



# THE DRUMMER



[www.senecarocksaudubon.org](http://www.senecarocksaudubon.org)

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## Birding Rail 66

by Deb Freed and Paulette Colantonio

In November of 2019, Deb met with the web designer for Rail 66 who proposed a birding link for trail users. It seemed like a good partnership between the trail users and local birders, so Paulette and Deb talked about walking the trail and creating a bird list. We thought this would also be a good way to check out the possibility of offering bird walks. We also wanted to generate “seasonal” lists to help new birders identify the species most likely to be encountered along the trail. With those ideas, we began walking.

Our first walk was on February 21. The day was a nippy 27 degrees, but sunny. We met at the start of the trail along Route 322 by O’Neils. We walked from 11 a.m. to 12:30 ending at Schwen Camper. Our list was short; the American Crow and Blue Jay. February is the end of the winter seasonal quarter, December to February. We definitely need to get busy this December to add to the winter list!

We really began the list in earnest in March. March begins the spring seasonal quarter, March to May. Two treks in March, two in April and one in May expanded our list to 50 species. We walked with or without masks, keeping our distance, meeting lots of walkers, bikers and pups. The trail is a friendly corridor. Again, we walked the section from Route 322 to the gate at Route 66. We also walked both directions from the Lucinda parking lot. The hikes were from one and a half to three hours in length.



Autumn glory along the trail, photo by Deb Freed

*Our programs have been cancelled because of the COVID-19 situation.*

*Check your email, our website and Facebook page for current updates. Stay safe!*

Our spring seasonal list of 50 species includes: American Goldfinch, American Robin, Baltimore Oriole, Bay-breasted Warbler, Black-capped Chickadee, Black-throated Green Warbler, Blue-headed Vireo, Broad-winged Hawk, Brown-headed Cowbird, Canada Goose, Carolina Wren, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat, Dark-eyed Junco, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Towhee, European Starling, Field Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Grackle, Gray Catbird, Hairy Woodpecker, Hooded Warbler, House Sparrow, House Wren, Indigo Bunting, Killdeer, Mourning Dove, Northern Cardinal, Northern Flicker, Ovenbird, Pileated Woodpecker, Purple Finch, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Red-eyed Vireo, Red-winged Blackbird, Rock Dove, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Scarlet Tanager, Song Sparrow, American Tree Sparrow, Tufted Titmouse, Turkey Vulture, White-breasted Nuthatch, Wood Thrush, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

The summer walks, June through August didn't happen. Dry, hot summer days and increasing caution over Covid19 didn't inspire us. (Paulette also had a Jones fracture, not very conducive to hiking). The summer seasonal quarter is wide open. We look forward to a renewed effort in 2021.

We are now in the fall seasonal quarter, September to November. On October 14 the colorful foliage and brilliant blue sky drew us to the trail for three hours where we added three species: Cedar Waxwing, Hermit Thrush and White-throated Sparrow, bringing our total to 55 species. We plan to get out on the trail in November to wrap up our first year of listing the birds along Rail 66. We are confident we can grow our list. Our current goal is to get to 66 species. You get it, 66 on Rail 66!

We look forward to publishing our list for the Rail 66 website [www.rail-66.com](http://www.rail-66.com), our own website [www.senecarocksaudubon.org](http://www.senecarocksaudubon.org) and perhaps some printed lists in the information boxes along the trail. Easy access to the popular trail, parking and variety of habitats all point to the possibility of SRAS offering public bird walks in 2021.

Note: It turns out that the first section of Rail 66, O'Neil's to just beyond Zacherl's Market is in our CBC count circle. It could become a unique (walking/snowshoeing/skiing) location to join the CBC!

The *Drummer* is the newsletter of Seneca Rocks Audubon Society (SRAS), PO Box 148, Clarion, PA 16214. SRAS is a chapter of the National Audubon Society. The *Drummer* is published 4 times per year – September, November, March and May.

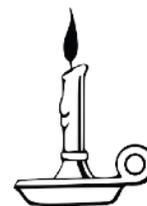
The *Drummer* is available on our website in Adobe pdf and may be read or downloaded from the site — [www.senecarocksaudubon.org](http://www.senecarocksaudubon.org).

Members are encouraged to contribute announcements, articles, photos, etc., to Editor Flo McGuire, 609 Ponderosa Lane, Tionesta, PA 16353 (814 755-3672) or email at [fmcguire1@verizon.net](mailto:fmcguire1@verizon.net).

## Cathedral by Candlelight

Cook Forest State Park

Saturday, October 31 at 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm



Experience something different for Halloween! Take a walk back in time to meet a lumberman from the 1800s who will lead us on a candlelit tour through the Cook Homestead, then show us the old bracket dam along Tom's Run. Ancient trees and old stories abound. Moving the lumber downstream to markets in Pittsburgh was a very dangerous job!

**\* Until further notice - Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all park programs are limited to 25 participants (unless otherwise stated), mask must be on person, social distancing in effect. All participants must register at the Park Office at (814)744-8407 or [cookforestsp@pa.gov](mailto:cookforestsp@pa.gov). Program starting location given upon successful registration.**



See our website, [senecarocksaudubon.org](http://senecarocksaudubon.org), Christmas Bird Count page, for updated printable forms: the CBC map as well as checklists for field birders and feeder watchers.

## Clarion Christmas Bird Count

by Debbie McCanna

Seneca Rocks has chosen December 19 for our Christmas Bird Count. Since the CBC began on Christmas Day in 1900, it has relied on the dedication and commitment of citizen scientists. The Clarion Christmas Bird Count Circle was established by SRAS in 1987, so this will be our 34th year. We cover a specific 15-mile-diameter circle. There are ways to participate by vehicle, on foot, or at a feeder station. Our CBC Committee has spent a lot of time this summer realigning our circle sections to account for highway changes and make the sections about the same size/time to count. We also have looked at places where hikers or cross-country skiers could help. If you are a beginning birder, you will be able to join a group that includes at least one experienced birder. There is a specific methodology to the CBC, and all participants must make

arrangements to participate in advance with the Team Leaders and circle compiler, but anyone can participate. Our count is organized by the count compiler, Debbie McCanna, [dmcc1018@gmail.com](mailto:dmcc1018@gmail.com). Feederwatch is handled by Danette Karls, [danettemkarls@gmail.com](mailto:danettemkarls@gmail.com). New forms for field birders and feederwatchers and the CBC map can be printed from our website.

