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The **REDSTART**

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A Lifer in More Ways than One: First West Virginia Record of Bell's Vireo, Thomas, Tucker County

Leo Dilling and Laura Dilling

The weekend of September 25, 2020, my wife Laura and I decided we needed to get out of town for some new scenery. Covid restrictions had taken their toll on us just like everyone else. A little hiking, fishing, birding, and camping in Wild and Wonderful West Virginia seemed just the ticket. What we did not yet know is that the birding would be not only the most memorable part of the trip, but perhaps even a historic part of the trip.

We headed 3 hours west to Blackwater Falls State Park. Weather looked great for some nights in front of a campfire and sleeping in our tent. Our first adventure was Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge. The birds were a little quiet, but the scenery was good and being in the crisp early fall air felt great. We saw both Kinglets, a couple of warblers, and one of Laura's favorites, Cedar Waxwing. Hearing a bird Anne Arundel County certainly doesn't have was a special treat: the drumming of a Ruffed Grouse deep in the woods. A young male practicing for spring or perhaps an established breeder announcing his territory? It was late morning now so we took a break before we headed back to the car and had a light trail lunch.

After lunch we decided to find a spot to wet our lines. We took a short drive to quaint Thomas, where the Blackwater River is partially dammed at this active and interesting former coal town. We had easy access to the river just below the Route 219 bridge. There was a nice wide gravel road along the banks that we found out is called the Blackwater Canyon Trail. We both did a little fishing. Laura caught a Largemouth Bass right away while I had nothing and lost my lure to a snag. I decided that I'd do a little casual birding along the river.

My attention was soon pulled away from the river. Many Gray Catbirds, Cedar Waxwings, and American Robins were enjoying a seemingly unlimited buffet from several old scraggly apple trees that years ago had been enveloped by larger deciduous trees. On the edges was a tangle of briars and brambles at the end of their summer prime; green growth just yellowing after the first kiss of fall.

I was drawn away from the buffet to some unidentified movement amid this dense foliage. Among the tangles there was a bird, active but hidden. I tracked the bird for several minutes and the several brief looks I had weren't slotting into any birds I was familiar with. Of course, I didn't have the camera with me. So I went back to the car to get it and recruit another set of eyes. I hurriedly told Laura to grab the camera while I thumbed to the Vireo section of my field guide (also at the car!).

We got back to the spot perhaps four minutes later and were able to relocate the bird which had flown across the gravel road to the tall plants along the riverbank. This was a blessing as there was no growth now between us and the bird. We stood 20 feet back and were able to track it by the moving branches and leaves. As it worked its way along the river we excitedly followed. We got one great look as it popped up to the top of the brush. We felt we may have gotten a good ID shot as long as the camera (which loves to focus on any branch or leaf in front of a bird) actually properly focused. We continued our pursuit and I excitedly told Laura where the bird was headed so she could anticipate and focus on getting more pictures.

A few minutes later the unidentified passerine flew back across the road. After several more two-second looks and a couple more shots that more or less showed the whole bird, we lost it as it flew deeper into the understory.

We headed back to the campsite and I started looking at the photos and attempting an ID. My initial thought was it looked like a really pale Blue-headed Vireo without the thick spectacles and namesake head color. We began the process of elimination. I texted some other birders my ID thoughts. I tried to convince myself otherwise, but I kept coming back to a Bell's Vireo although it was far outside its range. The digital grapevine worked its magic with some ID help. Another birder indicated that I should report this to the WV Bird Record Committee as it was probably a rare bird for the state.

After arriving home, I filled out the required report and we sent our photos in to the WVBRC. In early March a letter arrived in the mail. "On behalf of the West Virginia Bird Records Committee I am writing to inform you that your report of Bell's Vireo has been unanimously accepted." Laura and I had documented the FIRST confirmed Bell's Vireo for the state of West Virginia!

A lifer for Laura and me AND the state of West Virginia!

A little, drab, vagrant vireo, headed east instead of south, graced us for a brief moment and left a lifetime of memories.

Happy Birding!



Bell's Vireo photo by Laura Dilling

Pine Siskin Irruption – 2020 – and a Unique Siskin

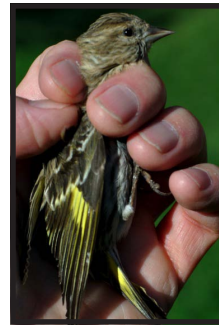
Bill Beatty

The year 2020 will go into history books as a grim year for a variety of reasons. However, 2020 also had a silver lining for those interested in watching and feeding birds. Many surprising northern-nesting finch species arrived in the fall, but the fall/winter of 2020-21 will be known by Jan and me as “the year of the Pine Siskin irruption”. An irruption happens when the cone crop food fails in the home territory of these birds in Canada’s boreal forests. Drought, fire, disease, spruce budworm outbreaks or other disasters dramatically reduce cone and seed production among spruce, aspen, ash, birch, and other kinds of trees. Irruptions happen when birds that are usually non-migratory do migrate farther south than normal to where food is more available.

Of course, there were other kinds of surprising birds at the feeders, too, but not in huge numbers like the siskins we had. Pine Siskins (*Spinus pinus*) are small birds, 4.3-5.5 inches in length, and weighing about 1/2 ounces, similar in size to the American Goldfinch. Pine



Pine Siskin at a bird feeder



Pine Siskin

(All photos pages 36-37 © Bill Beatty)

Siskins are not bright-colored birds. The only brightness is the yellow in some wing and tail feathers, especially on some males. From a distance they can be mistaken for female House Finches with small bills or American Goldfinches in winter plumage.

Project Feederwatch tracks siskins as they move around North America each winter. In most years, a few Pine Siskins can be found throughout most of North America, but every few years there are migrations of large numbers from their normal breeding grounds. It appears, from banding data information, that some Pine Siskins travel north/south, as might be expected. But other flocks appear to travel east/west, from the Pacific Northwest to central Pennsylvania and southern Ontario. (See this Project Feederwatch article and map: <https://feederwatch.org/learn/articles/tracking-pine-siskin-movements/>)

Pine Siskins are not known to nest in West Virginia, but I suspect they might. On several occasions I have encountered them during the breeding season while leading field trips or solo hiking in the high WV mountains of the Dolly Sods Wilderness. They are always in the same area -- the highest elevation along the beginning of the Rohrbaugh Plains Trail in a red spruce forest, an area similar to that further north in Canada.

