



THE MAIL BAG

A PUBLICATION OF THE BROOKS BIRD CLUB OF WEST VIRGINIA
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APRIL – MAY – JUNE 2020

RYAN TOMAZIN - EDITOR

Editor's Note

Well...THIS isn't how Spring was supposed to go! We all probably remember the Early Spring Meeting like it was yesterday. Joyful times with all of our friends, meals together, car rides with non-spouses. Sharing scopes and enjoying the birds. Our time outside (and everywhere else) has been turned on its head for the time being. Birding from home, birding alone, birding in the cold (okay, not COVID-related). But the birds have been there. Granted, that cold spell in early May was crushing for some species, and many died, but rarities have been enjoyed and our natural areas are again loud with bird song. I hope you're getting out to enjoy it all safely.



Hopefully, the virus has not touched you or your family. Unfortunately, not everyone in the bird club has been so lucky, and we're glad that those who were ill are recovering. Our hearts and thoughts were with you the whole way!



Obviously, Foray and most all BBC activities have been cancelled for the time being, at least through mid-summer. The Foray survived World War II, but this situation presented a much broader problem and couldn't be trifled with, no matter how painful it was for the decision to be made. So with the additional seven to nine days of early June that you have, please spend your time safely outdoors, and hopefully you can write up your findings and experiences for future Mail Bags. Also, if you get a little more technical and want to write a more scientific paper, I'm sure Casey Rucker would be happy to have it for The Redstart.



MESSAGE FROM OUR NEW PRESIDENT, CINDY SLATER

Here we are another new season. It is uncanny how for the human world this chapter seems so different. Yet, the natural world appears the same or even better. Trees are leafing out, more and more flowers are blooming every day and the BIRDS are singing and moving. In all of the world's natural beauty we see an abundance of life, a renewed freedom. CORVIDS for example, what do we really know about them? Did you know crows live very interesting lives? They never chase away family unlike other bird species that push their young out of the nest when they think it is time. Crows are a lot more pleasant and interesting than COVID-19 that is for certain.

So, during this time of individual isolation instead of dwelling on what we cannot do or the lack of freedom we have to join our friends whenever or wherever we want, look for a new freedom in learning. Whatever interests you most in nature, whether individually or at a social distance get out and take advantage of the natural beauty and appreciate this season. Maybe for you it is watching through the window looking at birds on your feeder, hiking in the woods, and journal your observations. That might even inspire you to send an article for the next mailbag. I am sure we would love to hear what you have to share during this unprecedented time. Stay healthy, my friends.

– *Cindy Slater, BBC President*

BBC BYLAWS AMENDMENT

The Board of Trustees decided at the March 6, 2020 Board meeting to recommend the following:

The bylaw under Article IX, The Office of President, 4.a. now reads: The Membership Secretary, Publicity Chairperson, Redstart Editor, and Mail Bag Editor;

The new bylaw, if approved by the general membership, shall read: The Membership Secretary, Publicity Chairperson, Redstart Editor, Mail Bag Editor, and Webmaster;

This bylaw change will be placed on the agenda to be voted on by the general membership on October 25, 2020, at the general membership meeting. Passage/no passage is by majority vote.

ANDY THOMPSON DIES UNEXPECTEDLY



Andrew M. Thompson passed away unexpectedly in Marietta, Ohio, on May 13, 2020. He is survived by his wife of 35 years, Jade, and his

three children, Annalea, Nathaniel, and August, and his sister, Laura Thompson (Bill Dauber). He was preceded in death by his parents, William and Elsa Thompson and his brother, William Thompson III.

Andy was born in Pella, Iowa, on February 8, 1963, but moved to Marietta in 1971. Upon graduating from Marietta High School in 1981, Andy attended Central College in Iowa where he earned a bachelor's degree in Political Science. During his junior year of college, Andy studied in Granada, Spain, where he met the love of his life, Jade. They were married two years later. Together they had three wonderful children who were the light of his life.

Andy began his career at the Competitive Enterprise Institute in Washington, DC before returning to Marietta to join the family business, Bird Watcher's Digest. As an area representative for the National Federation of Independent Businesses, Andy's interest in public policy grew, and he ran for and was elected to a seat on the Marietta City Council in 2005, serving twice more before running for the Ohio House of Representatives in 2010. Andy served four terms in the Ohio House representing the people of Southeast Ohio. After his last term in office, Andy worked briefly for the Competitive Enterprise Institute once more before joining the staff at the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio.

Andy had many diverse interests ranging from playing music with his band, his brother or his parents or sing-

ing in "the karaoke caucus" in Columbus with his statehouse colleagues. He loved history and was an avid reader. Andy enjoyed traveling the world and cooking for friends. He and Jade were host parents to six Marietta College basketball players and seven AFS students from around the globe with whom they have maintained close family ties. He was a member of the Marietta Rotary Club, an original board member of Marietta Main Street, and a member and proud supporter of the Marietta Area Chamber of Commerce.

Andy was a faithful member of Crown of Life Lutheran Church. He served the church as the Secretary on the leadership team and chairman of the evangelism committee. Above all, Andy was a devoted husband and dedicated father, a loving son and brother, and a loyal friend.

Back in the 70s and 80s, Andy was a participating member of the Brooks Bird Club and forays with his family (*Ed.*).

– *Edited from The Parkersburg News and Sentinel 5/15/20*

SHIRLEY MARTIN PASSES

Shirley Lee Martin, 72, passed away on March 13, 2020.

She was born on September 2, 1947 to the late Edward "Bryce" and Marjorie Mann. Shirley was a member of Trinity Hill United Methodist Church, a member of Daughters of the American Revolution-Lexington Chapter, and a University of Kentucky graduate. She was an avid bird watcher, traveler, loved watching her grandchildren participate in their sports activities, and UK sports. Shirley is survived by her husband, James "Dick" Richard Martin; two children, James "Jim" (Jennifer) Martin II and Sharon Lee Martin; two grandchildren, Connor and Reagan Martin; one brother, Thomas B. (Marty) Mann; and several nieces and nephews. She is preceded in death by her parents and a brother, James Edward Mann.

