



Berks Birds

March – May

2026

By Rudy Keller –

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Location name abbreviations: Blue Marsh L. (**BML**), Blue Mt. Academy (**BMA**), E. J. Breneman Quarry (**BQ**), Big Woods Trail, French Cr. SP (**BWT**), Hamburg Reservoir (**HR**), Kaercher Cr. Park (**KCP**), Kernsville Dam & Rec. Area (**KDRA**), Kittatinny Ridge (**KR**), L. Ontelaunee (**LO**), Schuylkill R./Douglassville (**SRD**), SGL 110/Northkill Gap (**NG**), SGL 106/Pine Swamp Rd. (**PSR**), Union Meadows Park (**UMP**).

The first **Yellow Rail** ever recorded in Berks was discovered 5/9 (EH) at a very unlikely location. According to the eBird report, the bird flushed from tall grass growing between raised beds in the garden of Mifflin Park Elementary School, located in a densely populated suburb. It briefly took refuge under a car, where Erin Hattt, the observer, photographed it looking very small on the pavement beside the car's tire. Hattt was unaware of its rarity until the next day. The bird was not seen again.

Unseasonably warm and windy weather 3/8 -10 triggered strong migration. The seasonal high counts of many waterfowl species were made on those days.

Most **Snow Geese** passed through in February. A few counts numbering up to 1500 were made in the first week of March. Four **Greater White-fronted Geese**, first seen in February, were last seen at BQ 3/1 (RR, JS, PJW). An imm. **Trumpeter Swan**, rare in Berks, was photographed at Birdsboro Reservoir 5/20 (CG, DG). Perhaps this was the bird seen a few miles south at Struble. L., Chester 5/18 (JKe). The warm front 3/8 brought an estimated 500 **Tundra Swans** to BML (JB) and 490 to LO, which was still partly frozen (AW, MW). Those were fairly high numbers for Berks.

No count of **Blue-winged Teal**, regular but uncommon, was higher than four during their period of passage 3/20 – 4/30. **N. Shoveler**, also usually uncommon, peaked at 20 at LO 4/2, a drizzly day (RK). Following a dip in 2025, **Am. Wigeon** rebounded to normal spring numbers. About 300 were at LO 3/8 (AW, MW) and 200 were at LO 3/15 (AZ). The once abundant **Am. Black Duck** continued to be seen in very low numbers. The spring high count was only 18 at LO 3/15 (TU). Most counts of **N. Pintail** were in single digits, but there was a surge of 100 at LO 3/8 (AW, MW, et al.). Warm winds brought 170 **Green-winged Teal** to LO 3/10 (RK).

Six **Canvasbacks** at LO 3/6 (GS) and six **Greater Scaup** at LO 4/19 (PJW) were the spring high counts of these uncommon Aythya. There was a strong migration of Redheads. An estimated 100 were at LO (AW, MW) and 51 at BMA (DM) 3/8. Many counts of 30 – 60 were made at LO 3/9 - 21. There were 440 **Ring-necked Ducks**, the most common and widespread Aythya, at LO 3/9 (RK). **Lesser Scaup** were not numerous, peaking at 58 at LO 3/12 (RK).

Long-tailed Ducks were reported on four dates in March and two in April, a good showing. This classic fallout species was most numerous on rainy 3/23, when about 27 were at LO and six at KCP, just the second recorded at that small lake (KG). Forty **Common Goldeneyes** were part of the crowd of ducks at LO 3/8 (AW, MW, et al.) and 14 were at LO 3/12, a windy day after rain (RK). They are usually seen singly or in small numbers.

A raft of 1600 **Common Mergansers** at LO 3/15 (TU) provided the spring high count. The observation of a female Common Merganser with 12 ducklings at Stonecliffe Rec. Area 5/20 was recorded as the first 2026 breeding confirmation of that species. The spring high count of 27 **Red-breasted Mergansers** was made at LO 4/2, a drizzly day (RK). There was a small rain induced fallout of 45 **Ruddy Ducks** at LO (AS), 18 at BML (BL) and 11 at KCP (KG) 4/19.

Birders exiting I78 at Shartlesville to see **Eurasian Collared-Doves** listed one to five of these doves on many checklists, but there was no breeding confirmation. **Common Nighthawks** were mostly reported singly here and there, but seven migrated past SRD 5/13 (JK). A few **E. Whip-poor-wills** were reported on their KR breeding range, including three above Port Clinton 5/9 (AS) and one or two at NG 4/16 – 25 (m. ob.).

