



# The Distelfink

Newsletter of the

## Baird Ornithological Club Fall 2022

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### President’s Message by Lucy Cairns

**What Are We Doing Here?** The core duty of the BOC president is to lead club members in fulfilling the mission of our organization. What, exactly, is that mission? What have we come together to try

to achieve? Per our by-laws, under Article II, "Purpose: The purpose of the club is to study birds and nature and through that study acquaint others with birds and the environment; and to help preserve wildlife and promote conservation and retention of natural areas." As your president, I have been contemplating our activities over the past year to evaluate how well we have been doing in achieving our purpose. Here are my conclusions:

**"... to study birds and nature ..."** I would give club members and club leaders high marks for their pursuit of this goal over the past year. Club leaders organized a varied schedule of educational Friday presentations and guided members on a series of field trips which provided opportunities to learn from Berks' best birders in an informal, small-group environment. A similarly informative and stimulating schedule of Friday programs and field trips has been put together by your hard-working Board of Directors for the coming year.

Take particular note of *a new series of outings* being offered this fall migration season at the State Hill Road Boat Launch. On one Wednesday in each of the months of September, October, and November you can join Russ Hoffman and/or other experienced hawk-watchers at one of Berks' best spots for seeing migrating raptors. Kudos to Russ for creating these events! At another great watch site, the Pagoda, Bill Uhrich will once again be hosting a series of hawk watch events on Saturdays. Russ, a newly-elected BOC Director, also organized this year's Tuesday walks and has accepted the role of Field Trip Coordinator. \*Thank you, Russ! \*

**"... and through that study acquaint others ..."** I doubt that there is any Baird member who does not study birds on their own, and those who take advantage of club programs and field trips are building on that foundation. The more you know, the more effective you become at acquainting others with the fascinating world of birding and with the urgent need to take individual and collective action to slow the ongoing human-caused degradation of the natural environment. The BOC's recent efforts to "acquaint others" include:

- Welcoming nonmembers to attend all our trips and programs at no charge
- Responding to requests from outside groups to provide leaders for community bird walks. This past year, BOC members shared their expertise in this way for the following events:
  - Nolde Forest EEC Birding with Baird
  - Celebrating Birds in Berks through Science and Art (Penn State Berks and Berks Nature)
  - Berks Birds event for teens (Dr. Bryan Wang and VOiCEup Berks)
  - Spring bird walk for Exeter Township
  - Last-minute substitute for a walk at The Nature Place when the scheduled leader canceled
- Participating in community events such as Earth Day celebrations
- Member Bill Uhrich's reporting in the Reading Eagle on notable bird-related happenings
- Member Russ Hoffman's public exhibitions of his extensive and stunning gallery of photographic bird portraits
- Agreeing to update the bird checklist for Nolde Forest EEC

**"... help preserve wildlife and promote conservation ..."** Birds are, of course, a form of wildlife, and conservation efforts are key to the protection of birds, so why is this additional wording included as part of the club's statement of purpose? I believe that it is an indication that the mission of the Baird club extends beyond any narrow focus on the study and protection of bird life. Many BOC members are already involved in conservation activities focused on non-avian wildlife, and lend their energy to land management projects and to the preservation of natural areas. But no such activities

are currently sponsored or specifically supported by the club. ***I therefore invite any member interested in leading the development of new conservation initiatives to be sponsored by the BOC to bring their ideas to any Officer or Director of the BOC for consideration.***

**Growing the Flock** - Membership numbers have been increasing – another measure of BOC's success in achieving its purpose. Due in part to our healthy membership roster, your Board has once again been able to keep dues steady at \$15 for the 2022-2023 year. No inflation at the BOC! However, when we have a little more in the bank to pay speaker fees and travel expenses, the job of the Board in attracting top-notch speakers for our meetings and annual banquet becomes distinctly easier. Some members choose to send an additional contribution with their dues – a generous gesture that is greatly appreciated. To encourage more members to consider contributing a little more to our coffers, if they are able, your Board has created a new membership category. On this year's membership form you will see a line for 'Sustaining Member' at a rate of \$30 per year. Please consider supporting your club by joining at this higher level. *Thank you.*

## **Reinvigorating the Route 183 Hawk Watch - Mike Slater**

For many years Bob and Anne MacClay of Schuylkill County watched and counted raptors on the Kittatinny Ridge where Route 183 crosses over the mountain (also where the Appalachian Trail crosses the highway). My wife Jan and I, along with many other BOC members, used to bring our lawn chairs and watch beside the MacClays at a place where you can just walk to the "lookout." It is in a field and doesn't have quite the scenic views as some other hawk watch sites, but many good birds come by and give observers nice looks!

Dr. Laurie Goodrich at Hawk Mountain has contacted several of us who used to spend time there about reinvigorating the raptor migration counting at the Rte. 183 site and she applied for a grant to get a paid hawk counter there for several days a week.

Dr. Goodrich wrote:

"The goal is to eventually person the lookout with volunteers or paid person sept through thanksgiving and to allow visitors, so space to park. We won't have funding for hiring help until next fall I suspect...but if I know of anyone to be hired, it could be by October.

So, for this year, I was wondering if there were any Baird members that might want to hang out and collect data at the 183 old lookout site in September and October just to hone in on where a watch should occur and what trees should be trimmed etc. I am working with PGC to do some management there in near future to allow the watch and improve access. I can let you know when I meet up with the guy later this month. I can do a training or Rudy could on forms from HMANA etc."

If you are interested in helping out with this effort please email me, Mike Slater at paplanting@gmail.com, to let us know of your interest and I will put together a contact list for getting out more organizing info soon!

## **BOC In-person Meeting Covid Guidelines for Fall 2022**

As of Aug. 23, Berks County is rated by the CDC as "low" community risk, based mainly on the risks for overburdening our healthcare system and for severe disease. This Community Risk rating does not mean that the risk of contracting COVID is low at this time in Berks. Current CDC guidance regarding masking is: "At all levels, people can wear a mask based on personal preference, informed by personal level of risk. People with symptoms, a positive test, or exposure to someone with COVID-19 should wear a mask." Individuals would do well to base their decisions on the risk to the most vulnerable person they have close contact with."

## Winter birding in Berkshire, UK - Robert Godden, Berkshire

### Ornithological Club - *A report from our sister bird club in the UK*

All around the northern hemisphere the cycle of the seasons drives bird migration which creates the variety and unpredictability that we birdwatchers enjoy. However, the species encountered either side of the Atlantic are quite different. Our winter birds are characterised by increased numbers of various species of ducks, finches, thrushes, birds of prey and a few wader [shorebird] species – these join the resident species once the summer migrants have headed south. The following paragraphs describe the typical wintering birds of Berkshire, UK.

Most of our waterbodies are man-made, and include many flooded gravel pits. In winter, these attract large numbers of: Wigeon and Shoveler which don't normally breed in the county; Teal and Pochard which are rare breeders; and Tufted Duck, Gadwall and Mallard which are common breeders. Occurring in smaller numbers within these flocks could be Pintail, Goosander [Common Merganser], Goldeneye and Smew; in recent years the last two species have been arriving in much reduced numbers, possibly due to an increased tendency for ice-free conditions further north closer to their breeding grounds. Birders regularly check these flocks in the hope of finding something much rarer, perhaps one of the sea duck species such as Scaup or Long-tailed Duck [Oldsquaw] or a rare American vagrant such as Ring-necked Duck or Blue-winged Teal. Other aquatic birds that attract much interest are the gulls which roost in large flocks on the gravel pits, sometimes concealing rarer species such as Glaucous and Iceland Gulls. Rare species of grebe (Red-necked, Slavonian [Horned] and Black-necked [Eared]), any of the divers [loons] and wild geese and swans also turn up from time to time at these locations.

The UK sees a large influx of waders in the winter arriving from their northern breeding grounds but the majority of these occur as large flocks around the coast. For inland counties such as Berkshire, this phenomenon is restricted to a handful of species: Lapwing, Golden Plover, Snipe and, less obviously, Woodcock. Lapwing and Golden Plover form large flocks, sometimes of several hundred birds, on arable land and in open areas along the river valleys; while Snipe frequent marshy areas mostly hidden by their cryptic plumage and the tall vegetation and where the true numbers present may not be evident unless they are disturbed or affected by adverse weather conditions. Woodcock arrives in the country in autumn in large numbers but are rarely seen – they roost by day in woodland but may be observed at some traditional sites where in the last rays of daylight they fly rapidly from their woodland to a nearby marsh or wet field to feed.

Berkshire is a relatively flat county only rising to 300m in parts of the west. In winter, these upland areas (for some reason referred to as “downs”!) can attract a handful of birds of prey such as Merlin, Hen [Northern] Harrier and Short-eared Owl which prey upon rodents and smaller farmland birds like Linnet, Meadow Pipit and Skylark. Some years, a Great Grey [Northern] Shrike turns up and may set up a winter territory for several weeks. Two species of thrush, the Redwing and the Fieldfare arrive in late autumn in large flocks. Fieldfare tend to occur in more open locations, often on higher ground. Redwing also form large flocks in fields and paddocks, but also woodland and even gardens.

