



# The DISTELFINK

Spring 2020

## Contents

<b>COVID-19 Cancellations</b> .....	1
<b>President’s Message – Tony Grimm</b> .....	2
In support of #5 in Audubon’s list here are a few Sources of Bird Friendly Coffee - Mike Slater .....	3
<b>More on Bird Conservation</b> .....	3
<b>What Just Happened to the MBTA? - Linda Ingram</b> .....	3
<b>Senator Bob Casey Responds to Inquiry on the Conservation of Birds in North America:</b> .....	4
<b>How to Give Deceased Birds a Second Life – Ian Cost, Albright College</b> .....	5
<b>Trip Reports</b> .....	6
<b>Fire Tower Hawk Watch - Bill Uhrich</b> .....	6
<b>Koch Field Trip for Sparrows, October ,2019 – Matt Wlasniewski</b> .....	6
<b>January 1, 2020 BOC Big Day - Peter Wolfe</b> .....	7
<b>Christmas Bird Count (CBC): Let’s Up Our Game! - Lucy Cairns, Compiler for the Reading CBC</b> .....	8
<b>“Italian”? Robin - by Sheila Martin</b> .....	8
<b>My Life List – Bird #1 – Matt Wlasniewski</b> .....	9
<b>My Best Three Hours - Russ Hoffman</b> .....	10
<b>Berks County Birds-Fall 2019 - Matt Wlasniewski</b> .....	10

**From: Tony Grimm, BOC President and the Board of Directors:**

## **COVID-19 Cancellations**

**Due to concerns about the virus and ever-changing recommendations about safe group sizes, the BOC board of directors has decided to cancel all remaining scheduled events this season, including the April 10 meeting, the May Banquet, and all scheduled bird walks. We hope to resume our normal schedule of events in fall of 2020.**

**We strongly recommend that no one give up birding on their own or in small groups with friends. Birding and time spent in the natural world are the best of all antidotes to anxiety and uncertainty, especially now that spring migration and the annual movement of millions of birds remind us that life blooms as it always has."**

## President's Message – Tony Grimm

At our meetings we have been talking about the lack of birds at our feeders. There are lots of resources for this and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has come up with [Seven Simple Actions to Help Birds](#) and I would like to share them with you.

### 1. Make Windows Safer

**The challenge:** Up to 1 billion birds are estimated to die each year after hitting windows in the United States and Canada.

**The cause:** By day, birds perceive reflections in glass as habitat they can fly into. By night, migratory birds drawn in by city lights are at high risk of colliding with buildings.

**These simple steps save birds:** On the outside of the window, install screens or break up reflections—using film, paint, or string spaced no more than two inches high or four inches wide.

**[More info on preventing bird-window collisions on Lehigh Valley Audubon's web site.](#)**

<https://www.lvaudubon.org/window-collisions>

### 2. Keep Cats Indoors

**The challenge:** Cats are estimated to kill more than 2.6 billion birds annually in the U.S. and Canada. This is the #1 human-caused reason for the loss of birds, aside from habitat loss.

**The cause:** Cats can make great pets, but more than 110 million feral and pet cats now roam in the United States and Canada. These nonnative predators instinctively hunt and kill birds even when well fed.

**A solution that's good for cats and birds:** Outdoor cats live 2-5 years, while indoor cats may live for more than 15. Save birds and keep cats healthy by keeping cats indoors. You can also train your cat to walk on a leash.

### 3. Reduce Lawn, Plant Natives

**The challenge:** Birds have fewer places to safely rest during migration and to raise their young. More than 10 million acres of land in the United States were converted to developed land from 1982 to 1997.

**The cause:** Lawns and pavement don't offer enough food or shelter for many birds and other wildlife. With more than 40 million acres of lawn in the U.S. alone, there's huge potential to support wildlife by replacing lawns with native plantings.

**Add native plants, watch birds come in:** Native plants add interest and beauty to your yard and neighborhood, and provide shelter and nesting areas for birds. The nectar, seeds, berries, and insects will sustain birds and diverse wildlife.

### 4. Avoid Pesticides

**The challenge:** More than 1 billion pounds of pesticides are applied in the United States each year. The continent's most widely used insecticides, called neonicotinoids or "neonics," are lethal to birds and to the insects that birds consume. Common weed killers used around homes, such as 2, 4-D and glyphosate (used in Roundup), can be toxic to wildlife, and glyphosate has been declared a probable human carcinogen.

**The cause:** Pesticides that are toxic to birds can harm them directly through contact, or if they eat contaminated seeds or prey. Pesticides can also harm birds indirectly by reducing the number of available insects, which birds need to survive and raise young.

**A healthy choice for you, your family, and birds:** Consider purchasing organic food. Reduce pesticides around your home and garden.

### 5. Drink Coffee That's Good for Birds

*(for a few recommendations by Mike Slater see page 2)*

**The challenge:** Three-quarters of the world's coffee farms grow their plants in the sun, destroying forests that birds and other wildlife need for food and shelter. Sun-grown coffee also often requires using environmentally harmful pesticides and fertilizers. On the other hand, shade-grown coffee preserves a forest canopy that helps migratory birds survive the winter.

