



The DISTELFINK

Fall 2020

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President's Message – Tony Grimm

Ramblings of an old "Twitcher"

Greetings All,

It's been a challenging time for all of us to stay healthy. I hope this newsletter finds you in good health!

Although we had to cancel our in-person meetings and annual dinner this spring, we will be having our Fall 2020 meetings and programs via online **Zoom Programs (see below)**.

We hope you are birding your yard and local parks, keeping your feeders full, and listening for all of *the great bird songs*. Watch the website for program updates and scheduled **guided walks**.

It's time to renew your **membership dues**. BOC is one of the best bargains in *Berks County*. Thank you for supporting us! (Membership form is at the end of this newsletter)

We are always looking for **volunteers**. If you are so inclined, please give one of our board members a call to help lead or coordinate field trips, work on the newsletter, serve on the Board of Directors, and more.

Thanks Everyone!

Tony Grimm, President, B.O.C.



*A singing male Prothonotary Warbler in the wooded swamp along the Exeter Scenic River Trail.
Photo by Russ Hoffman.*

BOC meetings via ZOOM

Each meeting requires an invitation to the meeting with by having the **ID number and passcode**.

To get an invitation with all of the Fall 2020 meetings, send an Email requesting a link to us at membership@bairdornithological.club

You can share the meeting invitation by with other members email (for security reasons, please DO NOT share it by posting on social media like Facebook or Instagram). Please try to limit guests you share it with as we are limited to 100 participants per meeting.

Using zoom is easy all you need is a computer, a tablet or a smart phone. For information about it see this helpful link provided by the people at zoom where they show you how to join a meeting.

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362193-Joining-a-meeting>

We hope to see you all there!

Mike Slater, BOC Web Master and ZOOM Meeting Host

Dues reminder

BOC dues are due 9/1/20. Please use the form enclosed. We are all struggling to get through this new world we find ourselves in. Your board has planned a great schedule of virtual meetings and field trips. Plus, some great surprises for our 100th Anniversary. Unfortunately, all this does cost money. Please use the form at the end of this newsletter and mail your dues in as soon as possible.

121st Reading Christmas Bird Count by Lucy Cairns

December 15, 2019 dawned with the temperature in the low 30's and a strong wind out of the northwest that numbed fingers and toes (among other tender body parts). Nevertheless, members of the BOC joined other intrepid birders to conduct the Reading circle count for Audubon's 120th Christmas Bird Count. The CBC is not for the fair-weather birder, as the prior compiler for the Reading circle, Ken Lebo, informed me. According to Ken, only weather that presents a high risk of death or injury (this may be a slight exaggeration) justifies shifting the date of the count, which for the Reading circle is the first Sunday in the official count period. During the 120th CBC, a total of 2,615 counts were conducted and 42,810,675 birds were tallied. The Reading CBC contributed 14,524 birds to this total, thanks to the efforts of 35 participants who devoted 99.5 party-hours and traveled a total of 430 miles to observe 77 species of birds.

The purpose of the CBC is to produce data in a form that can be used to reliably monitor trends in bird population numbers and geographic distribution year upon year. Ideally, during a CBC every bird present that day in each 15-mile diameter CBC circle would be found and counted. In actuality, the count tally varies depending heavily on the number of field observers, the time participants spend in the field, and the amount of ground they cover (in addition to the variation in the number of birds present). Accurate reporting of 'effort' data is the key to producing useful data, allowing each year's count to be weighted according to the effort expended (Birds per Party Hour). Scientists were reluctant to utilize CBC data for a long time, but were eventually convinced when analysis of CBC data was shown to align closely with similar analysis of data collected with methods more traditionally acceptable. Each year the compiler is responsible for making sure each team leader is familiar with the importance of effort data and the rules for recording it.

Audubon introduced a new tool last year, CBC Live, to allow CBC participants to upload photos of birds, each other, and other images to share the experience of the CBC on an interactive map. The map and photos can be found at <http://gis.audubon.org/cbclive/>

To ensure another successful year for the Reading CBC, additional observers will be needed since last year we were stretched uncomfortably thin when two participants fell ill at the last moment. Our count would also benefit from recruiting more birders to count birds at their bird feeders, for any time period that is convenient on count day. If you are interested in counting birds at your feeder, the easiest way to participate in the CBC, contact me to help you determine if your feeder is inside the count circle. BOC members contribute to the Hamburg, Bernville, and Elverson CBCs in addition to covering the Reading circle. **Anyone with an interest in joining the count for any of these circles is urged to contact me for further information: ljanetcairns@gmail.com.**

Birds of Blue – by Sheila Martin

Right at the parking lot, Eastern Bluebirds welcome me atop the main placard. Then Tree Swallows and Indigo Buntings take over the in-your-face, ridiculously easy sightings. Fleabane, Bladder Campion, King Devil, Orange Hawkweed, Cow Vetch, Teasel & Yellow Goatsbeard do not disappoint. It's either side of Memorial Day weekend, and I'm witnessing the ultimate of High Spring's symphony of colors, scents, sounds & species in the grand meadow environment which is **French Creek's Hopewell Big Woods Trail**.

It's a recently developed Natural Lands Trust-initiated, ADA compliant, crushed stone multi-use trail gently winding upland from the Thun Trail to intersect Crusher Road in Union Township. Its dramatic meadowlike grassland habitat dominates its panoramic 2-mile serpentine length. Feel free to dial down your binoculars to see a butterfly on the path, or to appreciate the complex detail of a flower's anatomy. Nesting boxes at a 4th grader's eye-level are positioned at highest elevations (*assume* they'll be occupied; give those Tree Swallows a wide berth when passing). Eastern Bluebirds will likely grace your visit, and Field Sparrows' background music is everywhere. But my faithful favorites, spring nesting through fledging time, are Indigo Buntings. Conspicuously perching equidistantly on tall snags to the back of grassy frontage, they tweet you along like Buckingham Palace guards. No bins required!



*Tree Swallow at a nest box along the trail.
Photo by Karl Gardner*



*Indigo Bunting.
Photo by Mike Slater*

If you want a reliable locale for birds of blue and their song, I cannot recommend this trail enough! Very underutilized, it's the best kept new secret in eastern Berks County. I had to surf for 20 minutes just to find a verified address for the trailhead, though I know where it is and how to get there. That's how (seemingly) secret this nature immersion opportunity has been. Check it out!

The Big Woods Trail can be accessed at a trailhead in Union Township, **GPS entry: 165 Center Road, Douglassville PA 19518**. Currently, only parking is provided; no restrooms or water. I've noted some mowing in late summer/September which may affect your "tallgrass" experience. I've also gotten kind ranger warnings in November to wear blaze orange, understanding that these fields are stocked for hunting.

