



# The Distelfink

## Fall 2023 Newsletter of the Baird Ornithological Club

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*A Swallow-tailed Kite flying over the Sheetz store on US-Rts.222 near Fleetwood. See the Spring Bird Report for Details. Photo by Russ Hoffman*

## President's Message by Sheila Martin

Welcome back to the '23-'24 term of Baird Ornithological Club! My name is Sheila Martin and – with 9 yrs. of club membership, 7 yrs. on its board and 5 yrs. as your secretary, I'm pleased to be following in the "bird-foot steps" of elite avian enthusiast-leaders of a century+ past, now as your president. Pursuing ornithology has been an eye-opening, life-elevating adventure for me, and I cloak all aspects of my own birding – even club administration, operations & governance – within that new-found joy!

Farewell & hello! We bid appreciative goodbyes-from-the-board to 3 retiring leaders: Tony Grimm, Joanne Kintner & Rudy Keller. They won't be going far away, just deservedly taking option to pick & choose where to apply their skill, knack & personality in club endeavors – like geese in V-formation, honking their encouragement to a new procession of leaders & doers as they take their place.

Welcome new board members: Secretary Ian Cost, and directors Lyn Cronomiz & Irene Taylor, ready to work on steering B.O.C. along with board veterans Chuck Coleman, Russ Hoffman, Hannah Salvatore, Mike Slater & Immediate Past-President, Lucy Cairns rounding it out. "Rounding" out? Should I more-accurately say that our board is lima-bean-shaped? Not a complete circle, this board will energetically proceed yet be one elected person short, see page 33. Consider joining this necessary responsibility.

Have a tremendous year of club birding! See you out there!

In this issue:

- An ever-evolving array of field trips are listed; mark your calendars for the whole year – plus watch the website [www.bairdornithological.club](http://www.bairdornithological.club) or possibly also Facebook for flash walks. Some new destinations plus tried-&-true birdwalk favorites are in our future!
- Herein you'll also find fun, newsy articles of interest plus some full-blown avian poetry!; who would guess? As well as the ever-important scientific reporting of our Berks sightings compilers!
- Renewals: Ease of joining or renewing via PayPal – installed last term – has heard great member acclaim! Members are more stridently encouraged to renew within 45 days of September 1, as your board has suggested follow-up ticklers much earlier than (this former secretary) would "do" (might we say, "badger?") in times past.
- Additionally, B.O.C. wishes to be "techno-accessible-&-inclusive" with information coming everyone's way – yet all the while exploiting and embracing the latest administrative and science tech. "Where would we be without E-Bird & Merlin?" Let us know your thoughts.
- Finally, see page 6 for the Save-The-Date and Speaker Announcement for our B.O.C. end-of-'23-'24 wrap-up event next May 10, 2024. Plans are in development and details will follow in the Early Spring issue.
- Last **but of utmost importance:**

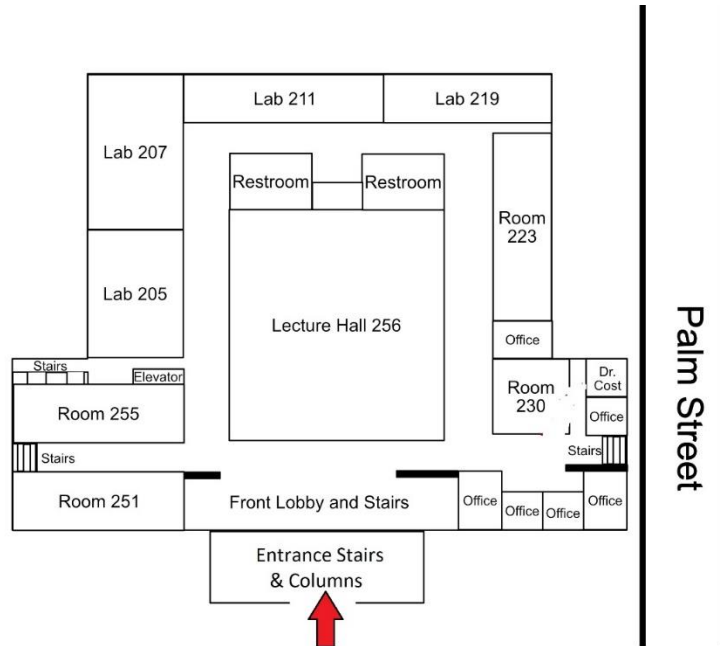
### Our temporary move: in-person meeting location to Albright College!

**Informed of an uncertain construction schedule of Nolde's McConnell Hall this fall, at Nolde Forest's suggestion & with their blessing, B.O.C. will be guests of Albright College for months where we meet in-person in '23-'24, e.g. September-November then March-May. Find extensive, detailed info elsewhere on this change – but boiled-down locators are "13th & Bern Streets" or "1650 Palm Street", Reading. Maps & even a walking video are shown. Basically, one is "crossing thru" campus with some elevation gain toward Science Hall, then to Lecture Hall 256, ultimately to one's seat. Check it out at your convenience! Kudos to Ian Cost for smoothly seeing to this offering.**

# Albright College Information for our meetings this coming season

Dear Baird Birding Friends -

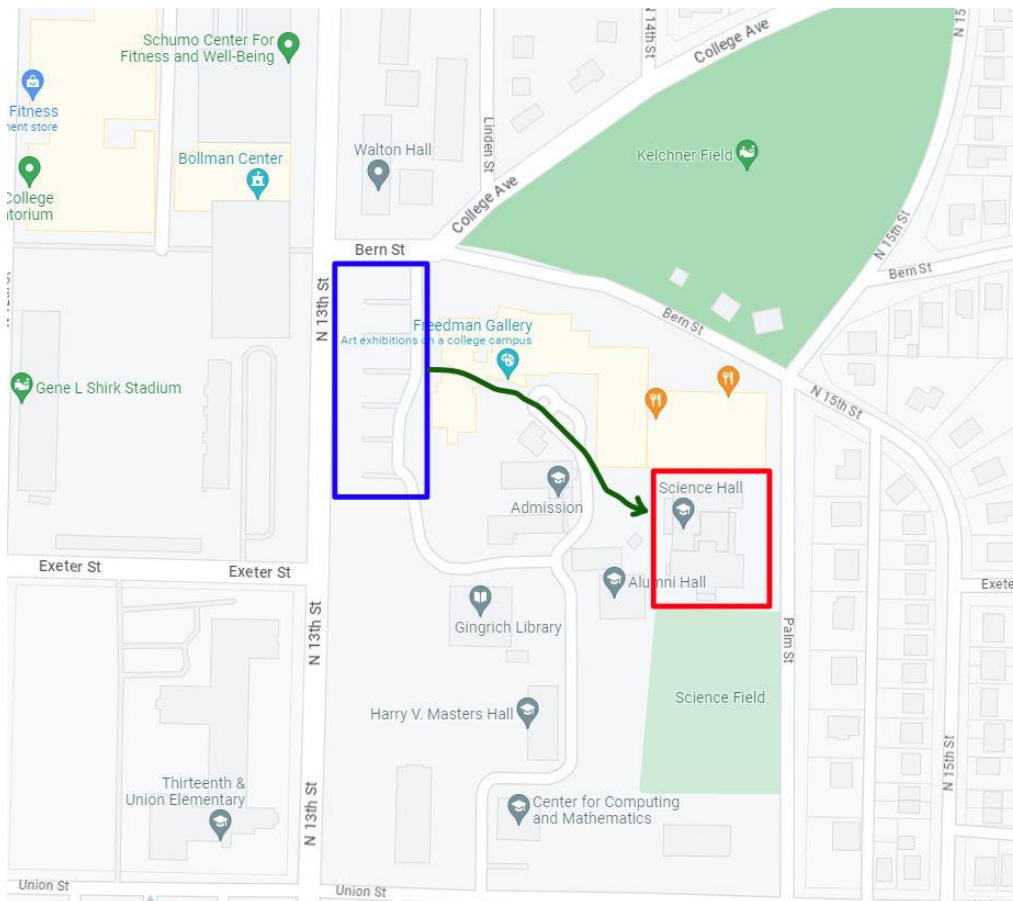
Please read on carefully to park, navigate your way and find the meeting - and your seat! – for our in-person B.O.C Friday night meeting in September, October, November, March and April:



B.O.C. will meet in **Lecture Hall 256**; an Interior Map of Science Hall indicates a floor plan so that you can find the large Front Lobby (foyer) and our room.

You can use the Visitor Parking located at the **corners of 13th and Bern Streets in Reading**. This is shown in the **blue rectangle** in the images below. Alternatively, if you have mobility concerns and do not want to walk up a hill with long, spread-out steps, you may park on Palm Street alongside/parallel to the **red square** marking Science Hall, with fewer steps. **Use 1650 Palm Street, Reading** as a GPS address

All are welcome!



A short, [7-minute video of this walk](#) has been created by [Dr. Ian Cost](#) for your information, assurance & use. Parking is also usually available in the evenings on Palm St. right beside Science Hall.

*(To follow the links, you will have to download the pdf of this newsletter and open in on your own pc/device rather than using the PDF view on our website.)*

## Upcoming BOC Meetings/Programs – September 2023 through May 2024

### **COVID Policy - your Board of Directors asks:**

- If you are feeling ill, have recently been exposed to COVID, or are awaiting the results of a test for COVID-19, please stay home.**
- Consider wearing a mask if you wish to minimize your risk for contracting the virus. A highly effective mask (N95, KN95, or KF94) is recommended.**

**September 8, 2023, 7:30 pm in person at Albright College and streaming\***

**“Catching Thermals – Tracking the Migration of Broad-winged Hawks”—Rebecca**

**McCabe, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary.** In 2014 Hawk Mountain Sanctuary launched a full annual cycle study of the Broad-winged Hawk. Almost a decade later, Sanctuary biologists are continuing to uncover the mysteries of this long-distance migrant. Join Rebecca McCabe as she explains how Hawk Mountain is helping to conserve Broad-winged Hawks throughout their range, from monitoring nests here in Pennsylvania to attaching tiny GPS devices to track them as they migrate between their breeding and wintering areas.

**October 13, 2023, 7:00 pm in person at Albright College and streaming\***

*Social ‘hour’ 7 – 7:30pm. Bring refreshments to share.*

**“Mechanical Nature: Investigating How Birds Work” – Ian Cost, Albright College.**

Albright College has an active undergraduate research program investigating all things related to the anatomy of birds! In this talk, I will describe the work that students have done in the lab, sharing detailed images of anatomy and discussing student projects in a way that anyone can understand, even if they are not well studied in anatomy. I will finish with a little about my personal research and how everything we do can benefit birds, our pets, and even human beings while helping us to better understand evolution.



**November 10, 2023, 7:30 pm in person at Albright College and streaming\***

**“Birding Southeastern Arizona”—Presented by BOC members.** Visiting the deserts and sky islands of southeastern Arizona is on the bucket list of many people, including some who have already been there. BOC birders will introduce you to a few of the hotspots and some lesser-known locations worth visiting, illustrated with photos of some of the special birds you might see.

*Mexican Whip-poor-will. Photo by Russ Hoffman*



**December 8, 7:30 pm ZOOM only\***

**“Looking Forward to a Third Pennsylvania Bird Atlas” – Andy Wilson, Assoc.**

**Prof. of Environmental Studies, Gettysburg College** and 2023 Poole Award winner for significant contributions to ornithology. (Joint program with the Mengel Natural History Society) Bird Atlas projects provide periodic in-depth snapshots of bird distributions and status across large areas, such as states or countries. With a new PA Bird Atlas project starting next year, Andy Wilson will talk about plans for the five-year project. The 3rd PA Bird Atlas (PBA3) will be designed to engage thousands of birders, of all experience levels, across the state. The talk will focus on recent innovations in atlas methods from surrounding states, and what we can expect in PBA3, including a first-ever winter bird atlas project in the State of Pennsylvania.

**January 12, 2024, 7:30 pm ZOOM only\***

**“Mature Forest Management: Wood Thrush Habitat and Opportunities for Carbon Forestry” – N. Scott Parkhill, Audubon Mid-Atlantic’s Forest Program Manager.** Join Scott as he discusses opportunities to manage mature forests for bird habitat while integrating the emerging field of carbon forestry. While more intensive forest habitat management can sometimes pay for itself with the material removed, mature forest habitat management is often a more difficult-to-fund activity for private landowners. The emerging field of climate resilient forestry, with the co-benefits of carbon sequestration and storage, offers new approaches to mature forest bird habitat management. Examining the habitat requirements of one of Pennsylvania’s favorite forest birds, the wood thrush, this presentation will show what interventions can be taken in your mature forest to help the wood thrush and many other mature forest birds.

**February 9, 2024, 7:30 pm ZOOM only\***

**“The Difference of Birding in Ohio” – Ken Lebo, Past B.O.C. President**

After leaving Berks County three years ago and moving to the Dayton, Ohio area, Ken will share his new experiences birding in SW Ohio’s metro-parks, fields, and lakes. He will also share with us some interesting differences in the other animals he studies, including moths, butterflies, dragonflies, and wildflowers.

