

The Syrinx



Voicebox of the Westmoreland Bird & Nature Club

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July-Sep. 2015

Exec Comm Dick Byers, Chairman, Tom Pearson, Tom & Billie Moser, Dale Matuza, Joe & Arlene Kalinowski, Rose Tillmann, Tim Vechter.

Sec/Treasurer – Rose Tillmann P.O. Box 188, New Derry, PA 15671

Rosebud162@verizon.net 724-694-2082

Bird Records – Karen Jackson 1566 Keystone Park Rd. New Alexandria, PA 15670

MERLEGJ@comcast.net 724-668-7421

Newsletter Editor- Dick Byers 233 Old Route 711, Stahlstown, PA 15687 otusasio@lhtot.com 724-593-3543

Archives/Scrapbook – vacant

Web Page – www.wbnc.net

Dues payable beginning January unless you joined after Sep. 1. \$7 Family or Individual. Supporting - \$20.

I rose and fell, as if in water, grappling
with a luminous doom. By morning
I had vanished at least a dozen times
into something better.

Mary Oliver

Suggested by Hope King

Sleeping in the Forest

I thought the earth remembered me, she
took me back so tenderly, arranging
her dark skirts, her pockets
full of lichens and seeds. I slept
as never before, a stone
on the riverbed, nothing
between me and the white fire of the stars
but my thoughts, and they floated
light as moths among the branches
of the perfect trees. All night
I heard the small kingdoms breathing
around me, the insects, and the birds
who do their work in the darkness. All night

Club Picnic

Keystone State Park

Pavilion # 2 4 p.m.

Sun. Aug. 9, 2015

See details on the Outings page.

Club Meeting

The Barn - Donohoe Center

Tues. Sep. 22

7:00 p.m. Doors open 6:30

Program: The life of the World's Greatest Naturalist - Charles Darwin. No nature club should exist without some knowledge of the scientist who discovered how animals and plants become adapted to changing conditions. See the outings page for details.



Field Trips & Outings

Sun. July 5 Ferncliff Peninsula Meet Mark Bowers at the bike trail parking lot on your right just before crossing the bridge into Ohiopyle at **10 A.M.**

Sat. July 11 MCP Wetlands Sue Miller will guide you through this small wetlands just outside Murrysville Community Park at **9:30 a.m.**

Directions: Going west on Rt. 22 past the Cozy Inn, turn right at the first light onto Cline Hollow Road right across from the Walnut Hollow Plaza. Follow Cline Hollow Road 1.7 miles to Hills Church Road. Turn left and continue on Hills Church Road .4 miles to where you'll bear straight ahead onto Weistertown Road. Continue straight ahead 1.1 miles and turn **right** into the wetlands parking lot.

Sat. July 18 Walter Reserve Meet Dick Byers at the Walters parking lot at **10 A.M.** If lot is full, we'll work a car shuttle from the MCP lot. Directions are the same as for MCP wetlands above except you go another mile further on Weistertown Road and turn **left** into the parking lot.

Sat. July 25 3rd Bridge Wetlands Meet Tom Pearson at the wetland parking lot at **1 P.M.**

Directions: **From Latrobe**, follow Rt. 981 out of town. About a mile past the railroad underpass (just past some townhouses called Holiday Acres) turn left onto Derbytown Road. Follow Derbytown Road to a T-intersection and turn right onto McFarland Rd. The wetlands are just ahead on the right. **From Route 22** in New Alexandria, Derbytown Road is 5.5 miles on the right. **Or**, when coming though Latrobe, turn northwest on Ligonier Street (toward the train underpass) and follow it straight out of town until you come to the wetlands. It joins onto McFarland Rd.

Sat. Aug 8 McGinnis Reserve Westmoreland Conservancy walk over the McGinnis Reserve for the black cohosh bloom. **Directions:** At the McDonald's light on Route 22 in Murrysville, turn north onto Vincent Hall Road. Continue straight ahead at the first light onto Sardis Road and continue for about 5 miles passing Mamont Road. Look for Hunter Drive, the 3rd road on the right past Mamont. Turn right and follow Hunter Drive onto Wallace and look for the small parking lot on your right. If you miss Hunter Drive, take the next right (Wallace Lane) and continue on Wallace to the parking lot.

Sun. Aug 9 Club Picnic Program details on first page. Before the picnic, some may want to explore the Loyalhanna Access Trail from the Rt. 981 parking lot - 2:45. We'll do the Old Beaver Pond loop trail after dinner. No nothing later.

Sat. Aug. 15 Shenango Reservoir, Miller's Pond (Presque Isle optional) for shorebirds. Meet Mark McConaughy at the rest stop on I-79 between Slippery Rock and Grove City at **9:00 A.M.** Mark will also have his sun scope if there is an opportunity to observe sunspots. Cancelled if there are heavy rains raising water levels prior the outing. Check with Mark (724-733-5299).

There is also a **star-gazing party** that evening with the Pittsburgh Astronomers at Kunkle Park a mile west of the state police barracks on Rt. 66 before heading into Apollo in Westmoreland County. Mark will be attending.

Sun. Aug. 23 Cunkleman Garden Show Potluck Picnic 1 P.M. Bring a covered dish to share and a chair. No perfume or hair sprays to protect Marcy's daughter who is severely allergic. Drinks, except diet, paper products, table service & insect propellant will be provided. RSVP 724-459-7229. Marcy is a master gardener and monarch butterfly bander. **Directions:** Mapquest or Google Maps address is 292 Swisco Rd. Clarksburg 15725. From Blairsville on Route 22, follow Route 217 north to Newport Road which breaks off 217 at a sharp bend,

maybe a mile north of 22. Follow Newport Road (3009) to Clarksburg Road (3007) another sharp turn to your left. Follow Clarksburg Road to Barkley Rd. on your right. Follow Barkley 1/2 mile to the first right (Swisco) and drive .2 miles to where you'll see Marcy's 292 mailbox.

