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*The* **REDSTART**

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# 2020 - The Brooks Bird Club, Inc.

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Membership Secretary	Juanita Slater, 56249 Hospital Road, Bellaire, OH 43906	304-639-1120

## PUBLICATIONS

Webmaster	Larry Helgerman, 1989 Louisa Ave., Wheeling, WV 26003 brooksbirdclubweb@gmail.com	304-242-8562
Editor The Redstart	Casey Rucker, P.O. Box 2, Seneca Rocks, WV 26884	304-866-4004
Editor The Mail Bag	Ryan Tomazin, 348 Station St., Apt. 7, Bridgeville, PA 15017	412-220-9726

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## ADVISORS

Tom Fox, 1447 Sycamore Road, Millstone, WV 25261	304-354-7686
Carol McCullough, 1119 Queensbury Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15205	412-921-6873
Robert Rine, 1269 National Rd., Apt. 51, Wheeling, WV 26003	304-243-8766

## COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

Budget	Sally Egan, 910 Sunset Dr., Bridgeport, WV 26330	304-842-9511
Research	Greg E. Eddy, 3603 Kirkwood Drive, Fairfax, VA 22031	703-980-3751
Foray	Ryan Tomazin, 348 Station St., Apt. 7, Bridgeville, PA 15017	412-220-9726
Foray Directors	Janice Emrick, 52713 SR 800, Jerusalem, OH 43747	740-472-5212
	Ryan Tomazin, 348 Station St., Apt. 7, Bridgeville, PA 15017	412-220-9726
Backyard Sanctuary	Cynthia Ellis, 3114 Steel Ridge Rd., Red House, WV 25168	304-586-4135
Club Library	Dorothy Broemsen, 340 Peter's Run Rd., Wheeling, WV 26003	304-242-4498
Historian	Ryan Tomazin, 348 Station St., Apt. 7, Bridgeville, PA 15017	412-220-9726

# The REDSTART

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## **Editorial Staff**

Editor • Casey Rucker, P.O. Box 2, Seneca Rocks, WV 26884 [autoblock@frontiernet.net](mailto:autoblock@frontiernet.net)

Associate Editor • Ryan Tomazin, 348 Station St., Apt. 7, Bridgeville, PA 15017 [wwwarblers@hotmail.com](mailto:wwwarblers@hotmail.com)

Field Notes Editor • Casey Rucker, P.O. Box 2, Seneca Rocks, WV 26884 [autoblock@frontiernet.net](mailto:autoblock@frontiernet.net)

eBird Editor • Michael Slaven, 632 West Virginia Avenue, Morgantown, WV 26991 • [mikeslavenwv@gmail.com](mailto:mikeslavenwv@gmail.com)

Advisory Editorial Board • A. R. Buckelew, Jr., Greg E. Eddy, Joey Herron, Matthew Orsie, James D. Phillips  
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**Valley Falls State Park  
Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding Station 2019  
Marion County, West Virginia**

Joey Herron

The fifteenth year of banding Northern Saw-whet Owls at Valley Falls State Park produced just three owls, tying the lowest total since this study began in 2005. The other year that totaled three owls was 2006.

Banding began on September 18 and ended on November 22. The station operated on eleven nights with the nets being opened for forty-three hours. Three of the eleven nights yielded owls with an owl captured on each night. No previously banded birds were captured this year. On the night of November 1, a Barred Owl was captured and banded.

The station had 60 visitors from four states. Unfortunately, owls were not captured on every night with visitors. On one of those nights one owl was captured, and what a thrill it was for all the visitors to experience such a tiny owl in this way.

Of the three captures, one was an adult, and the other two were hatch year birds. The adult bird was a female and the two hatch years included one female and one male.

After fifteen years of banding a total of 397 Northern Saw-whet Owls have been captured, including 31 foreign recaptures and one return. The breakdown shows a heavy advantage for females, 75 percent to 8 percent for males. The unknown category represents the last 17 percent. The adult-to-hatch-year ratio is almost even with 52 percent adult to 48 percent hatch year individuals. The station has hosted more than sixteen hundred visitors from twelve states and the District of Columbia.

Again, I would like to thank Valley Falls State Park superintendent, Brett Harshbarger for the use of the park facilities and allowing visitors to experience the fall migration. Without Brett's support, this operation would not be possible.

**15 Year Totals**

Females	Males	Unknown	Hatch Year	After Hatch Year	Second Year
307	29	61	197	124	76

**Banding Summary for 2019**

Date	NSWO caught
10/18/19	1
10/23/19	1
10/24/19	0
10/28/19	0
11/1/19	0 (1 Barred Owl banded)
11/2/19	0
11/6/19	0
11/8/19	1

Date	NSWO caught
11/9/19	0
11/18/19	0
11/22/19	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>

Age

After hatch year (AHY).....1

Hatch year (HY) .....2

Sex

Female – 2..... 67%

Male – 1 ..... 33%

511 Ohio Ave  
Fairmont, WV



Joey Herron holds a Barred Owl  
All photographs by Joey Herron.



Barred Owl



Northern Saw-whet Owl

## Poor Spring for Scarlet Tanagers

Thomas R. Fox

After hearing about the cold, snowy weather in the mountains in May of 2020, it brought to my memory an article I had written about poor weather for the Scarlet Tanagers in 1989 in Calhoun County, West Virginia, where I lived then and now. At that time, I was working for the WV Department of the Natural Resources. Following is the article:

### SCARLET TANAGERS MAY 1989

On Thursday, May 11, 1989, I first began to notice and hear about unusual high numbers of Scarlet Tanagers being seen along the highways in Calhoun County, West Virginia.

The weather had been unseasonably wet and cool for ten days prior due to a stalled low-pressure system that had settled over most of the Mid-Atlantic states.

By Friday, May 12, the birds were virtually along every road in Calhoun, Gilmer, Roane, Wood, and Wirt Counties. Scarlet Tanagers were being hit or run over by cars at an alarming rate. The tanager being a canopy dwelling bird of the dry forest, individuals either did not have any fear of the automobiles or were too weak and disoriented from the lack of food. I feel that it was probably a combination of both.

Several times I observed a bird at the edge of the road fly right into the path of an oncoming vehicle, when it could just as easily have flown the other way. They all looked weak and none of them flew strongly or with a purpose. They would flutter up about eight feet then glide back down.

By Saturday morning, May 13, the situation had worsened. The weather continued to be wet and cold. There were dead and dying tanagers along all roads in northern Calhoun County. I also found them trying to feed in plowed fields and feedlots.

White-crowned Sparrows were here in unusually large numbers this year and for a much longer period, probably due to the stalled weather system.

By Saturday afternoon, the weather pattern began to break. It warmed up and the rain slacked off enough that some insects began to move about and by evening, the birds that were still alive began to rally. Sunday morning the White-crowned Sparrows were gone.

The Scarlet Tanagers remained to stay along the roads and in the pasture fields until Tuesday, the 16<sup>th</sup> of May. During this period of recovery the tanagers could be found awkwardly feeding alongside Eastern Phoebes on rock cliffs and with Eastern Wood-Pewees in more open pasture land. That day, I also censused my property on Sycamore Creek in Calhoun County, West Virginia, for Scarlet Tanagers but found none. There is excellent habitat for them on our property. In the previous ten years, they had saturated the habitat thoroughly.

On Tuesday afternoon, I drove around southern Calhoun and Roane Counties and observed Scarlets feeding along the ponds, creeks and pastures. They looked awkward in their feeding but were managing to catch food. They no longer looked distressed although they did look out of place. By that evening I returned to my property and checked for the Scarlet Tanagers again. This time I found three female tanagers feeding in a small pasture that is surrounded by large oaks and maples, but they were still feeding on the ground.

On the morning of May 17, I returned to my property and was very happy to hear the friendly *chip-brrr* call of the Scarlet males. They had returned to my oaks and by that

evening, everything was back to normal or so it seemed.

After interviewing Department of Natural Resources and Department of Agriculture personnel in the area, I feel that at least half of the birds that were seen along the road Thursday, Friday, and Saturday were either killed by automobiles or dead from exposure.

This poses several interesting questions. First and probably foremost, how and where will this weather event affect the Scarlet Tanager population? Second, how will it affect the population of avian predators, as well as all other predators, in the areas where the birds died but would have lived? Third; why weren't other species who eat the same type foods, such as the warblers, affected as the tanagers were?

1447 Sycamore Road  
Millstone, WV 25261

[Editor's Note: The North American Breeding Bird Survey shows the greatest one-year drop in Scarlet Tanager populations in West Virginia from 1988–1989. The population has not reached the level of 1988 since that time.]

# 120<sup>th</sup> National Audubon Christmas Bird Count West Virginia Report

L. E. Helgerman

Let's look back at last season's Christmas Bird Count here in West Virginia during the 120th count season.

