



THE MAIL BAG

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

Editor's Note

And we're back! Foray, chapter outings, club weekends, all are in the pipeline for 2022. We hope to see as many people involved as possible this spring and summer, if spring ever comes. As I write this, it is 24 degrees outside, windy and spitting snow. It is also March 28th. In three days, it will be 70 degrees; in five days, back into the 40s.

Keep and eye on your mailbox, your email and the BBC website for Foray information. Details and pricing are being fine-tuned now. We will be convening at Camp Galilee in Terra Alta, Preston County. Not only is the location quiet and wooded, but much of the region is the same and there are the possibilities for many species of interesting birds, wildflowers, animals and much more. June 3-11, 2022, are the dates. Cranesville Swamp, Cathedral State Park, and more await you!



As with everything, there is transition. The bird club has not been immune to this. It allows us to bring in new ideas and fresh perspectives that may be married into the traditions that have made the BBC successful for so long. We have brand-new Board of Trustee members and are involving more people in planning of the 90th Anniversary.

If you find yourself with time on your hands (who does, these days), or have a desire to be a bigger part of the organization, the opportunities will always present themselves. As our club gets 'more experienced', we'll say, some leaders retire from long service, and the current leadership will be looking to involve more of our extended BBC family in our growth.

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT, CINDY SLATER

Recently, I have been asked what my favorite bird is. I have always replied that that is a terrific question. Or maybe my answer is if you really think I can just pick one? Then I think I am pretty clever and get by giving a group answer like shorebirds. Well, tonight, on March 15, 2022 at 7:45 p.m., I decided! It is definitely a Timberdoodle! Any male that has so many romantic gestures and goes through that much energy and effort to attract his mate wins my heart. I mean, come on, you must give a guy credit for picking the time of day when there is romantic lighting, a chill in the air, makes beeps, twitters, and warbles, combined with an evening flight display or sky dance as some say, then flutters down from the sky and lands very close to you and starts to disco on the ground a little before he repeats the process all over again. Courting might not really get any better than that, especially if you are a bird. I suppose you have to witness it for yourself to truly appreciate the aerial display and magical performance that sends the message of springtime.

Another bird that represents spring time for me is the Eastern Phoebe. I always get my first sign of spring of my first phoebe of the year at North Bend State Park, when the Bird Club meets for our first event and meeting of the year. This year did not disappoint, and we all had a wonderful visit. Spring is on the way!

Keep reading your mailbag for updates of events to come. Moving ahead a little into this year, the BBC Fall meeting will be at Hawks Nest State Park. Mark your calendars now for October 28 through October 30, 2022. Lots of planning and excitement is underway for our 90th Anniversary. You will not want to delay about sending in your reservation, as there is a very limited number of rooms. We all want to be as together as possible for this wonderful monumental celebration of the club.

– Respectfully, your BBC President, Cindy Slater

BIRDING-IN-OHIO WEBSITE CREATED

Thanks to the many birders who have helped create the Birding-in-Ohio website by submitting suggestions for eBird hotspots, tips for birding, photos, and more.

We added pages to the website describing five eBird shared bird reporting hotspots in Ashland, Guernsey, and Stark counties.

Check the latest post in the "What's New..." blog of Birding-in-Ohio, the Ohio Ornithological Society birding website, for details on new and updated hotspots: <https://birding-in-ohio.com/category/whats-new/>

Ken Ostermiller
eBird Hotspot reviewer for Ohio
Ohio Ornithological Society

FALL OBSERVATIONS FROM ROSIE CAMPBELL

Sun. Oct. 3, 2021 – Fall Walk at Sunfish Creek - In spite of misting rain, the drive down Rt. 26 to Sunfish was lovely. The roadsides were banked with goldenrod and purple/blue asters, the trees just beginning to show fall color. In a thick, woody area, a red-tailed hawk swooped by the windshield so close we nearly hit him.

Once a small group of us had reached Sylvia Owen's cabin along the creek, the rain stopped and we had a great walk. The woods here is old sycamores, oak, maple, and walnut. The understory is mostly paw-paw and spicebush with a ground cover of ferns and flowers. The creek wanders back and forth between massive old overhanging sycamores, shallow and wide in places, and deeper pools here and there. Large, mossy rocks jut above the reflecting water. It's a lovely place to be. In this excellent riparian habitat, wildflowers flourish. Several kinds of asters, blue-stemmed goldenrod, wing-stem, and woodland sunflowers were blooming now and a few tall, yellow Jerusalem artichokes. Walnuts, some hickory, acorns and paw-paws litter the ground. Some of us tasted the overripe, fallen pawpaws, which were too, too sweet. I didn't like them, but several kinds of wildlife do. I gathered some to plant.

Not many birds were seen, the woods quiet now. Most birds have finished raising families, and those still here hard to see in the thick foliage. We found a tall, large-berried stalk of jack-in the pulpit, and some tiny, peculiar Chinese yams. Sylvia showed us a particularly lovely spot where a wedding was recently held. That would have been nice!

At the end of our walk, we gathered at a picnic shelter along the creek for a covered dish meal. There were some natural foods, including some delicious butternut squash soup. Dessert was paw-paw ice cream. While we were eating and visiting in the shelter, it rained again. Plans were made for a tree walk at our place next Sunday.



Me in a sycamore tree on the Sunfish walk.

Sun. Oct. 10, 2021 – Tree Walk at Malv and Rosie Campbell's - About a dozen folks interested in trees met at our house to see some trees that are easily found in the area, but not seen everyday. The list included: burr oak, American chestnut, saw-toothed or "gobbler" oak, butternut, Kentucky coffee tree, paulownia, persimmon, hazelnut, Ohio and yellow buckeyes, bald cypress, dawn redwood, larch, (these last three being needled, but deciduous,) golden rain tree, little-leafed linden, Chinese chestnut, sourwood, ginko, and cucumber magnolia. Not all are native, but interesting nevertheless.

