

Philadelphia Larus



the newsletter of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club

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Ten Years on the Telephone Line

THE FOURTH-FLOOR OFFICES of the Academy of Natural Sciences Ornithology Department are brightly lit, hot and stuffy this Thursday night in August. The sounds of a busy work day have been replaced by the thin scratching of pen against paper.

Armas Hill, voice of the Philadelphia Birdline, has just left the DVOC meeting downstairs and is feverishly writing out his script for tonight's tape. He is working fast, since he needs to make a 10:26 train back to Washington, where his job with Amtrak has relocated him.

As he writes, he ignores the Great Horned Owl in perpetual pursuit of the pheasant on the book case behind him; the Lammergeier looks on grimly. The clock ticks on.

The Birdline chicken scratchings on the yellow legal pad still have to be typed. The IBM Selectric clatters out the news. Armas can determine by the length of the results — 1¾ pages, single-spaced — that this tape will run only about four minutes of the 6 minutes and 47 seconds maximum.

Not even stopping to proofread the hastily typed sheets, he shifts to a corner of the room where the tape machine awaits him.

Picking up the phone, he cues himself and a visitor that he is about to start, stabbing the air with his forefinger like a Great Blue Heron after a fish.

In a forceful and familiar tone, he fires away: "This is the Philadelphia Birdline for Thursday, Aug. 3. Shorebirding has been particularly good this past week, . . ."

With that tape, Armas began his sixth year as voice of the Birdline, alternately known as the Delaware Valley Birding Hotline or 567-BIRD for short. But, more importantly, the Birdline/Hotline is nearing completion of a decade of service to the tristate area.

Dr. Frank Gill, curator of ornithology for the Academy of Natural Sciences, was the initiator of the hotline. New York, Boston and Washington already had similar rare-bird alerts; Frank said he had wanted to put together a hotline since he arrived at the Academy in 1969.

"It seemed a progressive kind of thing to do," he recalled as he leaned back, his office chair facing sunny Logan Circle on a late afternoon. He envisioned the hotline then as "a hard-core rare-bird notice that would be updated as often as possible."

The problem of financing needed to be tackled, and Frank and Dr. Keith Richards, an industrial physicist and DVOC member, sent out a letter to a number of area birding clubs seeking funding. The response was encouraging, and on Dec. 17, 1974, the Delaware Valley Birding Hotline was a reality.

People calling the hotline were treated to Frank's baritone voice telling them that a Snowy Owl had been spotted at Brigantine, and a Golden Eagle, six Marbled Godwits and both eiders had been seen at Barnegat.

That first year, 27 organizations and individuals helped support the Academy venture. DVOC has, of course, been connected to the hotline since its beginning, providing funding and voices.

Displaying the fine qualities of a good administrator, Frank quickly absented himself from the microphone. As Keith tells it, he and Frank spent a lot of time together in '74, and they had discussed the idea of a hotline.

"Well, Frank gets up at a DVOC meeting," Keith said, "and arbitrarily appoints me to be the voice of the hotline. And I just said, 'Oh yeah, am I?'"

SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS of that first year haven't been seen around here since: a Common Ground-Dove in Bucks County in January; a Parasitic Jaeger in Lancaster County in August; and a Rufous Hummingbird in Devon in November.

The hummer has a tale.

"It was there for two or three weeks," Keith said of the Rufous Hummingbird, which breeds in northwestern North America and should have been lounging away the winter in Mexico. "It was ultimately netted by some people from the Academy because a cold spell was forecast. They took it to the Hummingbird House at the Zoo, where it immediately took over. It was very aggressive and started beating up on everybody."

One of the biggest problems in the hotline's early history was maintaining the recording machine used to tape the message and play it back when the number was dialed. Keith said the machine was temperamental; Frank called it archaic. With more than 30,000 calls to handle that first year, it broke down often.

Frank remembered Armas' frustration with being limited to three minutes for his message, and the machine was eventually replaced with one that gives him six minutes. Armas called it a "hard-core machine."

"It has to be able to endure a lot of use," he said. "Last year

(Continued on Page 2)

EAST COAST HOTLINES

Maine	207-781-2332
New Hampshire*	603-224-9900
Vermont*	802-457-2779
E. Mass.	617-259-8805
W. Mass.	413-569-6926
Rhode Island*	401-521-4252
Connecticut	203-572-0012
New York City	212-832-6523
Buffalo	716-896-1271
Schenectady	518-377-9600
New Jersey	201-766-2661
Cape May, N.J.	609-884-2626
Philadelphia	215-567-2473
W. Penna.	412-963-6104
Washington, D.C.	301-652-1088
New Orleans	504-246-2473

*Operate on limited schedule

PROGRAMS

Meetings are held the first and third Thursdays of each month at 8 p.m. at the Academy of Natural Sciences, 19th St. and Benjamin Franklin Parkway, unless otherwise noted. The Oct. 4 and Nov. 1 meetings will be held in the Widener Center Room; the Oct. 18 meeting will be held in the Auditorium.

