

# WHAT'S HATCHING?

*Official Newsletter of the Maryland & DC Breeding Bird Atlas 3*

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Photo credit: Bill Hubick

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## BIRD OF THE MONTH

This rare Maryland breeder tends to nest more frequently following irruptions—like the current one!

## TIPS & TRICKS

Ready to take your atlasing to the next level? Check out our Top Ten ways to improve your use of breeding codes.

## OUT OF THE ARCHIVE

Read the poignant, first-hand account of a former breeder's last flight through Maryland, the famously abundant Passenger Pigeon.

You may remember that earlier this year Maryland's late egg date for Black Vulture was extended by five days to July 5, after a find in Prince George's County. However, an egg found in Calvert County also preceded the early egg date by four days. Mikey Lutmerding checked in on a traditional Black Vulture nest site on March 10 and recorded a single egg. While the late egg date has changed a few times, the early date harkens back nearly 70 years to 1952, when A.D. Jones recorded eggs in Charles County.



"There's something magical about winter finches, something mysterious about where they come from."

- Ron Pittaway

2020 has had its downsides, but the presence of 'winter finches' in Maryland and DC this year hasn't been one of them!

Read on to learn why early 2021 may be our best chance to Confirm Pine Siskins.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

*Next month is the start of the 2020 Christmas Bird Count season!*

*For over 100 years, volunteers have participated in an early-winter bird census. It might look a little different this year, but there are still counts happening in Maryland and DC between Dec. 14 and Jan. 5.*

*To learn about counts in your area and how to get involved, visit [audubon.org/conservation/join-christmas-bird-count](https://audubon.org/conservation/join-christmas-bird-count).*

# From the Coordinator

*An overview of the Atlas data review and reinterpretation process.*



I'm so excited to finally be able to say that we now have a data review system worked out. I'm proud of this system; we emphasized standardization, consistency, and repeatability. Each review decision and its accompanying reason is maintained alongside the original observation in the dataset, while the reinterpreted observations are displayed in Atlas maps and summaries. This ensures transparency while maximizing Atlas data accuracy.

If you have used eBird for long, you are likely familiar with the species review. Reviewers use your comments and photos to determine whether an observation was likely. If the documentation is insufficient, the observation is removed from the dataset that researchers download. This same review is still in place for Atlas data, but we needed another step because that species review doesn't handle breeding codes.

To supplement species review, we created a series of filters using date, location, and breeding codes that each observation can be put through. These filters then flag the observations that need to be reviewed. If, after being reviewed, an observation is deemed unlikely, it is reinterpreted. Reinterpretation changes the breeding status associated with a breeding code, and it is this updated status that will be used for mapping, summaries, and other data outputs.

Reinterpreted data will show up on your checklist as a new breeding status written beside the original, crossed-out breeding status. Sometimes, reinterpretation is done to reflect the biology of a species (for example, terns carrying food may be reinterpreted because they can carry food long distances). Other times, it's done because the behavior that was observed doesn't indicate local breeding (for example, Hooded

Mergansers displaying in February may be reinterpreted because they often display prior to migrating north).

Some of the review decisions are simple; for example, if a White-throated Sparrow is reported singing in March, it will be reinterpreted to Observed status. Other cases are less straightforward, like a Red-shouldered Hawk reported as recently fledged in September. Particularly for these less distinct cases, comments enormously improve the reviewer's efficiency and accuracy. In the Red-shouldered Hawk example, a simple comment of "family group observed" would let the reviewer know that it wasn't just an immature hawk migrating through and the observation could be left as is.

So when should you include comments, and what should they say? In general, anytime you report something that you don't regularly see, it's worth including comments that describe it. Include enough details that the description would be a sufficient summary for someone who wasn't there. This description doesn't have to win you any literary awards; just imagine what someone else reading your comment might need so they can understand what you observed, and provide that.

If you want to read more about the reinterpretation process, you can visit the [eBird Support Article](#).

