got our two rails at Muddlety, which were Sora and Virginia Rail. At the Cranberry Boardwalk, we heard again the Olive-sided Flycatcher. At Mt. Zion Cemetery, we heard the Chick-will's-widow along with the Whip-poor-will. We located several Bobolinks in the Greenbrier Valley. We also to find 7 duck species including American Black Duck, Wood Duck, American Wigeon, Mallard, Hooded Merganser, Blue-winged Teal and Lesser Scaup.

– David Patick, Huntington, WV

Birded about 8 hours yesterday in my area of Wetzel County. Had a few misses and some first of year birds ended the day with 89 species. 15 warbler species and possible worm-eating. FOY species were in the order found: Olive-sided Flycatcher (same day as 2014), Swainson's Thrush, Grasshopper Sparrow, Yellow-breasted Chat, Acadian Flycatcher, Solitary Sandpiper and Green Heron.

– Wilma Jarrell, Wileyville, WV

On Saturday I spent the day totally within Grant Co except the road going north through Dolly Sods (which is Tucker Co). I started at my cabin in Cabins before dawn where I heard Whip-poor-will and Barred Owl, and I finished at North Mill Creek at dusk where I heard Chuck-wills-widow. In the morning I concentrated on the woodland passerines, looping through Dolly Sods to and from Jordan Run Rd. In the afternoon I birded all the main bodies of water that I normally visit near Jordan Run Rd, Patterson Creek Rd, Cabins area, and South Mill Creek area. I was surprised at how few waterfowl and shorebird species were present compared to just a week ago. Most of the passerines seen were resident birds not migrants. Some of the residents such as Alder, Acadian, and Willow Flycatchers had not yet returned to their usual spots.

The most exciting birds were Lincoln's Sparrow (private farm along Stony River Dam Rd), Great Egret (Belle Babb), Common Loon (Thorn Run Rd lake), Golden-winged and Cerulean Warbler (FR19), and Ruffed Grouse at Dolly Sods (heard two drumming, as well as a grouse nest with 12 eggs).

The most unexpected misses were Acadian Flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, Alder Flycatcher; several warblers such as Parula, Hooded, Blackpoll, Cape May, Nashville; waterfowl (none except a few Mallards, Wood Ducks, and Canada Geese); Screech and Great Horned Owl; Great Blue Heron; Swainson's Thrush; Cedar Waxwings, Pine Siskin, Blue Grosbeak, House Finch and Horned Lark. I was hoping for Red Crossbills at Dolly Sods but could not find any.

I found 111 species on Saturday, including 20 warbler species and 10 species of sparrows.

– Fred Atwood, Cabins, WV

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NEW RIVER BIRDING & NATURE FESTIVAL: 2015 EDITION – *by Bill Hilton*

As we are prone to do near the end of April or first of May, we departed Hilton Pond Center this week for West Virginia and the New River Birding & Nature Festival, held annually in the southern highlands around Fayette County. This event, considered by avocational birders and professional ornithologists as one of the best of its kind anywhere, attracts natural history enthusiasts from across North America. We been fortunate since its inception to be involved as bander, guide, and lecturer, and always look forward to our spring trip to the Mountain State just as bud burst and spring bird migration are getting underway.

As always, the 2015 Festival was a nice mix of field excursions, bird banding, identification workshops, nature walks, birding humor, presentations by prominent naturalists, and great food--all in a friendly, non-competitive atmosphere. It was, however, much colder than usual, with first morning temperatures on 27 April down to the upper 20s. Even early-blooming Catawba Rhododendrons (*Rhododendron catawbiense*) were keeping their flowers safe inside a tight sheath of protective bud scales. Brrrrr. Planted frequently as an ornamental across the Southeast, this species grows natively from the southern Appalachians to northern Alabama.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the 2015 Festival was it was almost like a mini-reunion for folks who have been with us on one or more Operation RubyThroat hummingbird expeditions to the Neotropics. On hand for the first time in Fayette County were Mary Kimberly & Gavin MacDonald (who have participated in SIX of our mid-winter hummingbird trips), along with Festival repeaters Mary & Gary Wolf, Lynn & Terral Jordan, Alma Lowry, Sally Tucker, and--of course--Ernesto Carman and Susan Hillton. It was great to see all of them again in the West Virginia Hills--especially since Mary and Gavin ably volunteered with net-setting and bird extraction during this year's Festival-based bird banding efforts.