Wed. Sep. 16 Westmoreland Heritage Trail

for migrating warblers and other passerines. Meet Ken Byerly (724-468-8594) at the Delmont Mac Donald's Restaurant on Route 22 just west of the Route 22/66 crossroads on the north side of the highway **at 8:00 A.M.** for his expertise on the confusing fall birds.

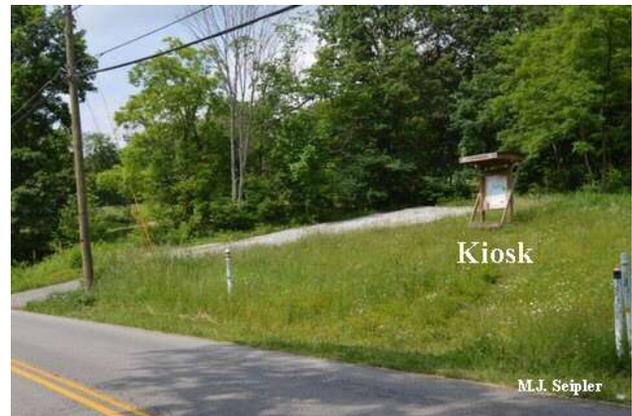
Tues Sep. 22 Club Meeting Dick Byers will speak on Charles Darwin, the man. This is not a talk about the theory of Evolution. This will be a biographical sketch of the world's greatest naturalist and how he came upon his theory, not the theory itself. Creationists have been demonizing Darwin since the publication of the Origin, calling him evil without knowing a thing about his moral character. This is the Darwin you never knew, from his birth to the publication of his third major book, The Origin of Species, and you can't help but be surprised.

Wed. Sep. 23 Allegheny Front Hawkwatch

for the peak movement of the fall broadwinged hawk migration. which usually falls sometime between the 16th and 28th of September. Last year it came early, on the 16th. This year we'll gamble on the first official day of autumn. The sun will arrive at the autumnal Equinox at 4:22 A.M. EDT. Plan to arrive at the hawkwatch around **10-11 A.M.** Bring a chair, something to drink. For directions, email or snail mail Dick Byers. Contact info on first page.

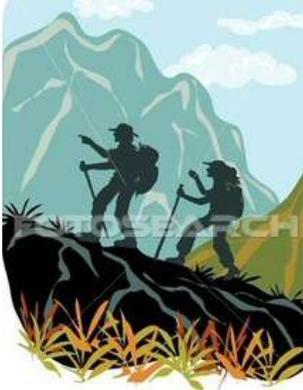
Sat. Sep. 26 Caywood Reserve This is a Westmoreland Conservancy outing to a small 44 acre reserve off Hills Church Road in Murrysville, formerly owned by club member Jane Caywood and willed to the conservancy on her death. It is the midway property on the 5-mile Don Harrison Community Trail. We can work a shuttle and hike to the Walter Reserve on Weistertown Road to prevent back tracking. Meet at the Caywood

Reserve parking lot at **9:30 A.M.** **Directions:** From Route 22 in Murrysville heading west past the Cozy Inn, turn right at the next light onto Cline Hollow Road. Travel 1.6 miles on Cline Hollow to a T-intersection with Hills Church Road. Turn left onto Hills Church Road and travel 1.8 miles to a three-way intersection. At the intersection, Hills Church Road continues to the right (Windover Road goes to the left). Continue on Hills Church Road traveling 1.3 miles to Caywood Reserve parking lot on right. Caywood Reserve parking lot is directly opposite a blue street sign reading: Beulah Lane. You'll see the conservancy kiosk beside the parking lot.



Caywood entrance

Sat. Oct. 10 The Big Sit Come for a day of bird watching without having to move around. Can't make it any more on the long club hikes? Need a cane? Like to eat and shoot the bull with fellow birders? Then the Big Sit is for you! Join club members anytime from midnight to midnight. Come anytime and stay as long as you like. This will be our 8th year. We have a record count of 46 species to break and 728 individuals. It gets tougher to outdo ourselves every year. This data collecting event is always under attended. Ideally, we'd like to arrange for a continuous coverage in three or four teams and have people there from sunrise to sunset so there's no gaps in the surveillance. More details will come in the fall newsletter.



Outings Revisited

Sun. Mar. 22 Rock

Hollow Run Four people showed up for this strenuous climb in the Loyalhanna Gorge. The temperature on this 4-hour hike was 32°F at the start at 10:45 and 41° when we ended at 2:45, but after a few minutes on the trail we were quite warm. Tim pointed out the **Carolina allspice** shrub (*Calycanthus floridus*) just above the parking area. This species ranges from Virginia to Florida with rare and undetermined status in Pennsylvania. While it may be native, most specimens are likely garden escapes, but since it is growing in a river gorge and former railroad corridor, it may have found its way there naturally.

The uphill climb on an old logging road was much easier than the descent over rocks and green brier entanglements before arriving on a foot trail. Tim took us clear to the headwaters of this scenic stream and down the other side. Just past the headwaters we were treated to two pairs of red phase **fox sparrows**.

Climbing to the top of one of the massive rock outcrops on this well named hollow we had a nice view of the Loyalhanna Gorge and a kettle of 12 **turkey vultures**. One curious bird made a very low pass to check us out.

On the descending trail we flushed the first **ruffed grouse** most of us had seen in several years. It is heartening to know there are still a few around. The hike ended with a stroll through the tire graveyard where massive construction vehicle tires were rolled into the hollow from the rock quarry above in another example why business enterprise must be watched and regulated.

As the trees age and shade out the competition in this hollow, it will become even more scenic as time passes. The lower area is protected and now under the ownership of the Westmoreland Parks and Recreation Dept.

Participants: Dick Byers, Janice Davis, Dennis McCarthy, Tim Vechter.