**One hundred twenty-two species** were accounted for in West Virginia this season. All twenty currently active WV Christmas Bird Counts conducted surveys during the 120<sup>th</sup> CBC season, which took place December 14, 2019 – January 5, 2020. Eight of our counts were held on the first weekend of the CBC season, December 14 and 15; ten were completed from December 18 to December 29; and two counts were conducted in January. Three of the counts were held on weekdays. In addition to our twenty long-running Christmas Bird Counts, a new trial CBC was conducted on December 21 in Mason County. Though that information is not reflected in this report, it needs to be noted that the count was very productive and successful. Details of the new Point Pleasant (Mason County) count will follow this report. It's also important to note that there are a few CBCs that border WV and collect data from our state. That information is not reflected in this report; only counts with CBC center points in West Virginia are in this report.

## Seasonal Weather Report

**Temperature Lows:** Only seven counts began below freezing. Pendleton County reported the coldest morning temperature with 12 degrees Fahrenheit. Elkins and Wheeling never made it above 27 degrees. Oak Hill had the warmest low at 56 degrees. Athens Princeton Area, Inwood, and Parkersburg started their counts in the forties. The Elkins December 18 count averaged the coldest in West Virginia this season with a 23-degree low and 26-degree high for the day.

**Temperature Highs:** Eight counts reached 50 degrees or higher; five of those counts went into the sixties with Hampshire peaking at 67 degrees. Oak Hill's December 29 count was the warmest recorded in West Virginia this season with a 56-degree low and a 65-degree high!

**Weather Notes:** Four counts reported light snow falling at some point during their counts. Canaan was the only count to report snow on the ground, with at least two inches. Nine counts reported light rain at times during their counts. No West Virginia CBC reported any severe weather this season.

## Effort Report

**Participation:** The Hampshire County count had the highest participation with 28 field birders. Seven other counts noted more than 21 in the field. Six counts reported ten or fewer counters.

**Diurnal Hours in the Field:** Seven counts had more than 60 party hours in the field on count day. The top three were Hampshire County with 89.25, Inwood with 71.25, and Wheeling with 70.25 hours. Seven counts reported 40–50 hours. Six counts had under 33 hours in the field.



**Miles Tallied:** Eleven counts tallied more than 300 miles on count day; Wheeling reported 456.75, the most. Inwood (424) and Lewisburg (393) were the other counts that chocked up high mileage. Six counts reported 198–293 miles covered in their circles.

**Feeder Watchers:** Fifteen counts had participants watching bird feeders/yards. Most counts had fewer than five feeder watchers, however Pendleton County reported 14 participating! Author’s note: a good feeder watcher can, and usually does, add species to a count.

**Nocturnal Birding:** Eleven West Virginia counts formed owling teams. Six counts reported more than four hours in the field during the evening hours. Inwood tallied the most nocturnal time, a very impressive 14 hours, followed by Parkersburg with 9, and Morgantown’s 7 hours of nocturnal birding.

### State Effort Totals

**Car:** 5,471 miles in 555 hours. **Foot:** 363.75 miles in 433.25 hours. **Motorized Boat:** 17 miles in 3 hours.

### Bird Reports

The avian groups in this report are not listed in the order used in the 120<sup>th</sup> National Audubon’s Christmas Bird Count seasonal checklist; they have been rearranged to reflect the current American Ornithological Society (AOS) check-list. Most species within these groups are in order of abundance.

Note: Each Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is held on a “Count Day,” a day that was chosen by the CBC compiler that is within the CBC season. It’s a 24-hour period, midnight to midnight. There is also a time frame called “Count Week” (cw): this is the period three days before and after “Count Day.” Any bird that was missed on count day can be added to a CBC if it is found during that count week period. It is added as a single cw bird and is not added to the count day list.

Only Count Day information is listed below unless otherwise noted.

**Geese/Swans:** **Canada Geese** (6,787) were the fourth most abundant species this season, found on seventeen counts. Rarer were the two **Greater White-fronted Geese** on the Inwood count; a **Snow Goose** on the Morgantown count; and a **Cackling Goose** found on the Parkersburg count. **Tundra Swans** (33) were noted in four circles: Wheeling (21), Morgantown (10), Elkins (2), and as a Canaan cw bird.

Seventeen species of ducks were reported this CBC season

**Dabblers:** **Mallards** (2,320) were the most numerous duck species and the eleventh most abundant state species, found on 19 counts, Morgantown (256) had the highest tally. **American Black Ducks** (141) were seen on thirteen counts, and **Gadwalls** (61) were tallied in eight circles, with Charles Town reporting high counts for both species (32 and 22). **Wood Ducks** (26) were tallied on eight counts. Rarer ducks found this season included four **Green-winged Teal**, Athens Princeton Area (2), Pendleton County (1), and Moorefield (1); three **Northern Pintails**, Moorefield (2) and Pendleton County (1); and two **American Wigeons** found on the Pendleton County count.

**Diving Ducks:** **Ring-necked Ducks** (39) were seen on seven counts, and nine counts reported **Bufflehead** (119). All three mergansers were found this season.

**Hooded Mergansers** (241) were counted on seventeen counts, and were the most abundant divers, with the Pipestem Area (44) reporting the highest number. **Common Mergansers** (212) were reported on half of the West Virginia counts. Again, the Pipestem Area count led the state, tallying an amazing 77 birds. Only three **Red-breasted Mergansers** were found, in Charles Town (2), Morgantown (1), and (Huntington cw).

Rarer diving ducks found included twelve **Redheads** on the Charles Town count, eleven **Lesser Scaup** in Morgantown (6) and Charleston (5), and three **Ruddy Ducks** in Morgantown (2) and Parkersburg (1). Rarer yet were a lone **Long-tailed Duck** on the Pipestem Area CBC, and one **Common Goldeneye** on the Wheeling count.

**Gamebirds:** Sixteen counts reported **Wild Turkey** (310). Eleven counts reported fewer than 20 birds, five of those in single digits. Morgantown (80) reported the highest number statewide. **Ruffed Grouse** (7) continue to be rare on the West Virginia CBC, with Pocahontas County reporting six, McDowell County finding one, and Canaan reporting a cw bird.

**Grebes:** Eleven counts noted **Pied-billed Grebes** (35); most counts had fewer than three birds while Morgantown tallied 14, the most statewide. Morgantown was also the only count to find **Horned Grebes** (2).

**Rails:** Not seen on a West Virginia CBC since the 115<sup>th</sup> count, a **Virginia Rail** was reported this season on the Moorefield count. Two counts reported **American Coot** (31): Charles Town (30), and Pipestem Area with one.

**Shorebirds:** Eight counts found **Killdeer** (18). Rarer were four **Wilson's Snipe**, in Huntington (2), Moorefield (1), and Hampshire County (1), and the lone **American Woodcock** was reported again this season from the Hampshire County CBC.

**Gulls:** Five counts reported **Ring-billed Gulls** (478), with Wheeling (450) reporting the most. The only other gull reported was a lone **Herring Gull**, spotted on the Huntington count.

**Loons:** Three counts posted **Common Loons** (6) this season: Pipestem Area (3), Morgantown (2), and Raleigh County (1).

**Cormorants:** Four counts located **Double-crested Cormorants** (37) on count days; Charleston (26) had the highest recorded.

**Hérons:** Most counts tallied **Great Blue Herons** (128); Huntington (21) and Charles Town (18) surpassed all others.

**Vultures:** **Black Vultures** (816) were not on as many counts as last year and did not make the top twenty species list this season, though still found in fourteen circles. Pendleton County (159), Lewisburg (143), and Inwood (135) reported the high counts. **Turkey Vultures** (1,362), also down from last year, were still found on 17 counts; Lewisburg (258) had the most by far.

**Eagles/Hawks:** Four counts reported the eight **Golden Eagles** submitted this season: Pendleton County (4), Canaan (2), Moorefield (1), and Pipestem Area (1). All West Virginia CBC Golden Eagle sightings require a Rare Bird Report to be submitted, helping to verify these rare and important sightings.

**Northern Harriers** (12 +1cw) were tallied on eight counts. **Sharp-shinned Hawks** (14) were reported on eight counts. Sixteen counts tallied **Cooper's Hawks** (40), with most counts finding one or two birds; the exception was Inwood (11).

**Bald Eagle** (158) numbers continue to be impressive here in West Virginia on the CBC. Fourteen counts reported Bald Eagles on count days, and high numbers came in from Pendleton County (42), Hampshire County (29), Charles Town (26), with both

Moorefield and Pipestem Area CBCs reporting 14 birds.

Buteos reported this season included **Red-shouldered Hawks** (132), found on eighteen counts, with Charles Town (26) and Inwood (24) reporting highest numbers. Found on all West Virginia CBCs were **Red-tailed Hawks** (291); high counts came from Huntington (38) and Pendleton County (35). Six counts reported more than 23 red-tails. Much rarer this season was the one **Rough-legged Hawk** on the Canaan count; Pocahontas County also reported it as a cw bird.

**Owls:** The **Eastern Screech-Owl** (77) is the most common owl reported, with almost 50 percent of West Virginia counts reporting them. Inwood (18) and Moorefield (15) tallied high numbers this season. Eight counts added **Great Horned Owl** (26) to their lists; the eleven Inwood tallied were, by far, the most reported. **Barred Owl** (18) were tallied on nine counts. The rarer owls found this season included three **Barn Owls** found on the Moorefield count, **Long-eared Owls**, one on the Inwood count and one heard during cw (Canaan), and two **Northern Saw-whet Owls** on the Morgantown CBC.

