



THE MAIL BAG

A PUBLICATION OF THE BROOKS BIRD CLUB OF WEST VIRGINIA
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JANUARY – FEBRUARY – MARCH 2016

RYAN TOMAZIN - EDITOR

Editor's Note

As I type this, snowflakes fly outside my window, whereas yesterday, it was 50 F and sunny. We've had one of the warmest winters on record, and it has affected our winter birding in some spots. There were no major invasions, other than good numbers of siskins and the odd northern rarity, but this left the door open for western vagrants. A Lark Sparrow was found in the Eastern Panhandle (see page 2 for story and photo); a Brambling has spent the winter in Medina, Ohio; and a Western Tanager has been at State College, PA, for months. Gull numbers were mostly lower, as the lakes up north didn't freeze to the extent of the past two winters, and ducks and geese were quite sporadic. A recent invasion of Greater White-fronted Geese and a smattering of Snow and Ross's Geese did spice things up regionally.



Foray is coming up in June, and I know that I'm excited to be back in beautiful Tucker County. We're planning another trip-filled week, as there is so much to see in the area. We'll travel to Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Blackwater Falls State Park, and hopefully Dolly Sods, Olsen Bog, Fernow Forest, and other interesting natural places. The programs are being developed, and plans are being made.

We would love to see you at Foray. You, your family, friends who like nature, whoever. We've enjoyed having new members make Foray their first official BBC activity, and would hope to continue with this. If you have a local publication, group or school that you think would benefit from us sending them information about Foray, please contact Foray Directors Janice Emrick (emricksj@gmail.com) or Ryan Tomazin (see below, page 2, etc.) with information on who to contact. This can help us continue to grow the club and Forays, in particular, so that we may have great folks around in the future to help and to benefit from Foray, one of the only events of it's kind in the United States.

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT, JAY BUCKELEW

I am excited at the prospect of leading the BBC for the next two years as your president. The activities of the BBC and its chapters are varied and draw the interest of birders around West Virginia and neighboring states. We offer Christmas Bird Counts, sponsor a week long Foray camp each June, organize national and international birding trips, have a birding trip to the eastern shore of Maryland and New Jersey every fall, and we publish this newsletter and West Virginia's oldest journal on birds, THE REDSTART. If you have some ideas for new birding activities, or if you would like to see more emphasis placed on something the BBC already offers, please send me your recommendations at 111 Logan Ct., Bethany, WV 26032.

Since 1933 THE REDSTART has been West Virginia's journal of record for observations on bird life as well as many other natural history subjects. I've been editor of THE REDSTART for 39 of my 45 years or so as a BBC member, and always at this time of the year, the backlog of articles waiting for publication in our journal is low. With the winter weather keeping us indoors, it is a good time to gather ones notes and write an article. Please send me your articles, notes, photographs, and book reviews.

– *Albert R. Buckelew, Jr., BBC President*



KEEP THOSE BBC MEMBER SURVEYS COMING IN!

To all the members who have mailed or emailed their BBC Member Surveys in: Thank You! We've received (at printing) 15 mailed and two emailed, and will continue to take in more as they come.

Through editor error, they were mailed without any return information. They can be mailed to: Ryan Tomazin, 348 Station Street, Apt. 7, Bridgeville, PA 15017, or emailed to wvwarblers@hotmail.com. They can be mailed to the BBC P.O. Box, but that isn't checked every day, and they are being compiled by yours truly for the Board, etc. A downloadable version, in both Word and PDF formats, if available on the BBC website.

This information is very helpful, and will continue to inform the Board and committees of directions for our beloved Brooks Bird Club.

11TH WV EAGLE SURVEY

It was a nice winter day January 9, 2016, for our eagle count. There were many people who joined in the groups for the count. It was great to have so many gorgeous birds in the neighborhood. You will see we have added two groups from Tygart and Stonewall Jackson to our totals. There was also the Mountwood club who tallied on Thursday (numbers not included in our total). There are plenty of eagles in Wonderful West Virginia. Now keep your fingers crossed for successful nests this year.

Bertha - 7 BAEA* (3 adults, 2 1st year, 2 2nd year) 4 GOEA** (1 adult, 3 immatures)

Mouth of the Bluestone River (Pits) - 6 BAEA(3 adult, 3 1st year)

Bluestone State Park - 2 BAEA(adult)

Bluestone Turnpike Trail - no eagles

Rt. 20 Overlook - 2 BAEA (1 2nd year, 1 3rd year)

Camp Brookside - no eagles

Brooks Island (river level & overlook) - 4 BAEA (2 adults, 2 3rd year)

Rt. 122(Greenville) - 10 BAEA (1 adult, 8 2nd year & 1 3rd year)

Barger Springs - 1 BAEA (adult)

Stonewall Jackson Lake - 1 BAEA (adult)

Tygart Lake - no eagles

*BAEA = *Bald Eagle* **GOEA = *Golden Eagle*

67 participants found 33 BAEA (13 adults, 5 1st year, 11 2nd year & 4 3rd year) and 4 GOEA (1 adult, 3 immatures).

Conditions- 37-50 degrees, 90-100% cloud cover, 0-7 mph wind speed, visibility 1-8 miles, no precipitation, water open

– *Contributed by Mindy Waldron, President, Bibbee Nature Club*

RARE LARK SPARROW VISITS E. PANHANDLE

Today, I looked out the kitchen window at the of regular yard birds feeding on some seed on the ground, when one bird stood out as being not so regular. Grabbing my binoculars, I verified that this was not a bird I usually see around here, but one I have seen before out west and in my bird books. A Lark Sparrow. That beautifully marked face, really made it stand out.

– Carol Del-Colle, Summit Point, WV, 2/5/16

(The bird was still being seen in mid-February by Carol and visitors. – Ed.)



