



# Berks Birds

## March – May 2025

*By Rudy Keller -  
Published by the  
Baird Ornithological Club*



*A Little Blue Heron in transitional plumage at Hopewell Lake in French Creek State Park, by Brian Lineaweaver. See page 3 for more information.*

Abbreviations: Blue Marsh L. (BML), E. J. Breneman Quarry (BQ), Hamburg Reservoir (HR), Hawk Mt. Sanctuary (HMS), Kaercher Cr. Park (KCP), Kernsville Dam & Recreation Area (KDRA), Kittatinny Ridge (KR), L. Ontelaunee (LO), SGL 106, Pine Swamp Rd. (PSR), School Rd. pond, Fleetwood (SR), Washington Rd. wetland, Leesport (WR).

Rainy weather in May ended the drought that had begun about a year before. The most dramatic weather-related event was a classic rain induced fallout 4/6 of many waterfowl and other species, most of which gathered at LO. Details are in the species accounts below.

Most **Snow Geese** left in February. The last large count was of 1600 in the Oley Valley 3/2 (RK). Eight **Greater White-fronted Geese** were in the Rt. 662 quarry in the Oley Valley 3/9 (RK). The last reported GWFG was one at Gotwals pond, Oley 4/16, 17 (LI,

DM, AS, PJW). Single **Cackling Geese**, six in all, were scoped out of Canada Goose flocks till 3/14. A free flying pair of **Mute Swans** had hatched two cygnets at a pond in Greenwich Twp. 5/7 (KG). One to four Mute Swans reported at other ponds and lakes will doubtless help maintain the feral population. Like Snow Geese, **Tundra Swans** left early. The last big count was of 200 flying over BML 3/1 (JT). Two at Morgantown L. 3/16 (FH) and 16 at BML 3/16 (BL) closed out the season.

Small numbers of **Blue-winged Teal** had begun to appear 3/15 (BL). The latest report this spring was of a pair at WR 5/21-25 (JS). **Northern Shovelers** are usually uncommon, but 85 were at LO during the rain induced fallout 4/6. Previous reports have documented declines of *Anas* species. This spring's low maximum numbers of four *Anas* species historically recorded in the hundreds during this season follow: 22 **Gadwall** at LO 3/15 (TU), 30 **American Black Ducks** at LO 4/6 (RK), 31 **American Wigeon** at LO 3/17 (LI, AZ), and 26 **Northern Pintail** at BQ 3/2 (RK). **Green-winged Teal** again bucked that trend. A count of 300 was made at LO after a strong warm front 3/16 (RK, LI). Several other counts in the 20's and 30's in March and April made it the most widespread *Anas* after Mallard.

The only reported **Canvasbacks** other than the wintering female at BQ last seen 3/6 were six at LO during the 4/6 fallout (AW). Migrants augmenting wintering birds added up to 16 Redheads at BQ 3/7. A few stayed till 3/19. The only common and widespread *Aythya* was **Ring-necked Duck**, and even that was less common than usual. A showy flock of 162 RNDU was at Hopewell L. 3/8 (HH) and 130 were at LO 3/16 (RK, LI). Scaup peaked during the 4/6 fallout, when 400 at LO were listed as **Greater/Lesser Scaup** due to poor visibility (RK).

The only reported scoter was a male **Surf Scoter** at LO 5/6 (RK). There were more chances than one to see **Long-tailed Ducks**. A warm front brought 12 to LO 3/16 (RK) and two to BML (EB) 3/17. The 4/6 fallout deposited 20 long-tails at BML (DM), 10-13, depending on observer, at LO (m.ob) and six at Hopewell L. (JK). Counts of **Bufflehead**, a classic fallout species, were of 50 at LO (RK), 52 at BML (JS) and 11 at Hopewell L. 4/6. Six **Common Goldeneyes** at LO 4/6 (JS) were the only ones reported all season.

A female **Hooded Merganser** leading 15 ducklings near Old Morlatton Village 5/16 (LI, JK) provided the year's first breeding confirmation of that species. A strong warm front brought 16 **Red-breasted Mergansers** to LO 3/16 (RK, LI), which had increased to 22 on 3/17 (RH). Forty were at LO during the 4/6 fallout (RK) and the season's last one was at LO 5/16 (AW). This merganser is often more common after most Common Mergansers have left. A modest count of 47 **Ruddy Ducks** was made at LO 4/6 (RK).