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

2020 BBC MID-WINTER MEETING REPORT

Arriving Friday at North Bend State Park in time to be sure of not to being late to dinner - no dues paying BBC member would accept being accused of that. We renewed old acquaintances, as customary, and later listened to the presentation of Jeff Gordon. No, not the noisy race car Jeff Gordon. Bad for birding ears. People so circumspect of decibels as to wave when others applaud don't listen to that. This Jeff Gordon has a much more sublime and interesting background as a former birding guide for Victor Emanuel Tours and now as President of the American Birding Association (www.aba.org). His presentation centered on birding ethics, environmental sensitivity, the larger social responsibility of the birding community and the ABA's leadership roll in advancing those principles. He and Wendy Clark, Publisher of Bird Watcher's Digest (www.birdwatchersdigest.com), prepared a table for us which contained a panoply of birding paraphernalia including buttons and bows and books and binos - Wendy even allowed us to borrow some of her high-end optics for a day to get a feel for them. See: www.redstartbirding.com

After Saturday's buffet breakfast we went...birding. Along the Ohio river to our customary local birding spots. It was chilly. No. It was cold. Fine, I shouldn't complain about temperatures in the 40's. We've all seen worse. But, the little bit of sun we occasionally found on our backs was welcome. Unusually, there were no ducks. (Scientific rigor demands I acknowledge the presence of Mallards, a single Black Duck and several mergansers.) Somebody may have mentioned a Pied-billed Grebe. But waterfowl were notable by their absence.

Another surprise were the number of Bald Eagles. We saw 5 over one pond (French Creek). Perhaps 10 on the day. And a kettle of 16 Black Vultures. Something I have never seen outside the tropics. A phoebe was reported. Not unusual this time of year. They are typically our first returning neo-tropical migrant. And of course Red-winged Blackbirds are back in numbers. It's beginning. Better birding days are on the way. We had 62 species of birds throughout the weekend, which is much lower than normal due to so few duck species.

Later Saturday evening, a thoroughly entertaining (and humorous) presentation on hawk watchers and raptor identification by Brian Wargo which included some photos by wife Jeanine Ging, who, along with their two children, we were also privileged to meet this weekend. Brian is a physics instructor, the Director of the Hawk Migration Association of North America Board, the Hawk Migration Studies Eastern Flyway Editor for Hawk Migration Studies, and much more.

I think Brian finds hawk watchers just as amusing as the hawks they watch. He has a point. Hawk watching, or bird watching more generally, isn't for everybody. Hawk watchers are a rather strange breed themselves. Specialized.

Several times over the weekend, during both of our evening presentations, for example, the advancing age of active birders was mentioned. Certainly, BBC is an older organization with a preponderance of older members. No doubt we could benefit from the perspectives of younger, more energetic people. I recognize the difficulty we have reaching them. And maybe that's always been a problem. But, I wonder if it's a serious problem. If, for example, Greta Thunberg can get the attention she's getting it isn't because young people aren't paying attention. They'll find their way. And I don't wish to think we're so sclerotic as to be an impediment to their progress. I believe it will work out. As strange or nerdy, or maybe even as irrelevant as we may seem.

Sunday; another buffet breakfast followed by a prayer service and business meeting. For those unable to attend; the highlight was a gift to be made to the Bill Thompson III Young Birders Fund. Bill and Elsa of Bird Watcher's Digest were supportive of all birders and especially to the BBC and surely an integral part of our family. It's heart-warming to know that we can help to maintain that legacy.

We broke up and scattered to the four winds and will reconvene at a latter time. Meanwhile, go birding.

– *Contributed by John Jacobs*

2020 WV BIG DAY RESULTS

I birded in Mason and Cabell County yesterday and finished the day with 119 species. Significant time was spent on Long Ridge Road and McClintic WMA, with less time at Green Bottom for stunning looks at a Least Bittern to bookend the day. With the weather being so cold, many passerines were foraging lower than usual and provided some nice looks. The most surprising birds of the day were a pair of Common Gallinules at McClintic. Some other notable sightings included Veery (2), Mourning Warbler, Wilson's Warbler (2), Prothonotary Warbler (4), Dickcissel and Bobolink.
– Josh Holland, Huntington, WV

On a day when the temperature was at times 28 degrees and snow on the trees and the ground along the Scenic Highway, but mostly not on the roads, we did good. We got about 15 new species for the year, including Mourning Warbler, Hermit Thrush, Veery, Rose-breasted Grosbeak (female), Pine Siskins, Winter Wren, Purple Finch, and raven.

We also saw, which I have never encountered before, literally dozens of Hermit Thrushes along the road from Richwood to Cranberry Glades. They were along the edges of the road in the early morning hours yesterday, and they were just as apt to flush and fly in front of the car. Often I had to travel 5 to 15 miles an hour slower to not hit any of them. We had to have seen as least a hundred of them, and there were other thrushes mixed in, although the only other ones that we saw with certainty were Veery. I also saw 5 Scarlet Tanagers along the road, although two of them were dead--victims of other cars.
– Rennie Talbert, birding Pocahontas Co.

Yesterday, May 9th, I did a Big Day in Fayette County. Nocturnal birding was a bust, as it was wet, foggy, and about 30-35 degrees in the morning. Though the weather was sunny and clear, the high for the day was about 45 degrees with a consistent, chilly breeze.

I ended with 107 species. First bird of the day was a Barred Owl and last bird was American Woodcock. Highlights include Bank Swallow, Mourning Warbler, Lincoln's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Horned Lark. I found 10 sparrow species and 21 warbler species.

– Steven Wilson, Beckley, WV

MOUNTWOOD BBCER'S TRIP TO LAKE ERIE – *Contributed by Rosie Campbell*

Wed. Jan. 29

23 bird clubbers drove north to Lake Erie. Terry Bronson had scouted out a good birding trip along Lake Erie and in several metro-parks and some sites on the way home. He'd checked these spots out and had some good birds in mind for us to find.

We gathered first at Chapel Hill Mall parking lot to look for gulls. There were many Ring-bills, crows, starlings, House Sparrows and Rock Pigeons. Also in the city, we encountered hawks; a Sharp-shinned, and a Red-shouldered perched close by a busy intersection. We guessed the hawks have moved to town to take advantage of the many squirrels.