A few finch species visit in the winter months, typically Brambling, Lesser Redpoll and Siskin. Numbers vary greatly from year to year, but they can occur in large flocks and sometimes visit gardens. Another family of small birds is the warblers – most of these species are summer visitors but over the last 40 or 50 years, Chiffchaff and Blackcap have been seen more frequently in winter. Scientists have worked out that wintering and summering Blackcap form two separate populations – our wintering birds depart to spend the summer in Germany and are replaced here by birds that have wintered in Africa.

A species that is keenly anticipated by birdwatchers is the Bohemian Waxwing. This is an irruptive species that reaches Britain occasionally, but sometimes in large numbers, when its food supply in

Scandinavia is scarce. They make landfall in the country further north and gradually make their way south as they exhaust their favourite food – berries. When they eventually reach us, they can often be found in small flocks in suburban settings, often attracted to berry-laden trees in gardens or supermarket car parks, and with their extravagant looks they attract the attention of birders and the general public alike. It's been a few years since the last good Waxwing year, so maybe we'll be lucky next winter!

Some highlights of the past winter:

Cattle Egret – one report, a species that is becoming more frequent;

Glossy Ibis – one for a week, another species that is becoming more frequent;

Bittern – one bird at a traditional site, but annual trend is downhill;

**White-fronted Goose** – two singletons and a flock of 18 for a fortnight;

**Pink-footed Goose** – one bird spending winter with Greylag Goose flock;



**(White-fronted and Pink-footed Goose - both photos © Andy Tomczynski) BOC-UK**

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker – two sightings of this rapidly declining species;

Siberian Chiffchaff – up to 4 of this eastern Chiffchaff race at a sewage treatment works;

Hawfinch – three scattered reports of this elusive species.

## Birds Per Unit of Effort: The Christmas Bird Count - Lucy Cairns

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is a winter bird census initiated by Frank Chapman that has been carried out every year since 1900 under the auspices of National Audubon Society. The data generated by this citizen science project have revealed trends in bird numbers and geographic distribution invaluable to conservation efforts, scientific research, and public policy decisions. Participation in the CBC is free and open to birders of all skill levels – in fact, it is a great opportunity for beginners to hone their ID skills and learn about good spots to find birds! To become a volunteer, it is necessary to sign up with the coordinator (compiler) of your chosen ‘CBC Circle.’ You will find a list of compilers for our nearby circles elsewhere in this newsletter.

The protocol for carrying out this census involves teams of volunteers making a dawn-to-dusk effort to find and identify every bird within circular areas 15 miles in diameter (CBC Circles). Last year, reports were received from over 2,500 active circles. This daylight field count is supplemented by nocturnal birding, or ‘owling,’ and, in recent years, by counts carried out at backyard bird feeders by additional volunteers. In Berks County, the CBC Reading circle is entirely contained within the county borders, and portions of the Hamburg, Bernville, Lehigh Valley and Elverson circles extend into Berks. An interactive online map of all active circles in the most recently completed CBC (the 122<sup>nd</sup>) can be found by searching for ‘122<sup>nd</sup> Christmas Bird Count map of active circles.’ The active circle map for this year’s count, the 123<sup>rd</sup>, will become available in the autumn and our 5 local circles will be included. Comprehensive information for those interested in the CBC is available at Audubon.org (search for ‘Christmas Bird Count’ on the home page).

When I first signed up for the CBC, in 2019, I assumed that the greatest challenge would be the day-long search for birds in whatever weather winter decided to throw at us on our count day. Count day for the Reading circle is always the first Sunday in the count period, which runs from December 14 through January 5. No deviation from this schedule is tolerated except in the most hazardous of weather conditions. In December 2019, count day began with freezing temperatures and an unrelenting 30-mph wind. As the day went on the temperature moderated a bit, but the wind did not. It was a long day, but the camaraderie of my team kept me warm and focused.

As strenuous as the field counting was that day, I soon discovered that my role as the ‘compiler’ of the Reading circle brought an even greater challenge: reporting the *effort* expended by our 15 teams. The compiler’s responsibilities include ensuring that all participants are aware of CBC protocols, fielding teams to cover the entire 275 or so square miles of the circle, and collecting, compiling, and reporting the data to Audubon. The data is then analyzed as number of birds per unit of effort. Analyzing the data in this fashion is what allows for meaningful comparison of bird numbers from year to year, since the number of birds found will tend to vary with the number of observers in the field, the time spent counting, and the distance traveled while counting-- along with other factors. Another key to meaningful trend detection is consistency in the way counts are performed year-upon-year. CBC teams strive to follow the same routes, checking the same locations at the same time of day year after year.

To report the ‘effort’ data required by Audubon, the compiler counts on the leader of each team in the field to report much more than the bird tally. Leaders must document their team’s start and stop times (including lunch or other breaks) and the number of field observers. If a team splits into more than one party, the total number of parties must be noted, since Audubon asks for the maximum and minimum number of parties in the field. He or she must also record the number of hours spent in the field and the miles traveled broken down by

mode of transportation: hours by foot vs hours by car vs hours by golf cart (yes, golf cart is an option, as is wheelchair), etc. and miles by foot vs miles by car vs miles by golf cart, etc.

In the three years that I have served as compiler for the Reading CBC, I have yet to receive all of the effort information I need from every team leader in the initial reporting. Even some folks who have participated in the CBC for years can overlook portions of this vital documentation. Eventually, after some emailing and phoning, I have obtained what is needed for our report. Perhaps the difficulty is related to the novelty of the CBC's reporting requirements, since most birding activities do not involve collection of such effort data. It may also be due to the distraction that keeping track of this data demands from the finding and tallying of birds. Everyone who volunteers for the CBC wants to perform as complete a count as possible, as they should, but without reliable and complete effort data for the report, our tally of birds cannot be meaningfully analyzed.

Preparation for the 123<sup>rd</sup> CBC will begin in October or November, with compilers touching base with team leaders and team leaders confirming the volunteers on their teams. The Reading circle is divided into 15 geographic sectors, each counted by a separate team. The Reading CBC will take place on Sunday, December 18. I look forward to working with our experienced leaders and participants, and I strongly encourage anyone with an interest in becoming a volunteer and spending a day with a team of top-notch birders to contact me or one of the other compilers on the list included in this newsletter. It is a unique opportunity to up your birding game, regardless of your present level of experience. If spending the day in the field is not a possibility, consider registering as a feeder-watcher. Those who count at feeders also contribute vital data, and have complete flexibility to count when it is convenient on count day. Do it for the birds!

## BOC Meetings/Programs Fall 2022 – Spring 2023

*For our 2022-2023 meetings at Nolde Forest EEC, 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 9, 7:30 pm *in person* at Nolde Forest Environmental Ed. Center  
Colorado Grouse Tour, and then some! - Sheila Martin, BOC Vice-president**

Five species of grouse inhabit the high chaparral, northern valleys & prairies of the US. All have spectacular mating displays, yet are exceedingly difficult to find away from their display grounds. Sheila traveled to observe these thrilling but elusive birds on their leks, plus scored two even more secretive winged denizens of the high-country West. She may even include a few surprises from onward travels this summer! This inaugural meeting of the 2022-23 season will include a social. Bring snacks to share. Drinks will be provided. Please minimize use of throw-away plastic.

**October 14, 7:30 pm *in person* at Nolde Forest Environmental Ed. Center  
“Raptors in Migration – Tips on Identification” - Vince Smith, Valley Forge Audubon Society president**

Just in time for hawk migration, Vince will be teaching the basics of raptor identification. This presentation will discuss some of the tricks you can use to improve your hawk, eagle, and vulture ID skills. Some topics covered include how to tell vultures from eagles and how to tell the difference between a *buteo*, *accipiter*, and *falcon*.

**November 11, 7:30 pm *in person* at Nolde Forest Environmental Ed. Center**

**“Hummingbirds I have Met” - Mike Slater, BOC Member**

From far southern South America home of the Giant Hummingbird and the Green-backed Fire-crown in Chile; up the Andes to Ecuador and north through central America for tropical beauties that may be shy or outgoing and into Berks County where Ruby-throats rule in the summer and Rufous Hummingbirds occasionally visit in the fall; Mike will share some of his most memorable hummingbird pictures and experiences with us.

**December 9, 7:30 pm Zoom only\***

**“Carolina and Black-capped Chickadees – the Contact Zone” - Dr. Robert Curry, Villanova**

**University** - Dr. Curry is returning to present new findings in the Black-capped and Carolina Chickadee contact zone where the species hybridize. This long-running study now focuses on rapid northward movement of the hybrids. Collaborative work with the Lovette Lab at Cornell has identified a strong signal linking the hybrid-zone movement with climate change. New information from graduate student research focuses on changes in the Nolde Forest population.

