

The Todd Nuthatch



Indiana, PA

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

October 2024

Meetings

Todd Bird Club meetings are held the first Tuesday of every month September through May at Blue Spruce Lodge in Blue Spruce County Park. The park is located just off PA 110 east of the town of Ernest. Our meetings begin at 7:30 p.m. Plan to arrive by 7:00 to socialize and snack. Refreshments are provided by various members at each meeting.

Tuesday, October 1 – “Costa Rica – A Birder’s Paradise” presented by Roger Higbee. Five members of the Todd Bird Club – Carol Guba, Gloria Lamer, Linda Wagner, and Roger and Margaret Higbee – traveled with Hillstar Nature to Costa Rica this past March.

At this meeting we’ll see some of the birds of Costa Rica, ranging in size from the Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant to the Jabiru and the Fiery-throated Hummingbird to the Great Potoo, as well as one of the most sought after species, the Resplendent Quetzal.

Tuesday, November 5 – We will travel with Dave Brooke to the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico for our November meeting. He will present many of the amazing birds found there. Dave came to birding late in life. As he was approaching retirement, he



This Yellow-throated Toucan is just one of the colorful birds you will see at our October meeting.

Photo by Roger Higbee



Dave Brooke poses briefly while birding.

attended a bird walk at Harrison Hills Park, led by Steve Gosser and Mary Ann Thomas. On that walk they spotted a Hooded Warbler sitting out in plain view. Dave hadn’t even heard of warblers and had never seen one. He was hooked. Ten years later, he is still obsessed with birds.

Tuesday, December 3 – With more than 70 species of orchids, Lesvos (also known as Lebos) is relaxed in pace and breathtakingly filled with natural beauty. It is also one of the largest islands in Greece and sits just four miles from the coast of Turkey. Among European birders and increasingly, American birders as well, it is known as one of the best spots to take in spring migration. Kraig Cawley will cover its wide range of habitats from reed fringed pools, mountain tops, bays, brackish flood puddles from spring rains and floods, forests, and more. Whether enjoying Island specialties such as Kr per’s Nuthatch or eastern migrants like Pied Avocet each day for a week brought them a great many treasures. A wide variety of unusual species were seen overhead such as Red-footed Falcon and Short-toed Snake-Eagle. For their 40th anniversary trip to Greece – and half of the couple dedicated to birding (and the other half a happy tag-along lover of the outdoors) they spent a week based in Athens

enjoying history and a week on this gem of an island. The program of course will focus on the keen birding interests Kraig came to know during his first visit to a Todd Club meeting last year.

Tuesday, January 7 – Members' Night. Please bring your digital or printed photos, anecdotes, stories, souvenirs, etc. to this meeting. We want to see and hear about your birding experiences and more! It's fun when everyone participates. We hope to see you there!



The Kraper's Nuthatch is a vocal resident of coniferous and mixed forests.

Photo by Kraig Cawley



This striking raptor, a Short-toed Snake-Eagle is noted for its hovering behavior.

Photo by Kraig Cawley

Outings

Tuesday Morning Outings – These will continue until regular deer season which starts November 30 and runs through December 14. For all Tuesday field trips, meet at the north shore gazebo at Yellow Creek at 7:30 a.m. through October. After the time change on November 3, meet on the north shore at 7:00 a.m.

Saturday, October 5 – Yellow Creek State Park. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the park office. We'll bird the south shore for early waterfowl.

Saturday, October 12 – Ed Donley will lead an outing on his property near Shelocta. Meet at Ed's home, 1243 Five Points Road, Indiana, PA 15701, at 8:00 a.m. Three driveways meet Five Points Road at the same location. The center one has a yellow iron gate. Ed's driveway is the paved one with the sharp left. If you get lost, call Ed's cell (724-599-5886).

Tuesday, October 15 – Allegheny Front Hawk Watch near Central City. Meet at the Yellow Creek State Park office at 8:00 if you wish to carpool or at the Front at 9:30. Dress warmly and bring something on which to sit. (We should arrive at the Front by 9:30 a.m.)

Saturday, October 19 – Allegheny Front Hawk Watch. Meet at the Yellow Creek State Park office at 8:00 if you

wish to carpool. Wear warm clothes and bring something to sit on. We should arrive at the Front by 9:30 a.m.

Saturday, October 26 – Blue Spruce County Park, led by Alice Stitt. We'll meet in the large parking lot just past the park office at 8:00 a.m. Plans are to hike Getty Run Trail and pick up some late fall migrants and early winter birds.

Saturday, November 2 – Yellow Creek State Park, led by Roger and Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493 home; 412-309-3538 Roger's cell). This is a joint outing with the Three Rivers Birding Club. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the park office, located on PA 259 just off US 422 east of Indiana.

Thursday, December 26 – Indiana Christmas Bird Count. This count is conducted in a 15-mile-diameter circle centered at the intersection of Second and Grandview in Indiana. If you live within 7.5 miles of this intersection, you are welcome to do a feeder and/or yard count. If you are farther away, you are welcome to join one of our field parties or take responsibility for a section of the circle. Please contact Roger or Margaret Higbee (724-354-3493 or Roger's cell 412-309-3538) if you plan to participate.

New Year's Day 2025 Birding

What will be your first bird of the new year? Will you hear a Great Horned Owl hooting at 12:01 a.m.? Or will you hear a Northern Cardinal chipping at 7:00? Or, if you've been partying the night before, will it be a House Sparrow at noon?

Whatever your first bird is, please let us know. The list of "first birds" will appear in our January issue of "The Todd Nuthatch." Either email or call with your first bird. (bcoriele@windstream.net or 724-354-3493).

January 1, 2025, Birding

One more thing to do on New Year's Day.... No matter where you are on January 1, make a list of all the birds you see. It doesn't matter if you're in Pennsylvania, New York, Arizona, Florida, Costa Rica, Timbuctu, wherever!