We started our hike at the edge of our yard and ended in the hollow where Bill Mead has a large stand of bald cypress, possibly the largest stand of bald cypress in Ohio. (these are large trees, planted in the 1960s.) Afterwards, we had good conversation and a nice covered dish picnic in the picnic shelter here.

Sat. Oct. 16, 2021 – The Captina Conservancy Festival - A cool, rainy, windy day failed to spoil it but caused the event to have many fewer attendees than usual. The Festival was held at their headquarters cabin along Captina Creek. Entertainment featured the local bluegrass band, "Almost Famous" whose banjo player is Steve Moore, the best banjo player in the USA.

Several conservation groups had displays. There was a silent auction of nature related art, a food tent, and an insect and water creature capture for children. Captina Creek is one of the extra-clean waters where the hellbender salamander can still be found.

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:

Ryan Tomazin
348 Station Street, Apt. 7
Bridgeville, PA 15017
412-220-9726
wwwarblers@hotmail.com



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

2021-22 WEST VIRGINIA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

Matt McKinney, Micah Brittain and I did the Mineral Wells area of the Parkersburg CBC on December 18th. Overall, we had 60 species and 17,484 birds. We had a fantastic day of birding. The coolest moment was right at dawn at the 4H grounds. We were looking over the water for any waterfowl (of which there were very few) and heard the sound of what was like a waterfall. We turned, and rising out of the fields to the east along the river was a flock of blackbirds with at least 16,000 individuals. Overwhelmingly grackles by the long tails and chip notes. However, mixed in among them we were able to discern a few with rusty heads and different chip notes. Plus some Red-wings. Throughout the day we saw large flocks of blackbirds dominated by grackles but did not count them because we figured they were just the same ones moving around. If we counted them the total would be more like 50,000.

The highlight species of the day was 3 Palm Warblers at the gated entrance to the Wood County 4H grounds, in the two large cedar trees on either side of the entrance.

– Ross Brittain, Bridgeport, WV

We held our Ona Christmas count yesterday December 18th. There were 18 participants and 8 teams. We were able to see 68 total species. The temperature ranged 42 degrees to 62 in the afternoon. It was cloudy and we did experience some rainfall for about an hour from noon thru 1 p.m.

Some of the highlights included our first record for a White-eyed Vireo and a third record for a Black-crowned Night-Heron which was a juvenile. We tied records for Lesser Scaup at 30 and Common Loons at 10. We also recorded a Common Raven, Eastern Phoebe and House Wren. We had no luck with Red-breasted Nuthatch or Barred Owl.

– David Patick, Huntington, WV

We keep closing in on the magical 100 species for Morgantown Area Christmas Bird Count. This year we had 95 species on count day and an additional three count week species. New species added to the count this year were Greater White-fronted Goose (D. Courtney), Black Scoter (count week bird by D. Courtney), Marsh Wren (D. Courtney) and American Woodcock (L. Graffious).

Other birds of note are Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Northern Harrier, Virginia Rail, Spotted Sandpiper, Bonaparte's Gull, Red-headed Woodpecker, White-eyed Vireo (2 this year and sixth year in a row in same area after first found by T. Bronson), House Wren (4 -high count for WVMO CBC), and Brown Thrasher. We had an usually high count of American Robins (2,700+). This was likely related to the number of Bradford Pear fruits in the area. We had another 15 species which set high count records.

Each year the number of participants continues to grow as does the skill level of those in the field. We had 12 to 20 parties in the field and 4 feeder counts. Parties were kept small for COVID safety.

We hope to grow the participation. Katie Fallon leads a morning count just for West Virginia Young Birders. This group is currently a subgroup of the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia. This year they had four young birders. Other young folks taking part in the main count were Conner (under age 10) with his parent and two competent birders under the age of 14. Nine other birders in the field were between the ages of 19 and 23.

My appreciation goes to all who all make this a successful count. This was my 33rd year to coordinate this event and it is only getting better because of the people who give their time and skill.

– LeJay Graffious, Bruceton Mills, WV

The Pipestem Area, WV Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, the 18th. Preliminary results indicate 57 species for the day with large numbers of Cedar Waxwings (81), Yellow-rumped Warblers (65) and American Robins. Two Great Horned Owls were in our neighborhood for count week.

Other highlights included Ring-necked Duck (13), Bufflehead (cw), Common Merganser (144), Hooded Merganser (32), Common Loon (1), Pied-billed Grebe (5),

Bald Eagle (14 - 6 adults, 8 1st year birds), Killdeer (17), Eastern Phoebe (2), Black-capped Chickadee (cw), Carolina Wren (59*), Hermit Thrush (13), Northern Mockingbird (19 - tied with record high), European Starling (396), American Tree Sparrow (3), Field Sparrow (6), Fox Sparrow (cw), and Eastern Meadowlark (5).

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV

The Parkersburg CBC was Saturday, December 18. Two new birds for our CBC list -- the Indigo Bunting and Eastern Wood-Pewee. Note the huge flock of grackles (16,000).

Highlights included Canada Goose (718), Gadwall (36), American Black Duck (17), Green-winged Teal (9), Ring-necked Duck (3), Hooded Merganser (30), Common Loon (3), Pied-billed Grebe (3), Horned Grebe (12), Turkey Vulture (156), Black Vulture (14), Northern Harrier (1), Red-shouldered Hawk (22), Merlin, Killdeer (27), Eastern Screech-Owl (7), Belted Kingfisher (17), Northern Flicker (37), Winter Wren (3), Ruby-crowned Kinglet (3), Hermit Thrush (2), Brown Thrasher, Yellow-rumped Warbler (104), Palm Warbler (8), American Tree Sparrow (31), Field Sparrow (27), Fox Sparrow (5), Swamp Sparrow (18), Eastern Meadowlark (4), and Rusty Blackbird (6). Total Species - 79.