**January 13, 7:30 pm Zoom only\***

**“Sparrows Simplified: Making Sense of the Little Brown Jobs” - Michael Moore, Delaware**

**Ornithological Society president** Many birders struggle with identifying sparrows, referring to them as LBJ's (little brown jobs) or sparrow sp. This talk will help you tackle this difficult group. It will discuss and then attempt to blend the two main approaches to identification, the Peterson System and the Cape May School, to lead you to sparrow identification confidence. Each of the 16 species of regularly occurring sparrows in this area will be compared with some discussion of finding and identifying rarities.

**February 10, 7:30 pm Zoom only\***

**“Do Female Birds Sing? “ - Lauryn Benedict, University of Northern Colorado**

They certainly do! Female bird song is more common and widespread than is generally appreciated. This presentation offers an overview of the diversity of female songs, including a few used in spectacular partner duets. Backyard birders are encouraged to advance a growing body of knowledge by listening to singing females.

**March 10, 7:30 pm *in person* at Nolde Forest Environmental Ed. Center**

**Migration Behavior of Snowy Owls and Broad-winged Hawks - Rebecca McCabe, Hawk**

**Mountain Sanctuary** - Learn about the nonbreeding period of two iconic raptors, the Snowy Owl and Broad-winged Hawk. Discover how Snowy Owls move across human dominated landscapes in winter and the threats Broad-winged Hawks face as they migrate south each autumn. Using the latest tracking technology, Rebecca will share a glimpse into the movements and habitat use of tracked individuals from Project SNOWstorm and The Broad-winged Hawk Project.

**April 14, 7:30 pm *in person* at Nolde Forest Environmental Ed. Center**

**“Echoes of the Past” - Bill Uhrich, BOC member**

We all have seen photos of our local conservation heroes Rosalie Edge and Maurice Broun of Hawk Mt. Sanctuary, but their voices have been lost to time until now. Thanks to Jack Holcomb, we have digital copies from old tape recordings of Rosalie and Maurice. Bill Uhrich will play snippets of the Edge interview along with parts of the interview Michael Harwood did with Maurice while researching his classic 1973 book, *The View From Hawk Mountain*. We'll also be treated to film Maurice shot in the 1950s and 1960s of non-raptor species at Hawk Mountain, including views of hundreds of irrupting Evening Grosbeaks, a sight we may never witness again in our lifetimes.

**May 12 Banquet at the Berkshire Country Club**

**(*Save the date. Details will be in the Spring newsletter*)**

*\*Zoom Links will be emailed to all members a few days before each meeting. If you don't receive it by the day before the meeting and you would like to join in, please contact Mike Slater at [paplantings@gmail.com](mailto:paplantings@gmail.com)*



## **BOC Field Trips/Bird Walks - Fall 2022 – Spring/Summer 2023\*\***

(Including our fall Tuesday Bird Walks (2nd & 4th Tuesdays)

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

### **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/>

### **August 30 (Tuesday) Morlatton Village SRT 4:00pm**

Nighthawk Migration Watch along the Schuylkill River

Join BOC members for a late day walk on Tue. Aug 30, to kick off the fall season. Meet at the parking lot for Morlatton Village Schuylkill River Trail trailhead near Douglasville. We will walk the Schuylkill River Trail and then hang out at the bridge over the river until near dusk. Target bird is migrating Common Nighthawk. Some BOC members did this last year at this time and had a good time.

Directions: Rt. 422 east to traffic light just past Douglasville. 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, [russhoff@yahoo.com](mailto:russhoff@yahoo.com)

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

### **September 13 (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 McKnights 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, [russhoff@yahoo.com](mailto:russhoff@yahoo.com)

**Meeting Location: Angora Fruit Farm, Berks County Parks & Recreation, Angora Rd, Reading, PA 19606 40.3624, -75.8839**

### **September 14 (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, [russhoff@yahoo.com](mailto:russhoff@yahoo.com)

**Meeting Location: 585 Brownsville Rd, Sinking Spring, PA 19608**

### **September 17 (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 (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**

### **October 1 (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 11 (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: Mike Slater

[paplantings@gmail.com](mailto:paplantings@gmail.com) Meeting Location at the big parking lot for the:  
**John Bartram Trail, Hamburg, PA 19526, 40.5624, -75.9947**

**October 12 (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,

[russhoff@yahoo.com](mailto:russhoff@yahoo.com) Meeting Location: Same as September 14.

**October 15 (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 25 (Tuesday) 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. Coordinator: Dale Beitzel 610-713-4330, [callpj07@verizon.net](mailto:callpj07@verizon.net)

Meeting Location: at the west end of the dam on Rt. 73 between Rts. 61 and 222. (Lake Shore Dr, Shoemakersville, PA 19555, 40.4468, -75.9325)

**October 29 (Saturday) Middle Creek Museum and Birdwalk 10:00 am**

We will take a trip back through time with a visit to the Conservation History Museum at the Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area's Visitors Center. We will learn about the history of the Pennsylvania Game Commission and how conservation efforts have evolved since the commission's founding in 1895. Meet in the parking lot at the Center to tour the museum. Participants can afterwards bird around Middle Creek. Bill Uhrich, 610-698-1575.

Meeting Location: 100 Museum Rd, Stevens, PA 17578

**November 6 (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. Coordinators: Linda Ingram 610-621-7473, Peter & Jane Wolfe. Meeting Location: 165 Center Road, Douglassville PA 19518

**November 9 (Wednesday) State Hill Hawk Watch 9:00 am – 4:00 pm**

Bald Eagles, buteos and other late migrants. Stay for a short time or all day. Bring a folding chair, lunch and non-alcoholic beverage. Experienced hawkwatchers will help you identify birds. Meet at the State Hill Boat Launch, Blue Marsh L., 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, [russhoff@yahoo.com](mailto:russhoff@yahoo.com)

Meeting Location: Same as September 14

**November 19 (Saturday) Mount Penn Pagoda Hawk Watch 9:00am – 2:00pm**

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 18 (Sunday) - Reading Christmas Bird Count**

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

**December 23 (Friday) - Elverson Christmas Bird Count**

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

**December 30 (Friday) - Hamburg Christmas Bird Count**

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

**January 1, 2023 (Sunday) New Year's Weekend - Berks Drive Loop 8:00am**

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 2, 2023 (Monday) - Bernville Christmas Bird Count**

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

**February 19 (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 **Meeting location: 1049 Reedy Road, Sinking Spring PA 19608 (Park at the Evans Hill RD end of the lot)**

**March 25 (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 26 (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 8 (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 23 (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, Linda Ingram 610-621-7473 **Meeting loc.: Union Meadows East parking lot, 100 Campbell Ford Road, Douglassville PA 19518,**

**April 29 (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, [russhoff@yahoo.com](mailto:russhoff@yahoo.com)

**Meeting Location: Old 82 & Paring Area, 2000 Hay Creek Rd, Birdsboro, PA 19508**

**April 29 (Saturday) Birds, 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 6, (Saturday) Nolde Forest Spring Walk 8:00am**

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 7 (Sunday) State Game Lands 106, Pine Swamp Rd. 7:00 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, [russhoff@yahoo.com](mailto:russhoff@yahoo.com)

**Meeting Location:** Pine Swamp RD, Kempton PA, 19529, 40.626208, -75.952045

**May 13 (Saturday) Hopewell Village Nat. Historic Site-Spring Migrants & Breeding Birds 7am**

Once an annual BOC venue, this has long been absent from our walk schedule. Eastern Towhees are reliable. Coordinator: Sheila Martin 610-858-6005 **Disregard the published address of 2 Mark Bird Lane; the NHS gate is still closed at 7:00 a.m. From obvious crossroad of Park Rd (Rte. 345), Clemente Brooke Dr & Hopewell Rd, continue south on Park Rd. Cross a bridge, then enter a brief dense wood. At modest residential-looking twin mailboxes Nos. 2 & 4, turn right onto a gravel driveway. Make several tight turns to the Park's handicap parking lot; limited to ~ 12 spaces.**

**May 20 (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 19606

**June 3 (Saturday) Hopewell Big Woods Trail 7:00 am**

Breeding birds of grassland and edge habitats. A wide trail meanders through open fields bordered by woodland. Reliable site for Yellow-breasted Chat and Blue Grosbeak. Meet at trail parking lot on Center Rd. adjacent to Union Twp. maintenance facility. Coordinators: Rudy Keller 610-845-7310, Sheila Martin 610-858-6005