*A wonderful winter visitor, a Lark Sparrow
– photo by N. Wade Snyder*

CONTACT THE EDITOR

Have an interesting story about the nature around your neck of the woods? Want to contribute an article or travelogue? Have a nature-related event that you'd like to tell the Club about? Please contact me by mail, email or phone:

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CORRESPONDENCE

We would love to hear from members of the BBC. What have you been doing? Have you taken recent trips? What interesting birds or plants have you seen in your locality or backyard?

The Club looks forward to little notes on Christmas cards and dues notices, but feel free to get in touch with us at other times of the year too. Even just a line or two would be of interest to our readers, especially if we haven't seen or heard from you in a while.

Correspondence may be mailed to: Juanita Slater, Corresponding Secretary, c/o BBC, PO Box 4077, Wheeling, WV 26003.

For those of you who prefer email, correspondences may be sent to: gusind@stratuswave.net

2015-16 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

Thanks to all the folks who gave up all or part of their last Saturday before Christmas to help with Mountaineer Audubon's Christmas Bird Count. The day was cold, with Hart Field not reporting any temperature above 32 F. The morning started with icy, mostly untreated roads. Thanks to Katie Fallon for being on phone, contacting and coordinating folks. The cold wind kept the birds hunkered down. The mild winter has kept the numbers of migrants north. Still, we totaled 71 species on count day and an additional 3 species to date for count week.

The afternoon skies cleared but the wind picked. I believe all had a fun day in the field.

– LeJay Graffious, Bruceton Mills, WV

The 44th Pipestem Area, WV Christmas Bird Count was held Saturday, December 19, 2015. A dozen participants found 65 species including Great Egret, Blue-headed Vireo (has been found during count week before), 3 Golden Eagles, 5 Bald Eagles, 1 unidentified eagle and record numbers for Red-tailed Hawk and Common Raven.

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV

The Charleston CBC took place on Saturday, December 19, 2015. Temperatures ranged from 28 to 40 degrees for the day and steady winds of 20-22 mph kept a lot of birds out of sight and off the Kanawha River. Thanks to the efforts of 24 volunteers, we were able to locate 59 species of birds for the day, 14,198 individuals.

Highlights for the day included an American Woodcock, a record number of Gadwalls (130), and an outstanding number of Field Sparrows in one flock (43) Our pair of Merlins have come back to the cemetery again for the winter and so these two Merlins tied our high count for this species.

– Doren Burrell, Mink Shoals, WV

20 participants enjoyed pleasant weather on December 20th for our Canaan Valley CBC. We found 2,070 individuals of 54 species, plus 3 count week species. Highlights included first-time American Bittern and Northern Saw-Whet Owls, as well as Common Goldeneye, Northern Harriers, and Golden Eagle. Plus, 439 Pine Siskins beat our former record by a factor of 10.

– Casey Rucker, Seneca Rocks, WV

The Pendleton CBC was held on Friday, Dec 18th, on a very windy day, with light snow flurries in parts of the count circle. The wind made it difficult to find passerines. All water was ice free and there was no snow on the ground. The temperature was in the high 20s to high 30s F. Many thanks to Carolyn Ruddle who organized the 14 feeder watchers.

We were surprised by the lack of Red-headed Woodpeckers and the scarcity of Blue Jays (only 83, half of the recent average for this CBC). Has there been low acorn production this year? Despite abundant good habitat for the following species, we also found no Ruffed Grouse, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Killdeer, meadowlarks, pipits, or Horned Larks. And despite thorough searching we found only 6 kestrels, which is half the recent average for this CBC. We also had lower-than-average counts for Great Blue Heron, Black Vulture, Cooper's Hawk, Mourning Dove, kingfisher, and most woodpeckers.

We found 62 species including the first Common Yellowthroat in the 38 year history of this count (David Carr along Dickinson Mt. Rd, Franklin). We tallied new count highs for Canada Goose, Bufflehead, Common Merganser, Hooded Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle (nearly 4 X the previous high!!!), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and White-breasted Nuthatch. The 77 Pine Siskins were the most since I started compiling the count in 2009, though historically, the high is 285. We also had our second ever Fish Crow (David Carr). The cedar berries (fleshy cones) were abundant this year and they attracted good numbers of robins, Cedar Waxwings, and Yellow-rumped Warblers.

– Fred Atwood, Cabins, WV

Huntington's 75th annual Christmas Bird Count of Jan. 3rd found a preliminary total of 67 species, including Snow Goose, Ross's Goose, Bald Eagle, Black Vulture, all 7 of the expected woodpeckers, and, at a feeder, a male Indigo Bunting.

– Cynthia D. Ellis, Red House, WV

The Moorefield CBC was held Dec. 31, 2015. We had good weather, light winds and 10 participants plus 3 feeder watchers. Our total was 57 birds and the best finds was a Peregrine Falcon and 5 Evening Grosbeaks (feeder).

– Jane Whitaker, Washington, DC

The Raleigh CBC was on Sunday Dec. 10th and we found 44 species for the day. Not many birds on the water up here.

We did the McDowell CBC yesterday, Sunday the 27th. Allen hasn't worked up the final numbers, but a good day. We (Alma, Allen and I) agreed the best bird of the day was our last. I noticed this dark "blob" in a tree behind the parking garage in Welch, which upon closer looks turned into a Wild Turkey. Then we were able to find a couple more. It was 5:30 PM and almost dark, and the turkeys had gone to roost. I'm sure Ed Evans' bird of the day was the Bald Eagle he saw soaring over the mountain we made our way up.

– Mindy Waldron, President, Bibbee Nature Club

2016 TRIP TO COSTA RICA

Sarah and I spent January 24th to February 5th in Costa Rica. The first part was a Road Scholar tour called "A Taste of Costa Rica." Though it was not primarily a birding trip, our guides, who were all Costa Ricans, were excellent birders. They were great with their ears, eyes and scopes. We spent time in San Jose, the Sarapiquí region, the Arenal Volcano region and the Monteverde region. I saw 180 species of which 131 were life birds. It was special seeing birds such as the Chestnut-sided Warblers that grace us with their presence in the spring and summer and winter in Central America.

