



# THE MAIL BAG

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

## Message from your President & Mail Bag Editor

So begins my two-year appointment as president of the SBBC. Looking forward to seeing where that takes us all. When Carl Slater brought me into the club in the fall of 1995, I had no ideas what the BBC would mean to me over the next two and a half decades. I hope that we as a Board and Membership can continue to grow the club, to find new and innovative ways to explore and study nature, and to engage the public to find new members and strengthen relationships with longtime BBCers. My email and telephone (and of course, old-fashioned mail box) are open for ideas to keep the club strong, relevant, and vibrant.



Foray will be back in Tucker County this year, and we are excited to announce a new camp location at Horseshoe Recreation and Campground not far from Holly River. The camp is in a valley, surrounded by lots of mature forest. Birding should be great just in the camp, but it's to be noted that Tucker County is one of the most bird-diverse Forays we have. In 2016, we had Eastern Whip-poor-will, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Northern Harrier, many species of warblers and sparrows, ending the week with 132 species, a record for Tucker County forays. What exciting birds will we find this time?

And what else? 2016's Foray had a number of black bears, a porcupine, and a wide range of other mammals. This year, I will personally be focusing on a family of great concern these days, lepidoptera, especially paying attention to moths. West Virginia has around 2,000 moth species, in addition to 135 species of butterflies. I have hopes of getting close to 10% of that, but we'll see. Lepid numbers are crashing globally, but there are still strongholds. With the vast expanses of large mature forests in Tucker County, there should be many treasures to find.



– Ryan Tomazin

## COMMON RAVENS COME TO TOWN

During the last WV Teachers strike, my wife and I joined the picket line. As I usually do, I submitted an e-bird checklist for each of the 3 Mercer County picket sites we visited. Across from Princeton Senior High School, we noticed a pair of common ravens flying into a billboard. The structure was located between the Kroger Store and Rt. 460 (four-lane highway crossing the county from east to west). Below the billboard was Brush Creek and a growth of brush and saplings. The birds were definitely carrying nest material. In the following weeks we discovered we could observe the area from the Kroger parking lot. We saw two birds fledge from the nest.

We began checking the nest whenever we found ourselves grocery shopping. The second year, we were fortunate to see three fledglings. Then, we noticed that the advertisement on one of the boards was for an obgyn who called himself "the baby doc". There was a photograph of him with his head protruding above the top of the sign. Next, Judy realized that he was one of her former students. Later, I discovered that my older sister had gone through school with his father. We were amused to find the adults had chosen a baby doctor advertisement for their nest site. One of the young birds was observed being fed while perched on the top of the doctor's head.

On our way to Rural King at Mercer Mall to buy bird seed and suet, we saw a raven perched on a billboard. This location was also along Rt. 460 about 6 miles west of the Kroger nest. As we were returning home, we remarked how wild it would be if the raven was nesting in the billboard. Even crazier, the advertisement was for a different obgyn. Sure enough, later in the season we observed two adults feeding a young bird on top of the structure.

Since then, we have found ravens nesting in two other billboards. One is at the Locust St. exit of Rt. 460 about 4 miles east of the Kroger nest and the other along I-77 just north of Princeton. We have not observed young at the Locust St. nest but the I-77 nest has produced at least one young and looks to be in use at this writing.

Our past experience with raven nests have all been on cliffs or rock ledges 8-50' above the ground. The billboards certainly provide shelter for the nests and a vantage point for the parents to scan for vultures, crows and hawks that need to be escorted out of the territory. Ample amounts of road-kill, commercial dumpsters and fast food parking lots provide plenty of food and the Mercer County Landfill is only a few miles down the road.

– Contributed by Jim Phillips

## 2023 KILLBUCK MARSH TRIP FROM ROSIE CAMPBELL

**Thursday, February 23, 2023** – A few Headquarters BBCers met Mountwood birders at the Dairy Queen/ McD's in Sugar Creek for Mountwood's annual trip to Killbuck Marsh.

There were seventeen of us as we drove on to the marsh. We spotted a sandhill crane before we got there. At our first stop, the birds made us dig for them. It was warm, but windy and the birds stayed down in the weeds and brush. Driving on, we had better luck; pairs of cranes, rafts of ducks, swans, scads of Canada Geese.

Near the bridge where we always set up the scopes, we saw swans, ducks, cranes, eagles, and more geese. The wooded hillside opposite the swamp had been logged and was a sad welter of broken and fallen trees. Later, we realized there had been a severe wind storm or tornado here. Many trees were broken off, uprooted and blown over. Part of the logging was an attempt to salvage some of the wood.

On the drive up, we'd seen lots of Turkey Vultures, crows, and a few Red-tailed Hawks. Here, we saw eagles! Eagles on nests, eagles flying, mature Bald Eagles and brown immatures. Once, we counted twelve eagles in sight, some perched, but mostly flying. There was also a beautiful "gray ghost" Northern Harrier, dodging through the back water bushes.

As there is hunting in this area, the ducks were usually far off and required scopes to identify them. It seemed to me that pintails were most numerous, and Mallards. The swans were both tundra and trumpeter. A lot of the Sandhill Cranes were paired and foraged by themselves but there were also flocks of them. Male Red-winged Blackbirds everywhere proclaimed their territories from any available bush or shrub.

We had a nice lunch at the Pine Tree Barn, one of our usual stops on this trip.

All day Thursday, it was warm and pleasant, a bit windy, but great for February. We mostly birded in our shirt-sleeves or light sweaters. (Not the case next day!)

After a good day of birding, we had seen lots of birds, not so very many species, but good birding, nevertheless. Finally, we drove to our hotel in Wooster, then later, out for supper at "the Barn". It was a big, fairly new, building made of the huge timbers of several old barns and decorated with old farm memorabilia, tools and equipment. It was cooler when we drove back to the hotel and the temperature fell all night.

**Friday, February 24** – Everyone was down to breakfast at seven with all the coats, hats, sweaters, boots, gloves, they had. And we needed the mall! After breakfast at the hotel, we bundled into our cars and set off for the marsh.

