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*The* **REDSTART**

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Webmaster	Larry Helgerman, 1989 Louisa Ave., Wheeling, WV 26003	304-242-8562
	brooksbirdclubweb@gmail.com	

# The REDSTART

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#### **Editorial Staff**

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

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

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

eBird Editor • Michael Slaven • [mikeslavenwv@gmail.com](mailto:mikeslavenwv@gmail.com)

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# 21st Report of the West Virginia Bird Records Committee

March 2017

John Boback

The West Virginia Bird Records Committee (WVBRC) held its annual meeting on March 4, 2017, at North Bend State Park. At the meeting, the committee made decisions on eleven records that had been submitted for consideration. Nine records were accepted and two records were not accepted.

Records accepted:

**Black-bellied Whistling Duck** (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) (2015-1). On June 28, 2015, Walt Kordek discovered four Black-bellied Whistling Ducks at Glendale/Riverbend Park in Elkins. Randy Bodkins later that day photographed them resting on the bank of the Tygart River and submitted the record to the WVBRC. This is the third accepted state record for the species.

**Brewer's Blackbird** (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) (2015-2). David Patick and Mike Griffith saw a flock of fifty Brewer's Blackbirds feeding in a muddy cow field in Mason County on January 1, 2009. There are more than five accepted records of Brewer's Blackbird in West Virginia, but the species was placed on the state review list in 2013 due to its recent rarity.

**King Rail** (*Rallus elegans*) (2015-3). On May 11, 2008, David Patick, Mike Griffith and Wendell Argabrite heard and saw a King Rail at the Greenbottom Wildlife Management Area. The King Rail used to be a breeding species in West Virginia, but was placed on the state review list in 2013 due to its recent rarity.

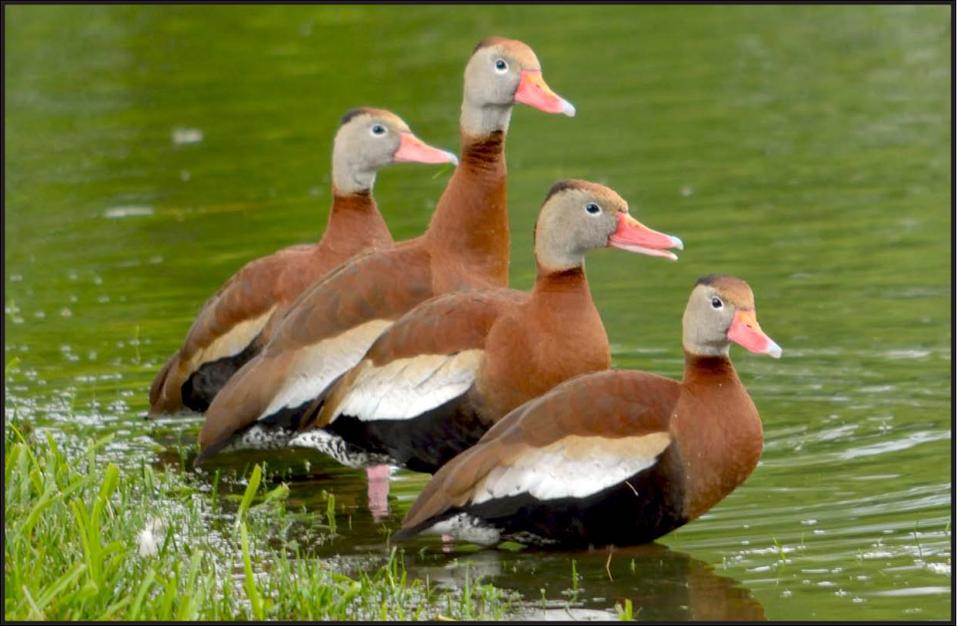
**White-winged Dove** (*Zenaida asiatica*) (2016-4). Ron Perrone, Wendy Perrone and Sam Richmond discovered a White-winged Dove mixed in with a flock of Mourning Doves near Hinton on May 1, 2015. This is the fourth accepted record for the species.

**Ruddy Turnstone** (*Arenaria interpres*) (2016-5). On July 29, 2009, David Patick saw a Ruddy Turnstone feeding with Killdeer at the RCB Lock and Dam. There are more than five accepted records of Ruddy Turnstone in West Virginia, but the species was placed on the state review list in 2013 due to its rarity.

**Painted Bunting** (*Passerina ciris*) (2016-6). A Painted Bunting visited the front yard feeder of Gail Hyer on April 25, 2015 in the town of Marlinton, Pocahontas County. This is the second accepted record for the species.

**Kirtland's Warbler** (*Setophaga kirtlandii*) (2016-7). On the morning of September 30, 2014, Bob Dean banded a Kirtland's Warbler that had been caught in a mist net at the Allegheny Front banding station at Dolly Sods. This is first non-hypothetical record of the species in West Virginia.

**Piping Plover** (*Charadrius melodus*) (2016-8). Gary Rankin found a Piping Plover on August 7, 2016, at a commercial sand and gravel pit in Gallipolis Ferry, Mason County. This is the third accepted record of the species.



Black-bellied Whistling Ducks. Photo by Randy Bodkins

**Eurasian Wigeon** (*Spatula Penelope*) (2016-11). On March 18, 2015, Fred Atwood discovered a drake Eurasian Wigeon in the flooded backwaters of a creek in Grant County. Derek Courtney and several other birders managed to see this rare duck despite the challenging viewing conditions. There are more than five accepted records of Eurasian Wigeon in West Virginia, but the species remains on the state review list.

Records not accepted:

**Mississippi Kite** (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) (2016-9). On September 20, 2016, Grant Canterbury reported a Mississippi Kite at the National Conservation Training Center in Jefferson County. There are currently three accepted records for the species.

**Ibis (species)** (2016-10). On December 14, 2016, Dawn Hewitt observed an ibis near a log yard in Parkersburg.

Other business:

The committee voted unanimously to amend the bylaws to provide a procedure for filling a vacancy in the secretary position.

The committee decided that in the future it would vote on submitted bird records more frequently than once a year.

The committee discussed and affirmed the category of “exotic birds” because of its usefulness as a possible indicator of colonization.

The committee discussed digitizing the submitted bird records and making them available on the WVBRC web pages provided there are protections regarding names and privacy.

