



# THE MAIL BAG

A PUBLICATION OF THE BROOKS BIRD CLUB OF WEST VIRGINIA  
P.O. BOX 4077 • WHEELING, WEST VIRGINIA 26003

VOL. 77, ISSUE 4

OCTOBER – NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 2020 RYAN TOMAZIN - EDITOR

## Editor's Note

What to write, during times like these? So many divisions, too many distractions. One constant should be our natural world, and I believe should be above most everything. The intricacies of the pieces, large and small, continue to try to teach us lessons, whether they're lessons in beauty or in the savage powers of nature and how it works. Will humanity as a whole ever understand that, or will it keep attempting to believe a myth that it stands apart from the natural order of things?

Probably because I long ago studied epidemiology in college, I have been very in-tune with the numbers of this year's catastrophe, and how numbers can't be ignored, whether we believe in them or not. When the question of how much loss of life we are to endure comes up, 'low' percentages are mentioned. One terrible bit of math in my mind right now reads like this: if 2% of WV's state and federal lands were destroyed, it would amount to Blackwater Falls State Park, Canaan Valley State Park and Refuge, and nearly all of Dolly Sods perishing. How much loss must we endure before we understand the simple sacrifices that are asked of us, both for our collective health and for our world? When in doubt, follow nature!

Many, many members contributed words, photographs and time to make this a special issue for all. Mrs. Ed. and I sincerely wish everyone a meaningful and safe holiday season, one where one year's sacrifices might lead to a new year of better memories. And hopefully, many of us can do Christmas Bird Counts for fun and for the peace of communing with the amazing network we live in!

## MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Looking for some last minute Christmas gifts? Need a great idea to fill a Christmas stocking that your favorite nature pal will appreciate? Buy your friends a Brooks Bird Club membership. It's the perfect solution to any last minute quandary you might be having for those hard-to-buy-for folks on your list. Now that all of your shopping dilemmas are over you can relax and enjoy the holidays. Maybe complete a feeder watch, do a Christmas count, or just take a walk in the Great Outdoors.

On another note, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to those who came along on the Eastern Shore trip this year. In spite of a couple soggy days, eighty-five species of birds was nice to find while spending some much needed time with friends.

I am also curious to hear from you. I was thinking, and I realize that can be a dangerous thing, but never the less toiling with the possibility of having the board meeting in March via Zoom. Then some time getting together for a 'bring your own lunch' social distance style membership meeting. Hopefully we will be able to have Foray and that the rest of the year will work itself out. You can email me your thoughts if you wish at [mountaingirl127@gmail.com](mailto:mountaingirl127@gmail.com), or call me if that is easier.

I hope to see you all soon. Don't forget to keep staying safe, mask up, and I hope you are able to enjoy the holidays.

– *Your President, Cindy Slater*

## TREE PLANTED AT OGLEBAY PARK FOR CARL SLATER



Last spring it was decided that the local BBC Wheeling chapter would plant a tree in honor of our friend, long-time member Carl Slater, who passed away in December 2019. Carl had been a

member for over 60 years, and was deeply involved in the club. He was a past President and was the administrator of the BBC's main organization, a position he held for many years.

A decision was made that we would get a Black Gum Tree, *Nyssa sylvatica*. It is the longest-living, non-clonal flowering plant in eastern North America, capable of obtaining ages of over 650 years. Black Gum is beloved by many birds and mammals. It's also used by bees; another common name is Tupelo (tupelo honey). In autumn the leaves turn bright scarlet, or yellow and scarlet.

I located a large Black Gum specimen this fall on a tree farm, and they dug, balled and delivered it a couple weeks back to the Schrader Environmental Education Center (SEEC). I planted the tree on November 28th behind the SEEC near the canopy walkway before the snow came.

– **Larry Helgerman**  
Headquarters Chapter President

# 2020-2021 WEST VIRGINIA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

## Athens/Princeton

Sunday, December 27, 2020  
Ron Canterbury - 513-556-9570  
roncanterbury@aol.com (best)

## Buffalo Creek - Washington Co., PA/ Ohio & Brooke Co., WV

Sunday, December 20, 2020  
Larry Helgerman - 412-508-0321

## Canaan/Tucker Co.

Sunday, December 20, 2020  
Casey Rucker - 304-866-4004  
autoblock@frontiernet.net

## Charles Town

Monday, December 14, 2020  
Bob Dean - 304-671-4995  
bobdean52@gmail.com

## Charleston

Saturday, December 19, 2020  
Doren Burrell - 304-553-8592  
g.immer@doren.net

## Elkins Area

Monday, January 4, 2021  
Rich Bailey - 703-307-1790

## Franklin/Pendleton County

Friday, December 18, 2020  
Fred Atwood - 703-242-1675  
fredatwood@yahoo.com

## Hampshire County

Saturday, January 2, 2021  
No contact information

## Huntington

Sunday, January 3, 2021  
David Patick - 304-633-4450

## Inwood

Sunday, January 3, 2021  
Bob Dean - 304-671-4995  
bobdean52@gmail.com

## Lewisburg

Saturday, January 2, 2021  
Larry Davis  
Benjamin Handley  
304-646-0602  
ben@potteryalley.com

## McDowell County

Wednesday, December 23, 2020  
Allen Waldron - 304-573-3247  
awaldron@suddenlink.net

## Moorefield

Monday, December 21, 2020  
Kyle Rambo - 301-757-0005  
Darrell Good

## Morgantown

Saturday, December 19, 2020  
LeJay Graffious - 304-379-7505  
lejajgraffious@gmail.com

