



THE MAIL BAG

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

Editor's Note

Well, THAT was a strange summer! We hope everyone out there is doing well and has kept their wits about them. With no Foray, almost no outings or picnics, most birders were forced to bird on their own or in small groups. That led to many having more personal birding experiences. Part of this issue covers how everyone across the state and the membership spent their time.

For my part, I spent almost eleven days in Preston County in June, luckily getting home not long before carloads of teens brought a couple dozen cases of COVID back from the beach, which led to a quick spike in cases in the county. My trip involved almost no interaction with the general public, and safe, clean situations otherwise. Most of my time was spent alone out in the woods, the fields, on the country roads, finding lots of birds, plants, moths and much more. I also learned that there are a LOT of roads in Preston County that suddenly end with no warning!

Keep on keeping on, and stay safe and smart. Spread intelligence and compassion, not COVID! I have had four good friends all catch it, and it takes months to recover from. It's no joke!



Thanks to everyone who contributed to this issue of the Mail Bag. In the future, if you have a story, a trip report, some citizen science or club history, please contact us to be included in the publication. The issues usually go to print at the end of February, May, August and November, and we love and need to hear your voices, especially in times like these.

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

The combined song of a Winter Wren, a Hermit Thrush, a Veery and a Black-throated Green Warbler is a symphony I never get tired of hearing. Having the opportunity to spend more time outdoors this year has given me some very special memories. I experienced lots of exciting nature moments that I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to have.

After having some wonderful moments I realize the only thing missing is my Bird Club Friends. Wondering what to do about the fall meeting became a question for the executive committee of the Bird Club when the location we reserved for the fall meeting cancelled our reservation due to COVID. In fact, they have closed their services permanently to outside groups using their facility. After discussing several options, the executive committee has decided that we will postpone our annual election for new board members. There is nothing else pressing that had to be voted on to keep the club in running order this year so the current slate of officers will remain the same and we will pick up in the spring. Although this decision was not an easy one, it was unanimous that everyone's health and safety was the most important and the right decision.

Now that I am getting back in a new groove at work and life is getting a little busier I still go home and listen to the night time symphony of katydids with an occasional interruption of a Barred Owl that always makes for a special treat. Whatever your favorite symphony is during the day or night I hope you are enjoying what is singing to you. I also hope you are telling us about your experiences in this edition of the mail bag. The point is to make the best memories you can with the moments you are given. With any luck we can all get together soon and enjoy each other's company the way we do so well. In the meantime, continue to stay safe, wear a mask, wash your hands, and stay healthy my friends.

– *Your President, Cindy Slater*

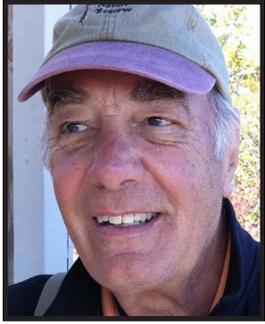
THANK YOU, JERRY DEVAUL

How does one say thank you to a person that deserves so much more? Jerry, thank you does not begin to express the appreciation and gratitude for your time, devotion, and dedication to the BBC. You have done a remarkable job mailing the Mail Bag & Redstart for countless years to all of our members. Forgive my lack of eloquent words worthy enough to express the recognition you deserve. You are a wonderful and kindhearted man.

Although I understand your retirement from this position, you still will be greatly missed. On behalf of the entire Brooks Bird Club, Thank you Jerry!

Sincerely, Cindy Slater
– *BBC President*

DON PATTISON PASSES



Donald Pattison, 79, resident of Fort Myers, FL, since 2008, formerly of Carlisle, PA, passed away at his home on June 8, 2020 of congestive

heart failure. Don was born March 22, 1941 in Sewickley, PA. After graduating from Peters Twp. High School, he went into the Army. Don then worked for Continental Coffee Company and married Joan Bell in 1967. They were married for 53 years. Soon after Don married, he began his long-time career with Kurtz Bros, School Supplies, Clearfield, PA. He was Regional Manager for much of his career and retired in 2001.

Don instantly became a “bird nut” after Joan took him home in 1966 to meet her parents, Ralph and Betty Bell. They all went to many Brooks Bird Club meetings and outings, including Forays with their 2 children, Grant (deceased due to diabetes complications) and Luke. Don loved to go on the BBC Eastern Shore Trip lead by Carl & Juanita Slater and their daughter, Cindy.

Don was a member of the Brooks Bird Club for 54 years and the Ralph K. Bell Bird Club, Waynesburg, PA since Marjorie Howard founded it in 2006. He was a BBC Bird Leader at the Wildflower Pilgrimage, Blackwater Falls, WV, helped Ralph K. Bell, Founder of AFMO, and Joan as a leader at AFMO, was a member of the PA Association of School Business Officials, Elder and Deacon of Second Presbyterian Church, Carlisle, PA, member of the Masonic Lodge, Canonsburg, PA, coordinator of the Juniata County Grassland Survey led by Dan Brauning of the PA Game Commission, volunteer for the PA Atlas Project, Breeding Bird Survey volunteer, and loved to participate in Ralph K. Bell’s Christmas Bird Count and also Pittsburgh Audubon bird walks on Bell’s farm in May. Besides Don’s love of birds, he was an avid golfer, fisherman, and liked to sail and go canoeing and biking.

Don Pattison – A Soft-spoken Gentle Friend *by Bill Beatty*

Ralph Bell, founder of the Allegheny Front Migration Observatory (AFMO), and I were best friends. When I needed to find two new bird leaders for the West Virginia Wildflower Pilgrimage, I asked Ralph if he could recommend anyone. He said, “How about my daughter Joanie and her husband Don?” Don and Joanie were eager to be leaders, especially since Ralph was also a leader, and I added two excellent, knowledgeable birders to our group.

