



Berks Birds

June - July 2025

*By Rudy Keller -
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Abbreviations: Blue Marsh L. (**BML**), Big Woods Trail (**BWT**), French Cr. SP (**FCSP**), Hawk Mt. Sanctuary (**HMS**), Hopewell L. (**HL**), Kaercher Cr. Park (**KCP**), Kittatinny Ridge (**KR**), L. Ontelaunee (**LO**), Rodale Experimental Farm (**Rodale**), SGL 106, Pine Swamp Rd. (**PSR**), SGL 106, Port Clinton (**PC**), SGL 110, Northkill Gap (**NG**), Schuylkill River (**SR**).

The highlight of the season was a visit by five **American White Pelicans** to LO 6/10 (TS) until 6/22, the second modern record. The last record was of a single bird at BML and E. J. Breneman quarry 6/16-18/2023 that was seen by relatively few birders. The 12-day visit by this year's flock allowed many more birders time to marvel at the size of the pelicans and enjoy watching the leisurely turns of their white flotilla around the lake. These modern records have a precedent. In *A Half Century of Bird*



Life in Berks County, Pennsylvania (1947),
Earl L. Poole wrote
under White Pelican,

"Walter H. Leibelsperger reported one seen on a dam at Moselem Springs about 1892."

American White Pelicans at L. Ontelaunee,

Photo by Russ Hoffman

A few **Snow Geese**, probably injured birds unable to migrate, are seen almost annually in summer. This year one was at Rodale 6/8 (JF, MJ) and two at a pond near Fleetwood 7/6 (AS). A **Northern Shoveler** drake first reported in early spring lingered at Bernhart's Dam through July (RH). This year's only breeding confirmation of **Hooded Merganser** was reported in May and detailed in the spring report. During the current period, there were a few sightings of one to three birds along the SR and at LO 6/18 – 7/6 (KG, ED). The core breeding area for **Common Merganser** is the SR. Females accompanied by broods of four to six ducklings were seen at four places along the river 6/2 – 7/17 (m.ob.). A flock of 36 Common Mergansers at LO 6/11 (MG) was large for that date and may have been composed of late migrants. Three late migrating **Ruddy Ducks** were at LO 6/24 (WK).

Northern Bobwhites heard in Marion Twp. 6/6 (SG, CF), Berks Ag. Center 7/1 (KB) and Grings Mill 6/8 (DT) were escapees or released birds. **Wild Turkey** hens leading broods of three to 10 poults were reported at five places in the Mohnton and Geigertown areas 6/12 – 7/19 (MG, JR, MSI, IT, TU), indicating a healthy population in that part of the county. Single **Ring-necked Pheasants** at BWT 6/8 (JK), near Bernville 6/13 (TC), and in Albany Twp. 6/9 (HW) were survivors of mass releases during last fall's hunting season.

There was an indirect confirmation of breeding by **Eurasian Collared-Dove** in Shartlesville. A town resident told WK that the "banded doves" had nested on his property and showed him the site, saying the nest had been predated by Blue Jays. This is the closest we have come to a first-hand breeding confirmation in this colony. **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** was fairly widely reported, mostly as single birds calling in the greenwood. **Black-billed Cuckoo**, always less common, was reported only twice, one bird at FCSP 6/11 (TF) and the other at Henningsville 6/20 (PS). Three **Common Nighthawks** migrated over Hamburg 6/6 (DK) and one flew over a house in Bern Twp. 6/30 (EB). **Eastern Whip-poor-wills** continued to find suitable breeding habitat on the KR. Three were heard near HMS 6/9 (LG), five at NG 6/25 (MW), and two near the Port Clinton fire tower 7/18 (KG).

Other than breeding **Killdeer** and presumably breeding **Spotted Sandpipers**, only three shorebird species were reported. Six northbound **Short-billed Dowitchers** continuing from late May were at Leesport 6/1 (BL, JSp). The first southbound **Solitary Sandpiper** was at Bernhart's Dam 7/22 (RH), closely followed by one at LO 7/27 (MG) and one at Gotwals pond, Oley 7/30 (YC). Also continuing from late May were 11 **Dunlin** flushed by a Peregrine at

School Rd. pond 6/1 (BL).

