

General Notes

Eagles Triumph in Philadelphia

Of course I'm writing about birds, not football! The story of Bald Eagles in Philadelphia is filled with surprise, excitement and inspiration. It begins in February 2007, when a casual encounter with a non-birder led me to discover a pair of Bald Eagles nesting in the Philadelphia Navy Yard, situated at the south end of the city, along the Delaware River, just north of Philadelphia International Airport. These two nesting eagles caused quite a stir for several reasons: it was the first such occurrence in the City of Brotherly Love in two centuries; the nest site was slated for razing to make way for a massive economic development project; particularly disturbing development since Bald Eagles were a federally threatened species and protected from harm or disturbance.

I monitored Philadelphia's first Bald Eagle nest for several months, observing egg incubation, signs of hatching high in a large maple tree, and brooding to protect the young chick. Details were reported to PA Game Commission (PGC) and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, who were delighted with the information, which signified increasing health of the Delaware River ecosystem and the surrounding habitat. PGC issued a press release on March 16, 2007 announcing the first confirmed pair of Bald Eagles nesting in Philadelphia in more than 200 years. The Philadelphia Inquirer published a front-page news story the next day, garnering the attention of the general public as well as the birding community.

It was thrilling to observe the majestic birds follow their age-old instinct to reproduce. Alas, there were many forces at work, and within a week of the chick's hatching, PGC Wildlife Conservation Officer Jerry Czech called me to say that there were no birds on the nest when he went to check it. PGC officials later climbed to the nest and found fragments of one hatched eggshell, and fish bones, indicating that there was likely one chick alive for a short period of time. It had been a cold and rainy week, and perhaps the parents were young and inexperienced, leading to high nest mortality. Or maybe the adults were harassed by a Red-tailed Hawk or a raccoon, just long enough for the chick to be snatched away. Or perhaps people approached too closely, determined to scare away a pair of birds that could derail a multi-million dollar development project. We'll never know for sure exactly what

happened. The last sighting in the area of an adult, female Bald Eagle was on April 6, 2007.



Bald Eagle. Watercolor © Howard Eskin

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service considered this an active nest site for five years. The development project was halted, at least temporarily. On June 29, 2007, Bald Eagles were officially de-listed from the federal threatened species list, with their recovery heralded as a national success story. The Endangered Species Act provides the strongest protection and support for wildlife, and this de-listing might make it easier for developers to dismiss birds in their way. The state of Pennsylvania claims the dubious distinction of being the first entity to file for a permit to remove the Bald Eagle nest site at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, so they can proceed with development plans. It is likely they will be granted permission. Bald Eagles are still protected, to a lesser extent, by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940, and remain a Pennsylvania state-listed threatened species.

The following year, the winter of 2008, the Bald Eagle pair returned to nest again at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Media

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attention had waned, and people involved in monitoring and documenting did not trumpet the news so loudly, hoping that a lower profile might afford a better chance for nesting success. Navy Yard access became stricter, but, being on friendly terms with local security, I was able to monitor activity from a decent vantage point. That year, the Bald Eagles raised one healthy chick, which fledged in early June and was not seen again.

In 2009, the Navy Yard ramped up security in preparation for demolishing the area in which the eagles' nest tree stood. My monitoring access was prohibited, but PA Game Commission maintained their right to check the area. For whatever reason, the Bald Eagles did not return to their nest site that winter, and no nesting took place. At the same time, nesting eagle activity continued its steady, annual increase on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River. It's possible that the Navy Yard pair switched states, shunned by the moneyed interests in South Philadelphia. Interestingly, a pair of Bald Eagles half-heartedly started building a nest in the nearby John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge in 2009. [*Editor's Note:* Bald Eagles did indeed become established at John Heinz NWR, and are now in their sixth consecutive year of breeding at the refuge.]

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Pennsylvania's First Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*)

On the unlikely date of June 20, 2013, Alexander Zorach was birding the newly developed Gray's Ferry Crescent Trail of Philadelphia when he happened upon a yellow-bellied kingbird. By mid-day he posted several images to the *Facebook Birders* page, writing, "I saw this highly unusual bird at Gray's Ferry Crescent Trail today. Looks a bit like a Western Kingbird, which would be rare enough, but I think this may actually be a Couch's or Tropical Kingbird..." Alex was entirely correct, and his discovery touched off excitement and great wonder among the southeastern Pennsylvania birding community. The kingbird was perhaps the most exciting vagrant to grace Philly in decades, a city that was the cradle of American ornithology. Any yellow-bellied kingbird in Pennsylvania is noteworthy. All to date had proven to be Western Kingbirds, of which there have been 23 accepted records since 1986. But Alex's photos revealed a distinctly long-billed *Tyrannus*, with rich yellow underparts, a greenish chest, a notched olive-brown tail, and dark cheeks. This bird was clearly not a Western Kingbird. Within a few hours of Alex's posting, Philadelphia birders converged on the site to give study to the bird. Given the plumage and proportions, it seemed straightforward that this individual was either a Couch's or a Tropical Kingbird (South American species were considered too), and owing to its bill structure, almost certainly a Tropical. Couch's and Tropical are often so similar to one another that the only way to separate them is through their distinctive vocalizations. Even before this bird was heard, several experts commented that its structure was not consistent with Couch's but certainly was typical for Tropical. The Philly bird did not vocalize frequently, yet was heard a number of times (three times by the author), giving the typical shrill, rising, twittering calls of Tropical Kingbird. These sounds are actually rather more like Gray Kingbird (Mobley 2004) than the squeaky, nasal or exclamatory "breer" calls offered by Couch's, a species that is also less prone to vagrancy. Alex's kingbird had indeed proved to be Pennsylvania's first Tropical Kingbird. Anytime such a rare vagrant is encountered the first questions are where did it come from, and how did it get here? The answer to both is: no one knows, of course. Some quickly pointed to Tropical Storm Andrea's passage a week earlier as possibly having influenced this bird. But the species is well known for



Photo: George Amistead

Tropical Kingbird found along the Gray's Ferry Crescent Trail in Philadelphia.

its ability to stray long distances, with records in Alaska and Quebec (Mlodinow 1998). It's just as likely the bird was not associated with any particular weather system but was just a fluke.

Most ABA birders associate Tropical Kingbird with Arizona or Texas, but in fact its breeding range spans from those states and south all the way to central Argentina. Most authorities recognize three subspecies: *T. m. satrapa*, breeding from the U.S. to Colombia and Venezuela; *T. m. despotes*, from northeast Brazil; and *T. m. melancholicus*, the austral migrant and nominate form, ranging over most of tropical South America, breeding south to central Argentina, including the range of *T. m. despotes* (Traylor 1979, Stouffer and Chesser 1998). Both *T. m. satrapa* and the nominate form are migratory, and migratory populations of birds foster more vagrants than resident populations. Given this, it seems reasonable to presume that vagrant Tropical Kingbirds in the northeast come from one of these two widespread populations, but it is hard to say which. Students of avian vagrancy often reference the congeneric Fork-tailed Flycatcher. Although there are populations of this species relatively close to the U.S. in Mexico, a majority of records in the ABA Area are of the austral migrant form (*T. s. savana*) from South America (McCaskie and Patton, 1994). With that in mind, it has long been wondered whether the same might be true of Tropical Kingbirds straying to the eastern U.S. and Canada. There are perhaps fewer than 15 records of Tropical Kingbird east of the Mississippi River and north of Florida. Most are detected between late October and December, but the Philly bird was discovered June 20. This date, combined with the bird's relatively fresh plumage, might indicate it was the nominate form hailing from South America. In June, *T. m. melancholicus* often have completed their molt and vacated breeding areas in Argentina or Paraguay to head north for milder climes in Amazonia and perhaps further north. An overly ambitious migrant might fly right past this region, and perhaps aided by favorable tail-winds continue all the way to Pennsylvania, or even beyond. Yet *T. m. satrapa* is expanding its range. Once considered a rare breeder in west Texas, it is now resident in south Texas, and it is increasing in fall and winter in southern and central coastal California. Since 2005 the species has greatly increased in winter in south Florida and these are believed to be *T. m. satrapa* (*vide* Jon Greenlaw). One pair even bred in Florida (Sarasota) for the first time in 2013. A June record in Pennsylvania of this subspecies could fit a pattern evident in some Middle American species that are also expanding their ranges (e.g. Black-bellied Whistling-Duck). Within its typical range, Tropical Kingbird is well known to even nonbirders. They perch prominently, call stridently, and often live in proximity to humans. In the midst of a very large urban space, the Gray's Ferry Crescent Trail hugs the tree-lined eastern bank of the Schuylkill River, and is bordered on the other side by open park space with a biking trail. Indeed, the Crescent Trail in June is a greenway not dissimilar to the Tropical Kingbird's haunts further south. The Philly bird was not seen after the 20th of June, and unfortunately for regional birders, it was a one-day wonder.

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Hearty Hirundines: Swallows Overwintering in Philadelphia

Photo: George L. Armistead



Since 2004, Northern Rough-winged Swallows have over-wintered in Philadelphia. This flock also contains two Cave Swallows, next to each other on a vertical limb in the upper-central part of the photo. January 5, 2013.

experts had been asked to guess in the years ahead which swallow species would be over-wintering and which would do so in the largest numbers, nearly all would have guessed wrong.

Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

The only hirundine with any real history of appearing in winter anywhere regionally is Tree Swallow. An especially hearty species nesting north into the Arctic Circle, they winter routinely north along the Delmarva Peninsula, and at times as nearby as coastal New Jersey. Occasionally they are seen in winter north even to coastal Massachusetts. Unlike most passerines (but similar to Yellow-rumped Warbler [*Setophaga coronata coronata*]) they can subsist on *Myrica* fruit. Winter records in Pennsylvania are rare (eBird shows less than 10 total for the month of January), but prior to 2004, a swallow found from December through January was most likely a Tree Swallow.

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

A quick perusal of the various references on Barn Swallow distribution show it to be a species that does not winter anywhere in the United States, but in reality it is, except for Tree Swallow, the most widely recorded in winter north of Florida. One Barn Swallow recorded during the winter of 2009–2010 at the NWPCP appears to be the only winter record for Pennsylvania. There are a few winter records each from Massachusetts, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland, and a few scattered records farther south to Florida. There are also a few winter records from the Great Lakes Region.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

Prior to their detection in 2004, Northern Rough-winged Swallow had never been recorded in the winter north of North Carolina. Since then it is an annual sighting at NWPCP. Often dozens of birds are present throughout the winter, and the 2007 Philadelphia Mid-Winter Bird Census (PMWBC) recorded a carefully counted 142 total individuals. Up to 150 birds have been estimated there. These are staggering numbers for a bird, that until that time, this did not winter anywhere in the region. Even at the sites in Florida where they occur routinely in winter, the concentration of numbers is not as high as at NWPCP. Northern Rough-

Historically swallows have not been considered birds that could survive a Pennsylvania winter, during which prolonged cold temperatures limit the availability of insect prey. March through October has been the accepted “swallow season.” Any swallow found after mid-November was deemed rare, and records from December through February were rarer still.

In December 2004, while participating in the Pennypack Christmas Bird Count, Peter Kurtz and Barbara Granger found a group of swallows at the Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant (NWPCP) in northeast Philadelphia, PA. The story that has unfolded since has surprised everyone. Since 2004, swallows over-winter annually at NWPCP. Prior to that, if

winged Swallows are rarely seen elsewhere in winter along the Delaware River in Philadelphia, but their presence locally away from NWPCP is in need of clarification. In particular, they have been seen at patches of water near the Philadelphia International Airport (Fort Mifflin, Southwest Water Pollution Control Plant). In the winter of 2012–2013, a similar situation arose at water treatment plant in Connecticut that hosted a few Northern Rough-winged Swallows. Why NWPCP in particular is routinely so good for these birds is unclear.

Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*)

Wintering commonly in Texas, and sparsely in Florida, Cave Swallow is rare north of there. On November 11, 2008 Frank Windfelder discovered three Cave Swallows at NWPCP in northeast Philadelphia. Though previous reports existed, these were the first documented in the city. This development is part of a large, expanding annual movement of these birds from southwestern U.S. and Mexico (*P. f. pallida*) each autumn into the mid-Atlantic, the northeastern U.S. and even southeast Canada.

Since 2008, Cave Swallows are seen in the city almost annually, scattered across several sites, though the NWPCP remains the best. Some years Caves Swallows are absent or very scarce while other years they are in greater numbers. The fall of 2012 saw particularly large numbers of Cave Swallow reaching the mid-Atlantic, and from at least October 29, 2012 to February 2, 2013, they were observed routinely at NWPCP. This was unusual in several respects. It marked the longest period ever in the state during which this species was continually present. It was also unusual as regional sightings from the mid-Atlantic to northeastern U.S have usually peaked in November, but then dissipated. By mid-December they are almost always gone. However, here at NWPCP, Cave Swallows found in December 2012 remained into winter and into early 2013.

After November 2012 Cave Swallow numbers did dwindle as expected, but at least four remained into January 2013. How many birds were involved in 2012–2013 is unclear. The largest count had been nine individuals, until Matt Sharp counted the “highest number seen perched at one time” on November 18, 2012. But even that day, there could have been more flying around. Others may have come and gone throughout the day. For comparison, migration concentration points like Cape May, NJ tally dozens on exceptional November days (counts of 100+ were made in 2012) and it is not unreasonable to think that 20+ individual Cave Swallows could have graced the NWPCP that fall.

On February 2, 2013 Sandra Keller observed a single individual for the last register that winter. That winter there were no eBird sightings of Cave Swallows after February 2, 2013, despite several visits by skilled observers. Autumn of 2013 saw just three reports of single birds on three separate days in November at the NWPCP, and that was it for all of southeastern PA. North of North Carolina, the only records in the eBird database (and perhaps the only records ever?), for January–February are those from Philadelphia.

Conclusion

These swallows appear to be taking advantage of a favorable microclimate that has allowed them to cut short a potentially longer and more



Photo: George L. Armistead

A Cave Swallow takes wing at the Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant in Philadelphia. January 5, 2013.

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dangerous migration. The waters discharged at NWPCP are productive for midges throughout winter, providing good sustenance for insectivores. Birders from all over the region now visit the site regularly, hoping for species of interest and marveling at the unprecedented aggregation of hirundines. It is not only the best site to see over-wintering swallows in all of Pennsylvania, but it is the best even for hundreds of miles around. Cold weather limits their food elsewhere and concentrates them at NWPCP, leading to large single-day counts of swallows. It is possible the numbers (of mostly Northern Rough-winged Swallows) attract other hirundines and even other bird species. But the site itself is obviously a magnet too. NWPCP is an excellent site in colder months for other late lingering insectivores. Good numbers (dozen+) of Yellow-rumped Warblers are often present, as are a few Palm Warblers. It is perhaps only a matter of time before a vagrant tyrant-flycatcher or western wood-warbler species is found here.

Acknowledgments

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First Record of Cave Swallow for the Pocono Mountains

On October 30, 2012, just after Hurricane Sandy passed through the area, I along with several other birders observed a single Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*) at Beltzville Lake, Carbon County, Pennsylvania. Dan Altif was already there when I arrived early in the morning and had several jaegers in view which were later identified as Pomarine Jaegers (*Stercorarius pomarinus*). As more birders gathered near the beach hoping for more storm-related birds, I noticed a swallow approaching us from the west. The bird flew low past us and I yelled, "Cave Swallow!" At close range the bird resembles a Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) but has a distinct pale buffy throat and cheek. The bird did not linger and continued on in an easterly direction. This is apparently the first record of this species for the Pocono Mountains area.

Interestingly, early the next morning I found another Cave Swallow at the marina at Nockamixon State Park, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. I was able to study the bird for about half an hour as it flew around me looking for insects, at times within a few feet

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Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at Bartram's Garden, Philadelphia County

I had planned to do a more serious day of birding for Saturday November 16, 2013, but a late night with friends left me in bed until noon. When I finally got up, I resolved to walk around Bartram's Garden for some fresh air. Needless to say, I arrived with no expectation of seeing much of anything. I walked the northern edge of the field and saw very little, before heading back down towards the river along the field edge closest to the gardens. (For those unfamiliar with Bartram's Garden, I have found this area to be wonderfully productive over the past year and a half. I've observed Yellow-breasted Chat, Pine Siskin, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Clay-colored sparrow, and now Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in this 50 yard stretch.) Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a bird fly to perch on a shrub in the meadow. Seeing bright flashes of black and white, I was all but certain it was just a Mockingbird. I'm sure everyone can imagine my shock to have my binoculars land on a gorgeous, delicate gray and bright pink flycatcher with a very long black and white tail. This was the first Scissor-tailed Flycatcher I had ever seen, but provided that I was not hallucinating, there was hardly a doubt about the identification. The bird was perched in perfect side profile and in textbook plumage. I noted the pale gray head with dark eye line; light chest and belly with warm pink flanks; and of course the unmistakable long, stiffly held tail. I watched in disbelief for about thirty more seconds, watching the bird flycatch for insects and spread its long forked tail in flight, before calling Tony Croasdale and Todd Fellenbaum.



Photo: David Allen

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at Bartram's Garden, Philadelphia, November 16, 2013.

From what I observed, the bird appeared to be an adult in clean plumage. The white edges of the dark wing feathers were clean and crisp. The tail feathers also appeared intact and neat. The tail appeared to be approximately the length of the bird's body, leading some to hypothesize that the individual was an adult female. I did not hear it vocalize at any time while observing it. From approximately 2:20 to 2:45 p.m., the bird was actively fly-catching from small brush in the field and occasionally taller trees on the field edge. It would frequently drop low to the ground and even stay there briefly. At one point, the flycatcher made its way into the gardens and fed on a small berry tree before returning to the field. After the longest 20 minutes of my life, Tony Croasdale arrived at approximately 2:40 p.m., having biked manically from Cobbs Creek Environmental Center. Todd Fellenbaum and Frank Windfelder arrived at approximately 3:00 p.m. By this time, the sun had set a bit and the temperature had dropped. The bird stayed perched higher up in trees slightly closer to the river during this period. We continued to watch it until approximately 3:45 p.m. when it flew high over the tree line toward the southwest. Those of us present worried that we may have caught a one day wonder, but happily the flycatcher returned on Sunday morning and put on a great show for many birders. I saw it as late as Tuesday morning, four days after the initial sighting; it looked considerably more worn, but otherwise appeared healthy. If accepted by the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee (PORC), this would prove to be the ninth Pennsylvania record for Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. PORC lists eight prior accepted records for Scissor-tailed Flycatcher; one additional record is listed on eBird was from John Heinz N.W.R. in October of 1972. Five of those nine prior records were from the spring season (four from May and one from June), two records were from August, and one each was from October and November. As a curious conclusion to this story, many have noted the proximity of Bartram's Garden to the Gray's Ferry Crescent, which rose to fame in the summer of 2013. What a coincidence that this vagrant *Tyrannus* occurred less than a mile from where Alexander Zorach found Pennsylvania's first Tropical Kingbird just

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four months earlier in July 2013 (p. 130 of this issue) — a pretty good year for this underappreciated stretch of the Schuylkill River!