After our tour, we stayed on 3.5 extra days in the Monteverde area. We hiked to the San Gerardo Biological Station in the Children's Eternal Rainforest and had a guide take us into the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. We were fortunate to have good encounters with the Resplendent Quetzal. One of the most satisfying experiences was finding and identifying the Tufted and Yellowish Flycatchers all by myself.

Costa Rica is a wonderful country to visit. They are welcoming of visitors and a relatively peaceful country. They have so many birds that one often had to choose between just watching, photographing or recording what we were seeing. It was a good dilemma to have.

– *Contributed by Herb Myers*

Gray-headed Chachalaca*
 Crested Guan*
 Black Guan*
 Neotropical Cormorant
 Anhinga
 Black-throated Tiger-Heron*
 Great Blue Heron
 Great Egret
 Snowy Egret
 Little Blue Heron
 Cattle Egret
 Green Heron
 Black Vulture
 Turkey Vulture
 Osprey
 Double-toothed Kite*
 White Hawk*

Broad-winged Hawk
 Gray Hawk
 Gray-necked Wood-Rail*
 Northern Jacana*
 Spotted Sandpiper
 Rock Pigeon
 Red-billed Pigeon*
 Ruddy Pigeon*
 Short-billed Pigeon*
 White-winged Dove
 Squirrel Cuckoo
 Groove-billed Ani*
 Common Pauraque
 Gray-rumped Swift*
 Long-billed Hermit*
 Stripe-throated Hermit*
 Green-fronted Lancebill*
 Green Violetear*
 Purple-crowned Fairy*
 Green-crowned Brilliant*
 Purple-throated
 Mountain-gem*
 Magenta-throated
 Woodstar*
 Scintillant Hummingbird*
 Canivet's Hummingbird*
 Violet-headed
 Hummingbird*
 Scaly-breasted
 Hummingbird*
 Violet Sabrewing*
 Bronze-tailed Plumbeater*
 Crowned Woodnymph*
 Stripe-tailed Hummingbird*
 Coppery-headed Emerald*
 Steely-vented
 Hummingbird*
 Rufous-tailed Hummingbird
 Blue-throated Goldentail*
 Resplendent Quetzal*
 Slaty-tailed Trogon*
 Orange-bellied Trogon*
 Blue-crowned Motmot*
 Keel-billed Motmot
 Ringed Kingfisher*
 Amazon Kingfisher*
 Green Kingfisher
 Rufous-tailed Jacamar*
 Emerald Toucanet*
 Black-mandibled Toucan*
 Keel-billed Toucan*
 Black-cheeked Woodpecker*
 Hoffman's Woodpecker*
 Smoky-brown Woodpecker
 Golden-olive Woodpecker
 Lineated Woodpecker*
 Pale-billed Woodpecker*

Laughing Falcon*
 Crimson-fronted Parakeet*
 Orange-chinned Parakeet*
 White-crowned Parrot*
 Red-lored Parrot*
 White-fronted Parrot*
 Mealy Parrot*
 Russet Antshrike*
 Wedge-billed Woodcreeper*
 Northern Barred-
 Woodcreeper*
 Spotted Woodcreeper
 Streak-headed Woodcreeper*
 Spot-crowned Woodcreeper*
 Plain Xenops*
 Buff-throated
 Foliage-Gleaner*
 Red-faced Spinetail*
 Yellow Tyrannulet*
 Yellow-billed Elaenia*
 Mountain Elaenia*
 Olive-striped Flycatcher*
 Paltry Tyrannulet*
 Common Tody-Flycatcher*
 Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher*
 Tufted Flycatcher*
 Yellowish Flycatcher*
 Long-tailed Tyrant*
 Bright-rumped Attila*
 Dusky-capped Flycatcher
 Boat-billed Flycatcher*
 Social Flycatcher
 Gray-capped Flycatcher*
 White-ringed Flycatcher*
 Tropical Kingbird
 Red-capped Manakin*
 White-collared Manakin*
 Black-crowned Tityra*
 Masked Tityra*
 Speckled Mourner*
 Cinnamon Becard*
 Yellow-throated Vireo
 Lesser Greenlet*
 White-throated Magpie-Jay*
 Brown Jay*
 Blue-and-white Swallow
 Southern Rough-winged
 Swallow*
 Mangrove Swallow*
 Scaly-breasted Wren*
 House Wren
 Ochraceous Wren*
 Band-backed Wren*
 Plain Wren*
 Gray-breasted Wood-Wren*
 Tawny-faced Gnatwren*
 Long-billed Gnatwren*

Black-faced Solitaire*
 Slaty-backed Nightingale-
 Thrush*
 Sooty Thrush*
 Mountain Thrush*
 Clay-colored Thrush –
 CR national bird
 White-throated Thrush*
 Northern Waterthrush
 Black-and-white Warbler
 Tennessee Warbler
 Hooded Warbler
 Tropical Parula
 Yellow Warbler
 Chestnut-sided Warbler
 Golden-crowned Warbler*
 Buff-rumped Warbler*
 Wilson's Warbler
 Slate-throated Redstart*
 White-throated Shrike-
 Tanager*
 Crimson-collared Tanager*
 Passerini's Tanager*
 Blue-gray Tanager
 Palm Tanager
 Golden-hooded Tanager*
 Bay-headed Tanager*
 Shining Honeycreeper*
 Red-legged Honeycreeper*
 Green Honeycreeper*
 Variable Seedeater*
 Bananaquit*
 Yellow-faced Grassquit*
 Grayish Saltator*
 Buff-throated Saltator*
 Black-headed Saltator*
 Orange-billed Sparrow*
 Black-striped Sparrow*
 Rufous-collared Sparrow
 Common Chlorospingus*
 Summer Tanager
 Red-throated Ant-Tanager*
 Carmiol's Tanager*
 Blue-black Grosbeak*
 Melodious Blackbird*
 Black-cowled Oriole*
 Baltimore Oriole
 Scarlet-rumped Cacique*
 Montezuma Oropendula*
 Yellow-crowned Euphonia*
 Yellow-throated Euphonia*
 Elegant Euphonia*
 Olive-backed Euphonia*
 Golden-browed Chlorophonia*

*Indicates a new life bird -
 #130



Crested Guan



Tufted Flycatcher



Blue-crowned Motmot



Masked Tityra

– photos by Herb Myers

FIRST WV BIRDS OF JANUARY 1, 2016

First "pre-dawn" bird this morning was a towhee, a good omen for us tea-drinkers. Happy New Year, and lets work for good habitats this year!