A **Laughing Gull** spent a rainy day at the BML beach 6/16, where it was photographed catching a fish (RH, RK, BL).



*Laughing Gull
at Blue Marsh Lake
. Photo by Russ Hoffman*

A **Caspian Tern** was at BML 7/15 (AP) and two **Common Terns** were there 6/19 (RH, BL, P&JWo). A non-breeding **Pied-billed Grebe** was at KCP 7/5 (ZS) and two were there 7/15 (KG). About six non-breeding **Double-crested Cormorants** spent the summer at BML and LO as usual. One was at KCP 6/29 (KG) and a few others were seen along the SR and Tulpehocken Cr. In July.

A **Glossy Ibis** spent part of a rainy day foraging on the lawn of Fleetwood Bible Church 6/14 (AM, MS). One to seven **Black-crowned Night Herons** were regularly seen fishing at the base of the LO spillway from mid-May through July. The season's first juv. was seen there 6/16 (RK), perhaps a local fledgling. Another juv. was seen along the SR near Birdsboro 7/17 (SF). One to seven unaged Black-crowns were seen on various dates at BML's Church Rd. and Sheidy Boat Launch between 6/1 and 7/8. Breeding by Black-crowned Night Herons has not been confirmed since a hailstorm destroyed the last known rookery in 2014.

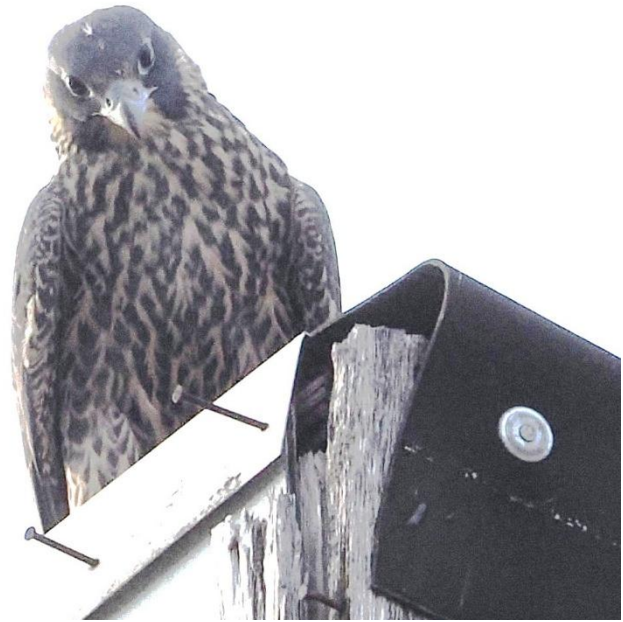
Berks County's first breeding **Osprey** pair attended two chicks in their nest on a communications tower near Edenburg 7/26 (KG). The nest was already active in 2024, but was not reported (KH, fide KG). This is indeed the pioneering pair. There is no previous record of Ospreys breeding in Berks, even before DDT decimated the species. Non-breeding Ospreys were reported as usual at BML, LO and along the SR all summer. The only breeding report of **Cooper's Hawk** was of a nest with four young at Union Meadows Park 6/20 (JK). A female **Northern Harrier** was seen over fields at KCP 6/28 (KG). There have been occasional summer records in previous years. Juv. **Red-shouldered Hawks** were reported in the Mohnton area 6/19 (IT)) and Hereford and District Twps. 6/26 (RK).

The **Broad-winged Hawk Project** of HMS monitored five nests in Berks (RM). Two of the monitored nests at FCSP fledged three young each. A nest near Morgantown fledged two young. A returning male (banded) and his mate fledged three young from their nest at PSR. A nest at HMS failed, probably due to predation of one of the adults, causing the nest to be abandoned and the young to starve. Besides those, an adult Broadwing and two fledglings were seen at Fleetwood Reservoir 7/5 (RK). A Broadwing was seen fighting a Red-tailed Hawk at Hay Cr. 6/10 (TF). There were six additional sightings of single birds at six other locations in June and July, adding up to an unusually thorough accounting of a rather inconspicuous species.

