

The Todd Nuthatch



Indiana, PA

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

April 2020

Meetings

Todd Bird Club meetings are normally 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.

Because of the COVID-19 situation, our April meeting had been canceled. In May we usually hold our banquet

meeting which starts at 6:00 p.m.; however at this time we do not know what the state of things will be in May. We realize that to be on the safe side, we should cancel that, too. We hope to see everyone in September, COVID-19 permitting.

Meanwhile, go outside, look at birds, and if you're able, post your results to eBird.

Outings

With the mandated social distancing, our spring outings have all been canceled. Please check your email, our Facebook page, and our website for up-to-date information.

Purple Martin Watch – May 15 to May 31 – The bird club still needs help. As you learned last year, we now have two Purple Martin houses. We hope to attract Purple Martins to both Blue Spruce Park and Yellow Creek State Park. If you are willing to bring a chair and sit for an hour near either box, please contact Lee Carnahan (724-388-4667). He is scheduling observers from May 15 to May 31. Time slots are: 5:30 to 6:30 a.m.; 6:30 to 7:30 a.m.; 7:30 to 8:30 a.m.; and 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. Observers will be the only persons present. Lee will provide instructions if you happen to sight a martin. If you care to cover more than one time slot, that will be appreciated. You can bring a book and read or just sit and watch birds.

Birding Blitz for Conservation 2021 – Birders have known for quite a while that our bird populations in the United States, like elsewhere in the world, have been in steep decline. In 2019, what we knew became known to the general public as well: 25% of our birds have disappeared from North America since 1970 – almost a three billion plunge in the overall North American bird population since 1970! Although there are many reasons for this, one of the main reasons is habitat loss.

In an effort to help turn this trend around, the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) created the first annual Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation (B4C). The B4C is one way to conserve habitat for our beloved birds. This would have been our first attempt at this effort to

conserve birds. It was to take place **Friday, June 12, through Monday, June 15**. PSO selected two target birds – the Wood Thrush and the Northern Harrier. Teams were supposed to form, get pledges and donations. The teams would then spend as much time birding during the designated time period to see how many birds each team could observe.

Yes, it was a competition. To date, Todd Bird Club entered one team – The Todd Towhees which included Carol Guba, Gloria Lamer, and Roger and Margaret Higbee. We were hoping to have multiple teams from Todd. At our February Todd Bird Club meeting, members voted to donate \$100 to the cause. The money would have been split between three partners – **Western PA Conservancy, Manada Conservancy, and Hawk Mt. Sanctuary.**

However, on Tuesday, March 31, the PSO board held a Zoom meeting via computer/phone and decided to postpone the 4BC till 2021. Since we still do not have a handle on the extent of the corona virus pandemic, we have canceled all of our outings and events, including the B4C. We did not feel it would be good to have groups of people birding together. This is now scheduled for June 2021. We will retain the same teams, partners, and rules.

How will the money raised be spent by the three partners in 2021?

Nearly 60% of Pennsylvania’s landscape consists of forests that provide essential habitat for a diversity of wildlife, including birds. In fact, more than half of Pennsylvania’s breeding birds are dependent on large, intact forests. Birds face many threats, but likely the most severe threat to forest interior bird populations is the fragmentation and loss of forested land due to energy and land development. The **Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC)**, established in 1932 as Pennsylvania’s first land trust, is a nonprofit conservation organization proactively addressing the issues facing forest birds by protecting important high-quality forests, conducting science-driven ecological studies of priority bird species and their habitats, and assembling powerful conservation partnerships.

WPC is working on three different forested land conservation projects in the Ligonier Valley that may benefit the Wood Thrush, one of the target birds identified by the PSO for the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation (B4C). The three potential forested properties, ranging from 50 to 188 acres, were identified as likely containing habitat for the Wood Thrush, along with other species of greatest conservation need and sensitive species of concern. These

species were identified in the 2015 PA Wildlife Action Plan, through the Conservation Opportunity Area Tool, and in consultation with WPC biologists. With funding awarded through the B4C program, WPC had a goal to permanently protect at least one of these forested properties through a donated or purchased conservation easement, and/or possibly the purchase of a property, with a later sale, subject to a conservation easement.

Manada Conservancy is a land trust dedicated to preserving the natural, historic, agricultural, and scenic resources of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, through land conservation, environmental education, and community engagement. Named after a local watershed, Manada Conservancy was formed in 1997 out of concern about the loss of farmland and wildlife habitat in the region. Since its inception, Manada Conservancy has grown from a seed of hope in the minds of a few individuals to a community of nearly 500 members.

In 2019, Manada Conservancy protected a little over 400 acres. This included the fee acquisition of the 44.3-acre Elizabeth Woods property in Lower Paxton Township located on the Kittatinny Ridge. Two other easement projects within the Kittatinny Corridor preserved 130.85 acres in Rush and Jefferson Townships, Dauphin County, with the help of the Army Compatible Use Buffer program through Fort Indiantown Gap and 225.63 acres in Halifax, Dauphin County, with the help of DCNR grant funding.

In 2020, Manada Conservancy will be celebrating the milestone of 2,500 acres preserved of valuable farmland, forests, creek sides, and wetlands with unique and threatened species. Just recently, Manada Conservancy obtained a 30-acre conservation easement project in a Lower Paxton Township, Dauphin County, wooded property within the Kittatinny Ridge Corridor. Another 165-acre easement project is also within the corridor, in Middle Paxton Township, Dauphin County. Future easements will protect important Wood Thrush habitat within the Kittatinny Ridge corridor.

