



Berks Bird Report

Summer 2024 – Rudy Keller

Berks County, PA. Bird Report Summary. June 1 – July 31 2024

Abbreviations: Blue Marsh L. (BML), Big Woods Trail (BWT), French Creek State Park (FCSP), Hawk Mt. Sanctuary (HMS), Kernsville Dam & Recreation Area (KDRA), Kittatinny Ridge (KR), L. Ontelaunee (LO), Schuylkill R. (SR).

Atlasing got off to a strong start. At least some data were entered in all Berks atlas blocks. Birders confirmed breeding by 106 species, the fifth highest rate in the state, and 150 species were assigned a breeding code.

A domestic **Mute Swan** pair at Arrowhead Golf Course in Amity Twp. fledged several cygnets (CF) that will probably join the feral population when they mature. A tardy **Lesser Scaup** drake was at LO 6/5 (RK). A female **Hooded Merganser** with 2 ducklings near Old Morlatton Village on the SR 7/1 (LI, PJW, LC) confirmed breeding by that species. Female **Common Mergansers** trailing broods of various sizes were reported at four places along the SR and its larger tributaries in Jun and early Jul (BB, LI, JS, MW). **Wild Turkeys** are more often seen by hunters than by birders. Nevertheless, hens with poults were reported in Pike Twp. (RK), Tipton Watershed (SF), and near Windsor Castle (AB) by atlasers in Jun. A **Ruffed Grouse** hen with 3 chicks at HMS 6/28 (DB) confirmed breeding by the small population on the KR. A **Pied-billed Grebe** on the SR at Monocacy Cr. 7/5 (LM) was probably a summering loner. This grebe bred at Glen Morgan L. IBA in the 1990's. A **Horned Grebe** in breeding plumage at LO 6/11 & 15 (RK) was late heading north.



*An Adult Female Hooded Merganser and duckling.
Photo by Russ Hoffman*

The **Eurasian Collared-Dove** colony in Shartlesville was discovered in 2012, but breeding there has yet to be confirmed. A male seen aggressively courting a female atop a chimney 6/25 (RH, LI, RK) was a step in that direction. **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** was confirmed breeding in at least one atlas block when a photographer

captured a picture of a well grown fledgling at BWT/FCSP on the early date of Jun 1 (RH). Most other reports of this cuckoo were of its voice in the forest. The sole reported **Black-billed Cuckoo** was heard on an atlas point count at FCSP 6/5 (GG). A **Common Nighthawk** in Hamburg 6/4 (SH) and another near Wernersville 6/9 (BL) were migrants. **E. Whip-poor-wills** sang through the night only on the KR. Two to 4 birds were heard at each of three places, most often at SGL 110, Northkill Gap, where aggressive territorial behavior was seen 6/25 (RK, et al.).

A **Virginia Rail** was heard in the KDRA cattail marsh 7/11 (KG) and one or 2 **Sora** were heard there 6/2 & 3 (KG, TU). See the Spring, 2024 report for documentation of territorial behavior by these rails at KDRA. Since the flooded fields where we most often see shorebirds were mostly dry or overgrown, few of these birds were seen. The goodies in the northbound group were a **Semipalmated Plover**, a **White-rumped Sandpiper** and a **Least Sandpiper** seen by many birders at School Rd. pond, Fleetwood 6/1. Birders reported **Spotted Sandpipers** at five places, with courtship observed at Bernhart's Dam (RH). About 10 nonbreeding **Double-crested Cormorants**, the usual number, summered at LO.

The only reported **American Bittern** was photographed at KDRA 6/2 (TU). An imm. **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron**, a rare find, was photographed along the SR near Old Morlatton Village 7/5 (LM). **Black-crowned Night-Heron** has not been confirmed breeding since 2014, when a May hailstorm destroyed the last known rookery. Adults and early season juveniles have been seen at BML and LO during every summer since then. From Jun through the first few days of Aug this year, as many as 7 adults and 4 juvs were seen on various dates at LO, giving hope that the species may still breed here.

We expect post-breeding **Great Egrets** to appear every summer starting about mid-Jul. This year's influx was a record breaker. Numbers began building at LO about 7/22 (AW, MW), when over 70 were scattered across the acres of waterlilies at West Shore Bridge. A search of the backwaters and coves 7/25 revealed 134 (RK) in a scene more evocative of the Everglades than a PA reservoir. They slowly dispersed during the following days.



Figure 1 Great Egrets at Lake Ontelaunee - Photo by Bill Uhrich

(Zoom in to see all the birds in the right rear of the picture)

A single imm. **Little Blue Heron**, sometimes bullied by the egrets, was among them 7/22 – 25 (m.obs.).



