

The Todd Nuthatch



Indiana, PA

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Todd Bird Club
www.toddbirdclub.org

April 2014

Meetings

Todd Bird Club meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. the first Tuesday of the month, September through April, at Blue Spruce Lodge in Blue Spruce County Park, located just off Route 110 east of the town of Ernest. Arrive early to socialize. Refreshments are provided at each of our meetings. In May we hold our banquet meeting which starts at 6:00 p.m.

Tuesday, May 6 – This is our annual banquet meeting which begins at 6:00 p.m. Please bring a covered dish to share and your own place settings. Following our dinner, David Yeany II will present, *Setting the Stage for Coastal Wetland Conservation: Maryland's Marsh Bird Survey*. During the spring and summer of 2012, the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program (PNHP) coordinated Maryland's portion of the Saltmarsh Habitat and Avian Research Program (SHARP), a two-year survey of tidal marsh birds through-out the northeastern U.S. from Virginia to Maine. Among wetlands worldwide, Atlantic tidal marshes have one of the highest rates of endemic vertebrate species, most of which are birds. With climate change threatening to flood many of these marshes over the next 100 years, the SHARP survey results will help determine population status and geographic distribution for saltmarsh birds across the northeast. This information will be invaluable to conservation planning efforts to protect tidal marshes and the specialized species which depend on them. The



David Yeany will be our May banquet speaker.

SHARP survey targeted secretive marsh bird species like Clapper Rail and Least Bittern as well as saltmarsh obligates like Saltmarsh Sparrow and Seaside Sparrow. While fighting wind, weather, and tides, they conducted more than 750 surveys and counted thousands of target marsh birds on the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay.

More information on the SHARP can be found at www.tidalmarshbirds.org.

In October 2011, David joined the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program as an ornithologist and conservation planning specialist in the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) Pittsburgh office. David provides support to numerous conservation planning projects, management of the statewide Natural Heritage Area database, performs GIS analyses, and provides capacity for field ornithology and bird conservation work for PNHP and WPC. His work focuses on collecting, interpreting, and providing ecological information, often utilizing GIS tools, for use in planning at regional, county, and municipal levels. David brings his experience with conservation planning and avian field studies, skills with GIS, and a passion for conserving biodiversity to his position.

Before coming to WPC/PNHP, David was the Important Bird Areas Coordinator for Audubon Maryland-DC. At Audubon, he helped identify critical bird habitats, developed conservation strategies for IBAs, and

conducted monitoring for populations of at-risk birds. He has also worked at Fort Indiantown Gap National Guard Training Center in Annville, PA, and for the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry, District 8 (Clarion) doing wildlife and habitat inventory and research.

David has an M.S. in Applied Ecology and Conservation Biology from Frostburg State University in Frostburg, MD, and a B.S. in Biology from Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, PA. He is a native of Forest County and currently lives with his wife, Colleen, just outside Pittsburgh in Cheswick.

Don't miss this excellent program on secretive marsh birds.

Outings

Tuesday morning outings, mostly at Yellow Creek, will continue. Meet at 8:00 at the park office located on Rt. 259, just off Rt. 422 east of Indiana. Everyone – from beginner to expert birder – is welcome. If you have questions, contact Lee Carnahan (724-388-4667) or Roger or Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493).

Saturday, April 19 –Powdermill Nature Preserve, led by Derek and Emily Clawson. Meet at Powdermill at 8:00 a.m. Cost for the Powdermill tour is \$7 per person.

Saturday, April 26 – Eagle Watch on the Mahoning Shadow Trail, led by Tom Glover (814-938-5618). Check on the progress of the resident Bald Eagles and this year's nesting effort as well as birding the trail for migrants. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Valier trailhead parking lot.

Sunday, April 27 – Spring Clean-up at Yellow Creek State Park. Meet at 1:00 at the North Shore Pavilion.

Saturday, May 3 – Yellow Creek State Park, led by John Taylor (724-397-2040). This is our annual warbler walk. Be prepared to hike.

Saturday, May 10 – Pennsylvania Migration Count. Count birds in your yard or out in the field. If you plan to participate in either Indiana or Armstrong counties, please contact Roger or Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493).

Saturday, May 17– Yellow Creek State Park, led by Gloria Lamer (724-349-1159). The warbler migration will be in full swing, and Yellow Creek is one of the best places to witness it.

Tuesday, May 20 – 4:00 a.m. Annual Yellow Creek Pontoon Ride. Spaces are limited. Please make your reservations by calling the Higbees at 724-354-3493. Reservations will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

Saturday, May 24 – Grasslands, Sandy Ridge Road,

Clearfield County, led by Tom Glover. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at small cemetery about seven miles out of Punxsutawney on Rt. 36 toward Mahaffey, near address 10939 Colonel Drake Hwy, Punxsutawney. Expected species include Eastern Meadowlark, Bobolink, and Field, Savannah, Grasshopper, and Henslow's Sparrows.

Saturday, May 31 – Blue Spruce County Park, led by Daniel Winstead. Meet in the first large parking lot near the park office at 8:00 a.m.

Friday, June 6 through Sunday, June 8 – This is our annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology which will be held in Bradford this year on the University of Pittsburgh campus. For more information, go to www.pabirds.org and click on “Annual Meeting” in the left column or contact the Higbees (724-354-3493).

Saturday, June 14 – Blacklick Valley Natural Area, led by Lee Carnahan (724-388-4667). We will walk the trails and focus on the area's breeding birds. Meet in the park located at 800 McFeaters Road at 8:00 a.m.