At Fairpoint Harbor Lakefront, we found many more Ring-bills and a Greater Black-backed Gull. A distant raft of ducks included Common Mergansers and a goldeneye. Very cold and windy here.

Along Airport Nursery Road, we saw a lot of robins, many deer, sometimes thirty or forty in sight at once. A Red-tailed Hawk sat obligingly on the fence, allowing us all a good look. (But it flew as soon as I aimed a camera at it.) A Peregrine Falcon also waited for us to look at it well, and we all agreed it looked large for the species. In this area, I noticed a lot of black alder trees, of which we don't see many at home. They seemed common here and are a good bird food species.

In an area near the city dump, there were thousands of gulls. A fly-over by a Bald Eagle put them all in the air at once; a snow-storm of gulls.

Lake Erie Bluffs Metro-park had a tall (five-tiered) observation tower, which only Fred McCullough had the ambition to climb. We saw Red-breasted Mergansers and a small flock of tree sparrows here. This place is called the Bluffs because of a fifty or so foot high bank along the lake shore that continually erodes to beach and is formed again. In town, Ashtabula, another hawk, a Cooper's.

At Walnut Beach, along the chilly edge of the lake, we found White-winged Scoters and cormorants, then on to our hotel for lunch. We had a nice, luxurious place, the Holiday Inn Express, east of Cleveland; chosen for it's rather central location as we birded east Wednesday into Ashtabula county; then on Thursday, west towards Cleveland. Supper was at the Red Hawk Grille, then back to the hotel.

Thurs. Jan. 30

After a nice breakfast at the hotel, and picking up sandwiches at Subway for lunch, we were off to Headlands Dunes to look for ducks. We birded along a boardwalk and made another stop at the beach. It was cold and windy there, not many birds. This place is the northern terminus of the Buckeye Trail, a 1,400 mile hiking trail, all in Ohio.

Our next stop was the Chagin River Park. Our target here was a Long-eared Owl, but it had gone. However, this was a nice spot with good hiking trails which were very popular with dog-walkers. We saw a few songbirds; cardinals, jays, Downy and Pileated Woodpecker, etc, We were rather surprised to see quite a few fisherman standing in the cold river.

At Cleveland Lakefront, we followed a trail out to the lake. Cold, and windy here with choppy water slapping the rocks,--no ducks.

At the 55th Street pier, we found, coots, Mallards, Canada Geese, Ring-billed Gulls, Ring-necked Ducks and a Hooded Merganser or two. We'd hoped for a Lesser-Black-backed Gull.

Burke Lakefront Airport had buildings with roofs covered white with resting gulls.

At Wendy Park were cormorants, a Red-necked Grebe, Hooded Mergansers, and there was a long scan for a Lesser Black-backed Gull.

As dusk came on, we hurried to the airport to look for a Snowy Owl. Right away, one was spotted, perched on a lighted sign inside the airport fence. We had great looks with the scopes, but couldn't approach any closer as there was a wide, busy highway and a tall, mesh fence between us and the owl. No photo was feasible. Just as we were leaving, the owl flew closer, but dropped out of sight in a shallow depression. What a

great way to end a good day of birding!

We had supper at the 100th Bomb Group Restaurant there, then back to our comfortable hotel.

Fri. Jan. 31

After breakfast at the hotel, we picked up sandwiches for our lunch and were off to Chardon. There was more snow there. We hadn't had much anywhere. The roads were sometimes wet, but clear. But it was obvious there had been more snow as some parking lots had lots of unmelted snow piles. Our temperature for the trip varied from high twenties to barely forty.

Near Chardon, there was a prosperous-looking Amish settlement. We birded the winter-plowed fields for Horned Larks and found several; also, Red-tailed Hawks. I enjoyed seeing the horses and got a photo of a nice team of three Belgian horses working.

At Swine Creek Lodge, we found a welcome pit stop and saw some feeder birds; Black-capped Chickadees, titmice, Blue Jays, cardinals, a nuthatch, etc.

We drove back towards town and had lunch in our cars, then started back towards home. In Akron, we watched a large flock of crows and starlings picking at some spilled trash. We thought at least two of the crows were fish crows.

At a beautiful city cemetery, we found a Merlin who perched obligingly long enough for us all to see it.

Our last stop was at Portage Lake where were found several kinds of ducks, many more than we'd seen at any other location; Canvasback, Redhead, Bufflehead, Ruddy, Gadwall, Mallard, Ring-necked, as well as Mute and Trumpeter swans. Also most of the other waterfowl we'd seen before. (And a black squirrel, which I've wanted to photograph for a good while.) Our unofficial count was nearly sixty species.

It was misting lightly as we bid our farewells here and started home. We drove south through a slushy mix of rain and fine snow, all looking forward to our next birding trip together.

Thank you, Terry, for a fine trip!

INTERVIEW WITH TWAN LEENDERS, PRESIDENT OF THE ROGER TORY PETERSON INSTITUTE



What were your impressions of the Brooks Bird Club Foray? I loved the absolute immersion in all things natural during the Foray! In spite of the 'Bird Club' label in its name, the Foray has something for every kind of naturalist - not just birders. All participants were so clearly passionate about the area's natural history and everything they were going to experience during the event - great presentations, exciting field excursions & the camaraderie of sharing cool finds with people who appreciate the natural things of life, no matter how creepy or crawly. I truly wished I could have stayed for the entire time! I also very much appreciate the history of the program and the organization's drive to con-

tinue long-running avian surveys. I am a big proponent of citizen science and the Foray is a wonderful example of how a gathering of area naturalists can contribute valuable information to the collective awareness and conservation of the organisms and habitats we care so deeply about. All while having fun!

Were you pleased with the range of reptiles and amphibians that we had at Foray? Well, the Foray and its participants helped me break my 15-year curse of finding a Smooth Green Snake in the wild, so I was very happy with that! Given how little time I actually spent looking for herps, it was great to see the species diversity we got. I also had not done my homework before heading down to WV and was very happily surprised to find out that the Foray's location was within easy driving distance of Cheat Mountain Salamanders. Getting to see these incredibly range-restricted salamanders in their beautiful habitat was a real treat!!

