

The Todd Nuthatch



Indiana, PA

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

April 2023

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 by 7:00 to socialize and snack. Refreshments are provided at each of our meetings. May's meeting starts at 6:00 p.m. with dinner. Please bring your own place settings and a dish to share. The evening's presentation begins as soon as we clean up.

April 4 – Randy Koleck and Jacob Goldman, two of Dr. Jeff Larkin's grad students, are using emerging technologies to examine factors affecting the Ruffed Grouse occupancy across Pennsylvania. They will present a joint program explaining their project and some of their results.



Don't miss our April meeting when we'll learn about factors influencing Ruffed Grouse occupancy.

May 2 – 6:00 p.m. This is our annual banquet meeting. Please bring a dish to share and your own place settings. Annie Lindsay from Powdermill Avian will be our presenter. Her talk is entitled "How Do We Know How Old That Bird Is?" Learn what techniques bird banders use to age birds in the hand, and whether some of these could be applied to ageing birds through binoculars. Then, we'll jump across the Pacific Ocean to a small island called Saipan where we'll learn how ageing techniques used in North America were applied to determining how to age Saipan's songbirds.



Annie's son Tommy holds the blacklight while Annie studies the Northern Saw-whet Owl.

Annie Lindsay is the Bird Banding Program Manager at Powdermill Nature Reserve in Rector, PA, field station of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, where she runs the long-term bird banding station and teaches banding workshops. She earned her M.S. in Natural Resources at the Ohio State University where she studied the effects of winter habitat quality, as determined by stable-carbon isotope analysis, on plumage characteristics and reproductive success in Yellow Warblers. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Toledo where she studies trends in long-term bird banding datasets, and how anthropogenic factors, in particular climate change, affect avian populations, movements, and behavior. Annie is a North American Banding Council certified bander trainer and serves in leadership roles for several bird-related organizations and societies. She's an avid birder and loves sharing the hobby with new birders, especially her son Tommy!

Outings

Tuesday Morning Outings – These will continue, but *we are heading to Moraine State Park on May 23, so most of us will not be at Yellow Creek*. See below. For the other Tuesdays, meet at the pavilion parking lot on the north shore sometime around 7:30. To reach the pavilion from Indiana, take US 422 to South Harmony Road; turn right onto South Harmony. Follow the road to the right at the “Right Turn Keep Moving” stop sign. Go past McFeaters Cove then turn left into the North Shore.

Everyone is welcome. If you have any questions or weather concerns, please contact Roger (cell - 412-309-3538) or Margaret Higbee (home - 724-354-3493). If you arrive late and can't find us, call Roger's cell.

Saturday, April 1 – Yellow Creek State Park, led by Roger and Margaret Higbee. This is a joint outing with the Three Rivers Birding Club. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the park office, located on Route 259 just off US 422 east of Indiana.

Saturday, April 15 – Elderton Area, led by Alice and Robert Stitt (717-381-6306). Meet at 8:00 a.m. at their property. Directions: Take US 422 toward Elderton. At the eastern most traffic light at the Log Cabin Restaurant, turn left onto PA 210 south. Follow 210 for less than 0.25 miles and watch for the driveway on the left (*not* Kimmel Plan Lane). Across the road from the Stitt driveway is a white farmhouse and a silo with a blue roof. Proceed up the driveway, past the first white and black house. Continue on the driveway past a green gas well, being careful of the dip in the road. Follow the driveway to the end of the road. Please park in front of the large green and white building.
(GPS coordinates: 40.681327 W, -79.341915)

Saturday, April 22 – Blue Spruce County Park, led by Mike Weible (feather_ridge@yahoo.com). Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the first large parking lot just past the park office.

Saturday, April 29 – Join Greg Tomb and crew (gtomb22@gmail.com) for a walk along the Rexis Branch of the Ghost Town Trail. Resident birds, warblers, and other migrants are our targets. The trail is flat and offers easy walking. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Rexis.

Saturday, May 6 – John Taylor (jftaylor@iup.edu) will lead his annual warbler walk at Yellow Creek. Meet at **7:30 a.m.** on the north shore at the pavilion parking lot. Be prepared to hike. Please note that this is a new starting location and time.

Saturday, May 13 – In honor of World Migratory Bird Day and Global Big Day, the Indiana County Migration Count will be conducted throughout the county. Mark your calendars now. Field birders, as well as feeder/yard watchers are welcome to participate. This count is county-wide and not limited to a 15-mile-diameter circle like the Christmas Bird Count. You may either eBird your data, send it to Roger (rvhigbee@windstream.net) or Margaret Higbee (bcoriole@windstream.net), 3119 Creekside Road, Indiana, PA 15701, or call and dictate (724-354-3493) as soon as possible after the Migration Count. May is a great time to get outside and observe migrants. Many birds pass through our state on their northward journeys. It's exciting because we never know what to expect.

Friday, May 19 - Sunday, May 21 – PSO Birding Festival and Annual Meeting in State College. See information on page 8 or go to PABirds.org and click on “Annual Meeting.”

Saturday, May 20 – Blue Spruce County Park, led by Ray Winstead (rw@raywinstead.com). Meet in the large parking lot just past the park office at 8:00 a.m. We'll walk along Getty Run Trail in search of warblers and other migrants.