The birds were more hunkered down than yesterday, the waterfowl far out, but there were eagles flying and plenty to see. The cold wind got a really good crack at us out on the open marsh. We checked all the usual spots, mostly finding fewer, but the same birds.

Our best spot today was a little out-of-the-wind corner where we found robins, Song Sparrows, a Brown Creeper and five Rusty Blackbirds. There was also a pair of blue birds who appeared to be picking up nesting material. (Maybe nesting, but cold as it was, maybe they were going to build a fire?)

It was great to be with friends for the birding and fellowship. We all enjoyed another wonderful time outdoors. Our species count for the trip was fifty-five.



## 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

**W**e 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

## THE 2023 BROOKS BIRD CLUB EARLY SPRING MEETING REPORT

The Brooks Bird Club held its spring meeting at North Bend State Park March 10-12. Friday afternoon began the weekend with the Board of Directors meeting and gatherings of birding friends catching up in the common area of the lodge. Nick Liadis of Pittsburgh, an Urban Avian Conservation Biologist, gave the Friday evening program. Nick is the founder and executive director of Bird Lab which focuses on developing and implementing bird-focused conservation practices.

One of his areas of research is implementing landscapes with native plantings that enhance opportunities for migratory birds in urban settings. Birds have developed a relationship with native plants over millennia. Improving biodiversity with native plantings contributes to bird-preferred insect populations, seeds and fruits resulting in increased fat reserves for migrants and successful broods upon breeding grounds.



*A lady bluebird along the refuge trails*

on urban, suburban and rural areas. Data reveals rural areas have more species than urban areas which promotes the need for increasing native plantings. Nick discussed varieties of plants, tree and flowers to achieve improvement in yard plantings to attract more birds and creating layers for a stronger ecosystem. He also discussed where to purchase native plantings through area nurseries specific to the region. Nick stayed through the weekend giving participants opportunities to discuss areas of interest from his presentation with him.

Saturday morning began early with breakfast and planning for field trips for the day. A large group set out with Dick Esker to hit the birding hot spots along the Ohio River from Williamstown to Willow Island Locks and Dam, and north of St. Marys to Middle Island stopping at the Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge. A pair of peregrine falcons was a highlight at the St. Marys Bridge. Stops also included Ritchie County 4-H Camp for the illusive Red-headed Woodpeckers. Another group visited the Burkharths' farm near the state park enjoying the thousands of naturalized daffodils that were in full bloom. A long walk around the property brought views early bloomers including Rattlesnake Plantain, Cranefly Orchid, and Walking Fern, as well as a great discussion on the history of the property. The Evening Grosbeaks though proved elusive that previously had been visiting the feeders.

Dick Esker started off the events on Saturday evening with an auction of hand-carved birds he had made and donated. The birds were all created from different woods in the style of a sandpiper. Each table bided among themselves for the privilege of



*Everyone was leaving as the snow was arriving. A quick 2"! - photos by Ryan Tomazin*

owning a one-of-kind wood piper! The event raised \$141 for BBC. Both evenings a door prize was drawn for a handmade basket by Beth Mankins filled with birding items and chocolates. A second door prize was given Saturday evening by Mary Jacobs of two lovely handmade placemats featuring waterfowl.

Casey Rucker announced the Bartley Award for 2023. Casey also proposed a possible bird-watching trip to Latin America in April, 2024. Under consideration is Costa Rica, Ecuador, or Columbia. If you would be interested, please let Casey know.

Ryan Tomazin called out the bird list for the weekend with everyone participating with birds they had sighted. The list exceeded 60 birds.

The Saturday evening speaker was Dr. Ross Brittain on his research project on Northern Saw-whet Owls. Dr. Brittain is Dean of the College of Science, Technology and Mathematics at Alderson Broaddus University. He has stud-

*(Continued on Page 5)*



*The first kingfisher of the day!*

## 2022-23 WEST VIRGINIA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

*On Wednesday, December 14th, my husband and I participated in the Brooks Bird Club CBC...it was overcast and cold but our hearts were warmed by the joy of birding. We were assigned the golf courses of Oglebay Park. The morning started out slowly but ended spectacularly with our list including so many woodpeckers (3 Pileated Woodpeckers in the same tree)! Other highlights included Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Merlin (Merlin's have nested here for at least the last 6 years)*

– Debby Koegler, Wheeling, WV

*Matt McKinney, Micah Brittain and I birded the Mineral Wells area yesterday (12/16/22) for the Parkersburg CBC. Overall, a slow day for numbers of individual birds (1145 total) but species richness was pretty good at 58 species. Highlights were 2 Chipping Sparrows, Merlin, Northern Harrier and 2 Great Horned Owls at the 4-H campgrounds. Last year we had over 15,000 blackbirds in a mixed flock of mostly grackles, but this year we only saw 2 Red-winged Blackbirds...amazing how much it can change from year to year. Also had a single Turkey Vulture and a single Black Vulture.*

– Ross Brittain

*On Saturday, December 17, Mountaineer Chapter of National Audubon held their annual Christmas Bird Count (WVMO). Our first was held in 1970. We 12 teams in the field of 31 birders. Seven feeder counters submitted data. We tallied 92 species with four count week birds so far.*

*Birders added four new species for WVMO: Virginia Rail; Golden Eagle; Wilson Snipe; Common Yellowthroat and Ringed-neck Pheasant (probably a PA Game Commission released bird).*

*A special part of our count this year, we had two Younger Birder counts. Katie Fallon held a count at the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia outdoor classroom. Zach Fowler lead a children's CBC at the WVU Core Arboretum. He had WVU Professor Chris Rota (Mountaineer Audubon's VP) doing a banding demonstration for the children.*

– LeJay Graffious

*On December 18, the Ona Count was conducted with 18 participants and 7 teams. The temp ranged from 26-31 with cloudy cover and snow flurries.*

*We tallied 72 species and had a Great Egret which was a first on the Ona count. We had 8 Bald Eagles which was a record. We also had records for Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, raven and tied a record for Gadwall.*