What will your next book or research project be about? Hmm... I'm working on a few different projects at the moment. My fellow authors and I are updating, expanding, and completely redesigning our 'Wildlife of Costa Rica' book, and I am still plugging away at the idea of a field guide to the amphibians and reptiles of the northeast, which may some day become a book. I'm also very excited to be working with some of my friends on other exciting titles, several of which involve other types of animals that are not slimy or scaly. But, admittedly, there are also other frog and snake books in the making. I just can't help myself!

You have children. How do their interests in nature shape what you do, and vice-versa? Absolutely! They have been so incredibly understanding and patient with my naturalist quirks and always loved going out exploring the woods with me. They are now at an age (10 and 13) where they are developing their own interests and I love how that process is evolving. Even though on the surface their focus seems to be diverting away from nature sometimes, I can tell that they always come back to it. My son has become really interested in insects lately, and he is teaching me things he's learning from his favorite books - which is awesome! We were also fortunate to travel to Costa Rica as a family last year. Even though I spend considerable amounts of time in Central America each year still, and even though my kids know a whole lot about tropical animals as a result of that, it was truly inspiring to share all these new experiences with them! Living vicariously through them, it gave me a whole new appreciation for the amazing things I had started to take for granted after seeing them so much over the years. It is always a good idea to not only surround yourself with people who know more about life around you, but also to go outside with people who are all new to this. It really forces you to take a step back and re-evaluate the amazing but common things we all start to tune out after a while.

What is next for the Roger Tory Peterson Institute? There's always a lot going on. We are expanding our staff to increase our ability to get Roger Tory Peterson's accomplishments and his amazing art in front of more people, which is very exciting! Our regional education programs are growing and we continue to study conservation questions in our own backyard - working with community leaders to bring nature back into Peterson's home town, investigating how microplastics move from aquatic insects into area bird and bat populations, trying to find practical solutions to support at-risk species that currently survive in largely man-made urban environments (e.g. Spiny Softshell Turtles, Common Nighthawks, native bees). Combining art, education, and conservation in ways that help bring nature back into people's lives is a never-ending task, and we are proud to carry on Roger Tory Peterson's important work!

KEN CRONENBERGER PASSES AWAY

Kenneth D. Cronenberger, 88, of Petroleum, WV, died March 26, 2020, at Camden Clark Medical Center.

He was born July 7, 1931, at Lorain, OH, the son of the late Marshall K. and Eleanor G. Risley Cronenberger.

Kenneth was a U.S. Army Veteran of the Korean War. He was member of American Legion Post 15, Parkersburg. He retired from PPG Industries in Accounting and Systems after 35 years. He was a member of First Lutheran Church, Parkersburg, WV.

He is survived by his wife, Virginia Lee Roth Cronenberger; children, Carol Lynn Cronenberger, Phoenixville, PA, Nancy Lee Cronenberger, Morgantown, WV, Steven Lyle Cronenberger, Jacksonville, FL, Susan Lou Knapp, Gainesville, GA, Jill Elaine Cronenberger, Parkersburg, WV and Sally Ann Cronenberger, Phoenixville, PA; sisters, Anne Baugartar, Tiffin, OH, and Ellen Stokowski, Bishop, GA., and numerous nieces and nephews.

BBC TRIP TO KILLBUCK MARSH – FEB. 27-28, 2020

Thirteen BBCers met at Sugar Creek, then drove on to Killbuck in a small convoy. It was very cold and windy when we set off. Our very first stop when we reached the marsh was one of the best! There weren't many ducks close enough to see, but we had several fly-overs of Sandhill Cranes and Trumpeter Swans. The snow was thick and blowing side-ways, but the big birds flying were lovely in the snow.

We were bundled up in warm clothes and gloves, but the wind made the cold more penetrating. Each time we stopped, it was a joy to get back into the car out of the wind.

One of the ladies said her two target birds were the cranes and swamp sparrows. We got both those early. At our next stop, we saw several Swamp Sparrows, more cranes, swans, ducks, and Red-winged Blackbirds. In the flooded woodlands where we'd found them last time, were several Red-headed Woodpeckers. We birded on to the Pine Tree Farm for a good, hot lunch.

Back out in the swamp, the water wasn't as high as it sometimes is and we were able to drive most of the marsh roads. There were rafts of ducks, swans, Canada Geese and gulls, mostly far out a ways. There were mainly Mallards, wigeon, and pintails. (The beautiful pintails were the most numerous duck species this trip.)

We spotted a few Red-tail Hawks and several small common species of passerines as we drove along. In late afternoon, we found a wet grassy area and watched for harriers and saw several. It was nearly dark by the time a few Short-eared Owls began to fly.



Swamp Sparrow at Killbuck

It was getting a bit late as we drove to our hotel, so stopped first for supper. It was after eight by the time we checked in. I think we were all glad of the rest by then.

Friday morning after breakfast at the hotel, we set off for the marsh again. It's very cold and windy as it was yesterday. At the Funk Bottom platform, we saw only a few Song Sparrows in the bushes and a mink's tracks in the snow .

On Wilderness road, we had better luck. Along the shore were ducks; wigeon,

Mallard, pintail and gadwall, a couple of Common Mergansers, and several (more than a dozen) Great Blue Herons. But the main attraction were the eagles! Eight or more immature Bald Eagles were perched on a cold, snowy spit with the swans and geese; others along the shore. Some of them were delighting in play-fighting or flying over and putting flocks of ducks into the air.

We had a fine lunch at an Amish restaurant in Sugar Creek, then made a stop at Time and Optics where some of the groups looked at new scopes and bins.

Our last stop was at a nearby place where Harris Sparrows have been seen at the feeders. Harris Sparrows would be a life bird for some of the group; so we stayed here watching from our cars a while. By the time, we left, the sparrow hadn't been spotted.

We bid our good-byes and 'hope to see ya soon's' here. The snow seemed less as we all drove towards home.