Along with cool morning weather at the 2015 Festival came a heavy layer of dew, as evidenced by water droplets outlining the silken traps of hundreds of Bowl and Doily Spiders (*Frontinella communis*) that set up shop in a meadow at Opossum Creek Retreat. These arachnids are aptly named, although younger folks might have no idea a doily is a piece of lace their great-grandmothers might have used beneath a dish to protect the furniture. Incidentally, the doily also protects the spider while it hangs beneath the bowl waiting for some hapless insect to tumble in.

Perhaps because of cool temperatures at the start of this year's Festival, bud burst seemed a few days behind schedule--meaning participants could more easily see birds in the trees. While tending mist nets at Opossum Creek Retreat, Gavin MacDonald was watching a Blue Jay hanging out in a tall White Oak. When the bird kept returning to the same crotch in a main trunk, Gavin got out his spotting scope and realized the tree contained a jumble of sticks--with another jay sitting tight on this typical loosely formed nest. Based on our extensive experience with Blue Jays during grad school days in Minnesota, the stationary bird was almost certainly an incubating female, with the male guarding her and the nest from intruders such as a Northern Cardinal he chased away. Through the scope we could even see the male jay hopping to the nest and giving the female morsel after morsel of food as she continued her duties. A male so atten-

tive greatly increases chances of a nest being successful.

Watching spiders and flora and nesting jays was fun, but our assigned goal was to show Festival participants how banding is useful in learning more about birds than one can discern through binoculars. (How cool was it, for example, that we provided in-the-hand views of four new Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and recaptured one from last year's Festival!) To that end, we set up four mist nets near the spider meadow at Opossum Creek Retreat and on three banding days caught quite a few individuals--many of which seemed to be wearing brown plumage. One of these was a small cavity nester known for its "rush-and-jumble" song and the disconcerting habit of sneaking into nest boxes to pip the eggs of Eastern Bluebirds. It was a House Wren, a New World species whose various populations range all the way from Canada to the tip of South America. West Virginia's House Wrens disappear each fall, flying as far as Gulf Coast states or Mexico before returning.

Brown bird #2 was somewhat larger than the wren with a shorter bill and no barring. It had the body and bill shape of a Wood Warbler, but don't warblers have some degree of yellow in their plumage? That's certainly true of most of them, notable exceptions being the two brown-colored waterthrush species (Northern and Louisiana) and... an Ovenbird. This streak-breasted species is identifiable by its chestnut crown bordered by two bold black stripes--AND by its explosive and repetitive song of "teacher, Teacher, TEACHER!" Incidentally, Ovenbirds take their name from their habit of covering their ground nests with a canopy reminiscent of old-style outdoor cooking ovens.

The third brown bird had dark breast markings and therefore remi-

niscent of the Ovenbird, but was twice its size and without head stripes. Instead it had a wide, broken white eye ring and the body shape of American Robin. This was a Wood Thrush, which is indeed in the *Turdidae* (Thrush Family), same family as robins, bluebirds, and their relatives. This bird is distinguished from the other five North American "spot-breasted thrushes"--Veery and Swainson's, Gray-cheeked, Bicknell's, and Hermit Thrush--by reddish brown above and with large almost circular spots on a pure white breast. Wood Thrushes all bail out come fall and end up in lowland forests in Central America.

At Opossum Creek Retreat we caught two other brown birds of the same size and shape but that looked very different; they were the two color morphs of the White-throated Sparrow. The dull morph (below left) is rather drab and has only a hint of yellow lores--the area between eye and bill. Nonetheless, the throat is white with a dark lower border, and the head is heavily striped--making it a WTSP.



In fresh plumage (right) the bright morph of the White-throated Sparrow is an eye-popping wonder, with every feature more prominent than in the dull morph. Oddly enough, these

two morphs are not indicative of sex or age, so one might wonder how both can exist within a given population. Extensive field studies provide the answer, as follows: Bright morph males sing more frequently and are more aggressive, so they are more protective of their mate and chicks. Dull morph males and females, however, do a better job of providing for and feeding nestlings. (A pair usually consists of dissimilar morphs, and bright morph females seem to prefer dull morph males.) In any case, any combination of morphs is capable of producing fledglings, so both morphs continue to occur.

Fayette County is full of natural wonders, from the New River Gorge to Hawks Nest State Park to smaller gems such as beaver ponds. As we headed out from Opossum Creek Retreat one morning Mary Kimberly spotted a big beaver lodge just off U.S. 19 north of Fayetteville. In some locales beavers will dig a bank tunnel rather than build a lodge of sticks like the one above. Near the lodge was a substantial log dam the beavers had constructed long ago, flooding the area where they then built the lodge.