OCT. 4 — ARGENTINA, with Phil Street, a fellow of the DVOC.

OCT. 18 — ANTARCTICA, with Bob Sehl, also a DVOC fellow.

NOV. 1 — PEREGRINE RE-INTRODUCTION, with Dan Brauning, assistant project coordinator of the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas and a member of the Academy's ornithology department.

NOV. 15 — ANNUAL DINNER. Chairing this year's banquet, to be held at Walber's on the Delaware, Essington, Pa., is Kate Brethwaite. See details below.

All programs are subject to change. Contact John LaVia, program chairman, for information: 609-877-8025.

FIELD TRIPS

Sept. 29 and 30: Barnegat to Cape May weekend. Meet Saturday morning at 7:30 at the Barnegat Lighthouse parking lot.

Oct. 28: Pelagic trip. Leaves at 4 a.m. from Barnegat. Cost: \$35. Send checks to Alan Brady, Box 103, Wycombe, Pa. 18980.

Sunday, Nov. 4: Bake Oven Knob. Meet at Lookout parking lot at 9 a.m.

For information on the above trips, call Bill Stocku, 215-586-2098.

Fall 1985: Argentina! Phil Street is organizing a DVOC trip to Argentina, with the approximate dates being Nov. 19 to Dec. 9, 1985. Argentine ornithologist Maurice Rumboll will accompany the group. The trip will start with coverage of the pampas southeast of Buenos Aires, followed by a flight to Tierra del Fuego and visits to the eastern slopes of the Andes, the Patagonian desert, the penguin colony at Punta Tombo and the rich Peninsula Valdez. It will conclude in the tropics on the Argentine-Brazilian border at spectacular Iguazu Falls. On a similar trip last fall, Phil had 300 species. Contact him at 1-363-7776 for further details.

Hotline Approaches Its 10th Anniversary

(Continued from Page 1)

we got 40,000 calls — that's four or five times more than Cape May gets."

Armas, who has been described affectionately as the "Howard Cosell of hotlines," brings his own upbeat style and enthusiasm to Birdline.

His smooth delivery is something he has acquired. He remembers his first tape in August 1979: "I talked about a Sandwich Tern at the tip of Holgate, and I was nervous as heck.

"The first year was a little rough. In September I got mono and was laid up until the Black-tailed Godwit appeared at Tinicum and Alan Brady virtually carried me down there."

Armas does more than just report on unusual birds seen in the area. He has put together features of which he is proud.

"For three years running, I was able to do a feature on Ruffs, and Pedricktown has been on the map for that. I did a review of the 1970s and highlights of the migration at Hawk Mountain. I've played a recording of a Black Rail on the tape," he said of some of his more unusual attempts.

Then there was the bluebird feature that had to wait. It was November 1981, and Armas had done a report about the breeding success of bluebirds aided by local folks who had developed bluebird trails.

The feature was postponed week after week, as Gyrfalcons, rare in the continental 48, made their descent into Lancaster County, Pa. Armas was in his glory, reporting with each new tape the location, number, color phase and quarry-swooping, pigeon-stooping, Redtail-chasing antics of the Arctic dwellers.

"A whole story unfolded there, not just with the exciting Gyr story for two years," Armas said. "Up until that point, if you had called a tape, what you would hear about in the winter was the Jersey shore. With the Gyrfalcon year, we had a network of people starting to report who never would have tied in to Philadelphia before.

"That was a good winter all around. Besides the Gyrs, there was the Snowy Owl. And then the winter finches came down."

Armas continued to give bulletins on the whereabouts of the three Gyrs, the last one leaving the area at the end of March 1982. That saga picked up the following winter, when the same pair, the white-phase male and the dark-phase female, returned to the Stolzhus Quarry in Leacock, Pa.

Armas' role in the Gyrfalcon story also continued that winter, until the following tape was heard early in 1983:

"I had originally planned to make a tape earlier this week with — I had hoped — a happy tone and continuing good news about Gyrfalcons and other birds in our region. Instead, I held off, because it seemed as if this edition of the Philadelphia Birdline would have to be made today, Thursday, Jan. 13, with an unhappy tone telling sad news about the death of a Gyrfalcon. And that it does."