– Dick Esker, Washington, WV

The Raleigh Co. CBC was held on December 19, 2021. We really want to thank the people who helped with this count. They really made it the successful CBC that it was. A total of 57 species was tallied with a grand total 18,598 birds. Jim Phillips found a Merlin in Beckley. Jim Phillips, Steven Wilson, and Deb Beutler found Cedar Waxwings. Everyone found robins. They seem to be everywhere. Steven Wilson found a House Wren. I found a Double-crested Cormorant and a Horned Grebe. Mindy and I tallied 15,000 crows in Beckley. So it was a good day.

The McDowell Co. CBC was held on Wednesday December 22, 2021. Mindy and I were the only 2 participants for the

(Continued on Page 4)

TWENTY-SIXTH REPORT OF THE WEST VIRGINIA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE, 2021

Alert observers submitted eight rare bird reports in 2021 of which seven were accepted by the West Virginia Bird Records Committee. The other report was likely correct but the Committee needed more observers or photographic evidence for inclusion in the record. Two birds were added to the official State List. The first was a European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) observed in Preston County at the home of Scott Cavallaro in Bruceton Mills on January 28, 2021, but it was added as an Exotic List species. The second, reported by Elliot Kirschbaum, was a Limpkin (*Aramus guarauna*) recorded in Steamboat Run in Jefferson County by Elliot, Nancy Kirschbaum and Todd Fagan on August 16, 2021.

In addition to the European Goldfinch and Limpkin, four reports of Eurasian Collared-Dove were added to the State Review List. Two different Eurasian Collared-Doves were spotted by Jack O'Connell in Greenbrier County on April 12th in the DMV parking lot, and on April 19th at the intersection of Rte. 21 and 30. Additionally, Casey Rucker found a Eurasian Collared-Dove near Dryfork in Randolph County on April 6, 2021, and Debra and Kenneth Floyd had one in Ronceverte during a Christmas Bird Count on December 19, 2021.

These four sightings combined with the one historic sighting outside of Monroe County means that Eurasian Collared-Dove has been removed from the state Review List and no longer requires a rare bird report for the Committee's review. Lastly, a White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chibi*) was located by Mike Griffith and Janet Keating about four miles south of Gallipolis Ferry in Mason County on April 17, 2021. This White-faced Ibis is the third confirmed sighting of the species in West Virginia.

Unfortunately, one report of a Bewick's Wren (**Thryomanes bewickii**) in Randolph County did not have sufficient

2021-22 WEST VIRGINIA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS (CONT.)

count. Very difficult to get help in that part of the world. We tallied 33 species for the day. We hope everyone enjoyed their counts this year.

– Allen and Mindy Waldron, Surveyor, WV

Despite low temperatures and many surveyors reporting a slow day, our Canaan CBC was surprisingly successful. Many thanks to our intrepid volunteers.

There were no new species this year, but we had new high counts for fourteen species. Our count found 57 species and 2,330 individuals.

– Casey Rucker, Dry Fork, WV

Eight feeder-watchers and 14 field participants found 68 species of birds on the Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count in Pendleton County centered around Franklin, WV. Two more species were noted during count week (Golden Eagle and Red-winged Blackbird). There were no rare species or new species for the count, but we did have new high counts for 18 species: Common Merganser, Ring-necked Duck, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Winter Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, Northern Mockingbird, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. The mild weather and the excellent crop of red cedar berries may have contributed to the high counts for many of these birds, especially the Hermit Thrush, mockingbird, bluebird, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. It is interesting that there were so many woodpeckers observed this year!

– Fred Atwood, Fairfax Co., VA

We ran the 122nd Christmas count for Huntington on January 2, 2022. There were 17 participants and 7 parties. The temperature started out at 54 degrees and dropped throughout the day to 36 in the afternoon. There were persistent light showers. We had recorded a total of 69 species. We had tied records for Merlin, Winter Wren, Bald Eagles and Barred Owls. Some interesting species seen were Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, American Woodcock and Common Merganser. The highlight of the count was a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher seen and photographed in Lawrence County, Ohio. This was the first record for the count and the first ever January record for both Ohio and West Virginia.

– David Patick, Huntington, WV

The Charles Town Christmas Bird Count was held on Dec. 19, 2021. Twenty-nine birders tallied 15,303 birds of 75 species. Highlights included Tundra Swan (tied the record high with 3), Common Loon, Virginia Rail (record high 7), Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, and a record high of 8 Eastern Phoebes.

The Inwood CBC was held on Jan. 2, 2022, with 17 birders tallying 9,860 birds of 72 species. Highlights included a single Snow Goose in a flock of -140 Canadas, count week Tundra Swans (flock of 63), and count week Redheads. Record highs of Eastern Screech-owl (22), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (29), Hermit Thrush (36), Field Sparrow (31), and Rusty Blackbird (200); singles of Red-headed Woodpecker and Merlin.

Thanks to all who helped make these two eastern panhandle counts enjoyable and successful!

– Bob Dean, Clear Brook, VA

documentation in the minds of a majority of the committee members, given that the species has not been seen in the state for about 30 years. Hopefully they can spot this bird again and get some good photos to confirm its presence in West Virginia.

The Records Committee actions can be seen on our website at <http://www.brooksbirdclub.org/west-virginia-bird-records-committee.html>.