Continuing on their dramatic upward trend, **Red-headed Woodpeckers** were reported at more than 40 locations, thanks in large part to atlasing efforts. They are most common in the small woodlots of northern and western Berks. Buried in all those eBird checklists were at least five breeding confirmations.

American Kestrels were reported at more than 30 places, with several breeding confirmations. A brown **Merlin** was seen in flight near Kutztown 6/6 (CF). Another flyover was seen at KCP 7/14 (KG). Merlin has now been reported in every month of the year. Given that nesting occurred in Philadelphia this year, future breeding here is possible.

Reading's **Peregrine Falcon** pair fledged three young (fide BU). One of their first flights was photographed downtown 6/13 (RH). Unfortunately, one of the fledglings was later hit by a car, a hazard of urban life. The bird was rescued, but its injuries were too severe to justify release. It will live its life as an educational bird. The report of two **Peregrines** at a quarry in the Oley Valley 6/22 (JSo) was interesting because Peregrines had previously been seen there, raising the possibility of a second breeding pair.



Peregrine Falcon fledgling in Reading.

Photo by Russ Hoffman

Common Ravens were reported at about 30 places, mostly as flyovers. Will the time come when they are seen as regularly as American Crows, but in smaller numbers? A raven pair guarding three playful fledglings in District Twp. 6/4 (RK) confirmed breeding in that atlas block for the second year. A flock of 11 **Horned Larks** that included six juvs. was at School Rd. pond 6/7 (RK). This early nester was recorded at eight other farms during the period.

Seven **Bank Swallows** were photographed at the Haines & Kibblehouse quarry at Birdsboro, their only known breeding location, 6/1 (LB). Small numbers of post-breeding Bank Swallows were reported at eight places in July. About a dozen **Purple Martin** colonies were reported on eBird. According to Mike McCartney, who manages Purple Martin colonies in Berks and other counties for Lehigh Valley Audubon Soc., breeding was delayed by cold, wet weather in spring. Some early clutches were abandoned or failed to hatch, and many birds delayed nest initiation. The late start meant that some pairs were still feeding nestlings in August, later than normal. Dispersal had begun by late July. Sixty martins were seen entering a seasonal roost on a small island in HL on the evening of 7/22 (NP, JK). About 30 **Cliff Swallows** were visiting nests at the LO dam in June (RK). This is the oldest continuously occupied colony in Berks, active since 1966. Fewer than 10 Cliff Swallows were at the LO West Shore Bridge colony, which was larger last year. At Berne Bridge, eight Cliff Swallows were counted 6/19 (MW) and five 6/23 (KG). At BML's Old Church Rd. colony, six birds were counted 6/1 (EB) and five on 7/4 (AS).

A few tardy **White-throated Sparrows** have often been reported in June over the years. This year's singing bird at KCP 6/27 – 7/1 (KG) was later than most. **Grasshopper Sparrow** was again the most widely reported grassland sparrow. It is most common in northern Berks, where grass hayfields and fallow fields still cover many acres of farmland. As many as eight were found along Monument Rd. in Windsor Twp. and five along Heidelberg Rd. in Heidelberg Twp. (BL) in June and July. **Savannah Sparrows** share that habitat but also do well in

pockets of pastureland in the corn and soybean belt between Fleetwood and Topton. At Rodale, a group of seven Savannah Sparrows, including fledged young, was seen 7/27 (LI, RK, AZ). The far more thinly distributed **Vesper Sparrow** is harder to find. Only five were reported, all single birds. The best documented was a singing bird at Rodale 7/6 – 20 (RK, BL, JSp) that lived in a pasture with Dickcissels. The others were found during atlasing efforts.