Tuesday, May 23 – Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Pleasant Valley Non-motorized Launch Area (South Shore) – Moraine State Park, led by EES Mike Shaffer (mishaffer@pa.gov). Come and enjoy a spring day of birding at Moraine State Park in a joint effort with the Todd Bird Club and Bartramian Audubon Society members. We will bird several sections of the Sunken Garden Trail, but our main goal is to find as many warblers as possible. This area has been known to produce some great bird sightings at this time of year. Interested birders of all skill levels from beginners to experts are welcome. Bring binoculars if you have them. If not, we will have binoculars on hand for you to use. So, just bring your enthusiasm, water, snacks, and sharp eyes and ears.

If you wish to carpool, meet at the Higbees' home (724-354-3493) at 6:40 a.m.

Saturday, May 27 – Yellow Creek State Park. Meet on the north shore at 7:30 to explore the area for late spring migrants as well as breeding birds.

The leader will be announced later; check our website - toddbirdclub.org for more information.

How to Receive Text Messages Alerting You to Unusual Birds in Indiana County

By Roger Higbee

Many times unusual to rare birds are sighted in Indiana County, but many birders are unaware of them. With modern technology, the phone tree is nearly obsolete because of the amount of time it takes to notify all interested parties. Sometimes the inevitable need to leave a message occurs, but that message may not be retrieved from minutes to hours to days later which means that the bird could now be in the next county or state.

With the advent of cell phones, a text message can be sent to hundreds of people at once precluding the necessity of making many phone calls and allowing the recipient to be notified that an interesting bird is present at the moment the text is sent. The only caveat is that a person must have a cell phone to receive the message. I understand that not everyone has or has the inclination to obtain a cell phone as I resisted buying a smart phone for years. But now that I have one, I can say that it has been very useful in communicating with other cell phone users and obtaining up-to-the-minute information. I know of one Todd Bird Club member who staunchly refuses to be sucked into purchasing another piece of modern

technology but laments at times that he wished he had known about a bird sighting.

So to help those who do have smart phones, it is possible to setup a notification system through the GroupMe app so they can receive text messages alerting them of rare or interesting bird sightings. It is a simple process which only requires the person go to the App Store to download the GroupMe app to their phone and ask someone already in the group to add them to the group by using their phone number. The one for Indiana County is called "Indiana County PA Rare Bird Alert" which was setup by Court Harding. There are several other ones in the area including the "Western PA RBA" and the "Allegheny County RBA" which, as the names imply, are specific to those areas.

For anyone interested, please text me after you download the GroupMe app at 412-309-3538, and I will add you to the "Indiana County PA Rare Bird Alert." I hope this will help any of you who are interested in receiving notifications of interesting birds in Indiana County.

Help Needed!

For many years Lee Carnahan has arrived at Blue Spruce Lodge no later than 6:30 to set up the room for our monthly meetings. Often with the help of Tom Glover, who has moved to New York, he set up all the tables and chairs, made coffee, and provided cold drinks. In addition, Lee has purchased the drinks, cups, plates, napkins, etc. that we use at our monthly meetings.

Every month various members bring dessert items to share with the group. Sincere thanks to all who have done this. We appreciate being able to socialize and snack.

Lee no longer attends our meetings because of health issues. We need someone to take over his position. Anyone interested in doing this will be reimbursed by the club for his or her purchases. Please contact our secretary Roger Higbee (412-309-3538) if you are willing to do this.

We owe Lee a great debt of gratitude for all he has given to the Todd Bird Club.

More Help Needed!

Todd Bird Club needs someone to take over planning our outings. Once again Lee Carnahan and Tom Glover served as our Outings Committee. If you are interested in helping out in this way, please contact Roger or Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493). We will provide you with the

names and contact information for those who have led in the past and suggestions for future leaders. If you have any suggestions for new destinations, please let us know as well!



Wood Ducks and Screech-Owls

By Ed Donley

Wood Ducks and Eastern Screech-Owls do not happily coexist in a peaceable kingdom. They are engaged in a passive-aggressive real estate battle. On March 15, a pair of Wood Ducks arrived at my pond and joyfully swam around eyeing up my two nesting boxes. She decided that she liked the one on the right side of my pond, so she went inside for a few minutes while the male adored her from the water below. They left a few minutes later. The next morning, they returned. When I looked out my living room window at the pond and saw that they were in the center, not near either of the boxes, I heard the female squawking incessantly. I looked at the duck box entrances, noting a gray morph screech-owl smugly perched in the entrance to the box on the right side of the pond – the box that the Wood Ducks had used the previous day. The Wood Ducks and I were not very happy.



The pair of Wood Ducks are fattening up in the Donley deckside pond.

Photo by Ed Donley

My neighbor and I built 12 boxes for screech-owls and scattered them throughout our properties. This gray morph owl and a slightly larger red morph mate (which is probably the female) spent the winter of 2021-2022 in the owl boxes around my house. I had been enjoying them and cheering them on all winter. This past winter, the red morph owl claimed my yard as its territory while the gray owl wintered elsewhere. She stayed almost exclusively in the owl boxes, only occasionally spending a day in a duck box. I thought that we had a good relationship. The ducks would be free to nest at the pond this spring. The red owl disappeared a few weeks ago. I figured that she was joining her mate at their breeding site, which I'm guessing is a natural cavity nearby since they are not in my boxes, my neighbor's boxes, or Higbees' boxes, who live less than a mile away. The male gray morph owl has shown up a couple of times during these few weeks. He mostly roosted in his mate's favorite owl box in my back yard. Once he was in a duck box. I was glad to see my old friend, who has been wintering in my boxes for the past five years. And I was glad that he found a mate, even though she did boot him out of his winter territory this year.