Mal Hays and Ron Montgomery are holding instructional gatherings and driving/hiking practices before the Count day—contact them for further information.

Count volunteers cover their section, counting every bird they see or hear all day, keeping track of their time and miles driving and walking. If you see a noteworthy bird that is not in your section, keep track of the time and its location, in case it was not seen in that section. It's not just a species tally—all birds are counted all day, giving an indication of the total number of birds in the circle that day. The Compiler reports to the CBC, which keeps the statistics and offers them on the Audubon website.

We thought you might be interested in some highlights from the Pennsylvania 2019-2020 CBC.

*The following report is from the National Audubon website, highlighting by Drummer editor.*

Seventy-eight counts were submitted from Pennsylvania (which has a total of 81 circles), with the return of Harrisburg and the addition of new counts at Cowanesque Lake, Montrose Area, and Ohiopyle. Temperatures were near normal, but heavy rain played havoc with many of the counts run on the first weekend, which usually has most of the highest totals. In 2019, counts run on the second weekend produced several of the top tallies. A statewide total of 161 species was near the average and included several outstanding rarities.

The 32 species of waterfowl detected included an impressive 178,000 Snow Geese, almost three-quarters of them at Bethlehem-Easton, which also held the only two Ross's Geese. A Barnacle Goose was seen during the count week at Western Chester. Six Trumpeter Swans was a new statewide high, with two each at Indiana and Johnstown and individuals at Dubois and Southern Lancaster. Eight Surf Scoters were at Erie and one at Southern Bucks, six White-winged Scoters were counted at Harrisburg and one at Johnstown, while the only two Black Scoters were at Southern Bucks.



All but five CBCs in PA recorded Bald Eagle—photo by Pat Conway

Forty-two Ruffed Grouse was just four more than the historical low recorded in 2017. Erie had the only two Red-throated Loons, while two Red-necked Grebes were tallied at Southern Bucks County and another was at Bushy Run S.P. Great Cormorant numbers remain at modest levels, with 16 at Southern Bucks and two at Pennypack Valley, which was for many years the center of the species' winter distribution. Delaware County and Lehigh Valley each had an American Bittern, the first on a Pennsylvania CBC since 2007. A Great Egret was an excellent find on the very successful Lititz CBC.

Black Vulture numbers continue to increase with a new statewide high of 2962 and the Turkey Vulture tally was a third-highest 4438. Individual Ospreys were at Pennypack Valley and Williamsport, the eighth year of the past nine with at least one in the state. Cooper's Hawks continue to outnumber Sharp-shinned Hawks by about two-to-one, as the latter species has been declining since 2001. Meanwhile, Bald Eagle totals continue to increase, with the count of 899 being 94 more than last year's record count as all but five of the CBCs recorded the species.

Seven Virginia Rails, two each at Central Bucks County, Lancaster, and West Chester and one at Upper Bucks County, was a new state high, surpassing the five recorded in 1974. The tally of 221 Sandhill Cranes was down from last year's record 374, but still the third highest statewide total. American Coots, on the other hand, showed a dramatic decline to just 123 individuals, a drop of 94% from the average for the previous ten years. Wilson's Snipe numbers have also been declining in recent years, and the 10 recorded on five CBCs was the fewest since 1951.

Just 11 Bonaparte's Gulls were located, while a Black-headed Gull at Delaware County was only the fifth ever for a Pennsylvania CBC. Southern Bucks once again led the continent with 36,000 Herring Gulls and also tallied 13 of the 16 Iceland Gulls and 12 of the 13 Glaucous Gulls. The 586 Lesser Black-backed Gulls was the fourth highest state total, led by Central Bucks (241) and Bethlehem-Easton (128). Southern Bucks had 120 and Upper Bucks 80 as the center of their winter distribution has shifted north from Southern Bucks County.

Lititz led the state with the highest number of owls (78), including 51 Eastern Screech-Owls, as perennial leader Upper Bucks was washed out by rain and wind. No Snowy Owls were reported **and just three Short-eared Owls, one each at Clarion, Grove City, and Lititz**, were a big drop from last year's impressive 29. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker numbers (281) were down 40% from the ten-year average after setting a new state high in 2017. Red-bellied Woodpecker and Pileated Woodpecker also dropped about 15% following years of steady increase, but these counts may only reflect poor weather conditions at many sites. The tally of American Kestrels (617) was the lowest since 2009, but Merlins continue to increase as wintering birds, setting at new state high at 69.



The Clarion Count is almost famous for its Short-eared Owls. We had one of only three in PA this past year. Photo by Jeffrey Hall

An Empidonax species was found at Newville, but could not be positively identified as to species. Northern Shrikes were scarce for the fourth year in a row, with singles at Cowanesque Lake, Dingman's Ferry, Johnstown, and Lehigh Valley, while Gettysburg had a count-week Loggerhead Shrike, a species not recorded on a Pennsylvania CBC since 2007. A Blue-headed Vireo, a tenth for a PA CBC, was a highlight of the Lititz count. American Crow numbers were down again to 50,899, the fewest since 2000 for this West Nile virus susceptible species, but Common Raven (549) came in just eight short of the 2015 record. Although Horned Lark numbers fluctuate considerably from year to year, the 1836 recorded this season was the lowest tally since 1965

and down 75% from the ten-year average. Pennypack Valley hosted the usual flock of Northern Rough-winged Swallows (60) and Audubon added another 10. A single unidentified swallow was at Huntingdon.

The total of 471 Red-breasted Nuthatches indicated a modest irruption. House Wrens were reported from Curtin (2), Delaware County, and Lititz, while single Marsh Wrens were at Delaware County and Penns Creek. One of the outstanding rarities of the season was a **Townsend's Solitaire at Indiana, only the second ever on a Pennsylvania CBC**; the first was at Butler in 1993. Four Brown Thrashers was the fewest since 2001, while the steady decline in Northern Mockingbird seen in recent years reached a modern day low of 1463 from a peak of 4199 in 2006. Thirty-six American Pipits were found on three counts, the lowest total since 1989, of a species usually tallied in the hundreds. No Lapland Longspurs were encountered for just the second time since 1972 and only 16 Snow Buntings could be located, 13 in Lebanon County and three at Penn's Creek.