Beaver-created wetlands can be important to all sorts of plants and animals that need standing or slow-moving water for survival. This includes amphibians such as Upland Chorus Frogs and Spring Peepers that serenaded us this week at Wolf Creek Park. Not vocal but still plentiful were salamanders swimming in waters muddied slightly by overnight rain. The most obvious of these were Eastern Red-spotted Newts, *Notophthalmus viridescens*, which lay their eggs in water, wander for a year of two on land, and as adults return to an aquatic existence. Note the streamlined appearance of the adult above, whose red spots are barely visible against a greenish-brown body.

Out on the trails around the Wolf Creek wetland we found several brilliantly colored salamander-like creatures. These were the terrestrial stage of those Red-spotted Newts from the beaver pond. Known as "red eft," they move

slowly on land, probing under leaf litter for small invertebrates to satisfy their hunger. Efts get along fine without standing water, their protective, mostly dry skin being similar to that of toads. The bright red coloration is "aposematic," meaning it's a warning to potential predators that a mouthful of eft at best tastes bad and at worst may cause gastric distress.

As always, Bill Thompson III--esteemed editor of *Bird Watcher's Digest*--was a guide and lecturer at the 2015 New River Birding and Nature Festival, which he calls his favorite among the dozens of outdoor events he attends each year. Hilton Pond Center is also a fun place to be, but based on the variety of nature-watching opportunities described above we tend to agree with Thompson and encourage folks to join us in West Virginia in 2016.

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www.hiltonpond.org/ThisWeek150427.html



*Doily spiderweb at Opossum Creek
Retreat meadow*

MAY 2015 WEST VIRGINIA BIG DAY HIGHLIGHTS

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On May 2nd, the Bibbee Club held our annual spring bird count. The weather was perfect. Just a few people were able to participate: Jim and Judy Phillips, Julie McQuade, Bill and Margaret Hank, Betsy Reeder and myself. We had 102 species for the day. I didn't get any details from Jim and Judy, but Julie and Margaret, (we met at the DQ) had good days. Though Margaret and Bill were limited to their yard and house. I thoroughly enjoyed my day. I began at Mountain Valley Lake where I got 28 species, including Willet, Osprey and Hooded Merganser. When I finally got to Bluestone Wildlife Management Area I found the gate locked, so I walked in, which really turned out wonderfully. No people, just me and the birds. All in all an absolutely memorable day.

– Mindy Waldron, Surveyor, WV

I did Bluestone State Park in the A.M. which was rather nostalgic. When I started in the club, I usually did the park with the likes of Bob Speich, Bob Knutson, Ray Sarles, James Taylor and Ben Markell. Sometimes we even camped there for the night. I had good birds on the 2nd including 16 warbler species. In the P.M., I picked up wife Judy and we rode the back roads of Pipestem. We had 91 species for the day.

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV

On Wednesday May 6, Beverly Delidow, John Hubbard, Derrick Kolling, John Waugaman and I conducted a Big Day in Cabell, Mason and Wayne Counties. We started at 4:15 am and ended at 7 pm, finding a total species count of 125. Areas covered included Green Bottom WMA, Robert C. Byrd Locks & Dam, Shady Waters Campground, Gallipolis Ferry, McClintic WMA, ridges in Cabell, Mason and Wayne Counties, and Beech Fork State Park. Highlights included the Chuck-wills Widow at Mt. Zion Church, six duck species, Virginia and Sora Rails (Green Bottom WMA), eight shorebirds (Killdeer; Spotted, Solitary Semipalmated, Least and Pectoral Sandpipers; Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs) and 23 warbler species (including Worm-eating, Blue-winged, Prothonotary, Tennessee, Kentucky, Cape May, Blackpoll, Palm, Pine, and Prairie Warblers; and Yellow-breasted Chat).

– Gary Rankin, Lavalette, WV

Today we did a count in Tucker County for International Migratory Bird Day. I was most excited to get a new WV bird. At the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge boardwalk on Freeland Road, I saw a dark bird come soaring in. It had its legs out the back and a long, curved bill. It was a Glossy Ibis. It circled the beaver pond a few times and looked like it was going to land. However it took off to the west toward the state park. I scanned sites in Canaan Valley State Park for it but couldn't find it.

