

The

PSO Pileated



March 2018

The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

Volume 29, Number 1

From the President's Desk....

Winter Birding Traditions

It's deep in winter as I write this. After a recent chase to see the Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch in Crawford County, I birded on the way home at several Western Pennsylvania locations that offer great winter birds. Most non-birders with whom I talk express how much they dislike winter with its gloomy skies and inclement weather. While I dislike driving in snowstorms and particularly ice storms, for me winter has a lot to offer to birding. Many species are found here only in winter, and their numbers depend upon environmental conditions.

One thing I like to do is check small ponds in local parks for waterfowl. When lakes and rivers freeze, these ponds where Mallards gather often attract the odd notable duck or two. These Mallard-filled ponds offer some open water (kept open by the activity of the birds) that attracts waterfowl that seem to come from nowhere. Where a single Northern Shoveler, for example, comes from is anyone's guess, but there always seems to be something interesting to find. The nice thing is the "wilder" species often become at ease with people, probably due to the tameness of the Mallards. This winter a male Northern Pintail has taken up residence with Mallards at Highland Park in Pittsburgh. An American Black Duck is also a special guest of the Mallards. I've seen nearly every expected duck species over the years at small ponds in parks during the winter as I'm sure many of you also have. When the Great Lakes freeze, it is even more exciting because in Pennsylvania we can find numbers of scoters and Long-tailed Ducks. In addition to that, we had three



This winter a male Northern Pintail has taken up residence with Mallards at Highland Park in Pittsburgh.

Photo by Mike Fialkovich

memorable Red-necked Grebe invasions, which occurred in 1994, 2003, and 2014, because of Lake Ontario's freezing over.

The second tradition is searching farm fields for open country birds. I stopped at the Amish farms in Lawrence County recently, searching for manure spreads. Have you ever mentioned spending a weekend searching for manure spreads to a non-birder? A puzzled look is often the response to something that

makes perfect sense to a birder. The rewards of such a quest are Horned Larks with a sprinkling of Lapland Longspurs, Snow Buntings, and American Pipits. If there is snow cover, all the better, because the birds are concentrated.

Other open country birds that I enjoy are Rough-legged Hawks and Short-eared Owls. Rough-legged Hawks are welcome winter visitors, and some locations are home to numerous individuals. The dark morph birds are stunning with their jet black bodies and silvery under-sides to the wings. Short-eared Owls are best found at dusk, just as the temperatures are dropping on winter days. I'm often puzzled by their behavior. Some days they are conspicuous and easy to observe while other days they fail to make an appearance. And there have been days I've seen them in flight hours before sunset. I've read they can be active in the middle of the day on overcast days, but I've also seen them active on bright, sunny days.

The Winter Raptor Survey started by Greg Grove in 2003 has become another winter tradition for many of us in the

state. I ran a survey in Butler County from 2003-2010 and continue a route in Allegheny County. I read every WRS post to the PA Birds listserv to see what other observers have recorded. I'm often amazed at the numbers of raptors some of you report as they always vastly outnumber what I see.

Gulls are another group of winter birds that are sought. They concentrate at such scenic sites as landfills and parking lots, but they are also found on rivers and lakes in winter. As with waterfowl, their numbers are dependent upon frozen water to the north. A lot of people associate gulls with summer visits to the beach, but I often associate gulls with frigid temperatures near inland bodies of water. When I was new to this activity, searching through flocks of gulls for "the different one" was a confusing exercise; but with experience and spending time with more experienced observers learning what to look for, gull watching developed into an enjoyable and exciting activity. This was particularly true when one of the white-winged gulls or other less common species came into view. In Pittsburgh, the local birders have been searching for gulls with

excellent results for the past several years – a new tradition on a local level. I still have great memories of searching for the Mew Gull in Berks County in 1992; the numbers of gulls at the nearby pig farm were astounding! I have old slides of the masses of birds.

Northern finches and Snowy Owls are always high on a birder's winter wish list. This winter Snowy Owls have been fairly widespread, but winter finches are scarce. A few Pine Siskins seem to be scattered around this winter. The memories of the two great crossbill invasions in 2009 and 2013 are still part of birder conversations. When will it happen again? Will the current spruce budworm increase bring Evening Grosbeaks back to the East in numbers? Time will tell.

