



# Berks Birds

## August to November 2025

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Abbreviations: Angora Fruit Farm (**AFF**), Blue Marsh L. (**BML**), District Twp. (**DT**), E. J. Breneman Quarry (**BQ**), Gotwals pond, Oley (**GP**), Heidelberg Twp. (**HT**), Kernsville Dam & Recreation Area (**KDRA**), Kittatinny Ridge (**KR**), L. Ontelaunee (**LO**), Schuylkill R. (**SR**).



*Yellow-bellied Flycatcher at Angora Fruit Farm. (See the report on page 4)*

*. Photo by Russ Hoffman*

For the second summer and fall, drought dominated the weather. The main effect noticed by birders was the low number of migrating waterfowl. Without rain induced fallouts, counts of many ducks, loons and grebes tend to be low, as they were this year and last.

**Snow Geese** had barely begun to arrive by the end of November, when 67 were at GP 11/30 (RK). Two **Cackling Geese** were intermittently seen with Canada Geese, one at GP 11/6-19 (RK) and one at BQ 11/19-29 (RK). Two **Snow X Canada Goose hybrids** were members of Canada Goose flocks. One was seen regularly at BQ 10/16 – 11/29 (RK) and the other was at GP 10/30 and 11/19 (RK). Like Snow Geese, **Tundra Swans** barely made the fall list. One flew over HMS 11/20 & 30, and one was at BQ 11/23 (RK).

As last fall, common non-breeding dabbling ducks were reported in low numbers. Weather was one factor because drought dried up ephemeral habitat, but the increase in duck (following are the seasonal high counts of

dabblers recorded in single digits on most checklists. Three **Blue-winged Teal** at LO 9/29 (AW) were the only ones reported. Three **N. Shovelers** were at BML 10/20 (AP). A flock of 20 **Gadwall** was at LO 10/31 (RK). Eleven **Am. Wigeon** were at BML 11/16 (RK). A bit of rain brought 21 **Am. Black Ducks** to LO 10/30 (RK). Six **N. Pintail** were at Conestoga Landfill 11/9 (FH) and six at BQ 10/30 (ZS). Twelve **Green-winged Teal** were at BQ 11/23 (RK).

Non-breeding diving ducks, which include the classic fallout species, were also scarce. A flock of 28 **Ring-necked Ducks** at BQ 11/9 (RK) provided the seasonal high count. A Greater Scaup at BML 11/11 (BL) followed by four at BML 11/13 (BL) were the only ones listed. Fifteen **Greater/Lesser Scaup** were at BML 11/6 (BL). **Lesser Scaup** was not reported. The only scoters were two **Surf Scoters** at BQ 11/23 (RK) and two **White-winged Scoters** at BML 11/6 (BL, AP). Strong NW winds brought the fall high count of 57 **Buffleheads** to LO 11/6 (RK). Two **Red-breasted Mergansers** were at BML 11/19 (RK). **Ruddy Ducks** had already begun to return to their overwintering site at BQ 10/1 (ZS), increasing to 30 by 11/9 (RK). Light rain brought 39 Ruddies to LO 10/31 (RK).

Breeding season reports that **Wild Turkeys** had successfully bred in parts of Berks were reinforced this fall. At least seven checklists reported flocks of 10 – 22 birds that included young of the year. Birders visiting Shartlesville to list **Eurasian Collared-Dove** found one to eight birds on many dates spanning 8/9 – 11/22. These doves are seldom reported outside the town, so a bird at Berne Bridge, Hamburg 8/10 (KG) was a bit of an outlier. While **Yellow-billed Cuckoos** were widely reported, it was unusual to have no reports of Black-billed Cuckoo. There was no dearth of **Common Nighthawk** reports from 8/19 – 9/30. At least five checklists reported 10 or more birds. The highest count was 56 at KDRA 8/31 (KG). An E. **Whip-poor-will** at SGL 106, Port Clinton 8/3 (LC, LI, RK) was still on territory. Migrating birds were heard at HMS 9/3 (JT) and 10/5 (EM, JP).

KDRA lies at the intersection of two local flyways, the SR and the KR. Over the years, KG has recorded some impressive counts of migrating **Common Nighthawks**, **Blue Jays** and **Chimney Swifts** at this site. From a clear vantage point after 6:00 pm this fall, he counted 428 Chimney Swifts 8/23, 210 on 8/28 and 340 on 9/15. Chimney Swifts are also common migrants at HMS, where the fall high count was 58 on 8/25. Peak counts of **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** passing North Lookout at HMS were all made in the last week of August, including 25 on 8/25 and 16 each on 8/27, 28.