## Oak Hill

Sunday, January 3, 2021  
Hilary Jones  
Hjones1336@yahoo.com

## Ona

Sunday, December 20, 2020  
David Patick  
304-633-4450

## Parkersburg/Wood Co.

Saturday, January 2, 2021  
Jeanette Esker  
304-863-8765

## Pipestem Area

Saturday, December 19, 2020  
Jim Phillips - 304-466-1275  
jimandjudyphillips@gmail.com

## Pocahontas County

Saturday, December 19, 2020  
Rich Bailey - 703-307-1790

## Point Pleasant

Sunday, December 27, 2020  
Josh Holland - jhollandua@gmail.com

## Raleigh County

Sunday, December 20, 2020  
Allen Waldron - 304-573-3247  
awaldron@suddenlink.net

## Wheeling

Wednesday, December 16, 2020  
Molly Check - 304-242-6855  
mcheck@oionline.com

## 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:

Ryan Tomazin  
348 Station Street, Apt. 7  
Bridgeville, PA 15017  
412-220-9726  
wwwarblers@hotmail.com



## 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

## YEAR-END GREETINGS FROM YOUR BROOKS BIRD CLUB FRIENDS!

I have enjoyed birding closer to home due to the pandemic. I had to cancel bird trips to California and Hawaii. I was able to get my 596th North American life bird during the pandemic in West Virginia. It was the Mississippi Kite near Scott Depot.

I have enjoyed monthly bird counts at Seneca Rocks. I am up to 89 species there. May was the top month with 56 species. At our place in Keezletown, Virginia, we have been pleased to enjoy a female Rufous Hummingbird for 13 days beginning October 30th. We wonder if it will still be there when we return to VA from WV next week.

I am seeing more migrants going through our WV and VA places since we are spending more time at home due to the pandemic and Sarah's severe ankle fracture. All has not been lost as we spend more time being fascinated by our local birds' behaviors and antics.

– Herb & Sarah Myers, Harman, WV

Between the virus and my advancing age, my birding has been limited. Enjoyed the hummers all summer, now checking my neighbor's feeders. Getting the usuals, also Downy and Hairy woodpeckers, plus House Finches. I hear they're getting Evening Grosbeaks at Oglebay, but I haven't gotten them here.

– Bob Rine, Wheeling, WV

On October 27, the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia admitted its 500th rehabilitation patient of 2020 -- a Nelson's Sparrow! This is the first Nelson's Sparrow admitted to the ACCA, and I think it's the first Nelson's Sparrow that I have ever seen (of course, I don't "count" rehab patients on my life list, alas). The sparrow had spinal trauma and difficulty standing after striking a window in Westover, WV, near the Morgantown Mall. We weren't sure he would recover from the trauma, but after just a few days of supportive care (and a lot of mealworms!) the Nelson's Sparrow made a full recovery. We released him on November 3, and we wish him the best of luck on his journey, wherever it takes him.

– Katie Fallon, Morgantown, WV

I'm staying close to home but haven't lost by birding ears. When I went to the bee lab at the Patuxent Wildlife Refuge I thought I heard a raven and then saw it on an electrical tower. When I mentioned it to Sam Droege, he said they were being seen out there.

I've seen several White-throats and last week I drove into McKee-Beeshers WMA and saw a flock of Rusty Blackbirds in a wooded swamp. I so miss seeing and talking to my fellow BBC'ers and look forward to our getting together again. I will miss the Hardy County CBC this year, only the second one I've missed since I started it. I wish them well out there.

Take care, fellow birders and botanists, and stay safe.

– Jane Whitaker, Washington, D.C.

Not that I have been super active in this club since joining but this year has been challenging outright. Didn't get a chance to do much birdwatching but did discover an American Chestnut behind my house this autumn. Only the second AC I have ever seen in my life. That was a wonderful highlight of the year. My first AC was summer camp 1978 in NE Ohio. I hope all were and are still staying safe.

– Valerie LaPolla, Lewisburg, WV

John and I are doing fine, teaching our small quiet rescue dog to be a good birder as we take her to walk new trails (our COVID defense) around here. Irondequoit Creek goes through a lot of parks, including our Burroughs Audubon Sanctuary (dog cannot go there) and it's fun to follow it. No California trip to see grandsons and shore birds, but we were thrilled to have two or three beautiful Fox Sparrows in our yard last spring. I've learned to keep a pile of leaves by the back door to welcome White-throats and a

family of juncos. We know a few folks who have survived COVID, thankfully. We LOVE reading Mailbag, vicariously enjoying all your sightings. All best to Brooks people.

– Mary and John Gordon, Fairport, NY

I go birding every day to keep me sane.

– Diane Holsinger, Timberville, VA

2020 has limited my birding travels from where I wanted. No new states but I was able to add seven counties in West Virginia. The only life bird this year was a Black Tern observed at the Marmet Locks. Hope I get a few more this year but that's okay, I'll take that one!

– Rick Gregg, Belle, WV

Beth and Jim are doing well in Pocahontas County. We are feeding the birds, wearing masks when leaving the property, restricting our social life and being thankful with what we have. Take care and be safe!