**The cause:** Too few consumers are aware of the problems of sun coffee. Those who are aware may be reluctant to pay more for environmentally sustainable coffee.

**Enjoy shade-grown coffee:** It's a win-win-win: it's delicious, economically beneficial to coffee farmers, and helps more than 42 species of North American migratory songbirds that winter in coffee plantations, including orioles, warblers, and thrushes.

## 6. Protect Our Planet from Plastic

**The challenge:** It's estimated that 4,900 million metric tons of plastic have accumulated in landfills and in our environment worldwide, polluting our oceans and harming wildlife such as seabirds, whales, and turtles that mistakenly eat plastic, or become entangled in it.

**The cause:** Plastic takes more than 400 years to degrade, and 91% of plastics created are not recycled. Studies show that at least 80 seabird species ingest plastic, mistaking it for food. Cigarette lighters, toothbrushes, and other trash have been found in the stomachs of dead albatrosses.

**Reduce your plastics:** Avoid single-use plastics including bags, bottles, wraps, and disposable utensils. It's far better to choose reusable items, but if you do have disposable plastic, be sure to recycle it.

## 7. Watch Birds, Share What You See

**The challenge:** The world's most abundant bird, the Passenger Pigeon, went extinct, and people didn't realize how quickly it was vanishing until it was too late. Monitoring birds is essential to help protect them but tracking the health of the world's 10,000 bird species is an immense challenge.

**The cause:** To understand how birds are faring, scientists need hundreds of thousands of people to report what they're seeing in backyards, neighborhoods, and wild places around the world. Without this information, scientists will not have enough timely data to show where and when birds are declining around the world.

**Enjoy birds while helping science and conservation:** Join Cornell Lab's eBird or Project FeederWatch to record your bird observations. Your contributions will provide valuable information to show where birds are thriving—and where they need our help.

<https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/seven-simple-actions-to-help-birds/>

In support of #5 in Audubon's list here are a few [Sources of Bird Friendly Coffee - Mike Slater](#)

- [Café Christina](#) is an organic coffee plantation that we visited a few years ago while we were on a bird trip to Costa Rica with Linda Ingram. Can be ordered online from their representative in Texas. Visit <https://www.cafecristina.com/> I have been ordering whole-bean coffee from them regularly for 2 years now, but they sell ground coffee too. I like both their light and dark roasts. (I haven't tried their medium roast.) They are reasonably priced considering each bag contains one full pound (16 oz.) of coffee.
- [ABA Song Bird Certified Bird Friendly Coffee](#) from Thanksgiving Coffee Company. I have a monthly subscription and at this time I'm getting two bags of their whole-bean decaf every month which is a medium roast. In the past I also have enjoyed the light roast Guatemalan coffee and their French roast for espresso. <https://www.aba.org/product-category/songbird-coffee/>
- **"Birds and Beans" available at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary's gift Shop.** This is also certified Bird Friendly coffee and you can pick some up anytime you are up at the mountain!

## [More on Bird Conservation](#)

### [What Just Happened to the MBTA? - Linda Ingram](#)

In January 2020 the U.S. Department of the Interior proposed regulations to codify the Trump Administration's 2017 legal opinion that Migratory Bird Treaty Act protections do not include so-called "incidental take."

In the fall of 2019 Leigh Altadonna, regional director for National Audubon Society's Atlantic-North Region and past BOC speaker, contacted Art Zdancewic, BOC past president, seeking persons with a birding history in the area of the

Birdsboro Pipeline Project, where this new interpretation had been utilized. [National Audubon had joined with the American Bird Conservancy, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, National Wildlife Federation, and the Natural Resources Defense Council, to challenge the Trump Administration's move to eliminate longstanding protections for waterfowl, raptors, and songbirds under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.](#) I responded and was guided through the process of submitting a declaration.

<https://www.audubon.org/news/audubon-lawsuit-seeks-restore-protections-migratory-birds>

## Background

**The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918** was passed by Congress and signed by President Wilson to protect birds and for the last 50 years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has interpreted MBTA, to protect birds from incidental take. The Act has been used sparingly as a punitive measure—just 14 times over the past two decades, including 9 federal prosecutions that were against energy industry operations and two that involved the use of pesticides. After the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, \$100 million in fines stemming from the MBTA were directed toward the restoration of damaged habitat.

**MBTA Was a Powerful Tool** “Numerous common sense solutions [stemming from the MBTA] have reduced the incidental, wanton killing of millions of birds by such hazards as open oil waste pits, oil spills, unprotected pesticide residues, unmarked transmission lines, and lethally situated wind farms,” wrote Cornell Lab director John W. Fitzpatrick in a 2018 column for *Living Bird* magazine. “Under [the Trump Administration’s] new and extremely narrow interpretation, whole industries (e.g., energy, mining, chemical production) are suddenly freed from legal liability even if their actions result in predictable, avoidable, and massive killing of birds.”

In September 2019, Cornell Lab scientists led by Ken Rosenberg coauthored research published in the journal *Science* that found North American bird populations have lost nearly 3 billion breeding birds—a 29% decline since 1970. “Now is clearly not a good time to be weakening regulations that prevent the killing of birds,” says Rosenberg.