I wrote about what I consider to be my most remarkable, and somewhat embarrassing, Pine Siskin encounter in my book, “Rainbows, Bluebirds and Buffleheads.” Amazingly

this flock was hanging out and singing in summer in a *large stand of Scotch pine trees in a neighborhood north of Wheeling, WV*. They were discovered by Greg Eddy who heard them singing, but didn't have a chance to track them down. Since it was early July and Pine Siskins would normally be long gone hundreds of miles north, Greg called me to verify what he had found. I located a flock of 14 birds. Since they were in a flock, not paired off, I knew they were not nesting. It was definitely strange to find them here in July.

Because we band birds, Jan and I can more accurately determine population densities of the birds in our area compared to people who can only watch birds at feeders or through binoculars. Amazingly, in just 2 ½ months (mid-October to the end of December) of 2020 we encountered the most pine siskins I have ever experienced in any season of my 46 years of banding birds. On October 21, 2020 we banded 100 Pine Siskins in one day, and by December 29 we had banded our 200th siskin. Interestingly, when Jan did her weekly, two-day Project Feederwatch counts for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, she didn't see anywhere near 100 Pine Siskins together at one time. The maximum seen at one time was typically in the 20s. However, when we were banding, catching them one-by-one throughout the day, the numbers were sometimes significantly higher.

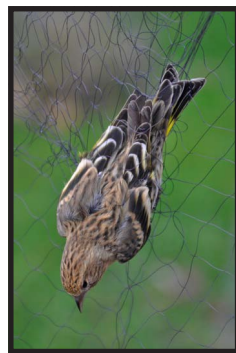


Pine Siskins feeding beneath a feeder



Approaching a mist net with many siskins

Some days we saw many siskins. Other days we didn't see even one. Did the large flock move on south? Or did a neighbor have a better feeding station than ours? Were they scared off by Coopers or Sharp-shinned Hawks in our area? When the large flocks showed up again at our feeders, were they the same birds we had before or had another northern flock taken their place? There is no other way to answer the last question except by banding and recapturing the birds. Our banding shows that when one flock of siskins moved on, we often saw a completely different flock later since we had many new siskins to band but no recaptures of birds we had previously banded. Banding also shows that the first flock sometimes did come back to our feeders en masse and were recaptured, meaning that they had stayed in the area and did not continue farther south. Can we speculate how many flocks were in the area? Future examination of our recapture data of the siskins we banded this year and then re-encountered later in the winter might help with that. And an encounter with a very special Pine Siskin also gave us some insights into what the flocks did this winter.



A Pine Siskin caught in a mist net



Jan with a recently captured Pine Siskin
(Photo © Bill Beatty)

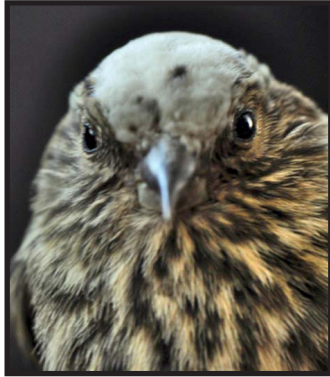
On December 14, Jan and I had a Zoom video conference scheduled for 10 am. Just before 10, to our delight and chagrin, we noticed an unusual Pine Siskin. The feathers on the top of its head were all white -- a leucistic “white-crowned” Pine Siskin! We were excited to see this unique bird, but troubled that we didn’t have time to take the photos we wanted. Jan did manage to shoot a few quick pictures before our meeting. After the conference, we looked for the bird all day, but it never returned.



“White-crowned” Pine Siskin (Photos © Jan Runyan)

More than a week went by with daily visits of large and small flocks of Pine Siskins to our feeders. We scanned them all carefully to find the flash of white on the head. No luck! I surmised that the flock with the “white-crowned” siskin had moved south and we would never see it again. I posted the quick photos we had taken on several bird-related Facebook groups for West Virginia. One of the responses to my photos was, “I have pics of one of these birds. Are these normal? I can post pics if you would like me to do so.” Hmmm. My first thought was that perhaps this man’s bird was a White-crowned Sparrow or some other bird, but surely not exactly the same siskin we had seen. I asked him to post his photos. The photos he posted were definitely a Pine Siskin -- the same one we had seen! He shared the date and location his photos were taken. The “white-crowned” siskin was at his feeders on November 25, more than **two weeks before** we had seen it. And, most interesting to me, he lives only 1 mile from us. Apparently the Pine Siskin flocks were not migrating further south, but instead they were staying and visiting different feeders in the same general area. Now, my hopes returned of seeing the “white-crowned” one again and of getting some close photos of this unusual bird.

On December 29 the bird did return. Not only were we able to see it, but, as I was setting up my long lens to take photos, the bird hopped right into a ground trap I had put out less than an hour before! We captured it, banded it, and got the close photos we wanted! Jan was fascinated by the one brown feather on top and by how the white feathers and brown feathers mixed at the edges of the patch.



“White-crowned” Pine Siskin (Photos © Jan Runyan)

As bird researchers, Jan and I are always questioning and looking for answers. Banding birds helps tremendously in answering a multitude of questions pertaining to birds. And when we band a unique bird, like the leucistic “white-crowned” Pine Siskin, it can be noticed by others who see it and then share the information.

The fall/winter of 2020-21 will be known by Jan and me as “the year of the Pine Siskin irruption” and the winter we were visited and revisited by a very special Pine Siskin friend. If you see this bird, please let us know.

540 Genteel Ridge Road
Wellsburg, WV 26070



Jan with the “white-crowned” Pine Siskin.
(Photo © Bill Beatty)

Twenty-Fifth Report of the West Virginia Bird Records Committee, 2020

LeJay Graffious

The year of Covid-19 did not dampen the birding around the state. In fact, many folks have found that birding is the perfect socially distanced activity. Birding takes us into nature and is just the stress relief we need. WV-Bird listserv, eBird, and several different birding Facebook pages have kept the birding community connected while social distancing. West Virginia is uniquely geographically positioned in that we have northern, western, and southern migrants or vagrants use our skies, forests, and waterways. Alert observers submitted twelve rare bird reports in 2020 of which ten were accepted by the committee. The other two were probably correct but the committee wanted more observers or photographic evidence for inclusion in the record. Two birds were added to the official State List. The first was a Pacific Loon observed in Wood County at the Belleville Locks and Dam on May 6. The second was a Bell's Vireo recorded in Thomas, West Virginia, by alert Maryland visitors. A previous Bell's vireo sighting in 1987 at Green Bottom Wildlife Management Area, Cabell County, was only a Hypothetical record.

