

Westmoreland County - Sighting of the Season for the Fall Migration of 2023

By the PA Birds Journal Westmorland County Compiler Tom Kuehl

A very many observers provided an extensive amount of effort this season. Dry conditions provided mudflats at the Beaver Run Reservoir section of the Westmoreland Heritage Bike Trail and at Derry Lake (Ethel Spring Reservoir) and the birders were there to observe some species that are often not reported during Fall Migration. These locations and effort at Pleasant Valley Park, Donegal Lake and Mammoth Park provided very many candidates for Sighting of the Season. Let's hear about some of these reports with excerpts from my full Westmoreland County Compiler Narrative and then declare the Sighting of the Season:

- An exciting report was of two **Surf Scoters** found at Derry/Ethel Spring Lake (ESL) on 11/10 by Richard Chirichiello (RC).
- Good to have this species reported; one **Sora** that was seen when it flushed from reeds and tall grass at Donegal Lake (DL) on 10/13 by Eric Hall (EH).
- A rare migrant in *Westmoreland* that has not been reported since 2017, so exciting to have report with photos attached to an eBird Checklist that reported one **Black-bellied Plover** at ESL on 10/31 by Pat Comas (PC) and Patience Fisher (PF).
- For this Fall Migration season there was a modest irruption of **Dunlin** across Pennsylvania. Late in the season a **Dunlin** was found at two locations in Westmoreland County. At ESL the highest count of 30 **Dunlin** was also the earliest report – on 10/29 by Sue Miller (SM), and the latest report was of one on 11/18 (RC). At Mammoth Park (MP) the earliest of three reports of **Dunlin** was of two on 11/7 by Mark McConaughy (MM) and latest report was of two on 11/12 (RC).
- The only tern species for the season was a report of one **Forster's Tern** at MP on 9/9 (RC).
- A nice find was one immature Little Blue Heron at WHT-BRR that was first reported on 8/12 by Ken Byerly (KB) and continued to 8/27 (KB).
- One **Merlin** was among the 37 species tallied for the 10/7 Westmoreland Bird & Nature Club Big Sit at KSP.



Surf Scoter at ESL Photo by Richard Chirichiello



Dunlins at ESL Photo by Richard Chirichiello

- The only report of the season of **White-rumped Sandpiper** was documented with several excellent



White-rumped Sandpiper

Photo by Richard Chirichiello



White-rumped Sandpiper

Photo by Richard Chirichiello

photos that were uploaded to the eBird Checklist for MP on 10/18 (RC).

- **Pectoral Sandpiper** was reported at two locations for the season – on the Beaver Run Reservoir section of the Westmoreland Heritage Trail (WHT-BRR) there was one reported on 8/13 by Amy Henrici and two reported on 8/17 (PF), and later in the season at MP there was one reported on 10/19 (RC).
- The one **Olive-sided Flycatcher** that was reported on 9/25 on the WHT-Delmont (KB, PF) was conveniently perched on a snag at the Athena Road trailhead – this was the only report for the season for this migrant species.
- An out-of-range **Western Wood-pewee** was captured at the Powdermill Nature Reserve (PNR) Banding Station on 10/12.
- Reports of the capture of one **Bicknell's Thrush** at the PNR Banding Station were made for 9/14 and 10/7 – smaller than the very similar **Gray-cheeked Thrush** so being able to take measurements is critical to making a positive identification of **Bicknell's Thrush**.
- Not routinely reported in fall migration so good to get a report of six **American Pipits** on the WHT-D/BRR on 10/24 (PF) and a report of two at MP on 11/5 (EH).
- In addition to captures at the PNR Banding Station **Connecticut Warbler** reports included two at MP on 9/13 by Natalie Donofrio, one at Pleasant Valley Park (PVP) on 9/15 by Micheal McDevitt and on 10/10 (EH), and one on the WHT-D on 9/26 (KB).
- Away from PNR, where **Wilson Warbler** was reported on 9/13 to 9/17, one was reported at PVP on 9/14 (EH) and one was reported on the WHT-D on 9/19 (KB).



Pectoral Sandpiper Photo by Richard Chirichiello

More for the body of work, and several excellent photographs, than for one specific sighting the Sighting of the Season is awarded to Richard Chirichiello. Hey, when your photos clearly show the white puff on the rump of a **White-rumped Sandpiper** and the pectoral chest line on the **Pectoral Sandpiper** an award is very justified! A very honorable mention to Pat Comas and Patience Fisher for their report of a **Black-bellied Plover** and other contributions for the season. And finally, with no intent to ignore any of the other observers mentioned, congratulations to Eric Hall and Ken Byerly for their field efforts that provided them with many excellent finds for the season, congratulations to Banding Manager Annie Lindsay and her staff at PNR for the unexpected Western Wood-pewee and kudos to the thirteen club members for the Merlin and the tally of 37 species for the October 7 Big Sit.