Eight species of warbler were reported, including the first Black-throated Gray Warblers ever recorded on a Pennsylvania CBC, one at Lancaster and another at State College. A Black-and-white Warbler was found at Lititz, an Orange-crowned Warbler at State College, and a Cape May Warbler at Pennypack Valley, only the seventh CBC record for the latter species. As in New Jersey, Yellow-rumped Warblers were in short supply – the tally of 180 individuals was the lowest since 1966. West Chester had a Yellow-breasted Chat.

American Tree Sparrows have been gradually declining from a peak of more than 15,000 in 1998, but the 1780 counted this year was the fewest since 1937. A Clay-colored Sparrow, the seventh for a state CBC, was a highlight of the Central Bucks County count, as was a LeConte's Sparrow at York Springs, only the fourth for a Pennsylvania CBC. **The Dark-eyed Junco total was down 40% from the 10-year average** and they were outnumbered by White-throated Sparrows for the first time. On the other hand, the 675 Swamp Sparrows provided a new high for that species on a statewide CBC.

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The long-term decline in the numbers of Eastern Meadowlark, like many other grassland species, was evident in the tally of just seven birds, the fewest since 1929. Western Chester County reported the vast majority (96%) of the 275,000 blackbirds, mainly Red-winged Blackbirds and Common

Grackles, found in the state. Several species of winter finch recorded modest irruptions. The count of 483 Purple Finches was nearly triple last season's tally and the highest total since 2007. Forty-five Common Redpolls (40 at Pocono Manor) was the most in six years, while a Hoary Redpoll was a count-week bird at Erie. No crossbills were encountered, but the 81 Evening Grosbeaks is the most since 2012; Pleasantville (30) and Benezette (17) had the highest counts. Pine Siskins were widespread and reached a respectable total of 707, well above average but far below the massive invasion of 2008, when 11,600 were reported.

These numbers show the CBC attention to detail and trends, and help Audubon to identify and work with local organizations who are on the front line of bird protection and habitat concerns. So help out if you are able, let your friends and neighbors know what the CBC is doing, and check in with the Christmas Bird Count website to follow the fascinating birds that live with us here and farther afield!

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## **2020 Common Nighthawk Migration Counts**

### **Oil City Marina, Foot of Wyllis Street, Oil City - by Gary Edwards**

Year 17 of the Common Nighthawk Migration Count at the Oil City Marina was another subpar year, with 497 nighthawks counted -- well under the 655 average; 32 other species were also recorded. A Merlin flew by on five evenings, making its appearance for seven of the past eight years. On one of the evenings, the Merlin chased a Cedar Waxwing for 15-20 seconds before the waxwing made it to safety in a tree. Others birds of note were Bald Eagle, Broad-winged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, and Scarlet Tanager.

We started on August 15 and ended September 13. Early on, the count began at 6:15 pm and ended about 8:15; by the end, we were starting at 6:00 and ending at 8:00. The highest daily count was 133 birds on August 30. As usual, the second hour was far and away the most productive with 88% of the birds recorded. Historically, the peak migration occurs from August 24 to August 30; this year 296 birds, or 60%, were counted during that week.

Meg and Nick Kolodick missed just one evening; Jim Wilson and Dennis Beaver also were regulars. We're always glad to have visitors and this year we were pleased to see Steve Berry, Deb Freed, Mal Hays, Dan Keth, Michael Leahy, Flo and Jim McGuire, Ron Montgomery, Kirby Neubert, Daniel Silva, Russ States, and Larry Towse, See you all next year.

### **Millcreek Boat Launch, Clarion River - by Mal Hays**

This was our fourth annual count at the Millcreek boat launch on the Clarion River. We started on August 16, and ended on September 9 with only one rain cancellation, August 28th. We began two hours before sunset each day and counted till sunset, breaking it down into four 30 minute quarters. We had 17 different people participate with the count this year with four new people watching for the first time. The numbers were down this year compared to the previous three years. Our total count was 394; 1st quarter—100 birds (25%), 2nd quarter—117 birds (30%), 3rd quarter—119 birds (30%), 4th quarter—58 birds (15%). The previous years' counts were 2017-567, 2018-710, 2019-560. Some of the other species we saw or heard during the watch were Bald Eagle, Osprey, Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, Common Merganser, Barred Owl, Merlin, Least Sandpiper, Killdeer, Raven, Coopers and Red-shouldered Hawks, Blackburnian, Nashville and Chestnut-sided Warblers. Thanks to all the watchers who participated; the more eyes the better! We had a fun year. Looking forward to 2021.

# Birding Sax-Zim Bog

By Debbie Kalbfleisch

*Reprinted from the Todd Bird Club Newsletter with the author's permission.*



Northern Hawk Owl (perched like a star on a Christmas tree!)  
photo by Jeffrey Hall

Let's see — it's January. Where, oh where, to go birding? Sure, you could always head somewhere warm, like Florida or Arizona. But you might want to consider going north to Minnesota! Always up for an adventure, Linda Wagner and I joined Margaret and Roger Higbee on the morning of Friday, January 10, 2019, for a trip to the Land of 10,000 Frozen Lakes. Linda and I were lucky; we got to sleep in, while Margaret and Roger were loading up the van at their house at 4 a.m! They picked us up at Linda's place in New Castle, and we were on the road by 6:30. It was dark and rainy and gloomy, but our spirits were high.

We rolled out of Pennsylvania, heading west through soggy Ohio. It stopped raining long enough in Indiana for fog to take over. In Illinois, we jumped an hour ahead into the Central Time Zone. Patches of snow started appearing in Illinois, and ponds and lakes were frozen in Wisconsin. Canada Geese were the most numerous birds seen that day; we tallied well over 2,600. Other notable birds seen along the roadway were Mallards, Wild Turkeys, Ring-billed Gulls, several Bald Eagles, numerous Red-tailed Hawks, and a few American Kestrels. A Herring Gull was spotted just outside of Chicago, and we snagged a couple of what-the-heck Red-winged Blackbirds in Indiana. Our best bird of the day was a Cackling Goose flying with a flock of Canada Geese as we went through Winnebago County in Illinois. After 12 hours on the road, we checked into a Super 8 Motel in Wisconsin Dells and had an excellent dinner at a Chinese restaurant just across the road from the motel.