– Beth and Jim Bullard, Marlinton, WV

I'm a relatively new member and new to the West Virginia area. I live in Chesapeake, OH, just across the river from Huntington WV. My wife and I moved here from Portland, Maine. Weather's a bit different here though; the most difficult thing to get use to is the darkness in the morning. In Maine, the sun is up by 6 AM, even in the winter. In the summer it's up by 5 AM. Not nearly as many seabirds here. We were surprised to see so many Rose-breasted Grosbeaks come to our feeders in the spring. Very nice. We discovered the Green Bottom Wildlife Management Area this past spring. A great place. Looking forward to discovering other birding spots!

– Dan Brazeau, Chesapeake, OH

Coping with COVID – Birding with buddies is out--so--options? I do breakfast birding. Bounce out of bed, feed the birds, settle into my fluffy chair and enjoy the seasonal show of birds from Rose-breasted Grosbeaks to winter juncos. Other options for us: boat birding.

*(continued on Page 4)*

*(continued from Page 3)*

We keep an old boat--we are old too--on Lake Erie. Our boat is socially-distanced so we can enjoy the seasonal show from spring waterfowl to late summer purple martins. Even cormorants flying across a scarlet lake sunset makes me forget COVID!

For breaks from birding I play old time musical instruments with friends on internet's Zoom. Now let's be honest, I don't play very well. But the music reminds me that sometime BBCers will be together again enjoying our really musical birds. Stay safe--keep birding!

– Norma Jean Venable, Morgantown, WV

Hello All, I was looking forward to going to Foray this year and any other BBC activity that I could find the time for but as we all know the coronavirus put a damper on that. My mom passed away in February so I was really looking forward to seeing you all again. I also volunteer at the Marmet Center (where my mom was at) but the coronavirus put a hold on that as well. I moved into a cabin in Pinch, WV and I have seen some really great birds at my house. I really hope that everyone is doing well and I can't wait to see you all again. Happy birding!

– Tina Long, Elkview, WV

After a trip to Sax Zim Bog, MN, in January, we did our annual trek to Cape May in March. While there, COVID-19 hit, causing the shut-down of our motel as well as most area restaurants. We headed home after only two days in NJ. Roger and I have been doing a lot of local birding. Our local group has canceled all outings and meetings, but we have been birding our yard, hiking local trails, birding Yellow Creek State Park, and feeding the chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches in the hand at Blue Spruce Co. Park. We normally take a three-week trip out West, but the farthest we've gone was a one-day trip to see the Brown Booby at Nimisila, OH. Six Evening Grosbeaks in our side yard on Nov. 1 were a one-day wonder; however, we've been enjoying the Pine Siskins and Red-breasted Nuthatches at our feeders on a regular basis.

– Marg & Roger Higbee, Indiana, PA

Hi all, from Barbara and Greg. Our plans for this year, like everyone's, went away with the pandemic and washed down by the political morass. Our time is divided into two parts. One is dominated by MSNBC, CNN and *The Washington Post*. *The Post* is delivered between 5 and 6 every morning. We spend about 2 hours drinking coffee and reading the paper before we get dressed. The rest of our day is spent reading, watching TV and I have worked at least 20 jigsaw puzzles. And every day has cocktail hour.

We had planned to spend most of the year traveling and visit friends and family. Some of them are moving. Barbara's sister is moving from Dallas to Oregon, George Lippert moved to Mexico, and Jay Buckelew is going to Colorado. But it looks like we will be here for the duration.

– Greg Eddy & Barbara Stocker, Fairfax, VA

During the stay at home order back in the spring, we did only necessary grocery store runs. Judy usually did the shopping and I would wait in the car. Then, after the order was lifted we took turns doing the shopping and sitting in the car. I started doing a parking lot bird list and then when I went in the store, Judy did the list. As expected, every parking lot had American Crows, European Starlings and House Sparrows and some also had Rock Pigeons, but there were a few surprises and treats.

The Hinton Kroger is across the road from New River. In addition to the Canada Geese and Mallards, we sometimes saw Double-crested Cormorants, Common Mergansers and herons and egrets. We could usually count on a Bald Eagle or an Osprey. The migration of Tree Swallows and Chimney Swifts (numbering hundreds of birds) was impressive.

The Grant's Super Market in Princeton has a small stream running along the parking lot. Green Herons, Belted Kingfishers and Barn Swallows were always entertaining but an extra treat was an adult Bald Eagle and adult Red-headed Woodpecker.

The Princeton Kroger is near a Black Vulture hangout, but the exciting thing there was a pair of Common Ravens nesting in a billboard. We saw them carrying in nest material, defending against American Crows and Red-tailed Hawks, carrying in food and eventually what appeared to be two fledglings.

Finally, in the fall, we decided to watch for migrating raptors on East River Mountain near Bluefield, WV. The location is good because it is near where we have our doctor's appointments, cheap gas in Virginia (sometimes sixty cents cheaper than the WV side) and a Rural King where we purchase bird seed and suet. During our most recent visit there, I noticed a steady stream of American Crows passing over the parking lot heading west. I had the clicker that we use during the Broad-winged Hawk migration peak and started clicking. By the time Judy returned to the car I had tallied 428 birds!

I have always told folks that if you are interested in nature, you will never be bored. Happy Holidays to the BBC!

– Jim and Judy Phillips, Pipestem, WV

Hi all,

I miss everyone, it's been so long! We've spent most of the year in quarantine. My sons and I have been doing a bit of bird watching in our backyard and woods, but in all honesty birding has taken a backseat lately as I have been too busy raising three young ones. Solomon is 5, Liam is 3 and Ira is 18 months. All boys!!! They are a handful but also a joy. And I am proud to say that they all are interested in birds and many other wonders of the natural world.