From Indiana and the north: Follow Route 954 south to Route 422 east. Take Route 422 east to Strongstown where you turn right onto Route 403 south and head to . Route 22 east. Follow Route 22 East one mile to McFeaters Road. Turn left onto McFeaters Road and proceed to the BVNA parking lot at the bottom of the hill where McFeaters Road ends.

Saturday, June 21 – Hemlock Lake County Park, located in northern Indiana County. Meet at 8:00 at the east entrance.

From Indiana, follow Route 286 east to Glen Campbell, which is approximately 25 miles from Indiana. Turn left onto Glenwood Avenue, the main street through Glen Campbell. After leaving town, Glenwood becomes Hemlock Lake Road. Follow this road for 5.5 miles and

turn left onto the entrance road. This half-mile road will end at the east side parking lot.

Saturday, June 28 – Pine Ridge County Park, led by Lee Carnahan. Meet at 8:00 a.m.

From Indiana take Route 119 south to the Route 22

interchange near Blairsville. Continue on Route 119 under Route 22 and take the second left (the first left is an on-ramp to Route 22) onto Old William Penn Highway (old Route 22) toward the Chestnut Ridge Inn. Travel several hundred feet past the Chestnut Ridge Inn and veer left, staying on Old William Penn Highway. Follow Old William Penn Highway 0.5 mile to the park entrance on the right. Meet here at the entrance.

Exploring the Bruce Peninsula

by Richard Nugent

The Bruce Peninsula is in the province of Ontario in Canada. It extends into Lake Huron and is a heavily forested region with thin soil on a dolomitic limestone base. As a result there are many marshes and fens. The woods are dominated by conifers with a modest number of deciduous trees and shrubs. Many of these wooded areas are almost impenetrable unless you are on a trail.

I left Pittsburgh Monday morning (June 18, 2012) and drove to Tobermory at the northern tip of the Bruce Peninsula. It was 450 miles (9 hours of driving plus stops). Crossing the border was time consuming with a border guard who asked a lot of questions and did not seem happy to see me. When I stopped for fuel, I discovered that I should have filled up in New York (gasoline in Canada was almost \$5/gallon). My next discovery was that my cell phone could be used only for emergencies in Canada.

On Tuesday the weather forecast was good with only a 20% chance of afternoon showers, so I decided that it was a good day to spend on Flowerpot Island (the best spot on the peninsula for orchids and ferns). I took the first boat of the morning to the island and at 10 AM was on the island with abundant sunshine and mild temperatures. On the boat ride I saw Ring-billed Gulls and many Double-crested Cormorants, and as we approached the dock a Common Merganser was swimming near the dock. My first fern was Maidenhair Spleenwort growing on a moss covered boulder; nearby a Winter Wren and a Red-breasted Nuthatch sang. Near the lighthouse I found my first “life” orchid (Stripped Coralroot) with another Winter Wren singing nearby. I was fortunate to meet Tony (a park naturalist) who was helping a photographer find orchids and invited me to join them. He took us off the trail to see a couple of rare orchids and showed us Heart-leaved Twayblade, which is so tiny that I would have never found it on my own. There were several Common Ravens on the island and I heard a Northern Waterthrush singing. Around 2:30 PM we heard thunder, and soon we were

experiencing a thunderstorm. Fortunately I had my raincoat in my day pack, and Tony led us to the staff cabin and allowed us to stay inside until the rain stopped. I then rode the 3:15 PM boat back to the mainland. My bird highlights for the island were:

Common Merganser	Hermit Thrush
Red-breasted Nuthatch	American Redstart
Winter Wren	Great Crested Flycatcher
Veery	Ovenbird
Blue-headed Vireo	Northern Waterthrush
Black-throated Green Warbler	Bald Eagle
Common Raven	Herring Gull

Wednesday (June 20, 2012) dawned with a clear sky and the promise of a warm afternoon. Canada was more of a foreign country than I expected, and Toronto was expecting a very hot day with the temperature reaching 34°C and fears of heatstroke. It turns out the 34°C is 93°F, which is hot even by Pittsburgh standards, but on the Bruce Peninsula it only reached 85°F. The speed limits in Canada are in km/hour, which also took some getting used to. The roads on the peninsula were straight and level with a speed limit of 80 km/hour (50 miles/hour), which seemed really slow. Some of the roads were posted even lower.

I started the day at Dorcus Bay (Singing Sands). I was greeted in the parking lot by a singing Brown Thrasher, and near the entrance to the boardwalk were a couple of really tame Snowshoe Hares. These are really big rabbits with enormous hind feet, and I was able to get within 10 feet of them. The boardwalk went through a fen (alkaline marsh) with lots of good plants. Besides Pitcher Plant and Sundew, there were many Rose Pogonia and Grass Pink (both “life” orchids) blooming as well as Indian Plantain. On some of the other trails I found Showy Ladyslipper and Yellow Ladyslipper. I encountered a couple of Northern Leopard Frogs and an Eastern Garter Snake as well as two “life” trees (Jack Pine and Tamarack). After considerable

searching, I managed to find a Lakeside Daisy (“life” flower). While walking, my red day pack attracted a Ruby-throated Hummingbird. My bird highlights for this location were:

Brown Thrasher	Ovenbird
American Redstart	Blue-headed Vireo
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Common
Veery	Yellowthroat
Common Raven	Hermit Thrush
Black-throated Green Warbler	Magnolia Warbler
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	

I then went to Cypress Lake, which has a nice network of trails. Not too many orchids here, but I did add Royal Fern to my list and found a Northern Water Snake right next to the trail. Viper’s Bugloss is an alien wildflower, which is very common in this part of Canada and was one of the best butterfly magnets that I saw. I wish I knew my butterflies better, but I still enjoyed seeing the many butterflies and dragonflies. I particularly enjoyed seeing many White Admiral Butterflies, which I don’t think are common in western Pa. There was a female Blue-winged Teal with seven babies, a couple of Great-crested Flycatchers, more Red-breasted Nuthatches and a very cooperative American Redstart.