**March 8, 2024, 7:00 pm in person at Albright College and streaming\***

*Social ‘hour’ 7-7:30pm. Bring refreshments to share.*

**“A Defense of the Unholy Trio” – Bernard “Billy” Brown, nature writer for Grid magazine, co-host of the Urban Wildlife Podcast, and cofounder of local nature hub PhillyNature.org.** Pigeons, starlings, and house sparrows are the most abundant and easily observed birds in urban settings. They can be entertaining to watch and listen to. Give them a chance, and you might even appreciate their beauty. Nature writer Billy Brown discusses their history, their place in the urban food web, and why he recommends that beginning birders start with the most disrespected birds in the Philly region.

**April 12, 2024, 7:30 pm in person at Albright College and streaming\***

**“Birding PA State Parks” – Chris Kemmerer, PA DCNR.** Pennsylvania has one of the largest state park systems in the country. With 124 parks across 64 counties, the system includes geographic wonders, prominent moments in American history, old growth forests, tidal waterways, and Great Lakes access. This diversity is also represented in the flora and fauna that call our Pennsylvania State Parks home. Join Chris Kemmerer, Education and Interpretation Chief for Pennsylvania State Parks, on a tour of the best birding spots in PA’s state parks.



*A Blue-headed vireo incubating eggs in Rickett's Glen State Park. Photo by Mike Slater*

**May 10, 2024, Our “Annual Event” held jointly with the Mengel Natural History Society.**

**“pOrnithology: The Birds and the Birds and the Bees” – George Armistead**

A review of interesting and unusual courtship and reproductive habits of birds, littered with copious innuendo and anthropomorphism to keep the concepts firmly in perspective.

*(Save the date. Details will be announced early in 2024 and published in the spring newsletter.)*

**“Streaming platform links will be emailed to all members a few days before each meeting. Nonmembers are welcome to request a link. If you do not receive the link by the day before the meeting:**

- For the meetings at Albright College, email a request for the link to Ian Cost at [icost@albright.edu](mailto:icost@albright.edu)
- For the Zoom-only meetings (December 2023, January 2024 & February 2024) email a request for the link to Mike Slater at [paplantings@gmail.com](mailto:paplantings@gmail.com)

## **YOUR CLUB NEEDS YOU – Sheila Martin**

I traveled to the famous Sax Zim Bog near Duluth MN in early February (you read that right; -30F my first morning!) with a commercial birding trip company, to experience Arctic migrants in residence at the southern edge of their range. That handsome, football-shaped little Napoleon on the snag is the Northern Hawk Owl, proud icon of this special environment. I was so enthralled by the city, the state and this adventure, that I came home imagining this magical ecosystem in summer, searching & finding the Sax Zim Bog Birding Festival – with this sobering headline & copy:

**“Sax Zim Bog [Birding] Festival Wraps after 13 Years ...** met in July to discuss the future of the birding festival – and at that time it was the consensus of the group to no longer sponsor/coordinate/offer the birding festival ... (they would ultimately vote NO, that August). The decision was a difficult one to make and the vote was not easy to take. But [they] felt they could no longer coordinate a successful [event.] The Friends of SZB agreed with our rationale for no longer sponsoring [it] ... There are numerous reasons for no longer holding the festival, but lack of help, the challenge of finding guides, the dramatic changes in birding technology (E-Bird, Facebook etc.) are just a few reasons discussed ...”

Back at home - during a B.O.C. birdwalk, I overheard the question posed, “So, what are we? Are we simply, merely? a bunch of good-natured retirees getting together on a Tuesday or a Saturday morning and benignly birdwatching? Or is there more to it in one’s ornithology club experience? I suggest to you that there is: Baird Club’s bylaws – yes, we do indeed have bylaws! – which state **our club’s governing purpose is:**

**“To study birds and nature – and through that study, acquaint others with birds & the environment; and to help preserve wildlife and promote conservation & retention of natural areas.”**

I’m so fortunate to have found birding in general, and an organized birding club in particular – where, through regular attendance, study, observation & application, my skill, experiences & understanding of what needs to be done ecologically have spiraled ever-upward in my nine years of club membership. Now, one of the more



*“Northern Hawk Owl at Sax Zim Bog courtesy of Erik Bruhnke, Victor Emanuel Nature Tours”*

seriously exciting trends I see is that Baird is ever-increasingly more visible to the public and in-demand for partnering, collaboration, delivering education & advancing like causes with so many Berks conservation groups in public-outreach field programs. Some of these collaborations happen quite spur-of-the-moment, but most are on the schedule well in advance. Look for those dates & partner listing elsewhere in these pages – and be a part of something bigger than Baird boundaries. Facing forward & outward, that takes people. Let your officers & board know!

We still need 1 member to fill a two- OR a three-year term on B.O.C.'s board. Please don't be put off and step backwards at that moniker, "Vice President"! Not necessarily; better to go without "names" and simply continue completing the unfinished business of our recent election ballot-"down-one". One more leader on the board is what's being actively sought as a new club term starts. Maybe you were phoned or messaged, and it was not a good time for you to serve, but things might have changed. Or you were not called but are willing to be involved and serve. Please let us know if you can.

The bottom line is that we need this opening in the office of Vice-President to be filled for our club to operate smoothly. For strategic planning & strong compliance with our mission, it's called "Succession".

## **The Christmas Bird Count – for All Ages and Abilities - by Lucy Cairns**

December 17 is 'the' day to count birds for science in the Reading CBC, and it will be here sooner than you think. The CBC is a citizen science initiative organized by the National Audubon Society. The first count took place in 1900, so this year will be the 124th CBC. Participating in the CBC is free, fun, and open to all, but registering beforehand with the designated data compiler for your circle is required. Counts take place in circles 15 miles in diameter, between December 14 and January 5, with the goal of documenting every bird present in that area on the count day.

Last year, birds were counted in over 2,500 circles. Most are located in Central and North America, but not all. Parts of Berks County are included in 4 different circles, with the Reading circle being the only one entirely within the county. Hannah Salvatore and I are the co-compilers for the Reading circle, which is divided into 15 sectors with a team of field observers dedicated to each. The CBC is a dawn-to-dusk effort, although some sectors can be completed in a shorter period. Those who cannot devote the day to this effort can contribute valuable data by doing a feeder count--provided the feeder is within the circle. Feeder counts can be done at any time on the count day, and for any length of time.

Once the compilers have uploaded data to Audubon, it is processed to yield results as 'number of birds per unit of effort' to make

the results comparable year-upon-year. The data, now extending over almost one-and-one-quarter century, is available at no charge to scientists, researchers, policymakers, conservation organizations, and anyone else



*Birders in Wyomissing Park counting birds on the Reading CBC.*



who wants to use it. The value of this huge database to the conservation of our feathered friends is incalculable.

To learn more about the CBC, visit [www.christmasbirdcount.org](http://www.christmasbirdcount.org). On the home page, click on “Join the CBC” to be taken to a page with a link to an interactive map showing all the active CBC circles. Enter ‘Berks County, PA’ in the search box to be zoomed down to our location and see which circle(s) you live in or near. Click on the bird icon in the center of a circle to see the name and contact info for the compiler. As of now (July), the most recent map is for last year – the 123rd CBC. An updated map for the 124th CBC will be available in the autumn.

If you have participated in past years, I hope you are able to lend your eyes and ears again this year. If you have never taken part in a CBC, I urge you to contact the compiler of your choosing to learn more about the process and the contribution you could make. And, speaking of contributions, since becoming free in 2012, the CBC is supported entirely by donations, so you can support the cause by donating any amount at: <https://act.audubon.org/a/donate-onetime>



*Birders counting Gulls at Blue Marsh Beach*

*on the Bernville CBC.*

**December 17, 2023 (Sunday) Reading Christmas Bird Count**

Compiler: Lucy Cairns 610-223-4501  
[ljanetcairns@gmail.com](mailto:ljanetcairns@gmail.com)

**December 22, 2023 (Friday) Elverson Christmas Bird Count**

Compiler: Jim Cook Cell: 610-587-7545 Work: 610-286-5021 [jim@elversonsupply.net](mailto:jim@elversonsupply.net)

**December 30, 2023 (Saturday) Hamburg Christmas Bird Count**

Compiler: Laurie Goodrich 570-943-3411 Ext. 106

**January 4, 2024 (Thursday) Bernville Christmas Bird Count**

Compiler: Mike Slater [paplantings@gmail.com](mailto:paplantings@gmail.com)

## Member Notes

### Ed Delaney Passing

OCTOBER 20, 1936 – AUGUST 7, 2023

A longtime B.O.C. member, Ed was a skilled birder and loved all of nature. Instead of flowers the family asks:

**“when you see a bird, appreciate its beauty  
and think of Ed.”**

### **In Appreciation, A thank you from Joanne Kintner**

The past BOC banquet brought an unexpected surprise. I was honored by the BOC board for past service to the club including 2 terms as president and helping the club through a tough transition period. It has been my honor to serve BOC for years and be a part of a wonderful and dedicated group of birders and friends. The gifts of chocolate, tea and a gift card were much appreciated. I plan to use the card to head to the Adirondacks to drop in on my favorite birds: loons!

Thanks again to everyone for your kindness, Joanne Kintner



## Berks Birding Site Profiles

Look under this heading for occasional descriptions and photos of publicly accessible birding sites in Berks County. Please consider writing a profile of one of your favorite birding places.

### Union Canal Corridor by Peter and Jane Wolfe

The Union Canal was originally started in 1821 with completion in the 1830's. The goal was to facilitate transportation between the Schuylkill and Susquehanna rivers to connect Philadelphia with Pittsburgh. It followed the Tulpehocken Creek to Lebanon, went through a 729' tunnel and continued along the Swatara Creek to Middletown. With its narrow width locks, and limited water supply, it was

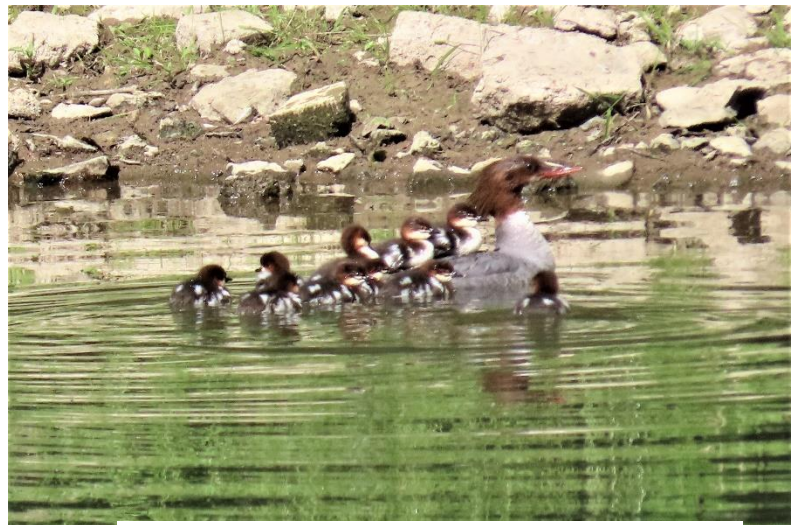
closed in 1881 mostly due to the competing Philadelphia and Columbia RR. A portion of the canal and towpath has been preserved and

maintained by Berks County Parks; maps are available online. Access points with parking can be found at Berks Leisure Area, Grings Mill, Berks County Heritage Center (also Red Bridge), Reber's Bridge and Swiftwater. The roughly 7+ miles of mostly flat gravel towpath where the mules pulled the barges, offers birders the ability to observe birds without emphasis on footing. Pets are not allowed but bicycles and runners are active especially on weekends.

As a riparian corridor which follows the Tulpehocken Creek, many species of birds can be found. Wood Ducks, Mallards, and this year surprisingly, Common Mergansers nest near the stream, raising young. Great Blue Herons, Osprey, Bald Eagles, Orioles, Flycatchers, Woodpeckers including Pileated, Warblers, Vireos, Sparrows and other songbirds can be found and heard at various times of the year. Rarities, such as the Western Flycatcher, a new county record, can show up. The Union Canal is a great place to walk and bird.



Wood Duck photo by Peter Wolfe.



A Female Common Merganser with ducklings on the Tulpehocken Creek. Photo by Peter Wolfe.

## BOC Field Trips & Bird Walks - Fall 2023 – Spring/Summer 2024

(Including our fall Tuesday Bird Walks on the 2nd & 4th Tuesdays of the month.)

*GPS addresses/coordinates are included as given by Google Maps.*

**Includes Fall Tuesday walks, Spring Tuesday walks to be announced in the Spring 2024 issue.**

### Flash Bird Walks

Field trips may be scheduled at short notice any time it appears conditions are right for an additional outing. Email announcements will be sent to all members and the information will be on our website at the same time. <https://bairdornithological.club/>

### September 5, 2023 (Tuesday) Morlatton Village Schuylkill River Tr. - 4:00 pm

Join BOC members for a late day walk to kick off the fall season. Meet at the parking lot for Morlatton Village, Schuylkill River Trail near Douglassville. We will walk the Schuylkill River Trail and then hang

out at the bridge over the river until near dusk. We will see migrants moving along the river that may include Common Nighthawk. Directions: Rt. 422 east to traffic light just past Douglassville. Turn right onto River Bridge Rd, continue a short distance to right turn onto Old Phila. Pike, parking area on left. Coordinator: Russ Hoffman 484-794-7053.

