

Philadelphia Larus

Vol. 31 No. 1

Spring 2004

From the president's desk

First, I would like to say that it is an honor to be elected President of DVOC, and I hope that I will be able to follow in the footsteps of my honored and distinguished predecessors. I have an outstanding support cast in Chris Walters, Paul Guris, and all of those on Council, and hope that they will bear with me during the course of my travels.

Secondly, our previous president has taken the club in a new direction, one for the 21st century, and the ground work has been laid for the DVOC to become one of the premier clubs in the country.

Membership over the last the past 18 months has risen considerably, in large part due to the outstanding job Anita Guris has done. An average of 55 people are now attending meetings and we continue to encourage members to bring guests. Not only are the meetings informative, they are also a lot of fun. It is my goal to increase member participation by offering more field trips and to get the members to share their wealth of knowledge with the entire club.

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Adventures in Birding: The Dave Cutler Story

by Chris Walters



Dave Cutler in Brazil 2003

It was black as pitch, and early March cold in Philadelphia, as my car tiptoed the unlit path leading down to the Wissahickon. Just above the Livezey dam, off on the right, lights and a big house suddenly appeared among the trees. Turning, I pulled up behind Dave Cutler's house, to talk birds and DVOC. I learned a lot that night. Including the fact that Time Magazine discussed Dave's DVOC May Runs in Delaware 35 years ago.

The records show Dave joined DVOC in 1944, after his older brother Herb had joined in 1939. "Bet you can't guess how long they kept me waiting, until they let me in," Dave asked me. "Five years"! And even then it took a push from Julian Potter, DVOC's principal birdman, to let someone so young as Dave into what was the most exclusive bird club around. But among other feats, young David Cutler had spotted three Glossy Ibis, a rare find, and with Potter's support he was finally nominated for membership.

The DVOCers had little choice, really. While on duty with the Navy Air Corps in Rhode Island during World War II, Dave had already been out birding with the legendary Ludlow Griscom. Had Potter done that? Had Choate? And had any of those old-time DVOCers heard Griscom's prediction (as Dave did, as Griscom looked at a Great Black-

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Current DVOC Officers

President: Adrian Binns
Vice President: Chris Walters
Secretary: Paul Guris
Treasurer: Naomi Murphy

Current Councilors

The four Officers, the Preceding President, six Councilors (fellows or active members elected by the members), and the Editor (appointed by the Council) constitute the Council that governs the Club.

Lynn Jackson, Anita Guris (to Jan. 2005)
Bert Filemyr, Art McMorris (Jan. 2006)
Doris McGovern, Martin Selzer (January 2007)

Preceding President - Colin Campbell

New DVOC Fellows Appointed at the January 2004 Meeting

Emmerson Bowes, Al Driscoll, Andy Ednie
Mike Fritz, Anita Guris, Lynn Jackson
Bernice & Joe Koplun, Doris McGovern
Martin Selzer, Jack Siler

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Martin Selzer, Field Trip Chairman, is

offering over 35 field trips. We have excellent leaders in the club, and are blessed with some outstanding birding locations. We always welcome suggestions for additional trips as well as offers of leadership, and encourage new members to join us.

The Ornithological Studies program is the backbone of the club and Art McMorris and Chuck Hetzel have done an outstanding job in lining up presentations. To date, members have presented a wide range of topics including identification pointers, phenomena, bird sounds, etc.....the possibilities are endless. We need to support this endeavor, and ask that each member consider presenting something that would be of interest to the club.

Our website, www.DVOC.org, is an integral part of the club. Bert Filemyr has worked tirelessly on keeping it updated. The website gets information out to everyone who may be curious about the club and also informs the members about what is going on. It is an on going "book" and I hope that you will visit it often.

Though these outlets I hope that new people will decide that we have a top-notch organization that is worth being involved in and will join us to help make our club better.

Here's hoping to see you at a meeting soon,
Adrian Binns

Meetings/Programs

DVOC meetings are held at 7:30 PM on the first and third Thursdays of the month, from the third Thursday in September through the first Thursday in June, at the Academy of Natural Sciences, 19th and Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Philadelphia. During the summer months, informal meetings are held once a month on the third Thursday evening. **Guests are welcome.**

Thursday April 1, 2004, 7:30 pm

CLAY SUTTON – "Birding Cumberland County, NJ." Our own DVOCer Clay Sutton will tell us the undiscovered benefits of birding the Jersey bayshore of **Cumberland County**. His talk is based on his recently-published book "Birding Cumberland, A Birder's Guide to Cumberland County, NJ." Copies of this \$12.00 book will be available for purchase. **Ornithological Studies - White-throated Sparrow: Biology of Color Morphs / Art McMorris**

Thursday April 15, 2004, 7:30 pm

DR. FRANK GILL - "Citizen Science Ornithology." Our own Frank Gill, Senior VP in charge of Citizen Science at National Audubon, will explain how any one of us can advance the knowledge of ornithology as a "citizen scientist". Frank joined DVOC in 1969. He led the Academy's Bird Department for many years, and headed up the Birds of North America Project. In 1998, Frank was elected President of the AOU (American Ornithologists Union). **Ornithological Studies - Endemic Birds of North America / Bert Filemyr**

Thursday May 6, 2004, 7:30 pm

LAURIE GOODRICH (Hawk Mountain) – "Saving Species While They Are Still Common." Learn the recent trends in NE raptor populations, the efforts being made to better monitor raptors both in Central America and North America, and the research being done at **Hawk Mountain** on habitat use, behavior, and feeding by migrating raptors.