Founded in 1934 as the first sanctuary to conserve birds of prey, **Hawk Mountain** has grown from 1400 acres in the 1930s to 2500 acres in 2020. In 2019 most of the land was put under conservation easement with The Nature Conservancy. Research suggests raptors and other birds seek out natural habitats along the base of the Ridge on their migration south for stopover and refueling. As development accelerates along the slopes of the Mountain and in farming areas to the south, the landscape is rapidly changing.

Hawk Mountain seeks to work with neighboring land-owners to keep key properties in forest, wetlands, and grasslands. Twenty-two acres of farmland were recently purchased, and this property is being restored to grasslands. In 2018, 78 acres were purchased and donated to the Game Commission to manage in native grasses and flowers. In both sites, habitat for nesting or migrating Northern Harriers and Bobolinks, as well as other grassland birds, is being developed. Countless warblers that may feed on stopover sites along the riparian and woodland edges will benefit as well.

In 2020, Hawk Mountain is raising funds to purchase 43 acres along their border that would protect a forested stream ravine that harbors nesting Louisiana Waterthrush,

Wood Thrush, Broad-winged Hawk, and a stream with native brook trout.

Hawk Mountain also seeks to work with landowners to put neighboring farmland under easement to maintain the rural character and keep native habitats intact. All this work is supported with private donations gifted to the Hawk Mountain Land Conservation Fund.

So please plan ahead for next year. Consider forming another team for the B4C. Let's do all we can to conserve habitat for the birds we love.

Special thanks to Laura Jackson, PSO Conservation Chairperson, and Vern Gauthier, PSO B4C Planner, for much of the information and text above.

Allegheny Front Hawk Watch

by Tom Kuehl

Hawkwatchers live for those days when epic flights of migrating raptors provide special lasting memories. March 14, 2019, was such a day at the Allegheny Front Hawkwatch. Although it's never a science when trying to predict when those days will occur, during the peak time for migration and if the winds are favorable for a hawkwatch – GO! For the spring Golden Eagle migration, it's more speculation than science; however, a second day with east winds is a likely contributor for pushing raptors onto Pennsylvania's westernmost ridge. A quiet morning turned into a very busy afternoon as strong east winds and a warming sun provided ideal conditions.

For the 2019 season March came in like a lion with almost two feet of snow and ice socking in the Allegheny Front. Kudos to Compiler Bob Stewart for getting the watch reopened. While no significant snow fell during the past week, overnight cold produced crusty morning walks to the northern end of the watch site where observers positioned themselves for the flight. Parking spots were still at a premium, and so an ambitious Ed Gowarty, Sr., decided to dig himself a new spot during the morning lull.



This kettle of Golden Eagles was photographed by Dave Kipp on March 14, 2019.



Dave Poder got his amazing photo of the Golden Eagle with the moon.

As is so often the case, and especially so in the spring, there is little or no reward for an early arrival. For this day, we received just a little gift when an adult Golden Eagle floated low over the site at 10:15 a.m. Shortly thereafter perhaps the same Golden Eagle rushed past us to the south – I hoped that it was in hot pursuit of a groundhog ready to peek from its hole to see if winter were over. Alas, it was to be the only bird of the morning. Hey, no wind, no sun, and as of yet, not even any vultures up and about – just another spring day at the Allegheny Front.

It remained cloudy for the next three hours; however, a stronger wind got the flight started. Surprisingly for the Allegheny Front, the day before had yielded a good flight of 11 Red-shouldered Hawks, which had another good showing today with a tally of 16. Adults were stunning in the blue sky, and a juvenile thrilled us with a close pass just over our heads. Cooper's Hawk added to the mix with the day's total of 18; several did their harrier-like display flight as they passed below us in the valley.

Though still cloudy through the 1:00 to 2:00 hour, the wind had started to pick up. Counter Dave Poder closed out the 2:00 hour with the day's migrating raptor tally at 63; however, with still just one Golden Eagle, I wondered if, despite a favorable southeast wind, this day would just be a bust. Fortunately, that would not be the case. The skies continued to clear, and the wind got stronger. The 2:35 p.m. Golden Eagle broke the eagle jam after which there was no break in the action for Counter Dave the rest of the day. Five Golden Eagles was the 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. total, then 11 for 3:00 to 4:00 p.m., and a remarkable 22 for 4:00 to 5:00 p.m., which included a kettle of seven. Five were high, (see Dave Kipp's photo above) and two below; and another Goldie trailed that group, so 8 were in sight at the same time! Dave Kipp, working to drain his third camera battery of the day, snapped merrily as the many late afternoon raptors passed by the moon (see Dave Poder's photo) in the eastern sky.

Another 14 Golden Eagles were tallied from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. as the flight continued at a torrid pace. Past experience at the Allegheny Front shows that Golden Eagles continue to migrate until dusk on strong east winds, and that was our expectation. Unfortunately, this was not the case today as the flight died out rather abruptly at 6:00

p.m. with just one more migrant raptor to be counted for the day; that bird was a long-tailed raptor (an unidentified bird that could have been a Northern Harrier or Cooper's Hawk) that streaked through the low blinding sun to the west.

See the Hawk Count Summary below: Tallied today were eleven migrating species including a distant single Osprey out over the valley and excluding one Peregrine Falcon that powered north parallel to the escarpment shortly after 3:00 p.m. Today's total tally was 267 including 53 Golden Eagles! Per Compiler Bob Stewart's research, the tally of 267 was a new record for a non- Broad-winged Hawk day for the spring, surpassing the tally of 231 recorded by counters Gene and Nancy Flament on March 15, 2003. The 53 Golden Eagle tally is a new spring record, besting the 51 on March 13, 2015, recorded by Counter Ed Gowarty, Sr., and (for the moment) ranks as the fourth highest count of Golden Eagles for both spring and fall. (See Top Ten Table below). With the warming temperatures and calls of gulls, the day felt like a summer day at the beach, and we certainly are all grateful to have experienced this flight and appreciate the conservation work that made it possible.

