



Berks Bird Report

Fall 2024 – Rudy Keller

Berks County, PA. Bird Report Summary. Aug – Nov. 2024

Abbreviations: Blue Marsh L. (**BML**), E. J. Breneman Quarry (**BQ**), Hamburg Reservoir (**HR**), Hawk Mt. Sanctuary (**HMS**), Kernsville Dam Recreation Area (**KDRC**), Kittatinny Ridge (**KR**), L. Ontelaunee Peters Cr. (**LOPC**), L. Ontelaunee Bailey Creek (**LOBC**), Schuylkill R. (**SR**), Union Meadows Park (**UMP**).

Aug was on the dry side of normal, but there was virtually no rain in Sep and drought dominated the rest of the season. LO receded to its lowest water level in decades, exposing vast mudflats in the shallow backwaters, too late to attract many shorebird species. Tropical storm Debby lightly touched Berks in Aug, bringing some strays. After that there was little rain and no large waterfowl fallout.

Two **Greater White-fronted Geese** were among **Canada Geese** at BQ 10/20 and 11/1 (MG, BL); one of those stayed till 11/13 (m.ob.). A **Cackling Goose** was identified by size in a flock of CANG flying over HMS 11/25. Another was at BQ 11/26, 27 (BL, ZS). Four **Blue-winged Teal** at Hamburg 8/31 (KG) were the first reported this fall. Others arrived in Sep and were mostly seen at LOPC, including 5 on 9/24, 9 on 10/2 and 6 on 10/9 (RK). The only reported **N. Shoveler** was one at BQ 11/30 (BL, ZS). This duck much prefers Green Lane Res. a short flight away in northern Montgomery Co., where more than 100 can sometimes be seen in fall. Illustrating the generally low numbers of common ducks were the seasonal high counts of 10 **Gadwall** at Adams Hotel Rd. 11/21 (DB), 8 **Am. Wigeon** at LOPC 10/2 (RK) and 38 **Am. Black Ducks** at LO 10/24 (JSo). An **Am. Black Duck X Mallard** was at Adams Hotel Rd. 11/21 (RK). The sole reported **N. Pintail** was at BQ 11/1 (BL, AP). In contrast, **Green-winged Teal** was widely reported and its seasonal high count was of 41 at LO 11/2 (RK).

For years **Canvasback** has been the least commonly seen Aythya duck. Four Canvasback were at LO 11/21 (RK, AW) and one at BQ 11/21-30 (m.ob.). One or 2 **Redheads** were seen at BQ, where a few have wintered in recent years, 11/21-30 (m.ob.). Another was at LO 11/21 (AS). There were no reports of **Lesser Scaup**, a classic fallout species, and just one of 4 **Greater Scaup** at BML 11/11, 13 (BL). The closest thing to a fallout raft of Buffleheads was a flock of 75 at BML 11/24 (AP). Most checklists noting **Common Merganser** were recorded along the SR in Aug – Sep and probably document the successful breeding population.

Noteworthy was a flock of 50 at UMP 9/11 (JK). **Ruddy Ducks** began to come and go at BQ, their wintering site, about 10/10, reaching a peak number of 73 on 11/2 (RK).

Two Aug breeding confirmations of **Wild Turkey** documented a hen with 12 poults near Fredericksville 8/9 (SF) and 3 hens with 14 poults at Sell Rd. near Green Hills Preserve 8/13 (AZ). A flock of 40 Wild Turkeys at Daniel Boone Homestead 9/30 was the largest reported this fall (LM). **Ruffed Grouse** singletons were seen at HR 9/10 (HG) and 10/10 (MT), and near Rt. 183 on 11/9 (BL). Both places are in the remaining narrow strip of the Berks Co. range of grouse on the KR. One or 2 **Eurasian Collared-Doves** were listed on each of 4 checklists in Shartlesville 9/20 – 11/25. **Black-billed Cuckoo** was reported once, a bird at the Angelica Cr. Trail 9/10 (SD). **Yellow-billed Cuckoos** were seen at multiple locations from Aug till 10/22.

The **Common Nighthawk** migration crested in late Aug and the highest counts were made at HMS, where 89 passed 8/22 and 66 on 8/23. Notable counts off the KR were of 24 birds at Hopewell L. 8/23 (PW) and 28 at BML 9/18 (BL). Three nighthawks at HMS and 5 at UMP 10/3 (JK) were the last of the season.



One of the two adult female Rufous Hummingbirds that took up residence in Berks County this fall. Photo by Linda Ingram in Douglas Twp.

Two **Rufous Hummingbirds** visited gardens this fall. An adult female first seen at a feeder near Douglassville 10/9 (LI) was banded by Sandy and Gary Lockerman 10/23. Another adult female first seen visiting salvias in a District Twp. garden about 10/29 (RK) was banded on the second attempt by the Lockermans 11/20. Both birds stayed through Nov.