Ornithological Studies - Porphyrin / Art McMorris

Thursday May 20, 2004, 7:30 pm

JIM CHACE - "Southeast Arizona's Response to Cowbird Parasitism." Want to (re)visit Southeast Arizona? Tag along as Dr. Jameson ("Jim") Chace from Villanova University recounts his field studies on cowbird parasitism in Southwestern Arizona birds. Jim promises to show us the bird hosts, not just the cowbirds!

Ornithological Studies - World Series of Birding Report

Thursday June 3, 2004, 7:30 pm

In lieu of a formal speaker, members will give reports on their "May Runs", also known as "Big Days", whether formally a part of the World Series of Birding or not. Audience is free to question or critique the reported sights.

Spring and Summer Field Trips

Saturday, April 3, 2004 - SOUTH WEST NEW JERSEY (PEDRICKTOWN and MANNINGTON MARSH) for possible winter stragglers (Ross Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, blackbirds) and any early migrants (Ruffs have previously been seen on this trip).

Leader: Frank Windfelder- fwindfelder@yahoo.com

Sunday, April 25, 2004 - BIRDING THE THREE OLD FORTS, DE/NJ

We bird three State Parks all having comprehensive remains of war fortifications. We start at **Fort Dupont State Park**, Delaware City, DE for migrants; we catch a ferry to **Pea Patch Island** in the Delaware River to see the second largest heronry in the eastern US (and Fort Delaware). We catch the ferry again to **Fort Mott** in NJ to traverse the nature trail and see the extensive fortifications and finally return by ferry to Delaware City.

Meet: 7 AM at the Ferry Dock, end of Clinton St., Delaware City. Late risers can join us at the same place at 9:30 AM. Return about 5 PM.

Cost: \$6.00 for the ferry; state park fees applicable (DE fee - \$2.50 for Delawareans, \$5.00 for aliens) so carpool where you can. Pay as you go.

Contact Doris if you intend to join; the ferry needs approximate numbers if there's a crowd.

Details: in flyer at DVOC meetings (March 18, April 1, 15) or by request from leader (send e-mail or stamped, addressed envelope by post)

Leader: Doris McGovern

mcgovern@masca.museum.upenn.com

Friday - Sunday May 7-9, 2004 - BIRDING SOUTHERN DELAWARE and into MARYLAND.

This weekend trip starts at **Bombay Hook NWR** on Friday morning and works south to **Trap Pond State Park** where you can camp or you can motel nearby. Saturday we bird **Nanticoke WMA** and areas around Seaford before returning to Trap Pond. Sunday, we bird the Cypress Swamps in DE and MD, then head north to the bayside areas. Interspersed throughout is a gourmet tour trying local delicacies such as crab, scrapple and muskrat. Yummy. Full details on a flyer nearer the time. Let me know in advance if you intend to come.

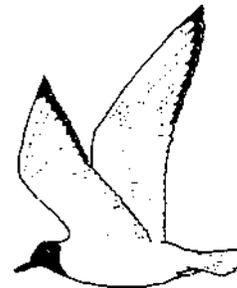
Leader: Colin Campbell - delawaretwitcher@comcast.net

Sunday, May 9, 2004 - FORT WASHINGTON STATE PARK, Montgomery County, PA for spring migrants. Meet at the Hawkwatch platform at 8 AM

Leader: Bill Murphy - ndmurphy3@hotmail.com

Save the Date! **DVOC Annual Banquet** **Thursday, November 18** **Speaker: Dr. Carl Safina**

Dr. Carl Safina of New York, author of more than a hundred scientific and popular publications on ecology and marine conservation, will be our 2004 Banquet Speaker on November 18, 2004. His talk, Eye of the Albatross, will tell us what it is like to travel with the albatrosses, the greatest flying creatures on earth. Safina is a leading voice for the conservation and restoration of the seabirds and other creatures of the oceans. He is President of the Blue Ocean Institute (www.blueoceaninstitute.org). His latest critically-acclaimed book, Eye of the Albatross, won the John Burroughs Medal for being the best book on natural history published in 2003. Carl will bring copies to the Banquet for sale and on request will sign them.



Please submit announcements, pieces to be considered for publication, schedules and other information for *Philadelphia Larus* to:

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Please send address changes to:
Naomi Murphy
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DVOC Website Address:
www.dvoc.org

Deadline for Autumn *Larus*: August 1, 2004

backed Gull): "Someday there'll be Lesser Black-backed Gulls here too."

By profession Dave is an engineer. He runs his own recycling company in Wyncote, PA. But don't be fooled by appearances. If the May Run competitions of DVOC were run not just for seeing/hearing birds, but for eating them, Dave would still be an eager competitor, and with knife and fork at the ready.

Dave grew up in West Philadelphia. His father was a long-time Philadelphia Police detective. His brother Herb, the Boy Scouts, and the Comstock Society were those that introduced Dave to birding. But it was seeing a male Hooded Warbler at an outlet pipe at Centennial Lake in Fairmount Park that Dave remembers, even now, as a defining moment in his birding life. For Dave as for so many birders, it was one bird - - one sighting - - that made all the difference.

Dave's adventures in birding have included some unusual experiences. Wait till you hear about some of these. For instance, he hitchhiked from Philadelphia to be part of the first Christmas Count ever conducted in Mexico (San Luis Potosi), where he found Mexicans using slingshots to kill birds for food. On another early trip to Mexico, an eight week collecting expedition organized by Louisiana State University, he learned how to shoot and skin birds. To bird Mexico before 1952, Dave recalls, he and his brother Herb had to create their own field guide, making drawings from records of Griscom's previous collecting expeditions. No field guide existed. Before leaving for Mexico the legendary James ("Jim") Bond gave the Cutler brothers guidance while examining Mexican birds in the Academy's skin collection.