Day's Raptor Counts		
BV	Black Vulture	7
TV	Turkey Vulture	93
OS	Osprey	1
BE	Bald Eagle	2
NH	Northern Harrier	2
SS	Sharp-shinned Hawk	7
CH	Cooper's Hawk	18
NG	Northern Goshawk	0
RS	Red-shouldered Hawk	16
BW	Broad-winged Hawk	0
RT	Red-tailed Hawk	60
RL	Rough-legged Hawk	0
GE	Golden Eagle	53
AK	American Kestrel	2
ML	Merlin	0
PG	Peregrine Falcon	0
UA	Unknown Accipiter	2
UB	Unknown Buteo	1
UF	Unknown Falcon	0
UE	Unknown Eagle	0
UR	Unknown Raptor	3
Total		267

Observation Start Time	08:00:00
Observation End Time	17:00:00
Official Counter	Dave Poder
Observers	Bob Stewart Ed Gowarty, Sr. Greg Gdula Tom & Janet Kuehl
Weather	SE winds, high of 60. High, thin clouds. Visibility 40 km
Non Raptor Notes	150+ gulls flying W, Ravens, Crows
Visitors	Greg Gdula, Bob Stewart, Tom and Janet Kuehl, Jim Rocco, Ed Gowarty, Nancy Ott, Dave Kipp, Jack Gilbert
Forecast	Partly cloudy, mid 50s, WSW winds, windy

Two Toms Go on a Wild Goose Chase

By Tom Glover

I have been actively birding now for more than ten years since I got my start during the winter of 2009-2010 in southern Texas. I have birded a number of interesting locations over those ten years, and I have discovered that you can bird in any location, even in one of the largest metropolitan areas of the world.

My wife Emry and I were visiting our daughter and family over the holidays this past winter. Yes, Phoebe was the main attraction. They live in Tuxedo, NY, about 25 to 30 miles north of New York City. Son-in-law Tom asked me if I had a Greater White-fronted Goose on my life list. After checking my list, I found no Greater White-fronted Goose. He advised me that we could add the bird to my life list.

A sighting of the goose had been recorded on eBird throughout the month of December 2019 in Westchester County, a suburb of New York City. The location was in the area around the Edith G. Read Wildlife Sanctuary on the north shore of the Long Island Sound. The sanctuary includes 179 acres along the Long Island migratory flyway. The birding venue consists of an 80-acre brackish lake and a shoreline overlooking the sound. New York Audubon recognizes the sanctuary as an "Important Bird Area."

Tom and I made plans to chase the goose on the last day of the year December 31, 2019. After a 50-minute drive, we arrived at the sanctuary at 11:23 a.m. We parked next to the lake and immediately started to survey the flocks of Canada Geese, looking for the Greater White-fronted. We walked along the shore scoping out more Canada Geese, Mute Swans, Gadwalls, Mallards, American Black Ducks, Greater and Lesser Scaup, Long-tailed Ducks, Buffleheads, Common Goldeneye, Hooded and Red-breasted Mergansers, and Ruddy Ducks. But no Greater White-fronted Goose! As we worked our way around the lake, we noticed two birders with scopes along the shore overlooking the sound. Naturally we had to check them out. We introduced ourselves, and Tom asked them if they were Gail and Tom; they were. Gail, along with her Tom, posts on eBird regularly. That explains why my Tom recognized them. They were friendly and shared birds to look for along the sound shore and told us to keep an eye on a string of rocky outcrops about 500 feet in Long Island Sound. The rocky outcrops produced Ring-billed Gulls, a Greater Black-backed Gull, and Double-crested

Cormorants. As my Tom was scoping out the rocks, he told me to check out a small shorebird. It was a Purple Sandpiper. The newfound Tom shared that they have been seeing small flocks of Purple Sandpipers along the shoreline and on the rocky outcrops. Other finds in the sound were Brant, a young Surf Scoter, a Common Loon, and Killdeer foraging among the rocks along the shore. Of course we asked them about our target bird. They shared with us the Greater White-fronted Goose has been putting in common appearances here at the sanctuary, but not that day. They did know the goose's current location, so they gave us directions to a pond north of the sanctuary.

As Tom and I worked our way back to the car, we added seven Great Blue Herons, a Cooper's Hawk, an adult Bald Eagle in a tree checking out the lake, a Red-tailed Hawk, a Red-bellied Woodpecker, and a lone Song Sparrow. Although we did not find the goose at the sanctuary, we did compile a nice list of birds.

Tom entered the location of the pond in his smart phone, and we continued on our goose chase. The chase took us on I-287, one of the heaviest traveled interstates in the New York City area. Getting close to our exit, I noted a small pond off to the right covered with Canada Geese. That was our pond. As we were exiting, the vehicle in front of us looked familiar. It was Gail and Tom from the sanctuary. We followed them, and they soon turned into a small parking lot overlooking Bowman Avenue Pond. The first thing we saw were hundreds of Canada Geese. I roughly counted 474 of the birds. We set up our scopes and started looking for our target bird. Since Gail was familiar with the species, she found the Greater White-fronted Goose immediately. The bird's head was tucked. My Tom and I were grateful for Gail and Tom's sharing their experience and their knowledge of its field marks. It would have taken us hours to weed out the bird among the Canada Geese. Another interesting find among the Canada Geese was a lone Snow Goose. That goose was an easy find. For the record we added 6 Mallards, 1 Great Blue Heron, a calling Downy Woodpecker, and a lone American Goldfinch to the pond's list.