– Ross Brittain, WVBC Chair, Bridgeport, WV

THE 2022 BROOKS BIRD CLUB EARLY SPRING MEETING REPORT

Friday, March 4 - We got to North Bend State Park for the Brooks Bird Club, for the 2022 Early Spring Meeting. It's been two years since we have spent quality time at North Bend State Park. We always enjoy the park, the hotel, and the restaurant with excellent food. We knew the hotel had been renovated within the last two years, but were disappointed to find that the restaurant was closed for lunch and would not be open to public, only for events like the Brook Bird Club. So back to Harrisville for a Subway sandwich for us to have a picnic at North Bend before the board meeting. Check in was at 3:00 p.m. and it's my first time on a board as a member of the club. It will be my honor to serve with the board! The Brooks Bird Club has a long history to live up to and I will do my best. After the meeting, we had dinner and a program of interest. The program was about The Legacy of Bird Watchers Digest, by Dawn Hewitt. A very nice presentation on history and what happened to Bird Watchers Digest. They had good news and said a new company will start printing a new magazine called the BWD.



Saturday, March 5 - The day started off cool and began to warm up around 70 degrees. Our group started at the Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge on the Ohio River. Lots of birds around the bird feeders at the refuge headquarters. We took some time watching the birds on the first stop of the day. This could be a day trip for the whole family to learn about the refuge, hike, and see the birds on the Ohio River. A trip that we would like to take are grandson to experience.

Our next stop would be Willow Island Dam to see the cormorants, a large number of cormorants! The water was high from rainfall in the last two weeks, and the water around the lock and dam was moving very fast downriver. The group caught a momentary view of Osprey down river from the lock and dam. This is when I got a rare bird in the water; there it was, a "duck". It had black body, white head and an orange bottom. A buoy in the Ohio River!

On the way to the French Creek backwater, we stopped at a man-made pond just past the Willow Dam. It is a park for company employees. Great Blue Herons, ducks and Canada Geese! French Creek backwater was ok. The Song Sparrow was singing and we found old Cliff Swallows nest under the bridge. We identified the birds on the water with some difficulty. There was a cormorant. We hoped for more birds at this stop. The next group got to see six Bald Eagles! Our next stop would be Middle Island in St. Mary's. We stop for a lunch break. At one time, they grew potatoes on the island and now they grow mussels for the island wildlife refuge to reintroduce the mussels back to Ohio River. The group hiked over to the wetlands on the island and got to see some ducks after lunch. I got sidetracked looking for spring plants along the river bank, where I found Hairy Bittercress with flowers (*Cardamine hirsuta*), and Poison Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) on Middle Island.

It was time to leave the island for North Bend State Park. We stopped at Harrisville side of the lake, a part of the Hughes River watershed to find Red-headed Woodpecker at the lake, and Wood Frog and Spring Peepers near the lake. Lots of people were enjoying the nice weather at the lake. A great day for all! At 6:00 p.m., a dinner buffet, and a program at 7:30 on National



Hairy Bittercress

Wildlife Refuge System Reflections and Ohio River Islands NWR by Vic Elam. A very informing talk on wildlife refuges and the undertaking to manage the Ohio Islands Refuge. The total bird count for the day was around 73 bird species from three groups that did a field trip to the Ohio River valley.

Sunday, March 6 - The day started out with a breakfast buffet, a prayer service and the membership meeting. Then the time had come to check out for home. The rain was just starting, but we got to hear and see a Pine Warbler outside the lodge. A quote from a good friend, "Life is Good". This was a great weekend to enjoy birding on the Ohio River with new and old friends, to learn new things and have fun with everyone! A weekend of memories with friends!

– *Contributed by Lee Miller*



Having fun at Hughes River in Harrisville

THE ART OF FINDING A RARE BIRD

Stories and photos contributed by Zealon Erich Wight-Maier

My name is Zealon and I love birds! I've been bird watching since I was five years old. (2014) During last year's pandemic, I started actively birding, which has brought me much peace and joy. Birding is when one seeks, records, and lists the birds that they find. My life list (a list of birds that one has seen in his or her life) is now at 293 species and growing each day. A rare bird is a bird that is unusual at a given location. Rare birds also include late or early birds. A late bird is a bird that has stayed past its usual occupancy time at a specific location. An early bird is a bird that has shown up before its usual occupancy time. In this past year, I have seen over 50 individual rare birds and would like to share some useful tips on how to find them with you!

In order to find a rare bird, it is important to get to know your local species. One good way to become familiar with the bird in your area is by using the Merlin bird ID app and reading local field guides. The Merlin app provides both audio and photos of any birds you have a chance of seeing in your area. Though most field guides do not have audio, they do cover a larger area such as a county or state. Field guides also provide more details about the bird's specific habits and habitat. Another way to become familiar with your local species is to simply get outside and look for them! Once you are familiar with your local birds, it is easier to recognize any unusual looking species and record it. You can record a rare bird by taking a picture, making an audio recording, drawing a sketch, and making specific notes of what you observe.

When I visit a new place, I always check out eBird's bar charts for that particular area. eBird bar charts summarize all the birds seen within a state or county. These charts list the abundance of each species from 0% (very rare) to 100% (almost guaranteed to see this species). When you have an idea of what species are unusual in an area, you can be more focused on looking for them in the field. Exploring eBird's bar charts was how I learned that both the Savannah Sparrow and the Vesper Sparrow breed in my area. eBird also offers another great tool called rare bird alerts which provides a list of all the rare birds seen the previous day at a selected location.

Once you have an idea of the rare birds you would like to see, it is a good idea to get to know each bird by sight and sound. Studying field guides provides descriptions of the bird, habitat, habits, range maps, and distinguishing features that can all aid in identification of a rare bird. Both eBird and Merlin are excellent options for pictures, sound recordings, and videos of almost every bird in the world. I like to watch videos of the bird singing because it helps me associate the song to the bird. Watching videos can also give you clues of the bird's preferred habitat. Using these tools was how I identified my only King Rail sighting, which was by sound.