On Thursday I headed to the southern part of the peninsula and Cape Croker. After a 40-minute drive at 80 km/hr, I arrived at Cathedral Road which is a dead-end road leading to Cathedral Woods. Parts of the road were covered with hundreds of butterflies and I had to drive about 5 mph to allow them to move out of my way. Most of the butterflies were Pearl/northern Crescent butterflies. Cathedral Woods is a deciduous forest, much like our Pennsylvania forests with oaks, beech etc. The birds were also more typical of western PA with Yellow Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Eastern Phoebe, Baltimore Oriole, and Eastern Meadowlark. The most exciting observation was a close encounter with a large Black Bear. I walked into the woods about a mile and then retraced my steps. As I was returning I saw the bear about 50 yards ahead of me walking toward me. It was larger than a Saint Bernard dog and saw me at about the same time I saw it. The bear turned around; walked a few feet and walked off the trail to the right never to be seen again. After returning to my van, I walked along the road to enjoy the spectacle of hundreds of butterflies. I got a really good look at one of them when it landed on my eyeglasses and stayed there even after I took the glasses off. Along the road I also found a Northern Red-bellied Snake.

I then explored more of Cape Croker including some excellent views of the Niagara Escarpment, which provides many cliffs, some more than 100 feet tall. Cape

Croker has many agricultural areas, which allowed me to add Savannah Sparrow. I finished the day by visiting two more fens. Oliphant Fen produced more orchids (Grass Pink and Tall White Bog Orchid) plus many other wetland flowers. Petrel Point Fen had a very nice – if slightly rotten – boardwalk and more orchids (Grass Pink, Tall White Bog Orchid and Rose Pogonia). I also picked up a new “trip bird,” a Wilson’s Snipe. My list of bird highlights for the southern part of the Bruce Peninsula is below:

Yellow Warbler	Wood Thrush
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	Eastern Meadowlark
Eastern Wood-Pewee	Barn Swallow
Scarlet Tanager	Killdeer
Cedar Waxwing	Veery
Eastern Kingbird	Indigo Bunting
Common Raven	Savannah Sparrow
Baltimore Oriole	Wilson’s Snipe
Eastern Phoebe	

Friday (June 22, 2012) was another warm and sunny day, which was nice for the drive home. The gasoline in Canada had a different smell than US gasoline and I discovered that with my second and third tanks of Canadian gasoline I got 30 miles per gallon and 32 mpg. The best that my minivan has ever gotten in the US is 26 mpg, so I think that the Canadian gasoline really is different. The drive home was uneventful, except for another very serious border agent, lots of questions, and a search of my vehicle. I finally arrived home at around 6 PM.

My trip lists are below:

Orchids

Yellow Lady’s Slipper	Rose Pogonia
Helleborine	Tall White Bog Orchid
Menzies’ Rattlesnake Plantain	Alaska Orchid
Blunt-leaved Orchid	Large Round Leaved Orchid
Striped Coralroot	Orchid
Small Round Leaved Orchis	Early Coralroot
Showy Lady’s Slipper	Long Bracted Green Orchid
Tall Northern Green Orchid	Orchid
Heart Leaved Twayblade	Grass Pink Orchid

Reptiles and Amphibians

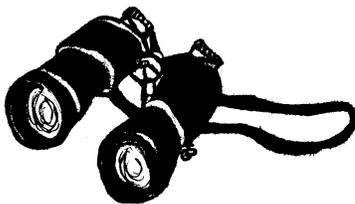
Eastern Garter Snake	Painted Turtle
Northern Water Snake	Northern Leopard Frog
Northern Red-bellied Snake	

Ferns

Bracken Fern	Rattlesnake Fern
Maidenhair Spleenwort	Green Spleenwort
Rock Polypody	Royal Fern
Fragile Fern	Sensitive Fern
Oak Fern	Common Wood Fern
Male Fern	Cinnamon Fern
Christmas Fern	Interrupted Fern
Northern Lady Fern	Northern Beech Fern
Northern Holly Fern	

Birds

Canada Goose	Winter Wren
Mallard	Veery
Blue-winged Teal	Hermit Thrush
Common Merganser	American Robin
Double-crested Cormorant	Brown Thrasher
Great Blue Heron	European Starling
Turkey Vulture	Cedar Waxwing
Bald Eagle	Yellow Warbler
Killdeer	Magnolia Warbler
Ring-billed Gull	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Herring Gull	American Redstart
Mourning Dove	Ovenbird
Rock Pigeon	Northern Waterthrush
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Common Yellowthroat
Northern Flicker	Scarlet Tanager
Eastern Wood-Pewee	Chipping Sparrow
Eastern Phoebe	Savannah Sparrow
Blue-headed Vireo	Song Sparrow
Red-eyed Vireo	Northern Cardinal
Blue Jay	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
American Crow	Indigo Bunting
Common Raven	Red-winged Blackbird
Tree Swallow	Eastern Meadowlark
Barn Swallow	Common Grackle
Black-capped Chickadee	Baltimore Oriole
Red-breasted Nuthatch	American Goldfinch
White-breasted Nuthatch	House Sparrow
House Wren	



The Aerial Ballet

by Gary Ferrence

The Deere came close,
His nerves caved in.
With his cover blown,
The game was to begin.