The committee's work to review records has been made easier with an increase in photographic evidence. Most reports made to the committee now include excellent pictures of the birds being reported. Also, with social media bird alerts being shared almost in real time, far more observers are able to see these rare birds to provide additional documentation.

The committee complimented Derek Courtney for his five years of service and two years as chairperson. Also, kudos to Randy Bodkins for his five years of service on the Records Committee. We welcome Mike Slaven and Matt Orsie to the records committee for five-year terms joining Ross Brittain, Joette Borzik, David Daniels, Jesse Fallon, Gary Rankin (alternate) and LeJay Graffious as the West Virginia Bird Records Committee. Ross Brittain was elected as vice-chair. This year's meeting was held virtually thanks to Katie and Jesse Fallon's Zoom account.

Following is a summary of species reports received and considered.

WVBRC 2020-1 Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) - On March 31, the alert David Daniels found this western species on the West Virginia University Farm in Reedsville, Preston County. In addition to photographs, he was able to provide a sound file to distinguish the Western from the Eastern Meadowlark. Great work, David!

WVBRC 2020-4 Franklin's Gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) - Mike Griffith and Janet Keating observed this small gull at the Gallipolis Ferry in Mason County. This ninth record for the state was photographed and submitted for review. Gulls are a complex group to sort out. Kudos to the observers on another great sighting for the state.

WVBRC 2020-5 Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*) - Probably the most abundant loon in North America, the Pacific Loon is strictly marine except when breeding in arctic ponds. As its name implies, it winters mainly on the west coast. On May 6, Terry Bronson reported the Pacific Loon at the Belleville Locks and Dam in Wood County. Terry sent out a rare bird

alert and several birders were able to observe the bird crossing the border between Ohio and West Virginia. Mike Griffith was able to document this first record for West Virginia on our side of the border.

WVBRC 2020-6 Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) - The Harlequin Duck is the northern counterpart to the southern hemisphere's Torrent Duck. They are agile swimmers in turbulent whitewater searching the stream bottoms for larval insects mainly north of the 49th parallel. Terry Bronson submitted outstanding documentation and his rare bird alert allowed for 11 different WV birders to support the report. Again, this bird flirted with the West Virginia and Ohio border. Terry was able to get GPS coordinates of it on the Sand Creek embayment of the Ohio River in Wood County to add it to the WV Bird List. Great find!

WVBRC 2020-7 Black-bellied Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) - You never know where you will find a life bird. Steven Wilson found his in a shallow retention pond behind the Cranberry Creek Walmart Super Center in Beckley, Raleigh County, on May 27, 2020. This is the fourth documentation for these ducks in West Virginia. Even though it was a life bird and he was birding solo, he was able to provide photograph documentation to accompany his written observation to meet the by-law standards to be accepted. Congratulations, Steven.

WVBRC 2020-8 Black-bellied Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) - On July 1, 2020 Annie and Terry Harmon added these Whistling Ducks to their Life List at the Pleasant Creek Wildlife Management Area in Barbour County. These ducks, formerly called Tree-Ducks, are resident from the Gulf Coast and southern Arizona into South America. Annie provided excellent documentation with photographs by Brian Peterman. Great collaborative effort!

WVBRC 2020-9 Great Blue Heron (White form - *Ardea herodias occidentalis*) - On July 22, 2020 Richard Gregg spied a white wading bird at Marmet Locks and Dam in Belle, Kanawha County. He was able to identify it as the white form of the Great Blue Heron. Since it is a Great Blue, it is not a new species at this time. One committee member noted, "However, it was recently split by Bird Life Taxonomy as a separate species. And the North American Classification Committee of the AOS recently rejected a proposal to split the species. However, if any further proposals with new scientific and genetic information warranting a split are submitted, a future split by the AOS is possible. In that event, this would be a new species for the West Virginia list should this record be accepted."

WVBRC 2020-10 Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) - Usually a bird of the coasts, a juvenile Brown Pelican was observed by several birders in the Bellville Pool of the Ohio River at Bull Creek, Waverly, Wood County, on September 12, 2020. Jason Fielding White submitted clear photos in an excellent report signed by three others, to document this wayward pelican.

WVBRC 2020-11 Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii*) - On September 26, 2020, Leo Dilling and Laura Dilling of Maryland happened on a life bird along the Blackwater River Trail, Thomas, Tucker County. Leo made good notes and was able to photograph the bird. Later,

with help from expert birders he was able to suss out the identity of the vireo. This is the first documented record for West Virginia. A great find for the state!

WVBRC 2020-12 White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*) - On April 27, 2020, Josh Holland spotted a long-legged wader with a long, decurved bill at Green Bottom Wildlife Management Area in Cabell County. Accompanying Josh were birders Janet Keating and Michael Griffith. With observation data and photographic evidence they were able to distinguish this ibis, which inhabits marshes in the western United States, from the Glossy Ibis. Thanks to Janet Keating for submitting the documentation.

Two reports were not accepted by the committee. Unfortunately, the reporters were not accompanied by other birders or a camera to provide adequate documentation. They are:

WVBRC 2020-2 Eurasian Collared-Dove - Greenbrier County.

WVBRC 2020-3 Eared Grebe - Monongalia County.

The Records Committee actions can be seen on our website at <http://www.brooksbirdclub.org/west-virginia-bird-records-committee.html>. The Committee thanks the Brooks Bird Club and L. E. Helgerman for continued partnership in this endeavor. The Committee also wishes to thank Wil Hershberger for continuing to serve as non-voting Secretary. We appreciate his patience and dedication to his duties.

