



Berks Birds

December 2025 to February 2026

By Rudy Keller –

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Location name abbreviations: Blue Marsh L. (**BML**), E. J. Breneman Quarry (**BQ**), Hawk Mt. Sanctuary (**HMS**), Kittatinny Ridge (**KR**), L. Ontelaunee (**LO**), L. Ontelaunee, Peters Cr. (**PC**), Pheasant Valley Farm (**PVF**), Schuylkill R. (**SR**), State Game Lands 280, Bright School Rd. (**BSR**), CBC's: Reading (**RCBC**), Hamburg (**HCBC**), Bernville (**BCBC**).

Following a series of mild winters, this one was more traditionally cold. January and February brought weeks of continuous snow cover kept in place by sub-freezing temperatures, often in single digits. Compilers of all three CBC's commented that wintry weather had affected their counts by reducing birder effort and making birds harder to find. BML and LO were frozen from mid-January through February. Wintering waterfowl concentrated at BQ, PC, the SR and a few other bodies of water resistant to freezing.

A mass arrival of **Snow Geese** in mid-December included 7,024 tallied on the RCBC 12/14. Counts up to 10,000 (KS) were recorded from mid-December till early January. Most left after snow covered the cornfields in which they feed. Counts similar to the above were made in late February as flocks headed north. The only reported **Ross's Goose** was seen and photographed by two lucky birders (JF, MJ) at BQ 12/30. **Greater White-fronted Geese** have been reported in winter in nine of the last 10 years. This year's birds were all seen at BQ. One was there 12/9 (RK), four 12/27 – 31 (BL, TU, et al.), two 1/24 (MG), one 2/21 and four 2/27, 28 (m.obs.). Single **Cackling Geese** were reported among Canada Geese at five places on many dates spanning the period. Two **Snow X Canada Goose hybrids** reported in fall stayed through part of the winter. One was at BQ 12/9 – 1/24 (m.obs.) and both were at BQ 12/25 (RK). Feral **Mute Swans** were seen at five places in January and February as they moved around in search of open water. Most were singletons, but six (five adults and an imm.) were at BQ 2/22, 23. **Tundra Swans** were migrating south in December (26 over HMS 12/15) and January (22 flying over Marion Twp. 1/10 – BL). Northbound flocks of similar size were reported in late February.

A few **Wood Ducks** lingered until the hard freeze in January. As many as five were sometimes seen along the Tulpehocken Cr. near Red Bridge 12/14 – 1/19. **N. Shoveler** is an uncommon dabbler in all seasons. One or two were at LO 12/6 – 10 (RK, TU, AS) and one was at BQ 1/24, 27. January and

February high counts of the **Gadwall** flock that winters each year at and around LO ranged from 12 – 26, normal for recent years but low by historical standards. A few **Am. Wigeons** were reported, mostly at BQ, where one to seven were seen on many dates 12/5 – 2/28. The two highest counts of wintering **Am. Black Ducks** were made on the icy SR. A flock of 61 was at Union Meadows Park 1/22 (S&F) and 59 were at Douglassville 2/3 (JK). Like Gadwall, this duck was much more common earlier in the 2000's. One or two **Mallard X Am. Black Duck hybrid** drakes were reported all season in the large **Mallard** flock that winters at BQ. One hybrid drake was at Wiley's Bridge 2/10 (RK) and one on the SR at Exeter 2/17 (JK). One to 12 **N. Pintails** were seen at BQ 12/9 through January. The only **Green-winged Teal** reported after mid-January were one to nine at BQ through February.