While still on active duty in the '40's Dave found himself stationed for a time in Alameda, California. To make the best of this, he birded there with shorebird expert Eunice Kelly and Robert Storer (Museum Curator) while attending meetings of the Cooper Ornithological Society. Dave's best find during that stint in California was that state's first Sharp-tailed Sparrow. Another extralimital highlight that Dave recalls was his finding - -in Lincoln, Nebraska - - an immature Long-tailed Jaeger in the 1960's. Dave found it sitting on an island while he was swimming at a local lake with his family. Others collected it the following day. It was a first state record.

One of the mysteries of DVOC history got straightened out for me that March night in Cutler's living room: the establishment of the "Miller Bird Club". The Miller Bird Club, I learned, was a splinter group formed before World War II by young DVOCers who thought DVOC was too narrow, social, and clique-ish. They also felt the Club was too slow to encourage and take in young birders. The 35 members of this club - - which only lasted a few years due to military service obligations - - met in members' houses and ran their own field trips. (See photo). Dave claims one had to recite about 100 Latin bird names to join (talk about narrow!). The leading "hotshots" in this group were Dick Miller, Bill Jay, Dr. Ed Reimann, Millard Lindauer, John Higgins, Billy Carr, both Cutlers, Bill Yoder, Quint Kramer, and Bob Newman of LSU.

Later, these Miller Bird Club troops nominated a slate in opposition to the DVOC's Nominating Committee's slate of new officers. The Miller slate called for Joe Cadbury and Ernie Choate to be officers (they each became DVOC Presidents years later). After the war most of the "Miller guys" gravitated back into DVOC activities.

Dave related to me another piece of Club lore - - the early debate on admission of women. This debate came to a head in 1951. Quintin Kramer's wife Evie was an obvious candidate. After devoting a full meeting to the subject in November 1951, women were not admitted. "The Club was split", Dave recalls, but the "powers-that-be" were against the change. Of course women were ultimately admitted in 1983.

In his early days Dave birded often with current member Dr. Joel Abramson (now residing in Florida). Dave recalls Joel starting his birding tour business, Bird Bonanzas. In fact Dave and Joel together ran the first preliminary camp out trip to Africa for Bird Bonanzas. Another of Dave's frequent early companion in the field, Bill Jay, was an egg collector who amassed a huge collection. Jay birded virtually every day, and seemed to know where all the nests were in the Wissahickon Valley.

Cassinia records a number of the early finds made by Dave in the Delaware Valley. These include finding nesting Great Blue Herons at Centennial Lake in Fairmount Park in 1944, an Audubon's Shearwater off Asbury Park, NJ on July 29, 1951, and the second North American record of Pink-footed Goose on November 1, 1953 at Bombay Hook. Another major Delaware find was Dave's getting the second state record of Brewer's Blackbird.

In terms of formal Club functions, Dave served twice on DVOC's Council, once starting in 1954 and again starting in 1959. He succeeded his brother Herb as the Club's Field Trip Chairman in 1952, and he also served on the Club's Nominating Committee with George Reynard.

For many years, the Club's leading figure was Julian Potter. Potter served as Mid-Atlantic Regional Editor for American Birds, and its predecessor Bird Lore. One job of the Regional Editor was the thankless one of deciding which "hot reports" were too unreliable to be placed into American Birds. Starting in 1958, Dave was asked to perform this function for local reports given at DVOC meetings. To do this job, believe it or not, DVOC created an "Accounting Committee." Its job was to screen the "local notes" given at Club meetings, to ensure that only reliable "local notes" would later appear in Cassinia.

In the early 1960's, Potter fell into ill health and American Birds turned to Dave Cutler to serve as Potter's

successor as Regional Editor. Dave agreed and continued in that capacity for more than 40 years. Before Potter became ill, however, Dave recalls how the Club held a special dinner in Potter's honor at a local restaurant. Few if any other DVOCers have ever been so honored. The dinner was kept completely secret from Potter, and proved a big surprise to him. After Potter's death in 1963, the Club created the Julian Potter Award, that we are familiar with today. The Club has awarded it nearly every year since 1964 for excellence in field birding.

Despite all his other birding accomplishments, Dave is perhaps most renowned for organizing and running his famous Delaware "May Runs." He has done this every year for the last fifty-five years. The Cutler brothers began doing these Big Days back in 1948, starting sometimes in Pennsylvania but normally spending most of the day in Delaware. The core regulars have been Harry Armistead, Carl Perry, Howard Brokaw, and Dave Cutler. But it has been the policy of this group to add an outside guest, or monitor, on many of the runs. Previous participants include illustrious birding names: Will Russell of Wings, Kenn Kaufman, Ted Parker, Arnold Small of California, Bob Pyle, John Miller, Davis Finch of Wings, Joe Cadbury, Andy Ednie, John Janowski, Herb and Betty Cutler (originators), Dick Miller, Charlie Wonderly, Bob Sehl, Alan Brady, Jim Merritt, and many other DVOCers. Dave says the participants have been as interesting as the birds, and the laughs have been many.