Let's see how many species Todd Bird Club members can compile on January 1, 2025. E-mail your bird list to bcoriole@windstream.net or call 724-354-3493.

September 7th Outing at Yellow Creek State Park

By Matthew St. Clair

Saturday's outing at Yellow Creek State Park started at 8:00 a.m. Ten people arrived at Dragonfly Pond. We started the day with a Green Heron, Pileated Woodpecker, Broad-winged Hawk, and a few Bald Eagles at Dragonfly Pond. We then heard and spotted a few Gray Catbirds, Northern Cardinals, and Cedar Waxwings around the pond. One member of the group was able to spot a Double-crested Cormorant located far out on the lake. Before leaving this area, we viewed a few American Crows chasing two Cooper's Hawks.



Matt St Clair photographed these two Wilson's Snipe at Yellow Creek on September 7.

The group then stopped at one of the South Shore boat launch areas where we saw Eastern Bluebirds, American Goldfinches, and Song Sparrows. Out in the cove was a lone Great Egret wading in the water. Killdeer were also calling and seen near the egret. Roger then spotted two Wilson's Snipe hiding in the wetland grasses. This was an amazing find and our group's favorite for the day. With distant views of the snipe in the scopes, we decided to try to get a better view of the snipe near the pull-off areas at the curve in the road. When we arrived at the pull-off, we spotted a Semipalmated Plover along with a Solitary Sandpiper. The group was able to find the two Wilson's Snipe again, which were even closer than at the previous location. Upon leaving, we noticed an immature Bald Eagle flying across the cove.

At the South Shore day-use area, near the restrooms, I decided to check whether the previously seen Guinea Paper Wasps were still on a nest. These wasps are uncommon in this area. The wasps were still active, and our group had very good views of them. At this site we

noticed a lot of birds, including a Hooded Warbler calling, Northern Flickers, Eastern Bluebirds, and more Cedar Waxwings.

After arriving at the beach area, I noticed a small baby Common Snapping Turtle crossing the road. As we continued to the beach, Ed immediately spotted two sandpipers walking along the shoreline. After further looking, we identified one as a juvenile Sanderling, an uncommon find at Yellow Creek State Park. Both sandpipers flew away quickly, so we were unable to get a positive identification on

the second bird. Most likely this was either another Sanderling or possibly a Semipalmated Sandpiper. We decided to check a nearby cove to see if the sandpipers had landed there. Unfortunately, no sandpipers were in the cove, but we did spot a Great Blue Heron and another Bald Eagle. However, while on our way to the cove, we noticed two very fast-flying Merlins land in the pine trees above us.

After leaving the beach, our last stop was at the Waterfowl Observatory Trail. We found multiple Wood Ducks and one more Great Blue Heron at the wetland boardwalk. On our way to the observatory blind, we managed to find an Eastern American Toad, Northern Pearly-Eye, and Chicken of the Woods. Nothing new was seen at the blind, besides a few more Great Blue Herons and Wood Ducks. Our group managed to list 38 bird species, a nice total for a morning on the south shore of Yellow Creek, including some birds and other critters that were uncommon and exciting!

Sincere Thanks!

Thanks to our new archivist Vicki Stelma for storing the back issues of "The Todd Nuthatch."



Birding Magee Marsh

By Vicki Stelma

On May 10 and 11, I was lucky enough to make my fourth trip in as many years to Lucas County, Ohio, with the Magee Marsh Boardwalk, the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, and the Howard Marsh Metropark my chosen destinations.

Around 4:30 pm on Friday, fellow new Todd Bird Club member Tiffany Chan and I arrived at the boardwalk at Magee Marsh. Although the weather would turn stormy overnight, that late Friday afternoon was clear and beckoning us out of the car after the long drive north.

When we arrived at the Boardwalk, we were, of course, greeted by a small crowd of people with binos trained on the trees. We hopped out of the car, eagerly approached the edge of the group, and were immediately engulfed by the excitement of our fellow birders and some warblers themselves.

Although I had studied my warblers on the way to Ohio and felt somewhat confident in my visual identification skills as far as the warblers I could expect to see were concerned, my approach on the boardwalk has always been to simply ask the crowd, "What are we looking at?" Everyone is happy to share their knowledge and to help each other to "see."

That evening as we walked the boardwalk over the course of a couple of hours and enjoyed the weather, we saw the following warblers: Black-and-white, Prothonotary, Cape May, Northern Parula, Bay-breasted, Blackburnian, Yellow, Black-throated Blue, Palm, Yellow-rumped, and Wilson's.

In addition, we were treated to long looks at three Bald Eagles, including an eaglet in the nest that periodically displayed a wing, and a close-up view of an Eastern Screech-Owl perched on a tree branch, presumably relaxing before the night's hunt. (Full disclosure - these looks were aided by the \$4,700 Swarovski smart binoculars that a fellow birder and sales rep was sharing with the crowd.) Other birds that we spotted included an Osprey flying overhead, three nesting Green Herons, countless swooping Tree Swallows, too-many-to-count Red-winged Blackbirds (one of which flew at eye level down the boardwalk towards us, gaudily displaying his red and yellow wings), a Veery, and a Warbling Vireo.

Although we didn't see anything unusual or rare on Friday afternoon, I always enjoy the Magee Marsh Boardwalk because of the sheer number of visible birds that surround me at any given moment.

Saturday dawned rainy and windy and cold, so we began the day around 8:30 a.m. on the wildlife drive at the Ottawa NWR. By this time, my non-birding daughters Sophia and Anna had joined us, and I was hoping the birds would be brilliant and plentiful so that they might be convinced to "come to the dark side," so to speak.