All the native diving ducks in the genus *Aythya* were reported. **Canvasback**, the least common of the group, was seen by many birders at two places. One, sometimes two, were at BQ 1/27 – 2/21. One to four were at PC 2/9 – 13. Small numbers of **Redheads** have annually wintered at BQ for more than a decade. Counts of this winter's flock at BQ ranged from one to 10 on various dates through the period. One to seven were at PC 1/12 – 2/26 and eight were at Wiley's Bridge 2/21 (TU). **Ring-necked Duck**, the most common *Aythya*, was reported in flocks ranging in size from a few to 42 on open ponds and the SR all winter. Kleptoparasitic *Am. Wigeons* and *Gadwalls* were often seen stealing the aquatic plants that the Ring-necks brought up from their dives. A notably large flock of 71 **Greater Scaup** appeared at LO during unusually cold weather 12/6 (AW). One or two Greater Scaup at PC 2/9 – 14 and two at BQ 2/28 (RK) were normal winter numbers. Eleven **Lesser Scaup** were among the Greater Scaup at LO 12/6 (AW). One or two were at BQ, Wiley's Bridge and PC on various dates in January and February.

A **Long-tailed Duck** at BML 12/15 (BL) was the only one reported this winter. Birders found small groups of **Buffleheads** on a few ponds and streams through winter, with no count higher than 10. **Common Goldeneyes** were scarce. Just three were reported, one at BML 1/2– 7, one at Wiley's Bridge 2/10, 11 (RH) and one at PC 2/13 – 15 (RK). **Common Mergansers** were the most commonly reported ducks after Mallards. A record 61 were counted on the HCBC 12/28. A raft of 300 was on LO 1/16 (RK) before the lake froze. After that, many small groups were seen on the SR and its tributaries. A few **Red-breasted Mergansers** usually appear in winter. Four at LO 12/7 (TU) were the seasonal high count. One or two were at BML on four dates 12/9 – ½ (BL, JS, ZS). One was at BQ 1/11, 13 (LI, MS). Many counts of the **Ruddy Ducks** wintering at BQ ranged from one to 30 birds on many dates through the period. A flock of 13 Ruddy Ducks was at the Fifth St. quarry 1/21. This quarry is much less accessible than BQ and seldom visited by birders.

Some of the larger **Wild Turkey** counts from across the county were 31 near Kempton 1/4 (HW), 12 at Holly Terrace 1/21 (HC), 15 on Mt. Penn 2/14 (BS), and 25 near Mohnton 2/26 (MG). Two **Ruffed Grouse** were reported in the species' narrow Berks range on the KR. One was at HMS 12/12 and one near Lenhartsville north of I 78 on 2/14 (HS). The highest of several counts of **Eurasian Collared-Doves** at their colony in Shartlesville was 11 in a backyard on Apple Dr. 1/18 (MG). A few *Am. Coots* have wintered at BQ each year for decades. Counts made on many dates from 12/15 - 2/28 ranged from one to 10 coots.

Reports of **Sandhill Cranes** have increased in recent years. Four were photographed flying over BML 12/25 (BM). For the first time, one stayed for much of the winter. The bird was documented on cellphone video foraging in old field habitat and in a silt storage basin near PC in mid-January. It was first reported at PC 1/11 (GS). From 2/11 – 22, the crane was seen and photographed by many birders as it waded in the cove and walked and rested on the ice near ice fishermen.

Locating flowing springs or seeps in otherwise frozen farmland was the key to finding **Killdeer** and **Wilson's Snipe**. One or two Killdeer and one to four snipe were found at each of about a dozen such places at various times through the season. The first two **Am. Woodcock** were heard at Hopewell L. 2/20 (S&F). Reports of displaying birds at other locations soon followed. SGL 280, Brownsville has become a hotspot for migrating woodcock in February. Sixteen were detected there 2/27 (AP) and 12 on 2/28 (BL, AP). The number quickly fell as birds moved on.