Ol' Sol; gone to bed,
The moon's light, so intense,
A brown ghost floated down.
The peent was heard: that important sound.

His beak opened to speak;
I heard not a word.
After all he was no more,
Than a ghostly brown bird.

The lunar glow, so clear and bright,
Up he'd spiral, out of sight.
Titters and chirps descend from above,
The objective of course: wild bird love.

A fluff of bird on the wetland was seen.
A little round bird: dancing for a queen.
The Prairie was shorn.
New life was born.

This newsletter is produced four times a year by the Todd Bird Club.

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“Sky Dance”

by Gary Ferrence

I’m not certain who coined the term “Sky Dance,” but the first time I encountered it was while reading *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold. If you’ve never read this book, you should buy it and place it at your favorite reading spot and immerse yourself repeatedly.

This year’s adventure with Sky Dance began while I was mowing prairie grasses on our farm. I have a three-year mowing schedule, so there’s always some tall prairie grass for wildlife cover. I mow early in spring before birds and mammals begin nesting. I mow with the loader bucket on my tractor just a few inches above the ground, so that wild animals are alerted and have a chance to escape.

About a month ago as I was mowing, a little brown fluff skittered away from the tractor and stopped about three feet to the side. I immediately recognized the American Woodcock, affectionately called the Timberdoodle. About a week later while mowing, I saw a woodcock fly way in front of the tractor. I don’t know whether this was the same bird or another, but it was “Game On.” Although the two sightings were in two different fields, they had one thing in common – wet areas. These little brown wetland birds use their long bills to probe the moist soil in search of earthworms and other small critters. Their mottled brown color helps them to blend with the leaf litter and other ground cover, essentially disappearing from view. But when spring arrives and just after the sun disappears beyond the western horizon, the show begins. Camouflage is no longer the name of the game; it’s now show and don’t tell.

Years ago I had a peenting ground on the farm where I regularly found woodcock in courtship. Later one summer, I came across a mother woodcock with a baby. That baby was nothing more than a little brown tuft of feathers, not much larger than a cotton ball and probably not weighing any more. Due to changes in agricultural practices, I was no longer finding Timberdoodle courtship. I’m not saying that the birds weren’t here, just that I hadn’t seen them. Over the years that followed, I witnessed Sky Dance at Yellow Creek State Park and in the Elk Range but not on our farm.

On February 9, I went back up on the hill to see if I could locate Sky Dance. Personally, I consider this courtship ritual as more of an aerial ballet. I was at the place of my first sighting at the right time but neither saw nor heard any woodcocks. I moved on to the second location and was again treated with nothing but traffic noise from the four-lane. I started to slowly drive back to the house when I spotted a woodcock on the two-track that I was



Gary Ferrence photographed this American Woodcock on his prairie peenting ground.

following, and I heard the first peents. With the aid of my headlights, I even managed to get a few poor quality photos. Although eventually I frightened him away, I had discovered the peenting ground.

I didn’t go back until February 12. It was about 7:55 p.m. when I heard the first peent. That sneaky rascal had fluttered in unnoticed, and I was not aware of his arrival until I heard that first quiet peent. On February 13, I actually saw him land at 8:15:05 p.m. He was

like a silent ghost as he floated to the ground without making a sound. Fifteen seconds later he uttered his first peent to announce his intentions to the world. The time between peents was as short as two seconds and sometimes longer than 30 seconds. Usually I can see at least the first few Sky Dances as the cock bird launches into the air and spirals upward in circles of increasing diameter until he’s out of sight in the dim light of the evening. When I hear a twittering sound, I know that he’s on his way back down to his peenting ground. Usually the final sounds of his return are accentuated with a chirping sound and then quiet as he lands at his special spot.

Often times the cock bird returns to the same spot from which he departed. I’ve taken advantage of this by slowly moving to that location and standing quietly. I’ve had him land within 10 feet of me in the dim light of the evening. While sitting in my truck, I’ve had him come down so close that the hood hid him from view.

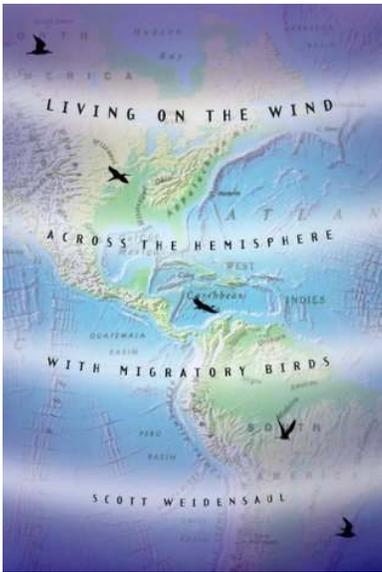
Who knows whether or not his courtship will be successful this year? I’ll not go hunting for nests or young, but if I should accidently find either, it will be one more treasure obtained by managing our farm for wildlife.

Book Review

Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds

by Scott Weidensaul

“And from our hot, dusty rooftop in Cardel (Mexico), we had counted more than 435,000 raptors. As our sense of numbed disbelief gave way to comprehension, we realized we had witnessed – by far – the heaviest hawk migration recorded, anywhere in the world.”



The above is a quote from Scott Weidensaul's 1999 *Living on the Wind*, published by North Point Press, New York. It is hard to imagine counting more than 435,000 hawks in one day, but that is what Scott and others accomplished on a hot September day in the early 90s in Cardel, Mexico, located in the state of Veracruz along the Gulf coast. But Scott detailed that this count was surpassed on another September day in 1994.

