

# THE FALL MIGRATION OF SHOREBIRDS AT GREEN LANE RESERVOIR

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The Green Lane Reservoir is located at the northern end of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania about 35 miles northwest of Philadelphia. The lake is six miles long and encompasses 814 acres with 26 miles of shoreline. The dam breast is located along Route 29 just north of the borough of Green Lane. The Philadelphia Suburban Water Company owns the lake itself, but Montgomery County owns the adjoining land which is part of the county Park System.

The shallow upper end of the reservoir is good habitat for migrating shorebirds when water levels are low. This area is west of Route 663 and the area south of Montgomery Avenue in Pennsburg near the sewage treatment plant. This area may be designated a natural area when the rest of the park is developed. Visitors to this area should contact the park office, especially if a group outing is planned.

In years of drought this is an excellent area to observe the fall shorebird migration because many acres of rich mudflats are exposed. In years of average or above average summer rainfall, there is little area of mudflats and few birds. The dam is always full in the spring, and shorebirding then is generally unspectacular.

How good is this place to observe shorebirds? The accompanying chart shows that in 1981 and 1983, years of drought in the mid-Atlantic states, 25 species of shorebirds were observed each year. Some species were present in good numbers and for a fairly long time. In 1982, there was no drought and few shorebirds.

In some respects, the Green Lane Reservoir is unique. Other good shorebirding spots in Pennsylvania all seem to have a significant geographical feature nearby. The Tinicum area is adjacent to the Delaware River, the Conejohela Flats are in the Susquehanna River, and the Lake Erie shoreline comes with the Great Lakes. Green Lane has nothing like this nearby.

So, what makes this place so good? The only logical conclusion is *habitat!* One has to assume that a considerable portion of the southerly shorebird migration is widely dispersed and that some of these birds pass through Pennsylvania every fall. When there is extensive mudflat, the birds stop to feed and rest; when there is no mudflat, they keep moving south.

A total of 28 different species have occurred. Add to that the Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicaria*) that appeared in November of 1980 and the American Woodcocks (*Scolopax minor*) that are nearby, and we have recent records of 30 species of shorebirds. Without a doubt, the Green Lane

SUMMARY OF FALL MIGRATION OF SHOREBIRDS, 1981, 1983  
GREEN LANE RESERVOIR  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

	DATE FIRST OBSERVED		MAXIMUM NUMBER SEEN & DATE		DATE LAST OBSERVED	
	1981	1983	1981	1983	1981	1983
1. Black-bellied Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	8/12	9/17	5,8/30	5,10/2	10/10	10/29
2. Lesser Golden-Plover <i>P. dominica</i>	8/24	8/18	10,9/6	19,9/14	11/1	9/27
3. Semipalmated Plover <i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>	7/26	8/4	17,8/12	13,8/17	9/13	10/6
4. Killdeer <i>C. vociferus</i>	—	7/8	100,11/14	55,8/30	—	—
5. Greater Yellowlegs <i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	7/16	8/9	11,9/2	6,10/25	11/8	11/5
6. Lesser Yellowlegs <i>T. flavipes</i>	7/2	7/9	150,9/2	45,9/8	9/20	10/25
7. Solitary Sandpiper <i>T. solitaria</i>	7/16	7/12	16,7/23	11,7/19	9/6	9/11
8. Spotted Sandpiper <i>Actitis macularia</i>	7/16	7/9	6,7/25	10,8/23	9/7	9/17
9. Upland Sandpiper <i>Bartramia longicauda</i>	9/7	—	1,9/7	—	9/7	—
10. Hudsonian Godwit <i>Limosa haemastica</i>	9/19	—	1,9/19	—	9/19	—
11. Ruddy Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>	—	10/4	—	1,10/4	—	10/4
12. Red Knot <i>Calidris canutus</i>	9/6	—	3,9/6	—	9/6	—
13. Sanderling <i>C. alba</i>	9/5	9/17	1,9/5	5,9/20	10/3	10/9
14. Semipalmated Sandpiper <i>C. pusilla</i>	7/16	7/16	64,8/30	24,8/6	10/11	10/9
15. Western Sandpiper <i>C. mauri</i>	8/30	8/21	8,9/2	12,9/7	9/13	9/17
16. Least Sandpiper <i>C. minutilla</i>	7/16	7/8	163,8/30	70,8/25	10/4	10/15
17. White-rumped Sandpiper <i>C. fuscicollis</i>	8/24	9/8	2,9/6	2,9/8	10/25	10/1
18. Baird's Sandpiper <i>C. bairdii</i>	9/5	9/3	1,9/5	4,9/10	10/3	10/1
19. Pectoral Sandpiper <i>C. melanotos</i>	7/22	7/19	170,9/2	52,10/4	11/1	10/25
20. Dunlin <i>C. alpina</i>	9/1	10/1	37,11/1	13,10/25	11/16	10/25
21. Stilt Sandpiper <i>C. himantopus</i>	8/3	7/30	48,9/2	9,9/4	9/26	10/9
22. Buff-breasted Sandpiper <i>Tryngites subruficollis</i>	8/29	8/25	2,8/29	2,8/25	9/19	9/21
23. Ruff <i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	—	9/14	—	1,9/14	—	9/14
24. Short-billed Dowitcher <i>Limnodromus griseus</i>	7/2	8/21	18,8/31	6,9/13	10/10	9/17
25. Long-billed Dowitcher <i>L. scolopaceus</i>	—	10/2	—	1,10/2	—	10/4
26. Common Snipe <i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	8/26	8/23	1,8/26	2,8/30	9/9	10/2
27. Wilson's Phalarope <i>Phalaropus tricolor</i>	8/24	9/8	2,8/24	1,9/8	9/7	9/8
28. Red-necked Phalarope <i>P. lobatus</i>	8/25	8/21	7,9/1	1,8/21	9/7	10/5

Reservoir has to be one of the best locations to observe the fall migration in Pennsylvania. Several of these records are significant in both species and numbers for the state.

The maximum numbers of each species were, in general, higher in 1981 than in 1983. A significant factor that may have accounted for this was the northeasterly winds during the end of August and much of September in 1981. Birds that may have followed the Atlantic Coast or Delaware River could have been blown inland. Moreover, several days of steady rainfall in mid-October, 1983, filled the reservoir. Numbers of each species, as a result, dwindled, but some lingerers remained.

The shallow end of the reservoir in fall is also very good for herons, egrets, gulls, terns, surface-feeding ducks, Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*), and Water Pipits (*Anthus spinoletta*). The entire reservoir is a good place to observe spring and fall migrations of waterfowl.

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