



THE MAIL BAG

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RYAN TOMAZIN - EDITOR

Editor's Note

There has been plenty to make the first half of this year good, with enthusiastic speakers and trip coordinators leading many of the club in meetings, programs and outings. Foray will be in full swing when the non-attendees receive The Mail Bag, and we hope for good weather, great birds and much enjoyment for all involved.

That said, it has also been a very sad last four months, with the BBC losing Dottie Sanders, Don Shearer, and most recently Eileen Higbee, all long-time members who participated in a myriad of events. All were friends to us, and all will be missed. All this was made more tragic in the last two months (and indeed in the last few days) by the early passings of both Bill Thompson III and now his mother, Elsa. Most everyone knew that Bill was suffering from an aggressive, recently diagnosed cancer, and he went to be with the eternal birding community at the end of March. Two months later, to the day, Elsa passed away as the result of a house fire in her Marietta, Ohio, home. We are all shocked by this, perhaps even more than by Bill's death. As you may read online in a number of forums, Bill actually wrote to us all, preparing us and letting us know that he was okay, and that we should be too. To the Thompson family and others, the Brooks Bird Club mourns with you, and we'll remember Bill and Elsa with love and mirth, two emotions that always emanated from them in warm, glorious waves.



Further on in this issue, some people emailed remembrances of Bill and Elsa. I will add mine here. I remember meeting Bill at the Upshur County Foray in 2002, where he did a program and birded with us. I have distant memories of lightheartedness and knowledge. The next year at Foray, I won a copy of his "Birding For Dummies" guide, which I still keep. Later, we met at a Three Rivers Bird Club program, and he performed for us at the 85th anniversary, where I captured a sweet video of him singing "My Dream Of Flying Dreams", with his mother smiling proudly from the crowd.

I was happy to finally meet Elsa face-to-face a few years ago when we were discussing the writing of an article on Foray for Bird Watcher's Digest. Over lunch with her and Bill III, their comedic interplay was in evidence, as was their fondness for each other and the Brooks Bird Club. The club meant so much to them, and them to us. Sweet 'flying dreams' to you both.

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT, JANICE EMRICK

As the 80th Foray approaches, I am thinking of all the people I have met and birded with over the past 30 years. There have been many outstanding birders, plant gurus, butterfly experts, etc. over the years. One of the best was Bill Thompson III. He only attended a few of the forays that I did, but his impact was always felt. He was truly a nice guy, eager to share his knowledge with others, and had the ability to make everyone feel like they were a special friend of his. He always had a big smile and was able to point out the birds and songs so everyone got a chance to see and hear them. Scott and I also attended a few other events where he was, including a few Midwest Birding Symposiums, the Bird Expo in Columbus, and others. We will truly miss his enthusiasm for all things bird, and we want to extend our condolences to all who loved him.

Speaking of Foray, to those who have never attended this is an awesome outdoor adventure. It really should be called a Nature Camp as we explore everything to do with the natural world outdoors. Our main focus is birds, but we also delve into other topics such as butterflies, mushrooms, geology, plants, herps, and anything else anyone has an interest in. We have a lot of fun and learn a lot. If you can't make it this year, please plan on attending in the future. I think you will like it!

– Janice Emrick, BBC President

TWO BBC CHIMNEY SWIFT TOWERS ERECTED



The BBC currently has a Chimney Swift tower program for our chapters and affiliates. To date, two towers have been completed. Here are photos from the site constructions. Photos 1-5 on left by Jim Triplett, photo 6 by Richard Gregg. Photos on right by Larry Helgerman, except for photo 4 by Chase (Schradler Center).



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: jslater1120@yahoo.com

Go to www.brooksbirdclub.org for more photos and information

POPULAR BIRDER, PUBLISHER AND BBC MEMBER BILL THOMPSON PASSES



Bill, with presumably clean binoculars – photo from Facebook.com

*Published March 28, 2019,
at www.mariettatimes.com*

William Henry Thompson III, of Whipple, Ohio, was taken by pancreatic cancer on March 25, 2019. He was born March 3, 1962, in Pella, Iowa, and spent his early years in a rickety farmhouse with room to roam. His family spent nine glorious years in Pella with many dear friends. It's said that Billy's first word was "junco," and the first bird he remembered seeing through binoculars at age six was a snowy owl.

The Thompsons moved to Marietta, Ohio, in 1971; Bill's dad (Bill Thompson, Jr.) went to work at Marietta College, and his mom Elsa joined a local bird watching group, the Betsey Birders. Over time, Bill and his brother Andy's interest in birds surged, and their weekly bird watching excursions with Marietta Times nature columnist Pat Murphy enhanced their skills tremendously.

In 1978, the family launched *Bird Watcher's Digest* in their living room on Warren Street with family friend Bill Sheppard. Elsa's passion for birds combined with her husband's journalism background made the magazine a success. Bill III graduated from Marietta High School in 1980, with the It. Richard N. Christy Leadership award for many accomplishments, including his work as editor of the school newspaper and his service as President of the Marietta High School Band.

Bill's parents (Bill Thompson Jr. and Elsa Ekenstierna Thompson) met at Marietta College when Elsa auditioned as a singer for his band. Music was in young Bill's blood; among his earliest memories was sitting on the stairs, listening to his parents and family friends playing live music in the living room below. With the encouragement of legendary musician (and unofficial uncle) Bruce DeMoll, Bill took up bass, later switching to guitar. His most successful bands were The New Chameleons, The Swinging Orangutangs and The Rain Crows. Bill produced and recorded the Rain Crows' second CD, *Dream of Flying Dream*, in 2013.