The youngest is finally getting old enough that travel will soon become easier (no stopping every two hours to nurse, change a diaper, etc...) so when this awful mess of a virus finally backs off, we are hoping to make some appearances at club events. Sending love to all.

– Mariah Fowler and Ernie, and Solomon, Liam and Ira, Worthington, WV

Jan and I found ourselves in an unusual situation this year -- most of our programs, workshops and field trips were cancelled so we were at home during the spring mi-

gration, something that hasn't happened for a very long time. We added several new species to our property list. Currently, we are banding Northern Saw-whet Owls most nights and occasionally banding local and migratory songbirds during the day -- 100 Pine Siskins one day. We are having a great time, even in these troubling times.

– Bill Beatty and Jan Runyan, Wellsburg, WV

We've been spending our birding time on a few local patches around Pittsburgh's East End, most of all Schenley but also Duck Hollow, Frick Park, and a couple other sites that few other people bird: Southside Riverfront Park and Calvary Cemetery, where I've been trying to add birds to their eBird list. I've really enjoyed local birding during the pandemic, trying to fill in gaps on my personal lists for these sites while staying close to home. My most exciting bird endeavor lately was on the same day adding Horned Lark and American Tree Sparrow to not just my personal list for Schenley, but for the eBird site list. Because of the pandemic, I won't be visiting my family for Christmas, but I look forward to participating in the Pittsburgh CBC and putting up some numbers!

– Frank and Adrienne Izaguirre, Pittsburgh, PA

Gosh, what a year it has been. 2020 has been a getting back to nature year for me and re-learning things I had forgotten and spending time in my favorite places and discovering some new favorite location spots. I originally set a goal for myself last year to go camping 50 times. That turned out to be a pretty unrealistic goal. So, I shortened it but managed to go camping in all of my spare time. I even shared some camping time with friends both in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, at a social distance of course. I spent a good bit of the early summer kayaking and that is a splendid way to observe birds and other nature scenes. Fall and winter are my most favorite seasons of the year.

It is a smidgen of a letdown to see winter arrive this year because I cannot just jump in the car and go camping whenever I like. Or can I? Curious, has anyone ever snow camped? Hmm, something to think about. I am just not sure I have it in me for that cold adventure. For now, I will be perfectly content catching up on some reading, knitting, and maybe I can even snow shoe or x-country ski a time or two.

– Cindy Slater

Fred and I have mostly stayed close to home enjoying our feeder birds. We had a family of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in our yard for the first time. Other species surprised us as well. In October we spent a few days in Davis, WV. We were missing Dolly Sods since the bird banding station never opened this year. We have spent several weeks there during banding season for several decades; I hadn't realized how much I missed being there until we visited the station site during our trip. Sure hope we can be open next year.

We ventured out again in November and enjoyed a very different Eastern Shore trip. A recap of that trip can be found elsewhere in this issue. Keep safe everyone. We miss you and hope the club can resume at least some activities next year.

– Carol and Fred McCullough, Pittsburgh, PA

Hi, all! I've had some great birds at my feeders this year. In early to mid May, I had some lovely Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. In June, when kayaking on North Bend Lake, I saw some beautiful Red-headed Woodpeckers. In early November, I had some Pine Siskins and Purple Finches stop by briefly and more recently have had a Red-breasted Nuthatch at my feeder. Sure hope it sticks around. Now, I'm hoping for some Evening Grosbeaks! Miss seeing my BBC friends! Stay well, everyone!

– Sally Egan, Bridgeport, WV

As I type this, my husband and I are ending our quarantines from positive COVID tests. We were some of the lucky ones with few and mild symptoms.

In the early days of the pandemic, we took many long rides in the surrounding counties in WV and OH. Some places we'd never seen others not for a long time. We

realized even more what beautiful scenery we have right here are home. On all our rides we were amazed by the beauty of the spring blooming trees.

We had to cancel a trip to Arizona, so we took two trips to Blackwater Falls and Canaan, where we rented a cabin and kept to ourselves. We went down in July – when we missed my 75th year at a cottage on Lake Erie with my family. In October we went back and made an ill-advised trek to Dolly Sods – much too crowded. But we did enjoy the trail up to the Bell Knob Lookout Tower – no one else was up there. We were a little early for much color but it still is lovely.

In June when we should have been at Mountain Camp, Rebecca Wertime and I went to Canaan Valley. We drove to Spruce Knob and were rewarded with many wildflowers, the best being Dwarf Cornell and Yellow Clintonia. From the deck of our cabin in The Pines we heard Hermit Thrush, Red-breasted Nuthatch, robin, cardinal, Carolina Wren, Blue-headed Vireo and towhee. In October we took a long planned trip to Watoga State Park. While we were there we visited Beartown State Park and took the amazing boardwalk. We also stopped at Droop Mountain Battlefield State Park and took a trail and learned more about the battle. We enjoyed staying in one of the CCC cabins. They have added heat and AC but it didn't touch the very chilly bedrooms!! We enjoyed a couple nice campfires and the feeling just being away.

– Mary Edith Sambuco, Martins Ferry, OH

Warbler watching season is long past us, and I have been trying to hone my water fowl watching skills. It's a whole different ball game! I am in need of a two-way radio, a scope and a different vehicle! Some of my birding buddies and I caravan up and down the Ohio river searching for whatever has migrated down our way. It really hasn't gotten cold enough up north to move that many ducks down here. However, I sure have enjoyed seeing other wildlife including hawks, deer, beaver and one mink that seems to appear with regularity at the wetland just above the Belleview locks and dam.