Soon after that I began to volunteer at the AFMO. Not only did I get to see and handle hundreds of migrating warblers and other kinds of birds, I met some wonderful people. Joanie, Don and I immediately became good friends.

What a wonderful time in my life — sharing a cabin at Blackwater Falls State Park with Joanie, Don and Ralph for several days in early May and then, in September, spending two weeks on Dolly Sods with them each year. When Joanie and Don retired to Florida and eventually stopped coming back to West Virginia, I thought about them often when I was on Dolly Sods at the AFMO.

Yesterday, when I got news that Don had passed away, my memory flood-gates opened and I was back in the mountains walking the Dolly Sods road with him.

Don always had a smile and he laughed a lot. He was special. Many days after the morning bird banding and afternoon hawk watching, Don and I would walk Forest Service Rd. 75 and look at wildflowers. We talked about, well... just about everything. Don was a good listener and had wonderful and valuable advice. There were some times I really needed it, and appreciated and followed it.

Don was a loving, caring person. You could just feel it when you were near him. He made everyone feel welcome. His smile warmed the room (or campsite) like the glow from a campfire. His memory still warms my heart.

Goodbye my friend! Until we meet and walk together again.

Visit Bill’s blog at <https://wvbirders.wordpress.com> for photos and more.

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: jslater1120@yahoo.com

HOW HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AFFECTED YOUR WV BIRDING?

Since I typically bird alone and in very rural places where it is easy to social distance, it hasn't changed much for me in my personal birding. However, on a few very popular trails such as Seneca Rocks, it has been a challenge. On the hike back down from Seneca Rocks, I passed 123 people hiking up the trail and none of them wore face coverings; and some of them kept walking in the middle of the trail, not giving wide berth as they huffed and puffed their way up the mountain. This has been a real problem in my birding in crowded Northern Virginia too. There are certain places that I have stopped visiting because of this. Here in Virginia I have also had to stop taking my students and the Northern Virginia Teen Bird Club on field trips, which I GREATLY miss. We will not be able to do our annual visit to Dolly Sods to see the bird banding this year because they have understandably canceled their activities because of COVID-19 risks.

– Fred Atwood, Cabins, Grant Co, WV, & Oakton, Fairfax Co, VA

I have tried to do an e-bird checklist from our place every day since about mid-March. We usually bird our 1-acre plus along 1/4 mile of driveway. Sometimes we branch out to more of the neighborhood but all birds are less than a mile from our house. Highlights have included osprey, bald eagle, great horned owl and fledglings for at least 30 species of birds. Unusual, was a male ring-necked duck that still remains on a neighbor's lake.

We are fortunate to monitor at least 7 bald eagle nests within 20 miles of our house. During most of July, our entertainment consisted of keeping count of the different birds eating the periodical cicadas. We were surprised at the number of birds that became flycatchers.

We are also fortunate to have state & national park areas nearby as well as county & town parks. The only big crowd we encountered was at Camp Creek S.P. when the "stay at home" order was lifted. Runners, cyclists, hikers, anglers and sightseers everywhere. We headed back to our porch. One uncomfortable outing was the boardwalk at Cranberry Glades. We had to keep moving because of the narrow confines.

Judy has been telling everyone that we have been safe distancing for years. We just called it birdwatching.

– Jim & Judy Phillips, Pipestem, WV

Since early June I've made 2 one day trips to Hardy County to bird with Diane Holsinger. The trips were inspired by a case of acute cabin fever. My backyard bird list normally results in about 10 or 12 species including rare flyovers of Bald Eagle and Great Blue Heron.

The trips were wonderful. We had the back roads to ourselves and could stop wherever we wanted. Scarlet Tanagers were abundant. We heard over 20 but thanks to the dense foliage we never saw one. Our most memorable sighting was a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Black-and-white Warbler in the same tree only about 20 feet from us. Our totals were in the mid fifties. I'll be doing it again in September to bird and botanize.

I also took a 2 day trip to Blackwater Falls in July to see my daughter and grandsons. It was crowded! Visitors from all over the east coast were hiking and driving around. On Monday morning Luke and I went down the Camp 70 road behind the grocery store in Davis to birdwatch and found it as crowded as a city street. One needed to use a turn signal to pull over to stop. We saw more tourists than birds. I guess we were tourists too. Our best birds was a long look at a Brown Thrasher foraging beside the road - a new bird for Luke. We finally went back to the lodge as the traffic was too bad to enjoy our outing. Of course, we heard ravens, a favorite of mine.

– Jane Whitaker, Washington, DC

We conducted both of our MAPS stations this year from May to August. At the Sandstone site (Raleigh Co.) we had around 211 birds handled. We had high numbers of American Redstarts, Carolina Wrens, Wood thrush, and Northern Cardinals. One

cardinal recapture was originally banded in 2011 as an After Hatch year. So we know he is at least 10 years old.

At our Wolf Creek site (Fayette Co.) we had 256 birds handled. The last couple of banding days we were busy with gray catbirds. We are still banding Swainson's Warblers each year. That is proof of breeding in the area. There were only a couple of outings with other people. We birded in Raleigh Co. at familiar sites. We helped with the Pipestem area Spring Bird Count. We did our area and turned the results into Jim Phillips. I thought our individual numbers for the day were low. We usually see lots of orioles and E. kingbirds, but there were very few that day.

We didn't have our Bibbee Nature Club outing for July at Blueberry Hill. It wasn't open for the season. In June, I had lots of Ruby-throat hummingbirds. Mid July on, I have very few hummers.

– Mindy & Allen Waldron, Surveyor, WV

Since this darned virus, my birding has been limited to watching the hummingbird feeder. I get at least three, a male and two females. The male takes the most sips, 30-some at a time. The record is 50. And I don't need binocs.