– Herb Myers, Harman, WV

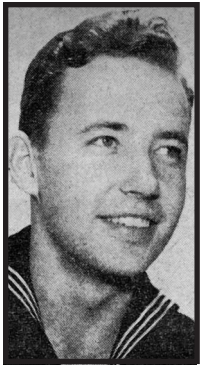
Our International Migratory Bird Day count in Tucker County on Saturday, May 16, yielded some surprising results, with Canaan Valley as the hotspot. Jackie Burns found a Double-crested Cormorant, a Least Sandpiper and a Forster's Tern, and Herb Myers continued his practice of finding mega-rarities during the count with his Glossy Ibis sighting. Warmest thanks to them and to our other dedicated surveyors. On a generally cool, cloudy day with showers, we ended up with 118 species, which was 8 ahead of last year, and included 21 warblers.

– Casey Rucker, Dry Fork, WV

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.





JIM OLSEN PASSES AWAY

James H. Olsen, age 95, of Columbus, Ohio, died March 28, 2015, at Friendship Village of Dublin.

He was born in Wheeling, West Virginia, the son of James H. Olsen Sr. and Marjorie A. Rine. In Wheeling, Jim was manager of The White Haines Optical Company and the Editor of THE REDSTART, an ornithological journal. He served in the U.S. Navy during WWII as a Chief Aviation Radio Technician. He was well known in Central Ohio as a Civic Leader and as a Business Consultant, specializing in

Employee and Executive Benefit Plans.

Jim was active in the Columbus Chamber of Commerce's Sales Executive Club, Advertising Club and the Export-Import Club. He was formerly Advertising and Sales Promotion Manager for White Haines Optical Company in Columbus, Advertising Manager for the Ohio Fuel Gas Company (now Columbia Energy Group) and a national sales director for the Columbus Showcase Company. He was a trustee of and president of a number of organizations including the Family and Children Bureau, Tuberculosis Society of Columbus and Franklin County, Unites Community Council, The United Way and Board of Trustees of First Community Church in Marblecliffe, Ohio. He was also a member of Scioto Country Club, the Wheaton Club group of Professional and Amateur Naturalists and was a Master Mason of New England Lodge in Worthington,

RALPH K. BELL MEMORIAL BIRDING EXTRAVAGANZA

You don't have to go far to enjoy some incredible birding! The proof was at the Ralph K. Bell Memorial Birding Extravaganza. The weather was "iffy" – temperatures in the 70s, but "thunderstorms around"—but that didn't deter about 30 birders who knew the avian treat in store for them. The secret they knew was that, until his death a year ago in May, 2014, Ralph Bell had a license to destroy the predatory cowbirds who visited his farm near Jefferson, PA, in southwestern PA. That has given many songbirds a great chance to reproduce without interference. And they have! During the mile and a half walk from hilltop hayfields and meadows, through varied habitats, down to the large creek, birders encountered over 70 species of birds. We were thrilled to hear many Cerulean Warblers singing. Other highlights included Northern Parulas, Hooded Warblers, lots of Acadian Flycatchers, Louisiana Waterthrushes, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, American Redstarts, Black and White Warblers and several hawks. Migrating Blackpoll Warblers were singing.

At the house we were treated to the sight and sound of a large Purple Martin colony and Bobolinks in the hayfield. A road-cut outcrop of rock gave us a Phoebe nest and a Black Rat Snake getting ready to shed. The roadsides had many wildflowers, too, including large areas of beautiful Miami Mist. Plant-lovers had the opportunity for in-depth discussions, including the subtle differences between Golden Alexander, Yellow Pimpernel and Hairy-jointed Parsnip. Everyone had returned to the Bell farm by the time the first raindrops started and we enjoyed lunch together under flip-up garage doors. We all appreciate David and Ruth Bell (Ralph's son and his wife) as well as C. David and Leah Bell (Ralph's grandson and his wife) for hosting another wonderful birding walk just as Ralph K. Bell used to do every year.

— Contributed by Jan Runyan

Ohio and York Lodge, Lodge Council of Scottish Rite and Aladdin Temple Shrine of Columbus.

Jim loved to travel and he, or he and his wife Mary visited most countries on the entire world's continents, active as a golfer, he often played in the mixed events and the members tournaments at Scioto Country Club.

He was predeceased by his father and mother, brother Thomas D. Olsen, wife Rachel Green Olsen who died in September of 1967 and wife Mary Huck Olsen who died in December of 2005. James is survived by his daughter, Elizabeth Ann Pillow (Duke) of Lake Worth, Florida; son, James F. Olsen of Carmel, California; and sister, Nancy O. Southworth (John) of Stuarts Draft, Virginia.

CORRESPONDENCE

As you know, I fell and broke my elbow April 14 which is sidelining me until probably July. Can't drive which is a real bummer. Spring and early summer is a wash.