– David Patick, Huntington, WV

*Thirty-three intrepid birders made their way into the field on Dec. 17th to participate in the Charles Town Christmas Bird Count. Their efforts were fairly fruitful as they tallied a total of 6,670 birds comprising 74 species. The total time and mileage spent in the field were 73.75 party hours and 429.5 miles traveled, 403.5 miles by car and 26 miles by foot. The highlights for the day were new high counts for Bald Eagle (29), Red-shouldered hawk (39), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (45), Hermit Thrush (13), and Savannah Sparrow (8).*

*In Dec. of 1991, Wil Hershberger and your faithful compiler found an Ash-throated flycatcher north of Shenandoah Junction. It was the state record for the species. With that as backdrop it sets the stage for the two Ash-throated Flycatchers found by Wade Snyder and Phil Welser to establish a new high count for the species on this CBC. No other CBC in the state could have accomplished that feat. Wade was able to get some very good photos of the birds as well; one of which is regrowing its tail following some significant encounter.*

*A few other highlights were Pine Siskin (1) and American Pipit (27) found by Bill Telfair, a young Tundra Swan found by Vickie Crites, and a Virginia Rail found by your compiler.*

*This was the 71st edition of the Charles Town count which was started in 1952 by Clark Miller who was an early bander at the Allegheny Front Migration Observatory and*

*an amazing birder. It was a pleasure to spend time in the field with Clark and to experience his teaching skills first hand.*

– Bob Dean, compiler

*Here are the results of the 2022 Parkersburg Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to all who participated. There were 22 field participants and 7 feeder counters. Birding was a little slow this year. About half the average number of birds were recorded, although the species count (77) was near the 10 year max.*

*We did find several species we do not normally find -- Cackling Goose, Greater Scaup, Lincoln's Sparrow, two Merlin and three Hermit Thrushes. There was a dearth of ducks -- very few on the river, although we did find a nice raft of Green-winged Teal on the backwater. A lot of the regulars were also hard to find, like Mourning Doves, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Pileated Woodpeckers and American Goldfinch. Our local ravens continue to hang around.*

– Dick & Jeanette Esker

*Here are the results (subject to verification and approval by Audubon) from our 2022 CBC for the Charleston area.*

*We tallied 60 species for the day, which is a typical number for our Christmas Counts. Highlights from this year included 5 Merlins, 4 Brown Creepers, a Canvasback, 5 Wild Turkeys, a Hermit Thrush, and both a Great Horned Owl and a Barred Owl.*

*Generally, the overall numbers were down, particularly for ducks, but it was a good day for hawks and woodpeckers.*

– Doren Burrell

*Six birders tallied the Athens/Princeton, Mercer County, WV CBC on December 22, 2022. A total of 1,224 birds comprising 56 species was noted. The total time and mileage spent in the field were 25 party hours and 311 miles traveled, 305 miles by car and 6 miles by foot.*

*The highlights for the day were getting more than 50 species, which is good for this count, a Golden Eagle, Black-capped Chickadee, and 2 Rusty Blackbirds. There*

**(Continued on Page 5)**

## 2023 EARLY SPRING MEETING REPORT *(Continued from Page 3)*

ied saw-whets for over 25 years leading a team of volunteers in the first study of migration patterns of Northern Saw-whet Owls in Indiana. He has continued his research studies in West Virginia.

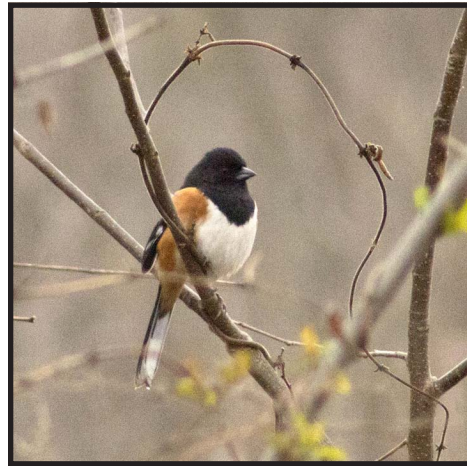
Brooks Bird Club sponsored the nest box study developed by Dr. Brittain on nesting site preferences. Saw-whets are very secretive birds which can make it challenging to study breeding habitat in the higher elevations in West Virginia. Saw-whets prefer dense understory at 3400 feet with larger evergreens. Transparency is significant as saw-whets are heavily predated by Barred Owls. The grant began with breeding surveys of 316 sites in 2015. In 2016, 125 sites were resurveyed. This included 10-minute listening sessions on windless nights. Of the 125 sites, 112 sites had saw-whet response. Ranges from north to south in these higher elevations were discussed indicating breeding areas.

The nest box study included the construction of 216 boxes built of tulip poplar and mounted on trees. A specific height for placement was developed for the study and placed at certain locations near designated forest roads. Additional locations at specified meters from the forest road were reviewed in their placement further in the woods. The concept was to determine box preference with the theory that the furthest boxes from the forest road would have the most occupancy. Saw-whets show preference for natural nest sites so the rate of use of nest boxes was important to the study. Dr. Brittain reviewed yearly results from 2016 through 2022 along with statistical analysis of the current results. Of significance to the study were the types of small mammals occupying the nest boxes.

Dr. Brittain discussed banding for Northern Saw-whet Owls using Project OwlNet protocol. He is currently banding at Pleasants Creek Wildlife Management Area in the fall. Saw-whets tend to move with cold fronts. Males usually remain on boreal grounds to defend their breeding areas with females being the majority of the migrants. Questions

answered from the audience included recapture of banded saw-whets which usually around 10%. Dr. Brittain has had two recaptures of saw-whets banded by joey heron at Valley Falls State Park.

The weekend concluded with breakfast buffet and the membership meeting on Sunday morning.