So, I was frustrated when the gray screech-owl prevented the Wood Duck from laying an egg in her favorite box. I imagine that it is how parents feel when their children are fighting. The ducks flew away after the female was done

squawking. They returned a few hours later. She quickly entered the box on the other side of the pond, stayed for about only two minutes and then emerged. I imagine that she urgently laid an egg in the box. About 20 minutes later, I looked out to find the pair of ducks were standing at the edge of the mowed part of my front yard, about 40 feet from the pond. They were looking at my tube feeder full of black-oil sunflower seed, which was being noisily bombarded by 80 to 100 goldfinches. I looked again about five minutes later, and the ducks were gone. They had lost their nerve.

Late that afternoon, I looked out my window — I don't dare walk outside this time of year for fear of scaring away the wildlife. I'm a prisoner in my own house — and the two Wood Ducks were happily feeding in my frog pond. This is a 20-foot by 25-foot by 3-foot deep pond that I built for amphibians next to the front deck by my house. What a beautiful view! Each duck filled the frame of my

binoculars. At this range even the female looks stunning. Frankly, the male looks a little ridiculous, like he is dressed for the Oscars. But I marvel at him, too. They are chowing down on the Arrow Arum seeds that are plentiful in the shallow areas of the pond. Arrow Arum seeds are about the size of acorns. Using his bill, the duck grabs the seed, which is large enough to keep the bill partway open. He then submerges his bill and rapidly swings his head from side to side. I don't know if he is trying to clean off strings of algae or the thick gelatinous coating on the seeds.

The ducks have been in the pond for most of the past three days now. They are spending more of their time now snapping rapidly at the water. I assume that they are trying to filter out macro invertebrates and tadpoles. But maybe they are filtering plants. I do have a small amount of duckweed in the pond. It is an interesting behavior to watch up close. A few times I saw the male lift his bill out of the water before closing it. Water burst from both sides of his bill, split into rows of fine jet streams by the serrations on his bill.

The owl is back with his mate today leaving the pond boxes for the ducks, the ducks are enjoying a rich food source in my small pond, and I get to watch it all up close. We are all very happy now.

Birding in Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Rice Festival

By Debbie Kalbfleisch

Sunday, October 30, was our last day of birding in Louisiana on the Field Guides Tour led by Eric Hynes and Owen Hilchey, and it looked like it was going to be a gorgeous day. We had not yet had a chance to bird the coast, so we made a quick dash in the morning to Cameron Parish. This is the second largest parish in Louisiana, but it has the second smallest population in the state, only around 6,000 people. While driving through the tiny town of Cameron, we saw a number of old oaks dying from an incursion of salt water, as well as several stairs leading up to stilts with no house, evidence of a series of hurricanes that have slammed into Louisiana over the past few years.

On the way, we snagged several Crested Caracaras and Roseate Spoonbills. Boat-tailed and Great-tailed Grackles were our first on the trip. Our first Green Heron was spotted in a ditch. Rutherford Beach was particularly productive. A White-winged Dove sat quietly on a wire, and Clapper Rails wandered out of the salt marsh, allowing great views. Shorebirds included Black-bellied Plover, Piping Plover, Sanderlings, Dunlin, Greater Yellowlegs and Willets. A few Caspian Terns and Royal Terns were mixed in with the Laughing Gulls. We saw our first Neotropic Cormorants, and an American Bittern skimming over the marsh in the early morning light was a special treat. Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, and Snowy Egrets dotted the landscape. We tallied a Cooper's Hawk and a Red-tailed Hawk, as well as several Northern Harriers and American Kestrels. A Peregrine Falcon made its typically brief appearance, and only a few of us saw it. Roughly 1,300 Tree Swallows were swarming through the air, and a single Cave Swallow with its rusty rump cooperated by sitting and preening on a wire with its bigger neighbors. We went hunting for sparrows and wrens, and among the Savannah Sparrows, Swamp Sparrows, and Marsh Wrens, we were able to get lovely close looks at Sedge Wrens and Nelson's Sparrows.

At the north end of Wakefield Road on the edge of the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge, we saw more Clapper Rails, Caspian and Forster's Terns, as well as the trip's only Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, and Black-

crowned Night-Heron trip. Shorebirds aren't the only birds that like mud — the three sparrows here, Seaside, Nelson's, and Savannah, were all grubbing about in the muck. Next to the Seaside Sparrow, the Nelson's Sparrow with its orange face and crisp streaking looked quite spiffy!



Erik Johnson poses with a Yellow Rail.

Photo by Debbie Kalbfleisch

Late in the morning, we headed north to the rice fields. I was in Owen's van when he suddenly yelled White-tailed Hawk and pulled off the road. He barked an explanation into his walkie-talkie, and we saw Eric's van ahead doing an about turn. When Owen quickly turned onto a side road, we saw two soaring hawks with white bellies and short white tails. With their gray wings, they were certainly striking birds. This species has been moving north from Mexico into Texas and have recently been moving east into Louisiana. They soon disappeared, harassing a young Bald Eagle as

they went.