With Armas in the city less often, Dan Brauning has been helping out with the tapes. If Dan is ever reincarnated as a bird, surely he'll be a member of the Mimidae family: He picked up Armas' speech patterns so quickly that it has been difficult at times to figure out who is doing the tape.

To report weekly sightings, call Dan at 215-299-1181. — SLS

National Birds of Prey Week Set for October

National Birds of Prey Conservation Week will be celebrated Oct. 7 to 13, thanks to the efforts of two Pennsylvania legislators.

U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter and U.S. Rep. Don Ritter, representing Pennsylvania's 15th District, co-sponsored the bill.

Specter pointed out that "Pennsylvania is home to some of the world's best outlooks for observing birds of prey, including nearly 150 miles along the Kittatinny Ridge desig-

nated the 'Kittatinny Birds of Prey Natural Area.'"

Pennsylvania has had an annual Hawk Watching Week since 1979.

The resolution reads, in part:

"... hawks, owls and other birds of prey are vital ecological components of the wild-life communities in which they live, and are important environmental indicators of ecosystem quality;

"... forty of the fifty-three species of birds of prey that occur regularly in the United States have been listed by one or more state conservation agencies as endangered, extirpated, threatened or of concern;

"... public attitudes regarding birds of prey are changing to one of appreciation and understanding;

"... over a million Americans are birdwatchers who regularly observe hawks and other birds of prey every autumn at migration outlooks located on major raptor flyways scattered from California to Maine, and from Minnesota to Florida and Texas."

Wildlife conservationists and birdwatchers hailed the passage of the bill designating National Birds of Prey Conservation Week as an excellent way to promote public awareness of birds of prey.

You are cordially invited to the

DVOC Annual Dinner

Thursday, November 15, 1984

Guest speaker: Pete Dunne, Naturalist/Director, Cape May Bird Observatory

Walber's on the Delaware
Taylor Avenue
Essington, Pa.

Social hour, 6 p.m., Bridge Room

Dinner, 7 p.m.

Cost: \$11.50 per person

Mail checks to:

C. Brethwaite, chairwoman

533 Atterbury Rd.

Villanova, Pa.

19085

Make checks payable to DVOC

Proper Etiquette on N.J. 'Biggest Day'

by ALAN BRADY

We fell for it. We took Peter Dunne's bait and ran with it. Mike and Chris Danzenbaker, Robert Ridgely, Kate Brethwaite and I made up the DVOC team for the Biggest Day in New Jersey.

The rules were simple — one car, five-person limit, midnight to midnight May 19, no tapes, all team members must see or hear 95 percent of all species. All in New Jersey.

We began the run at midnight in Marmora with Black Rail, picked up a Saw-whet calling in the pines as we were on the way to Princeton, where light rain was falling. Our problem now was to get a good list, but not too large because the Cape May Bird Observatory team included Roger T. Peterson, and no one would want to put Peterson in second place. That would be tantamount to putting down motherhood and apple pie — truly sacrilegious.

With the warblers falling out of the trees in Princeton, we did have difficulty holding down the list. Between warblers, Kate pointed to a hummer on nest. Then, fortunately, the rain increased as we birded the Bull's Island area and we were able to miss a couple of "sure things."

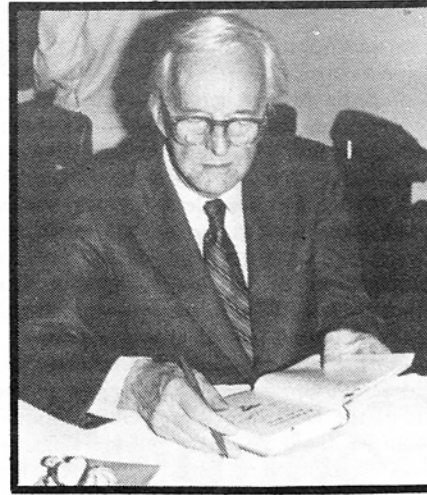
Bob blundered into a Lincoln's Sparrow and a Red-breasted Nuthatch, and we had to warn him sternly.

When we pulled into Brigantine, we were informed that the Big Show-Biz group was 45 minutes ahead of us in their 300SD Mercedes with a CBS-TV crew running interference. My 12-year-old Volvo was sputtering along with Ridgely sitting on the hood spotting everything in the book, and when he picked up a Curlew Sandpiper, that was almost the last straw!

This might be the end of North American birding as we know it if we continued on this way, for who would want to purchase a field guide written by someone who comes in second?