In the pursuit of finding a rare bird, it is important to know when all birds migrate. During migration, many birders check the weather patterns at known migrant traps. A migrant trap is a place where birds stop before or after crossing large bodies of water or deserts. A couple of well known migrant traps include Magee Marsh, Ohio; Point Pelee, Ontario; High Island and South Padre islands, Texas; and Cape May, New Jersey. During migration and along coastal areas, it is a good idea to check your favorite birding patch after a strong storm. Fierce storms can make birds stop and rest when migrating. Storms may also push offshore species farther inland than they would normally be seen. On my trip to South Carolina this year, I got to see a Magnificent Frigatebird! This rare species got forced out of its normal range by a huge storm we had the previous day.

Oftentimes, nature will provide helpful clues for the observer. When crows and jays discover a suspected predator, they tend to make a loud ruckus to drive away the threat. Many times you may see them dive bombing and chasing a bird of prey. Smaller birds like chickadees and titmice have specific alarm calls to alert nearby



A Forster's Tern at Fairfax Pond WMA in Preston County, taken August, 2021



A Cackling Goose at Star City in Monongalia County, taken January, 2022



A Marsh Wren at my home in Cassville, Monongalia County, October, 2021



A Northern Shrike at Decker's Creek Trail, Preston County, December, 2021

birds of danger. Knowing these alarm calls is a useful tool for the birder. On one of my trips to AnneMarie Sculpture Gardens in Maryland, I kept hearing a big group of crows making a fuss about something. So I decided to check it out. When I got closer, I saw that all the noise was caused over a Great Horned Owl! Though the owl wasn't rare, it was a rare chance for me because I had only heard this species in the wild and had never actually seen it until then! (thank you, rowdy crows!) As I am writing this, three Blue Jays alerted me of an adult Cooper's Hawk right outside my window! The more time you spend outside in nature, the more attuned your senses will become to the clues she provides. It may seem overwhelming at first, but finding a rare bird can be as simple as going out in the field, enjoying yourself and having fun on the search!



A Birder's Daydream of Spring!

It was a pleasant mid March evening. The first Louisiana Waterthrush recently arrived a day or two ago and was singing his heart out. I walked closer to the stream and listened to the bubbling water. It was fast flowing from the recent snow melt, but still as clear as glass. I walked further up the hillside until I reached an overgrown field. It was bustling with activity. Eastern Meadowlarks, Red-winged Blackbirds, Song and Field sparrows were all singing their evening chorus. A Tree Swallow glistening in the soft evening light, dashed over me and caught a mouth full of gnats. It was getting late so I started walking back down the hill. As I was making my way back, I heard a sound that filled my heart with joy. Woodcocks! Peent, Peent, Peent! I was surrounded by their endless buzzy calls which made me chuckle. It was finally spring!

CORRESPONDENCE

I'd like to offer some background on the chickadee quote in the fall-winter Mail Bag. Teale's son died in combat in Germany in 1945, and Teale and his wife went on their "wandering through" trip in 1947 as a way of dealing with grief. Nature helped to soothe Teale's heart, and that makes the quote more deeply meaningful.

I enjoy The Mailbag!

– Janet Belding

•••

"A word about the passenger pigeon, at this stage, might be of interest to the younger set. It is a large slender bird with a small head, notched beak, short, strong legs, with naked feet, long tail and long pointed wings. These birds migrated by the million from one section of the country to another during the autumn in search of food. They lived principally on acorns and dog-wood berries. The rapidity of their flight is marvelous (sic). When I was a small child their annual roosting place was in the swamp between Princeton and Augusta, and between the old baseball park and A. M. Sutton's residence. This section, then, was heavily timbered. I think I do not exaggerate (sic) when I state that I have seen pigeons by the thousands (possibly millions) in autumn afternoons flying to this roost. Their numbers were such that the light of the sun would be obscured. Large oaks would crash to the ground from the weight of the birds. Their cooing and chattering at night could be heard for miles. Princeton always turned out en masse, at night, with sacks and pine torches (it was before the time of the electric flashlight) for a raid on the pigeon roost.

To indicate the immensity and size of these flocks of birds, during the last season that the passenger pigeon(s) roosted in Mercer County, my old friend, R. F. Karnes (father of our clerk of the Circuit Court), states that one afternoon while standing on the bank of Rich Creek, above Spanishburg, a flock of pigeons passed going west. He estimated this flock to be one mile in width and it was about forty-five minutes in passing one point."

– from Harrison W. Straley II's *Memoirs of Old Princeton*, shared by Jim Phillips

ED PITNER PASSES

Recently, the club was made aware of the passing of longtime member Ed Pitner four years ago.

Edward Pitner Sr., 93, of Marietta, died Saturday, March 10, 2018 at Selby General Hospital.

Edward was born July 21, 1924 in Mannington, West Virginia to John James and Lillian Pitner.

He was a World War II veteran of the U.S. Army who landed on Omaha Beach at Normandy.

He married Rosalie North on February 9, 1973.

He was a pilot for the Department of Natural Resources in Athens for many years. He retired from teaching at PCC in 1989. He was a member of the Ohio Arts and Crafts Guild as well as an artist. He taught nature survival classes and founded the Poison Control Center in Parkersburg.

Edward will be deeply missed by his children Linda Sue Ormond, Lee (Susie) Pitner and John (Debby) Pitner; stepchildren Nyla (Dan) Wiggins, Richard (Linda) North and Cheryl (Sam) Keller; numerous grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren, spanning five generations.

Edward was preceded in death by his first wife Geneva, second wife Rosalie, stepdaughters Gayle Camp and Brenda Miller-Wolfe, grandsons Danny Wiggins and Richard North. Special thanks and heartfelt appreciation to daughter Nyla and son-in-law Dan, for providing 24/7 care and comfort for both parents in their final years.

– *The Parkersburg News and Sentinel*, March 2018



Ed on Texas boat trip, 1985

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS AROUND THE STATE

I always enjoy listening to owls during a meteor shower. Last evening, I was listening to a screech owl in our yard when its call was drowned out by a gang of very vocal coyotes. Only saw one meteor but I am glad for the experience.

