

... from the Editor

Advanced County Listing

The title of this missive notwithstanding, whether you're into in the game of listing birds or not, this topic could be of some interest. By now most everyone has heard of the various projects that track the movements of large migratory birds via satellite telemetry. (Large birds: those species large enough and strong enough to carry a transmitter without serious burden, such as the larger shorebirds, some raptors, waterfowl, etc.). We've read with amazement, for example, the now documented accounts of species like Bar-tailed Godwit making non-stop, 9-day, 7,000-mile flights from Alaska to New Zealand.

At the same time, certainly we all know by now also of the magic of listening to nocturnal migration. Some of us try to discern as many species as we can among the calls that filter down to us at night, while others of us simply listen for the sake of listening, as if it were music.

Recently, and thanks in great part to a discussion with Ben Coulter, it occurred to me that herein lies a great opportunity for those of us who enjoy listening to the birds at night and who diligently list the birds we see and hear, because the scope of avian satellite telemetry is not limited just to the vast and far-flung Pacific. In fact many species are being tracked even as they fly over our home state of Pennsylvania—by day and by night.

Check out this website when you can: <www.wildlifetracking.org>. Pull down the "Animals" menu, then "Birds", and finally click on a species name. You'll find the results of several projects to track a number of species of North American birds by satellite, including such hard-to-find-in-PA species as Whimbrel (<<http://www.wildlifetracking.org/?species=Whimbrel>>) and Marbled Godwit (<<http://www.wildlifetracking.org/?species=Marbled%20Godwit>>). Here you'll find hard evidence, for example, that at least one Whimbrel migrated over western Pennsylvania specifically on 24 May 2010, which was probably part

of a larger and perhaps noisy flock, and that other Whimbrels migrated over central Pennsylvania around the same time period.

It isn't exactly news that Whimbrels and other species migrate over Pennsylvania annually (and probably in great numbers) yet remain hard to find on the ground. But there is a wealth of information to be mined among these satellite tracks anyway. Dates and locations from past migrations can be matched up with weather reports and prior observations. These tracks prove that some otherwise unthinkable birds for your location fly right over your head every year, and on what dates they made the journey.

Do you have Whimbrel on your home county's list? Unless you bird regularly in Erie or along the Susquehanna, with few exceptions, you probably don't. Certainly, unless you have a particularly impressive place to call home, you don't have Whimbrel on your yard list. I'm fairly passionate about my Allegheny County list. I even started listening for Whimbrels here in Allegheny in late May a few years ago, without much luck, of course. Now, I know for sure that I'm not listening in vain, and given the right circumstances and a little more luck, I might just hear one someday. Likewise, if you have good ears, some patience, and a good measure of luck, you might just be able to turn a little research into some of these satellite tracks into a really crazy county or yard bird. Find out what birds are possible in your area, and familiarize yourself with their flight calls. Then, go out and listen on the right dates. Even if you don't care about listing at all, wouldn't it still be wonderful to head outside at 3:00 some morning in late May and pick out the calls of a high-flying flock of Whimbrels over your house? I think so. Maybe such efforts would all be in vain. Maybe they fly too high and just aren't audible even on the best nights. But, maybe not...

Birds are the Houdinis of the natural world. One day they're here, and the next they've vanished. Sometimes, we can see the birdlife

around us change even by the hour. How they do it isn't magic, of course, but it is in a way magical. After birding for nearly three decades, few things are as interesting to me anymore than listening to birds on their migrations at night, as they make their escape under the cover of darkness. They leave no trail, no evidence of their presence at all, except the fleeting echoes of their voices. In a way, hearing birds at night is like catching the magician in the act. I don't know about you, but that kind of stuff is what keeps birds at the top of my list of the most fascinating things in the world, and a passion that I'll have for the rest of my life.

Yeah, I'm a lister, though not as gung-ho as I used to be, to be sure. Still, Whimbrel is a species I've long coveted for my home county's list. So I'll be out at the quietest spot I can find in Allegheny County each morning next May around the 24th, and every May after that too, doing my best to catch up with the magic.

Again, thanks to Ben Coulter for inspiring the subject of this editorial.

Compiler News

Some news from the ranks of the compilers, and all of it positive. As hoped, the *Westmoreland* vacancy did not last long; **Tom Kuehl** has agreed to compile for this storied county. *Perry* has a new compiler: long time Pennsylvania birding veteran **Ramsay Koury**. Finally, Peter Robinson has decided to take a well-deserved rest from compiling and transition his long-standing editorship of *Adams* sightings to **Phil Keener**. Peter will still compile for *York* for now, and will stay on as the Pennsylvania Birdlists compiler. Many thanks again to all the outgoing compilers and to the "new blood" who have volunteered their time to keep these counties in the record books. Contact information for all of these new compilers can be found in the Local Notes for this season.

Geoff Malosh
Editor-in-Chief

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