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Bahama Woodstar (*Calliphlox evelynae*) in Lancaster County



Bahama Woodstar. Head and gorget detail of the bird in hand, April 22, 2013 at Denver, Lancaster. A strong purple sheen to the gorget is visible, as is a white “collar” separating the gorget from a rufous- and green-colored chest.

Perhaps the most extraordinary Pennsylvania rarity in decades — a Bahama Woodstar — was in Lancaster County from April 20th to the 24th in 2013. It was also a cautionary tale in the dangers of seeing what one expects to see. On the 22nd of April, I received an email from Ruth Witmer of Denver, Pennsylvania with photographs of what she believed was a Broad-tailed Hummingbird, which had appeared two days previously at their feeder. A review of the photographs (which largely obscured the bird's tail) seemed to support Mrs. Witmer's initial identification. Sandy Lockerman, who bands hummingbirds under my permit, captured the bird shortly after her arrival later that morning, and marked it with a numbered leg band (USGS Banding Lab #P24356). She immediately noticed a number of anomalies inconsistent with a Broad-tailed Hummingbird, however, including an unusually short wing, a gorget strongly tinted with purple, and most strikingly, a deeply forked tail with large areas of rufous. With the bird in hand, and at my suggestion, she contacted Fred Bassett of Montgomery, Alabama who has extensive experience banding Broad-tailed Hummingbirds in the northern Rockies. He suggested the possibility of a hybrid, perhaps involving another *Selasphorus* species. Photographs of the bird were forwarded that evening to me

and Bassett, to hummingbird banders Robert S. and Martha Sargent in Clay, Alabama, and to bander Kelly Bryan in Fort Davis, Texas. All concurred with Bassett's initial conclusion that the bird was most likely a hybrid of western origin. Potential parent species discussed included Rufous Hummingbird, Allen's Hummingbird, Lucifer's Hummingbird, and Mexican Sheartail, all predicated on the assumption that the hummingbird was most likely in part Broad-tailed, and — like all the other vagrant species occurring in Pennsylvania to that point — western in origin.

Meanwhile, Sandy Lockerman alerted the PABIRDS listserv to the presence of the presumed hybrid. A few birders accepted the Witmers' open invitation to see the hummer, and Chris Bortz of Jonestown posted his photographs of the bird in flight by the evening of April 23rd. Pittsburgh area bander and ornithologist Bob Mulvihill saw those images the morning of April 24th and was the first to suggest Bahama Woodstar, a species no one had considered, given the assumption of western hybrid origin. In fact, as Mulvihill realized, the Denver hummingbird was a perfect match for an adult male woodstar. It had a slightly decurved bill, pink-violet gorget, deeply forked tail with very short, green R1 feathers and extensive rufous on the R2-4 rectrices. A prominent patch of rufous was visible under each wing. Underparts were dark greenish suffused with rufous, and separated from the gorget by a white collar. Measurements were also consistent with the limited data available on Bahama Woodstar: wing length of 39.45 mm, tail 31 mm, culmen 15.55 mm, and weight 3.41 g. Lockerman noted significant subcutaneous fat (2 on a 0–5 scale). The lack of violet on the forehead suggests this individual was of the nominate *evelynae* race, found throughout the Bahamas except for Inagua (Raffaele et al, 1998). The identification was made early on the morning of April 24th, and although it was quickly posted to listservs and alert services, the hummingbird was last seen only a few hours later, around 12:30 EDT. Nearly 300 people made the trek to the Witmer home, but most arrived after the

bird had departed. The Lancaster County record has been submitted to PORC for review.

Although the identification seems straightforward, the bird's origin remains the subject of speculation. Bahama Woodstar is a sedentary species with little history of long-distance movement. There are just four records of five individuals from the U.S., all from south Florida, and all between 1961 and 1981 (Fisk 1974, Langridge and Sykes 1974, Owre 1976, Atherton and Atherton 1982). The final sighting, July 17 to August 24, 1981, was of an adult male and adult female together. The 1961 record was not accepted by ABA checklist committee because the specimen has been lost (Stevenson and Anderson 1994, B. Pranty, et al. 2008).

Beyond the fat deposits, which struck some observers as unusual for a sedentary species, there was no physical indication of captivity. A review of the relevant database by the Philadelphia Zoo showed that only 11 U.S. zoos (and none in Pennsylvania) house hummingbirds, and no woodstars are listed among any of these collections nationwide (A. Baltz, pers. comm.). Other than a single widely reported case in 2010 of a Dutch man smuggling hummingbirds in his pants from French Guiana to Europe, there appears to be little evidence for routine black market traffic in hummingbirds of any sort. Hurricane Sandy in October 2012 produced no records of other Caribbean or Bahamian landbirds in its wake, making it an unlikely causative factor, and unlike western *Selasphorus* hummingbirds, a tropical genus like *Calliphlox* would seem poorly equipped to have survived the very cold winter of 2012–13, although the ability of most hummingbird genera to undergo torpor is untested. A review of cruise company websites suggests that the nearest port at which cruise ships from the Bahamas routinely dock is Baltimore, some 115 km distant. Passage time from Nassau appears to average 40–60 hours, which would pose a survival challenge for a hummingbird if no supplemental food source was provided, and seems at odds with the bird's excellent condition. For these reasons, we believe the most plausible explanation is that Pennsylvania's first Bahama Woodstar was a legitimate vagrant.

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Photo: Michael Burkholder

Bahama Woodstar. Head, bill, and gorget detail of the bird in hand, April 22, 2013 at Denver, Lancaster. The lack of violet in the forehead evident in this image suggested this bird was of the nominate *evelynae* subspecies.

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Leucistic Catbird in Bucks County: October 2–3, 2012

On October 2, 2012 at 12:25 p.m., I noticed a white bird about thirty feet away in a bush at the edge of the woods behind our house. The bird flew to the ground under a bird feeder filled with black sunflower oil seed. A wire basket containing suet was attached to a tree trunk about five feet above the ground and approximately three feet to the right of the feeder. The white bird started eating small pieces of suet that the woodpeckers and nuthatches had dislodged and which had fallen to the ground at the base of the tree. It also probed amongst the sunflower seeds and hulls which had fallen to the ground under the feeder. After feeding for about five minutes, the bird disappeared for the rest of the day.



Photo: Richard C. Bell

Leucistic Catbird feeds in a Bucks County yard.

The feathers were totally white, the beak and legs were creamy white, and the eye appeared to be jet black. Because the bird in question was the size and shape of a Gray Catbird and the observed feeding behavior matched perfectly with that of the normally pigmented catbirds that spend the summer in the woods at the rear of our house, I was of the opinion that the bird I had been watching was a leucistic Gray Catbird.

At 6:30 a.m. on October 3, the bird appeared again and was observed probing amongst the sunflower seed and hulls on the ground under the feeder. The bird was observed throughout the day and was again observed eating suet pieces that had fallen to on the ground in addition to probing amongst the hulls under the feeder. At one point, the bird was observed to fly to the suet basket, land on it, and take suet from the feeder itself. Such a visit to the suet feeder sometimes occurs with the normally pigmented catbirds and, while not the typical feeding behavior, it is not unusual. Throughout the second day, the bird made frequent forays to the feeder area — usually on the ground and, on two occasions, to the suet feeder itself.

On October 3, I was able to secure a photo from my kitchen window. I used a small Nikon D3100 point-and-shoot, digital camera to photograph the bird while it was on the ground beneath the suet feeder. The trap in the photo is my way of keeping the squirrel population in check. By capturing them and relocating them to a location about five miles away, I am able to keep the squirrel population to a reasonable level. As an assist in estimating the size of the bird, note that the wire grid on the squirrel trap forms squares that are one inch on a side. The bird is located in front of and about one foot from the nearest corner of the trap. The diameter of the tree trunk where it meets the ground is 12.5 inches.

I was able to watch the bird for most of the day and was able to observe it on the ground with normally pigmented Gray Catbirds in proximity. By comparing size and shape, length of tail, posture, size and shape of bill, and behavior, I am convinced that the leucistic bird was a Gray Catbird.

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Hurricane Sandy and Northern Harriers

On October 29, 2012, Hurricane Sandy, the largest Atlantic hurricane on record, made landfall in New Jersey. In terms of dollar-damage and length of economic recovery, it was also one of the most destructive Atlantic hurricanes in history. In some coastal areas, ocean-front dunes were breached; sea water and resultant sand washed over many areas of both barrier islands and the mainland, and also flooded back bays. The Delaware Bay and nearby rivers and creeks flowing into it experienced similar heavy flooding.

Birders were immediately curious about how such flooding, unprecedented in recent memory, would affect populations of marsh birds, especially Northern Harriers (*Circus cyaneus*), a large part of whose diet consists of meadow voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*), small “aquatic” mammals, sometimes known commonly as “field mice.” Although meadow voles are able to swim, many feared that the level of flooding would completely overwhelm their burrows, runs, and indeed any nearby “high ground” from which any population remnant might begin quickly to recover. Obviously, Northern Harrier populations cannot be tied exclusively to those of Meadow Voles, as other prey make up some portion of their diet, but the question remained.