*First towhees of the year were on the refuge*

## 2021-22 WEST VIRGINIA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS *(cont. from pg. 4)*

*were some notable misses, such as Pileated Woodpecker and American Robin.*

– Ron Canterbury

*On December 14, 2022 we conducted the McDowell Co. CBC. There were 3 participants that counted for the day. The highlight was the White-eyed Vireo found by Chris Mullens. Total species was 42, which is a good count for 3 people in McDowell Co.*

– Allen and Mindy Waldron

*Nineteen intrepid birders braved wind and snow all day for the 30th Canaan Christmas Bird Count on December 18. High was 28 F, low 19 F, and 2.3" of snow.*

*Aaron Graham and Kyle Klotz found an astounding Black-throated Blue Warbler, unsurprisingly a first for our count. We also reached new high counts of Hermit Thrush at 5, Evening Grosbeak at 241 (biggest number for any species), and Northern Cardinal at 110. Our species*

*count was 48, a bit below average but terrific considering the weather, plus count week Red-shouldered Hawk and Barred Owl. We counted 1,875 individuals.*

– Casey Rucker

*The 2nd annual Tygart Lake CBC was held December 28, 2022. The river was the only open water in the area and all waterfowl reported below were seen in this stretch between the dam and Grafton. Some of the highlights included: a Northern Saw-whet Owl to start the day as our first bird at 5:20 a.m.; Horned Grebe; Ross's Goose (in with flock of Canada Geese); Swan sp. (4), seen flying overhead going east but they never vocalized to give any idea which species of swan; Double-crested Cormorant; Ruddy Duck; Northern Shrike (at upper PCWMA, presumably the same one reported by Cynthia Mullins on 12/16); Pine Warbler in stand of pines near the PCWMA campground, along with Red-breasted Nuthatches.*

*Things that were clearly missing on the day were Icterids - no blackbirds of any kind were seen. Also no Ruby-crowned Kinglets.*

– Ross Brittain

*The temperature of the WVOH count on Dec. 26th ranged from 10 to 26 degrees Fahrenheit before wind chill. As it usually does, weather played a large role but this year the count coincided with the final day of Winter Storm Elliott in our area.*

*First CBC observation of 35+ Sandhill Cranes (flyover, moving west south-west at 4:30 pm); the highest count year for Black Vultures, Cooper's Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, Winter Wrens, and Dark-eyed Juncos; the top three most abundant birds observed were the American Crow, European Starling, and the Dark-eyed Junco.*

*51 bird species (not including cw), for 2,147 total birds counted.*

– Rachel Davis

**NOTE: More CBC reports were on the WV LISTSERV, but due to space they are limited here to just counts from the 2022 portion of the count year. No further preference was given. – Ed.**

## LEARNING BIRDS IN KANAWHA VALLEY

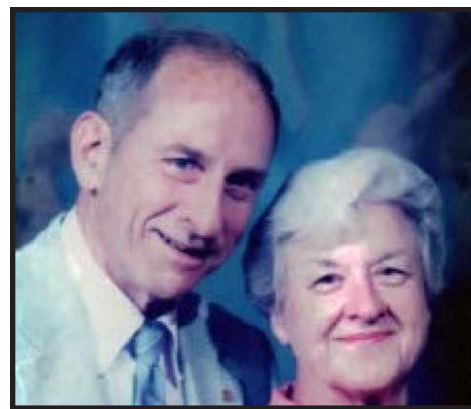
*Created by Laura Ceperley, Handlan Chapter*

Get outside! We have many public spaces in Kanawha Valley with grasslands, forests and water. Visit eBird.com and select “explore” then “Kanawha County” to see additional sites and to learn the species currently being reported in our area. In parenthesis below are the number of different species reported in eBird by early 2023. Can you add to the list?

- Coonskin County Park near Mink Shoals. From the clubhouse, walk along the Elk River, or park at one of the upper shelters and walk the loop road. (167 species)
- Kanawha State Forest near Loudendale. Park at the entrance and walk Range Road, or park at the nature center and hike the Davis Creek or Snipe Trails. (149)
- Forks of Coal Nature Preserve, near Alum Creek. Park at the entrance, hike any trail including along the rivers. (84)
- Little Creek Park, South Charleston. Park near the entrance, walk the roads or trails, or drive to the last ball field and bird along the edges, then venture down the trails to the creek. (60)
- Meadowood County Park, Tornado. Park in the dirt lot at the park entrance and walk along the river and around the edges of the lawns. (89)
- Springhill Cemetery, Charleston. Park at the office and walk the roads. (106)
- Ridenour Park, Nitro. Park across the dam and walk the circuit around the lake, or up the hill on one of the trails. (128)
- Marmet Locks and Dam, Belle. Park in the lot near the dam and walk the gravel road westward toward Charleston. (173)
- Wine Cellar Park, Dunbar. Park on the left at the entrance, and walk a loop by the cellars, up the creek to the lake, and back by the road. (90)

### Join others!

- Handlan Chapter of the Brooks Bird Club (Kanawha Valley)- monthly meetings, regular outings, recurring projects. Also, the Brooks Bird Club (WV) for statewide meetings, newsletters, and outings. Both at brooksbirdclub.org.
- Mountain State Birders-WV on Facebook.
- WV Master Naturalists, Kanawha Chapter. See MNofWV.org. Learn on-line!
- allaboutbirds.org. Cornell University’s online classes, games and lectures. Many resources are free.
- Youtube. Search for “birdwatching,” “ebird”, etc. Free.
- Merlin (app) from Cornell for both visual and sound identification. Free.
- eBird.org. Website and app to record sightings and learn about birds. Build bird habitat! Be inspired by visiting facilities that feature native plants.
- Kanawha State Forest-along the recently restored Davis Creek. Also the arboretum behind the nature center.
- Forks of Coal Nature Preserve - native landscaping in the parking lot and around the education center.
- National Fish Hatchery, Lewisburg - around the grounds of the historic hatchery.
- Sandstone Visitor Center, New River Gorge National Park - native landscaping and interpretive signs.
- Visitor Center, Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge near Davis - native garden.



### CARL RADCLIFFE PASSES

J. Carl Radcliffe died at his home in Parkersburg, WV, on Saturday, March 11, 2023. He was preceded in death by his wife of 64 years, Shirley R. Radcliffe. Born in Lancaster County, PA, on March 24, 1935, he was the son of the late Warren Kurtz and Mary Hank Radcliffe.