The Bird Records Committee is dependent on the birders in West Virginia to submit observations. In my experience birding in West Virginia since 1972, I believe there has been an increase in skill level among the birders, an increase in the number of birders, and timelier sharing of bird sightings via the Internet which helps build an accurate list of birds seen in our mountain state. Kudos to all those who submit records to the committee for evaluation. Keep those rare bird reports coming in! And please do not hesitate to contact any of the members of the committee if you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions for improvement. Keep alert and your camera handy for rare bird observations to add to our state list. You never know where or when they will appear. Good birding!

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2020 Floyd Bartley Memorial Award Announced

Jane Whitaker was awarded the 2020 Floyd Bartley Memorial Award for her article, “Native Bees of West Virginia,” which appeared in the April 2020 issue of *The Redstart*, Vol. 87, No. 2, pp. 54–62. The award includes a cash prize of \$100.

The Floyd Bartley Memorial Award was established by an anonymous donor to honor the memory of Floyd Bartley. (See *The Redstart* 1976, Vol. 43, p. 68.) Previous winners of the Award are listed below.

1976	Ray and Jo Ashworth
1979	Harry Slack
1980	James D. Phillips
1981	J. Lawrence Smith
1982	Eugene E. Hutton
1983	Linnie Coon
1984	Patricia Temple
1985	Melvin Hooker
1987	Jonathan Minear
1988	Julie Beatty
1989	Lorraine Rollefson
1993	Ralph K. Bell
1994	Wendell Argabrite
1995	Greg Eddy
1997	Ann Pyle
1998	John Northeimer
1999	Joey Herron
2000	Anna M. McRae
2001	Gary Felton
2002	William Beatty
2003	Matthew Orsie
2004	George E. Hall
2005	Jane J. Whitaker
2006	Matthew Orsie
2008	Rosie Campbell
2009	Jane J. Whitaker and Reba Hutton
2010	James Triplett and Beverly Triplett
2011	Joey Herron
2012	Scott Pendleton
2013	Douglas McClure Wood and Cynthia D. Ellis
2015	John Boback
2016	Jan Runyan
2017	David Patick
2018	Joey Herron
2019	Mindy Waldron, Allen Waldron, Keith Richardson, and Bob Dameron

eBird Report September 1–November 30, 2020

Michael Slaven

The fall of 2020 seemed short to many outdoors lovers, with the autumn leaves and their dramatic colors fading quickly. Dry and windy weather seemed to shorten the season for this fall display of colors, but the birds maintained a predictable sequence of arrivals and departures whatever the fall display. There were more lists in 2020 than in most years, but the lists mostly contained reports of expected species reported in average numbers in eBird in both species and individual counts. There were more birders and eBird reports were modestly more numerous than usual, which is probably explained by the burgeoning interest in birding as a way to have socially distanced activity during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

Big Day eBird reports from October 17, 2020, showed there were 109 species counted on that occasion. Among the eBird reports that day was one from Greenbrier County listing 30 Pine Siskins (*Spinus pinus*), a bellwether indicator that some birds were moving south from eastern Canada. This could mean other species that followed similar patterns to the Pine Siskin, such as Red-Breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*) were likely also to appear in good numbers.

Nine days later, the big birding news in West Virginia broke, as eBird reports started flooding in of Evening Grosbeaks (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) being seen in the state. These large, chunky, social birds are finches, but of a bulky, thick chested sort. The other Grosbeaks that one finds in the state, the Blue Grosbeak and the Rose-breasted Grosbeak, are similar in several features. They are bulky birds, with large heads and massive bills, and colorful plumage. But these other birds differ significantly from Evening Grosbeaks. In fact, Rose-Breasted Grosbeaks (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) and Blue Grosbeaks (*Passerina caerulea*) are not finches at all. The term “grosbeak” does not imply that these birds are closely related and they are actually no more than distant cousins taxonomically. They were given the generic descriptor name long ago to describe their large powerful bills rather than imply close taxonomic ties. Evening Grosbeaks are very uncommonly seen here and are usually entirely absent from West Virginia birding lists except in one very special circumstance--“irruption years.”

Irruptions are southward movements of birds searching for food. Since I have been an eBird reviewer, there have been several minor irruptions of different species including a memorable year of Snowy Owls and a slightly less spectacular one of Pine Siskins. In our area, bird irruptions are usually tied to the condition of mast and available food in trees in eastern Canada. Species that are commonly prone to follow an irruptive pattern of surges to our region include Red and White crossbills, Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, Common Redpolls, and (sadly and rarely) Bohemian Waxwings. Seldom do the irruptions stretch as far south as West Virginia, but occasionally they do, and when that happens, it is quite a treat for observers.

Irruption years are reliably predictable a few months ahead of the fall season if one studies the food supplies in eastern Canada, where bird movements correlate strongly with available nutrition. A year of very scarce food can bring birds in eastern Canada out of the balsam and fir forest south or west to search for sustenance. Years of great abundance

sometimes paradoxically can do the same thing, when very successful breeding seasons can cause pressure on available resources due to a large increase in population. The latter was the case with Evening Grosbeaks in 2020. In eastern Quebec there was an explosive population spike in spruce budworms (*Choristoneura fumiferana*), a species having a huge increase in numbers thanks to its success in infesting various evergreen species, particularly balsam firs. The spruce budworm is a moth native to the region that causes significant damage to balsam and fir trees, but also provides a rich food source for Evening Grosbeaks during breeding season. Once the moth numbers decline after their progeny reach the chrysalis stage, the grosbeaks are left with a large bird population and limited supplies of food. And so they move, forming flocks and flying south or west.

In fall 2020, significant numbers of Evening Grosbeaks reached West Virginia, making sightings of this usually rare visitor suddenly very frequent occurrences. For the researcher, the eBird lists from October to November create a rich picture of the movement of the species. I was happy to see the arrivals of these grosbeaks, but I cannot say I was surprised. Several factors gave me a heads up that these birds would be expected this year. First, there was the annual Winter Finch Report from the Finch Research Network (<https://finchnetwork.org/winter-finch-forecast-2020>). This website provides an annual forecast that has proven very reliable in predicting years of irruptive behavior. I was therefore, watching the eBird lists starting in early October and began to see reports from southern Canada, New England, and eventually New York and Pennsylvania. It was no great surprise when the Evening Grosbeaks began to be reported in West Virginia. From October 26 to November 30, there was a steadily increasing number of sightings, often from backyard feeders. Some birders reported very large flocks crowding their feeders (they especially like black oil sunflower seeds). For many observers (including me) this was a chance to add this beautiful bird to a life list.