Harry Goldstein, Herb Cutler, Quintin Kramer, Evie Kramer, Sid Margolis 1940

This Cutler team holds the Delaware state single-day record of 201 species (205 prior to the A.B.A.'s current rules). Hot competition continues. In 2003, the Cutler-Perry team had 193, Andy Ednie's team 191, Mary Gustafsen's 191, and Jim Lenhard's gang had 189, each team afield on different days.

Along the way on the runs, there were a few shockers. Like the one year when the first bird identified – at 12:10 a.m. – was a staked-out Cerulean Warbler! It was on nest with tail seen extended in the beam of the flashlight mounted to a telescope, and taped to a tree the prior evening.

Team Cutler is of course famous for "inspiring" night birds to "speak," so they can be identified. Why wait till dawn? And after all, there are years when the Black Rails will just not respond or speak on cue. More than once when this happened Cutler would announce: "OK, we're not going to waste any more time. This is it," and pull out a gun. BLAM! BLAM! The blanks would echo across the fog-covered and moonlit swamp, instantly awakening something – at least a Woodcock.

Time Magazine said this about the famous Cutler Team in its June 2, 1967 issue: "In Delaware, Dave Cutler, who can identify more than 200 birds by song alone, led his five-man team over 500 miles of wind-swept back roads. Armed with a supply of cherry bombs (to startle sleeping birds into song) and a portable tape player programmed with 42 different calls, the team identified 187 species."

But the stories and laughs do not end. There was the time when German U-Boats in 1940 were sinking ships off the Jersey Coast, casting oiled seabirds inland, many to their deaths. Right on the spot appeared the "Dead Birding Clan": Dave and a gang of others (the Kramers, Harry Goldstein, and Herb Cutler). They picked up dozens of dead alcid in several weekends of systematic beach surveys (see picture of the gang, with this article, with dead alcid, Dave as photographer). Herb Cutler found the first dead Ivory Gull ever for New Jersey on one of these weekends.

Today, Dave remains a force in the field, as Keith Russell can attest. On Keith's Philadelphia Mid-Winter Censuses, Dave often makes good finds. Just this year he brought back reports of 15 Redpolls, plus an Iceland Gull.

Looking back on a lifetime of adventures with birds and birders, however, there is little doubt what has attracted Dave the most: the people and the laughs. At the DVOC Annual Meeting this year, the Club made Dave Cutler an Honorary Member, a recognition long overdue.

Field Trips, continued

Sunday, May 16, 2004 - HAWKIN ROAD and BRIGHTVIEW FARM, Burlington Co., NJ.

The target species at Hawkin Road will be breeding Prothonotary, Worm-eating, Kentucky and Hooded Warblers and grasslands species at Brightview Farm. Meet at 6:30 AM at the bridge over Little Creek where the macadam turns to dirt road on Hawkin Road.

Leader: Don Jones - djones446@comcast.net

Saturday, May 22, 2004 – RIDLEY CREEK STATE PARK, PA for spring migrants. Expected: warblers, including Louisiana Waterthrush and possibly Kentucky Warbler; thrushes (possibly including Swainson's), vireos, flycatchers, many others. Meet at 6:30 AM at the Ridley Creek bridge on Gradyville Road (near Newtown Square, PA). We will bird until 11:00 or noon, depending on when the birds give out.

Leader: Art McMorris - mcmorris@mac.com

Wednesday, May 26, 2004 – RIDLEY CREEK STATE PARK, PA for spring migrants. See May 22.

Leader: Art McMorris - mcmorris@mac.com

Saturday May 29, 2004 - PEREGRINE WATCH

Help monitor peregrine fledglings from 7-10 AM. Meet at the Betsy Ross Bridge

Leader: Matt Sharp - sharp@acnatsci.org

Thursday, June 3, 2004 - BIRDING the NATIVE GRASSLANDS at the PENNYPACK TRUST, Montgomery Co., PA

The sixth growing year for the restoration of the grasslands at the Trust might produce some good breeding birds. Come help us survey the bird species and enjoy a two mile walk. Meet at the Trust center parking lot at 7:30 AM. Location is 2955 Edgehill Road, Huntingdon Valley, PA. Leader: JoAnn Raine -

Friday - Sunday June 25-27, 2004– WESTERN PA GRASSLANDS for such specialty sparrow species as Henslow's, Savannah, Grasshopper, Clay-colored, and Vesper Sparrows. Bobolink, Northern Harriers, Uppies and possibly Short-eared Owls. Leave Friday evening, return Sunday evening.

Leaders: Chris Walters - cwalters@reedsmith.com, Rick Mellon - rmellon@voicenet.com

Saturday, July 17, 2004 - BOMBAY HOOK NWR and ENVIRONS, DE Part 1. Join us to witness the early part of the annual southbound shorebird migration spectacle. Meet at 7:30 AM at the headquarters

Leader: Martin Selzer - mselzer@prdus.jnj.com

Saturday, August 21, 2004– BOMBAY HOOK NWR and COASTAL DE Part 2 –A trip to catch the later wave of the shorebird migration spectacle. Meet at 7:30 AM at the headquarters.

Leader: Martin Selzer - mselzer@prdus.jnj.com (215)233-9090

Saturday August 28, 2004 – BRANDYWINE CREEK STATE PARK, DE at a good time for early warblers (Golden-winged and Mourning) and possible unusual flycatchers (Yellow-bellied or Olive-sided). Meet at the park nature center at 7:45 AM. Park fee is in effect.