It was hard to hold my team down after this, however. The Double D's were calling out birds all over Nummy's Island and Mike murmured something about a Cape May Warbler, making our 30th warbler. So I floored it to Cape May, where we cruised about a bit trying not to see too many more birds.

Kate looked up from her clipboard at 9 p.m. and announced that we had 188 species, which I thought would be OK. Unfortunately a Chuck-will's-widow called as we drove down Seagrove Avenue and we all heard it, so we had to count it: 189 species.



Following an Academy lecture several days after his "Biggest Day" victory, Roger Tory Peterson patiently signed autographs as he celebrated the 50th anniversary of his *A Field Guide to the Birds East of the Rockies*. He was accompanied by his wife, Virginia, who prepared the maps in the 1980 edition of the book. SLS Photo

As it turned out, we could have gone a bit further, for the Dunne-Peterson team came in at midnight with 201 species. But how could we have known?

We hear Peterson's not coming next year, so that's going to be a piece of cake.

Thanks to those who helped us in the pre-running: Bob Maurer, Tom Southerland, Ray Blicharz, Steve Haskin and yes, even Pete Dunne.

New Jersey Audubon and DVOC also wish to acknowledge those who pledged a total of \$480.82 for the DVOC team. They are Jim Meritt, Harry Franzen, Phil Street, Gene Stern, Dale Twining, Sam Jones, Harry Todd, Barb and Frank Haas, Sandy Sherman, Richard Kelley, Edward Crawford, Jean Fuschillo, Charles Wonderly, Frank Hubbard and Ann Bacon.

After registration fees and an even split between the two organizations, DVOC was left with \$180.41, which was donated to the Delaware Valley Birding Hotline.

EDITOR'S NOTE: DVOC members Brian Moscatello, Serge LaFrance, Bill Stocku, Paul Guris and Gerry McChesney also participated, representing the Rancocas Nature Center.

BOOKS: Lancaster County Hot-Spots Guide

by EDWARD D. FINGERHOOD

A GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF LANCASTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA, Harold B. Morrin, editor, Lancaster County Bird Club, 1984. 197 pages. \$9.50.

It is regrettable that more bird clubs don't pool their resources and talents to produce county bird accounts as good as this one is. This book must become a model for all such future efforts.

The book is divided into two broad sections. The first describes the county's outstanding birding locations after a brief and helpful introduction to the area's habitats, geology and topography. No listener to the Philadelphia Birdline can fail to recognize the roll call of hot spots: Middle Creek, Muddy Run, Octoraro Reservoir and so on. The full-page maps to these sites are clear and, although I have not tested the directions, those areas in the county I do know are well represented and the text seems easy to follow and exact.

The second division presents an annotated checklist of the county's birds, past and present. This list is a thorough compilation

of each bird's status, habitat with additional comments as needed for the 325 species known to have been observed in Lancaster County. The Checklist Committee is to be commended. It is an extremely difficult task to accurately describe just the current status of a region's birdlife. But this committee has gone the extra long step of adding a historical dimension by incorporation of the work of earlier county ornithologists such as J.J. Libhard (1869) and Dr. Herbert Beck (1924). This step adds a perspective to many of the bird accounts that current-status lists, to their detriment, lack.

My only reservation is the book's lack of a place-name index. While the bird name index is excellent — it even has check-off boxes next to the bird names for county listers — the absence of a geographic index leaves the searcher for specific sites scanning the birding locale chapters for a familiar word. Nevertheless, this inconvenience is easily ignored, given the overall excellence of the book.

This volume is the result of a two-year effort of the Lancaster County Bird Club, certainly one of the premier bird organiza-

tions in the country. The chairman of the 10-person editorial committee, Harold B. Morrin, has done a superb job of imposing a readable and consistent style on this richly illustrated paperbound book. I recommend it highly.

Copies can be ordered at \$9.50 each, plus \$2 postage/handling, from William Adams, 1400 Quarry Lane, Lancaster, Pa. 17603.

Philadelphia Larus

Send information you would like considered for publication in *Philadelphia Larus* to:

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Media, Pa. 19063
215-566-6569 (home)
215-893-5739 (work)

LOCAL NOTES

Horace Alexander, a fellow and honorary member of the DVOC and author of *Seventy Years of Birdwatching*, was honored this spring by the government of India for his service to the country in its drive for independence. In ceremonies at the Quaker retirement community of Crosslands, Alexander, 95, received the Padma Bhushan Award. He taught international relations at a Quaker college and, on a sabbatical in 1927, he traveled to India, where he met Mahatma Gandhi. He returned as an ambulance driver during World War II and stayed through the mid 1950s. A native of Croydon, England, Alexander has been a member of the British Ornithological Union for more than 70 years, and was named to the first wildlife board established in India after independence.