--Gabriel



**Species observed** 30 individuals

10 **American Black Duck** *Anas rubripes*

4 **Common Eider** *Somateria mollissima*

BREEDING CODE: P Pair in Suitable Habitat (Probable) (Observed)

1 **Bufflehead** *Bucephala albeola*

BREEDING CODE: H In Appropriate Habitat (Possible) (Observed)

6 **Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)** *Columba livia* (Feral Pigeon)

2 **Black Guillemot** *Cephus grylle*

Not in breeding plumage so it was hard to tell male or female but very clearly guillemots might have been three but the other was too far to tell

BREEDING CODE: P Pair in Suitable Habitat (Probable) (Observed)

An example of a checklist with reinterpreted data from the Maine Bird Atlas.



## bird of the month: PINE SISKIN

Photo credit: Bill Hubick

A flock of small, undulating birds and a slurry of twittering and explosive *zhreeee* calls overhead are usually the first indicators of Pine Siskins. Although redpolls and goldfinches have phonetically similar calls, siskins produce a raspier, punchier note. It's a good call to be familiar with, and once alerted aurally to the presence of siskins, the flock's antics can be enjoyed and the species visually confirmed. Superficially, siskins and goldfinches can appear similar, but siskins are streaked above and below and they have a thin, sharply pointed bill unlike other finches.

Pine Siskins are a rare nesting species in Maryland and have never been recorded nesting in DC. Breeding evidence has been recorded in Garrett, Allegany, Prince George's, and Anne Arundel Counties, but nesting has only been Confirmed in Garrett County; the state's solitary nest record came from

Swallow Falls State Park immediately after the first atlas.

In the surrounding states of West Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York, Pine Siskins have been recorded nesting during each state's most recent atlas. Descriptions range from a very rare nester in Ohio to an uncommon breeder in New York. Regardless, breeding in each location was strongly associated with winter abundance and more breeding records were found following irruptions.

Unlike many other species, Pine Siskins are somewhat flexible in when and where they nest. This phenological flexibility, combined with their rarity as Maryland nesters, makes local timing difficult to accurately predict, but it's safe to assume that they begin nesting much earlier than most other species

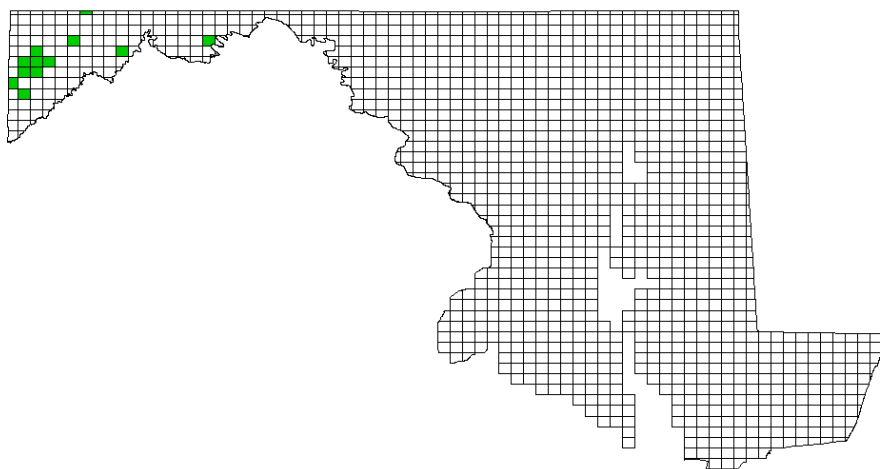
## PINE SISKIN

### *Hang on... just what is an irruption?*

In 1999, Canadian naturalist Ron Pittaway began publishing an annual Winter Finch Forecast. His forecast predicted where the so-called 'winter finches' would appear, a group of birds that includes Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, White-winged and Red Crossbills, Purple Finches, Common and Hoary Redpolls, and Pine Siskins. These species are typically most abundant in northern coniferous forests, but they rely on the production of cones and catkins to fuel them through the winter. When there is a poor seed crop in their usual range, they 'irrupt' elsewhere in search for food.