Carl attended Lebanon High School and graduated from Lebanon Valley College in 1957 with a degree in chemistry. He was retired from the former American Cyanamid Company at Willow Island, WV.

He and his wife loved to travel and took birding trips, including to Trinidad, Tobago, Belize, and Costa Rica. He was a SCUBA diver and went to Bonaire many times on dive trips with the Parkersburg Dive Shop. He had his private pilot’s license and was a member of a flying club at the Parkersburg airport.

He volunteered for almost 20 years at the Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge. He assisted the refuge with its wildlife surveys on the Ohio River. At the refuge he did everything from operating boats, to filling scuba tanks, to planting trees. He was also a long-time member of the Mountwood Bird Club.

Carl is survived by his two children, Richard Carl Radcliffe (Kelly Gates) of Williamstown, WV, and Cathy Jo Radcliffe of Lansdale, PA. He is also survived by his brother Paul Radcliffe (Salinda) of Robeson, PA, many nieces and nephews, and birding and Wildlife Refuge friends. He was preceded in death by one sister and two brothers, Esther R. Nissley, Warren Kurtz Radcliffe, Jr, and Allen L Radcliffe.

## RECALLING THE SOMETIMES UNUSUAL OR HUMOROUS SIDE OF NATURE

*Text and Photos by John Northeimer*

On a trip to the golf course at Canaan Valley State Park, West Virginia, I noticed a browsing white-tailed deer in the shrub adjacent to the road, moving slowly in the direction of a Red-winged Blackbird. The bird was becoming rather agitated, flaring its wings and vocalizing its presence emphatically from the top of a cattail stalk. The deer seemed oblivious and moved in the direction of the bird. As it closed the distance, the blackbird took flight and started to buzz the deer. The deer totally ignored these threats. In a last-ditch effort to get the deer's attention, the blackbird landed on top of the deer's head right between its ears and started pecking. I have heard of thick-headedness, but this deer took the cake. It raised its head in a "duh" kind of acknowledgment that something was amiss, but then lowered its head and continued grazing while the blackbird furiously pecked away.

One afternoon, as I walked across the Abe Run Trail boardwalk on the Park, I noticed a commotion in a small spruce. When I approached I was greeted by three newly fledged Pileated Woodpeckers perched (well, almost perched) side-by-side along a small, horizontal branch. They had huge heads with puffy, red crests that appeared to be out of proportion to the rest of their bodies. As much as they tried, they could not master the skill of staying upright on the branch. They kept rotating to an upside down position, out of sequence with each other. It reminded me of the old carnival game where you would try to shoot rotating targets or whack-a-mole where one would fall while the another popped back up.

We had irruptions of evening grosbeaks during the winters usually every other year in Davis, WV. Marjorie and I always anticipated their arrival and would make sure the shelf feeder in front of the house was full of black oil sunflower seeds. Every morning we would check



the feeder. To our despair the resident red squirrel had taken possession of the feeder, defending its territory and thwarting the approach of any bird. Determined to correct this situation, we purchased a feeder with a tray cover that would close when excessive weight was applied. We relished the thought of excluding the squirrel. Gleelessly we watched the squirrel approach. As expected the cover closed when it attempted to feed. It must have sensed our exultation as it turned our way and roundly unloaded what must have been squirrel expletives in our direction. We were elated and enjoyed this show for several days as we drank our morning cup of coffee. One morning that smugness was erased when the squirrel ran to the front of the feeder, did a flip upside down, and hooked the claws of one hind leg along a small crack at the top of the glass of the feeder seed bin. From this position the feeding ports remained open and it simply reached down with its front legs and grabbed a seed. It proceeded to eat upside down. Oh, almost forgot, the grosbeaks did arrive and seemed to be content sharing with the squirrel.

On a trip to St. Mark's National Wildlife Refuge on the Gulf Coast, Marjorie and I pulled into a trail head parking lot we often visited. As soon as we arrived a towhee landed on the hood of the truck and moved to the passenger side mirror. It had a malformed foot and had a difficult time balancing on the window ledge



while it furiously thrashed and pecked at its own image in the mirror. This occurred every time we pulled into the parking area. We looked forward to this display and were glad to see that the bird was surviving in spite of its handicap.



## BAN ON MOTORIZED TRAILS PASSES

The House and the Senate overwhelmingly approved a permanent ban on any new motorized trails in WV State Parks and Forests!

The House amended SB 468 to include permanent protections. The House passed these protections 94-4. The Senate agreed to the amendment and passed the no new motorized state lands law 32-1.

Your Delegates and Senators listened to you: We want our public lands for non-motorized recreation.

Please take a moment to contact your Delegate and both Senators and tell them "Thank you for protecting public lands!"

*This information was shared by a chapter member.*

## INTERESTING SIGHTINGS AROUND THE STATE

*In spite of the temperatures hovering around 70, and some members of the InstaTwitterTok generation modeling some beachwear for their social media feeds at Cheat Lake Park, the return of the Buffleheads to the waters signal conclusively that winter is indeed here. I was hopeful that the winds overnight might have blown in something, and to my delight there was a nice little early season collection on the lake. Probably the best sighting was a small group of Evening Grosbeaks hanging around a house at the bottom of Morgan Run Road leading down to Cheat Lake Park.*

– Derek Courtney, Morgantown, WV, 11/6/22

*Mike Griffith, Janet Keating and I birded Rt. 2 from Green Bottom WMA to Gallipolis Ferry yesterday morning. A real highlight was finding Greater Yellowlegs at three locations (total over 50 birds), which is a large number for this time of year. We also found a small group of American Avocets and a Lapland Longspur (probably winter female) in a flock of about 60-70 American Pipits. There was a good assortment of ducks at the sandpit at Gallipolis Ferry, the first time this fall that we have seen very many ducks at this location. The strong winds we had on Saturday may have blown in these birds, but it was good to see this number of ducks starting to show up in our area.*