This is a short report detailing Northern Harrier numbers based upon statistics gathered from the Southwest Counties Raptor Census, conducted each February in the three New Jersey counties of Gloucester, Salem, and Cumberland, all bordering the Delaware River and Delaware Bay. The history of the Census within Salem County and the current methodology in all three counties were published in *Cassinia*, Volume 72–73.

In February 2012 (almost ten months before the storm) observers in Salem County recorded 25 Northern Harriers contributing to a three-year average for the years 2010–2012 of 44. The ten-year average for 2003–2012 had been 40. On February 3, 2013, approximately three months after the storm, observers recorded only 14.

Cumberland County, to the south of Salem County, showed similar results. In February 2012, observers recorded 45 Northern Harriers, contributing to a three-year average for the years 2010–2012 of 34. On February 3, 2013, observers recorded only 22.

Results in Gloucester County, the northernmost county taking part in the census, were less clear-cut. In February 2012 (before the storm) observers there recorded no Harriers; 2 and 3 had been recorded in 2010 and 2011, respectively. On February 3, 2013, observers recorded 3. There is no ten-year record for Cumberland and Gloucester Counties comparable to Salem County’s.

Although Meadow Voles, like other animals, undergo population cycles, it would not seem illogical that Hurricane Sandy would, indeed, affect their numbers adversely, regardless of any “normal” bust or boom. Observation of one of their chief predators, Northern Harrier, shows that it seems to be in a temporary decline within the same habitats. The assumption is that such decline is probably attributable to seeking other prey elsewhere and not to any immediate effects of the local weather system at the end of October 2012. Examination of Christmas Bird Count results for Northern Harrier during this period are inconclusive at this time, as only the data for the 113th CBC, December 14, 2012 to January 5, 2013 are available.

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Partially Leucistic White-throated Sparrow in Bucks County

A partially leucistic White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) appeared at our backyard feeding station in Furlong, PA on November 20, 2013. The bird showed a great deal of white on the head and upper chest and had prominent white spots on the back. A ring of brown and black at the base of the head separated the white on the head from the white on the back. A yellow spot in front of the eye was quite noticeable.

Initially, the partially leucistic bird was very wary and approached the feeder area very timidly — often staying in the bushes behind the feeder while feeding upon the white millet seeds that I spread on the ground each morning. At first, the other White-throated Sparrows, which had arrived about three weeks previously, behaved quite aggressively toward the leucistic bird and it was often chased away by them. By the middle of December, the aggressive behavior of the other White-throated Sparrows had waned and the leucistic bird was feeding in the open and among the other birds without being chased away. The bird continued to be a daily visitor through the end of December, 2013.

Photo: Richard C. Bell



Partially leucistic White-throated Sparrow.

This is the second year in a row in which a leucistic bird has appeared at our feeder. In 2012, it was a nearly all white Gray Catbird that spent some time in our yard (p. 138 in this issue).

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Sedge Wrens Successfully Breed in Montgomery County in 2012

In the summer of 2012 a pair of Sedge Wrens successfully bred at the Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust, just north of Philadelphia in Montgomery County. The birds were discovered August 13th when I heard a Sedge Wren singing before sunrise in a ten acre hayfield at the corner of Terwood Road and Creek Road. A second bird was seen and heard nearby, uttering a chip call and a raspy alarm. The habitat was dry grassland, comprised of separate stands of big bluestem, little bluestem, and Indian grass. Sedges and bushes were notably absent.

Subsequently, the male was heard singing persistently in the early morning hours before sunrise and regularly throughout the day, except at dusk, surprisingly, when I never heard it. It had three song posts, all in big bluestem, each about 70 m apart. The bird was always hidden from view while singing, which sometimes went on for hours. Singing was last heard September 1st.

On September 6th I discovered the nest site by watching a bird with a grasshopper in its bill visit a spot near the edge of a big bluestem stand. I observed it go to the same spot several times, carrying away a fecal sac on one occasion. I was able to pinpoint the exact location of the nest, which was a good distance (50 m) from the nearest singing post. On subsequent days, the bird (most likely the female) was observed flying low over the grass to the nest site, occasionally making the raspy call. Only one bird was ever observed feeding the young in the nest. On September 11th there was no activity at the nest site and the nest was approached and examined for the first time.

It was 38 cm off the ground, hidden in the base of a 18 cm big bluestem tussock, and contained two unhatched and unmarked white eggs. The entrance faced west.

That evening, at least three fledglings were observed returning to the nest vicinity at dusk. They continued to return to the nest shortly before sunset during the next week and were last seen approaching the nest September 17th. They were heard during the day that week in the big bluestem near to the nest site, calling with chips which were identical to the first few notes of the adult song. Thereafter they were observed and heard on several dates in the Indian grass area (ca. 100 m north of the nest), keeping close to each other and an adult. Subsong by one of the fledglings was first heard on October 6th, by which time it was only seven weeks old. They were last observed on October 14th. The nest was collected in December and given to the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. It measured 15 x 7.5 cm, domed with a 2.5 x 3 cm side entrance. It was composed of grass with a lining of fine fibers, which I believe was thistle down, and some hair.



Photo: Paul Driver

Sedge Wren nest, Montgomery County, September 2012, situated in a stand of big bluestem.

Working back from the date the fledglings left the nest, I estimate that the pair probably arrived at the end of July. The family apparently left the area in mid-October. Sedge Wrens raise their first brood in the spring in the upper mid-western states and adjacent Canada, and then often disperse to nest a second time elsewhere, to the south or east (Herkert et al., 2001; Bedell, 1996). The second nesting is frequently very late compared to other songbirds, and there is little site fidelity. Consequently nesting is easily overlooked. In this case, the male sang persistently and the fledged young were also very vocal, which aided in the discovery and in the confirmation of successful breeding.

Addendum: In 2013, Sedge Wrens returned to the same location. Singing was first heard August 1st, and on August 10th a second bird arrived. The two counter-sang at dawn until the 21st, after which only one was heard. Singing decreased towards the end of the month, and was last heard briefly on September 2nd. At the time of writing, breeding had not been confirmed.

[*Editor's Note:* This article was first published (in a slightly different form) in Volume 27, no. 2 of *Pennsylvania Birds* in 2013.]

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Dovekie in Northampton County

Photo courtesy of Pocono Wildlife Rehabilitation Center



Dovekie found on a driveway in Northampton County in December, 2012.

Bay at Cape May Point, New Jersey, which was reported as a modern day record (fide A. Mirabella).

On December 22, 2012 a stranded Dovekie was found on a driveway west of Danielsville, Northampton County, Pennsylvania (fide B. Silfies). The homeowner remarked that it “looked like a little penguin.” The bird was taken to Pocono Wildlife Rehabilitation Center but unfortunately did not survive. The specimen is now in the collection at Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center. The only previous county record was one found in Bethlehem on November 12, 1970. (E. Martin, personal comm.).

Coincidentally, another Dovekie was found the day before (December 21, 2012) on a driveway at New Hope, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. That was the same morning that 31 left Delaware

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Merlins Nesting at Promised Land State Park, Pike County, 2007–2011

On June 3, 2007, I discovered a Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) actively hunting dragonflies at Promised Land State Park in Pike County, Pennsylvania. The area was just outside the town of Promised Land (elevation 1,745 feet) in a stand of tall White Pines (*Pinus strobus*). Needless to say I was excited about the possibility of a nest in the vicinity. Eventually I found a nest in a large white pine tree and by the end of July four young fledged from the nest. Merlins nested again at the same location during the next four consecutive summers, producing a total of 19 healthy fledglings! This included four young in 2008, three in 2009, three in 2010, and a high of five in 2011. The Promised Land site represented the southernmost nesting location of Merlins in eastern North America until 2009 when Merlins were found nesting in the Canaan Valley of West Virginia (C. Rucker, WV Bird listserv).

During the period of 2007–2011 I spent many hours observing and photographing the Merlins at Promised Land as well as keeping copious notes. In 2010 and 2011, I first saw a male in the vicinity on April 11th, flying around as if it was scouting out the area. The Merlins were observed in courtship behavior as early as April 18th. Two nests were located near the main lake close to a busily traveled road. Both were well-hidden near the tops of White Pines and were believed to be old nests of Fish Crows (*Corvus ossifragus*). Fledglings remained in the vicinity of the nest for about five weeks and appeared to disperse from breeding sites in mid-August.



Merlins at Promised Land State Park.

Photo: Rick Wiltraut

Probably because there is a higher density of prey, the male consistently hunted a regenerating clearing, the result of a F-2 tornado in May 1998. The Merlins vigorously defended their territory from larger birds including Common Ravens (*Corvus corax*) and Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). In one instance, two Red-eyed Vireos (*Vireo olivaceus*) were observed chasing a female Merlin! The Merlins were very vocal around the nesting area. The male uttered a very fast, high-pitched call when bringing in prey, probably to alert the female for food transfers. This call was also heard during aggressive attacks on other birds. At least fifteen species of songbirds were identified as prey items over a five year period with Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*), Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) and Cedar Waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) being particular favorites. Also, the remains of an unidentified small bat was found under a tree regularly used by the fledglings. On several occasions, Merlins at the Promised Land site were also observed caching prey. Nearly all food exchanges between the male and female occurred at the top of the same tall Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*) tree. This same tree was then used by the fledglings to retrieve prey.