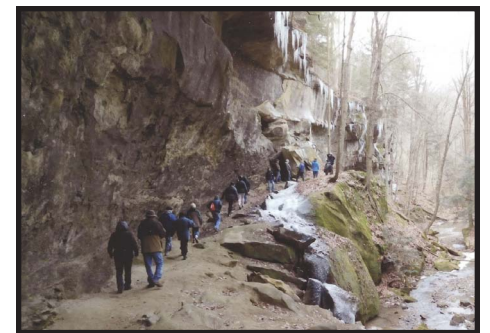
Birders chowing down!

APRIL 2020 OHIO NATURE EVENT RECAPS

Winter Walk at Raven Rocks

In spite of chilly weather the winter walk was well attended; between sixty and seventy outdoor folks came and were well rewarded for the effort. Besides the usual beautiful area, the scenery was enhanced by fantastic icicles and trickles of silvery waterfalls on the edges of the rock cliffs. Footing was tricky in places, but no one was hurt. (A nice boardwalk and stairs has been a fairly recent addition to Raven Rocks.) We hiked farther up the ravine and were rewarded by scenic spots some us hadn't seen before.

At the conclusion of the walk, the Captina Conservancy folks served cookies, snacks and hot chocolate.



Raven Rocks in winter

Ohio Wildlife Diversity Conference

The conference was held in the Ohio Union building of Ohio State University in Columbus. Over 1,050 people attended. This year's topics were: Moths, Insect Musicians, Ecology of Whip-poor-wills, Brook Trout, The Uncertain Future of Lake Erie, Deer in Ohio, and Bats,

But the topic that brought down the house was Nature Preschool. A very knowledgeable speaker who had taught a nature pre-school told us about the added educational benefits (mental and physical) of classes taught outdoors and how they benefitted all different types of students.

Her first question was "Where did you go to play when you were a child?" "Outside!" we all replied. This is no longer true and Nature Preschool is one good answer to the problem .

(Continued on Page 7)

– *Text and photos for both articles contributed by Rosie Campbell*

BBC MEMBER ROBERTA MITCHELL PASSES

I'm writing to let you (Juanita Slater) know of the passing of my mother-in-law, Roberta Mitchell.

Roberta loved watching birds. She had different feeders outside several windows at home. She even put food out on her balcony when she moved to Cincinnati.

Roberta and Ray were long time members of BBC. They spoke fondly of you and Carl, especially about the Eastern Shore trips. My sincere sympathy to you. Carl will be missed. Those were wonderful tributes published in The Mail Bag.

Stay safe and well in these unusual times. We can only hope and pray that there will be some good things when we finally come to the new normal! Thanks for all you do for BBC and the birds,

Beth Ann Mitchell



Obituary for Roberta Stobbs Mitchell (edited), written by her sister and niece (Barbara McFarland and Linda Foster):

Few people live 103 years, even fewer accomplish so much as Roberta Lee Stobbs Mitchell (January 18, 1917 - March 22, 2020.) She was the fourth of eleven children born to the late Matthew and Lena (Sunderman) Stobbs on a farm in Belmont County, Ohio. Days were spent tending the fruit and vegetable crops and evenings were for reading the many books in her father's library. The love of learning was instilled in each of the children.

Roberta graduated from Bridgeport High School in 1935 and yearned to attend college, but The Great Depression prohibited that possibility. She married the late Ellis "Raymond" Mitchell of Colerain, Ohio in 1939 and in 1943 was the mother of a two-month old son (Raymond "Bruce") when Raymond was called to serve his country during WWII.

In 1949, with the birth of a second son, Mark Cope, their family was complete. During the following years she helped found the Colerain Senior Center as well as provide programs and decorations. She worked tirelessly to restore the Concord Hicksite Friends Meeting House of Colerain, Ohio which resulted in it being placed on the National Historic Register.

As members of the Brooks Bird Club, she and her husband traveled to several areas of the country. She kept field glasses at two of her windows to watch and identify these feathered friends who visited her feeders and suet. Not only did she learn to identify each species by sight and sound, but also its habitat. Whether it flew in the sky above or was a fossil from the ground, she studied and learned of it judiciously. There were travels not only within the United States but also to many countries where she endeavored to learn about each area and culture.

For several years Roberta taught elementary children in the Bridgeport School System. She opened their minds to reading, writing, science, math, history, geography, and most of all, to nature, creativity, and the love of learning. They benefitted from her experiences and in her words, "I wanted to learn for my own benefit.

Roberta practiced this philosophy not only with the school children, but throughout Eastern Ohio communities and at The Seasons Retirement Home in Cincinnati. A display of her creative accomplishments was shown at the Center in September 2018.

In addition to the many lives she enhanced, surviving are sons Raymond Bruce Mitchell (Jill) of Cincinnati, Ohio, Mark Cope Mitchell (BethAnn) of Shadyside, Ohio, grandchildren Tricia Johnson (Eric) and Brian Mitchell as well as four great grandchildren. Also surviving are sisters Doris Morrison (age 105) of Colerain, Ohio, Barbara McFarland (89) of Granville, Ohio and several loving nieces and nephews. The "ripple" she created will be felt far and wide.

Roberta passed away from heart failure and current health and safety conditions prevented a funeral service.

CORRESPONDENCE

I wanted to say how touched The Slater Family was with the special memories everyone contributed and shared in the last issue of the mail bag. What a wonderful collection of remembrances that we will be able to cherish and carry in our hearts forever. Ryan, you did a remarkable job compiling this issue. Thank you very much.

The Entire Slater Family

APRIL 2020 OHIO NATURE EVENT RECAPS

(Continued from Page 6)

Also available at the conference were great nature handouts on several topics and this year's conservancy stamp. New booklets for this year were Freshwater Mussels and Gardening for Butterflies.

Ohio Falconry Weekend

Many BBCers didn't get to attend because this event was held the same weekend at North Bend meeting. Mick Brown and other members of the Ohio Falconry Association presented their birds at Holloway, Ohio, hosted by the Holloway Old Timers Club.

Friday, the weather was wet and very cold, but Saturday was nice. Several folks accompanied the falconers and their hawks. Mick flies Harris hawks and a Saker/gyrfalcon hybrid. There was also a red-tailed hawk.

This is an interesting, unusual event, (strenuous too, if you follow the hawks and the small dachshunds used to put up the game.) Afterwards, the Old Timers served an excellent hot meal.