The MBTA has for a century been one of the most powerful legal protectors of migratory birds. This administration’s interpretations will undermine it. If this concerns you, contact your Senators and Representatives in Congress.

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/storm-clouds-brewing-for-the-migratory-bird-treaty-act/>

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/analysis-reinterpretation-of-migratory-bird-treaty-act-runs-counter-to-spirit-of-the-law/>

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/vanishing-1-in-4-birds-gone/>

## Senator Bob Casey Responds to Inquiry on the Conservation of Birds in North America:

On October 4, 2019, *Science Magazine*, an academic journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), published a study about the significant decline of the North American bird population. Since the 1970s, North America has lost three billion of its native birds, or approximately 29 percent of the overall population. Due to the increasing threat of continued bird population decline, the study identified an urgent need to address habitat loss, agricultural intensification, coastal disturbance and commercial development, all of which are expected to be exacerbated by climate change.

Several pieces of legislation have been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives aimed at supporting bird conservation efforts:

- Representative Mike Quigley of Illinois introduced H.R. 919, the Bird-Safe Buildings Act of 2019, on January 30, 2019. This legislation would require each public building constructed, substantially altered or acquired by the General Service Administration to meet standards to reduce bird collisions with windows.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/919>

- February 15, 2019, Representative Alan Lowenthal introduced H.R. 1305, the Albatross and Petrel Conservation Act. This bill would implement the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), which is an international treaty to conserve and protect albatrosses and petrels from known threats.  
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/1305>
- February 25, 2019, Representative Earl Blumenauer of Oregon introduced H.R. 1337, the Saving America's Pollinators Act, which would compel the Environmental Protection Agency to take actions specifically related to pesticides that may negatively affect pollinators and other species.  
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/1337>
- Representative Debbie Dingell of Michigan introduced H.R. 3742, the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, on July 12, 2019. This legislation would authorize \$1.3 billion of federal funding for fish and wildlife conservation programs.  
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/3742>

Currently, these bills have not been introduced in the Senate. Should these or similar legislation reach the full Senate for consideration, please be assured that I will keep your views in mind.

I also believe it is essential that Congress provide consistent and sufficient funding for conservation programs. Programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the State Wildlife Grant Program, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and the Multinational Species Conservation Fund serve many important purposes and play an important role in preventing many of our Nation's wildlife species from becoming endangered.

<http://casey.senate.gov>

## How to Give Deceased Birds a Second Life – Ian Cost, Albright College

It is a sad reality that birds hit our windows, and sometimes our vehicles, and suffer tragic consequences. However, the loss of these unfortunate birds can be used to educate future biologists and for conducting research that helps us to not only better understand, but also to help birds that might need rehabilitation. Fortunately, we have a number of universities and colleges that can accept donations of deceased animals for these purposes.

I met some of the members of the Baird Ornithological Society back in December, when I attended a meeting to hear more about the Reading Christmas Bird Count. I know that this organization cares about birds and I would like to offer my services to help you help birds! For those of you whom I did not speak to, my name is Ian Cost and I am a professor of biology at Albright College. My research is in dinosaur and bird feeding and I teach classes in human anatomy and physiology and comparative vertebrate anatomy. As one of the scientists that can accept these donations, I was asked to write a short guide on how one might go about doing so. I have also provided my contact information below, so that you can donate birds to my classroom and lab.

The first step of collecting birds is to assess their situation. Most important, of course, is determining whether they are alive or dead. As we all know, some window strikes merely daze birds and, after some time, they might get up and fly away. No scientific collector accepts birds that are inhumanely treated or were killed without veterinarian consultation. If you come across a live bird that needs rehabilitation, we scientists, or the game wardens of our area, will happily help you find rehabilitation services. Birds that are deceased can be collected only if they are recently deceased. We do our best to keep that window to within the last few hours to reduce the amount of scavenging and natural decomposition that the birds have been subjected to.

The next step is that the bird must be frozen if it cannot be immediately deposited in the proper collections. It is important to protect the bird (and your freezer!) when freezing. Place birds in Ziploc bags and properly label them with a permanent marker (Sharpies are the marker of choice). Labels should include the species of bird (genus and species as well as common name if possible), name of the collector, the place it was collected, and the time and date. When recording the place, be as specific as possible. If one can attach latitude and longitude coordinates to their bird then that is wonderful data, but something like "southwest corner of X St." is fine. Scientific collectors should never share your address, but these kinds of data allow us to build a database of where window strikes occur and how certain man-made structures impact birds.

Migratory birds can be held for a limited amount of time according to state, federal, and international laws and treaties. After you have frozen your bird contact the institution as soon as you can. This allows the institution to label

the bird with the proper state and federal numbers and to catalog the deceased bird in all proper databases. After one contacts the institution arrangements can be made for pick-up or drop-off of animals that need to be deposited. Because these are relatively infrequent occurrences the timing and method will vary based on the situation.