Memorable COVID Spring Polar Vortex by Joan Silagy

After visiting Arizona for the first time back in 1979 and seeing all the many species of birds feeding on oranges and grape jelly, I was determined that I would try doing it at my feeders when I got home. I

found out the birds here in the East enjoy the fruit as much as those out West do. It's a great way to attract species that may otherwise never stop at your feeders, and you have the chance to get some really up close

and personal looks. I had always fed raisins or currants to the N. Mockingbirds and Gray Catbirds and was able to train both of those species to eat out of my hand and they did so for many years. In early spring the Baltimore Orioles would stop by and feed on the oranges when I started putting them out.

When I moved to my present location I continued to do so and the numbers of returning migrants, especially catbirds and orioles, has increased. For 2020, throw a polar vortex into the picture and the excitement increases. It was a pleasure to stay home following the "Stay at Home" COVID orders, as I was inundated with birds.

In anticipation of the catbirds and orioles returning, I started putting oranges and apples out on my feeder. I cut them in half, placing the cut side skyward, making it appear like a cup. In a day or two the catbirds arrived followed shortly by the orioles. I was delighted. After their long flight to reach their northern nesting sites, they are starved as they have used up much of their body reserves to get here.



A male Rose-breasted Grosbeak and a male Baltimore Oriole on a feeder with safflower seed and orange halves.

Photo by Mike Slater

Then the numbers started increasing with the Baltimore Orioles in the lead. Okay, I'm up to four now; no, wait, that's 6 or is it 7? Oh, some of them are on the suet cakes also. More orioles in the bushes -- who's who and what's happening? Wait, there is a first year Orchard Oriole eating the orange. I never had one of them at my feeder before. Time to restock the feeder with more

oranges, apples and grape jelly. Where do I put the jelly? In the orange halves because now most of the juice is gone. First the orioles drink the juice and when it's gone they work on the flesh of the oranges, so now I'm left with a great natural looking orange cup that I fill with grape jelly.

The number of hungry birds increases and I'm constantly going outside to restock the fruit, seed and suet cakes. At one point I had 14 Baltimore Orioles on my tray feeder at one time plus two Orchard Orioles, and to my delight a Bullocks Oriole, a rare visitor from the West. Perched in the trees and bushes near the feeder were many more orioles waiting their turn. On the suet cakes nearby were more orioles fussing and fighting plus two male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. I had never seen Rose-breasted Grosbeaks feeding on the suet cakes, as they usually prefer the sunflower seed. Brown Thrashers and my local N. Mockingbirds, Downy, Hairy, Red-bellied woodpeckers, N. Flickers, N. Cardinals, Carolina Wrens, Blue Jays, Tufted Titmice, White-breasted Nuthatches and Chickadees all jockeyed for their turn at the suet cakes as well. I also make some of my own luring bird food (a lard based mix) to put in the suet log and it's next to impossible to keep that stocked as it's the preferred food. On the tray feeder two beautiful male Indigo Buntings fed on the millet seed, adding to my enjoyment.

It was a spring polar vortex to be enjoyed, thanks to the birds. I ended up using three bags of oranges, one bag of apples, 2 bags of mandarins, 3 large jars of grape jelly, one large jar of strawberry jelly, half a jar of sour cherry preserves (my last jelly) and at least 52 suet cakes. It was an expensive two weeks because that's how long the visitors stayed. During that time a kind friend with whom I had been sharing my visual sightings mailed me a check for the bird fund, as she loved hearing the news. The money spent for the pleasure I received from these migrants was well worth it and in the long run I think we owe it to them. They have a long journey to get here facing weather obstacles, especially this past spring, natural predators and huge glass buildings, so why not help them out. They repay us with all the insects they eat and all their beauty and song they share with us.

In closing, as I thought of all those orioles on the feeder and in the bushes and trees I couldn't help but think of a Christmas tree because that's the impression they gave me. A tree filled with color and I thought how lovely it would be if Monarch Butterflies perched nearby. What beautifully colored birds they were. The grand rush is over, but think spring of 2021 and beyond. It's worth the effort and besides, the Red-bellied Woodpeckers and Gray Catbirds just love oranges all season and often partake of the juice or flesh as they carry it off to feed their young. When the red-belly comes in to feed, no matter what other bird is on that orange, apple or suet, they leave. Large beaks rule. Plan ahead for your 2021 feeding frenzy. You may not get a large number of orioles but even a few are a pleasure and as the orioles learn that you are on the feeding track they and their friends will return year after year, increasing your odds. Good Birding.

Charming Third Time by Art Zdancewic

I frequently walk Green Hills preserve in southwestern Berks. It's 200 plus acres of warm weather grasses and forest provide many birding opportunities. There are almost always birds to observe as soon as you pull into the parking lot. Such was the case recently.

I turned off my pick-up and started to open the door when I glanced at one of several bluebird boxes located in the parking area. There was a bird sitting on the roof of the box. Usually these boxes are used by E. Bluebirds or Tree Swallows. In fact, this spring I watched a bluebird defending this box against Tree Swallows. I believe that the bluebirds were successful in fledging their chicks.

Several weeks later the Tree Swallows were guarding the same box and I could hear chicks when a parent arrived with food. Overall, there seemed to be fewer Tree Swallows at Green Hills than in past years. No Tree Swallows were observed on this visit. Many of the bluebird boxes were used this spring by Tree Swallows. I think that they have raised their young and moved on to other locations. There were at least 3 successful bluebird nests and possibly more.



On this visit I watched a House Wren singing and adding twigs to the box. My guess is that this was a male looking for a mate. He was very active. Bouncing around from shrub to rock to box while continually singing. He added several twigs in the 10 minutes or so that I watched. One of the twigs was about a foot long and he unsuccessfully attempted to get it into the hole. It was never going to fit. I admired the little guy for his determination. After the third unsuccessful try, he wisely chose a smaller twig.

House Wren. Photo by Art Zdancewic

House Wrens. It's fascinating to me that a single cavity is being used by three species of birds in the same nesting season. I enjoy building bird boxes and have contended that if you make a cavity some creature is going to make it their home. In the case of this particular box, the third time is the charm for me.

