

The Syrinx

Voicebox of the
Westmoreland Bird &
Nature Club, Vol. 42 No. 4
October to December 2023

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Dues payable beginning January unless you joined
after Sep. 1. \$15 Family or Individual. Supporting,
optional -\$30, must be paid by the July issue.

November 13, 7:00 PM

Club Meeting

The Donohoe Barn

Member's Night!

Doors open 6:30 p.m.

**See Field Trips and
Outings**

The Other Fall Migrants

Tips for Tricky Sparrow ID

By Alex Busato

While fall may not garner the same “migration fever” as spring for most, I find it to be my favorite time of year for birding. That’s because when I first started this hobby, fall was a big challenge for me. Between a myriad of confusing warblers all sporting the same shade of olive-yellow and a steady stream of equally puzzling shorebirds, birding in the fall pushed me to sharpen my field ID skills in ways I hadn’t needed for the bold-colored birds of spring migration. And while fall warblers and shorebirds used to receive a lot of my attention, I found myself overlooking an equally diverse, beautiful, and challenging group of birds that also become active in the Fall: The Sparrows.



Lincoln's Sparrow (Melospiza lincolnii), a lookalike to the Song Sparrow (M. melodia) uncommon in PA

In a contest for “most overlooked bird family,” I think sparrows would probably come in a close second to gulls (which are perhaps a topic for another time). To many they’re just “LBBs” (little brown birds), quickly resigned to the realm of “*all of these look the same*” and overlooked in favor of bright colors. Yet, while it’s true most sparrows are small and sport an earth-tone color palette duller than most other songbirds, they are a diverse family of birds and one well worth learning. I consider my choice to take the time needed to learn and appreciate

sparrows as one of my most formative experiences in my birding, since not only did it expose me to a new family of birds, but it also dramatically improved my identification skills overall.

Fall is the perfect time to look for sparrows in PA, when blooming meadows of goldenrod seem to act like a magnet for transient migrants and year-round residents alike as they feast on insects and seeds. Working the edges of meadows and thickets can often be very productive this time of year, along with the borders of wetlands, farm fields, and even backyard feeders. Finding a sparrow can be a challenge in itself given their preference for dense vegetation but standing still long enough or lightly “pishing” is a reliable way to get eyes on them. But it’s the part after you find one where most give up on sparrows, the ID. The key to this hurdle is not a photographic memory, but rather simplifying your view by learning what is and what isn’t important to look for in the field. This holds true for any bird, but for sparrows the areas to focus on first are typically the breast and face. Regions like the back, tail, and wings may help in particular instances, but generally these are more similar between species to the point that they aren’t as useful in the field.

When it comes to breast markings, sparrows generally come in two flavors: clean-breasted and streak-breasted. This simple but important distinction can halve the number of options from 16 (in PA) to nine or seven respectively. Other breast marks like the central dark spot on American Tree Sparrows, the tawny bib on Lincoln’s Sparrows (pictured), and namesake white throat of White-throated Sparrows can additionally serve as means to distinguish to species level. On streak-breasted sparrows, the boldness and distribution of streaks can also be important to look for, though these features can vary to a degree depending on the bird’s age and feather-wear.

Once you’ve narrowed down your options from the breast, it’s time to take a look at the bird’s face. Most sparrow faces follow a similar basic pattern, with some form of eye line or lore (area between the eye and beak) coloration, a longitudinally striped crown,

a malar stripe (“mustache”), and an auricular (cheek) patch. Each feature’s color, size, and shape can be indicators of different species, so learning to map the



Clay-colored Sparrow (Spizella pallida), an

face of the bird will help to yield more positive IDs quickly and reliably. Malar stripes, for example, can be useful in differentiating similar species like Chipping and Clay-colored Sparrows (pictured), and lore coloration can serve as a go-to mark of Savannah and Grasshopper Sparrows. Striping on the bird’s crown can serve as a good marker for species like White-crowned and Swamp Sparrows, and eye rings can set apart Vesper and Field Sparrows from other options.