One of Scott's friends and others counted 925,000 hawks in a single day! Scott goes on to describe kettles of hawks, mostly Broad-winged Hawks, that numbered twenty or thirty thousand each. Scott, a fellow Pennsylvanian, has written other nature books and is also a noted nature columnist. His book *Living on the Wind* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction in 2000.

My copy was a Christmas gift last year from my daughter and son-in-law. Those two have provided me with a number of birding books, but Scott's has proven to be the most educational. I found his descriptions of various birds and their migration patterns to be more than anecdotal. An example is the Bar-tailed Godwit's migration that begins in Alaska; it then flies nonstop for 6,000 miles over the Pacific

Ocean to New Zealand. And now I know where some of those Yellow-rumped Warblers that we see on our spring Yellow Creek outings may have spent their winters – the Yucatan peninsula, along the eastern Central American coast, and on sunny Caribbean islands. I also learned that my first life Blackpoll Warbler discovered during the fall migration in September 2010 at Blue Spruce Park may have hatched along the Alagnak River in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska and may have wintered in western Brazil. Now it is hard to realize that this little bird can make a migration that starts on an island off Alaska, fly east across Canada, then turn south through the eastern US, continue over the Atlantic and makes landfall in Venezuela before heading to Brazil. Scott relates a quote from a couple of researchers about the Blackpoll Warbler. “If a Blackpoll Warbler were burning gasoline instead of its reserve of body fat, it could boast of getting 720,000 miles to the gallon.”

Scott also details the impact man has on migrating birds, especially on their wintering grounds. He relates, for example, how man's impact on the Argentine pampas affect the Blue-winged Teal we see at Yellow Creek. One story he details is the death of thousands of Swainson's Hawks from pesticides used on their wintering grounds also on the pampas of Argentina.

Scott's stories focus on migrating birds throughout the Western Hemisphere, but because Scott is from Pennsylvania, he gives the birds that are familiar to us special attention. And that may be the most valuable information that this book has to offer to us birders of the Todd Bird Club.

– Tom N. Glover

PA Migration Count

The Todd Bird Club has sponsored both the Indiana and Armstrong PA Migration Counts since their inception. Help us continue the tradition and plan now to count birds on Saturday, May 10. You may count for the full 24 hours or for just a very short period of time. Just let us know how long you've spent.

Last year we tallied 9,524 individual of 150 different species in Indiana County; 844 birds of 85 species in Armstrong. Let's see if we can surpass these totals. If you plan to participate, please contact Roger or Margaret Higbee at 724-354-3493 or bcoriolle@windstream.net.

New Jersey Revisited

The Todd Bird Club trip to New Jersey was scheduled for March 7 through 10. We – Melissa Little, Roger, and I – left Indiana shortly before 6:00 a.m. on Friday and arrived at our first New Jersey destination at 12:20. Our first target species was a Smith's Longspur at Stone Harbor. Unfortunately, however, we were greeted by gale force winds and very few passerines – one Northern Mockingbird and a Snow Bunting. Our consolation prize was an American Bittern flying – truly being blown around – over the marsh. We decided to drive to New York Avenue in Wildwood to search for two King Eiders that had been reported. Here we lucked out having great looks at both as well as all three scoter species. We made a brief stop at Rotary Park, where we looked across at the ferry terminal for any unusual gulls, but few gulls were here, only the usual three – Bonaparte's, Ring-billed, and Herring. A drive around Lily Lake in Cape May yielded numerous Fox Sparrows and one Purple Finch. A Lincoln Avenue feeder had been hosting a Painted Bunting which we found within minutes of arriving. In addition, the Eurasian Collared-Dove flew onto a nearby telephone wire. Our last two stops of the day included Cape May State Park where we found a nice assortment of ducks as well as a Red-necked Grebe and Sunset Beach which produced a Merlin as well as several Red-throated Loons. After a delicious dinner at Bella Vida, we drove to the Camelot for the night.

The morning of March 8 dawned sunny and just a tad breezy, so we decided to drive directly to Stone Harbor to look for the longspur that we failed to find yesterday. We couldn't believe the number of cars in the parking lot. Numerous birders had arrived. We grabbed our scopes and headed once again for the point. Passerines were more numerous, and it wasn't long before we spotted a large group of birders staring through scopes. They had just seen the Smith's Longspur. It took only a minute or two before we, too, had the bird in view. We watched this vagrant that normally migrates through the Midwest until it finally disappeared in the heavier vegetation.

Our plan was to head next to Breezee-Lee Marsh where two drake Eurasian Wigeons had been reported. Besides these wigeons, we also noted numerous waterfowl, Boat-tailed Grackles, and a Northern Harrier. After leaving the marsh, we made stops at Cape May Bird Observatory, Lily Lake, and Sunset Beach, seeing many of the same birds we had observed last evening.

Cape May State Park was our next stop as we wanted to walk the trails at the park to pick up a few more passerines. We walked one of the trails, arriving at

Lighthouse Pond where another birder excitedly told us that he'd just received a text that a Common Teal had been spotted on the other side of Lighthouse Pond. We hurriedly followed him back along the trail, returned to our van, and drove to the designated location. Here were 13 Green-winged Teal, but we could not find one lacking a vertical stripe and sporting a horizontal stripe. After searching in vain for about 20 minutes, we decided to return to the boardwalk and continue our birding around Lighthouse Pond. At the observation deck, not too far past where we had been stopped before, we found a pair of birders staring through scopes. This part of Lighthouse Pond was around a bend, so it had not been visible from either of our previous locations. One of the birders asked, "Did you see the Common Teal? It's right here." Tucked into the vegetation right across the pond was a bird none of us had ever seen before. Although it's not yet considered a full species, it was great to see this very striking duck. The green on its face was outlined boldly in pale yellow. When we first spotted the teal, we could see only its lack of a vertical stripe. Fortunately, he decided to swim out into the open where all the field marks were visible.