As soon as we arrived at the visitor's center, a Yellow Warbler flew by the car and into a tree, and numerous Purple Martins flew in and around and about their house. Once on the drive, we spotted a couple of White-crowned Sparrows and two Indigo Buntings, which, with their brilliant coloring, make a great "gateway" bird for non-birders whom we are seeking to convert (like my daughters, fingers crossed).

Other highlights of the drive included a family of Trumpeter Swans that we watched cross the road, slip into the water, and slowly swim away. Once again - who doesn't love a baby bird? - another "gateway" possibility.... By the time we had finished the drive, we had added Great Blue Herons and both Snowy and Great Egrets to our list and had seen enough baby Canada Geese to make us happy for weeks, or perhaps even months, but perhaps happy is the wrong word.

By around 10 a.m., we had finished the drive, the weather had cleared, and we headed back to the Magee Marsh Boardwalk. I was glad I had gone on Friday night because the conditions weren't ideal, and the crowds had increased to an almost uncomfortable level - because there seemed to be so few birds, when someone spotted one, everyone on the boardwalk gathered to look, it seemed.

Highlights for Saturday's boardwalk walk included the Green Herons on their nests as well as flying, a Common Nighthawk perched on a very visible tree branch, the majestic Bald Eagles, the sleeping screech-owl, an Ovenbird, a Magnolia Warbler in addition to the other warblers that were seen on Friday, Gray Catbirds, and Baltimore Orioles.

After a short break for lunch and a look at Lake Erie, we ended the trip with a quick walk through the Howard Marsh Metropark. Species spotted included my personal favorite of the trip - the Black-necked Stilt with its vibrant pink legs. We also watched a pod of American White Pelicans flying overhead and then out of sight. Mallards, Killdeer, and Dunlin were added to the list, and after seeing just these few birds, we headed back to Indiana County late Saturday afternoon.

Once again, Lucas County, Ohio, in May didn't disappoint. I saw many year birds and enjoyed the

company of other birders and my daughters who maybe will become birders themselves someday.

An Outing to Sewickley Heights Park

By Debbie Kalbfleisch

On September 6, 2024, 19 people gathered for a Three Rivers Birding Club outing at Sewickley Heights Borough Park in Allegheny County, with Sheree Daugherty as the leader. At least six of the 19 were Todd members, including Sheree, Frank Moone, Melissa Little, Roger and Margaret Higbee, and me. The temperature was in the low 50s that morning, but the birds were already active. Against the background of a Carolina Wren's song, several warblers were bouncing around in the trees surrounding the parking lot, including Hooded and Cape May Warblers and American Redstart. As we started walking on Black Cherry Trail, we heard an abbreviated version of a Swainson's Thrush's song, then a Veery called shortly after from deeper in the woods. We lined up on the trail overlooking a shrubby meadow and were delighted with a wave of warblers and other migrants. Everyone tried to get on the Tennessee, Northern Parula, Magnolia, Bay-breasted, Black-throated Blue, and Black-throated Green Warblers as they popped up, and then too quickly, dropped out of sight again. A Ruby-throated Hummingbird darted by us, and an Eastern Towhee called. A few of us were lucky to see a Common Nighthawk as it skimmed the trees. A Scarlet Tanager perched in the open, puzzling some of the newer birders who pointed out that it was not red but yellow. Many birds other than warblers are also confusing in the fall!

Continuing down the path and through the meadow, we noted large flocks of Common Grackles. These flocks will eventually head south later in September.

Bay-breasted Warblers were turning into the bird of the day and seemed to be even more numerous than the Hooded Warblers that breed in the park. An immature Indigo Bunting sat in a tree next to the path, and again, we explained to our new birders that it would only acquire its blue color next spring...and only if it were a male! We took the path up to the horse fields that are presently occupied by long-horned cattle, and spotted the first Turkey Vultures of the day soaring in the sky above the barns.

The Gravel Path was mostly quiet, but things got lively when someone spotted a Yellow-billed Cuckoo flying into the trees. Most of us just got quick glimpses of this secretive bird, but one of our photographers captured a photo confirming the yellow bill. We finally shed our jackets as we left the woods and came into the warmth of the sun on the Pipeline Trail. There were gasps of admiration as masses of yellow flowers, Devil's Beggar-ticks, lined the path on both sides. A Ruby-throated Hummingbird buzzed our group, and we discovered another wave of warblers foraging in the trees. We happily tallied more Black-and-white, Hooded, Magnolia, Bay-breasted, and Black-throated Green Warblers. A few people even spotted an Ovenbird stalking along the ground.

We tallied 42 species for the day, including a dozen warblers. Another highlight of the day was the spotting of a Red-banded Hairstreak, a rather uncommon butterfly in Pennsylvania.

Sincere Thanks to Greg Tomb!



Special thanks to Greg Tomb who volunteered to compile the 2024 Indiana County Migration Count summarized on pages 6 and 7 of this newsletter!!! He spent countless hours entering everyone's data into a spreadsheet, so the totals could be reported. We sincerely appreciate Greg's help!

– Roger & Margaret Higbee

Did You Know? The Cattle Egret has been split. The bird that has occurred in *Indiana, Armstrong*, and other PA counties is now the Western Cattle Egret. The Western's range includes Africa, western Asia, southern Europe, and the Americas. The range of the Eastern Cattle Egret extends from south Asia to east Asia to New Zealand.