*(continued on Page 6)*

*(continued from Page 5)*

I hope everyone is hanging in there, and I can't wait to get together and share birding stories in person when all this is over.  
– Mary Murin, Vienna, WV

Thinking back through the past several months this year I visualize the map the CDC had us follow which showed the curve we were to flatten. Those ups and downs illustrated my daily life with my hodge, podge various hobbies. In the early spring my son made a square foot garden for me located close to my back door. This was much easier to maintain but still large enough to preserve some vegetables for the winter months.

In the meantime, the Eastern Phoebe couple decided to make their home for their coming babies under the awning which is over the large living room window. This gave me a “bird’s eye view” through the process. Happy to report they successfully produced four youngsters. They all came back later in the summer, the family scattered in the backyard, like a reunion. The awning over the back porch hosted a pair of Carolina Wren’s. They would scold me every time I used the door to go off the porch. They also raised a family, but I couldn’t see how many they had.

Generally, a good migration of warblers came through my 2 1/2 acres along with a hawk here and there; the Red-shouldered I will call my resident throughout the year.

As the curve was flattening in Ohio, my family tolerated me cautiously going to buy my own groceries....if I went early in morning on the specified shopping day for “seniors”. As I got braver, I would sneak out on Wednesday’s to meet my book club friends for lunch. Unfortunately, I was just informed that my shopping days are over as the curve went straight up the mountain. Oh well, “tomorrow is another day”.

– Juanita Slater, Bellaire, OH

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, Caroli-

na 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 Eastern 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-throated Hummingbirds. From mid-July on, I had very few hummers.

– Mindy & Allen Waldron, Surveyor, WV

My COVID-19 birding story:

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 sound 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 weeks I watch 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’.

I went away for a few weeks at the end of July and returned early August. Each evening around 10 PM, 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 PM, sometimes 11 PM, 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

I introduce myself as tall, slightly overweight, and not too bright...anyway, I had open heart surgery April of this year, darn near died twice, but Jesus saved me. Wonderful wife, Joan, was a great nurse. Very sorry about Carl. Bill and Jan’s articles helped me during months of recovery!!! Will be at outings in 2021.

– Dave Schroeder, Dover, OH

We spent our shutdown days watching the backyard and continue to do so. As seemed to be the case with everyone, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks occupied a great deal of time. Last year we recorded two sightings in one day, likely the same bird. This year the first one was heard on 4-26 and seen in our yard on 4-27. As they increased, we added another tray feeder. The highest number we counted at once was 13. After a few high-number days, the visits decreased daily. We saw the last one in our yard on 5-16 and heard one on 5-17.

Other highlights were a Blackpoll Warbler in one of our oaks, a Red-headed Woodpecker (a first for our yard—in the trees then at the feeder), and the highlight of the summer—a young, male Pileated Woodpecker that had been coming with its female parent and showed up alone. The suet feeder was empty so

I (MK) grabbed a cake and inched my way out, expecting him to fly. He didn't and when I was about six feet from him, he saw the suet, stretched his neck, and raised his crest. I was wondering how sharp those toenails would be when he flew to the tray feeder, hanging clumsily upside down and swinging wildly. When his head went out of sight, I stepped closer and extended the suet cake. When he came back around, he began to eat and continued for about 4 to 5 minutes before flying away.

We managed to sneak in a porch visit with my (M's) dad in June, but he had little time to visit. He was heading out to bale hay—at 97. Camping trips to Greenbrier and Pendleton Counties coupled with oodles of projects at home, walks around the neighborhood, gardening, lots of reading, a bit of TV, and the occasional heavy sigh have kept us occupied. That and cutting, splitting, and stacking the wood from several trees. Now for some visits to the chiropractor. —Marjorie Keatley and John Northeimer, Charleston, WV

## CORONAVIRUS, BIRDING, AND YOU

A long-time British birding friend and his wife were traveling and birding in Argentina when the coronavirus closed the country March 17. My friend Steve, realizing that the unexpected extension of their visit could be prolonged, created the World Garden Birdwatch, a coordinated online bird count with 57 of his friends and contacts on six continents. Antarctica was the only continent not represented.

The instructions were simple: record all species in your garden (British for “yard” in America) or visible from your garden during quarantine which would then be collated by Steve. There were two participating American birders, one in California and the other in West Virginia, me.

The coronavirus quarantine in Argentina ended in mid-June. The birding results were unexpected. A total of 847 species was tallied by all observers, or approaching nine percent of the world's re-

corded full bird species of approximately 10,000. I contributed 43 species from our home in Morgantown, an unexpected total that was augmented by Spring migration. The world list was truly eclectic. Our Northern Cardinal and Carolina Chickadee joined Picazuno Pigeon and exotic Scaly-throated Earthcreeper amidst a colorful collection of Old World and New World birds, for example.

Who would have predicted that without straying too far from the comfort of homes worldwide that so many species could be observed? It was a surprise to many, including the organizer. The experience was a testament to the Earth's avian biodiversity. It also verified that anyone who is interested in the natural world in general and birds in particular could make a contribution to the science of avian distribution via an online platform.

Birding and natural history study easily lends itself to solo participation. The activity is appropriate especially to the outdoor-oriented participant when group participation is neither necessary nor advisable. When birding in a small group during these COVID pandemic times, remember to social distance appropriately, wear an effective mask, do not handle others' binoculars, telescopes or books, document your observations, and have fun.

