

Susquehanna River Walk also is a birding hot spot

By MADDI DUNLAP
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Most people in our area already are familiar with the Susquehanna River Walk as a great place to walk, jog or bike during the warm weather months, but it also is an excellent spot for birding all year round.

The diverse habitat offered near and on a river provides the opportunity to observe a wide variety of species and is easily accessible.

This winter has been especially difficult, and yet the harsh weather has meant a bonanza of waterfowl on the Susquehanna. The frozen Great Lakes have forced many waterfowl to head south in search of open water, and the area below the dam provided just what they needed.

Canvasbacks, red-heads, greater and lesser scaups, common goldeneyes, long-tailed ducks, hooded and red-breasted mergansers have kept company with common mergansers, mallards

and buffleheads for many weeks. Later arrivals have included white-winged scoters and green-winged and blue-winged teals.

Raptors also are a common sight near the river, including in the winter when the bare trees make observation even easier. Bald eagles often can be found perched in trees or even on top of electrical towers as they scan the river for prey. Later, osprey will be fishing these waters, too. Peregrine falcons are a common sight in the trees or on the piers of the Market Street Bridge. It is not unusual to catch sight of a red-tailed, a Cooper's or a sharp-shinned hawk, as well.

In the coming months, as migration begins, the trees and bushes near the river will come alive with small songbirds and other perching birds. Some of these will pass through on their way to their northern breeding grounds, while others will stay. Red-eyed vireos, gray catbirds, cedar waxwings and many species of warblers will be observed from the river walk.

Cliff, tree and northern rough-winged swallows will fly close to the surface of the water, hunting for insects through the spring and summer. Cliff swallows nest on the bridges, in homes made of mud attached to the underside of decks and piers.

Shorebirds make frequent stops by the river. Killdeer are among the first arrivals in spring and already are being observed this year. In previous years, they have nested on both sides of the river and often were seen standing on the railroad tracks that parallel the

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Adult great blue herons have a wingspan of 5.4 to 6.5 feet and weigh 4.5 to 5.5 pounds.

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MADDI DUNLAP

River Walk is a birding hot spot

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shorelines.

What makes the Susquehanna River Walk unique is that it gives an observer the opportunity to not only see and identify birds, but to observe their behaviors as well. Because the waterfowl are mostly in open view, it is a great place for the

beginning birder to practice identification skills.

The easy accessibility to this habitat gives us the chance to study feeding habits, courting displays and the care and raising of young. You easily can observe the differences between the divers, dabblers and waders in the same stretch of open water.

Lycoming Audubon

has regular birding outings at the Susquehanna River Walk and everyone is welcome to join the fun. Check the events listing on its website.

Maddi Dunlap loves birding in her spare time. She is a member of the Lycoming Audubon Society and is a contributor to its quarterly online newslet-

ter. She may be reached at madwoman@chilitech.net. The Lycoming Audubon Society is a chapter of the National Audubon Society, with responsibility for members in Lycoming and Clinton counties. Information and events may be found at <http://lycomingaudubon.blogspot.com>. Anyone may share sightings and join discussions at www.facebook.com/groups/lycomingAudubon.