But even narrowed down to just two regions of the bird, this is still a lot of information to keep straight. It’s important to realize that sparrow ID, like anything in birding, takes practice and patience to master and to not be discouraged. At first it will seem that field marks as subtle as these are difficult to impossible to see, but over time your eyes will train themselves to find them at even a quick glance. Taking the time to study a reliable field guide will in turn translate those field marks into species IDs. By accepting the challenge to learn sparrows, you’ll likely come away not only a few lifer species, but a sense of satisfaction and new field skills that will help identify other notoriously tricky groups like shorebirds and fall warblers too.





Field Trips & Outings



NOTICE

All outdoor activities involve some risk, including falling trees and branches, wet or slippery conditions, and interactions with animals and insects, and other unforeseen risks. In attending any of our outings or events, you agree to assume those risks and to hold harmless Westmoreland Bird and Nature Club for those risks.



Westmoreland Bird & Nature Club 4th Quarter 2023 Outings

Saturday, October 7 -- 2023, Keystone State Park – “The Big Sit”

Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the wetlands area across from the beach.

Leader: Tom Moser, mosertd@gmail.com, 412-478-5513

Directions: From Murrysville, follow Rt. 22 east to New Alexandria and turn south (right) onto Rt. 981. There are three access roads to the park from Rt. 981 between New Alexandria and Latrobe all well marked, the first beginning about a quarter mile from the Rt. 22 intersection.

Description: Join us for our all-day Big Sit bird count from our single location on the left side of the

marsh at Keystone S.P. Although members typically gather at around 8:30 a.m., we'd like to have 2-3 people present throughout the day from dawn until dusk. Bring a comfortable lawn chair and some baked goods, fruit, or nuts to share (not required). Most members park in the beach parking lot and cross the road to our spot in the wetlands. This is a day of birding from a sitting position where we let the birds come to us. It gets tougher every year to break the record. Bring a folding chair if you plan on staying a while to help us identify and count.

Sunday, October 14 -- Various – eBird’s October Big Day Bird Count

Leader: Steve Manns, psuloon@yahoo.com, 724-963-6612

Directions: Various locations as coordinated by Steve

Description: Like Global Big Day, October Big Day is an opportunity to unite around our shared love of birds. Last October, nearly 35,000 people from 185 countries submitted 80,000 checklists with eBird, demonstrating the power of birds to bring people together, and helping us better understand bird populations. Turn data in to Steve.

Sunday, October 22-: Bridgeport Dam County Park (Jacobs Creek Wetlands) / Jacobs Creek Park (Greenlick Run Lake)

Meet at 8:30 am at the Jacobs Creek Park (Greenlick) parking lot near the boat launch. Waterfowl often take off with the morning sun, so we'll begin here where waterfowl most often gather.

Leaders: Georgia Shalek, gshalek@gmail.com, 724-887-9210 or 724-875-9222, Mike Smith, skeetor72@yahoo.com, 412-526-8360

Directions: From points east & west - Take Route 31 east through Mt. Pleasant toward the village of Bridgeport. Turn right onto Bridgeport Street and proceed 1.3 miles to a four-way stop sign. Go

straight through the stop sign and over the bridge, veering left along the stream. Follow this to the intersection (no stop sign) and turn left. Jacobs Creek Park (Greenlick) will be on your right. Follow to the entrance and park in the lot toward the boat launch. From points North and South -- follow Route 119 to Route 31 East. Follow the directions above to Jacob's Creek Park (Greenlick).