The season's only **Virginia Rail** was detected in Albany Twp. 10/4 (HW). Because ephemeral pools in fields had been dried up by drought, shorebird habitat was mostly limited to permanent ponds and lakes. A dozen shorebird species were reported, most of them annual visitors in spring and fall. The more unusual species included an **Am. Golden-Plover** seen with about 175 **Killdeer** on a manured field along Mine Lane, Oley Twp. 10/5-7 (AS, m.obs.). An **Am. Woodcock** briefly wandered along a garden path at HMS 9/26 (RK). Four others were detected by dawn calls or twittering wings at various places on four November mornings. A **Baird's Sandpiper** was at Blue Mt. Academy 8/24, 25 (DM, AW). Three **White-rumped Sandpipers** were on an LO mudflat 10/11 (PJW).

**Bonaparte's Gulls** were reported on three dates, all at BML. One was there 10/20 (AP), 50 on 11/12 (AS), and two on 11/13 (RH, BL). An imm. **Laughing Gull** wandered inland from the coast and stayed at BML 8/14-22 (RH, m.obs.). The season's only reported **Great Black-backed Gull** was at BML 11/24 (PJW). An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at LO 9/3 (JH)

established Berks's earliest fall and only September record of a gull usually not seen before November. Two at BML 11/16 (BL) and one there 11/29 (JR) were more timely. One or two **Caspian Terns** were seen on each of six dates 8/16 – 9/6 at BML or LO. A **Forster's Tern** was reported at LO 8/14 (ZS), another 9/6 (DC), and 10, a high count for Berks, at LO 9/25 (AS). The sole reported **Common Tern** was at BML 8/13 (RH).

A **Pied-billed Grebe** summering at Kaercher Cr. Park was still there 8/15 (KG). Up to nine Pied-billed, a small number, were seen at BML, LO or BQ on various November dates. No **Horned Grebes** were reported. Hawkwatch high counts of **Common Loons** were modest. Nine passed over HMS 11/1 and 40 over Rt. 183 11/1 (HM). Lacking storms to bring more, just two Common Loons, an extremely low number, were seen on lakes. No **Red-throated Loons** were reported.

The only reported **Am. Bittern** was nicely photographed at Peters Cr., LO 11/8 (DK). The



easiest place to see **Black-crowned Night-Herons** is the LO spillway, where as many as five, including juvs., were seen in August and early September. A rare juv. **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** was spotted among the Black-crowned at LO 8/8 (AS) and stayed till 8/18, photographed by many birders. Another rare heron, a **Western Cattle Egret**, was seen among cows on a farm in HT 10/20-31 (BL, m.obs.).

A **Northern Saw-whet Owl** was captured on a wildlife cam at a backyard pond in Birdsboro 10/25 (JE). Two saw-whets were heard at LO 11/22 (JS)

*Immature Yellow-crowned Night-Heron at the Lake Ontelaunee Spillway.  
Photo by Russ Hoffman*

and one at the same place 11/24 (AS). One was heard near Kempton 10/20 and one nearby 10/21 (HW). Results of this fall's Northern Saw-whet Owl banding project at HMS will be made available elsewhere.

Over several seasons these reports have commented on the mind-boggling increase in **Red-headed Woodpeckers**, not long ago a very localized species in Berks. Counts of these woodpeckers migrating past HMS indicate that the increase may be more than local. Between 9/6 and 10/14, the usual window of occurrence, 39 Red-headed Woodpeckers migrated past North Lookout, with high counts of five 9/26 and 10/5. The usual seasonal total has been about 10 birds. The increase locally appears to correlate with the widespread availability of dead ash trees following the emerald ash borer catastrophe. Is any ornithologist studying this?

**Olive-sided Flycatchers** are on many birders' target lists in fall. This year they were reported from 10 places, most often at AFF and HMS, 8/23 – 9/29. **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers**, equally sought, were found singly at four places 8/23 - 9/13, with several reports from AFF. (Photo on page 1)

**Philadelphia Vireos** were seen around the county on about 16 dates 8/26 – 10/2. The high count was of three at HMS 9/28. **Bank Swallows**, our least common swallows, are most easily identified and counted when lined up on utility wires in farmland. The two highest counts were made this way – 28 in HT 8/9 (BL) and 20 along Clauss Rd., Hamburg 8/17 (P JW).

**Red-breasted Nuthatches** were steady migrants at HMS 8/29 – 11/24, with high counts of seven 9/19 and eight 10/18. Off the KR, they visited many feeders. Groves of cone bearing eastern white pines attracted good numbers, including 6 at BML 9/10 (BL) and 12 at Hay Cr. 11/2 (JK). Just one **Marsh Wren** was found, a bird in the cattail marsh at KDRA, where they have most consistently been found in recent years, 9/27 (KG). Seventy nocturnal flight calls (nfc's) of **Veery** were heard at dawn in DT 9/13 (RK), the peak flight there. **Skulking Gray-cheeked Thrushes** were seen at seven places on seven dates 9/27 – 10/10. Single nfc's (nocturnal flight calls) of Gray-cheeks were heard at dawn in DT 9/21, 9/28 and 10/4 (RK). The peak flight of **Swainson's Thrushes** in DT was on 10/3, when 400 nfc's were heard at dawn (RK). The first report and largest number of **American Pipits** was 75 at the shorebird spot on Mine Lane, Oley 10/5 (AW, MW). Smaller flocks were found at other sites into November.