The last time Roger and I had been in New Jersey, we had birded Jake's Landing. I really like the mature pines with the heavy understory and the marsh at the end of the road. I wanted Melissa to see this habitat. Highlights here included Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a year bird for us, and Brown Creeper.

We returned to the Garden State Parkway and arrived at Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge where we drove the wildlife drive. It was 3:06 when we left the parking lot and after dark when we completed the drive. Some of the birds seen here included Snow Geese, Brant, numerous ducks, two Peregrine Falcons, a calling Clapper Rail, and two Snowy Owls. We spent the night in Absecon.

Sunday morning we left Absecon, heading to Barnegat Lighthouse State Park. We were greeted in the parking lot by 27 Boat-tailed Grackles and four Yellow-rumped Warblers among other species. From the concrete walkway we counted 46 Common Eiders near the jetty across Barnegat Inlet. We continued out the jetty listing American Oystercatcher, Harlequin Ducks, Purple Sandpipers, Sanderlings, and Great Cormorants.

Our final target species was Barnacle Goose in Rahway River Park near Clark. We decided to bird our way north, so we made a stop at Manasquin Inlet where we enjoyed

more Brant, Long-tailed Ducks, Common Loons, and one Red-necked Grebe. A stop between New York and Brooklyn Avenues in Sea Girt yielded great looks at another flock of Purple Sandpipers. A stop along Ocean Avenue produced our first 30 Ruddy Ducks. As we were continuing our drive northward, we spotted a Merlin in Wall Twp. We stopped for the night in West Long Branch at the Holiday Inn Express.

Monday morning we continued our drive to Rahway River Park. The first time around the circular drive we spotted a flock of Canada Geese to our left. A search through the flock did not reveal anything but Canadas. We completed the circle and decided to try again. This time the Barnacle Goose was visible. We set the scopes up, and I was able to digiscope the Barnacle. After watching for a while, we

all needed a pit stop so we drove to the restrooms we had spotted on our first trip around. Right behind the restrooms, we heard then saw a Red-headed Woodpecker. Since it was only 8:30, we decided to do a bit more birding before heading home. Our first stop at Raritan Bay Waterfront Park in South Amboy was quite productive. Some of the birds sighted here were Red-throated Loons, Horned Grebes, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Killdeer. As we drove across I-78 we spotted a sign for Spruce Run State Park, so we exited. Unfortunately, all the water here remained frozen, so birding was slow. We returned to the highway and arrived back in Indiana by 5:50 p.m. Our trip list included 93 species.

– Margaret Higbee

Indiana – Armstrong – Cambria County

Locations: Conemaugh Dam (CD), Crooked Creek Park (CC), Freeport (FP), Indiana (IN), Kittanning (KT), Lewisville (LV), Prince Gallitzin (PG), Rosston (RT), Shelocta (SH), Two Lick Reservoir (TL), Worthington (WT), Yellow Creek State Park (YC).

With the severe winter, most lakes and ponds and much of the Allegheny River were frozen this period. Open water remained at the Freeport, Clinton, Kittanning, and Mosgrove dams, so waterfowl were concentrated on the Allegheny River, making this one of the best years for birding the river. Yellow Creek Lake was mostly frozen for the CBC 12/26 but retained a small patch of open water through 1/14. Total ice thickness on Yellow Creek reached 18". Two Lick Reservoir, which is deeper, had also completely frozen over by mid January. By the end of the period, these lakes had not yet begun to thaw.

An unusual flock of 15 **Mute Swans** was photographed on the Kiskiminetas River near Leechburg 2/15 (MVT) while a singleton was spotted at FP 2/17 (EF, MF). PG yielded the only Tundra Swan reports – 2 on 11/20 (JS) and one 12/28 (RB, JS).



Marge Van Tassel photographed this unusual-for-the-region flock of Mute Swans on the Kiski 2/15.

Last **Gadwall** was found 12/26 (LC, RC) on TL. First 4 **American Wigeons** appeared at KT 2/21 (MH, RH). CC's last **American Black Ducks** were sighted 12/1 (MVT); 2 on 1/14 (LC, TG, WL, DJM) were YC's

last; by 2/10 (MM) 11 had returned to the CC dam outflow. At the KT dam, of the 4 Blacks that appeared 1/30 (MH, RH), 3 were still present 2/28 (MH, RH). **Mallard** maxima were 69 at YC on 12/1 (LC), 57 at Manorville 2/7 (MH, RH), and 43 at KT 2/17 (TR); by 2/20 (MH, RH) the Ernest treatment ponds were open enough to harbor 19 Mallards. Last **Green-winged Teal** was a singleton at PG 12/4 (DG, JS).