Description: Bridgeport Dam is a multi-purpose flood control dam on Jacobs Creek, where Jacobs Creek and Brush Run converge. We'll spend our day beginning at Jacobs Creek Park (Greenlick), then caravan to Bridgeport Dam and on to the Jacobs Creek Wetlands. These beautiful areas often boast large numbers of migrating waterfowl, especially in rainy weather which brings them down to ride out the storms, usually overnight. All these sites are in close proximity with adequate parking. Some of our hiking may take place in grassy, wet, or muddy areas, so toss some boots and rain gear in your car. A scope will also come in handy if you have one.

Sunday, November 4, 10:30 a.m.: **Allegheny Hawk Watch**

Meet at the lookout at 10 a.m.

Leader: Tom Moser, mosertd@gmail.com, 412-478-5513

Directions: From U.S-30 at Reels Corners, take PA-160 north for 4 miles into Central City. Make a sharp right at a BP gas station. When PA-160 makes a sharp left, instead go straight onto Lambert Street (SR1018). Go slowly and watch for the "rough" RR crossing. After the crossing, bear to the right and stay on Lambert Street. Lambert Street becomes Shaffer Mountain Road (SR1018). Proceed 1.4 miles out of Central City and bear right at a Y-intersection onto Lambert Mountain Road. Go 2.9 miles through State Game lands 228 to a small four-way intersection with Fleegle Road. Go straight thru the intersection. This will become a gravel road. Go 0.5 miles to a blue gate on the right. Turn through the gate and go 0.25 miles to the Hawk Watch parking lot. If the gate is closed, there is no

admittance since it is not manned and is private property. We will try to make early contact to ensure its availability.

Description: This 5-acre site, managed by the Audubon society, is on the eastern edge of the Allegheny plateau at an elevation of 2850 feet. <https://www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org/allegheny-front-hawk-watch>. The site provides a unique vantage point, sitting approximately 800 feet above a valley with a surreal 180-degree view. When weather conditions are right, many raptors follow the valley during spring and fall migrations. Early November is Golden Eagle "season", with large numbers expected daily, often flying at eye level. If there is bad weather, e.g., fog or rain, an email will be sent to inform the club. Winds from the east are preferred, as they push the birds closer to the lookout for more spectacular viewing. This is mostly a "sit" outing, so dress for conditions and bring a chair and lunch. There is a portable restroom available.

November 13, 7:00 p.m.:

Club Meeting

The Donohoe Barn - Member's Night!

Meet inside at the Donohoe Center at 7:00 p.m.
Doors open 6:30 p.m.

Leader: Alex Busato/Tom Moser,
busatoalex67@gmail.com, 724-963-6612

Directions: Turn north onto Donohoe Road at the Route 30 traffic light near the overpass to the Westmoreland Mall in Greensburg. Drive north on Donohoe 1.7 miles past WOW Outlets until you see the sign on the right for the Donohoe Center. The "Barn" is in the back.

Description: After a short administrative meeting, those of you who want to share your seasonal experiences for the past year, let Tom Moser (mosertd@gmail.com, (412-478-5513) know prior to the meeting. Bring your nature pictures on a flash/USB drive. Limit your show to 10 minutes. These "show and tell" pictures can be from actual outings, trips, vacations, other adventures or just shots from around your backyard or neighborhood.

Nature Paraphernalia Auction Fundraiser: Have any nature paraphernalia to donate to the club – books, feeders, checklists, old binoculars, hand lens, working electronics, baked goods, a husband or wife or significant other, etc.? Items donated to the club will be sold at silent auction for \$1.00 a ticket or 5 for \$3.00.

Finally, we will appreciate members who can provide baked goods such as cookies and pies to share. Please bring your own drinks since coffee and tea are no longer provided.

Place: TBD – Overnight Outing
Date: Friday & Saturday, December 1-2, 2023

Leader: Alex Busato, busatoalex67@gmail.com, 724-963-6612

We are again contemplating an overnight outing. Details will be provided at a future date.