The peak winter count of **Ring-billed Gulls** was 5000 at BML 12/9 (RK) and the peak count of **Herring Gulls** was 500 at BML on 12/21, 25 (RK). Most gulls left after the lake froze in mid-January. Few **Great Black-backed Gulls** were seen. One or two visited BML on a few dates 12/1 – 1/12. The winter high count was only three at BML 2/21 (AS). A first winter **Glaucous Gull** was spotted at Conestoga Landfill in New Morgan 12/19 (HH). Probably the same bird commuted with other gulls to roost at BML, where it was seen and photographed on various dates 12/19 – 1/15. It was the first Glaucous Gull reported in Berks since 2023. The maximum number of **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** recorded this winter was 11 at BML 12/21 (RK), one of the highest counts of the last 10 years. There was a strong showing of **Iceland Gulls**, all first winter birds as usual. One or two were seen on many dates at BML 12/12 – 1/16. Five, the highest count since 2013, were lined up at the edge of the BML beach 12/31 (TD, RK, BL, AZ).

The only **Pied-billed Grebes** reported after early December were one to six at BQ on many dates 12/5 – 2/28. The only **Horned Grebes** reported after BML and LO froze were one to four at BQ 1/22 – 2/22. The dearth of **Common Loons** noted in fall continued into winter. The only reports were of one at BML 12/27 (DR) and one at BML ½ (BL, AP). **Double-crested Cormorants** did not stay as long into winter as they had in some milder years. One at BML 1/1 (PJW) was the last reported. An **Am. Bittern** found on the HCBC 12/28 was one of very few ever recorded in winter.

Two tracts of vole producing habitat supported **N. Harriers** and other raptors (see below) most of the winter. Grassland and old field habitat at BSR attracted one to three harriers 12/9 – 2/10 (BL, m.obs.). Warm season grassland alternating with strips of unharvested sorghum and corn at PVF held one to three harriers 12/9 – 2/1 (BL, m.obs.). For many years, visits by **Rough-legged Hawks** have been few and short. This winter gave birders more chances to see one. A light morph bird was seen in the Oley Valley 12/17 (RHor) till 12/20. One was at PVF 1/17 (BL). The crowd pleaser was a light morph bird at BSR 1/31 – 2/11, easily seen and photographed as it hunted the fields and perched on treetops for long periods. Birders seeking the rough-leg also reported **Cooper's Hawk**, **Red-shouldered Hawk**, **Red-tailed Hawk**, **Am. Kestrel** and **Merlin** at this productive site. A **Golden Eagle** found on the HCBC 12/28 was the only one reported away from HMS this season.

More **Short-eared Owls** were found than the usual one or two per winter. One was in a field above the BML beach 1/2 (BL, MW). One was at SGL 280, Brownsville 1/3, 5 (AP). Four were at PVF, their most consistent winter location, 1/17 and two were there 1/24 (AP). The PVF birds were also seen at nearby Showers Rd. 1/17 – 26 (KL, AS). A **Long-eared Owl** found during count week of the HCBC was the sole report. Three **N. Saw-whet Owls** were heard on the HCBC 12/28, the only ones this winter.

Few **Am. Kestrels** were seen after snow covered the ground in January. Six **Merlins**, a count record, were seen on the HCBC 12/28. Merlins were recorded as single birds at about 16 places at various times through winter. Reading's **Peregrine Falcon** pair wintered in place. A Peregrine was fairly regularly seen at BML by gull watchers 12/17 – 1/15 and again 2/6 (JS) and 2/11 (PJW) after most gulls had left. Single birds reported at nine other places may have been different birds or the Reading pair on the hunt.

The only reported **E. Phoebe** was beside the SR at Douglassville 12/22 (JK). There was a small influx of **Black-capped Chickadees** in late fall through December. Birds were credibly reported at six places 12/5 – 1/7 at feeders and afield. **Horned Larks** were numerous, especially after snowstorms. The highest counts reached 750. A record count of 50 **Common Ravens** was made on the HCBC 12/28 and 20 gave the RCBC its second highest count 12/14. The small flight of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** noted in fall continued into December, when six were found at LO 12/13 (ZS) and seven at Flying Hills 12/28 (RG). Fewer were seen in January and February. **Gray Catbirds** were reported as frequently as in some milder winters. Single birds were found at seven places. Two of the birds still here in February were surviving at feeders, one in Reading (SD) and one in Henningsville (PS). Most **Am. Pipits** were seen in December. The flocks were small, such as 15 on Mertz Rd. 12/3 (PJW). A few remained after the early snows, including seven foraging on piles of exposed mushroom soil near Oley 1/19 (RK). There were no February reports.