Bill graduated in 1984 with a B.A. in philosophy from Western College at Miami University. His junior year, spent in London, made Bill a world citizen and fanned his lust for travel. After returning home and completing his studies at Miami, he worked part time in restaurants and played bass in a Columbus band. An invitation to a press trip to Israel in 1985 introduced Bill to the larger world of birding. He moved to New York, working as an event planner for Ogilvie and Mather. During his three years there, he earned the nickname "Thumper." In 1988, Bill joined *Bird Watcher's Digest* at its Baltimore office, where he learned the art of editing from longtime Editor Mary Beacom Bowers.

Bill met natural history writer/artist Julie Zickefoose at the World Series of Birding in May 1991, and they were married in 1993. They relocated from Baltimore to Whipple around that time, building a birding tower atop their home. Daughter Phoebe Linnea was born in 1996; William Henry Thompson IV (Liam) followed in 1999.

Bill wrote books from home while editing and publishing BWD, including *The New Birder's Guide to Birds of North America*; *Identify Yourself*; *Bird Homes and Habitats*; *Identifying and Feeding Birds*; *Bird Watching for Dummies*; and *All Things Reconsidered: My Birding Adventures* by Roger Tory Peterson, which he edited.

His blog, *Bill of the Birds*, was succeeded by the popular birding podcasts *This Birding Life* and *Out There With the Birds*. Bill and his brother/partner Andy worked together at BWD to develop and market a best-selling Backyard Booklet Series with sixteen titles.

Bill continued expanding the mission of *Bird Watcher's Digest*, hosting the Midwest Birding Symposium and creating the American Birding Expo in 2014. He had a knack for creating community among BWD subscribers and especially for encouraging newcomers and children to take up bird watching. Under his vision, BWD Reader Rendezvous have taken subscriber tours to 11 states and six foreign countries since 2014. Bill launched Redstart Birding, an optics, equipment and expertise venture, in 2018. All the while, he traveled tirelessly, speaking, guiding and giving the gift of music to birding festivals throughout the U.S. and the world. Aided by his supportive and hardworking staff at BWD, Bill was at full strength as a leader and force in the birding world when he was struck down.

Alongside birdwatching and music, Bill was a lifelong fan of the Pittsburgh Pirates, and passed his undying love for the team and game along to Phoebe. He was a grilling virtuoso who loved to fire up the charcoal for gatherings of friends and family. He also found great joy in starting up his Massey Ferguson (when it cooperated), building fires and roasting hotdogs and s'mores with Liam, and cracking open several Heinekens at the end of a long day.

His awards include a Service Citizen Award from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; a Moonlight Book Medal for *The New Birder's Guide to Birds of North America*; and a Nichee Award for Best Consumer Hobbyist Magazine from Niche Magazine. In 2009, he was nominated for a Heart of Green Award for fighting nature deficit disorder in children. Bill received the American Birding Association's Robert Ridgway

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NOTES FROM ROSIE CAMPBELL



*Short-eared Owl in silhouette –
photo by Rosie Campbell*

Feb. 9 – Short-eared Owl Trip

About a dozen BBCers met at the Barnesville (Rt. 800) Park'n Ride for a drive through the Dickinson Longhorn Ranch and surrounding area. (This is where the Bobolink Bonanza was held last year and will be again Sat, June 1st. Birding will be morning until noon, then there are demonstrations on 'scopes and binoculars by Cabella's. At two p.m. is an optional tour of the longhorn ranch to view the impressive long-horned cattle.)

Driving the roads there, we saw several raptors, mostly red-tailed hawks and turkey vultures. We had a good look at a perched Northern Harrier and found a few ducks on the still mostly-frozen ponds.

Our best find, on a back road near Mt Ollivett, (near Barnesville) was an open grasslands area where several Short-eared Owls were flying. The owls were out early on a sunny evening and were beautifully back-lit. They were seen flying, perched on the ground, fence posts and hay feeders for the cattle. Also in the distance, we saw several small herds of deer and a lone coyote hunting.

At dusk, we made a short drive up Egypt Valley looking for ducks and did find a few. Some of the group went to Schlepp's for supper together.

Feb. 28-Mar. 1 – Killbuck Marsh

Eighteen BBCers met at the McDonald's in Sugar Creek and drove on to Killbuck. Our first stop was a good one, with several kinds of ducks, a fly-over of Trumpeter Swans and several Sandhill Cranes. We found one group of sandhills at the far edge of the marsh that we thought might be forty or more.

(Had these many cranes been herons, the collective name would have been a "siege;" or if they had been storks, a "mustering," but Lipton gives no collective name for a flock of cranes.)

At every stop, we found ducks and Canada Geese. Most of the ducks were Mallards and pintails, but before the trip ended, we had counted about all the species of waterfowl we expected except Green-winged Teal and Common Mergansers.

We ate lunch at the Pine Tree Barn, then birded on, finding a few more species. At one place, we saw seventeen eagles, mostly immatures. Mostly, the eagles were perched in trees or sitting on the ground, but occasionally one would make a pass over the water causing a cloud of ducks to fly up and fill the air till the eagle perched again.

In late afternoon, we parked at a grassy area along the marsh and found several Northern Harriers. At least three of the beautiful male "gray ghosts" were flying in sight of us at once. As it grew later, the harriers retired and Short-eared Owls came out. We watched until dark, then checked into our hotel. We had our evening meal at an Italian restaurant, then retired for the night.

Next morning, we set off for a new area, one mentioned in the book by the Amish boy who wrote *A Big Year With Bicycle and Backpack*. At Prairie Lane Marsh we found more varieties of ducks; this included the first shovelers of the trip. We might have found more here but were hindered by limited parking and by the sun shining directly in our eyes. A shrike was reported in this area, but we didn't see it.

We drove on to Messner Road and found a woods full of Red-headed Woodpeckers!