**Meeting Location:** 165 Center Road, Douglassville PA 19518

**June 10 (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 19540

**June 17 (Saturday) Kernsville Dragonflies & Damselflies 10:00am (with Mengel Natural History Society)** - Directions: Rte. 61 north, right on Jetson Dr. (across from Cabela's), right on Industrial Dr., left on Kernsville Dam Rd. Coordinators: Mike Slater [paplantings@gmail.com](mailto:paplantings@gmail.com), Karl Gardner 610-987-3281

**Meeting Location at the big parking Lot:** John Bartram Trail, Hamburg, PA 19526, 40.562424, -75.994708

**June 24 (Saturday) Nolde Forest EEC Moth Night 8:30 pm (with Mengel Natural History Society)** - The leaders will hang sheets with UV lights and bait trees with rotten fruit/beer to bring in the night insects 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 19607

## **July 15 (Saturday) Wildflowers and Pollinators at Union Meadows West 10:00 am (with Mengel Natural History Society)**

A meandering path through this former ball field converted to a pollinator meadow provides good access for observing a variety of 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, Linda Ingram (610-621-7473)

**Meeting Location: 980 E Main St, Birdsboro, PA 19508**

## **August 5 (Saturday) Blue Marsh Butterflies 10:00am (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 19 (Saturday) Angelica Park Butterflies 10:00am (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, PA 19607**

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

**\*\*Includes Fall Tuesday walks, Spring Tuesday walks to be announced in 2023.**

## **Past Season's Field Trip Reports**

### **E. J. Breneman Quarry – February 27, 2022 - Rudy Keller**

Scheduling this introduction to winter waterfowl at 1:00 pm instead of early in the morning was key to its success. We attracted 35 people, many new to BOC and some to birding! We were able to provide scope views of 13 duck spp. to many people. Colorful male Redheads and Ring-necked Ducks and stiff-tailed Ruddy Ducks were crowd pleasers.

### **Lake Ontelaunee - Big Loop, The East – March 29, 2022 - Dale C. Beitzel**

On Tuesday, March 29<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 am ten hardy birders braved a start temperature of 21F and very strong winds, sun, and clear skies. We started at the Dam Breast then went east on Rt. 73 to the next parking lot, where 7 Great Blue Herons were spotted. Our third stop was Maiden Creek Station (aka Fishermen's pull-off and Happy Trails), where we had a Horned Grebe and a large group of Double-crested Cormorants bringing up fish. The fourth stop was Evansville Road, south parking lot of Peter's Creek. We made a loop on the south side of the pond, where Red-winged Blackbirds and Brown-headed Cowbirds were present. On to the fifth stop, the north parking lot of Peter's Creek. We followed the trail to the railroad tracks. We had good looks at Brown Creeper, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Blue- and Green-winged Teal.

The final stop was Berks Memorial Gardens at the PGC gate on Evansville Rd. Small songbirds were spotted such as White-throated Sparrows, Carolina Chickadee, and Common Grackle. These were some of the highlights of the birds we saw in some of the areas. Weather suppressed bird activity, but this was a good introduction to birding places some participants had not visited before. The final tally of birds that were spotted were 42 species and 770 individuals over a 5 mile, 3 hour and 15 minute walk ending with a temperature of 31°F.

### **Lake Ontelaunee - Big Loop, The West – April 21, 2022 - Dale C. Beitzel**

This "WEST" side story started at 8:00 am on Thursday, April 21 with 10 curious souls meeting at the Dam Breast parking lot on Rt. 73. The starting temperature was 34 degrees and went to 48/50 degrees two and a half hours later. At the start we had sunshine with a few clouds. The wind was 6 to 8 mph. We traveled 7.46 miles. The number of species totaled 24 with 185 individuals counted.

We scanned the Dam Breast area and a Bald Eagle was spotted, plus Snow Geese, Common Grackles and a Double-crested Cormorant. There was very little activity on the dam side and nothing was spotted on the downstream side in the Maiden Creek. We moved on to Kindts Corner and walked the trail for about 350 yards. The birds were quiet and there was very little movement. The next stop up the road was the “trash can parking lot.” Cormorants were the birds of note at this stop. We continued on to the closed cement bridge. There were some good observations here. Osprey, Wood Duck, an entertaining group of Double-crested Cormorants and an otherwise elusive Common Loon. We were treated to good looks at a Belted Kingfisher. Proceeding to Bailey Creek, the group walked to the small cement bridge about 300 yards in. On the way Am. Goldfinch, White-breasted Nuthatch and Turkey Vulture were spotted. The small birds were very quiet.

At this point I stopped my eBird and ended my counting. Rudy Keller was kind enough to lead the group down a grassy side trail which comes closer to the water’s edge. When the group caught up with me they reported some good sightings, one of which was a White-winged Scoter. The birds they saw on the side path are on Rudy’s eBird checklist for the day. Thanks to Rudy for the help.

### **Union Meadows Park – April 24, 2022** - Rudy Keller

This walk targets resident birds and early spring migrants, all well represented in our list of 43 spp. Our group of 9 birders watched a steady stream of Yellow-rumped Warblers, one yellow Palm Warbler among them, move slowly through the floodplain forest. We had a good count of 7 newly arrived House Wrens, and our tally of 21 resident Carolina Wrens showed that the Schuylkill R. valley remains their stronghold in Berks County.

### **SGL 106, Pine Swamp Rd. – May 1, 2022** - Rudy Keller

On this cold spring morning (31°F at start), the neotropical migrants we were seeking had barely begun to arrive. Our group of 4 birders found 37 bird spp., including 2 of vireos and 8 of warblers. Most warblers were Ovenbirds and Yellow-rumped, but we had good looks at one Worm-eating Warbler. Most trees had just started leafing out, leaving a see-through canopy that allowed excellent views of Scarlet Tanager and Rose-breasted Grosbeak, two very colorful breeders often heard but not seen in denser foliage.

### **Nolde Forest Env. Ed. Center – May 10, 2022** - Mike Slater



Ten birders, including BOC members and Nolde Staff, had a pleasant morning walk birding along Punches Run in the middle of the park. Among the highlights of 36 species observed were a Barred Owl, several Louisiana Waterthrush nests, a Blue-headed Vireo sitting on its nest and great views of Scarlet Tanagers. The list is available on eBird at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S109616826>

*Barred owl at Nolde Forest, photo by Peter Wolfe*



Louisiana Waterthrush sitting on its nest, photo by Peter Wolfe

## Berks County Birds, Winter 2021/22 compiled by Rudy Keller

Dec 2021 – Feb 2022

Abbreviations: E. J. Breneman Quarry (**BQ**), Blue Marsh L. (**BML**), French Creek State Park (**FCSP**), Hawk Mt. Sanctuary (**HMS**), Kempton valley, Albany Twp. (**Kemp**), L. Ontelaunee (**LO**), Kittatinny Ridge (**KR**), Conestoga Landfill pond, New Morgan (**Con**), Christmas Bird Counts: Reading (**RCBC**), Hamburg (**HCBC**).

Dec was again a fairly mild extension of fall, but Jan and Feb were sharply colder, freezing lakes and ponds for weeks. Snow cover was not continuous. As often before, a warming trend in mid- to late Feb triggered strong migration of waterfowl, gulls, crows and blackbirds.

A **Western Tanager** that appeared at a feeder on Bloody Spring Rd. north of Strausstown on or about 2/18 and was last seen there 3/2 (CC) was the first recorded in Berks. The bird was in female type plumage and had an orange bill (see photos in eBird <https://ebird.org/species/westan/US-PA-011>) At the feeder, the bird preferred shelled peanut halves. It also spent time on the ground, apparently foraging in leaf litter. Sometimes it flew to a silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*) and pecked at honeydew, the hardened sugary excretion of spotted lanternflies that had infested the tree in fall, though the honeydew was covered with sooty mold. Cedar Waxwings were also observed feeding on this.

**Snow Geese**, the most dramatic of migrants, quickly increased from winter numbers to 50,000 migrating over Penn Twp. (BP) and 20,000 resting at Gotwals pond, Oley (RK) 2/28. Flying with Snow Geese over Kemp were 22 **Greater White-fronted Geese**, a large number for Berks, 1/7 (BB). One

or 2 **Cackling Geese** were detected in Canada Goose flocks at 11 locations during the period. An apparent family group of 4-5 **Mute Swans** was at LO till freeze-up, then dispersed to other locations (mobs.). **Tundra Swans** began increasing at BML and LO in mid-Feb, peaking at 48 at LO 2/27 (TU).

