

# Seventy-Eight Years of Birding at Little Brook Farm, Chester County, Pennsylvania

Alan Crawford, Jr.

I was ten months old when I moved with my family to a remodeled farmhouse near Devon in southeastern Easttown Township, Chester County. In those days Easttown Township was mostly open country of farmland and woods. To our west and north was the 400-acre Newbold farm. To our south in Newtown Township was the 600-acre duPont property. To our east was the 38-acre Okie farm.

In my early years I was into butterfly collecting, but my parents had bird feeders so I had some exposure to our avifauna. I well recall a Red-headed Woodpecker pointed out to me by my parents when I was five years old in 1931. To this day it is the only record I have of a Red-headed Woodpecker on the property.

When I was 12 in 1938 I went to a summer camp in New Hampshire. The nature counselor there was a fellow from Philadelphia named Emlen Cresson, who later joined DVOC and is still a member today. He quickly changed my interest from butterflies to birds. Upon returning home I commandeered my father's World War I Bausch & Lomb 6x binoculars, and got my sister Polly interested. She was three years older than me and would have her driver's license in April, 1939. Polly drove the two of us to Hawk Mountain that fall, where we met Albert Conway, a student at West Chester State College. Albert was already an expert birder and member of DVOC.

Albert took me to a meeting of the West Chester Bird Club in late 1940. The first order of business was a little old lady reading a poem she wrote about a chickadee. I never went there again. He took me to a meeting of the DVOC a little while later and I was delighted that there were no poetry readings. Julian Potter was president and I met Phil Street, who became a life-long friend. My sister was furious that the DVOC discriminated against women and refused to join when the doors were opened to women many years later. I went away to school in Massachusetts in the fall of 1941 for three years. My only memorable birding

experience while there was a morning bird walk in Auburn Cemetery with Ludlow Griscomb.

Some of the commonest birds in the 30's and 40's were Eastern Meadowlarks, Field Sparrows, Vesper Sparrows and Grasshopper Sparrows. In recent years these species have become virtually non-existent. Common nesters were Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Great Crested Flycatchers and Yellow-breasted Chats, likewise almost never seen today. My first Northern Mockingbird arrived in 1946 and my first Red-bellied Woodpecker in 1947 (which was noted in *American Birds* by David Cutler).



*Red-bellied Woodpeckers*  
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Our property has changed little in my 78 years. We dammed our stream in 1947, creating a pond of roughly 2 acres which to date has accounted for 26 species of waterfowl, 8 species of waders and 5 species of sandpipers. We own directly 37 acres of fields and woods and another 110 acres which we acquired from the Newbold estate in partnership with a neighbor in 1971 to keep out the bulldozers. However, the neighborhood has changed dramatically since World War II.

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In 1947 our neighbor Gene Newbold sold 200 acres (half of his 400) on the north side of his property, and roughly 100 houses were built. Then years ago the Okie farm of 38 acres abutting our eastern boundary was developed by Toll Brothers with 38 “luxury” houses. Just across the road from us 240 acres of duPont property was sold, with 78 houses being built on the area closest to us. Whereas our woods protect us from seeing all these houses, the impact on the area is obvious. Add into this the deer problem. We permit some controlled deer hunting, but it has negligible impact on the population. The understory has been devastated. We no longer have nesting Ovenbirds or Kentucky Warblers, and we have two or three pairs of Wood Thrushes at most.

Other factors have created vastly diminished populations of warblers and other insectivorous species. Even though DDT has been banned, this county still sprays every bug in sight: gypsy moths, spruce budworms, mosquitoes, you name it. This has

to have an impact on the food supply of the birds that need insects to survive.

In 1954 I got a federal bird-banding permit and from then through June of 1971 I banded roughly 10,000 birds of 117 species, including 28 species of warblers. Increased responsibilities in business and at home (4 children) precluded my spending the time and effort required for bird banding, and the Feds cancelled my permit for disuse in 1974. For the first 5 years I used only wire-mesh traps, but I expanded to mist nets in 1959. The only Lincoln’s Sparrows I have recorded on my property (5 in all) were mist-netted. My most interesting returns were a Mallard born and raised on our pond and shot two years later in Outagamie County, Wisconsin, and a Black-and-White Warbler banded on Labor Day, 1964 and shot 10 days later by David Wingate in Bermuda. He was doing a study on weight loss of songbirds during migration.