– Gary O. Rankin, Lavalette, WV, 11/7/22

*The tundra swans have arrived!*

*There were at least 3 Tundra Swans flying from north to south along Laurel Mountain in Barbour County from 6:08 to 6:20 this morning. It was too dark to see them. It's been nice to have the nights so relatively warm that we can sleep with the windows open. Usually it's the coyotes, Killdeer, Barred and Great Horned owls I listen to, so it was a thrill to hear the swans.*

– Donna Mitchell, Barbour County, WV, 11/8/22

*Late this afternoon I drove to visit a spot where I have seen harriers in the past. With the cold temperatures and windy conditions, I parked my car in a strategic location and watched through the side window. At 5:00 PM I noticed several harriers flying the field with one "Gray Ghost" prominent. As I was watching the male harrier with my binoculars two female/juvenile birds came into view. Then another, and another! I was watching FIVE in all. Darkness came soon and it was all over, but what a treat!*

– Jack O'Connell, Greenbrier County, 11/20/22

*Well, not exactly. But it was funny to see the Brown Creeper and nuthatch pass each other just inches apart on the walnut tree. To minimize waste I put the shelled sunflower chips in a flat 8" dish on the tray outside the kitchen window. The birds are not at all bothered by my proximity and makes for prime, close up viewing. Yesterday a flicker came in, overshot the edge of the tray and landed on his butt in the feed dish. A bit later a nuthatch was doing his intimidation maneuver with his wings (love that) but instead of just ignoring him the titmouse hopped right over him to the other side. Cracked me up. So much fun to watch their behavior and interaction.*

*Still have lots of flickers and the female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Usually the sapsucker will hold her ground but at one point a flicker flew in and literally nudged her aside. The big surprise a few days ago was seeing a Ruby-crowned Kinglet on the suet. Thought it was a goldfinch but the colors were wrong. When it moved to the suet cake that was only 12 feet away I could see the eye ring. I had no idea they even ate suet. I saw it two days in a row. A male Purple Finch also showed up briefly.*

– Bruni Haydl, Charles Town, WV, 12/13/22

*I was at Pike Island Dam this afternoon and saw a Red-necked Grebe there. Also, Pied-billed Grebe, coots, Ring-necked Ducks and Hooded Mergansers.*

– Paul McKay, Ohio County, 12/16/22

*This morning I had a delightful group of our regular customers at our feeders...until about 10 AM when they suddenly flew away and completely disappeared! I continued with my housekeeping routines for a while and never saw any signs of birds again until about 3:00 PM. The birds came back and were feeding like crazy and then they suddenly disappeared again. This time I watched the sky and saw the culprit soaring down and into the trees near the feeders. I managed to get a few shots through my kitchen window and trees and discovered a juvenile Cooper's Hawk eyeing the feeders and trees.*

*I continued keeping an eye on him and looking for signs of the other birds. He finally flew away about 20 minutes later. The regular birds returned and I continued to watch the skies. At 4:00 PM, I counted 50 American Crows flying NW towards the Kanawha river*



*Northern Shrike found at Pleasant Creek WMA around Dec 16, 2022  
- photo by Cynthia Mullens*



*Sandhill Cranes, Greenbrier, WV,  
on Jan. 2, 2023 - photo by Heid Church*



**INTERESTING SIGHTINGS (con.)**

and Patrick Street area. I also saw 2 Turkey Vultures flying in the same direction.

– Bev Triplett, Charleston, WV, 12/17/22

Matt McKinney, Micah Brittain and I did some birding in the Stonewall Lake and Stonecoal Lake area today as a pilot of a CBC we plan to start next year... doing some scouting to determine the best placement of the count circle. We birded from the Stonewall Resort area to Walkersville, to Vandalia (bumping into Davette Saeler who was scouting for the CBC, too), to Georgetown to Frenchton. We found 48 species as a group but did not try for any owls, so there is at least two more species that could have been added on.

– Ross Brittain, Bridgeport, WV, 1/2/23

Good frosty morning, all! It was a beautiful dawn. The full wolf moon, and two Great Horned Owls making plans or working out differences. The raven pair were perched in between the owls, preening, and the Carolina Wrens were greeting the day with their calls. Just a perfect morning!

– Shannon Burner, New Creek, WV, 1/8/23

2/24/2023 2:57 PM

My FOY Red-winged Blackbird here in Ritchie County was on Feb. 10. Had 2-3 each day until Feb. 16, when there were 10. Dropped back to 2-5 each day, then 13 on Feb. 22. Then back to 2-5 again.

20 Common Grackles showed up today. Beautiful and glossy in the sunshine.

The pair of Canada Geese that hung out in our stock pond, pasture, front yard pond and front yard last spring is back



Merlin, Jefferson Co., Feb. 9, 2023

– photo by N. Wade Snyder



Cooper's Hawk surprise visitor  
– photo by Bev Triplett

again this year. Can anyone explain why geese honk so much when coming in to land on the pond?

We had a close encounter with a Sharpshinned Hawk yesterday. I was in the barn and my husband was working on a project in the driveway when a Sharpie flew into the woven wire pasture fence, about 6' from the barn. Jay heard the "thunk", then called me out of the barn to see. The hawk, still alive, was hanging upside down, holding onto the wire with one toe. I carefully loosened its grip, the hawk fell softly to the ground, then flew, just a few feet above ground, for about 20', landed, and rested. After about 5 minutes, the Sharpie flew off, looking good. Today, I saw a Sharpshinned Hawk fly through the front (full of feeders) yard, twice. It didn't catch anything. I'm hoping it's the same bird.

– Cynthia Burkhart, Ritchie Co., 2/24/23

Good morning, all. Last week a cat was killed along the road in front of our house. We carried it out to the field behind us with the intent to bury it later in the day when we had more time. Well, the Black Vultures spotted it and shortly there was nothing left to bury. Yesterday morning I looked out and one of the local ravens was collecting mouthfuls of cat hair for his/her nest. Nothing goes to waste in nature.

– Shannon Burner, New Creek, WV, 2/26/23

**BLACKWATER FALLS STATE PARK FOUNDATION**

A group of volunteers from the Canaan Valley Master Naturalist's group are working with Blackwater Falls State Park administrators and the WV State Park Foundation to establish a nonprofit foundation in support of activities and programs at Blackwater Falls SP.