These irruptions are an exciting opportunity to see boreal birds—many of which are breathtakingly gorgeous—close to home. Although Ron Pittaway stepped down from the Forecast this year, he has passed it on to another Canadian, Tyler Hoar.

You can find the Forecast at [finchnetwork.org/winter-finch-forecast-2020](http://finchnetwork.org/winter-finch-forecast-2020).



Pine Siskin distribution map from the Maryland & DC Breeding Bird Atlas 2.

breeding in Maryland and DC. In New York and Pennsylvania, nest building has been recorded from early March to early June, and nests with young have been found up until the end of June.

Pine Siskins vocalize ceaselessly, but only males in reproductive condition sing. Compared to calls, the songs are a long, complex series of seemingly random notes, nearly always given from the top of a tree or shrub. Singing regularly takes place near a nest site while it is being constructed. If heard while atesting, their song should be recorded—a smartphone works exceptionally well for this. Courtship flights involve a continuously singing male flying in a circle, sometimes with a rapid, butterfly-like wing-fluttering. Although the sexes are essentially indistinguishable, only females build the nest;



the male perches nearby, watching her efforts.

Pine Siskins are aggressive birds, especially for such a small bird. In fact, Pine Siskins in Wisconsin initiated 71% of aggressive encounters with the much larger Purple Finch, and won 81% of all encounters. Despite their irritable tendencies, siskins routinely forage in flocks while breeding, nest in loose colonies, and are practically non-territorial. In a breeding context, the only space they actively defend from other siskins is a few feet surrounding their nest. Aggressive behavior should not be interpreted as breeding behavior if it is away from the nest site. In other words, Pine Siskins tussling with each other at a feeder should not receive a breeding code.

Siskins' diets are primarily composed of seeds. Depending

on the season, the seeds of composite flowers (flowers that look like a single flower but are actually multiple small flowers) such as chickweed, dandelions, and sunflowers or trees such as conifers, birch, and alder provide most of their diet. Siskins will also eat soft buds or young leaves, and supplement their vegetarian diet with insects and spiders. Most of their foraging takes place in the top of a tree, and they are found most often in loosely spaced coniferous or mixed forest.

Garrett and Allegany Counties are the most likely sites in Maryland for breeding Pine Siskins, but other locations with planted conifers such as suburban neighborhoods, parks, or cemeteries should not be overlooked. Siskins build a well-concealed nest near the end of a conifer branch, often sandwiched under another branch and usually around 20 feet high. Over 5–6 days, the saucer-like nest is constructed from small twigs and stems, grass, rootlets, strips of bark, and lichens and lined with fur, feathers, moss, and thistle down. An easy way to aid Confirmations is to fill a suet feeder with suitable nest





material such as fur or hair; because siskins regularly nest much earlier than other species, this should be set up by January or February.

Pine Siskins have a remarkable tolerance to the cold, and their nesting strategy is congruent with cool temperatures. Experiments have demonstrated that a siskin can maintain a body temperature of over 93°F for three hours at ambient temperatures of -76°F to -94°F. These results support the theory that siskin movements are driven by food shortages, not by weather. The female lays 3–4 smooth bluish-green, brown-speckled eggs and incubates them almost continuously for 13 days; in one New Hampshire study, the longest a female was off the nest was only eight minutes. To support this strategy, the male feeds the female throughout incubation. Once the eggs hatch, the female continues her vigil unabated for another 8–10 days, brooding the chicks almost continuously. The



male continues to feed her through the first part of the brooding period, and she in turn divides that food to her chicks. Feeding both mate and chicks is done through regurgitation, so code CF (carrying food) has little use for siskins. After the tenth day, the male stops feeding the female and both sexes forage for the chicks; the chicks fledge after fifteen days. The parents will continue to feed their begging fledglings for another three weeks.