Tim in one of the discarded truck tires

Sun. Apr. 12 Roaring Run Recreational

Area A perfect sunny 70° day to walk this beautiful bike trail in Apollo. You have the wooded hillside on your left and the Kiskiminetas River on your right as you move down the bed of the old canal towpath with its remnant structures. Vernal pools still exist in the old canal bed. Spring wildflowers were all late as expected from the hard winter. Only **spring beauty, Dutchman's breeches, bloodroot, Vinca minor, Hepatica, trout lily,** and **red maple** were in bloom. **Trillium** was in bud with no blossoms.

The Kiski River was turbid and above its banks from the previous week's heavy rains and two waterfalls from intermittent streams tumbled down the hillside as you approached the Rock Furnace Trail.

Birdlife was restricted to **yellow-throated warbler, bufflehead, raven, Louisiana waterthrush, robin, titmice** and **chickadees**.

The best find of the day was the **West Virginia white butterfly** seen at the suspension bridge. **Garlic mustard**, an introduced invasive we all know well,

displaces the host plants of this uncommon butterfly which is becoming more scarce.

WBNC Participants: Dick Byers, Grant Miliron, Nicole McCoy, Mary Lou Schreffler, Tom Pearson, Kathy Saunders, Beverly Young and Arlene Kalinowski.



Suspension bridge over Roaring Run

Sat. May 2 Deadman's Hollow It was our first visit here since April 2005. This beautiful spring morning coincided with the wildflower bloom and bird migration. We were treated to huge patches of **trillium, larkspur, Virginia bluebells, Dutchman's breeches, star chickweed, yellow cordylis, sessile bellwort and Canada** and **long-stemmed violets**. The birding had a great start with a **red-necked grebe** on the Yough River. The best of 37 bird species included **chestnut-sided, yellow, black-throated blue, yellow-rump, yellow-throated, blue-winged, black and white** and **worm-eating warblers**. We had great views of the worm-eating warbler and Patience Fisher was finally able to add it to her life list. There were also **scarlet tanagers, Baltimore orioles, ruby-crowned kinglets** and **wood thrushes**. An immature **bald eagle** made a pass. **American toads** trilled the entire morning.

There was a meadow on the pond side of the reserve that was literally carpeted with **bluets** and a pretty waterfall that drains into Catfish Pond in wet periods.
Participants: 2015 - Dick Byers, Patience Fisher, Tom Pearson, Jim Pemberton, Janet and Tom Kuehl.
Participants 2005 - Tim Vechter, Pauline Petrucci, Jack & Valerie Baker, Jim Pemberton, Kathy Saunders, Tom Pearson, Dick Byers



Both photos taken at the triple trunked sycamore

Sun. May 3 Harbridge Run Hollow Eleven people showed up for this hike up a quarry road to the top of Chestnut Ridge to view a rock quarry torn out of the top of the ridge and cut into high walls to provide stone for the repair of highway damage from Hurricane Agnes in 1973 and the current trend of adding more lanes to existing highways. Part of the quarry was abandoned in 1978 with little reclamation. The views from the top northward toward the Homer City power plant and Brenizer rewarded those who made the long climb, but they viewed over the top of a lunar landscape of rock quarry rubble, the price we pay for highways, many of which, aren't even necessary. You can see the extent of the quarry easily on google earth.

A pretty form of **long-stemmed violet** was found on the way up. **Foam flower** was also

beginning to bloom and there were a few stands of **trillium**.

There were plenty of birds to hear but few to see. The warblers were high in trees just leafing out, feeding on the caterpillars that were eating the leaves. We did hear **cerulean, American redstart, Kentucky (several), hooded, Louisiana waterthrush, black and white, black-throated green, blue-winged warblers, blue-gray gnatcatcher**. Also **raven, turkey vulture, wood thrush, robin, rough-winged swallow** (mine shafts), and **eastern phoebe** (mine shafts).



A deep quarry hole filled with water and dissolved minerals



Quarry Cave



From inside the cave

There were several square holes gouged out of the side of a cliff with interesting lighting inside. Our highway systems around here have left Chestnut Ridge hollow in many places. The longest quarry tunnel I know is in the Loyalhanna Gorge which is 40 feet high and runs through the ridge for over 20 miles. Most of this quarry is not tunneled, it's mountain removal.

Wed. May 13 Westmoreland Heritage Trail

A very cold morning with dark overcast skies held down attendance. From the high 30's it never did get above 50. Ken took us through the Beaver Run Reservoir portion of the trail beginning at Trees Mills Road. Six people had a grand time identifying 53 species of birds, the best of which were **yellow, magnolia, hooded, yellow-throated, and Tennessee warblers, willow, alder, great-crested and Acadian flycatchers, Indigo bunting, blue-gray gnatcatcher, redstart, rose-breasted grosbeak, ovenbird, peewee, phoebe, red-eyed and yellow-throated vireo, purple finch, kingbird, wood thrush, scarlet tanager, Baltimore oriole, goldfinch catbird, yellow-billed and black-billed cuckoo, Indigo bunting, common yellowthroat, barn and rough-winged swallow, Carolina wren, shift, killdeer and double-crested cormorant**.

This part of the bike trail was literally lined with **wild blue phlox** and scattered **trillium, wild geranium, bluets**, both species of **sweet cicely and celandine poppy**. **Dogwood** and **crabapple** were in full bloom. The first **dame's rockets** were breaking into flower. Participants: Ken Byerly, Dick Byers, Dennis Smeltzer, Georgia Shelak, Dale Matuza and Tom Pearson. We lunched at the Wagon Wheel and looked for the cattle egret in the afternoon. It had left the area.



Fading dogwood blossoms turning pink with the Beaver Run Reservoir in the background



Black-throated blue warbler on nest

Photo by Tom Moser

Sat. May 16 Picnic Trail A beautiful cool morning with partly cloudy skies greeted six birders at the Summit parking lot on Laurel Hill. We had good looks at **yellow-throated vireo, veery, redstart, ovenbird, hooded, chestnut-sided, Canada, black & white, black-throated green and black-throated blue warblers**. Tom Moser got a picture of the latter on nest. We also had **wood thrush, towhee, and pileated woodpecker**.