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV, 12/13/21

I'd gone out to put seed on the tray when I noticed an immature Yellow-bellied Sapsucker on the edge of the birdbath just hacking away at the ice. Something I haven't seen before. Time to get out the heater.

Last week I saw over two dozen Cedar Waxwings on our morning dog walk. I pointed them out to another neighbor who was out with his little dogs. The homeowner was just coming back from her walk so I showed her the flock in her tree. The light was not great but that shape is so recognizable. I told her how special these birds were and just to emphasize this point I printed out a photo of one and dropped it off at her house that evening.

Yesterday morning they were there again, but in lower numbers. A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was working the trunk of the same tree. I saw the homeowner on the road and told her the special birds were in her tree again and to look for them. This morning the light was good and illuminated that lovely yellow breast.

– Bruni Haydl, Charles Town, WV, 12/13/21

Bev and I traveled to Mason County, Plain Valley Road, today to see the Snowy Owl. We found it with the help of local residents sitting on top of a farm house. The owner was very accommodating, letting us walk around his home and take photos. Weather was 62 degrees with a beautiful blue sky.

– Jim Triplett, Charleston, WV, 12/14/21

This morning about 11:10 near Mathias, WV, there was a dead deer in a field. Seven Golden Eagles were in the field feeding on the dead deer. They were later joined by thirteen Bald Eagles. They were immature birds. The Bald Eagles kept flying in and landing at the site of the deer. We watched the show for half an hour or more until the eagles scattered and flew further down in the field. At one point, three eagles were trying to snatch a piece of deer meat from another eagle. The piece of meat was dropped.

About four miles down the road I counted fifteen additional mature Bald Eagles, all having white heads. They were sitting in the trees and were easy to count. There was one Golden Eagle with them.

– Diane Holsinger, Timberville, VA, 12/25/21

While doing the Point Pleasant Christmas Count today, late in the afternoon, I was lucky enough to find fourteen Brewer's Blackbirds. They were located in Mason Co. on Rt. 817 just north of McCausland WMA. Two or three of the group were females. A few minutes after I found the birds, Josh Holland and Matt Togger arrived and we all had good scope looks.

– Mike Griffith, Huntington, WV, 12/26/21

Today, we took a ride to Greenville, Monroe County. We found Bald Eagles (13), Rough-legged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawks (3), Northern Harrier and American Kestrels (3). In our travels, we also had two American Kestrels in Forest Hill and three Bald Eagles in Hinton. Also, saw 50+ Common Ravens.

Here at the house, we saw a Cooper's Hawk this morning and again this afternoon.

– Jim & Judy Phillips, Pipestem, WV, 1/3/22

We left our little cabin in Blackwater Falls State Park this morning. The temperature was eight degrees. On our way out, I went back to the sled run where I first saw two Red Crossbills yesterday. Sure enough, there they were again. We counted twenty of them. They flew from the treetops to the building to the snow making machines to the picnic table and back to the treetops again chattering all the while. They did this repeatedly. They seemed interested in the snow blowing out of the machines.

On the way to Harman, we found eight Hooded Mergansers on the Blackwater River on Beall Lane where the river was not frozen.

– Herb Myers, Tucker County, WV, 1/11/22

The Eagle Brigade of Southern WV conducted its 17th Winter Eagle Survey on Saturday, January 8, 2022. Thirty-five volunteers from Three Rivers Avian Center, Bibbee Nature Club, Brooks Bird Club, Hanging Rock Migration Observatory, Pipestem State Park and guests covered areas of Monroe, Summers, Raleigh & Greenbrier Counties in WV and Giles County, VA. Their efforts were rewarded with 3 Golden Eagles (adult, sub-adult & immature) and 56 Bald Eagles (24 adults & 32 immatures).

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV, 1/14/22



Snowy Owl found in Mason County in December, 2021 – photo by Jason White

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS (con.)

What a wonderful couple of hours of birding brought me this morning - and what I consider to be a strange combination. My first birds in the snowy field were two Killdeer and a small flock of Field Sparrows. They I saw an eagle perched in a dead tree that I assumed to be a bald - until I saw zoomed in with my camera and noticed some details....Golden Eagle! My first ever in WV!

– Jack O’Connell, Greenbrier Co., WV, 1/14/22

A special regular visitor is a Brown Creeper. Sometimes I see two but one of them is always on the suet cake. Two cakes are on the trunk of the walnut tree and sometimes the sapsucker and creeper are feeding at the same time, side by side. I’m still hoping for a Fox Sparrow but will settle for the pretty Song Sparrows. There is also one Chipping Sparrow.

Four cowbirds show up on occasion. Homemade peanut suet and live mealworms are in high demand by the bluebirds, Carolina Wren, chickadees and titmice. One of my cats helped himself to mealworms before I had a chance to put the dish out. Who knew? Guess it’s protein.

– Bruni Haydl, Charles Town, WV, 1/24/22

The dog and I were finishing up our walk, coming back through the pasture, when I saw a little bird hopping along the sunny, grassy bank of the access road to our solar panels. The bird didn’t flush, just kept hopping along, burrowing it’s head into the grassy hummocks...it was a Pine Warbler. My chance to get a better photo than those blurry blobs I’ve gotten so far! Did I have



Pine Warbler - photo by Cindy Burkhart



My name is Lang Elliott and I am spearheading the creation of Hear Birds Again, a mobile application for bird enthusiasts who suffer from high frequency hearing loss and desire to once again enjoy the uplifting songs of wild birds.

This is a non-profit effort.

