

The Todd Nuthatch



Indiana, PA

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

April 2013

Meetings

Todd Bird Club meetings begin at 7:00 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. We will socialize and snack till 7:30 when the meeting will be called to order. Refreshments are provided at each of our meetings. In May we hold our banquet meeting which starts at 6:00 p.m.



Bob photographed this beautiful Snow Bunting at Conneaut Harbor on February 18, 2013.

Tuesday, May 7 – 6:00 p.m. This is our annual banquet. Please bring a covered dish to share and your own place settings. The evening's speaker will

be Bob Greene, an accomplished birder-photographer from Pittsburgh, who will present his birding videos. Bob has been photographing birds since his father first introduced him to the world of photography years ago. Both he and his wife started birding more seriously in 2008. Bob plays our birding game a little differently than most as he doesn't add a species to his life list until he has photographed it. Bob spoke at our banquet in 2011 and got rave reviews! Check out

his great website at www.bobbygreene.com and be sure to read Bob's note on page 2! Don't miss this one!



Bob captured this Bald Eagle on camera in February.



Bald Eagles are one of Bob's favorite subjects.

A Note from Bob Greene

I hope to see you all for my presentation of "Birding Adventures with Bob" on May 7. During this evening I will take you on a tour of some of my favorite birding locations and share with you some of my favorite recent photographs.

You are probably aware of the recent increase in the number of eagle sightings in the Pittsburgh area. Previously, one had to travel farther north with the hope of seeing an eagle in the wild. I will share with you photos of eagles and many other species of birds from my home area, the South Hills of Pittsburgh, the Hays

and Harmarville sections of Pittsburgh, the Volant and Westminister areas, Shenango Reservoir, Pymatuning State Park, and the Conneaut, OH, shores of Lake Erie.

From there we'll go east to the Cunkelman home in Indiana County, then to Magee Marsh (between Cleveland and Toledo, OH) to check out the warbler migration on the shores of Lake Erie, and finally to the sunny shores of Myrtle Beach, SC.

I look forward to seeing you soon!

– Bob

Outings

Tuesday morning outings at Yellow Creek will continue, except for May 28 (see below). Meet at 8:00 at the park office located on Rt. 259 just off Rt. 422 east of Indiana. Early comers are invited to meet at the pavilion on the north shore shortly after dawn. Everyone – from beginner to expert birder – is welcome. If you have questions, contact Lee Carnahan (724-465-7323) or Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493).

Saturday, April 6 – Yellow Creek State Park, led by Lee Carnahan (724-465-7323). Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the park office.

Saturday, April 13 – Our 30th Anniversary Celebration. The morning will start with a Yellow Creek State Park outing, led by Georgette Syster (724-349-6293). Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the park office.

Saturday, April 20 – Yellow Creek State Park, led by Roger and Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493). Meet at 8:00 at the park office. This is a joint outing with the Three Rivers Birding Club. After the field trip, we'll head to the Chinese buffet in Indiana for lunch.

Saturday, April 27 – Westmoreland County, led by Derek and Emily Clawson (724-953-6942). Meet at the swimming beach parking lot at Keystone Lake State Park at 7:00 a.m. From there we will bird around the lake which offers a variety of habitats, before continuing to Strawcutter Road to bird fields at a friend's home for sparrows as well as a few forest species. Afterwards we

will drive around the farmland near Derek's grandfather's home for American Kestrel and possibly Northern Harrier. The last stop will be at Lake Ethel (aka Derry Lake), which usually is home to Mute Swans and may harbor late migrants.

Saturday, May 4 – Blue Spruce County Park, led by John Taylor (724-397-2040). Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the first large parking lot just past the park office. This is our annual outing for warblers and other migrants.

Saturday, May 11 – Pennsylvania Migration Count. If you plan to participate in either *Indiana* or *Armstrong*, please contact Roger or Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493).

Saturday, May 18 – Yellow Creek State Park, led by Lee Carnahan (724-465-7323). Meet at 8:00 at the park office.

Saturday, May 25 – 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.

Tuesday, May 28 – 4:00 a.m. This is the date for our annual pontoon ride at Yellow Creek, piloted by Mike Shaffer. Please make your reservations by calling the Higbees at 724-354-3493 as space is limited. Reservations will be accepted on a first-come, first served basis.

"In order to see birds it is necessary to become a part of the silence."

-- Robert Lynd

Searching for the Ghost Bird

by Pat Johner

Hill, Geoffrey E. *Ivorybill Hunters: the Search for Proof in a Flooded Wilderness*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

The Ivory-billed Woodpecker was the largest woodpecker in North America. It was often referred to as the “Lord God Bird” because of its noble appearance, spectacular black and white plumage, and ability to chop through solid wood almost as fast as a man could wield an ax. Then, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the wholesale cutting of southern swamps and collectors’ systematic killing drove the Ivory-billed Woodpecker to the brink of extinction.

In 1942 James Tanner published *The Ivory-billed Woodpecker*, a book that described the results of a two-year study he had conducted from 1937 to 1939 to determine the status of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in the Singer Tract, a 81,000-acre forest of virgin tupelo, cypress, and oak along the Tensas River in northeast Louisiana. Two years earlier, Tanner’s associate, Cornell ornithologist Arthur Allen, had spent a week in the Singer Tract studying a pair of nesting ivory-bills. His motion pictures and his recordings of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker’s characteristic “kent” calls have long been regarded as the last definitive recorded evidence of the bird’s existence in the United States.

As Tanner was completing his study, the Singer Tract was disappearing. The Singer Sewing Machine Company, which owned the land, had leased the logging rights to a Chicago lumber company. The National Audubon Society and Cornell appealed to Franklin Roosevelt to save the tract. Their pleas were to no avail. The lumber company exercised its rights, and, by 1944, what was thought to be the last intact swamp forest in the Mississippi River Valley was gone. Tanner had concluded that the Singer Tract could only support six pairs of ivory-bills when he conducted his study. With the destruction of the forest, he was convinced that the bird was now extinct.