The trail was literally lined with **dwarf ginseng** and **painted trillium**. There were scattered patches of **yellow Clintonia** and **sessile bellflower**. **Cinnamon fern** was just unfolding and **greenbrier** had new leaves and tendrils. **Canada mayflower** was about to bloom.

Fresh black & tiger swallowtails and a **juvenile duskywing** accounted for the butterflies. There was minor annoyance from **black flies** and **mosquitoes**.

We followed Picnic Trail to Edie Road and returned via Spruce Flats and Wolf Rocks trail arriving back at the parking lot at 12:30.

Participants: Dick Byers, Ellie Cochran, Dale Matuza, Sue Miller, Tom & Billie Moser.

Sat. June 6 Charles F. Lewis Natural Area

When we visited here for the first time about 20 people showed up. On this trip we were down to five, but the place still has a magnetic charm and there's lots to see besides the venomous creatures we list as our main quarry. It was 66F when I arrived

with overcast skies and the forecast of a possible thunderstorm probably kept a few away, if not the strenuous climb to the top which we took in stages. **Louisiana water thrushes** were singing the whole way. Near the top the stream is much closer to the level of the trail and we had good views of two waterthrush families, the first consisting of an adult and three fledglings. The second, another 100 yards up was a family of 4 young and one adult. I did not have a long enough lens to take their portraits. We also had three **worm-eating warblers**, one singing in the parking lot and an adult feeding a fledged young on the downhill trail. All told, we had 29 species with nice views of **ovenbird, scarlet tanager, rose-breasted grosbeak, tree swallow, turkey vulture** and **Acadian flycatcher**. **Heard were cedar waxwing, magnolia, hooded, black-throated blue & green warblers, raven, crow, towhee, r.e. vireo, phoebe, and wood thrush**.

Jim Pemberton leaves no stone unturned and found **mountain dusky** and **slimy salamander**.

The trees on the south side of the gorge are reaching impressive sizes. Many are well over a century old and it won't be long before we can call the area an old **growth stand**. There are also huge boulders from rock fragmentation that lodged on the trail edge before rolling into the gorge. We found three sandstone **fossil rocks** with the imprints of branches in them - all of carboniferous vegetation. Then there was the shed bark of a tree riddled with holes from years of **yellow-bellied sapsucker peckings**. The sugar that tree produced became its downfall. See photo.

We were glad to see an increase in the **pink-lady slipper** population. On our first trip here we may have seen somewhere in the vicinity of 12-25 of these orchids. On this excursion we estimated over a hundred. I stopped counting at 35. They had bloomed the previous week, so we may schedule earlier next year.

There were no rattlers where we usually see them, but we did find fresh **woodrat** scat in two different locations. Our endangered rodent is still alive and well in this natural area.

Determined not to fail, Jim searched the rocky area of the power line and found a **black phase timber rattlesnake** just before heading for the parking lot on the last leg of the trail, so no one was disappointed. It was a 4 hour jaunt with interesting things to see the entire way. D.B.

Participants: Dick Byers, Bev Young, Larry Helgerman, Mary Gray, Jim Pemberton.



**Black
Phase
Timber
Rattler**

Birding the Valley with Karen Jackson, Mary Lou Schreffler, Linda Huber, Linda Baker, Ellie Cochran

By Patience Fisher

In his book, *The Feather Quest*, Pete Dunne refers to Bentsen-Rio State Park as the place “where check marks grow on trees.” But for the six of us this past February, they grew everywhere we went in the Rio Grande Valley. No wonder more than 125,000 birders visit this region each year! Despite that impressive statistic, it was not crowded, and we never had to vie for position to see a bird. I couldn’t believe how empty it was; it almost felt like our private paradise. This tropical ecosystem extends westerly for 140 miles from the Rio Grande’s mouth near South Padre Island to Falcon Lake, a fishing destination. More than 500 species of birds winter, nest, or migrate through this river delta, the most biologically diverse area in the continental United States. And thanks to The World Birding Center, a \$20 million project, nine distinct birding habitats are protected. We visited seven of them in addition to four other birding hot spots. All of these birding areas are well-supplied with bird feeders, many including hummingbird feeders and peanut butter. Often there are blinds between where the birders are to stand and the feeders, with arm rests for stabilizing your arm when taking that close-up photo.

The first life bird was at the airport; the Great-tailed Grackle. Flocks of this noisy bird would be seen and heard daily. The background birds of Texas were so different than in Pennsylvania. The Green Jay, Orange-crowned Warbler, Plain Chachalaca, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Couch’s/Tropical Kingbird, White-tipped Dove, Harris’ Hawk, and Crested Caracara were seen most days. Turkey Vultures and the Northern Mockingbird were the only two birds I saw regularly on this trip that were regulars back home.

We birded Sabal Palm Sanctuary the afternoon of our first day. It was sunny and warm, and ridden with mosquitos. Luckily, the sanctuary offered an array of bug spray at the visitor center, located in the historic 1892 Rabb Plantation House. As our first stop, naturally we garnered many life birds, many of which we would see at other locales. The pond gave us our first sighting of the Least Grebe, a darling little dark bird blending in with the shoreline except for the bright yellow eyes. Neotropical Cormorant was also seen. Other species of note were

Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Olive Sparrow, Altamira Oriole, Green Jay, Black-crested Titmouse, White-tipped Dove, and Couch's or Tropical Kingbird. (These last two look the same, and are only distinguished by voice.)

That evening, we drove into Brownsville to see the Green Parakeet come to roost. There were about 30 of them lined up along the telephone wire; we viewed them while standing on the sidewalk.