Indiana Pennsylvania Migration Count 2024

May 11, 2024

Canada Goose	112	Great Crested Flycatcher	10	Field Sparrow	17
Wood Duck	19	Eastern Kingbird	7	White-crowned Sparrow	9
Mallard	13	White-eyed Vireo	7	White-throated Sparrow	2
Lesser Scaup	1	Yellow-throated Vireo	11	Song Sparrow	199
Common Merganser	8	Blue-headed Vireo	6	Swamp Sparrow	14
Red-breasted Merganser	5	Warbling Vireo	3	Eastern Towhee	122
Wild Turkey	12	Red-eyed Vireo	223	Eastern Meadowlark	11
Rock Pigeon	29	Blue Jay	107	Orchard Oriole	12
Mourning Dove	101	American Crow	151	Baltimore Oriole	60
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	1	Common Raven	3	Red-winged Blackbird	382
Black-billed Cuckoo	2	Black-capped Chickadee	49	Brown-headed Cowbird	37
Chimney Swift	85	<i>chickadee sp?</i>	2	Common Grackle	208
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	14	Tufted Titmouse	78	Ovenbird	94
Sora	2	Bank Swallow	11	Louisiana Waterthrush	4
Killdeer	22	Tree Swallow	161	Blue-winged Warbler	1
Spotted Sandpiper	9	Purple Martin	27	Black-and-white Warbler	4
Solitary Sandpiper	3	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	38	Swainson's Warbler	1
Ring-billed Gull	5	Barn Swallow	266	Tennessee Warbler	34
Common Loon	8	Cliff Swallow	1	Kentucky Warbler	6
Green Heron	3	White-breasted Nuthatch	24	Common Yellowthroat	119
Great Blue Heron	14	Brown Creeper	3	Hooded Warbler	30
Turkey Vulture	56	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	12	American Redstart	42
Osprey	3	House Wren	32	Cape May Warbler	3
Cooper's Hawk	3	Carolina Wren	41	Cerulean Warbler	3
Bald Eagle	4	European Starling	211	Northern Parula	5
Broad-winged Hawk	2	Gray Catbird	182	Magnolia Warbler	6
Red-tailed Hawk	15	Brown Thrasher	27	Bay-breasted Warbler	4
Eastern Screech-Owl	2	Northern Mockingbird	5	Blackburnian Warbler	2
Barred Owl	3	Eastern Bluebird	63	Yellow Warbler	95
Belted Kingfisher	4	Veery	1	Chestnut-sided Warbler	9
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	2	Swainson's Thrush	3	Blackpoll Warbler	2
Red-bellied Woodpecker	54	Wood Thrush	80	Palm Warbler	1
Downy Woodpecker	24	American Robin	456	Pine Warbler	3
Hairy Woodpecker	10	Cedar Waxwing	6	Yellow-rumped Warbler	5
Pileated Woodpecker	16	House Sparrow	57	Yellow-throated Warbler	1
Northern Flicker	26	House Finch	44	Prairie Warbler	1
American Kestrel	4	Purple Finch	2	Black-throated Green Warbler	12
Eastern Wood-Pewee	7	Pine Siskin	3	Wilson's Warbler	1
Acadian Flycatcher	5	American Goldfinch	110	Scarlet Tanager	56
Willow Flycatcher	7	Grasshopper Sparrow	5	Northern Cardinal	173
Least Flycatcher	1	Chipping Sparrow	96	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	46
Eastern Phoebe	50			Indigo Bunting	34

Total Number of Species = 125
 Total Number of Individuals = 5,260

Note: The *sp?* are not counted as species since other members of those families are already on the list, but the numbers are included in the final total.

Indiana County Migration Count Observers

Sue Appleby
Dave Beatty
Tom Betts
Marcy Cunkelman
Sue Dickson
Ed Donley
John Dudash

Judy Emigh
Gary Ferrence
Margaret Higbee
Roger Higbee
Clayton Lamer
Gloria Lamer
Marilyn Moore

Joseph Pumford
Bob Ramsey
Henry Rummel
Nancy Smeltzer
Vicki Stelma
Blair Stormer
Linda Stormer

Rodger Stormer
Mark Strittmatter
John Taylor
Greg Tomb
Mary Lu Tucker
Karen Valyo
Ray Winstead

Total Participants = 28
Total Parties = 23

Party Hours on Foot = 67.994
Party Hours by Car = 20.863
Party Hours by Other = 4.471

Party Miles on Foot = 39.61
Party Miles by Car = 136.48

Total Party Hours = 93.328

Total Party Miles = 176.09

Winter Is Coming!

We are excitedly gearing up for our first ever Winter Atlas season! More info will come in October and November, but here are key points to help answer some of the questions cropping up.

- * Winter survey season will run December 1 - February 28.
- * Winter atlas data will be collected via the PA Bird Atlas portal in eBird. You'll need to switch back into the portal on Dec. 1 if you've left it.
- * Observe block boundaries for the winter surveys just like you've done during the breeding season. In other words, be sure to start a new checklist if you are crossing into a new block.
- * A few targets will be set for surveying priority blocks (more on that soon), but data can and should be submitted from any and all blocks possible!
- * What kind of data do we want? One of the most optimal ways to contribute will be to conduct one-hour-long, traveling (by foot, not vehicle) checklists in habitat patches in your blocks. Adding this standardization to the data collection (in this case, checklists of the same length of time) will allow for more comparison across blocks!
- * In addition to one-hour checklists, all traveling, stationary (including feeder watches), and incidental checklists will be welcome and helpful data.

– Amber Wiewel, PA Bird Atlas Project Coordinator

Don't Shrug the Atlas

By Greg Tomb

The stoplight on Market Street in Blairsville turned red and I sat staring out my windshield. A young couple entered the crosswalk pushing their toddler in a stroller. This July has been a hot one, and the temperature was already nearing 90 degrees at noon. You couldn't blame the child for not walking. As the light changed and I began driving off, I found myself falling into Breeding

Bird Atlas protocol. Coming to terms with deciding whether the child was in fact a recent fledge, "Yes," I said, "fledge." That seemed problematic. Could the child actually walk? Likely. Had this family group traveled far from the nesting site? Also, likely. If the parents had just handed the child a juice box or packet of goldfish crackers, I would feel comfortable giving this sighting a

breeding code of FY (feeding young), and mission accomplished. This scenario pretty much sums up my first summer documenting breeding bird behavior for Pennsylvania's 3rd Breeding Bird Atlas.