I'll visit again in a few days. I am hopeful that at that visit I find 2

Occurrence of Glaucous Gull and Iceland Gull in Berks County by Rudy Keller

A highlight of winter birding in Berks County is scanning the gull flocks at Blue Marsh L. for rarer species. Highly prized are two arctic visitors, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls. Finding one among the wheeling, shrieking masses of Ring-billed Gulls is sure to make the day for any birder. Both were virtually unknown here for most of the 20th century, suddenly becoming more familiar in the late 1980's and early 1990's, when heaps of stockpiled garbage at a pig farm in Strausstown attracted tens of thousands of gulls in winter. Before one was seen on the Reading Christmas Bird Count Dec 21, 1986, Glaucous Gull had been recorded only once, a second-winter bird at L. Ontelaunee Mar 5-7, 1961. Berks County's first Iceland Gull, a first-winter bird, was recorded at L. Ontelaunee Feb 19, 1989. Both species were regular winter visitors for the next few years while the pig farm operated, moving onto the life lists of many birders. After the Strausstown pig farm closed in 1995, landfills in Berks (especially the one in New Morgan) and Lebanon Counties took its place as reliable winter food sources for the gulls that loaf and roost in Berks County lakes. What has been the pattern of occurrence of Glaucous and Iceland Gulls since those early years? A review of 30 years of archived bird records provided answers.



This long staying immature Glaucous Gull was at Blue Marsh Lake for much of January-February 2020 (With an adult Herring Gull behind it). Photo by Mike Slater

Glaucous Gull has been the less common of the two species, appearing in 21 of the 34 years from 1986-2020. It has been recorded from Dec 9 (2000) till Mar 17 (2007). Birds have most often arrived in Dec or Jan and almost all have departed by the end of Feb. There are only three Mar records, indicating that this gull is truly a winter bird in Berks County. During most winters, only one

Glaucous Gull has been seen among thousands of Ring-billed Gulls and

Herring Gulls, enhancing our perception of its rarity. Two or more birds have been seen in just five of 21 winters, with a high count of four in 1992. Glaucous Gulls take four years to mature, cycling through four plumages on the way. Of the Berks County birds whose ages have been recorded, the great majority have been juvenile or first-winter birds. Five second-winter birds, one third-winter bird and four adults have been reported in 21 years. Some of these birds have been one-day wonders, but others have stayed for weeks, such as the first-winter bird reported at Blue Marsh L. Jan 4 till Feb 17, 2020.



Immature Iceland Gull (R) with Ring-billed Gulls and an immature Herring Gull (L), Photo by Russ Hoffman

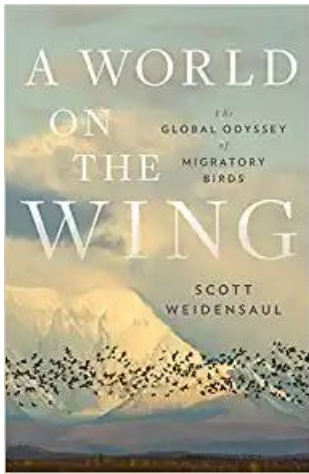
Iceland Gull has been more regular and numerous than Glaucous Gull, appearing in 27 of 31 years from 1989 till 2020, missing only 1990, 2009, 2017 and 2018. It may arrive a little earlier and leave a little later than Glaucous Gull and has been recorded from Nov 9 (2016) till Apr 19 (1995). Most birds have been seen in Dec, Jan and Feb, but there are at least six Mar and four Apr records. As with Glaucous Gull, single birds have most often been reported, but two or more Iceland Gulls have been recorded during about 12 of 27 winters. High counts have been five in 1992, five in 2005 and six in 2013. Iceland Gull also matures over four years through four plumages, but the juvenile or first-winter plumage can vary from very light to quite dark according to subspecies. As with Glaucous Gull, the great majority of Iceland Gulls whose ages have been recorded have been first-winter birds at the light end of the color range. A few dark first winter birds have been reported, including at least four Thayer's Gulls, recently considered to be a separate species, but now considered to be a subspecies of Iceland Gull. Second-winter birds have been reported five times, a third-winter bird once, and adults only three times in 27 years. Though the length of stay of individual birds can be hard to determine, many have been seen a single day while others have stayed for days or weeks, such as a first-winter bird seen at Glen Morgan L. Jan 1 till Mar 8, 1995.

Landfills have for decades provided the reliable, concentrated food sources needed by migrating and wintering gulls in Berks and nearby Chester, Bucks and Northampton Counties. While such landfills continue operating, it seems likely that Glaucous and Iceland Gulls will continue to be prized winter visitors among thousands of more common gulls. Berks County records prior to 1997 are referenced in Uhrich, William D., *A Century of Bird Life in Berks County*,

Pennsylvania. Reading Public Museum, 1997. Thank you to the birders who recorded and submitted their observations over the last 30 years. You made this report possible.

BOC 100TH ANNIVERSARY BANQUET PROGRAM

The status of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring of 2021 will determine whether or not BOC will be able to hold our traditional banquet. As of now, we intend to celebrate our 100th anniversary with a banquet, and Scott Weidensaul, our most popular speaker, has agreed to present the program. Below is a press release from Scott's publisher describing his latest book, which will be available for signing and sale. Final banquet details will be published in the Spring, 2021 Distelfink. Save the date.



A World on the Wing - The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds by [Scott Weidensaul](#)

(This title will be released on March 30, 2021.)

An exhilarating exploration of the science and wonder of global bird migration.

In the past two decades, our understanding of the navigational and physiological feats that enable birds to cross immense oceans, fly above the highest mountains, or remain in unbroken flight for months at a stretch has exploded. Certain species, such as thrushes, avoid dehydration by “drinking” from their own muscles and organs, extending their flight range by more than two thousand miles; it now seems all but certain that birds orient themselves using Earth’s magnetic field through a form of quantum entanglement that made Einstein queasy.

These and other revelations convey both the wonder of bird migration and its global sweep, from the mudflats of the Yellow Sea in China to the remote mountains of northeastern India to the dusty hills of southern Cyprus. This breathtaking work of nature writing also introduces readers to those scientists, researchers, and bird lovers trying to preserve global migratory patterns in the face of climate change and other environmental challenges.

Scott Weidensaul is the author of nearly thirty books, including the Pulitzer Prize finalist *Living on the Wind*. A writer and re-searcher specializing in birds and bird migration, he is a native of Pennsylvania now living in New Hampshire.

BOC Programs 2020-2021

Sep 11, 7:30 pm - Bird Stack: Two Migratory Seasons at China by Mark Bonta

Mark Bonta was raised in central PA and went on to explore the remote corners of the planet through service to the Peace Corps and academic research at several small colleges. He has been involved in environmental conservation efforts in the Philippines, Australia, Honduras, Mexico, and the US. You can access his publications at <https://markbonta.academia.edu/> and his eBird profile at <https://ebird.org/pa/profile/NDE4MTI5/world>.