The next day was hot and humid. We started with a reserved tour of Bahia Grande (Big Bay), which is a 21,700 acre portion of Laguna Atascosa (Lake Sticky) that is closed to unescorted birders due to its use as a recovery area for the ocelot. Ocelot, while numbering in the thousands in Mexico, is endangered in the United States, with less than 80 individuals. Many nearby ranchers are also protecting ocelot habitat, as this fits well with their land use. The greatest threat to the cat's recovery is traffic. These wide-ranging cats are hit by cars as they cross the highway. Texas is installing culverts in the highway barriers, to the tune of \$5 million, in the hope of helping the cats to cross safely. Our guides informed us that in Bahia Grande, the original 12 ocelots now number 17.

In the tour van on the way to Bahia Grande, we saw 20 Black-bellied Whistling Duck. These ducks are everywhere! We also saw Crested Caracara, known as the Mexican Eagle. We saw them nearly every day, along with the prevalent Harris' Hawk. A rarity was the Chihuahuan Raven, courtesy of our intrepid guides. At Bahia Grande we enjoyed the wide span of wetlands, which yielded numerous Great Egret, Snowy Egret and Pintail Ducks, as well as Osprey, Long-billed Curlew, Brown Pelican, Caspian Tern, White Ibis and Sandhill Crane. We saw both morphs of the industrious Reddish Egret, chasing after fish in their distinctive horizontal way. We also saw Cactus Wren, an impressively patterned large wren. And yes, there were quite a few cactuses! Cassin's Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike, the striking White-tailed Hawk and the dapper Aplomado Falcon were added to our list.

We ended our day at Alligator Pond, where there was what looked like a big old fallen oak, covered in algae, along the edge of the pond. Only problem was, there are no big trees here – yikes! It was a massive alligator! And not the last one we would see. As far as birds are concerned, we picked up Long-billed Thrasher and

Verdin, as well as Mottled Duck, Ruddy Duck, and Least Grebe. Driving away, we spied our first Road Runner.

The next day was cold, wet, and windy; it never got out of the 40s. We birded Harlegen Thickets where we figured birds would hunker down. We saw numerous Orange-crowned warblers and other birds we had picked up yesterday. On to Hugh Ramsey, where we added White-tailed Kite, Curve-billed Thrasher, Green Kingfisher, and Cattle Egret to our growing list. We finished our day at Resaca de la Palma (Palm Ox-bow Lake). We got our first group of Great Kiskadees, a common Texan bird, as well as Inca Dove, a delightfully scaly-looking dove.

The next day, Wednesday, the weather was fine, and in the 70s. We went to Estero Llano Grande (Big Grassland Estuary), a beautiful park with paths and ponds. We arrived early and bee-lined past fabulous birds and habitat to set up shop where the rare visitor from Mexico, the Gray-crowned Yellow-throated Warbler, had been seen for about an hour each morning for the last few days. Luck was with us; we got him! We also got the rare White-throated Thrush. At a more leisurely pace, we added Roseate Spoonbill, White-faced Ibis, Black-necked Stilt, Avocet, Yellow-crowned Night heron, Cinnamon Teal, Common Gallinule, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Clay-colored Robin, and Common Parakeet as well as many other ducks, heron, egrets, and songbirds.

Thursday was also sunny with comfortable temperatures. We visited Bentsen Rio, a lovely park with a tram car to pick you up and take you to another bird feeder location, or back to the Visitor Center should you require the facilities. We began our day stationed for the morning visitor of the last few days: the Hookbilled Kite. Right on schedule, he soared past us with the sun on him, giving us long, fine views. We also saw Black Phoebe, Ringed and Green Kingfisher, Lark Sparrows, Gray Hawk, and Black-chinned Hummingbird. We ended our day enjoying Roma Bluffs, a Spanish-colonial town steeped in history and rich in architectural landmarks, including an old customs house. A newly-constructed platform overlooks the Rio Grande and Mexico.

Friday morning was our quest for the White-collared Seed-eater at San Ignacio, where this secretive bird has been for many years. It lurks within the sugar cane. We waited for hours, listening to a chorus of Chacalacas and chatting with Everesto, who was charged with filling up

the many bird feeders. The Border Patrol was also there; it was a daily presence as we followed the Rio Grande. Everesto was glad to see them; he stated he felt better knowing they had guns to protect him from drug dealers, whereas he only had a bucket and bird seed. Finally the Seed-eater peaked out and afforded some of our group a look: time to move on to Falcon Lake.

Falcon Lake is a popular fishing spot, where fishermen come from afar to fish and sometimes to compete. On our way we saw Pyrrhuloaxia and Cactus Wren. At Falcon Lake we all got great views of the Vermillion Flycatcher and Bewick's Wren. Ellie was treated to a view of a Blackthroated Sparrow, and I spied a Zone-tailed Hawk.

That afternoon we went to Salineno, and were given lawn chairs and invited to sit with other birders outside of a volunteer's trailer, looking at feeders galore. We saw all three species of oriole: Audubon, Hooded, and Altamira. A juvenile Cooper's Hawk kept careful watch, and a Screech Owl slept in a box.

Saturday found us in Santa Ana on a sunny but windy day. This is another lovely park, with hanging Spanish moss along charming pathways by hidden ponds. We went on a guided walking tour, and saw Broad-winged Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Tree Swallows, Ladder-back Woodpecker, Wilson's Snipe, Sora, Northern Shoveler, and three species of Teal. We even saw yet another Common Parakeet sleeping on the ground. My! How they do blend in!

After lunch I bowed out, and the group went to visit Mazalan, an historic home built by a Pennsylvanian. I was told it was lovely, and Lesser Goldfinch and Rufous Hummingbird were seen.

Our last day brought us to South Padre Island and views of birds on the shores and waters of Laguna Madre, the Mother Lake, which is actually the bay. This was one of my favorite stops, and afforded us ducks, herons, gulls, terns, and shorebirds. I won't list them all, but highlights included great views of Least Bittern and Clapper Rail. Long-billed Curlew was seen standing and in flight. Not only was there another alligator, but a mother alligator carrying eight (count 'em!) eight babies on her back and head.