If you are not aware by now, 2024 brought the 3rd Breeding Bird Atlas to the State of Pennsylvania. The scope of the project, headed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission and Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, seems almost monumental. Over the next five years, researchers and volunteers will survey more than 4000 established Atlas Blocks, with each block being roughly 9 square miles. The goal, put simply, is to document breeding bird distribution and abundance in our great state. Volunteers can sign up to become the principal atlaser for each specific block. The title of Principal Atlaser may seem daunting, but it's merely a way for folks to become more involved in tracking Atlas goals over the next five years for the blocks in which they choose to focus their birding effort. There are in place regional directors and county level leaders who have the real cross to bear, so I would encourage anyone to consider signing up for a block on the PA Game Commission website – it is not too late.

The Game Commission website is where I found myself in February. Excited as the onset of 3rd Atlas had arrived, I eagerly signed up for specific Atlas blocks near my home near Dilltown in southeastern Indiana County. In hindsight, I was a bit overzealous in choosing five blocks to survey. Part of my enthusiasm was rooted in getting back to "field work" like I had done as a wildlife researcher for more than 15 years. I yearned for the protocols and any semblance of a structured project that I once enjoyed.

As September has now arrived and the final robin nestling has fledged from the nest in the carport rafters, my first summer of Atlas surveying has come to an end. The robin pair, or pairs, successfully fledged three broods from the carport this year. I pulled the first nest down in mid June after the first brood had fledged, only to have robins rebuild on the exact spot in July. Then in August, I was even more surprised to see a female sitting again on eggs without even the slightest modification to the nest that I had forgotten to remove. High marks for nest site selection and a very successful breeding season for the carport robins.

Reflecting back on my summer of surveying Atlas blocks, a few encounters stick out as highlights that I will share. One thing I have the Atlas work to thank for is breaking me out of my so called rut. Maybe it's my age, geographic problems, access issues, and/or variables unbeknownst to me, but surveying for the Atlas got me out birding in areas I likely would not have gone to otherwise. I even found myself returning to areas I had not set foot in for over 40 years since I was a kid. I am so grateful for this unexpected reward of doing the Atlas.

My first highlight occurred near Armagh, Pennsylvania, in a small unbecoming wetland area. The area is a strip mine

reclamation, the core area being maybe three acres with a significant cattail component. It was here that I encountered a pair of Willow Flycatchers. On a Todd Bird Club trip to Moraine State Park last spring a Willow Flycatcher was in the field adjacent to the parking lot as we arrived. I failed to see or even hear the bird that day, so seeing my first Willow Flycatcher so close to home was a real treat. Subsequent visits followed, and I eventually found the pair feeding recent hatchlings in a nest situated in a clump of multiflora rose. Weeks later I returned to find the adults and three fledges working this little gem of a wetland. I drive by this location a dozen times a month, and I worked for three years near this location and never would have thought to bird the area, but for the Atlas. I documented over 40 species at the location this summer.

Very early in the season, I came across a Black-capped Chickadee excavating a cavity. Yes, I said excavating! Now, most birders know these birds use cavities for nesting and roosting. However, I have never really considered that modifications likely occur from species not labeled excavators like the woodpeckers. The cavity start was likely a Downy Woodpecker's doing that just hadn't made the grade.

The chickadee was all but tail into the cavity feverishly working and would hurriedly back out and expel the very punky, almost powdery decaying wood. As material fell to the ground, the bird would tilt its head and watch the wood fall like a squirrel tracks a cone it cuts from the top of a tall spruce.

The bird was deepening the cavity for use. I eventually coded this as nest building behavior. Although as I write this, it could very well have been roost building activity. I never really considered that possibility. Anyway, the following month I returned as the safe date to begin coding chickadees had arrived. I began coding a lot of "singing" chickadees, the S breeding code. This went on for a week or two before I became aware that the chickadees' "chickadee-dee-dee" is not a song but rather, a call. The chickadee's "fee-bay" or "sweetie," is the chickadee's song. This led to a wonderful bit of knowledge that coding singing birds did not apply to all birds. Crows, other corvids, vultures don't sing. Who knew? Also, woodpeckers don't sing. Ok, that makes sense. But a woodpecker drumming *is* singing! Owls hooting? Again, singing. A song is a drum is a hoot, right? This learning experience left me with the conundrum though. If a chickadee doing a dee-dee-dee call is not considered singing, then is a Gray Catbird mimicking a chickadee's call also not singing? Actually, no, it is singing. Makes perfect sense! I love these little nuances.

How often when birding do moments occur where you find yourself stopping to calibrate or even recalibrate how you look at, interpret, or feel about something? This summer it happened to me quite more than I would have thought. In June I found myself along the Ghost Town Trail near Twin Rocks, Cambria County. It was here that I

came upon a Brown-headed Cowbird fledgling perched on a trail gate, wings flapping and begging. When I see a brood parasite, there is always that moment of anxiety if you haven't seen the adult host yet. When I saw this cowbird, I immediately was hoping for the adults to be Common Grackles, I could even accept a Northern Cardinal or Gray Catbird. The surrounding coniferous habitat and trail side location was telling me to bet on Chipping Sparrow. But to my surprise, up from the streambed of Blacklick Creek flew in a Louisiana Waterthrush. Eventually, I observed both adults repeatedly returning from the streambed to feed the young bird. A bit of curious reading later shed some light on how vulnerable Louisiana Waterthrush are to cowbird parasitism when the nest is located in a riparian area with a width less than 50 meters. This location seemed to fit that data result.

Brown-headed Cowbirds always seem to have a villainous air about them. I can not say I have ever felt that way

about a brood parasite species like the cowbird. However, when you step back and look through the lens of the bird atlas, somewhere near Twin Rocks, a pair of cowbirds had a successful breeding season. And so, too, did a pair of Louisiana Waterthrushes, but it would be productivity they fell on. A cowbird is a Louisiana Waterthrush is a cowbird.