Thank goodness for the BBC. First I'm enjoying seeing what everyone is seeing on the list serv. Gregg Eddy came over Friday and we went birding at McKee Beeschers WMA one of my old haunts and had some good birding—Prairie Warblers, lots of Common Yellowthroats, Redstart, Yellow-rumps in spring plumage, catbirds, Great Blues, grebe, coots, several woodpeckers, and a couple of frogs and turtles. Also Virginia Bluebells. I really appreciated getting out of the house. I was feeling like spring had passed me by. Have a good foray. I'll be there in spirit.

— Jane Whitaker

We received a note from Mary Lee McPherson in early March that her husband, Thomas, passed away January 21, 2014. The BBC wishes to extend our sympathy.

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS AROUND THE STATE



A siskin in the hand...
– photo by Bruni Haydl

17 Ring-billed Gulls & 8 Great Blue Herons.
– Jim & Judy Phillips, Pipestem, WV, 2/6/15

On our trip along the New River today, we watched a river otter eat a very large fish. Parts of the river were frozen all the way across. Bluestone Lake at the mouth of the Bluestone River was completely frozen as far as we could see. We watched an immature Bald Eagle feeding on something on the ice. Three coyotes walked all the way across the lake & spooked a group of 12 wild turkeys. Then the coyotes went back across the lake as a Great Blue Heron flew over.
– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV, 2/20/15

On River Road out of Moorefield about 10:26 this morning, the blue skies filled with eagles. Eagles started flying from sycamore trees. I counted 28 mostly immature Bald Eagles flying from what I assume was a roost last night and another 25 sitting in sycamore trees. Counted 12 'white heads' in the trees. Saw one 'white head' sitting in a tree with an immature sitting right beside it. One Golden Eagle among the immature Bald Eagles. An exciting eagle morning!
– Diane Holsinger, Timberville, VA, 2/24/15

PVAS bird walk - Harpers Ferry – Bright beautiful (and cold) morning along the C&O Canal towpath at Harpers Ferry. The peregrines were not out this morning, but we watched an adult Bald Eagle make circles in the shadow of MD Heights. We also enjoyed seeing the bluebirds, robins and Yellow-rumped Warblers feeding on the swaths of river ice (it looked like the riverside trees had dropped seed there). Song Sparrows were singing. Mike found us our first Ruby-crowned Kinglet of the day (there were 3) and the Hermit Thrush. My favorite part was following the flying flickers - 8 or 9 of them flashing ahead of us on the path, flushing from ground or trees or the canal walls; what a gorgeous sight. Loads of ducks on the water, but the Common Goldeneyes well outnumbered the others - a sea of at least 100 of them in a long slice at the furthest edge of the river from where we walked. At one point, 50+ had taken to the air in a kind of aerial ballet. It was worth struggling along on foot through what felt like frozen tundra to see it all. Thanks to all participants for coming out today to help find these birds!
– Deb Hale, Harpers Ferry/Bolivar, WV, 2/25/15

While working in the valley, I was able to locate 6 shrikes at 4 sites in Pocahontas, Greenbrier and Monroe counties. One site is newly-discovered, near Union. Pairs were at 2 of these sites. Near Renick, I watched a male capture prey and fly to the female on a nearby fence post and feed her. They then sat side by side, touching, for several minutes.
– Rich Bailey, Elkins, WV, 3/30/15

My last spring vacation day here in WV is a beautiful one. I saw mourning cloaks and anglewings (sp), heard spring peepers, and saw red maples and elms in bloom.

Another sign of spring is the arrival of Louisiana Waterthrushes which I heard proclaiming their territories along a creek in Powers Hollow, Cabins, Grant, and along the river in Smokehole canyon, Pendleton. Just 1 singing in each location. I also birded Seneca Rocks visitor center and picnic area. Nothing very exciting but I had a total of 18 phoebes this morning, 6 singing Pine Warblers, 4 Fox Sparrows, and 7 towhees. I also had two Pine Siskins flying over my cabin this morning before I went out birding. In Smokehole canyon, the Common Mergansers were in pairs in different locations along the river so perhaps these are birds that will breed there again this year. No Chipping Sparrows or Yellow-throated Warblers here yet.

– Fred Atwood, Cabins, WV, 3/26/15

At Prickett's Fort State Park in Marion County today I found one of the resident Common Ravens--presumably the female--in apparent incubating position in a handsomely refurbished nest at the top of the old railroad bridge, where a pair has nested for several years now.