**To summarize, here is a list of what one should do upon finding a bird:**

1. Determine if the bird is deceased or needs rehabilitation services.
2. If deceased, place in a Ziploc bag and label appropriately.
  - a. Full common name, genus, and species should be used if known.
  - b. Name of person collecting.
  - c. Time and date.
  - d. Location.
3. Freeze the bird as soon as possible.
4. Contact a permitted collector.
  - a. To contact me please send an email to [icost@albright.edu](mailto:icost@albright.edu) with a subject heading of "Deceased Bird". This allows me to see and respond to your email faster.
  - b. You can also leave me a voicemail at 610-921-7728; I'm not often near my office phone, but I will call you back as soon as possible.
5. Deposit birds with a permitted collector.

## Trip Reports

### Fire Tower Hawk Watch - Bill Uhrich

**You know you're striking out at hawk watching when you see more blimps than hawks.**

The Baird Ornithological Club's September hawk watch atop the William Penn Memorial Fire Tower along Skyline Drive in Lower Alsace Township came up empty on the raptor side. But sharp-eyed birder Katrina Knight spotted way in the distance to the northeast a blimp that entertained us as it journeyed through Berks. It took its good old time, too, until we were able to read Goodyear on its side, and then it passed above the Reading Regional Airport before leaving the scene. The good news is that Katrina before arriving stopped at the List Road corner on Skyline Drive, always a good, small-bird hot spot, and came up with a mixed flock of chickadees and titmice. Finally! Some tufted titmice!

And as the watchers departed the fire tower, a lone raven flew up and perched on the nearest antenna tower, providing us a good look at this increasingly familiar species that once could only be found along the Kittatinny Ridge.



Join Bill next season on the third Saturdays of September and October from 9am until 2pm.

COMMON RAVEN IN FLIGHT – Photo BY Mike Slater

### Koch Field Trip for Sparrows, October ,2019 – Matt Wlasniewski

The annual field trip to Arlene Koch's bird sanctuary near Easton and the search for Lincoln's Sparrow always poses two questions: What effect will the weather have on the bird activity and are we early or late for the special sparrow migration? One thing is always certain: the hospitality of our host-Arlene Koch. She welcomes us with open arms and a report on the previous day's activity with the caveat that seeing a Lincoln's Sparrow is not guaranteed.

We understand our chances but there are a lot of other birds to be found in the jumbled jungle of special plantings. At this point, our success rate is about 50% in finding the elusive sparrow but we never leave disappointed.

There were only two of us this year: Katrina Knight and myself. The light drizzle that was predicted and stayed with us for two hours may have been a deterrent for some BOC members. There was still the thrill of the hunt as we

worked our way through the tangled aisles and used our best pishes. Sparrows popped out of the tall grasses, clutched the top of a swinging stalk for seconds and then dove headlong back into the grass.

We missed the Lincoln's Sparrow this year but had plenty of stand-ins: Song, Swamp, White-throated, Field and Savannah Sparrows put on a grand show. Each bird was checked carefully and we noted the many varieties in plumages for each species. Some have fresh feathers and sharp markings and others are not as neat looking.



We ended the morning, as always, sitting on the front porch where we find American Goldfinch at the thistle feeders and vultures and hawks taking advantages of the winds along the ridge. We recorded eighteen species with great looks at most of the birds.

Will we do this again in 2020? Sure will. I made a reservation with Arlene before we left. Maybe this year... a Lincoln's or some other lost western species. At Arlene's sanctuary, anything is possible.

Juvenile Swamp sparrow – photo by Mike Slater

## January 1, 2020 BOC Big Day - Peter Wolfe

It was a 32°F, breezy, partly cloudy day. Seven members of the BOC participated. They were Mike Slater, Liz Cates, Art Zdancewic, Russ Hoffman, Linda Ingram, Peter and Jane Wolfe. The goal was to follow a similar route to the one used by Ken Lebo for several years and see as many species as possible.

The group assembled at E.J. Breneman Quarry at 8:00 AM. Among the 800 Canada Geese and 30 Mallards were 2 Redhead males, 2 Common Mergansers, 4 Ruddy's and a Ring-necked Duck. Surprisingly, only 3 American Coots were found possibly due to the nearby Bald Eagle. Mike Slater found a Cackling Goose which most of us viewed through his scope.

From Breneman's we drove to the Blue Marsh State Hill Boat Launch where 3 Bald Eagles gave a nice aerial performance. There were hundreds of Ring-billed gulls and some distant ducks which could only be seen with a scope. As we were trying to decide whether they were Greater or Lesser Scaup, we sadly realized that they were DECOYS!

We headed to the Stilling Basin where we all got to see Hermit Thrushes, Great Blue Heron and a cooperative Belted Kingfisher along with Carolina Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Goldfinch, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Red-bellied Woodpecker, American Crow, and Carolina Wren.

After a bathroom stop at the Visitor Center, we drove to the Dry Brooks beach where there were 30 Ring-bills and 2 larger Herring Gulls. The Sensory Trail yielded 3 Downy Woodpeckers, 3 House Finches, 3 White-throated Sparrows and a Golden-crowned Kinglet.

The next stop was on Bright School Road where we saw Turkey Vultures, 7 Eastern Bluebirds and a flock of about 35 Dark-eyed Juncos. From here we traveled and birded country roads stopping at Meadow Bend farm on Belleman's Church Road, where there were Blue Jays, a Northern Mockingbird, but no sparrows.

