



## Opalanie Park – Hotspot to Spot Feathered Friends on a Cold Rainy Day

- D. Delany, EAC Chair and Rachel McKay (photo credits) - November eNewsletter

A bird walk in the middle of a tropical storm may not sound appealing to most, but our intrepid guides from the Valley Forge Audubon Society, John and Patty Werth and Eric Hughes along with 11 dedicated participants did not let the wet weather dampen their enthusiasm to take part of the second Beginner Bird Walk held on October 2 at Opalanie Park, located at 1422 St. Matthews Road.

Twenty-four species of birds, including palm, yellow-rumped and black-throated green warblers were spotted. Other species recorded included three kinds of woodpeckers, an American kestrel, bluebirds, towhees, finches, sparrows, cardinals, and hawks – an impressive list, considering the gloomy, rainy weather!

Opalanie Park has become the hottest new spot in Chester County for avid birders to gather. Since becoming an eBird Hotspot in October 2021, an astounding 122 species of birds have been recorded in the park! Some of the birds are rarely seen in our area anymore, but they visit Opalanie. If you would like to see the list of birds that have been observed so far, or if you want to start your own list, check out the Opalanie Park eBird page at <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L16684648>.



Left: Immature Ruby throated hummingbird at the jewel weed on the road down to the dump area in Opalanie.  
Middle: Lincoln's Sparrow in the area behind the building at Opalanie.  
Right: Magnolia Warbler enjoying the Poke berry ripening at Opalanie.

Another bird spotted on that rainy morning, perched on a dead tree over the top field was an American Kestrel, the smallest bird of prey. You may only *occasionally* see kestrels hanging around the kestrel boxes at Bryn Coed as kestrel numbers have declined by 73% in our region, which is the highest rate in the nation. (<https://kestrel.peregrinefund.org/decline>). We plan to install boxes at Opalanie Park to help keep them returning to our area and prevent further decline. Right: Kestrel hunting the gravel circle field area



Opalanie Park, located at 1422 St. Matthews Road, is a unique area because of the variety of habitat within the park and its location, nestled in a landscape of farmland, fields, forests, and the extensive trail system shared with Bryn Coed. The flowering fields fill up with a variety of butterflies, grasshoppers, and insects, providing food for the blue birds, flycatchers, and finches.

Low-lying shrubs provide cover for sparrows, migrating warblers, and songbirds, and these birds provide food for the local Coopers hawk family. The babbling stream meandering through the woodland draws cuckoos, thrushes, and towhees who will tell you to “drink-your-tea” each spring when they sing to each other. If you visit the pond area, you might catch a glimpse of the green heron eating a frog or the brightly colored wood ducks passing through.

Sadly, our ash trees have died from the emerald ash borer, but these dead trees are now providing plentiful new food and homes for nuthatches, red-bellied woodpeckers, flickers, downy and hairy woodpeckers and Woody Woodpecker’s family, the pileated woodpeckers.

The park has had two sightings of a red-headed woodpecker this year! Often confused with the more common, red-bellied woodpecker, who has a red marking (like a Mohawk!) on the back of his head and a faint blush of red on his belly, the red-headed woodpecker’s head is completely red, with white body underparts, a black back, and large white patches in the wings. Red headed woodpeckers are rarely seen and have been designated as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Pennsylvania State Wildlife Action Plan.

### How can you help slow the decline and keep our township vibrant with our feathered friends?

- **Plant** more food for the birds! Plant native trees (especially oaks), native shrubs that provide berries, and native flowers at your home.
- **Join** the West Vincent EAC email list to learn about our Bird Town, other nature projects and events, volunteer at an event and/or participate!
- **Create** your own account on eBird and become one of the many citizen scientists collecting data.
- **Explore** using the Merlin Bird ID app, created by The Cornell Lab.  
(<https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>)
- **Wander** around Opalanie Park and go on a birding treasure hunt! Grab a pair of binoculars, a camera, or record sounds with your phone. Early mornings when the birds roll out of bed are usually the best time to hear them sing the praises of the new day or squawk about being hungry!