Saturday, December 30: Bushy Run Christmas Bird Count

Leader: Steve Manns, psuloon@yahoo.com, 724-963-6612

Description: This year's count will take place on December 30, 2023. Please contact Steve at psuloon@yahoo.com to grab a spot or team up with another party. Want to bird yourself? Great!!! If you are in the CBC circle you can tally the birds you see that day. Check to see if you are in the circle on this [map: https://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=ac275eeb01434cedb1c5dcd0fd3fc7b4](https://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=ac275eeb01434cedb1c5dcd0fd3fc7b4) Zoom in to see if your yard is in the circle for the count. Doesn't matter if you are a night owl or an early bird. You can count the birds in the circle between 12AM and 12AM. Turn data in to Steve.

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Outings Revisited

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June 24, 2023 – Northmoreland Park

The morning was heavily overcast with foggy columns of mist rising from the valleys. The temperature was 64 degrees F and there was a light sprinkle in the air as we drove towards Northmoreland Park. What a day to lead a bird outing. Will we get rained on? Will there be people attending? Would it be too cool? Will the birds show up? The car discussion between my wife and me as we drove circled around these questions. As we entered the park shortly after 8 a.m., we noticed about 100 people in the pavilion close to our parking lot. What event was happening and would it interfere with our outing?

When we entered the parking lot, we were greeted by early arrivals from WBNC and as we readied ourselves while others kept showing up and the light mist began to slow and stop. We started off with a



Photo by Linda Huber

nice group of 15 people walking the 1.1-mile paved trail around the lake.

Identifying birds as we walked. The highlight was the observation of 3 broods of Wood Ducks with 3 females and 14 ducklings of different ages. And, a beautiful male bluebird displayed in a field. Following the around the lake walk, we crossed the road and began walking the paths on the north side of Markle Road. We found a centennial white Oak tree in the middle of a field. The paths around the fields were well mowed and easily walkable. There we found field species abundant. The wildflowers in

these fields were not ready yet but this may be a place for late summer or fall wildflower outing. During



Centennial White Oak Photo by Tom Moser

lunch at a pavilion, members noticed a king bird making trips with captured bugs to a willow tree near the water. Dale Matuza was able to capture an excellent photo the following days.

In total we observed 50 species. These included: Common Grackle, Red-Eyed Vireo, Chimney Swift, Orchard Oriole, Warbling Vireo, Baltimore Oriole, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-Bellied Woodpecker, Northern Cardinal, Hairy Woodpecker, Bluebird, Tree Swallow, Northern Mockingbird, Wood Thrush, Chipping Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, American Crow, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Wood Duck, Song Sparrow, American Goldfinch, House Finch, Common Yellowthroat, Eastern Phoebe, Gray Catbird, Acadian Flycatcher, Canada Goose, Eastern Kingbird, Mallard, Eastern Wood Peewee, Green Heron, Great Blue Heron, Rough Winged Swallow, Barn Swallow, Purple Martin, Mourning Dove, Northern Flicker, Carolina Wren, European Starling, Field Sparrow, Eastern Towhee, American Redstart, House Wren, Tufted Titmouse, Wild Turkey, Turkey Vulture, Yellow Warbler, Indigo Bunting, Blue Jay, and Ruby Throated Hummingbird.

It was an excellent day with a wonderful turnout of 15 people. Tom Moser, Billie Moser, Denny McCarthy, Regina Gaison, Ken Byerly, Norm Bono, Dale Matuza, Bob Kamenic, Angie Kamenic, Lorrie Hunker, Linda Lou Baker, Denise Hagerman, Linda Huber, and Mary Lou Sheffler. – **Tom Moser**



Photo by Tom Moser

Saturday, July 1, 2023, Murrysville Community Park Wetlands

Did you know that a bear can smell 200 times better than a dog? Or that the bear's milk tooth is used only while it nurses from its mother and then not needed?