Although this site was abandoned after five years, Merlins are still occasionally seen in the area around Promised Land during the summer and possibly nesting at a new site nearby. My five years studying the Merlins at Promised Land were among the memorable experiences of my birding career.

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Record Flight of Northern Saw-whet Owls at Little Gap, Fall 2012

In the fall of 2007, several licensed banders including Brad Silfies, Steve Boyce and myself decided to try and net Northern Saw-whet Owls (*Aegolius acadicus*) on the Kittatinny Ridge at Little Gap, Northampton County, to see if these birds regularly use the ridge as a fall migration route. This area is at an elevation of about 1,400 feet and is primarily second-growth woods, predominately Gray Birch (*Betula populifolia*), Scrub Oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*), Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) and Pitch Pine (*Pinus rigida*). A mist net was placed near a thicket of Common Greenbrier (*Smilax rotundifolia*) and a boom box with the call of a male Northern Saw-whet Owl was used to lure the owls in. On November 7th we caught our first owl and we were elated.

We did not set up on the mountain in 2008 but resumed in 2009. In 2009 we only banded between November 3rd and 9th and caught 11 owls. In 2010 between October 7th and November 22nd, a total of 265 Northern Saw-whet Owls were captured including a high of 46 on November 2nd. This total also included an astonishing 16 foreign recaptures. At this point we had a good idea that the ridge was an important flyway for this species. Things slowed down in 2011 when we caught 82 owls including seven foreign recaptures. One hatch year owl recaptured on October 29th had been banded in Tadoussac, Quebec on October 3rd, flying 600+ miles in less than a month.

In the fall of 2012, we had a record flight. On the first night (October 12), 28 owls were caught, an indication of things to come. The flight was heavy through October. Sixty were captured October 16–18th and 40 on Octo-



Photo: Rick Wiltraut

Saw-whet Owl banded at Little Gap, Northampton County.

General Notes

ber 22–23rd. Although most owls migrate on light westerly winds after a cold front, several large flights actually occurred during easterly winds. Following a heavy snowfall in New England, a single night record occurred on November 6–7th. It was a moonless night with temps around 30°F. Winds were NE at about 5 mph. By 3:00 a.m. we had banded 87 Saw-whets! Another 38 were caught November 14–15th. By November 18th a record total of 435 Northern Saw-whet Owls had been banded.

Some of the owls that were banded were recaptured again after several weeks indicating that the owls were apparently finding enough prey in the area like White-footed Mice (*Peromyscus leucopus*). The future of this operation remains uncertain at this time, although our totals thus far shows that the Kittatinny Ridge is an important migration corridor for this species.

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Peregrine Falcon Observer

As a volunteer for the Pennsylvania Game Commission since 2000, I have observed the Peregrine Falcons that nest on the PA/NJ Turnpike connector bridge. My observations assist Dr. Art McMorris, the Peregrine Falcon Coordinator, in deciding when banding should occur. Banding is important because it allows the game commission to track the progress of this species that was extirpated about 1960. The number of nest sites has grown since a reintroduction program began in the late 1970s.

I conduct my observations at the underside of the Turnpike Bridge from Radcliffe St. in Edgely, Bristol Township, which parallels the Delaware River. Each February I begin visiting the bridge weekly to look for the adult pair that nest there. All of these observations are recorded in a notebook and increase from weekly to daily in May through July. When I do locate the adults, I try to see them with a spotting scope to determine if they are the same pair seen the previous nest season. This is determined by the pattern on their heads and their leg bands. We know the current female is 12 years old.

Through February into March I watch for copulation. After observing copulation, I can begin to predict a date for nesting in about 14 days. The female incubates the eggs on a nest inside a beam on the Pennsylvania side of the bridge, so knowing when the female is on the eggs is not an easy task. Nesting is assumed once I begin seeing only one adult. The definitive confirmation of this is a nest exchange. The male brings prey to a favorite perch and calls. Then he leaves the prey and flies off to enter the nest beam from the rear. In moments the female will leave the nest beam and fly to the location of the prey. Once nesting is confirmed, we count ahead 30 days for hatching.

It is not easy to determine hatching when you are unable to see the nest. However, peregrines will not take prey into the nest until the eggs hatch; the next step then is to watch for a peregrine arriving with prey going into the nest beam. This is a very important date to set, because if the information provided is not accurate, the banding team may not arrive at the proper time. The best time to band is when the young are about 22–30 days old.

On banding day I finally learn how many young are in the nest. Art McMorris and his team from the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission move through the catwalks under the bridge to reach the nest beam. Often Art will need to go into the nest beam to get the young and put them in a backpack to bring up to the catwalk on the nest beam. Each is weighed to determine the sex, and then given a quick exam to look for parasites and fungal infections. They are banded with a silver Federal Fish and Wildlife band and a color band that is either black over red or black over green which has an alpha-numeric combination.

These bands allow individual birds to be identified. Art puts a different colored piece of tape over the silver band to make it easier for the observers to identify the individual young when they fledge.

Based on their age and appearance, on banding day the fledge date is predicted, which is usually about two weeks after banding. Often the first view of the young is as they perch in a hole in the nest beam. Since the river and a bulkhead are below, this is not a good place for the young to test their wings. The smart birds will find their way through the beams to a platform where they can hop and flap with no danger of falling in the river. They need some time outside the beam to strengthen their wings. The first day any young are seen on the bridge is an exciting day. It begins what I call Peregrine season. This usually happens in early June, at which time I make more frequent observations, try to count the young, identify the individuals, and note interactions with the adult peregrines. This is an exciting and challenging time. On a good day all the young are accounted for; on a not-so-good day, I can hear them but not see them. The young do a lot of calling, especially as they see the adults who will continue to feed them and train them to hunt.

This period of observation goes on into July and sometimes August. The first weeks out of the nest are the most dangerous for the young when they are inexperienced flyers. Neighbors near the bridge are notified and have phone numbers of people to call in the event a young Peregrine is found on their property. In 2012 the yellow banded young Peregrine flew into the barbed wire surrounding the land under the bridge. A neighbor was able to free it from the wire, but it unfortunately fell into the locked area. The bird was eventually rescued and taken to a rehab center. Due to a variety of problems, this bird died at the rehab center. Over the years I have been observing, I have recovered two other deceased juvenile Peregrines. These birds were taken to the Academy of Natural Sciences where they became study skins.

During late June and July when the young are experienced, it is a joy to see them chasing one another and the adults. When the young wander off my job is done.

Hanging out under the bridge, I encounter many people. Whether they are walking, riding a bike, or driving, many people stop to ask, "What are you looking at?" They often think I am taking pictures, but I only have binoculars and a spotting scope. In the post 9/11 world where people are concerned about terrorism, it is not easy to hang out under a bridge without arousing the attention of the authorities. I have a letter from the Pennsylvania Game Commission explaining my role as a volunteer monitoring the Peregrines nesting on the bridge. When people stop to see what I am doing, I let them look at the Peregrine through the scope, if one is in sight. Then if they are interested, I tell them the history of the Peregrines and what I do as a volunteer.

I am very lucky to live near a Peregrine Falcon nest. The opportunity to observe these birds and to assist the Pennsylvania Game Commission is personally satisfying. I enjoy educating people about the history of a beautiful endangered species, and I do not mind when people recognize me as the "bird lady from the bridge."

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A Banded Rufous Hummingbird at Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center, Northampton County

On November 5, 2011, I observed an immature male Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) at my hummingbird feeder outside my office at the Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center near the town of Belfast, Northampton County, Pennsylvania. In addition to the feeder, the bird fed at several *Salvias spp.* I had planted in the flower bed in front of the office including Pineapple Sage (*Salvia elegans*). The bird was well photographed

General Notes

Photo: Rick Wiltraut



Adult male Rufous Hummingbird at Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center in November, 2011. The bird was originally banded in Louisiana in January of the same year.

had a band on its left leg! I immediately notified several people, including hummingbird bander Scott Weidensaul who was excited about the prospect of recapturing a banded Rufous Hummingbird. Although he had previous plans, he dropped them for this opportunity. Later in the day Scott was able to capture the bird (band number 3100-43455). Amazingly, it was later discovered that the bird had been banded as an immature male on January 9, 2011 at River Ridge, Louisiana by noted hummingbird bander Nancy Newfield! This beauty remained for several weeks and was seen by numerous local birders. I eventually dubbed the bird "Rufus." Interestingly, the woman who had spotted it at my feeder decided to put her feeders back up and the bird relocated to her yard on November 25th and remained until January 3, 2012!

and observed by several local birders until the cold morning of November 7th when it tanked up on sugar water and disappeared. Then on November 13th, a local woman (Pat Houck) was driving past the office and stopped to ask me why the feeder was still outside. She also said she had seen a hummingbird at the feeder on November 11th, a day I was off from work. Thinking that the immature male had returned, I came in early the next day (November 14th) to watch the feeder and to my astonishment, an adult male Rufous Hummingbird appeared at the feeder! I couldn't believe my luck that two different Rufous Hummingbirds would find my feeder in a period of about a week. I quickly went outside and took several photographs of the bird. When I returned to my office to view the photos, I was astounded to see that the bird

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Arctic Tern, Carbon County

On May 21, 2012 I was birding at Beltzville State Park in Carbon County, Pennsylvania. The weather was ripe for something good with a steady drizzle and stiff winds out of the east. As I scanned the lake I spotted a lone tern flying up and down the lake near the beach area. Several field marks caught my eye, especially the small head and bill, dark gray underparts, a pale gray upper wing, translucent primaries, a dark trailing edge of the primaries, a long tail and a "snappy" flight style. The dark gray underparts contrasted with a white cheek. The bird seemed to cover a pretty long stretch of the lake in a very short time period. Once I saw it catch a fish and drop it, then retrieve it, and then drop it again. It repeated this about four or five times. Several times it rested on a buoy where I could study it through a Leica spotting scope. The bird had noticeably short legs, a rounded head and a short, dark red bill. At this point I was pretty confident



Photo: Rick Wiltraut

Arctic Tern photographed at Beltzville State Park in May, 2012.

the bird was an Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*). Rob Bergstresser was also birding there and I pointed out the bird to him. Rob was able to obtain several flight photographs. The sighting was posted on the PA bird list serve and several others birders arrived and were able to study the tern. The last observation of the bird was around 7:30 when it left the buoy and flew low over the lake several times before dropping into the water to bathe, perhaps to condition its feathers before continuing on its long trip. The weather conditions that day also produced two Red-necked Phalaropes (*Phalaropus lobatus*) on the lake. The Arctic Tern was looked for the next day to no avail.