**Meeting Location: 480 Old Philadelphia Pike, Douglassville, PA 19518**

**September 12, 2023 (Tuesday) Angora Fruit Farm -8:00 am**

Walk the area around Angora Fruit Farm on Mt. Penn, now part of the Berks County parks system, looking for fall warblers, thrushes, and flycatchers. Meet at the farm parking lot. Take Rt. 12 (Warren St. Bypass) north to Spring Valley Rd. exit. Left on Spring Valley Rd. 1/2 mile to McKnight's Gap Rd. on left. Take road up hill to stop sign. Proceed bearing slightly left past Skyline Dr. to Bingaman Rd. Go downhill to stop sign, turn right and then left onto lane to farm. Coordinator: Russ Hoffman 484-794-7053. **Meeting Location: Angora Fruit Farm, Berks County Parks & Recreation, Angora Rd, Reading, PA 19606 40.3624, -75.8839**

**September 13, 2023 (Wednesday) State Hill Hawk Watch 9:00 am – 4:00 pm**

Peak time for Broad-winged Hawk migration. Bald Eagles and Ospreys will probably be seen. Stay for a short time or all day. Bring a folding chair, lunch and non-alcoholic beverages. Experienced hawk watchers will help you identify birds. Meet at the State Hill Boat Launch, Blue Marsh Lake, accessed from Brownsville Rd. Park in the first lot on the right at the top of the hill after you enter. Coordinator: Russ Hoffman 484-794-7053, **Meeting Location: 585 Brownsville Rd, Sinking Spring, PA 19608**

**September 16, 2023 (Saturday) Mount Penn Pagoda Hawk Watch 9:00am – 2:00pm**

Peak time for Broad-winged Hawks. Walk down the steps at the front of the Pagoda and meet on the lawn. Bring a lawn chair. Coordinator: Bill Uhrich 610-698-1575

**Meeting Location: 98 Duryea Dr, Reading, PA 19602**

**September 27, 2023 (Tuesday) Bombay Hook NW Refuge -9:00 am**

Targeting shorebirds, herons, early waterfowl, gulls and terns, fall songbird migrants. Meet at Bombay Hook NWR Visitor Center. Coordinator: Art Zdancewic, 610-858-3315

**Meeting Location: 2591 Whitehall Neck Rd, Smyrna, DE 19977**

**September 30, 2023 (Saturday) Union Meadows Fall Migrants -8:00 am**

An easy walk on a wide flat trail through wooded and open field habitats seeking sparrows and other fall migrants. Meet at Union Meadows East parking lot, trailhead for the Schuylkill River Trail, Rte.724/East Main St. in Monocacy, 2 miles east of Birdsboro. Coordinators: Rudy Keller & Linda Ingram, 610-621-7473 **Meeting Location: 100 Campbell Ford Road, Douglassville PA 19518**

**October 10, 2023 (Tuesday) Kernsville Dam Recreation Area - Desilting Basin -8:00 am** This recently augmented wetland habitat is continuing to produce interesting sightings. A LeConte's Sparrow was found in 2020. Will Nelson's Sparrow be next? Mid-October is prime time for rare and common sparrows. From Reading, take Rt. 61 north. At light for Cabela's make a right onto Jetson Dr., then right on Industrial Dr. to left on Kernsville Dam Rd. Coordinator: Matt Wlasniewski 484-577-3530. **Meeting Location at the parking lot for the: John Bartram Trail, Hamburg, PA 19526, 40.5624, -75.9947**

**October 11, 2023 (Wednesday) State Hill Hawk Watch 9:00 am – 4:00 pm**

Peak time for accipiter and falcon migration. Bald Eagles and Ospreys will probably be seen. Stay for a short time or all day. Bring a folding chair, lunch and non-alcoholic beverages. Experienced hawk watchers will help you identify birds. Coordinator: Russ Hoffman 484-794-7053, **Meeting Location: Same as September 14.**

**October 14, 2023 (Saturday) Mount Penn Pagoda Hawk Watch 9:00 am – 2:00 pm**

Accipiters, falcons, buteos possible. Walk down the steps at the front of the Pagoda and meet on the lawn. Bring a lawn chair. Coordinator: Bill Uhrich, 610-698-1575

**Meeting Location: 98 Duryea Dr, Reading, PA 19602**

**October 21, 2023 (Saturday) Lake Ontelaunee Waterfowl 8:00 am**

Look for ducks, geese, grebes and other waterbirds at Berks County's premier site for this group of birds. Meet at the dam on Rt. 73 between Rts. 61 and 222. We will carpool to other locations around the lake as time permits. Coordinators: Peter and Jane Wolfe, 484-794-3703. Rudy Keller 610-845-7301 **Meeting Location: at the west end of the dam on Rt. 73 between Rts. 61 and 222. (Lake Shore Dr, Shoemakersville, PA 19555.**

**October 28, 2023 (Saturday) Berks Leisure Area 8:00 am**

Walk the river trail from the Leisure Area to Grings Mill. Late migrants will be the target. Directions: Broadcasting Rd. east to the "T". Make right 2 miles to sign for the Leisure area on left. Coordinator: Russ Hoffman 484-794-7053. **Meeting Location: Berks Leisure area at 1901 Tulpehocken Rd, Wyomissing, PA 19610**

**November 5, 2023 (Sunday) Hopewell Big Woods Trail, French Creek State Park - 8:00 am**

Wide trail meanders through open fields bordered by woodland. Previous seasons were excellent for field and edge species, including late migrants and wintering birds. Meet at trail parking lot on Center Rd. adjacent to Union Twp. maintenance facility. Coordinator: Linda Ingram 610-621-7473, **Meeting Location: 165 Center Road, Douglassville PA 19518**

**Nov 11, 2023 (Saturday) Mount Penn Pagoda Hawk Watch 9:00 am – 2:00 pm**

Buteos and eagles. Walk down the steps at the front of the Pagoda to the lawn. Bring a lawn chair. Coordinator: Bill Uhrich 610-698-1575 **Meeting Location: 98 Duryea Dr, Reading, PA 19602**

**December 17, 2023 (Sunday) Reading Christmas Bird Count**

Compiler: Lucy Cairns 610-223-4501 [ljanetcairns@gmail.com](mailto:ljanetcairns@gmail.com)

**December 22, 2023 (Friday) Elverson Christmas Bird Count**

Compiler: Jim Cook Cell: 610-587-7545 Work: 610-286-5021 [jim@elversonsupply.net](mailto:jim@elversonsupply.net)

**December 30, 2023 (Saturday) Hamburg Christmas Bird Count**

Compiler: Laurie Goodrich 570-943-3411 Ext. 106

**January 1, 2024 (Monday) New Year's Day- Berks Drive Loop - 8:00 am**

Begin your year with a visit to various Berks birding spots, starting at E. J. Breneman Quarry. Meet at Cacoosing Meadows Park parking lot on Reedy Road at the end closest to Evan's Hill Road.

Coordinators: Jane & Peter Wolfe 484-794-3703

**Meeting Location: 1049 Reedy Road, Sinking Spring PA 19608**

**January 4, 2023 (Wednesday) - Bernville Christmas Bird Count**

Compiler: Mike Slater [paplantings@gmail.com](mailto:paplantings@gmail.com)

**February 18, 2024 (Sunday) E.J. Breneman Quarry - Introduction to Wintering Waterfowl -**

**1:00pm** Learn to identify ducks and geese that winter in Berks County at this easily accessible site. Experienced birders with scopes will be there to help you get good looks. Park at Cacoosing Meadows Park on Reedy Road at the end closest to Evan's Hill Road. Snowy or icy conditions may limit access to the parking lot. Coordinator: Linda Ingram 610-621-7473, Rudy Keller, 610-845-7310

**Meeting location: 1049 Reedy Road, Sinking Spring PA (Park at the Evans Hill RD end of the lot)**



**March 3, 2024 (Sunday) L. Ontelaunee. Introduction to Spring Waterfowl -12 Noon**

Meet at dam breast on Rte. 73 to carpool to the different areas of the lake. Bring a spotting scope if you have one. Experienced birders with scopes will be there to help you get good looks. Coordinator Rudy Keller 610-845-7310 **Meeting Location: at the west end of the dam on Rt. 73 between Rts. 61 and 222. (Lake Shore Dr, Shoemakersville, PA 19555.**

**March 23, 2024 (Saturday) Green Hills Preserve – Wintering Birds -8:00 am**

Wintering birds and early spring arrivals in managed grassland and edge habitats. From Rte. 10, go west on Rte. 568 (Kurtz Mill Rd.), turn right onto Gunhart Rd. Parking lot is on the right. Coordinator: Art Zdancewic 610-858-3315 **Meeting Loc.: Natural Lands' Green Hills Preserve, 553 Gunhart Rd, Mohnton, PA**

**March 24, 2024 (Sunday) French Creek State Park – Woodcock Watch -7:00 pm**

American Woodcock courtship display. Coordinator: Art Zdancewic 610-858-3315 **Meet at park office 843 Park Road, Elverson PA 19520.**

**April 6, 2024 (Saturday) Gring's Mill - Spring Walk for Early Migrants –8:00 am**

Meet at the Gring's Mill Recreation Area. Dir. East on Broadcasting Rd to end. Make right 1/2 mile to entrance on left. Coordinator and for more information Russ Hoffman 484-794-7053.

**Meeting Location: Gring's Mill Recreation Area, 2083 Tulpehocken Rd, Reading, PA 19610**

**April 13, 2024 (Saturday) State Game Lands 280 Spring Outing -8:00 am**

Walk the fields and edges of Blue Marsh Lake looking for migrant and resident birds. Coordinator Brian Lineaweaver. Russ Hoffman 484-794-7053

**Meeting Location: 40.37066, -76.06973 Directions: State Hill Rd. to Brownsville Rd. Make left and travel 4 miles to Justa Rd. Take right and go to end and park.**

**April 21, 2024 (Sunday) Union Meadows - Early Migrants -8:00 am**

Spring migrants including early warblers. An easy walk on a wide flat trail through wooded and open field habitats. Meet at Union Meadows East parking lot, Schuylkill River Trail, Rte.724/East Main St. in Monocacy, 2 miles east of Birdsboro. Coordinators: Rudy Keller 610-845-7310 Linda Ingram 610-621-7473 **Meeting loc.: Union Meadows East parking lot, 100 Campbell Ford Road, Douglassville PA**

**April 27, 2024 (Saturday) Hay Creek Watershed -8:00 am**

Walk the Hay Creek Watershed in search of spring warblers, including La. Waterthrush, nesting raptors and possibly nesting Bank Swallows. Meet at the closed south end on Hay Creek Rd. From traffic light at Rtes. 568 and 724 in Gibraltar, take 568 west approximately 1.5 miles and turn left on White Bear Rd. Drive 4 miles through 2 stop signs and turn left on Hay Creek Rd. Drive to the dead end and park on the shoulder Coordinator: Russ Hoffman 484-794-7053, **Meeting Location: Old 82 & Parking Area, 2000 Hay Creek Rd, Birdsboro, PA 19508**

**April 27, 2024 (Saturday) Butterflies & Botany, Neversink Mountain -10:00 am (with Mengel Natural History Society)** For butterflies flying only in early spring, this is one of the few accessible Berks County locations. Meet at S 10th & South ST., Reading. (Park on South St.) Coordinators: Karl Gardner 610-987-3281, Ryan Woolwine 484-883-6461. **Meeting Location: 999-975 South St, Reading, PA 19602. 40.326248, -75.918611**

**May 4,2024 (Saturday) Nolde Forest Spring Walk -8:00 am**

Join BOC members for a walk to search for spring migrants including Louisiana Waterthrush, other warblers, and Acadian Flycatcher. Maybe also catch sight of a Barred Owl which usually nests here. We will meet at the Sawmill Parking Area just off Rt. 625, south on Rt. 625 from Shillington to sign for Sawmill Parking. Coordinator: Linda Ingram 610-621-7473 **Meeting Location: 2910 New Holland Rd, Reading, PA 19607**

**May 5, 2024 (Sunday) State Game Lands 106, Pine Swamp Rd. -8:00 am**

Excellent location for neotropical migrants and one of the few Berks County locations where Ruffed Grouse is possible. From Hawk Mt. Sanctuary go south on Hawk Mt. Rd. 4 miles and turn right on Pine Swamp Rd. Drive 1 mile to parking area on right. From Rte 143, turn left on Hawk Mt. Rd. and drive 4 miles to Pine Swamp Rd. (left turn) then 2 miles to parking lot on left. Coordinator: Russ Hoffman 484-794-7053, Rudy Keller 610-845-7310 **Meeting Location: Pine Swamp RD, Kempton PA, 19529, 40.6262, -75.9520**

**May 11, 2024 (Saturday) Hopewell Furnace NHS – Spring Migrants & Breeding Birds -8:00 am**

This revived venue was a hit with walkers last spring! Eastern Towhees & Baltimore Orioles reliable; spring migrants, shorebirds, maybe. Coordinator: Sheila Martin 610-858-6005 Disregard **the nat'l park gates; still closed at our arrival time. Use 23 Clement Brooke Ln, Elverson 19520 This exact GPS is to their secondary handicapped lot, at historic "boarding house"&"tenant house #3". Orange cones ID lane. Limited to ~10 spaces. Restrooms might not be open yet for the season..**