Photo by Tom Moser

These and many more facts were shared by Denton Schellhammer of the Pennsylvania Game Commission giving his talk about bears. He carried with him a bear pelt and skull as well as handing out Wildlife Notes on the Pennsylvania black bear (*Ursus Americanus*). In 1970 there were fewer than 5,000 bears in Pennsylvania. Today, there are approximately 18,000. They have been spotted in every Pennsylvania county.

The second half of the program was a talk on Purple Martins by Sue Miller. Purple Martins are migrants who travel from Brazil and other South American countries each year to their nesting locations which

are primarily man-made structures. Sue described the Martin behaviors that she has observed. Typically, mostly males arrive first in early Spring and may have difficulty finding feed (insects). The Martin house in Murrysville wetlands is a T-14 Housing System. Every 5-7 days, the landlord, Sue, checks on the purple martins. Earlier this season, she had difficulty with house sparrows trying to occupy a compartment with a martin nest. House Sparrows destroyed the purple martin eggs.

After her informative presentation, Sue cranked down the martin house and opened several of the nest compartments showing the martin babies via a nest check.



Photo by Tom Moser

There was also an opportunity to stroll the short wetlands path and view wildlife from the blind.

The 20 attendees included many WBNC members and the public. These included Pat Comas, Vicky Bromyard, Joanne Dihrlnacdo, Ken Byerly, Eric Hall, Delia White, Ann Einsporn, Anna Janci, Kathy Janci, Denise Hagerman, Billie Moser, Tom Moser, Kelly Murphy, Zach Murphy, Maddie Murphy, Liam Murphy, Angie Kamenic, Bob Kamenic, Alex Busato, and Russ. - **Tom Moser & Sue Miller**

Saturday, July 22, 2023, Youngwood Swamp/Sewickley Creek Wetlands.

The day dawned with clear sunny skies, comfortable temperatures, and a gentle breeze as ten eager birders



Photo by Tom Moser

gathered at the 5 Star trail head in Youngwood to trek through the Youngwood Swamp. Situated along Jacks Run/Sewickley Creek, the area is a forested swamp that provides a habitat for a diversity of wetland plants and animal species. The group then traveled the short 10-minute drive to the Sewickley Creek Wetlands Interpretive Area to continue their quest.

Given the time of year when vegetation is thick and bird activity is usually decreased, the 10 sets of eyes and ears in the group amounted to a total of 51 species of avian delight. Kudos to Mike Smith for



Photo by Denny McCarthy

bringing an 8 ft step ladder for a better field of view. But, alas, the ladder did not create an advantage for him in the highly competitive challenge of “who can be the 1st to spot a Swamp Sparrow?”. That honor goes to Billie Moser – Congratulations and enjoy your Pocket Bird Watching Log.

In no particular order, the list of identified bird species included: American Goldfinch, Mourning Dove, Canada Goose, Rock Pigeon, Acadian Flycatcher, American Robin, European Starling, Song Sparrow, Mallard Duck, House Sparrow, House Wren, Northern Cardinal, Blue Jay, Brown-headed Cowbird, Gray Catbird, Chimney Swift, Carolina Wren, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Carolina Chickadee, Chipping Sparrow, Yellow Warbler, Indigo Bunting, Common Raven, Red-winged Blackbird, Ruby-throated Hummingbird (on her nest!), Northern Flicker, Eastern Towhee, Sharp-shinned Hawk, House Finch, Barn Swallow, Turkey Vulture, Common Yellowthroat, Swamp Sparrow, Warbling Vireo, Common Grackle, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Blue Bird, Red-tailed Hawk, Downey Woodpecker, Cedar Waxwing, Brown Thrasher, Wood Duck, Willow Flycatcher, Great Blue Heron, Baltimore Oriole, Back-capped Chickadee, American Crow.