One or 2 **Wood Ducks** and one to 3 **N. Shovelers** lingered at a few places till the hard freeze, then a few began returning in Feb. The wintering **Gadwall flock** around LO numbered about 24 this year (RK), and counts of a wintering flock at Morgantown L. ranged from 2 - 20 (mobs.). With the LO flock was a **Gadwall X Mallard** hybrid drake, the "Brewer's Duck" of Audubon, first seen on the HCBC 12/26 (RK) and again at LO 2/18 through the period (RK, TU). This hyb., probably this individual, has been coming and going with the Gadwall flock since 2017. One to 12 **Am. Wigeons** were seen on various dates through winter at BQ, a deep quarry that doesn't freeze solid. Numbers increased in Feb, building to 65 at LO 2/26 (RK). Winter counts of **Am. Black Ducks** never exceeded the 33 seen on the RCBC 12/19, a very low number of a species that has been declining here for years. Single **Am. Black Duck X Mallard hybrid** drakes were reported among **Mallards** at six places during the winter (mobs.). Up to 3 **N. Pintails** were seen at BQ this winter, and the Feb thaw brought 40 to LO 2/22 (RK). **Green-winged Teal** can move to small springs when ponds freeze, which was the case with 11 birds, the seasonal high count, showing their teal green in a shallow roadside spring 1/30 (RK).

All five native **Aythya ducks** were here, four of them all winter. The exception was **Canvasback**, the sole report consisting of 4 at SGL 182, Kutztown 2/19 (KT). Several birders commented on the excellent looks they had at **Redheads** at BQ, where 2 - 32 (mostly males) could be seen on almost any day from 12/28 - 2/28. Leisurely comparative studies in low angled light could be made of one or 2 **Greater Scaup** with about 5 **Lesser Scaup** that wintered at BQ. The latter increased to 51 at LO 2/26 (RK), while counts of the former did not exceed 8. A flock of 6 **White-winged Scoters** at BML 2/18 (BP, JSp) was a good catch for the three birders who were there at the right time. Several birders saw the 4 **Long-tailed Ducks** that stopped at BML 12/8 & 18. Four more Long-tails were at BML 1/15 (AW). One to 7 **Buffleheads** bobbed up among other diving ducks wintering at BQ and LO, their number growing a little in late Feb. The highest count of **Common Goldeneyes** was of 12 at Con 12/25 (FH). They were quite uncommon everywhere else. Up to 60 **Hooded Mergansers** were at LO till freeze-up in mid-Jan (RK), and 20 - 47 were at Con through the winter (FH). **Common Mergansers** pushing the ice line quickly increased to 1050 at LO 2/26 (RK). A small flock of **Ruddy Ducks** has wintered at BQ for 20 years. Counts of this winter's birds ranged from one to 30 (mobs.).

Local **Wild Turkey** populations have boom and bust cycles. Currently they appear to be most common in northern Berks along the KR, where 58 visited one feeder 2/20 (CC). That said, 29 strolled through a yard near Douglassville at the opposite end of the county 1/3 (LI). The only report of **Ruffed Grouse**, perhaps too rare and local now to have boom and bust cycles, was of 5 on the KR during the HCBC 12/26. Put-and-take **Ring-necked Pheasants** were seen bumbling cluelessly along paths and roads at a few places, mostly near SGL's. One to 3 **Pied-billed Grebes**, a normal winter number, were seen diving with the ducks at BQ through the period. The only reported **Horned Grebe** was at BML 12/12 (JV). List padding birders reported one to 6 **Eurasian Collared-Doves** in Shartlesville on various dates, but none outside the town this season. Among the winter regulars at BQ for about 20 years has been **Am. Coot**, one to 6 of which were seen there during the period. Two **Least Sandpipers** were seen foraging among 18 **Killdeer** at the muddy inflow of Spring Creek into BML 12/8 (EH). This is the first Dec record of a peep that is usually gone by early Oct, if not earlier than that. The first peenting **Am. Woodcock** of spring was heard in Kemp 2/11 (BB), with others soon reported elsewhere. **Wilson's Snipe** were scarce, but birders managed to find one to 3 in a few traditional spots.

A **Bonaparte's Gull** stopped briefly at LO 12/12 (RK, TU). The Feb thaw brought a surge of 8000 **Ring-billed Gulls** to BML 2/26 (RK). First-winter **Iceland Gulls** paid brief visits. A light bird was at



BML 1/8 – 15 (JD, RK, PJW), joined by a dark, possibly **thayeri type** 1/14 (RK) just before the lake froze. After the Feb thaw, a light bird was at BML 2/12 & 26 (JS, MS). Counts of one to 3 **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** on a few dates at BML were at the low end of normal winter numbers. Eleven LBBG at LO 2/12 (TU) were migrants. A second winter **Glaucous Gull** was at BML 1/13, 14 (RK, PJW). A few late migrating **Common Loons** appeared in Dec, the last of which was seen at LO 12/29 (TU). The last of a few lingering **Double-crested Cormorants** was also seen at LO 12/29 (TU). An **Am. Bittern** photographed at LO 12/12 (TU) joined a very short list of these birds recorded in winter.

Record setting vulture counts on CBC's included 227 **Black Vultures** on the HCBC 12/26, 556 **Turkey Vultures** on the RCBC 12/19 and 245 Turkey Vultures on the HCBC 12/26. Bald Eagles followed that trend, with new high counts of 14 on the RCBC 12/19 and 21 on the HCBC 12/26. All three species have shown multi-year increases at hawkwatches. **Golden Eagles** continued migrating past North Lookout, HMS through Dec, but 2 birds, an adult and a juv., in Kemp 2/1 (BB) were wintering. More **N. Harriers** were reported than usual. Of about 30 reports, repeat sightings or multiple birds were recorded at SGL 280 (BML), Pheasant Valley Farm (Robesonia), Big Woods Trail (FCSP) and Blue Mt. Academy (Hamburg). All these sites have vole producing habitat in the form of fields that were converted to grasslands or, in the case of the academy, a grass airstrip and nearby hayfields. Two prized raptors made short single visits. A dark morph **Rough-legged Hawk** was seen in Kemp 2/1 (BB) and a **Snowy Owl** was seen perched on a utility pole near Bethel 12/6 (GR). A **Short-eared Owl** was seen at Pheasant Valley Farm 2/2 (LI). This farm has attracted these owls in previous years, but seeing one takes patience and luck. Three **N. Saw-whet Owls** were heard on the HCBC 12/26. Considering their decline, the number of **Am. Kestrel** reports was encouraging and a little surprising. They (like N. Harriers, above) were featured on a good number of single species eBird checklists, perhaps indicating that birders are more aware of their status and are taking the time to record all they see. There were scattered reports of **Merlins**, mostly at BML, where they were not as regular as in past years (JS). Reading's **Peregrine Falcon** pair was in residence. Seven reports of one or 2 Peregrines at other locations during the winter may have been of peregrinators or of the residents out hunting.

Of 6 reports of **E. Phoebes**, the latest was of a bird at Reading Airport 1/21 and 2/6 (JSp). A **Northern Shrike** was in Kemp 1/17 (BB), another single sighting of a rare bird this winter. **Common Ravens** lived up to their name. There were widespread reports, often of multiple birds. The record count of 39 on the RCBC 12/19 would have been inconceivable before now. In this non-irruption year, a few **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were found on the CBC's and one to 3 were reported later in winter at each of 12 locations with conifers or feeders. At least 5 of many reports of **Winter Wrens** were of birds present all period. A **House Wren** stayed long enough to be found on the RCBC 12/19. Single **Gray Catbirds** apparently lived through the winter at three sheltered places (RH, RK, CL, AW). A much rarer **Brown Thrasher** was seen at Rodale Experimental Farm 1/8 (SB) and another near Mohrsville 2/11 (SS). With a strong showing on the CBC's, there were many reports of **Hermit Thrushes** in Dec and Jan, fewer in Feb. All the winter fruit eaters benefited from an unusually abundant fruiting of native and exotic shrubs and vines this year. **Am. Pipits** were common in early winter on farms in the Mertztown and Topton areas, where 120 were seen 12/18 (TU) and 135 on 1/7 (JH). Smaller flocks were seen elsewhere during the same period. Winter weather may have pushed them out, as there were no Feb reports.

Small flocks of **Purple Finches** migrated through the county in Dec, some tallied on CBC's. Numbers quickly declined in Jan and few were left by Feb. The seasonal high count of 60 **Pine Siskins** was of migrants passing North Lookout, HMS 12/7, and 11 were seen on the HCBC 12/26. The only report after that was of 2 at a feeder near Reading 2/21. A **White-winged Crossbill** seen on the HCBC 12/26 was an anomaly. Unlike last winter, arctic field birds were scarce. A **Lapland Longspur** was

near Lyons 1/7 – 11 (SB, JH, JV) and 2 were near Fleetwood 1/29 (MW). A **Snow Bunting** was near Fleetwood 1/29 (MW) and 8 were in Kemp 2/1 (BB).