Cynthia Ellis stepped down from her position as alternate member of the WVBRC. The committee thanked her for her service and dedication.

David Patick and Patty Morrison are leaving the WVBRC this year. The committee thanked them for their service and dedication.

Candidates to fill the two vacancies on the WVBRC were nominated and voted upon. LeJay Graffious will fill a five-year term and Davette Saeler will serve the final two years of Patty Morrison's unexpired term.

David Daniels will fill the alternate seat being vacated by Cynthia Ellis.

It was moved and approved that Wil Hershberger become permanent secretary of the WVBRC.

An election was held to select a chair and vice-chair of the WVBRC. John Boback was re-elected as chair and Joe Hildreth was elected vice-chair.

Submitted by John Boback, chair; and WVBRC members Joey Herron; Joe Hildreth; Randy Bodkins; Derek Courtney; LeJay Graffious; Davette Saeler; David Daniels, alternate; and Wil Hershberger, secretary.

1107 Dorsey Knob Road  
Morgantown, WV 26508



White-winged Dove.  
Photo by Ron Perrone



Painted Bunting. Photo by Gail Hyer

## A.O.S. Taxonomic Changes for 2017

Casey Rucker

On December 19, 2016, the American Ornithologists' Union merged with the Cooper Ornithological Society to form the American Ornithological Society (AOS). The AOS is continuing to publish *The Auk* and *The Condor*. I note that both journals have taken the admirable step of providing all of their content to the public at no charge beginning six months after publication. *The Auk* is located at <http://americanornithologypubs.org/loi/tauk>, and *The Condor* is located at <http://americanornithologypubs.org/loi/cond>.

The Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of the AOS published the fifty-eighth supplement to its Check-list on July 6, 2017, and made the article publicly-available immediately (Chesser et al. 2017). Among the notable changes extralimital to West Virginia were the lumping of Thayer's Gull with Iceland Gull and the split of the "South Hills" Crossbill, now named the Cassia Crossbill, from Red Crossbill. Although a net sixteen species were added to the AOS list, no species were added to or deleted from the West Virginia bird list. On the other hand, the Committee approved many changes to our list, including two new families, changes in scientific names of a number of species to reflect splits and lumps of genera and splits with extralimital species, substantial changes in taxonomic order, as well as a spelling change for one species name.

**New Families.** The towhees, sparrows and juncos in West Virginia are no longer emberizids. All of their genera have been placed in a new family, the Passerelidae. In addition, Yellow-breasted Chat is no longer a wood warbler, but along with the other chats is included in a separate family, the Icteriidae, named after the members' genus. The changes were based on phylogenetic analyses of DNA sequences.

**New Scientific Names.** The following species have new scientific names:

Snow Goose: *Anser caerulescens* (Genus *Chen* lumped with *Anser*)

Ross's Goose: *Anser rossii* (Genus *Chen* lumped with *Anser*)

Blue-winged Teal: *Spatula discors* (genus split from *Anas*)

Cinnamon Teal: *Spatula cyanoptera* (genus split from *Anas*)

Northern Shoveler: *Spatula clypeata* (genus split from *Anas*)

Gadwall: *Mareca strepera* (genus split from *Anas*)

Eurasian Wigeon: *Mareca penelope* (genus split from *Anas*)

American Wigeon: *Mareca americana* (genus split from *Anas*)

Northern Harrier: *Circus hudsonius* (split with extralimital species)

Northern Shrike: *Lanius borealis* (split with extralimital species).

**Changes in taxonomic order.** The following sequences of species and families were changed.

**Families after Calcaridae:** The order of all of the families at the end of our list has been reshuffled, and they are now in the following order after Calcaridae (Longspurs and Buntings):

Passerelidae (Towhees, Sparrows, and Juncos)

Icteriidae (Chats)

Icteridae (Blackbirds and allies)

Parulidae (Wood Warblers)

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and allies).

Accordingly, Dickcissel is now the last bird on our state list.

**Species in Anatidae:** The following species, in order, were moved to follow Wood Duck and precede Gadwall:

Blue-winged Teal  
Cinnamon Teal  
Northern Shoveler.

**Species in Scolopacidae:** Wilson's Snipe was moved to follow American Woodcock and precede Spotted Sandpiper. In addition, our yellowlegs have switched places. The following sandpipers now follow Solitary Sandpiper and precede Wilson's Phalarope, in the following order:

Lesser Yellowlegs  
Willet  
Greater Yellowlegs.

**Species in Fringillidae:** Evening Grosbeak has been moved to first among our finches, and Common and Hoary Redpoll, in that order, have been moved to follow Purple Finch and precede Red Crossbill.

**Species in Icteridae:** The order of blackbirds and allies has been reshuffled to:

Yellow-headed Blackbird  
Bobolink  
Eastern Meadowlark  
Western Meadowlark  
Orchard Oriole  
Baltimore Oriole  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Brown-headed Cowbird  
Rusty Blackbird  
Brewer's Blackbird  
Common Grackle.

**Change in spelling.** Last and least, the AOS has eliminated the space between "Le" and "Conte's" in both LeConte's Thrasher (not on the West Virginia list) and LeConte's Sparrow. Many typographical errors are likely to follow.

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

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R. T. Chesser, K. J. Burns, C. Cicero, J. L. Dunn, A. W. Kratter, I. J. Lovette, P. C. Rasmussen, J. V. Remsen, Jr., J. D. Rising, D. F. Stotz, and K. Winker. 2017 Fifty-eighth supplement to the American Ornithological Society's Check-list of North American Birds. *Auk* 134:751–773. Available at <http://americanornithologypubs.org/doi/full/10.1642/AUK-17-72.1>.

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

## A Melanistic Tufted Titmouse in Kanawha County

Gary O. Rankin

On Friday, December 9, 2016, I received an email from a long-time friend, Greg Booth, with a couple of photos attached. His message was “Check these out!”. When I opened the photos, I was looking at a strange bird, the size and shape of a tufted titmouse, but with a black breast, throat and face, a charcoal colored crest, back and wings, and an orange belly and sides.