Being only Feb. 4, this seemed extremely early to me, and, in fact, it is. According to Birds of North America Online, nest building begins as early as late January, and the only example given indicates it can take 9 days until completion. Eggs can be laid as little as 3-7 days after the nest is completed--as early as mid February. So we have here a very ambitious pair of birds. Maybe they didn't see their shadows a couple of days ago? Has anyone else noted nesting activity for this species yet?

– Terry Bronson, Morgantown, WV, 2/6/15

We sat at the mouth of the Bluestone River, Summers County this evening and saw 8 immature & 5 adult Bald Eagles. Also had 40 Common Mergansers, 12 Hooded Mergansers,



Horned Lark with food
– photo by N. Wade Snyder

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS (con.)

This morning we got our exercise by hiking up the trail at Seneca Rocks. Before leaving I heard a Louisiana Waterthrush singing from our house along the roaring, swollen Horse Camp Run. Then at Seneca Rocks they were singing along the North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac. There were two pairs of Common Mergansers riding the swift current.

At the top of the trail we were treated to a real concert. There were 3 - 4 Pine Warblers singing their sweet, musical trills accompanied by two Chipping Sparrows with their dry trills. Black-capped Chickadees added their piccolo notes. I'm not sure how the squeaky Blue-gray Gnatcatcher fit in. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker didn't add any percussion notes - maybe because its rhythm is bad.

– Herb Myers, Harman, WV, 4/10/15

Rare Faux Tanager – Yesterday--in between downpours-- I heard the clear call of a Scarlet Tanager on the ABU campus. That surprised me a bit, until I saw the bird--it was one of the two hormone-crazed mockingbirds on campus doing a note-perfect Scarlet Tanager imitation.

– Jeff Del Col, Philippi, WV, 4/11/15

There seemed to be a lot of sparrow activity today on the USDA property in Bardane (Wiltshire Road) in spite of the rain showers. Close to 1 pm, I was able to spot my first Grasshopper Sparrow in the company of a large flock of twenty or so Chipping Sparrows and three Field Sparrows. Closer to my work area, I could hear the songs of two singing Savannah Sparrows. I spotted a total of six Savannahs today. The usual flock of eight White-crowned Sparrows are still milling in their favorite thicket which is also close to my work area. I'm not sure how many are rehearsing, but there are plenty of their songs being practiced, mostly in a hushed low key way. In that same thicket, a Song Sparrow likes to include his version as well.

When the rain eased a bit during the afternoon, singing burst out all around the fields with the Eastern Meadowlarks belting out the loudest tunes.

– N. Wade Snyder, Shenandoah Junction, WV, 4/14/15

April is the cruellest month according to Eliot. That rings true to me. And while over the past few days I came across no lilacs out in the waste land, I did run across a few birds.

Sunday evening at Snake Hill found at least 3 Eastern Whip-poor-wills and at least 5 American Woodcock. A few Brown Thrashers, Chipping and Field Sparrows have made their way back as well. Monday evening at the Raven Rock trail had few birds overall, and surprisingly few people enjoying a fine evening. Black-and-white Warbler was really the only obvious arrival. Tuesday insomnia again led to late night Morgantown roaming. Barred Owls and Eastern Screech-Owls are in the Arboretum and at Snake Hill. Great Horned Owls are west of I-79 along Martin Hollow. A few nocturnal flight calls were heard in a couple hours out in the field. Snipe were moving as were Chipping Sparrows. Nothing major though. Unsurprising given the conditions.

Today had a pair of Caspian Terns at Cheat Lake Park as I walked in the rain. 3 Forster's Tern at the Star City Sewage Plant. Other than those it was just a few Bufflehead with the regular Mallard and Canada Geese.

– Derek Courtney, Morgantown, WV, 4/16/15

Took maybe an hour this afternoon and relaxed the old-fashioned way: lying back on blanket on backyard grass with baby. My view bordered by privet hedge, bare linden tree branches and the budding chartreuse leaves of Norway maple. The canvas a moving mixture of puffy



A rare Common Redpoll for his area
– photo by Wil Hershberger

clouds and blues sky. Black Vultures floated by, way up in the clouds; one of them I thought might be a Bald Eagle. I ran to get my binoculars. A little later, two large birds - shaped like a cross as cormorants are - flew by heading northwest - serious migrants. Common Loons. A Sharp-Shinned Hawk crossed the canvas closer to earth. Then a couple of Tree Swallows. A heavenly way to pass an hour.