**Chipping Sparrows**, traditionally rare in winter, are now more often reported. This winter they were seen at about a dozen locations on various dates through the period. Most were singletons, but a flock of 8 was at FCSP 1/9 (TU) and a flock of 15 (possibly very early migrants on a warm front) was at Union Meadows Park 2/20 (LI, PJW). As many or more Chipping Sparrows as **Am. Tree Sparrows**

were reported, which may become a trend. Winter reports of **Fox Sparrows** also continue on an upward trend. Many of the birds reported in Dec, such as 15 at Big Woods Trail, FCSP 12/15, were probably still migrating. But there were at least 6 reports of birds seen at various places in Jan and Feb, some repeatedly at the same location. **E. Towhee** repeated and magnified the Fox Sparrow scenario. There were reports of 3 – 5 birds, probably migrants, at each of several locations in Dec. But at least a dozen places still hosted single birds in Jan and Feb.

A striking male **N. Cardinal** colored **yellow** and rosy red rather than cardinal red was photographed in Hamburg 2/13 (see photo at left) and seen again 2/15 (MW).

*(Research indicates that the bird exhibited xanthochromism, a genetic condition that inhibits conversion of dietary carotenoids into red pigment, resulting in a largely yellow bird. It was shy and hid in the large thorn bush.*

*These are my best scope shots.” - Matt Wlasniewski)*



*Yellow Northern Cardinal. Photo by Matt Wlasniewski*

Moving along from slow, steady increase to steep decline, there were just 2 reports of **E. Meadowlark**, a bird seen on the HCBC 12/26 and a bird seen at Blue Mt. Academy 2/6 (EK). There were a few more reports of **Rusty Blackbirds** than usual, but numbers were low. The season's high count was of 8 at Peters Cr., LO, a traditional stopover site, 12/1 (AM). Five were found on the HCBC 12/26 and 5 in Kemp 2/19 (BB). The others were scattered singletons.

OBSERVERS: Rudy Keller, [rkeller@dejazzd.com](mailto:rkeller@dejazzd.com), Ed Barrell, Dan Brennan, Bracken Brown, Sara Busch, Lucy Cairns, Chuck Cravotta, Jonathan DeBalko, Steve Fordyce, Laurie Goodrich, Kerry Grim, Frank Haas, Holly Hartshorne, Elaine Hendricks, Dan Hinnebusch, Russ Hoffman, Jason Horn, Kate Houlne, Linda Ingram, Chris Langman, Brian Lineaweaver, Alan MacEachren, Brandon Pentz, Glenn Riegel, John Ruggles, Peter Saenger, Aaron Shirk, Joan Silagy, Lee Simpson, Mike Slater, Susan Smith, Jo Spilde, Stollery & Flood, Jaime Thomas, Keegan Tranquillo, Todd Underwood, Jeff Vinosky, Todd Watkins, Nelson Weber, Patty Werth, Andy Wlasniewski, Matt Wlasniewski, Peter & Jane Wolfe, Art Zdancewic.

## Berks Birds, Spring 2022 compiled by Matt Wlasniewski August-November 2021

Locations: Bartrum 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**), Blue Marsh Stilling Basin (**BMSB**), Buxton Conservancy (**BC**), Daniel Boone Homestead (**DBH**), EJ Brennan's Quarry (**BQ**), Exeter River Trail (**ERT**), 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**), Hay Creek (**HC**), 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**), Old Topton Road (**OTP**), Peter's Creek (**PC**), Pine Swamp Road (**PSR**), Rodale Experimental Farm (**REF**), Sacony Creek Kutztown (**SCK**), 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 (**SGL28**), Trout Run Reservoir (**TRR**), Union Meadows Park (**UMP**).

In what has become the norm, the greater portion of the north-bound migrants moved along the eastern coastal regions and the ridges to the west of Berks. The satellite images showing clouds of birds headed north over those two areas also displayed the empty night skies over Berks. Two weather events, March 6-7 and April 18-19, produced thunderstorms that brought heavy rains and left behind rain pools and forced waterfowl to seek refuge on the largest lakes—Blue Marsh Lake and Lake Ontelaunee.

The only report for **Greater White-fronted Geese** was one that kept company with a flock of **Canada Geese** at PC 3/6 (RK). The greatest **Snow Goose** numbers arrived during the first week of April. RK monitored 10,000 **Snow Geese** on LO 3/5 -3/6. Smaller flocks of these vocal geese were noted in the fields of northern Berks such as the 400 in a Shartlesville corn field 3/5 (MW). Single **Cackling Geese** mixed with **Canada Geese** at BQ 3/4 (AZ), KDRA 3/7 (KG) and GP 3/26 (AS).

The greatest number of **Tundra Swan** was 500 at BMLSH 3/3 (JS). PW and JW found 175 **Tundra Swan** at LO 3/4. The day before, 3/3, MW counted 220 **Snow Geese** on LO while another 110 **Snow Geese** swirled overhead. Eighty **American Widgeon** took cover during the storm on LO 3/7 (MW). **Blue-winged Teal** are not usually common migrants but this quarter, they were scattered in small numbers throughout Berks. Twelve **Blue-winged Teal** surprised birders on LO 3/29 (JSp, RH, RK, SF). The high number for **Northern Pintail** was 40 LO 3/6 (AS). Twenty-three **Redhead** hid in the more secluded water at LOBC 3/16 (KD). Flocks of 150 **Ring-necked Ducks** were seen several times: LO 3/4 (JW, PW), LO 3/7 (MW) and LO 3/15 (m obs).

The thunderstorms of March 7 pushed 10 **Greater Scaup** and 50 **Lesser Scaup** to the safety of LO 3/7 (MW). Rare **White-winged Scoters** were seen on LO after storms with one 4/19 (MW) and an unusual high number of twelve 5/19 (RK). Eleven **Long-tailed Ducks** were found near the **White-winged Scoters** 4/19 (MW). The large rafts of **Bufflehead** that usually appear at LO were missing this quarter. 28 **Bufflehead** LOWS 3/14 (RK) was the high count this quarter.

**Common Merganser** raft numbers were lower and less frequent this quarter. On 3/6, 875 **Common Mergansers** were counted LO (EK) and 800 3/14 LO (RK). Ten **Red-breasted Mergansers** roamed LO 3/31 (MW). A lone **Red-throated Loon**, the usual number, made a short appearance BML 4/28 (JS). Large **Common Loon** rafts were not seen this quarter. Three **Common Loons** at BML 4/6 (JS) was the highest count. A very rare **Eared Grebe** was a cooperative comparison with a close Horned Grebe (RK) LOWS 5/19. This was only the third record for this western grebe. A single **Eared Grebe** was seen 4/10/1999 at Carr's Lake (KL, MW, et al.). On 4/11/04, RK had a lone **Eared Grebe** on LO. The high count for **Horned Grebe** migrants was six LO 3/7 (MW). The same day, LO 3/7, MW found a lone **Red-necked Grebe**.

**Double-crested Cormorant** numbers grew to 80 LO 3/29 (RK) with small numbers dropping in. KG counted 81 **Double-crested Cormorants** as they headed northeast over KDRA 4/14. **American Bitterns** make rare appearances in Berks. On 4/28, TU found one in Kutztown's North Park. A Henningsville yard list grew when an **American Bittern** stopped by 4/13 (PS). On 4/4, MW found an early **Great Egret** hiding along the LO shoreline. On 4/12, JW and PW found three **Great Egrets** at SCK. JB found a **Little Blue Heron** in the

process of a plumage change at Bernhart's Dam 4/29. The first report of **Black-crowned Night-Heron** was 5/14 DBH (DH).

The **Osprey** reported 3/26 flying along the Schuylkill River at ERT was an early find (JW, PW). **Bald Eagles** continue to make almost daily appearances in Berks with eight nests found to be active. Other nests may exist. The "Rutter's Nest" along Route 61 in Hamburg entertains shoppers and should fledge two birds this summer. For the weeks of 3/15 and 4/22, birders made 44 reports of **Bald Eagles**. The annual Spring Hawk Migration at Hawk Mountain occurs 4/1 to 5/15. A comprehensive report will be coming in a future edition of *Pennsylvania Birds*.

**Golden Eagles** have historically been known as ridge migrants. On 4/25, RK was alerted by a **Common Raven** to a **Golden Eagle** soaring overhead. The raven harassed the eagle as it made its way above Lutz Road. A **Turkey Vulture** watched the proceedings from a safe distance until the eagle was out of sight. The winds were calm, skies overcast and the temperature 55F degrees. **Golden Eagles** are normally seen along the Kitatinny Ridge when conditions are more winter-like.

Shorebirds have few choices for stopping to rest and refuel in Berks. Spring storms can create rain pools along the usual rural roads. A single **Black-bellied Plover** fed in such a pool on Evansville Road 5/8 (RH). **Solitary Sandpipers** are early arrivals on farm ponds. MW found one at HCP 4/30 and two at HCP 5/2. Four **Greater Yellowlegs** fed at LOBC 4/8 (KD). Five **Lesser Yellowlegs** fed at LOBC 5/1 (JR). The rain pool at Evansville Road is usually a good spot for shorebirds and RK found four **Lesser Yellowlegs** there 5/2.