I called Greg that evening to follow up on his e-mail, and to find out more about this strange-looking bird. Greg indicated that a client of his, Brien Chase, who lived three miles outside of Charleston, WV in Kanawha County, had first noticed the bird coming to his feeders in late summer/early fall of 2016. The bird was a regular visitor along with Tufted Titmice, White-breasted nuthatches, Carolina Chickadees, and other woodland birds. The family had named this oddity “Batman”, because it would come into the feeders quietly, gets its food and leave just as quickly. Brien had sent Greg the photos and wondered what type of bird Batman really was. Greg contacted me, and while it looked like an odd titmouse, I did some searching through all of my bird guides for Mexico, Central and South America, Europe and Africa. I had concluded by this point that it was probably a melanistic tufted titmouse. I called Greg back and we arranged with Brien to visit their home the next morning (December 10) to see Batman in person, if we could.

Brien and his wife graciously welcomed Greg and me to their home the next morning and we watched from the kitchen table as the “regulars” came in to feed. After about 45 minutes, Batman appeared, very cautiously landing on a railing near the kitchen door, grabbed a seed and left. He made a few more quick trips to feed and then left for good.



Melanistic Tufted Titmouse. Photo by Katherine Chase

We were able to observe the bird at close range, and it did behave very much like the other titmice coming in to feed. As it turned out, Batman was never seen again after our visit.

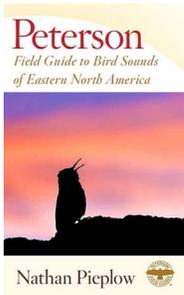
Over the next few days, I sent photos of this unusual bird to several experienced birders, including Jon Dunn, with agreement that we were observing a melanistic tufted titmouse. Melanism is observed when there is an increase in the pigment melanin that gives rise to a black coloration of skin or feathers. There are many examples of melanistic animals and birds in nature, but as I was preparing this article, I did a search for melanistic titmice. Interestingly, a report by Meg Houston Maker to ProjectFeederWatch included a photo of a melanistic titmouse that had been visiting her feeders in Lyme, New Hampshire since November, 2016. The photo she posted was almost identical to the melanistic titmouse that had been visiting Brien Chase's' feeders for several months, but with the back and parts of the wings of the New Hampshire bird more black than charcoal gray.

While I have observed numerous partially or completely leucistic (white) birds, this melanistic tufted titmouse is one of the few melanistic birds that I have observed in almost 40 years of birding. By keeping a watch for the birds at our feeders and in the field, it is possible that even more melanistic or leucistic birds might be detected and reported.

109 Cedar Court  
Lavalette, WV 25535

## Book Review

Wil Hershberger



Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds of Eastern North America. Nathan Pieplow. March 2017. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, NY, New York. Flexicover, 608 pages. ISBN: 9780547905587. \$28.00.

This new field guide in the Peterson Field Guide series brings to the public a herculean effort, compiling thousands of recordings of songs, sounds, and calls of 520 species of birds, representing these sounds as spectrograms (sonagrams, sonograms) with a clarity and completeness new to the field.

Chandler Robbins was the first to use sound spectrograms in a field guide to birds with the 1966 publication of his popular Golden Guide — *Birds of North America: A Guide to Field Identification*. Many didn't see the utility of these small sonagrams, but a few ardent ear-birders found them useful. It wasn't until 2005 when Donald Kroodsma published his ground-breaking and award winning, *The Singing Life of Birds*, that sound spectrograms were again brought to the public. Don's clear and easy text brought the graphs alive for the reader and took us into the mind of the bird as never before.

Now, Nathan Pieplow has scoured over 5,400 recordings, including recordings from

the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds, Xeno-Canto.org, and recordings specifically collected for this project, to bring a complete record of bird sounds to the sonagram-loving public. I think that the time was ripe for this effort. Pieplow used Cornell's Raven Pro software to prepare the sonagrams for both the book and the accompanying website (<http://petersonbirdsounds.com>), producing some of the cleanest, most detailed spectrograms I have seen published. The introduction to the guide dedicates no less than 25 pages to learning about sonagrams — the most complete and easy to read treatment of the topic to date. Amazingly, the introduction is also available on the website so that you can read about and listen to sound examples at the same time. This certainly helps the student more deeply learn the material and more easily comprehend how the visuals of a sonagram translate into sound.

The Guide to Bird Sounds covers 520 species of birds that are commonly found in eastern North America, east of the 100th meridian and south of the 50th parallel. There are songs, calls, and other sounds created by all of these species, except for some that do not sing their songs within this area of North America (e.g., sandpipers who only sing on their breeding grounds in the arctic). Why the use of "sounds" in the title? A number of species produce sounds with bills, wings, and feet, not using the syrinx to produce these sounds (e.g., woodpeckers, Roughed Grouse drumming, Sharp-tailed Grouse dancing). The syrinx is used to produce songs and calls.

Each species has at least half a page; many are given an entire page. Features include paintings of the species by Roger Tory Peterson, Michael O'Brien, and others, up-to-date colored range maps, a description of the bird's regional and habitat preferences, and several sonagrams of the different vocal and or non-vocal sounds the species creates. Each sonagram is labeled and captioned with the type of song (for those species with multiple songs), and the call type. The peer-reviewed and popular literature are full of varying "descriptive labels" for the different calls that bird make, leaving a mass of confusion in their non-uniformity. Pieplow tries to use the most-often referenced descriptors to label these calls, perhaps leading to some standardization in the literature moving forward. I can only imagine that the second edition will be an even more solid reference for call and song names as Pieplow interviews more researchers that are working on vocalizations of specific North American bird species.

Pieplow also includes a "Visual Index," perhaps the most innovative aspect of the book — trying to find a bird sound from verbal and visual descriptions of the sound leading the reader to possible species that produce that type of sound. It is well worth the effort to spend considerable time within this visual index learning what familiar sounds look like and how they are described in the text. This allows the reader to then learn new sounds and track down unknowns from the field with alacrity.

Unfortunately, the 58th supplement to the American Ornithological Society's checklist of North American bird species was published in July of this year. Therefore, the taxonomic order, and some of the genus and species names have changed since the guide was produced.

In summary, I would say that this field guide has a place on every birder's bookshelf — better yet, every birder's field bag. Ear-birders will immediately find the guide useful, birders learning songs and calls will find this guide a doorway to a whole new world of birding and the appreciation of birdsong — sounds.