The Killbuck group at the woodpecker spot – photo by Rosie Campbell

After watching them a while, we took a group photo of ourselves here to commemorate the great birding.

At noon, we drove back to Berlin for lunch at the Farm House, a pretty place decorated with photos of the Amish country and some beautiful quilts. We had a good meal and were entertained by a flock of robins and Cedar Waxwings feeding in a crab apple tree outside the window. Some of the group made a last stop at Time and Optics before driving home.

Mar. 12 – Bethany/Ohio River Islands Birding

We drove to Ohio River Islands wildlife area. We weren't the first to arrive and began looking for birds while we waited for the others. There weren't many. Jay Buckelew came, and Larry Helgerman. (Mary has just had a knee replacement.) We saw one Great Blue Heron, a pair of Common Mergansers and a few small birds, sparrows, jays, titmice, chickadees, etc. 14 species were seen or heard.

We drove on to a hillside where there is an eagle's nest. We could not see if there was an eagle on the nest, but one was perched nearby. Jay left us after we'd seen the eagle. Then there were just the four of us.

We made a pit stop at Bethany College and birded in that area a while. At a marshy place, we found more ducks and at a nearby lake, we found ducks and mergansers. The only raptors besides the eagles were Red-tailed Hawks, Turkey Vultures and kestrels. We stopped along a country road to look for Red-headed Woodpeckers, but didn't find any.

We had a good lunch at the Breezy Heights. It is a fairly nice restaurant out in the middle of nowhere, on a high, windy hilltop. The owner was a big game hunter and there are mounts of nearly every African animal except elephant, and several North American big game mounts. Some are only head mounts, but many are full mounts: a huge lion, a tiger, several antelope, a white-tail buck etc.

The house special there is broasted chicken. Janice, Scott and Larry all had that. Having just had chicken at home, I had fish. (Very good and I brought half home for later.)

Our best birding stop was on very high hills to look for Horned Larks. There were quite a few flying around, but none allowed me a photo.

Mar. 30 – Shreve Migration Sensation

Today's agenda was the speakers, vendors, and wildlife department displays at the new location. Before, it had been held in the Shreve elementary school. It's now going to be in a big church pavilion.

We went first to some of our usual



*Sandhill Crane in flight –
photo by Rosie Campbell*

Killbuck Marsh birding locations. It was sprinkling when we first got there and seemed to rain harder at each stop. There were a good many ducks, but some were quite far off and could only be seen with "scopes." At the second stop where the

road goes out into the marsh and dead-ends, we saw a large flock of Sandhill Cranes, a big occupied heron rookery, a Bald Eagle on her nest and a few distant ducks.

At Wright Marsh, we walked about a mile out the long causeway, seeing nothing but a few song sparrows. Once out there, we did find ducks, a large raft of widgeon and other assorted waterfowl. While we watched these, it began to rain much harder. We all had raincoats and Scott had worn rain pants. I wished I had too as my jeans got wet and I was chilly the rest of the day, though it was by no means a cold day (mostly in the mid- to upper fifties).

We had a bit of a drive-around locating the church, but were soon there. It was very nice, but we noticed right away there were NO vendors! There are usually optics, birding equipment, bird houses, nature art work, and sundry other interesting things for sale. (None here. We wondered if it was because it was a church property?)

Several wildlife outfits had displays and a little handout literature. There were live reptiles, amphibians, and some small raptors; screech owl, kestrel, and peregrine falcon. We looked at these displays and talked to some folks that Emricks had met before. We just had time to eat our bag lunches before the speakers began.

The first was a talk by a game warden on ducks. Very good! He showed slides and told us ways to recognize different duck species, divers or dabblers, markings, locations etc. A good talk and I could hear him fairly well. We'd taken front seats.

At the end, he answered questions and showed how to tell a duck's age by the white line on its wings at the edge of the secondaries. I asked where one could purchase the fiberglass nesting boxes the Dept of Wildlife uses. He thought the shells for them could be bought where they sell acetylene materials for welding.

The second speaker was Cheryl Kearns. We've heard her before on butterflies and she is very good. Today, her subject was Sandhill Cranes. I was very interested and she spoke well, but didn't hold her microphone closely. I could not hear much of her talk. I was sorry I couldn't get more of it.

The last speakers were a father-daughter team talking about birding adventures. They were GOOD! Their slides were excellent, the talk both informative and amusing. The girl, especially, was funny. They went a few minutes over their allotted time, but everyone would like to have heard more from them.

Leaving Shreve, we checked out Funk Bottoms and a couple other sites, finding more ducks and more rain. It was still in the fifties, but seemed much colder.

THE WONDERS OF MAGEE MARSH

by Bob Rine

The wonders of Magee Marsh continue to excite and amaze. My daughter and I made our annual visit May 3-7 to the 7-acre wetland with a boardwalk at the west end of Lake Erie, a prime migration route. Author Kenn Kaufman calls it "the warbler capital of the world" in May and he's right.

We were greeted by hundreds of kinglets, in almost every tree, but didn't see one with a crown. Could they all have been female ruby-crowned, which don't have a crown? On our last day, we got a good look at a male ruby-crowned and his crown.

The most abundant warblers were yellows and black-throated blues. And there were a lot of sprightly Blue-gray Gnatcatchers around. We got good looks at the Cape May and parula warblers, among the 17 species we saw (23 last year). We were too early, I guess, for the bay-breasted and prothonotary, which we always hope to get.

There are two Bald Eagle nests and we saw them often, on the nests and circling. There were newly hatched eaglets in one nest, which we got glimpses of. A couple of sleeping owls, screech and later great-horned, caused a traffic jam on the boardwalk. Another highlight was a singing House Wren at his nest hole.