On our drive back to Tuxedo Tom and I discussed our day's outing. What at first looked like a wild goose chase turned out to be a "found goose day"! And I added number 335 to my life list!

Birding Sax-Zim Bog

By Debbie Kalbfleisch

Let's see — it's January. Where, oh where, to go birding? Sure, you could always head somewhere warm, like Florida or Arizona. But you might want to consider going north to Minnesota! Always up for an adventure, Linda Wagner and I joined Margaret and Roger Higbee on the morning of Friday, January 10, for a trip to the Land of 10,000 Frozen Lakes. Linda and I were lucky; we got to sleep in, while Margaret and Roger were loading up the van at their house at 4 a.m! They picked us up at Linda's place in New Castle, and we were on the road by 6:30. It was dark and rainy and gloomy, but our spirits were high.

We rolled out of Pennsylvania, heading west through soggy Ohio. It stopped raining long enough in Indiana for fog to take over. In Illinois, we jumped an hour ahead into the Central Time Zone. Patches of snow started appearing in Illinois, and ponds and lakes were frozen in Wisconsin. Canada Geese were the most numerous birds seen that day; we tallied well over 2,600. Other notable birds seen along the roadway were Mallards, Wild Turkeys, Ring-billed Gulls, several Bald Eagles, numerous Red-tailed Hawks, and a few American Kestrels. A Herring Gull was spotted just outside of Chicago, and we snagged a couple of what-the-heck Red-winged Blackbirds in Indiana. Our best bird of the day was a Cackling Goose flying with a flock of Canada Geese as we went through Winnebago County in Illinois. After 12 hours on the road, we checked into a Super 8 Motel in Wisconsin Dells and had an excellent dinner at a Chinese restaurant just across the road from the motel.

On Saturday, we loaded the van at 6 a.m. under a full moon. The temperature read a balmy 20° F with several inches of snow on the ground. We picked up several new birds in Wisconsin that morning, including Common Ravens, Northern Shrikes, and a dozen Trumpeter Swans. During the next four days, we would see more than a dozen shrikes. The temperature had dropped to 5° F and it was snowing as we entered Superior, Wisconsin. A Peregrine Falcon was perched on the bridge as we crossed into Minnesota, and we could see ice fishermen camped on

Lake Superior. The sun emerged as we skirted the edge of Duluth, and it was turning into a glorious day.

We arrived at the Bog at noon and headed to the Friends of Sax-Zim Bog Visitor Center on Owl Avenue. The Bog itself is 300 square miles with a mix of bog, jack pine, and balsam fir forests, and large aspens at the edges of fields and pastures. The Visitor Center has a small gift shop and a large window that looks out onto the bog. There are usually hot chocolate and cookies inside for visitors and a deer carcass or two outside for the critters. A number of photographers were camped outside, hoping for a shot at an elusive ermine that sporadically visited the carcass. We missed the ermine but saw our first Canada Jays, along with Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, and Black-capped Chickadees coming into the feeders. Best of all, there is an outhouse that is open 24 hours a day! While there are scattered houses and farms throughout the bog, we were pretty much in the middle of nowhere — facilities are few and far between! We stopped there two or three times a day, and since the volunteers that man the center are up to date on all the latest sightings, we made a point of chatting with them every time we dropped by.



Debbie does a victory dance after spotting the Black-backed Woodpeckers.
Photo by Margaret Higbee

Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers were being seen at the Winterberry Bog, so that was our next stop. The Friends of Sax-Zim Bog have so far acquired seven properties for a total of 483 acres, and the Winterberry Bog is one of them. We paused to watch chickadees and Red-breasted Nuthatches at the feeders near the edge of the road then took a narrow, snow-packed trail leading into the woods. Soon we heard a woodpecker tapping on a tree, so we followed the sound. Somehow, and unusual for me, I had ended up in the lead. The tapping was definitely louder, and more than that, I was being showered with wood chips! I looked up, and a Black-backed Woodpecker was 10 feet above me, intent on its work. What a wonderful way to get a lifer! We all got good looks at it, as well as its mate. More tapping was coming from deeper in the woods, possibly from an American Three-toed Woodpecker. The trail ended rather abruptly, but a few people had gone ahead, breaking a path in the

deep snow. Did I mention that there was a 20-inch snow cover on the ground? Margaret and I plunged forward, leaving Roger and Linda to keep watch on the Black-backed Woodpeckers, but the tapping was always faint and tantalizingly ahead of us. We had already spent an hour and a half in the woods, so we reluctantly turned back. While wandering in the woods, Margaret and I also heard the quiet muttering of a Great Horned Owl, and realized afterwards that we might have gotten a glimpse of it had we not been so intent on the woodpeckers!

When we got back to the road, we stopped to talk to a few birders who had just arrived. They told us where to find a nearby Northern Hawk Owl, so we sped there next. They laughingly told us that the bird was perched next to a farm field, and farm machinery had been busy all around it for most of the afternoon, with the owl's paying no attention! On the way, we spotted two Ruffed Grouse, our first for the trip. The owl was just as cooperative and tolerant as the birders had described as it perched like a star on a Christmas tree. While we watched, it sallied forth into a field and caught its dinner.

The day was coming to an end, but there was just enough time and light to check out a report of a Snowy Owl along County Road 7, at the eastern edge of the bog. From a quarter of a mile away, we spotted a group of people on the edge of the road – always a good sign! The Snowy Owl was perched beautifully at the top of a bare deciduous tree, but the birders had more important news for us — a Barn Owl in the next field over. We politely tried to keep the skepticism off our faces. Heavens! It was a Barn Owl! We could clearly see its tawny back, and as it coursed back and forth, we caught a glimpse of the heart-shaped face. Barn Owls are not really adapted to the cold and this one was only the fourth St. Louis County record, the first since 1984.