The most gratifying aspect for me in taking part in the 3rd Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas has been how it is making me a better birder. I have always been an average birder with a lot of patience and willingness to use whatever tools were available to learn. Collecting Atlas data has been a real joy and quite the learning experience. I highly recommend giving it a try, regardless of whatever time commitment you can afford.

Till next year....

Summer 2024 Indiana - Armstrong - Cambria Report

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 15701-7934.

Locations: Allegheny River (AR), Birding Blitz for Conservation (B4C), Brush Valley (BV), Ghost Town Trail (GTT), Keystone Reservoir (KR), L&D (Lock & Dam), Marion Center (MC), Prince Gallitzin State Park (PG), Shelocta (SH), Yellow Creek State Park (YC).

Armstrong's precipitation for June was sparse with a little more than half of the normal rainfall occurring and this was unevenly distributed. Overall precipitation was below the normal amount of 4.34" by 1.86". Precipitation continued in July as in June with below average rainfall until the last day of the month. The month ended 0.68" below the normal of 4.26". This is unlikely to be normal for the entire county. Precipitation for June in *Indiana* was very sparse with less than half of the normal rainfall occurring, and this was very spotty and unevenly distributed. Overall precipitation was below the normal amount of 4.81" by 2.46". July's precipitation continued as in June with spotty, below average rainfall. The month ended 2.32" below the normal of 5.13". Precipitation in *Cambria* in June was also sparse with a little more than half of the normal rainfall occurring. Overall precipitation was below the normal amount of 4.43" by 2.18". July precipitation continued as in June with spotty below average rainfall. The month ended 2.81" below the normal of 4.79" with nearly half of the month's rainfall coming on the last day of the month.

Temperatures in *Armstrong* ranged from a low of 46° F to a high of 97° F for the month of June. The temperatures averaged 1.7° F above normal for the month. July's temperatures ranged from a low of 56° F to a high of 97° F and averaged 2.6° F above normal. *Indiana's* temperatures ranged from a low of 37° F to a high of 92° F for the month

of June. The temperatures averaged 1.0° F above normal for the month. July's temperatures ranged from a low of 49° F to a high of 94° F and averaged 1.8° F above normal. Temperatures in *Cambria* ranged from a low of 40° F to a high of 90° F for the month of June. The temperatures averaged 2.7° F above normal for the month. July's temperatures ranged from a low of 50° F to a high of 93° F and averaged 3.6° F above normal.

Unusual was the 6/12 (MG) report of a **Snow Goose** near Black Lick. The observer writes, "I was unsure at first, but after research and comparison with every other large white bird with black wing tips, based on size and shape, I have no doubts this was perhaps a straggler in migration very late. It soared around 50 feet right above me." This is the only summer report of Snow Goose ever eBirded in the county.

An **American Black Duck** female was first sighted at YC with three ducklings on 6/11 (MSC); all four were still present through 7/23 (MH, RH, DK). **Hooded Mergansers** were confirmed near MC 6/6 (SN) and at Logansport 6/11 (JB); hens were observed with eight young near MC and with two young at Logansport, where the observer commented that he had also confirmed nesting at the same location during the 2nd PA Atlas. A hen **Common Merganser** with at least four young was found at Red Mill

6/1 (MS) while a later brood of five with the hen was noted near Shelocta along Crooked Creek 7/22 (MH, RH).

Both cuckoos, but especially the Black-billed, seemed to be scarce this season. The number of reports of **Yellow-billed Cuckoos** and **Black-billed Cuckoos** in the region were respectively 18 and six this summer; only two Black-bills were found in each county. The only **Common Nighthawk** was heard vocalizing on 7/9 (TH) in *Indiana's* White Twp.; no other reports were received. An **Eastern Whip-poor-will** was heard near West Lebanon 6/22 (MR) then again 7/22 (DC); these were the region's lone summer reports.

Because of the lack of rain, water levels dropped at YC creating mudflats, so this was the only known location hosting shorebirds in the region. All reports are from YC unless otherwise noted. The region's lone **American Woodcock** was flushed 7/27 (MSC). Single **Semipalmated Plovers** were listed on only two dates – 6/11 (ED, MSC) on its northward migration and again on 7/30 (SD) as a plover headed southward. A single **Spotted Sandpiper**, which in previous years had nested at YC, was noted 6/7 (CJ, AM, HR); southward-bound birds appeared 7/9 (ED, DK) and 7/23 (MH, RH, DK); in *Armstrong* first migrant Spotties occurred 7/13 (JB) n. of L&D 6. Bakerton Reservoir hosted two on 7/6 (PI, WI) while Colver Reservoir produced 4 on 7/19 (JX). Two stopped at Hinckston Run Reservoir 7/29 (AM). KR hosted three **Solitary Sandpipers** on 7/18 (MH, RH) and another singleton 7/29 (MH, RH); YC boasted one Solitary 7/19 (TH) and 10 on 7/27 (MSC). Single **Lesser Yellowlegs** appeared at YC 6/9 (CG, MH, RH, GL) then on their trip south 7/27 (MSC) through 7/31 (TH). A **Greater Yellowlegs** was noted 7/19 (TH) while two were spotted 7/27 (MSC). Top **Least Sandpiper** count was eight on Phalarope Flats at YC 7/30 (MH, RH) when last **Pectoral Sandpiper** was also listed there. Five was the high B4C **Semipalmated Sandpiper** tally 6/9 (CG, MH, RH, GL).

Herring Gulls nested successfully once again at Kittanning and were confirmed 6/10 (TR) when a chick was photographed in the nest and three adults were also present. A **Caspian Tern** visited YC 7/9 (ED, MH, RH, DK), the same day (RL) five were counted at PG. A **Common Tern** was identified at YC 7/30 (AM, HR).