See? Winter isn't so bad. I hope you have been able to get out and enjoy these winter birding traditions this season.

Mike Fialkovich, PSO President
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2018 Birding Trips, Excursions, Surveys, and More

More trips may be added later or at the last minute. We continue to work with local groups and clubs to bird with them in their favorite spots by joining their existing field trips or creating new ones. Please contact any PSO board member for more information. Details will follow in the June newsletter and on line.

May 4-5 – Shaver's Creek Birding Cup. This annual fundraiser for Shaver's Creek Environmental Center is an attempt to find as many species as possible in a 24-hour period. There are various categories. See their website (www.shaverscreek.org) for more information.

May 12 – PA Migration Count (PAMC). The second Saturday in May is a great time to get out to count birds. See article on page 10.

June 15 - 18 – Breeding Bird Blitz. This will be the fourth year of this organized count, with the goal of getting reports of breeding birds entered on eBird. Do the Blitz! See article on page 12.

September 8 – Blue Spruce Co. Park in Indiana Co., led by members of the Todd Bird Club. This is one of the best locations in southwestern PA for fall warblers.

September 14-16 – PSO Annual Meeting in Meadville, Crawford County. A great variety of field trips are in the planning stages. Details will follow in the June issue.

October 13-14 – The Big Sit, sponsored by *Bird Watcher's Digest*. You may join or create your own circle and count what you see in a 24-hour time frame.

November 3-4 – Waggoner's Gap Hawkwatch. This is usually the peak for migrating Golden Eagles.

Kevin McGowan to Speak

The Penn State Arboretum Avian Education Seminar will be held Wednesday, April 4, at 5:00 pm in Room 112, Forest Resources Building. Researcher, author, and editor, Kevin McGowan of Cornell, will be discussing his long-term research on crow behavior, survival, and family dynamics. His talk is titled "To Know the Crow: Insights

and Stories from Over a Quarter Century of Crow Study." He will discuss all aspects of their behavior, including their home and family life, flock life, creativity, and crow-human interactions.

The seminar is free and open to the public.

The Raven Reporter

Tales of Discovery about Pennsylvania Birds



Iconic Snowy Owl Featured on Working Together for Wildlife 2018

The February issue of the *Pennsylvania Game News* cover story was about the Snowy Owl, certainly the “Spectacular Visitor” to Pennsylvania and anywhere else it roams. Considering the name of the agency’s magazine, this is a significant demonstration of the appeal of this winter raptor. Although they are characteristic denizens of the Arctic, Snowy Owls visit our state fairly regularly, especially in “invasion years” like 2013-14 and this winter of 2017-18. Many were fortunate to get good looks at a Snowy Owl this year and take great photographs of them, thanks not only to the numbers of the birds but modern social and digital media. A full story about the Working Together for Wildlife (WTFW) and the Snowy Owl patch and art print can be found on the PA eBird page:

<https://ebird.org/pa/news/iconic-snowy-owl-featured-on-working-together-for-wildlife-2018>

Pennsylvania may be far from the heart of the Snowy Owl’s range but it is decidedly at the center of energy and activity for recreational birding and research on its wanderings. We have appreciated the support of the state’s birding community for Snowy Owl observation and the research projects associated with Project SNOWstorm. For up-to-date news about Snowy Owls and researchers studying this species, check out the Project SNOWstorm website at <http://www.projectsnowstorm.org/>. There you will find opportunities to contribute sightings, photos, and donations.

Given the fascination with this bird, it is appropriate that it is the newest wildlife icon for the WTFW program to raise funds for wildlife diversity projects of the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC). The painting by Linda M. Hilgert features a Snowy Owl perched on a fence post with a classic Lancaster County farm scene with red barn and fields in the background. That is the kind of place where birders often go to see birds of the open country. Sales of a reproduction of this painting and a matching patch fund the WTFW program. To support Working Together for Wildlife, visit <http://www.theoutdoorshop.state.pa.us/FBG/game/GameProductSelect.asp?ShopperID=56256E0BD2BB411D92B3AB2E1A6AD616>.