**May 18, 2024 (Saturday) Exeter Scenic River Trail at Trout Run Park -7:00 am**

Spring migrants & breeders along the Schuylkill River. Park anywhere on both sides of the road. Coordinator Russ Hoffman 484-794-7053 **Meeting Location: just before the Exeter Twp. Yard Waste Composting area next to Trout Run Park, 914-920 East Neversink Rd, Reading, PA**

**June 1, 2024 (Saturday) Hopewell Big Woods Trail -7:00 am** Breeding birds of grassland & edge habitats. A wide trail meanders through open fields. Yellow-breasted Chat, breeding warblers and Willow Flycatcher are reliable. Meet at the trailhead adjacent to Union Township maintenance building. **GPS: 165 Center Road, Douglassville Coordinators: Rudy Keller 610-845-7310 & Irene Taylor 610-856-1116.**

**June 8, 2024 (Saturday) Green Hills Preserve Butterflies -10:00am (with Mengel Natural History Society)** Extensive open fields and some wooded habitat. Directions: From Rte. 10, go west on Rte. 568 (Kurtz Mill Rd.) Turn right onto Gunhart Rd. Parking lot is on the right. Coordinators: Karl Gardner 610-987-3281, Ryan Woolwine 484-883-6461 **Meeting Location: Natural Lands' Green Hills Preserve, 553 Gunhart Rd, Mohnton, PA**

**June 22, 2024 (Saturday) Dragonflies & Damselflies at Hay Creek-Birdsboro Reservoir-**

**10:00am (with Mengel Natural History Society) Coordinators: Mike Slater [paplantings@gmail.com](mailto:paplantings@gmail.com), Todd Underwood [underwoo@kutztown.edu](mailto:underwoo@kutztown.edu) & Karl Gardner 610-987-3281** A new Location with different dragonflies. We'll be looking for Tiger Spiketails, Prince Baskettails and Gray Petaltails plus other species not seen on our walks before!

Meet at the closed south end on Hay Creek Rd. directions as for the April 27 bird walk. **Meeting Location: Old 82 & Parking Area, 2000 Hay Creek Rd, Birdsboro, PA**

**June 29, 2024 (Saturday) Nolde Forest EEC Moth Night -8:30 pm to ? (with Mengel Natural History Society)** – With UV lights and trees baited rotten fruit/beer night insects show up for viewing. Bring flashlight. Meet at Mansion parking lot. Coordinators: Ryan Woolwine 484-883-6461, Jim Eckert 610-373-1064, Karl Gardner 610-987-3281 **Meeting Location: 3025 New Holland Rd, Reading, PA**

**July 20, 2024 (Saturday) Wildflowers and Pollinators at Union Meadows West -10:00 am (with Mengel Natural History Society)** A meandering path through this pollinator meadow provides good access for observing a variety of butterflies and bee species. Directions: Route 724 (East Main St., Birdsboro) (turn opposite St. Michael's Cemetery) Park in the ball field parking lot. Coordinators: Mike Slater [paplantings@gmail.com](mailto:paplantings@gmail.com), Linda Ingram (610-621-7473) **Meeting Location: 980 E Main St, Birdsboro, PA 19508**

**August 3, 2024 (Saturday) Blue Marsh Butterflies -10:00 am (with Mengel Natural History Society)** Coordinators: Karl Gardner 610-987-3281 and Ryan Woolwine 484-883-6461  
**Meeting Location: Blue Marsh Visitor's Center, 1268 Palisades Dr, Leesport, PA 19533**

**August 17, 2024 (Saturday) Angelica Park Butterflies -10:00 am** (with Mengel Natural History Society) Meet in the parking lot adjacent to Berks Nature, the entrance is off Rt. 10, Morgantown Rd., at the big sign for Alvernia University. Coordinators: Karl Gardner 610-987-3281, Ryan Woolwine 484-883-6461 **Meeting Location: Berks Nature Angelica Creek Park, 575 St Bernardine St, Reading**

*\*(GPS addresses are included as given by Google Maps)*

## **Past Field Trip Reports and B.O.C. Public Outreach - Field Programs**

### **Birding With Binoculars at Nolde Forest E.E.C.– February 5, 2023\_** Rudy Keller

Mike Slater, assisted by other BOC members, used the club's stock of loaner binoculars to teach about a dozen people how to select, adjust and focus binoculars for maximum ease and effectiveness of use. Participants were able to practice the techniques they learned by focusing on birds coming to feeders outside the windows of McConnell Hall. A highlight for many was the sight of a Downy and Hairy Woodpecker sharing a suet feeder so comparisons could easily (and leisurely!) be made between them. In the early afternoon, Mike led the group outside on a bird-walk around the grounds demonstrating how to find birds in forest and how to help companion birders use their binoculars to focus on a bird you found. Everyone seemed to have learned at least one technique they hadn't known before.

### **Birding With Baird at Jim Dietrich Park, Muhlenberg Twp. – February 11, 2023 –** Rudy Keller

BOC members assisted with an introductory birding talk and walk facilitated by Brandon Pentz, Recreation Programs Supervisor for Muhlenberg Twp. Following a brief indoor session on birding techniques and binocular use, the group of about a dozen novice birders split into two groups for a walk in the park on a warm, spring-like afternoon. The people led by Mike Slater and Rudy Keller concentrated on finding used bird nests along the shrubby river edge. We found 6 Gray Catbird nests plus nests of N. Cardinals, Am. Goldfinch, Am. Robin and Baltimore Oriole, all previewing what birds might be found there in summer. The best actual bird was surely an Am. Woodcock that flushed on whistling wings from beside the path, giving reasonably good looks to people who had never seen one when it went to ground in the thicket. The group led by Brandon, Lucy Cairns and Russ Hoffman spotted a few Canada Geese and Mallards on the Schuylkill River (which forms one border of the park), Eastern Bluebirds, N. Cardinals, and a White-breasted Nuthatch in the woods, and a few Black and Turkey Vultures soaring with a Red-tailed Hawk in the distance. The novice birders were enthusiastic. It was an excellent outreach experience for BOC.

### **Winter Waterfowl at E. J. Breneman Quarry – February 19, 2023 –** Rudy Keller

Mild weather, an afternoon start time and the desire to see ducks up close through scopes brought 35 people to this trip. Experienced birders with at least 5 scopes found all of the wintering ducks, brought them into clear focus, and invited participants to see them. Everyone who attended saw the species of interest to them, including Redheads, Ring-necked Ducks, Ruddy Ducks, Bufflehead (winner of the most cuddly duck award), Am. Wigeons stealing salad from Am. Coots, and more. See you next winter.

### **Grings Mill Recreation Area – April 8, 2023 -** Rudy Keller

Fifteen birders sick of winter and wanting to see spring migrants recorded 45 bird species on this easy walk along the Tulpehocken Creek. The crowd pleasers were 3 Pine Warblers and 3 yellow Palm Warblers, all well seen by everyone as they foraged low in the leafless trees. Russ Hoffman's photos on the eBird checklist will



bring back pleasant memories. Two Bald Eagles were a bonus. A nice variety of ducks and lingering winter birds rounded out a chilly but pleasant morning.

### **Breakfast with Baird at Berks Nature - April 15, 2023 - Marie Metcalf**



The Baird Birding Breakfast was hosted by Berks Nature at Angelica Creek Park. Baird Ornithological Club members Mike Slater, Sheila Martin, Marie Metcalf, Russ Hoffman, and Ian Cost mixed and mingled with enthusiastic participants at the venue's newly constructed Rookery. This unique space features gigantic windows and a rooftop deck that showcases beautiful views of the park.

The event had a wonderful turnout of 25+ attendees ranging across all ages and skill sets. The morning kicked off with a slideshow of beautiful bird photography by Russ Hoffman. Russ photographed these birds at the park in the weeks prior to the

event, to get participants familiar with some of the birds they might encounter during the walk. After a brief introduction of target bird species, bird walk leaders headed out in small groups to see what they could find. Participants were educated on basic birding how-to's, including how to use their binoculars.

After an hour-long walk around Angelica Creek Park, leaders and members headed back to the Rookery to enjoy a delicious breakfast spread of beverages and baked goods. The tone of the event was upbeat, and participants seemed to have caught the birding bug by the end of their time with Baird. Group leaders took turns discussing what birds each group saw before ending with brief tutorials on some helpful birding resources, such as Merlin and E-Bird.

### **Union Meadows Park – April 23, 2023 - Rudy Keller**

Ten birders saw 49 bird species along this easy, level trail through mixed riverine habitats. The birds were a dynamic mix of residents, departing winter birds and early spring arrivals. The latter group included Blue-headed Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, House Wren, Rusty Blackbird (this site consistently attracts them on spring migration), N. Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat and yellow Palm Warbler.

### **Baird at the Berks County Conservation District 'Conservation Celebration' on April 23, 2023 - Lucy Cairns**

The BOC was represented at this event by Sheila Martin, Marie Nelson, Holly Arbuster, and me. It was held at the Berks County Ag Center on a warm and sunny spring day, with exhibitors arranged around the edge of a large lawn. Holly and Lucy took the first shift, relieved by Sheila and Marie after 2 hours. Attendance was rather sparse, but our booth did attract some interest and several people picked up our program brochure and other items during the time I was there.



*Photo by Lucy Cairns*

### **SGL 106, Pine Swamp Rd. – May 7, 2023 - Rudy Keller**

Just two observers recorded 41 species in the mountainside forest of the Kittatinny Ridge. Unlike last year, when cold weather had delayed leaf-out and we had a see-through forest canopy, trees this year were almost fully leafed-out and birds were hard to see. Nevertheless, the Kittatinny provided migrants, and we recorded 3

vireo species and 12 species of warblers, plus those eagerly awaited pretty boys, Scarlet Tanagers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in full song. Note that the starting time for this walk in 2024 will be 8:00 a.m. instead of 7:00 a.m. in hopes of attracting more birders.

### **Hopewell Big Woods Trail, French Creek State Park – June 3, 2023** - Irene Taylor

Sat., June 3 was partly sunny and breezy, perfect for a walk on the Big Woods Trail through a meadow in bloom with gorgeous wildflowers. Early rising BOC birders were led by Peter & Jane Wolfe and saw at least 25 species, including wonderful looks at Indigo Buntings, Prairie Warblers, a Yellow-breasted Chat and Willow Flycatchers. See you here in fall. View the eBird checklist online.

## **Hopewell Furnace NHS Bird Monitoring Project – Lucy Cairns**

Every bird walk is an adventure, and not uncommonly something you don't expect comes along. On the BOC May 13 trip to Hopewell Furnace, organized by Sheila Martin, that something was a plea from one of the staff for volunteers to help with a bird monitoring project to take place between late May and mid-July. This is a National Park Service program designed to determine the status and trends of birds on NPS sites during the breeding season. By tracking the composition of bird species and their abundance and locations over time, the NPS will be enabled to better detect ecosystem changes and to adjust land management strategies in ways that benefit birds and other wildlife. This initiative has been in effect at several NPS sites for some years, including Valley Forge National Park, but 2023 is the first year of gathering data at Hopewell Furnace. Nine other parks in the Mid-Atlantic Network are involved.

A call for volunteers was sent out to all BOC members, via a blast email, but I was the only Bairder who was willing and available to help this year. I had not participated in a breeding bird survey previously and was motivated to learn how such surveys are performed and to become more familiar with forest birds. The first thing I learned is that the NPS does not do things by half! To participate in this project, one must follow a strict and detailed protocol and undergo training in the use of a variety of equipment and the 'health and safety' practices of the NPS. The hazards we were warned we might encounter included tick-borne diseases, mosquito-borne diseases, undergrowth bristling with thorns, rough and rocky footing, the need to wade across streams, injuries from falls and other trauma, and getting lost in the wilderness! Did I mention motor vehicle accidents? For each hazard, we were taught protective steps to take. The fact that as volunteers we were under no obligation to do anything we felt uncomfortable with was repeatedly emphasized. The staff member responsible for this project at Hopewell Furnace NHS this year is Natural Resource Assistance Brianna Casario, who proved a pleasure to work with.

The protocol involved navigating to assigned count points located approximately equidistant from each other throughout the site, and recording all the birds the observer could identify by sight or sound over a 10-minute period. The procedure is repeated several times during the designated period. With few exceptions, volunteers go out as teams of 2, with one acting as observer and the other doing the documentation. My partner was Nancy Cook, another newbie at doing a breeding bird survey. For the first outing we had an experienced person acting as observer while Nancy and I took turns doing the documentation, but then we were turned loose. Nancy did not feel that her bird ID skills were quite what they should be to act as observer, so I suppressed my own doubts and did the best I could. We had requested count points rated as 'easy' to access, but still had to do a bit of bushwacking through Japanese barberry and pick our way over rocky and uneven ground, not to mention wading through waist-high grass in a couple of meadows while imagining ticks questing on every leaf. We covered our points three times and emerged with bones intact and no obvious evidence of insect-borne disease.