On Saturday, we loaded the van at 6 a.m. under a full moon. The temperature read a balmy 20° F with several inches of snow on the ground. We picked up several new birds in Wisconsin that morning, including Common Ravens, Northern Shrikes, and a dozen Trumpeter Swans. During the next four days, we would see more than a dozen shrikes. The temperature had dropped to 5° F and it was snowing as we entered Superior, Wisconsin. A Peregrine Falcon was perched on the bridge as we crossed into Minnesota, and we could see ice fishermen camped on Lake Superior. The sun emerged as we skirted the edge of Duluth, and it was turning into a glorious day.

We arrived at the Bog at noon and headed to the Friends of Sax-Zim Bog Visitor Center on Owl Avenue. The Bog itself is 300 square miles with a mix of bog, jack pine, and balsam fir forests, and large aspens at

the edges of fields and pastures. The Visitor Center has a small gift shop and a large window that looks out onto the bog. There are usually hot chocolate and cookies inside for visitors and a deer carcass or two outside for the critters. A number of photographers were camped outside, hoping for a shot at an elusive ermine that sporadically visited the carcass. We missed the ermine but saw our first Canada Jays, along with Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, and Black-capped Chickadees coming into the feeders. Best of all, there is an outhouse that is open 24 hours a day! While there are scattered houses and farms throughout the bog, we were pretty much in the middle of nowhere — facilities are few and far between! We stopped there two or three times a day, and since the volunteers that man the center are up to date on all the latest sightings, we made a point of chatting with them every time we dropped by.

Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers were being seen at the Winterberry Bog, so that was our next stop. The Friends of Sax-Zim Bog have so far acquired seven properties for a total of 483 acres, and the Winterberry Bog is one of them. We paused to watch chickadees and Red-breasted Nuthatches at the feeders near the edge of the road then took a narrow, snow-packed trail leading into the woods. Soon we heard a woodpecker tapping on a tree, so we followed the sound. Somehow, and unusual for me, I had ended up in the lead. The tapping was definitely louder, and more than that, I was being showered with wood chips! I looked up, and a Black-backed Woodpecker was 10 feet above me, intent on its work. What a wonderful way to get a lifer! We all got good looks at it, as well as its mate. More tapping was coming from deeper in the woods, possibly from an American Three-toed Woodpecker. The trail ended rather abruptly, but a few people had gone ahead, breaking a path in the deep snow. Did I mention that there was a 20-inch snow cover on the ground? Margaret and I plunged forward, leaving Roger and Linda to keep watch on the Black-backed Woodpeckers, but the tapping was always faint and tantalizingly ahead of us. We had already spent an hour and a half in the woods, so we reluctantly turned back. While wandering in the woods, Margaret and I also heard the quiet muttering of a Great Horned Owl, and realized afterwards that we might have gotten a glimpse of it had we not been so intent on the woodpeckers!



Black-backed Woodpecker by our own Jeffrey Hall, who was also in Sax-Zim Bog recently.

When we got back to the road, we stopped to talk to a few birders who had just arrived. They told us where to find a nearby Northern Hawk Owl, so we sped there next. They laughingly told us that the bird was perched next to a farm field, and farm machinery had been busy all around it for most of the afternoon, with the owl's paying no attention! On the way, we spotted two Ruffed Grouse, our first for the trip. The owl was just as cooperative and tolerant as the birders had described as it perched like a star on a Christmas tree. While we watched, it sallied forth into a field and caught its dinner.

The day was coming to an end, but there was just enough time and light to check out a report of a Snowy Owl along County Road 7, at the eastern edge of the bog. From a quarter of a mile away, we spotted a group of people on the edge of the road – always a good sign! The Snowy Owl was perched beautifully at the top

of a bare deciduous tree, but the birders had more important news for us — a Barn Owl in the next field over. We politely tried to keep the skepticism off our faces, for such an unlikely species. Heavens! It was a Barn Owl! We could clearly see its tawny back, and as it coursed back and forth, we caught a glimpse of the heart-shaped face. Barn Owls are not really adapted to the cold and this one was only the fourth St. Louis County record, the first since 1984.

A forty-minute drive north took us to Virginia, Minnesota, and our lodgings for the next few days. Originally settled by homesick lumbermen from the state of Virginia, its location on the Mesabi Iron Range transitioned the community to iron ore mining. The Lake Shor Motor Lodge (no e in Shor!) turned out to be an old-fashioned, rustic, and homey place. We found a Chinese buffet in town, and afterwards were glad to settle in for the night.

After an early breakfast at McDonald's, we headed to the feeders on Admiral Road, a reliable site for Boreal Chickadees. In spite of the fact that no one person is responsible for the feeders on this road, there is always a nice smorgasbord of treats for the birds. A Northern Shrike staking the feeders out explained the initial lack of small birds. Three Canada Jays were having a good time with the peanut butter smeared liberally over tree branches and logs, and we enjoyed watching their antics. (Canada Jays were formerly known as Gray Jays, and the Commonwealth of Canada, after a national vote, made them their official bird.) Hairy Woodpeckers and Blue Jays joined in, and when we noticed Downy Woodpeckers and Black-capped Chickadees coming to the feeders, we realized the shrike had left.

For the next two and a half hours, we drove the back roads of the bog. A Great Gray Owl glaring at us from a tall stump was our morning's best bird. It was wonderful to spot the odd Ruffed Grouse at the side of the road, and we added more Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Northern Shrikes, Canada Jays, and Dark-eyed Juncos. Late in the morning, we cruised up to Mary Lou's feeding station. Several people who live in the Bog have graciously opened up their properties to birders, and Mary Lou invites the public to pull into her large circular driveway to bird her yard. A flock of 30 Cedar Waxwings flew off as we arrived, and several Wild Turkeys cautiously emerged from the surrounding woods, as well as one very fat deer! We were enjoying the activity of the usual northern backyard birds when a flock of ten Evening Grosbeaks descended noisily onto the feeders next to the van! This species has steeply declined over the years, and it's always a treat to find these lovely birds.