– Laura Ceperley, Kanawha County, WV

Good morning, all. Woke to a birch tree full of juncos, making them my first 2016 birds. It is finally cold and a tad snowy in Mineral County today, so I am hoping for lots of feeder action. Happy New Year, birders!!

– Shannon Burner, Keyser, WV

Our first bird of the new year was the American crow.

– Jim & Judy Phillips, Pipestem, WV

First birds were a titmouse and a house finch on the feeder.

– Bill & Carole Telfair

My first bird was a pair of female cardinals in the dogwood tree by the kitchen window. Ron's was a Carolina Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse sitting together.

– Wendy Perrone, Brooks, WV

My first bird was a Mourning Dove drinking at the pond edge. My husband's first bird was the Eastern Screech-owl seen at 7:08 AM sitting in the nest box hole before it went to bed this morning. Happy New Year!

– BIRDMOM, Jefferson County, WV

Happy New Year to you all. Black Vulture coming off the roost beside the house. There were about 60 birds last night; though the numbers change from day to day. About twice as many TVs as BVs. Most of these birds spend quite a bit of time on the WV side of the line.

– Bob Dean, Near WV and White Hall, VA

At first light I had a Carolina Wren singing on the deck. What a great way to start the New Year - with a song.

– Wil Hershberger

I have enjoyed everyone's posts for their first bird in the new year. Mine was the Black-capped Chickadee. The BCCH is one of my favorite birds!

May your 2016 be filled with the wonder of the natural world.

– LeJay Graffious, Bruceton Mills, WV

My first birds was a White-throated Sparrow in the quince bush. It might have been the Carolina Wren if I'd remembered to check the Williamsburg bottle by the front door. More often than not one spends the night in there.

– Bruni Haydl, Charles Town, WV

First birds: Pine Siskins. The hordes in my yard are only increasing. I counted 310 yesterday, and that wasn't all of them. Happy New Birding Year to All!

– Casey Rucker, Dry Fork, WV

My first bird was a crow it was more visible than the Carolina Chickadee or House Finch at feeders.

– Wilma Jarrell, Wileyville, WV

I had a Northern Mockingbird here in Follansbee, Brooke County. We recently discovered it and since then it's been hanging around for several days. Never saw one here before.

– Becky Szabo

Had a Blue Jay first thing this morning in Franklin, WV.

– Roy Boyle

WINTER BIRDING IN ICELAND

A winter trip to Iceland? Good gracious, why? First, to see the northern lights, a good possibility given 18 hour-long nights, and second, to see Iceland's unique geology: volcanoes, glaciers, ice-sculpted landforms, and Mid-Atlantic Ridge, a tectonic plate boundary stretching over Iceland.

Given Iceland's near Arctic Circle location and short daylight hours, I did not expect to see many birds.

With our trip objectives in mind, previous to leaving we booked a two week tour with a travel company called Nordic Visitor. The Nordic folks were excellent and provided airport transfers, all lodging in guest houses for our 1500 mile two week trip, rental car with cell phone and GPS, and maps.

We began our tour in the capitol city, Reykjavik. Then, equipped with nature and geology books purchased from the city's excellent bookstores, we set off. Just in case, I also had a book on Iceland's birds.

We drove west to the Snaefellnes Peninsula. Although only a 2 hour drive from Reykjavik, the peninsula is remote and rugged, as well as incredibly beautiful. We followed route 1, the Ring Road, which goes along the hilly coast. We saw only a few cars on the wintry roads. We drove slowly; those contemplating a long life do not speed on Iceland's winding roads. I was immersed in glacial geology noting cirques, aretes, u-shaped valleys, hanging waterfalls, when—OMG!--it flew across the road only feet from our front car window--a large raptor, with pointed wings and mottled brown and white feathers. Gyr Falcon! Over 40 years of birding, and my first gyr Falcon! So excited I almost flew out the window after the bird, I stared in awe as with quick wing beats the gyr Falcon flew toward a mountain cliff.

That day, the Icelandic bird goddess smiled on us. A few minutes later, as we drove near a fjord whose waters shone like deep blue chrome in the low level winter sunlight, overhead circled—a white tailed eagle! Great views of another lifer.

Goddess still smiling. A flock of large white birds stood in a field. Whooper Swans. I'd been trying to find them for years in Great Britain, with no success. Whoopers are Iceland's largest bird, and only swan species.

Incredibly, there's more. Later in the trip we stopped for a hike to a glacier. As I was checking out the vegetation including low growing juniper and bear-berry, we almost stepped on them—five Rock Ptarmigan. Their soft white plumage gleamed in the sun. So close were the ptarmigan we even saw their feathered feet. They browsed in typical habitat, at snow line, picking amid the glacial till for buds, berries, and evergreen leaves.

And then snow buntings. The buntings were at the famous glacier lagoon, and while photographing lovely floating cerulean-hued icebergs, I passed near a picnic table. There the little beauties paraded, hunting crumbs left by picnickers. I had already seen distant flocks of snow buntings undulating around Icelandic moors, but these perched-picnic table views were up close and personal.

Some surprises are superlative. Iceland's winter birds were just that. Our trip bird list included: Common Eiders, often seen in coastal waters, Tufted Duck, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Graylag Goose, Great Cormorant, Northern Fulmar, Glaucous Gull, Iceland Gull, and the ubiquitous and noisy Common Raven.