“When the weather is just right along China's NE coast, birds migrating on the East Asian-Australian Flyway pile up on the tips of peninsulas. Fallouts and other phenomena give these special places their reputations as "bird stacks," none more famous than Laotieshan (Old-Iron-Mountain) at the southern tip of the Liaodong Peninsula. Purely by serendipity, I landed a teaching job in the shadow of Laotieshan in 2018, at the Liaoning University for International Business and Economics. During one glorious year, I recorded 133 species on campus ponds, forest, and fields, and gained valuable insights to the threats and opportunities facing Chinese bird conservation. Along the way, I saw clouds of Amur Falcons appear and disappear as if by magic, thousands of Chestnut-flanked White-eyes streaming over for days on end, orioles, bulbuls, snipes, flycatchers, grosbeaks, and Phylloscopus leaf warblers all over the ground and trees, and even Siberian Rubythroats flying into open classroom windows. Join me for a slideshow on this spectacle, and a sobering assessment of the future of birds in one of the most biodiverse countries in the world.”

Oct 9, 7:30 pm The State of Pennsylvania's Boreal Conifer Forest Birds by Doug Gross
(Rescheduled)



Pennsylvania mountain conifer forests, found primarily on glaciated parts of the Allegheny Plateau, are dominated by spruce and hemlock, but are diminished from pre-settlement forest. Unlike other Appalachian spruce forests, some of those in Pennsylvania harbor Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and Blackpoll Warbler (both PA Endangered). Other species of state conservation concern in this habitat include Swainson's Thrush, Northern Waterthrush, Canada Warbler, Red Crossbill, White-throated Sparrow and formerly Olive-sided

Flycatcher. These boreal conifer forests also host numerous other northern species having high continental conservation priorities and PA Species of Greatest Conservation Need status. Doug Gross, a biologist recently retired from the Pennsylvania Game Commission, will introduce us to some of these species and speak of management plans for this threatened ecosystem.

Nov 13, 7:30 pm - Life in the Avian Slow Lane by Keith Bildstein (Rescheduled)

Keith Bildstein, PhD, retired Director of Acopian Center of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, is the author of several volumes on raptor migration ecology. Keith is presently working on his next book presently titled "The Secret Ecology of the World's 23 Species of Vultures and Condors." This presentation will be a review of his work with vultures and condors.



*A Turkey Vulture basking in the sun on an electrical tower.
Photo by Mike Slater*

Dec 11, 7:30 pm - Insect Apocalypse by Dr. Ashley Kennedy (Joint meeting with Mengel Natural History Society)

Your yard might look beautiful, but how do you know if it's contributing to the local ecosystem? Numerous studies from around the world suggest that insect populations are in decline, and that affects birds who rely on insects for food. **Dr. Ashley Kennedy** will show how food webs connect plants, insects, and birds, and how you can convert your yard into better wildlife habitat for these groups.



*Caterpillars are an important part of the food webs that support birds. Here is a Canadian Owlet Caterpillar eating a Meadow-rue.
Photo by Mike Slater*

Dr. Kennedy earned her doctorate at the University of Delaware's Dept. of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology. She is a board-certified entomologist, a Science Policy Fellow of the Entomological Society of America, and a member of the Delaware Native Species Commission. She currently researches tick-borne diseases at the Army Public Health Center in Edgewood, MD.

Jan 8, 7:30 pm - Nicaragua Connection- A Wood Thrush's Journey from Nicaragua to Tinicum Township, Bucks County by Diane Allison

In 2011 a Wood Thrush that had been banded in Nicaragua died after striking a window in Tinicum Township Bucks County. Diane traveled to Nicaragua to visit the cloud forest where this Wood Thrush spent the winter and was banded. Through her photos she will share this bird's story and open the little known world of birds in Nicaragua to viewers. This land of many habitats has a treasure of unexplored bird life and is an important wintering ground for many of our summer breeders. Over 700 species of birds have been found in Nicaragua and the list grows every day. Join Diane in a visit to the cloud forests, wetlands and pine-oak forests of Nicaragua to see its amazing natural resources.

Diane has lived in Tinicum township, Bucks County for 40 years with her husband Dave. She has

served on the board of Bucks County Audubon, and the Tinicum Conservancy. Her interest in birds has taken her to many places including all 50 states, Europe, Mexico, Central America, South America, the Galapagos Islands and the Caribbean. She is the compiler for the Central Bucks Audubon Christmas Bird Count and the compiler for all of Bucks County for the Pennsylvania Migration Count since 2001. Diane is on the speakers bureau for the North American Bluebird Society and has built over 2000 bluebird boxes with school children, community groups and scouts. She enjoys hiking, nature photography and introducing people to the wonders of birds and nature.

A Wood Thrush on a lawn in Central America (Belize) photo by Mike Slater



Feb 12, 7:30 pm -
Broad-winged Hawk
Migration Ecology:
Flying from
Pennsylvania to Peru by
Dr. Laurie Goodrich
(Rescheduled)

Hawk Mountain has
tracked adult and
juvenile Broad-winged

Hawks throughout their life cycle from 2014 through 2019. Broad-winged Hawks have declined in southeastern Pennsylvania but remain common in more heavily forested regions. Hawk Mountain's study is only the second study to use satellite-telemetry with Broad-winged Hawks and the first to tag males. The talk will detail some of the key findings on range, migration ecology, stopover and wintering sites as well as emerging conservation threats. Dr. Laurie Goodrich is the Sarkis Acopian Director of Conservation Science at Hawk Mt. Sanctuary

Mar 12, 7:30 pm - How Birds Made Us Human by Dr. Rob Fergus

People have been living and interacting with birds since before we were human. Many of the behaviors that we take to be inherently human—including walking upright, using tools, language, writing, music, dance, sewing, pottery, home building, and flight—were perfected by birds long before we became human. This presentation looks at the shared history of humans and birds and how we may have become human by copying these behaviors from birds in our shared environment.

Dr. Rob Fergus studied bird conservation at the University of Texas, where he received his PhD in 2008. He was the founding director of the Hornsby Bend (Texas) Bird Observatory and was the first executive director of the Travis Audubon Society in Austin, Texas. He worked for the National Audubon Society for nearly 5 years as their senior scientist for Urban Bird Conservation. Dr. Fergus is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography and the Environment at Rowan University, where he teaches cultural geography and environmental science. He also teaches urban ecology and biodiversity courses at Rosemont College in

Philadelphia, and provides bird pest control consulting for BirdBGone, Inc. Rob recently moved from Bucks County, PA to a geothermal home in the wilds of Hunterdon County, NJ where he enjoys birding and exploring nature with his kids.

