

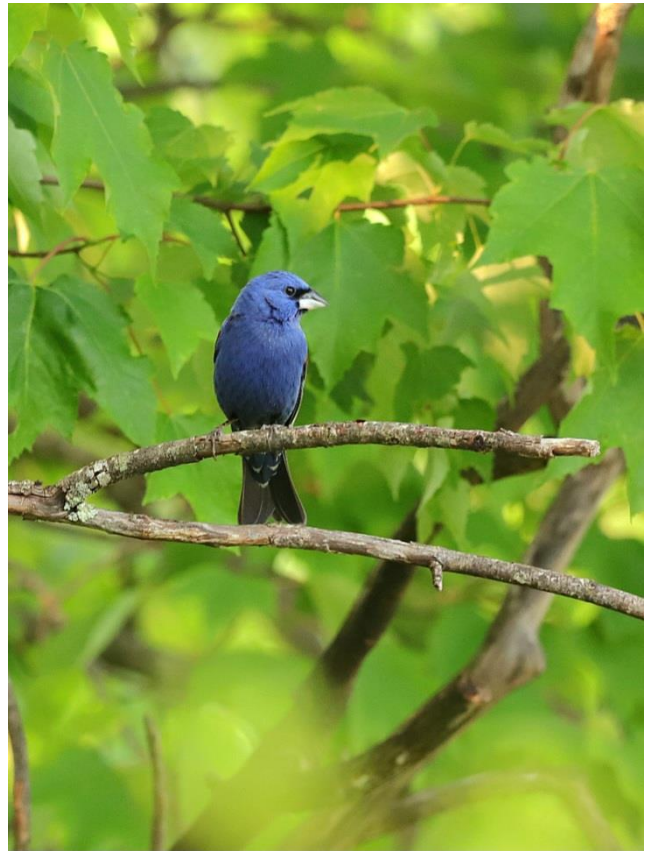
For the Westmoreland Bird and Nature Club

Westmoreland County – Sighting-of-the-Season for 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



Blue Grosbeak, Scottdale, PA Photo by Mary Beth Molnar



Blue Grosbeak, Scottdale, PA Photo by Mary Beth Molnar

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. 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 Morosini Reserve, and Mark McConaughy (who



American Woodcock at Night Photo by Alex Busato



Redheaded Woodpecker Photo by Dale Matuza

always has a camera at the ready) captured the aerial acrobatics of juvenile **Bald Eagles** at the Beaver Run Reservoir.

** 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!



Acrobatic Juvenil Bald Eagles

Photo by Mark McConaughy