Leader: Andy Ednie - ednieap@wittnet.com

Saturday, September 4, 2004 – JOHNSON SOD FARM in Cumberland County, NJ – for an assortment of shorebirds including plovers and sandpipers. Last year Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Pacific Golden Plover in 2002. Meet on Grier's Lane, just east of Rte 77 at 7:30 AM

Leader: Adrian Binns - wildlifegd@aol.com

Friday September 10, 2004 – “CONFUSING FALL BIRDERS” at HIGBEE BEACH WMA, NJ - spend a morning birding the fields and forest edges looking for songbird migrants. We will sort through the fall plumages of the (hopefully) numerous migrants at this Fall hotspot. With luck we will get to see a big fallout of birds, but there should be plenty to see regardless this time of year. Emphasis will be on sorting out “confusing fall warblers”. The warblers are not confused, we are. They know who they are, but we are the ones confused (sometimes anyway). Meet at the main lot at **Higbee Beach WMA** (the one at the end of the road) Cape May Point NJ at 7:30 AM

Leader: Mike Fritz - kngfshr@sprynet.com

Field Trips, Cont'd

Wednesday, September 15, 2004 – MANAYUNK SWIFT ROOST.

In autumn migration, huge numbers of **Chimney Swifts** roost in chimneys of certain schools in the Roxborough/Manayunk area. Meet at the **Dobson School** on Umbria Street and Hermitage Lane in Manayunk on Wednesday, at 7:00 PM to witness this annual spectacle. Parking is limited; carpooling advisable.

Leader: Jane Henderson - janeh008@aol.com (215)836-1965

Saturday, September 18, 2004 - FALL BIRDING at the BAILEY TRACT, PALMYRA COVE NATURE PARK, NJ.

Focusing on migrating warblers anything is possible including numerous Connecticuts. Up to 20 species of warblers have been seen in past trips at this wonderful birding location. Meet at 7:00 AM at car park.

Leader: Ward Dasey - w.daseyiii@worldnet.att.net (609)953-1686

Sunday September 19, 2004– HAWK MOUNTAIN, PA at the peak time for Broad-wing migration. Meet at the visitor's center at 8:00AM. Bring a packed lunch. Entrance fee unless you are a member.

Leader: Adrian Binns - wildlifegd@aol.com (215)364-4407

Saturday, October 2 OR 9, 2004 - TUCKERTON MARSHES, NJ for Sharp-tailed Sparrows. We should get great looks at Salt Marsh Sharp-tail's as well as being able to compare all races of Nelson's. A walk along 7 bridges road will add additional species. We have gotten Clay-colored Sparrow in several years. Bring high boots or wellies. Pack a lunch if you will follow us to Brigantine afterwards. Meet at the end of 7 Bridges Road at 7:30 am sharp!

Leader: Frank Windfelder - fwindfelder@yahoo.com (215)673-0240

Request from DVOC Archivist Lynn Jackson:

Lynn Jackson is looking for information about former club member, Conrad Jenkins. If anyone in the club has any info could he/she please contact Lynn at jacklyn001@aol.com or 215-548-9034.

You Never Know What You'll Find at City Hall by Kate Somerville

Since I had a new yardbird this morning (Fox Sparrow) and since last spring, when it was also foggy overnight and there had been a lot of birds at City Hall, I went over today about 2PM, my lunch hour. First I saw three Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers on the same tree at the northeast entrance (two had been seen for the past couple weeks). Then I saw the Ovenbird that had been there for a month. Then, and I couldn't believe my eyes, saw a Chat. A friggin' Yellow-breasted Chat. I thought, well, maybe it's that Common Yellowthroat that comes and goes. But it was twice as big, and it had the eye markings. I didn't bring my camera, so, after a for-sure look, I ran back to see if anyone had a camera. I ended up with a polaroid from the Sex Offender Unit. I dash over, get to the curb to cross JFK and I spot someone with a dog taking a squat right at the spot in the bushes. I whistle rather loudly, scream to get that dog outa there, whistle again, and come dashing after them. I come up on them and the woman is quickly getting the poop into a plastic bag while the man stands there. She is afraid of me and angry. He is befuddled. He is also blind and misshapen; the dog is his aid. Sheesh. I say I'm sorry, wrong place/wrong time for a dog in there. She mutters and they leave. Not a bird left. Not even the homeless guy who was smoking a cigar in there. Only his empty 40 oz. was left. There had also been half a dozen White-throated Sparrows and a Catbird. So I go looking around. I check inside the courtyard and spot a couple Juncos, more white-throats, and a Hermit Thrush. I thought I saw a towhee, but when I nudge myself inside that area, it's closed off for the construction workers cleaning the building. I was told to leave: "What are you doing? This is restricted area." Not taking my glasses down a second, I state that I am looking at the tree for migrating birds. He says I am a liability and have to leave. I call him a redneck cement-lover and leave. So I go back to the Sapsucker spot. Two sapsuckers and the Ovenbird are back, but nothing else. Lunch is over and I go back to my building. There's some woman causing a fight with the McDonald's workers at the corner of Broad & Arch. She had hit one on the head with her umbrella and is fighting to go back in for more. I flag down a cop, point out the disturbance, and go back to my office. This is when my co-workers look at me askance when I tell them, "I just saw a Chat."

Monitoring Pennsylvania Biodiversity by Doris McGovern

Soon the watchful eyes of Pennsylvania birders will be scouring the Commonwealth to identify breeding species and record their locations. This exhaustive inventory, requiring thousands of field volunteers, is the 2nd Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas Project 2004-2008 (BBA).* It has begun this year, two decades after the 1st Atlas began, and there are exciting changes to report and many ways for birders to contribute.