– Bob Rine, Wheeling, WV

Once COVID-19 hit and it was determined that Foray was a no-go, I decided it was a good idea to explore more birding areas near me. I was determined not to let the situation keep me from becoming a better birder as had been my goal for 2020.

I began to bird every day at McDonough Wildlife Refuge, just two minutes from my home. Boy was I pleasantly surprised. It was chock full of warblers! Two of my birding acquaintances from the Mountwood Bird Cub were also birding there on a regular basis and we've become fast birding buddies. They've really helped me learn to identify the warblers, and I've helped them by being able to hear what they cannot. Luckily my hearing is still very acute while theirs is beginning to fail. Consequently our threesome made for a great collaboration!

(continued on Page 4)

(continued from Page 3)

All in all I have felt privileged to live near an area that offers such great birding opportunities, and I'm blessed to have made such wonderful birding friends with whom I can share my experiences.
– Mary Murin, Vienna, WV

The COVID-19 virus certainly impacted our birding – not so much the amount but how. The Mountwood Bird Club halted all our organized birding activities. Being “older” individuals we considered ourselves at the high risk category so we followed the strict guidelines as far as the club was concerned. Individuals continued to bird, sometimes even in small groups (usually four max) but no carpooling. Sightings were sent to one individual who forwarded them to the club's usual distribution list. There were a lot of emails going back and forth, especially during the migration and nesting season. The biggest thing missing was the social aspect – not seeing our birding companions for months.

One other thing that is different is the frequency. The MBC always went birding on Thursdays. With the virus and no scheduled activities and more leisure time every day was a potential birding day. If you had the urge to chase some exciting bird or check out some new place, off you went. This led to some interesting sightings, like a Mourning Warbler and Golden-winged Warbler here in Wood County.

Birding turns out to be a good hobby during a pandemic. Yes, we regret the closure of prime birding locations like Magee and restricted travel but birding offers the opportunity to get out and enjoy nature in relative isolation.
– Dick & Jeanette Esker, Wash., WV

I was disappointed to have to cancel two birding trips due to COVID but not all is lost. I have enjoyed observing and learning more about our local birds. Recently I was at a friend's house and pointed out a male Northern Cardinal feeding a fledgling. They had not observed this before and were excited which got me excited. Even when tending my son-in-law's chickens, I have taken time to observe a hen teaching her newly hatched chicks to eat. She would take food from the tray

and move toward the chicks. They would pick the food from her bill. She would cluck contentedly. It was touching. It seems the local birds such as the Wood Thrush are hanging around longer this year. Maybe I am just around more to notice. I have been doing more local eBird counts.

– Herb Myers, Harman, WV

We have spent many hours on our back screened in porch, watching squirrels, chipmunks and birds. A female Cooper's Hawk, spent a leisurely ten minutes or so bathing in our bird bath. It took up the entire area of the upside down garbage pail lid we use for her bath.

Also, a fox squirrel has been nibbling on our old cedar patio chairs. It peels off only the outermost layer composed of algae, lichens, etc. and stops when it gets down to new wood. The squirrel doesn't seem to damage the old chairs, and it doesn't pay any attention to two much newer cedar chairs on the patio. It must have something to do with the growth of algae, lichens, etc. on the old wood. These chairs are pretty old.

– Jay Buckelew, Bethany, WV

By request: Birding the Pandemic.

I might have hoped for a different assignment. Perhaps Birding the Pampas. And, thinking big, that there were funding available to write it. A stipend.

Frankly, we haven't done any serious birding for several years. I've been...fishing. Not bait and tackle fishing. Tropical fishing. With a camera. Underwater. Mary walks the beaches while I'm underwater. We've been to the Canary Islands, Saba Island (part of the Dutch Caribbean), Fiji and made four trips to Mexico. We were scheduled to go to the Cayman Islands in April. Then rescheduled. That has fallen through. And of course we take our binoculars everywhere we go. But the primary focus, if you like, is on those tropical fishes.

Extravagant. Yes, but it was easier than you might think. Maybe too easy. A booby trap laid by sirens.

By contrast, pandemic birding is an extended feeder watch. Not that we haven't enjoyed that. Red-headed woodpeckers have become rather common locally. We enjoy those little changes. And in one of those signs of the resilience of nature, the continuity of life, our hummingbird crowd is preparing to leave us again. It's time. The world isn't upside down. It's only us. I hope to be here when they return.

Meanwhile, I've rather enjoyed staying home. We have no plans to go anywhere. And there's much to do right here. I know this isn't the forum to be negative, but this pandemic was unanticipated. We were unprepared. Life was precarious for many even before. I'm afraid it's one more shoe to drop and dust bowl all over again. We're not prepared for that either. It's time for me to grow up. To get serious. And to get to work. I thought I might list my favorite charities, but you're birders. You all have your own lists.
– John & Mary Jacobs, Independence, WV

Overlooking a small lake where my house sits in the South Hills of Pittsburgh, my story begins. The long months of winter mating calls quieted down between the Great Horned Owls that yearly frequented the tall pines here. Only once in a while in March did I see the large silhouette swoop stealthily across the lake from one pine to another. By April and May, an evening chatter of strange sounds was coming from a tall pine in northeast corner of the lake.

By the end of May, I saw them! Three young Great Horned Owls had left the nest to congregate on a branch closer to where I could see them. They didn't just sit on the branch that early evening; they used it as a gymnasium. I never saw such antics in birds. They squawked, chased each other, played hide and seek, and roughhoused. I could not see any ear tufts, just fluff. They ceaselessly begged to be fed in rasping barks. Over the next few weeks, I watched them grow up. I would hear them in the early morning and every evening. I rarely saw the parents. They had favorite trees to hang out in. They tried out their voices and their calls, and their beak clacking. But I never heard them cry out with 'A hoo hoo'.