—Larry Schwab, Morgantown, WV



## CHINCOTEAGUE, REHOBOTH BEACH, AND THE SECRET SERVICE

*(A story of the 2020 Eastern Shore Trip)*

Arriving through the wilds of West and regular Virginia, we celebrated Don's 77th Birthday at (of all places) Don's Seafood Restaurant, Chincoteague. The seafood medley was fantastic, as was the eleven-layer chocolate cake. Walking back to the Island Motor Inn in the rain,

we surprised a Great Blue Heron in the small inlet marsh by the sidewalk.

Thursday morning found the group treating themselves to the usual breakfast fare with hot selections as well as the usual cereal, etc. Everyone left in their own vehicle and convoyed to the school grounds beach area and the Firemen's parking arena and then to the marina area. We watched several sparrows and found a Seaside Sparrow among them. Since it was still raining, we decided to motor back to the Island Motor Inn Café for a warm and dry place to eat our lunches. Motoring in the afternoon, we spotted the Assateague Island Ponies and a few other avian finds. We all ate at the spacious AJ's on the Creek – socially distanced at different tables in the center of the restaurant. For some it was their first dining out experience since COVID-19 lockdowns in March.

Friday was less rainy so after breakfast again at the café we tried the Firemen's parking area and watched the oystercatchers out on the breakwaters. After several U-turns we found White Ibis and a Tri-colored Heron. George's Island Landing, the Public Landing, and in the afternoon later the Wildlife Loop netted the Surf Scoter, Forster's Tern, and both kinds of loons.

Moving on toward Ocean City, we tried Silver Lake in the afternoon and not much was happening. The Indian River Inlet was aflutter with Common Eider, Greater Cormorant, Ruddy Turnstone and pipers, White-winged and Black scoters, along with Royal Terns and Sanderlings. By the way, the Ocean City Bridge is a spectacular architectural engineering marvel!

After finding our ocean view rooms at the Atlantic Sands Hotel, we walked to Fins Fish House & Raw Bar and indulged (or over). Saturday morning, we were overjoyed at the sunrise on the Atlantic with dolphins cavorting just offshore. After breakfast in the Dolphin Room, we went back to Silver Lake and parked long enough to spot several shore birds. Then we motored on to Cape Henlopen State Park. While we

*(continued on Page 9)*

## INTERESTING SIGHTINGS AROUND THE STATE

*The Great Blue Heron (white form) seems to like the Marmet Locks. (First reported on July 22). He didn't seem to mind a fisherman on the walkway below the AEP turbine outlet on the Marmet side.*

– Rick Gregg, Kanawha County, WV, 8/21/20

*When a Red-headed Woodpecker showed up at our feeder in early June this year, we were thrilled. But that soon turned to consternation when most of the local birds, especially the Tree Swallows, went after it mercilessly. However, after just a couple days, everyone settled down and the woodpecker could feed unmolested. We saw it almost daily at the sunflower feeder until it switched its diet and began taking blobs of suet at least 500 meters across the neighbors pasture to an oak woodlot. They have nested in that area twice in the last 13 years but we have never had them at our feeder or near the house.*

*For about 2 weeks now, 2 fledged young and 1 adult Red-head have been at the suet daily. And now an adult is again carrying suet across the field to a different area, presumably feeding a second brood in the nest.*

*We only put out the suet in the afternoons so hopefully they will get a more balanced diet than the suet.*

– Donna Mitchell, Barbour County, WV, 8/23/20

*Yesterday, I did my monthly bird count at Seneca Rocks. Most of the birds seemed to be along the river. At one place near what we call the swimming hole, there was a pool of water in the woods. Many birds came to actively bath including multiple Cedar Waxwings at the same time. Other birds that came to bathe included a Wood Thrush, Scarlet Tanager, Worm-eating Warbler and a Magnolia Warbler. The little ones had to wait until the larger ones were finished. I could have been entertained there for a long time.*

– Herb Myers, Harman, WV, 9/17/20

*On September 19th several friends met up on East River Mountain with Jim and Judy Phillips to look for migrating hawks. They had an impressive list. I assume everyone had a great time. They watched from 9:45 to 1:45 PM.*

*The raptors counted included Black Vulture (2), Turkey Vulture (7), Osprey (1), Sharp-shinned Hawk (2), Cooper's Hawk (8), Bald Eagle (15) (10 adults, 5 immatures), Broad-winged Hawk (821), and Red-tailed Hawk (2).*

– Mindy Waldron, Surveyor, WV, 9/30/20

*The Pine Siskins are still present along Wiltshire Road in Jefferson County, feeding on overgrown Arborvitae trees exploding with cones. A conservative estimate of 125 were seen today. Also, a Northern Harrier flew across Wiltshire Road on its way to cruise over the undeveloped lots in the Burr Industrial Park. The sky was so blue, and a mature Bald Eagle graced the sky, flashing its white head and tail against the blue background. Common Ravens "wonked" their presence as well. It was a beautiful day to get some fresh air, see the changing leaves and celebrate the Big Birding Day 2020. When we find something good to celebrate in 2020, we need to seize the day!*

– BIRDMOM, Jefferson County, WV, 10/18/20

*Yesterday, as we travelled from Princeton to Pipestem, we noticed several groups of vultures, (mainly Turkey Vultures) flying about. Today, on our way to the east River Mt. Overlook to look for migrating raptors, I decided to use the clicker that was a gift from our hawk watching friend Sharyn (during broad-wing season) and get a count.*