Although the West Virginia breeding bird atlas states that Pine Siskins fledge a first brood there before returning north for a second brood, there is no evidence to support this claim. As far as is known, Pine Siskins raise only one brood per year.



The annual movements of Pine Siskins appear to be irruptive, and attempts to determine any regular migratory movements have been obscured by these irruptions. In Maryland and DC, we are currently enjoying an irruption, with abundant Pine Siskins across the region. Atlasers should take note of this and the species' history of local breeding efforts that parallel irruptions; early 2021 is an excellent time to find nesting Pine Siskins. The safe dates for siskins in Maryland and DC don't start until May 20, but don't let that dissuade you from searching for breeding evidence in February, March, and April. Any record of a Pine Siskin nesting in Maryland is noteworthy, so provide ample comments and documentation on any breeding code you use for them.

*Author: Gabriel Foley*

#### References

Dawson, W.R. (2020). Pine Siskin (*Spinus pinus*), version 1.0. In Birds of the World (A.F. Poole, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.pinsis.01>

# ATLASER SPOTLIGHT

***Nara Anusonti-Inthra is a 7<sup>th</sup> grader at Fallston Middle School, Harford County, who loves to bird, read, play violin and piano, and explore outdoors with her family.***



*What made you interested in birds?*

Since I was a toddler, my parents brought me to nature centers every weekend. This happened in three states, Michigan, Tennessee, and finally Maryland, until there were no more programs left to see. So, my mom decided to join the Harford Bird Club to continue to encourage my love of nature. Eventually we met Mr. George Radcliffe on our first YMOS trip, at Chincoteague Wildlife Refuge. Mr. George opened my eyes to the extraordinary world of birdwatching and conservation.

*What's the best thing about atlasing?*

The best thing about atlasing is that it provides data for bird conservation.

*What is today's biggest conservation issue?*

The biggest issue in conservation is the use of pesticides and insecticides. Pesticides and insecticides are very harmful to birds when the birds digest them through a contaminated water source, poisoned small mammals and insects, and tainted seeds and nectar. A lot of birds are susceptible to this threat, and that is why it is the biggest issue in bird conservation. An innovative solution is to invent a new pesticide with added substance that is extremely bitter, but is benign to birds. This will dissuade birds from eating pesticide-infected plants and animals due to their bitter taste.

*In addition to binoculars and a field guide, what would you take atlasing?*

I would bring my scope because I like looking at waterfowl, and waterfowl can be seen best with a scope.

*What bird reflects your personality?*

I think the goldfinch reflects my personality best because I am resourceful, inventive, and I like to travel places. Also, yellow is my favorite color!

*If you could pick anyone to go atlasing with for a day, who would it be?*

I would go atlasing with Mr. George Radcliffe because he has a lot of bird jokes that are really funny, and he knows a lot about birds and their calls.

*Have you participated in an atlas before?*

No, this is my first atlas.



*What bird do you particularly like?*

My favorite bird is a Marsh Wren. They have an adorable bubbly and giggly call. Also, they are so cute and tiny flitting in the reeds.

*Where is your favorite place to atlas?*

My favorite place to go atlasing is Susquehanna State Park. I saw a beautiful Scarlet Tanager and my first Cerulean Warbler.



American Goldfinch. Photo credit: Bill Hubick

# ATLASER SPOTLIGHT

***Tyme Anusonti-Inthra is a 4<sup>th</sup> grader at Youth's Benefit Elementary School, Harford County, who loves to bird, be in nature, and play violin and piano.***



*What made you interested in birds?*

When I was five years old, my parents took me to a hummingbird banding event in Tennessee where we lived before we moved to Maryland. I felt very exhilarated seeing such a small bird with mighty power. I started to love looking at different birds in field guides that my mom gave me. I wanted to see them all in real life. I remember one chilly sunny morning in November of 2018 when I was in 2nd grade, I met Mr. George Radcliffe at Chincoteague Wildlife Refuge who really showed me how wonderful birding is. After that, I always want to bird and learn more about them.