(continued on Page 10)

PRESTON COUNTY 2020, or WHAT I DID ON MY SUMMER VACATION

Fri., June 5

“Call it a ‘bio-blitz,’” one friend said. I’m not one for pop catch-phrases, so off I went with a car full of optics, books, food and clothes to do censusing of Preston County and to get back to the mountains.

First stop was at the county line at Cooper’s Rock’s offices. I’d had ideas on how I was going to collect my data, so this was an easy place to start. Birds started accumulating on my bird list, the plants I knew got IDed, and the ones I didn’t know (read: most of them) were photographed with a DSLR camera with a macro lens that is used, but new to me.



Staghorn Beetle species

Let me share one main reason for this trip: I need to learn more plants. While I covered as much of the flora and fauna as possible, I tried to focus on plants a good amount of the time. Nearly 1,300 plant photos later will attest to that, and I’ll be identifying them as best I can for months.

Next stop was Hemlock Run, a virgin Eastern hemlock/oak/birch creek hollow that is an oasis for good birds, mushrooms and ferns. Half a dozen Black-throated Blue warblers competed with Red-eyed Vireos for most numerous songsters there. An Acadian Flycatcher called near a nest in a spindly tree. A parent and juvenile raven were very vocal nearby, especially after a Red-shouldered Hawk flew over. The one missing species that we’ve always heard there was Veery. As per usual, the gully was much cooler than up the hill and was very humid.

From there, I worked my way over to Terra Alta Lake and the cabin that I was being allowed to use for the whole trip. After unpacking, I took a walk up the road, photographing more plants and ticking off more birds. Since I am eBirding ev-



Giant Pileated hole

erything, exact counts of every species was necessary throughout my time in Preston County. 47 species were counted on this walk alone, including daytime-calling Barred Owls, a Broad-winged Hawk that was very visible the whole trip there, and many warblers, vireos and more. A good first day!

Sat., June 6

Fog! Sometime overnight, the clear sky turned to milk, but still I started the day with a breeding bird survey, going from Alpine Lake area to Freeport and beyond. American Woodcock, Alder Flycatchers and frogs marked the first half of the run, while the horrid roads on the second half gave me more time to hear plenty of Vee-ries, Hermit Thrushes and seven warbler species. The foggy ride home on Aurora Pike netted Grasshopper Sparrows and the ever-present, effervescent Bobolinks.

After breakfast, I walked Camp Galilee Road, where there was a lot of bird activity. A Yellow-billed Cuckoo gave good looks, but the most interesting species to me was a singing male Yellow-throated Warbler that was working the pines around camp and the road.

For my afternoon plant study session, I walked down to the Oglebay Mountain Camp. By then, the fog had given way to clear skies and cool temps. I picked a couple dozen plants and sat in the shade for nearly five hours trying to ID them, all while enjoying fly over Black Vultures, Broad-winged and Red-shouldered hawks, a noisy raven family and more. Very pleasant, and I did learn some plants.

After dinner, I discovered that the dusk-to-dawn light on my friend’s cabin was drawing in moths, which throughout the week covered the side of his home. Got a lot of photos of a lot of species, both

in the evenings and during the days.

Sun., June 7

What a chilly morning this was! Nearly froze on my breeding bird survey. Today was my planned trip to Cranesville Swamp. It started well with a Red Fox trotting down Camp Galilee Road at my first BBS stop. As the route took me north towards the swamp, there were lots of woodpeckers, good numbers of ravens, and plenty of Bobolinks. First Green Heron for the trip was spotted. At my last stop, which coincided with my breakfast stop, an Alder Flycatcher sang constantly from a tall snag in a swampy spot by the road, while a Swamp Sparrow trilled on the other side of the car. Fun!

I worked a few nice back roads on the way to the swamp, and there were three more Alder Flycatchers, lots of Swamp Sparrows and a Red-shouldered Hawk. At a barn in the hamlet of Cranesville, there was a small colony of Cliff Swallows.



A Red Squirrel stalking me at Cranesville

The time spent at the swamp was varied and interesting, plus quite informative. 41 bird species were found, but no Hermit Thrushes, Vee-ries or Canada Warblers. There wasn’t much water in the swamp, either. However, good amounts of the birds of the day, being Alder Flycatcher (five singing males) and Swamp Sparrow (eight birds, mostly males). There were a few Sundew in the marshy spots, as well as Small Bog Cranberry. I also enjoyed beginning to learn sedges, which were everywhere. I was lulled into a sense of identification ease due to the first two sedges I IDed being on the same page of my Core plant guide. The next

(continued on Page 6)

fifteen sedges I found were not so easy! It also took quite a while to find Golden-thread, even though it is copious there. Beautiful Cinnamon Ferns and flowering Mountain Laurel competed for the most showy plants. A very nice way to spend four comfortable hours, rocking my new botanist's clothing outfit.

I spent the afternoon birding and (sort of) botanizing my way around the Cranesville region. A wrong turn at Albuquerque took me into a short birding excursion into Maryland, and after that it got warm, muting some of the bird song. Found a four-foot-long Black Rat Snake sunning in the middle of Lakeford Road. As I got out of the car in an attempt to photograph it, a "good 'ole boy" in a small pickup came flying up the road at top speed. I stood behind the snake to try to stop him from running it over, but he never slowed until I jumped out of the way. After greeting me, I told him I was trying to keep him from running over the snake. He sat silent for a moment, then said, "hope I got it!", and gunned it. Poor snake.



*A beautiful
Rosy Maple Moth*

At dusk, I set up my new portable moth light/sheet station on the side of my cabin. My friend and I went back and forth between our cabins photographing the copious number of moths.

There were dozens of species, from plain, tiny micro moths to large, colorful silk moths. A great first attempt to document the many moth species of the county.