**Kingfisher:** Eighteen counts tallied **Belted Kingfishers** (100).

**Woodpeckers:** Seven species of woodpecker were found this season. Nine counts tallied **Red-headed Woodpecker** (54). Common on most, if not all, West Virginia CBCs, in order of abundance, **Downy Woodpecker** (859), **Red-bellied Woodpecker** (881), **Northern Flicker** (421), **Pileated Woodpecker** (365), **Hairy Woodpecker** (188), and **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** (145). Hampshire County, similarly to last season, reported high counts of woodpeckers, this season having high counts in five of the seven species found.

**Falcons:** The **American Kestrel** (149), regularly seen on most counts, was reported in higher numbers on the Moorefield (21), Ona (19), and Pendleton County (19) counts. Most counts that have breeding **Peregrine Falcons** reported them this season, with nine birds observed. Seven counts also reported **Merlins** (8) on count days; Morgantown found two.

**Flycatchers:** **Eastern Phoebe** (32), the only flycatcher typically found on a West Virginia CBC, was recorded on sixteen counts. While most counts found one or two, Pendleton County tallied five.

**Vireos:** A vireo is always a rare find on a West Virginia CBC, and this year we had two sightings of **White-eyed Vireo**. One was found on the Morgantown count, which happened to have reported one for the last two seasons, and another one on the Pocahontas County count. Note: historically, prior to this season, **White-eyed Vireo** has only been reported six times in the past on a West Virginia CBC, the first occasion being on the 108<sup>th</sup> CBC.

**Jays/Crows/Ravens:** **Blue Jays** (2,977), found on all counts, showed a 50 percent increase from last season. A few counts with impressive numbers were Ona (414), Parkersburg (362), and Huntington (334).

On all counts, **American Crow** (30,741) was the second most abundant state species. Large crow roosts reflect the substantial number of crows reported each count season. Large crow roosts were reported from Charleston (12,000), Wheeling (8,500), and Raleigh County (8,000); numbers in these large roosts are estimated. Rarer on a West Virginia CBC, Charles Town reported the only **Fish Crow**. Note: most of the state's historical CBC records of Fish Crow come from the Charles Town count. Eighteen counts added **Common Raven** (349) to their species lists, with the highest reported in Pendleton County (68) and Hampshire County (67).

**Thrushes:** Two thrush species made the top species list in West Virginia this season. Coming in eighth place was **Eastern Bluebird** (1,336), with Hampshire County reporting the highest number (196). The second most abundant species in the state was **American Robin** (8,373). More than seven thousand more robins were reported this season versus last season. Impressive numbers of robins were tallied from Wheeling (2,700), Inwood (2,289), and Huntington (1,299) counts. **Hermit Thrush** (114) was found on all counts this season with high counts coming in from Huntington (18), Pipestem Area (14), and Moorefield (11). An unusual find this season was a **Wood Thrush**, found and photographed on the Charleston count.

**Mimids:** **Northern Mockingbirds** (578) were found statewide with high counts from Inwood (85), Parkersburg (68), and Charles Town (62). Relatively rare were two count day **Gray Catbirds** in Lewisburg and Morgantown, with a count week bird in Pocahontas County. Also rare this season were two count day **Brown Thrashers**, again, in Lewisburg and Morgantown, with a count week bird in Huntington.

**Starlings:** The top species in the state this season, **European Starling** (40,205), was found throughout the state. In some cases, starlings appeared in large murmurations such as Charles Town's 14,539 and Wheeling with 11,000 birds. Five other counts reported starlings in the one-to-three thousand range.

**Waxwings:** Fourteen counts tallied **Cedar Waxwings** (609), with the most reported in Charles Town (92).

**Finches:** The **American Goldfinch** (1,273) was the twentieth most reported species with Pocahontas County (187) having the high count. Rare this season were the winter finches, which included **Purple Finches** (23), tallied from Lewisburg (18), Elkins (3), and Morgantown (2). The Pocahontas County count reported the only **Red Crossbills** and **Common Redpolls**, with six each. **Pine Siskins** (30) were found on seven counts.

**Sparrows:** Thirteen species of sparrow were found this season. **Dark-eyed Junco** (3,245) was the seventh most abundant statewide species, with Pendleton County (610) reporting the most. Both **Song Sparrow** (1,965) and **White-throated Sparrow** (1,858) made the top species list. The Moorefield count reported the highest numbers for both species (398; 302).

**Eastern Towhee** (368) was found on most counts, with Huntington (84) reporting the most. Thirteen counts tallied **White-crowned Sparrows** (238), and Moorefield (69), once again, had an impressive high count. Always a nice find, **Fox Sparrows** (28) were posted on eleven counts.

Seasonally rare, but regularly found in low numbers on West Virginia CBCs were three **Savannah Sparrows** located on the Moorefield (2) and Pendleton County (1) counts and a **Vesper Sparrow** reported on the Moorefield CBC. A **first for the West Virginia CBC** was a **LeConte's Sparrow** found and photographed on the Moorefield CBC! Moorefield had a banner sparrow CBC season.

**Blackbirds:** Of the nineteen **Eastern Meadowlarks** noted this season, Lewisburg posted 12. Half of the counts posted **Red-winged Blackbird** (768); Moorefield (184) and Ona (180) posted high counts. **Rusty Blackbirds** (72) were on four CBCs; Ona (63) found the majority. Eleven counts tallied **Common Grackle** (4,567), but none like Ona with an estimated flock of four thousand.

**Warblers:** The **Yellow-rumped Warblers** (287) tallied on seventeen West Virginia counts marked a 50 percent increase from last season; a high count of 88 birds was

reported on the Huntington count. Rare, but found on occasion on a West Virginia CBC, a **Pine Warbler** was found on the Morgantown count. **New to the West Virginia CBC**, an **Orange-crowned Warbler** was found and photographed on the Huntington count!

**Other Noteworthy Birds:** Three counts found **Horned Larks** (127), with Charles Town (93) recording the high count. **House Wrens** are not a common CBC species in West Virginia, but single birds were found on the Canaan, Moorefield, and Morgantown counts. A nice, and very rare, find this season were two **Indigo Buntings** on the Morgantown CBC. Note: this is only the fourth record of Indigo Bunting in the West Virginia CBC.

**120<sup>th</sup> WVPP Point Pleasant (Trial) CBC:** Back on the 54<sup>th</sup> CBC (1954), a new count was formed in West Virginia in Mason County. That count ran on and off until the 77<sup>th</sup> CBC (1977). During that time the circle shifted between two center points. In 2018, Josh Holland expressed interest in creating a circle once again in Mason County. At the time I made clear the amount of work necessary to create and run a CBC, and that I would like to see at least one trial year conducted to see how it went. The WVPP count didn't come to fruition on the 119<sup>th</sup>, but did come together for the 120<sup>th</sup>. With thirteen participants which included two feeder watchers, the group found 75 species on count day and added 6 count week birds! Together they tallied 6,722 birds. All of this is very impressive; these results show that this is a very rich and diverse CBC circle. The WVPP CBC came in third place in the most abundant species category in the state this season!

Creating a new CBC in West Virginia is great, and we have many areas within the state that have superb diverse habitats that are not in a current CBC circle. There are lots of wintering birds here that need to be counted, but we need to be able to support these new counts and all the other West Virginia Christmas Bird Counts that have been running here for decades. As always, please help where you can and on as many counts as possible!

For more information on West Virginia's Christmas Bird Counts and complete seasonal CBC data, go to the Brooks Bird Club website <http://www.brooksbirdclub.org/wv-cbc-results.html>. This website shows where all the West Virginia circles are located and includes compiler contact information and count dates (when available) for all West Virginia counts.

This is my fourth year as the West Virginia State Editor, and I would like to again thank all the WV state compilers for their dedication and all their hard work. Without these compilers and all their participants our state would not have been so well represented in this 120<sup>th</sup> winter bird survey.