Oh, yes, the sights we had planned on seeing on this trip—one, Northern lights. Wally and I sat in our car several hours one night on a dark side road in an equally dark lava field. And we saw the northern lights: streaming, shimmering ribbons across the sky. Now, I made my living as a nature writer. And could I adequately describe those ethereal, evanescent, mesmerizing celestial lights? No.

I might add that Icelanders have their own version of northern lights view-



Whooper Swans
—photo by Norma Jean Venable

ing. They sit immersed in their cozy outdoor hydro-thermally heated hot tubs, and sky watch. Wally and I tried the hydrothermal approach. Icelanders have got it right.

And then, geology. First, glacial. We went "hiking" inside a glacier, marveling at the cave's blue light, and slippery blue icy walls, like a scene from Star Wars. We also drove over a 20 mile wide glacial out-wash plain, which is a channel for glacial melt-water. The glacier that made this wide channel is quite interesting. It's cool ice reposes on top of an active volcano. When the volcano erupts, the glacier melts and slews vast quantities of flood water, inundating all in its violent path.

We also saw the Mid Atlantic Ridge where it surfaces in a series of fissures and cracks near Reykjavik, and checked out the rift valley where the North American plate is spreading from the Eurasian plate.

In summary, those contemplating an Icelandic trip will be rewarded. It's a geologists playground, and a birder's paradise. Naturalist's marveling at frost-shattered sea stacks and towering cliffs, can (in spring) see nesting puffins, guillemots, fulmars, and kittiwakes. Over 370 bird species have been recorded in Iceland, and with 18 hours of daylight to see them – Iceland may again feature in our travel plans.

— Submitted by Norma Jean Venable

DID YOU KNOW?

The Bibbee Nature Club is an affiliate of the Brooks Bird Club, located in southeastern West Virginia. It has been an affiliate for many years and was named for Dr. Paul Cecil Bibbee who was a Professor of Biology at Concord College (University) in Athens, WV. He was a photographer, taxidermist, and ornithologist. His 1947 thesis on the Bewick's Wren earned him a Ph.D. and serves as the inspiration for the Nature Club today.

At the beginning of each new year, the headquarters of the BBC receives the new schedule of events for the year along with their quarterly newsletter of past happenings. Ann McRae has been faithful to this project for years and now Mindy and Allen Waldron are the new reporters.

To this writer, it is amazing for a small club how varied their schedule is and to read of their successful birding adventures. Don't you wish you could go birding at "Blueberry Hill" for a morning of birds and blueberries? Of course, when you live in the area of Bluestone Wildlife Mgmt., it can be pretty worthwhile to stop at the "Bertha Campground" and enlist some campers' advice on where to see some eagles! And then there is hawk watching in September at East River Mountain and on to their "Big Sit" in October. November this past year was a scheduled meeting with their neighbors who represent Bird Clubs in Buchanan and Russell County in Virginia for a day of birding along the river in WV, starting at Bluestone Lake along Rt. 20.

The attendance number doesn't seem to have a bearing on the success of the outing, other than the birds, which always seem to show up! Jim Phillips, the BBC's *Redstart* Field Notes Editor

for several years, and also Nature Director at Pipestem State Park (retired) has, I am sure a dedicated following of members that share the same love of nature that he and Judy do.

Thanks to all who faithfully send us such a good read in Wheeling! Wishing you all good birding in 2016!

– Juanita Slater,
Corresponding Secretary

CORRESPONDENCE

Having a bad hip which made walking difficult, I concocted the idea of spending a night on our pontoon boat. Whoa, what an experience that is! You need a blue lightweight tarp to cover your sleeping area or a free-standing tent, for night dew is wet, a porta potty, one burner stove, cooler, sleeping pad with some sort of padding and the anticipation of great birding. Finding a small cove on any lake is easy, drop anchor or pull up to the bank and tie up to a tree. The bank is better, for the boat is steadier, with less movement. It's necessary to have an adventurous wife that enjoys heating water for tea, smoking a cigar and thoroughly enjoying IDing birds by their songs. Doc Hutton always said "ID a bird by it's song and if you see the bird, that is a bonus"! Of course, he was right. At the water's edge, by yourself, quiet, with thousands of acres of deciduous woods completely around you is an excellent location for birding. Being awoken by a chorus of singing birds that are in love is fantastic! One such morning on Salt Fork Lake, another boater earlier gave us two White Bass that were eaten for breakfast with eggs and coffee, while five kingfishers were playing, fishing and chasing each other the entire breakfast time. What a treat! A doe with a new fawn came to the bank unafraid to show off her baby, and the eagles and Osprey were show-offs also. It is easy to ID 25 songsters in this setting!

– Dave and Joan Schroeder, Dover OH

HANDLAN/BIBBEE CHAPTER OUTING

Thanks to our excellent hosts (Jim Phillips, Sharyn Ogden, Ron Perrone, Sam Richmond, Betsy Reeder), 18 members of the Handlan bird club of the Charleston area had a wonderful outing yesterday at Camp Brookside on the New River near Hinton. Angela Allison, the National Park Service employee who heads up the project of restoring Camp Brookside, had given our club a wonderful presentation about the Camp on the previous Monday. We should all take advantage of this new addition to the Park -- The public can use the trail on the perimeter of the camp which gives great access to the New River even when the Camp itself is closed. The island has a nice mix of riparian, forest and riverine habitats.

Saturday, the river was unexpected high and muddy due to rains in NC and VA, and there were few water birds. But the group did enjoy both kinglets, and very nice views of one of the eagle on the Brooks Island nest. Also seen were most of our woodpeckers (flicker, Red-bellied, Hairy, Downy, sapsucker, Pileated), as well as both vultures (Turkey and Black), kingfisher, Great Blue Heron, Winter Wren, and other common birds.

A few in our group made an additional stop at Mountain View Lake on Route 3 between Hinton and Beckley, spying about 50 water birds, including Canadas, ringnecks and pied-bills.

– Laura Ceperley, Charleston,
11/22/15

Received a note from Roberta Mitchell's daughter-in-law which states the following: although Roberta is no longer a member of the BBC, she continues her interest in birds, watching them outside her windows. She turned 99 in January! She enjoys the memories of trips with BBC friends.