Mon., June 8

This morning's BBS route took me down Aurora Pike, mainly through farm land. This resulted in good numbers of Bobolinks, Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows. Nine Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers was a nice high number. From there, I hopped over to Cathedral State Park for a morning under the towering hemlocks.

After my breakfast in the parking

lot, I walked through a many of the trails in the park, netting 55 species of birds, including a few Brown Creepers, competing Winter Wrens, and three Hermit Thrushes. The differences in the park compared to twenty years ago are stark. There are no longer Canada Warblers singing near the parking lot, and warblers are fewer, with only one Blackburnian all morning. The walk was cool and sunny, and the ferns and shade were welcoming.

After lunch, I went next door to Brookside Farm. Owner Ed Utterback took me back beyond his property to a neighbor's farm, where we hiked in to a stand of giant virgin hemlocks that few people know are there. Ed is in his 80s, and I could barely keep up with him on the hike! The trees were amazing.



Kangaroos near Kingwood...seriously?

The rest of the afternoon was spent looking for birds in the southeast corner of the county. Hogback Road was particularly good, but no Golden-wings or chats were found in logged areas or fields.

Tues., June 9

Stayed up too late last night, so I passed on my planned BBS route on Brandonville Pike and drove it after breakfast. First kestrel, more Bobolinks everywhere, and lots of grassland sparrows. This also began a streak of days where I drove down roads that ended inexplicably in impassible gulches. My new idea for making my fortune is to create signs for all the roads stating "Road Impassible For Any Vehicles." I'd make millions...

My main reason for heading up the Pike was that it went right to Old Hemlock, where I met with LeJay and Helen Ann Graffious. LeJay and I went for a hike through a handful of ecosystems, and he helped me learn a few plants

that I'd seen a lot of, but hadn't IDed yet. A couple of Blackburnian Warblers and Yellow-throated Vireos sang. I finally got to see some of the giant hemlocks that the property is named for. It is a magical gully down off the road.



*An Io Moth met an
unfortunate end*

After we parted ways, I went around the corner to pay a visit to Orion Metheny who was missing Foray as much as I was. While I ate my lunch, we sat in the shade as he told me about his homesteading plans at the house he shares with Kaylee, his new bride. There were a number of warbler species singing on what promised to be a very hot day. We drove nearby to scout for more birds, and then I headed off for Big Sandy and the Lake 'O The Woods. A drive on dicey roads that took minutes but felt like hours. No birds graced the lake, so I took the long drive back to Kingwood for some dinner and then back to the cabin for evening moths.

Wed., June 10

On a day that threatened to rain later, it began hot. Today's BBS route took me down to Albright with few birds, but quickly got good when driving up Beech Run Road. Kentucky Warblers early on gave way to regenerating clear cuts that sported chats, Prairie and Blue-winged Warblers. The giant fields on the north end of the road have been chemically treated, but the borders still had the same Henslow's and other sparrows.

After a breakfast in a roadside spot loaded with many sedge species, I continued to work that region of the county. More Blue-wings were found, as were a lot more sedges. Someday, I might even identify them!

A rest at the Allegheny trail head in Albright, and then down the path I went. It was a nice hike along the Cheat River with beautiful canyon views at times. I found my first-ever Umbrella Polypore,

and there were a wide variety of plants, but the birds were pretty quiet.

Later on, I began driving up a decent road below Albright. Just about the time that it started pouring rain, I met another gulch in the road, 3.7 miles from where I started...and the upper half of that was perilous to begin with. I backtracked and found that it never rained in Albright! Back home, then.

Thurs., June 11

Overnight, we got a hellacious storm. I woke during it to find a mouse riding it out on my shoulder.

The BBS route I planned was Stemple Ridge, southwest of Aurora. The temperature was 10-15 degrees colder than yesterday, and it was quite windy. Not conducive for birding, but ten warbler species were eked out. The road was bad, but not impassible. The next couple of roads I was on in the southwest corner of the county weren't as forgiving. However, they both had good birds before they petered out to nothing.

I had never been in SW Preston before, and it gave up great birds. I had Worm-eating, Kentucky, Prairie, Cerulean and Golden-winged warblers, as well as my first Red-headed Woodpecker ever in the county. The rolling hills were nice. By mid-afternoon, I was heading home, and spent the evening on plants.

Friday., June 12

I ran my last planned BBS route on Cadell Mountain today. A dozen warbler species was good, but eight Yellow-billed



Red-headed Woodpecker near Arthurdale

Cuckoos were even more welcomed. The morning was pleasant, and the route ended with the perfunctory, yet unexpected

'Road Ends Here' sign for all three roads of an intersection. I backtracked to Rt. 7 and headed down the mountain. A stop at the golf course was fruitful, with Yellow-throated Warbler and Green Heron being the best birds. It was foggy there, but it soon broke.

I back-roaded it over to Rehe WMA, passing a gravid, giant female Snapping Turtle and a White-eyed Vireo. The morning got hot quickly. I did spot a Red-shouldered Hawk flying over the lake with a prey item. On the Rt. 92 side, I could have sworn I saw Purple Martins.

I had visited the Reedsville WVU farm yesterday, hoping for the record Western Meadowlark that David Daniels had found there in March, but I'd come up empty. Today, I had time to kill, so I rested with the windows open in their parking lot, hearing a raven, Savannah Sparrow and more, when the lilt of the meadowlark drifted in on the wind from 1/4 mile away. I got closer to the bird, but only heard it singing for 30 minutes. A life bird for me, and a great one for the area.

I had more time, so I drove around Decker's Creek, and then into the back roads of the area. There was bird song here and there, and I added an Orchard Oriole, plus saw a Luna Moth. The biggest shock was driving by a zoo with kangaroos out in the WV sun. Well, I never...