Tanner’s conclusion was also based on the fact that areas such as the Apalachicola River Basin in Florida and the Santee Swamp in South Carolina, where a few ivory-bills had been discovered in 1939, had been logged or were being logged. In the years that followed the publication of Tanner’s book, there were scattered reports from locals and amateur ornithologists that the bird still existed. They were largely discounted. The Ivory-billed Woodpecker was never officially declared extinct, but it usually wasn’t listed in birding field guides and, when it was, it was identified as extinct or near extinction.

Then, in April 2005, Cornell University and the president of the American Ornithological Union made the astonishing announcement. They claimed to have

rediscovered the Ivory-billed Woodpecker along the Cache River in Arkansas. They presented as evidence an out-of-focus video shot by David Luneau and what they described as seven “solid” sightings of the bird. The report of their study includes frames from the Luneau video, which they claim show an Ivory-billed Woodpecker perched on a water tupelo.

Cornell’s stunning announcement was met with considerable skepticism in the birding community. A scientist from Florida Gulf Coast University referred to Cornell’s claims as “faith-based ornithology.” Most recently, a 2010 article in *BirdWatchingDaily.com* reported that two teams of scientists from the University of Vermont and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution had completed independent statistical analyses of sightings and museum specimens and had concluded that the bird is extinct.

Their studies followed others published in 2010 that declared the bird to be extinct. These skeptics argued that even if the bird existed in the recent past, there weren’t enough birds to sustain a viable population of the species, and that the reported sightings may actually be the result of wishful thinking on the part of observers who are mistaking a Pileated Woodpecker for an Ivory-bill.

To date, there has been no definitive, conclusive evidence to back up Cornell’s claims. And, after five years of an intensive follow-up search in many of the areas of the bird’s historic range, Ron Rohrbaugh of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology has concluded that there are no recoverable populations of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, at least none in the areas where his team had searched.

Which brings me to Geoffrey Hill, the author of *Ivorybill Hunters*. Hill is an assistant professor and avian biologist at Auburn University in Alabama. The Cornell expedition and local reports of Ivory-bills in the Pea River area of Alabama convinced him to begin a search of his own. He recruited a small team that included graduate students and a Canadian biology professor and sound expert to join him. Their search, which is the subject of this book, would take them to a two-square-mile flooded wilderness near the Choctawhatchee River and Bruce Creek in the panhandle of Florida.

In the flooded river bottom, Hill and his team discovered inaccessible, almost impenetrable forests of old-growth oak and cypress trees, some more than six feet in diameter, that had not been logged in seventy or eighty years. James Tanner and others had claimed that no large,

mature swamp forests were left in the Southeast. The Choctawhatchee River bottom, however, had never been included in Tanner's or Cornell University's search of typical Ivory-bill habitat. Geoffrey Hill was hoping that this remote, undisturbed forest might suit the particular habitat requirements of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

Hill and his team found what he believed to be clear evidence that from May 2005 to April 2006 at least one pair of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers inhabited a two-square-mile area near the mouth of Bruce Creek. He offers as proof sonograms of some of the ninety-nine recordings his team made of the Ivory-bill's distinctive double-knock which he describes as sounding like a heavy bat pounding a tree--*BAM bam*. Hill also recorded more than two hundred "kent" calls that often accompanied the double-knocks he heard.

His book includes photographs of tree trunks from which ten-inch square sections of bark have been "chiseled" or pried or peeled away, sometimes in paper-thin shavings, by a bird with a large and powerful bill. This chiseled bark is further evidence of the existence of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers, Hill asserts, because Pileated Woodpeckers with their pointed bills can't remove bark in this manner. Members of Hill's team also claim that they had quick glimpses of a large bird with white on the trailing edge of its wings flying deeper into the forest as they approached.

Hill admits that the only video recording he was able to make of the bird in flight is as unfocused and indistinct as the Luneau video. Even so, he claims that his evidence suggests that at least a half dozen pairs, perhaps tens of pairs of the Ivory-bill survive in the extensive swamp forests of the Choctawhatchee River in the Florida panhandle. The bird is not extinct, he argues; it is not even "hanging by a thread" but has a "solid toehold" in the deep, impenetrable forests of the panhandle.

Hill reported his findings in an article in the online journal *Avian Conservation and Ecology* (<http://www.ace-eco.org/vol1/iss3/art2/>). Other sightings of the Ivory-bill have also been reported. At the website www.sciencedaily.com an article about the Ivory-billed

Woodpecker concludes that "scientists working independently in three states have now published articles that report multiple sightings of and various forms of evidence for this elusive species...." The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the Southeast Region has a website devoted to the bird (<http://www.fws.gov/ivorybill/>) and has not yet declared it to be extinct.

At the end of the book, Hill offers specific advice for birders who may want to undertake their own search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. He suggests that birders search similar Ivory-bill habitat in river basins in the Florida panhandle and all river systems between Mobile Bay and the Apalachicola River. Extensive old growth forest was discovered in the Apalachicola/Chipola Basin in 2003. It might include Ivory-billed Woodpecker habitat, Hill theorizes. He also recommends searches of forests along the Escambia River, which has been protected by the State of Florida as a water management district for decades. The Yellow and Shoal rivers also have forested floodplains that should be explored, Hill says.