Irruption years such as 2020 are infrequent, and reflect a specialized kind of semi-migratory behavior, one that is more flexible and opportunistic than the more rigidly programmed behavior of many other birds. This is an advantage over long-range migrants who are sometimes the victims of “phenological mismatch” during migration, where changing climate means that birds are arriving at stopping points along migratory routes only to find plant and insects having appeared too early for them to be used by the migrants.

It is one of the great wonders of birding when one encounters these Canadian visitors so far from their boreal homes. The Evening Grosbeaks in West Virginia in fall 2020 were a product of many factors converging hundreds of miles to the north, including especially the spread of a destructive moth. The spruce budworm is the bane of foresters in eastern Quebec, but its proliferation created conditions that gave eBirders the rare opportunity to appreciate this impressive finch. How long would the Evening Grosbeaks linger here? The next eBird Report will continue the story.

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Field Notes
Fall Season
September 1 – November 30, 2020

Casey Rucker

September and November were drier than average, according to the Northeast Regional Climate Center at Cornell University, while October was slightly wetter. Temperatures ranged from about average in September to much warmer than usual in November.

The following notes were gathered from the West Virginia Birds Listserv, sponsored by the National Audubon Society, and from field notes submitted to the author by email at autoblock@frontiernet.net, and by regular mail. The full content of the reports submitted by the contributors of the WV Listserv may be viewed by visiting the archives at the following web site: <http://list.audubon.org/archives/wv-bird.html>. Observations were once again more numerous than usual, likely due to the continuing Covid-19 pandemic, with reports from 41 of West Virginia's 55 counties during the fall season.

On September 26, Leo and Laura Dilling discovered a first-state-record **Bell's Vireo** in Thomas, Tucker County, as described on pages 34 and 35 of this issue. An irruption of **Evening Grosbeaks** spread across the Mountain State in November, with reports from 27 counties. On September 12, Jason White found a third-state-record **Brown Pelican** on the Ohio River near Waverly, Wood County, and the bird remained through the next day. Diversity was up this year, with 211 species reported in the state during the fall months.

Geese, Swans, and Ducks – LeJay Graffious found a **Snow Goose** on Freeland Road in Canaan Valley, Tucker County, on October 8, and the bird likely remained in the area through October 24 (CR, RB, RBo). Rodney Bartgis observed a **Greater White-fronted Goose** at the Mill Creek water treatment plant, Randolph County, on November 13. In Mason County, Gary Rankin, Janet Keating, and Michael Griffith spotted another **Greater White-fronted Goose** on Route 817 on November 7, following Josh Holland's discovery of a **Greater White-fronted Goose** in Point Pleasant two days earlier. **Canada Geese** were as usual widespread throughout the state. Five **Trumpeter Swans** and two **Tundra Swans** appeared in Pleasant Creek Wildlife Management area, Barbour County, on October 27, as observed by Matthew McKinney, and six **swans** remained for two days (JH, CF, RB). In Barbour County on November 12, Donna Mitchell counted 110 **Tundra Swans** flying over her home and later counted 170 **Tundra Swans** flying south of Teter Creek Lake. **Tundra Swans** were also observed in Jefferson (WS), Monongalia (SO, ST), Preston (LeJ), and Randolph (RB) Counties.

West Virginia birders reported 22 species of **ducks** this season. There were reports in at least six counties each of **Wood Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Gadwalls, Mallards, American Black Ducks, Ring-necked Ducks, Lesser Scaup, Buffleheads, Hooded and Common mergansers, and Ruddy Ducks** this fall. Reports of the following species came from fewer than six counties, as noted: **Northern Shovelers**: Grant (RB), Mercer (JP), Monongalia (HC, DCo), and Randolph (RB) Counties; **American Wigeons**: Hardy (DH), Mason (MG, JK, GR), Randolph (RB), and Tucker (AG) Counties; **Northern Pintail**: Mason (GR, JK, MG), Mercer (JP), and Pendleton (RB) Counties; **Green-winged Teal**: Grant (RB), Mercer (JP), Monongalia (HC, DCo), Randolph (RB), and Tucker (RB) Counties; **Redheads**: Barbour (DMi), Mason (GR, JK, MG), and Tucker (AG) Counties;

Greater Scaup: Monongalia County (HC, DCo); **Surf Scoter:** Tucker County (AG); **White-winged Scoter:** Raleigh County (SWi); **Black Scoter:** Wetzel County (WJ); **Common Goldeneye:** Tucker County (CR); and **Red-breasted Mergansers:** Barbour (DMi) and Monongalia (DCo) Counties.

Pheasants, Grouse, and Turkeys – Richard Gregg observed four **Ring-necked Pheasants** at Marmet Locks, Kanawha County, on November 14. Rodney Bartgis found **Ruffed Grouse** in Pocahontas, Randolph, and Tucker Counties this fall, and Herb Myers heard a **Ruffed Grouse** drumming in Dolly Sods, Randolph County, on November 19. **Wild Turkeys** inspired reports from only seven counties this fall.



White-faced Ibis
Photo by Josh Holland

Grebes – **Pied-billed Grebes** appeared widely throughout the state, while reports of **Horned Grebes** came from Mason (MG, JK, GR), Summers (JP), Taylor (JH), and Wetzel (WJ) Counties.

Pigeons and Doves – **Rock Pigeons** and **Mourning Doves** continue to reside throughout the state.

Cuckoos – **Cuckoo** sightings rose this fall in West Virginia, breaking a three-year period of declines. **Yellow-billed Cuckoos** were reported in nine counties, and reports of **Black-billed Cuckoos** came from Kanawha (HG), Mercer (JP), and Summers (JP) Counties.

Goatsuckers and Swifts – Reports of **Common Nighthawk** came from the following counties: Berkeley (RB), Jefferson (BH, JBz), Kanawha (HG), Mercer (JJP), Monroe (RBi), Morgan (RB), Putnam (KK), Randolph (RB), Summers (JJP, SOg), Tucker (EG), and Wood (JB). There were nine counties with reports of **Chimney Swifts**.