Jack Padalino of the Pocono Environment Education Center has graciously offered to provide DVOC members with copies of the latest Checklist to the Birds of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. They should be available at the fall meetings, or write to PEEC, R.D. 1, Box 268, Dingmans Ferry, Pa. 18328. The checklist is handsomely designed, with histograms giving information on seasonal occurrence and frequency. PEEC also sponsors several hawk-watch weekends each fall; the September and October sessions are filled, but they've opened another for Nov. 2 to 4. Call for information at 717-828-2319.

BIRD DEPARTMENT DEPARTMENT: A flock of Academy ornithologists, et. al., trekked to Cordillero de Cutucu, Ecuador, this summer in a successful but strenuous expedition. **Frank Gill, Bob Ridgely, Mark Robbins, Bob Peck** and Skip Glenn collectively saw 220 species in the mountainous habitat, returning with seven or eight species each represented by less than 10 collected specimens in the world. They also brought back tales of horror about tough hiking along calf-deep mud trails and guides who ate the expedition's allotment of canned tuna very early in the trip, leaving the participants short on provisions. . . . **Pete Myers** has received a grant from the World Wildlife Fund-U.S. for a study mapping migration of shorebirds in the Western Hemisphere.

Kate Brethwaite sighted one of Pete's Sanderlings July 22 on the jetty at the Rips at Cape May Point. The bird, with a colorful variety of bands and one green flag, was tagged in May at Stone Harbor.

A ONE-WEEK STINT: The best rare species that had DVOC members on the move this summer had to be the Rufous-necked Stint in fine breeding plumage that was identified July 22 at Port Mahon. The bird, which stayed for seven days, must have made a wrong turn leaving western Alaska. Other oddities have been the Masked Duck near Lake Ontelaunee in mid-June, a second "once-

in-a-century" Ross' Gull, this one in West Milford, Conn., in mid-April; a Fork-tailed Flycatcher at Cape May that gave **Roger Tory Peterson** his 697th North American species on the Biggest Day; and a Black-tailed Gull at Sandy Point State Park, Md., in July. All these special birds followed what many called the best spring warbler migration in 25 years.

DVOC is saddened by the deaths of four of its members: **Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee**, a DVOC fellow and former curator of ornithology at the Academy; **A. Lloyd Davis** and **John N. Foster**, both life members; and **F. Morse Archer**.

GOOD FINDS I: Credit **Jim Meritt** with discovery of two pairs of Dickcissels this spring in South Jersey. Looked like the *Spiza* species wanted to nest in the alfalfa fields, but they had their home mowed out from under them. . . . While teeing off at Springhaven Golf Course in Swarthmore, where she has played since 1952, **Helen McWilliams** had a singing Yellow-throated Warbler from June 15 to 22. . . . **Rick Mellon** was the finder of a nest full of hissing Turkey Vultures while doing a botanical survey.

GOOD FINDS II: **Ed Fingerhood**, to whom DVOC owes thanks for a fine issue of *Cassinia*, says the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas Project had between 450 and 500 atlasers in the field this past season. Ed, project coordinator, reports some of the surprise species nesting in our area this year included Rough-winged Swallow, discovered by **Chris Walters** in Delaware County; Upland Sandpiper at the Philadelphia Airport, found by **John Miller**; and Blue Grosbeak, which Ed came up with at Bartram Gardens. Funding for the five-year project, just completing its first "official" year, has been approved by the Wild Resource Conservation Fund Board, according to **Dan Brauning**, assistant project coordinator and editor of the project's newsletter. The fund is generated by the Pennsylvania tax check-off programs and through direct contributions.

Congratulations to **Tom Reeves** and his wife, **Helen N. (Nicki) Simmons**, who were married July 7, and **Harry Todd** and his St. Patrick's Day bride, **Anne Lyons**. Tom took an unscheduled flight when he was unceremoniously dumped into the backyard pool at **Frank and Barbara Haases'** annual birders' picnic.

DVOC welcomes the following new members, who were elected in the spring: **Edward Boyd** of Sicklerville, N.J.; **Chris (Jim) Danzenbaker** of Linwood, N.J.; **Mike Danzenbaker** of Merion; **Alfred Driscoll** of Moorestown, N.J.; **John Frink** of Wilmington, Del.; and **Lee McAvoy** of Overbrook Hills.

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