The easiest place to see **Yellow-breasted Chats** is BWT, where as many as five were seen in June, including a female carrying nesting material 6/8 (JK). Three other chats were reported, one in Albany Twp. 6/20 (HW), one at HL 7/3 (JE) and one at PSR 7/12 (BB). Breeding was confirmed in the colony of seven **Bobolinks** at Goose Run Park when a female was seen carrying food 6/13 (P&JW). Five other small colonies, each having fewer than 10 birds, were found in the grass hayfields of northern Berks, with no breeding outcomes reported. **Eastern Meadowlarks** had breeding success in the pastures of a farm in Heidelberg Twp., where a female was seen carrying food 7/16 (BL). Up to six meadowlarks were seen at that farm in June and July. Nine other sites hosted meadowlarks, usually one or two birds each. A meadowlark singing atop a hay bale in a mowed field in Douglass Twp. 7/3 (P&JW) was a poignant reminder that breeding bobolinks and meadowlarks are in a constant race with the mowing machine.

Birders reported 25 warbler species. Among those were late spring migrants of the following five species not known to breed in Berks. A **Northern Waterthrush** was near Douglassville 6/1 (LI). A **Magnolia Warbler** was at FCSP 6/1 (CL) and another at Wm. Penn SF near Wernersville 6/5 (BL). Two **Blackburnian Warblers** were seen at FCSP 6/4 (NL). A **Canada Warbler** was at Shillington Park 6/2 (NW).

As last year, atlasing efforts revealed new potential breeding locations for some warblers. **Worm-eating Warblers** were reported at Ironstone Park (P&JW), Earl Twp. Park (AS) and Bear Creek Mt. Resort (RK) for the first time. **Blue-winged Warblers** were feeding young on Topton Mt. 7/23 (SF), and two were at PC in June (AS), as well as at their well known locations. Recently clearcut forest at PC attracted three **Chestnut-sided Warblers** this year and will probably attract many more as regrowth occurs.

After the flurry of reports in May, the only **Prothonotary Warbler** reported this period was one at HL 6/29 (JE). The **Kentucky Warbler** that had returned for years to Sixpenny Cr. in FCSP went silent in May (TU). The only Kentucky reported this period was one on the KR above Shartlesville 7/9 (KG). A **Cerulean Warbler** that had returned to its breeding territory at HMS was heard 6/13 (DB). Two Ceruleans were reported nearby just over the Schuylkill line around the same time (JT). The small population of **Black-throated Blue Warblers** that breeds on the KR was represented by one bird at PSR 7/4 (LS) and two at NG 6/18 (ED). **Yellow-throated Warblers** were reported at more locations along the SR than in previous years. One or two sang along Old River Rd. 6/5 – 7/3 (RH, DK, DM, MA). One was near Trout Run 6/8 (JB). Returning birds were counter singing near Old Morlatton Village 6/27 (RW). One was at Grings Mill on the Tulpehocken Cr. 6/27 (ZS). Some probably breed, but confirmation of breeding in the high, dense sycamore canopy that the birds prefer is very difficult. Up to five **Prairie Warblers** were reported at BWT in June. Breeding was confirmed by a nest with eggs in a blackberry thicket (TU). A few Prairies were also found on the KR where logging provided openings. **Black-throated Green Warblers** were reported at eight places on the KR, their only local breeding area. A pair with fledged young was at NG 7/5 (P&JWo).

Blue Grosbeaks were found at about 12 locations and pairs were noted at a few of those. **Dickcissels** continued their long fidelity to the grass pastures at Rodale. One to three birds, depending on observer, were seen by many birders on many dates from 5/26 till 7/29. Two males and a female were photographed 7/3 (KD). As in previous years, a male singing daily from utility wires along Kunkel Rd. was most often reported. Unlike last year, Dickcissels were

also found at intermittently occupied sites on other farms. Two males fought over a territory at Clauss & Seidel Rds. near Windsor Castle 6/6 – 13 (KG, RK, LI, DB). A male was in the Monument Rd. vicinity 6/6 and 7/1 (AW). One was in Albany Twp. 6/26 (BB). There were no breeding confirmations.

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