**Dunlins** are one of the rarer spring shorebirds and there were three reports of single birds: BM 4/9 (JSp), HCP 5/3 AW, Evansville rain pool 5/28 (DJ). First report for **American Woodcock** was five along River Road 3/5 (MW). On 4/4, three American Woodcock performed for LZ, LI, JW and PW SGL110 Shartlesville.

**Bonaparte's Gulls** prefer the larger Berks lakes and the high count was 66 LO 4/19 (MW). The same day, 4/19, JSp found 44 at BML. **Little Gulls** are known to migrate with flocks of **Bonaparte's Gulls**. On 3/15, a Little Gull was photographed by RH as it flew with thirty **Ring-billed Gulls**. This is only the 4<sup>th</sup> record **Little Gull** for Berks. The first record was at Carr's Lake 4/24/1995 (KL, JH, MW) as it flew with 90 **Ring-billed Gulls**. A **Great Black-backed Gull** lingered at LO 3/13 (TU). A good number, 5, of this large gull was seen flying over Blandon near LO 3/7 (AS). Five **Caspian Terns** wandered around BML 4/10 (RH). **Common Terns** are not common in Berks. A lone **Common Tern** was reported at BML 5/4 (JW, PW).

On 5/15, RK found two very rare **Arctic Terns** foraging at LO along with one **Common Tern**. This was only the second record for Berks with the first being 9/18/18 at BML (KL). The **Arctic Terns** were cooperative as they made close-by passes for identification and comparison with the **Common Terns**.

The **Eurasian Collared-Doves** have not expanded their range with most sightings being made in Shartlesville with their numbers varying. On 3/13, four **Eurasian-collared Doves** were found along the main street (AWi, AD). During the winter quarter, **Short-eared Owls** were rare; hence, it is ironic that one would be found dead due to a collision with a vehicle in Leesport 3/7 (KH).

The first report of a **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** was from Bern Township 4/24 (JS). The known **Red-headed Woodpecker** nesting areas are still active. The first report from Bastian Road in Lyons was 03/19 (MW). The first report from Allendale Road in Shoemakersville was 4/6 (MW). After an unsuccessful breeding season in 2021, the **Peregrine Falcons** changed mates and the 2022 fledging was successful with three birds surviving.

**Acadian Flycatchers** arrived in Nolde Forest 5/10 (MS). An uncommon **Alder Flycatcher** stopped along SCK 2/21 (TU). KG located a migrant **Least Flycatcher** in KDRA 4/24. **Fish Crows** have become more numerous in northern Berks and rummage through trash bins and fields. A roost of approximately 200 **Fish Crows** is active along Hex Highway in Hamburg 05/31 (MW). An early report for **Purple Martins** came from Bern Township 4/18 (JS). With scarce numbers during winter, **Red-breasted Nuthatches** headed north through Berks in small numbers. On 3/19, KG found two along BAT. The conifers in PC provided suitable habitat for the two **Red-breasted Nuthatches** found 3/27 (AW). A rare wren in migration, a **Marsh Wren** was heard and seen 5/31 at the Moselem Springs access to LO (DB).

A **Gray-cheeked Thrush** was found in the dense conifers at Nolde Forest 5/23 (RC). On 5/16, on his morning walk, KG counted eight **Swainson's Thrush** at SGL110. The evening of 5/16, during a Red Moon Lunar

Eclipse, MW counted numerous flight calls of both **Gray-cheek Thrush** and **Swainson's Thrush**.

Usually found in single numbers, **Fox Sparrows** were seen in light concentration during migration. On 3/5, MW found 4 **Fox Sparrows** SGL110. Along Bartrum Trail 3/19, KG recorded 5 Fox Sparrows. A nice sparrow in migration, one **Lincoln's Sparrow** was found 5/18 SCK (GA).

**Orchard Oriole** pairs were found in two locations: on 5/9 PC (MW); on 5/24 LOBC (AW). At both locations, there were several **Baltimore Orioles** and **Warbling Vireos**. Two **Rusty Blackbirds** in transitional plumage were found under a bird feeder 3/13 Scenic Drive, Hamburg (MW). At FCSP, three **Rusty Blackbirds** were flushed 4/9 (AB, MS). On 3/13 two late **Lapland Longspurs** were noted. On 3/13, TU found one in the reliable area—Mertz Road, Lyons. Also on 3/13, BL found a **Lapland Longspur** in the farmland of Heidelberg Twp..

Thirty-one species of warblers were tallied in Berks this migration. The satellite images were accurate when displaying the lack of blips indicating neo-tropical migrants. These are some of the warbler highlights which are noted to be single birds: **Prothonotary Warbler** 5/5 ERT (LI, RH); **Mourning Warbler** 5/21 KDRA (AS); two **Kentucky Warblers** 5/20 FCSP (TU); **Bay-breasted Warbler** 5/16 UMP (MSL, LI); **Wilson's warbler** 5/14 KDRA (KG) and 5/3 HR (AW, JR); **Yellow-breasted Chat** 5/30 SGL 106 (MW).

**Blue Grosbeaks** were present 5/15 to 5/24 SCK (GA). The farmland surrounding REF is excellent habitat for grassland birds. Two **Dickcissels** were seen 5/24 REF (JV). Five Bobolinks flew over BML 5/1 (JS) on their way to breeding grounds. Monument Road is excellent habitat for grassland birds with the hazard of multiple hay cuttings. Eight **Bobolinks** on Monument Road were counted 5/29 (RH).

Observers: **Matt Wlasniewski, 191 Scenic Drive, Hamburg, PA 19526, 610-463-8845, [martind28@comcast.net](mailto:martind28@comcast.net)**, Gary Angstadt, Ed Barrell, Ann Becker, Joe Beatrice, Dan Brennan, Sarah Busch, Lucy Cairns (LCr), Liz Cates, Michael Cox, Robert Curry, Angela Detweiler, Kevin Dougherty, John Driscoll, Cheryl Faust, Caroline Fegley (CFe), Steven Fordyce, Steven Gautier, Laurie Goodrich & HMS Volunteers/Staff, Mary-Therese Grob, Kerry Grim, Bert Harris, Holly Hartshorne, Paul Heveran, Russell Hoffman, Kate Houlne, Jason Horn, Matt Hunter, John Hutchinson, Linda Ingram, Dean Johnson, Rudy Keller, Ken Lebo, Dave Kozlovsky, Edward Komito, Katrina Knight, Brian Lineaweaver, Sandy Lockerman, Andy Matsko, Holly Merker, Dennis Miranda, Sandra Moroney, Derek Price, Barbara Ritzheimer, John Ruggles, Troy Sabocheck, Peter Saenger, Aaron Shirk, Joan Silagy, Mike Slater (MS), Michael Sokowsky (MSo), Jo Spilde (JSp), Jaime Thomas, Todd Underwood, Bill Uhrich, Jeff Vinosky, Ron Wagner, Ken Walsh, Nelson Weber, Matthew White (MWh), Chris Whitely (CWh), Amanda Williams (AWi), Claudia Winters, Andy Wlasniewski, Jane Wolfe, Peter Wolfe, Art Zdancewic.

## Five Places in Berks to Study Nature by Matt Spence

*NOTE: This piece was written for the Summer 2013 edition of the Medical Record (the quarterly magazine of the Berks County Medical Record) some info may be a little out of date, but it well worth reading especially if there are places you haven't visited!*

It is not necessary to travel to Trinidad, New Guinea, or the Gambia to find a varied flora and fauna; indeed, it is possible to discover an interesting variety right here in Berks County. Granted, our wildlife may not be quite as spectacular and complex as that found in tropical climates, but it can be every bit as interesting. What is intriguing to the local naturalist is the dearth of information about the distribution and life histories of many of our plants and animals. Local naturalists have a golden opportunity to make significant contributions to our knowledge of these organisms.

As to variety, there are almost 1600 species of plants found in Berks (Hans Wilkens has identified 145 species of mosses, 43 species of ferns, and 29 species of orchids--all within the boundaries of our county). Additionally, 46 species of reptiles and amphibians, 315 species of birds, and 48 species of mammals have been recorded.

We have been blessed with many excellent areas for the study of Nature. I will discuss the five localities with which I am most familiar. Nonetheless, there are some other regions which, at least, demand to be mentioned – the Earl Poole Nature Preserve, Nolde State Park, Northkill Gap, Mount Neversink, and South Mountain. A visit to any one of these localities should be most rewarding.