Immature Little Blue Heron - Photo by Bill Uhrich

Nonbreeding **Ospreys** again summered at the lakes and along the SR. Though stick carrying behavior was observed once early in the season (DH), no nest has been found. **Sharp-shinned Hawks**, rare and secretive breeders, are very difficult to detect. A returning pair nesting at Hay Cr. (RH) provided the only breeding confirmation. In contrast, breeding by **Cooper's Hawks** was confirmed when nestlings or noisy fledglings were seen at five locations (RH, RK, LM, BU, TU). The two **Bald Eagle** nests known to this compiler fledged young, but this is surely an undercount of nests in the county. It still remains to be seen if this atlas confirms the perception that **Red-shouldered Hawks** have increased as breeders. Five pairs were confirmed nesting in the extensive Piedmont forest in southern Berks, their stronghold for many years. In eastern Berks, two sites that had hosted breeding **Broad-winged Hawks** during the two previous atlases were occupied by pairs of Red-shouldered Hawks this year (RK). Two pairs of Broad-winged hawks were confirmed nesting at FCSP (KA) and one at HMS (DB). Single birds or pairs were reported at five other locations, mostly on the KR.



Atlasing has confirmed that **Red-headed Woodpeckers** are more widespread breeders than previously known. Nesting was confirmed at eight places and probable nesting at five more. At many of these sites, dead standing ash trees are prominent, providing the large snags and more open woodlots that these birds prefer.

Red-headed Woodpeckers

at Dreibilbis Farm in Virginville, PA

Photo by Russ Hoffman

American Kestrels were confirmed breeding at seven sites, doubtless an undercount. At most of these, the birds nested in boxes provided for them. Reading's **Peregrine Falcon** pair fledged 3 young, which were banded by PGC.

An **Olive-sided Flycatcher** at SGL 106, Port Clinton 6/2 (BL) was on its way north. A **Blue-headed Vireo** was seen at Nolde Forest EEC, which has mature conifer plantations, 6/25 (BQ). The first recorded nesting of BHVI south of the KR in Berks was documented there in 2022. This vireo was also reported at six KR locations in hemlock ravines. Breeding by **Common Ravens** in eastern Berks was confirmed when adults followed by stridently begging fledglings were seen in District and Longswamp Twps. 6/19 & 20 (CE, RK, PS). Birders counted 21 **Bank Swallows** at Haines & Kibblehouse Quarry, Birdsboro, their only known breeding colony, 6/17 (JR, AW). Atlasers reported **Cliff Swallows** tending nests or fledglings at six bridges at LO, BML, Hamburg and Lenhartsville.

The two largest colonies are at LO, where up to 36 Cliff Swallows were seen at West Shore Bridge and about



An American Kestrel Family at Green Hills Preserve - Robeson Twp., Berks County PA

Photo by Russ Hoffman

12 at the Rt. 73 dam in Jun (KG, TK, RK, et al.). Reports showed healthy populations of **Veery** and **Wood Thrush** at many places, but the largest populations of both are in the moist Piedmont Forest at FCSP, where 18 Veeries were counted 6/25 and 29 Wood Thrushes 6/10 (PW). A few **Hermit Thrushes** bred along the top of the KR in the 1990's before logging altered the habitat. One Hermit reported at SGL 106, Port Clinton 6/6 (DB) may indicate that they are not gone.

A **Dark-eyed Junco** at Bear Creek Mt. Resort 7/22 (JV) was a summer anomaly. The grassland sparrow trio was well documented. **Grasshopper Sparrow**, reported at about a dozen locations, appears to be the most common. A few checklists listed up to 5 birds, sometimes including fledged young. Hay fields in Windsor and Albany Twps. are the best places to find them. **Savannah Sparrow** was reported at about seven locations, with fewer birds per site. It sometimes co-exists with Grasshopper Sparrow and is more common in the Fleetwood area and western Berks farmland. **Vesper Sparrow**, reported at only three sites, remains the least common of the trio. **Swamp Sparrow** is so thinly distributed in summer that it has sometimes gone unreported. This year one was found along Bright School Rd. near BML 7/2 (JSp) and 2 at Daniel Boone Homestead 7/26 (JK).



Yellow-breasted Chat was found at five places, more than usual. Most birders seek them at BWT/FCSP, where one to 3 were seen and heard through Jul. One observant birder got a rare breeding confirmation photo of a fledgling with a nearby adult carrying food in a hedgerow there 7/9 (JK).