A forty-minute drive north took us to Virginia, Minnesota, and our lodgings for the next few days. Originally settled by homesick lumbermen from the state of Virginia, its location on the Mesabi Iron Range transitioned the community to iron ore mining. The Lake Shor Motor Lodge (no e in Shor!) turned out to be an old-fashioned, rustic,

and homey place. We found a Chinese buffet in town, and afterwards were glad to settle in for the night.

After an early breakfast at McDonald's, we headed to the feeders on Admiral Road, a reliable site for Boreal Chickadees. In spite of the fact that no one person is responsible for the feeders on this road, there is always a nice smorgasbord of treats for the birds. A Northern Shrike staking the feeders out explained the initial lack of small birds. Three Canada Jays were having a good time with the peanut butter smeared liberally over tree branches and logs, and we enjoyed watching their antics. (Canada Jays were formerly known as Gray Jays, and the Commonwealth of Canada, after a national vote, made them their official bird.) Hairy Woodpeckers and Blue Jays joined in, and when we noticed Downy Woodpeckers and Black-capped Chickadees coming to the feeders, we realized the shrike had left.

For the next two and a half hours, we drove the back roads of the bog. A Great Gray Owl glaring at us from a tall stump was our morning's best bird. It was wonderful to spot the odd Ruffed Grouse at the side of the road, and we added more Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Northern Shrikes, Canada Jays, and Dark-eyed Juncos. Late in the morning, we cruised up to Mary Lou's feeding station. Several people who live in the Bog have graciously opened up their properties to birders, and Mary

Lou invites the public to pull into her large circular driveway to bird her yard. A flock of 30 Cedar Waxwings flew off as we arrived, and several Wild Turkeys cautiously emerged from the surrounding woods, as well as one very fat deer! We were enjoying the activity of the usual northern backyard birds when a flock of ten Evening Grosbeaks descended noisily onto the feeders next to the van! This species has steeply declined over the years, and it's always a treat to find these lovely birds.

Later that day, we had just come from a break at the Visitor's Center when we saw a large accipiter flying ahead and Margaret noticed the gray back and white breast — Northern Goshawk! We continued cruising the back roads, and at one point, I noticed a blurry, owl-like shape in a tree. I never, ever, spot owls in trees, so naturally, I started hyperventilating, yelling "Stop! Stop!!! STOP!!! Back up! Back up!!!" Roger quickly put the van in reverse, and Linda calmly looked back and announced



The Northern Hawk Owl was perched like a star on a Christmas tree.

Photo by Margaret Higbee

“Barred Owl.” I will only add that it was the most beautiful Barred Owl I’ve ever seen!

The temperature in the afternoon climbed to 19° F, and we went back to the Winterberry Bog for another stab at the American Three-toed Woodpecker. We quickly found the two woodpeckers with solid black backs among the mature black spruce, as well as a couple of Downy and four Hairy Woodpeckers. This time, when we walked to the point where the trail had ended the day before, we found that enough people had tramped the snow down to make walking farther into the woods a little easier, and all four of us explored further. We ran into two guys from Minnesota and compared notes, and finally started back to the van. We hadn’t gotten very far, however, when our new friends started yelling at us to come back — they had found the woodpecker with the laddered back! The American Three-toed Woodpecker was a lifer for both Linda and me, and it was wonderful to finally have a good look at this species!

We almost hit a Ruffed Grouse on our way back to County Road 7 for a second look at the owls, but we could find only the Snowy, still perched, but on a more distant tree. Sadly we learned after we had returned home that the Barn Owl did not survive and had passed away on its way to a rehab center that day. The light was fading and light snow fell as we made our way back to the town of Virginia.

Monday was our last full day at the bog, and at first light, we were staking out the feeders on County Road 29 for Sharp-tailed Grouse. We had been sitting patiently for almost an hour when another vehicle pulled up behind us, and a woman approached and asked if we’d had any luck. With them watching the front yard, we decided to pull up just beyond the house and check the fields beyond. Margaret was the first to see two Sharp-tailed Grouse, wings pumping like mad, flying low across the field and into the evergreens next to the house. Roger executed a quick u-turn and we joined the six people from the other van in watching the grouse, both males, stroll out from under the trees to forage. Part of the fun of birding is becoming instant friends with birders you have never met before! They told us that they had seen two Black-billed Magpies in a large flock of crows as they came down that same road. This was another of our target birds, and one



The Canada Jay was known as the Canada Jay from the 19th century till 1957 when the American Ornithologists’ Union changed its name to “Gray Jay.” In June 2018, the American Ornithological Society restored the Gray Jay to its original name, “Canada Jay.”

Photo by Margaret Higbee

hundred crows are fairly easy to find. The magpies were a bit more elusive. Eventually, however, after several passes up and down C.R. 29, we all got quick looks at the magpies.

At the Admiral Road feeders, the Canada Jays were even more fun to watch than before, as they tore large half-frozen hunks of peanut butter from the snags and lumbered off with them! We spotted a pair of Red-breasted Nuthatches, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, and a flock of Black-capped Chickadees. Unfortunately, this was not a good year for winter finches, and we

never were able to locate a Boreal Chickadee. We resumed slowly driving along the bog roads, and as we turned a corner, a Black-billed Magpie was perched in the open on Sax Road!

Later that day, we checked out Loretta’s feeders on Kelsey Whiteface Road. We enjoyed stretching our legs on the wide snowshoe path that meandered into the woods, and we found a nice variety of the usual suspects including 17 Black-capped Chickadees. We were also amused by the odd assortment of traditional and not-so-traditional feeders, such as kitchen utensils, bowls, and serving dishes, that were doing duty as bird feeders!