Our total of 78 species, 17 of them warblers, including the spectacular blackburnian, with its flaming orange throat, made it another thoroughly enjoyable weekend at the Marsh.



EILEEN HIGBEE PASSES

Eileen L. Higbee, 95, of Finleyville died Sunday, May 5, 2019 at the Fountains of Indiana Care Home in Indiana, Pa.

She was born April 6, 1924 in Venetia; a daughter of Benjamin D. and Ethel Patton Lewis.

Mrs. Higbee was retired as a clerk with the U.S. Postal Service in Gastonville. She also was employed as a glider inspector at the H.J. Heinz plant in Pittsburgh during WWII

She was a member of Wright's United Methodist Church in Venetia, the Venetia Heritage Society, Peters Creek Historical Society and Brooks Bird Club of Wheeling.

Mrs. Higbee enjoyed reading, knitting and bird watching.

Surviving are two sons, Roger Higbee (Margaret) of Indiana and Brian Higbee (Kathy) of Springfield, VA; a daughter, Aimee Earley (Steve) of Parkersburg, WV; a sister, Gwendolyn Botti of Beaver; four grandchildren, Rob (Stephanie) and Jon (Heidi) Higbee and David (Katie) and Ashley Earley; four great grandchildren, Jocelynn, Ella, Chase and Penny Higbee; and many nieces and nephews.

Deceased are her husband, William "Bill" Higbee, who died in February of 2015, and sisters, Thelma Boyd and Davida Stehle.

Photos from the Higbee Photo archive



THERE WERE GIANTS *by Dave Gibson at birdpartner.com*

There were giants. We just lost a giant in the world of poetry, Mary Oliver. If you haven't done so already, kindly read my tribute to her. We also just lost a giant in the world of birding and bird conservation, Dr. Tom Cade. He was the driving force behind the recovery of the federally endangered Peregrine Falcon.

Much like the Osprey, the Peregrine Falcon experienced significant population declines in the mid-20th century largely due to the widespread use of DDT. The residual effects of the pesticide's use caused eggshell thinning—and often, crushing—dramatically reducing the species' reproductive rates. Its numbers plummeted as a result, and its extinction as a nesting species in the U.S. seemed inevitable. By the late 1960s, the Peregrine Falcon had been extirpated from the eastern U.S., and only about 40 mating pairs remained in the West.

Dr. Cade, an ornithologist and experienced falconer, who was intimately familiar with and passionate about the species, understood what was happening. He went to work to ban DDT, and he went to work to save the Peregrine. He would also go on to cofound the Peregrine Fund—an organization that has been responsible for the recovery of not only the Peregrine Falcon but also many other endangered raptor species, including the iconic California Condor.

In 1970, Dr. Cade and others started a successful captive breeding program at Cornell University in New York. That program served as a model for future programs like the Peregrine Fund's Condor Reintroduction Project. Birds that hatched and were raised at Cornell in a specially built breeding barn with 3-story-high stalls were later released into the wild. Good numbers of those birds in the now relatively chemical-free environment went on to mate and produce young. And the Peregrine population recovered (owing in large part to Dr. Cade's vision and hard work). According to Tim Gallagher in "Mission Accomplished," "[Dr. Cade, his staff, and volunteers had] a profound passion for these birds and an inability to imagine a world without [them]. What they accomplished was one of the greatest successes in the field of endangered species management."

BILL THOMPSON (CONT.)

Award for Excellence in Ornithological Publications, followed by their Roger Tory Peterson Award for Promoting the Cause of Birding, given and eloquently received by Bill on the morning of his passing.

Bill Thompson III is survived by his wife, Julie Zickefoose, of Whipple; his children, Phoebe Linnea and William Henry (Liam); his beloved partner, Wendy Clark; his mother, Elsa Ekenstierna Thompson; his brother, Andrew Miller Thompson; his sister, Laura Thompson Dauber; his sister-in-law Jade Daniel Thompson; his brother-in-law William Dauber; his niece, Annalea Thompson; his nephews Nathaniel and August Thompson; and nephew John David (Jake) Rudie. He was preceded in death by his father, William

Henry Thompson Jr.; his grandfathers, William Henry Thompson and Harvey Conrad Ekenstierna; grandmothers Margaret Miller Thompson and Anna Scott Ekenstierna; his great aunt Laura Katherine Miller and great uncle, Luther Conrad Miller.



Bill's death is a huge loss to the birding world and to me personally. He brought joy and knowledge into every encounter I had with him. He loved the Brooks Bird Club and would credit the club with inspiring his love and knowledge of birds regardless of who the audience was. I participated in several BWD Reader Rendezvous trips and can attest to what Jeff Gordon, ABA President, said

BILL THOMPSON (CONT.)

about Bill. He really did clean everyone's binoculars. He was a gracious, thoughtful and fun trip leader and is greatly missed.

– Carol McCullough

I remember being on van birding sessions with him at two different events and both times he insisted that we must all have clean optics. He had us pass them forward to him and so he could clean them for us.

– Pat Brannon

Good-Bye BT3.

Some things are just plain wrong, and there's absolutely nothing anyone can do about it. Last fall my friend, Bill Thompson III, editor and co-publisher of Bird Watcher's Digest (BWD), began feeling poorly. In mid-December he was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer. He was 57 when he died on March 25.

Bill cemented his reputation in the birding world with a blog and two podcasts. And since 2014, his BWD Reader Rendezvous have led readers on birding adventures to 11 states and six countries. When it came to birds, Bill was simply indefatigable.

Bill was also a talented musician and songwriter. At birding festivals, his group, The Rain Crows, often performed for enthusiastic audiences. I remember one day at West Virginia's New River Birding Festival a few years ago when he grabbed his guitar and serenaded the crowd: "Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be cowbirds." That pretty much sums up Bill's life and attitude as a birder-musician.