Two **Great Egrets** stopped at YC 7/30 (AM, HR), the only summer report.

Becoming more commonly reported in *Indiana*, single **Black Vultures** were noted near Black Lick 6/14 (MG) and at SGL 276 on 7/19 (MS, JT). Another was sighted near South Fork 6/8 (SB).

Barred Owls, consistently reported from two Nolo locations (DB, GL), were also listed at one *Armstrong*, six other *Indiana*, and four *Cambria* spots this summer.

Only two **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** were noted, both in *Indiana* – one 6/30 (MS) at Cameron's Bottom and the other, a juvenile near Creekside 7/25 (MH, RH). A **Red-headed Woodpecker** was a great find near Sidman 6/25 (AnM).

Single **Merlins** were sighted at four *Indiana* locations between 6/11 (JP) and 7/18 (TH). *Cambria* yielded three near Northern *Cambria* 7/17 (RV) and two at another undisclosed *Cambria* location 7/22 (KL).

Alder Flycatchers were found at three locations in northern *Indiana* for the B4C on 6/7, 10 (CG, MH, RH, GL).

Least Flycatchers were noted only on two point counts, one w. of Johnstown 6/2 (AnM) and one near Vintondale in *Cambria* 6/3 (AnM) and at two *Indiana* locations – near YC 6/11 (CG, MH, RH, GL) and at YC 7/16 (MSC).

A single **Horned Lark** was singing near YC on 6/9 (CG, MH, RH, GL) for the B4C but could not be relocated later in the month; another was heard singing 6/18 (AnM) near Portage; two, an adult and a juvenile, were photographed near Worthington 7/6 (TR).

Six **Bank Swallows** observed at YC 6/15 (AL) and one near Mineral Point 7/14 (ER) were the only ones noted. A **Purple Martin** colony near Penn Run hosted 56 pairs that produced a total of 257 eggs and/or babies. Landlord Ron Alsop noted that one nest contained

seven eggs and all hatched and fledged successfully. Another landlord near MC (*fide* RA) with three large martin boxes hosted more than 40 martins this year, but their martins left two weeks early this year. Upon checking the boxes after the martins had departed, they found "some unhatched eggs." They theorized that possibly something was harassing the martins, but there were no other details.

Cliff Swallows were in low numbers with only three reports of one to two individuals between 6/1 (MS) near Clarksburg and 6/10 (CG, MH, RH, GL) near Smicksburg; six were at the Freeport Bridge along the Butler-Freeport Community Trail 6/5 (SiW, SW); PG hosted five on 6/15 (KL).

Only single **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were found 6/8 (PI, WI) at PG and 6/22 (AM) on the north shore of YC. The only **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were noted in *Cambria* 6/16 (TA) at Wilmore Dam and 7/7 (ER) near Mineral Point. **Veery** reports were limited to *Armstrong* where one was listed on a point count 6/21 (TR) and 2 were reported at SGL 247 N on 7/12 (TR) while 20 were found in *Cambria* at eight separate locations with high count of four at Hinckston Run Reservoir 6/20 (AnM). Even with all the summer atlasing in *Indiana*, single **Hermit Thrushes** were



Matt St Clair photographed this Pectoral Sandpiper at Yellow Creek on 7/16/2024.

listed only 6/7, 10 (CG, MH, RH, GL) south of SGL 174 and 7/11 (AM) north of YC. *Cambria* hosted 11 Hermits at 10 locations (v.o.).

Grasshopper Sparrows were noted at three *Armstrong* spots (all single birds) between 6/1 (ABu) s. of West Valley and 7/7 (SM) n. of Edmon, four *Indiana* locations between 6/3 (TC) and 7/14 (JP) with the high counts of four (JP) and seven (MSC) at two separate BV locations. None were reported in *Cambria*. Unusual were the first June reports of **White-throated Sparrows** in *Indiana* – one to two at YC 6/7 (CJ, AM, HR) and one on 6/19 (AM); the YC birds were both heard and seen. Another White-throat was heard singing 6/24 (SS) near MC. *Cambria* yielded on 6/8 two reports of single **Vesper Sparrows**, one at SGL 108 - Bellwood (JC) and the other at Gallitzin SF - Babcock Mine Area (GH). Best locations for **Savannah Sparrows**, two near BV, yielded counts of eight on 7/4 (MSC) and five on 7/14 (JP); the Worthington area in *Armstrong* yielded eight on 7/6 (TR) while one was listed near West Valley 6/1 (ABu) and two, south of Dayton 6/3 (MH, RH). The only other Savannahs noted were singletons s.e. of North Point on 6/24 (MH, RH) and n.e. of Marchand on 7/20 (MH, RH). The Babcock Mine Area yielded one to four **Henslow's Sparrows** between 6/4 (JK, AR) and 6/11 (KH). At least three Henslow's Sparrows were found n. of Glen Campbell 6/10 (CG, MH, RH, GL) and four were listed wnw of BV 7/21 (MH, RH).

Continuing to be difficult to find in our region in recent years, **Yellow-breasted Chats** were noted at five *Armstrong* sites between 6/1 (TR) and 6/10 (TR); at five *Indiana* locations between 6/11 (CG, MH, RH, GL) and 7/10 (MH, RH); and at three spots in *Cambria* – one near Belsano 6/1 (MS), one at SGL 108 on 6/28 (CS), and the third at SGL 79-C on 7/7 (GT).

Our region hosted 25 warbler species this season. The 13 species found in all three counties included Ovenbird; Louisiana Waterthrush; Blue-winged and Black-and-white Warblers; Common Yellowthroat; Hooded Warbler, American Redstart, Northern Parula; and Magnolia, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Prairie, and Black-throated Green Warblers. Twenty-one warblers were sighted in *Indiana* this summer including the highlight, a singing **Swainson's Warbler** near Conemaugh Dam. *Armstrong* and *Cambria* each harbored 18 warblers.