The 1st Atlas project resulted in the publication of *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Pennsylvania*, and provided bird watchers and land managers with detailed information on each of the 187 breeding species in the Commonwealth. Among its contributions were the discovery of two species not known to breed in the state (Black-necked Stilt and Eurasian Jackdaw) and the removal of Henslow's Sparrow from the Endangered list when it was found in an amazing 363 blocks. The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, which had not previously been listed, was found to be so rare that conservation efforts began. The second Snowy Egret nest in Pennsylvania history was also documented. In general, our knowledge of the distribution of species, now taken for granted, was greatly advanced.

So how does the project work? And how can you become involved? Birding for the Atlas is simply Birding with a Purpose. Rather than counting birds, the goal is to identify species that are present in an area and then to assign a code to each species to indicate its breeding status: Possible, Probable, or Confirmed.

The state is divided into 5000 rectangles, each one is 2.5 by 3 miles. An Atlas "block" is adopted or "owned" by an individual or a group of birders. Two or more birders can have a lot of fun birding a small area and watching their block come to completion with the accumulation of "Confirmed" species. You will receive a detailed map of your block and a species-list from the 1st BBA. That's one advantage of being part of the 2nd Atlas: we know what to expect from the list of birds found in each block 20 years ago.

The block owner or team agrees to visit the block several times during breeding season, surveying each habitat type—forest, field, wetlands, etc.—to observe species and record their behaviors that relate to breeding—carrying food or nesting material, territorial singing, copulation, etc. The average block requires about 20 hours of effort distributed over the several visits. The owner elevates breeding status codes as observations indicate more clearly that a species is breeding. Data can be submitted on paper or on the web.

A species may be "Present," but not breed, e.g., Ring-billed Gulls are ubiquitous even in summer, but they do not breed in our area. If a species is present in breeding habitat during the safe breeding dates, its status advances to "Possible." If a pair is observed in breeding habitat in season, that's a "Probable" breeder, and if you're lucky enough to find a nest or observe activity that involves feeding young, carrying fecal sacs, or copulation, that species will be "Confirmed." A block is completed when a set percentage (usually 75%) of species is "Confirmed."

Five years are allotted to finish a block, but when you see how interesting it is and how much you learn from birding with a purpose, you'll want to adopt a different block each year.

Among the innovations of the 2nd Atlas is the creation of a customized web-based data entry and exploration system by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, similar to their eBird system of recording bird observations. The block owner and the Regional Coordinator can view the data and also know who contributed it. Since all our birding and feeder watching takes place in a block, once we are registered on the Atlas web site, we can contribute our sightings via the website and save the block owner time and effort. All our birding activity anywhere in Pennsylvania during breeding season can be an occasion to gather data for the atlas if we are registered and take the time to submit our sightings.

Nocturnal surveys will be done in one-sixth of the blocks. Special computer models will be used to predict where rare species may be found and extra effort will be made to locate the species. Survey routes driven in each area will log 40,000 locations to help estimate the abundance of species, something not usually done in Atlas work. Wetlands will be targeted for special surveys and specific data will be collected from hemlock stands because of the invasive insect, the woolly adelgid.

Regional Coordinators (RC) have been appointed in 56 areas. An RC is responsible for assigning approximately 100 blocks and keeping track of the progress in each block. The RC can visit blocks with birders when asked, answer questions or find the answers, and assist if a special species is encountered.

All in all, this promises to be a very exciting five years and everyone is invited to participate. As soon as the Atlas website is completed, you will be able to view all the blocks in the state, register to participate, and download maps and species lists for your block.

To find out more contact a Regional Coordinator near you, or go to <http://www.pabirdatlas.org>.

Atlas blocks are grouped into Regions, which correspond to pages in the DeLorme Atlas of Pennsylvania. If you're not sure which Region your favorite birding place is in, make your best guess; the Regional Coordinator will help direct you to the right place.

Continued next page

Warm Season Grasses Established at Pennypack Trust Property by JoAnn Raine

In late May, the DVOB birders walked through the sixty acres of native grasses at the Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust in Huntingdon Valley, Montgomery County. Our plan was to use the expert eyes and ears of the birders to spot any migrant Bobolinks, Meadowlarks or grassland sparrows that were present and might become possible nesters. The taller grasses are already a breeding site for the Red Winged Blackbirds and Savannah Sparrows. Native grasses also promote the breeding of small mammals on which the hawks and owls feed. Two pairs of Red Tailed Hawks and a pair of Red Shouldered Hawks are resident here. During the spring, we see Cooper's, Sharp Shinned Hawks and Kestrels hunting over the fields. In simple terms, the native grasses can be defined as the prairie grasses of the plains states that accomplish most of their growth in the late spring and summer of the year. We believe that the eventual 100 acres that will be established in warm season grasses will be attractive to those birds and such animal wildlife that need protection from habitat loss.

The "Trust" is committed to reforesting the Pennypack Creek Watershed as it flows through properties from Hatboro to Lorimer Park. As a result of acquiring a hay farm adjacent to the already wooded sections, they saw an opportunity to create native meadowland to compliment the forest. The land managers employed Nathan Burns who was studying for his Master's degree in plants propagation to undertake the project. In consultation with several Universities that also have native prairie lands in restoration, a management plan for the Raythorn Farm was established. Members of the Trust accomplished funding for the expenses of the Raythorn project privately.