Wildlife watching is a growing movement in America and Pennsylvania with more in their ranks than hunters and anglers combined. It is unfortunate that a wildlife watcher who does not purchase a hunting license in Pennsylvania does not contribute directly to the state’s wildlife agency financially, even if that person cares about such programs and participates as a volunteer – contributing valuable “in kind services” that are appreciated by the agency and bird conservationists everywhere. The WTFW patch and print are among the best ways for birders, photographers, and other wildlife watchers to contribute to the Pennsylvania Game Commission’s Wildlife Diversity programs and support the wildlife they love.

During the Snowy Owl incursions, we have learned a lot about this mysterious Arctic bird. Contrary to beliefs of many, it is humans, not starvation, that are one of the biggest causes of Snowy Owl mortality. Like other raptors, Snowy Owls are prone to collisions with vehicles and aircraft, especially since the open landscape of large highways and airports mimic their breeding grounds. Several owls were hurt or killed by vehicles in recent irruptions. The feeding of owls, especially near roads and airports, is very discouraged for many reasons. Other human-related sources of mortality are rodenticide poisoning and electrocution. Recent research has suggested that the nomadic Snowy Owl has a much lower population and is at greater risk than previously thought. For more information about Snowy Owls, please see posts about it on the Pennsylvania eBird portal. We have previously discussed the possible Snowy Owl invasion in a PA eBird story: <https://ebird.org/pa/news/another-snowy-winter>.

That Game News Snowy Owl issue may still be available on many magazine stands in grocery stores and anywhere periodicals are sold. If you cannot find it there, the main Game Commission office in Harrisburg often offers copies of older issues for months after publication.

Northern Goshawk Update and a Request that Reports Are Still Needed

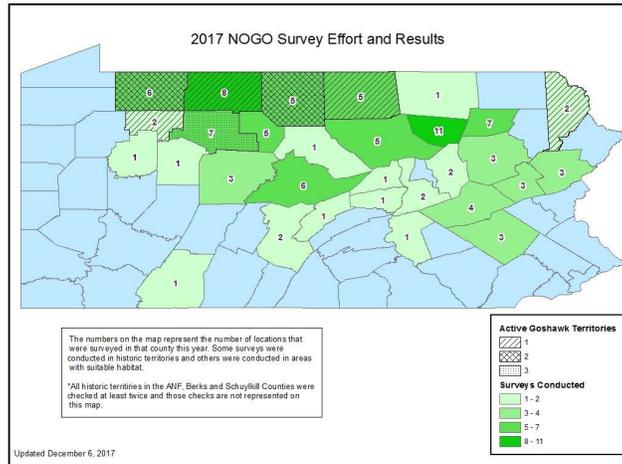
The Northern Goshawk is one of the state’s rarest breeding raptors and an appropriate symbol of Pennsylvania’s wildest forests. The PA Game Commission is one of the partners in a PA Goshawk Project that also involves Penn State, the PA Biological Survey (OTC), Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Allegheny National Forest, the Central Appalachian Goshawk Project, DCNR Bureau of Forestry, and some falconers. Chelsea Demarco, a graduate student in Dr. Margaret Brittingham’s lab at Penn State, has been collecting goshawk nesting season records and conducting searches for goshawk territories in various parts of the

state that have recent histories of goshawk breeding season activity. As I have written in past columns, the Northern Goshawk seems to be declining in the state, not only in numbers of breeding pairs, but also in the size of its breeding range. This is of great concern to bird conservationists and an emerging issue for most states in the Northeast.

The project made significant outreach to the public including an article in PA Game News, The PSO Pileated, PA birds listserv, PA eBird, organization publications, and hunting and falconry groups. We really got the word out which was made easier by establishing a website for the project.

The PA Goshawk Project team worked hard to cover the recent goshawk territories in forested counties. The effort and cooperation were quite impressive. This is especially true since most observers consider goshawk information as confidential, so we really worked at sharing information on an “as needed” basis, protecting confidentiality and avoiding any possible conflicts between the observer/contributor and the research team members. If our sources put limits on information dispersal, we respected those concerns. But even with that extensive effort, the 2017 season results were pretty dismal. There were five basic approaches that included the usual Central Appalachian Goshawk Project (led by Dave Brinker) and Allegheny National Forest searches, the two agencies doing searches in areas of interest (Doug Gross of PGC and Aura Stauffer of DCNR), a Kittitiny Ridge search led by Laurie Goodrich of Hawk Mountain, and the Penn State crew covering many locations with more formal surveys. Many of these surveys were area searches of locations with recent history of goshawk territorial behavior (nests, calling birds, attacks) including reports from the public, but there also were more technical surveys using established protocols and audio-lures.