Carolina Chickadee. Photo credit: Bill Hubick

*In addition to binoculars and a field guide, what would you take atlasing?*

I would bring my favorite foods and snacks because the birds never wait for you to eat.

*What bird do you particularly like?*

This year, on January 1st, I went birding with the Baltimore Birding Club at Washington DC. The bird that I will never forget will be a lone Lark Sparrow. He was right in front of Capitol Hill with his brilliant black breast spot. I saw the Lark Sparrow next to a flock of Song Sparrows. This makes me want to learn how to identify sparrows.

*What's the best thing about atlasing?*

Atlasing makes my family go birding together more and I really like that.

*What bird reflects your personality?*

My personality best describes a chickadee because I'm small but packed with lots of energy. I am also smart and creative and like to try new things.

*If you could pick anyone to go atlasing with for a day, who would it be?*

I would pick Mr. Dennis Kirkwood because I love birding with him.



*Have you participated in an atlas before?*

No, this is my very first one.

*Where is your favorite place to atlas?*

I like to go to Susquehanna State Park near the Rock Run Gristmill. It was the first time that I had identified a Louisiana Waterthrush which I accidentally identified as a Northern Waterthrush at first. You will never be disappointed with how many birds are at this amazing place.

*What is today's biggest conservation issue?*

Definitely, habitat loss is the biggest issue. We build buildings and homes in their habitats. Birds often hit the windows and die due to head injuries. We need to invent more bird-friendly windows to save more birds.



# BLOCK PARTY

## Federalsburg NW, Caroline County



Tucked away from the Bay on the Eastern Shore, rural Caroline County seems to be overlooked by atlasers. It trails other regions by both effort and species, and only Kent County has had fewer atlasers. But over 20% of Caroline County is preserved under the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)—five times the size of the county's Tuckahoe State Park. This means that Maryland's second-smallest county represents 13% of the total land preserved under the statewide program. One of the program's ancillary goals is to protect wildlife habitat, and data collected through the Atlas can help inform that goal.

Federalsburg NW is located just north of the county line with Dorchester, midway between the towns of Preston and Federalsburg, and has not been atlased yet. About a fifth of the block's

5,760 acres are preserved through MALPF, mostly in the north end. The block has a county park with sports fields near the road, but the park boundary follows a wooded area and contains a small wetland. Hunting Creek traverses the block's western side while Faulkner Branch cuts through much of the center, and both of these riparian areas are transected by roads at multiple locations. There are contiguous stands of forest in this agriculture-dominated block, but, other than a stretch of Laurel Grove Rd. in the northwest corner, these stands lack road access.

In BBA2, atlasers documented 22.5 hours exploring this block, mostly in June and July, and found 74 breeding species. Fifty-six of these were Probable or Confirmed, nearly identical to the 55 reported in BBA1. BBA1 lacked any waterfowl, but four species

were reported in BBA2. Northern Bobwhite, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Green Heron, and American Kestrel were found in both atlases, while a Probable Northern Harrier was only seen in BBA1. Barn Owl, Eastern Screech-Owl, and Barred Owl were all Probable in BBA1, but Great Horned Owl was the only owl found in both atlases in this block. Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers and Northern Flicker were recorded in each atlas, but Pileated and Hairy Woodpeckers were not found in BBA1. Most songbirds documented in BBA1 were also found during BBA2, but Prothonotary Warbler is a notable absence from the BBA2 list. House Finch, Cedar Waxwing, Worm-eating Warbler, Summer Tanager, and Dickcissel were found only in BBA2.

The block's land cover is largely unchanged from the last atlas, so the BBA2 species list will be a useful tool to help atlasers reach its completion goals. If you are able to, head out and atlas locations like Federalsburg NW, rather than better 'birding' locations that have easier access or more species. Understanding the species composition in a block with such a large proportion of preserved agricultural land will help us understand the effect of the program on bird conservation in Maryland.