Along with the obvious benefits of nesting and roosting cover, the warm season grasses provide a degree of cover for wildlife even when there is no snow in winter. From the view of the owners of the land, the nearly maintenance free and drought resistant grasses are highly desirable. Over the past five years experimental plots were created searching for the right tactics to employ when planting seeds of native grasses. Careful records showed that hay fields couldn't be replaced with less aggressive native plants unless farm crop winter grass is first destroyed. Weed control will dictate the success or failure of the seedlings. Several sprayings are needed to effectively kill established plants and weeds. It is also vital that the land not be plowed or disturbed which would turn up and expose hidden soil seeds from the former pasture. A machine called a Truax or No Till Drill cuts a slit in the sod and slots the native seed into the opening was employed to plant the land. Native grasses available for seed collection right in Eastern Montgomery County are Indian grass and Little Bluestem. Volunteers made fall collecting trips to these sites and brought back Pennsylvania seed. The other seed was purchased from Penna. growers and consisted of Big and Little Bluestem, Prairie Dropseed, Eastern Gama Grass and Switch Grass. Planting in the spring provided the best start for the forbs. No fertilizers are required as the warm season grasses are hardy in poor soil and drought years. The wet springs of the first few planting years proved that grasses could be growing well in three years. It is important to understand that the native plants begin growing by sending a long roots system down as far as 12 feet into the soil. The first spring after planting you won't see much green on top of the field. The plant is establishing a deep root base. Second spring the grasses put up a few blades of green from July to September. The fields don't begin to look healthy until the third to fifth season. Meantime hand weeding and some herbicide spraying on noxious weeds is necessary to allow the grasses to dominate the plantings.

Pennypack, continued on Page 10

Atlas, Continued

Region 80 (DeLorme page 80): Mid and southwestern Berks Co., northeastern Lancaster Co., and northwestern Chester Co.:

Steve and Sue Fordyce Region80@PaBirdAtlas.org

Region 81 (DeLorme page 81): Northwestern Montgomery Co., northeastern Chester Co., southeastern Berks Co. and southernmost Lehigh Co.:

Art McMorris, or Region81@PaBirdAtlas.org

Region 82 (DeLorme pages 82 and 83): Southeastern Montgomery Co., Bucks Co., and northern Philadelphia:

Barbara McGlaughlin, or Region82@PaBirdAtlas.org

Region 94 (DeLorme pages 94, 95 and 96): Delaware Co., southern Chester Co., southern Lancaster Co., and southern Philadelphia:

Doris McGovern, or Region94@PaBirdAtlas.org

* Sponsored by Carnegie Museum of Natural History with Powdermill Nature Reserve, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Dan Brauning, Project Director, and Bob Mulvihill, Project Coordinator.

Pennypack, continued from Page 9

Some areas will require reseeding but the warm season grasses are compact little tufts of growth, looking like clumps of isolated plants. Each year they send up new clumps from runners and fill in the spaces. As little as one plant per two to three feet will produce a vital field in a few years. The new grasses need direct sunlight so weed control and mowing to a height of 6 inches is advisable. Eliminating the competitive plants will establish the native grasses to a density that crowds out other non-natives. Fire is the natural controller and revitalizes the grasslands. Since the fire controlling policies of suburban areas often will not permit prescribed burns, the plan to keep the grassland healthy will be to "hay" the fields on a rotational basis. About every 4-5 years the area will be divided into plots and mowed to eliminate woody plants and thatch from the fallen grasses. Too deep an accumulation of thatch will smother crowns and promote rotting forbs. Burns also provide the nitrogen and carbon that the plants need on a limited basis. We will have to see how we can provide this element after the mowing. After three years most plots will not need maintenance other than weeding. This is the time to add wildflowers and other food producing plants in hedgerows or edge plantings.

The reasons to undertake this conversion of winter hay fields to warm season grasses is now receiving publicity from the Federal Government and Conservancy groups. In order to slow the severe decline of birds and mammals needing this type of grasses in which to produce young, the Government is dedicating funding to promote habitat that will support birds like Pheasants, Meadowlarks and Sparrows. These grasses also give cover to all the rodents which are year round food for hawks and owls. A native habitat with bushes and trees that have berries into the fall and winter months will enrich the total ecosystem. Native fields larger than 60 acres in contiguous grass are necessary to bring some of the more endangered sparrows to nest. Footpaths must stay on the edges and not bisect or cut through the dense areas. The least disturbance possible between April and October will allow some species several nestings. All mowing and maintenance must be accomplished in the later fall and winter months when the birds are not involved with reproduction.

Naturalists and birders can help the Trust determine if we are successful in attracting grassland birds. The Trust will also be a show place in our own area for the beauty of the warm season grasses in their finest months of September and October. Wintering species like Harrier, Short and Long Eared Owls and Hawks use the fields to hunt rodents and the flocks of sparrows and larks can find food and shelter all winter. The Trust will also provide a model for other land conservancy or public lands authorities to study and learn from the experiences here. The Land managers have accumulated knowledge that will work for other fields in Pennsylvania and perhaps we will eventually become a source of native seed to begin new projects.

The birds seen this year at PERT are a step up for us. In November we saw Merlin and Peregrine Falcons. The Red-breasted Nuthatches have been regular at the pines and the Barred Owl is certainly a milestone. The two Rough-legged Hawks are first winter visitors also.

Birder Beware! by DVOC Council February 27, 2004

(The Council and Officers of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club offer this article as a service to the club membership. DVOC has recently received specific reports as outlined below that allege unprofessional and improper conduct concerning birding tour companies and we wish to prevent harm to any of our members. The cases quoted which exemplify the improper actions are from the actual victims themselves and documented in the club.)