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170 Stallion Ct.  
Hedgesville, WV 25427

## eBird Reports and News

Michael Slaven

November and December 2016 brought relatively mild weather and temperatures to West Virginia. The warm temperatures conspired to keep wintering gulls mostly to our north and contributed to less-than-usual excitement for the larophiles in the state. **Scoters**, **Red-necked Grebes**, and **Red-throated Loons** were similarly scarce around the state. Nonetheless, there were a few notable sightings that in West Virginia that were reported to eBird. A **Brewer's Blackbird** (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) showed up on December 14, 2016, in Pocahontas County, a sighting I have provisionally validated on eBird. The **Brewer's Blackbird** is a beautiful Icterid. The male in Pocahontas County showed a glossy-black, metallic-green, and midnight-blue iridescence on its body, with a startlingly clear yellow eye. Quite a handsome bird! I urge all of you to keep an eye out for this chunky blackbird, which is common in the West, but quite unusual in our part of the country. That being said, it is also very probably under-reported in our region, in part because people are not really looking for it. There are a couple of reports from reliable observers of large flocks in Mason County in previous years, but this is a bird that is generally pretty rare here.

Another noteworthy bird was the **Lark Sparrow** (*Chondestes grammacus*) that persisted in making occasional but regular appearances in a backyard in Jefferson County. It was spotted in the Summit Point yard in December, January, and March. Lark Sparrows do turn up in the state somewhat regularly, but it's always going to be a great day if you see one of these birds. They are a little more common just to the east in the Gettysburg area, but are pretty scarce in West Virginia. It's a very distinctive bird, with strong facial markings that give it its name.

Rarities are certainly fascinating, and eBird is an effective platform to record these unusual species, but eBird's most compelling function – at least to me – is its power to collect data and help us visualize the patterns and trends in the population, migration

patterns, abundance, and distribution of avian populations. When birders get together, the conversation inevitably turns on questions peculiar to the birding community, such as whether or not the migration is early or late, whether there are declining numbers of certain species, what are the prospects for fallouts, will it be an irruption year for **Common Redpolls** or **Snowy Owls**, does climate change have a measurable effect on the birds we encounter, etc.

Using eBird and its ability to compile data over time, we can put the experiences of the whole birding community together to help us put a little science into the conversation and shed perspective on the anecdotal evidence that we use to try to understand what we see (and what we don't see) in the field. This winter's low numbers of **gulls**, **grebes**, **scoters**, and **loons** made me wonder if eBird could help shed some light on the role of temperature on the numbers of **gulls** that are spotted

One obvious trend that the data shows for the past winter (December 2016 through February 2017) is that there seems to have been almost no southward push of **gull** species this winter down from the Great Lakes to our region. Usually, there is an influx of **gulls** and some **ducks** and **grebes** forced south from the lakes as they freeze over, or become more generally-inhospitable for **gulls** and **waterfowl** due to heavy snows, arctic winds, and prolonged cold fronts. The mild winter is probably the reason for the failure for the **gulls**, **scoters**, and other northern birds to arrive here in anything like their usual numbers. It may take another cold January like that of 2015 or 2016 to bring the numbers and variety of **gulls** that spoiled us then.

To illustrate the precipitous drop-off in numbers, I have produced a chart at the end of this article showing the general trends in numbers of **gulls** reaching the state. In the chart, I have taken the eBird reports from December and January from the last five years, and have calculated the average number of birds recorded in eBird reports of the most common gull encountered in West Virginia, the **Ring-Billed Gull**, (*Larus delawarensis*). To do this, I counted the number of gulls seen for the months and divided them by the number of reports to give me the average number of **gulls** seen per observer in field reports. I tried to eliminate duplicate reports at the same location when I could to improve accuracy of this rough analysis. The data collected in eBird makes this kind of data crunching quite easy to do, and potentially is useful for both scientists and casual sifters of the data who would like to be more knowledgeable about the birds they watch, chase, or enjoy.

The chart below clearly shows the dramatically-lower number of **gulls** seen (when they were seen at all) in December 2016 and January 2017. This seems clearly to be tied to the weather. I have also included a chart where I plotted the average January temperature for the last five years in Erie, PA. I chose Erie because it is one of the closest cities on the Great Lakes to West Virginia. The chart shows a clear relationship between mild weather and the small number of **gulls** that appeared this season. In years when the temperature is near or below the 34° F historical average, **gulls** tend to move south into West Virginia. In years where the temperature is much warmer, such as 2017 (39.4° F average), the gulls are barely present at all. The story is the same for **Red-throated Loons**, **Red-necked Grebes**, **Long-tailed Ducks** and other northern specialties that spend time on the Great Lakes.

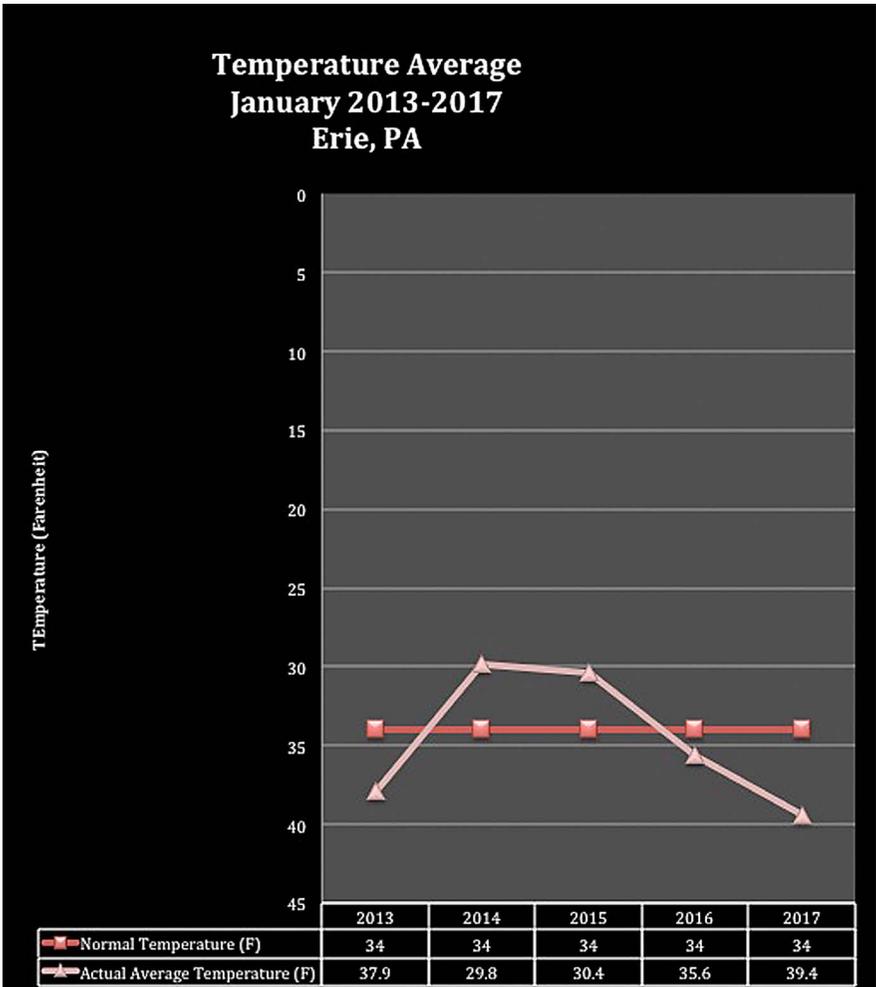
Having this sort of high-quality evidence of the numbers and distribution of various species can help refine our thinking as we try to predict and track bird populations and movements. As climate changes over time, phenology, the study of the cyclical variations in the appearance of plants and animals that depend on the regularity of these cycles, is becoming more crucial. By using the big data supplied by eBird, we have an opportunity