Later that day, we had just come from a break at the Visitor's Center when we saw a large accipiter flying ahead and Margaret noticed the gray back and white breast — Northern Goshawk! We continued cruising the back roads, and at one point, I noticed a blurry, owl-like shape in a tree. I never, ever, spot owls in trees, so naturally, I started hyperventilating, yelling "Stop! Stop!!! STOP!!! Back up! Back up!!!" Roger quickly put the van in reverse, and Linda calmly looked back and announced "Barred Owl." I will only add that it was the most beautiful Barred Owl I've ever seen!

The temperature in the afternoon climbed to 19° F, and we went back to the Winterberry Bog for another stab at the American Three-toed Woodpecker. We quickly found the two woodpeckers with solid black backs among the mature black spruce, as well as a couple of Downy and four Hairy Woodpeckers. This time, when we walked to the point where the trail had ended the day before, we found that enough people had tramped the snow down to make walking farther into the woods a little easier, and all four of us explored further. We ran into two birders from Minnesota and compared notes, and finally started back to the van. We hadn't gotten very far, however, when our new friends started yelling at us to come back — they had found the woodpecker with the ladder back! The American Three-toed Woodpecker was a lifer for both Linda and me, and it was wonderful to finally have a good look at this species!

We almost hit a Ruffed Grouse on our way back to County Road 7 for a second look at the owls, but we could find only the Snowy, still perched, but on a more distant tree. Sadly we learned after we had returned home that the Barn Owl did not survive and had passed away on its way to a rehab center that day. The light



American Three-toed Woodpecker, photo by Jeffrey Hall

was fading and light snow fell as we made our way back to the town of Virginia. Monday was our last full day at the bog, and at first light, we were staking out the feeders on County Road 29 for Sharp-tailed Grouse. We had been sitting patiently for almost an hour when another vehicle pulled up behind us, and a woman approached and asked if we'd had any luck. With them watching the front yard, we decided to pull up just beyond the house and check the fields beyond. Margaret was the first to see two Sharp-tailed Grouse, wings pumping like mad, flying low across the field and into the

evergreens next to the house. Roger executed a quick u-turn and we joined the six people from the other van in watching the grouse, both males, stroll out from under the trees to forage. Part of the fun of birding is becoming instant friends with birders you have never met before! They told us that they had seen two Black-billed Magpies in a large flock of crows as they came down that same road. This was another of our target birds, and one hundred crows are fairly easy to find. The magpies were a bit more elusive. Eventually, however, after several passes up and down C.R. 29, we all got quick looks at the magpies.

At the Admiral Road feeders, the Canada Jays were even more fun to watch than before, as they tore large half-frozen hunks of peanut butter from the snags and lumbered off with them! We spotted a pair of Red-breasted Nuthatches, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, and a flock of Black-capped Chickadees. Unfortunately, this was not a good year for winter finches, and we never were able to locate a Boreal Chickadee. We resumed slowly driving along the bog roads, and as we turned a corner, a Black-billed Magpie was perched in the open on Sax Road!

Later that day, we checked out Loretta's feeders on Kelsey Whiteface Road. We enjoyed stretching our legs on the wide snowshoe path that meandered into the woods, and we found a nice variety of the usual suspects including 17 Black-capped Chickadees. We were also amused by the odd assortment of traditional and not-so-traditional feeders, such as kitchen utensils, bowls, and serving dishes, that were doing duty as bird feeders!

Once again, we were out early on Tuesday, hoping to make the most of our last morning. As first light was breaking, a Pileated Woodpecker, a rarity in the bog, flew over the van! We had been stopping at the Sisu feeders on McDavitt Road, on and off, for the past couple of days with little luck, but this morning a flock of a dozen Evening Grosbeaks joined the Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Blue Jays, and Black-capped Chickadees. Afterwards, we made one last stop at the Visitor's Center and spotted our last rarity in the Bog — six chattering American Goldfinches!

All in all, we had a very satisfying visit to Minnesota's Sax-Zim Bog, with a total of 48 species, including six owls: Barn, Great Horned, Snowy, Barred, Great Gray, and Northern Hawk Owl.

Linda and I got a lifer with the American Three-toed Woodpecker, and the Black-backed Woodpecker was also a lifer for me. Thank you, Margaret and Roger, for another grand adventure into the Wild!

## Book Review: “Guide to Birding Coastal Mississippi: and Adjacent Counties” by Judith A. Toups, Jerry Bird, and Stacy Jon Peterson

Sitting in Jerry and Debbie Bird's comfortable living room in Tucson, the conversation drifted to birding. They always have interesting sightings. I always enjoyed birding with the Birds because Jerry could identify a western bird call, and then explain to me why it was a different call than an eastern bird of the same species. I inquired about the migratory birds that they would see in amazing abundance when they lived in Coastal Mississippi. Instead of answering the question, Jerry went to the bookcase and handed me a book titled “Guide to Birding Coastal Mississippi: and Adjacent Counties” by Judith A. Toups, Jerry Bird, and Stacy Jon Peterson, with a foreword by Kenn Kaufman.

"Those of us who live and bird here consider the counties covered in this book to be the the most challenging and stimulating birding area in a thoroughly exciting State," declare the authors. There is a diversity of birds. Varied habitats, from bodies of salt water, barrier islands, salt ponds, prairie marshes, sand beaches, savannas, swamps, bottomlands, pine forests, and farms away from the immediate coast. As of 2004, 381 species of birds have been identified in Coastal Southern Mississippi.

The best time to visit is whenever the opportunity arises. There are hints about clothing and hats to deal with the heat (if you are brave enough) to explore Coastal Mississippi in summer. There is even a birding contacts list and hints about how to make contacts through the various state and national birding organizations.

There is a lengthy chapter about the birds, and where to find them, followed by a chapter about migration. The birding year starts for those of us who are birders in January. When does the bird's year begin? Is it when plumages change? Is it when the northbound trip begins? Or when it ends? The migration chapter evolves into sections of winter, spring, summer, and fall.