Wheeling, WV 26003

**Table 1**  
**120th Audubon Christmas Bird Count**  
 Region: West Virginia  
 Species/Participants/Effort Totals

Count Code	CBC Count Name	Total Species	Max Field Participants	Parties Max	Total Hrs. Diurnal	Total Birds	Species Found in High Numbers	Single Birds
WVMC	McDowell County	41 ew-1	4	2	12	563	No high count species	5
WVEL	Elkins Area	48 ew-0	9	6	33	2303	MALL-120	2
WVRC	Raleigh	49 ew-3	10	3	23.5	8802	CANG-125 AMRO-8K	9
WVAP	Athens Princeton Area	51 ew-0	10	7	26	1882	EUST-463	5
WVOH	Oak Hill	51 ew-0	10	5	29	1120	No high count species	10
WVLE	Lewisburg	52 ew-0	17	9	63.75	3288	CANG-626 BLVU-143 TUVU-258	7
WVCA	Canaan	54 ew-3	18	9	58.75	1808	DEJU-248	14
WVPH	Pocahontas County	55 ew-7	13	6	45.5	2476	CANG-192 DEJU-362 AMGO-187	5
WVCH	Charleston	60 ew-0	19	7	46.25	14602	CANG-374 MALL-117 TUVU-140 AMCR-12K	6
WVWH	Wheeling	60 ew-1	21	16	70.25	25821	CANG-570 RBGU-450 AMCR-8.5K AMRO-2.7K EUST-11K	12
WVHC	Hampshire County	61 ew-2	28	16	89.25	3951	DEJU-381 WTSP-217	7
WVON	Ona	62 ew-0	16	7	55.5	9789	CANG-570 BLJA-414 EUST-1,503 RWBL-180	4
WVPA	Pipestem Area	65 ew-2	13	6	29.75	2068	CANG-170 MALL-195	10
WVPK	Parkersburg	67 ew-0	23	10	56.5	9340	CANG-1,225 MALL-365 ROP1-2,281 BLJA-362 EUST-1,950	8
WVHU	Huntington	70 ew-4	22	7	60.25	8407	CANG-458 MALL-222 AMRO-1,299 EUST-3,288 WTSP-185	3
WVCT	Charles Town	72 ew-0	22	9	64.25	19690	CANG-754 MALL-141 TUVU-159 EUST-14,539 WTSP-190 COGR-201	8
WVIN	Inwood	72 ew-0	26	10	71.25	9302	CANG-550 MALL-196 AMRO-2,289 EUST-2,884 WTSP-222 COGR-345	10
WVPC	Pendleton County	73 ew-1	12	7	45.25	4670	CANG-269 BLVU-159 EUST-651 DEJU-610	10
WVMF	Moorefield	78 ew-0	10	5	44.25	6236	MALL-184 EUST-1,168 DEJU-235 WTSP-302 SOSR-398 RWBL-184	14
WVMO	Morgantown	86 ew-0	24	9	68	3846	CANG-514 MALL-256	15

**Table 2**

**120th Audubon Christmas Bird Count**

Region: West Virginia, Species Distribution- Widespread Species  
120th Totals in **BOLD** – 119th Totals in Parentheses

**Species found on all twenty WV Counts:**

1. Mallard\* – **2,320** (2,306)  
\*includes a cw bird
2. Red-tailed Hawk – **291** (283)
3. Mourning Dove – **3,085** (3,074)
4. Red-bellied Woodpecker – **881** (657)
5. Downy Woodpecker – **859** (657)
6. Hairy Woodpecker\* – **188** (125)
7. Pileated Woodpecker – **365** (249)
8. Blue Jay – **2,977** (1,948)
9. American Crow – **30,741** (29,245)
10. Tufted Titmouse – **1,435** (1,254)
11. White-breasted Nuthatch – **1,017** (789)
12. Carolina Wren – **1,691** (1,341)
13. Golden-crowned Kinglet – **395** (395)
14. Eastern Bluebird – **1,336** (1,031)
15. Hermit Thrush – **114** (58)
16. Northern Mockingbird – **578** (474)
17. European Starling – **40,205** (16,699)
18. Dark-eyed Junco – **3,245** (3,440)
19. White-throated Sparrow – **1,858**  
(1,948)
20. Song Sparrow – **1,965** (1,606)
21. Northern Cardinal – **2,996** (2,393)
22. American Goldfinch – **1,273** (1,174)
23. House Sparrow – **2,158** (2,175)

**Species on nineteen WV Counts:**

1. Rock Pigeon – **5,762** (4,552)
2. Northern Flicker – **420** (348)
3. American Kestrel – **148** (144)
4. Eastern Towhee – **368** (214)
5. House Finch – **816** (561)

**Species on eighteen WV Counts:**

1. Red-shouldered Hawk – **132** (159)
2. Belted Kingfisher – **100** (89)
3. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker – **145** (86)
4. Common Raven – **349** (216)

**Species on seventeen WV Counts:**

1. Canada Goose – **6,787** (6,931)
2. Hooded Merganser – **241** (116)
3. Great Blue Heron – **128** (82)
4. Turkey Vulture – **1,362** (1,790)
5. Winter Wren – **57** (48)
6. American Robin – **8,373** (939)
7. Yellow-rumped Warbler – **287** (129)
8. Swamp Sparrow – **117** (88)

**Species on sixteen WV Counts:**

1. Wild Turkey – **310** (511)
2. Cooper's Hawk – **40** (44)
3. Eastern Phoebe – **32** (27)

**Species on fifteen WV Counts:**

1. Carolina Chickadee – **1,328** (1,079)
2. Brown Creeper – **63** (63)
3. Field Sparrow – **340** (260)

**Table 3**

**120th Audubon Christmas Bird Count**

Region: West Virginia, Top Species- Over 1K Birds

Alfa Code	Species	Total	Last Season	Difference
EUST	European Starling	40205	16699	<b>23,506+</b>
AMCR	American Crow	30741	29245	1,496+
AMRO	American Robin	8373	939	<b>7,434+</b>
CANG	Canada Goose	6787	6931	144-
ROPI	Rock Pigeon	5762	4552	1210+
COGR	Common Grackle**	4567	198	<b>4,369+</b>
DEJU	Dark-eyed Junco	3245	3440	195-
MODO	Mourning Dove	3085	3074	11+
NOCA	Northern Cardinal	2996	2393	603+
BLJA	Blue Jay	2977	1948	<b>1,029+</b>
MALL	Mallard	2320	2306	14+
HOSP	House Sparrow	2158	2175	17-
SOSP	Song Sparrow	1965	1606	359+
WTSP	White-throated Sparrow	1858	1948	90-
CARW	Carolina Wren	1691	1341	350+
TUTI	Tufted Titmouse	1435	1254	181+
TUVU	Turkey Vulture	1362	1790	428-
EABL	Eastern Bluebird	1336	1031	305+
CACH	Carolina Chickadee	1328	1079	249+
AMGO	American Goldfinch	1273	1174	99+
WBNU	White-breasted Nuthatch	1017	789	228+
BLVU	Black Vulture*	816	864	48-

\* On Last Season's Top 20 Species List

\*\* Not on Last Season's Top Species List

**Table 4**

**120th CBC Species found in Low Numbers**

**One Found**

Snow Goose  
 Cackling Goose  
 Long-tailed Duck  
 Common Goldeneye  
 Virginia Rail  
 American Woodcock  
 Herring Gull  
 Fish Crow  
 Wood Thrush  
 Orange-crowned Warbler  
 Pine Warbler

**Counts Located**

Morgantown  
 Parkersburg  
 Pipestem Area  
 Wheeling  
 Moorefield  
 Hampshire County  
 Huntington  
 Charles Town  
 Charleston  
 Huntington  
 Morgantown



LeConte's Sparrow  
Vesper Sparrow

Moorefield  
Moorefield

### **Two Found**

Greater White-fronted Goose  
American Wigeon  
Horned Grebe  
Rough-legged Hawk  
Long-eared Owl  
Northern Saw-whet Owl  
White-eyed Vireo  
Indigo Bunting

2-Inwood  
2-Pendleton County  
2-Morgantown  
1-Canaan, cw-Pocahontas County  
1-Inwood, cw-Canaan  
2-Morgantown  
1-Morgantown, 1-Pocahontas County  
2-Morgantown

### **Three Found**

Northern Pintail  
Ruddy Duck  
Barn Owl  
House Wren  
Gray Catbird

2-Moorefield, 1-Pendleton County  
2-Morgantown, 1-Parkersburg  
3-Moorefield  
1-Canaan, 1-Moorefield, 1-Morgantown  
1-Lewisburg, 1-Morgantown,  
cw-Pocahontas County  
1-Canaan, 1-Moorefield, cw-Huntington  
2-Moorefield, 1-Pendleton County

### **Four Found**

Green-winged Teal  
Red-breasted Merganser  
Wilson's Snipe

1-Moorefield, 1-Pendleton,  
2-Athens-Princeton Area  
2-Charles Town, 1-Morgantown, cw-Huntington  
2-Huntington, 1-Moorefield,  
1-Hampshire County

### **Five Found**

None

### **Six Found**

Common Loon  
Red Crossbill  
Common Redpoll

2-Morgantown, 3-Pipestem Area,  
1-Raleigh County  
6-Pocahontas County  
6-Pocahontas County

**120th Audubon Christmas Bird Count**  
 Region: West Virginia, Status Report  
**Twenty Active Circles**  
 WV CBC State Editor: L. E. Helgerman

Count Code	Count Circle Name	Circle Compiler(s)	Contact Information
WVAP	Athens-Princeton Area	Ron Canterbury	ron.canterbury@uc.edu
WVCA	Canaan	Casey Rucker	autoblock@frontiernet.net
WVCH	Charleston	Doren Burrell	g.immer@doren.net
WVCT	Charles Town	Bob Dean	bobdean52@gmail.com
WVEL	Elkins Area	Rich Bailey	richard.s.bailey@wv.gov
WVHC	Hampshire County	Vini Schoene	vinil@earthlink.net
WVHU	Huntington	David Patick	patick@comcast.net
WVIN	Inwood	Bob Dean	bobdean52@gmail.com
WVLE	Lewisburg	Ben Handley	ben@potteryalley.com
		Larry Davis	anldavis@suddenlink.net
WVMC	McDowell County	Allen Waldron	awaldron@suddenlink.net
WVMF	Moorefield	Kyle Rambo	kerambo@gmail.com
		Darrell Good	darzgood@gmail.com
WVMO	Morgantown	LeJay Graffious	lejaygraffious@gmail.com
WVOH	Oak Hill	Hilarie Jones	hljones1336@yahoo.com
WVON	Ona	David Patick	patick@comcast.net
WVPA	Pipestem Area	Jim Phillips	jimandjudyphillips@gmail.com
WVPC	Pendleton County	Fred Atwood	fredatwood@yahoo.com
WVPH	Pocahontas County	Rich Bailey	richard.s.bailey@wv.gov
WVPK	Parkersburg	Jeanette Esker	eskerrb@frontier.com
		Dick Esker	eskerrb@frontier.com
WVRC	Raleigh County	Allen Waldron	awaldron@suddenlink.net
WVWH	Wheeling	Molly Check	molly.check@gmail.com
		Larry Helgerman	brooksbirdclubweb@gmail.com