The goal of the 2016 PA Goshawk Project was to conduct two protocol surveys at each targeted site. There were 60 sites that fell in the region that the ANF crew was covering, and 76 were divided between Hawk Mountain and Penn State. Due to the late start, only eight sites outside of the ANF were surveyed twice, and 56 sites were surveyed once; but that is a very big list of sites to survey for a deep forest raptor. In total, 10 active territories were reported this last season. Around 352 hours were spent using the directed search method to locate nests in recently active



territories. Eight nests were found between April and May by surveying historic nest sites using the directed search method. Five were found on the ANF, two by falconers and one by a goshawk enthusiast. (Most nests had been active in 2016, and the oldest record was active in 2012). Two additional nests were found through contacts in the birding and wildlife community. We suspect that 2017 was a particularly poor year for Northern Goshawk, a

species whose presence is known to vary on a year-to-year basis for a variety of reasons. Wet spring weather, low prey populations, human interference, the cumulative effects of forest fragmentation, nest predation, and West Nile Virus are all suspected factors. Some territories are occupied with a nesting pair one year and not occupied the next, even when the site’s condition seems the same and the birds are closely watched.

On the brighter side, goshawk team observers found many other forest raptors in these surveys. A total of 84 forest raptor detections were recorded with 12 active nests and 3 territories located. Most detections were Red-shouldered and Broad-winged Hawks. This demonstrates that the observers did have success finding forest raptors and that these species are doing comparatively well in the state’s big woods. We are trying to determine how the goshawk is doing and why it is not doing as well as the other forest raptors. Each good observation helps the research and also increases protections for nesting pairs. ***We cannot protect a nesting goshawk if we do not know exactly where that nest is located.***

The Pennsylvania Goshawk Project will continue in 2018 with some adjustments. Chelsea Demarco plans to complete a GIS analysis of historic nest sites. In addition, we are currently discussing options that would provide us with some solid data on goshawk abundance and distribution within its apparent remaining core habitat in PA. The northwestern counties will probably get the most attention, but we also will be surveying historic goshawk sites in the northcentral and northeastern counties. We urge Pennsylvania birders to check old goshawk areas that they know about and report their results to the PA Goshawk Project. For more background, I previously wrote about the Northern Goshawk in Pennsylvania in a Raven Reporter column and at <https://ebird.org/pa/news/northern-goshawk-reports-needed-for-the-ultimate-forest-raptor/>.

For more information about the PABS goshawk

committee's research, visit the PA Goshawk Project website at: www.pabiologicalsurvey.org/goshawk. There you can find images and audio to aid identification as well as forms, instructions, and contact information. Goshawk reports can be e-mailed to goshawk@psu.edu. Any goshawk observations during the breeding season, from late March to June, on game lands should be sent to pgcgoshawk@pa.gov or to me at dogross@pa.gov or dagross144@verizon.net. Reports to either the Pennsylvania Goshawk Project or the Game Commission will be treated as confidential. We do share information if allowed by the conditions set by the contributor of the observation. We want to assist the goshawk through research and cooperation whenever and wherever we can.

Rare Boreal Birds Persist in Some Places, Decline in Others

At the very fringe of Pennsylvania's forested landscape, several boreal forest birds are found regularly and in good numbers. My long-term studies of Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and Blackpoll Warbler have generated a lot of information about these species and also protections for locations where we have documentation of nesting behavior. I continue to study these species even though they have apparently declined in number and in range. However, both Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and Blackpoll Warbler have demonstrated their ability to colonize new breeding areas in recent decades. So, searching for new sites, watching and listening for evidence of breeding is worthwhile.

After many years of working mostly alone, I have really benefited from the assistance of Eric Zawatski, a Penn State student and excellent field observer, and David Yeany, a first-rate ornithologist at the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. With David Yeany, I have been conducting point counts in peatland and high elevation conifer forest sites for the last two years. This accumulated data set will better inform us about the bird communities of headwater forested wetlands and boreal forests in the state.