Our trip list was 140 species. Linda Baker and I got 45 life birds. Ellie Cochran got 44, Linda Huber 43, Mary

Lou Schreffler 36, and Karen Jackson 15. Well, I guess I've got more traveling to do to catch up! What a good problem; so many birds, so many places.



Patience Fisher, Linda Lou Baker, reserve employee, Karen Jackson, Mary Lou Shreffler, Ellie Cochran, taken while searching for the white-collared seed-eater. All photos by Linda Huber

Short-tailed Shrew



It isn't often you see a short-tailed shrew or shrew of any species, let alone get a picture of one. Dale Matusa found this little guy in his backyard and fed him a grub, which he accepted readily. Shrews have to eat every two hours or starve to death. This guy was probably weak from lack of food when Dale found it and got this picture.

Believe it or not, this is the most common mammal in Pennsylvania, even out doing the white-footed mouse. I find many dead, often killed by foxes or other carnivores that don't like the taste and leave it lay. Every one I've caught in my live traps set for mice are dead by the time I check them in the morning from starvation.
Dick

Our Cultural Photographer

Tim Vechter can't go anywhere these days or even do anything without taking along his trusty camera, a Canon compact digicam with a 30+ optical telephoto lens. Tim is not just a nature photographer, but a cultural photographer. I don't think anyone has recorded what things are really like in southwestern Pennsylvania in the year 2015 better than Tim. You won't like all his pictures, but you will know what the area he's photographing is really like from every angle. He shoots subject matter that you and I would never even think to shoot, that which is so common it is ignored. You should check out his entries on Facebook and the club's Facebook page. It might take you awhile to appreciate his style. Perhaps he won't always have the perfect exposure, but the portraits he shows deeply reflect

the daily life we all live and the landscape we all see, know well, and take for granted.

Dick Byers

Our Wildlife Photographer

While I'm on the subject we have another pro photographer in the club whose wildlife shots are absolutely stunning. Cris Hamilton must be the Pied Piper for getting animals to pose for her in perfect position in perfectly lighted conditions. Her Facebook entries are breathtaking. I don't know how much patience it took or how much time she's spent stalking, creeping or crawling to get the pictures she gets, but whatever method she uses, it pays dividends and interest plus. She does have the ultimate in equipment, but as we all know, the equipment can't do the job itself. It's the person behind the lens who sets the camera, finds the subject and has the patience to wait for the right time to depress the shutter button.

Dick

Are We for Real? Or just an illusion? Perhaps part of a hologram or an entanglement? OR, are we merely part of a FIELD?

Dick Byers

Everybody understood Isaac Newton's theories. After the apple bopped him on the head, Newton came up with the laws of motion and gravity. The world was held together by mass and gravitational attraction. Everything was just fine - until Einstein came along and upset Newton's apple cart. Einstein showed Newton's gravity and motion equations wouldn't work beyond planet earth. Einstein introduced Relativity to explain that motion was not absolute as Newton's laws pronounced, but relative, and that time was variable. He added a new theory of gravity showing how objects were attracted to each other because of the curvature of

space and time. Unintuitive though they may be, Einstein's theories have passed all the constructed tests scientists were able to make for verification.

Meanwhile, back at the lab, Quantum Mechanics theory was explaining the weird behavior of subatomic particles and the role of the observer. Quantum Mechanics says all matter can take on the form of a wave or a particle and that all matter is normally in the form of a wave. It is only due to the process of observation that the waves collapse into the particles that make up the real world we see, hear and touch. When we aren't looking, all matter is a wave. The funny thing about this seemingly nonsense QM theory is the darn thing actually works! Quantum Mechanics has brought us computers, lasers, cell phones, MRI imaging and digital cameras. In fact, nearly a third of our economy is based on Quantum Mechanics, BUT, it doesn't make any sense! Even more weird than the wave-particle duality is the phenomenon of entanglement, that an atom can influence another atom with which it has been previously entangled instantaneously over space even if the other atom is light years away in another galaxy! If an electron is spinning to the left in an atom, we know it is doing the same thing in another atom it was formerly associated with many miles or light years away. This is referred to in physics circles as *action at a distance*. How can an atom control another atom light years away without any visible physical connection?

The frustrating situation in today's physics is that the two major theories that explain our reality, Einstein's theory of gravity and Quantum Mechanics, are completely incompatible. Relativity and Space-time Curvature cannot be wed to Quantum Mechanics. That means the behavior of stars and galaxies, that are composed of atoms, cannot be explained by the very theory that governs the behavior of particulate matter - Quantum Mechanics. **Something is haywire somewhere!** But both theories have experimental verification for support! However, the Hadron Collider at CERN, despite the verification of the Higgs boson, is still

not producing the evidence needed in support of the particle theory of matter, referred to as the Standard Model of the atom. The *Theory of Everything* has been put on hold - or has it?

Neither Einstein or Newton believed you could have physical *action at a distance* without some kind of connection. As Einstein put it, spookiness at a distance, was impossible. You needed a connecting link, like the ether idea of the 1800's that all space was connected by the medium of an ether. Scientists have long since discarded that concept. But maybe the ether idea has revived, in the form of *fields*. We all know about magnetic fields and we obviously live in a gravitational field that holds us to the ground. Is everything a field? That's the new thinking! Friends of Einstein convinced him that the universe, instead of being made of particles, consisted entirely of *fields*. Einstein spent the last 25 years of his life trying to discover a unifying theory that would incorporate all the known fields - the electromagnetic field, gravity field, etc. He died before finishing his work on the *Unified Field Theory*, now known as the *Theory of Everything* on which a recent movie has been made about the life of Steven Hawking, the British scientist who took up where Einstein left off. Hawking, however, hasn't yet come up with anything.

Meanwhile, lurking in the background of the general public, is a theory which may eliminate the spookiness and weirdness of Quantum Mechanics and Space-Time Curvature. It also allows retention of the theory of atomic particles and the theory of relativity. It is called the *Quantum Field Theory(QFT)* that maintains everything in the universe can be explained by *fields*, rather than particles. QFT is radically different than the other theories of the universe. In QFT, everything in the universe is a field. There is no such thing as empty space. There are no particles! All "matter" itself is considered a field.