Just past noon, we pulled into a large rice field in the Thornwell area for the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival. Eric took us on a short walk to orient us and to caution us about fire ants and snakes. Greater White-fronted Geese and a few Snow Geese flew overhead while Great and Snowy Egrets were foraging in the fields. We were offered the opportunity to ride the combine or an ATV they called a gator. A line quickly formed for the combine, and I grabbed a seat in one of the smaller vehicles. We went bouncing off after the combine which was cutting a wide swath on the outer edge of the field. Birds started flying up ahead of the combine, and our driver pointed at a larger bird and shouted King Rail! Smaller birds, their backs the color of yellow rice, with white secondaries were flying up and away — the elusive Yellow Rail! This is certainly a fun way to bird! We came back to where we had started, and realized that the combine was cutting the outside edge of the field. After two or three passes, the combine and gators stopped to let others have a chance to ride.

A banding table had been set up and some of us gathered around Erik Johnson, Director of Bird Conservation for

Audubon Louisiana, as he reached into a bag and casually pulled out a Yellow Rail. Very little is known about where these secretive birds spend the winter, and Erik explained that they are putting nano tags on some of them and have only recently discovered that a few of them overwinter in the marshes south of Thornwell. Eventually, Louisiana will have 30 VHF receiver stations along its coastline and interior. This individual was a nice plump bird with good fat reserves, and I was thrilled to be allowed to release it after it was banded.

I eventually took my turn on the combine, and rode in the cab with Kevin Berken who along with his wife was one of the event founders. Years ago, they became friends with a couple of local birders who had learned that standing on the edge of rice fields during harvest was an excellent way to see rails. The festival began in 2009, when they joined forces to bring birders and rice farmers together. They quickly discovered that participants were clamoring to ride the combine, so the second year, they put up a metal platform with a railing next to the cab. After an early experiment with a few hundred visitors, they decided to keep the festival small, at around 100 participants, as so much depends on weather and the cooperating area landowners who will allow access to their fields. With little advertising and mostly word of mouth, the event fills up quickly every year.

Kevin is proud of the fact that rice provides more habitat for wildlife than any other crop and expressed the hope that people who come to the festival will leave with a better appreciation for rice grown in this country. U.S. rice may cost a bit more, but with every bag you buy, you

are directly helping with bird conservation. Even the flooded impoundments bring in many migrants, as we saw the day before. He explained that the first harvesting of rice happens in the middle of the summer. As the combine gathers the crop and separates leaves and straw, it leaves behind enough rice in the field to start a second crop, and they often get a third harvest, as well. Yellow Rails much prefer to run from danger and only fly when the machine is almost on them, so we were getting good looks from the combine. I was surprised at the many small Cotton Rats that ran ahead of us. They don't usually see that many rodents, but the summer and fall had been unusually dry. A larger and darker bird flew up in front of us, and Kevin called out Virginia Rail!

The center of the field had been getting smaller as the combine cut around the edges, and the birds were forced into the smaller area. The university students holding the mist nets braced for a final onslaught, and Marsh Wrens, LeConte's Sparrows, and a Virginia Rail got tangled in the nets along with Yellow Rails. A single Blue-winged Teal shot off to the side and luckily avoided punching a hole in the net. We watched the birds get their bling, and then had a picnic lunch in the field. On our way back to the motel that afternoon, we had one last bird — a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, sitting on a telephone wire! A great way to end a wonderful trip.

I listed a total of 127 species in Louisiana, including nine lifers: Yellow Rail, Whooping Crane, Brown Booby, White-faced Ibis, White-tailed Hawk, Vermilion Flycatcher, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Sedge Wren, and LeConte's Sparrow.

The Northern Ohio Trip Revisited

Members of the Todd Bird Club met at 6:00 a.m. at our home near Shelocta to head to northern Ohio on Saturday, February 25. Carol Guba; Court Harding; Trent Millum; and John, Jennifer, and Matt St Clair were all prompt and on time. Five of us piled into our van and the St Clairs followed in their vehicle. We made our first brief stop just off US 422 in Kittanning to pick up Theo Rickert and our second at the Grove City exit off I-79 to meet Linda Wagner and transfer Carol to Linda's Subaru, so Lin wouldn't be driving alone to Ohio. We crossed into Trumbull County, Ohio, at 8:30 and Cuyahoga County, our main destination, at 9:07.

Our first stop was at Rocky River Park where our target birds were four Harlequin Ducks. They did not disappoint as we had immediate excellent views. The Harlequins were life birds for several in our group. In addition, to the Harlequins, we added roughly 60 Tundra Swans, Buffleheads, Common Goldeneyes, Red-breasted Mergansers, and the expected three gull species –

Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, and Ring-billed Gull. With so much avian activity, it was difficult to move on, but we had many other stops planned, too many as it turned out.