Among the things I learned:

- How to operate a GPS unit, a 2-way radio, a count-down timer, and a laser rangefinder (one of the challenges was the requirement to record each bird as being closer than 50m or further than 50m).
- How to tell a Red-eyed Vireo from a Robin (sorry! I have spent too little time birding in vireo country.)
- It is easier and safer to get across a rail fence when the gate is locked by removing one of the rails than by climbing over.

Best bird encounters:

- Hearing the ethereal song of a Veery in the depths of a forest.
- Being circled by a singing Eastern Towhee and his mate, in plain view and not more than 40 feet away.
- Seeing a Great Crested Flycatcher at eye level as it perched on a piece of equipment in the Hopewell Furnace 'boneyard.'
- Finding 39 Barn Swallows lined up on utility wires over a meadow.

Will I do this again next year, despite the heat, humidity, biting bugs, the myriad of other hazards? Very likely. I will do it for the birds. And I will take some photos next year!

## Berks County Birds, Winter 2022-23 compiled by Rudy Keller

December 2022 – February 2023

Abbreviations: Blue Marsh L. (BML), E. J. Breneman Quarry (BQ), French Creek State Park (FCSP), Hawk Mt Sanctuary (HMS), L. Ontelaunee (LO), Christmas Bird Counts: Reading (RCBC), Hamburg (HCBC), Bernville (BCBC).

This winter ranked as one of the five warmest and had the lowest amount of snowfall in weather reporting history. Lakes and streams were mostly open and the ground was only superficially frozen. The coldest weather of the winter came at Christmas after a very strong northeaster 12/23 briefly dropped temperatures to 2F at some places.

**Snow Geese** arrived in mid- to late Dec as usual. Because they were not frozen out of their roosting quarries and snow never covered cornfields, they didn't leave till Feb and Mar. There were several reports of flocks exceeding 10,000 birds, especially in eastern Berks County. A restless flock of 50,000 gleaning cornfields in Maxatawny Twp. 1/27 was cruised by **5 Bald Eagles**, one of which almost managed to snag a meal (MW). The bigger the Snow Goose flock, the harder it can be to find **Ross's Geese**, but one was seen at LO 12/9 (JSp), 2 near Mertztown 2/25 (JH, RG), and one at Shartlesville 2/27 (MW). Two **Greater White-fronted Geese** at BQ 2/20, 21 (MW, et al.) were the only ones reported. **Cackling Geese**, mostly singletons, were reported at least a dozen times in Canada Goose flocks (m.obs.). Feral **Mute Swans** (there are still a few sedentary estate swans) were seen singly or paired at a few places, notably Bernhart's Dam and LO (RH, m.obs.). The season's high counts of 114 **Tundra Swans** at LO (Anon) and 35 over Henningsville (PS) 12/28 came just a few days after the pre-Xmas storm. A few were sometimes seen through the winter.

Ducks are highlights of the dreary months and many are reported every winter. It is now expected that migrants will have begun to appear by late Feb, but this year numbers began increasing earlier than that. **N. Shovelers**, never common, are even less so in winter. One or 2 wintered at BQ and single birds were sometimes seen elsewhere, with a high count of 5 at BML 12/24 (CE). The **Gadwall** flock that winters around LO numbered about 23 at peak. A **Gadwall X Mallard** drake, occasionally seen since 2015 with the Gadwall flock, made one appearance at LO 12/10 (RK). A male **Eurasian Wigeon** arrived with **Am. Wigeons** at LO 2/5 (MW, m.obs.) and stayed with them through Mar, a typically long sojourn for this rarity. LO is a significant stopover site for Am. Wigeons. A few hundred might be found there for one to 3 months in spring, often seen stealing aquatic salad from divers like **Ring-necked Ducks** and **Am. Coots**. Wintering **Am. Black Ducks** have been declining for years. The high count was of 27 at BQ 1/16 (EB), but most counts were of fewer than 10 birds. One or 2



**Am. Black Duck X Mallard** drakes were seen at BQ 12/20 – 2/7 (RH, RK) and single birds were at LO 2/6 (TU) and FCSP 2/20 (S&F). Before the Feb surge, 5 **N. Pintails** were at BQ 12/20 (AZ). On 2/23, 127 were at LO (RK). The usual small flocks (fewer than 10 birds) of **Green-winged Teal** were found on shallow ponds in Dec and Jan, then counts doubled in Feb.

The expected 5 *Aythya* duck species were here in the usual order of abundance. Least common was **Canvasback**, 2 of which were fairly regular at Morgantown L., formerly a winter hotspot for them, 1/25 – 2/18 (FH, m.obs.). One or 2 others were seen a few times elsewhere. Hardly more common was **Greater Scaup**, 2 of which gave birders nice views at BQ in Dec. There were a few more in Feb. Birders enjoyed regular views of one to 3 **Redheads** at BQ all period. A little surge of 17 Redheads at BML 12/25 (Anon) may have been storm driven. Flocks of 1-10 Lesser Scaup bobbed on BML and LO on various dates all period. Honest eBirders chose the **Greater/Lesser Scaup** option for a flock of 50 scaup at BML 12/24 (Anon) and 29 there 12/25 (BL), also probably storm driven birds. The 12/23 northeaster blew in **Long-tailed Ducks**, one of which was at BML 12/25 – 27 (m.ob.) and 5 at BQ 12/31 (RK). Singletons were at LO 2/1 (BL) and BML 2/4 (RK, BL). One to 6 **Buffleheads** were up and down among the other divers at BQ all period. On 2/26, 40 were at LO (RK). **Common Goldeneyes** began appearing in late Dec, with a high count of 16 at LO 2/6 (RH) during one of the few icy periods. **Hooded and Common Mergansers** were easily found all winter, greatly increasing in Feb, when counts of over 1000 Common Mergansers were sometimes made at LO. Single **Red-breasted Mergansers** were sometimes picked out of COME flocks in Feb; 4-5 were at BML 2/28 (BL, JSp). **Ruddy Ducks** first found BQ to be an agreeable winter home about 20 years ago. Many visiting birders make many counts, which ranged from one to 40 Ruddies this winter.

An escaped **N. Bobwhite** seen at Berks Leisure Area 2/8 (RH, et al.) was apparently well known to local walkers, who had left little stashes of corn for it along the path. **Wild Turkeys** are currently most common on the Kittatinny Ridge, where 104 were found on the HCBC 12/30. The Kittatinny is the only place to see **Ruffed Grouse**, one of which was at Northkill Gap 01/4 and 1/30 (KG). Put-and-take **Ring-necked Pheasants** were seen near SGL 280 and other release sites during the winter. A **Chukar** was seen at Pheasant Valley Farm near Robesonia, a private gamebird farm and hunting preserve, 01/4 (PJW). One or 2 **Pied-billed Grebes** wintered at BQ as expected. One or 2 others were occasionally seen at LO and BML. Two **Horned Grebes** were at BML 12/25 (JS), but after that all sightings were from LO, where one to 3 were periodically seen, mostly in Feb (m.obs.). As many as 15 **Eurasian Collared-Doves** were reported in Shartlesville this winter. Where all those birds go during the breeding season remains unknown. Like **Ruddy Ducks**, **Am. Coots** have wintered at BQ for 20 years. Counts of the birds this winter ranged from one to 22 (m.obs.). Reports of coots from LO started in Feb, the high count of 18 made 2/23 (RH).

A birder (SP) who arrived early at the BML beach 12/28 made one of the most memorable observations of the season. He photographed and audio recorded a flock of **108 Sandhill Cranes** crowded on a narrow gravelly spit jutting into the lake, where they had roosted overnight. The flock was in view for about 30 minutes before it took flight at 8:50 a.m. This was by far the largest group of Sandhills ever recorded in Berks. Another flock of 10 – 12 Sandhill Cranes was spotted flying low in fog over Rt. 183 near BML 2/23 (JS). One to 6 **Killdeer** were regularly seen at Bernhart's Dam, a drained reservoir, till 1/22 (RH). Lots more appeared around the county in Feb. **Two Least Sandpipers** continuing from fall stayed on the mud at Bernhart's Dam till 12/9 (RH). One of those stayed till 1/16 (RH, photo), becoming the first recorded on the RCBC 12/18 and the first in Berks in Jan. An **Am. Woodcock** flushed at FCSP 12/18 (TU). Given the mild weather, it seems likely that some overwintered. Birds were reported courting by mid-Feb. Unlike Killdeer, **Wilson's Snipe** were not reported till Feb, when multiple birds were seen.

This winter's rarest gull would have been reported as a **Mew Gull** until the recent split of that species into **Common Gull of Eurasia** and **Short-billed Gull** of western North America confused the

identification. The bird in question was crisply photographed on the beach (Dry Brooks Day Use Area) at BML 12/16 (LSp) resting among hundreds of Ring-billed Gulls. Its darker mantle and short, indistinctly marked bill made it stand out. The bird was not photographed in flight, had left by the next day and never returned. The photos were shown to a few gull experts, one of whom was comfortable calling it a Short-billed Gull, but the others thought it could not definitively be attributed to either species. For the record, it became a dreaded slash bird, in this case **Short-billed/Common Gull**, and dropped into lister limbo. But a Mew Gull by any other name is still a very noteworthy rarity in PA and the observers (JSp, LSp) are commended for recognizing its difference and recording it for posterity. A Mew Gull that caused a big stir in Berks and PA in 1992 is now thought to have been a Common Gull, perhaps the more likely of the two species to appear on the east coast.

Among many birds blown in by the northeaster 12/23 were 6 **Bonaparte's Gulls** at BML 12/24 (JH) and one at LO 12/25 (RK). A Bonaparte's was seen occasionally with the BML gull flock 1/10 till 2/4 (m.obs.). The first **Iceland Gull** (first winter bird) of the season was seen at Conestoga Landfill, New Morgan 12/7 (FH). Two first winter birds, one lighter than the other, were seen at BML on various dates from 12/31 till 2/14, sometimes both on the same day. Counts of one to 7 **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** made at BML and one to 3 made at LO on various dates were normal winter numbers. A first winter **Glaucous Gull** was seen at BML 12/28, 12/31, 1/1 and 1/27 (m.obs.). Perhaps 2 birds were involved, one lighter than the other, but both were never present for comparison on the same day. One to 4 **Great Black-backed Gulls** were seen on just a few days this winter.

**Gulls intermediate between Lesser Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull and between Great Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull** have occasionally been seen at BML for a few years (RK).

Previously they were left unidentified or, given larid variability, shrugged off as lighter versions of the dark backed species.

Online photos of LBBG X HEGU and GBBG X HEGU from Tullytown, Bucks Co. and other places have made it easier to identify these hybrids.

This winter one **LBBG X HEGU** was photographed at BML 1/29 (RH – photo, RK)



and one **GBBG X HEGU** was photographed at BML 12/20 (Todd Underwood–photos, RK).

*A GBBG X HEGU was photographed 12/20/2022 at BML by Todd Underwood. Pictured above (top center bird) with several HEGUs and a RBGU. At Right flying toward the beach.*





A Herring Gull with a red-colored leg-band at BML.  
Photo by Todd Underwood

**Ring-billed Gulls and Herring Gulls** have a penchant for loafing on the beach at BML and are so habituated to humans that they allow approach to within a few yards. This makes it fairly easy to see the birds' legs and any color bands (which can identify their place of origin) that they might be wearing. Over the years, many blue banded Ring-billed Gulls that breed on lakes around Montreal have been spotted (RK). This winter's bling wearers included a Herring Gull given an orange band as a nestling on the roof of the Portland, ME art museum, a white banded Ring-billed Gull from Ontario, and (the farthest wanderer) a Ring-bill with a red band from a breeding colony at Duluth, MN (RK).

The only reported **Red-throated Loon** was at LO 12/8 (TU). Three **Common Loons** migrated over HMS, one 12/1 and 2 on 12/8. The last Common Loon of the season was at LO 01/4, 5 (AW, JSp). Fall's last Double-crested Cormorant was at LO 12/8 (RH). Early returnees were one at BML 2/5 (JR) and one at LO 2/25 (AS), with many to come in Mar.

Migrating **Golden Eagles** were counted at HMS till 12/30. A Golden eating a carcass in an Albany Twp. field 2/11 (CF) was probably wintering. Snowless conditions made hunting easier for **N. Harriers**, which were fairly widely reported, most often at SGL 280, Green Hills Preserve and Pheasant Valley Farm, all of which have vole producing grassland and old field habitat. A few **Short-eared Owls** were seen at some of the same places, one 12/20 (BL), one 12/26 at Reading Fairgrounds (JSp) and 2 on 12/31 (JS). Three **N. Saw-whet Owls** were heard on the HCBC 12/30 and one at SGL 106 on 2/18 (DK). The only reported **Red-headed Woodpeckers** were 3 found on the HCBC at Bordner Bridge 1/5 and subsequently seen by many birders. The story was the same for **Am. Kestrels** as for **N. Harriers**, both repeatedly seen at the same hotspots. Single **Merlins** were reported at about 20 places, but unlike Am. Kestrels, seldom more than once at any location.

**Peregrine Falcons** were reported at 7 scattered sites on various dates through the period. As ever, it is not



clear if these were wanderers or Reading's resident birds out hunting.