Apr 8, 7:30 pm To be announced.

May 14 - BOC 100TH Anniversary Banquet – Scott Weidensaul

(See announcement above in this newsletter)

Fall 2020 Field Trips

BOC Fall Field Trips



Red-tailed Hawk- Photo by Ken Lebo

Covid-19 precautions for the BOC Fall Field Trips.

Due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, the following precautions will be observed on field trips:

*We will try to **maintain 6 ft. social distancing**. However, even though we will be outdoors and the trails at all locations are fairly wide, it may be unrealistic to maintain constant social distancing, **so masks must be worn**. Please bring your own optics, especially spotting scopes when needed. It is difficult if not impossible to sanitize scopes for multiple users. (Changes may be made at the discretion of trip leaders.)*

September 19 – 9 am to 2 pm Mt. Penn Hawk Watch at the Pagoda – Bill Uhrich, 610-373-8109 micheleandbill621@gmail.com

September 26 – 8:00 am Greenhills Preserve, Gunhart RD, Robeson Twp. – Art Zdancewic (cell # 610-858-3315) and Tony Grimm (Saturday)

October 3 - 8:00 am Hopewell Big Woods Trail
Rudy Keller (610-845-7310; rckeller@dejazzd.com) and Sheila Martin
See directions in Sheila's article about the trail in this issue.

October 10 - 8:00 am Union Meadows Recreation Area– meet at the Schuylkill River Trail parking lot behind the Fork & Ale Restaurant on Rte. 724 east of Birdsboro. - Linda Ingram (610-326-9531) and Mike Slater (paplantings@gmail.com) (Saturday)

October 13 6:30 am Delaware Shorebirds from Delaware City to Bombay Hook – Art Zdancewic.. Meet at the McDonalds in Morgantown. Drive with yourself or with a trusted friend or family member. Limited to 5 cars, Call Art at cell # 610-858-3315 for reservations and more info. (Day trip on a Tuesday)

October 17 – 9 am to 2 pm, Mt. Penn Hawk Watch at the Pagoda – Bill Uhrich , 610-373-8109 micheleandbill621@gmail.com (Saturday)

Berks County Birds - Dec 2019 – Feb 2020 by Rudy Keller

Abbreviations: Blue Marsh L. (BML), E. J. Breneman Quarry (BQ), Hawk Mt. Sanctuary (HMS), Kernsville Dam & Recreation Area, Hamburg (KDRC), L. Ontelaunee (LO), State Game Lands (SGL). Christmas Bird Counts: Reading (RCBC), Bernville (BCBC), Hamburg (HCBC).

Winter was exceptionally mild with virtually no snow cover. Lakes and larger waterways mostly stayed open and the ground was never deeply frozen. Spring migration of waterfowl and such passerines as blackbirds and Fish Crows, which usually begins late in Feb, was well underway by the beginning of that month.

The enormous wintering population of **Snow Geese** in the Lehigh Valley again spilled over into eastern Berks, where flocks of hundreds to 15,000 were often reported. Sightings increased in late Jan and Feb, when multitudes of geese staged at Middle Creek WMA in Lancaster Co. Winter's only **Ross's Goose** was photographed as part of a flyover flock of **Snow Geese** at Green Hills Preserve 12/27 (NW, DW). Two **Greater White-fronted Geese**, a typical winter number, were with **Canada Geese** in the Oley Valley 2/16-20 (RK, m.ob.). A **Pink-footed Goose**, the first in 20 years, was a one-day wonder at Gotwals pond, Oley 1/30 (PJW, m.ob.). Pennsylvania's first Pink-footed Goose was seen at this pond 3/29/97, attracting dozens of birders to see what was then a mega-rarity. One to three **Cackling Geese**, annual in small numbers, were reported at three places 1/1 till 2/22 (m.ob.). A **Canada X dark morph Snow Goose** was at BQ 12/24 (RK). This hybrid combination has previously been described in Berks. A few Dec reports of southbound **Tundra Swans** were followed in Feb by reports of a strong northbound movement, including 250 flying over the Schuylkill R. 2/9 (EB).

The last **Wood Ducks** had barely left in early Jan before small numbers began returning in mid-Feb, such as three at KDRC 2/17 (KG). The seasonal high count of the small, long established wintering population of **Gadwall** around LO was 72 on 2/29 (RK), when migrants were already swelling the numbers. LO is a favored regional spring stopover site for **American Wigeon**. The seasonal high count there was 150 on 2/28 (JSp). **American Black Duck** continued to decline, its winter high count a mere 28 on the RCBC 12/15. One or two **American Black Duck X Mallard** were periodically seen at six locations, showing how widespread this hybrid is. One or two **Northern Pintail** were at BQ in Jan and 18 were part of the Feb migratory movement at LO 2/15 (PJW). Open ponds favored wintering by **Green-winged Teal**, up to seven of which were reported from various places during the period.

Ring-necked Duck, the *Aythya* that prefers ponds, was well reported, with 18-50 at a farm pond on Zweizig Rd. near Shoemakersville in Jan and Feb (MW) and up to 35 at BQ during the period. **Canvasback**, **Redhead**, **Greater Scaup** and **Lesser Scaup** were far more scarce, with one to seven seen at BQ and a few other places on various dates. Single **Long-tailed Ducks** were reported at BML 12/3-22 (DP, RH) and Hopewell L., French Creek State Park 2/26. A few **Buffleheads** (up to nine at KDRC 12/10 – KG) popped up with Ring-necked Ducks at some ponds and lakes during the winter. **Common Goldeneye**, a winter lake duck here, peaked at 10 at BML 1/27 (VS). Patient scans of lakes and shadowy pond edges revealed elegantly cryptic **Hooded Mergansers** at many places, with the winter high count of 20 made on the RCBC 12/15. Some Common Mergansers wintered, but 1000 at LO 2/18 (RK) were part of a migratory surge. Four **Red-breasted Mergansers** seen on the RCBC 12/15 were the first on the count since 2008. Two

others were at BQ 12/31 (KG) and one was at LO 1/31 (RK). Many counts were made of the annually wintering flock of **Ruddy Ducks** at BQ, tallying a range of one to 38 birds from 12/4 till 2/23 (m.ob.).