Our next destination was Wendy Park where a nice variety of gulls had been reported. These included Slaty-backed, Lesser Black-backed, Iceland, and Glaucous Gulls as well as Black-legged Kittiwake. A group of birders had already assembled, but we soon noticed their leaving. One who had not yet departed told us to drive down Whiskey Island Drive to the end as the Slaty-backed Gull had just been sighted there. We hurried to our vehicles and drove as instructed to the end of the road. We had just parked and gotten out of our cars when another birder hurried by, telling us it was now at another nearby location. He apparently was on a "Group Me" list and had up-to-the-minute information. We started to climb back in to follow him when he came racing back. "It's here again!" So once again we all scrambled to grab our scopes and head to the

end of the walkway where 30 or more birders had assembled. We set up our scopes, but it took only a few minutes before the Slaty-backed Gull reappeared. When it perched on the water, we were able to get a few photos. Court was able to get some great flight shots of its underwings as it wheeled and landed.

The Slaty-backed Gull is a rarity, a species found on the coast of Asia. It resembles a Lesser Black-backed Gull, but it is bulkier, has dark pink legs, not yellow like those of Lesser Black-backed, and a “string of pearls” – a line of white dots on the outer primaries. In addition, it has a broad white tertial crescent separating the wings from the tail when the bird is perched. This was the best bird of the day!

Before long, someone spotted an Iceland Gull in flight. It was very easy to pick out because of its all white plumage. Fortunately, it perched on a dock in front of a flock of Ring-billed Gulls where its larger size and white plumage were apparent. Everyone had great views. It, too, was a life bird for several in our group. A Lesser Black-backed Gull was another nice find here and great comparison with the Slaty-backed. Again we spent too much time – over two hours – studying the gulls, so we had to move on.

We slashed a few stops from our agenda and headed next to Cleveland Lakefront Park where our target was a Northern Saw-

whet Owl. In spite of ten sets of eyes searching the conifers for the roosting owl, we failed. We enjoyed a walk along the trail adding the trip’s lone Horned Grebe and a small assortment of passerines.

Our fourth stop was at Sims Park which had been loaded with ducks when Roger and I had visited in January and in previous years. We were hoping for scoters, and we weren’t disappointed as two Surf Scoters and six Black Scoters were present. The views weren’t as great as we had hoped, but we could identify the scoters through our binoculars and scopes.

We had to eliminate two more stops as the day was quickly ending. We made a mad dash to Geneva-on-the-Lake State Park, but it was too late to see the Red-headed Woodpeckers as they’d already gone to roost. It was a good trip and a lot of fun with many of our participants seeing birds they’d not seen before. Lifers are always good!

To see photos from the trip, go to <https://ebird.org/pa/checklist/S129752149> for Rocky River; <https://ebird.org/pa/checklist/S129813704> for Wendy Park & Whiskey Island.

– Margaret Higbee

Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

2023 Birding Festival
(and Annual Meeting)

May 19-21, 2023

Ramada Hotel and Conference Center

State College, Pennsylvania

Registration is now open! Birders from all over the state will be gathering for a time of great birding, making and renewing friendships, and an opportunity to increase their knowledge about the birds!

Field trips are scheduled for Saturday and Sunday morning in Centre, Huntingdon, and Blair counties where more than 25 breeding and up to 8 migrating warblers species can be sighted. First ever, there will be two photography sessions and a drawing session that will be available the weekend mornings.

The meeting and programs will be available to watch online if you can't make it to the event.

The Keynote Speaker for the Saturday evening banquet is George Armistead, the author of “Better Birding: Tips, Tools and Concepts for the Field.” He has visited all 7 continents for birding and has been guiding bird tours since 2002. He recently started his own touring company, Hillstar Nature Tours.

Go to <https://pabirds.org/BirdingFestival/BF.php> for more information.

Birding Blitz for Conservation (B4C)

What is the B4C?

The B4C is part contest and part fundraiser sponsored by the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology. It is a contest of teams of birders across PA who compete to find the most birds in different categories. It is a fundraiser for three of PSO's partner conservation organizations that preserve habitat vital to the preservation of PA bird species.

In 2021 and 2022, Todd Bird Club sponsored a team, the Todd Towhees, to compete. The team included Carol Guba, Gloria Lamer, and Roger and Margaret Higbee. The first year we tried to do a regional count which was to include at least an hour in each of four counties – Indiana, Armstrong, Cambria, and Westmoreland. On the date we selected for the count, June 21, we encountered heavy rain in mid-afternoon. We did not see one bird on a drive through Westmoreland. We had listed 101 species by 6:42 p.m., but the rain put a damper on finding more birds. We ended after 10:00 p.m. still with 101 species even though we had tried for several additional birds that were “staked out,” but they didn't materialize in the rain and wind.

The rules changed in 2022. The dates selected for the Blitz were June 17 - 19. We decided to bird only Indiana County each day and submit our best day; because of our geographical limitations our numbers were lower than in 2021. On June 17, we ended with 84 species; on the 18th we birded different areas and ended with 82 species; Day 3 we listed 90 species; and Day 4 ended unexpectedly with a flat tire. Our attempt last year was exhausting, but our team raised \$500 for conservation.

This year the dates for the Blitz are June 9-19. I don't think we will bird every day, but we do plan to participate. If anyone would like to support our efforts, please go to <https://www.breedingbirdblitz.org/> to donate. Thanks for your support in the past!

And if anyone is interested in pulling another team together, go to the website above for more information and to read the rules. There are a variety of categories from which to choose – Regional, County, Low Carbon, Youth, etc.