And this writer's thanks to Tom Moser, Billie Moser, and Alex Busato for the assist with a short list of the Trees/Wildflowers that were observed along the trails. Tree of Heaven, Catalpa Tree, Common Morning-Glory, Wingstem, Sweet Joe-Pye-Wee, Sweet Pea, Bird's-Foot Trefoil, Button Bush, Grey-Headed Coneflower, Wild Bergamot, False Sunflower, Self-Heal Plant, Water Lilies

And not to be outdone and to be noted: a deer, some young bunnies, a couple of squirrels, bull frogs and many, many turtles!

Attendees: Denny McCarthy, Georgia Shalek, Brian Rutter (new member-yay! and welcome aboard), Ken Byerly, Mike Smith, Jack Munsch, Lorrie Hunker, Billie Moser, Tom Moser, Alex Busato,.

Regina Gaison.

Sunday, August 6 -Blue Grosbeak

"Pop-Up" Outing

Background: In May during the spring migration, Mary Beth Molnar reported on ebird a Blue Grosbeak sighting with photo. (see "Westmoreland

County Sightings of the Season" at the end of this newsletter).

New Report: Now months later, Saturday, August 5th, Mary Beth reported that a Blue Grosbeak returned to her home in Scottsdale to Tom Kuehl. The news was sent to WBNC members via our email distribution list that day. Mary Beth was allowing visitors to her home the following day for an



Photo by Tom Moser

opportunity to see a Blue Grosbeak – possible returning bird that she photographed in May this year.

Well, how could we miss this opportunity? Billie and I traveled to Mary Beth's home the following day. As we approached her home, we noticed a few other cars in the driveway, and we were greeted by Mary Beth. She directed us to a field on the other side of the wood where she said that others were gathering. She told us that she had photographed it the previous day in that area.

In the field, we found approximately 10 other "hard-core" WBNC members scanning the treetops, brush and environs for the Blue Grosbeak. Various members of the group remained on site for several hours. Sadly, the Blue Grosbeak did not show itself.

While a sighting did not happen, the visit to Mary Beth's home and meeting her was a highlight. The club thanks her for her information and hospitality!

- Tom Moser

Sunday, August 6, 2023 – Club Picnic at Mammoth County Park

We had 22 members attended another enjoyable afternoon of eating and socializing at Mammoth’s pavilion #12.



Photo by Tom Moser

The few sprinkles even held off till the end of the day allowing for a short hike along the lake shore. The pulled pork from Carson’s in Scottsdale turned out great and thanks to all who attended, brought the delicious side dishes and desserts, and helped with the set-up and clean-up. **Denny McCarthy**

Sunday, August 20 -- Morosini Reserve

The morning started out damp and chilly, but we soon doffed our jackets and appreciated the sunny and then shady parts of the reserve. August outings



Attendees scan the open meadow from a new and very well-constructed bird blind on the main trail to the pond. Text and photo by Denny McCarthy.

usually provide more than just bird sightings, we took advantage of the wildflower and butterfly populations as we strolled the mostly cut and well-blazed trails in Morosini. Statistics are as follows:

Attendees (7): Vicky Bromyard, Angie Kamenic, Bob Kamenic, Marcia Heisey (Guest), Kevin Heisey (Guest), Denny McCarthy, Ken Byerly

Butterflies (10): Cloudless Sulphur, Eastern Tailed Blue, Orange Bordered Blue, Tiger Swallowtail, Black Swallowtail, Spicebush, Swallowtail, Wood Nymph, Great Spangle Fritillary, Cabbage White, Monarch

Wildflowers (19): Wingstem, Boneset, Thistle, Ragweed, Goldenrod, Queen Anne’s Lace, Evening Primrose, Ironweed, Cone Flower, Fleabane, Indian Pipe, Selfheal, Jewel Weed, Brown-eyed Susan, Joe Pye Weed, Chicory, Rose of Sharon, Yarrow, Mullein