Hill's book is a fascinating and often exciting adventure story. With only a GPS unit to guide him, Hill ventured into a mysterious, trackless wilderness of massive trees bordering miles of streams and a wild, untamed river that flows through places birders had never explored before. Traveling in kayaks with video cameras and sound recording devices, Hill and his team spent weeks exploring this wilderness looking for any signs that the Ivory-billed Woodpecker still exists. His photographs and description of this landscape with its giant trees and alluring remoteness should appeal to any adventurous birder. And, when you contemplate his tantalizing evidence, you will be convinced that in 2005 Hill did, indeed, find this wary, secretive, elusive creature – the Lord God Bird, the Ghost Bird, the Holy Grail of birding.

I highly recommend *Ivorybill Hunters: the Search for Proof in a Flooded Wilderness*. It is still in print if you want to buy it, or, you can probably obtain it through interlibrary loan if your local public library doesn't have a copy.

Participants in the Great Backyard Bird Count

Pat Andrascik	Susan Dickson	Len Hess	Mark McConaughy	Lynn Ramage
Tom Betts	Randi Gerrish	Linda Hess	Donna Meyer	Cindy Rogers
Lee Carnahan	Sarah Gerrish	Margaret Higbee	Ed Meyer	John Taylor
Derek Clawson	Tom Glover	Roger Higbee	Nancy Murphy	Lawrence Valasek
Emily Hughes Clawson	Steve Gosser	Tom Lace	Richard Nugent	Marge Van Tassel
Marcy Cunkelman				Daniel Winstead

If you participated in the GBBC and your name is not listed here, please let me (bcoriol@windstream.net) know. We'll add you to the list. Thanks!

Sandy Ridge Road Outing Revisited

by Derek Clawson

On Saturday, February 9, my wife Emily and I met the Higbees at their home to ride with them and Lee Carnahan to meet Tom Glover to bird on Sandy Ridge Road. The target species for the day were Rough-legged Hawks and Short-eared Owls. Because of this, the outing started at 3 p.m. instead of the normal early birding hours. We left Indiana promptly an hour before the meeting time and made our way to a small cemetery near Sandy Ridge Road where we met Tom Glover who was leading the outing that day. He briefly discussed with us some of the various birds we might see and a general history of the area before we embarked on our snowy birding expedition. And indeed there was quite a bit of snow on those old country roads as we began. Tom even found himself spinning the tires of his truck in a few deeper portions of the white slush as we trekked through the winding roads. Luckily for him and for us, he managed to carry on without much incident.

I spotted the first bird we came across, soaring over the horizon to the left of our vehicle. Margaret identified it as a Rough-legged Hawk. Unfortunately, we were not able to get a good look at it because of the distance and the fact that it disappeared behind a distant hill top. While we were still searching for it, Tom, who was farther ahead of us on the road at that time, reported having heard a raven calling as well.

As we continued along, the fields were surprisingly dead and held very little bird activity until we neared the latter portion of the road. There we managed to spot a group of Black-capped Chickadees. And just ahead of them, I once again spotted what was likely the same Rough-legged Hawk just above the hill. This time it was much closer

and gave us all great views of his wing patches and even displayed a hovering behavior while searching for prey. We observed this for a good bit of time until a group of hunters drove up behind us. We let them pass and continued onward to the very end of the road. It was there that Margaret spotted a murder of more than 100 crows in the treetops on a distant ridge.

When we circled back around closer to sunset in search of Short-eared Owls, we parked the van across the way from a nice cluster of tall spruce trees with the hope of spotting the owls as they left the roost. After a lengthy stake-out that resulted in no birds, we decided to move onward to try to find them at another promising looking area we had seen earlier that day. Just before we arrived, I noticed an oddly shaped dark mound on the ground and noted that its anterior portion seemed to be rotating. I shouted for Roger to stop the van, and low and behold it was a Short-eared Owl. The nocturnal predator took flight and we got a brief glimpse of it before it disappeared down over the hill. Once out of sight we quickly caught up to Tom and Lee who were riding together at this point and told them the news. While Margaret was talking to them, I happened to look out the rear window and as luck would have it, the Short-eared Owl was flying above the horizon in the waning minutes of twilight, the sunset casting its contrasting silhouette beautifully as its fluttering haphazard flight pattern put on one final show for the night. I announced its presence once more, and this time Tom and Lee managed to see it, too. Once the owl disappeared from sight, we made our way home, stopping in Punxsutawney for a quick dinner and our return to Indiana.

Congratulations, Nathan Birch!

Congratulations to fifth grader Nathan Birch who placed first in the Ben Franklin Elementary Science Fair. Nathan studied the effects of using bird calls to attract birds. First he birded for five minutes and recorded each of the species and the number of individuals of each that he saw. This was his control group.

Next he used his I-phone app to call in five different species and recorded what he saw during the next ten-minute period. He then analyzed his data and presented it in the required form at the school's science fair in March.

Congratulations, Nathan!!!

Binoculars for Sale

If anyone is in the market for binoculars, former member Carol Kerr has a pair for sale. They are 8 x 40 Bushnells. Call Carol for more information (724-463-1318).

Birding New Jersey in March 2013

by Tom Glover

On Monday, March 18, 2013, five members of the Todd Bird Club, Roger and Margaret Higbee, Derek and Emily Clawson, and I, Tom Glover met a little before 5:00 a.m. at the Higbee home. Roger loaded all our suitcases and birding gear into their van, and finally left at 5:08 a.m. Now I have to add a sixth party to this outing, Ruby Garmin the GPS navigation unit. She proved to be very useful and at times entertaining over the next four days.

Our first target was a Pacific Loon reported on a small lake in Morris Plains, NJ. The trip to Morris Plains proved to be uneventful, and we managed to stay ahead of the threatening weather that was predicted for Monday. We did not find the Pacific Loon on this lake, but we did have a backup plan as a second Pacific Loon had been reported on Lake Parsippany just north of the first location. We did find the bird on Lake Parsippany along with a Bald Eagle and a nice collection of Common, Hooded, and Red-breasted Mergansers. Red-breasted Mergansers proved to be common birds along the coast.