After a lunch stop at Sheetz on R. 61, the last stop was Lake Ontelaunee Dam where we saw not only more Ring-billed and Herring Gulls but also 3 Lesser Black-backed Gulls and a beautiful pair of Hooded Mergansers. We returned to Breneman's at 1:30 PM. The total species for the fun event was 40, a good start to the New Year 2020, or 20+20!

Peter Wolfe

## Christmas Bird Count (CBC): Let's Up Our Game! - Lucy Cairns, Compiler for the Reading CBC

Be careful who you sit next to at the BOC Annual Banquet, lest you find yourself volunteered to take over a job for which you have no knowledge or experience! I learned this lesson in May of 2019, when Ken Lebo stopped by the table where I was sitting with Tony Grimm. Ken brought up the need to find a new compiler for the Reading CBC due to his imminent move out of state. Minutes later, with some nudging from Tony, I had the job. It sounded to me as though all I would need to do was add up participant observations from their checklists and enter the data onto the site at Audubon. How hard could that be? Months later, I learned that the job included a number of other responsibilities including contacting prior year participants to determine who intended to help out this year, updating contact info for all participants, assigning new volunteers to specific teams, coordinating last-minute changes when more than one key participant fell ill, ensuring that all participants had the necessary sector maps and data-collection forms, AND compiling and submitting our data after the count! As I waded through the compiler manual, trying to figure out how to accomplish all these tasks, I could not help wishing that I had had the opportunity to complete an apprenticeship before being given the reins! But thanks to the generous help of Art Zdancewic and (remotely) Ken Lebo, my maiden voyage ended happily.

Through this experience, I became aware of the potential for improving our performance in the 3 local CBCs: Reading, Hamburg, and Bernville. The other BOC officers and directors all agreed that our club should place a high priority on improving our approach to this historic and important citizen science project, with the goals of increasing participation and maximizing the quality and quantity of our data. We are very fortunate to have a good group of skilled birders committed to the CBC, but we were stretched a little thin in 2019--especially with the last-minute issues which prevented a couple people from participating. Our team needs more depth, in other words, so recruiting more participants is one priority--both for the teams that spend the day in the field and those who submit feeder watch data.

Opportunities for improving the quality and quantity of the data we submit include making sure all team leaders can easily review the exact boundaries of the sector they are responsible for, organizing pre-count scouting forays to identify locations likely to produce birds on count day, and reviewing CBC rules with all participants. I spent a lot of time trying to identify the best means of providing team leaders with maps of their sectors, since Audubon had a couple of new map tools available. I was excited to find a map of our circle that could be downloaded to a smartphone, on which one's exact location was flagged via GPS tracking as one moved about. Unfortunately, there was no way to mark the boundaries of the 15 sectors the Reading CBC circle is divided into on this map. Audubon also offers an online mapping tool, which Ken used prior to his departure to draw the boundaries of our sectors. While this map could be accessed online from a smartphone, vital landmarks such as street names could not be seen until I zoomed in so far that only a sliver of a sector showed on the screen. In the end, photos Ken had taken of each sector outlined on our 'historic' (i.e. ancient) paper map and emailed to participants turned out to be the only workable option. Maybe this year Audubon will provide a better solution. I also hope that for 2020 we can identify a secondary compiler to work with me on the process so that if/when I am not able to fill this role the Reading CBC can have an experienced compiler to fall back on.

You would be forgiven for thinking that a project that has been underway since 1900 would run like a well-oiled machine, but with a little more effort and planning I know we can make the 2020 Christmas Bird Count the best yet. Hoping you will consider participating, Lucy Cairns

## "Italian"? Robin - by Sheila Martin

Late October '19, I traveled to far northern Italy to hike The Cinque Terre, a series of rugged historic coastal Mediterranean towns connected near the sea and upwards onto fertile piedmont by steep, rocky footpaths brilliantly tempting a keen athletic walker. Eye-popping, quaint, 1000-year-old architecture and thirty flavors of gelato add to the delight of this destination.

Of course I took my binoculars! This being October, though a different continent, I realized that most migrants would have already flown to Africa. I kept spirits up by telling myself that I'd take whatever European birds I could get and be happy. Focus of this trip was challenging walking; nowhere near dedicated birding could be done! Of the dozen

late-season resident birds I bagged, I was able to view two very nice species daily from my 4th-floor window down to a Mediterranean rock garden. Great Spotted Woodpecker & European Robin. Nothing like balcony birding when one's motives are mixed!

Asking "How do you say "birds" in Italian?", my guide replied, "Ucelli" (pron. [oo-cheh-lee]). Each opportunity to speak to locals, I'd ask them what the chubby, bold little orange-breasted bird was; and got "Italian Robin, our national bird", as the reply everywhere, without pause. Once I finally got a copy of *Birds of Europe* by Lars Swenson for my library, I realized that European Robin is definitely its correct name. Leave it to the Italians to embrace such a ubiquitous, precious species as their own informal mascot, boldly nicknaming it to their liking, to boot!

