

Westmoreland County - Sighting of the Season for the 2023-2024 Winter Season

By the PA Birds Journal Westmorland County Compiler Tom Kuehl

Formal effort for this season was provided by the Rector and Bushy Run Audubon Christmas Bird Counts, and the Sighting of the Season, along with quite a few of the other Sightings of Note, comes from field work for the CBC's. Eight Winter Raptors Surveys were conducted during the Winter Season, and I suspect that once the data is compiled that once again Westmoreland County will remain the Winter Red-tailed Hawk Capital of Pennsylvania with the new record high of 248 that were observed at a very healthy rate of .52 per mile.



*Red-tailed Hawk Leucistic 12162023 Rector CBC
Westmoreland Co.*

Perhaps a result of a warm Winter Season, the only report for **Rough-legged Hawk** was of one light morph that was soaring with a partial leucistic and a "normal" adult **Red-tailed Hawk**, and one **Turkey Vulture** along Rt. 381 in the farm area near PNR during field effort for the 12/16 Rector CBC. After (very minimal) deliberation (by Me, and Me alone by the way), I have selected this exciting



*Rough-legged Hawk 12162023 Rector CBC
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collective observation as of the **Sighting of the Season**. As you might have now imagined, the CBC party making this sighting was myself (with Janet Kuehl and Mark McConaughy). In a rare occurrence on any raptor sighting when Janet is with me, I made the call on the Roughie ahead of Janet, so I am a bit proud of that. The photos are not stunning due to the distance of the soaring birds, however certainly confirm the identifications of these buteos.

Other Sightings of Note for the Season included:

- An astounding count of 915 fly-over **Canada Geese** for the 12/16 Rector CBC found in the Donegal Lake Sector on Fort Hill Road by Eric Hall, Sue Miller and Delia White.
- Far less crazy than the **Canada Goose** report, however 92 **Mallards** at Turner's Pond reported by Ken Byerly on 1/19 is quite a gathering of this common Dabbler species.

- Other rather significant numbers of waterfowl were a report of 35 **Red-breasted Mergansers** at Derry Lake on 12/6 by Richard Chirichiello and a report by Eric Hall of 34 **Ruddy Ducks** at Latrobe Reservoir on 12/1 (EH).
- A rare waterfowl species for Westmoreland – Patience Fisher provided the only report of **Red-necked Grebe** for the season – at the Beaver Run Reservoir on 2/23.
- The Helen Drive seep in Crabtree will have to step down as Mammoth Lake County Park is the new hot spot for wintering **Wilson Snipe** – the high count from many reports was of crazy 17 on 2/13 by Natalie Donofrio.
- One **American Woodcock** found by Grace Muench, Natalie Donofrio and Alyssa Myers on Rt. 381 on 12/16 near the intersection of Route 30 was a new species for the Rector CBC.
- Another unusual report by Natalie Donofrio at Mammoth Park was of one **Great Egret** on 1/3.
- The Ligonier Valley remains as the Western Pennsylvania Meca for Vultures, and never more so than for the 12/16 Rector CBC when reports of 14 by the Claire Nemes party and 26 by Luke DeGroot provided for a new tally record of 55 **Black Vultures**; while a not shabby count of 80 **Turkey Vultures** was tallied for CBC that day.
- Another report from the Rector CBC - Jim Kellam tracked down one **Northern Saw-whet Owl** near Acme during early morning owling-effort.
- What must be attributed to this largely mild winter were three reports of **Eastern Phoebes** – Kimberly Rider, a non-birder from Slickville sent Bob Mulvihill a photo of one taken at her home on 2/17, one tallied for the 12/16 Rector CBC by Andrea and Mike Kautz near Ligonier and one seen wagging its tail in a forsythia bush caught Cokie Linday's attention at her home in the Ligonier Valley on 2/21.
- Just one **Pine Siskin** for the season was the one found at the feeders at Bushy Run Battlefield on 2/15 by Pat Comas.
- **Snow Buntings** were with **Horned Larks** in two reports for the Season, with just one near Old Hannastown that was found on the Greensburg-Latrobe WRS Route run on 1/22 by Tom & Janet Kuehl and Jim Kellam; and two in the Crabtree farm area on 1/23 by Richard Chirichiello.
- The Dale Matuza party found two **Eastern Meadowlarks** in the Slickville area during effort for the 12/30 Bushy Run CBC.
- A crazy sighting of 880 **Common Grackles** was provided by the Higbee Party on Koontz Road near Saltsburg which provided for a crushing of the previous record tally of that species for the 12/30 Bushy Run CBC. Knowing Margaret I think we can safely assume this was an exact count!
- Of the several reports of **Rusty Blackbird** were 20 for the Rector CBC near Powdermill Nature Reserve that was reported by the party of Grace Muench, Natalie Donofrio and Alyssa Myers, and reports of two (on 2/8) and six (on 2/26) by Michael McDevitt at Youngwood Swamp.