Merlin near Akron - Photo by R. Campbell

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS AROUND THE STATE

Today, I decided to check around the nature center at Pipestem to see what was in the area. As I was close to the turn off to the nature center, I noticed a small flock of birds fly up into the pines. I parked the car and got out in the rain to see what they were. Turned out it was a flock of American Goldfinch working through the pine trees. That is when I heard Red Crossbills. After looking around the tops of the pines, I eventually saw at least four crossbills checking the pine cones for seeds. It was raining pretty hard at that point, so I got back in the car. I've seen reports of Red Crossbills at Pipestem State Park from Jim Phillips in the past, but this was the first time that I was able to encounter them myself.

– Gary O. Rankin, Lavalette, WV, 2/12/20

Here's what I have learned about the Black Vultures with red wing tags that we observed near Glen Lyn, VA on 12/27/2019.

K62 was banded 9/17/2019 near Anstead, Fayette County, WV and had hatched in 2018. L21 was banded 10/24/2019 near Peterstown, Monroe County, WV and had hatched in 2019. K87 was banded 10/17/2019 near Peterstown, Monroe County, WV and had hatched in 2017 or earlier. All of these birds were banded by Chad Neil, Elkins, WV.

What we recorded as L58 had not been used yet by the bander so we probably misread the number. A bander reported banding 44 Black Vultures in Monroe County, WV with numbers between L00-43 and suggested that we misread the numbers. So L02 may have been one of those birds and L82 we must have misread.

If you see Black Vultures with red wing tags see if you can get the numbers from the tags. With numbers report them to www.report-band.gov. If you can't get the number from the tag you can report it to vulture.tag@gmail.com

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV, 2/13/20

I observed a male House Finch this morning at my feeders displaying a yellow coloration along with some red—an interesting variation and a first for me.

– N. Wade Snyder, Shenandoah Junction, WV, 2/15/20

A Common Redpoll was working the sycamore seed balls in our neighbors yard. We first noticed the sharply notched tail and could tell that it was significantly smaller than the nearby House Finches. We could clearly see the beak, the red on the head and the black under the chin. Body colors were mostly hidden from our view. Watched it for about two minutes and then it flew to the back of the same tree and we weren't able to locate it anymore.

– Marilyn Morton, Kanawha, WV, 2/15/20

I must write up my most special and sacred bird experience of this morning. It was so special to me that I'm posting both here in the Shenandoah Valley and in West Virginia.

I was preparing to draw water from the hydrant for the chickens here in Keezletown. It was a cold 17 degrees. Everything was frozen. Then I noticed a little bird in a shrub by the garden fence. It was looking at me and making a soft "chup, chup" sound. I saw that it was a Hermit Thrush. When I began drawing water, it flew to the ground about 4 - 5 feet from me and continued its soft sound. Then it flew into a small tree on the other side of me still watching me and making its sound. It did not seem at all afraid.

I said to it, "I bet you want a drink." When I finished filling my bucket, I ran some water into the rocks and onto the ground around the base of the hydrant. Then I backed a few steps away with my bucket. The thrush immediately flew down and began to drink. I was touched that a bird trusted and talked to me.

– Herb Myers, in Keezletown, Rockingham County, VA, 2/21/20

I was returning my baby goat to the pasture after his morning walk in the woods and play-time on the picnic table/ kayaks/big rocks at the pond (much leaping and cavorting), when I heard a Red-shouldered Hawk. I saw a soaring bird and got my binoculars on it, expecting the Red-shouldered, only to see a beautiful male Northern Harrier...nice surprise!

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a Turkey Vulture, which then became 6 impressive Turkey Vultures, flying pretty low, gorgeously sunlit against the deep blue sky. So majestic! The Northern Harrier made another fly over, and I continued to hear the Red-shouldered. I finally saw him out over the woods. There were also 7 Tree Swallows flying around, chattering, occasionally landing on a nest box; a pair of bluebirds, 2 juncos, a singing titmouse, and several noisy Red-winged Blackbirds.

Hope everyone is staying healthy, and getting out in this beautiful weather.

– Cynthia Burkhardt, Ritchie Co., WV, 3/28/20



Red-headed Woodpecker at Cindy's feeder.

– photo by Cynthia Burkhardt



Cabwaylingo State Forest Black-and-white

– photo by David Patick

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS (con.)

On Friday a Pied-billed Grebe was found stranded on a parking lot at Blackwater Falls State Park. When a park employee tried to touch the bird, it ran across the tarmac and took off. I didn't think they were supposed to be able to do that!

–Casey Rucker, Dry Fork, WV 3/29/20

It's nice to know that nature is moving right along, business as usual. How comforting to hear the Pine Warblers moving through, their trill perhaps woods. Today two Blue-headed Vireos arrived and a boatload of Yellow-rumped Warblers fresh off the river. We heard the first Louisiana Waterthrush singing at the far end of the stream two days ago when my son & I forged a new path through the leaf-littered woods looking for wildflowers. The Ruby-crowned Kinglets have been belting out their song.

In other areas of the Park we've found frog eggs, toad eggs, butterflies, wildflowers. With so much nature for all to explore here locally, it's a shame the Park has chosen to lock all parking area gates during this time.

– Deb Hale, Harpers Ferry, WV 3/29/20

3/29/2020 2:15 PM

A dozen or more flickers flew from the split-rail fence at my approach at the North Schoolhouse Battlefield, along with two or three meadowlarks, and a handful of Red-winged Blackbirds. And then up popped two Vesper Sparrows to take their place. They treaded carefully all along the zig-zag of rails keeping safely ahead of my step. They are too cool for school!

– Deb Hale, Harpers Ferry, WV, 3/29/20

Gabriel Ricketts and I had a rather productive morning birding in eastern WV today. We started at the US-48 Overlook Wetlands near Moorefield that hosted the LeConte's Sparrow last winter in the hopes of finding some marsh birds. We were quite successful in that regard with two calling Virginia Rails (we saw one of them as well) and a flushed American Bittern, which appears to be a first county record for Hardy. Lots of singing Swamp Sparrows as well.