*Author: Gabriel Foley*



Northern Harrier. Photo credit: Gabriel Foley

# TIPS AND TRICKS

The completion of the 2020 breeding season provides an opportunity to examine breeding codes for any unexpected observations. While the list below highlights the most commonly aberrant codes, they still represent an exceedingly small proportion of total observations. Overall, atlasers did an outstanding job documenting breeding behavior, and this list is simply an attempt to make what is already commendable even more exemplary.

Here's your Top Ten list:

1) Sometimes, young birds haven't been included in abundance estimates. While eggs shouldn't be included, young birds—even newly hatched birds—should always be. A pair of Eastern Phoebe at a nest with four chicks should be reported on your checklist as six phoebes and code NY (nest with young).

2) It appears that code S7 has been used occasionally to indicate that a non-singing bird has been at the same location for a week. However, code S7 (singing for 7+ days) is only suitable for birds that can sing (or drumming woodpeckers) and shouldn't be used on species that don't sing.

3) Code P (pair) should be used within safe dates, and should be used cautiously if the sexes can't be distinguished. It's still valid for sexually monomorphic species, but supporting comments should be provided.

4) Code UN (used nest) indicates a nest that was used, not a nest that is in use, so it should only be used for

old nests that are found. There is also no need to use it multiple times for the same nest. Nest identification is quite tricky, so always include supporting comments or photos when using this code.

5) In previous atlases, observations were tied to the block level, but now we can be more precise. Avoid submitting checklists at the block level. Instead, use a location that accurately shows where you were atlas-ing.

6) Code FL (recently fledged young) should not be used for Chimney Swifts. It is possible to age swifts based on their wing molt, but this does not translate to Confirming local breeding. And if you use code FL for raptors, please include comments supporting why it is a recently fledged bird and not simply an immature bird.

7) Raptors, kingfishers, crows, and jays regularly carry food, regardless of their breeding status. Only use code CF (carrying food) for them when they are carrying food to their nest, and include comments describing this. Without comments, these observations will be reinterpreted.

8) Codes NY (nest with young), FL (recently fledged young), and FY (feeding recently fledged young) are regularly confused with each other. Any time that there are young birds in a nest, they should receive code NY. If they are not in a nest (including downy young such as ducks, geese, or shorebirds), they

receive code FL. Code FY is reserved for parents feeding their recently fledged young after they have left the nest.

9) Another series of breeding codes that are often confused with each other include codes T (territorial), A (agitated), and DD (distraction display). Code T should be used when an individual is interacting aggressively with the same species. Code A should be used when an individual is interacting aggressively with a different species. Finally, code DD should only be used for distraction displays (not territorial or agitated behavior). In a distraction display, the parent is trying to lure you towards them and away from a nest or chicks, whereas an agitated bird is trying to drive you away from themselves and their nest. Distraction displays typically involve a fanned tail, spread wings, and a good deal of noise. Distraction displays are not well documented for many species, so if you use this code, include comments describing the behavior.

10) You may have noticed a theme of using the comments field throughout many of these recommendations. If you observe a behavior that you know could be misinterpreted or that you don't regularly observe, include comments about it. This helps a reviewer know that the report wasn't an accident, and it can provide qualitative behavior information—which is the basis of natural history! A useful comment includes details about why you decided to report it the way you did, and it shouldn't require follow-up questions to get the whole story.