One chapter covers pelagic birding in Coastal Mississippi. Pelagic is defined by the authors to refer to species that don't normally come to land, except perhaps to breed. Pelagic birds are greatly impacted by tropical storms and hurricanes. There are guides with boats who can provide a pelagic trip. The more adventurous birder could bring his own boat—probably not a good idea for those with limited experience with the gulf.



*View of Coastal Mississippi by Flo McGuire—  
Editor's note: Jim & I had the privilege of  
birding with Judith Toups and the Mississippi  
Coastal Audubon Society in August, 2003.  
We were welcomed with southern hospitality!*

There is a chapter that focuses on Site Guides with good maps and expected birds that will be found. There are pictures, as well as off-limits areas for now, e.g., Pascagoula River Marsh and Singing River Island. Another site that is shrouded in mystery is Don't Woods, which is a spring migrant trap.

For each county that is included in this wonderful guide, there is an index of Site Coordinates. So while you are packing your bag, and waiting for the pandemic to subside, Chapter 6 focuses on the Probability of Occurrence. Have your wish list at hand.

Birding resources comprises its own chapter. While not exhaustive, it does include contact information for local birders who can be helpful. A concise list of Hunting Seasons is included; although the dates change somewhat from year to year.

Normally, I skip any appendices, unless I am writing an article that warrants sources of additional information. Interestingly, the Appendix of this book begins with the ABA's code of birding ethics. And who among us ever reads the Acknowledgments? As you skim the Acknowledgements, you may be surprised to find some familiar names.

By the time you finish reading this tome, South Mississippi may surface at the top of your places to visit, and don't forget to take this book with you. Surely this pandemic cannot last forever.

Hurricane Katrina has changed the Coastal Mississippi ecosystems, so you may be able to help formulate a new book about birding in Southern Mississippi. As Pete Dunn would say, "have you seen any good birds today?"

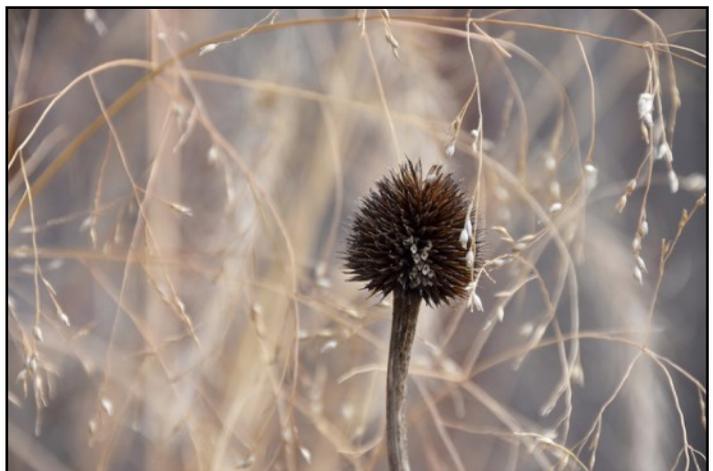
———The Old Curmudgeon

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## Meaningful Maintenance: Fall Clean-up with Positive Impact

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**W**e've all done it...prepared the garden for winter. Cut down, hauled off, raked clean or burned every shred of dead plant material in site. Applying a rigorous cleaning at the end of the season is still commonplace, but it's important to know that scraping the yard clean to make it "ready for winter" impacts the lives of countless garden occupants – butterflies, moths, bees, toads and others – who's home and plant-centric existence are at the mercy of our industriousness.



*Creating positive ecological impact in your garden can be as easy as letting go of excessive fall clean-up. With native plant gardeners leading the charge, the fall clean-up routine is not what it used to be.*

Yards and gardens are havens that deserve stewardship – places capable of supporting a host of pollinators and other inhabitants. Our actions, and especially the fall clean-up, can either benefit or inhibit their lives. Let the following ideas guide your action, or non-action, in the garden this fall:

**Nesting and Over-Wintering Bees.** Native bees hibernate in a variety of ways in your garden. They may overwinter beneath the woodpile or in a rock crevice. Queen bumblebees hibernate in underground burrows, and in spring they wake up and start constructing a brand new nest. Layers of mulch inhibit the queen bumblebee from building a nest. To encourage nesting bumblebees, leave some areas of bare ground in your garden. Don't mulch where it is not needed. Leafcutter bees, mason bees and yellow-faced bees will nest in the hollow stems of many native plants. Leave your native plants standing over winter, and in the spring instead of cutting them all the way down, leave 12 – 15 inches of stalk stubble standing for pollinator nesting sites.



Luna moth cocoons exposed in the melting snow.  
Photo by David Britton.

**Butterflies Hibernate, Too.** Declining butterfly populations are one of the best reasons not to clean up the garden. The swallowtails, the cabbage whites and the sulphurs all form chrysalises in late summer using the spent plant material of leaves and stalks for hibernation. Mourning Cloak and Eastern Comma butterflies hibernate as adult butterflies in the plant litter. The Baltimore Checkerspot, Meadow Fritillary, and Red-Spotted Purple all hibernate as caterpillars. In autumn, even though we don't see it, next summer's butterfly and moth populations are rolling up in the fallen leaves to hibernate. When we cut down and clean up our gardens, we are removing overwintering sites for butterflies.

**Birds Need Your Plants.** A yard that's been scraped clean and bare gives the birds good reason to fly on by. From a bird's aerial perspective, a highly textured landscape signals a diversity of plants and better opportunity for food. The seedheads offer food to fall migrating birds and birds that stay for the winter. The standing, spent plants offer screening and a safe place for the birds to forage. In spring, the extra plant material means that there are more insects, and insects are a critical food source for nesting birds as they feed their young. All songbirds raise their young on insects and worms. Your native plants provide the right material, the right environment, and the right nutrition, just when the birds need them.

**Toads and Salamanders Live There.** It's all making sense now. Where do these little critters overwinter? In spent plant material or in the ground, protected by the plants. What do they eat when they emerge? Insects. Toads are beneficial in the garden as they constantly consume insects, snails and slugs. Toads dig deep down into loose soil to hibernate through the winter. To encourage toads, you can offer a safe winter retreat areas by stacking up rocks and leaving a toad-sized space beneath them. Situate the hibernation spaces under a bush, or any insulated and protected spot in your yard.