Hummingbirds – Birders in sixteen counties reported sightings of **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds**, through early October. The last report was on October 10, when Lynne Wiseman hosted a **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** at her home in Jefferson County.

Rails and Coots – James Triplett found a **Sora** near the Freeland boardwalk in Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Tucker County, on October 4. **American Coots** appeared in birders' reports from eight counties.

Cranes – Sharon Kearns enjoyed a visit from two **Sandhill Cranes** at her home near Hillsboro, Pocahontas County, on November 4.

Avocets – On October 17, Laura Ceperley spotted two **American Avocets** in South Charleston, Kanawha County.

Plovers – There was a **Black-bellied Plover** at Apple Grove, Mason County, on October 24, as observed by Josh Holland, David Patick, and Michael Griffith. Reports of **Killdeer** were up this fall, coming from eleven counties. On September 10, Michael Griffith spotted two **Semipalmated Plovers** at Robert C. Byrd Locks and Dam, Mason County.

Sandpipers – **Sandpiper** diversity was flat compared to last fall, as West Virginia birders submitted reports of thirteen species. Joseph Hildreth found a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** in Reedsville, Preston County, on September 2. Reports of the following **shorebirds** came from the counties listed: **Sanderling:** Kanawha (DG), Mason (MG, JK), and Preston (JH); **Dunlin:** Mason (MG, JK, JsH, DP); **Baird's Sandpiper:** Mason (MG); **Least Sandpiper:** Berkeley (RB) and Mason (GR, JK, MG); **Pectoral Sandpiper:**

Berkeley (RB), Mason (MG, JK), and Wood (TB); **Semipalmated Sandpiper**: Berkeley (RB); **American Woodcock**: Randolph (RB) and Tucker (HS); **Wilson's Snipe**: Grant (RB) and Mason (GR, MG, JK); **Spotted Sandpiper**: Mason (JK, MG, GR), Randolph (RB), and Summers (JP); **Solitary Sandpiper**: Berkeley (RB), Kanawha (HG), and Mason (GR, MG, JK); **Lesser Yellowlegs**: Berkeley (RB) and Wood (TB); and **Greater Yellowlegs**: Berkeley (RB), Cabell (JsH), Grant (RB), Hardy (DH), Jefferson (WS), Mason (GR, MG, JK, JsH), Taylor (JH), and Wayne (ReT).

Gulls and Terns – The fall was slow for inland seabirds, in keeping with recent years. **Bonaparte's Gulls** were reported in Mason (DP, JsH, MG) and Randolph (RB) Counties. Reports of **Ring-billed Gulls** came from Kanawha (HG), Mason (GR, JK, MG), Monongalia (DCo), and Wetzel (WJ) Counties; and **Herring Gulls** were reported in Mason (GR, JK, MG) and Summers (JP) Counties.

On September 6, Gary Rankin, Janet Keating, and Michael Griffith found a **Caspian Tern** at Robert C. Byrd Locks and Dam, Mason County, and Wilma Jarrell spied a lone **Black Tern** at Hannibal Dam, Wetzel County. The only **Common Tern** reported this season was discovered by Josh Holland on October 2 in Huntington, Cabell County, also observed by David Patick, and re-found the next day by Gary Rankin.

Loons – Hannah Clipp and Derek Courtney spotted the first **Common Loons** of the season on October 25, finding 20 individuals at Cheat Lake, Monongalia County. Other reports of **Common Loons** came from Jefferson (WS), Mason (MG, JK), and Taylor (JH) Counties.

Cormorants – Reports of **Double-crested Cormorants** came from nine counties.

Pelicans – The **Brown Pelican** found on September 12 by Jason White near Waverly, Wood County, is described near the beginning of these notes.

Hérons and Egrets – Richard Gregg observed the White form **Great Blue Heron** continuing at Marmet Locks and Dam in Belle, Kanawha County, on September 2. **Great Blue Herons** appeared throughout much of West Virginia this fall. **Great Egrets** were reported in four counties and **Green Herons** in only five.

Vultures – Reports of **Black Vultures** came from nine counties, while eighteen counties had reports of **Turkey Vultures**. Paul McKay watched three **Black Vultures** and thirty **Turkey Vultures** feeding on a deer carcass at his farm near Wheeling, Ohio County, on September 5.

Hawks and Eagles – Raptors were reported in good numbers in West Virginia this fall. **Osprey**, **Sharp-shinned Hawks**, **Cooper's Hawks**, **Bald Eagles**, **Red-shouldered Hawks**, and **Red-tailed Hawks** were all well represented in reports throughout the state during the fall season. **Golden Eagles** appeared in reports from Hardy (DH), Mercer (JP), Monroe (JP, GR, DP, MG), and Pendleton (RB) Counties. **Northern Harriers** were noted in Berkeley (RB), Jefferson (JBz, BT), Mason (MG, JK, GR), Mercer (JP), Pocahontas (KB), and Tucker (CR) Counties; and reports of **Broad-winged Hawks** came from Jefferson (DH, EK, RB), Mercer (JP), Monongalia (DCo), Tucker (CR), and Wood (JB) Counties. A **Northern Goshawk** perched on a porch railing at the home of the editor of these notes in Dry Fork, Tucker County, on September 22.



Brown Pelican
Photo submitted by
Jason Patrick White

Owls – Richard Bailey relayed a homeowner report of a **Barn Owl** in Pendleton County on October 21. **Eastern Screech-Owls** were widely reported for the third year in a row, with observations in eight counties, while **Great Horned Owls** were observed in Barbour (DMi), Jefferson (JBz), Kanawha (HG), Randolph (HMy), Summers (JJP), and Wayne (GR) Counties; observers reported **Barred Owls** in eight counties. Rodney Bartgis spotted a **Short-eared Owl** in the Laurel Fork headwaters area, Randolph County, on November 5.

Kingfishers – Reports of **Belted Kingfisher** were numerous this fall, with sightings in sixteen counties. A **Belted Kingfisher** was a new yard bird for Matthew Orsie in Hedgesville, Berkeley County, on November 27.