*Author: Gabriel Foley*



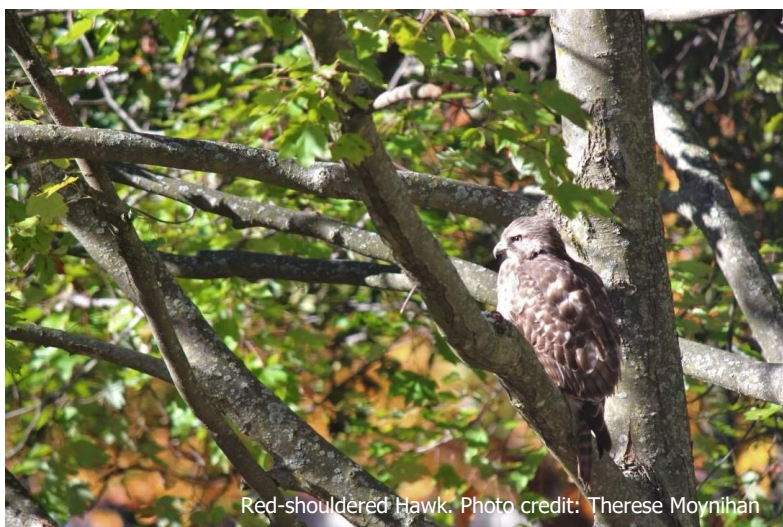
# FROM THE FIELD

*Contributions from the atlasing community!*

## A Little Bit of Normal

Fall is in the air, the sweet scent of pumpkin spice, the changing color of the trees, and of course, fall migration, where we say farewell to our summer avian residents and greet our winter ones. It almost feels ordinary, almost. I was lucky enough to have a sense of normalcy earlier this month, in the form of a bird walk.

I work at a nature center and had the opportunity to host a bird walk (registration was limited). Masks were required and everyone stayed six feet away from each other. At the appointed time, I had three participants join me on our walk. Within the first five minutes we saw a Hairy Woodpecker



Red-shouldered Hawk. Photo credit: Therese Moynihan

swoop in and land on a large fallen branch near the trail. We observed the Hairy Woodpecker peck at the branch for food. So far it was a great start to the bird walk.

We walked into a meadow, taking in the fall blooms. A few dragonflies were seen buzzing around the tall grass, along with a few bumblebees. We were able to get a glimpse of an Eastern Phoebe, but not for long as the sun's rays were right in our field of sight.

Eventually we ventured into the woods, hearing the distant calls of cardinals and chickadees. We rounded a corner and heard a strange noise.

"THUNK... THUNK."

I looked up in the oak tree and saw a wonderful sight. It was Pileated Woodpecker, pecking deep into the tree, causing bits of bark to fall to the ground. I quietly gestured to the group to look up. There was a look of awe in each of their eyes as they observed the woodpecker pecking away. We stayed under the tree for a good ten minutes before reluctantly moving on. We came to the bird feeders at the nature center and wrapped up the hike by watching the White-breasted Nuthatches fly to and from the tray feeder.

I was asked by all the participants of the different bird apps they could download or what bird guidebooks to check out. I even told them about the Maryland and DC Breeding Bird Atlas and how they could participate. Once I answered all their birding questions, they thanked me for all the help and fun. It felt great being able to do a bird hike, we saw some amazing birds, and I (hopefully) instilled a love of birding with my hikers. It is still nice to see how birding can bring a little bit of normal into our lives during uncertain times.

*Author: Katherine Pauer*



Juvenile Northern Cardinal. Photo credit: George Jett

*Do you have a story or photo to share with atlasers?*

*We'd love to hear about it! Send your submissions to the editor at [mddcbba3@mdbirds.org](mailto:mddcbba3@mdbirds.org).*



# OUT OF THE ARCHIVE

## The Last Maryland Flight of the Passenger Pigeon

Grant, E.R. 1951. The Last Maryland Flight of the Passenger Pigeon. *Maryland Birdlife* 7(2-5):27:29.



Passenger Pigeons at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. Photo credit: Gabriel Foley

Although I may not be the only man alive who has seen Passenger Pigeons (*Ectopistes migratorius*) in Maryland, I expect I am the only person who can give an eye-witness account of the last big flight and the disaster which befell it.

I was born and reared at Franklin Hill, a few miles north of Westernport at the base of the Allegheny Plateau in Allegany County, Maryland. My earliest memories of the Passenger Pigeon, or Wild Pigeon, as we always called it, date back to the early 1870s. At that time this species was a regular spring and fall migrant in Allegany County. It normally arrived from the South in about the middle of April. The return flight took place during Indian Summer; I suppose this would make it about the first half of October. I

always saw fewer in the fall than in spring, because they left in scattered bunches and returned in a, so to say, concentrated body. I cannot recall having heard anyone say during my childhood days or since, that the Wild Pigeon had a fixed intuition to return from the South on a certain feast day, as the Capistrano swallows are reputed to do.