Four **Ruffed Grouse** were counted on the HCBC 12/29 and one was at SGL 110, Northkill Gap 2/9 (PJW), all on the Kittatinny Ridge, which harbors the last of the county's grouse. One or two **Pied-billed Grebes** wintered at BQ and at a pond in Morgantown. One to three **Horned Grebes** at BML 12/2-6 (DP) were late migrants. Birders starting annual lists found two or three Eurasian Collared-Doves at the Shartlesville colony during the period. This colony apparently renews itself, but does not grow. Along with **Canada Geese**, gangs of corn demanding suburban **Mallards** and a few **Ruddy Ducks** and **American Coots** have become winter fixtures at BQ. Coot counts this season usually numbered in single digits, but there was a surge to 30 on 2/1 (CH). **Killdeer** were not reported during most of Jan, but birds slowly returned in Feb, with a seasonal high count of 12 at Kutztown 2/29 (TU). **Wilson's Snipe** were regularly seen only at Rodale Experimental Farm in Maxatawny Twp., where one to eight were reported on various dates 1/6-23 (m.ob.). Three **American Woodcock** were displaying at Union Meadows Park near Birdsboro 2/22 (S&F).

Shrieking masses of gulls sated with landfill delicacies enliven the dark months when they gather on the beach at BML in late afternoon. Birders seeking white-winged gulls among them were well rewarded this season. Two first winter **Iceland Gulls** were there 12/3 (JS), when few birders were paying attention. The next Iceland Gull, a light first winter bird, was not seen till 1/21 (RW), but stayed till 2/8 (RK). This light bird and a dark **Thayer's type** bird were seen together 1/29 till 2/8 (m.ob.), leading to the conclusion that at least two but probably four different Iceland Gulls were present this season. Sorting out the number of **Glaucous Gulls** was equally interesting. A first winter bird was at BML 1/4 till 2/28 (RK, m.ob.). Another bird, possibly second winter, was at BML 1/17 (RK), and two birds, likely the ones above, according to photos, were there 1/28 (JH). An older, probably subadult bird was photographed at BML 1/5-9 (SG, DP, PJW, RPW), when neither of the younger birds was apparently present. Thus, three Glaucous Gulls visited BML this winter. Counts of one to nine **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** and one to 10 **Great Black-backed Gulls** during the period were within expected numerical ranges.

There were reports of single **Red-throated Loons** at BML 12/2-13 (DP, JSp). **Double-crested Cormorants** did the expected thing by disappearing after 12/15. An adult **Northern Goshawk**, now rare in all seasons, was clearly seen perched at close range in Bern Twp. near BML 1/24 (JS). This species has been seen around BML in a few recent winters, perhaps attracted in part by sacrificial pheasants released for the hunting season. Credible winter reports of **Golden Eagles** off the Kittatinny Ridge have increased in recent years, but definitive details should always be provided to distinguish them from the many immature Bald Eagles on the scene. The BCBC recorded its first **Golden Eagle** 12/28. Two birds were seen from North Lookout, HMS during the HCBC 12/29. A probable adult was seen at BML 1/9 (ZM), one was soaring over SGL 106, Pine Swamp Rd. 1/29 (KG), and one was seen near LO 2/9 (JV). Single Northern Harriers were reported from seven locations, mostly in Dec. These birds are forced to move on because modern intensive agriculture does not provide vole habitat. The only reported **Long-eared Owl** was found on the HCBC 12/29. Two Northern **Saw-whet Owls** were heard on the HCBC 12/29. Single birds were attracted by playback at Port Clinton Firetower 12/29 (DKr) and at HMS 1/11 and 2/8 (DKr, MW).

Mild weather may have induced some **Red-headed Woodpeckers** to stay on territory rather than migrate. Birds were recorded on all three CBC's, which is not the norm, and at some known breeding locations later in winter. The largest colony currently known is in the vicinity of Allendale Rd., Shoemakersville, where three pairs were found as late as 12/27 (SM). **Red-bellied Woodpecker**, apparently still expanding, was abundant, with a record 202 tallied on the HCBC 12/29. A first year female **Rufous Hummingbird** first identified in Exeter Twp. 10/14 and banded by Sandy Lockerman 10/21 was last seen 12/24 (LV). Lack of snowcover probably helped **American Kestrels** winter in the low numbers that have become the norm in recent years. Merlins were recorded on all three CBC's, including a record four on the BCBC 12/28. Single birds were reported periodically for the rest of the winter in habitats from rural to urban. Reading's resident **Peregrine Falcons** were seen in Jan. Singletons were seen at Hereford 12/27 (JH) and along Bastian Rd. near Bowers 1/26 (DB).

Eastern Phoebes were surviving in Wyomissing 1/9 (LC), at KDRC 1/12 and 2/4 (KG), and at Gring's Mill 1/31 (PJW). Following their decimation, likely by West Nile Virus, numbers of **Tufted Titmice** on CBC's were slightly higher than the lows of last year, but still far below ten-year averages. In this non-irruption year, single **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were reported in Wyomissing Park 12/26 (LC) and at Gring's Mill 2/16. Thanks to a run of non-lethal winters, **Carolina Wrens** will enter the 2020 breeding season with a booming population. High numbers were tallied on the CBC's, including a record 224 on the HCBC 12/29, and theirs were among the most frequently heard voices on winter birdwalks. Single **Gray Catbirds** were found in Shillington Park 12/2 (NW), at KDRC 12/5 till 1/15 (KG), and on two CBC's. A **Brown Thrasher**, still exceptional in winter, was at KDRC 12/6 till 1/23 (KG). In early Dec, a small regional movement of **Pine Siskins**, also not irruptive this year, was detected in Berks, with 15 counted at HMS 12/4 and seven at LO 12/12 (AZ).

Birds associated with cold, snowy winters were scarce. No reported flock of **Horned Larks** exceeded 250 birds. Most often encountered were resident birds of the prairie subspecies in pairs or small flocks in fields where they breed. The sole report of **American Pipits** was of three on the BCBC 12/28. A **Lapland Longspur** was near Fleetwood 1/18, 19 (JH, MW). A **Snow Bunting** was found on the HCBC 12/29 and one was near Fleetwood 1/19 (MW).

Chipping Sparrows, **Fox Sparrows** and **Eastern Towhees** seem to be continuing a trend of staying later in fall and perhaps overwintering more regularly. Green Hills Preserve, a farm converted to warm season grassland and edge, held three **Fox Sparrows** 12/27 and five **Eastern Towhees** 2/18 (NW). **Red-winged Blackbirds** and **Common Grackles**, normally about 30 miles southwest of Berks in winter, stayed later and returned early (e.g., 2000 **Red-winged Blackbirds** near Bowers 1/26 (DB) and 1000 **Common Grackles** near Morgantown 2/3 (RK, AZ). An **Orange-crowned Warbler** was photographed on the Exeter Scenic River Trail 12/22 (RH). There were eight recorded in Dec and Jan during the 20th century, most recently in 1995. This is the first since then. A **Pine Warbler** was photographed in its eponymous habitat at Daniel Boone Homestead 12/3, 5 (SF). There have been several winter records, from single sightings to overwintering birds, of this species since 2000. There was just one, in 1957, in the 20th century. **Yellow-rumped Warblers** were reported in their usual small winter numbers, mostly in the Schuylkill R. valley. Two **Purple Finches** visited a Bern Twp. feeder 12/31 and a single bird visited there 2/14 (JS).