Woodpeckers – **Red-headed Woodpeckers, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Downy Woodpeckers, Hairy Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers,** and **Pileated Woodpeckers** were all widely reported. On November 3 Donny Good saw a family of **Red-headed Woodpeckers**, two adults and three juveniles, at his farm in Amma, Roane County.

Falcons – It was a slow fall for **falcons** in West Virginia. **American Kestrels** continued to appear widely throughout the state. **Merlins** made appearances in Cabell County (DP), Jefferson County (DHa, BT), Randolph County (RB), and Tucker County (CR, RB). There were reports of **Peregrine Falcons** from four counties: Mason (DP), Mercer (JP), Putnam (CE), and Wetzel (WJ).

Flycatchers – **Eastern Wood-Pewees** and **Eastern Phoebes** were widely seen in the state, with reports from nine and fifteen counties, respectively. The following **flycatchers** were reported in the following counties: **Great Crested Flycatcher**: Jefferson (BT, DHa, JBz) and Wood (JB), **Eastern Kingbird**: Berkeley (RB) and Morgan (RB); **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher**: Mason (GR, JK, MG), Monongalia (DCo), and Wood (JB); **Acadian Flycatcher**: Jefferson (BT, RB) and Wood (JB); and **Least Flycatcher**: Wood (JB).

Shrikes – On September 10, Richard Bailey found two **Loggerhead Shrikes** at sites in Greenbrier County where they were previously unknown.

Vireos – The first **Bell's Vireo** documented in the state, found by Leo and Laura Dilling in Thomas, Tucker County, on October 26, is described elsewhere in this issue. Otherwise, it was a moderate fall for **vireo** sightings in West Virginia. **White-eyed, Yellow-throated, Blue-headed,** and **Red-eyed vireos** appeared in many counties during September and early October, with **Blue-headed Vireos** continuing through November 3 (LC). **Philadelphia Vireos** were spotted in Berkeley (RB), Mason (GR, JK, MG, DP), Monongalia (DCo), Tucker (KK), Wayne (MG, JK), Webster (KK), and Wood (JB) Counties. **Warbling Vireo** reports were up a bit compared to the year before, coming from Berkeley (RB), Jefferson (JBz, BT, RB), Kanawha (HG), and Morgan (RB) Counties.

Crows, Jays, and Ravens – **Blue Jays, American Crows,** and **Common Ravens** prompted many reports throughout West Virginia. **Fish Crows** were seen and heard in Berkeley (RB), Jefferson (BT, DHa, JBz), and Morgan (RB) Counties.

Larks – **Horned Larks** were reported only from Mason (GR, JK, MG) and Monroe (JP) Counties this fall.

Swallows – Reports of **swallows** increased this season compared to the year before. **Tree Swallows** appeared in eight counties with the latest report on October 19, when Laura Ceperley and the editor of these notes saw an unexpected **Tree Swallow** near Davis, Tucker County. **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** appeared in Berkeley (RB),

Jefferson (WS, BT), Randolph (RB), and Tucker (CR) Counties. On September 2, Rodney Bartgis counted fifteen migrating **Purple Martins** at the Ridge fish hatchery in Morgan County. **Barn Swallows** inspired reports in Mercer (JP), Ohio (PM), Pocahontas (KB), Randolph (RB), and Wood (JB) Counties.

Chickadees and **Titmice** – **Black-capped Chickadees**, **Carolina Chickadees**, and **Tufted Titmice** appeared widely in state reports.

Nuthatches – In the usual two-year pattern of irruptions, **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were seen throughout the state, with reports from more counties than of **White-breasted Nuthatches**.

Creepers – Reports of **Brown Creeper** came from Berkeley (RB, MO), Cabell (ReT), Jefferson (BH, JBz), Kanawha (LC), Pendleton (RB), Tucker (CR), and Webster (KK) Counties.

Wrens – **House Wren** reports were scarce as usual, coming from Berkeley (RB), Jefferson (BH, RB), Pendleton (RB), Pocahontas (KB), Randolph (RB), and Summers (JP) Counties. **Winter Wrens** inspired reports from eight counties. As many as four **Sedge Wrens** were observed at the Rt. 48 overlook wetlands near Moorefield, Hardy County, beginning on October 4, when Aaron Graham and Kyle Klotz discovered the birds along with a **Marsh Wren**, and continuing through October 16 (FA, DH). On October 6, Rodney Bartgis found a **Marsh Wren** at the Mill Creek water treatment plant, Randolph County, and the bird remained through October 26; Josh Holland, David Patick, and Michael Griffith spotted a **Marsh Wren** at Green Bottom Wildlife Management Area, Cabell County, on October 24; and Michael Griffith and Janet Keating discovered a **Marsh Wren** at Robert C Byrd Locks and Dam, Mason County, on November 13. **Carolina Wrens** were as usual reported throughout the state.

Gnatcatchers – Birders in Kanawha (HG), Mason (GR, MG, DP), Morgan (RB), Summers (JJP), Wetzel (WJ), and Wood (JB) Counties reported **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers**, all during September.

Kinglets – Both **Golden-crowned** and **Ruby-crowned kinglets** inspired reports throughout the state this fall.

Thrushes – It was a good fall for **thrushes** in West Virginia. **Eastern Bluebirds**, **Swainson's**, **Hermit**, and **Wood thrushes**, and **American Robins** were all seen widely in reporting counties. Hulett Good hosted two juvenile **Eastern Bluebirds** who remained at the nest box in which they were born through September 26. James Phillips found lone **Veeries** in Pipestem, Summers County, on several occasions during the second half of September. **Gray-cheeked Thrushes** appeared in Kanawha (RG), Mason (MG, JK), Randolph (RBo), Summers (JJP), and Webster (KK) Counties.

Catbirds, **Thrashers**, and **Mockingbirds** – There were reports of **Gray Catbirds**, **Brown Thrashers**, and **Northern Mockingbirds** throughout the state this fall.

Starlings – Reports from thirteen counties confirm that **European Starlings** continued to occupy widespread habitats throughout West Virginia. On November 9 in Harpers Ferry, Jefferson County, Deborah Hale watched a cloud of some 4,000 **European Starlings** split apart above her, dispensing light and shadow through the fields below.

Waxwings – **Cedar Waxwing** reports were surprisingly down this season, with sightings in only fifteen counties throughout the state.