Single individual **Worm-eating Warblers** were observed at three *Armstrong* locations – n. of L&D 6 between 6/10-30 (JB), n. of L&D 8 on 6/24 (TR), and s. of Clinton on 7/5 (MAS). Worm-eating Warblers were observed at two spots in the northern part of *Indiana*, one at North Point 6/6 (MSC) and one south of Smicksburg 6/15 (CG, MH, RH, GL); another was listed at Cramer in the southernmost part of *Indiana* 6/8 (MSC). The only **Golden-winged Warbler** was noted near South Fork 6/24 (TC). The only reported **Northern Waterthrush** was listed along Rock Furnace Trail on 6/13 (WF). The singing **Swainson's Warbler** was

refound on 6/27 (AH) at Conemaugh Dam, the same location where it had been singing this past spring with the last spring eBirded sighting 5/27 (MS, JT, EW). Was it quiet for a month because he had found a mate? If so, did they actually nest? **Kentucky Warblers** were only noted at six *Indiana* locations between 6/2 (GT) along the GTT and 6/19 (MH, RH) near Shelocta.

The only *Indiana* **Cerulean Warblers** eBirded were along the Conemaugh River 6/8 (RH, SM) and 7/1 (ED, JT). In *Armstrong* Ceruleans were sighted at 10 locations along the AR 6/2-19 (JB) and along Crooked Creek 6/11-26 (JB). **Blackburnian Warblers** were observed at eight *Indiana* and four *Cambria* locations between 6/4 (NM) and 7/30 (HR). Two **Black-throated Blue Warblers** were noted in *Indiana* – one on the Rexis Branch of the Ghost Town Trail on 6/30 (GT) and the other along the Upper Damsite Trail at YC on 7/17 (GT); *Cambria*'s Black-throated Blues were found at four locations – SGL 108 - Fallingwater on 6/15 (TA, KL), along the Rexis Branch of the GTT 6/30 (GT), at PG 7/6 (JG), and along the Lemon House Trail 7/13 (JM,JS). **Pine Warblers** were found only at YC 6/11 (CG, MH, RH, GL) and near SH 6/28 (MH, RH). They had nested at both the YC and the SH locations in previous



Matt St Clair photographed this Prairie Warbler near Brush Valley.

years, but the pines at both sites are dying so they've moved into other nearby areas. At YC they still frequented the remaining dead pines, but they seemed to be nesting across the road in the healthier pines. The Shelocta Pine Warblers still came to the water feature but did not spend as much time in the immediate area, so their new nesting location was not determined this year. One **Yellow-rumped Warbler** was sighted 6/1 (PI, WI) at PG, the region's lone report. **Yellow-throated Warblers** were more widespread than usual with sightings at YC on 6/1 (AM), as far north as the Big Mahoning on 6/15 (CG, MH, RH, GL), and along the West Penn Trail at the county's southern border between 6/9 (CG, MH, RH, GL) and 7/10 (GT). Even though **Prairie Warblers** were listed in all three counties, only one was noted in *Armstrong*, three in *Cambria*, and 12 in *Indiana*. The GTT at Ebensburg hosted the region's lone **Canada Warbler** 6/21 (JL).

Observers: Dave Beatty, John Boback, Seth Burnosky, John Carter, Dave Cecchi, Tammy Colt, Sue Dickson, Ed Donley, Wiltrud Fassbinder, Mike Gillespie, John Golden, Carol Guba, Rebecca Hart (RH), Keith Helmer, Amy Henrici, Margaret Higbee, Roger Higbee, Gregory Hockenberry, Tyler Hodges, Caelie Jones, Debbie Kalbfleisch, Jeff Kenney, Rachel Kester, Gloria Lamer, Annie Lindsay, Renee Lubert, Karen Lucas, Jeremy Lunn, Andrew Mack (AnM), Steve Manns, Avi Marshall, Sandra Newell, Joseph Pumford, Mark Rearick, Theo Rickert, Elaine Rodriguez, Angela Romanczuk, Henry Rummel, Matt St Clair (MSC), Sherry Shank, Mark Strittmatter, Mary Ann Swiergol (MAS), John Taylor, Greg Tomb, Sierra Waltenbaugh (SiW), Stacy Waltenbaugh, Ezra White, James Xiao.

Thanks to Clayton & Gloria Lamer

Gloria and Clayton (aka Wimp) Lamer have been handling the Indiana Roadrunners' water stops for the Todd Bird Club. Thanks so very much for taking care of this for so many years!!! In November they will be manning the water stops for the Roadrunners' Veterans' Race which started in 2012. Even before Todd member Tom Fetterman started the Veterans' Race, Wimp and Gloria took care of the water stops for the Deerfly Race and the Dilltown Race. The Roadrunners give Todd a donation for all except the Veterans' Race to which Todd Bird Club donates.

That's a lot of water stops!!! Thank you both!

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

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Dues Reminder

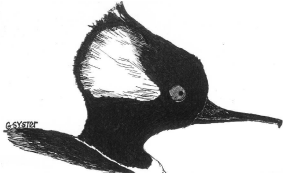
Todd Bird Club dues are due on January 1 each year. If you plan to join at or after our October meeting, you will be paid through December 31, 2025. Dues are \$5 student, \$10 individual, or \$15 family membership which you may either pay at the meeting or mail to:

Gloria Lamer, Treasurer
515 Laurel Run Road
Penn Run, PA 15765

Please remember to indicate whether you prefer the electronic version or a hard copy of the newsletter.

Thanks to Our September Set-up Crew

Thanks to Noah and Warren Jones, Joseph Pumford, Liz Pumford, Jim McGuire, and everyone else who came early to help set the room for our monthly meeting. We appreciate your willingness to help!!!



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