An **E. Phoebe** near Robesonia 1/30 (MS) was a survivor, One that appeared near Bechtelsville 2/27 (DW) was an early arriver.

On March 10 - 11, 2023 an early arriving Eastern Phoebe was eating from a suet-cake feeder and Mike and Jan Slater's house in Brecknock Twp. Berks County. Photos by Mike Slater



It became apparent in fall that this would be another **Black-capped Chickadee** irruption year. Single birds were widely reported, often at feeders, and small groups up to 4 were seen in the field all winter. Numbers reported on CBC's, at feeders and afield indicate that **Tufted Titmice** are steadily recovering from decimation by West Nile Virus in 2017. Though it was not a **Horned Lark** winter, a few large flocks were seen, notably 1100 in Mertztown area farmland 1/25 (JH). A lively fall movement of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** ended early. Passing birds were noted at about 20 places and a few settled at feeders. Two **Gray Catbirds** were reported early in the period, one at FCSP 12/8 (TU) and 1/7 (PW), and one near Breezy Corner 1/8 (PW). **Am. Pipits** are hard to see on bare earth, but the number of reports indicates that snowless conditions kept some of them around. Flocks were small, the high count having been of 30 near Mertztown 2/25 (JH, JR).

Despite hopes aroused by an exciting fall movement of **Evening Grosbeaks**, it was not a boreal finch year. Fall's **Purple Finch** flight petered out by early winter. After Dec, a few birds were regularly reported only at the HMS visitor center feeders. Three **Pine Siskins** were found on the HCBC 12/30 and one visited a Bern Twp. feeder 12/9 (EB). Two **Common Redpolls** flew over North Lookout, HMS 12/14 (MW). That's it.

**Lapland Longspurs**, associated with snowy winters, were few. One was on Mertz Rd., Lyons 1/25 (JV) and 2/28 (RK), and single birds were near Mertztown 1/25 and 2/25 (JH, JR). Knowing their rattle calls proved key to finding them in bare fields, where they are virtually invisible. Three sparrow species continued on a trend of regular winter occurrence. **Chipping Sparrow** was seen, mostly singly, at over a dozen places on various dates. **Fox Sparrow**, maybe infiltrating the uncommon but regular group, was reported singly but sometimes regularly at 7 locations. Ditto the biggest sparrow, **E. Towhee**, one to 4 of which were found at more than a dozen places. A **Clay-colored Sparrow**, a prized rarity not found by all who sought it, wintered with a mixed sparrow flock along a seedy weedy edge of BML 1/9 (RH – photo) till 2/19 (m.obs.). The mild, snowless weather allowed overwintering by many more **Field Sparrows** than usual. Of at least 25 reports, several were of 5 or more birds, including a big count of 15 at Green Hills Preserve 12/27 (CL). Seekers of the Clay-colored Sparrow reported up to 20 **White-crowned Sparrows** in its associated flock. Illustrative of its drastic decline, **E. Meadowlark** was convincingly reported just once at the end of the period, a bird at BML 2/27 (LCat). The flock of 36 **Rusty Blackbirds** found on the RCBC 12/18 provided the winter's highest count. Just 2 others were reported.

Birders reported 5 warbler species, a remarkable number for winter. An **Orange-crowned Warbler** was photographed at BML 1/9 (RH) at the Clay-colored Sparrow spot. Experienced birders thought **Yellow-rumped Warblers** were even less common than usual. One to 3 were sometimes seen, mostly in the Schuylkill R. valley. A **Pine Warbler**, maybe an early migrant, found a suet feeder in Amity Twp. 2/20 and continued to visit that reliable food source through Mar (RS – photo). An adult male **Wilson's Warbler** (first winter record) visited a suet feeder hanging just outside a window of a house near Bernville 11/22 till 1/14 (BB – photos). The bird often hovered at the window, probably fighting its reflection. Best of all, a **Townsend's Warbler** (first Berks record) was seen 12/18 – 21 in a residential neighborhood near Reading Airport. The bird tended to appear in early morning on the sunny side of a Norway spruce in the backyard of the observers (JSp, LSp), where it was photographed 12/21 (RH). Then it would disappear for the rest of the day. The neighborhood's gardens contain many mature ornamental conifers in which the bird probably roosted and fed. It was last seen two days before the strong northeast storm 12/23.

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## Berks County Birds, Spring 2023 compiled by Matt Wlasniewski

### March – May, 2023

Locations: Angora Fruit Farm (AFF), Bartrum Trail (BAT), Berne Township (BT), Bernhardt's Dam (BD), Blue Mountain Academy (BMA), Blue Marsh Lake (BML), Blue Marsh Lake State Hill Boat Launch (BMLSH), Blue Marsh Lake Sheidy Boat Launch (BMLSBL), Blue Marsh Stilling Basin (BMSB), EJ Breneman's Quarry (BQ), French Creek State Park (FCSP), Gotwal's Pond (GP), Green Hills Preserve (GHP), Hamburg Commerce Park (HCP), Hamburg Reservoir (HR), Hawk Mountain North Lookout Data (HMNL), Hawk Mountain South Lookout (HMSL), 183 Hawk Watch (HW), Hay Creek (HC), Hopewell Big Woods Trail (HPT), Kaercher Creek (KC), Kernsville Dam Recreation Area (KDRA), Kutztown University (KU), Lake Ontelaunee (LO), Lake Ontelaunee Bailey's Creek (LOBC), Lake Ontelaunee Blue Falls (LOBF), Lake Ontelaunee Water Street (LOWA), Lake Ontelaunee West Shore Drive (LOWS), Lowland Road Retention Pond (LRRP), Monacacy Hill Recreation Area (MHRC), Mount Penn (MP), Northkill Gap (NG), Old Topton Road (OTP), Peter's Creek (PC), Pine Swamp Road (PSR), Rodale Experimental Farm (REF), Sacony Trail Kutztown (SYT), School Road Pond (SRP), Shartlesville Farm Pond (SFP), State Game Lands 52 (SGL52), State Game Lands 106 (SGL106), State Game Lands 110 North Kill Gap (SGL110), State Game Lands 280 Brownsville (SGL280), State Hill Hawk Watch (SHHW).

The first two months of this spring quarter had no "lion or lamb" effects on Berks other than the fact there were no fronts to urge the neotropical migrants to stop by. May set a record in Berks meteorological annals as the second driest month in the books at 0.009 inch of rain. Needless to say, there were no fall-outs to produce the desired results for local birders. However, there were some unusual sightings that enlivened field reports.

The large flocks of **Snow Geese** present in January and February began to leave in mass leaving behind smaller flocks of hundreds scattered through Berks. The largest flock of 3,000 **Snow Geese** stayed in the area of SRP 3/5 (RK). A single **Cackling Goose** mingled with **Canada Geese** at LOBC 3/2 (RK) while RH found four with a flock of the larger **Canada Geese** at LOWS 3/27. **Tundra Swan** are often seen flying over Berks during their journey north. On 3/2, JS found eleven at BQ while RK counted 75 **Tundra Swans** at LO. A pair of puzzling **Trumpeter/Tundra Swans** was too distant for definitive identification at LOBC 4/2 (SN).

The more-desired **Blue-winged Teal** was first reported LOBC 3/15 (AS). A nice number of 14 were found at PC 4/13 (PN). Ten **Northern Shovelers** joined a group of puddle ducks at LOWS 3/12 (NW, WW). A single male **Eurasian Wigeon** first seen at LOWS 2/5 (BL) remained in that section of LO until last reported at LOBC 4/8 (KR). The 100 **American Wigeon** reported at LOBC 3/16 (AW) remained at this preferred feeding area until their numbers crested at 208 on 3/26 (RK). Becoming more rare in Berks, a single **Canvasback** stayed at BQ 3/8-3/20 (RK, m.ob.). This was the only **Canvasback** reported for this spring migration. In contrast, a raft of 60 **Redhead** (28 male, 32 female) rested at LO 3/2 (RK). At nearby PC 3/21, KI counted 18 **Redhead**.

During the week of 3/15, reports of **Ring-necked Ducks** throughout Berks totaled 1779 birds (m.ob.). At LO, AW found six **Greater Scaup** on two occasions, 3/17 and 3/28. RK found three at LO 4/4. On 3/7 at BML, JS reported a fallout of 136 **Lesser Scaup** close enough to count while a distant raft of

**Greater/Lesser Scaup** were uncountable without a scope. An unusual number of **Long-tailed Ducks**, 12, sought refuge at LOWS 3/28 (RK). The fallout of 3/7 resulted in 100 **Bufflehead** sheltered at BML (JS). The same weather event brought 30 **Bufflehead** to LOWS 3/8 (RK). Two **Common Goldeneye** lingered at LOBC 3/8-3/26 (RK, AS, AW)

March and April are usually when high numbers of **Common Mergansers** enjoy feeding at LO and LOWS. Birders enjoy the antics of gulls as they chase and harass the rafts of **Common Mergansers** as they churn the waters looking for food. The highest numbers at LO were: 871 3/2 (RK), 1100 3/14 (TU) and 600 3/23 (RK). On 4/2, RK counted 66 **Common Mergansers** at LO as their numbers dwindled. Two **Red-breasted Mergansers** mingled with **Common Mergansers** LO 3/2 (RK) and a discrete group of ten **Red-breasted Mergansers** mixed in the **Common Mergansers** LO 3/23 (RK, JW, PW).

Drumming, but seldom seen, **Ruffed Grouse** were consistently heard during the quarter at HR and SGL106 (KG, BL, JR, AW, JW, MW, PW). LOWS was the preferred spot for grebes in good numbers on 3/31. TU found ten **Pied-billed Grebes** there and RK found ten **Horned Grebes**. The report of one **Red-necked Grebe** LOWS 3/12 (NW, WW) was the only one for that rare grebe.

**Eurasian Collared-Doves** continue to be reported in Shartlesville in numbers as high as six (m.ob.). Reports of **Yellow-billed Cuckoos** with many reports throughout Berks far outnumbered those for **Black-billed Cuckoos**. There were only two reports of **Black-billed Cuckoos**: MP 5/6 (RH) and a pair at HBT 5/26 (BR). Migration flights of **Common Nighthawks** were scattered throughout Berks. KG counted 9 at KDRA 5/19 after MW tallied 46 at KDRA 5/17 in the hour before sunset. **Eastern Whip-poor-wills** continue to concentrate along the Kittatinny Ridge at NG. On 5/27, an estimated six “whips” were heard by JR, AW and MW with two “whips” dropping in on the gravel lane for a close-up view. KG also reported 6 **Eastern-Whip-poor-wills** at NG three days later- 5/31.

Two **Sandhill Cranes** called as they flew overhead at High Street, Womelsdorf 4/9 (KL). On 4/21, JR was alerted to look up and saw three **Sandhill Cranes** calling as they flew over his home in Green Hills.

Lack of suitable feeding habitat continues to reduce the number of shorebirds reported in Berks. There were no large numbers of shorebirds feeding in the exposed shorelines—especially during the severe May drought. A single **Semipalmated Plover** found a small puddle at SRP 5/11 (JW, PW). A rainstorm created a pool on Virginville Road for a **Dunlin** 5/9 (TU). **Least Sandpipers** were the most commonly reported shorebirds with eleven in a field in Mertztown 5/3 (RK) and ten in a flooded field in Lyons 5/6 (TU). Single **Pectoral Sandpipers** were at pool on Evansville Road 5/1 (MW) and a small marsh at HCP 5/7 (JR, AW). The only **Semipalmated Sandpiper** reported was at SRP 5/2 (RK) in the remnants of a once larger pond.

**American Woodcocks** arrived to exhibit their courtship rituals around Berks with numerous shows being reported. JS barely avoided hitting a woodcock in the throes of ecstasy as it headed for her windshield near Bern Township 3/6. A flooded field near Fleetwood provided cover for eight **Wilson’s Snipe** 4/28 (JSo).

The huge gull numbers dispersed and disappeared with the warmer weather leaving smaller flocks of **Ring-billed Gulls** and **Herring Gulls** to wander Berks in search of rain pools and freshly plowed fields. On 3/4, RK scanned a flock of 300 **Ring-billed Gulls** along Route 73 in Oley and found one **Lesser Black-backed Gull**. On 3/8, a lone **Lesser Black-backed Gull** rested on LO (RK). Might it have been the same bird - since LO is approximately five miles from Oley? Two **Great Black-backed Gulls** stopped at BML 3/8 (RK). On 3/3, BL had seen only one **Great Black-backed Gull** BMLSH.



**Caspian Terns** are usually the first terns to appear on Berks lakes and one showed up on 4/30 LOWS (DH). A lone **Red-throated Loon** avoided the **Common Mergansers** 3/11 LO (TU). Most of the reports of **Common Loons** involved those calling as they migrated overhead in Berks. Two **Common Loons** were seen during a club field trip BML 4/18 (m.ob.). The highest count of **Common Loons** at LO was 17 4/30 (DH).

The elusive **American Bittern** surprised GA on 5/12 as he drove along Crystal Cave Road near Kutztown. Another **American Bittern** was flushed at BMLSBL 5/29 (JY). **Great Egrets** were reported as singles in Berks except for the two found in a field near Fleetwood 5/8 (AS). The earliest report for **Black-crowned Night-Heron** was 3/24 at the LO access at Moselem Springs. Three **Black-crowned Night-Herons** were found at BML 4/13 (PN) and four fed in the LO spillway 5/16 (RH).