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS AROUND THE STATE

One of the advantages of aging is that one does not sleep through the night. When I awakened at 2:51 a.m. I thought I heard an owl but thought maybe I was dreaming. However for the next half hour a Great Horned Owl kept on hooting just up behind our house near the edge of the woods. It either stopped or I fell asleep, but at 4:30 it was again hooting at about the same place. I was tempted to get a light and go out to try to see it, but I didn't want to frighten it off since we hear so few owls around here anymore.

When I took my walk up the mountain this morning there was a murder of crows and ravens mobbing something in the mixed forest across the ravine from where I was. They were really upset. As I got about parallel to where they were, something large flew off back into the forest. I do not know if it was the owl or another raptor as I got a fleeting naked eye look through the forest. Things quickly quieted down after that. My neighbor said she heard the owl when she went out to get wood early this morning.

At the top of my walk there was a large patch of multiflora rose, goldenrod and other weeds going to seed. In it there was a flock of American Goldfinches with a few Pine Siskins thrown in. I have not seen any of them at our feeders this fall yet. As I watched them, my first of the season Fox Sparrow popped up. It was quite rusty and vividly marked.

I'm not sure if the day can get any better.

– Herb Myers, Harman, WV, 11/02/15

With the weather being so nice this evening, I drove over to Altona Marsh for a quick survey - specifically Rusty Blackbirds. I wasn't disappointed. There were several flocks of Rustys and Rusty/Red-wing mixed flocks. I had to estimate numbers since there was so much activity and the sun was disappearing so quickly for the day. I entered 25 Rustys for eBird reporting. At one point a flock of Common Grackles landed as well which added to the flurry of noise and activity. The walk ended with some good views of a pair of Great Horned Owls.

– N. Wade Snyder, Shenandoah Junction, WV, 11/03/15



A beautiful gray ghost

– photo by N. Wade Snyder

This morning, our bird walk at Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge witnessed the most amazing display of Rusty Blackbirds I've ever seen. The first few flocks flew close to us, and we could hear the whistling calls. Wave after wave after wave flew by. About an hour later we began to see and hear some Red-winged Blackbirds too.

We counted very conservatively, and were over 1,500 birds before we saw any Red-wings. Given that some of the distant flocks might have been Red-wings, a conservative count of the flight was more than 1,000 Rusty Blackbirds and 100 Red-winged Blackbirds.

Last Wednesday was a good day in the yard, with my first Golden-crowned Kinglet of the fall, a very late Brown Thrasher hanging around, and a Field Sparrow. Eastern Bluebirds were chowing down on poke berries, too.

– Casey Rucker, Dry Fork, WV, 11/07/15

You never know what you're going to see in Tucker County. An adult female Surf Scoter was hanging with a male Bufflehead at the settling ponds at Canaan Valley State Park yesterday afternoon. When I got home, an adult Bald Eagle was flying by. Yesterday evening, a pair of Great Horned Owls were calling to one another near my house.

– Casey Rucker, Dry Fork, WV, 11/12/15

Spent almost an hour at Kimsey Run Dam this morning after the sun came out & blue skies appeared. Two Bald Eagles were at the old nest. The nest looks to be in bad repair. I saw six Bald Eagles; half were immature. They were soaring with ravens. One Golden Eagle in the bunch of ravens & two Red-tail Hawks. The ravens were really dive-bombing the eagles, and were doing a funny 'HONK' that I rarely hear. At one point, so were the RT-Hawks. There were ten Pied-bill Grebes on the lake and a Lincoln Sparrow feeding in the tall grass.

– Diane Holsinger, 11/12/15

This morning, I led a public bird walk at Altona Marsh, Jefferson County, for the Potomac Valley Audubon Society. With totally crazy, but luxurious, temperatures for December (48-63 degrees F, mostly sunny with no wind), there were 14 of us walking the tracks, enjoying the morning. As we looked for birds, we peeled layers of clothing off ourselves as the day warmed. It was a perfect day for observing Rusty Blackbirds with a scope. I counted a conservative ten of them as they mixed in with Brown-headed Cowbirds, European Starlings, Red-winged Blackbirds and one Common Grackle. We only identified one male Red-winged Blackbird out of the flock of female Red-wings.

A highlight was watching two young mink frolicking in the cattails just below the tracks near the residence. I've never seen mink at Altona before. I didn't expect to see many birds today, because of the high temperatures, but my theory was proved wrong. With a number of good birders, we had eyes and ears in all directions. We had a visitor from Oregon come



A Baltimore Oriole on the wrong side of the calendar – photo by N. Wade Snyder

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS (con.)

all the way to West Virginia just to go to Altona Marsh. Well, that's a bit of a tale, or should I say tail, but she sure seemed to enjoy herself, and we enjoyed having her with us.

Two immature bald eagles were seen more than once, and a Brown Creeper was seen and heard too. They seem to be in smaller numbers now, possibly due to the warmer weather. We had great looks at Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and different sparrow species. Bill found us a Golden-crowned Kinglet at the end of the walk. Absent were Turkey Vultures, Cedar Waxwings and Yellow-rumped Warblers. We had 40 different species this morning.
– BIRDMOM, Jefferson County, WV, 12/12/15

As I went outside to pick up the mail from the mailbox about 2:00 PM, I heard the mewing of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker coming from the backyard. I went to investigate and found a silent sapsucker also present with the mewing one. Looks like they are here for the holidays. Earlier in the day, I peeked through the window curtains to have an "oh my gosh" moment. There was a Red-shouldered Hawk sitting on a short broken off branch in a large oak tree right at window level, not far off the ground. It appeared to be trying a Cooper's Hawk behavior, and the large raptor looked a bit silly and awkward in its position. The hawk was just a few feet above a feeder pole, and goldfinches and chickadees were merrily buzzing around on the feeders and surrounding area, oblivious to the possible danger lurking. But they probably knew better. The Red-shouldered Hawk does not have the maneuverability of a Cooper's hawk, and it wasn't even close to successful.