Joined with members of the Kanawha Valley Astronomical Society, our immediate project is championing Blackwater Falls' application for International Dark Sky Park designation. As part of that process significant upgrades to the park's lighting will need to be tackled -- and that is where the newly formed Blackwater Falls SP Foundation can be of assistance -- through fundraising activities and grant applications. As we await IRS nonprofit approval our group continues to meet monthly with the Blackwater Park SP staff to learn more about park operations and needs not covered by State appropriations, as well as the specific upgrades required to become a certified Dark Skies Park.

Our first project will be a presentation by Blackwater Falls SP naturalist on Dark Skies at the park during the WV Wildflower Pilgrimage - May 11th – 14th. That weekend we will be hosting an information table from the Dark Skies International Association. Please stop by if you are attending the Pilgrimage!

We welcome you and any interested members of the Brooks Bird Club to join in our monthly meetings and partner with our work supporting Blackwater State Park's application for designation as a Dark Skies Place. We are eager and excited to build on the work Paulita, BFSP Naturalist, has already accomplished in making Blackwater Falls State Park a very special sky watching destination. Information on the effect of light pollution on migratory birds can be found on the IDA website: <https://www.darksky.org/light-pollution-poses-threat-to-migrating-birds/>

Linda L Cronin,  
linda.lcronin@gmail.com  
(304) 642-1372

– Sightings taken from  
WVBird ListServ

## 18TH WINTER EAGLE SURVEY

Eagle Brigade of Southern WV(including Three Rivers Avian Center, Bibbee Nature Club and Hanging Rock Migration Observatory) – January 7, 2023

Narrows & Glen Lyn, VA to the State Line nest – BAEA – 2 adults.

Bertha – BAEA – 1 adult, 1 4th year bird.

Mouth of the Bluestone(The Pits) – BAEA – 7 adults, 7 1st year birds, 1 2nd year bird, 1 3rd year bird, 2 4th year birds & 1 immature

Bluestone State Park – BAEA – 2 immatures.

Rt. 20 Overlook(south of Bluestone Dam) – BAEA – 2 adults, 2 first year, 1 2nd year, 1 3rd year.

Bellepoint – BAEA – 2 adults, 1 immature.

Brooks Island Overlook – BAEA – 2 adults.

Sandstone River Access – No eagles.

Alderson, Barger Springs, Red Sulphur Springs & Dropping Lick nests – 1 UNA at Dropping Lick.

Greenbrier River Trail(MP 13) – BAEA – 1 adult.

Greenbrier River Trail(MP 20) – BAEA – 1 adult.

Hans Creek – BAEA – 4 adults, 1 2nd year, 1 3rd year & 2 immatures.

Rt. 122 through Greenville – BAEA – 1 2nd year bird, 13 immatures & 5 UNA.

Greenville nest – BAEA – 1 adult.

Covered Bridge on Rt. 219 – BAEA – 2 adults.

Frankfort, Greenbrier County – BAEA – 1 adult.

Bent Mountain, Mercer County – No eagles.

Meadow River, Howard's Creek, Lake Tuckahoe & Blue Sulphur Turnpike nests – BAEA – 2 adults at meadow

River, 1 adult at Howard's Creek, 1 adult at Blue Sulphur Pike, 1 adult at Tuckahoe Lake, 1 adult at Grassy Meadows Rd. and 1 immature at Fairview Rd., Lewisburg(maybe a new nest).

BAEA = Bald Eagle UNA = undetermined age.

Conditions – 28-50 degrees, 0-50% cloud cover, 0-17 mph wind & no precipitation.

46 participants located 79 bald eagles(34 adults, 9 1st year, 4 2nd year, 3 3rd year, 3 4th year, 6 undetermined age and 20 immatures).

– Jim Phillips/Mindy Waldron  
Bibbee Nature Club

## CHAPTER HAPPENINGS

### HANDLAN CHAPTER

**April 10, 2023** – Monthly meeting at South Charleston Library, 6:30 pm. Program will be presented by Dianne Anestis – Early Naturalists and Birds of Appalachia.

**April 13, 2023** – Rick Gregg will lead a walk at Marmet Locks & Dam; wear boots for mud, dress for weather, bring binoculars; time 08:30 a.m. meet at the gazebo on the Belle side of the river.

**April 15, 2023** – ‘Walk on the Wild Side’ nature walks at St. Albans City Park; 9-12; nature interpretation along the walk route; no fee, but donations are appreciated.

**April 22, 2023** – Osbra Eye Nature Walks, Kanawha State Forest, various nature-themed walks of varied levels of difficulty with knowledgeable leaders, 8:30-?, participation fee is \$7 adults and \$2 for walkers ages 12 to 18; children under 12 are free. More info: <https://mailchi.mp/85f0ee3efb54/renewmembershipdues-16093164?e=c9bde0bb10>

**May 8, 2023** – Spring Picnic, Coonskin Park, Charleston. Bird walk 5pm, meal 6-7pm, bring a covered dish to share and your BINOCULARS.

### MOUNTWOOD CHAPTER

*April Coordinator – Jeanette Esker*  
304-863-8765

**April 6, 2023** – Washington Bottom Area, 8:00am. Washington Works trail parking lot.

**April 13, 2023** – Pat Collins' Farm, 8:00am. WV Welcome Center, Williamstown.

**April 20, 2023** – Birds & Flowers, Newell's Run, 8:00am. WV Welcome Center, Williamstown; bring lunch.

**April 27, 2023** – Leith Run, 8:00am. WV Welcome Center, Williamstown; bring lunch.

**April 29, 2023** – Johnson T Janes Park, 8:00am. Park parking lot, foot of 27th St., Parkersburg.

*May Coordinator – Nina Ott*  
304-863-6020

**May 4, 2023** – Ohio Birding Route Trail 8:00am. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 33/ Rt. 7; bring lunch.