Another insightful memory of Bill is a quote by Charles Lindbergh he once shared with me. "If I had to choose, I'd rather have birds than airplanes."

I first met Bill back in the early 1990s. His parents invited their sons, a photographer, an artist, and a few writers to their home to get some outside perspectives on the magazine. Bill was one of those people who never met a stranger. We stayed in touch ever since.

Though we only saw each other a few times a year, I considered Bill a good friend. For a span of about 15 years, we'd connect at the New River Festival, where

we'd usually get to guide at least one field trip together.

In fact, my most vivid memory of Bill comes from one of those field trips. I had often heard Swainson's Warbler, but Bill knew I had never been able to see one well enough to add it to my life list. As we got off the bus for lunch by a boulder-strewn river, Bill pulled me aside and said, "There's a good chance you'll get your Swainson's today."

Next thing I knew, Bill was scanning some dense vegetation with his binoculars. Others had already gathered behind him to see what had caught his eye. Then he whispered, "Watch for movement. There it is... Swainson's!" It was a life bird for most of the group.

But even that wasn't good enough for Bill. He always tried to get everyone to see every bird through his scope. And that is no easy task. But he did it. And always with patience and good humor. That's how I finally got my Swainson's Warbler.

I also remember Bill as a favorite guest on my weekly radio show. Several times he came on to promote two of his favorite projects - the Midwest Birding Symposium and the American Birding Expo. And every time he published a new book, I loved hearing him explain how the book came to be.

Bill was a great radio guest. He was knowledgeable, articulate, entertaining, and always full of fascinating stories. I so enjoyed those conversations that I often forgot anyone else was listening.

No one ever promised that life was fair; losing Bill Thompson III at age 57 is proof of that.

In the words of a great Steve Miller song, Bill, "...fly like an eagle to the sea..." until you're free.

– Scott Shalaway



STATE BIG DAY RESULTS

Bryan Smith and I just completed our big day in Cabell and surrounding counties (includes Lawrence & Gallia, OH). We set off at 5 a.m., expecting to get soaked and see very few birds, but the rain held off until late evening and we finished at 10 p.m. In total we saw 136 species.

– Josh Holland, 5/4/19

It was a beautiful day in Summers County. Allen and I did our usual route, but this time we did it in reverse order. We started down Zion Mountain Road to Bertha then returned via Seminole Road. We had great birds. Jim and Judy Phillips worked their area. Ann McRae and Margaret Hanks handled the Hinton area. Jim Phillips compiled the results and noted 91 species. Total species numbers were the lowest in recent years. This is Jim's 48th annual spring count. Quite an accomplishment.

– Mindy Waldron, 5/11/19

Mimi Kibler, Steve Kimbrell, Herb Myers, Jim and Bev Triplett, and I braved a soggy Mother's Day for our Tucker County spring bird count. Our total of 93 species was well below the norm but quite a success considering the weather. Most exciting bird to me was a Purple Martin found by Mimi and Steve in Parsons. It was the first sighting I've heard of in the county.

– Casey Rucker, 5/12/19

On May 14 Derrick Kolling and I did a count starting around 4:00 am at Green Bottom WMA. We worked our way upriver to McClintic WMA, then back downriver to Huntington before proceeding to Beech Fork SP to end the day around 7:30 p.m. We found 101 species.

We heard at least three woodcocks calling near Pete Meadows Cemetery. Species of relatively high abundance included Spotted Sandpiper, Acadian Flycatcher, and both Tennessee and cerulean warblers. However, we did not find a Carolina Chickadee until late in the day. The best bird may have been the Common Tern flying below RCB Locks & Dam; second might have been the female Hooded Merganser at the fish hatchery.

– John Hubbard, 5/14/19

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS AROUND THE STATE

I had a great day birding today, making a big loop through Hardy (Wardensville wastewater ponds, Kimsey Run Lake, and Teets Cattle Farm pond), Grant (Thorn Run, Belle Babb, Martin, Stony River Dam Rd, Hogueland, my cabin, South Mill Creek Lake), and Pendleton (Franklin Wastewater ponds, Brushy Fork, Big and Little Stony, Little Fork, and Broad Run), mostly to check to see what waterfowl were around.

I found 74 species including 20 species of waterfowl (25 if you include loons, grebes, coot and gull), as well as a Golden Eagle, and calling flyover Red Crossbill. Most exciting were TWO Red-throated Loons, one at Kimsey Run Lake and the other in Pendleton at the end of the day at Broad Run Lake. This was a state lifer for me. Another unusual bird for the area was the female Long-tailed Duck at Belle Babb. It was only my second in WV. Please remember if you bird this lake, to park off the road at entrance to the small dirt road just upstream from the upper end of the lake where it floods back into the woods and meadow. This road's name has the word "Rail" in it. Also do not go beyond the fence. The landowners are friendly if you obey these two rules. I bumped into Aaron Graham a little later and he said he saw the same long-tailed duck a little earlier in the day.

I finished the day at Broad Run Lake in Brandywine (Pendleton). The lake had over 150 waterfowl in it including some unidentified dabblers flying in at near-darkness. Also a screech owl was calling and I heard the chirping notes of a woodcock display flight once.

– Fred Atwood, Cabins, WV, 3/2/19

We were watching our feeders this morning when we noticed a strange-looking Red-winged Blackbird. It was a normal appearing male but with a cream colored bib. When we checked it with binoculars we found the bib contained a wash of red coloring in it.

Last year, we had a red-wing with a bib but we didn't notice the red in the bib. Same bird? Who knows.