This was the second time I observed Arctic Tern at this location. On May 16, 1989 I observed and photographed two Arctic Terns there under similar conditions which proved to be the first documented record for the state.

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Second Record of King Rail for Lehigh County



Photo: Rick Wiltraut

On April 26, 2011, Dave Neimeyer observed a rail on his property near Fogelsville, Lehigh County, Pennsylvania which he could not identify. The bird was seen on the edge a flooded cornfield, a somewhat odd spot for a rail. Later that day I visited the site and identified the bird as a King Rail (*Rallus elegans*). The rail was unconcerned of my presence and I was able to obtain several close photographs. The rail remained in the area until April 30th and was seen by many others. It proved to be the second record for Lehigh County. The only other record was one seen at Alburdis by Clint Miller and others on May 9, 1954.

This King Rail, found near Fogelsville, was only the second sighting on record for this species in Lehigh County.

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Sedge Wren Nesting, Monroe County

On August 8, 2011 I was birding in the newly established Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge in Monroe County, Pennsylvania when I heard a Sedge Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*) uttering chip notes. I was in a wet area dominated by various species of sedge (*Carex, sp.*) and rush (*Juncus, sp.*) as well as several flowering plants including Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), New York Ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*), Boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*), and Great Blue Lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*). Eventually I located the bird and was able to study all field marks. On subsequent visits to the site in August and September I heard a Sedge Wren singing and confirmed that there were at least two birds present. I was not able to confirm nesting at the site until October 21st when I found and photographed a single fledgling, which presumably hatched on site.



Photo: Rick Wiltraut

Sedge Wren, Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

General Notes

Interestingly, this site is about 12 miles northeast of where I found nesting Sedge Wrens in the summer of 1996 at Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center, Northampton County, Pennsylvania.

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Winter Roosting Behavior of a Sharp-shinned Hawk in Philadelphia

[*Editor's Note:* The author of this note herself admitted to not being 100% sure of her identification of the Sharp-shinned Hawk, so the editor solicited the opinions of birders more experienced than himself to confirm the identification. Unfortunately, the feedback was equally split three ways — one third said that it was definitely a Sharp-shinned Hawk, another third said that it was definitely a Coopers Hawk, and the final third said that it was basically impossible to tell the difference between the two raptors species in a photo of a perched bird. Furthermore, there was no consensus on whether or not the bird was an adult or an immature. Therefore, the editor has decided to stick with the author's initial identification of the bird.]

Relatively little is known about the daily roosting habits of migratory raptors during the winter. The following description provides information about the roosting behavior of an adult Sharp-shinned Hawk observed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania during the winter of 2009–2010.

From the middle of December 2009 to early March 2010, an adult Sharp-shinned Hawk roosted regularly outside my home on the 200 block of Morris Street in South Philadelphia. I had not seen the hawk in previous years. The bird roosted within the branches of a mature Bradford pear tree (*Pyrus calleryana*) that is about 45 feet high, but the bird actually perched on a horizontal telephone line that ran through the branches of the tree about 30 feet above ground level. The tree is located on the sidewalk along the street in front of my house. The bird returned each night to the exact same spot on the wire, directly behind one of the tree's thicker vertical trunks (about two inches thick). Needless to say, as it was winter, there were no leaves on the tree, allowing this bird to be quite visible from my second-story window when roosting. Although from the sidewalk looking up into the tree, the bird was harder to locate because its colors camouflaged well with the tree. The street on which the tree is located is a typical South Philadelphia street with row homes, which lack front lawns. There are about 20 other trees located along both sidewalks of the street on this block. Among these are several other tree species including varieties of cherries, elms, and *Zelkovas*. The street is a very busy one that includes a bus route that runs throughout the day and night and an elementary school that generates a large amount of noise during the day.



Photo: Rob Williamson

Sharp-shinned hawk roosting along Morris Street in South Philadelphia.

The 200 block of Morris Street is also located about half a block from a small park (Dickinson Square Park)

that has many old, tall trees with sparrows, starlings, pigeons and squirrels. It is also located about two blocks from Interstate 95, about half a mile from the Delaware River and about two to three miles from Franklin Delano Roosevelt Park, a much larger park of 270 acres.

I first observed this hawk roosting on Dec. 19, 2009, during a very heavy snow storm that produced 18 inches of snow in Philadelphia (the largest single snow fall ever recorded in Philadelphia during December). I had not noticed the bird prior to that date. During December and January the bird typically arrived at its wire perch at dusk each night between 5 and 6 p.m., and it left at dawn each morning between 6 and 7 a.m. I never observed the bird at its roosting spot during the day, nor did I ever observe it in the general vicinity during the day; however, but I cannot say that I actually looked for it beyond my block. When roosting on its wire perch, it would tuck his head down into its breast feathers covering its eyes, and it would sit in a manner that made it appear like an oval shape in the dark shadows of the tree. It remained in this position throughout the night. However, its behavior during snowstorms was different. From November 2009 through the end of February 2010, Philadelphia received 78 inches of snow (the largest winter total ever recorded in Philadelphia). I was able to observe that while the bird remained on its perch when roosting during a snow storm, it was much more active. The bird's activity involved periodically shaking its head and slightly lifting its wings to shake off the accumulated snow — one of the snowstorms produced an inch of snow per hour.

The bird's perch in the tree is located about five feet from my home's second-story window. From there, I was able to view it from the two windows in the room. At times I opened both windows, which are old and rather noisy, but this would not cause the bird to move at all. It would only react from the flash of my camera, and even then, it would only lift its head up from beneath its feathers and look right at me with no attempt to fly away. I also never observed any of the bird's droppings under the tree.

One night in early January, the Sharp-shinned Hawk was not on its perch at the usual time, so I went looking for it. About five houses down (about 100 feet) from mine, there was another smaller bird perched on the same wire as the one where the Sharp-shinned Hawk had been perching. It was larger than a sparrow, smaller than a crow, and it had long legs, a slender profile, and a longish tail. It was difficult to see it because it was dark, but it appeared to be grayish brown. This other bird was "barking" at the Sharp-shinned Hawk, which was precariously perched on a cable connector attached to the side of my neighbor's brick row home. The smaller bird flew off after about 15 minutes of "yelling" at the hawk, but the hawk remained on the very small cable connector all night. The next night, however, the hawk returned to its usual spot outside my house.

During the last week of February, as the days were getting longer, the hawk's behavior changed. It was not on its roost at all during two rainy nights, and it returned to its perch later each night between 6:30 and 7:30 p.m. By the first week of March, it was not seen at all.

Timeline:

First sighting 12/19/09 – Left roost the first week of March 2010

Second Return Sighting 12/9/10 – Left roost the second week of March 2011

Third Return Sighting 11/12/11 – Left roost the first week of March (it was an unusually warm winter)

In the summer of 2012, the Philadelphia Electric Company trimmed all the trees on the 200 block of Morris Street, exposing a lot of the area around the wire where the hawk would perch. The hawk did not return to his roost during the winter of 2012–2013. However, a similar hawk was seen in the area.

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High Numbers of White-winged Gulls in Falls Township

George Armistead, Rick Mellon, Matt Sharp, and I covered the GROWS North landfill (restricted access) in Tullytown, Bucks County on December 14, 2013, as part of the Southern Bucks Christmas Bird Count. We spent around four hours scanning the multitudes of gulls in the landfill and nearby water bodies (over 30,000 large gulls were in the immediate area, we reckoned), and tallied the following highlights:

- 17 “Kumlien’s” Iceland Gull (new eBird high count for Pennsylvania)
- 6 Glaucous Gull (my highest count for PA)
- 55 Lesser Black-backed Gull
- 3 Herring x Lesser Black-backed Gull hybrids (2 adults, 1 second cycle)
- 1 Herring x Glaucous Gull hybrid (1 first cycle)

The large number of Iceland and Glaucous Gulls around Tullytown this early in the winter season seems like an interesting signal — certainly something to keep an eye on as winter progresses. The huge Fish Crow numbers (over 500 in the immediate area of the GROWS North landfill) and a flock of 32 Snow Buntings were also impressive. While the landfills and the surrounding Penn Warner Tract are strictly off limits to public birding (with the +exception of the CBC, when special access is arranged), nearby Falls Township Community Park on Wheatshaf Lane is a great place to scan some of these same flocks of gulls that are attracted to the landfill.