More recent travels took me to Tokyo, Japan. I encountered there a similarly short list of year-round avian residents (this time, five in all) – with the locals doing the same by imbuing their favorite common birds with place names. I spotted Japanese Bush Warbler without binoculars deep in bare branches along a city path. Okay, its correct ornithological name is as above. BUT locals call it by its (now incorrect) name, Japanese Nightingale, since that name just stuck from centuries of art & poetry, and from its distinctive beautiful song. Seeing this bird without bins in 65 degrees, mid-February, this little guy is lovingly said to be the earliest harbinger of spring in Japan.

of these two species' sweet legendary attributes. Fair enough to grant them that. I guess that's also how plants get their many regional, colloquial, slang names as well.

## My Life List – Bird #1 – Matt Wlasniewski

Every trip worth taking starts with a first step. With each step is a learning experience. Some lessons are easier to learn than others and there is something to be learned even when the expected outcome isn't reached. This all sounds rather obscure but I have found my adventure in birding has pretty much followed that process.

I found birds fascinating even in grade school. I still have some of my primitive art class creations that were supposed to resemble birds. In fifth grade, I was assigned a scrap book project. I found mine at J.J. Newberry's, the only department store in my home town of Wellsville, New York. I still have it. The *Lone Ranger* on his trusty steed, *Silver*, still jumps of the cover at me.

I filled it pages with poems and dozens of bird drawings I cut from the *National Geographic* journals stacked in the make-shift library of my small school. The artists were unknown to me at the time: Singer, Peterson and Fuertes. I read about them years later.

My uncle Ted often took my brothers and me out for walks. He brought along his binoculars and shared them with us. I remember feeding chickadees by hand in winter. There was no birding club that I knew of in the area. My Cub Scout troop came the closest to a bird club. So my early birding was quite unorganized.

It wasn't until 1978 that I realized that there were clubs of people who took walks to find birds and kept lists of the birds they saw. A co-worker at the school that hired me as its maintenance man had bird feeders outside his classroom. He was the biology teacher. One morning in January, 1978, I stopped by and noticed the sparrows at the feed he threw under the oak tree. I mentioned that they were not all alike in either plumage or behavior. My friend gave me his **Golden field guide** and told me to find the sparrows.

There was one sparrow that was more aggressive and chased the other birds away from its seeds. Its breast was heavily streaked with a large spot in the middle. I found a sheet of paper and numbered the lines up to ten. Bird #1 on my life list—Song Sparrow on January 20, 1978.

My life list stands at 522 and the last entry was in 2017 for the Black-backed Oriole that captured the birding world for several months. So many steps and lessons in the 42 years that have passed. Birding has been rewarding in so many ways and there are still more birds to find.

## My Best Three Hours - Russ Hoffman



The word pelagic, accent on the middle syllable, means pertaining to the open oceans. Birds that spend their lives at sea, except for when they nest, are referred to as pelagic birds. They range from the small swallow-like storm petrels to the very large (wingspan wise) albatrosses. Other birds included in this group are the petrels, shearwaters, and diving petrels. One of the main characteristics that they share are external nostrils fused to the top of their bills. Through these pathways seabirds excrete the saltwater they ingest while feeding. Most of these birds are threatened or endangered due to interaction with human activity.

*Salvin's (rear) and Chatham (front) Albatrosses in Chile – by Russ Hoffman*

I became interested in seeing seabirds about twenty years ago and have been on many pelagic trips on both sides of the US. This can become an obsession, just as birding in general can become an obsession. After a few trips on the ocean, one quickly will want to see the largest of this group of birds, the albatrosses. In the northern hemisphere one is restricted to the possibility of seeing three species of the twenty-four species that exist on earth. The Black-footed albatross can be seen in large numbers off the west coast of the US. The Laysan albatross is casual off the coast in the west and the Short-tailed albatross is found in Alaskan waters. Other than the Waved albatross found in the Galapagos Islands, one must travel to the southern hemisphere to see the rest of the species.

Last fall, a group of BOC members along with three others traveled to southern Chile to see birds. I had the opportunity to extend my stay for two extra days to participate in a pelagic trip out of Quintero, Chile, a small town north of Valparaiso. Checking eBird reports from past trips gave me hope that I might see some new sea-going species of birds.

We left the dock at 7:00 AM and headed to sea. Within thirty minutes we started seeing birds. This contrasts with trips in the United States where you must travel two or more hours before seeing birds. The great part of going to a new place for a birder is that almost every bird you see is a 'life' bird. This was the case on this trip. We saw shearwaters – Pink-footed and Sooty; petrels – White-chinned and Northern Giant; and four species of albatrosses. Black-browed albatross was the first to appear. We had seen this bird from shore in southern Chile the previous week. Then we started chumming (putting food in the water from the stern), and this brought in close a variety of birds. Included were three more species of albatross; Salvin's, Chatham, and the largest, Northern Royal. This bird also has the distinction of having the longest wingspan in the avian world which is eleven feet.