to be much better informed birders.

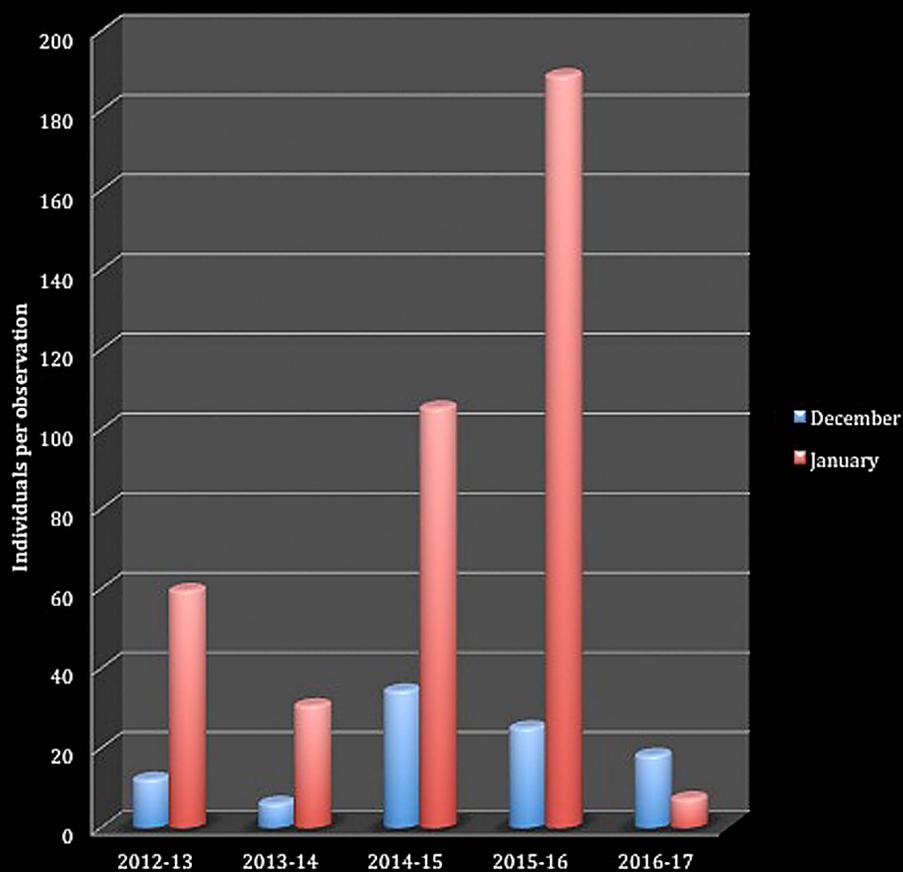
In my next update, I plan to show a few more examples of patterns of bird distribution and trends over time. With luck, there will be some really exciting migration sightings and statistics to share with all of you by then.

Until then, consider submitting your sightings to eBird to help make the databases more robust. It's very easy to get started eBirding if you have not tried it yet. Simply go to <http://ebird.org/content/ebird/> and follow the simple instructions to begin entering your lists. Happy birding!

632 West Virginia Avenue  
Morgantown, WV 26591  
[mikeslavenwv@gmail.com](mailto:mikeslavenwv@gmail.com)



## Larus delawarensis in West Virginia, 2012-2017



## Field Notes Winter Season

December 1, 2016 – February 28, 2017

Casey Rucker

It was the second-warmest winter on record in West Virginia, according to the Northeast Regional Climate Center (NRCC) at Cornell University. All three months were warmer than normal, and February was the warmest ever recorded. December and January were wetter than normal statewide, while February was drier.

These notes were gathered from (a) the West Virginia Birds Listserv, sponsored by the National Audubon Society, (b) Christmas Bird Count (CBC) results, and (c) field notes submitted to the editor by e-mail and regular mail. The full content of the submitted notes by the contributors of the WV Listserv may be viewed by visiting the archives at the following web site: <http://list.audubon.org/archives/wv-bird.html>, and the results of the Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) may be found at <http://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/CurrentYear/ResultsByCount.aspx>.

The Parkersburg Christmas Bird Count found an **Ibis** species during count week, as reported by Richard and Jeanette Esker on December 26. Overall, it was the third middling winter in a row for West Virginia bird diversity, with 138 species reported in the state during the winter, from 36 of West Virginia's 55 counties.