**Glossy Ibis** make rare appearances in Berks. There were two reports of **Glossy Ibis** this spring. Two were observed feeding in a field along Bowers Road near Kutztown 5/2 (PS). A marshy wetland along Washington Road in Leesport turned out to be good habitat for puddle ducks and visiting **Glossy Ibis**. Seven **Glossy Ibis** were foraging in the marsh on 5/7 (AW, MW) and were photographed the following day (5/8) by JR, JW and PW.

The shift in **Black Vulture** populations has been under study in recent years. Locally, Hawk Mountain staff members have been wing tagging **Black Vultures** with yellow tags. On 3/12, AZ noted a **Black Vulture** with two red wing tags near Green Hills in southern Berks.. It was one of four **Black Vultures** sitting on a high tension power tower. A follow-up by Hawk Mountain staff determined that this bird was tagged in West Virginia by USDA's wildlife services.

On 5/19, RH was pumping gas at a Sheetz station at the intersection of Routes 222 and 662. He happened to glance at the sky and saw a "very white bird" soaring over the intersection. He grabbed his binocular and then his camera to photograph a **Swallow-tailed Kite**. (See the photo on page 1) The kite lingered for a few moments and headed south above Route 222. He wasn't aware that on 5/9, KH of Longswamp Township reported a **Swallow-tailed Kite** along Old Topton Road. The two sightings were less than ten miles apart. No other sightings of **Swallow-tailed Kites** have been noted. The first record of **Swallow-tailed Kites** was of two in southern Berks near Knauers from 5/24 to 5/28, 1995. These kites created quite a stir and were seen by many.

**Bald Eagle** reports of nesting pairs and perched birds are numerous and county-wide. Local citizens watch the nests in Berks and report the progress of nest building, eggs hatching and fledgling changes. A well known site is known as the Rutter's nest along Route 61 in Hamburg. Two fledglings were seen and survived to leave their nest. The number of nests in Berks is estimated at ten or more.

A full report of the 2023 spring raptor migration at Hawk Mountain will be published in a future Pennsylvania Birds journal. JS reported finding **Northern Saw-whet Owl** pellets in March at the area where she found a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** in prior months.

**Red-headed Woodpecker** sightings were county-wide this period. There were many reports of these colorful woodpeckers visiting suet and sunflower feeders. A new nesting site was discovered on SGL106 5/12 (MB) and confirmed 5/15 (LS). The **Peregrine Falcon** nesting at 5<sup>th</sup> Street and Penn Avenue was successful with two fledglings that survived to leave their nest on the ledge of a building in Reading (BU).

There were only two sightings of **Olive-sided Flycatchers** and it was not for the lack of perches with the hundreds of dead Ash Trees. Single **Olive-sided Flycatchers** in their distinctive vests were reported at: Maiden Creek at LO 5/8 (SS) and Keim Road, District Township 5/14 (RK). **Acadian Flycatchers** returned to their breeding grounds with reports of four at HC 5/21 (JT) and six at HR

5/31 (KG). **Least Flycatchers** made lone appearances in these locations: KDRA 5/6 (KG), HR 5/5 (KG,TU), HPT 5/3 (AS).

**Fish Crows** are more common in residential areas than **Common Crows** and seem to have less fear of humans than **Common Crows**. They frequent parking lots, dumpsters, community parks, beaches and restaurants. JS observed a **Fish Crow** looking for food by tearing a rotting stump apart. After little success in removing grubs or ants, it dropped to the ground for small twigs which it stuck into the stump and pulled out with some tasty morsels and sap on them. They are often seen removing food wrappers from trash cans and opening them.

**Bank Swallows** were seen in migration with mixed flocks of **Barn Swallows** and **Tree Swallows**. The only known breeding site in Berks is the quarry operation at HC. RH observed eight **Bank Swallows** 5/15 flying to and from their nesting sites. Limited access prevents better observation of the nest holes in the quarry. **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were seen in singles throughout the county primarily near a number of conifers and bird feeders. A lone **Pine Siskin** was found at SGL 280 3/21 (JSp). At the Shillington home of GW and NW, a **Pine Siskin** enjoyed their thistle feeders 4/24 to 5/4.

**Lincoln Sparrows** are anticipated in migration but are usually shy singles found around Berks. On 5/13, KG had one at KDRA; 5/15 Wyomissing Park (BL), 5/14 Keim Road, District Township (RK).

Thirty-four species of warblers were reported this quarter. Continuing the trends of the past decade, there were no major fallouts of these feathered jewels. In fact, satellite images seemed to indicate that the waves of migrants appeared to fly around or over Berks. Observers had to be content with finding clusters of mixed warblers.

These were the notable species reported: **Yellow-breasted Chat** HPT 5/6 -5/29 (m.ob.); **Golden-winged Warbler** Dryville residence 5/7 (SF); **Prothonotary Warbler** Schuylkill River Trail 5/21 (RH); **Mourning Warbler** HR 5/15 (MW), SGL110 5/16 (LS), Hawk Mountain visitor center 5/16, KDRA 5/26 (KG); **Kentucky Warbler** SGL106 5/13 (JW, PW); **Cerulean Warbler** HR 4/21 (MW), HR 5/12 (KG); **Yellow-throated Warbler** NG 5/28 (MWh); **Wilson's Warbler** SYT 5/15 (TU), SGL 280 5/20 (LC, et al.), FCSP 5/20 (BL).

**Blue Grosbeaks** prefer specialized habitats and can be difficult to find. Two **Blue Grosbeaks** were reported: HPT 5/10 (BL), Virginville Road 5/31 (DR). REF presents acres of grasses-the perfect habitat for **Dickcissels** which were present there from 5/20 to 5/29 (m.ob.)

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## Cowbird Poem and Picture by Holly Arbuster



Cowbird  
Perched atop an Adirondack chair  
Water rustles over the stones  
A lift of the tail ...  
All that is left is berries

## Cape May Birding Festival - Lucy Cairns

Photos by Lucy Cairns

– Day 1 Recap

How did I get to be so lucky to live only miles from one of the best birding spots on continent!!! Since my first revelatory birding trip to Cape May in the spring of 2010, I have returned once or twice every



150  
the  
  
year  
for  
the

spring and/or fall NJ Audubon migration festivals. Even after 13 years of visits, the experience always exceeds my expectations. On this trip I was joined for all three festival days by a friend from Massachusetts, and BOC member Holly Arbuster drove down for the two weekend days.



I hope you enjoy this recounting of some of the highlights of the first day.

Friday, May 19 Chilly (but not cold!), partly cloudy, light breeze

On the early morning Leader's Choice Trolley Trip with Brett Ewald, our first stop was the Springwatch platform in Cape May Point, which looks out over the mouth of the Delaware Bay. During spring migration, birds may approach this site from any and all points of the compass. Ospreys hunted far from shore, a few Double-crested Cormorants fished closer to the beach, a single Brown Pelican made a brief appearance, and there was a constant parade of Common Grackles flying out to the water's edge to forage for Mole crabs to feed their young in nests just behind the dunes. The most riveting sighting was of a prolonged battle between a Parasitic Jaeger and a gull, just visible on the far watery horizon through binoculars. The larger, darker bird pursued the smaller bird through repeated sharp climbs and sudden dives reminiscent of a nightmare roller-coaster ride. One local expert among the enthralled watchers exclaimed that he'd never seen such a battle last so long. It appeared to me that it was the Jaeger who finally broke it off, unsuccessful, and disappeared in search of a less determined victim.

Our second morning trip was to the South Cape May Meadows, to view and learn about the beach-nesting birds that have been attracted by habitat carefully created, fenced in, patrolled, and made welcoming to Least Terns by placement of decoys and use of audio recordings. On this day, each of the two large enclosures hosted a small number of Least Terns and a single American Oystercatcher nest. We learned that attempts to attract Piping Plovers to this site have been unsuccessful. Piping Plovers have increasingly concentrated their nesting efforts in a few federal sites in the central and northern NJ coast, with 74% nesting in just two locations (Gateway NRA – Sandy Hook Unit and EB Forsythe NWR). "The continued funneling of birds to these two areas is not a sustainable path to recovery," per the NJ Dept. of Fish and Wildlife 2022 NJ Beach-Nesting Bird Project Report.

The nesting season was just beginning for Least Terns, so we were treated to a front-row seat for the courtship behavior



in which a male follows a female across the sand holding a tiny limp fish in its bill, in an attempt to impress. If he gets her attention and she is feeling cooperative, the female hunkers down on the sand while the male takes up a position behind her and the two wag their heads in unison—the male still holding the tiny, limp offering.

Our afternoon guided trip was to Stone Harbor Point, where our best bird encounters occurred along the path to the beach when we stopped at a small pond. We had just set up to scan the shorebirds on the far side of the pond when two Clapper Rails burst into sight flying along the near side not fifty feet away. One quickly disappeared into the reeds, but the other landed in the water and swam to shore, duck-like, to reach cover. Our group was thrilled at this close view of such a secretive bird, but it was just the beginning. A few minutes later, another Clapper Rail was spotted taking a leisurely bath at a different spot on the edge of the pond, and while this display of Rail hygiene had our attention, yet another popped out of the reeds and foraged briefly in the water close by. I am sure that I will never again see so many Clapper Rails in such a short time!

# Birding Etiquette & Ethics - Three perspectives on birding when you are with other people and when you are alone!



Most BOC bird walks tend to be small gatherings of friends and acquaintances who are considerate and understanding of one another and unspoken etiquette prevails. When a BOC event attracts outside people, often new to birding, or when we pay to go on a birding tour with strangers, the question of etiquette immediately arises and may even become

contentious. Sheila Martin and Linda Ingram present the etiquette standards of two professional tour guides.

**The ABA Code of Birding Ethics.** Concern for the welfare of birds lies at the core of ABA and touches everything we do. ABA has developed a code of ethics for birding, provided there in multiple formats for you to download and print. The ABA encourages all birders to print and follow these guidelines to preserve the welfare of wild birds and the integrity of birding. [Perma-link from the "useful links" page B.O.C. website.](#)

**Practice and promote respectful, enjoyable, and thoughtful birding as defined in this code**

## 1) Respect and promote birds and their environment.

- a. **Support the conservation of birds and their habitats.** Engage in and promote bird-friendly practices whenever possible, such as keeping cats and other domestic animals indoors or controlled, acting to prevent window strikes, maintaining safe feeding stations, landscaping with native plants, drinking shade-grown coffee, and advocating for conservation policies. Be mindful of any negative environmental impacts of your activities, including contributing to climate change. Reduce or offset such impacts as much as you are able.
- b. **Avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger.** Be particularly cautious around active nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display sites, and feeding sites. Limit the use of recordings and other audio methods of attracting birds, particularly in heavily birded areas, for species that are rare in the area, and for species that are threatened or endangered. Always exercise caution and restraint when photographing, recording, or otherwise approaching birds.
- c. **Always minimize habitat disturbance.** Consider the benefits of staying on trails, preserving snags, and similar practices.

## 2) Respect and promote the birding community and its individual members.

- a. **Be an exemplary ethical role model** by following this Code and leading by example. Always bird and report with honesty and integrity.



- b. **Respect the interests, rights, and skill levels of fellow birders, as well as people** participating in other outdoor activities. Freely share your knowledge and experience and be especially helpful to beginning birders.
- c. **Share bird observations freely**, provided such reporting would not violate other sections of this Code, as birders, ornithologists, and conservationists derive considerable benefit from publicly available bird sightings.
- d. **Approach instances of perceived unethical birding behavior with sensitivity and respect**; try to resolve the matter in a positive manner, keeping in mind that perspectives vary. **Use the situation as an opportunity to teach by example and to introduce more people to this Code.**
- e. **In group birding situations, promote knowledge by everyone in the group of the practices in this Code and ensure that the group does not unduly interfere with others using the same area.**

### 3) **Respect and promote the law and the rights of others.**

- a. **Never enter private property without the landowner's permission.** Respect the interests of and interact positively with people living in the area where you are birding.
  - b. **Familiarize yourself with and follow all laws, rules, and regulations governing activities at your birding location. In particular, be aware of regulations related to birds, such as disturbance of protected nesting areas or sensitive habitats, and the use of audio or food lures.**
- Birding should be fun and help build a better future for birds, for birders, and for all people.
  - Birds and birding opportunities are shared resources that should be open and accessible to all
  - Birders should always give back more than they take

### **Tony Beck's Birding Etiquette** – shared by Sheila Martin

(This broad-brush, light-handed suggestion of in-the-field comportment traits was authored by & obtained by me from birding guide Tony Beck, as a hand-out on a songbird migration tour of Point Pelee, Rondeau, & Long Point Provincial Parks, north shore of Lake Erie. Tony is a freelance naturalist & professional photographer based in Ottawa, Canada. An enthusiastic, skilled & popular guide, his award-winning work appears in many books, field guides, websites, magazines & calendars. He also holds the prestigious title of Nikon Ambassador of Canada.)