Birds (29): American Crow, Downy Woodpecker, Mourning Dove, Wood Thrush, European Starling, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, American Robin, Coopers hawk, House Wren, Turkey Vulture, American Goldfinch, Chimney Swift, RB Woodpecker, Barn Swallow, Carolina Wren, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, Downy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Wood Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Eastern Towhee, Northern Flicker, Cedar Waxwing, Red-tailed Hawk, Eastern Kingbird, Tufted Titmouse, Northern Cardinal, Carolina Chickadee **Denny McCarthy**

Sunday, September 3, 2023 - Harrison Hills County Park

For the first part of this outing, we joined the Park Rangers for a guided hike, “Animal Habitats”, on



Park Rangers Matthew and Angelique enthusiastically describe animal and plant habitats at Harrison Hills. Text and photo by Denny McCarthy.

trails through meadows and woodlands. We viewed and heard descriptions of various park fauna --- Praying Mantis, Monarch Butterfly, Chimney Swift, Bat, Pileated Woodpecker, Spotted Lanternfly--- and flora --- Stilt Grass, Tree of Heaven, Plant Galls. After the hike, a smaller group walked the pond trail with special sightings of a Green Heron, posing in a nearby tree, and a Painted Turtle, sunning on the pond bank. 23 bird species were identified: Red-bellied Woodpecker, Red-eyed Vireo, American Robin, Northern Cardinal, Cedar Waxwing, Northern Flicker, Song Sparrow, Pileated Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee

, Carolina Wren, Gray Catbird, Chimney Swift, Barn Swallow, Blue Jay, Common Raven, Eastern Phoebe, Hairy Woodpecker, Turkey Vulture, American Crow, American Goldfinch, Mourning Dove, and Green Heron. Attendees were Regina Gaison, Norm Bono, Ken Byerly, Denny McCarthy, Mike Smith, Vicky Bromyard, Glenn Davis, Donna Billing and canine “River”, member Lucy Stanislaw and her family Christie, Jason, Peter, Josh, Becca, Maria, and friend Abby Ramaley. **Denny McCarthy**

Saturday, September 23, 2023, Powdermill Nature Reserve – Nature Event

Information not available this month



Westmoreland County – Sighting-of-the-Season

Spring Migration of 2023

By PA Birds Compiler Tom Kuehl

The backbone of compiling the Westmoreland County seasonal narrative for PSO’s Pennsylvania Bird Journal is a march through the Cornell eBird bar charts. A sort on a Pennsylvania county for the applicable date of the season (in this case March 1 - May 31) provides a list of the species reported – now the march, which is clicking on the species to see the details in the submitted checklists. I now do this with the Sighting-of-the-Season selection in mind and make a note of a candidate as I work through the listing in taxological order. Nothing extremely rare

as I worked through the species, however some very good species were reported and in most cases with some truly excellent photos that had been uploaded – this made the species march a fun exercise for me this season and provided for several worthy candidates in mind for the Sighting-of-the-Season. As I neared the end of the species list, I was surprised by the species that was being reported and was compelled to do some research. In eBird I had to go back to checklists from 1974 and 1976 that indicated reports 4 miles south of Ligonier (in a Westmoreland Co Data account) and a report noted as “near Blairsville” in 1992 with no details provided in the WB&NC *Westmoreland* list that was largely compiled by Dick Byers. Bob Leberman’s “*The Birds of the Ligonier Valley*”, that was updated by Annie Lindsay in 2022 credits the 1974 record to Josh and Joseph Van Buskirk, reports a female seen at PNR on June 18, 1982, by Bob Leberman and another one bird spotted at PNR by Mike Lanzone and Trish Miller on May 27 and 28, 2005. The May 20, 2023, eBird checklist prompting this research had three excellent photos that were uploaded by Mary Beth Molnar of one **Blue Grosbeak** at her home near Scottdale. Based on the available information the 5/20 sighting would be just the sixth report of **Blue Grosbeak** in *Westmoreland*, and so a no-brainer selection for the Sighting-of-the Season.