Our resident red morph Eastern Screech-owl popped its head out of the nest box at 4:17 PM, and is still there now. It should begin its hunt in about 20 minutes.
– BIRDMOM, Jefferson County, WV, 12/21/15

I've had two Red Crossbill encounters the last few days in Randolph County. I saw and heard two flying over in the spruce forests near Cheat Bridge on Saturday and then this morning was surprised by a flock of 18 in the yard, flying and chattering in our Norway and red spruces and gathering grit in the driveway. It was a mix of males, females and juveniles. Sometimes they'd land in the same tree as a flock of about 50 siskins.
– Rodney Bartgis, Cheat Bridge, WV, 12/21/15

We stopped in at the mouth of the Bluestone River on Bluestone Lake yesterday around lunch time. We had at least 8 Bald Eagles in the air at one time. Also, saw a Golden Eagle there. Several dozen Common Mergansers, a couple dozen Hooded Mergansers and 2 Buffleheads were also in the area.

In the Greenville area of Monroe County, we found 2 Bald and 2 Golden Eagles. They were being harassed by 40-50 ravens and even more crows.

In our travels between spots, we found 1 American Kestrel, 1 Cooper's Hawks, 6 Red-tailed Hawks & 2 Red-shouldered Hawks.

– Jim & Judy Phillips, Pipestem, WV, 1/19/16

At about 1 p.m. on 1/20/16, we observed 18 large, slim birds flying over in V-formation. Long wings, long necks, shorter slim legs out behind, with slow, graceful wing beats, they called to each other with a chuckling sound that reminded us of raccoons or nursing Black Bear cubs. Light snow was beginning to fall and skies were solidly overcast. They were heading from northeast to southwest, and seemed to be following the course of the Greenbrier River. We could still hear their distinctive calls after they were out of sight. They were majestic Sandhill Cranes...no doubt about it!

– Gwen & Alan Balogh, Greenbrier Co., 1/20/16

I was out shoveling my Shepherdstown driveway this afternoon with the garage door open when a bird flew into the garage. I saw just a small, yellow flash at first and assumed it was one of the Goldfinches who frequent my feeders. However, when I went back in the garage I saw that it was a Pine Warbler! It must have been quite stressed since it let me get within

two feet and was very reluctant to go back outside. It finally scooted out only when the garage door was closing. I hope the little guy makes it.

– Heather McSharry, Jefferson Co. 1/23/16

Mr. Jonas the Snowstorm really kicked our butts in the Eastern Panhandle. We ended up with over 3 feet of lovely powder at my house in the woods. Many of the neighbors in the open fields ended up with less, because it blew into someone else's yard. Today was just a gorgeous day to be outside. I chose to shovel the back deck while hubby shoveled the driveway. Our Great Blue Heron came twice to the yard to see what the status of the pond was. There was no access to fish, so it merely circled overhead, landed once on my roof, then landed in the backyard in untracked snow while I was standing on the upper deck shoveling snow off. I was very curious to see what happened when it "touched down" on the snow. I watched its wide feet, then legs, disappear deep into the white blanket of snow. In other words, it looked like the heron had no legs once it landed. It was so odd to see this beautiful Great Blue Heron standing in 3 feet of untracked snow in my backyard. It didn't stay long after realizing where it had just landed. I wish it could have gotten something to eat, but only the active waterfall is open, with deep snow all of the rest of the pond. The fish are quite safe these days.

– BIRDMOM, Jefferson County, WV, 1/24/16

– Sightings taken from WVBird ListServ



Ross's/Snow Goose Hybrid
– photo by Terry Bronson

CHANGES IN CONTACT INFORMATION

CHANGE OF ADDRESSES

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Jay Fox & Jess Pressman
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Doug Wood & Dianne Anestis
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NEW MEMBERS

Matt Fox and Jutima Simsiriwong's
baby daughter Prim

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Denise Gwinn – 304-376-8565

George Lippert – 620-432-8167

Paul & Debbie McKay –
304-780-0557

Shirley Martin – 304-276-4995 (cell)

Ronald Preston – 740-425-1889

Rennie & Amy Talbert –
304-638-8573

CHAPTER HAPPENINGS

BIBBEE CHAPTER

March 26, 2016 – 1:00 PM. We will have a speaker on his adventure on the Appalachian Trail. Hinton, WV. Contact Betsy Reeder.

April 23, 2016 – Time TBD. Travel to Brush Creek Falls for wildflowers. Contact. Mindy Waldron.

May 14, 2016 – All day Century Day Bird Count. We count total species for the day in the Pipestem CBC Circle. Contact Jim Phillips, jimandjudyphillips@gmail.com

May 21, 2016 – 8:00 AM to ????. Warblers and wildflowers along the Bluestone River Trail/Bluestone State Park. Contact Mindy Waldron or Betsy Reeder.

May – September, 2016 – Every second and fourth Saturday at 9:00 AM. Join the birding group at Grandview NPS for a morning of birding. Meet in front of the Visitors Center. Contact Mindy Waldron or Alma Lowry.

HANDLAN CHAPTER

March 21, 2016 – 6:30pm. March Meeting at South Charleston Library. Rich Bailey will present the program.

April 17, May 1, 8, and possibly 15, 2016 – 8:00am. Spring Hill Cemetery Bird Walk. Russ Young will lead a bird walk. Meet at the parking area near the cemetery office.

April 18, 2016 – 6:30pm. April Meeting at South Charleston Library. Dr. Ross Brittain will discuss the Northern Saw-whet Owl project.

April 30, 2016 – April Outing. Carriage Trail, led by Joan Steven.

May 16, 2016 – 6:00pm. Annual Potluck Picnic at Coonskin Park.

HEADQUARTERS CHAPTER

April 19, 2016 – Bill Beatty - The Cicadas are Coming. Bring a friend to the meeting night.