The next target bird was a Barnacle Goose in Lincoln Park West. Lincoln Park was programmed into Ruby, and she dutifully took us to Lincoln Park, NJ. Well, it turned out that we were in the town of Lincoln Park, not in the park, Lincoln Park. After wandering around Lincoln Park, we found there was no park in Lincoln Park with a pond. We came across the police station, and Roger volunteered to go in and ask for directions. The rest of us patiently waited in the van, and we waited and waited. We began to speculate what had happened to Roger. The police had to be suspicious as here was a guy asking for directions to a goose! After a while Roger did return to the van, and it turned out that the police were very helpful. They had even gone on line, looked up Barnacle Goose, and printed out information on Lincoln Park West, which turned out to be in Jersey City, NJ. This time Ruby was programmed with the right information, and after a quick lunch at the local McDonald's, we set out for Jersey City. Now you have to note the five of us are "small town folks," for Ruby's directions took us by and near some remarkable landmarks. I suddenly realized we were near one of the world's largest metropolitan areas when we passed Met Life Stadium in the Meadowlands where the NY Giants and NY Jets play football, and we could see the Empire State Building on Manhattan Island. Ruby got us to the right location, but after all that effort the Barnacle Goose was a no show! Our consolation prizes were two Black-crowned Night-Herons and Great Egret.

We had better luck with our next bird, the Monk Parakeet in Carteret, NJ. We had an exact address so Ruby took us to High St. in Carteret where the large stick nests of the parakeet decorated the utility poles. And we got good views of three Monk Parakeets. Our next goal was the Jersey coast. There we hit Monmouth Beach and Seven Presidents Park. We found large flocks of Brant, and we saw our first Northern Gannets of the trip. But the feature that impacted us the most was not the birds but the weather. At Seven Presidents Park on the beach we encountered a strong wind coming off the ocean, pelting us with sand and sea spray. And did I mention the wind chill? Derek proved to be a good wind shield for Emily. Luckily we picked a location next to the restrooms, and these restrooms were life savers – they were heated. Margaret set up her scope on the wind side of the restrooms and was pointing out various birds when she turned around and no one was there. The rest of us had wimped out and retreated to the warm toasty restrooms. Farther down the coast we checked out Lake Takanassee and Deal Lake. By that time the day was getting long, and we headed to our first night's lodging, the Sea Girt Lodge in Sea Girt, NJ.



Emily Hughes Clawson photographed this Great Cormorant as it took flight at Barnegat Lighthouse State Park.

Tuesday, the 19th of March, our second day on the outing, began with breakfast at McDonald's in Sea Girt. Our first target were Northern Lapwings reported on Brynmore Road just outside New Egypt, NJ. The birds were supposed to be in a pasture field. We found the field, but we did not find the Lapwings. We

did record 26 different species of birds in the field and in the surrounding area. Highlights included Sandhill Cranes, Pectoral Sandpipers, Carolina Chickadees, White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows. Most impressive were the 25 or more longhorn cattle in the field. Where we pulled off the road, the longhorns were feeding on a full flat farm trailer of what look like lettuce. I have always wondered about the purpose of such long horns. Well, after observing the herd, I noticed that these cattle had no trouble scratching their rumps.

Our next destination was Barnegat Lighthouse State Park on Long Beach Island, a barrier island off the coast of New Jersey. This stop proved to be very productive. In the parking lot we found Fish Crows, both Herring and Ring-billed Gulls, and an Eastern Phoebe. After using the welcomed restrooms, we made our way to the lighthouse and a concrete walkway that led to a stone jetty. Upon entering the walkway we were greeted with Long-tailed Ducks, American Black Ducks, Brant, Red-throated



Tom Glover and Derek and Emily Clawson are trying to stay warm at Barnegat Light as they observe the Harlequin Ducks, a lfer for all three. Note the smiles!

Loons, Horned Grebes, and Great Black-backed Gulls. Farther out we came upon one of our target birds, Harlequin Ducks. In fact these ducks were very cooperative; not only were they nearby in the water but it was common for them to roost on the rocks no more than 8 feet from us – very impressive!

On the rock jetty extending out from the end of the boardwalk we spied an American Oystercatcher. We decided not to walk the stone jetty, because the waves were actually breaking over the rocks. As we backtracked on the walkway we were treated to a Great Cormorant. We wanted to explore the jetty further, so we approached it via the beach. Here we were rewarded with Sanderlings, Ruddy Turnstones, Northern Gannets, and another of our target birds, Purple Sandpipers. That stop was very gratifying.

We next took a break for lunch in nearby Manahawkin, NJ. After pulling into a Burger King, we voted for the Taco Bell next door. After lunch as we were pulling out of the parking lot, Margaret spotted a Sharp-shinned Hawk take down a black bird. The hawk flew behind the Burger King with its kill, and Emily noticed a hawk in a tree behind the restaurant. That bird was a juvenile Red-tailed Hawk with a black bird in its talons. We speculated that the Red-tail may have stolen the Sharpy's lunch.

Working our way south along the NJ coast, we arrived at Brigantine Island. Now to get to the Island you have to pass through Atlantic City with all its casinos. On the Island we found shore birds, Willets, Sanderlings, and Marbled Godwits, another target species. As we departed the area in the shadows of the casinos, I made the suggestion that next year we do a March bird outing combined with a stay at one of the casinos. I could see us with our spotting scopes on a balcony of one of the high rise hotel/casinos. My suggestion did not get a response.

We continued south toward Cape May using the Garden State Parkway. After exploring Cape May proper, we

checked into the Camelot Motel, and ended the day at the Italian restaurant.