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Berks County Birds, March – May, 2020 by Matt Wlasniewski

Locations: Bartram Trail (BAT), Berne Township (BT), Blue Mountain Academy (BMA), Blue Marsh Lake (BML), Blue Marsh Lake State Hill Boat Launch (BMLSH), Blue Marsh Lake Sheidy Boat Launch (BMLSBL), EJ Breneman Quarry (BQ), Exeter Scenic River Trail (ESRT), French Creek State Park (FCSP), Gotwals Pond (GP), Hamburg Commerce Park (HCP), Hamburg Reservoir (HR), Hawk Mountain North Lookout Data (HMNL), Hawk Mountain South Lookout (HMSL), Hay Creek (HC), Kernsville Dam Recreation Area (KDRA), Kutztown University (KU), Lake Ontelaunee (LO), Lake Ontelaunee Bailey's Creek (LOBC), Lake Ontelaunee Blue Falls (LOBF), Lake Ontelaunee Water Street (LOWA), Lake Ontelaunee West Shore Drive (LOWS), Lowland Road Retention Pond (LRRP), Monacacy Hill Recreation Area (MHRC), Mount Penn (MP), Old Tipton Road (OTP), Peter's Creek (PC), Pine Swamp Road (PSR), Sacony Trail (ST), Shartlesville Farm Pond (SFP), State Game Lands 52 (SGL52), State Game Lands 106 (SGL106), State Game Lands 110 North Kill Gap (SGL110), Trout Run Reservoir (TRR).

March 13, 2020 was a Friday that turned out to have a larger than anticipated impact on the lives of Berks Countians. For on that date, the term COVID-19 became part of everyone's daily life. We discovered that we had taken the freedom to move freely in our communities for granted. Birders, although restricted in some parts of Berks County, continued to pursue their pastime and file their reports which now probably included more sightings with less travel---even their own backyards if the changes to their employment kept them at home. Life changed on that Friday the thirteenth and birding provided an avenue to reduce the stress of COVID-19.

Snow Goose migration routes continued to avoid Berks County with fewer flocks of large numbers spending days on the two major lakes and surrounding farms. Three exceptions were: 1500 **Snow Geese** in the fields along Zweizig Road 3/1 (MW), 5000 at Gotwals Pond 3/1 and 6000 at the same location 3/4 (RK). A single **Cackling Goose** was found in a flock of geese at LOBC 3/1 (RK).

Three immature **Mute Swans** arrived at SFP 5/2 and stayed until 5/9, which included side trips to nearby lakes. Six **Mute Swans** were also seen at Bernhart's Dam 5/28 (JSp). On 5/17, KG was surprised to find two unbanded **Trumpeter Swans** at SFP. Unfortunately, they had flown when he returned with his camera. **Tundra Swans** continue to prefer LO for stopovers. On 3/4, RK counted 153 at LO while on 3/2, MW tallied 87 **Tundra Swans** there.

Nine **Blue-winged Teal** were found at Peter's Creek 4/23 (JW, PW) and two were seen foraging along the shoreline of LO 4/18 (RK, MW). On 4/18, RK found a good number of **Northern Shovelers**, 16, at LO where he also found twelve **Canvasback** 3/13. A lone drake **Redhead** found SFP to its liking and was seen there 4/19 to 5/17 (MW, m. obs.). At LO, JH counted 11 **Redheads** 3/12 and on 3/9 DK had 14 at the same lake.

Several storms forced “storm birds” to rest on the two main lakes in Berks. On 3/13, DP found five **Greater Scaup** at BMLSH. JW and PW braved the weather to count three **Greater Scaup** at LO 3/30. Greater numbers of **Lesser Scaup** sought refuge on Berks lakes as did 20 on LO 4/18 (MW, RK) and 30 on BMLSH 3/29 (DP). The 4/18 storm resulted in two **Surf Scoters** and one **White-winged Scoter** stopping at BMLSH (MW, JW, PW).

Long-tailed Ducks usually appear in small numbers in Berks, such as two at LO 4/6 (MW). But MS counted an unusually high number of 32 **Long-tailed Ducks** at BMLSH 3/20. At LO, RK totaled 362 **Bufflehead**, a more common storm bird, in scattered groups on 4/18. A high number, 13, of the more uncommon **Common Goldeneye**, weathered a storm at LO 3/20 (RK).

On 3/1, RK watched 357 **Common Mergansers** feed at LOWS. A female **Common Merganser** was observed teaching two young how to fish in the Schuylkill River at Berne Bridge 5/7 (MW). Eleven **Red-breasted Mergansers** were seen at two different locations: BML 4/18 (RH) and LO (RK).

A single **Red-throated Loon** appeared at LO 5/16 and 5/23 (RK, DP). **Common Loon** numbers vary with each storm. At LO, MW counted eight on 4/9 while 51 **Common Loons** rested at LO 4/13 (JW, MW, PW). A surprising 357 **Common Loons** arrived before the fishermen at BML 4/18 (JS) but were scared away by the noisy fishing boats. A high number of **Horned Grebes**, 21, displayed their breeding plumage at BMLSH 3/27 (DP). Only one **Red-necked Grebe** was reported this quarter at LO 5/13 (JW, MW, PW).

Double-crested Cormorants are usually seen at LO and BML, such as the 35 at LO 4/13 (MW). Surprisingly, KK added **Double-crested Cormorant** to her yard list when 35 flew over Mount Penn 4/20.

Single **American Bitterns** made appearances throughout Berks. On 4/16, one fed at LRRP (MW). On 4/25, SF discovered one hiding along the shoreline of LO. Two **American Bitterns** flushed at PC 4/25 (TU). The **Great Blue Heron** rookery at New Bethel Church Road numbered 17 nests 5/9 (MW) and the rookery at Van Reed Road in Spring Township had 28 herons present 3/22 (EB). The first reported **Great Egret** was at LRRP 4/6 (MW). LW photographed a **Cattle Egret** next to a small herd of cows along Hoch Road in Fleetwood. The curious cattle were lined up along the fence within six feet of the egret. Six **Black-crowned Night-Herons** were seen along the marshes of BML at the Old Church Road access 4/25 (JW, PW).