Hear Birds Again will be a free, open-source iOS app (hopefully with an Android version to follow) that employs advanced algorithms to lower the pitch of bird songs in real time, thereby making them audible during walks in nature. Once we publish the initial version, our source code will be made available to other developers who may then help us improve our existing app or else use the code in their own productions. Our intent is to share freely to encourage continued development of more evolved solutions.

As of early March, our project is unfolding as planned. We were able to upgrade our basic pitch-shifting algorithm for significantly improved audio performance, and then code it in a format acceptable for use in Apple’s mobile operating system (iOS). We are currently refining the User Interface (UI), which is the last step before internal testing of a working prototype. Barring unforeseen delays, we still hope to have the initial version of our app in the Apple App Store this spring. Go to <https://hearbirdsagain.org>

my camera? Of course not!! So I walked back to the house, got the camera, and walked back out to where the bird had been, figuring it would be gone. But surprise! As I approached, I saw it fly into the lower branches of a white pine. I took a few pics, then the bird hopped down to the ground and resumed the same foraging activity that I had watched earlier. It didn’t seem upset with me following along taking pictures, but wouldn’t let me pass it to get front angle shots.

– Cynthia Burkhart, Ritchie County, WV, 1/26/22

Janet Keating and I spent the morning birding along Rt 2 between Ashton and Pt. Pleasant and then south along Rt 817 and old 35 to Kay Lane. Highlights were two Short-eared Owls flying over fields near the McCausland farm area along Rt 817 in Mason County, a Brown Thrasher in Ashton and a few thousand ducks. The Short-eared Owls were relocated later in the day by David Patick and Mike Griffith. The Ohio River was alive with groups of ducks and the sand pit at Gallipolis Ferry held an estimated 2,000 duck, mostly Mallards. Perhaps the one surprise in the duck line was the high number of Common Goldeneye. We saw three groups of goldeneye at different locations that totaled about 60+ birds, the most I have seen in a day in West Virginia.

Other highlights included Horned Lark (12), American Pipit (20), and Savannah Sparrow 38.

– Gary Rankin, Lavalette, WV, 2/6/22

I heard recently that a Barn Owl had been living in a Greenbrier County barn a few years ago. I followed up on the lead and made contact with the landowner. She gave me permission to check out the barns, as she was as interested as I was. I entered slowly and quietly and spotted what I thought at first was a big hornet nest. Then I saw a leg move! Life Bird!

This was in my mind the “perfect” barn for it. Tall old barn that is in relatively good shape and away from the farm headquarters so very little disturbance. Also situated on woods edge facing large pasture.

– Jack O’Connell, Greenbrier Co., WV, 2/16/22

– *Sightings taken from
WVBird ListServ*

CHANGES IN CONTACT INFORMATION

NEW MEMBERS

Elizabeth Brewer
211 Westgate Dr., Apt. B
Lewisburg, WV 24901
Tel: 765-490-2234
Email: ebrewer@abcbirds.org

William "Mark" Elliott
720 Dawnridge Rd.
Princeton, WV 24739
Tel: 304-920-8811
Email: erdoc501@aol.com

Sam England, Carol & Family
386 Dutchman Ln.
Weston, WV 26452

Hilarie Jones
8047 Gatewood Rd.
Fayetteville, WV 25840
Email: hljones1336@yahoo.com

Linda Reehling
617 Steeplechase Dr.
Hurricane, WV 25526
Email: alps46@aol.com

Edward Regula
476 Hopwood Fairchance Rd.
Uniontown, PA 15401
Email: ejregula@gmail.com

Kelly Schetselaar
13675 Bridlewood Dr.
Gainesville, VA 20155
Email: kelschets@verizon.net

Michael Slaven
632 West Virginia Ave.
Morgantown, WV 26501
Tel: 724-984-5016
Email: mikeslavenwv@gmail.com

CHANGES OF ADDRESS

Jeanne Barnes
326 Mt. Parnassus Dr.
Granville, OH 43023
Tel: 304-771-1682
Email: jkjmbarnes@suddenlink.net

Ashton Berdine
15898 S. Calhoun Hwy.
Arnoldsburg, WV 25234
Telephone & email same

Bill Chambers,
1705 N. Hague Ave.
Columbus, OH 43204-1618

Helen Cowger
888 Ravenwood Dr.
Greenwood, IN 46142-1983

Annie & Zach Fowler
1272 Buckeye Rd.
Mount Morris, PA 15349

LeJay & Helen Ann Graffious,
17098 Brandonville Pike
Bruceton Mills, WV 26525-0069

John & Kim Henderson
437 E. Main St.
Barnesville, Ohio 43713-1413

R. Lindsay Lilly, Jr.
1058 Schoonover Hollow Rd.
Beverly, WV 26253-1121

Mary Lee McPherson
200 McCauley Run Rd.
Orlando, WV 26412

CHANGES OF TELEPHONE

Kathy Kern
412-667-1886

Dave & Ruth Bell
814-933-6777

Randy Bodkins
304-517-0364

Sally Egan
304-931-6209 (cell)

Jon & Tris Hamm
304-233-8331

Barb Hohman
740-525-5512 (cell)

Katherine Payne
301-613-0864

CHANGES OF TELEPHONE

Chuck & Lucine Wright
lucinewright@sbcglobal.net

Scott & Janice Emrick
emricksj@gmail.com

Dave & Mary Davenport
daved3@yahoo.com

Mariah Fowler
mafowler@runbox.com

Jim & Nancy Fregonara
fregonarafamily@cebridge.net

Jerry & Marjorie Howard
rkbirdclub@yahoo.com

Gordon & Connie Knight
gknight1938@gmail.com



CHAPTER HAPPENINGS

HANDLAN CHAPTER

April 18, 2022 – Allegheny High Mountain Birds by Jim Triplett, South Charleston Library, 6:30PM.

May 16, 2022 – Annual picnic, location to be announced.