The next day, Wednesday the 20th, began at 6:45 a.m. And the first stop of the day was St. Peter's Dune Crossing. Crossbills were reported in the pines at the crossing, and we did not find the crossbills. But from the beach we did score both Black and Surf Scoters, along with Laughing, Ring-billed, Herring, and Great Black-backed Gulls, and Red-throated Loon. A short distance away we checked out another dune crossing, Whilldin Ave. In this area Eurasian Collared-Doves had been reported on the wires. Guess what we did not find? But we did find more Black and Surf scoters, Northern Gannets, American Oystercatcher, and a Great Blue Heron. We did see doves, but they turned out to be Mourning Doves.

On our way to breakfast we came across a Wilson's Snipe and farther along, two Merlins putting on a show chasing each other. That was one of the top experiences of the outing. As we arrived at McDonald's for breakfast, we were greeted by Fish Crows calling from the golden arches. After breakfast we stopped by the David Douglas Rotary Park near the Cape May Ferry Terminal. After checking out the park, we stopped by the terminal to pick up a ferry schedule.

Next we worked our way north along the Cape to Miami Beach. Here we were looking for Black-headed Gulls. Mmm... guess what, no Black-headed Gulls. We settled for Laughing, Ring-billed, Herring, and Great Black-backed Gulls. When we arrived at the beach, the tide was low, and a great expanse of the beach was exposed. Feeding on the sand were hundreds of Dunlin along with fewer Sanderlings, Black-bellied Plovers, and Willets. We decided to check this area later in the day at high tide. Our next destination was Nummy's Island where we found a lone Tree Swallow along with one Greater Yellowlegs, a Great Egret, and Savannah and Song Sparrows. Avalon Sea Watch was next on our list, here we found more Dunlin on a jetty along with Long-tailed Ducks and a Red-throated Loon in the water.

The Cape May Bird Observatory was high on our list of stops, but it turned out to be closed on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, the days we planned to be in Cape May. So we settled for Carolina Chickadees, Northern Cardinals, Common Grackles, and Brown-headed Cowbirds at CMBO. As an afterthought, we again checked for the Eurasian Collard-Doves in the Whilldin Ave. area. No Doves, but Roger did spot a nice Red-breasted Nuthatch. Our primary afternoon stop for the day was Cape May Point State Park. Here we checked the hawk watch platform and walked the Red Trail. We found 30 species at the park, including Mute Swan, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup, Northern Shoveler, Ruddy Duck, Gadwall, Double-crested Cormorant, and Pied-billed Grebe. We also added an Osprey, American Kestrel, Carolina and House Wrens,

Yellow-rumped Warbler, and a nice Pine Warbler. When we checked the park office, we learned that high tide was at about 3:30 p.m., so we headed back to Miami Beach, hoping to score the Black-headed Gull. No luck. But we did add Forester's Terns, Bonaparte's Gulls, and two Bald Eagles. We spotted a flock of gulls way up the beach, and we did check out that flock, but no Black-headed Gulls were in that flock either.

Working our way back toward Cape May, we stopped at Higbee Beach (no relation to Roger and Margaret). On the road to the beach we spotted a Wild Turkey, and we did not find any new species on the beach. A trail from the parking lot produced a Downy Woodpecker. As we were leaving, at the same field where we had found the Wild Turkey earlier, now was a whole flock of turkeys, including a couple of males trying to impress the hens. On our way back to the motel, we stopped by Joy Chinese Buffet. Over dinner we confirmed our plans for our last day of the outing, Thursday. We would catch the 7:30 a.m. Cape May - Lewes Ferry crossing the Delaware Bay to Lewes, DE. En route home we planned to check out birding locations in Delaware.

On Thursday, the 21st, we arrived at the ferry terminal 30 minutes before departure, allowing us time to eat breakfast in the terminal. When we drove onto the ferry, I suggested that we check Ruby to see how she would handle the water crossing. We thought that she would have a problem. But after Roger programmed her, she did not blink; she had us taking the ferry across the bay. The ferry ride across the bay took about an hour and 15 minutes, and we took advantage of the time to check out the birds on the crossing. We observed both Black and Surf Scoters, along with Long-tailed Ducks, a few American Black Ducks, and many graceful Northern Gannets. The terminal on the Delaware side of the bay is just a few miles north of Cape Henlopen State Park. At the

nature center feeders we added Brown-headed Nuthatch to our trip list. The office had a nice display on the various wildlife found in the park.

About 35 miles up the coast on the Delaware side of the bay, we drove Port Mahon Road. Here we added Snow Goose and Eastern Meadowlark to the trip list. Just north of Port Mahon Road was our trip's final destination, Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge. This was the second time I have birded Bombay Hook, and like my first time, the birding was great. On the road to Bombay Hook we found Horned Larks, but the most impressive site were the huge flocks of Snow Geese. We estimated we saw well over 2,000 Geese. In the refuge I recorded 52 species, the highest count for any one location on the outing. A sample of the birds included Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets, Lesser Yellowlegs, Short-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's Snipe, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and American Tree Sparrow.

At about 5:30 p.m. we decided it was time to head for PA. Ruby was programmed for Indiana, PA, and off we went. She took us north around Wilmington, DE, and west of Philadelphia to the PA Turnpike. Now at times during this leg of the drive home, Ruby's directions were questioned. But she was polite when we missed a turn and put us back on the right track. We made a pit stop on the PA Turnpike, and we exited the pike at Bedford around 10:00 p.m. We got a quick bite to eat at Sheetz before what we thought would be a quick ride to Indiana. We were slowed down by snow just west of Altoona on US Rt. 22. And it snowed all the way to Indiana. We arrived at the Higbee home-stead about 12:30 a.m. Friday morning. Yes, everyone was tired. I felt sorry for Emily and Derek as they had to be at work at 4:00 a.m. that morning! That made a really long day for them, but I bet if you asked them, they would do the whole thing again despite the "no shows" on a number of targeted birds.