Once again, we were out early on Tuesday, hoping to make the most of our last morning. As first light was breaking, a Pileated Woodpecker, a rarity in the bog, flew over the van! We had been stopping at the Sisuu feeders on McDavitt Road, on and off, for the past couple of days with little luck, but this morning a flock of a dozen Evening Grosbeaks joined the Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Blue Jays, and Black-capped Chickadees. Afterwards, we made one last stop at the Visitor’s Center and spotted our last rarity in the Bog — six chattering American Goldfinches!

All in all, we had a very satisfying visit to Minnesota’s Sax-Zim Bog, with a total of 48 species, including six owls: Barn, Great Horned, Snowy, Barred, Great Gray, and Northern Hawk Owl.

Linda and I got a lifer with the American Three-toed Woodpecker, and the Black-backed Woodpecker was also a lifer for me. Thank you, Margaret and Roger, for another grand adventure into the Wild!

Indiana - Armstrong - Cambria County – Winter 2019-2020

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

Abbreviations: Allegheny River (AR), Armstrong Trail (AT), Christmas Bird Count (CBC), Crooked Creek (CC), Indiana (IN), Keystone Reservoir (KR), Kittanning (KT), Lock & Dam (L&D), Prince Gallitzin (PG), Two Lick Reservoir (TL), Winter Raptor Survey (WRS), Yellow Creek State Park (YC).

Three **Greater White-fronted Geese** visited PG 12/4 (TD) through 12/7 (PI).

Three **Trumpeter Swans** appeared at PG 2/23 (TA, RL) through 2/24 (TD); the only other *Cambria* report was of 2 on 3/6/16 (RL). First southward-bound **Tundra Swan** flocks included 3 at PG 2/9 (PI) and 23 at YC 2/18 (SD). By 2/23 (TA) numbers at PG had build to 147.



These three Trumpeter Swans photographed by Tony DeSantis 2/23 at Prince Gallitzin comprise only the second Cambria eBird report.

Two **Wood Ducks** lingered at both PG 12/15 (TD) and along the AT n. of L&D 8 on 12/16 (TR); 5 remained in IN 12/26 (TS) for the Indiana CBC; 3 noted at IUP 1/3 (JT) were possibly some of the same ones. There are no eBird January Wood Duck records. A **Gadwall** remained on YC Lake 1/14 (LC, SD, BF, TG, DM), but the next sighting did not occur there until 2/4 (MH, RH) when 11 were counted; PG's first returnee appeared 2/9 (RL) while CC's occurred 2/17 (TR). Away from the major lakes, one was at Lake Rowena 2/10 (AM) and one near Marion Center 2/15 (SN). On 2/4 at YC 4 northward-bound **American Wigeons** arrived and were present through the end of the period; PG's first 9 were tallied 2/14 (TD). A flock of 32 **American Black Ducks** was CC's last report 12/7 (JB) while 28 remained at PG 1/10 (TD). In *Indiana*, 1-7 were noted periodically, depending on open water, throughout the period (v.o.) at YC. PG's first northward-bound Blacks were one 2/2 (PI) and 26 by 2/14 (TD). Last **Northern Pintails** listed were singletons at L&D 7 at KT 12/23 (SG) and at PG 1/2 (TD). The IN CBC yielded 3 at TL on 12/26 (LC, DL); 6 appeared 2/11 (LC, BF, MH, RH, GL, KT) at YC where they remained through 2/15 (JK, TK, MM); PG hosted its first 14 on 2/14 (TD). Fifteen **Green-winged Teal** 12/1 (MH, RH) at YC, one at PG 12/8 (RL), and 2 at KT 1/10 (SG) were last. Two returnees appeared 2/1

(SG) at KT and 2/16 (RL) at PG.

Two **Canvasbacks** lingered at YC through 12/17 (MH, RH) with first 2 spring arrivals on 2/17 (MO, HW); PG hosted 2 on 2/23 (TA, RL). Seven **Redheads** at KT 2/10 were Armstrong's first and only report; YC yielded 13 on 2/1 (SM), but by 2/11 (LC, BF, MH, RH, GL, KT) 71 were tallied; numbers continued to increase with the maximum count of 94 on 2/17 (MO), the highest Feb. tally on record for

YC. At PG the last sighting of 5 occurred 12/15 (TD) while first 4 northward migrants arrived 2/9 (TD) and had increased in number to 32 by 2/16 (TD). Fifteen **Ring-necked Ducks** were last sighted at PG 12/15 (TD); at YC one still swam among the Canada Geese on 1/18 (SD); high counts included 37 at YC 2/17 (MO) and 72 at PG 2/23 (TA). Two **Greater Scaup** lingered through 12/1 (MH, RH) at YC while 3 remained at PG through 12/15 (TD) at PG; the only northward migrants were 4 observed at PG 2/23 (TA, RL) and again on 2/25 (TD).

The first **Lesser Scaup** were 2 at YC on 2/11 (LC, BF *et al*) and 6 to 8 at PG 2/16 (TD, RL); numbers remained low through the end of the month. Sixteen **Long-tailed Ducks** were nice finds 12/17 (MH, RH) at YC, first 4 spring arrivals appeared 2/1 (SM), the first Feb. reports ever on eBird for YC; 2 stopped at PG 1/1 (TD), and one was spotted at RT 2/5 (TR). An estimated 70 **Buffleheads** were noted 12/5 (TD) at PG, where last 8 southward bound birds were seen 12/22 (PI); PG's first spring arrivals were 4 on 2/16 (PI). At YC 2 Buffleheads were listed 1/11 (DW), and one remained through 1/18 (SD); next YC Bufflehead reported was a singleton 2/4 (LC, MH, RH), after which reports were continuous through month's end. In *Armstrong* Dec. reports were

widespread with counts of one to 4 (v.o.); Jan. reports included singletons at RT 1/9 (ABu) and at KR 1/30 (SG). A **Common Goldeneye** was observed 1/28 (TR) and 2/25 (MH, RH) at YC; PG hosted the high of 12 on 2/23 (RL); counts of one to 2 were the rule along the Allegheny between 12/27 (TR) and 2/25 (ABu), but 7 at KR on 1/30 (SG) was the all-time high winter count on eBird for KR.