**Ruffed Grouse** remains an uncommon resident on the KR. Birders on the Appalachian Trail spotted one each near Bethel 4/16 (TK), near Hamburg 4/19 (KG) and near the Pinnacle 5/23 (TF). Birders pulling off I78 at Shartlesville to list **Eurasian Collared-Dove** found one to seven on various dates through the period. The usually uncommon **Black-billed Cuckoo** was well and widely reported. Singletons appeared on more than 10 checklists 5/1-25. A bird consistently heard and seen at the same spot at PSR for two weeks was likely on territory. Reports of small numbers of migrating **Common Nighthawks** spanned May. The two highest counts were of nine near Fleetwood 5/15 (AS) and 14 at KCP 5/25 (KG). A **Whip-poor-will** singing near Plowville 4/14 (JR) was the earliest reported this year. At SGL 110, Northkill Gap, the most accessible goatsucker breeding area, two to four were heard on evening walks starting 4/25.

The cattail marsh at KDRA remains the best place to find rails. One or two **Virginia Rails** were there 3/3 – 5/10 (m.ob.) and a **Sora** was there 5/11 (DM). Few **American Coots** were seen after the wintering birds left BQ about 4/15. A lingering bird was at Shartlesville pond 5/24 (CE).

Thirteen shorebird species were reported, mostly regular migrants and two breeding species. **Black-bellied Plovers** on nocturnal migration were heard at a home near LO 5/9 (AW). Just one was seen on the ground, a bird at SR 5/22 (RK). Also heard overhead were **Short-billed Dowitchers** near Pleasantville on the night of 5/20



(AS). Five SBDO were seen in the tall grass at WR 5/20 (JS) and seven on 5/31 (AW, MW). Up to nine **Dunlin** at SR 5/21-31 gave many birders the chance to see them in breeding plumage.

Many **Bonaparte's Gulls** rested on lakes and ponds during the rainy fallout 4/6. At LO around midday, 430 Bonaparte's Gulls skimmed the water like swallows or settled into two buoyant rafts. At BML 4/6, 85 Bonaparte's Gulls gathered around the beach (RH). Smaller numbers were seen in ponds and flooded fields 4/7 before continuing their migration. Four tern species were one-day wonders. Two **Caspian Terns** flew among the gulls at LO 4/6 (TU). On 5/9, another drizzly day, a **Black Tern** was at LO (m.ob.) and another at SR (RK, TU). A **Forster's Tern** was at KCP 5/28 DM). Five **Common Terns** visited the BML beach 5/9 (RH).

A warm front (temp. of 68°F) with a strong southerly wind brought 70 **Horned Grebes** to LO 3/16 (RK, LI). Twelve were at LO during the 4/6 fallout (RK). The only reported **Red-throated Loon** was at BML 5/5, 6 (BL, AP, AS). The 4/6 fallout list included 23 **Common Loons** at LO (RK). Ten COLO were at BML 4/10 (BL, AP). **Double-crested Cormorants** were most numerous during the 4/6 fallout. At LO, 700 formed dark rafts on the lake or draped themselves over lakeside trees like wet Halloween bats. A few cormorant counts in the low hundreds were made at LO later in April.

A **Glossy Ibis** seen in flight and then perched in a tree near Leesport 5/9 (TU) may well have been the bird seen at nearby WR 5/10 (PJW). Three Glossy Ibises flew over a site near Bernville 5/15 (KH). An **American Bittern** was photographed at WR 4/6 (m.ob.) and one was at KDRA 4/7 (KG).



As many as five **Black-crowned Night-Herons** could be seen fishing at the base of the LO spillway starting 5/13. One was at BML 5/20 (AB). **Little Blue Herons** are less likely to appear in spring than in summer. Two well photographed birds still in transition to adult plumage visited Hopewell L. One was seen 5/3, 4 & 6 (TU, m.ob.) and two were there 5/4 (JK). *(See Photo on Page 1)*

More **Great Egrets** were seen this spring than usual. Six migrated over HMS 5/4 (GB, ES). Single birds were seen at HR 4/29 (AW), Brown's Mill Rd. 5/5 (AS) and LO 5/14 (IT).