January Crossword Puzzle Answers

Across

- BAIRD—discoverer and describer of Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
- GROUSE—to complain
- EAGLE—bird on a 1964 half dollar
- ROBIN—an unusual "miss" on the 2012 Indiana CBC
- EGGTOOTH—a sharp crania protuberance that enables hatching
- RESIN—substance smeared by Red-breasted Nuthatches around nest cavity
- NATHAN—our youngest active member
- GRAYJAY—Perisoreous canadensis
- DIPPER—bird that lives along and in rapidly moving water
- SPENCER—first name of # across
- SPECTACLES—Blue-headed and Yellow-throated Vireos have them; Red-eyed and Bell's do not

- BREWERS—most abundant sparrow in Death Valley
- CONJUNCTIVITIS—disease affecting primarily House Finches

Down

- SHOVELER—possessor of a spatulate bill
- BITTERN—thunder pumper
- SYSTER—last name of Todd's secretary
- CRANE—hero in Irving's "Legend of Sleepy Hollow"
- MERGANSER—fish duck
- GOSHAWK—our largest accipiter
- BLUEBIRD—a sad bird
- GNATCATCHER—resembles a miniature mockingbird
- JUNCO—most numerous bird on 2012 Indiana CBC
- TWEETMENT—what you give a sick bird

Indiana - Armstrong - Cambria Winter Report

Please submit your reports at the end of each month to Margaret Higbee, 3119 Creekside Road, Indiana, PA 15701-7934 or e-mail to bcoriole@windstream.net. Apologies to Pat Johner whose data was inadvertently omitted from the fall report.

Abbreviations: Blue Spruce County Park (BS), Christmas Bird Count (CBC), Crooked Creek Park (CC), Keystone Reservoir (KR) Lewisville (LV), Prince Gallitzin State Park (PG), Rosston (RT), Shelocta (SH), Two Lick Reservoir (TL), Winter Raptor Survey (WRS), Yellow Creek State Park (YC).

Forty-five **Snow Geese** stopped at PG 2/16 (KL); 3 were noted near Brady's Bend 2/18 (DM). **Canada Goose** maxima included 219 at KR 12/9 (LC), 400 at PG 12/15 (JS), and 290 at TL 2/28 (LC, RC). A **Mute Swan** appeared on Redbank Creek 12/9 (JK). **Tundra Swans** continued to move through the region with 12/28 (v.o.) producing the high counts of 190 at CC (TR) and 533 in Indiana (v.o.). Last southward bound swans were 2 at YC 1/15 (LC, TG, RH, KT); 83 on 2/5 (TG) were probably heading north.

YC Lake was mostly frozen for the CBC 12/28. It then continued to freeze till by 1/8, there was no open water, and it remained frozen through the end of the period. TL, which is deeper, however, remained somewhat open through 1/17. PG did not completely freeze and retained a remnant of open water throughout the season. A late **Wood Duck** lingered at TL 12/20 (LC), only the sixth December record, while a drake found on McKee Run 1/26 (MH, RH, DL) provided only the second January sighting on record; the first spring returnee appeared on a pond near SH 2/28 (ED). Last **Gadwalls** remained at YC 12/30 (LC). KR remained partially open 12/31 (MH, RH) and harbored 23 Gadwalls in the shallow water where Cowanshannock Creek enters; first 2 returning Gadwalls appeared at Parks Industrial Park on Rt. 66 on 2/13 (MVT). A **Eurasian Wigeon**, the fourth *Indiana* record, appeared at YC 12/3 (LC) where it lingered through 12/9 (LC). Two **American Wigeons** were last noted at TL 12/28 (LC, RC) while one was found at YC the same day (GL, GS). First returning **American Wigeons** included 3 at Manorville 2/15 (MH, RH) and 2 at RT 2/23 (SG). Last **American Black Ducks** sighted were 24 at TL 1/9 (LC) and 10 at Conemaugh Dam 1/10 (MC); by 2/25 (JSo), 5 had returned to YC. The maximum **Mallard** tally was 251 at YC on 12/23 (LC), an unusually high count late in the season; by 2/15 (MH, RH), 47 Mallards had congregated at RT. Five **Northern Shovelers** at YC 12/27 (LC) provided the latest *Indiana* date on record for this species. Four **Northern Pintails** appeared at YC 12/16 (LC), the lone report. At PG 3 **Green-winged Teal** were last noted 12/15 (JS); 12/27 (LC) yielded the last

Green-winged Teal including one at YC and 14 at TL.

Nine **Canvasbacks** lingered at YC 1/1 (LC, TG, MH, RH). Four **Redheads** arrived at YC 12/28 (GL, GS), and 3 remained through 1/1 (LC, TG, MH, RH); the first 2 returning **Redheads** arrived at Parks Industrial Park 2/13 (MVT). January 1 (LC, TG, MH, RH) produced the last 9 **Ring-necked Ducks** at YC while RT yielded the first 3 on 2/15 (MH, RH). One to 4 **Greater Scaup** were noted at YC on five dates between 12/3 (LC) and 12/13 (TA, LH). Eleven **Lesser Scaup** 1/1 (LC, TG, MH, RH) at YC were last; 2/15 yielded 16 returnees at PG (JS) and singletons at CC (LV) and RT (MH, RH). An immature male **Harlequin Duck** at Freeport, found 2/10 (DY *et al*), was the first *Armstrong* record; this bird remained through the end of the



Dan Yagusic found this first-year drake Harlequin at Freeport. It was seen by many birders.