**Ducks, Swans, and Geese** – It was a good winter for **geese** in West Virginia. There were **Snow Goose** reports from Berkeley (JBz), Cabell (MG, GR, DP), Jackson (GR, MG, JWe), Mason (MG, GR), Pendleton (MWi), Wetzel (WJ), and Wood (CBC, JWe) Counties; and **Ross's Geese** appeared in Cabell (GR), Jackson (JWe, MO), Lewis (TB, JoS), Mason (MG, GR, DP), and Monongalia (TB, DD) Counties. On January 20, Randy Bodkins found 18 **Greater White-fronted Geese** in Elkins, Randolph County. Other **Greater White-fronted Goose** sightings came from Jackson (GR), Kanawha (HG), Mason (GR, MG, DP, MO), Monongalia (TB), Preston (KA, TB), and Randolph (SKi) Counties. The only report of **Cackling Goose** this winter was from the Morgantown Christmas Bird Count, Monongalia County, on December 17. Reports of **Canada Geese** were as usual widespread throughout the state. This season birders reported **Mute Swans** only in Mason County (DP, MG, MO) and Monongalia County (CBC). **Tundra Swans** were reported in Hampshire (WS), Hardy (DH, KKi, TB, DD), Mason (MG), Mineral (WS), Monongalia (TB), Summers (CBC, JP), and Tucker (CBC) Counties.

**Waterfowl** numbers improved this winter compared to the previous two. The following species made appearances in at least ten West Virginia counties: **Gadwalls, American Black Ducks, Mallards, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Ducks, Lesser Scaup, Buffleheads, and Hooded and Common Mergansers**. Birders in at least six counties each found **Wood Ducks, Northern Shovelers, American Wigeons, Northern Pintails, Canvasbacks, Redheads, Common Goldeneyes, and Ruddy Ducks**. The following birds inspired reports from the counties listed: **Blue-winged Teal** in Wood (CBC); **Greater Scaup** in Mason (MG, GR, DP), Monongalia (TB), Nicholas (SWi), and Wood (DP, MG); **Surf Scoters** in Fayette (SWi), Kanawha (RG), Mason (GR, MG, DP), Raleigh (CBC), and Taylor (JoH); **White-winged Scoters** in Kanawha (RG), Marion (DCo), Mason (JWe), and Taylor (JoH); **Long-tailed Ducks** in Kanawha (RG), Mason (JWe, GR, MG, DP),

Monongalia (TB), and Nicholas (SWi); and **Red-breasted Mergansers** in Jefferson (JF), Kanawha (RG, CBC), Monongalia (CBC, TB), Summers (JP), and Wood (CBC, DP, MG). On December 14, Terry Bronson estimated waterfowl numbers at Cheat Lake, Monongalia County, at more than 12,000 individuals, including 450 **Mallards**, 110 **Northern Shovelers**, 190 **Canvasbacks**, 900 **Redheads**, 7,500 **Scaup** species, 1,878 **Buffleheads**, and 650 **Ruddy Ducks**. Herb Myers spotted more than 25 **Common Mergansers** on a farm pond north of Riverton, Pendleton County, on February 22.

**Grouse, Turkeys** – There were reports of **Ruffed Grouse** from Monongalia County (CBC), Pendleton County (CBC), Pocahontas County (CBC), Randolph County (HMy), Tucker County (CBC), and Wetzel County (WJ). Birders found **Wild Turkeys** in many counties throughout the state, including many on the tallies of Christmas Bird Counts.

**Grebes** – It was a good winter for **Pied-billed** and **Horned Grebe** reports, which came from throughout the state. Hullet Good saw a **Red-necked Grebe** on the Elk River near his home in Milliken, Kanawha County, on December 30.

**Pigeons and Doves** – **Rock Pigeons** and **Mourning Doves** continue to reside throughout the state, as reported primarily in Christmas Bird Counts.

**Rails, Coots** – On January 8, Matthew Orsie found a **Virginia Rail** at Altona Marsh, Jefferson County. **American Coots** appeared in eleven counties this winter.

**Cranes** – **Sandhill Cranes** graced reports from Kanawha (RG), Marion (TB, AW), Mason (MG), Preston (TB, DD, SWi), and Raleigh (CBC) Counties.

**Plovers** – Reports of **Killdeer** were widespread again this mild winter, with records from fifteen counties.

**Sandpipers** – On February 26, David Patick and Michael Griffith spotted a **Long-billed Dowitcher** on a private pond in Mason County. **American Woodcocks** showed up in Cabell (GR, MG, DP), Mineral (WS), Monroe (RBi), Summers (JJP), Wayne (GR), and Wetzel (WJ) Counties, mostly in late February. Birders in seven West Virginia counties reported **Wilson's Snipe**: Hardy (DH, KKi, TB), Jefferson (MO), Mason (MG), Monongalia (TB), Pocahontas (CBC), Summers (CBC), and Tucker (CBC). On December 17 the Morgantown Christmas Bird Count, Monongalia County, found a **Spotted Sandpiper** in Star City, where the bird remained until December 23 (TB), as well as a **Greater Yellowlegs** in White Park.

**Gulls** – Warm temperatures apparently did not attract winter **gulls** to West Virginia this season. **Bonaparte's Gulls** made appearances in Braxton (TB), Kanawha (RG), Nicholas (SWi), and Wayne (MG) Counties. Birders reported **Ring-billed Gulls** in sixteen West Virginia counties, while **Herring Gulls** appeared in reports only from Kanawha (RG), Mason (MG, GR, DP), Monongalia (TB), Ohio (MO), and Summers (JP) Counties.

**Loons** – **Common Loon** reports were sparse in our state this warm winter, with reports only from Cabell (CBC), Kanawha (RG), Monongalia (TB, CBC), Nicholas (SWi), Raleigh (CBC), and Taylor (JoH) Counties.

**Cormorants, Bitterns, Herons, Egrets** – **Double-crested Cormorants** appeared in Jefferson (JF), Mason (GR, BMi, DP, MG), Monongalia (TB), Nicholas (SWi), Putnam (CE, KK), Taylor (TB), and Wood (CBC) Counties. Reports of **Great Blue Herons** were widespread throughout the state. On December 14 Wilma Jarrell watched a **Great Egret** fly by her car at Hannibal Dam in Wetzel County before it crossed back to the Ohio side of the Ohio River.

**Vultures** – Reports of **Black Vultures** and **Turkey Vultures** came from thirteen

counties each. On December 31, Laura Ceperley and Barb Koster watched eight **Black Vultures** soaring over the New River in Fayette County.