*On the way to Bluefield from Pipestem - we had 99 Turkey Vultures, 6 Black Vultures and a Peregrine Falcon (at Princeton). Coming home from the overlook, we encountered 98 Turkey Vultures, 16 Black Vultures, 1 Red-tailed Hawk, 1 immature Bald Eagle and 1 adult Golden Eagle. Also had a Cooper's Hawk in our yard this morning. What a day!*

– Jim & Judy Phillips, Pipestem, WV, 10/30/20

*My wife, Debbie, was working at the Oglebay Nature Center, aka Schrader Environmental Education Center, today and saw an Evening Grosbeak at the feeders. Later, two more were spotted by visitors. Naturally, when I arrived they were gone.*

– Paul McKay, Ohio County, WV, 10/31/20

*Yesterday morning, Janet Keating, Mike Griffith and I took our three-car caravan in search of the two Greater White-fronted Geese reported at Krodel Park in Pt. Pleasant by Josh Holland earlier in the week. Unfortunately, only Canada Geese were present at Krodel Park. So, we headed for Rt. 817 to check the agricultural fields. Sure enough, we soon found two Greater White-fronted Geese mixed in with about 50 Canada Geese. Checking the fields, we also found two Peregrine Falcons, American Pipits and Horned Larks.*



*Sanderling at Harris Riverfront Park in Huntington, WV – photo by David Patick*



*Trumpeter & Tundra Swans, Pleasant Creek WMA – photo by Tammy Anderson*

## INTERESTING SIGHTINGS (con.)

Returning to Rt. 2 and heading back toward Huntington, we observed two Common Ravens just down river from Pt. Pleasant, which was only slightly surprising. Common Raven sightings are becoming more common along Rt. 2, and it is worth checking those "crows" a little closer if you are birding between Green Bottom WMA and Pt. Pleasant.

The morning's birding also led to a three falcon day. We saw several American Kestrels, the two Peregrines in a field (on the ground) along Rt. 817, and a Merlin near Shady Waters Campground off Rt. 2. So, a nice morning to be out and good birds!

– Gary Rankin, Lavalette, WV, 11/8/20

Looking out my kitchen window this morning, I was surprised to see two Evening Grosbeaks at my sunflower feeder. To get a better look, I went out into the backyard and found that the two grosbeaks had flown to a nearby Tulip Poplar tree, where four more Evening Grosbeaks were eating the poplar seeds. As I watched the grosbeaks, a small flock of about 12 Pine Siskins flew into the thistle feeder for breakfast. Although we had up to 100 Pine Siskins at our feeders a few weeks ago, I hadn't seen a siskin at the feeders for well over a week. A Dark-eyed Junco soon flew in below the feeders and began to feed on the ground as well. A nice way to start the day!

– Gary Rankin, Lavalette, WV, 11/13/20



Evening Grosbeaks seen daily at Cairo feeders –  
photo by Cindy Burkhart

### – Sightings taken from WV Bird List Serv



Great White Heron – photo by Rick Gregg



Lifer Evening Grosbeak at Bruceton Mills  
bird feeder – photo by Orion Metheny

## CHINCOTEAGUE, REHOBOTH BEACH, AND THE SECRET SERVICE (continued from Page 7)

were "dilly-dallying" getting ready to walk the trail, a large, black SUV with heavily tinted windows came into the parking area and proceeded onto the walking path. Following it, a large white limo-bus pulled into the parking area and disgorged its assemblage of reporters with cameras and audio equipment. Some bicyclists whizzed by on the path, so we started walking the path as well. Later on the path we found another SUV with full camo Secret Service men at the ready. We asked what was going on and they let us try out their 15X80 binoculars. We walked a bit further to some signage and an observation ramp where there were a few more people. In a few minutes the guy in charge asked us to move back to let President Elect Biden and his group come down from the platform. We all cheered and wished him luck on the rest of his bicycle adventure.

Gordon's Pond was a black duck paradise. We had lunch at the nature center at Cape Henlopen State Park and watched the Red-breasted Nuthatches at the feeder along with the Brown Thrasher and House Finches, Pine Siskin, and goldfinches. We went to the Hawk Watch but it was at a lull for the day. The Point was the place to find the Brants out of the water on the sand spit.

Saturday evening was supper on your own at various restaurants on the boulevard. Sunday morning found us in the Dolphin Room for breakfast and the final bird checklist for the trip. We tallied 85 species this year which was not bad considering 5½ inches of rain on Chincoteague. We said our goodbyes and motored off to our homelands. An interesting excursion we all agreed and a nice break from quarantining away from the rest of the world.

Contributed by  
Don and Sara Creamer



## CHANGES IN CONTACT INFORMATION

### NEW MEMBERS

Kim McCluskey  
5036 Bennington Dr.  
Cross Lanes, WV 25313  
Tel: 304-982-2008  
Email: grumpybuckeye@frontier.com

Peggy Kiser-Crouch  
11 Dapplewood Rd.  
South Charleston, WV 25309  
Tel: 681-215-9181  
Email: pkisercrou@aol.com

Jack O'Connell  
590 Anthony Ridge Rd.  
Frankford, WV 24938  
Tel: 540-420-2394  
Email: jack@thebigtrees.com

Christina Slover  
118 Bishop Ave.  
Barnesville, OH 43713  
Tel: 567-207-8286  
E: christinamonroeswcd@gmail.com

Nancy Zapotocki & Matthew Graves  
P.O. Box 35  
Dryfork, WV 26263  
Tel: 304-866-8783  
Email: nazwv1@gmail.com

### EMAIL CHANGE

Terry & Sam Watkins  
tyw10s@yahoo.com



## 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.*

## BBC MEMBER ALICE FRICK PASSES



Alice L. Frick, 72, of York, PA, died on Friday, June 26, 2020, at her home, after succumbing to cancer. A York native, she was the daughter of the late Paul and Carolyn Spangler. Alice was the wife of Bernard L. Frick, Jr., with whom she would have celebrated her 43rd wedding anniversary in August.