I considered this to be my best three hours of birding in my life. My life total of albatrosses seen is now six, which is one-fourth of the total that exists. [My eBird checklist for the trip is here.](https://ebird.org/checklist/S62127610) <https://ebird.org/checklist/S62127610>

## Berks County Birds-Fall 2019 - Matt Wlasniewski

**Locations:** Bartram Trail (BAT), Berne Township, (BT), Blue Mountain Academy (BMA), Blue Marsh Lake (BML), Blue Marsh Lake State Hill Boat Launch (BMLSH), Blue Marsh Lake Sheidy Boat Launch (BMLSBL), Christman Lake (CL), EJ Breneman's Quarry (BQ), Exeter Township (ET), French Creek State Park (FCSP), Gotwal's Pond (GP), Hamburg Commerce Park (HCP), Hamburg Reservoir (HR), Hawk Mountain North Lookout Data (HMNL), Hawk Mountain South Lookout (HMSL), Keim Road (KR), Kernsville Dam Recreation Area (KDRA), Kutztown University (KU), Lake Ontelaunee (LO), 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), Old Topton Road (OTP), Peter's Creek (PC), Pine Swamp Road (PSR), Sacony Trail (ST), Shartlesville Farm Pond (SFP), State Game Lands 52 (SGL52), State Game Lands 106 (SGL106), State Game Lands 110 North Kill Gap (SGL110), Wyomissing (WYO).

2019 entered the record books as the 13th wettest year in Berks weather history. 2018 and 2019 combined to be the wettest back-to-back years with a total of 121.83 inches. In apparent contradiction to the rain totals, there were few cold fronts to push migrants along their migration routes. Weekend rainstorms had a negative impact on raptor counts and hours in the field by Berks birders.

Snow Goose migration at HMNL totaled 52 with the first two counted 11/2 (RK) and 50 on 11/8 (SG). A single Greater White-fronted Goose first seen at GP 11/13 (RK), spent two days there 11/18 and 11/19 (DP). A Cackling Goose was found in a flock of Canada Geese at GP and stayed six days 11/18-11/23 (S&F, EH). An unusual low count of 5,226 Canada Geese was evidence of the lack of beneficial cold fronts (HMNL). The only report of Tundra Swan, an unknown number, was reported at BML 11/27 (JS).

The three main Berks lakes (BML, BQ and LO), did not have any significant fall outs of migrant waterfowl. Twelve American Widgeon were reported at LO 11/8 (DH). The single Redhead found at BQ 11/9 (DH, RK) is a small number when compared with spring migration for this species. The same is said for the two Ring-necked Ducks at LO 11/3 (RK). The expected rafts of Bufflehead were missed due to lack of proper conditions. Three Bufflehead were found at LO 11/9 (RK) and LOWS 11/19 (JSp).

The first Common Loons at HMNL were two birds 9/24 and the total number was 91 for the quarter. The highest number of Common Loons was 47 11/8. Single birds were found off-ridge BML 11/25 (DP) and LO 11/23 (EH). The weak cold front 11/8 that resulted in small total of waterfowl also put eleven Pied-billed Grebes down on LO (CH) and one Horned Grebe (DH).

The seven Great Egrets at LOBF 9/6 (JSp) was the high for this species. Single Great Egrets were found throughout Berks. One egret lingered at HCP 8/16 -11/2 (MW) although whether it was the same bird cannot be confirmed, of course. The lone immature Little Blue Heron at LRRP 8/11 to 8/30 (MTG, KG) was more likely to be the same bird. The late summer dispersal of Black-crowned Night Herons resulted in eleven at BMLSBL 8/27 (EB) and four at LOBF 9/6 (JSp). An uncommon immature Yellow-crowned Night Heron fished in the spillway at LO 8/13 (MW).

A change of roosting sites seemed to take place for Black Vultures recently BML 10/24 (JS). Due to their tendency to be destructive and the negative press in local newspapers, Black Vultures were encouraged to leave the Wernersville School and have, at the moment, moved on to the dam and beach at BML. Hundreds of Black Vultures now perch on beach buildings and furniture when not probing the beach for food. The vulture flocks at the dam breast are now comprised of both Black and Turkey Vultures.

The lack of significant cold fronts resulted in lower than usual raptor movement along the ridge at HMNL. The final numbers will be reported in volume one 2020. As of this quarter-end, these are high counts of some species: Osprey 36 9/13, Bald Eagle 30 10/4, Northern Harrier 6 9/15, Golden Eagle 12 11/8. Two Golden Eagles were tallied at the Route 183 Hawk Watch 11/1 (EB). The first Northern Goshawk passed HMNL 11/9. An adult Swainson's Hawk, a rare ridge migrant, made an even more rare appearance off-ridge at BML 11/29 (JS) where it was observed several minutes before it flew off.

The last documentation of Virginia Rail at KDRA was 8/11 (KG) where it first appeared 4/30 (KG). Despite the high rainfall this season, the continuing loss of suitable habitat proves to decrease shorebird presence in Berks. A new retention pond at HCP resulted in small shorebird numbers stopping there briefly until heavy rains covered the shorelines. These shorebirds were all observed at HCP: two Greater Yellowlegs 10/11 (MW), eight Lesser Yellowlegs 8/24 (MW), five Least Sandpipers 8/16 (MW), one Pectoral Sandpiper 8/16 (MW) and one Wilson's Snipe 9/30 (MW). The only Semipalmated Sandpiper was found at KDRA 8/29 (KG). An American Woodcock surprised some homeowners in Shoemakersville when it dropped in to their back yard 11/7 (SM).