Adult Yellow-breasted Chat carrying food to feed it's young. (above)

The recently fledged youngster is hiding in a nearby bush waiting to be fed. (Right)

Photos by Jason Kline



Small groups of **Bobolinks** were reported displaying at seven hay or fallow fields in Jun, with fewer than 10 birds at most sites. Some of the less intensively managed fields have fledged young in past years, but others are cut too early to allow chicks to fledge. **Eastern Meadowlarks** in even smaller numbers share these fields and face the same problem. Counts of one to 4 E. Meadowlarks were made at each of nine sites in Jun with no breeding confirmations.

Of the 20 warbler species reported this summer, 3 were nonbreeding species. A **Magnolia Warbler** at SGL 106, Port Clinton 6/3 & 6 (DB, PJW) was a late spring migrant. A **Yellow-throated Warbler** at Union Meadows Park on the SR 7/14 (JT) was probably a lingering overshooting male (see Spring, 2024 report). A **Canada Warbler** near Kempton 7/19 (HW) was probably an early fall migrant. Atlasers visiting under-birded blocks found some of the less common breeding warblers at places from which they had not previously been reported, at least in recent years. **Blue-winged Warbler**, **Northern Parula**, **Chestnut-sided Warbler** and **Prairie Warbler** were among those species. Numbers were small, usually one or 2 singing males per location. **Kentucky Warbler** was found at its two traditional sites, SGL 106, Pine Swamp Rd. (AW) and Sixpenny Cr., FCSP (TU). Breeding was confirmed at the latter site by a bander documenting brood patches on a netted bird 6/19 (TU). Pairs of **Cerulean Warblers** were documented at HMS (DB) and SGL 106, Port Clinton (BL, et al.). Singing males were reported at three other KR sites in Jun (TB, MG, AM, JTr). **Pine Warbler** was found in eastern white pines at Hay Cr. Reservoir 6/1 (TU) and 6/27 (AW). Visits to other mature eastern white pine plantations, as at LO, during the breeding season might reveal more. **Black-throated Blue Warblers** and **Black-throated Green Warblers** were listed at several places in their narrow Berks breeding range on the KR.



Blue Grosbeak photo by Russ Hoffman

Singing **Blue Grosbeak** males and some pairs were found at about eleven places, some of them previously undocumented. **Dickcissels** have returned to fields and pastures at Rodale Experimental Farm in Maxatawny Twp. for nine consecutive years and were reported intermittently there in many years before that. During all those years, breeding has been confirmed only a few times, including this year, when a female was seen carrying food to a nest or fledged young hidden in the grass 6/16 (RG). Apparently just one pair was present this summer from about 6/3 till 7/29, though 2 males were sometimes reported. This was not an invasion year. Dickcissels were not reported at any of the other farms they have visited in the past.

OBSERVERS: Rudy Keller, rckeller544@gmail.com, Katie Anderson, Ada Bailey, David Barber, Ed Barrell, Joe Beatrice, Beau Bivens, Mark Boyd, Bracken Brown, Tom Buehl, Liz Cates, Catherine Elwell, David Feathers, Camille Fiescher, Steve Fordyce, Ross Gallardy, Greg George, Laurie Goodrich, Mark Grebe, Kerry Grim, Mike Grubb, Karen Hardy, Scott Harp, Holly Hartshorne, Dan Hinnebusch, Russ Hoffman, Linda Ingram, Ted Keen, Jason Kline, Brian Lineaweaver, Lisa Miller, Anna Mindel, Andy Price, Brian Quindlen, John Ruggles, Christian Scheibe, Mike Slater, Jacob Socolar, Jo Spilde, Irene Taylor, Bill Uhrich, Todd Underwood, Helen Weaver, Patty Werth, Amanda Williams, Andy Wlasniewski, Matt Wlasniewski, Peter & Jane Wolfe, Art Zdancewic.

Some pictures of birds not mentioned above:



Eastern Wood Pewee on its nest

by Russ Hoffman



A greenish looking Chipping sparrow

by Russ Hoffman

“The Chipping Sparrow photo is interesting. Apparently the yellow-green color is from reflected light from the leaves. Sometimes the eye sees this, but the brain corrects it. Not so with a camera. You would think this was some kind of warbler before looking closer.”
Rudy Keller

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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.

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

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Dan Brennan (2024-27) dbrennan50@aol.com
David Hemberger (2024-27) dave.hemberger@gmail.com

Linda Ingram Newsletter Coordinator lindamingram29@gmail.com

Rudy Keller Newsletter Editor and

Avian Report Compiler for the Summer & Winter Seasons rckeller@dejazzd.com

Mike Slater paplantings@gmail.com Website manager and newsletter composer

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(This recently established category helps us support our programs and activities and will be recognized in our newsletter.)

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