Weaver Finches – The **House Sparrow** prompted reports from ten counties this fall.

Pipits – Michael Griffith and Janet Keating found two early **American Pipits** at

Green Bottom Wildlife Management Area, Cabell County, on October 12. N. Wade Snyder observed as many as 38 **American Pipits** at Bardane, Jefferson County, during late October and early November. Gary Rankin, Janet Keating, and Michael Griffith spotted three **American Pipits** along Route 817, Mason County, on November 7. Rodney Bartgis found **American Pipits** on several occasions during October at the Mill Creek water treatment plant and on November 22 in Valley Bend, both locations in Randolph County.

Finches and Allies – Evening Grosbeaks were the star finches of the season, appearing in a remarkable 27 counties, beginning on October 31 at Oglebay Park, Ohio County, as reported by Paul McKay. Cynthia Burkhart hosted an increasing number of **Evening Grosbeaks** at her home in Ritchie County, with approximately 90 observed on November 22. **House Finches, Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, and American Goldfinches** inspired widespread reports throughout the state this fall. **Red Crossbills** appeared in reports from Lincoln (JTr), Pocahontas (KB), Summers (JP), and Tucker (AG) Counties.

Sparrows, Juncos, and Towhees – Nelson’s Sparrows appeared once again this fall, at Robert C. Byrd Locks and Dam, Mason County, on October 10 and 11, observed by Josh Holland, Janet Keating, David Patick, Michael Griffith, and Bryan Smith, and at Green Bottom Wildlife Management Area, Cabell County, found by Michael Griffith and Janet Keating on October 16. The most-frequent **emberizid** species in reports this fall were **Chipping, Field and Fox sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, White-throated, Song, and Swamp sparrows, and Eastern Towhees**. The following **sparrows** were reported only in the counties listed: **White-crowned Sparrows** in Barbour (DMi), Jefferson (BT), Kanawha (RG, LC), Pocahontas (SK, KB), Randolph (RB), Summers (JJP), and Tucker (CR) Counties; **Savannah** in Jefferson (WS, DHa) and Mason (GR, JK, MG, DP) Counties; and **Lincoln’s** in Cabell (MG, JK), Jefferson (BT), Kanawha (RG), Mason (GR, MG, JK, DP), and Randolph (HMy) Counties.

Blackbirds – Janet Keating and Michael Griffith spotted 25 lingering **Bobolinks** at Robert C. Byrd Locks and Dam, Mason County, on September 29. West Virginia birders reported sightings of **Eastern Meadowlarks** in Berkeley (RB), Mason (GR, JK, MG), Pendleton (RB), Randolph (RB), and Tucker (CR) Counties. Joette Borzik found an **Orchard Oriole** at Cool Spring Preserve, Jefferson County, on September 6. **Baltimore Orioles** were observed during September in Berkeley (RB), Wetzel (WJ), and Wood (JB) Counties. **Red-winged Blackbirds** were reported in fourteen counties, **Brown-headed Cowbird** reports came only from Berkeley (RB), Jefferson (JBz, BT), Randolph (RB), and Tucker (JTr) Counties, while **Rusty Blackbirds** were seen in Barbour (RB), Kanawha (RG), Mason (MG, JK), Randolph (RB), Summers (JJP), Tucker (CR), and Wetzel (WJ) Counties. **Common Grackles** were reported in twelve counties.

Warblers – This fall birders in West Virginia found 29 **warbler** species; it was a fair season for reports. Derek Courtney found the only reported **Connecticut Warblers** during the fall, when he found two and likely a third on September 20 at Little Indian Creek Wildlife Management Area, Monongalia County. Herb Myers spotted the only reported **Worm-eating Warblers** of the season on September 16 at Seneca Rocks, Pendleton County. Other **warbler** species reported in six or fewer counties are listed below with the counties and contributors. Species listed without contributors were reported in at least seven counties. **Warblers** reported this fall included **Ovenbird; Blue-winged** – Mason County (GR, JK, MG); **Black-and-white; Tennessee; Orange-crowned** – Mason (GR, JK, MG), Monongalia (DCo), Raleigh (SWi), and Wayne (GR) Counties;

Nashville – Jefferson (BT, BH), Kanawha (HG), Pendleton (HMy), Randolph (RB), Summers (JP), and Wood (JB) Counties; **Kentucky** – Wayne County (MG, JK); **Common Yellowthroat; Hooded** – Mason (MG, JK, DP), Morgan (RB), Summers (JP), Wayne (MG, JK), Webster (KK), and Wood (JB) Counties; **American Redstart; Cape May; Northern Parula** – Jefferson (DHa), Mason (GR, JK, MG), Pocahontas (KB), Summers (JP), and Webster (KK) Counties; **Magnolia; Bay-breasted; Blackburnian** – Mason (GR, JK, MG), Monongalia (DCo), Summers (JP), Wayne (MG, JK), Wetzel (WJ), and Wood (JB) Counties; **Yellow** – Jefferson (JBz, BT) and Summers (JP) Counties; **Chestnut-sided; Blackpoll; Black-throated Blue** – Berkeley (RB), Jefferson (JBz, BT), Tucker (CR), Webster (KK), and Wood (JB) Counties; **Palm; Pine; Yellow-rumped; Yellow-throated** – Kanawha (HG), Mason (GR, JK, MG), Summers (JP), Wayne (MG, JK), and Wood (JB) Counties; **Prairie** – Kanawha (RG), Mason (GR, JK, MG), and Wayne (MG, JK) Counties; **Black-throated Green; Canada** – Wood County (JB); and **Wilson’s** – Tucker County (CR). On September 18, John Benedetti, Mary Murin, Emily Grafton, Archie Carpenter, Pat Collins, and Jason White saw thirteen **warbler** species in McDonough Refuge, Wood County.

Tanagers, Cardinals, Grosbeaks, and Buntings – **Summer Tanagers** appeared in reports from Kanawha (HG), Mason (GR, JK, MG, DP), Wayne (GR), and Wood (JB) Counties. **Scarlet Tanagers, Northern Cardinals, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and Indigo Buntings** prompted reports from birders in most parts of the state. Bruni Haydl spotted a late **Indigo Bunting** at her bird bath in Charles Town, Jefferson County, on October 4.

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