In addition to her husband, Alice is survived by her sons Bernard Frick III and Brian Frick and his wife Emily (Martin) Frick.

Alice graduated from William Penn High School in York. She attended Maryland Institute of Art and received an Associate degree from Harrisburg Area Community College. She was apprenticed to a hand weaver in New York City and taught hand weaving at the Manning's in East Berlin. She was most proud of her work through Lincoln Intermediate Unit mainstreaming K through 3rd grade students in Alternative Education.

Alice loved the natural beauty of the outdoors. She met her spouse through the York Hiking Club and they enjoyed many hiking trails and trips with club members. Later in life she returned to an old interest in birding and became active with York Audubon Society, both on local birding trails and internationally. She spent many hours working with City School youths at Kiwanis Lake in conservation efforts and bird appreciation. She initiated a Christmas Bird Count for Kids at Nixon Park. Alice enjoyed her Springdale Neighborhood. She was an avid reader and dearly loved her book club and friends of more than 40 years.

## BABY BIRDS ABOUNDED

*Contributed by Cindy Burkhardt*

Cindy shared a number of eBird checklist photos earlier this fall of some of the nestlings and fledglings at her farm in Cairo, Ritchie County. Enjoy!



*(top to bottom) Red-winged Blackbird, American Robin, Brown Thrasher and Barn Swallows*

# HAPPENINGS AND PHOTOS FROM ROSIE CAMPBELL

## Saw Whet Owls

On November 3rd, a few BBC-ers met at Bill Beatty's to possibly catch and band a Saw-whet Owl. Our small group gathered outside around a nice bonfire while we waited for the owls to get into the nets. It was wonderful to be with friends again and conversation flourished.

On our first net check, there was an owl! Bill and Jan measured, weighed and banded the tiny creature. It was so cute; we'd all liked to have one for a pet. Those of us who hadn't seen the process before were delighted to see how the owl was attended to. It was weighed in a little cloth bag. A black light was shone under its wings to see how much color showed to help age the little owl. A tiny band was clipped to its leg and its particulars written down. Then it was placed on one of our arms and allowed to take flight at will. (We all wanted to hold the little owl!) We all took pictures. Later, Bill told us he'd already caught one before we arrived, in case we didn't catch another. It was processed the same way.

After another pleasant sit around the fire, we found a third owl in the net. What luck! We would have been extremely happy to catch one owl! It was determined that all three owls were females. Bill and Jan told us the females, like nearly all raptors, are a bit larger. (Larger hardly being a word you'd use for these tiny creatures.)

## Fun with Trail Cams

With other activities being cancelled, we are all looking for things to do at home. I have found it fun to set up trail cams to see what's going on out there when I am not out there with my regular camera.

All sorts of things !



ones are blurred as the wildlife hurries by. Sometimes a camera will be triggered over and over by a nebbly squirrel, a waving weed or branch, or a busy bird. Once one of my cameras was pulled down by a red squirrel who wanted the mounting strap for its nest. It made a frazzled mess of the nylon belt. Sometimes a hunter or trespasser is caught on camera. It's like Christmas going through the photos on the chip to see what was there.



*Bobcat in the dark*



## VULTURE TAGGING

I have been working with the WV State Office of USDA Wildlife Services on a project investigating movements of Black Vultures. The vultures with red patagial tags on both wings were tagged in WV as David Barber said. Observations of these vultures can be reported to the Bird Banding Lab ([reportband.gov](http://reportband.gov)) or by sending the information to [vulture.tag@gmail.com](mailto:vulture.tag@gmail.com). I appreciate receiving the location as a street address or gps location, the code on the tag and when the bird was observed. This information is very helpful in better understanding the extent of their movements.

Adam Duerr  
New Castle, PA  
Director of Research  
Conservation Science Global  
Adjunct Professor, WVU  
[adam.duerr@consciglobal.org](mailto:adam.duerr@consciglobal.org)

*Photos in all issues can be seen in color online at <http://www.brooksbirdclub.org/the-mail-bag.html>*



...

**Well, how about that...**

*– Jane Whitaker contributed this photo of a woodpecker hanging on a leftover chunk of wood on a cable line, possibly feeding.*

---

## **WHAT'S INSIDE**

Editor's Message .....	1
Message From Our President.....	1
Tree Planted At Oglebay Park For Carl Slater.....	1
2020-2021 WV Christmas Bird Counts.....	2
Year-end Greetings From Your BBC Friends .....	3-7
Coronavirus, Birding, and You .....	7
Chincoteague, Rehoboth Beach, and The Secret Service.....	7, 9
Interesting Sightings Around The State.....	8-9
Changes In Contact Information.....	10
BBC Member Alice Frick Passes .....	10
Baby Birds Abounded .....	10
Happenings and Photographs From Rosie Campbell.....	11
Vulture Tagging.....	11