Just about everybody has heard the term "Buyer Beware!" Normally it conjures up images of sleazy used car salesmen, companies that sell cure-all products and, more recently, people who sell dubious goods through spam E-mails. In the birding community, honesty and integrity are generally considered the norm. Lists, big days, and sightings of rarities are all based on the honor system. Even questionable reports are assumed to be caused by an observer being overzealous or incautious, not by deliberately being dishonest. Generally, the operators of birding tour companies are viewed as being held to the same standards, and normally this is true.

The February 2004 issue of *Birding* (Volume 36: Number 1) published by the American Birding Association has an article on problems with birding tour operators. These warnings and anecdotes all referred to tour operators that were overzealous, incautious, and perhaps a bit "spacey", but did not mention tour operators that might be dishonest. Unfortunately, fraudulent practices also occur in the world of birding tours. This article will hopefully help you avoid a bad experience. So what are the signs you should look for to ensure that your time and money are well spent when you book your next trip?

Problems Getting a Refund

Tour operators do cancel trips. While disappointing, this is a normal part of the business. Whatever the reason for the cancellation, a full refund should be offered immediately. Your money was sent to pay for expenses that never occurred, so there should be no problem having it returned.

There are reports of tour participants being unable to get their refunds from cancelled trips. The common thread involves the operator providing a mixture of excuses, delays, broken promises, and simply ignoring the "problem". It appears that such operators hope that the outcome will be an exasperated client who simply gives up.

Case: After one participant was unable to obtain a refund through numerous phone and E-mail messages over a period of months, he went as far as sending registered letters. The tour company operator refused to sign for them.

Case: Three participants published an open message to a list server that outlined the problems they encountered as they tried to receive a refund for nearly a year. Delays included "the check is in the mail" and "the check must have been lost in the mail". Promises included "I'll send you another check immediately". Once enough time elapsed, all inquiries were simply ignored.

Another obvious sign of trouble is an aggressive push by the tour operator to carry the client's refund as a credit. While an offer to carry a credit may not be a problem for you, an operator should never try to "sell" this as an option. Operators that aggressively push credits over refunds may be financially incapable of returning the money and delivering the tour as advertised.

Borrowing Money and Credit Cards

Believe it or not, there have been reports of people being asked to "loan" a tour operator money or use of a credit card during the trip. Can you imagine being half way around the world and suddenly being asked for a loan to fund the trip? What do you do? The operator obviously doesn't have the money to continue the trip, which puts you in a terrible spot. Or perhaps you're asked to put the trip's vehicles on your credit card? Promises are made, of course, that the card will just be used to make the rental and the bill will be paid before the charges are actually placed on your card. Once you're home, the truth arrives in the form of a bill. As the finance charges accumulate, your calls for repayment go unanswered.

Reports have been received that this has been done many times to both participants and tour leaders. Participants are asked to loan money or for a loan of their credit card throughout the trip. Tour leaders have arrived at their destinations with assurances that the expenses are covered. Suddenly they are standing at a hotel a long way from home and they are being told that the bill hasn't been covered.

Case: One participant was asked for a loan of several thousand dollars, and still has not been able to recover all of it. Several people have reported this.

Bounced Checks

Bounced checks should be an extremely rare occurrence for any company or individual, and a bounced check that is not instantly made good, including any bank charges incurred, is strong evidence that the operator is dishonest or in dire financial trouble or both.

Once checks are being routinely bounced, the problem has become more complicated because the participant's money has been used to pay for some other trip or expenses, and cannot be refunded. When bounced checks become an operator's regular way of doing business, you can be sure the owner has a cash flow problem and is using your money to finance other people's travel.

Case: One person that had loaned the tour operator money received two separate \$1000 checks, both of which bounced.

Case: One leader demanded payment of previous expenses before leading another trip. The check arrived just before the trip, was deposited, and bounced. Further bills were incurred on the trip. None of the expenses have been repaid.

Other Problems

Other problems have been reported such as the "mistaken" use of another person's credit card for trip expenses, overcharging for airline tickets, sending undated checks for payment, failing to pay tour guides and lodges, and skipping out on meal checks for an entire group at a restaurant.

As you can see, any one of the above practices would be considered at least a serious breach of ethics, but when numbers of examples accrue to one or two tour companies repeatedly, it is incumbent on birders to BEWARE and to protect themselves, their time and their money.

What Can You Do to Protect Yourself?

It is very important that you ask around about any company that will provide a bird tour service. The trip you are planning may be very expensive, and it pays to be careful as you would if you were buying an expensive appliance. You'd consult Consumer Reports, talk to your friends and shop around before making a decision. Feel free to question the members, officers, and council of DVOOC about their experiences with tour operators. When possible ask several people about their best experiences and their favorite tour company. Sharing information, both good and bad, is part of the reason why people join bird clubs in the first place.

Another source to use is the Better Business Bureau. The following are step-by-step instructions on using their web site to research a business:

- 1) Go to <http://search.bbb.org/search.html>.
- 2) Type in all or part of the company name. Do not use a phone number. At least one company has since changed their phone number, and the BBB does not have the updated number.
- 3) Select the state where the company resides.
- 4) Click "Search".
- 5) Click on the company you want to research from the list that is returned.
- 6) Read the "Customer Experience" section. If the company is said to have an "unsatisfactory" record, it is a company to beware of.

Final Thoughts

The vast majority of bird tour operators, like the vast majority of birders, are honest people. This article is not intended to scare you away from taking tours. Tours are a great way to see areas and species that you might never see on your own. We would just like you to ask around and perform basic "due diligence" before selecting a company for your next birding trip.