A subadult **Mississippi Kite** soared over HR 5/25 (KD). Single **Merlins** were reported at each of about 10 places 3/6 – 5/6. Three were along Hawk Mt. Rd. 5/25 (MA, LH). Reading's **Peregrine Falcon** pair was often seen near the downtown building on which they nest. Single

*A Black-crowned Night Heron Below the spillway at Lake Ontelaunee,  
Photo by Brian Lineaweaver*



Peregrines, probably migrants, were reported at six other places 3/30 – 5/10.

Three uncommon late migrating flycatchers were seen. An **Olive-sided Flycatcher** was at PSR 5/17 (DA), one at Big Woods Trail 5/24 (m.ob.), and one at LO 5/25 (DK). A **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** was at Keim Rd., District Twp. 5/19 (RK) and another near the Pinnacle 5/23 (TF). Two **Alder Flycatchers** were identified by voice, one at LO 5/25 (DK) and the other near Pleasantville 5/25 (AS). There were no reports of **Bank Swallows** at their only known nesting colony at Haines & Kibblehouse quarry near Birdsboro. Fast growing trees have blocked most of the view into the quarry from the public road. Just one or two Bank Swallows were reported at each of several other places, and the spring high count was of only six at LO 5/23 (AS).

Single **Red-breasted Nuthatches** on their way north stopped at 10 places 3/1 – 5/14, sometimes refueling at feeders for a few days. A few **Gray-cheeked Thrushes** were seen in the usual late May time frame. One was at French Creek SP 5/18 (KR), one was at SGL 110, Northkill Gap 5/24 (MWh) and 5/26 (KH), and one at Green Hills Preserve 5/27 (JR). As many as six **American Pipits** were seen at much visited SR on many dates during the long span of 3/25 – 5/10. The largest reported pipit flock was of 40 birds at Kutztown 4/13 (TU).

A totally unexpected **Evening Grosbeak** that visited a feeder in Hamburg delighted the host (MW) and a few friends who got there in time to see it. Following a few in March, there was a small but widespread surge of northbound **Purple Finches**, up to 10 birds per flock, in April. Two were seen in May. **Pine Siskins** were few and mostly moved through in March, including 10 near Wernersville 3/2 (BL). Four siskins were at Angelica Park 5/2 (JR) and two at Angora Fruit Farm 5/3 (DBr).

The largest spring count of the once abundant **American Tree Sparrow** was of 11 birds at BML 3/1 (JT). One to three birds per checklist were the norm at the 10 other places reporting them till 4/17. An exceptionally large flock of 20 **Vesper Sparrows** was counted in a field with **Horned Larks** along Ridge Rd. north of LO 4/5 (AW). The other three VESP reports were of single birds probably on breeding



*The Evening Grosbeak at Matt Wlasniewski's feeder in Hamburg,  
Photo by Brian Lineaweaver*



territories at BML 4/3 (JS) and 4/15 (BL), and near Shoemakersville 5/23 (KG). Finding **Lincoln's Sparrows** in May is harder than it is in fall. Three were reported, one at Big Woods Trail 5/4 (BR), one in Bern Twp. 5/10 (ZS), and one at LO 5/6 (DBr).



*A Yellow-breasted Chat at Hopewell-Big Woods Trail  
Photo By Brian Lineaweaver*

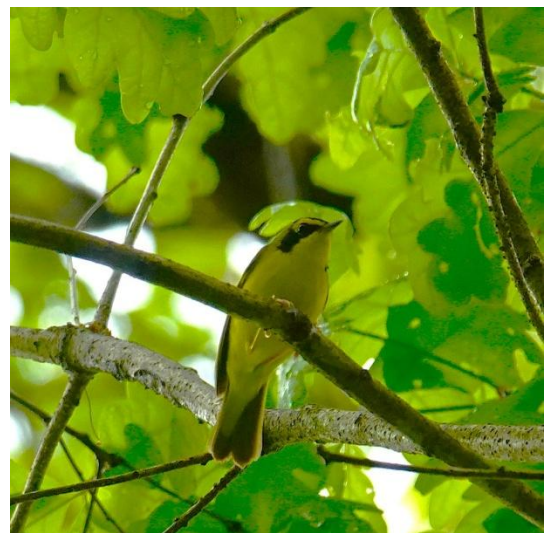
Five **Yellow-breasted Chats** were found at Big Woods Trail, which holds the county's largest breeding population, 5/24. A singing male was at Reading Airport 5/20, 26 (JS). A chat at LO 5/29 (DBr) and one near Plowville 5/29 (JR) were not on known breeding territories.