Three **Canvasbacks** and 2 **Redheads** lingered at YC 12/3 (TG); PG still harbored 2 Canvasbacks 12/4 (DG, JS). In *Armstrong* Canvasback reports mentioned 2 at the Blanco treatment pond 1/30 (MH, RH, GL, DL), 2 at the CC outflow 2/10 (MM), and up to 18 at KT 2/21 (MH, RH). **Redheads** peaked at 75 at KT 2/21 (TH). PG's last **Ring-necked Ducks** were 15 on 11/20 (JS); 7 Ring-necked Ducks remained at YC 12/26 (GL, GS) with one hanging on till 12/31 (LC, MH, RH). A drake Ring-neck was feeding in Cowanshannock Creek 2/17 (ML); by 2/28

(MH, RH) 8 Ring-necked Ducks had arrived at KT. A single **Greater Scaup** was noted at YC 1/14 (MH, RH) while the Blanco treatment pond on 1/30 (MH, RH, GL, DL) also hosted one; single birds were also spotted at Clinton 2/7 (MH, RH) and at FP 2/17 (EF, MF); KT's first 21 appeared 1/28 (MH, RH) where the high count of 29 was achieved 2/24 (TR). Last 9 **Lesser Scaup** were listed 12/31 (LC, MH, RH) at YC; another appeared in a WT yard 2/7 (MW) "looking exhausted." First **White-winged Scoter** was found at KT 1/30 (MH, RH); by 2/21 (TH) 5 were present; Mosgrove also yielded a single White-winged Scoter 2/17 (MH, RH). A **Long-tailed Duck** was spotted at PG 11/20 (JS); on 2/7 (MH, RH) a Long-tail had joined the mixed KT flock, and numbers built to the high of 30 on 2/21 (TH); FP also harbored 3 Long-tails on 2/17 (EF, MF) where one remained 2/21 (EF, MF). Four **Buffleheads** departed YC 12/25 (LC), the day before the CBC. The open water near the KT bridge harbored 3 **Buffleheads** 1/23 (MH, RH); by 2/17 (MH, RH) 17 was the tally there. Three **Common Goldeneyes** on 12/25 (LC) comprised the entire report at YC for this species; one was found at PG 12/28 (RB, JS); 2 were at KT 1/28 (MH, RH); FP produced 7 on 2/17 (EF, MF) and 2/21 (EF, MF); KT's high count was 37 on 2/28 (MH, RH). PG hosted 12 **Hooded Mergansers** 11/20 (JS) and 8 remained there through 12/4 (JS); 3 appeared at YC 12/1 (LC), the lone YC report; 2 lingered at CC 12/7 (TR); first 3 returnees arrived at KT 2/17 (TR) where they remained through 2/28 (MH, RH); 2 had also returned to the CC dam outflow by 2/27 (MVT). CC harbored 140 **Common Mergansers** 12/7 (TR); by 1/1 (TR) the CC flock had reduced to 34; 4 appeared at RT 1/12 (TR); 38 were at KT 1/30 (MH, RH); FP produced 3 on both 2/17 (EF, MF) and 2/21 (EF, MF). In *Indiana* TL yielded the high Common Merganser counts of 26 on 12/23 (MH, RH) and 18 on 12/28 (MH, RH), *Indiana's* last sighting this season. Three **Red-breasted Mergansers** lingered at PG 11/20 (JS); 5 had returned to CC by 2/27 (MVT). **Ruddy Ducks** dwindled at YC from 19 on 12/3 (TG) to the season's last 3 sighted 12/26 (LC, GL, GS).

Ruffed Grouse continued in low numbers with the *Indiana* CBC on 12/26 (v.o) producing only 3. **Wild Turkeys** appeared in mostly small flocks with the two largest comprised of 72 individuals near Washington Church 2/16 (TB) and 58 on the *Armstrong* WRS 1/30 (MH, RH, GL, DL).

A lingering **Common Loon** was sighted at PG 12/4 (DG, JS). Last **Pied-billed Grebes** were one at CC 12/9 (MVT), 3 at RT 12/14 (TR), and one on TL 12/28



Steve Gosser photographed this striking Common Merganser at Crooked Creek Park.

(MH, RH). A **Horned Grebe** appeared to be stranded in a puddle on a small run near Creekside 12/27 (MH, RH, DL); a subsequent search for the bird by a wildlife rehabilitator was unsuccessful, but water levels had risen, and the run had overflowed its banks, allowing us to believe that the grebe had succeeded in taking off. A **Double-crested Cormorant** lingered at YC 12/1 (LC).

Seven early **Turkey Vultures** at Mahoning Lake 2/15 (AD) were the only ones reported this season. An adult **Bald Eagle** was spotted at TL between 12/20-25 (LC); another was noted on the Ferrence Farm near IN 12/26 (KB, GF, JK, TK); other reports mentioned 5 at CC 12/30 (MVT), one at PG 2/2 (RL), 2 at KT 2/17 (MH, RH), and 4 at Mosgrove 2/17 (MH, RH); the Mosgrove birds included 2 adults and 2 juveniles, all visible at the same time. Thirteen **Northern Harriers** were noted during the winter season (v.o.). **Sharp-shinned Hawks** were noted at 12 locations this quarter (v.o.); **Cooper's Hawks**, at 22 (v.o.). Although widespread in *Armstrong*, in *Indiana* **Red-shouldered Hawks** were noted only at YC between 12/2 (DJM) and 1/14 (LC, TG, MH, RH, WL, DJM) and at Conemaugh Dam 2/22 (MD); PG produced one 2/7 (LG). The season's first **Rough-legged Hawk**, a dark morph, was found at PG 11/20 (JS). Another dark morph Rough-legged Hawk was listed near Goheenville 1/30 (MH, RH, GL, DL) on a WRS while a light morph was found on another WRS in s. *Armstrong* 2/1 (MMc); another light morph was observed near Creekside 2/9 (MH, RH), and a dark morph was found near the Rt. 422 and Parkwood Road intersection 2/13 (MH, RH). Conemaugh Dam yielded an adult **Golden Eagle**, photographed by the observer, 2/8 (RCa); this was the sixth county record. **American Coots** continued to dwindle at YC from the estimated 300 seen on 12/1 (LC) to the last 34

spotted 12/15 (LC); the first and only returning coot was spotted 2/21 at KT (TH).