**May 6, 2023** – Kroger Wetlands, 8:00am. Kroger wetlands parking lot & Broughton Nature Trail.

**May 11, 2023** – McDonough Wildlife Refuge, 8:00am. McDonough parking lot.

**May 18, 2023** – Waterloo / Lake Hope / Zaleski, 7:00am. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339/Rt. 7; bring lunch.

**May 25, 2023** – “The Wilds”, Ohio, 7:00am. WV Welcome Center, Williamstown; bring lunch.

**May 27, 2023** – McDonough, 8:00am. McDonough parking lot, Wildlife Refuge.

*June Coordinator: Jon Benedetti*  
304-295-8945

June 1, 2023 – Hocking Hills, Ohio, 7:00am. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339 / Rt. 7; bring lunch.

June 3, 2023 – Johnson T Janes Park, 8:00am. Johnson T Janes Parking Lot.

June 8, 2023 – North Bend State Park, 8:00am. Kroger, 7th St. Parkersburg, bring lunch.

## NATURE HAPPENINGS AROUND THE STATE

### PRICKETT'S FORT STATE PARK

**April 22, 29, May 3, 8, 2023** – Annual Bird Walks, 8am – 10am, 88 State Park Rd, Fairmont, WV. Come celebrate the joys of spring with a Saturday morning bird walk. Renowned birder Joey Herron will lead the public on this annual rite of passage. Please wear sturdy walking shoes and bring binoculars if you have them. Free and open to the public.

### MOUNTAINEER AUDUBON

**April 18, 25, May 2, 9, 2023** – WVU Core Arboretum, 7:30am. This local hotspot provides birders with the opportunity to see many Neotropical migrants during spring migration. Meet at the entrance to the Arboretum, near the parking lot on Monongahela Boulevard. Multiple leaders.

**April 26, 2023** – Old Hemlock, Bruce-ton Mills., 7:30-11:30am. Join guest leader Jane Clark and Lee Miller for a monthly bird walk at Old Hemlock to watch the arrival of spring migrants and experience the breeding season develop. We will walk approximately three miles and stop at ten predetermined locations to census birds for three minutes. The trip will cross several habitat types. Contact Jane for specific directions: jan-eschclark@gmail.com

**April 29, 2023** – Fairfax Pond-Rehe Wildlife Management Area, 7:30am. Join us for a spring birding trip as we explore the wetlands of Fairfax Pond/Rehe WMA, south of Reedsville in Preston County. This trip will be spent looking at newly arriving spring migrants. Meet at the last (and largest) parking area on the right. Leader: Orion Metheny.

**May 5, 2023** – Upper Decker's Creek Trail, 7:30am. This even, paved trail will offer easy access to anyone looking to go birding! We will explore a variety of habitats from wetlands to grasslands and everything in between. We will be looking for spring migrants feeding in the variety of habitats present. Park on the

McKinney Cave Road access (coordinates close to the location: 39.5315849,-79.8111248). Leader: Orion Metheny.



## HOSP! THE DREADED DAY

There are many events in life that we eagerly anticipate. However, the appearance of the first House Sparrow at our feeders was not one of them. We have anticipated crossing this threshold as the landscape within our neighborhood has gradually yielded to encroaching urbanization. Over the last ten years the landscape has been degraded mainly through the removal of mature trees, leaving huge gaps in canopy cover. We encourage urban and suburban landholders to replace removed trees or plant new ones with native species so that in the future this situation may be reversed.

– John Northeimer and Marjorie Keatley

## MARCH MADNESS IS FOR THE BIRDS

Late this past fall, I broke my ankle and had to have surgery. Not being able to drive and requiring a boot and a crutch and later a brace to walk, my mobility was needless to say, challenged. This was the first Christmas Bird Count season that I conducted four counts by car with no pedestrian birding involved. Thank goodness for our bird feeders. Most of my birding was through the window with exotic field trips (Judy driving) to the post office and the grocery store. When it was too windy or rainy to watch the feeders, and during the darkness of night, we found ourselves watching college basketball games. In the past, we had listened to the WVU Mountaineers or the Virginia Tech Hokies on the radio but during the 2022-2023 season we have watched more basketball in a few months than we have watched for 30+ years of marriage. This brings me to March Madness.

Several years ago, one of Judy's co-workers invited us to take part in their

basketball pool. Even though we knew hardly anything about basketball, we decided to give it a try. They accepted our money and provided us with a bracket to complete. That's where it got tricky. Most of the participants in the pool knew all of the team stats, the shoe sizes of all of the players, and what the coaches had had for breakfast. We were clueless.

One evening, we decided to be brave and choose our teams. When you are in the dark, you go with your best bet. So, we started by choosing all of the teams that had a bird for the mascot. There were lots of cardinals. There were eagles, falcons and hawks. There were even some that seemed to be near-birds – Jay-hawks, Red Hawks, Blue Hawks, Hokies, Gamecocks and such. When we ran out of bird teams, we decided to choose states and colleges where we had friends or relatives. Judy has an aunt and cousins in Michigan and an uncle in Wisconsin. Her dad was born in Iowa but was raised in Minnesota (Go Golden Gophers!). Since her dad was a career Navy man, they had lived all over the place – California, Illinois, Connecticut (Judy was born there on a submarine base), Missouri (her sister was born there), Virginia, South Carolina and Guam (we didn't see a team from there).

So, we turned in our best guesses and waited. When it was all over, we had picked the final two teams and the winner. The Louisville Cardinals\* beat Michigan. We were in either way since my mother-in-law was born in Bay City, Michigan. Even though some of our hawk watching friends said we would have won cash for our bracket in their pool, we didn't win a thing. Apparently, in our pool they counted points all through the thing and we didn't do as well as it seemed. We settled for the satisfaction that the birds came through for us, and we got to hear griping from the scientific folks when they saw our method for success.

\* *The Cardinals participation was later vacated by the Committee on Infractions.*

– *Contributed by Jim Phillips*



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### **Memories of Spring**

*We were at North Bend State Park in March, as evidenced by the name tags and favors, courtesy of Cindy Slater.  
Photo by Lee Miller.*

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