**Hawks and Eagles – Bald Eagles** were reported from twenty counties this winter. On January 7, in their twelfth annual Winter Eagle Survey, as reported by James Phillips, thirteen participants braved frigid temperatures and two-to-six inches of fresh snow to find at least 50 **Bald Eagles** as well as a **Golden Eagle** at sites on Indian Creek in Monroe County, and along the New River in Raleigh and Summers Counties. **Northern Harriers, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Cooper’s Hawks, Red-shouldered Hawks, and Red-tailed Hawks** all appeared widely throughout West Virginia during the winter season. **Rough-legged Hawks** inspired reports only in two counties this winter: Grant (MO) and Tucker (HMy, CBC). **Golden Eagles** inspired reports from Greenbrier (BWi), Hardy (MO, DH, KKi, TB DD), Monroe (JJP), Pendleton (CBC), Pocahontas (CBC), Raleigh (CBC), and Summers (JJP) Counties.

**Owls** – It was a fair winter for **owl** sightings in West Virginia. Once again, the only winter report of **Barn Owls** came from Moorefield, Hardy County (CBC) on December 29. Reports of **Eastern Screech-Owls** came from eleven counties and **Great Horned Owl** sightings inspired birders in seven counties. Birders in eight counties reported **Barred Owls**. Matthew Orsie spotted a **Short-eared Owl** along the Deckers Creek Trail, Preston County, on January 23. The discovery of **Northern Saw-whet Owls** brightened the Christmas Bird Counts of Morgantown, Monongalia County, on December 17, and of Canaan Valley, Tucker County, on December 26. Joette Borzik witnessed the victory by a red-morph Eastern Screech-Owl in a fight to the death with a gray squirrel, in her yard in Jefferson County on December 26.

**Kingfishers** – West Virginia birders reported **Belted Kingfishers** in fifteen counties.

**Woodpeckers – Red-headed Woodpeckers** made appearances in reports from Hardy (CBC, TB), Kanawha (CBC), Monongalia (CBC), and Pendleton (CBC) Counties. **Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, and Pileated Woodpeckers** were all subjects of widespread reports in West Virginia over the winter. On December 23, Bruni Haydl observed a **Downy Woodpecker** using a bluebird box as a roost in her yard in Charles Town, Jefferson County.

**Falcons – American Kestrels** were represented in Christmas Bird Counts and other reports in most parts of the state. Birders spotted **Merlins** in Berkeley (AT), Hardy (DH, KKi), Jefferson (WS), Monongalia (CBC, TB, MO, MSl), Putnam (CE), Randolph (RBo), Wetzel (WJ), and Wood (CBC) Counties. **Peregrine Falcon** reports came from Hardy County (CBC, FA), Jefferson County (DHa, WS, JF), Kanawha County (CBC, RG, LC), Mason County (GR, DP, MG, MO), Monongalia County (CBC), Ohio County (PM), Summers County (JP), Wetzel County (WJ), and Wood County (CBC, JB). On December 27, Richard Gregg saw a **Cooper’s Hawk** along with both an **American Kestrel** and a **Peregrine Falcon**, at Marmet Locks in Kanawha County. Three days later N. Wade Snyder found both an **American Kestrel** and a **Merlin** at the USDA Fruit Research Orchards in Jefferson County.

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

**Shrikes** – Reports of **Loggerhead Shrikes** came from Greenbrier County (RBi), Monroe County (RBi), and Pocahontas County (CBC).

**Crows, Jays, and Ravens – Blue Jays, American Crows, and Common Ravens**

appeared in their usual haunts throughout the state. Steven Wilson estimated that there were 1,700 **American Crows** at a roost in Beckley, Raleigh County, on January 7. **Fish Crows** inspired reports from Hardy County (TB, DD) and Jefferson County (JBz, MO).

**Larks** – Reports of **Horned Larks** came from Grant County (FA, TB, MO, HMy), Hardy County (CBC), Mason County (DP, GR, MG), Monongalia County (CBC), Pendleton County (CBC), and Putnam County (DP, MG).

**Swallows** – David Patick and Michael Griffith saw their first **Tree Swallows** of the year along Route 2 in Cabell and Mason County on February 26, and two days later Terry Bronson and David Daniels spotted three **Tree Swallows** at Kimsey Run Dam, Hardy County.

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

**Nuthatches** – **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were the only boreal visitors appearing widely in West Virginia this winter. **White-breasted Nuthatches** were well-reported as usual throughout the state.

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

**Wrens** – West Virginia birders reported **Winter** and **Carolina Wrens** in good numbers statewide.

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

**Thrushes** – **Eastern Bluebirds** and **American Robins** appeared in good numbers in our state this winter, mostly in lower elevations. **Hermit Thrushes** prompted reports from Barbour (TB), Jefferson (DH, HMc), McDowell (CBC), Pendleton (CBC), Pocahontas (CBC), and Summers (CBC) Counties.

**Mockingbirds and Thrashers** – The Morgantown Christmas Bird Count turned up a late **Gray Catbird** on December 17 in Monongalia County. A **Brown Thrasher** appeared in Christmas Bird Counts for Charleston, Kanawha County, on December 17, and Huntington, Cabell and Wayne Counties, on January 2. West Virginians reported **Northern Mockingbirds** widely over the winter season.

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

**Waxwings** – **Cedar Waxwings** appeared sparsely this winter, with sightings in only eight counties. On January 19, Diane Holsinger and Kathy King saw more than 150 **Cedar Waxwings** near Moorefield, Hardy County.

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

**Pipits** – Deborah Hale found 40 **American Pipits** in Harpers Ferry, Jefferson County, on December 4. On January 8, Gary Rankin spotted two or three **American Pipits** at Ravenswood, Jackson County, one of the season's hotspots. James and Judy Phillips saw the only other reported **American Pipits** on February 5 and 6, along the New River and at Bertha Campground in Summers County.

**Finches and Allies** – The Canaan Valley Christmas Bird Count found a single **Evening Grosbeak**, the only report in West Virginia this winter, on December 26 in Tucker County. Feeders in most parts of the state hosted **House Finches** and **American Goldfinches**. **Purple Finches** appeared more sparsely, in Hardy (CBC), Jefferson (CD), Monongalia (CBC),

Ohio (PM), Pendleton (CBC), Summers (CBC), and Tucker (CR) Counties. James Phillips reported as many as eleven **Red Crossbills** at Pipestem State Park in Summers County between December 9 and January 24. Reports of **Pine Siskins** were extremely scanty this year, coming only from Jefferson (BH, MO), Kanawha (CBC), Pendleton (CBC), Tucker (CR), and Wetzel (WJ) Counties.