Some other highlights were a good variety of waterfowl on Belle Babb Lane in Grant Co including Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, American Coot, Green-

winged Teal, American Black Duck, Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck and Bonaparte's Gull. We also had an Osprey near Thorn Run Road. Kimsey Run Lake in Hardy was also decent with Red-breasted Merganser, Horned Grebe, Pied Billed Grebe, Bufflehead, Green-winged Teal and Wood Duck, along with Osprey and Bald Eagle. After this, we worked our way back north. The remaining highlights were a Ruddy Duck at the wastewater ponds at Wardensville and at least two Vesper Sparrows at Fort Edwards in Hampshire.

– James Fox, Front Royal, VA, 4/4/20

While working in the backyard today, pulling endless amounts of weeds, I heard the "mew" of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, who was eating from a suet basket. I rarely see sapsuckers eating suet, so this was neat.

After I pulled all the weeds I could and was returning my tools to the garage, I heard a Brown Thrasher singing in the tall trees around my driveway. I then saw three Brown Thrashers chasing each other in a line formation. One would fly off a perch, and two others would follow closely behind. Then a fifth thrasher was seen sitting quietly on a tree branch while the first one was still singing. So seeing five Brown Thrashers at one time was an all time record for me! There must have been some movement last night. I'm having so much fun breaking my yard records while sheltering-in-place.

– BIRDMOM, Sheltering-in-Place in Jefferson County, WV, 4/5/20

To celebrate my husband's birthday yesterday, we visited Ward Hollow in Kanawha County to check on the Great Horned Owls. The two owlets are almost as big as mom and their face feathers are changing. They were sitting tall, keeping an eye on us while mom was off foraging. We were delighted to hear and see many of the usual birds and some not so usual. On the lake were three Great Egrets standing with one Great Blue Heron while a Forster's Tern circled, dove for fish and sat on a lone pipe sticking up out of the water. Surprisingly, there were no Mallards, but eight Blue-winged Teal swam with a dozen coots.

Bluebirds and Tree Swallows were busy claiming their nest boxes as two rough-

winged swallows watched from a wire. We were pleased to identify four Swamp Sparrows among the cattails while nearby were chipping, white throated and song sparrows. Seven Brown Thrashers flew by as we watched and listened to a fantastic display of killdeer, cardinals, robins, chickadees and many more of our feathered friends.

– Martha Hopper, South Charleston, WV, 4/7/20

What's better than finding Easter eggs in the grass? Finding warblers in the bare trees, knowing that in a few days when the leaves have emerged, the birds will have even more opportunities to tease us folks stuck on the ground without wings. Yellow-throated, Black-and-white, Black-throated Green, and parula. Along with Chipping Sparrows, Louisiana Waterthrushes, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, gnatcatchers, and several sapsuckers! Welcome back!

– Laura Ceperley and Christy Carr, 6+ feet apart in Kanawha State Forest, WV, 4/7/20

The day started great with a sighting of FOS Ruby-throated Hummer on the deck feeder while getting my coffee. Later while filling the feeders I thought I heard a Red-headed Woodpecker but had my doubts. I played the recording quietly on my cell phone and sure enough that's what I heard. Within two minutes, there it was in the side yard. It stayed around going to the sunflower & suet feeders for two hours. We've been here 31 years and that's the first sighting. Finally!! What a beautiful bird.

Thought that was terrific but then had a Bald Eagle fly over, then a raven and later had a FOS thrasher, Blue-headed Vireo (only had one of those many years ago) and a first year male Baltimore Oriole. Great birding day with about 28 species in two hours.

Happy Birding and stay safe

– Lynne Wiseman, Jefferson County, WV, 4/23/20

– Sightings taken from
WV Bird List Serv



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CHAPTER HAPPENINGS

BIBBEE CHAPTER

These are both tentative events based on future safety recommendation. Contact Mindy Waldron to verify.

July, 2020 – Blueberries and Birds at Blueberry Hill. Date and time to be determined, and this is for individuals, not a group event. Always a great time. Can't beat berries, birds and friends. Contact Mindy Waldron at mwaldron@suddenlink.net.

August 29, 2020 – 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.

HANDLAN CHAPTER

All meetings and events are canceled due to COVID-19 until further notice.

HEADQUARTERS CHAPTER

Due to recent events, all outings are subject to change. Please contact event/outing leaders. All events are still posted on the BBC website.

MOUNTWOOD CHAPTER

No planned group activities until further notice due to the COVID-19 safety measures.

NATURE HAPPENINGS AROUND THE STATE

Due to safety measures associated with COVID-19, most activities have been cancelled or postponed. Check with the websites below for details.

POTOMAC VALLEY AUDUBON

www.potomacaudubon.org/calendar/category/bird-events/

WEST VIRGINIA STATE PARKS

www.wvstateparks.com/calendar/

2020 SCREECH OWL CHRONICLES - JEFFERSON COUNTY YARD

The last time "our" gray morph Eastern Screech-owl was seen occupying a nest box in 2020 in our back yard was February 2. It disappeared on February 3, and I assumed it was using a neighbors recently erected nest box a few properties away from ours. His property has no water, no bird feeders and no juicy compost bins where I've been seeing small moths and insects flying near it. So my yard has all the luxuries. The neighbors property probably has fewer squirrels though. The squirrels love the ground underneath the feeders and love to drink pond water. My yard squirrels are famous for stealing active owl nest boxes by moving in immediately after the owl departs for its evening hunt. Pretty sneaky if you ask me.

Squirrels had taken over 2 of the 3 boxes, so recently took advantage of our specially designed nest boxes with a drop down floor (creation of Gary Sylvester). We dumped the "contents" of two boxes a few days ago, and replaced the bedding. I have to admit that my warped sense of humor surfaces when we drop the bottom out of a nest box when a squirrel is in it. Out bounces the bad boy squirrel, and the leaf bedding falls on top of it. Some are so traumatized that they never return.

So as we were closing up the 3rd box tonight, I noticed something was in one of the other boxes. Once back in the house, we were able to verify it was a gray morph owl, not a squirrel. Victory!