The only reported **Sora** was in the cattail marsh at KDRA 5/4, 5 (BL). **Am. Coots** were seen at their BQ wintering site till 4/11, and 31, the spring high count, were at LO 3/29 (DH). Continuing their trend of more frequent occurrence, **Sandhill Cranes** were reported four times. Singletons flew over Henningsville 4/29 (PS), HR 5/11 (KG) and Wiley's Bridge near LO 5/17 (AC – photo). One foraged in a pasture near Bowers 5/11 (AS). A **Ruffed Grouse** drumming on the KR at NG 5/25 (BL) was the only one reported.

Shorebirds that rarely alight in Berks can sometimes be seen migrating low overhead in early evening in late May or June. At about 6:42 p.m. 5/26, a birder near Pleasantville spotted, distantly in dim light, flocks of large shorebirds flying in regular vee formation that he identified as 120 **Hudsonian Whimbrels** (AS). Another 400 shorebirds of smaller species were too distant to identify.

On the ground, shorebirds visited edges of permanent ponds, springs and lakes because fields normally flooded in spring were dry in this third year of drought. Numbers and variety were low. Spring high counts of locally non-breeding shorebirds follow. Four Semipalmated Plovers were at BMA 5/22. Fifteen **Wilson's Snipe** probed the Krause Rd. wetland 4/4 (TU). Five **Solitary Sandpipers** squabbled at Leesport 5/1 (TU). Nine **Lesser Yellowlegs** foraged at Big Spring Farm 4/19 (BL) and five **Greater Yellowlegs** strode through the mud at Leesport 5/2 (BL). **Dunlin** was reported only twice, and the flock of five at BMA 5/25 (DM) was the larger of the two. Fifteen Least Sandpipers were in the retention basin at Hamburg Commerce Park 5/17 (DB), and 10 **Semipalmated Sandpipers** were at BMA 5/25 (DM).

In light rain 4/19, 30 **Bonaparte's Gulls** were seen at LO (TU) and 45 at BML (BL, AP). Lower numbers were seen on other dates 3/16 – 4/19. An imm. **Laughing Gull**, a stray from the coast, joined terns at BML 5/25 (RG, DM). Fifteen **Great Black-backed Gulls**, the largest count in more than a dozen years, came to BML with the warm front 3/8 (AP). A **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was at BML 3/26 (DC).

The only reports of **Forster's Terns** were of one at LO (AW) and two at BML (RG) 5/25. Birders had more chances to see **Common Terns**, which were reported on at least five dates 4/19 – 5/25. Rain brought one or two to LO (AW, TU) and four to 11, depending on observer, to BML 4/19 (RH, AP. JS. Et al.). It was unusual to have no **Caspian Terns** reported.

Red-necked Grebes, seldom seen in recent years, were reported three times. Two were at LO 3/8 (m. obs.), one of them staying till 3/9 (BL). The other was photographed at BML 3/27 (PL). **Red-throated Loons**, also scarce for a few seasons, were reported on five dates 4/5 – 20. A rain induced fallout 4/5 dropped four at LO (RK, AW) and one at BML (RH, BL). The same fallout brought 73 **Common Loons** to LO (RK) and 20 to 33, depending on observer, to BML (RH, JS, et al.) 4/5. Most **Double-crested Cormorants** migrate in April, and this year's high count was 700 at LO 4/2 (RK).

Eleven **Glossy Ibises** in full breeding plumage graced BMA pond in the rain 5/21 (MW, AS). **Two Am. Bitterns** were reported, one at LO 4/16 (DB) and one at Lowland Rd., Hamburg 4/27 (AW). A rare **Least Bittern** was photographed in a tree at sunset in suburban Wyomissing Park, far from any marsh, 5/9 (LC). One to four adult **Black-crowned Night-Herons** were seen at the LO spillway 4/29 through May. Single birds were reported at four other places during May, but without evidence of breeding. Four **Western Cattle Egrets** were spotted foraging in a field near Fleetwood 5/9 (TS) and one was at the Shartlesville pond 5/22, 25 (SF. BL. DM, AW). Berks' first breeding **Osprey pair** returned for the second year to their nest on a communications tower east of Hamburg. At least one chick was visible in the nest 5/28 (MW).