My evening was to be spent at the farm of John and Mary Jacobs. I saw another Red-headed Woodpecker on the way there, and my third at their bird feeders. They have a wonderful place. After a delicious dinner and a walk around, we sat out front and listened to five whip-poor-wills call. I hated to leave, but I had a 'whip' route planned. However, I found no more, but saw a Red Fox kit.

Sat., June 13

I worked my way down the Cheat River towards Rowlesburg this morning. I had hoped for hours of birding and botanizing, but neither were stellar. I did find a Carolina Chickadee in a neighborhood across the river from Rowlesburg. A promising road up a mountain ended 1/2 mile in with another epic washout, so I



Moth sheet set up at Cranesville boardwalk

worked Salt Lick Road north, finding a raven family. Buck Lick Road was loaded with birds, as well as with Maidenhair Ferns. I ended up resting up until dinner time, after which I started north towards Cranesville Swamp again, working the hemlock marshy areas there. It paid off well with Canada Warblers, Northern Waterthrushes, and *Catharus* thrushes.

My two goals at the swamp after dark were to photograph moths and to call in a saw-whet owl. Well, the best-laid plans. The temps crashed down to 48 F pretty fast, making the mothing slow, and no saw-whets called. I did have beautiful Io moths, plus night-singing Willow Flycatcher, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and a Barred Owl that I exchanged calls with for 15-20 minutes. It was a nice night to be out, nonetheless. On the way home, I surprised a mother Raccoon and four little ones on the road, and I got an adorable video of the bumbling babies.

Sun., June 14

My last full day was cold and drizzly. Temps never got above 54 F. I spent the morning birding the Alpine Lake area, getting four swallow species and my only Osprey of the trip. It soared over for a long time before splashing down to catch a tiny fish. I had 42 species just around the lake. Afterwards, I worked the roads along the state line with Maryland, where a good number of mountain conifer species were heard.

That was pretty much it for the data collection and nature watching of the trip. This afternoon was spent with friends on our first trip to a restaurant since the COVID outbreak. The next morning I returned home with lots of good memories.

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS AROUND THE STATE

I finally found the suspected raven nest near the Washington Works Nature Trails in Wood County south of Parkersburg under the Route 50 Ohio River bridge. One bird has been seen frequently there in the last couple of months.

Today, two birds were flying around the bridge. I stopped on Route 892 directly under the bridge and set up my scope in line with the first support pillar with the blue graffiti. The nest is on the metal catwalk under the middle of the bridge just before the second support pillar.

There are three nestlings visible in the nest--almost fully-grown. In fact, two were exercising their wings, so they may fledge any day now. It's pretty dark under the bridge, and a scope is necessary to see the nest with any detail.

The nest is over land in WV between the railroad tracks and the shoreline.

– Terry Bronson, Marietta, OH, 4/28/20



Long-billed Dowitcher at Beech Fork Marina – photo by David Patick

We had a beautiful morning to hike Seneca Rocks to do our monthly count there. We wished we hadn't done it on a Saturday as there were quite a few people there. However, this looked like the best day weather-wise in awhile. Before we left while putting seed in our feeder, I heard the first Chestnut-sided Warbler of the spring here in Harman.

We had a list of first-of-the-year birds at Seneca Rocks: Spotted Sandpipers, White-eyed Vireos, Yellow-throated Vireo, Yellow-breasted Chat, Orchard Oriole, Ovenbird, Worm-eating Warblers, Cerulean Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, and Yellow-throated Warbler.

I was happy to get five species of vireos. We had fun watching a pair of Worm-eatings Warblers feeding on the ground in the leaves while a pair of Black-and-white Warblers chased in the trees above them.

Our biggest surprise occurred at the entrance to Seneca Rocks as we were leaving. I was about to pull out on Route 33 when I heard the weird song/calls of a Yellow-breasted Chat coming from shrubby habitat across the road. I parked the car. I never could see the chat but also heard White-eyed Vireo and Common Yellowthroat singing in the same area.

Right now I cannot think of how the morning could have been better other than an Elegant Trogon in the ravine beside the rocks.

– Herb Myers, Harman, WV, 5/2/20

And a fine mother's day it has been, so far. It started first thing, with young son looking out my bedroom window saying, "There are so many birds!" And there were: a flock of about 50 cedar waxwings rushing the holly tree, swooping back and forth across the front yard in a feeding frenzy.

Then we went for a 4-mile walk, which included a large portion of Shenandoah river wetlands. By the waterfall flowing from Cavalier Heights there was a chorus of song, which included Common Yellowthroat, Northern Parula, American Redstart, Cape May, Tennessee, Chestnut-sided and Yellow-rumped warblers, Scarlet Tanager, Orchard oriole and Baltimore Oriole.

Returning home up the hill, 3 Cape Mays singing near the old high school. Super morning. Happy Mother's Day!

– Deb Hale, Harpers Ferry/Bolivar, WV, 5/10/20

Sat outside on the deck during Sunday dinner with my dad, brother and sister. We enjoyed our meal while watching about 14-16 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks hang out around the feeder station, including a couple of females with distinct, golden, throat patches. On top of that, a lone Red-headed Woodpecker made frequent visits to the feeder. On top of that, we saw several hawks and a Bald Eagle soar by overhead. Fork in one hand, binoculars in the other.

– Kevin Cade, Elmwood, WV, 5/11/20

This afternoon I counted 12 male and 7 female Rose-breasted Grosbeaks at the feeders -- by far the biggest numbers I've seen here. Recent arrivals include Baltimore Oriole (5/8) and Scarlet Tanager (5/10). I watched a male Ruby-throated Hummingbird making mating displays yesterday, and a male Northern Cardinal has been courtship-feeding his lady love.