One to 6 **Am. Coots** were seen on several dates in Nov at BQ, where a few spend the winter. A **Sandhill Crane** was heard calling as it flew past a home near Limekiln at 11:45 pm 8/24 (JSo). Another foraged in a pumpkin field near Fleetwood from about 10/20-30 (NW), leaving when the adjoining cornfield was harvested. It was last seen about a mile away 11/1 (AS).

Most of the shorebirds of 13 species moved through in Aug before the LO mudflats were fully exposed, but some of the later migrants gathered there. As during previous droughts, **Killdeer** were the most abundant shorebirds on the flats. The largest of many counts were of 120 at LOBC 10/26 and 101 there 11/11 (RK). Two **Semipalmated Plovers** were at LO 10/20 (PJW). Due to their cryptic, crepuscular nature and preference for moist thickets, **Am. Woodcocks** are seldom encountered by birders in fall. Just 2 were seen, one at SGL 106 on 10/17 (KG) and one at French Cr. SP 11/12 (PM). Five **Wilson's Snipe** were on the LOBC flats 10/22 (JSo) and smaller numbers later. A new retention basin at a solar farm near Fleetwood attracted a variety of shorebirds 8/8-9, when 4 **Solitary Sandpipers**, 9 **Lesser Yellowlegs**, 6 **Pectoral Sandpipers** and 2 **Semipalmated Sandpipers** were seen there (AS, JV). All of these except the latter were seen in similar numbers along with a few **Greater Yellowlegs** on the LO mudflats till late Oct or Nov. The fall high count of 10 **Pectoral Sandpipers** was made at LOBC 10/24 (JSo). A **Dunlin** was at LOBC 10/22-28 (JR, JSp, KD) and 4 were there 10/29 (RK). The rarest shorebirds reported this fall were 3 juvenile **Baird's Sandpipers** at Blue Mt. Academy 9/11 (AW, MW).

A **Bonaparte's Gull** visited BML 9/25-26 (BL, RK, JR) at the early end of their migration. Two others were at BML 11/11 (BL) and one on 11/24 (AP).

Tropical storm Debby brought two rare gulls. An adult **Franklin's Gull**, the fourth recorded in Berks, was beautifully photographed at BML 8/8 (RH, JR) on its very brief visit. Previous records are of 2 in 2011 and one in 2015.



(above) The adult Franklin's Gull at Blue Marsh Lake on 8/8/2024. Photo by Russ Hoffman



(above) The adult Franklin's Gull at Blue Marsh Lake on 8/8/2024/ Photo by John Ruggles.

An imm. **Laughing Gull** was photographed at the BML beach 8/9 (PJW). The same or perhaps another imm. was seen at BML's Church Rd. access point 8/19 (JH, AP). Many others were reported regionally during this time. The season's only **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was at BML 11/28-29 (ZS, AP). Probably thanks to TS Debby, all four of the likely tern species were seen.

Caspian Tern, the most regular, was reported in small numbers of one to 3 over a long period spanning 8/1 –

9/17 (m.ob.). Two **Black Terns** hawked for insects over the waterlilies in mist and rain at LO 8/8 (MW) and one was at BML 8/9 (AP). A **Forster's Tern** was seen briefly at BML 8/7 (BL, AP). Three or 4 **Common Terns** were seen by several birders at the BML beach 8/8. One Common Tern at LO 9/26 closed out the season on terns.

Starting with one at Hopewell L. 9/3 (JB, TK), **Pied-billed Grebes** were reported for the rest of the period. This grebe prefers the shallow, waterlily filled cove at LOPC, where 7 were counted in the receding waters 10/29 (MW). Three birders making separate checklists counted one (AP), 2 (BL) or 3 (MG) **Horned Grebes** at BML 11/24, the only reports this fall. A **Common Loon** at LO 8/8 (AP, PJW) was very early and perhaps a storm bird. With no rainstorms causing fallouts during their regular migration period, few other loons were seen on the lakes. At HMS, the two highest counts of loons flying over were of 23 on 11/16 and 13 on 11/24. Most **Double-crested Cormorants** passed through in Oct as usual. At LO, 51 were seen 10/6 and 58 on 10/19 (RK). At HMS, 106 were counted flying over on 10/7 and 120 on 11/2.



Three of the 4 Glossy Ibis near Old Morlatton Village on 8/10/2024. Photo by Brian Lineaweaver

Western Cattle Egret followed cows on a farm near Tipton 11/4-8 (PS). One was at Pheasant Valley Farm, Robesonia and later at nearby Palm Rd. 11/17 (AP, JR).