To my knowledge the Wild Pigeon did not rear its young in Allegany County in the '70s. In those parts of Garrett County with which I was familiar—the areas around Deer Park, Mountain Lake Park, Oakland, and Grantsville—the Wild Pigeon nested each summer. But they were not found around the towns themselves, only back in the nearby woods. I believe these birds were attracted to Garrett County by the abundance of farm land, which supplied the grain which formed such an important part of their diet. Acorns, which they also relished, were found in abundance in surrounding woodland. Some Wild Pigeons nested in adjacent Mineral County, West Virginia, but evidently the limited acreage of farm land in Allegany County made this part of Maryland unattractive to the Wild Pigeon

during the breeding season.

The Pigeons were usually lean when they first arrived in the springtime, but they quickly put on weight. When they were well fed up, my father, Patrick Grant, would go out and shoot about a dozen. I well remember his returning from a successful hunt in the Franklin area, laying his dozen plump birds on the kitchen table, and saying to my mother: "Rosey, pick out what you want and give the remainder to the neighbors." My two brothers and I always looked forward to a pigeon meal; they were the finest kind of eating.

At times, Father would bring home a Wild Turkey, which he always obtained by an ingenious method of imitating the mating call of the female, and thus attracting the male to where he was hiding. His turkey caller consisted of a pointed iron rod made from a file, and imbedded in a half coconut shell which was held in the palm of the right hand. The turkey imitation was made by striking the pointed tip of the file against a piece of soapstone in the left hand.

Father last went hunting in November 1873. Shortly after that we moved a few miles north to Phoenix Foot, which is three



miles southwest of Barton, Allegany County. Mother became quite ill in the early winter of 1875–76, and it became necessary for her to live with relatives in Barton in order to be near a doctor.

On New Year's Day in 1876, I walked from Phoenix Foot up to Barton to visit Mother. We had had fine weather all through December, and the first day of the new year was warm and sunny—so warm that I was dressed in summer clothes. At about 1:30 or 2 o'clock in the afternoon, when I was about halfway between Phoenix Foot and Morrison's Mill, a strange shadow suddenly engulfed me. Looking up, I was astonished to see a tremendous flock of Wild Pigeons flying toward the west. Had this event taken place in April instead of January, I would still have been greatly impressed due to the large size of the flock. It was definitely the largest I ever saw. But what were these birds doing in

Maryland in the dead of winter. As I watched the flock in amazement, the birds continued to come, in a dense band which as I recall was about 75 to 100 feet wide. The flock stretched continuously for something between one-eighth and one-quarter of a mile, and contained thousands and thousands of birds. They flew rapidly westward and soon disappeared over Phoenix Hill in Garrett County. During the remaining two miles to Barton I watched for additional flocks of Wild Pigeons, but no others appeared.

The weather remained mild until late February. Then severe cold and snowy weather came. I feared that any Wild Pigeons that were in Garrett County at that time must have perished, although I did not read in the paper that any dead ones had actually been found. In the fall of 1876 I watched in vain for an autumnal flight; and

likewise, during the succeeding springs I was disappointed in not seeing any more Wild Pigeons.

I have read (Coues and Prentiss, *Avifauna Columbiana*, Bull. U.S. Nat. Mus. 26:90–91, 1883) that the last large flock seen in the vicinity of Washington, D.C., was in about 1858 or 1859. The only Maryland records I can find since the flight I observed were small flocks near Jefferson and Laurel, both in the fall of 1889.

It is a terrible shame that such a fine bird should have disappeared, never to return. Let us all strive together for better protection of endangered species so that no other shall follow the fateful path of the Wild Pigeon.

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