Spring migration count at HMS was conducted 4/1 to 5/15. This year the total count was 30% above the ten year average. 1269 raptors of 14 species were counted. Increases were noted for **Bald Eagle**, **Turkey Vulture** and **Broad-winged Hawk**. Decreases were counted for **Northern Harrier**, **Black Vulture** and **Sharp-shinned Hawk**. On 5/17, the 7th record for **Mississippi Kite**, a non-migrating raptor, flew to the southwest past the north lookout. It was an adult bird. The high count day tallied 392 hawks (LG, HMNL).

The first report of **Osprey** in Berks was on 4/4 at KDRA along the Schuylkill River. An immature **Golden Eagle** surprised a group of Sunday morning birders at LO 3/1 (MS, MW).

The **Virginia Rail** was seen and heard calling at KDRA 4/12 to 5/2 (KG, MW). On 4/23, KG saw and heard four **Virginia Rails** on both sides of the marsh trail at KDRA. In Bern Township, JS stopped her yard work when she heard **Sandhill Cranes** calling as they flew overhead 3/9. She lives near Blue Marsh Lake.

Three **Semipalmated Plovers** sought cover at LOWA 5/26 (RK). A 5/25 storm forced a nice variety of shorebirds to seek shelter at HCP 5/26, including two **Solitary Sandpipers**, a **Spotted Sandpiper**, one **Greater Yellowlegs**, 3 **Lesser Yellowlegs**, a **Least Sandpiper** and 4 **Baird's Sandpipers** (MW). The scattered storms provided rain pool feeding areas for a variety of migrating shorebirds.

A **Dunlin** appeared at the School Road farm pond 5/23 (RK). A male **Red-necked Phalarope** found enough food at the same School Road farm pond on 4/30 to return on 5/13 and stay until 5/17 (JW, MW, PW and m. obs.).

Twenty **Wilson's Snipe** fed in a rain pool along Siegfriedale Road in Kutztown 4/17 (TU). Four **American Woodcock** began displaying in the fields along River Road 3/1 and six were at the same site 3/2 (MW).

A frequent spring migrant in Berks, 150 **Bonaparte's Gulls** stopped at LO after a storm 4/18 (RK). At BML, RK found a holdover **Greater Black-backed Gull** 3/4. Four **Caspian Terns** made a fleeting appearance at LOBC 4/19 (JW, PW). Two irregular visitors appeared 4/18 after storms—a **Common Tern** at LO (J Sp) and a **Forster's Tern** at BMLSH (DP).

Eurasian Collared-Doves were present all quarter at their usual spot-Shartlesville. However, on 3/2, seven doves, a new high count, were photographed as they fed at a farm (CDP, JCP). A **Short-eared Owl** perched on a traffic sign in Hamburg's farm area 3/10 (MW). **Common Nighthawks** made their first appearance 5/23, with three seen in Leesport (EB) and three in Morgantown (HH). SGL 110 remains the only nesting area for **Eastern Whip-poor-will**. KG heard three 4/28 and MW saw and heard four 5/1 in that location. On 5/23, MW observed a female **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** taking worms from a gypsy moth worm nest.

The **Peregrine Falcons'** nesting at 5th and Penn in Reading was successful this year with two young being fledged (BU, m. obs.). Migrant flycatchers were scarce in Berks but these four were documented: **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** 5/16 at TRR (RK), **Acadian Flycatcher** at Neversink Mt Preserve 5/17 (RK), **Alder Flycatcher** at Jim Dietrich Park 5/23 (J Sp), and **Least Flycatcher** at SGL 110 (KG).

An early arrival date for **Purple Martin** at the Mill Hill Road gourds was 4/4 (MW). The earliest **Purple Martin** arrival date on record is 3/28/1984 (KG) at a colony in Hamburg. **Cliff Swallows** arrived at LO 5/1 (DB). The new bridge at Berne had nesting **Cliff Swallows** 5/14 (MW).

On 5/16, MW observed a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** taking worms from a Gypsy Moth nest to a nearby tree at SGL 106. **Golden-crowned Kinglets** sang loudly on their stopover in SGL 110 where MW counted 79 in several groups 4/4.

Gray-cheeked Thrush sometimes get overlooked during migration but single birds were seen at: Buxton Conservancy 5/17 (MSI), Nolde Forest 5/25 (DK) and William Penn Forest 5/10 (AZ). Bad weather often brings **American Pipits** to the fields in Berks and such was the case 3/28 when MW found 50 along Mertz Road and 4/18 when TU watched 30 feed along the roadside.

*Birders found 33 warbler species during migration. Perhaps the most cooperative was a singing **Prothonotary Warbler** found 5/12 at ESRT (RH, m.obs.). (Error! Reference source not found.) It was last documented 5/25 (RH). **Mourning Warblers** proved to be easier to locate this season with eight different birds being documented by birders.*

A **Le Conte's Sparrow** photographed KDRA 3/9 (KG) was a new species for Berks. An earlier photograph 2/18 (AM) was shown to KG after his discovery. The first birder had difficulty with his bird's identification and then didn't know who to notify of his discovery. **Lincoln's Sparrows** appeared in five reports from all four corners of Berks: 5/3 at Peter's Creek (JB), 5/14 at Berne Bridge (KG), 5/15 at North Park (JW, PW), 5/17 at Kutztown (NL) and 5/18 at FC (RK). A singing **Blue Grosbeak** caught the attention of KG 5/19 at KDRA.

On May 9, a record setting polar vortex dropped down from Canada and surprised the northeast with freezing temperatures and snow. Several locations recorded the lowest May temperatures ever. From Texas to Maine, temperatures fell in every state in the eastern half of the lower 48 north of Florida. Caught in this mayhem were millions of migrants. Berks also had freezing temperatures which destroyed some of the food for those hungry birds. **Baltimore Orioles** and **Orchard Orioles** began showing up at residential feeding stations that had never had those birds so close to their windows. The birds were desperate to replace the food lost to the cold temperatures and consumed oranges, grape jelly and suet in a frenzy. **Baltimore Orioles** competed with the usual suet eaters such as **Red-bellied Woodpeckers**. eBird records show almost unbelievable numbers in a period of two weeks after May 9. For the week

of 5/9, 462 **Baltimore Oriole** sightings were reported; for the week of 5/15, there were 406. These numbers do not include **Baltimore Orioles** seen but not reported. The average homeowner who put out feeders for the children to enjoy were depleting the shelves of oranges and grape jelly. Hardware stores in Hamburg had to order more feeders just when the bird feeding purchases normally slow down. **Orchard Oriole** sightings peaked at a much lower rate but still sightings were above normal. During the week of 5/1 there were 33 reports and 22 for the week of 5/8.

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