(above) The Snowy Egret at Blue Marsh Lake. Photo by Brian Lineaweaver

Four **Glossy Ibis** sightings came on the heels of TS Debby. Seven were in a wetland along the SR near Old Morlatton Village 8/10 (RH, LI) and one the next day. One probed the lily pads among many egrets at LO 8/10-12 (m.ob.), and one was at SGL 280, BML 8/12 (GS). A birder watching for nighthawks saw 2 **Am. Bitterns** fly over his home near LO on the evening of 9/8 (AW). A flock of 14 **Black-crowned Night Herons** photographed flying along BML 8/8 (RH) was large for Berks and may have included storm birds. BCNH of the summering population were reported at LO and BML till early Oct. A juvenile on the mudflats at LOBC 10/29-30 was late in leaving (KD, RK). A



(above) The Western Cattle Egret with a cow. Photo by Cassidy Horst

Tropical storm Debby also brought the year's only **Snowy Egret** to the BML beach 8/8-9 (RH, m.ob.). As it moved around BML over the next few days, it was seen at two other vantage points 8/11-12 (RH, AZ).

Meanwhile at LO, there was a replay of the **Great Egret** spectacle described in July. On 8/8-9, 63 were counted at West Shore Bridge, increasing to 72 on 8/10 (AW, MW). As in July, the birds soon dispersed.

Most of the raptors recorded in fall were counted at HMS. David Barber's annual summary of statewide raptor counts can be read in the fall issue of Pennsylvania Birds. Largely due to unfavorable weather patterns, counts of 12 of the 16 raptor species monitored at HMS were below average. Perhaps unsurprisingly, **Bald Eagle** bucked the trend and set a new count record. The sixth **Mississippi Kite** ever recorded at HMS glided past North Lookout 10/15. The big day for **Broad-winged Hawks** at HMS was 9/15, when just 1870 were counted. The seasonal total of BWAH was 31% below average. Off the KR, the largest reported BWAH flight was of 50 birds at Hopewell NHS 9/29 (WM). An imm. **Golden Eagle** seen at Green Hills Preserve 11/13 (AZ) had chosen to migrate through the Piedmont rather than along the KR. A **Short-eared Owl**, present for about a week, was seen at Pheasant Valley Farm, the only consistent wintering site, 11/11 & 16 (BL). A **N. Saw-whet Owl** was heard at SGL 106, Port Clinton 11/7 (BL, JR, JM).

A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** seen in a Lower Heidelberg Twp. yard 8/24 (BL) was about a month early. There was an exceptional flight of **Red-headed Woodpeckers** at HMS. On 19 dates between 8/19 and 10/16, counters recorded a total of 40, much higher than average. Perhaps the population increase noted in Berks in previous reports is part of a broader trend.

As in previous years, **Olive-sided Flycatchers** were most often seen at HMS (single birds on four dates 8/28 – 9/30) and Angora Fruit Farm on Mt. Penn (single birds 8/24 – 9/18). Angora's abandoned orchard allows good looks with long lines of sight at Empidonax spp. such as **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher**, which was seen there 8/24 – 9/18, often with **Least Flycatchers**.



*The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher at Berks County Park System's Angora Fruit Farm.
Photo by Brian Lineweaver*

A "yellow-bellied kingbird sp." (eBird designation) was briefly seen from below at the Angelica Cr. Trail 11/5 (JR). Its yellow belly, gray back and notched tail were noted, but its head could not clearly be seen before it flew away.

Seeing large Blue Jay flocks silently flying just above the treetops along the slopes of the KR is one of the highlights of late Sep at HMS. This year 4359 flew by on 9/30 and 1000+ on two other days. At KDRC, another clear vantage point, the season's high count of 574 jays was made 10/2 (KG). A small irruption of **Black-capped Chickadees** started in Sep (7 at HMS 9/2), but most were reported in Oct and Nov when birds began visiting feeders. Most reports were of single birds, but a few small groups were seen. A strong early surge of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** (4 each on 9/2, 4 & 9 at HMS) extended into Oct, when 1-3 were seen at each of about 15 places countywide. But it lost steam as the earlier birds moved on, and few were reported after mid-Nov.

Some of the stronger pulses of migrating **Catharus thrushes** were detected by listening for their nocturnal flight calls at dawn. **Veeries** are the earliest migrants in this group. In District Twp., 88 calls of Veery were heard 8/21 and 70 on 9/5 (RK). A few **Gray-cheeked Thrushes** were heard starting 9/14, notably 6 calls 10/4 as part of a large **Swainson's Thrush** flight. There were more sightings of GCTH than usual, single birds having been found at 9 places in Sep and Oct, and 3 at HMS 9/30.