**New Trial WV Christmas Bird Count**

WVPP	Point Pleasant	Josh Holland	jhollandua@gmail.com
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# American Ornithological Society Taxonomic Changes for 2020

Casey Rucker

The Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of the American Ornithological Society (AOS) published the sixty-first supplement to the AOS Check-list on June 30, 2020, and made the article publicly available immediately (Chesser et al. 2020). Among the notable changes extralimital to West Virginia was the re-split of Mexican Duck (*Anas diazi*) from Mallard; the two species had been lumped in 1983. In addition, the Committee lumped Northwestern Crow with American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhychos*), and added Yellow-chevroned Parakeet (*Brotogeris chiriri*) to the list.

As has recently been the case, no species was added to or deleted from the West Virginia bird list. The taxonomic order in our state list was changed for Phasianidae (turkeys, grouse, and pheasants), Rallidae (rails), Anhingidae (anhingas) and Phalacrocoridae (cormorants).

**Changes in taxonomic order.** The order of species in the family Phasianidae has been reshuffled, and they are now in the following order:

Wild Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>
Ruffed Grouse	<i>Bonasa umbellus</i>
Ring-necked Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>

The order of species in the family Rallidae has been reshuffled, and they are now in the following order:

Clapper Rail	<i>Rallus crepitans</i>
King Rail	<i>Rallus elegans</i>
Virginia Rail	<i>Rallus limicola</i>
Sora	<i>Porzana carolina</i>
Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata</i>
American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>
Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio martinicus</i>
Yellow Rail	<i>Coturnicops noveboracensis</i>
Black Rail	<i>Laterallus jamaicensis</i>

The order of Phalacrocoridae and Anhingidae has been changed to the following:

## **Anhingidae**

Anhinga	<i>Anhinga anhinga</i>
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## **Phalacrocoridae**

Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>

Wil Hershberger, Secretary of the West Virginia Bird Records Committee, has revised our state list, which is available online at links located at the bottom of the page on <http://www.brooksbirdclub.org/west-virginia-bird-records-committee.html>.

## Reference

R. T. Chesser, S. M. Billerman, K. J. Burns, C. Cicero, J. L. Dunn, A. W. Kratter, I. J. Lovette, N. A. Mason, P. C. Rasmussen, J. V. Remsen, Jr., D. F. Stotz, and K. Winker. 2020. Sixty-first supplement to the American Ornithological Society's Check-list of North American Birds. *Auk* 137, ukaa030. <https://academic.oup.com/auk/advance-article/doi/10.1093/auk/ukaa030>.

## Book Reviews

Tallamy, D. W. 2019. *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard*. Timber Press, Portland, OR. 256 pp.

Douglas Tallamy is a professor of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware and the author of several other books on gardening, conservation, and use of native plants. He has published numerous academic articles, many comparing the ability of various plant species to sustain certain insect species. This book further explores themes in his earlier book, *Bringing Nature Home: How you can sustain wildlife with native plants* (Timber Press, 2009.)

Tallamy explains that healthy ecosystems need all of their parts. Every time we remove or substantially diminish a species, the ecosystem becomes less stable and productive. This is the problem with introduced species, which not only reduce the number of species in an ecosystem, but reduce the number of interacting species. As if the introduced species were made of plastic, insects avoid them. The invaders use space that would otherwise be occupied by plants that feed native insects and other fauna, on up the food chain. Of particular interest to Tallamy and birds are caterpillars, which he describes as “soft bags filled with food.” Warblers need an estimated 4,000 caterpillars per clutch, and chickadees about 9,000. Currently, many fewer caterpillars are available to birds, because more than 3,300 invasive plant species have displaced huge numbers of native plants. Many caterpillars are dependent on a single plant species to develop. Examples include the monarch butterfly caterpillar which depends on milkweed, and the spicebush swallowtail caterpillar which depends on spicebush. Tallamy also talks a lot about the importance of our 4,000 native bee species, and their vital role in pollinating.

The book proposes a “Homegrown National Park.” Tallamy describes how beneficial even small plots of native plants are to insects and birds. If each American homeowner converted half of their current lawn into productive native plant communities, 20 million acres of land could be restored to some semblance of ecosystem function. That is bigger than the combined area of the Everglades, Yellowstone, Yosemite, Grand Teton, Canyonlands, Mount Rainier, North Cascades, Badlands, Olympic, Sequoia, Grand Canyon, Denali, and the Great Smoky Mountains National Parks.

There is information on which plants are most valuable to support native insect and bee species. These are called keystone plants. A landscape without them will produce 70–75 percent fewer caterpillars, even if the landscape has 95 percent of other native genera. Oak is a keystone genus supporting 537 species of caterpillars in our area, and

934 species nationwide. Other important trees are cherry, willow, birch, and elm. Plant superstars for restoring native ecosystems include goldenrod (110 caterpillars and 36 bee species), aster, and sunflower. With support from the US Forest Service, Tallamy and his research assistant Kimberly Stropshire created a database of beneficial native plants. The World Wildlife Federation used the database to develop a searchable tool which can be found on their website. Enter your zip code to see which woody and herbaceous plants are the best host plants in your area for caterpillars. Audubon developed a tool as well, which includes links to purchase beneficial plants. (I am not sure why, but the two tools gave quite different results for my zip code.)

Margy and Dan Terpstra achieved inspiring success attracting wildlife to their 2/3-acre corner lot in Kirkwood, Missouri. They removed the invasive honeysuckle from under their several mature native trees and replaced it with native shrubs. They installed a bubbler to provide a shallow circulating water source. So far, they have seen 35 species of warblers and 120 species at the bubbler. 149 is their yard species total. They did this without any special training. Visit their blog to see their amazing photos of birds including Golden-winged Warbler and Blue-winged Warbler at the bubbler. See [hummerhavenunltd.com](http://hummerhavenunltd.com).

The last chapter addresses frequently asked questions. It provides answers for those who would doubt the scope of the problem or the value of tackling it.

Mimi Kibler

Meiter, G. H. 2020. *Bird is the Word: A Historical Perspective on the Names of North American Birds*. McDonald and Woodward Publishing Co., Newark, OH. 437 pp.

Peterson, R. T. 2020. *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America, Second Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, New York, NY. 511 pp.

What's in a name? Would a rose by another name really smell as sweet? For birdwatchers, naming a particular bird is a major part of our beloved pastime. Some of our earliest written languages, such as Ancient Egyptian and Sumerian, already named many species of birds, and throughout history cultures all over the world have named birds that we hunt or even just appreciate. It seems we humans are just compulsive namers.

Our practice of identifying birds according to standard names reaches back at least to 1735, when Linnaeus first published his system of binomial terminology for animals and plants. Since that time, each species of bird has had a two-part name that is used all over the world by scientists. The rest of us, however, have applied myriad common names to birds we encounter, and standardization of common names is still a patchwork affair.

Most of us are familiar with the rules of the American Birding Association (ABA), which sets a game of observing and identifying bird species included on a list that changes from year to year, over a geographic area that until recently spanned North America north of Mexico, and which was expanded to include Hawaii in 2016. The list follows the nomenclature of the American Ornithological Society (AOS), which can change the official common name of a bird in its annual taxonomic changes publications. Just two years ago, all the Gray Jays who have eaten out of my hands over the decades suddenly became Canada Jays. And on June 30, 2020, some of the Mallards I've seen in the southwestern US became Mexican Ducks, a new species for my list balanced by my loss of Northwestern Crow which was lumped with American Crow.

Wait, you may wonder, isn't Mexico part of North America? The map shows our continent unbroken through Central America. Culture rather than geography was likely most responsible for ornithology's appropriation of the continental name for two of its nations. I do not know when the practice began, but it appeared to require no explanation as early as 1919, when A. C. Bent published the first of his monumental *Life Histories of North American Birds* series. Only birds making it across the US-Mexican border could be included. The tradition continued with the publication of Roger Tory Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds Including All Species in Eastern North America: A Bird Book on a New Plan* in 1934.

Given changing perspectives on cultural prejudice, when I saw that two bird books published in 2020 referred to "North America," I eagerly opened them hoping to find the hundreds of Mexican bird species so far denied me in all my 'North American' sources. I was disappointed; the American Ornithological Society seems still to be the only representative of birdwatching in our country that recognizes birdlife south of the US border.