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Red-Headed Woodpeckers in the Pine Barrens

On November 11, 2011, my husband and I were hiking in Estell Manor Park in Atlantic County, NJ, through an area of the southeastern pine barrens which closely borders the South River. It was uneventful, bird-wise, until dusk, when a dry rattling call made us stop to find one immature Red-headed Woodpecker, then another. About 15 minutes later, we found a third. Two weeks later we returned to find five immatures and two adults; the following week gave us eight of them, with a third adult.

We returned to the site when we could, and found a peak count of 11 in late December. It was fun to watch these chatty, pugnacious birds chase each other, flycatch and harass the many Juncos. As winter progressed to spring we watched the immatures’ plumage change. The birds became increasingly silent (and surprisingly inconspicuous) and the adults spent more time posed motionless atop the snags they favored. They became localized around three spots about ¼ mile apart, and we hoped to confirm nest sites. One cavity that a pair seemed to be using two weekends in a row was taken over by a Flicker the following week.

Tick nymphs became a deterrent before the derecho of June 29, 2012, closed the park for weeks (after which it was hit hard by Sandy). We eventually returned to find the area much altered, but with most snags still standing — so, intact from a woodpecker’s perspective. However, we didn’t see or hear any Red-Headeds. And we haven’t found any since, though the numbers of other woodpecker species were (and are) more-or-less what we’d expect. I fear that their late nesting habits may have made them more vulnerable to that late-June storm — which hit when they may have just started to nest — than their cousins. I’d prefer to think that they just moved to a less accessible part of the pine barrens.

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Warbler Vocalization Mysteries

In the southern pine barrens in late April 2012, we were surprised to hear, repeatedly, a Pine Warbler trill that morphed into the distinctive song of a Yellow-Throated Warbler. We located and watched the singer, who appeared to be a beautiful Yellow-Throated, consistently introducing his classic song with six Pine Warbler-type notes. In June of the following spring, we were happy to re-encounter the singer in the same spot, singing the Pine Warbler introduction to his Yellow-Throated song.

According to BNA, there are some Yellow-Throated Warblers who have been found to countersing with Pine Warblers in Maryland. I don't know how this relates to our bird's amalgamated song or its function; I do know that it was gratifying to discover him and then to re-find him the following spring.

The second warbler vocalization mystery on that April day was one which we could solve. Puzzled by a muffled trill we couldn't place from a singer we couldn't see, we decided to sit and have a snack. We were rewarded seconds later by the appearance of a Prothonotary Warbler on a low branch about 10' from us, with a huge Pondhawk in its beak. He eyed us for at least a minute before flying back down and out of sight, resuming his muffled trill, with his mouth full.

Anne Bekker

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A Quest for a Nest

The first nesting pair of Common Ravens in Delaware County was confirmed in 2013.

The first record of a Common Raven seen in Delaware County was a bird seen at Tyler Arboretum on January 20–29, 1974. Steve Ross and Paul DeAuon saw this bird on multiple days. More recently, John Freiberg found a single bird on the Glenolden Christmas count on December 16, 1995, and Sheryl Johnson and Skip Conant observed another raven on March 18, 1997 as they manned the Rose Tree Hawk Watch.

As far as I can tell, the next record took another thirteen years. This was another sighting at Rose Tree Hawk Watch by me on November 10, 2010. The sightings then started becoming more regular. I had another on March 1, 2011, at the Darlington Tract in Middletown Township. A little over a year later on April 22, 2012, I was thrilled to observe two Common Ravens interacting as a pair, once again at the Darlington Tract. Four days later, April 26, 2012, Dave Eberly and I returned to Darlington and observed a raven being pursued by a flock of crows. This was when a few of us started discussing the possibility of ravens nesting in the county.

In September 2012, Chris Langman and I heard and observed one at Ridley Creek State Park. A few days later in the park, Eric Weislogel found another. October 2012 produced yet another sighting at Darlington and we started noting the direction of flight. Every time I observed a raven at Darlington it was flying in the same direction. The day Dave and I saw a raven it would fly in the same direction as previous times but this time it returned in the opposite direction, as if it were returning to a particular place. We decided that it was possible that the raven could be hanging around the Glen Mills quarry which was only a mile and a half distant as the raven flies.

In the fall of 2012, Dave Eberly was talking to Dan Hayes at the Rose Tree Hawk Watch and he also suggested that the ravens might be nesting at the quarry since he lives in Glen Mills and had been seeing them near his home at least once a week. After discussing the ravens for a while Dan left and amazingly, within two minutes of his departure, Dave saw a pair of ravens fly past the hawk watch.

General Notes

Photo: Dave Eberly



The Raven nest in the quarry shed.

On January 29, 2013, I happened to meet Bob Kelly at Tyler Arboretum and after our walk, Bob suggested we go to the quarry in search of a possible raven or two. Well, as luck would have it, we got to the quarry just in time to see the raven perched on the top ridge. Now things were really looking good for the possibility of a nesting pair.

On March 7, 2013, thanks to the effort of Dave Eberly making arrangements with the quarry manager to enter the quarry, we arrived with high expectations. After waiting for about an hour, and having to sign release forms and watch a safety video, we donned our hard hats and followed a worker through the quarry.

He drove Dave, Nick Pulcinella and me to a steel building, and lo and behold, inside the open structure was a raven sitting close to a large stick nest in the rafters. We did it — confirmation of our first Common Raven nesting in Delaware County! This is a major departure from their usual haunts, since most ravens are high elevation birds breeding in the Appalachians or high deserts out west. Here we are at 189 feet above sea level with a nesting pair of ravens. What a milestone for Delaware County!

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Featherbed Lane Banding Station Reports: 2010–2012

The Featherbed Lane bird banding station is located on the remains of a 180-acre farm on the crest of the Sourland Mountains (elevation approx. 125 meters or 440 feet above sea level) in Hopewell Township, Mercer County, New Jersey. The farm's hayfields, surrounded by wet woods, were abandoned at various times between 1959 and 1970. Hannah B. Suthers began recording the birdlife of these fields in 1969, and mist netting and banding began in 1977. Identification and surveys of plant life on the site began in 1974.

The juxtaposition and interaction of 80 acres of old fields flanked by over 800 acres of woods has created a diverse habitat. This habitat has supported 74 species of breeding birds and provided food and resting area for 51 additional species of migratory birds.

When research on the site began, a developer owned the property. However, sewer lines to this part of the Township were never built, which precluded any concentrated development. In the late 1990s the Delaware and Raritan Greenway land conservation organization purchased the property from the developer and gave it to the county as a park. It is now known as Sommer Park Preserve.

Goals and Projects:

- **Old Field Succession:** The longest running project at Featherbed Lane has been monitoring the changing bird use of abandoned hay fields as they develop into forest.
- **MAPS:** The station has participated in the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) Program since its inception in 1989.

- **Catbirds:** Identification of external characteristics to age and sex Gray Catbirds.
- ***Empidonax* Flycatcher Identification:** Development of a flow-chart type key to identify the species of *Empidonax* flycatchers in the Eastern US based on the data in Pyle's *Identification Guide to North American Birds*.
- **Speedy Pyle:** Conversion of the data in Pyle's *Identification Guide to North American Birds* into Field Reference Tables.
- **Ticks and Lyme Disease:** Collection of *Ixodes* ticks found on birds and DNA testing for Lyme Disease bacteria.
- **Banding Techniques:** Development of improved techniques for band removal.

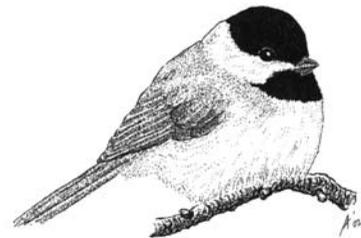
There are opportunities for volunteers and bander trainees. The station welcomes visitors by prior arrangement. Please contact Hannah at hsuthers@princeton.edu for information.

Fall 2012:

Not to be outdone by Hurricanes Irene and Floyd and the October 29 freak wet snow storm last year, the massive Hurricane Sandy, twice the size of Irene, with 90 mph winds, made landfall over 900 square miles in New Jersey this year on October 29–30. Hurricane Sandy devastated the entire sweep of the NJ shore and laid waste big old trees inland, especially pin oaks and pines. A Nor'easter roaring through the following week caused further damage. The Featherbed Lane birds hunkered down successfully according to high banding recaptures and censusing.

Otherwise, the fall was mild, September ranging from 40° F low to 92° F high, October from 39° F low to 78° F high, November from 28° F low to 64° F high. Frost did not appear until November 5. A warbler flight occurred at Sandy Hook on August 23, at Baldpate on August 29 (Magee), at Featherbed Lane, September 26. Banding peaks were on September 16 (warblers), October 14 (thrushes, kinglets, sparrows), October 21 (Myrtle Warblers). The Catbird migration was sparse. Grass seed and fruit set were poor due to the spring drought and migratory birds did not linger.