A **Gray-cheeked/Bicknell's Thrush** call was heard in District Twp. during the 10/4 flight, a different voice in a wave of about 400 Swainson's Thrush calls (RK). The vast mudflats at LOBC attracted large flocks of 200 **Am. Pipits** 10/26 and 400 on 11/2 (RK), their colors so well matched with the mud that they were difficult to count.

The moderate **Purple Finch** flight was strongest and best documented at HMS, where they were recorded 8/31 – 11/30 with peak counts of 78 on 10/21 and 47 on 11/25. Single birds or flocks of fewer than 10 were the rule off the KR, and most had left by early Dec. The first **Pine Siskin** to make the fall list was at a Mohnton feeder 9/26 (MG), but this year's small flight was mostly along the KR. Counters at North Lookout, HMS tallied siskins from 10/12 – 11/29 with high counts of 22 on 11/4 and 36 on 11/18. Off the KR there were just four reports and the highest count was of 4 siskins at Angelica Park 11/6 (JR). A total of 5 **Am. Tree Sparrows**, much more common just 20 years ago, appeared on four checklists 10/28 – 11/30. Birders found more **Lincoln's Sparrows** than tree sparrows, one or 2 at each of about 7 places 9/12 – 11/2 (m.ob.).

A lucky and observant birder spotted a rare **Yellow-headed Blackbird**, noting especially the "clear and distinct yellow head," flying with 22 Red-winged Blackbirds over Wyomissing Park 11/9 (AP). A few **Bobolinks** were occasionally heard flying over HMS in Aug and Sep, and 5 were heard overhead at UMP 9/28 (RK, et al.). The declining **E. Meadowlark** was represented by 5 birds on 4 checklists at grasslands 8/5 – 10/7. For a short time in Oct, the LO mudflats attracted more **Rusty Blackbirds** than most local birders had seen in years. A flock of at least 120 probed the mud and flipped dead leaves at LOPC 10/29 (MW), and smaller numbers were seen on days before and after. A flock of 20 was counted at HMS 11/9, and one to 4 were seen at other locations in Oct and Nov.



Fall adult male Cape May Warbler among the pink stems of Asian Devil's Walkingstick at Angora Fruit Farm. Photo by Brian Lineaweaver

Thirty warbler species were seen. The busiest warbler mornings at North Lookout, HMS were in late Aug. On 8/23, the season's only **Golden-winged Warbler** was part of a large flight of 90 **Blackburnian Warblers**, 46 **Black-throated Green Warblers**, 9 **Cape May Warblers**, 4 **Tennessee Warblers**, 4 **Magnolia Warblers**, one **Pine Warbler** and several others. A smaller flight of 29 **Blackburnians**, 23 **Black-throated Greens**, 17 **Cape Mays**, one **Worm-eating Warbler** and several others kept counters busy 8/26. With few cold fronts to provide tailwinds, the rest of the warbler season at HMS was much quieter. Of the spruce budworm warblers, **Cape May Warbler** was the most widely reported. At Angora Fruit Farm and other places, Cape Mays in particular gather to eat the abundant tiny blue fruits of the invasive Asian devil's walkingstick (*Aralia elata*). **Blackpoll** (15 HMS 9/27) and **Tennessee** were widely seen, but there were few records of **Bay-breasted Warbler**, about 12 in all countywide.



*(Above) Fall adult female Cape May Warbler among the pink stems of Asian Devil's Walkingstick at Angora Fruit Farm.
Photo by Brian Lineaweaver*

Canada Warbler singletons were found at each of 10 places 8/15 – 9/11 (m.ob.). A **Wilson's Warbler** was at HR 9/3 (KG), one at HMS 9/9, and one at KDRC 9/20 (KG, MW). Most **Blue Grosbeaks** were reported in Aug, possibly breeders or local dispersers.

Single **Orange-crowned Warblers** were found at each of four places 9/30 – 10/15, a good showing. A **Connecticut Warbler** was at KDRC 10/2 (KG) and 10/18 (AW), and one was at Saddlebrook Playground 10/3 (AP). A **Mourning Warbler** was seen at SGL 280 on 9/19 (JSp) and another at Hopewell L. 9/30 (JR). Two good sized groups of **Palm Warblers** were seen, 15 birds at Daniel Boone Homestead 10/13 (KK) and 19 yellow **Palm Warblers** at Big Woods Trail 10/23 (LI, RK, AZ).

*(Below) Adult male Canada warbler
Photo by Brian Lineaweaver*



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B.O.C. Initial & Renewal Memberships, Now at Two Levels

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

- **Regular Membership Dues - \$15/ year /per person**
- **Sustaining Membership Dues - \$25 or more/ year / per person**

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BOC Membership and Renewal

- Payment is for **September 2025 – August 2025**

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

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

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

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

Name(s):

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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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