We are fortunate that these birds are much more adaptable than generally given credit. For instance, although it has declined in most of its southern range, the Olive-sided Flycatcher has been found breeding in the mountains of West Virginia. There have been some reports of Olive-sided Flycatchers in June at various locations in Pennsylvania. Nesting is not out of the question given the history of this species in the state as a fairly widespread breeder in mountain forests and the boreal swamps. Another boreal species, the Swainson's Thrush, is now fairly common in Allegheny National Forest conifers and has made some

slow but steady range expansion into the Northeast's forests at higher elevations. Before the great timbering of the state's forests, it was much more widespread in the Black Forest of the northcentral counties and the North Mountain region. The well-shaded trails of Ricketts Glen State Park are some of the better places to find it in the Northeast. Even Evening Grosbeaks visit the state in the breeding season now and then, perhaps nesting without being observed. We encourage birders to visit these areas and the Poconos where spruce, pine, hemlock, and balsam fir stands may harbor northern species found rarely elsewhere in the state.

More reports of these and other boreal forest species are welcome. It is worth the extra effort to search out spruce and hemlock woods at higher elevations to make your own discoveries. I provide a lot of additional information about some of these birds and their habitats on the PGC website in the Endangered Species section, the Birds of North America species account for Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, and in a publication by the Forest Service on Appalachian Mountain spruce forests.

The Cone Crop May Trigger Nesting by Boreal Songbirds

With a record red spruce cone crop and a very good hemlock cone crop, there are plenty of conifer seeds out there for boreal conifer birds to find. With days getting longer and the air warming up, some of these songbirds may feel the urge to pair up and nest. This is the time when this is most likely to occur. I advise taking treks to conifer woods and looking around for Red Crossbills, Pine Siskins, and White-winged Crossbills, even if you have not found them close to home. The migration of these cone-loving birds continues through the winter months. They keep wandering south into new areas as they consume their commodities farther north.

Pine Siskins nest readily where there is a ready cone crop to harvest with their pointy little beaks. They may visit your niger seed feeder and fly to a nest tucked away in a conifer somewhere nearby. But they also may nest in a hemlock grove or a spruce swamp where cones are abundant. They can be found in places where Red-breasted Nuthatches and Golden-crowned Kinglets dwell in spring and summer. Red Crossbills are another possible nesting species in our state that may "nest at any time," but are more likely to nest as the days get longer in spring and where there is an abundant cone crop that would support feeding nestlings. In fact, they may nest multiple times at a location with sufficient seeds. These incidents tend not to involve large numbers of crossbills but only a few pairs that can be quite vocal as they sing and display with males

singing loudly from high atop pines and spruces. The challenge is to go to the many conifer groves and search them out. With the enormous red spruce cone crop found last year and the good hemlock cone crop in many woods, there are many possibilities for such rarities to appear.

Next on the agenda, the trouble with our aerial insectivores which are declining dramatically as a group no matter their taxonomy.... That's it for now.

Good Birding,

Doug Gross

Nominations for the Conservation and Earl Poole Awards

Nominations are now being sought for the Conservation Award and the Earl Poole Award which will be given at the PSO Annual Meeting in September.

The Conservation Award is presented to an individual or organization that has had a positive impact on bird conservation in Pennsylvania. The award is most often given to an organization or individual from the area where the Annual Meeting is being held; this year the meeting is in Crawford County. A list of previous winners can be found on the PSO website.

The Earl Poole Award is presented annually to a person or persons who have made significant contributions to Pennsylvania's ornithology. This may be in the form of research, volunteer efforts, publications, field work, or any

other pursuit that has increased our knowledge and understanding of the birdlife in Pennsylvania. A list of previous winners can also be found on the PSO website.

Nominations for the Conservation Award should include the name of the organization or individual along with the contribution that the organization or individual has made to conservation in PA. Please include the organization's website address if it is applicable.

Nominations for the Earl Poole Award should include the name of the person and his or her contributions to PA Ornithology.

Please send all applications no later than May 31 to vern_gauthier14@gmail.com.