– Deb Hale, Harpers Ferry/Bolivar, WV, 4/17/15

Yesterday, 4/29/2015, 9:30 a.m., I saw and heard a Swainson's Warbler near the confluence of Kanawha Fork and Middlelick Branch beside Kanawha State Forest. I first heard the SWWA, followed by a Louisiana Waterthrush. Both sang a few more times before I saw the SWWA only 17 feet away on a low branch of a beech tree at an old road edge. He was only four feet off the ground. The LOWA landed on the same branch, bobbed his tail a few times, when the SWWA suddenly chased and tangled with him to the ground. Definitely an interspecific brawl. This observation was in the same vicinity of observations in spring/summer of 2014 and 2013.

– Doug Wood, Coal Mountain, WV, 4/30/15

– **Sightings taken from
WVBird ListServ**



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ADD MEMBERS

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CHAPTER HAPPENINGS

BIBBEE CHAPTER

June 6, 2015 – 8:00-12:00 PM. Birding at Betsy Reeder's Cave Ridge property. Meet at Hinton DQ and travel up Rt. 3 to the property. Contact Betsy Reeder er-eeder44@msn.com.

June 13, 2015 – Grandview NPS Birding and lunch. Meet at the Grandview parking lot at 9:00 AM. We will join the birding group at Grandview NPS for a morning of birding. Then we are invited to lunch and birding at Alma Lowry's house. Contact Alma for information at jalowry@suddenlink.net

July 11, 2015 – 9:00- 12:00 PM. Blueberry Hill near Flat Top, WV, for berries and birds. We enjoy this trip to pick berries, bird and spend time with friends. Contact Alma for information at jalowry@suddenlink.net

August 29, 2015 – 8:30- whenever you need to leave. Plan to share lunch with us. Trip to the Bluestone Wildlife Mgmt. Area (Bertha Campground) for late summer plants, butterflies, dragonflies, and birds. Meet at Bellepoint Park in Hinton to travel to the area. Contact Mindy Waldron for information at mwaldron@suddenlink.net.

HEADQUARTERS CHAPTER

June 21, 2015 – Picnic and field trip at Malv and Rosie Campbell's begins at 2 pm.

July 11, 2015 – Picnic and Field trip at Bill Mead's begins at 2 pm.

MOUNTWOOD CHAPTER

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

June 11, 2015 – Crown City Wildlife Area, Ohio. 7:00am, Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339 / Rt. 7; bring lunch.

June 17-19, 2015 – Canaan Valley – overnight. Details later.

August Coordinator: Dick Esker (304-863-8765)

August 13, 2015 – Sandy Creek Back-

water & area. 9:00am, first parking lot, Northwest Drive.

August 27, 2015 – Greenbottom WMA. 7:00am, Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339 / Rt. 7; bring lunch.

NOTE: Call coordinator for possible changes in locations and/or additional locations for August.

September Coordinator: Jeanie Hilton (304-428-8641)

September 3, 2015 – Open to suggestions. Details later.

September 5, 2015 – SATURDAY - Annual Picnic. 5:00pm, McDonough Log Cabin "A," bring covered dish, drink and service.

September 12, 2015 – SATURDAY - Mountwood Park. 8:00am, Kroger's on 7th Street or 8:15am at beach area (near torpedo), bring lunch.

NATURE HAPPENINGS AROUND THE STATE

POTOMAC VALLEY AUDUBON

June 10, 2015 – Bird Walk at the Blue Ridge Tract (WMA) in Shannondale, 7:30 AM. Join Jim Farley on a birding trip to the Blue Ridge Tract Wildlife Managed Area in Shannondale 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. For more information, contact Jim Farley at jamesfarley@frontiernet.net or 540-686-2056.

June 27, 2015 – Bird Walk at Final Attack Trail, Antietam National Battlefield, 7:30 AM. Join Sandy Sagalkin on a bird walk at the Final Attack Trail/Otto Farm at Antietam National Battlefield. The Potomac Valley Audubon is co-sponsoring this bird walk with the Washington County Bird Club. Participants should meet at Burnside Bridge parking area on the Antietam National Battlefield.

July 25, 2015 – Bird Walk at Final Attack Trail, Antietam National Battlefield, 7:30 a.m. Details same as above. Contact Sandy Sagalkin at monsansagalkin@myactv.net or 240-291-6465 with any questions.

September 18-20, 2015 – Seventh Annual Berkeley Springs Fall Birding Festival, Berkeley Springs, WV. Sponsored by PVAS. Details to be announced. Specific events will include walks, workshops and evening presentations for beginning and intermediate birders and families with children.