Photo by Marcy Cunkelman

period (m.ob). TL harbored 3 **Surf Scoters** 12/27 (LC). **White-winged Scoters** continued at YC with reports of 1-5 individuals on 15 dates through 1/1 (v.o.). **Long-tailed Duck** reports at YC included 5 on 12/9 (LC) and 4 on 12/22 (LC); on 2/18 (KP) a **Long-tailed Duck** joined the Harlequin at the same Freeport location and also stayed into March. PG's last **Buffleheads** included 27 on 12/15 (JS); 5 remained at YC through 1/1 (LC, TG, MH, RH); the Allegheny River hosted 3 Buffleheads at Kittanning and 5 at RT 1/23 (MH, RH). Two **Common Golden-eyes** visited KR 12/9 (LC), and one appeared at RT 2/15 (MH, RH); these amazingly comprised the only

Armstrong reports for this species that usually winters on the Allegheny. In *Indiana* 5 Common Goldeneyes lingered at YC through 1/1 (LC, TG, MH, RH).

Thirty-nine was the high **Hooded Merganser** tally at YC 12/3 (LC) while KR's best count was 76 on 12/9 (LC); TL yielded the season's last 3 on 1/12 (LC) while the first spring returnee appeared on a Lower Two Lick Drive pond 2/28 (GF). KR harbored 14 **Common Mergansers** 12/9 (LC); best Common Merganser counts were 47 at TL 1/13 (LC) and 140 at CC 1/19 (TR); *Indiana's* last singleton stayed at TL through 1/17 (LC). Four **Red-breasted Mergansers** were listed at YC 12/11 and 1/1 (LC, TG, MH, RH). KR hosted *Armstrong's* only **Ruddy Ducks** listed this season—5 on 12/9 (LC) and 14 on 12/23 (LC); at YC Ruddies continued in triple digits through 1/1 (LC, TG, MH, RH) when the last 136 were recorded.

Two **Ruffed Grouse** at YC 2/10 (KT) were the only ones reported. Top **Wild Turkey** counts included 15 at Yatesboro 12/24 (ErD), 31 near IN 1/31 (AB, DB), and 30 at Patton 2/18 (RB, DG, JS).

A **Red-throated Loon** found 12/27 (LC) remained at YC for the CBC the following day (ED, GL, GS, JT). KR's high count of **Common Loons** was 13 on 12/9 (LC); 3 were last observed at PG 12/15 (JS); LC received a nice Christmas Day present of 45 loons at YC. Eleven **Pied-billed Grebes** stopped at PG 12/15 (JS); on 12/24 (LC) at YC numbers had peaked at 62; last 3 were spotted at TL 1/17 (LC), just before freeze-up. A **Pied-billed Grebe** appeared at RT 2/3 (TR) and remained through 2/15 (MH, RH). TL still harbored 3 **Horned Grebes** 1/1 (MH, RH); PG yielded the first returning bird 2/7 (DG, JS).

Two **Double-crested Cormorants** at YC 12/1 (TR) 12/4 (LC, TG, MH, RH) were the only ones noted this season.

An early **Turkey Vulture** was noted 2/13 (MC) near LV. **Bald Eagle** reports mentioned one at PG 12/15, 1/30 (JS), 2 at KR 1/10 (ErD), and 2 at CC on several dates (v.o.); 4 Bald Eagles were reported at Conemaugh Dam 2/17 (TL); *Indiana's* first Bald Eagle nest was found this year (NK) at an undisclosed location as these eagles are very sensitive to



A Red-shouldered Hawk visited Marcy Cunkelman's yard near LV on 12/30.

disturbance. A **Northern Harrier** visited PG 12/4 (JS); 4 were counted on the 12/28 (v.o.) CBC while single harriers were spotted on two of *Indiana's* three WRS (MH, RH, DL). **Sharp-shinned Hawks** were noted at ten locations this quarter (v.o.); **Cooper's Hawks**, at 17 (v.o.). Six reports mentioned **Red-shouldered Hawks** this season. A light morph **Rough-legged Hawk** on Lower Two Lick 12/28 (KB, GF, JK) was the only one reported in the region this period.

American Coots at KR totaled 46 on 12/23 (LC); coots remained in triple digits at YC through 1/1 (LC, TG, MH, RH) when 389 were tallied.

Last **Killdeer** was found near Conemaugh Dam 12/30 (MC); the same location yielded another on 2/6 (MC). Three **Wilson's Snipe** found on Neal Road 12/28 (KB, JK) were the only ones noted.

Bonaparte's Gulls were observed only at YC on two dates, one on 12/9 (LC) and 8 on 12/11 (LC, TG, MH, RH). **Ring-billed Gulls** were in very low numbers at YC with the maximum count of 44 on 12/11 (LC, TG, MH, RH); 30 were listed at PG 1/30 (JS); all other reports were of single digits. Four **Herring Gulls** were listed at Kittanning 1/23 (MH, RH); 2/15 (MH, RH) produced 2 at Kittanning and 2 at RT.

An immature **Red-headed Woodpecker**, that had arrived at Ford Cliff last October, remained through the end of the season (JR, LR); the bird's head progressively gained more red as time passed. Lynn writes: "That bird was all over our property all winter until the last couple of weeks when he staked out a great nest cavity in a big black oak near our garages and began spending almost all of the daylight hours around the cavity. Lots of calling and hopping around near the hole. I guess nobody responded and the bird left." An adult Red-headed Woodpecker near SH on WRS #3 on 1/11 (MH, RH, DL) was a nice surprise. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** sightings included one n. of IN 12/13 (SB), 2 on the CBC 12/28 (v.o.), one eating suet near Homer City 1/14 through the end of the period, and a visitor to black oil sunflower seed at Nolo 1/22-26 (CL, GL).



Marge Van Tassel captured this shot of a Merlin near Worthington 2/9.

A **Merlin** was a good find on WRS #1 on 1/19 (LC, CG, RH, DL); another was photographed at Worthington

2/9 (MVT); and a third was spotted at Ford Cliff 2/15 (MH, RH).

A **Fish Crow** was heard on Reservoir Hill 1/3 (PJ).