Margaret Higbee

Unusual Bird Sightings at Yellow Creek State Park

During the presence of the Eurasian Wigeon at Yellow Creek, someone asked what other unusual birds had occurred at the state park. Many “rarities” were associated with hurricanes tracking to the west of us. A check of our records revealed the following:

Greater White-fronted	Red Phalarope	Cattle Egret
Goose	Pomarine Jaeger	White Ibis
Brant	Black-legged Kittiwake	White-faced Ibis
Cackling Goose	Sabine's Gull	Glossy Ibis
Eared Grebe	Little Gull	Black Vulture (recent range expansion)
Common Gallinule	Laughing Gull	Golden Eagle
Piping Plover	Franklin's Gull	Mississippi Kite
Whimbrel	Great Black-backed Gull	Loggerhead Shrike
Hudsonian Godwit	Leach's Storm-Petrel	Townsend's Solitaire
Red Knot	Great Cormorant	Red Crossbill
Stilt Sandpiper	American Bittern	White-winged Crossbill
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	Least Bittern	Clay-colored Sparrow
Wilson's Phalarope	Snowy Egret	Nelson's Sparrow
Red-necked Phalarope	Little Blue Heron	Summer Tanager

It often pays to go birding in “bad” weather – rain, wind, etc. Sometimes it's better to go birding the day after “bad” weather!

Indiana, Armstrong, Cambria County Sightings, Fall 2022

Please send your bird reports at the end of each month to Margaret Higbee at bcoriol@windstream.net or mail to 3119 Creekside Road, Indiana, PA 15701.

Locations: AR (Allegheny River), Armstrong Trail (AT), L&D (Lock and Dam), Crooked Creek (CC), Keystone Reservoir (KR), Kittanning (KT), Lewisville (LV), Prince Gallitzin SP (PG), State Game Land (SGL), Yellow Creek SP (YC).

A single **Snow Goose** appeared on the AR in n. *Armstrong* 12/26 (TAr) while a **Cackling Goose** was found along the AT n. of L&D 8 on 2/19 (MD). One **Mute Swan** was noted at PG between 2/8 (JC) and 2/27 (JC). Top **Tundra Swan** Dec. counts included at least 35 flying over 12/1 (TR) in North Buffalo Twp., 80 on 12/26 (ED, TM, MS, JT) at YC; best northward bound tallies were 157 at PG 2/19 (JC) and 83 on 2/22 (AL) at YC.



Michael David photographed this Cackling Goose in Armstrong Co. on February 19.

With the large areas of open water at YC in late Feb., many waterfowl species were early. One **Wood Duck** near LV 2/4 (MC) was possibly a wintering bird; 7 Wood Ducks 2/26 (AH) and a single **Northern Shoveler** also 2/26 (CG, MH, RH, JT) were early YC returnees. Best count of **Gadwalls**, which were present at YC all three months, but not continuously, was 50 on 2/26 (AH). A **Eurasian Wigeon**, the sixth county record, first observed at YC 2/25 (GT) was subsequently sighted through 2/28 (m.ob) and eBirded by 14 birders. High counts included 6 **American Wigeons** at PG 2/19 (TA) and 35 at YC 2/23 (GT); 16 **American Black Ducks** 1/28 (TR) n. of L&D 8 and the same number 2/14 (SD, ED, CH, TR) at YC; 8 **Northern Pintails** at PG 2/19 (TA), 5 at KR 2/24 (MS), and 47 at YC 2/25 (MCa); and 6 **Green-winged Teal** 2/19 (TA) at PG, and 17 on 2/25 (MS, JT) at YC.

Four **Canvasbacks** had already arrived at PG by 2/12 (TA); Canvasbacks began drifting into YC



Court Harding captured the Eurasian Wigeon at Yellow Creek on February 26.



Mark McConaughy photographed this male in a flock of 74 Common Mergansers at Crooked Creek Lake on February 19.

2/2 (AL) with highs of 24 on both 2/26 (AH) and 2/27 (CG, MH, RH). By 2/28 **Redheads** (JaP, JP) and **Ring-necked Ducks** (LC, CH, MH, RH, GT) had started to peak with respective YC tallies of 50 and 280; PG's respective high Redhead and Ring-necked Duck counts were 10 on 2/12 (TA) and 25 on 2/23 (MK); KR yielded at least 200 Ring-necked Ducks 2/24 (MS, JT). First 2 **Greater Scaup** appeared 12/13 (SD,CH) at YC; high YC counts included 5 on 2/3 (MW) and 6 on 2/28 (LC, CH, MH, RH, GT); in *Cambria*, a singleton was noted 1/8 (JC) then 3 on 2/12 (TA) at PG. Forty **Lesser Scaup** were tallied 1/31 (LC, JeC, SD, ED, CH, MH, RH) at YC while 50 were found at PG 2/23 (MK); the next largest YC flock included 30 on 2/28 (JaP, JP). *Armstrong* reports included singletons 1/28 (TR) along the AT n. of L&D 8 and 2/24 (MS, JT) at KR. Hemlock Lake hosted the region's only **Long-tailed Duck** 1/21 (AK, JKe). **Buffleheads** remained in low numbers across the region throughout the period except for a flock of 90 at PG before freeze-up on 12/11 (KC). One to 6 **Common Goldeneyes** were the YC norm this season with top count of 12 on 1/31 (LC, JeC *et al*); Rosston yielded 45 on 2/17 (LV). On their way south 44 **Hooded Mergansers** stopped at PG 12/11 (KC); 18 was the high YC Hooded Merganser tally both 2/3 (MW) and 2/23 (GT). Largest **Common Merganser** flocks at YC included 60 on 1/28 (JT), 57 on 1/27 (MS), and 56 on 1/29 (AL, JS); PG harbored 31 on 2/27 (JC);

but CC took the prize for the highest tallies which

included 320 on 12/2 (MVT), 250 on 1/14 (TR), and 145 on 2/11 (TR).