2018 Festival of the Birds

Hosted by Presque Isle Audubon Society and PA DCNR

May 18, 19, & 20

Keynote Speaker: Drew Lanham

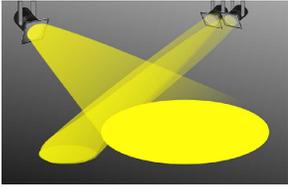
Dr. J. Drew Lanham is a birder, naturalist, and hunter-conservationist. He is a Clemson University Master Teacher and Alumni Distinguished Professor in wildlife ecology, with research interests in songbird ecology and conservation; integration of game and nongame wildlife management; the African American land ethic and its role

in natural resources conservation. The title of his presentation is *Ornithotherapy --Confessions of a Lapsed Lister and a Life Saved by Birds*.

For more information, go to www.presqueisleaudubon.org/festival.html

Richard Crossley to Visit Penn State

RSVP by April 2 (info@wildlifeforeveryone.org or 814-238-8138) to attend a program entitled *There and Back*, a reception, and book signing at Nittany Lion Inn's Alumni Fireside Lodge on April 7, beginning at 11 a.m. Richard Crossley awoke one morning in Cape May and decided to drive to the Arctic Ocean. He will discuss his 16,000-mile adventure, living in his car, the inspiring people he met, and the places he visited. He will be signing his most recent bird guide, *The Crossley ID Guide: Waterfowl*.



Young PA Birder Spotlight

The PSO Education Committee is pleased to announce a

Young PA Birder Spotlight! This feature article will be a recurring column in The Pileated.

In an effort to recognize the many contributions to ornithology, birding, and conservation, that many of our PA young birders are making, we will spotlight a young birder from the Commonwealth in this newsletter. If you know a young PA birder you think should be spotlighted, please send an email to the email address below!

Some birders have a spark moment, which opens the door to the world of birding, and others are lucky enough to be born into it. This edition's young birder, Kristen Johnson of Montgomery County, was born into it.

I first met Kristen Johnson as an infant who attended the Rose Tree Park Hawkwatch with her mom, Sheryl. My earliest memories of Kristen were as she sat quietly playing with toys on a blanket.

Fifteen years later, Kristen has grown into a birder who possesses a knack for bird identification as well as superb skills with a camera. And she's now one of the best hawk spotters at the Rose Tree Park Hawkwatch!

This story does not start with Kristen. It begins a generation before her. Sheryl Johnson, PSO compiler for Montgomery Co. and a birder since her teens, did not let motherhood put her love for birding on the shelf until her kids grew up. Instead, it was quite the opposite. Sheryl continued to actively bird, count hawks for two hawk-watches, do CBCs, and volunteer at banding sites, always with her two young daughters in tow. I think that a lot of us who were birders before becoming parents aren't lucky enough to have a kid who's become an active birder. But Sheryl's passion has become Kristen's, too. In fact, it's Kristen who is now begging Sheryl to take her to rare bird stakeouts or to the National Wildlife Refuge!

When she was around 5 years old, Kristen began to learn the process of bird banding from PSO's own Doris McGovern, Master Bander at Rushton Farms Banding Station near Newtown Square, PA. Under Doris's careful guidance and tutelage, Kristen has grown into a highly capable banding volunteer who continues to help at Rushton Farms with their Northern Saw-whet Owl banding project and songbird banding to this day. In summer she also volunteers for the Wings Island Banding Station on Cape Cod.



Besides banding, Kristen is devoted to many other bird census projects and citizen science efforts. Some of these include helping to run the Haverford College Nighthawk Watch in August every year and participating in the Glenolden CBC and the Philadelphia Midwinter Census. Kristen is also a passionate eBirder who has submitted over a thousand checklists to eBird. She has also contributed over 400 photographs to Cornell Lab's Macaulay Library! See some of her fine contributions, here: https://ebird.org/media/catalog?mediaType=Photo&searchField=user&includeUnconfirmed=true&userId=USER533253®ionCode=&sort=upload_date_desc

Kristen's photography is spectacular. Her keen eye for composition and documentation is commendable. Her photographs were recently featured in the American Birding Association's (ABA) *Birding* magazine article "A Tale of 2 Bird Camps," p. 38, which appeared in Vol. 49, No. 5, October 2017, accompanying her friend, Madelyne Ray's fine article!