Last week a Lincoln's Sparrow paid a brief visit to the porch (5/6).

Our polar vortex during the last few days has been hard on the birds, especially the returners (I imagine the grosbeaks are pining for Colombia and Ecuador). Last Friday night it got down to 20 degrees here, and we had 2.8" of snow on Canaan Mountain. Sadly, it appears that a male Indigo Bunting who had been visiting the feeders every day succumbed to the cold (update: he appeared to have survived). All the other yard denizens seem to have survived, including a plucky Field Sparrow who is holding his or her own with the big guys at the feeders. Fingers are crossed that the House Wrens make it through to warmer weather. I've gone through sunflower seeds faster over the last five days than any time I can remember,



Female Common Merganser and crew – photo by Cynthia Burkhart

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS (con.)

and it's a privilege to be here in a time of need for my guests.

– Casey Rucker, Dry Fork, WV, 5/11/20

I had a great day yesterday. In the morning I headed for southwestern West Virginia to find my first life bird since June 9, 2018. I was met by Laura Ceperley, who was to be my guide. She led me up Crooked Creek Road near Scott Depot in Putnam County for what she said would be an easy breezy find. We stepped out of our cars on a ridge in a housing development - nothing. However, within 5 minutes we saw a dark bird soaring flat winged over the trees some distance away. Then we saw two. They were Mississippi Kites - North American life bird #596!

As we observed them, we heard them call to each other. We observed them carrying nesting material repeatedly into a large tree. They mated. We even got to see one eating a rather large insect on the wing. It dropped part of the insect which may have been the wings as one of their favorite foods is dragonflies which they catch and eat while flying. To cap the experience, one perched on a dead snag above me begging to be photographed. Wow!! Now I have a new favorite bird - until the next one.

– Herb Myers, Harman WV, 5/19/20



Black-bellied Plover at Beech Fork Marina – photo by David Patick



Blue Grosbeak at the USDA Fruit Research Station – photo by N. Wade Snyder

This past weekend was spent mostly around our home working in the rose and perennial gardens, but Saturday evening my wife and I drove over to Mt. Zion Baptist Church to listen for the Chuck-wills-widow. Sure enough, around, 9:25 pm we heard one calling from the large pasture beyond the cemetery. As we were leaving the area, we stopped near the school and heard Whip-poor-wills calling from the woods across the street. Two nice night birds on a truly pleasant evening.

The next morning we enjoyed break-

fast on our deck. As we were getting our deck table ready, I heard a sound that we haven't heard for several years - a Blue Grosbeak singing! Blue Grosbeaks were present in our subdivision for many years, but I haven't heard one for over five years, so this was a pleasant surprise. The I heard a Yellow-breasted Chat, another bird that we haven't heard in our area for a few years because of some habitat changes. Another nice surprise! As we were finally settling in for breakfast, my wife noticed a couple of birds flying overhead. So, I got the binoculars and found that one was a Turkey Vulture, as expected, but the second bird was an Osprey. Another unusual bird for our area. Three nice companions for Father's Day breakfast.

– Gary Rankin, Lavalette, WV, 6/22/20

It has been two weeks since my husband, Bill, and I visited the Merlins at Oglebay Park. We were thrilled to discover the two adults AND TWO FLEDGLINGS!!!! The young were exercising their wings and fluttering from branch to branch and annoying their parents. What a sight to behold; it was majesty on # 17 fairway! We were scoring birdies of a different nature on the golf course.

– Debby Koegler, Wheeling, WV, 7/2/20

NOTES FROM ROSIE

The Bobolink Bonanza was held May 30th at Dickinson's Longhorn Ranch. Because of the virus limitations there were no inside activities, (vendors, food, exhibits, etc.) The first fifty attendees received t-shirts with the Bobolink Bonanza logo. The event was sponsored by Belmont County Soil and Water Conservation, the Captina Watershed Conservancy and Brooks Bird Club.

Members of BBC set up 'scopes in the vast pasture fields to look for birds. There were plenty of Bobolinks, Red-winged Blackbirds, some meadow larks, grassland sparrows and more; a few species less than last year, but a good showing for the day.

The surprise was the many Mallard ducks flying around. There are several small ponds and lakes tucked among the grassy fields and the mallards are nesting there. Walking higher on the hill for a better vantage point, a nest with ten eggs was discovered. We marveled at what long, difficult journeys the baby ducks would have in the tall grass to get to water.

At the end of the event, names were drawn. A nice bird house and other nature-related items were awarded the winners.

•••

On July 25, after a long break, a few BBCers met for a summer outing at Rosie Campbell's. The weather was very hot (90 degrees!). But we met outside in a picnic shelter and had a nice breeze. Everyone brought bag lunches and drinks. Since it was too hot for a bird walk, we just enjoyed the company and conversation of other birders.

Everyone mentioned the large number of Baltimore orioles seen this spring. Most of us agreed we'd never seen so many. Here (at Campbell's farm) we many Orchard Orioles and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, too.) Many of the group had noticed there seem to be fewer butterflies this year and decided it may be because of the late spring frost and heavy rains.

We also talked about the comet, which most of us have managed to see, though several evenings have been too cloudy for it. It was good to be with our bird club friends again.

– **Sightings taken from
WVBird ListServ**

CHANGES IN CONTACT INFORMATION

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CHAPTER HAPPENINGS

All upcoming meetings and events throughout the fall for the Headquarters, Handlan, Mountwood and Bibbee chapters/affiliates are cancelled due to COVID-19 safety measures.

NATURE HAPPENINGS AROUND THE STATE

POTOMAC VALLEY AUDUBON

Sept. 12, Oct. 3, 2020 – Fall Bird Walk at USGS Fish Health Lab, 7:30 am-10:00 am. This event is free and open to the public; however, in order to follow the best practice local, state and national guidelines, registration is required and limited to 8 participants. Please register online and note the health guidelines.