The new edition of the Peterson guide follows the American Birding Association's recent adoption of Hawaii, the birds of which were not included in the previous North America edition but were in the Peterson *Western Birds* guide for many years. Hawaiian birds are presented separately in the back of the book and the section includes many species that also appear earlier in the book. Another addition is a set of clever line drawings that characterize the *Empidonax* flycatcher calls. There are few other improvements, however. Unlike the 2008 version, there are no larger range maps in the back, and the thumbnail maps facing the plates appear unrevised except to add a superimposed yellow "Traditional Migration Range" that creates green, orange, and other puzzling colors in the tiny maps. Oddly, the order of presentation of some categories of birds has changed for no reason given and not in conformity with the 2019 ABA checklist that is included in the back of the book.

One notable exception to the lack of updates in the new Peterson guide, however, is found in the common names of birds. There is the Canada Jay, with Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay on the page before. Even the space has been removed from LeConte's Sparrow, per the AOS change from 2019. Changes in a bird's range and distribution may not be reflected, but names remain sacrosanct in the birding community.

Some of us purposely use names for birds that differ from the checklists. We may mark our veteran status as birders by only seeing Marsh Hawks and never a Northern Harrier, or we may identify certain warblers as Myrtle instead of Yellow-rumped. We are more likely to report a cardinal than a Northern Cardinal unless we are trying to be formal. Our diversity of language in describing birds in the United States and Canada fills the pages of *Bird is the Word*. For each of almost 800 species of birds Gary Meiter describes the name's origin, analyzes the scientific name, and lists often-numerous common names as well as names in French, Spanish, and occasionally other languages. Birds are listed in the order of the 2019 AOS check-list, including nearly all but the rarest ABA-list birds but excluding the recently-added Hawaiian species. Tidbits of natural history as well as color paintings accompany the entries, and sidebars present essays on various topics. There is a brief introduction as well as an appendix devoted to the naturalists who named our species or had species named after them. Another appendix gives collective names for birds, such as an exaltation of larks. In all, the book presents an enormous amount of information and is obviously the product of a mountain of labor.

The bulk of the book is a list of birds with short narrative passages interspersed, and its structure seemed to draw my attention to aspects that made me scratch my head. For instance, there is a pronunciation guide (with no source mentioned) for each species' scientific name, and the suggested pronunciations and breaks in syllables often clash with what I was taught in Latin and Greek classes; the book does not mention that there is no national, much less international, standard regarding the pronunciation of these names. In practice, most people pronounce scientific names as they were taught by their biology professors. Plus, I only found clues to the sources of the thousands of colloquial names in the relatively short bibliography. Unsurprisingly featured is A. C. Bent's *Life Histories* series, which is one of the richest sources of colloquial names for birds and available in its massive entirety for free download from the Smithsonian Institution's website. Bent's species accounts always let you know where the local names were used. Additionally, certain usages in *Bird is the Word* appear tone deaf in our current era: one word generally considered too offensive to print is included many times among the common names, and the language of certain Native Americans is identified as "Eskimo or Inuit" (which reminds me of saying "Frog or French"), in each case without explanation or disclaimer. And I can't help but mention, although "Canada Jay" and "LeConte's Sparrow" are up to date, at least one listed name for a species is incorrect: the Eurasian Skylark appears as a "Sky Lark."

*Bird is the Word* is a postmodern work, preferring to let the reader make connections among the thousands of bits of factual and anecdotal information included. The back cover states that it began as a database, and it would also work well as a website with links to each of the bird names on a home page. Rather than a compulsive read, this is a book to be kept on hand for reference when one bird name or another arouses the curiosity.

The new Peterson field guide was apparently released to serve ABA listers who want to work on their recently authorized Hawaii lists. The guide, which is too large for most pockets, does not appear to be aiming to compete with Sibley and National Geographic in quality of paintings or currency of information. It does still include nostalgic touches such as the silhouettes I studied in my early days of birding, and the little arrows pointing to distinctive plumage.

With so much information about birds available on our phones and computers, field guides and other reference books may become vulnerable or even threatened. I'm still waiting for the North American field guide that includes Mexico, but I have access to amazing amounts of data from eBird and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Birds of the World website. (And, to be fair, the Peterson Guide series does include *Field Guide to Mexican Birds*, although it hasn't been updated during this century.) Online sources, which can easily be updated to reflect annual changes in names and taxonomy, likely pose a long-term threat to publications that by their nature are frozen in time.

Casey Rucker

# eBird Notes for Winter 2020: The More Things Change...

## December 1, 2019–February 29, 2020

Mike Slaven

The French have a saying, “*Plus ça change, plus ç’est la même chose.*” (The more things change, the more they stay the same). And so it was in the late winter of 2019 to the end of February 2020, when a warm winter affected duck, geese, and especially gull sightings in West Virginia. It was practically a repeat of the previous year, with generally lower numbers and diversity of species. Some noteworthy exceptions were two Cackling Geese seen on February 28 at Apple Grove Fish Hatchery, reports scattered from the eastern panhandle of Snow Geese, and Tundra Swans which were observed in several counties, although not in large numbers.

There were some notable sightings of other rarities, as editor Casey Rucker noted in this issue’s field notes. A Cave Swallow and Harlequin Duck certainly are exciting birds to have seen in the state, and I congratulate the dedicated birders who found and documented these great new birds. But the paucity of some regular and expected winter visitors comes amid a host of climatic warning notes.

I wrote in this publication a couple of years ago that the species and numbers of gulls in the northern panhandle depended on cold weather to drive them into the state from the Great Lakes. I have found that if there is approximately one month of lower-than-average winter temperatures ( $-2^{\circ}\text{C}$  or about  $28.4^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) as monitored in Erie, Pennsylvania, weather stations, it usually means that there will be an influx of gulls into northern West Virginia. If there is no such chill wave, the gulls stay on the big open waters of the lakes, and not the Ohio River and its tributaries. In Lake Erie, the average lake temperature hovers at just over or just under  $0^{\circ}\text{C}$  in February and March. These temperatures are enough to begin freezing the lake, but that depends too on daytime temperature.

By December 2019, average temperatures were several degrees higher than average in the daytime, which effectively kept the waters open in most areas of the Great Lakes. To put this in perspective, late January 2014 through February 2015 was one of the last truly big freezes on the Great Lakes. I witnessed, with many others, an amazing number of gulls at the Pike Island Dam near Wheeling: 2,400 Ring-billed, 1,200 Herring Gulls, two Lesser Black Backed, a Great Black-backed, two Iceland Gulls, and a Glaucous Gull. That was in one day. Similar numbers were seen at the confluence of the Monongalia, Ohio, and Allegheny Rivers near Pittsburgh. This year’s numbers were (forgive the pun) the polar opposite. According to eBird, in the three Pike Island eBird Hotspots, there were only 62 gulls seen from December 2019 through February 2020. One might think that it is better for the gulls if they are not forced to flee from freezing lakes, but the reality is that gulls need open water for the most efficient feeding, and when lakes to the north begin to freeze or even develop deep slush, conditions become very difficult for gulls. They like to feed in open water and scavenge shorelines and tidal areas. In cold weather they are protected by a circulatory system that keeps their feet from freezing by recirculating blood from their arterial system, and they can take the cold, but ice inhibits their feeding. Gulls also congregate in large groups when it is freezing, and can take some advantage of the mass of warm bodies to stave off heat loss.



The gulls that end up in the southern part of the state in winter have either come in search of open water or have traveled short-to-medium distances in migrations from elsewhere. The gulls there seem to have smaller but more stable numbers in the winter from year to year.

As I have been looking at eBird reports from the winter, I observe that many birders report flocks of birds as “flyover.” This is something to be careful about. For example, if you live between two ponds that are a short distance away, and a flock of 100 Canada Geese moves between these two areas to feed every day, it seems logical that you might list them as “flyover” birds. Actually, eBird tries to reserve that special term for long-distance birds in migration, as for example Tundra Swans flying high overhead on their way to somewhere that probably is not local. This helps them better track migration patterns and flight ways. Locally travelling birds could be described by saying something like “flying to a local pond where they congregate each evening.” It sounds like a small thing, but the confusion can really add up over many reports.

Many of my eBird Reports for *The Redstart* sound like weather reports, and in the winter editions it sounds like my real passion is gulls, gulls, ducks (and mergansers, too). I guess in the winter it is a fair criticism. But it is important, because the weather and these birds are indicators to me that conditions are changing, and rapidly. As I close for this issue, let me say that I hope the December 2020–February 2021 eBird report contains a report of cold, icy weather bringing many more of our wintertime birds to the state. I will be the first to complain about the cold, but I hope it comes back next year.

632 West Virginia Avenue  
Morgantown, WV 26591  
mslavenwv@gmail.com

## Field Notes Winter Season

December 1, 2019 – February 29, 2020

Casey Rucker

Following the pattern of the year before, all three months this winter were warmer and wetter than usual in the Mountain State, according to the Northeast Regional Climate Center at Cornell University. It was the fifth warmest winter on record.

These notes were gathered from (a) the West Virginia Birds Listserv, sponsored by the National Audubon Society, (b) Christmas Bird Count (CBC) results, and (c) field notes submitted to the editor by email and regular mail. The full content of the submitted notes 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>, and the results of the Christmas Bird Counts may be found at <http://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/CurrentYear/ResultsByCount.aspx>.