## **1. The Blue Marsh**

In 1979, the US Army Corps of Engineers created the Blue Marsh Lake and Recreation area by constructing a dam across the Tulpehocken Creek. Since that time, the Blue Marsh has become a favorite locale of hikers, boaters, and birders. To reach the Blue Marsh, go North on Rt. 183, then turn left at the traffic light to Palisades Road, which will take you near the Visitor's Center. Palisades will also lead to the entrance of the Dry Brooks Day Use area. This location has a beach area which is the best place in Berks County to see a variety of gull species. This is also a good place to see Canada Geese, Bald Eagles, and Merlins (a small falcon). Another spot which can be quite productive is the State Hill Boat Launch area. It can be accessed from the Brownsville Road. A splendid hawk watch area is just inside the Blue Marsh boundary. Further on is the boating area, which can produce woodcock in March and April. The entrance to the Squirrel Run Nature Trail is nearby. On the trail, one can find Redstarts, Ovenbirds, and Scarlet Tanagers. It is prudent to check yourself for ticks!

## **2. Hay Creek and French Creek State Park**

This area is located south and east of Birdsboro between Rt. 82 and the southeastern boundary of our county. Triassic rocks (sandstone, conglomerate, trap, etc) form the substrate for this region. One of the choice sublocations is the Birdsboro reservoir and the small stream which flows from the reservoir to Hay Creek. This spot has been home to Cerulean and Worm-eating Warblers, Acadian Flycatchers, and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers. Flowers seen here include Trailing Arbutus (April), Pink Lady-slipper (May), and Cardinal Flower (August). Hopewell Lake, in French Creek State Park, often provides an opportunity to view and feed Mallards and Canada Geese; a number of other waterfowl species have been known to visit the lake. At nearby Scott's Run Dam there is a good location to hear and see the mating flights of the American Woodcock in March and April. The Scott's Run area is one of the few places in Berks County where one can reasonably expect to find poison sumac! Hopewell National Park, adjacent to French Creek State Park, is host to a small colony of Cliff Swallows and a large roost of Black and Turkey Vultures; on occasion, Wild Turkeys have been seen displaying and heard gobbling near the National Park headquarters.

## **3. Mount Penn and Lake Antietam**

Solan Parks should be given credit for saving Mount Penn from being denuded by logging and quarrying interests; he referred to Mount Penn as "Reading's background curtain." Mount Penn is composed of Cambrian and Precambrian rocks – the oldest rocks in our county. Some experts believe that the mica schist outcropping along Hill Road near Egelman's Park is our oldest known rock formation. On the eastern slope of the mountain is found Lake Antietam, formed by the damming of Antietam Creek. Special note should be taken of the dam breast, part of which imitates a natural waterfall; I believe this to be the most beautiful human-made spot in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Nearby is the Reading Nature Center (formerly known as the Ferndale Nature Trail and Museum) with a number of nature trails which meander over eastern Mount Penn. Plants common here include the Red Trillium, Nodding Trillium, Wild Ginger (all these species may be found in May), and the brilliant red berries of Jack-in-the-Pulpit (in late summer and fall). Screech Owls, Carolina Wrens, Louisiana Waterthrushes, and Scarlet Tanagers nest near the nature center. I have recorded more than 120 bird species near the center; of course, my total includes a number of migrants and winter residents.

## **4. Lake Ontelaunee**

Constructed in the late 1920's for the water supply of the city of Reading, the Ontelaunee Dam allows one to observe water birds on a reasonably regular schedule – Mallards, Gadwalls, Black Ducks, and resident Canada Geese during December and January; Pintails in February and March; migrant Canada Geese in March and April; Blue-winged Teal in April and May. In years of drought, the shore-birding may be quite spectacular. Unfortunately, in years of normal rainfall, few if any shorebirds can be found. Gulls, mostly Ring-billed and Herring (often called "Seagulls" by the uninitiated) can be found throughout the year. In spring, Bonaparte's Gulls can be sighted near the dam breast, which is located on State Rt. 73. It is here that a large colony of Cliff Swallows make their mud nests; this is the same swallow species that returns to Capistrano, and they are almost as regular here at Ontelaunee.

Tropical storms have provided the finest ornithological shows, with such exotics as Sooty Terns, Hudsonian Godwits, and Leach's Storm Petrels noted by competent observers. Any type of storm from March through May, and August through November, will likely provide the birder with a number of interesting waterfowl,

including loons, grebes, swans, coots, gulls, terns, and a variety of pond and diving ducks. A short but severe rainstorm on November 2, 1971 yielded a total of 31 waterbird species.

At present, the original pines are being removed; hopefully, the replacement plantings will provide adequate cover so necessary for the abundance of wildlife. The pines formerly hosted a winter roost of American Crows; estimates of the population reached 125,000 individuals. Sadly, this phenomenon is but a memory, for the roost relocated and/or dispersed after the winter of 1975.

The “lake” is truly an evergreen location for those interested in Nature. There are many surprises yet in store for those willing to visit the dammed-up Maiden Creek, or as the Lenni Lenape called it, “Ontelaunee.”

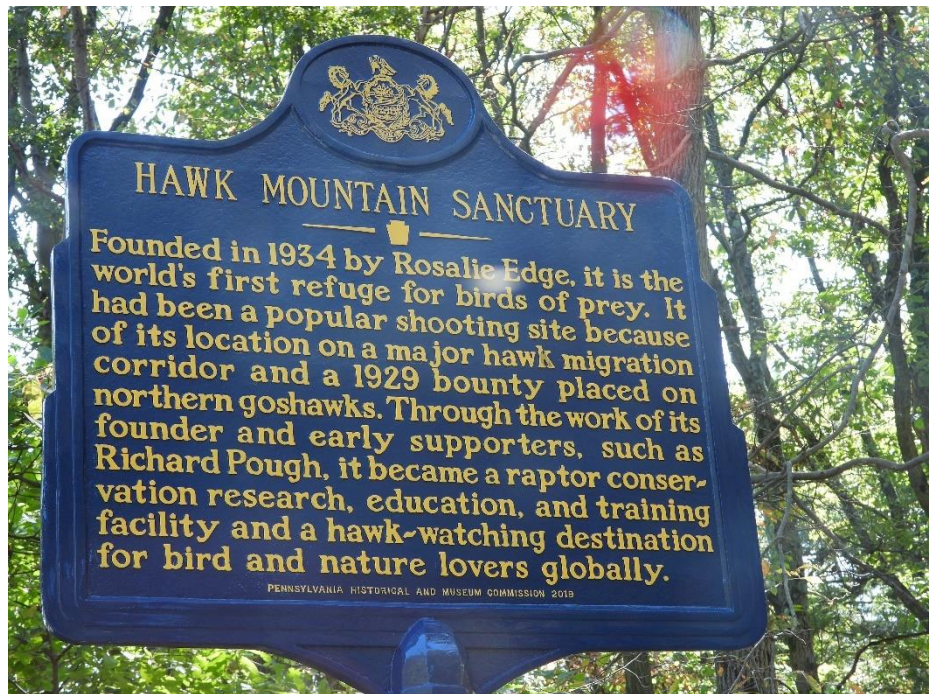
## 5. Hawk Mountain

I have saved the most famous place for last. While the Pagoda, the Reading Outlet Stores, and the Reading Railroad (not to mention beer and pretzels) have brought a measure of regional fame to Berks County, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary has received resounding acclaim by conservationists on six continents! The Sanctuary was founded in 1934 by feisty and tireless Rosalie Edge; she hired the first curator, Maurice Broun (1906-1979), whose job it was, along with his wife Irma, to stop the slaughter of migrating hawks which passed over the lookout while on their southerly migration during the months of September, October, and November. After a number of unpleasant and even dangerous confrontations with the hawk shooters, the Brouns succeeded! Thus, the first Sanctuary for birds of prey had survived its birth pangs. Hawks Aloft, the story of the early days at Hawk Mountain by Maurice Broun, is required reading for anyone interested in raptors or conservation.

Today, the mountain is a joy to visit. Hawks and other birds can be observed throughout the year; thus far, 243 bird species have been recorded. For hawks and eagles, the best time to visit is autumn, with September providing the greatest numbers (on September 14, 1978, a record 21,447 Broad-wing Hawks were counted), and October producing the greatest variety. An advancing cold front, a low over New England, and a northwest wind usually produce the largest hawk flights.

The headquarters building contains a small museum, a bookstore, and an extensive bird-feeding area at which one can often see Pine Siskins and other northern finches, as well as the usual variety of “feeder” birds. If your

visit is in May or June, you may be able to find a nice variety of migrating and/or nesting warblers. But you are certain to see the gorgeous display of Mountain Laurel and the less-common Sheep Laurel.



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\* Newsletter Committee Member

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## **BOC MEMBERSHIP and Renewal - Payment is due in September for the year running from September through August.**

- **Regular Membership Dues \$15/ year /per person**
- **Sustaining Membership Dues \$30 or more/ year / per person**  
(This new category will help 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> Use the button to pay, with a credit card/Paypal to pay the appropriate amount and also fill out the online form and submit it. ***By joining or renewing online I give my permission for BOC to contact me 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): \_\_\_\_\_

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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.*

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