Red-breasted Mergansers numbered 54 at YC 2/25 (MCa), the highest count this winter; PG hosted 2 on 2/8 (JC) while one was found at KR 2/22 (MH, RH). Peak **Ruddy Duck** numbers at YC were 109 on 12/13 (SD, CH) and 115 on 2/26 (CG, MH, RH); in *Cambria* and *Armstrong* best counts occurred 12/11 (KC) when 22 were present at PG and 12/27 (TR) with 3 noted at Schenley.

Single **Ruffed Grouse** were sighted at SGL 184 on 2/3 (NV) and at Two Lick Reservoir 2/12 (MS).

One to two **Pied-billed Grebes** showed up at YC 2/23 (GT) and remained through the end of the period (LC, CH, MH, RH, GT). YC yielded a single **Horned Grebe** 1/10 (MW) then 5 were listed there on both 2/25 (MS, JT) and 2/28 (LC, CH *et al*); KR yielded 3 on 2/24 (MS, JT).

The **Rufous Hummingbird** which had been visiting a feeder near Seward since 9/25 (GT) was banded by Sandy Lockerman 12/2 (GT *et al*) and was last sighted 12/21 (GT).

Lingering at PG 12/4 (JC) and at YC 12/20 (ED, MH, RH, DK) respectively were flocks of 61 and 26 **American Coots**. An estimated 18 **Sandhill Cranes** flew over Seminole in *Armstrong* 12/25 (PL) while 6 were counted over YC 12/28 (JT) just an hour before sunset, a nice addition to the Indiana CBC count week list. A flock of 20 **Killdeer** 2/25 (MCa) was an interesting find near YC. The first **American Woodcocks** noted were 3 males calling and displaying at the Conemaugh Floodlands 2/15 (DL), 2 at PG 2/19 (MD), 3 at SGL 247 on 2/19 (DB), and 3 WSW of IN 2/24 (JeC). A **Wilson's Snipe** at the



This Northern Harrier was spotted on a Winter Raptor Survey near Marion Center by Carol Guba, Gloria Lamer, and the Higbees on January 16.



This Short-eared Owl, perched in a corn field, was an unexpected find for Roger Higbee on January 4.



Mike Weible found this darling Northern Saw-whet Owl on December 18.

Windy Ridge Industrial Park 12/26 (MW) was a great CBC bird.

An extremely early **Bonaparte's Gull** appeared at YC 2/3 (MW); 14 also stopped at YC 2/24 (JL); these are the only Feb. sightings on record for the three-county region besides one individual at CC on 2/09/2009 (MVT). Best **Ring-billed Gull** counts included 51 at PG 1/1 (PI, WI), 23 at YC 2/9 (GT), and 20 at YC 2/12 (TH). Winter **Herring Gull** sightings have become much more common at YC this year; prior to 2023, there were only two Jan. sightings 1/17-18/1990 (GL, GSy) and 1/3/2019 (JH) and three Feb. sightings 2/24/1991 (MH, GL), 2/10/1996 (MH), and 2/22/2017 (RLo). **Herring Gulls** were present at YC on 6 dates this year with top counts of 5 on 1/3 (MH, RH, GT) and 11 on 1/5 (GS, MS).

Thirty **Common Loons** visited PG 12/10 (TA) while last sighted were one at PG 1/8 (JaP, JP), 2 at YC on 12/20 (ED, MH, RH, DK), and one at KR 12/5 (DBr).

Four **Black Vultures** were listed 1/22 (MCa) at Tunnelview County Park and 1/28 (JK, TK) near Seward. Twenty was a good count of **Turkey Vultures** in Indiana 2/18 (VS). A first-year **Golden Eagle** was photographed between Hillsdale and Cherry Tree 2/4 (MW). A dark morph **Rough-legged Hawk** was photographed near Olivet 1/27 (ABus); a light morph was found 2/9 (GT) near YC; PG hosted one 2/13 (JC) while another was listed at YC 2/27 (DM).

Barred Owls were most consistently found at Nolo this quarter with the first sighting on 1/16 (DB); on 2/14 (DB) one was calling at 7:00 p.m.; the following day one was spotted in the same yard on the ground with prey. On 2/19 (DB) one

was hooting at 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon. Besides the Nolo Barred Owls, there were only four other *Indiana* sightings – all singletons – on the CBC 12/26 (MH, RH, NJ, WH), on a WRS near Hillsdale 1/16 (CG, MH, RH, GL), at YC 1/28 (JT), and near Plumville 2/11 (TH). *Cambria* and *Armstrong* both yielded two reports.