Last **Hooded Mergansers** were 8 at TL on 12/26 (CG) and 3 near HC the same day (CW, PW); after 1/7 (LC, PF, BF, TG, MH, RH, DK) 2 to 11 were mostly present in patches of open water at YC; TL yielded 9 on 2/8 (MH, RH). The AR harbored one to 6 between 12/5 (TR) and 2/21 (PF); 12 at Blanco 1/23 (ABr, MH, RH) was *Armstrong's* top tally. High counts at PG included 36 on 12/15 (TD) and 32 on 2/14 (TD). Peak *Indiana* numbers of **Common Mergansers** included 41 at TL 2/8 (MH, RH), 51 at YC on 2/11 (LC, BF *et al*), and 33 in McFeaters Cove at YC 2/18 (SD). In *Cambria*, PG hosted 82 on 2/19 (MD), but *Armstrong* yielded by far the largest flocks. CC harbored 335 on 12/3 (JB), 170 on 1/5 (TR), and 150 on 2/5 (TR). The highest count along the AR was 40 on 12/23 (TR) while KR yielded 46 on 1/30 (SG). Fifteen **Red-breasted Mergansers** arrived at YC 2/1 (SM); this was only the 8th year with Feb. reports since 1983; the earliest previous Feb. arrival date was 2/14/90 (MH, TJ, GL, GS). The only reports for *Cambria* and *Armstrong* respectively mentioned 2 at PG 12/8 (RL) and 5 near CC 2/1 (JB).

Ruddy Ducks numbered 39 at YC on 12/1 (MH, RH) but the flock had dwindled to 19 by 12/17 (MH, RH). A Ruddy Duck over at TL a day or two before the IN CBC (LC) was countable for count week. A singleton, at YC, first spotted 1/7 (TG, DK), continued through 1/14 (LC, SD, BF, TG, DM). Next Ruddy arrival occurred at YC 2/11 (LC, BF *et al*) after which sightings were continuous through the period's end. At PG 4 Ruddies on 12/15 (TD) were the top tally and the last report till the first northward-bound bird on 2/25 (TD). There were no *Armstrong* reports.

The region's only **Ruffed Grouse** was found south of New Bethlehem 12/24 (BR).

Last **Pied-billed Grebes** were 3 at PG 12/15 (TD), 2 at TL through 12/26 (CG), and one at L&D 7 at KT on 1/15 (TR); the only returnees were singletons found at TL 2/8 (MH, RH) and at PG 2/24 (TD). Last **Horned Grebes** were 3 at YC 12/17 (MH, RH); heading north were single Horned Grebes at L&D 7

on 2/1 (TR, SG), at YC 2/11 (LC, BF *et al*), and at PG 2/14 (TD).

American Coots were in better numbers at PG than at YC with counts of 33 on 12/5 (TR) and 21 on 12/9 (TA); 2 to 3 coots stopped at YC 2/23-27 (MH, RH, SS), the only spring reports. First **Killdeer** were one at CC 2/11 (JB), 3 in IN 2/11, 23 (DL), and one at Buttermilk Falls 2/25 (JB). Three **American Woodcocks** were found near Josephine 2/20 (DL).

Last **Bonaparte's Gull** was sighted 12/17 (MH, RH) at YC. A flock of 177 migrating **Ring-billed Gulls** flew high over BS 2/23 (MH, RH), the same day (TA) 61 were tallied at PG. The only **Herring Gulls** reported were one to 2 along the AR near KT (v.o.).

Two **Red-throated Loons** graced YC Lake 12/1 (MH, RH); only one could be relocated 12/3 (MH, RH); PG harbored a great flock of 18 on 12/17 (TD). The **Common Loon** count at YC reached 32 on 12/3 (MH, RH). First returning Common Loon was listed at YC 2/15 (LC, TG, MH, RH, JK, TK, MM, JaP, JP).

Two **Double-crested Cormorants** listed at PG 12/8 (RL) were the only ones noted.

Two **Turkey Vultures** at KT 1/11 (SG) were unusual; one near Clymer on *Indiana* WRS #1 on 1/21 (ED, MH, RH, GL) was only the second time any were found on this route; next reported ones were at Clymer again 2/8 (DB) and at IUP 2/17 (JT). *Cambria's* first appeared at PG 2/23 (TA).

Amazingly, there were four times as many Cooper's Hawks sighted this winter than Sharp-shinned Hawks. Cooper's Hawk reports routinely outnumber Sharp-shinned, but not quite by this amount. **Sharp-shinned** were noted at 8 locations; **Cooper's Hawks**, at 32 (v.o.).

Single **Barred Owls** were regular only at Nolo 12/24; 1/3; 2/5 with 2 heard on 1/13, 28; 2/8, 10, 11, 16 (DB). Two **Short-eared Owls** near Chest Springs were nice finds 1/23 (TD); by 1/26 (TA) 3 were noted.

Only 4 **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** were listed: one near Homer City 12/29 (LC); one near SH 1/3 (MH, RH), one at YC 1/18 (SD), and one n. of L&D 8 along the AT on 1/22 (TR).