WV STATE PARK ACTIVITIES

June 13, 2015 – Nature Hike, Tygart Lake State Park. Master Naturalists are volunteering to lead this hike. Join them for a summer walk. Hike begins at the Nature Center at 10:00 am. Explore what Mother Nature has to offer us for the sights, sounds and smells of summer. Guides are Master Naturalists Gary Niezgodna and Dorothy Hood. Contact: 304-265-6144.

June 20, 2015 – “Wings of Wonder” - Birds of Prey, Beech Fork State Park. “Who cooks for me, who cooks for you all?” What bird says this phrase? Come to this Birds of Prey Education Program featuring live birds native to West Virginia to learn about owls, hawks and eagles. You’ll learn about the habitat, diet and behavior of each bird presented, the most common causes of injury to each species and the laws protecting these special birds. No fee to attend. Open to the public. 7:00 p.m. Contact: 304-528-5794. *Note: This program will be repeated at different WV State Park locations throughout the summer.*

June 22-27, 2015 – Wilderness Survival & Primitive Bushcraft Five Night Workshop, Seneca State Forest. For five nights and six days, learn the basics of primitive bushcraft skills that includes making cordage, establishing shelter, creating fire, foraging wild edibles, procuring & purifying water, land navigation, field sanitation and hygiene, fashioning tools, constructing traps and snares, preserving meat, preparing bannock and pem-

mican, bird/song identification, plant and tree identification and more. This is an reality adventure and experience by conducted by Forest Manna Outdoors. This high adventure event shares, sustains, preserves the primitive bushcraft skills associated with West Virginia’s proud Appalachian history, heritage, and culture and enhance the diversity of outdoor recreational opportunities offered at West Virginia State Parks and Forests. Contact: 304-531-3683.

July 9, 2015 – Geology! Rocks, Blackwater Falls State Park. Don’t know limestone from sandstone or granite from gravel? Enjoy this evening program presented by the West Virginia Geological Survey to explore the mysteries of “rock.” Great for everyone, especially scouting groups, families, future geologist or just the curious. Meet in Blackwater Falls Lodge Conference Center. 7:30 p.m. Contact: 304-259-5216.

August 1, 2015 – Nature Walk - “What’s That Strange Thing”, Blennerhassett State Park. Make a Bird Nest” – Nature Hunt Come to the island! Get outside and explore the island. Learn how birds build their nests. We’ll weave a nest of our own using natural materials. Learn more about birds in the Ohio River area. Listen and watch for feathered friends. Activity begins at 2:00pm and concludes around 3:15pm. There is no fee to participate. Contact: 304-420-4800.

SOUTHERN WEST VIRGINIA SPRING EAGLE SURVEY

Our 8th spring eagle survey was conducted in southern West Virginia on Saturday, March 14, 2015. Twenty-nine observers watched for eagles from sites along the New, Greenbrier and Bluestone Rivers in Summers and Raleigh Counties and along Indian Creek in Monroe County. Rain was a hindrance for the day as well as flooding from recent snow melt and rain. Some of the usual sites were difficult if not impossible to reach. Seven of

the eight sites recorded eagle activity including observations of three nests. A total of 24 bald eagles (adults accounting for half of the total) were seen for the day producing the second highest count for the spring event. In 2014, we had 29 eagles.

The Barger Springs nest has been monitored by B. Price, S. Richmond, S. Ogden & R. Davis. One egg was observed and Sharyn was able to photograph it. Since then, the adults have spent hours away from the nest and no egg or young have been visible. We assume it has been abandoned.

The Bluestone pair seemed to be sitting tight until a female was brought in to TRAC with a wing injury (part of the wing had to be amputated) and high lead levels. Increased monitoring of the nest produced concern that the TRAC bird was the female from that nest – a redtail was seen perched next to the nest without being chased, no birds were in or next to the nest, then one adult was seen near the nest, then two adults suddenly were aggressively defending the nest area against a 4th year bird and an adult. We believe the nest has failed. I think the high density of eagles in the Pits area may put some stress on the Bluestone pair.

The Brooks Island pair continued to take turns covering at least one egg. On April 2, J. Worles, R. & W. Perrone and J. Phillips were able to view at least one young bird in the nest (thanks to those who brought scopes, since I forgot mine). During the afternoon shift, S. Richmond observed a raft with two fishermen approaching the nest area of the island. Both adult eagles became extremely agitated. NPS law enforcement rangers were notified. Two rangers took Sam’s statement and he provided them with photographs of the incident. They also went in pursuit of the fishermen.



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The last vestiges of winter

– *Oregon Junco photo*
by Randy Bodkins

highvirginiaoutdoors.blogspot.com

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