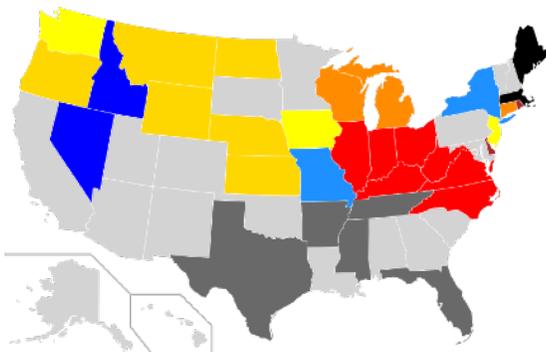
**Insulation, Protection and Mulch.** The spent plants, and the snow they gather add a layer of insulation that protects the plant root from harsh winter winds and frigid temperatures. The plant layer protects the many hibernators hunkered down within. Wait until spring to cut down the plants. They can be laid on the ground immediately as a mulch layer, or removed to a designated spot, away from the garden where they will continue to provide nesting and over-wintering opportunities.

**Free Plant Seedlings.** When plants self-seed there are several ways to address the proliferation of plants. 1) You can let 'em grow – some plants have shorter lives than others, and the self-seeded plants will replace the old ones. Remove some of the seedlings, and leave others to grow and fill-in as needed. 2) Move the new seedlings to a different location entirely or pot them up and share them with friends. 3) Some plant species are abundant self-seeders that can be difficult to keep up with if they are not favored by birds. If this is the case remove most of the entire seed head from the species that the birds seem to ignore, prior to seed dispersal.



**Immeasurable Beauty.** The winter garden has a quiet, restful beauty. Red brown, black and gold seedheads, leaves and stems. Crispy mounds of snow-covered stalks. Frosted leaves and glittering grasses. Native plants are beautiful in all seasons – let them play their part in bringing your landscape to life. If you want to see more life in your garden, simply “Leave the leaves” and let your native plants stand through the winter. This simple non-action is more challenging than one would think, as the desire to tidy up the yard before winter is strong. But leaving spent plant material is one of the simplest and

easiest things that we can all do to promote biodiversity in our landscapes. Understanding the important environmental role of the spent plant material is the first step. So the next time you head out with pruners in hand, think about the life that depends upon those plants. Next spring you can greet the garden with even more anticipation – for all of the life it holds.



### Did you know?

Relax, this has nothing to do with politics. Do you know what the seven red states have in common? Their state bird is the Northern Cardinal. The six gold states have all chosen the Western Meadowlark. Northern Mockingbird is the state bird of the dark gray states, American Robin for the orange states, American Goldfinch for the yellow states, and chickadee for the black states. Eastern Bluebird for the blue states and Mountain

Bluebird for the dark blue states. The 32 light gray states all have unique state birds, and the District of Columbia is also unique with the Wood Thrush.

# Clarion County Summer 2020 Bird Sightings

by Carole Winslow

Locations: Beaver Creek Nature Area (BC), Clarion (CL), Cook Forest (CF), Curtlsville (CV), Kahle Lake (KL), Lucinda (LU), Mt Airy (MA), Mt Zion (SGL 330/Piney Tract)(MZ), New Bethlehem (NB), Redbank Valley Trail (RVT), Rimersburg (RI), Sarah Furnace (SF).

Just two waterfowl reports are of note, the first being a **Tundra Swan** that was present at KL from 6/10-15 (ES, CW). A **Hooded Merganser**, an unusual breeding species still, was seen on a pond at SGL 72 6/22 (DD, CW). There were just two reports of **Common Nighthawk**, the first was one heard near CV 6/2 (CW), and one also seen near LU 6/15 (ES). Another nightjar that is usually low in numbers reported, **Eastern Whip-poor-will**, was only noted once, a bird calling on the RVT near RI 7/19 (KK).



The most notable report for the season was that of a **Virginia Rail** at SGL 72 near Shippenville, first found 6/19 (MW). An adult bird was seen with possibly a fledgling. An adult was also found with a downy black young bird walking next to it in the same location 6/20 (DD, CW). The fledgling was seen again 6/22 (CW) and 6/24 (MH, RM), but no adult was found on either date. The area was checked for activity 7/1 and no adult or young was found (CW). This game lands area has scattered small ponds next to a mix of wooded and scrubby fields, and this particular pond currently has excellent habitat that may last for several more years. It is possible that the area may hold more species that are missed by lack of attention from birders. **Upland Sandpiper** has to always be noted, as it remains a rare breeder for Pennsylvania. Two birds, one calling, were found at their traditional nesting area of MA 6/18 (CW) and a single bird 6/19 (ES). Another shorebird with scattered reporting over the years, **Spotted Sandpiper**, was found in two areas this year. One bird was found at KL 6/1 (ES), and another bird late in season at NB along Redbank Creek 7/26 (J&AK).



A single **Bonaparte's Gull** was likely a late spring migrant at KL, along with an adult **Common Loon** at the same location 6/1 (ES). A **Double-crested Cormorant** was also found at KL on the same date, and continued to be seen through 6/15 (ES, CW). Another cormorant was also reported on the Allegheny River near Parker 6/3 (ES).

**Northern Harriers** showed some decrease in numbers surprisingly, although this may be a function of less birder effort. At the CV strips one was just reported 6/4 and 6/14 (KA, AL, EN, KN). One was also reported at a new location further

Virginia Rail (top) and Spotted Sandpiper photos by Meg Kolodick

north near Lucinda 6/22 (ES). At MZ where there has been breeding evidence for the last several years, one was seen 6/5 (MS), 6/12-13 (JH, NH), and then a pair reported 6/14 (KA, AL, T&JK, MMc, AS). At one of their known nesting areas, **Bald Eagles** continued to be seen into summer with two adults and two young still present at the site 6/3 (MiH). A juvenile was seen there also 6/12 (JH) and two were spotted on 6/29 (ES).



Meg Kolodick photographed this Red-headed Woodpecker in her yard in Seneca.