Last 5 **Killdeer** were found on the CBC 12/26 (v.o.). First returnees were 2 near LV 2/21 (DC).

One **Bonaparte's Gull** was observed at TL 12/23 (MH, RH), the only report for the region. **Ring-billed Gulls** appeared twice at YC with counts of 4 on 12/10 (LC) and 5 on 1/14 (LC, TG, MH, RH, WL, DJM); 2/22 (MD) produced the first returnees with tallies of 12 near Blairsville and 6 at Conemaugh Dam. *Armstrong maxima* included an estimated 100 at CC 2/23 (JB), 22 at KT 2/23 (TR), and 22 also at RT 2/28 (MH, RH). Four **Herring Gulls** lingered at CC through 12/4 (MVT); 2/28 (MH, RH) produced the next 2 at RT.

Eastern Screech-Owl reports detailed 2 at Homer City 12/26 (SP), a gray morph in a cavity in a sycamore along the Roaring Run Trail 12/28 (JB), one near LV 1/11 (MC), and one near SGL 247 on 2/2 (TR). **Great Horned Owls** were heard at 7 locations (v.o.) this season; **Barred Owl**, only near SH on three dates (MH, RH), twice at CC (TR, MVT), and once near SGL 247 on 2/16 (TR).

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers wintered at three *Indiana* feeders this year, one at Nolo 1/8-2/28 (CL, GL), one near IN along Lions Health Camp 12/26-2/16 (DM), and another in IN 1/24-2/16 (SD). Feb. 16 yielded 2 *Armstrong* sapsuckers, one near KT (AB) and the other east of KT (ML); in *Cambria* one was found at Dunlo 2/16 (BMA) and another n. of Ebsburg the following day (JS).

Single **Merlins** were good finds near WT 12/1 (MVT) and at YC 12/26 (GL, GS). A **Peregrine** was listed in Johnstown 2/4 (MD, BR) and 2/9 (LG); another chasing a Rock Pigeon was noted at KT 2/17 (MH, RH).

Horned Larks were found in good numbers throughout the region with *Indiana* tallies of 225 on the CBC 12/26 (v.o.), 120 on Kohlhepp Road, also 12/26 (TS), and 63 on Brady Road 12/27 (MH, RH, DL); *Cambria* produced 85 near Chest Springs 12/4 (JS) and 15 near Carrolltown 2/7 (LG). The farm fields near WT yielded 120 **Horned Larks** on 1/22 (MH, RH); by 1/28 (MH, RH) only 80 could be located, and numbers decreased thereafter with three flocks totaling 62 individuals on 2/10 (MH, RH); a subsequent trip to WT on 2/17 (MH, RH) produced only 8 larks. LV still yielded 32 larks 2/17 (DC).

Red-breasted Nuthatches were tough to find in *Indiana* and *Armstrong* this winter with reports only from a feeder near SH between 12/15 (MH, RH) and



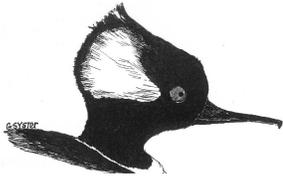
This Red-breasted Nuthatch, photographed 2/19, visited a peanut feeder near Shelocta this period.

end of the period and another in Armstrong Twp. 12/26 (LS, LuS, RS); *Cambria* reports, all 2/16, noted 3 at Johnstown (PG), 2 in W. Taylor Twp. (HS), and one s. of Ebsburg (LP). Single **Winter Wrens** were sighted 12/1 (TR) along the Butler-Freeport Trail, 12/26 (EFu, TF, TG) near Chambersville, and 2/1 (SG) near FP. A late **Gray Catbird** foraged in yews near SH 12/15 (MH). Top **Cedar Waxwing** tallies were 80 at the Johnstown Airport 1/02 (LG) and 53 at YC 12/26 (ED, MS, JT); 7 first appeared 1/10 (MH, RH) near SH where they roosted thereafter in an American Holly; peak number was 28 on 1/13 (MH, RH), but smaller numbers were seen through the end of Feb.

Three **Lapland Longspurs** were found in Center Twp. 12/26 (BM, KM, CW, PW); the same day (TS) 2 were spotted on Kohlhepp Road while the following day, 12/27 (MH, RH, DL), 3 were found near Marion Center. One Lapland Longspur accompanied a flock of 17 Horned Larks near WT 2/10 (MH, RH); 6 was a good count near the same location 2/17 (MH, RH). The CBC yielded a single **Snow Bunting** near Brush Valley 12/26 (GL, GS); 6 were in a flock of 80 larks near WT 1/28 (MH, RH) but were not reported later.

Single **Yellow-rumped Warblers** were found 12/26, both at YC (ED, MS, JT) and on the Ferrence farm (KB, GF, JK, TK). Six Yellow-rumps were found at CC 1/1 (SG) with last report of one at the same spot 1/19 (TR); another singleton was at RT 2/23 (TR).

The CBC 12/26 yielded 2 **Eastern Towhees**, both visiting feeders, one near Penn Run (IT, ST) and the other in IN (NB); 2 were also found near SGL 105 on 2/1 (DMc). A **Fox Sparrow** was noted at CC 12/4 (MVT), the lone report. Three **Swamp Sparrows** lingered till 1/14 (LC, TG, MH, RH, WL, DJM) at YC but could not be found on later outings.



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