- **Stay together in a close group.** Don't spread out. Animals will feel less threatened by a tight group – & you will likely see more.
- **Stay close to your guide(s). But don't get ahead of them.** They are very focused, both looking and listening for the best things to show you.
- **Please try to stay calm and quiet at all times, even when an exciting, rare bird is found.** Abrupt movement or noise can scare away the birds. It can also distract the guides.
- **Be courteous and considerate to others. Be aware of where you are in relation to everyone else.** Avoid walking/standing/bending sideways in front of others while something is being observed. If the group has formed multiple rows, "hold your column"; do not lean sideways. A fellow participant may be behind you.
- **Share the telescope when it's set up to view something.** Don't be a scope hog! Once at the lens, use a "slow count of 5 – then step away sideways" as a good guideline until all those wishing to, have seen the bird once.
- **When the guides have found something of interest, they will do everything possible to bring it to everyone's attention.** Listen carefully to everything the guides are saying.



- **Speak up if you don't see a bird after a few moments. If possible, the guides will give your personal attention to help you locate it successfully.**
- **If you have questions, don't hesitate to ask.**

## **Birding With a Group - How Does That Work? By Barry Walker** – Shared by Linda Ingram

Whether going out with BOC or on an exotic tour to far-flung places on the planet, birding in a group has challenges and rewards. If you pay to go on a professionally led birding tour, be assured that your guide has seen it all and knows how to make it the best experience for everyone. The key is to follow his or her direction. No one wants to be the reason someone else didn't see a bird! As a veteran of many group tours and guides, I think this covers it.

“Barry Walker’s Guidelines for Group Birding (take this with a pinch of salt and in good humor!) .....and apologies to those of you who know all this stuff already!

OK, so you’ve signed up for a tropical birding trip to some cool place like Colombia or Peru, and you’ve plunked your \$1,500 down for airfare and \$4,000+ down for the trip. If you’ve paid for a private tour, congratulations! But if you’re like the rest of mere mortals, you’re going to be stuck with 5-9 other people for 2-3 weeks, birding in conditions that are rainy, hot/cold, and difficult in many ways.

Some of the birds (antbirds, antpittas, tinamous) are difficult to see even if it’s just you and a guide; with 9 people it’s nearly impossible. Make no mistake about it; in the rough-and-tumble world of “full contact” birding for lifers, it’s tough! Some get in your way, assure that you will miss some important birds, and provide numerous opportunities for frustration during the trip, and, after the trip is over you may never see them again for the rest of your life. In the spirit of this concept, about which I am only partially joking, I offer these guidelines to preserve sanity and possibly prevent violence!

### **1. Basic rules and guidelines for clothing:**

- Don't wear bright clothing.
- Wide-brimmed hats are a real nuisance when everyone is clustered together trying to peer into the bushes. Take it off. On shady forest trails a simple baseball cap may be a better option.
- Plastic/Gore-Tex clothing, particularly rain pants, that swish noisily as you walk, are particularly annoying.
- Velcro is no-no! – It disturbs birds and leader when recording songs.
- If you're using an umbrella, step to the rear of the group; nobody can see anything standing behind someone who is holding an umbrella.

### **2. Basic rules and guidelines for behavior:**

- Be quiet!
- Don't point.
- Try not to make sudden movements. Stand still, particularly if you're in the front. The people behind you are moving slowly to try to get a look around you, and if you move it screws them up
- Lift your binoculars slowly.
- Try not to step in front of someone who is looking through his or her binoculars at something.
- If you're standing in front and have seen the bird, move slowly and quietly out of the way (if you can) to let others have a turn. It can be boring to stand there while everyone else tries to see a bird you've already seen, but you could screw it up for everyone else by wandering

around or talking; remember, next time it could be you who's still trying to see the bird while others have already seen it.

- g. If you have to drop back to pee or take a photo, or for some other reason, approach the group slowly and quietly; they may be looking at something and you don't want to scare it off.
- h. If you spot a bird that you want to call the group's attention to, use conventional methods like the 'clock system': "it's in the largest Cecropia tree in front of us, at about 3 o'clock, sitting about 3 feet in from the edge". If you don't know what a Cecropia tree is ask the leader on day one. If you don't know how to describe a bird's location, it does no good to shout, "it's in the green tree!" unless there's only one green tree out there (not likely). Pointing probably won't help much, except to orient people in a general direction; if you point, do it in a non-jerky manner, with the finger close to the chest.

### 3. Basic rules and guidelines for interacting with the guide:

- a. If you see the bird, the leader probably sees it too. But not always.
- b. When standing, don't get in front of the guide unless he asks you to do so. Leaders differ on their policy and will tell you on day one how they work.
- c. When walking along a road or trail, don't go ahead of the leader UNLESS THE LEADER SAYS ITS OK TO DO SO. THIS IS #1 RULE
- d. If it's a large colorful bird right in front of you, the leader probably sees it too. If he doesn't call attention to it, there may be several reasons: you've already seen it, or he knows you'll see many of them later and he's onto something else that may be more important. In any case, it is probably not a good idea to distract the guide at this point. This is a subtle situation. If you know you are seeing a new trip bird and you sense that the leader has not noticed it, by all means you need to call attention to it.
- e. When the leader is trying to sound record a bird in, be quiet and don't wander around; stay still and with the group. Quiet means not just any talking; it means no unwrapping candy wrappers, unzipping packs etc. Don't point and shout "there it is!" when it pops up; everyone's looking in the same place you are...they see it too.
- f. Pay attention to what the leader says. If someone didn't hear the bird name or something else important that the guide says, help them, but quietly.

### 4. Basic rules and guidelines for equipment:

- a. Invest in a decent pair of binoculars and learn how to use them. Time the leader spends helping only you see a bird everyone else has seen means fewer new birds for everyone.
- b. Practice and understand focusing 'in front of' and 'behind' things. Frequently the guide will say something like: "See that post out there...look about 10 feet behind it on the ground".
- c. When using a group tripod, step up to it quickly, get your look, and then step away to let others have their turn; the bird may fly away at any moment. If you don't see the bird, it may have flown, but it may be there and you just can't find it in the scope view...if this happens, step away and let someone else have a look; the bird may still be there. If you're wearing glasses, practice before-hand to see whether you're better off taking them off before looking through the scope...if this is the case, get them off before stepping up to take your turn; it saves time.
- d. Practice looking through the scope and focusing it when there is no bird around, not when the group is all trying to see a bird through it!
- e. Don't kick the tripod or move the scope when taking your turn at the scope.
- f. **Photography: this is a difficult situation, and very dependent on what is happening.** You are not on a private tour and, in general, it is rude and inconsiderate to assume, simply because

you have carted a Canon with a 400mm lens along, that you somehow have more of a right to approach the bird than the rest do, with our little point-and shoots: you don't. ....unless you are on a photography-specific or private tour, you're just going to have to fit in the photos without holding up or distracting the birding, which is what everyone else is doing. Of course, when time and circumstances permit the guide will try and make sure you get great photos like letting you go ahead to get closer once all have seen the bird well.

- g. Digiscoping: The group scope is NOT AVAILABLE for digiscoping. If you have your own scope and are planning to digiscope, see (f) above.

**5. Basic rules and guidelines when traveling single file along a narrow-forested trail:**

- a. This is often an unpleasant and frustrating situation; sometimes only the first several people behind the guide will see the bird before it flushes and is gone. **Basic fairness and civility, and a certain maturity, fatalism and sense of humor are required.**
- b. Use the 'pace-line' concept, like bicyclists in a line: don't spend more than 10-15 minutes behind the leader before dropping back to the end. Everyone else moves up toward the front.
- c. Keep up; don't lag or stop if there are people behind you.
- d. Try to walk quietly; avoid snapping sticks or dry leaves.
- e. Often people in the rear cannot hear what the leader is saying; pass the information back quietly so everyone can know what's going on.
- f. When the leader stops on the trail, the people in the front should move around him and 'bunch up' as much as possible to let the people in the rear have a chance to see the bird: The guide will often move to the back of the group to give folks a better chance.

**6. Basic rules and guidelines when a mixed feeding flock comes through.**

- a. Look where the leader is looking as he calls out the bird names. That's your best chance to see the most birds.
- b. Don't distract the leader; wait until the flock is gone before asking questions and comparing notes. bird Walking

**7. General rules for group dynamics:**

- a. You are bound to miss some birds that others see, and you will probably see birds that others miss. In the interest of group psychology, it's important to understand managing disappointment and masking elation. Nobody wants to hear you going on and on about the beauty of a bird they missed (the Brits call that "getting gripped off").
- b. The leader is usually too polite to discipline the group except in extreme circumstances. It's usually up to someone in the group to point out inappropriate behavior. If this happens to you, take it with good humor and don't get defensive or offended.
- c. If your skills are diminished due to sickness, poor equipment, or other factors, don't expect to have the same success as the rest of the group.

**Good Birding!!** The Author thanks to Rick Romea for the development of this memo Send hate mail to [Birding@ManuExpeditions.com](mailto:Birding@ManuExpeditions.com) Barry Walker, with wife and partner Rosario, owned and operated Manu Expeditions, a pioneer in Peru birding, wildlife, and archaeological travel. Originally from England, Walker landed in Peru as a young and adventurous birder over 40 years ago.





*Chihuahuan Meadow Lark will be seen at an upcoming meeting. Photo by Russ Hoffman*

### **B.O.C. Initial & Renewal**

#### **Memberships, Now at Two Levels –**

Whether joining initially as a Baird member, or renewing annually, a **new category of dues - Sustaining Member** - was added last year to help our club support programs and activities, and as a gesture demonstrating appreciation of birds, nature, the environment, conservation and natural areas generally, through elevated financial support. Recognition will be shown in our newsletter.

The Baird Ornithological Club gratefully acknowledges our Sustaining Donors of '22-'23

Katie Andrews	Ed Delaney	Jonathan Ruiz-Cortes
Holly Armbuster	Pat Dignan	Hannah Salvatore
Christine A. Basso	Jeff Duplak	Irene Taylor
Elizabeth Cates	Marie Therese Grob	Bryan Wang
Ian Cost	Brian Lineaweaver	Karen Wang
Lynn Cronomiz	Sheila A. Martin	

### **Baird Ornithological Club, Current Officers and directors**

Sheila Martin	President (2023-25)	<a href="mailto:sheilamartin554@gmail.com">sheilamartin554@gmail.com</a>
Vice President	(office vacant)	
Ian Cost	Secretary (2023-25)	<a href="mailto:icost@albright.edu">icost@albright.edu</a>
Charles Coleman	Treasurer (2023-25)	<a href="mailto:coleman1801@comcast.net">coleman1801@comcast.net</a>
Lucy Cairns, Immediate Past President	(2023-25)	<a href="mailto:ljanetcairns@gmail.com">ljanetcairns@gmail.com</a>

#### **Directors:**

Mike Slater	(2021-24)	<a href="mailto:paplantings@gmail.com">paplantings@gmail.com</a> (and Website manager and newsletter composer)
Russell Hoffman	(2022-25)	<a href="mailto:Russhoff@yahoo.com">Russhoff@yahoo.com</a> (and Field Trip Coordinator)
Hannah Salvatore	(2022-25)	<a href="mailto:hannah.salvatore@comcast.net">hannah.salvatore@comcast.net</a>
Lynn Cronomiz	(2023-26)	<a href="mailto:Lynsekie@ptd.net">Lynsekie@ptd.net</a> (and Social Media Coordinator)
Irene Taylor	(2023-26)	<a href="mailto:iltaylor@dejazzd.com">iltaylor@dejazzd.com</a>

Linda Ingram Newsletter Coordinator	<a href="mailto:lindamingram29@gmail.com">lindamingram29@gmail.com</a>
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Matt Wlasniewski Avian Report Compiler for the Fall and Spring seasons	<a href="mailto:martind28@comcast.net">martind28@comcast.net</a>

## BOC MEMBERSHIP and Renewal

- Payment is for **September 2023 – August 2024**

- **Regular Membership Dues \$15/ year** /per person
- **Sustaining Membership Dues \$25 or more/ year** / per person  
(This recently established category helps us support our programs and activities and will be recognized in our newsletter.)

**Now we have two ways to join or renew your B.O.C. membership!**

- **We will still happily take a check and the completed membership form (below) or**
- **you can do it online though our website at <https://bairdornithological.club/join-or-pay-dues-online> in two easy steps! 1) Use the button to pay with a credit card or Paypal. Pay the appropriate amount and step 2) Fill out the online information form and submit it. By joining or renewing online you give your permission for BOC to contact you by email for club related announcements and newsletters.**

**If paying by mail**, please print out this form and mail it to the address below.

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Note: An email address is required if you want to receive electronic communications and the link to receive the digital copy of The Distelfink from BOC and links for when the club's meetings are held via Zoom in the winter. By supplying my email address, I give my permission for BOC to contact me by email for club related announcements and newsletters.*

[ ] I do not have access to or can't read an electronic version of the newsletter. Please send me a quick-printed version by USPS.

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Send this form with payment to the BOC Treasurer: **Charles Coleman, 129 Grecian Terrace, Sinking Spring, PA 19608-1164** [coleman1801@comcast.net](mailto:coleman1801@comcast.net)