The movement of **Purple Finches** that started in early fall continued at lower volume in December. At HMS, 1,211 Purple Finches were tallied 8/15 – 12/15, the largest flight since 2007. South of the KR the flight was smaller and more diffuse. Flock sizes of fewer than 10 birds were the rule and most moved on. The **Pine Siskin** flight was a faint echo of the Purple Finch flight. Eighteen were seen at HMS 12/15 and 10 near Bethel 12/6 (NF). Besides those, two were at Nolde Forest 1/9 (BL) and one at PC 1/12 (AS). There was a small flight of **Red Crossbills** at HMS 12/8 -15, with 18 counted 12/13. No crossbills were seen away from the KR, which is typical.

This cold, snowy winter brought the best **Lapland Longspur** flight since 2021. Individual birds or small groups of two to six were seen on many farms 12/1 – 2/6. Most foraged on roadsides cleared of snow, making them easy to find by birders in warm cars. Small numbers of Snow Buntings were often seen with the longspurs 12/1 – 1/30. The largest reported **Snow Bunting** flock was 10 in Marion Twp. 12/14 (BL).

Chipping Sparrow continued on a strong trend of increasing winter occurrence. A flock of 27 feeding on the lawn near a feeder in Bern Twp. 1/16 (EB) was by far the largest reported. Over 25 checklists cited the species in numbers from one to seven, mostly in December and January. **Am. Tree Sparrow**, formerly one of the most common winter sparrows, continued on a downward trend. One was found on the RCBC 12/14 and two on the HCBC 12/28. The winter high counts were 10 at BML1/2 (BL, MW) and 10 at BSR 1/9 (PJW). Like Chipping Sparrow, **Fox Sparrow** is now seen more often in winter. It was cited on about a dozen checklists, mostly in December. A few were tracked later into winter, including one at BSR 12/9 – 2/10 and one near Kempton 1/17 – 2/21 (HW). Five were counted on the HCBC 12/28. The decline in winter of **White-crowned Sparrows** was detailed in the 2024-25 report. Peak counts this season were 19 on the HCBC 12/28 and 11 in Heidelberg Twp. 1/15 (IT). None were found on the RCBC 12/14. **Vesper Sparrow** is rarely found in winter. This year two were seen, one in the Oley Valley 1/19 (RK) and one on Pine View Rd. north of LO 1/22, 23 (AW, DK, DM, ZS). **Lincoln's Sparrow**, another winter rarity, was seen twice. One was seen on the HCBC 12/28 and the other was photographed near Bethel 2/6 (HY). **E. Towhee** has become a winter regular. It was cited on over 20 checklists, usually singly but sometimes in twos or threes.

Nine **E. Meadowlarks** were reported, a typically low number. Five were at Pine View Rd. 1/19 – 23 (AW, DK, TU). The others were singletons at four places 1/29, 2/6 and 2/20. Five **Rusty Blackbirds** were a good find on the RCBC 12/14.

A rare **Orange-crowned Warbler** was photographed visiting a peanut feeder at a home near the Reading Airport 12/20 (JS). **Pine Warbler** has been recorded in six of the last 10 winters. Four of the

five birds seen this winter visited feeders. Two birds, a male and a female, regularly visited a suet feeder in Reading from 12/14 through February (SD). One of those established the second record for the RCBC, which had recorded its first in 2025. A Pine Warbler visited a suet feeder near LO 1/4 & 15 (DB). A Pine Warbler had visited that feeder in 2025. Another was briefly seen at a suet feeder in Heidelberg Twp. 2/22 (BL). One was photographed in Birdsboro 2/21 (JBB). The only other winter warbler was **Yellow-rumped Warbler**, which was seen in small numbers of one to seven at BML, LO and in the SR valley as in previous years.

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