MOUNTWOOD CHAPTER

April Coordinator – Jeanette Esker
304-863-8765

April 7, 2022 – Washington Bottom Area 8:00am, Washington Works trail parking lot.

April 14, 2022 – Pat Collins' Farm 8:00am, WV Welcome Center, Williamstown.

April 21, 2022 – Birds & Flowers, Newell's Run 8:00am, WV Welcome Center, Williamstown; bring lunch.

April 28, 2022 – Leith Run 8:00am, WV Welcome Center, Williamstown; bring lunch.

May Coordinator – Nina Ott
304-863-6020

May 5, 2022 – Ohio Birding Route Trail 8:00am, Park & Ride, OH, Rt. 339/Rt. 7; bring lunch.

May 7, 2022 – Kroger Wetlands 8:00am, Kroger wetlands parking lot & Broughton Nature Trail.

May 12, 2022 – McDonough Wildlife Refuge, 8:00am, McDonough parking lot.

May 19, 2022 – Waterloo / Lake Hope / Zaleski, 7:00am, Park & Ride, OH, Rt. 339/Rt. 7; bring lunch.

May 26, 2022 – “The Wilds”, Ohio, 7:00am, WV Welcome Center, Williamstown; bring lunch.

May 28, 2022 – McDonough 8:00am McDonough parking lot, Wildlife Refuge.

June Coordinator – Jon Benedetti
304-295-8945

June 2, 2022 – Hocking Hills, Ohio 7:00am, Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339/Rt. 7; bring lunch.

June 4, 2022 – Johnson T Janes Park, 8:00am, Johnson T Janes Parking Lot.

June 9, 2022 – North Bend State Park, 8:00am, Kroger, 7th St. Parkersburg, bring lunch.

June 16, 2022 – Mountwood Park 8:00am, Beach area (near torpedo), bring lunch.

June 22-24, 2022 – New River/Cranberry Glades. Details later.

NATURE HAPPENINGS AROUND THE STATE

June 3 - June 5, 2022 – West Virginia Bird Discovery Weekend
<https://wvstateparks.com/event/mountain-state-birding-festival/>

Join birding enthusiasts at beautiful Blackwater Falls State Park in Davis, West Virginia, for a weekend to remember. The West Virginia mountains offer a diverse variety of habitats for many exceptional species of birds. Programs about raptors, wood warblers, and birding skills will teach participants how to become more accomplished birders. Expert-led field trips on Saturday and Sunday to a variety of scenic, bird-filled mountain habitats will provide outstanding bird sightings and sounds. This birding event is designed to delight both advanced and beginning birders.

Advance reservations required by calling 304-259-5216. For times and specific programs, email naturalist and birder: Paulita.L.Cousin@wv.gov.

POTOMAC VALLEY AUDUBON

April 20, May 18, 2022 – ‘Third Wednesday’ Bird Walk at Cool Spring Preserve, 7:00 am - 10:00 am. This event is free and open to the public, however, registration is required. Join Beth Poole on her regularly scheduled ‘Third Wednesday’ bird walk at Cool Spring Preserve. From well maintained foot paths to gorgeous views, the preserve’s 12 acres is home to much wildlife.

Please meet by 7:00 am in the front parking lot of Cool Spring Preserve, the walk will last a couple of hours. Anyone with an interest is welcome to come along, regardless of their birding skills. Registration is required.

If you have questions or would like more information, contact Krista Hawley at AdultPrograms@PotomacAudubon.org or 681-252-1387. The trip may be cancelled in the event of bad weather. See www.potomacaudubon.org/calendar/category/bird-events/ for more outings.

MOUNTAINEER AUDUBON

Spring 2022 Field Trips

Everyone is welcome to attend Mountaineer Audubon field trips. Trips are free and no birding experience is necessary, but a pair of binoculars will help. Please contact Field Trip Coordinator Katie

Fallon with questions about any of our trips: katie@accawv.org.

April 19, 26, May 3, 10, 17, 2022 – 7:30am: WVU Core Arboretum. This local hotspot provides birders with the opportunity to see many Neotropical migrants during spring migration. Meet at the entrance to the arboretum.

April 27, May 25, 2022 – 7:30-11:30am: Old Hemlock in Bruceton Mills. Join LeJay Graffious for a monthly bird walk at Old Hemlock to watch the arrival of spring migrants and experience the breeding season develop. For directions: lejay@oldhemlock.org.

April 30, 2022 – 7:30am: West Virginia Botanic Garden. Join trip leader Derek Courtney on this mostly flat walk through the garden’s habitats to look for spring migrants. Pre-registration is required; register online at www.wvbg.org.

May 20-21, 2022 – 6pm – 6pm: Morgantown Birding Cup. Everyone is invited to join the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia and Mountaineer Audubon for the third annual Morgantown Birding Cup. This is a friendly competition; the goal is for families, friends, and individuals to have fun and get out bird watching. Register for the Morgantown Birding Cup by emailing Katie Fallon at katie@accawv.org. Registration is free but fundraising is welcome! Any funds raised will benefit the West Virginia Young Birders Club.

May 22, 2022 – 8:00am to 12:00pm for visitors, 5:30am for banding team: Old Hemlock Bird Banding: MAPS Banding. Monitoring Avian Production and Survivorship banding project continues in its sixth year. This scientific research is available for visitors to view. Contact LeJay for directions: lejay@oldhemlock.org.

May 30, 2022 – 10am: Young Birders’ Walk, West Virginia Botanic Garden. Young birders of all ages are welcome to join us on this flat, slow-paced walk on the garden’s trails. Hosted by the West Virginia Young Birders Club. Register in advance: www.wvbg.org. Leader: Katie Fallon.



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**Look at all the
happy people :)**

*Our first Early Spring Meeting
in two years went off without a
hitch and was nicely attended.
Thanks to John Jacobs for
taking the group photo!*

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