A few years ago, I had an Oregon Junco to show up on Pipestem S.P. It had a white spot on the dark chest. It was usually at park headquarters and the nearby Canyon Rim Center. It remained all winter. A bird with the same markings showed up every winter in the same area for at least 4 years in a row.

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV, 3/8/19

Checked a Bald Eagle nest in Gilmer County today. Female was sitting on the nest for about half an hour before male appeared with food for her. I watched her eat but didn't see her feed young. Nice addition was an Eastern Meadowlark singing song and chatters in a nearby field.

– Tom Fox, Millstone, WV, 3/18/19

After work today, I checked Kimsey Run Lake and was surprised to find what I believe to be a Marsh Wren. I got several good looks at it as it scuttled around the cattail patch beside the road just as it crosses the emergency spillway. It had the typical rusty-brown body, black wings, and cocked tail and the right size and behavior. As far as I know, this is the first spring record in Hardy County, though they certainly show up here in the fall.

– Darrell Good, Baker, WV, 3/25/19

It has been a few years since we had a visit from a Great Blue Heron in our yard pond. It was a gorgeous adult with bright white on the face and beautiful plumes on lower chest and black smaller plume off the crown. Previous herons have been juveniles or adults in non breeding plumage.

It arrived at a time that many of the orange Comet fish were in the center of the pond in a big orange clump. They must have been super noticeable from the air. The heron flies in, lands quietly on the rocky pond edge and freezes. The dumb fish continue to bask in the sun in the middle of the pond. My husband and I watch from the living room window through a 2 inch gap in the curtains. Experience tells us that if we open the curtains, the heron flies away.

We watch the heron move one leg forward a few inches, stop, then move the other, very slowly toward the pond edge. The fish do not notice, and continue to enjoy the afternoon sun. There appears to be a pool party going on consisting of about 35 bright orange fish.

The pace of the heron's legs increases, then the fish notice the movement. They scatter like teenagers getting busted by cops while underage drinking. The heron makes a quick strike, catching on decent sized meal. It bagged about a 5-6 inch long orange Comet, and had it swallowed within seconds. The bulge in the heron's neck hinted of a fish shape.

In a panic, the fish swam off in haphazard directions. The heron appeared confused, and missed a few more opportunities to catch another fish, despite our cheering for the heron in the living room. While we love our fish, I rely on a heron to keep my fish population size in check. Unfortunately, only one fish was eaten, and the heron lost interest, or thought it was time to return home for the evening. It probably has a nest on the river in the rookery on the Shenandoah River, or was moving through the area. We suspect we will have an early visitor at 6 or 7 AM tomorrow.

– BIRDMOM, Jefferson County, WV, 3/28/19



March Pine Warbler in Ritchie County – photo by Cynthia Burkhardt

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS (con.)

First we observed an Osprey (FOY) flying away from the train station as we exited our car.

Then as we crossed the footbridge squawking made us look up - there was a peregrine flying about the MD Heights rocks. He was soon joined by another, and they whirled around the quickly warming skies together, sometimes landing on a ledge or disappearing from view. They followed us downriver (Potomac); as we walked the towpath, they soared high and lazily with the vultures before streaming away from them back towards their rocky home.

Things got more exciting on our return trip. While I scoured the rock face to find the peregrine pair again, a new squawking brought my attention to the river below. A lone Bonaparte's Gull - poor unfortunate bugger, somehow parted from the rest of his flock high overhead - was being chased by a very determined, aggressive falcon. I watched the pursuit for perhaps 5 minutes until the birds disappeared around the river bend. But I would guess things ended badly for the gull.

Progressing further along the footbridge, I watched while the Osprey delivered a twig to the existing (but never used??) nest atop the trestle. And then suddenly there were two Osprey. Before I reached the train station, another twig was put in place. And a robin sang heartily from his perch declaring the joyfulness that we all shared.

– Deb Hale, Harpers Ferry, WV, 4/3/19

4/12/2019 8:48 AM

Yard trees loaded with finches this morning! From my porch I counted 31 Purple Finches (21 males, 10 females). All that raspberry color, along with the 40 goldfinches, getting brighter and brighter yellow, and the male Pine Warbler...what a sight!

– Cynthia Burkhart, Cairo, WV, 4/12/19

– **Sightings taken from
WVBird ListServ**



ELSA THOMPSON PASSES TRAGICALLY



Elsa Ekenstierna Thompson, 85, died May 25, 2019 in Marietta. She was born in Bayonne, NJ on February 18, 1934 to Anna Scott Ekenstierna and Harvey Conrad Ekenstierna. On June 6, 1956 she was married to William H. (Bill) Thompson, Jr. of Marietta at St. Luke's Lutheran Church. They were the parents of three children, William, III, Andrew Miller and Laura Scott, and the grandparents of Annalea, Nathaniel (Nat) and August (Gus) Thompson of Marietta; John David (Jake) Rudie Jr.; Phoebe and William, IV (Liam) Thompson of Whipple, and their mother Julie Zick-efoose. She was preceded in death by her parents, her husband and very recently by her son, Bill.

Elsa was the child of a Swedish immigrant father, Harvey, who won his citizenship fighting for the U.S. in World War I under General John J. Pershing in France. Their family moved from Bayonne to Roselle, New Jersey early in her life, and she resided there until she graduated from Marietta College. Elsa was proud of both her Swedish heritage and her noble lineage, traced through the Saxe-Coburg line that includes the Royal Family in England. Her genealogy was traced by her cousin, Alfred Winroth, back to 2 B.C., and included Charlemagne.