April 23, 2016 – Raccoon Creek SP in PA. Joint outing with the 3 Rivers Birding Club of Pittsburgh. 9:30 at Picnic Area West. Covered dish lunch; bring place settings, drinks and one dish. Contact Ryan Tomazin,, wvwarblers@hotmail.com

May 17, 2016 – Middle Wheeling Creek Shelter picnic. There will be a walk/exploration for birds and wildflowers 4:30pm, covered-dish supper at 6:15. If you cannot make the walk, there will be plenty of things to see near the shelter.

June 11, 2016 – 2 PM Picnic/Field Trip hosted by Malv and Rosie Campbell, Bethesda, OH.

MOUNTWOOD CHAPTER

Mar. – Shirley Radcliffe
304-428-8520

Mar. 24, 2016 – Middle Island, 8:00am. Burger King, Rt. 68 & I-77.

Mar. 31, 2016 – Ohio River Islands NWR, 8:00am. NWR Parking Lot.

Apr. – Jeanette Esker 304-863-8765

Apr. 7, 2016 – Elberfeld's Farm, 8:00am. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339/Rt. 7.

Apr. 14, May 5, 19, 2016 – McDonough Wildlife Refuge, 8:00am. McDonough parking lot.

Apr. 21, 2016 – Johnson T Janes Park, 8:00am. Parking lot, east end of 27th Street, Parkersburg.

Apr. 28, 2016 – Birds & Flowers, Newell's Run, 8:00am. WV Welcome Center, Williamstown.

SCREECH OWL CHRONICLES

We've been keeping records since February 2012 on our Eastern Screech-owls, but they've been living in our little sliver of back woods longer than that. I've had a "guaranteed" owl for Birdathons and Christmas Bird Counts prior to putting up nest boxes in the winter of 2012, and they still haven't failed me!

At 7:20 AM this morning, our red owl was not in the box it had been seen in for the past week. So to our surprise, at 5:04 PM tonight, a red owl popped its cute head out of the south nest box. Then at 5:17 PM, we did a double take when another red owl popped its head out of the north nest box. Dueling red heads! Both were seen with their heads out of the nest box at the same time until it was so dark, and we were having trouble seeing the action. If we shut off all the lights in the house, it helps viewing through the scope. My neighbors must think we never pay our utility bills, as we always darken the house about this time of evening for better owl viewing.

Then at 5:35 PM tonight, the north box owl flew out and landed on a small tree branch directly above the other owl while it was in its nest box with head out. Hum-m-m. So they know each other, and maybe quite well by now! It was only a foot or two away from the other. A few mornings ago, my husband thought he saw two owls flying across the yard together before sunrise, but he didn't get a great look to say for sure. Must have been those two buggers up to no good.

We've had up to three owls at one time in the back yard. Note that I live in a subdivision. The most exciting time was when we had an owl in two of the boxes from March 3-11, 2012, and a third owl trilling near the boxes. They all trilled together that evening from about 5:30-6:30 PM. We called it the Trilling Fields.

There's been numerous encounters with squirrels in the boxes over the years. Because two of the three boxes have a bottom that can be dropped open, if we detect a squirrel is getting too cozy in one of the "prime" boxes, eventually it gets dropped from the picture, and we hope the owl moves back in.

A gorgeous Northern flicker male spent November 16-20, 2015 in one of the boxes, and it was a joy to watch him as he proudly stuck his head out of the nest box hole like an owl would. His black bib was easily seen, and his head was much smaller than the owls puffed out head. We were sad when it left, and didn't return. I wish woodpeckers would use nest boxes more often. So far, 2016 has been a real hoot!



During our morning owl watching, we were happy to see one Eastern screech-owl in the north nest box hole at 7:03 AM. Next we saw a squirrel in the box at the back of our property. Yeah! We've been hoping one of the owls would move closer to the house to the south box. No sign of an owl in the south box in the morning though. The thought always comes to mind whether the owls will actually come back daily. It's so sad when they don't, and I can't help but wonder what happened to it. All we can do is hope for the best, and provide conditions they will find welcoming, like a water source that never freezes, compost bins "fed" daily that attract small creatures and insects, and safe habitat.

It was a good evening tonight. At 4:59 PM and 5:09 PM respectively, we ended up with an owl in each of the "prime" boxes, located closest to the house. I hadn't had a chance to clean out the back property box this fall, and it was put up specifically so the squirrels would stop fighting with the owls over the better boxes. We just didn't think one of the owls was going to find it so appealing.

May – Nina Ott 304-863-6020

May 12, 2016 – Ohio Birding Route Trail, 8:00am. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339/Rt. 7.

May 14, 2016 – Pat Collins farm, 8:00am. WV Welcome Center, Williamstown.

May 26, 2016 – Hocking Hills, 7:00am. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339/Rt. 7.

June – Jon Benedetti 304-295-8945

June 2, 2016 – "The Wilds", Ohio, all-day trip, 7:00am. WV Welcome Center, Williamstown.

As we watched fluffy faces in the box holes tonight, it got darker and darker. It's so exciting to be watching in a scope at the exact moment you see an owl leave the box for the evening hunt. That's when we start the high 5's and the cheering! If you blink at the wrong moment, you miss it!

At 5:32 PM, the north owl flew out heading south, and I watched it fly over to the south box, where the other owl was still perched. Quickly figuring out the intentions of the flying owl, the perched owl dropped down inside its own box and allowed the other owl inside. I got a great view of the owls butt on the way into the box. It was Romeo and Juliet playing out before my eyes.

The West Virginia breeding safe dates for Eastern screech-owl are March 1-May 31, so this must be some serious bonding going on ahead of time. We watched the box for another half hour, and neither owl came out. Then we gave up. Obviously food was not on these owls minds. How amazing it is to be spying on the trysts of these lovers! Lots of sharing going on this evening in the back woods.

– *BIRDMOM, Jefferson County, WV*



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Icelandic Sojourn

*– Male Rock Ptarmigan,
photographed by Wally Venable
while in Iceland*

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