Red-breasted Nuthatches were widespread with numerous reports from almost all observers this season (v.o.). Single **Winter Wrens** were sighted 12/28, both at Forest Manor (SD) and near Homer City (SP). A **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** made daily visits to a Rural Valley suet cake 2/8 through the end of the period (CH).

A **Hermit Thrush** appeared at YC 1/8 (LC, MH, RH, RN, KT); another was found at the Waterworks Conservation Area 2/18 (SD). **American Robins** were in amazingly short supply, and this species was a "missed bird" on the IN CBC; 17 was the best count on Reservoir Hill by 2/9 (PJ). A late **Brown Thrasher** was found near Homer City 12/28 (LC, RC); this was only the second December sighting on record for *Indiana*. **Cedar Waxwings** did not linger in *Indiana* this winter; the only sightings included a singleton on 12/28 (SD) near Chestnut Ridge and 12 on WRS #3 on 1/11 (MH, RH, DL). In *Armstrong* the lone report noted at least 78 **Cedar Waxwings** perched in trees along Dutch Run 2/2 (MH, RH, DL).

One **Yellow-rumped Warbler** graced the IN CBC 12/28 (DC); 1/11 produced single Yellow-rumped Warblers, one near SH (MH, DL) and another on WRS #3 (MH, RH, DL).

The CBC 12/28 yielded 2 **Eastern Towhees**, one visiting feeders near Penn Run (IT) and the other near Gaibleton (TG); another towhee was found at CC 1/12 (SG). A **Fox Sparrow** was noted near Homer City 12/28 (GM), and another arrived near

SH 12/31 (MH, RH), where it remained through 2/26, visiting the area under the bird feeders almost daily. **Swamp Sparrows**, which sometimes winter, could not be found at YC after 1/1 (MH, RH). A flock of 30 **White-crowned Sparrows** was sighted s.w. of IN 12/28 (KB, JK); singletons were found near Leechburg 1/22 (MVT) and at CC 2/15 (LV).

A late **Eastern Meadowlark** was noted in Center Twp. 12/28 (BM, KM, CW, PW). A single **Rusty Blackbird** visited YC 12/11 (LC, TG, MH, RH); 3 Rusty Blackbirds were sighted in a marshy area along Mac Road on an Armstrong WRS 2/2 (MH, RH, DL); at least 18 Rusties had returned to the marshy area along Fry Cemetery Road by 2/7 (MH, RH), but 18 was probably an underestimate as most of the rusty calls were coming from the dense vegetation; the observers counted only the birds visible in the trees.

The female **Baltimore Oriole** that appeared at a feeder near IN 11/29 (DJ) was last observed 12/16 (DJ).

It was a good northern finch year. A **Red Crossbill** was found in IN 12/6 (MC). another flew over a yard near SH calling on 2/16 (MH, RH). Top **White-winged Crossbill** tally was 60 in IN 12/28 (SG); these birds were feeding on hemlock cones; 20 were sighted at CC also on 12/28 (TR); 3 were also noted at CC 1/12 (SG); a singleton was photographed at a feeder on East Pike 2/5 (CR).

Common Redpolls were widespread with top counts of 37 near IN 1/29 (DJ), 40 near Patton 2/2 (DG), 48 near LV 2/13 (MC), 38 near South Bend 2/15 (MH, RH), and 46 n. of IN 2/16 (SB); other reports included 5 near Brush Valley 1/3 (PA), one near Nolo 1/4 (DB), 4 at Nolo 1/8 (CL, GL), one at Blue Spruce 1/18 (EP), 6 at Rural Valley 1/22 (SL), 2 near Rural Valley 1/26 (CH), 4 in IN 2/6 (TS), 25 near IN 2/7



Cindy Rogers photographed this rare visitor at her feeder on East Pike.



Daniel Winstead photographed this Common Redpoll through his window.



Common Redpolls were widespread this season. Marcy Cunkelman photographed this one near Lewisville.



Tom Simmons found this redpoll at his feeder near White's Woods 2/16.

(DW), one at Ebensburg 2/17 (JS), and 2 in IN 2/26 (SD). Almost every Todd Bird Club member reported redpolls this winter. **Pine Siskins**, on the other hand,

were hard to come by with the only reports of one near LV 12/15 (MC), 4 on the CBC 12/28 (v.o.), and 2 near Brush Valley 1/02 (PA).

Observers

Tim Anderson, Pat Andrascik, Alice Beatty, Dave Beatty, Sid Blair, Ken Byerly, Lee Carnahan, Roger Carnahan, Marcy Cunkelman, Sue Dickson, Ed Donley, Erma Dovenspike (ErD), Gary Ferrence, Sue Gatti, Tom Glover, Dave Gobert, Steve Gosser, Carol Guba, Laura Hahn, Carol Hall, Margaret Higbee, Roger Higbee, Dory Jacobs, Pat Johner, Nick Kalanavich, John Keener, Jan Kuehl, Sally Labino, Tom Lace, Clayton Lamer, Gloria

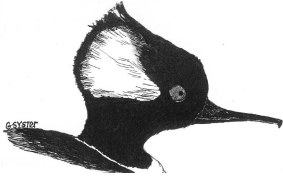
Lamer, Dennis Lauffer, Kathy Lubert, Beth Marshall, Ken Marshall, Deborah McCanna, Greg McKee, Richard Nugent, Kevin Parsons, Sara Pulliam, James Ramage, Lynn Ramage, Theo Rickert, Cindy Rogers, John Salvetti, Tom Simmons, John Somonick, Georgette Syster, John Taylor, Ken Truitt, Ila Tuorinsky, Marge Van Tassel (MVT), Lawrence Valasek, Cris Williams, Paula Williams, Daniel Winstead, Dan Yagusic.

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Roger Higbee photographed this Harlequin at Barnegat Light on 3/19.



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