Sept. 14, Oct. 7, 2020 – Hawk Watch at Bolivar Heights, 10:00 am-2:00 pm. This event is free and open to the public; however, in order to follow the best practice local, state and national guidelines, registration is required and limited to 9 participants. Please register online and note the health guidelines.

See the website for more great programs:
www.potomacaudubon.org.

WEST VIRGINIA STATE PARKS

See the website for programs and outings:
www.wvstateparks.com/calendar.html

PLUMMER'S HELL FIRE BEER CHEESE

I thought you might like to have this recipe for The Mailbag. We have been using it for probably 15 years and have found it to be popular. Here's the story of how I obtained it.

When I was the naturalist for Pipestem State Park, I planned field trips for park guests and one of my favorites was a trip to Hanging Rock Tower Migration Observatory on Peters Mountain in Monroe County. BBC member, Oliver Johnson, took me there for the first time in the mid-1970s and I was introduced to members of the Handlan (especially the three Georges- Koch, Flouer and Hurley) Chapter of BBC who were conducting raptor counts for the fall migration.

On one of my trips a couple from the park campground rode with Judy and me. His name was Plummer and I'm sorry to say I can't remember his wife's name. As we were getting ac-

quainted on our drive to the tower, they apologized for the smell of alcohol coming from their Peterson guide. They had had a bottle of wine come open in their camper and soak their field guide. This caused us to start talking about the use of alcohol in cooking and such. Plummer was very proud of his recipe for what he called Plummer's Hellfire Beer Cheese and they pulled out a note card and promptly made a copy of the recipe for us. We have enjoyed and shared it ever since.

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV

1 1/2 lbs. extra sharp or sharp cheddar
3/4 c. mayonnaise
flat beer, to make spread consistency
1 to 2 1/2 tsp. red pepper
1 medium onion
1/2 tsp. dry mustard
1/4 to 3/4 tsp. black pepper
1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
2 tbs. mild honey

Use a food processor to make a smooth spread—I like to leave completed spread out for several hours. The honey and yeast in the beer start to work! Go slow on red pepper—you can always add more the next day. This is set for our taste; you might add a dash of garlic powder.

COVID BIRDING

(continued from Page 4)

I went away for a few weeks at the end of July and returned in early August. Each evening around 10 p.m., I would search the sky over the lake and listen. They must've left I thought. I so wanted to be here to see them off. No. They're still here. The last few nights, one has been sitting closer to the house on the other side of the lake exclaiming the familiar loud juvenile raspy "caw." 10 p.m., sometimes at 11 p.m. I see its silhouette now at the top peak of the pine tree. Only one little guy! Who is not so little anymore. Where are the other two?

I hope this birding story continues next year. Just not the Covid part.
– Johanna Sholder, Pittsburgh, PA

EASTERN SHORE TRIP 2020
NOVEMBER 11th-15th

We will begin this year's trip to the shore much differently than in previous years. It breaks my heart to say there will not be a van leaving from Morgantown. (How on earth am I going to stay awake without listening to lots of chit chat, singing pink Floyd songs, and playing crossword puzzles not to mention the birding and the never ending Cookie, Cookie and do I turn HERE or stay STRAIGHT?) This year you will also be required to bring a mask. You will all be on your own getting to my favorite destination Chincoteague which is where we will start our avian observations. Your room will be awaiting you when you arrive any time after 3pm Wednesday. Thursday and Friday mornings' Continental Breakfast is included but you must wear a mask to pick up. You may eat in the limited seating dining facility or pick up and take to your room or eat on the observation deck and watch birds. As usual dinner will be on your own. Another change is lunch. We can provide lunch for you at your request or if you feel more comfortable you may choose to bring your own. As difficult as it may be, physical distance will be honored during all times. Everyone has different comfortable ranges and we will give our best college try to honor all of those. Friday morning we will check out of our hotel and head north eventually ending in Rehoboth Beach at our ocean front hotel. Sunday morning we will go over the bird list, say our good-byes and drive safely home remembering all the fun we have had with each other.

Price includes Wed., Thurs., Fri., and Sat. night's lodging (2 per room); Thurs., Fri., Sat., and Sun. Morning Breakfast; Lunch can be provided if you request one in advance at the additional cost. A full itinerary will be sent to everyone who signs up.

DEADLINE FOR RESERVATIONS – OCTOBER 25, 2020

Make checks payable to Cindy Slater and send along with your reservation to:

**2310 Cowling Road
Scottdale, PA 15683**

=====please cut here and return=====

NAME(S) _____

ADDRESS _____

TEL. NO. _____ Name of person sharing room _____

(2 people per room. I will not be assigning roommates this year; you will need to let me know if you choose to have a roommate and who that person will be, otherwise a single room supplement rate may apply.)

Are you interested in lunch or will you be bringing your own? _____

Per Person Rate with roommate - \$400.00 \$ _____

Per Person Rate with No Roommate - \$500.00 \$ _____

Per Person Lunches add \$75.00 \$ _____

TOTAL \$ _____



...

Park your raven here...

– A funny sign of the times that was sent in from Cindy Ellis, coming soon to a neighborhood near you!

WHAT'S INSIDE

Editor's Message	1
Message From Our President, Thank You, Jerry Devaul	1
Don Pattison Passes	2
How Has COVID-19 Affected Your Birding?	3-4, 10
Preston Co. '20, or What I Did On My Summer Vacation.....	5-7
Interesting Sightings Around The State.....	8-9
Notes From Rosie.....	9
Changes In Contact Information.....	10
Chapter Happenings/Nature Happenings.....	10
Plummer's Hell Fire Beer Cheese.....	10
2020 Eastern Shore Trip Form	11