Grass hayfields and pastures have greatly declined in acreage, but in May, **Bobolinks** and **Eastern Meadowlarks** still sing in the largest of those that are left. May's highest count of 15 Bobolinks was made at Grist Mill Rd., Douglass Twp. 5/5 (RK). No more than five Eastern Meadowlarks were found in any of the fields they prefer, notably those along Monument Rd, Hamburg. Birders found **Rusty Blackbirds** at 14 wetlands on several dates from 3/6 – 4/27. The largest flocks were of 11 at KDRA 3/27 (KG) and 10 at WR 4/10 (JS, et al.)

Active birders working on their warbler lists found 33 species this spring. Most of the nonbreeding species were reported in low numbers. A **rare Golden-winged Warbler** was a prize at PSR 5/10 (AP, AS, AW, MW).

The only reported **Kentucky Warbler** was the male that has returned for years to Sixpenny Cr., French Creek SP.

A **Cerulean Warbler** had returned to a breeding territory at HMS 5/19 (DB). Another was seen and heard at nearby PSR 5/29 (JT). The other warbler with a long history of overshooting its southern breeding range is **Yellow-throated Warbler**. This one probably breeds, but that is very difficult to confirm for a high canopy species. A returning male was seen and heard at Douglassville 4/16 – 5/24, sometimes counter singing with another (LI, m.ob.). Two were at Hay Creek 5/7, 25 (AE, JK). One was at Grings Mill 5/10 (DT) and another near the Reading Airport 5/20, 25 (JS). All were associated with sycamore trees in riparian habitat.



*The male Kentucky Warbler at Six-penny  
in French Creek State Park. Photo by  
Brian Lineaweaver*



Keen birders found one or two **Canada Warblers** at each of eight places 5/10-26, most of them 5/20-26. An early **Wilson's Warbler** was photographed at Kutztown 5/1, 2 (TU, ZS). Four others were seen, a good haul of this uncommon bird. One was at Mt. Penn 5/25 (RH), one at HMS 5/25 (RK), one at Ruth Zimmerman Natural Area 5/26 (PJW), and one at Bernhart's Dam 5/26 (RH).

Male **Prothonotary Warblers** that overshoot the breeding range are found almost every spring, usually near or along the Schuylkill R. in southern Berks. One was at Daniel Boone Homestead 5/4 (KF). One sang near Gibraltar 5/8-11 (RH, JK, et al.). One sang near Old Morlatton Village 5/16-20 (JK< et al.). Two **Mourning Warblers** were found, one at HR 5/23 (TF) and the other at PSR 5/26 (AC, AM-G).



*A male Prothonotary Warbler at a wooded swamp along the Schuylkill River. Photos by Jason Kline*

**Blue Grosbeaks**, first reported 5/6, had been seen at about a dozen places by the end of May, sometimes at known breeding sites. The first **Dickcissel** was reported at Rodale Experimental Farm, the longstanding breeding site, 5/26 (AS), with many reports from there to follow.

OBSERVERS: Rudy Keller, [rckeller544@gmail.com](mailto:rckeller544@gmail.com), Dan Altif, Michael Aronson, David Barber, Ed Barrell, April Bonavita, Dan Brennan, Grace Brouillard, Adam Carter, Liz Cates, Kevin Dougherty, C. Elphick, Anne Esbenshade, Tom Filip, Kellee Fries, Kerry Grim, Frank Haas, Karen Hardy, Holly Hartshorne, Lane Hochschild, Russ Hoffman, Linda Ingram, Ted Keen, Jason Kline, Daryl Klopp, Brian Lineaweaver, Adam Magill-Goodskey, David McAuliffe, Andy Price, Brent Richardson, Ken Rieker, John Ruggles, Peter Saenger, Emily Sandly, Aaron Shirk, Zachary Spatz, Jo Spilde, Jaime Thomas, Dan Trifaro, Todd Underwood, Matt White, Peter & Jane Wolfe, Andy Wlasniewski, Matt Wlasniewski, Art Zdancewic.