

*Birdwatch #30, August 2007*

**Extra! Extra! Bird Stories and Bird Lists Needed** by Phil Krajewski

A chimney swift soared above the park lawn, catching insects while the maestro, Robin Fountain, was introducing the next piece of the Summer Pops Program at Brandon Park in Williamsport. He was explaining the inspiration that Aaron Copeland had in the composing of *Fanfare for the Common Man*. He then turned to the orchestra, and with a wave of the baton the kettle drums and percussion section exploded. To my amazement the chimney swift completely stopped in mid flight and was suspended for more than a split-second as the gigantic sound waves rippled through the air. The incident twirled its way into my memory bank as a minor but significant account of a bird story.

Bill Millard (my wife Ellen's uncle), a 40 year veteran of the United States Forestry Service, was attending a dedication of a section of the Huron-Manatee Forest in northeast Michigan, which was being upgraded for the protection of the Kirtland's warbler. The ceremony was filled with enthusiasm while gracious platitudes were directed towards the groups and individuals who were responsible for the expansion of this warbler's refuge. No one, even within the far reaches of their imagination, expected the rarest of North American songbirds to show up. There are very few of these birds within their limited range, and they are usually seen with the help of an informed source. Random appearances, although not unheard of, are very rare. Bill said, "as the Director of the Forestry Service was speaking, a Kirtland's warbler alighted in a tree behind the speaker's podium, and silence fell over the crowd. A Twilight Zone eeriness gripped the small gathering. It was as if a messenger from heaven was not only validating everyone's efforts, but was blanketing the very spot with a sacred cover."

My son Peta was born with the help of a midwife at 2:00 AM in 1981 in our first house on the Nauvoo farm. Just after sunrise I buried a part of his umbilical cord at the base of a gigantic sugar maple close to the side door. An hour later a pileated woodpecker landed on the tree one foot above this spot. The tree being clear of pileated holes and coupled with the timing and place of touch down attached a certain significance to this bird. Twelve years later during the March-1993 blizzard, a pileated woodpecker startled us by swooping right by the front window at the height of the storm. An earlier concern of Ellen's and the sighting of this bird filled our thoughts with premonitory dread. We checked on Peta's whereabouts and found that he had left a neighbor's house 45 minutes earlier for the 15 minute walk home. A short time later we found him unconscious by a stream in the snow, and we barely had enough time to bring him out of a diabetic low.

Last year at the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas coordinators meeting, Bob Mulvihill announced an important discovery to the group. A man from Somerset County, Pa. had been keeping a daily bird list for over 50 years, complete with detailed weather reports. The list was a compendium of scientific data and represented in its entirety a bird story one-half century long. Singular interactions with birds can be colorful and can provide important behavioral insights, but a daily list compiled over five decades can help to determine or validate changes or trends in the population, distribution, and

movements of many species of birds. Extensive lists are more like an account in novel form instead of a smaller story of poetic dalliance.

The 1913 annual list of the Wellsboro (Tiadaghton) Audubon Society listed a northern (boreal) chickadee, Carolina chickadee, brown-headed nuthatch, and fish crow. The present day story that complements this list is that I have not seen or know of anyone who has seen any of these four birds in Tioga Country in a very long time.

Many books are published periodically concerning bird ranges and behaviors and much knowledge is presented. However, I am sure that a great deal of bird information is sitting with people, waiting to be tapped and shared with the public. Information from personal sources is a cornucopia that can keep ornithology alive and fresh.

Please contact me at [krajewsk@epix.net](mailto:krajewsk@epix.net) if you have any interesting or insightful avian stories or if you have past bird lists collecting dust. Your bird story may unknowingly be a one-of-a-kind observance.

Please visit the website of the Tiadaghton Audubon Society at [www.tiaudubon.org](http://www.tiaudubon.org) or volunteer for the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas (PBBA) project by emailing me at [krajewsk@epix.net](mailto:krajewsk@epix.net)