Two **Olive-sided Flycatchers** were reported, one at BWT (JK) and the other at HR (EH) 5/16. **Least Flycatcher**, a former breeder in Berks, was reported singly at 10 places on 12 dates 5/7 – 16. Twelve **Gray-cheeked Thrushes** seen at seven places 5/7 – 29 made a good accounting of that secretive bird.

Following last fall's strong southbound flight of **Purple Finches**, birders reported a fairly widespread return flight. Most checklists tallied fewer than 10 birds, but a few noted up to 30. **Pine Siskins** were as scarce as they had been last fall and winter. Four visited a feeder in the Mohnton area 4/13, 30 (JR) and one was near Morgantown 5/9 (HH).

Of the locally breeding grassland sparrows, **Grasshopper Sparrow** and **Savannah Sparrow** were reported at multiple places in low but reasonable numbers. **Vesper Sparrow's** low numbers are concerning. Just three were reported on three farms 4/5 (JH), 5/6 (BW), and 5/24 (BL). **Lincoln's Sparrow**, usually hard to see during its May migration period, was reported three times. Singletons were at SRD 5/5 (KJ, KK), Hay Creek 5/11 (RH) and LO 5/12 (AS). The largest breeding population of Yellow-breasted Chats is at BWT, where as many as five were reported in May. Single birds, some probably moving through, were reported at five other places 5/7 – 26.

Considering its decline, **Bobolink** was fairly widely reported on migration. Four birders on a Big Day run estimated 100, a large count, along Monument Rd., Hamburg 5/9 (AW, MW, AS, JR). Checklists from six other places logged one to eight birds 5/3 – 30. **E. Meadowlark** was reported in predictably low numbers of one to six at nine places 3/9 – 5/30. One of the more productive places was Goose Run Park, a breeding site, where two to six birds were seen on several dates 4/11 – 5/30 (JT, et al.). **Rusty Blackbirds** were reported at 10 places 3/9 – 5/11, usually one to five per checklist. The high counts were 10 at UMP 4/2 (JK) and 10 near Breezy Corners 4/5 (TK). Three at LO 5/11 (DB) were late on their migration.

Birders found 33 warbler species and one hybrid, a good tally. A rare **Golden-winged Warbler** was seen at PSR 5/14 (BL). PSR is a hotspot for **Blue-winged Warblers**, five of which were also seen there

5/14 (BL). A rare male **Brewster's Warbler**, the hybrid of those two species, was photographed at PSR 5/15 (TJ) and seen there again 5/25 (MA). It is of interest to note that Brewster's Warbler was confirmed breeding at PSR during the second breeding bird atlas in the early 2000's (RK). A male **Prothonotary Warbler** was photographed in a swampy basin near SRD 5/1 (BL), but was not seen again. Another male Prothonotary was found in a wetland along Hartz Store Rd. near Green Hills Preserve 5/29 (AZ). It was coded CF (carrying food) in the atlas protocol, but the observer was not able to return for a more definitive breeding confirmation. A **Mourning Warbler** was seen at HR 5/13 (KG) and 5/16 (EH). Another Mourning was at PSR 5/15 (DM). **Kentucky Warblers** returned in May to their two traditional breeding locations at French Cr. SP (MA, BL) and at PSR (EC, DB). Spring's only reported **Cerulean Warbler** was photographed at PSR 5/14 (BL). **Yellow-throated Warblers** did not return in last year's exceptional numbers. Many birders reported a singing male in sycamores at Hay Creek 5/10, 11, 12 & 22. Another singing male was detected by the Merlin app at SRD 5/29 (IT). Both sites have attracted singing males in previous years, but there has been no breeding confirmation.

A male Summer Tanager that had overshot its breeding range was at LO 5/11 (DB). **Blue Grosbeaks**, mostly singing males, were reported at eight places 5/3 – 31. Paired birds were noted at two of those locations. This year's **Dickcissel** influx was impressive. Dickcissels returned to their long established breeding location at Rodale Experimental Farm, where one to five were seen on most days 5/22 – 31. Three males and two females were noted there 5/24 (TG). Dickcissels also settled at two farms in Lower Heidelberg Twp., where these birds had not been reported in previous years. Five birds, mostly singing males but also females, were at each of the farms 5/24 – 30 (BL). In addition to those, a Dickcissel visited Hamburg Commerce Park 5/25 (DB) and two were seen along Monument Rd., Hamburg, where Dickcissels have occurred in prior years, 5/28 (KG). The question of how long these birds stayed may be answered in the June – July report.

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