

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology meeting was held in Indiana May 16-18, 2003. So far it had been a good meeting – good fellowship, excellent speakers, great outings, and delicious food. Everyone seemed very satisfied on Saturday night.

Sunday morning, May 18, dawned overcast with showers threatening. In fact, before we left the Holiday Inn for our outings' destinations, it started to spit rain. Many of the meeting attendees decided to cut the weekend short and head home, so several of the scheduled field trips had no participants. No one wanted to go to Yellow Creek State Park, one of the premiere birding spots in western Pennsylvania. I couldn't believe it! I thought EVERYONE would want to go to Yellow Creek. In fact, we all did, so when we, the members of the Todd Bird Club, scheduled outings we included 5 Yellow Creek outings. That was apparently a little overkill on our part. Sunday's Yellow Creek leaders were John Taylor, Gloria Lamer, and Georgette Syster. Since Gloria and Georgette live near the park, they planned to meet their group at the park office. But there was no group. John Taylor was to lead the group to the park.

Saturday's outing to State Game Lands 273, led by Carol Guba, had yielded an excellent assortment of warblers and two Olive-sided Flycatchers. Sunday morning Carol Guba and WCO Patrick Snickles had planned to lead an outing to State Game Lands 248 near Two Lick Reservoir. By popular demand spurred by tantalizing thoughts of Olive-sided Flycatchers, the outing's destination was changed to a repeat of SGL 273. The ragtag crew heading to SGL 273 included Carol Guba, Patrick and Monica Snickles and their young daughter Julia, Tom Lord, Scott Speedy, John Taylor, Gene Zielinski, and my husband Roger and me. Because John and Tom had to drive to Yellow Creek first to inform the other two leaders that their outing had been canceled, we planned to linger near the parking lot so they could catch up with us. Since we had at least 30 minutes before they could possibly return, we

birded the area across Route 954 around the ponds established for passive treatment of acid mine drainage. It started to rain, but that didn't deter the birds. A Louisiana Waterthrush was bopping along the edge of the stream, and a Hooded Warbler and a Northern Waterthrush were singing from the woods behind the first pond. We had an excellent look at a beautiful male Scarlet Tanager – excellent for those of us whose bins weren't completely fogged. We added E. Wood-Pewee, Tufted Titmice, Wood Thrushes, Red-eyed Vireos, Common Yellowthroats, Indigo Buntings, and Northern Flicker. The rain and the birding continued. American Goldfinch, Black-capped Chickadee, Song Sparrow, Ovenbirds, Hairy Woodpecker. We caught a glimpse of a large flycatcher perched atop a snag which caused us a few shots of adrenaline, but after wiping the rain drops from our optics, we realized it was only an Eastern Kingbird – not the sought-after Olive-sided Flycatcher. The only waterfowl on any of the ponds were three Canada Geese. Yesterday, Carol's group had found Wood Ducks and Spotted Sandpiper – yesterday's birds but not today's. This did not seem like an auspicious start.

The Game Commission is allowing SGL 273 to be strip mined in exchange for property in northeastern Indiana County. As a result, the usual access road has been widened so that two coal trucks may pass. As a result, the shrub growth along the edge has been grubbed. In its place is mud. The truck traffic on the dirt road has created more mud. So as we walked, our boots accumulated mud. Periodically, I'd stop and scrape the mud from my boots onto a protruding rock. Scott commented that he felt like he was wearing high heels. Julia was wearing tennis shoes. She was muddy and cold, but she was a trooper. She didn't complain but joined in, using the binoculars to look at birds. It had stopped raining, and the birds were very cooperative – Acadian Flycatchers, E. Phoebe, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher were busy feeding in the nearby trees. Two Wood Ducks zipped

by overhead, and both Barn and N. Rough-winged Swallows were catching insects just above the road.

We finally reached what we call "the good area." This is the most reliable spot in Indiana County for Worm-eating Warbler. We spotted a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak carrying nesting material. The warblers were here – Black-and-white, Magnolia, Bay-breasted, Blackburnian, Black-throated Green, Yellow, Kentucky, American Redstart, Black-throated Blue, Prairie, and Chestnut-sided. I could not write fast enough. I was wishing I'd brought my recorder. And finally we heard the Worm-eating, and everyone did actually see at least one of the three that were present. While we were trying to glimpse the worm, we heard what I, at that time, believed to be the highlight of the day – a singing Dark-eyed Junco. He was perched in a spruce very near the path. Juncos don't nest in Indiana County; at least, we have been unable to confirm them, and we almost never see them after May 10. But here was a junco singing in SGL 273. Wow!