She met her husband at Marietta College in 1955, when his band was con-

tracted to do a telethon on WTAP and needed a singer. Elsa (a proud member of the Chi Omega sorority, and a drama major) was considered one of the best singers at Marietta College, and Bill, Jr. led a jazz ensemble group locally. Elsa tried out, singing "Lover Man" by Billie Holiday, her favorite female singer. She got the job. She also agreed to a date with Bill. On the first date, he kissed her and proposed marriage. She accepted and after graduation from MC, they were married.

After Bill finished his Master's Degree at Ohio University, the couple moved to Avalon N.J., and Bill joined the Atlantic City Press, while Elsa began teaching seventh graders in Cape May County. In 1961, Bill accepted an offer to join Central College in Pella, Iowa. The couple loaded up their MG and headed westward. This move changed their lives, and they made many lifelong friends, while seeing the birth of their three children.

In 1971, Bill received an offer to return to Marietta College as Vice President for Development. Not long after arriving, Elsa learned about the Betsey Birders, a local group that took regular bird watching trips up and down the Ohio and Muskingum Rivers. Marietta Times nature columnist Pat Murphy taught Elsa, Billy and Andy all about the pastime. Bill, Jr. got the bug, and suggested they start a magazine devoted to bird watching. The family agreed and Bird Watcher's Digest was born in the summer of 1978 in their home and still operates today at 149 Acme St. Elsa served as Co-Publisher with her husband until the mid-1990s. Until her death, she still worked 4-5 days a week in customer service and served as "The Voice of BWD."

Elsa had many passions. Number one was her family; number two, her pets; third, Bird Watcher's Digest; fourth, Marietta College, for whom she served as a trustee, and Chi Omega Sorority; fifth, her Christian faith and St. Luke's Lutheran Church; sixth, music, which earned her a husband, and found flight in the Bill Thompson Trio and Duck Creek Ensemble; and many more things.

*Published May 29, 2019,
at www.mariettatimes.com*

CHANGES IN CONTACT INFORMATION

NEW MEMBERS

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PHONE OR EMAIL CHANGE

Cindy Conrad Peters
740-228-1215

Amy Wallace
814-755-3836
Email: askwallace@verizon.net

CHAPTER HAPPENINGS

BIBBEE CHAPTER

May-August 2019 – 6 AM -Noon. Contact us for the specific dates. MAPS bird banding at Sandstone Falls (Raleigh Co.) and Wolf Creek (Fayette Co.), day use area beyond the Sandstone Falls Parking Lot. New River Bird Observatory near Oak Hill, WV. Contact Allen and Mindy Waldron at mwaldron@suddenlink.net.

May-September 2019 – Second and fourth Saturdays at 9 AM. Join the birding group at the Grandview NPS for a morn-

ing of birding. Grandview Visitors and Picnic area. Meet near the Visitors Center.

June 15, 2019 – We will have a trip to Betsy Reeder's property on Cave Ridge, Summers Co. WV. We'll meet at the Hinton DQ around 8 AM and travel to the property. We do need to know if you are planning to go, so RSVP please.

July 2019 – Date and TBD. Blueberries and Birds at Blueberry Hill. Always a great time. Can't beat berries, birds and friends. Blueberry Hill near Flat Top, WV. Contact Mindy Waldron.

August 24, 2019 – We'll meet at Bellepoint Park in Hinton at 8:00 AM. Bring a lunch. Trip to Bluestone WMA (Bertha Campground) for birds, plants, butterflies and all things natural. This trip is so amazing with the number of plants, dragonflies, eagles, and butterflies. Bluestone WMA is located along the New River. Contact Mindy Waldron.

September 21, 2019 – 10-3 PM. Hawk Watch on East River Mountain. East River Mountain in Mercer County near Bluefield WV. Contact Jim Phillips at jimmandjudyphillips@gmail.com.

HEADQUARTERS CHAPTER

June 29, 2019 – Picnic/outing hosted by Suzanne Quinn. 44 Easy Dr. Dallas, WV 26036. PLEASE NOTE: You cannot get to the farm from the WV side, you MUST enter from the PA side. If needed use this address for car GPS units 106 Dague Ln, West Finley, PA 15377. Bring a covered dish, drink and lawn chairs. Meet at 2:00 p.m.

July 6, 2019 – Outing for Grassland Birds. Meet at the Cadiz Animal Clinic at 8:00 a.m. Upland Sandpipers, Bobolinks, Meadowlarks, Grasshopper Sparrows, Henslow's Sparrows and Vesper Sparrows are some of our target birds.

July 21, 2019 – Picnic-outing hosted by Rosie Campbell at 61121 S. 26 Rd. Bethesda, OH 43719. Bring a covered dish and drink. Meet at 2:00 p.m.

September 17, 2019 – Picnic/outing at Barkcamp State Park. Meet at the beach

pavilion at 5:00 p.m. Dinner will be 5:30. Bring a covered dish, drink and lawn chairs.

MOUNTWOOD CHAPTER

June Coordinator – Jon Benedetti
304-295-8945

June 12-14, 2019 – Canaan Valley overnight. Contact Jon Benedetti for more details on travel and lodging.

June 20, 2019 – McDonough Wildlife Refuge, 8:00 a.m. McDonough parking lot.

June 27, 2019 – North Bend State Park, 8:00 a.m. Kroger, 7th St. Parkersburg, bring lunch.

July Open

August Coordinator – Dick Esker
304-863-8765

Aug. 1, 2019 – To be determined

Aug. 8, 2019 – Sandy Creek Backwater & area, 9:00 a.m. Boat ramp, Northwest Drive.

Aug. 15, 2019 – Greenbottom area, 8:00 a.m. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339/Rt. 7; bring lunch.

Aug. 22, 2019 – To be determined.

Aug. 24, 2019 – Annual Picnic, 5:00 p.m. McDonough Log Shelter "A", bring covered dish, drink & service.