**Table 1** Birds observed at Little Brook Farm, 1931 – present

<b>Species</b>	<b>Banded</b>	<b>Nested</b>	<b>Single</b>
Tundra Swan			x
Canada Goose		x	
Brant			x <sup>a</sup>
Snow Goose			
Mallard	x	x	
American Black Duck			
Gadwall			
Northern Pintail			
Green-winged Teal			
Ring-necked Duck			
Blue-winged Teal			
American Wigeon			
Northern Shoveler			
Wood Duck	x	x	
Redhead			
Canvasback			
Lesser Scaup			
Common Goldeneye			
Bufflehead			
Long-tailed Duck			x
Ruddy Duck			
Hooded Merganser			
Common Merganser			
Red-breasted Merganser			

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Species	Banded	Nested	Single
Ruffed Grouse			x
Northern Bobwhite		x	
Ring-necked Pheasant		x	
Wild Turkey			
Common Loon			x <sup>b</sup>
Pied-billed Grebe			
Double-crested Cormorant			x
Great Blue Heron			
Green Heron		x	
Little Blue Heron			
Great Egret			
Black-crowned Night Heron			
Least Bittern			x <sup>c</sup>
American Bittern			
Glossy Ibis			x <sup>d</sup>
Turkey Vulture			
Black Vulture			
Northern Goshawk			
Sharp-shinned Hawk			
Cooper's Hawk		x	
Red-tailed Hawk		x	
Red-shouldered Hawk			
Broad-winged Hawk	x	x	
Swainson's Hawk			x <sup>e</sup>
Rough-legged Hawk			
Golden Eagle			x
Bald Eagle			
Northern Harrier			
Osprey			
Peregrine Falcon			
Merlin			
American Kestrel		x	
Sora		x	
American Coot			x
Killdeer		x	
American Woodcock		x	
Wilson's Snipe			
Spotted Sandpiper	x		
Solitary Sandpiper	x		
Greater Yellowlegs			
Lesser Yellowlegs			
Least Sandpiper			
Herring Gull			
Ring-billed Gull			
Rock Pigeon		x	
Mourning Dove		x	
Yellow-billed Cuckoo		x	

## Seventy-Eight Years of Birding at Little Brook Farm, Chester County, Pennsylvania

<b>Species</b>	<b>Banded</b>	<b>Nested</b>	<b>Single</b>
Black-billed Cuckoo			
Barn owl	x	x	
Eastern Screech-Owl	x	x	
Great Horned Owl	x	x	
Barred Owl			x
Long-eared Owl			x
Short-eared Owl			
Northern Saw-whet Owl	x		
Whip-poor-will			
Common Nighthawk			
Chimney Swift	x	x	
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	x	x	
Rufous Hummingbird			x <sup>f</sup>
Belted Kingfisher			
Northern Flicker	x	x	
Pileated Woodpecker		x	
Red-bellied Woodpecker	x	x	
Red-headed Woodpecker			x
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	x		
Hairy Woodpecker	x	x	
Downy Woodpecker	x	x	
Eastern Kingbird	x	x	
Great Crested Flycatcher	x	x	
Eastern Phoebe	x	x	
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	x		
Acadian Flycatcher	x		
Alder Flycatcher	x		
Least Flycatcher	x		
Eastern Wood-Pewee	x	x	
Olive-sided Flycatcher			
Loggerhead Shrike			x
White-eyed Vireo	x	x	
Yellow-throated Vireo	x	x	
Blue-headed Vireo	x		
Red-eyed Vireo	x	x	
Philadelphia Vireo	x		
Warbling Vireo			
Blue Jay	x	x	
American Crow			
Horned Lark			
Tree Swallow	x	x	
Bank Swallow			
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	x	x	
Barn Swallow	x	x	
Cliff Swallow			
Purple Martin			
Black-capped Chickadee	x		

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Species	Banded	Nested	Single
Carolina Chickadee	x	x	
Tufted Titmouse	x	x	
White-breasted Nuthatch	x	x	
Red-breasted Nuthatch	x		
Brown Creeper			
House Wren	x	x	
Winter Wren	x		
Bewick's Wren	x		x
Carolina Wren	x	x	
Golden-crowned Kinglet	x		
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	x		
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	x		
American Robin	x	x	
Wood Thrush	x	x	
Hermit Thrush	x		
Swainson's Thrush	x		
Gray-cheeked Thrush	x		
Veery	x	x	
Eastern Bluebird	x	x	
Northern Mockingbird	x	x	
Gray Catbird	x	x	
Brown Thrasher	x	x	
European Starling	x	x	
American Pipit			
Cedar Waxwing	x		
Black-and-white Warbler	x		
Prothonotary Warbler			x
Worm-eating Warbler	x		
Golden-winged Warbler	x		
Blue-winged Warbler	x	x	
Brewster's Warbler (Hybrid)			x
Tennessee Warbler	x		
Orange-crowned Warbler			x
Nashville Warbler			
Northern Parula	x		
Yellow Warbler			
Magnolia Warbler	x		
Cape May Warbler			
Black-throated Blue Warbler	x		
Yellow-rumped Warbler	x		
Black-throated Green Warbler	x		
Cerulean Warbler	x		
Blackburnian Warbler			
Chestnut-sided Warbler	x		
Bay-breasted Warbler	x		
Blackpoll Warbler	x		
Pine Warbler	x		