By now, Julia was shivering, so Patrick and Monica decided they should go. Now we were seven. Shortly after the Snickles left, we found a feeding flock of warblers. There were at least four Tennessee Warblers and two Northern Parulas. A warbler flew into the top of a deciduous tree where it perched, backlit. Putting the binoculars up, I said, "I've got a warbler with wingbars." The bird was completely backlit; all I could see were faint wingbars. Just then it flitted into a spruce where it now had a dark background, making the colors and pattern very clear. I continued, "It's a Kirtland's, and I'm not kidding!" A few members of the crew know me too well, and I was afraid they wouldn't believe me; but I guess that the urgency in my voice convinced them as three of them were able to find the same bird I was viewing. Carol was the first to voice her thoughts, "It is!" John Taylor and Tom Lord saw it, too. Just then a Bay-breasted Warbler flew in, landed on the same branch the Kirtland's had occupied. The Kirtland's flew downhill with the Bay-breasted in hot pursuit.

both birds entered the vegetation on the opposite side of the path. One flew uphill, one down. But which was which? None of us were certain which bird had gone which direction. While we were waffling, Gene and Scott heard a Hermit Thrush. John, whose specialty is warblers, commented, "That bird just wouldn't slot in. I knew it was none of the regulars." Many of us keep year's lists, but John keeps yearly warbler lists. His goal is to see 30 or more warbler species every spring in Pennsylvania; he always meets his goal and usually surpasses it.

We split up. Roger, John, Tom, and Scott continued up the road out of sight. Carol, Gene, and I hung around the spruce where we first saw the bird. For a while we wandered slowly uphill then down. It began to rain again; this was a downpour. The three of us retreated to the shelter of a cluster of spruce where we waited for the rain to abate. We exchanged "bird tales" and after a while realized that the rain had completely stopped, so we continued our jaunt further into the game lands. We met up with the other four who had also had no luck relocating the Kirtland's. We added a few more species, including Red-tailed Hawk, young Mourning Doves, Chimney Swifts, and one Cerulean Warbler.

By now it was early afternoon. I had seen 60 species including 21 warblers, but we could not relocate the best bird of the day. We were tired, cold, thirsty, and hungry and finally by 1:30 admitted that we had failed. We bired our way back to our vehicles, but before we reached the bottom of the hill, we spotted someone approaching, wearing a red flannel shirt. Remembering Bob Mulvihill's program the evening before, we joked about the red flannel shirt. But as we got closer, we realized it was Steve Hoffman. We shared our Kirtland's story with him, describing the exact location where we had first seen it. Steve was enthusiastic—he was going to go look for it. We wished him well and continued back to our cars. It had been a good weekend.

Later that evening when I checked e-mail, there was the following note from Steve Hoffman: "Hi Margaret. Great job on the annual meeting! The field trips were excellent -- I only wish I could have attended more of them. Thanks for the tip on the Kirtland's Warbler -- I found the location right away, and heard the bird sing one time! I never saw it, however. It remained in the thickest part of the Norway Spruce. I only spent about half an hour there, as I needed to get home at a reasonable time.... Thanks, Steve"

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There are six accepted records of Kirtland's Warbler in Pennsylvania. Of these, three are from the species' spring passage through the western part of the state.

9/21/1971 one banded at Powdermill Nature Reserve, *Westmoreland*.
5/14/1994 in Little Cove, *Franklin*.
9/5/1996 at Engleman's Park, *Berks*.
5/14/1997 at Presque Isle State Park, *Erie*.
8/26/2000 in Williams Township, *Northampton*.
5/12/2001 at the Piney Tract, *Clarion*.

There are also undocumented records from Big Elk Creek, *Chester* 9/27/1964, Jennerstown, *Somerset* 9/21-22/1974 and *Allegheny* 5/23/1981.

This *Indiana* report falls nicely into this mid-May period. This small window of time may be something to keep in mind if looking for spring Kirtland's Warblers in Pennsylvania. *Ed*.



Plate 1. Lark Bunting (*Chondestes grammacus*). This male was an unexpected visitor at Presque Isle State Park, *Erie*, 25 May 2003. (Jerry McWilliams)