The owl popped its head out of the box tonight at 5:45 PM. I watched it until 6:12 PM, when the owl departed from the box. I waited about 10 seconds, and another owl head popped up inside the box. Some lucky owl must have had a nice Valentines Day, and brought home its lover. I assume that it is "our" gray morph owl, as it was in the same box it was last seen occupying. I could not tell if the second owl was a gray or red morph, as I was struggling to see details tonight due to low lighting. My fingers

are crossed, hoping for a red morph so we can tell who is who.

After dancing around the living room cheering and giving each other "high 5's", my husband and I are quite pleased with our tenants.

– BIRDMOM, Jefferson County, WV

13TH SOUTHERN WV SPRING EAGLE SURVEY

On March 7, 2020, the Eagle Brigade of Southern WV (including Three Rivers Avian Center, Bibbee Nature Club, Hanging Rock Migration Observatory, Pipestem S.P. & guests) located the following eagles:

Mouth of the Bluestone River – BAEA – 2 adults, 5 immatures.

Bellepoint – 4 BAEA – 2 adults & 2 immatures.

Brooks Falls – 2 BAEA – 1 adult, 1 immature.

Brooks Overlook – 2 BAEA – (1 adult, 1 immature.

Pipestem S.P. – 1 BAEA – adult.

Rt. 122 – 6 BAEA – 1 adult, 5 immatures.

Hans Creek Valley – 2 BAEA – 2 immatures and 1 GOEA – adult.

Lindside – 1 BAEA – adult.

Alderson – 1 BAEA – adult

Anthony Creek – 1 BAEA – adult

Red Sulphur Springs – 2 adults and 1 unidentified eagle.

31 participants located 29 BAEA (13 adults, 16 immatures), 1 GOEA(adult) and 1 unidentified eagle. BAEA = Bald Eagles & GOEA= Golden Eagles.

Conditions – 31-43 degrees, 70-100% cloud cover, wind NNW 1-20 mph, visibility 2-5 miles & no precipitation.

– *Contributed by Jim Phillips*

NEW MORGANTOWN BIRDING CUP RESULTS

The first annual Morgantown Birding Cup was held from Friday, May 15, at 6pm, until Saturday, May 16 at 6pm. The event was sponsored by the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, Mountaineer Audubon, and the West Virginia Young Birders Club, and included the five counties in Mountaineer Audubon's region: Harrison, Marion, Monongalia, Preston, and Taylor. We had originally envisioned teams traveling around the region looking for birds, but because of the coronavirus, we revised the event. Teams could only count birds within walking distance of where they live, and instead of a closing "count party," we had a Zoom meeting yesterday evening where results were announced. This was a free, friendly competition, and we had a great time!

We had seventy-three teams register for the Cup, and sixty-four teams submitted bird lists—this is amazing! We also had many young birders participating in the count, ranging from infants to high school students. Congratulations and thank you to everyone who participated!

The winning team was Hannah Clipp and Derek Courtney with 90 species. They birded in Morgantown. Notable species included Black-billed Cuckoos and fledgling Barred Owls in the WVU Core Arboretum.

Mollee Brown was a close second place with 84 species. Mollee birded near the Marion/Taylor county border. Notable species included Mourning Warbler and Bobolinks.

In third place was the team of LeJay and Helen Ann Graffious and Amy Hill. They tallied 65 species, including many Hooded Warblers, at Old Hemlock in Preston County.

We had many warbler species migrating through our area during the Cup, including Tennessee, Cape May, Magnolia, Bay-breasted, Blackburnian, and others. Several teams spotted young birds in their nests, including Black Vulture, Red-shouldered Hawk, and American Robin. Also, many teams saw Baltimore Orioles, or noted on their lists that they'd seen Bal-

timore Orioles earlier in the week. Several teams saw Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and Indigo Buntings in their backyards. Unless I missed it, no teams reported Yellow-billed Cuckoos in our area yet. The most commonly reported species across the lists included Mourning Dove, Blue jay, chickadee sp., Tufted Titmouse, European Starling, American Robin, and Northern Cardinal.

Thank you to everyone at the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, Mountaineer Audubon, and the West Virginia Young Birders Club who helped make this event happen, and a huge THANK YOU to all the participants! We were thrilled with the number of folks who participated in the first annual Morgantown Birding Cup.

– Katie Fallon

Chair & Co-founder, Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia

President, Mountaineer Chapter of the National Audubon Society

THE HUNGRY RAVEN

On August 20, 2007, I was with a group touring the western national parks and we were in the geyser area of Yellowstone Park. It was windy and chilly, so after a visit to Excelsior Geyser Crater and being briefly warmed by the clouds of steam, I went back to the bus.

A raven landed in the top of a lodgepole pine at the far end of the parking lot. He flew towards us, hovering over a white pickup truck, then lit on the pavement right in front of us. He walked a few feet towards us, then flew onto the tailgate of the pickup, then into the bed. We saw him begin to feed on something. Then he hopped up onto the side panel with a cookie in his mouth and flew away.

A few minutes later, he came back, got another cookie and flew away. Two of us went to the truck to see where he got the food. We saw a canvas lunch bag with one section not fully zipped. That was all he needed. As we pulled away, he was back again, this time enjoying a sandwich.

– *Contributed by Bob Rine*



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There were good times...

Before the coronavirus attacked, there were a number of interesting winter and early spring bird outings. Read more about all of these inside and remember more calm times.

*(Photo by Rosie Campbell
on the Erie trip)*

WHAT'S INSIDE

Editor's Message	1
Message From Our President.....	1
BBC Bylaws Amendment	1
Andy Thompson & Shirley Martin Pass	2
2020 BBC Early Spring Meeting Report.....	3
2020 WV Big Day Reports	3
Mountwood BBCers Trip To Lake Erie	4
Interview With Twan Leenders Of The RTPI.....	5
Ken Cronenberger Passes	5
BBC Trip To Killbuck Marsh, April Ohio Outings	6-7
Roberta Mitchell Passes	7
Correspondence	7
Interesting Sightings Around The State.....	8-9
Changes In Contact Information.....	10
Chapter Happenings/Nature Happenings.....	10
2020 Screech Owl Chronicles.....	10-11
13th Southern WV Spring Eagle Survey.....	11
New Morgantown Birding Cup Results.....	11