On a snowy December 2, Sharon Kearns discovered a first-state-record **Cave Swallow** at her home in Pocahontas County, as reported last issue by Derek D. Courtney. On February 6, the Mountwood Bird Club spotted a **Harlequin Duck** on the Ohio River south of Parkersburg, Wood County, as reported by Terry Bronson. Overall, bird diversity was similar to that of the winter before, with 143 species reported from 37 of West Virginia's 55 counties.

**Geese, Swans, and Ducks** – Sightings of **geese** were once again relatively sparse in West Virginia this winter. **Snow Geese** appeared in Jefferson (JBz), Kanawha (RG, LC), Mason (GR), Monongalia (CBC), Randolph (RB), and Summers (JP) Counties; on February 17 Janet Keating saw the only **Ross's Goose** reported this season, in Huntington, Cabell County, and Josh Holland found the bird in the same location on the next day. **Greater White-fronted Geese** were reported in Berkeley (RB), Kanawha (LC), and Mason (JsH) Counties, and birders observed **Cackling Geese** in Berkeley County (RB), Mason County (JsH, CBC, GR), Raleigh County (MAW), and Wood County (CBC). Reports of **Canada Geese** were as usual widespread throughout the state. **Tundra Swans** were observed in Monongalia (CBC), Ohio (CBC), Randolph (CBC, RBo), and Tucker (CBC) Counties.

**Waterfowl** numbers were down this winter. The **Harlequin Duck** found by the Mountwood Bird Club is described near the beginning of these notes. The following species made appearances in at least ten West Virginia counties: **Gadwalls, Mallards, American Black Ducks, Ring-necked Ducks, Buffleheads, and Hooded and Common mergansers**; while birders in nine counties found **Wood Ducks**. The following birds inspired reports from the counties listed: **Northern Shovelers** in Mason (JsH, JK, MG), Mercer (JP), and Randolph (RB); **American Wigeons** in Cabell (MG, JK), Jefferson (BT), Pendleton (CBC), and Pocahontas (KB); **Northern Pintails** in Hardy (CBC), Mason (JsH, GR, MG), Monongalia (HC, DCo), Pendleton (CBC), and Randolph (RB); **Green-winged Teal** in Hardy (CBC), Jefferson (DHa), Mason (GR, MG), Mercer (HJ), Pendleton (CBC), and Randolph (RB); **Canvasbacks** in Mason (JsH, GR, MG, LC); **Redheads** in Berkeley (RB), Jefferson (CBC), and Randolph (RB); **Greater Scaup** in Mason (MG); **Lesser Scaup** in Berkeley (RB), Kanawha (RG, CBC), Mason (MG),

Monongalia (HC, DCo), and Randolph (RB); **Long-tailed Ducks** in Grant (DH), Preston (RBo), Summers (JJP), and Wood (TB); **Common Goldeneye** in Mason (LC); **Red-breasted Mergansers** in Jefferson (CBC), Kanawha (RG), and Monongalia (CBC); and **Ruddy Ducks** in Mason (JsH, GR, MG), Monongalia (HC, DCo), Randolph (RB), Wetzel (WJ), and Wood (CBC).

**Turkeys and Grouse – Wild Turkey** sightings were widespread, including many on the tallies of Christmas Bird Counts. **Ruffed Grouse** reports came from McDowell (CBC), Pendleton (RB), Pocahontas (GR), Summers (JP), and Tucker (CBC) Counties.

**Grebes – Pied-billed Grebes** were reported throughout the state. **Horned Grebes** made appearances in Kanawha (RG), Mason (JsH), Monongalia (HC, DCo), and Summers (JJP) Counties.

**Pigeons and Doves – Rock Pigeons and Mourning Doves** continue to reside throughout the state, as reported primarily in Christmas Bird Counts. **Eurasian Collared-Doves** continued in Union, Monroe County, as observed by Gary Rankin on January 21.

**Rails and Coots –** The Moorefield Christmas Bird Count found a **Virginia Rail** in Hardy County on December 21. **American Coots** appeared only in Jefferson (JBz) and Summers (JJP) Counties this winter.

**Cranes –** James and Judy Phillips watched a **Sandhill Crane** flying along the Greenbrier River near Hinton, Summers County, on February 15.

**Plovers –** Reports of **Killdeer** were again sparse this warm winter, with records from only nine counties.

**Sandpipers – American Woodcock** showed up in Cabell (JsH, DP), Hampshire (CBC), Randolph (RB), and Summers (JJP) Counties. Christmas Bird Counts in Hampshire and Hardy Counties reported **Wilson's Snipe**. Janet Keating found an unseasonal **Spotted Sandpiper** in Huntington, Cabell County, on February 17, and Josh Holland re-found the bird on the next day in the same location.

**Gulls –** It was a sparse season for winter **gulls** in West Virginia once again. Birders reported **Ring-billed Gulls** in eight West Virginia counties. **Herring Gulls** appeared in reports from only Kanawha (RG) Mason (GR, MG, DP), and Summers (JP) Counties. James and Judy Phillips spotted a **Great Black-backed Gull** near Hinton, Summers County, on February 9.

**Loons –** Josh Holland discovered a **Red-throated Loon** downriver from Gallipolis, Mason County, on December 2, and three days later Rodney Bartgis saw another **Red-throated Loon** on the Tygart River in Elkins, Randolph County. **Common Loon** sightings were sparse in our state once again this winter, with reports only from Kanawha (RG), Mason (JsH), Monongalia (HC, DCo), Raleigh (MW), Summers (JJP, CBC), and Wood (CBC) Counties.

**Cormorants –** There were reports of **Double-crested Cormorants** from only three counties this winter.

**Pelicans –** The **American White Pelican** enjoyed by many birders during November remained through December 4 at Robert C. Byrd Locks and Dam, Mason County, as observed by Josh Holland.

**Hérons – Great Blue Herons** appeared throughout the state this warm winter, and the Parkersburg Christmas Bird Count found a **Great Egret** in Wood County on December 28. On December 5 Richard Gregg found a lingering **Green Heron** in Belle, Kanawha County.

**Vultures** – Reports of **Black** and **Turkey vultures** came from fifteen and twenty-one counties, respectively.

**Eagles and Hawks** – **Golden Eagles** inspired reports from Barbour (RB), Hardy (CBC), Pendleton (CBC, RBo), Randolph (RB), Summers (CBC, JJP, SOg), and Tucker (CBC) Counties. **Northern Harriers** as well as **Sharp-shinned** and **Cooper’s hawks** appeared widely throughout West Virginia during the winter season. **Bald Eagles** were reported from at least twenty counties this winter. **Red-shouldered** and **Red-tailed hawks** were observed in many parts of the state, while **Rough-legged Hawks** were once again scarce this winter, inspiring reports only from Pocahontas (CBC), Randolph (RBo), and Tucker (CBC, JFo, HMy) Counties. On January 11, in their fifteenth annual Winter Eagle Survey, as reported by James Phillips, participants found two **Golden Eagles** and a record 71 **Bald Eagles** at sites on Indian Creek and along the Bluestone, Greenbrier, and New Rivers.

**Owls** – **Barn Owls** were reported as usual in the Moorefield Christmas Bird Count in Hardy County on December 21. Reports of **Eastern Screech-Owls** came from eight counties and **Great Horned Owl** observations inspired birders’ reports in nine counties. Birders in thirteen counties reported **Barred Owls**. Continuing this century’s interesting pattern, **Long-eared Owls** were found in the Inwood and Canaan Christmas Bird Counts in Berkeley and Tucker Counties respectively, and Gary Rankin discovered a **Long-eared Owl** at Stonewall State Park on January 10. The two **Northern Saw-whet Owls** found during the Morgantown Christmas Bird Count, Monongalia County, on December 14, were the only ones reported this season.

**Kingfishers** – West Virginia birders in twenty-three counties reported **Belted Kingfishers**, their increased presence perhaps being due to open waters during this warm winter.

**Woodpeckers** – **Red-headed Woodpeckers** made appearances in nine counties, and **Red-bellied Woodpeckers**, **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers**, **Downy** and **Hairy woodpeckers**, **Northern Flickers**, and **Pileated Woodpeckers** were all subjects of widespread reports in West Virginia over the winter.

**Falcons** – **American Kestrels**, **Merlins**, and **Peregrine Falcons** were all well-represented in Christmas Bird Counts and other reports in most parts of the state.

**Flycatchers** – Reports of **Eastern Phoebe** came from fifteen counties this winter.

**Shrikes** – Richard Bailey spotted a female **Loggerhead Shrike** in southern Pocahontas County on January 14.

**Vireos** – For the third year in a row a **White-eyed Vireo** appeared during the Morgantown Christmas Bird Count, on December 14 in Monongalia County, as reported last issue by Derek D. Courtney, and another **White-eyed Vireo** was discovered during the Pocahontas County Christmas Bird Count on the same day. Hullett Good spotted a **Blue-headed Vireo** at his home in Milliken, Kanawha County, on December 23.