A small rain storm resulted in Bonaparte Gulls being found on 11/15. Five Bonaparte Gulls were counted at both BML (DP) and LO (AC, ES). Ring-billed Gulls and American Herring Gulls commenced their winter roost at BML in early November when 80 Ring-billed Gulls arrived 11/1 (JSp).. High numbers were found at BML by DP on 11/20 800, 11/25 1600 and 11/26 850. 39 American Herring Gulls spent the night at BML 11/10 (RK). Lesser Black-backed Gulls are annual visitors to BML. Two were found at BML 11/25 (DP). Three uncommon Great Black-backed Gulls made their first visit to BML 11/26 (DP).

Caspian Terns make scattered showings at LO and BML. Two Caspian Terns appeared at LO 8/29 (MTG) while six flew around BML 9/3 (DP). Eurasian Collared-Doves have yet to be confirmed breeders in Shartlesville. A single dove was reported 8/3 (JH).

A Long-eared Owl's harassment by crows alerted a BT resident to the owl's presence in the woods behind her house. The Long-eared Owl arrived 11/18 and departed 11/28 (JS). A Northern Saw-whet Owl called from the kettle below Hemlock Heights shortly after the counter's morning arrival at HMNL 11/10 (MW).

Two western hummingbirds, both Rufous Hummingbirds, were banded in Berks. A first-year female arrived 10/14 at a home in ET and departed 11/30. The second hummingbird, also a young female, stayed for only two days in WYO 11/10 to 11/12 (SL).

A total of fifteen migrating Red-headed Woodpeckers were seen at HMNL. A recently active nesting pair at Allendale Road was consistently seen 8/19 to 11/23 (MTG, MW, SM). An immature Red-headed Woodpecker was at the nesting cavity 8/2 (MW). Yellow-bellied Sapsucker are common fall migrants—usually only one at a sighting. Three Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were observed 10/13 LOBF (JSp).

A single Merlin returned to BML, its winter residence, 10/27 (JS). It was joined by a female Merlin 11/12 (JS). BML has been a Merlin over-winter residence annually for several years. Fifty-six migrant Peregrine Falcons have been tallied to date HMNL with a high count of eleven 11/12.

The ridges have consistently been good places to spot flycatchers in fall migration. Sightings include: Olive-sided Flycatcher seven, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher three and Least Flycatcher five—all at HMNL. Vireos also follow the ridges and descend on HMNL in the early morning hours. White-eyed Vireo is rarely seen and one passed the lookout 11/3. Six Yellow-throated Vireos were seen as were 76 Blue-headed Vireos although the last one was documented 10/28. HMNL is a favorite site to find Philadelphia Vireos and this season, 21 were found in a four-week period 9/3 to 10/2. The most common vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, numbered 336.

Common Ravens continue to make their presence known off-ridge. One pair appears often along Route 183 in Bernville's commercial area. High counts in migration along the ridge were 17 11/20 and 13 11/21 HMNL. The most common swallow along the ridge is the Tree Swallow. High numbers at HMNL were: 9/14 623, 9/19 520 and 10/23 350. A total of 52 Bank Swallows are spotted at HMNL during the quarter with a high count of 18 9/7.

The Tufted Titmouse appears to be slowly recovering from its "crash" with single numbers being reported throughout Berks. On 11/23, six were spotted at HMNL. The first Red-breasted Nuthatch appeared 9/22 on the ridge HMNL. A single Red-breasted Nuthatch fed a home feeder in BT 10/6 (JS). Spring migration is the more common period for Marsh Wren to appear in KDRA reeds. A single Marsh Wren was heard and seen 10/12 (KG).

On 10/12, an overnight thrush migration ended in a woods of a BT resident. Competing for a spot at the water bath were: Swainson's Thrush, Veery, Gray-cheeked Thrush and Hermit Thrush. The number of birds was not reported. Snow Buntings appeared at HMNL 11/15-11/30. On 11/23, thirteen flew past with a number landing on the lookout rocks.

There was no large warbler fall-out reported this season along any of the Berks ridges although 9/16 resulted in the best counts for several species. High counts at HMNL reported were: Tennessee Warbler 4 9/16, Nashville Warbler 3 9/16, Cape May Warbler 43 9/23, Magnolia Warbler 17 9/16, Bay-breasted Warbler 20 9/16, Blackburnian Warbler 22 9/16 and Black-throated Green Warbler 64 9/16.

The first reported American Tree Sparrow came from Kempton 11/13 (HW). Fall migrating Fox Sparrows were seen in single numbers by many birders. Five found along the BT 11/26 (KG) was the highest number reported. A prized fall Lincoln's Sparrow found at the Acopian Center was the only report 9/19 (DS). A single White-crowned Sparrow found at BML 10/30 (JS) was the first report.

Scarlet Tanagers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks often are often reported in the same flocks at HMNL as warblers and vireos. High count of Scarlet Tanagers was 61 9/16 and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks 43. An unusual sighting, perhaps the first, of two Blue Grosbeaks, on 9/7 took the counters and visitors at HMNL by surprise.

The winter finch forecast predicted few if any migrants from the far north. This forecast has held true to-date. During the month 10/19 to 11/14, only 8 Purple Finch had flown past HMNL.

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