Blue Grosbeak Photo by Mary Beth Molnar

Congratulations Mary Beth!***

As stated in the opening paragraph there were many excellent photos in the eBird Checklists for this season. Among these photos I am giving an Honorable Mention to Linda Huber for her birding and photography efforts at Pleasant Valley Park (which by the way, is becoming quite the hot spot for both Spring and Fall warblers) that provided for

photographic documentation on May 7 of a **Golden-winged Warbler** and on May 9 of a **Blue-winged Warbler**. **Golden-winged Warbler** was only reported on May 7 and only at Pleasant Valley Park this season in *Westmoreland* and while there were many reports for **Blue-winged Warbler**, few included photo documentations. Given the hybridization among these two species, song no longer confirms the identification of the winged-warbler species and their regular occurring hybrids, so it will be interesting to learn what the protocol will be on reporting these species for the 3rd Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas that begins in 2024.

With my respects to the effort of many other Observers with excellent finds for the Season, the following are some highlights plucked from my full report for the Season:

- On March 2 Richard Chirichiello reported on a **Trumpeter Swan** at Donegal Lake – his photo provides a nice comparison of a **Trumpeter Swan** (all black bill) and a **Tundra Swan** (with yellow on it lores).
- Sue Miller’s efforts at the Murrysville Municipal Park Wetlands provided for the first of several reports there for **Virginia Rail** on April 18 and her reports for **Sora** there on May 10, 11 and 13 were the only reports of the season for that species in *Westmoreland*.
- Eric Hall photographed a species that must be observed during migration; an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** at Pleasant Valley Park on May 24.
- Again, Eric Hall photographed a species that must be observed during migration; a **Philadelphia Vireo** at Pleasant Valley Park on May 21. This species is most often only reported as captures at the Powdermill Nature Reserve Banding Station so good work by Eric and other birders who provided several in-the-field reports this year.
- **Wilson’s Warbler** is another bird most often only reported as a capture at the PNR Banding Station – there were many this year; however, the only” in-the-field” report was for one that

Ken Byerly found on the Westmoreland Heritage Trail on May 8.

- **Yellow-breasted Chat** is now a rarity in *Westmoreland* so it is good for some other birders to chase the one that Alex Busato was able to photograph at the Morosini Reserve on May 14th.

Other photo highlights of the season included an adult **Red-headed Woodpecker** that Dale Matuza was just a bit excited to find as it was a new yard bird at his home in Murrysville. Excellent photography work in darkness by Alex Busato provided for some very cool photos of **American Woodcock** at the

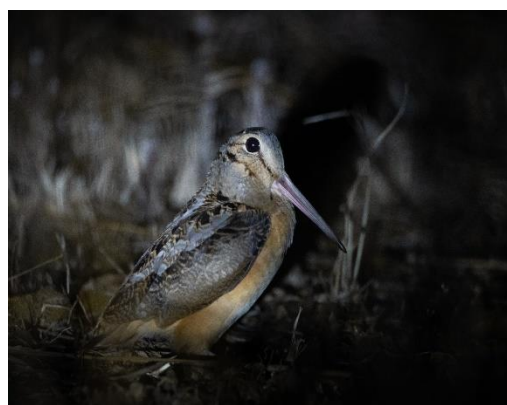


Photo by Alex Busato

Morosini Reserve, and Mark McConaughy (who always has a camera at the ready) captured the aerial acrobatics of juvenile **Bald Eagles** at the Beaver Run Reservoir.



Photo by Mark McConaughy

The Syrinx
Westmoreland Bird and Nature Club
197 Dickerson Run Road
Vanderbilt, PA 15486

** Thanks to Tom Moser for his Facebook detective work that directed me to Karen Barnhart, who then provided the email address for me to contact Mary Beth Molnar, who graciously provided her excellent **Blue Grosbeak** photos. Also, Mary Beth reported that the bird stayed around for several weeks and has indicated she would be more than happy to share the bird with others, so let's hope that it returns!