**Jays, Crows, and Ravens** – **Blue Jays**, **American Crows**, and **Common Ravens** appeared in their usual haunts throughout the state. **Fish Crows** only appeared in Jefferson County, as observed by Carol Del-Colle in Summit Point on January 22.

**Larks** – Reports of **Horned Larks** came from Grant County (RB), Hardy County (CBC), Mason County (MG), Ohio County (CBC), and Preston County (RBo).

**Swallows** – The first-state-record **Cave Swallow** discovered by Sharon Kearns in early December is described near the beginning of these notes. Josh Holland saw



Cave Swallow photograph  
by Sharon Kearns.

a lingering **Tree Swallow** at Robert C. Byrd Locks and Dam, Mason County, on December 1. Michael Griffith spotted the first **Tree Swallows** of 2020 on February 19 at Green Bottom Wildlife Management Area, Cabell County.

**Chickadees** and **Titmice** – **Carolina** and **Black-capped chickadees** appeared in reports from their overlapping territories throughout West Virginia. **Tufted Titmice** occupied their usual spots in reports from throughout the state.

**Nuthatches** – It was not an irruption year for **Red-breasted Nuthatches**, which inspired reports only in Berkeley (CBC), Marion (DCo), Monongalia (CBC), Pendleton (CBC), Pocahontas (RB), Randolph (RB, CBC) and Tucker (CBC, HMy) Counties. **White-breasted Nuthatches** were widely reported throughout the state.

**Creepers** – Birders in sixteen West Virginia counties reported **Brown Creepers**.

**Wrens** – Christmas Bird Counts in Hardy, Monongalia, and Tucker Counties recorded **House Wrens**, and Donny Good spotted a late **House Wren** in Roane County on December 10. West Virginia birders reported **Winter** and **Carolina wrens** in good numbers statewide.

**Kinglets** – **Golden-crowned** and **Ruby-crowned kinglets** were both familiar sights in most parts of the state this winter.

**Thrushes** – **Eastern Bluebirds**, **Hermit Thrushes**, and **American Robins** appeared in good numbers in our state this winter, mostly at lower elevations. On December 21, the Charleston Christmas Bird Count, Kanawha County, recorded a **Wood Thrush**.

**Catbirds**, **Thrashers**, and **Mockingbirds** – **Gray Catbirds** were recorded in Christmas Bird Counts in Greenbrier County, Monongalia County, and Pocahontas County. **Brown Thrashers** were spotted in Cabell (MG), Grant (RB), Hardy (CBC), Kanawha (LC), and Tucker (CBC) Counties. West Virginians reported **Northern Mockingbirds** widely in lower elevations over the winter season.

**Starlings** – **European Starlings** continued their widespread occupation of habitats throughout our state.

**Waxwings** – **Cedar Waxwings** appeared widely this winter, with sightings in thirteen counties.

**Weaver Finches** – Thanks to Christmas Bird Counts, we have been assured that the **House Sparrow** continues throughout the state, primarily in urban and farm settings.

**Pipits** – Gary Rankin found the only reported **American Pipits** this season, at Gallipolis Ferry, Mason County, on Christmas Eve.

**Finches** and **Allies** – Herb Myers found the only **Evening Grosbeak** reported this season, a female at the feeders of White Grass Ski Center in Tucker County on February 9. Feeders in most parts of the state hosted **House Finches** and **American Goldfinches**. **Purple Finch** sightings were sparse, coming only from Greenbrier (CBC), Jefferson (JBz), Monongalia (CBC), Randolph (CBC), Summers (JJP), and Tucker (CR) Counties. Six **Common Redpolls** were an unexpected delight for surveyors in the Pocahontas County Christmas Bird Count on December 14. **Red Crossbills** were observed in Pocahontas County (GR, CBC), Randolph County (RBo), and Summers County (GR, JJP). **Pine Siskins** made appearances in nine counties.

**Sparrows, Juncos, and Towhees** – Aaron Graham found a **LeConte’s Sparrow** in Hardy County during the Moorefield Christmas Bird Count on December 21, and the bird remained at least until December 28 (SWi, JSh, MJ); the same count also discovered **Vesper** and **Savannah sparrows**. **Chipping, Field, Fox, American Tree, White-crowned, White-throated, Song, and Swamp sparrows**, as well as **Dark-eyed Juncos** and **Eastern Towhees**, appeared widely. N. Wade Snyder found a surprising **Clay-colored Sparrow** in Bardane, Jefferson County, on January 23. **Savannah Sparrows** were also observed in Jefferson (DHa, WS), Mason (MG, JK), and Pendleton (CBC) Counties. **Eastern Towhees** made their usual appearances at lower elevations in many parts of the state.

**Blackbirds and Allies** – Reports of **Eastern Meadowlarks, Red-winged Blackbirds, Brown-headed Cowbirds, and Common Grackles** came from areas all over the state. **Rusty Blackbirds** were reported in Cabell County (MG, JK), Hardy County (CBC), Jefferson County (CBC), and Mason County (MG, GR).

**Warblers** – Josh Holland found three **Palm Warblers** near Gallipolis Ferry, Mason County, on February 12, and **Pine Warblers** appeared in Monongalia County (CBC) and Raleigh County (JP). Birders in lower elevations saw Myrtle-race **Yellow-rumped Warblers** at locations throughout the state.

**Cardinals** – Birders throughout the state reported **Northern Cardinals** in good numbers. Joette Borzik hosted a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** at her home in Jefferson County during mid-February. The Morgantown Christmas Bird Count, Monongalia County, included two **Indigo Buntings** on December 14.

Contributors to the Winter Field Notes: Catherine Bailey (KB), Rodney Bartgis (RB), Randy Bodkins (RBo), Joette Borzik (JBz), Terry Bronson (TB), Laura Ceperley (LC), Hannah Clipp (HC), Derek Courtney (DCo), Robert Dean (BD), James Fox (JFo), Richard Gregg (RG), Michael Griffith (MG), Deborah Hale (DHa), Josh Holland (Jsh), Diane Holsinger (DH), Wilma Jarrell (WJ), Mark Johnson (MJ), Hilarie Jones (HJ), Janet Keating (JK), Herb Myers (HMy), Sharyn Ogden (SOg), David Patick (DP), James Phillips (JP), James and Judy Phillips (JJP), Gary Rankin (GR), Casey Rucker (CR), N. Wade Snyder (WS), Bill Telfair (BT), Mindy Waldron (MW), Mindy and Allen Waldron (MAW), and Steven Wilson (SWi).

P.O. Box 2  
Seneca Rocks, WV 26884  
autoblock@frontiernet.net









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## 2020 Calendar of Events The Brooks Bird Club, Inc.

Date	Activity	Place
Jan. 29–31	Trip to Lake Erie area (Contact Dick Esker)	
February	Write an article for <i>The Redstart</i> and <i>Mail Bag</i>	
Feb. 27–28	Funk/Killbuck trip (Contact Dick Esker)	
Mar. 6–8	Early Spring Meeting (Contact Dick Esker) .....	North Bend State Park
Mar. 15	Seneca Lake Trip	
Apr. 18	Raccoon Creek Outing, 3 Rivers Bird Club and Headquarters' Chapter .....	Cancelled due to COVID-19 (Contact Ryan Tomazin)
May 7–10	Wildflower Pilgrimage .....	Cancelled due to COVID-19
May 9	Migratory Bird Day	
June 5–13	Foray – Camp Galilee.....	Cancelled due to COVID-19 (contact Janice Emrick or Ryan Tomazin)
July 29–31	Howard Marsh area .....	Cancelled due to COVID-19 (Contact Terry Bronson)
Aug.–Oct.	Bird Banding .....	Cancelled due to COVID-19 Dates to be announced
October	Fall Reunion Meeting.....	Cancelled due to COVID-19
Nov. 11–15	Eastern Shore Trip (Contact Cindy Slater)	
Dec. 14–Jan. 5, 2021	Christmas Bird Count.....	Statewide

### BBC FORAYS

2020 Camp Galilee, Terra Alta, WV ..... Cancelled due to COVID-19  
 2021 Camp Kidd 4-H Camp, Tucker County, WV  
 2022 Foray TBD

### SEASONAL FIELD NOTES DUE

Winter: March 15      Spring: June 15      Summer: September 15      Fall: December 15  
 MAIL TO: Casey Rucker, P.O. Box 2, Seneca Rocks, WV 26884, [autoblock@frontiernet.net](mailto:autoblock@frontiernet.net)

### ARTICLES FOR THE MAIL BAG DUE

February 15      May 15      August 15      November 15  
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The dates for the 2020 BBC programs may be changed if necessary. Changes will be announced on the web page or in The Mail Bag.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Terry Bronson, [tbronsonbirds@gmail.com](mailto:tbronsonbirds@gmail.com)  
 Janice Emrick, [emrick@gmn4u.com](mailto:emrick@gmn4u.com)  
 Dick Esker, [eskerrb@frontier.com](mailto:eskerrb@frontier.com)

Cindy Slater, [slater@setonhill.edu](mailto:slater@setonhill.edu)  
 Ryan Tomazin, [wwwarblers@hotmail.com](mailto:wwwarblers@hotmail.com)

**The Brooks Bird Club**  
P.O. Box 4077  
Wheeling, WV 26003

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