Single **Merlins** were sighted in *Indiana* 12/29 (RH, SM) and 2/17 (JaP, JP, JT); in *Armstrong*, 1/4 (EH). WRS #1 on 1/27 (ED, MH, RH, GL) yielded a **Peregrine** perched on a wire over a field near

Clarksburg. One of the KT Peregrines was present near the nest sight from 12/30 (SG, MH, RH) through 2/25 (ABu).

Two **Fish Crows** were heard in IN 2/17 (SD), the season's first report.

The Worthington area yielded 150 **Horned Larks** on 12/19 (DBr) and 2/7,8 (DBr); WRS #3 on 1/27 (MH, RH, GL, DL) yielded 55 larks while WRS #2 on 1/31 (MH, RH, DK, GL) produced 15; thirty showed up at YC 2/27 (SS).

An unusual four **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** reports were received – all from *Armstrong*; individuals were seen 1/2 (TR) along the AT n. of L&D 8; 1/23 (TR) at Manorville; 1/26 (MD) along the Butler-Freeport Trail near Laneville; and 2/21 (TR) along the AT n. of L&D 8.

A **Red-breasted Nuthatch** popped up 12/1 (MVT) near Leechburg; another showed up near Sidman 1/4 (PB), and yet a third 2/5 (MH, RH) at a feeder near SH where it remained through 2/29 (RH, MH, RH, SM). **Brown Creepers** were in short supply this winter in *Indiana* with only five reports from YC (v.o.) between 12/26 (RC, MH, RH) and 2/17 (MO); one from the Blairsville area 1/11 (JKe); and one near Marion Center 2/17 (SN). *Cambria's* reports included 2 each at PG 12/8 (JC, SH, BS) and at Loretto 2/2 (SVH).

PG hosted a **Winter Wren** 12/8 (JC, SH, BS) and 12/9 (TA); single wrens were found along the AT n.

of L&D 8 on 12/23 (TR) and 1/5 (AH). Three Winter Wrens were noted in *Indiana* this season: one on the IN CBC 12/26 (CW, PW), one near Homer City 1/12 (BF), and one at YC 2/4 (LC, MH, RH). The only **Hermit Thrushes** listed were 3 on the IN CBC, all at YC, 12/26 (MH, RH).

Purple Finch reports included 2 at Nolo 12/12 (GL); one near Lucerne Mines 12/24 (RS); one at YC 12/26 (MH, RH); one at Patton 1/1 (RL); one to 2 individuals near Homer City 1/5,12 (BF); and one near IN 2/16 (CR).

A flock of 120 Horned Larks near Patton also yielded 2 **Lapland Longspurs** on 1/26 (RL). Ten **Snow Buntings** were a great find near Patton 1/29 (MD); one was still present 1/31 (TD); another flew across the road near Carrolltown 2/29 (RH, SM).

A **Chipping Sparrow** lingered near Homer City 12/4, 5 (BF). A **Fox Sparrow** wintered at a feeder near SH 12/1 (MH, RH) through 2/29 (RH, MH, RH, SM). A single **White-crowned Sparrow** was found 12/26 (LC, DL) on the IN CBC; 5 were near IN 1/26 (DL) through 2/16 (DL)

when 7 were counted. A **Rusty Blackbird** at PG 2/18 (TD) was the first arrival.

Two **Yellow-rumped Warblers** appeared 12/5 (TR) along the AT n. of L&D 8, where one was still present 1/2 (TR); a singleton was also at Rosston 12/31 (TR) and 1/5 (TR).



Brian Schmoke got this phenomenal photo of a Winter Wren at PG 12/8.

Observers: Tina Alianiello, Alice Beatty, Dave Beatty, Paul Bernhardt John Boback, Dave Brooke (DBr), Alan Buriak (ABu), Rich Carlson, Lee Carnahan, John Carter, Marcy Cunkelman, Michael David, Tony DeSantis, Sue Dickson, Ed Donley, Barb Fletcher, Tom Glover, Carol Guba, Sam Guthrie, Rebecca Hart (RH), Amy Henrici, Sean Herrmann, Elizabeth Hewitt, Margaret Higbee, Roger Higbee, Pam Illig. Timmi Jones, Debbie Kalbfleisch, James Kellam (JKe), Jan Kuehl, Tom Kuehl, Gloria Lamer, Dennis Lauffer, Renee Lubert, Steve Manns, Mark McConaughy, Donna Meyer, Sandra Newell, Miriam Ohanjanyan, James Pumford (JaP), Joseph Pumford, Bill Reddinger, Theo Rickert, Cindy Rogers, Steve Schmit, Brian Schmoke, Richard Staffen, Georgette Syster, John Taylor, Ken Truitt, Stewart Van Horn (SVH), Marge Van Tassel (MVT), Ding Wang, Howard West, Chris Williams, Paula Williams.

Indiana County Migration Count

The Indiana County Migration Count will be held on Saturday, May 9, 2020. We plan to continue the count, but we will not be birding in teams. The migration count will be done individually or by family groups. If you plan to participate, please notify Roger (rvhigbee@windstream.net) or Margaret Higbee (bcoriole@windstream.net; 724-354-3493).

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

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Tony Bruno found this gorgeous Barred Owl in Armstrong Co. on Feb. 1.

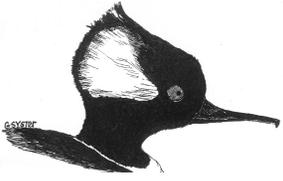


This White-breasted Nuthatch cached his sunflower seeds under the bark of a pine in a yard near Shelocta on Feb. 24..

Photo by Margaret Higbee



This Eastern Screech-Owl was another Armstrong Co. find on Feb. 20 for Tony Bruno.



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