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Species	Banded	Nested	Single
Prairie Warbler			
Palm Warbler	x		
Ovenbird	x		
Northern Waterthrush	x		
Louisiana Waterthrush	x		
Kentucky Warbler	x		
Connecticut Warbler	x		
Mourning Warbler	x		
Common Yellowthroat	x	x	
Hooded Warbler	x		
Wilson's Warbler	x		
Canada Warbler	x		
American Redstart	x		
Yellow-breasted Chat	x	x	
Scarlet Tanager	x	x	
Summer Tanager			x
Eastern Towhee	x	x	
Savannah Sparrow	x		
Grasshopper Sparrow		x	
Henslow's Sparrow			
Vesper Sparrow	x	x	
Dark-eyed Junco	x		
Tree Sparrow	x		
Chipping Sparrow	x	x	
Clay-colored Sparrow			x
Field Sparrow	x	x	
Harris's Sparrow			x <sup>e</sup>
White-crowned Sparrow	x		
White-throated Sparrow	x		
Fox Sparrow	x		
Lincoln's Sparrow	x		
Swamp Sparrow	x		
Song Sparrow	x	x	
Lapland Longspur	x		x <sup>g</sup>
Northern Cardinal	x	x	
Rose-breasted Grosbeak			
Indigo Bunting	x	x	
Dickcissel			x
Bobolink	x		
Eastern Meadowlark	x	x	
Red-winged Blackbird	x	x	
Orchard Oriole		x	
Baltimore Oriole	x	x	
Rusty Blackbird	x		
Brewer's Blackbird	x		x
Boat-tailed Grackle			x
Common Grackle	x	x	

## Seventy-Eight Years of Birding at Little Brook Farm, Chester County, Pennsylvania

Species	Banded	Nested	Single
Brown-headed Cowbird	x	x	
Evening Grosbeak			
Purple Finch	x		
House Finch	x	x	
Common Redpoll	x		
Hoary Redpoll			x
Pine Siskin	x		
American Goldfinch	x		
Red Crossbill			x
House Sparrow	x	x	

Comments on some one-time sightings:

<sup>a</sup> **Brant** - Broken flocks of perhaps 2000 total flying low under heavy clouds, heading south, perhaps towards Delaware Bay. The Great Lakes were becoming ice-bound in January 1995.

<sup>b</sup> **Common Loon** – Spent three days on the pond waiting for a favorable north wind so that it could take off into the wind without crashing into trees.

<sup>c</sup> **Least Bittern** – On its fourth day on the pond, the only evidence of its presence was its feathers on the water. Cooper’s Hawk maybe?

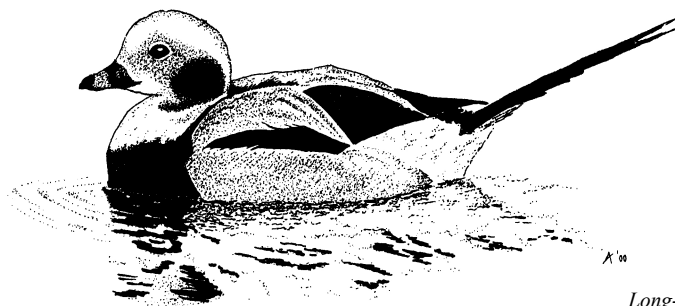
<sup>d</sup> **Glossy Ibis** – Four individuals flew low over the pond without stopping.

<sup>e</sup> **Swainson’s Hawk** and **Harris’s Sparrow** – March 14, 1993, following “the storm of the century,” so called because of the extent of the storm, originating in Texas and dumping up to a foot of snow in the deep South on its way north with wind gusts up to 60 mph. The Harris’s Sparrow stayed all morning and was seen at close range, and the Swainson’s Hawk was a low fly-by. My theory is that the birds were caught by the storm in Texas during migration and were blown all the way up to here and perhaps further north.

<sup>f</sup> **Rufous Hummingbird** – Sept. 19, 2004, the day after Hurricane Ivan blew through.

<sup>g</sup> **Lapland Longspur** – Caught in a mist net along with Redpolls in the neighboring duPont field and released on my property. Might you say I cheated so that I could count it as a property bird?

2221 White Horse Road  
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*Long-tailed Duck*  
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*Cassinia*