There were 472 fall banding encounters at Featherbed Lane Banding Station: 398 were newly banded, 31 recaptured from previous weeks, 22 recaptured from previous years, and 21 escaped. Species banded totaled 49 of which 26 species were Neotropical migrants, 11 temperate migrants, 4 overwintering migrants and 8 residents. Censusing resulted in 35 additional species of which 5 species were Neotropical migrants, 10 temperate migrants, 1 winter and 2 irruptive species and 17 residents. A total of 77 species used the area. The returns of note were a 9-year-old Black-capped Chickadee recaptured for the third time, a 5-year-old hybrid chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus* x *P. carolinensis*), and 8-year-old and 6-year-old Cardinals.



Hybrid chickadee
(*Poecile atricapillus* x *P. carolinensis*)
© Adrian Binns

Fall 2011:

Foremost in memory of Fall 2011 has to be the freak nor'easter snow storm of October 29 with three inches of branch-snapping, tree-felling, power-outing wet snow — and all this just one month after the tree-felling, basement-flooding, power-outing Hurricane Irene. Otherwise the fall was mild, with migration held up by periods of rain and warm south-westerly winds. Our weekend banding peak was on October 23 with 97 birds. Other peaks during our 11 weekends of banding were 59 birds on September 5 and 55 birds on October 16. Seed and fruit sources were abundant, though flocks of about 4000 grackles at the end of November gleaned fruits and fallen pin oak acorns. First frost was on October 28, followed by four frosts each about a week apart in November with days in between averaging 57 degrees.

General Notes

There were 452 encounters at Featherbed Lane Banding Station: 399 were newly banded, 38 recaptured from previous weeks, 10 recaptured from previous years, and 8 not banded. Species totaled 78 of which 28 were Neotropical migrants, 19 temperate migrants, 5 overwintering migrants and 26 residents. The returns of note were a 6-year-old Common Yellowthroat and Gray Catbird, and an after-five-year-old Tufted Titmouse. Catbird numbers were up to normal with 39 new birds and 7 recaptures.

Breeding Season 2011:

The succinct summary of this breeding season is early and wet. Migrants and their chicks were about two weeks early, and August was the wettest on record. Trails and areas with sparse ground cover eroded. Forbs were lush and shrubs showed a good fruit set. Hickories and oaks were dropping their mast by end-August.

The first fledglings of Neotropical migratory birds in our weekly mist nets were a Worm-eating Warbler and a Blue-winged Warbler on June 12, followed by an early Gray Catbird on June 19. For the second year in succession, fledglings were sparse until the third week in July, implying early nesting failures due to inclement weather. Catbirds managed a second wave of fledglings on July 24, and a third wave on August 19. Fall fledglings, Canada Warbler and Northern Waterthrush, were banded on August 19.

A new Veery age record beat the national age record which had been previously set by one of our birds. This male Veery banded on May 25, 2003, as an after-second-year bird was recaptured on May 31, 2009, and again on June 26, 2011, at the age of after-ten-years and two months. Our previous national age record was set by a female Veery banded on July 3, 1980, as an after-hatch-year, and recaptured on July 2, 1989, at age greater than or equal to ten years and two months.

The singing male census indicated 62 nesting species, 23 being Neotropical migrant species representing 37% of all species. (Compare with the high of nearly 47% in 1985.) Total breeding male individuals were up this year to 608, 41% being Neotropical migrant species.

Constant effort mist-netting and banding for the MAPS program resulted in 180 new birds of 28 species. (2008 had 341 new birds of 43 species.) Returns of birds banded in previous years were at 15% — 32 birds of the 212 individuals captured.

As cooperators with the University of California Los Angeles Center for Tropical Research and The Conservation Genetics Resource Center, we pulled two tail feathers from each of 71 birds. The DNA in skin cells attached to the quill is used to determine the population origin of an individual bird. In addition, a stable isotope analysis of a portion of the feather is used to determine the latitude where the feather was grown. Researchers are trying to determine migratory connectivity, that is, the wintering grounds for specific populations of breeding birds and vice versa. The conservation implications are tremendous.

Spring 2011:

Again, the one-word summary of spring was “early.” The vernal puddles were iced over on March 3, but on March 6 there were hundreds of Wood Frog egg masses. Spotted Salamander spermatophores appeared on March 7, egg masses on March 10, along with singing Spring Peepers, compared with March 18 last year. Heavy rain on March 10 was followed by snow, sleet, and rain on April 1, then 60 degrees on April 3. The spring ephemeral wildflowers started their succession of bloom on April 14. A Cabbage White Butterfly was seen on April 20, a Spring Azure on April 24, and a Tiger Swallowtail on May 6. A brown bat was over the puddles on April 24 and Green Frogs appeared on April 27.

By mid-March large, mixed flocks of blackbirds were coming through. The resident and temperate migrant breeding birds started nesting early. The Neotropical migrants were a few days early, but again appearing after

early bud-break was well underway. Fourteen species of Warblers appeared on May 5. Bird species lists at the Featherbed Lane Bird Banding Station were large, expanding from 30 species in March, to 69 species by April, 30 and 59 species on our Birdathon day May 14, accumulating 84 species in May and 99 species over the three months.

Winter 2010–2011:

This winter did not bode well for the 47 species of birds in the vicinity of the Featherbed Lane Bird Banding and Research Station. A record-breaking summer drought that preempted a good wild fruit set and grass and wildflower seed supply was followed by heavy winter storms (9 inches on December 26, 6 inches on January 7–8, 11 inches on January 11–12, 3 inches on January 21, 9 inches on January 26–27, and a half inch of ice on February 2) that left deep snow on the ground through most of February. Fewer migrant individuals overwintered. Feeders kept many migrants and residents from starvation. A roost in tall spruce trees on Hart Avenue accommodated up to 77 Turkey Vultures and 16 Black Vultures. Screech Owls were calling at the end February and Woodcock were peenting on February 27.

Breeding Season 2010:

In contrast to last summer's (2009) ample rain, this nesting season (2010) was dryer than normal with unprecedented heat, June being the driest and warmest on record (starting in 1895). Forbs, shrubs and saplings were wilting in June. The heavy spring fruit sets on shrubs started shriveling or dropping off. Stressed trees started to drop leaves by July.

The singing male census held its own with 64 nesting species, missing species being the Willow Flycatcher, both Cuckoos, and Yellow-breasted Chat. Neotropical migrant species on territory dropped again to 38% of all species from the high of nearly 47% in 1985. Neotropical migrant numbers are slowly drifting down from the peak of 57% of singing males censused in 1995 to 40%. Effects of the rained out nesting season of last year are showing. Our big February snow reduced Carolina Wrens and nuthatches. And I can't help but wonder if two weather events didn't have something to do with this decline: a recent-year spring storm that blew off-land at the Gulf during spring migration and resulted in drowned songbirds washing up on the beaches; and an October tropical storm up the Atlantic coast that blew 11 species of our migrant songbirds, plus 2 sandpiper species, an egret and a teal to the small island Corvo in the Azores on October 17, 2009. These events imply large flocks of birds lost at sea.

Constant effort mist-netting and banding for the MAPS program resulted in 186 new birds of 30 species, a 22-year low. 2008 had 341 new birds of 43 species. Returns of birds banded in previous years held up at 18%, or 40 birds of the 226 individuals captured. Of these 40, 15 birds were banded as fledglings the previous year: 6 Catbirds and 9 other birds. Individual high ages were: one Gray Catbird 9 years old, three 6 years, two 5 years; Wood Thrush greater than or equal to 6 years; hybrid chickadee 7 years, Tufted Titmouse 5 years.

The young of all species took a hit again this year. Among the ground nesters there were only 7 Ovenbird fledglings compared to 15 in the last good nesting season of 2008, no Towhee fledglings, and 1 Blue-winged Warbler fledgling. Other target fledglings banded were only 2 Wood Thrushes compared to 15 in 2008 and only 21 Catbird compared to 69 in 2008. The first Catbird fledgling appeared in the nets at the usual time, end of June, and three waves of fledglings were evident.

As cooperators with the University of California Los Angeles Center for Tropical Research and The Conservation Genetics Resource Center, we pulled two tail feathers from each of 121 birds. The DNA in skin cells attached to the quill is used to determine the population origin of an individual bird, and stable isotope analysis of a portion of the feather is used to determine the latitude where the feather was grown. Researchers are trying to determine migratory connectivity, that is, the wintering grounds for specific populations of breeding birds and

General Notes

vice versa. The conservation implications are tremendous. Another researcher is looking for traces of West Nile Virus RNA that can be extracted from the feather calamus of previously exposed birds.

Winter 2009–2010:

Perhaps enticed by mild temperatures and open conditions with lots of wild fruits and seeds, 50 species inhabited the vicinity of the Featherbed Lane Bird Banding and Research Station. They were not using the feeders heavily until the big snow of December 20. The surprise was two Red-headed Woodpeckers on the December 27 Christmas Count, an adult and an immature, photographed on that day and on New Year's Day. A Merlin buzzed two feeders on January 9. More big snows came on February 9–10, 15–16. The only “winter finches” this year were five Purple Finches. Attrition due to harsh storms was evident among the Carolina Wrens and House Finches. No owls were seen or heard.

More detailed information on the Featherbed Lane Bird Banding and Research Station can be found at www.washingtoncrossingaudubon.org/pages/chklists/chklists.htm or at hopewell-birds.freehostia.com/index.html.

[*Editor's Note:* Hannah B. Suthers was awarded the DVOC's Rosalie Edge Conservation Award in 1998 for her work at the Featherbed Lane Bird Banding and Research Station. The author would like to thank the Washington Crossing Audubon Society for access to their online resources.]

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