**Longspurs** and **Buntings** – On December 19, Frederick Atwood found a **Lapland Longspur** and three **Snow Buntings** at Hogueland Lane, Grant County, and at least some of the birds were found at the same location through January 10 (TB, DD, HMy, MO).

**Towhees, Sparrows, Juncos** – The **Lark Sparrow** that appeared intermittently between December 20 and January 6 at the feeders of Carol Del-Colle in Summit Point, Jefferson County, is described in the eBird Notes appearing in this issue. **Savannah Sparrows** were observed in Grant County (FA), Hardy County (MO, TB, DD), Mason County (GR), and Putnam County (DP, MG). **Eastern Towhees** made their usual appearances at lower elevations in many parts of the state. **American Tree, Chipping, Field, Fox, Song, Swamp, White-throated** and **White-crowned Sparrows**, as well as **Dark-eyed Juncos**, appeared widely.

**Blackbirds and Allies** – Reports of **Red-winged Blackbirds, Eastern Meadowlarks, Rusty Blackbirds, Common Grackles**, and **Brown-headed Cowbirds** came from areas all over the state. On December 6, Doug Jolley saw and photographed a **Baltimore Oriole** in Heaters, Braxton County, as reported by Terry Bronson.



Baltimore Oriole with suet in during a snow flurry. Photo by Doug Jolley

**Warblers** – A **Common Yellowthroat** was found at Green Bottom Wildlife Management Area, Cabell County, by the Ona Christmas Bird Count on December 18, and Gary Rankin found a Common Yellowthroat, possibly the same bird, at the same location on January 3. **Palm Warblers** appeared at

Robert C. Byrd Locks and Dam, Mason County, on December 25 and January 3, observed by Gary Rankin and David Patick; at Magic Island, Kanawha County, on January 27, found by Joseph Jarrell; and at Green Bottom WMA, seen by Michael Griffith on February 11. **Pine Warblers** appeared in Putnam County (KC) and Wayne County (DP, GR) in late February. Birders in lower elevations saw Myrtle-race **Yellow-rumped Warblers** at locations throughout the state.

**Cardinals** – Birders throughout the state reported **Northern Cardinals** in good numbers.

Contributors to the Winter Field Notes: Kyle Aldinger (KA), Frederick Atwood (FA), Richard Bailey (RBi), Randy Bodkins (RBo), Joette Borzik (JBz), Terry Bronson (TB), Kevin Cade (KC), Laura Ceperley (LC), Derek Courtney (DCo), David Daniels (DD), Carol Del-Colle (CD), Cynthia Ellis (CE), James Farley (JF), Hullet Good (HG), Richard Gregg (RG), Michael Griffith (MG), Deborah Hale (DHa), Bruni Haydl (BH), Joey Herron (JoH), Diane Holsinger (DH), Wilma Jarrell (WJ), Kim Kazmierski (KK), Stephen Kimbrell (SKi), Kathy King (KKi), Paul McKay (PM), Heather McSharry (HMc), Bill Mills (BMi), Herb Myers (HMy), Matthew Orsie (MO), David Patick (DP), James Phillips (JP), James and Judy Phillips (JJP), Gary Rankin (GR), Casey Rucker (CR), Michael Slaven (MSl), N. Wade Snyder (WS), Jodie Sylvester (JoS), Alex Tsiatsos (AT), Andy Weeks (AW), Jerry Westfall (JWe), G. Michael Willenborg (MWi), Barry Williams (BWi), and Steven Wilson (SWi).

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

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## 2017 Calendar of Events The Brooks Bird Club, Inc.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Place</b>
January	BBC Membership Month .....	Wheeling, WV
February	Write an article for the Mail Bag or The Redstart .....	mail to editors
February 1-3	Trip to Killdeer Plains (Contact Gene Hilton)	
March 3-5	Early Spring Meeting (Contact Dick Esker) .....	North Bend State Park Harrisville, WV
March 9-10	Funk/Killbuck Marsh (overnight trip — contact Dick Esker)	
March 11	Waterfowl Field Trip (day trip) (Contact Carl Slater) ....	Seneca Lake, OH
April 22	Three Rivers Bird Club (day trip) .....	Raccoon Creek State Park, PA (Contact Ryan Tomazin)
May 4-7	Wildflower Pilgrimage, Blackwater Falls State Park .....	Davis, WV
May 13	International Migratory Bird Day/ N. American Migration Count .....	local chapters
June 9-17	Foray - 2017 Lost River Retreat Center, Hardy County .....	Lost City, WV (contact Janice Emrick or Ryan Tomazin)
August-October	Bird Banding .....	Dolly Sods, WV
October 20-22	BBC 85th Anniv./Annual Meeting .....	Oglebay Park, Wheeling, WV
November 8-12	Eastern Shore (Contact Carl Slater)	
Dec. 14-Jan. 5, '18	Christmas Bird Counts .....	local chapters

### BBC FORAYS (dates and places tentative)

2017 Lost River Retreat Center, Hardy County Lost City, WV ..... June 9-17, 2017  
 2018 Thornwood 4-H Camp, Pocahontas County Thornwood, WV ..... TBD

### SEASONAL FIELD NOTES DUE

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

### ARTICLES FOR THE MAIL BAG DUE

February 15      May 15      August 15      November 15  
 MAIL TO: Ryan Tomazin, 348 Station St., Apt. 7, Bridgeville, PA 15017, wwwarblers@hotmail.com

**<http://brooksbirdclub.org>**

The dates for the 2017 BBC program may be changed if necessary. Changes will be announced on the web page or in The Mail Bag.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Dick Esker, eskerrb@frontier.com  
 Carl & Juanita Slater, gusind@stratuswave.net  
 Gene Hilton, treehugger@suddenlink.net

Dawn Fox, dafox210@gmail.com  
 Ryan Tomazin, wwwarblers@hotmail.com  
 Janice Emrick, emrick@gmn4u.com

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

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