QFT has not received the publicity of the other theories because the mathematics of it are so complex and the theory itself is so involving that it

is difficult to even explain its basic components. It requires a whole new way of thinking and looking at the universe. You have to think in terms of *fields* rather than particulate matter. Exactly what is a *field*? We already know about magnetic fields. We have all seen the high school science demonstration how iron filings fall into place in a pattern on a sheet of paper with a magnet underneath. We know electric current generates a magnetic field around it, the principle on which the electric motor is found. Light itself is part of the electromagnetic field with a long list of other fields - infra red, ultra violet, gamma ray, microwave, radio waves - it goes on and on. The universe, apparently, is composed of many fields, all interconnected and occupying space together. Fields are actually a property of space. The old idea that space is an empty void is completely wrong. Space is something. Brian Greene calls space a fabric. Besides having field properties, space also has residual energy and can be stretched, curved and twisted. Space is anything but nothing, and it contains many *fields*. Fields are the connecting links, the properties that give us the illusion of entanglement.

This theory has been taught for some time at several of the world's best universities and is just beginning to grab attention. We common mortals haven't heard much about it because of the difficulty of explaining it in laymen terms without the use of complicated mathematics. One scientist has made the attempt to bring Quantum Field theory into the public domain without the encumbering mathematics. The explanatory book is called *Fields of Color: The theory that escaped Einstein*, by Rodney Brooks. The reviews of the book run to all extremes. Some thought it clarified all the confusing information astrophysicists have been generating for the past half century. Others were disappointed. While the book does not do much to explain the nature of fields, it does explain a replacement theory that eliminates the problems and weirdness of quantum mechanics. Rodney Brooks substitutes colors for all the different fields of space that exist together and interact. Is it worth reading? I thought

so. If you get nothing else from the book, it is a marvelous compact review of the history of physics from the mid-nineteenth century to today and that we are on the verge of a complete revolution of how we should interpret the universe and our own reality. I never had much faith in parallel universes, multi-verses, holograms and entanglement. While the ideas were much more exciting than fields, the field idea makes more sense about how the universe is put together. *Quantum field theory* is about to emerge into the public consciousness, unless something better pops up. QFT is not yet complete. It needs some verifying tests and some equations to be worked out, but it seems closer to understanding our reality than parallel universes and holograms.

Club Business

A donation of \$100 was made to The Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania in memory of long-time club member Hope King, who passed away in May. A sympathy card was sent to the family of club member Anna Mary Myers, who passed away in June.

A \$100 donation was made to Wildlife Works Inc. for their continuing work on rehabilitating injured and orphaned wildlife in our area.

Eight extra copies of newsletters were printed to send to people who signed up for a sample newsletter on Earth Day at Saint Vincent College.

Mark Bowers submitted a five page write-up on the Cedar Creek Park Gorge for the club book with photographs and agreed to do the same for the Ferncliff Peninsula Natural Area. We still need authors for Mammoth Park, Winnie Palmer Reserve, Ackerman Reserve, Powdermill, Nature Park, SGL # 196 & Todd Sanctuary. And we are awaiting submissions on PV Park, Indian Creek Gorge, Townsend Park and Jacobs Creek. Otherwise the book is coming along fine and we are nearing publication.



Joan Maloof standing under the Great Oak on the Perchanga Indian Reservation

The Old Growth Forest Network

Dick Byers

Last January I read a book called *Among the Ancients, Adventures in the Eastern Old Growth Forests* by Joan Maloof, an ecology and environmental science professor at Salisbury University in Maryland. She, like many of us, felt a sense of sadness that the most common habitat of North America, the old growth forests, have mostly disappeared. Except for the areas that native Americans cleared to plant corn, beans and squash, old growth forests covered the eastern and western portions of the continent, rivaled in area only by the

prairies between the Rockies and the Mississippi River. To the new settlers, who came from the open expanses of Europe, where timber was getting scarce, the forest was a frightening place, dark and gloomy and full of wild dangerous beasts. The colonists brought all the superstitions of the wolf with them and must have been horrified by cougars and rattlesnakes. The foreboding forests had to go. They cleared them for farms, homes, fuel and roads. Although William Penn recommended they leave one acre of forest for every two acres cleared, they paid little heed to his wise advice. Today, 99% of the Eastern old growth is gone. The remaining 1% exists in scattered remnants, mostly in hard to reach

places. Most Americans have never seen or experienced the charm and beauty of an old growth forest, or know of its benefits. Although Pennsylvania is over 60% forested, over 99% of this is second growth, of a totally different age and composition than what George Washington witnessed. Only what are mostly inaccessible remnants are all that remain of the grandeur forests that greeted the colonists. A few of these sites are being preserved, but in remote areas and not nearly enough for accessibility to everyone. More people, and especially children would have the opportunity to experience an old growth forest if one was closer to home.

Joan Maloof, author of the above book, identified this need and decided to do something about it. She created an organization to identify and preserve an old growth forest in every county in the United States that has forested areas. It is called the ***Old Growth Forest Network***. The idea came to Dr. Maloof in 2007, but it was 2011 before she quit her teaching job at Salisbury University to take on this project full time. Since then her 501 (c)3 organization has dedicated 39 forests in 13 states, five in Pennsylvania. The latest to be added to the network is the Hemlock Trail in Laurel Hill State Park, dedicated the morning of May 22. That afternoon Joan toured the Powdermill Nature Reserve as a potential site that will eventually become old growth.

The following morning I had the privilege of meeting Joan at the Ramada Inn in Ligonier and driving her to see Duff Park in Murrysville. The permanence of Duff Park's old growth oak forest is pretty assured, but since it is owned by the Municipality of Murrysville, where developers are often elected to the town council, I felt one more bit of insurance wouldn't hurt. Besides, I wanted to see what this lady who has been to numerous old growth forests across the country thought of it. Although I told her it was in the middle of town she was still surprised at the urban location when I pointed it out

at the Sheetz intersection. She had read black maple grew here, a species not present at her home in Maryland, so we looked at every understory maple until we found one. She was also somewhat astonished by the mass of squaw root, a non-green flowering plant that lives parasitically on oak roots.