Five **Evening Grosbeaks** were reported, all flyby birds on the KR. One was on the ridge above Hamburg 10/31 (KG), two passed the Rt. 183 hawkwatch 11/20 (HM) and single birds were seen at HMS 11/23, 26. A fairly strong movement of **Purple Finches** began in mid-September and reached full steam in late October and November. The largest of many counts at HMS were 180 on 10/17 and 115 on 10/23. Off the KR at Mt. Penn, 26 were seen 11/15 and 29 on 11/23 (JS). Smaller flocks were seen in the rest of the county. **Pine Siskins** appeared later than Purple Finches and peaked about the same time, but in much lower numbers. They were recorded at HMS 10/15 – 11/16, with peak counts of 22 on 10/8 and 20 on 11/15. Elsewhere siskins were scarce and no count exceeded four.

Two **Grasshopper Sparrows** were seen at SGL 280 11/3 (JSp), a late date for a sparrow that in recent years has seldom been reported after the breeding season. Six **Am. Tree Sparrows** in total were reported at four places 11/1-24 with a high count of two at LO 11/22 (JS). The only listed Vesper Sparrow was a bird still on territory at Rodale 8/10 (TG). A flock of 24 **Savannah Sparrows** in a wet meadow in the Oley Valley 11/23 (JS) provided the highest fall count by far. **Lincoln's Sparrow** is another fall target bird for many birders, who found them at about 20 locations 9/20 – 10/19. Three near Virginville 10/11 (m.obs.) and four at Green Hills Preserve 10/3 (JT) were the high counts.



*Lincoln's Sparrow. Photo by Russ Hoffman*

A flock of 25 **Bobolinks** visited the grass pastures at Willow Run Farm near Fleetwood 9/9 (NW). Ten other reports listed one to four birds at various places 8/15 – 10/3. **E. Meadowlark** holds on in very small numbers. Counts of one to three were made at each of about 10 places 8/1 – 11/27. Ten **Rusty Blackbirds** at LO 10/25 (AP) and 10 at Peters Cr. 11/1 (RK) were the largest flocks reported. A few were counted at HMS and five were at KDRA 11/1 (KG).

The morning songbird flights at HMS are often indicators of peak flights in the warbler migration. The first strong songbird flight of the season 8/28 brought 11 warbler species featuring early migrants such as 35 **Blackburnian Warblers** and 12 **Chestnut-sided Warblers**, plus 19 unidentified warblers. On 9/19, the list of 11 warbler species included 11 **N. Parula**, seasonal high counts of 23 **Cape May Warblers** and 58 **Black-throated Green Warblers**, and 111 unidentified warblers.

The 31 warbler species listed by birders covered most of the possibilities, including some skulkers. The sole reported **Orange-crowned Warbler** was at KDRA 10/1 (KG). Single **Connecticut Warblers** were seen at Reading Airport 8/3 (JSp), at LO 9/1 (TS), Douglassville 9/12 (LI) and near Leesport 9/22 (SG). Single **Mourning Warblers** were at BML 9/7 (BL), Boyer's Junction 9/9 (KC), and LO 9/10 (TS). Two **Kentucky Warblers** at Hopewell L., French Cr. SP, 8/31 (AZ) gave hope that they still breed there. **Blackpoll Warblers** were notably uncommon. The seasonal high count of nine at HMS 9/27 was low. **Pine Warblers** were unusually well reported. Single birds were listed at about 10 places 8/27 – 9/30. Two birds were seen at each of three places, and three birds were at HMS 10/5. **Canada Warblers** also showed well, especially at AFF, where they were found by seekers of

uncommon flycatchers on five August dates. Single **Wilson's Warblers** were spotted in thickets at five places 8/28 – 9/20.

A very active morning flight at HMS 9/26 brought the fall high counts of 33 **Scarlet Tanagers** and 25 **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks**. Also seen were 14 warbler species and 100 unidentified warblers. All but one of the six reported **Blue Grosbeaks** were seen in August. Some were on breeding territories and others may have been locally dispersing birds. For many years **Dickcissels** had been reported only during the breeding season at Rodale and other farms. That changed this year. One migrating Dickcissel associating with **White-crowned Sparrows** was photographed in HT 11/8 (BL). Eight others were identified by their flight calls at HMS on various dates 8/15 – 11/9 (JG, CK, DK, et al.).

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