Theo Rickert was able to photograph the Graff Bridge Peregrines on January 4.

The Worthington area produced 2 **Short-eared Owls** 12/27 (DBr); West Lebanon strips harbored one to 3 Short-eared Owls 1/4 (MH, RH) through 2/11 (LM); one to 2 were also present from 12/8 - 2/3 (ABu) northeast of KT. A **Northern Saw-whet Owl** was a great find at SGL 332 on 12/18 (MW).

An adult **Red-headed Woodpecker** 12/26 (MH, RH, NJ, WJ) near Creekside was the lone report this winter.

Single **Merlins** were sighted in various areas of *Indiana* between 12/1 (GT) and 2/15 (CH); single Merlins were also observed at PG 1/2 (TA) and 1/8 (JaP). One to 2 of the Graff Bridge **Peregrines** were reported on five dates bracketed by 12/17 (MH, RH) and 2/25 (DBr); 2 were photographed 1/4 (TR).

Northern Shrikes were noted 1/8 (JC) through 2/19 (JC, MD, RL) at PG; another was reported in the CC Valley 1/11 (MVT).

After a somewhat long winter's absence, **Fish Crows** returned to IUP 2/15 (CH, TH).

Two locations harbored **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** this winter – YC and the AT. At YC one was noted 12/26 (ED, MS) and another (or the same individual?) was present 1/5 (GS, MS); the second spot along the AT north of L&D 8 boasted individuals on 12/21 (TR) and again on 2/19 (MD). **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were noted at nine locations – 4 *Indiana*, 3 *Armstrong*, and 2 *Cambria*; all locations boasted one or 2 individuals (v.o.). **Winter Wrens**, too, were more widespread than usual with consistent reports at Waterworks Conservation Area between 12/5 (SD) and 2/11 (SD). Various YC locations between 12/4 (AL) and 2/28 (LC, CH, MH, RH, GT) harbored Winter Wrens, and one was found along the AT n. of L&D 8 between 12/2 (TR) and 2/23 (TR).

A **Gray Catbird** lingered near Saltsburg 12/31 (MB). Single **Hermit Thrushes** were listed near Freeport 12/2 (SW); at SGL 247 on 12/17, 1/4, and 2/6 (all TR); along

the AT n. of L&D 8 on 12/21, 29 (TR); at YC 1/7 (TH); and at SGL 411 on 1/15 (MCa). Two **American Pipits** stopped at PG 12/29 (JC).

Pine Siskin reports included one 12/2 (SW) near Freeport and one 12/17 (TA) at PG, where 2 were spotted 1/8 (TA).

A **Chipping Sparrow** was present at a feeder near Shelocta 12/22-24 (MH, RH); one was also noted 2/28 (MH, RH) at the same location. A

Fox Sparrow appeared near LV 12/3-4 (MC) and at Nolo 12/4-6 (GL); another was present near Seward 12/1, 7 (GT); and SGL 247 harbored one on 1/4 (TR). Two **Eastern Meadowlarks** were spotted near YC 2/25 (MCa). A flock of 23 **Rusty Blackbirds** was seen at SGL 411 on 1/21 (MW); this was the only report eBirded in the region.

Yellow-rumped Warbler sightings included none in *Cambria* and only one in *Armstrong*, where one was noted along the AT n. of L&D 8 on 2/23 (TR). *Indiana* boasted five reports – one on the CBC 12/26 (AL, JS) south of Indiana, 3 at SGL 411 on 1/15 (MCa), one near LV 2/9 (MC), and one at Floodway Park 2/10 (JP).

Observers: Tina Alianiello, Tammy Arnold (TA), Alice Beatty, Dave Beatty, Mark Bowers (MB), Dave Brooke (DBr), Alan Buriak (ABu), Alex Busato (ABus), Michele Carlson (MCa), Lee Carnahan, John Carter, Jeremy Castle (JeC), Kyle Clark, Marcy Cunkelman, Michael David, Sue Dickson, Ed Donley, Carol Guba, Court Harding, Amy Henrici, Margaret Higbee, Roger Higbee, Tyler Hodges, Jason Horn, Pam Illig, Winnie Illig, Noah Jones, Warren Jones, Debbie Kalbfleisch, Avis Keener, John Keener (JKe), Michael Kensinger, Jan Kuehl, Tom Kuehl, Clayton Lamer, Gloria Lamer, Jeff Larkin, Dennis Lauffer, Patricia Lee, Annie Lindsay, Rich Love (RLo), Renee Lubert, Lynn Mamros, David Medler, Trent Millum, James Pumford (JaP), Joseph Pumford, Theo Rickert, Joe Saxfield, Vicki Stelma, Garrett Strittmatter, Mark Strittmatter, Georgette Syster (GSy), John Taylor, Greg Tomb, Lawrence Valasek, Marge Van Tassel, Nick Varvel, Stacy Waltenbaugh, Mike Weible.

Dues Reminder

Todd Bird Club dues are due on January 1 each year. If you haven't already paid, please submit your \$5 student, \$10 individual, or \$15 family membership to:

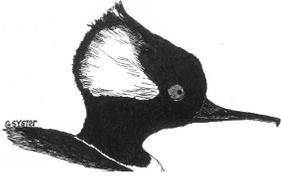
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