A **Red-headed Woodpecker** was again seen at SGL 24 near Tylersburg 6/4 (ES). There is some good open forest habitat at this location and they have been seen there previously in the past two years. Another uncommon species that continued into safe date range this year is **Alder Flycatcher**. One was found singing in good habitat near LU 6/22 (ES). Four were found singing at BC 6/10 in migration time frame, and two were still present and singing 6/24 (ES). There is some suitable habitat at this location for potential breeding. There was increased reporting this year for **White-eyed Vireos** with two reported at MZ from 6/28-7/20 (CB, BC, ES, TSu). They were also found singing at two locations on MA 6/18-19 (CW) and one also still there 7/2 (DK). The other less common vireo is **Yellow-throated Vireo**, with just a single bird heard on the RVT near Redbank 6/12 (MHi, RH, FM), and also 6/15 (ES) and 6/20 (CW). The last vireo of note was a **Warbling Vireo** heard singing at MA 6/18-19 (ES, CW).

**Purple Martins** are not always regularly reported so it's encouraging to hear of another active colony near Fryburg, where 25 birds were counted 6/4 (ES). Just up to four birds were found at KL 6/10 and 6/24, and one also at KL that same date (ES). **Bank Swallow** is the least reported swallow and just a single bird was found along the Allegheny near Foxburg 6/3 (ES).

The next three species are reported just for their relative scarcity in the county at large, though they are more regular in their traditional breeding areas of old growth pine and hemlock at CF where they are reported in small numbers annually. The first species is **Golden-crowned Kinglet**, with up to five singing birds found in four separate areas of CF 6/22-7/6 (BM, JP, RT). **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were also found in four areas 6/6-7/13 (m.ob.) The last of this northern trio is **Brown Creeper** with two birds found singing on Tom's Run Rd 6/9 (ES), and then single birds reported from two locations 6/22 (RT) and 7/5 (JP). Significant numbers of **Purple Finches** continue their presence at a regular breeding site in RI, where they are year-round and this season reported starting 6/8 and through 7/17 where there was a high count of 12 birds including juveniles.

Both **Grasshopper** and **Henslow's Sparrows** continue in their traditional nesting locations primarily in the southern strip mine areas, with numbers appearing mostly unchanged this year. **Clay-colored Sparrow** was reported in only one location at MZ, with one bird 6/6 and 7/19 (MT). This species has had a steep decline in the last five years and while possibly still present in areas that are not checked by birders, it should no longer be considered a regular breeder as in past years. While there are likely multiple causes, one of the more obvious conclusions would be the aging and overgrowth of



Worm-eating Warbler photographed by Tony Bruno on the Redbank Trail about a mile from the Allegheny River



Pine Warbler by Meg Kolodick

(KA, AL). Only one area reporting **Yellow-throated Warbler** this year, which was a singing male at Lawsonham on the RVT, present 6/7-7/26 (CB, ES, CW).

Observers: **Carole Winslow** , [cjwinslow94@gmail.com](mailto:cjwinslow94@gmail.com), Katie Andersen, Chelsea Beck, Becky Costello, Patience Fisher, Melanie Gainey, Jeffrey Hall, Mal Hays, Margaret Higbee (MHi), Roger Higbee, MiMi Hoffmaster (MiH), Nathan Holmes, Brian Isett, Deborah Kalbfleisch, John and Avis Keener, Ken Knapp, Tom and Janet Kuehl, Alejandra Lewandowski, Mark McConaughy (MMc), Flo McGuire, Ron Montgomery, Brendan Murtha, Elizabeth Nicholson, Ken Nicholson, Julia Plummer, Eric Schill, Tabassam Shah, Adrian Smith, Mike Smith, Travis Suckow (TSu), David Taylor, Ryan Tomazin, Molly Toth, Mike Weible.

reclaimed strip mine fields where they once were found. The other sparrow worth mentioning by its absence is **Vesper Sparrow**, which usually is only reported once a season or so, but this year no sightings were noted.

**Worm-eating Warblers** continue to be regularly reported along the south-facing riparian woods along the Allegheny River and Redbank Creek. On the Armstrong Trail at SF one was seen 6/4 (EN, KN). From 6/3-20 up to five singing males were found along the RVT between Redbank and Lawsonham (MHi, RH, FM, ES, CW). A new area was reported for this species, along the Allegheny near West Monterey, where two birds were found 6/3 (ES). Also found along the RVT near Redbank were two **Kentucky Warblers** 6/14-15 (KA, AL, ES). The only other location for this species was near RI where a singing male was found 6/5, 6/7 (ES, CW) and still present 6/29 (CB, ES). The third warbler species that is found along the same RVT area is **Cerulean Warbler**. This year they were reported present with up to six singing males found between 6/5-20 (KA, AL, ES, CW). Birds are usually found singing in sycamore, elm and oak trees. **Pine Warblers** were not reported as frequently this year, with a single bird at CF 6/22 (RT), and one at MZ 6/14

## Events

Our group outings are cancelled.

You may contact Mal about joining him on an Owl Survey.

Or contact Mal or Ron for Feederwatch information or CBC Scouting.

**Christmas Bird Count December 19**



Leadership Team		
Team Member	Role	Phone
Deb Freed	President	814-226-4719
Alice Thureau	Vice-President	814-319-2677
Kay John	Secretary, Membership	724-526-5960
Janice Horn	Treasurer	814-226-7367
Paulette Colantonio	Education	814-797-2031
Pat Conway	History, Facebook	814-752-2036
Gary Edwards	Outreach Programs, Website	814-676-3011
Jeffrey Hall	Facebook	
Mal Hays	Outings Leader	814-764-5645
Danette Karls	CBC Feederwatch	814-764-3251
Mike Leahy	Beaver Creek/IBA 21	814-229-1648
Debbie McCanna	CBC Coordinator	724-526-5693
Flo McGuire	Website, <i>Drummer</i> Editor	814-755-3672
Ron Montgomery	Outreach Programs	814-764-6088
Jim Wilson	Nest Boxes & Feeders	814-676-5455

*Look at the trees, look at the birds, look at the clouds, look at the stars... and if you have eyes you will be able to see that the whole existence is joyful. Everything is simply happy. Trees are happy for no reason; they are not going to become prime ministers or presidents and they are not going to become rich and they will never have any bank balance. Look at the flowers – for no reason. It is simply unbelievable how happy flowers are. ~Osho*

Seneca Rocks Audubon Society  
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 Clarion, PA 16214