Not much in the park escaped this experienced lady. Of all the people I have led through Duff Park, she is the only one who noticed the lack of grapevines, a distinct feature of any normal, healthy Pennsylvania forest. I recalled the period when grapevines in our area were cut because of the erroneous belief they killed trees. It also occurred to me if somebody might be missing a golden research opportunity to study the role of grapevines in forests. Here was an old growth forest devoid of *Vitis* species for direct comparison to those that have a wild grape population.

Joan was favorably impressed with Duff Park and wrote a letter to Murrysville Council suggesting Duff Park enter the permanent protection of the Old Growth Network. We'll keep you posted on what Murrysville Council decides to do.

The Old Growth Forest Network I was surprised to learn is funded completely by tax deductible donations. There is no foundation lending financial support, so if you want to make a donation, you can do so through their website www.oldgrowthforestnet.net/ or simply type in your browser Old Growth Forest Network.

Other forests in Pennsylvania already dedicated include Cook's Forest, Ricketts Glen Gorge, Ferncliff Natural Area and Alan Seeger Natural Area.

Dedicated forests will be allowed to exist into the future undisturbed and will become numerous enough to allow public exploration close to home. For purposes of comparison, beauty, education and research, some forests need to left alone from the hand of man.

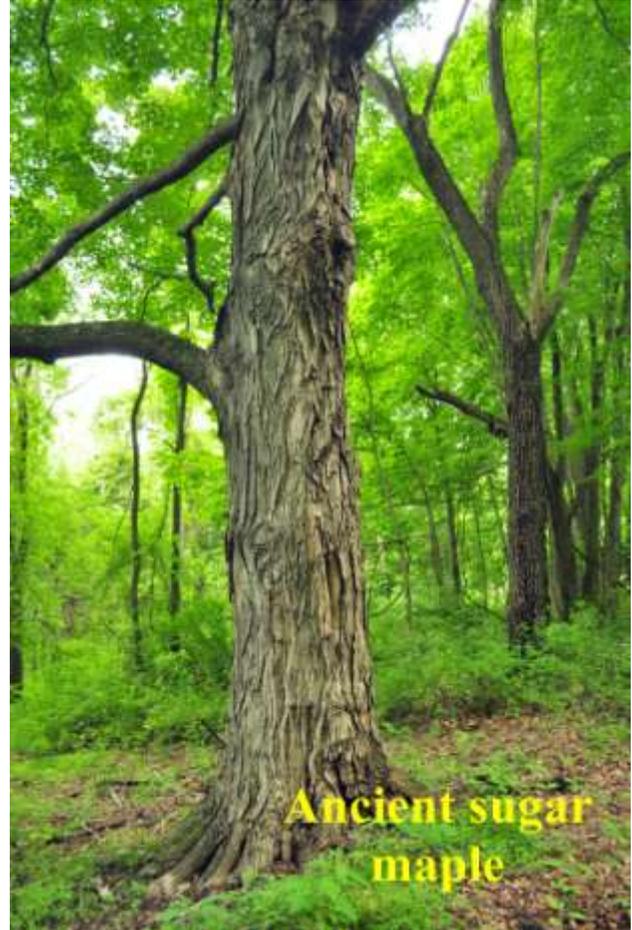
Outings Revisited continued...

Wed. June 17 Skena-Kellman Reserve Five came to gather data on this nature reserve in Murrysville. The Lillian Kellman Nature Reserve was the first property to be acquired by the Westmoreland Conservancy in 1994. The conservancy was too young at the time to legally own property, so the 55-acre parcel was turned over to the Municipality of Murrysville. Thanks to the Westmoreland Land Trust, the adjoining 22-acre Peter and Victoria Skena Nature Reserve was added in 2012. Our hike covered both properties to gather data for the club book. We were joined by a young gentleman from the South Hills named Adam Haritan who is working on an exciting new website he calls Learn Your Land which can be found at www.learnourland.com Check it out. His goal is to get all of the Pennsylvania nature-based walks, events, meetings and workshops on this map as well as profiles of each organization. He is a member of the Western Pennsylvania Mushroom Club and we were impressed with his identification skills at so young an age. Adam just recently graduated from Pitt.

Both reserves were wet and muddy from the three inches of rain we had received in the previous two days. The pond was brown from churned up mud and hillside runoff. We identified over a hundred species of plants, and various numbers of insects, fungi and birds. Both these reserves are abandoned farmland, so everything there has moved in since the farming activity ceased, making it an important data gathering location in terms of species establishment, succession, and alien invaders. The property has interesting features. The dominant tree is the black walnut. They seem well distributed over the sections we traversed with some pretty impressive specimens. We found an old sugar maple we didn't at first recognize because of the old bark. The bark of old growth trees changes character with age (pictured). We also found the large Kentucky coffeetree Lillian Kellman planted and many offspring growing above the old

homestead. You should go there and gather a seed pod or two for a nature memento this fall. They are large, anachronistic, and take a fine polish.

We also saw nannyberry, a huge white oak and a beech, the latter forming a healthy clone. Up north, this cloning tendency of beech is usually related to beech bark disease, which is spreading south, but hasn't reached Westmoreland County yet. Beech clones here appear healthy.



Ebony jewelwing damselflies were everywhere and Dale saw a Prince Baskettail dragonfly. Tom located a hangingfly and Dick got his first picture of that species. It isn't a fly at all though, like so many misnames of insects. It is a Mecopteran with four wings. Flies have only one pair of wings, the second pair being vestigial or altered to form a gyroscope organ. We had a great time. Participants: Adam Haritan, Dick Byers, Patience Fisher, Dale Matuza, Tom Pearson.