Aug. 30, 2019 – Open to suggestions.

NOTE: Call coordinator for possible changes in locations and/or additional locations for August or to suggest birding outings in August.

September Coordinator – Jeanie Hilton
304-428-8641

Sept. 5, 2019 – McDonough Wildlife Refuge, 8:00 a.m. McDonough parking lot.

Sept. 7, 2019 – Mountwood Park, 8:00 a.m. Beach area (near torpedo), bring lunch.

Sept. 12, 2019 – Lake Hope, Zaleski forest, Ohio, 8:00 a.m. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339/Rt. 7; bring lunch.

NATURE HAPPENINGS AROUND THE STATE

POTOMAC VALLEY AUDUBON

June 12, 2019, July 17, 2019, August 21, 2019 – Bird Walk at Cool Spring Preserve. This event is free and open to the public, however, registration on the website is strongly encouraged. Join Beth Poole on her regularly scheduled bird walk at Cool Spring Preserve. Please meet by 7:00 am in the front parking lot of Cool Spring Preserve.

If you have questions or would like more information, contact Krista Hawley at adultprograms@potomacaudubon.org or 681-252-1387. Children ages 12 and up will be welcome but they must be accompanied by an adult. Binoculars will be available for anyone who needs them.

August 24, 2019 – Late Summer Bird Walk, USGS Fish Health Lab property, 7:00 am. Trip Leaders are Bob Dean and Heather Walsh. This event is free and open to the public, however, registration is strongly encouraged.

Our expert birders are offering regular walks at the Fish Health Lab property and are excited with what it has to offer! The size is not excessively large, but the bird species are diverse and the quality of the wetland is excellent. The property has a mix of open ponds and woods; offering different species.

The address for the USGS Leetown Science Center is 407 Reservoir Road, just off Leetown Road in Leetown. To search for it on Internet mapping sites, enter 407 Reservoir Road, Kearneysville, WV.

Please contact Krista Hawley with any questions you may have.

More PVAS outings at www.potomacaudubon.org/birdcal.

CANAAN VALLEY NWR

June 22, 2019 – 7 a.m. Midsummer Bird Walk. The breeding birds are here, and they're busy! We'll try to find a nest or two, and look and listen for our summer visitors as well as our residents as they raise their families. Meet local ornithophile Casey Rucker at 7 a.m. at the Visitors Center; binoculars are available.

June 29, 2019 – 7 a.m. High Elevation Bird Walk: Meet at the refuge visitor center at 7:00 a.m. Summer birding is usually quieter than spring birding but maybe we can find some youngsters. We will go up Forest Road 80 and bird along Wilderness Way Trail.

July 13, 2019 – 7 a.m. Heart of Summer Bird Walk. The birds have quieted down, many youngsters have left their nests, and some are beginning to molt their feathers. There's still time to watch and listen to them before the migrants begin their travels, long or short. Join Casey Rucker at the Visitor Center at 7 a.m.; binoculars are available.

July 27, 2019 – 7 a.m. High Elevation Bird Walk: Meet at the refuge visitor center at 7:00 a.m. Summer birding is usually quieter than spring birding but maybe we can find some youngsters. We will go up Forest Road 80 and bird along Wilderness Way Trail.

SCREECH-OWL CHRONICLES, WINTER 2018-2019 ISSUE - JEFFERSON COUNTY

The 2018 owl breeding season on our property north of Charles Town, West Virginia was a sad one. We had no owl activity, and it was the first year that we had empty nest boxes since the boxes were erected in 2012. We will never know why, but I can say that we had a lot more free time in the early spring evenings when we would normally be spying on owls from the living room window with a scope. A new nearby subdivision began construction in what used to be a farmed field, so I suspect the disturbance could be a possible reason we lost the owls that season. There may be other factors involved also.

The subdivision is still being built and is slowly growing, but we were fortunate to have a red morph owl show up on October 23, 2018. This owl stayed with us until November 15, 2018. It disappeared after that, and we had no occupancy in any of the owl boxes, until just recently.

At 5:40 PM on February 19, 2019, we observed a gray morph owl with its

head popped out of the nest box hole of our middle nest box. We had one morning sighting of our gray morph "screechie" at 6:50 AM on February 20 before it dropped into the box for its daytime sleep. It then was not seen at all the next day or night, and it was a sad time in our household. We wondered if we were going to have another breeding season with no owls.

Then the following evening on February 22, we discovered our "screechie" seemed to have brought home a friend from the night before. Sweet! There has been no trilling on our property this fall or winter. I miss not hearing the owl sounds of love in the air, but I am happy regardless.

We had only evening sightings from Feb 22 to date, including tonight. We watched one food delivery on the night of February 22 and then tonight, February 25, we watched a first quick food drop by an owl into an empty box hole. Obviously there was an owl inside waiting, but it did not show itself. A few minutes later, the aerial owl flew by again and hung on the nest box hole for at least 2 minutes, head inside. It could have been the male owl regurgitating food for his bride. We were able to observe this only via night vision scope. All this activity is happening in the dark.

Hopefully this is the start of something good.

– *BIRDMOM,*
Jefferson County, West Virginia

NEW BIRD BOOK RELEASED

Smithsonian ornithologist Bruce Beehler and premier nature photographer Middleton Evans have crafted a comprehensive volume of beautiful photos and captivating storytelling. *Birds of Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia* invites readers to experience the birds' lives as they live them: where they nest, how they forage, their various behaviors, and the natural environments they need to survive.

Beehler was a guest speaker at the 2018 Foray at Thornwood. The foreword of this book was written by Chan Robbins.



...

**We lost another good one
(and then one more...)**

– Photo by Jonathan Meyrav

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