In 2014, Kristen was the recipient of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club's (DVOC) Adam Sabatine scholarship, which sent her to the ABA young birder camp, Camp Avocet, to explore the Delmarva Peninsula. In 2016 she was awarded the Audubon Ambassador Scholarship, and attended the Hog Island Camp for teens: Coastal Maine Bird Studies, where she had the opportunity to photograph Atlantic Puffins and Black Guillemots at close range.

It's amazing that Kristen can find time for much else, given her remarkable efforts devoted to avian endeavors, but she does. Kristen enjoys drawing, playing the violin, singing in her church choir, running cross-country, and especially, horseback riding. Like she does with birding, she puts herself fully into these other interests and contributes more than just being a participant.

There's no doubt that this young woman will continue to contribute to our fine birding community here in Pennsylvania for many years to come. Kristen is a shining example of a birder who inspires us, and we are grateful

for her passion and dedication to the birds of Pennsylvania!

Holly Merker,
PSO Education Committee Chair
HCybelle@gmail.com

PSO Web Site News

The **Birds of PA** page on the **PSO website** (pabirds.org) now includes the following:

1. **Class I species** - records for which there is an existing specimen, photo, or audio recording.
2. **(New) Provisional Species** - records that consist of sightings only – no specimen, photo, or audio recording – but were accepted by the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee as credible.
3. **(New) Pending Records** - recent credible sightings (i.e. Photos) waiting for the PORC review and vote.

The downloadable spreadsheet also includes these categories.

This makes the list more comprehensive and allows users to see what species need upgrading and which species are coming to the list.

– Frank Haas

PS: Did anyone notice the photos in the Birds of PA page banner? Can you figure out why those species were selected?

Moving?

Please let us know if you are moving so we don't incur charges from the post office for address changes.

The Post Office does not forward periodicals (ie. *Pennsylvania Birds*), so when your address is no longer valid, they return the back page of the issue to us with a new address label attached (and charge us for doing so!).

We then have to send a new copy to the member for full cost (plus the cost of the extra copy!).

So please... do one of the following:

✿ Log in to the PSO website and update your address.

or

✿ Send an email to psa@pabirds.org

or

✿ Send a postcard or letter to PSO, 2469 Hammertown Rd, Narvon, PA 17555.

Thank you!



Mifflin County 200 Challenge Revisited

by Rob Dickerson, Jon Kauffman, & Chad Kauffman

In 2017, a group of birders in and near Mifflin County attempted the eBird 200 challenge to see if we could get 200 species in one year. This hadn't been done before in Mifflin County. The previous highest year's species count occurred in 2014 with 194 species. With a limited number of birders, topping 200 wasn't going to be easy. Birders came from other areas and from neighboring counties to help. Those who lived in the county birded intensely to help add to our list. We also were aided by the Amish, who contacted several of us with their sightings.

Besides the few birders in the county, Mifflin County birders face additional challenges. Mifflin County is very rural with much of the county dominated by farmland and forest. Publicly accessible land is limited as few parks provide good habitat for birds. One exception is Victory Park, which is adjacent to the Juniata River in Lewistown. Other public areas include three state forests (Bald Eagle, Rothrock, and Tuscarora), one state park (Reeds Gap), and two State Game Lands (SGL 112 and SGL 107, which includes a Woodcock Management Area that provides excellent habitat for Blue- and Golden-winged Warblers). Mifflin County also hosts two hawkwatches: Jack's Mountain and Stone Mountain.

The main challenge in birding Mifflin County is the lack of water other than the Juniata River and a few small farm ponds. Victory Park is generally very good for waterfowl and the occasional shorebird. Unfortunately, much of the Juniata River is far from roads and bordered by private lands. Looking for shorebirds is generally limited to farm fields that flood following heavy rains.

January started out at a nice pace with 71 birds for the month, including a Snow Bunting found by Chad Kauffman and Aden Troyer. February was a bit slower with 18 new species, mainly waterfowl, including a Common Goldeneye, a bird that is not seen in the county every year. March was another slow month for the challenge, with 20 new species seen, bringing the total to 109 species. Highlights for the month included a solitary Long-tailed Duck found by Jay Zook on a farm pond outside of Belleville and a pair of Barn Owls, first reported in the fall of 2016 and currently being monitored by Shaver's Creek Environmental Center. Rob had the privilege of viewing the owls in early May when he accompanied Jon Kauffman of Shaver's Creek to the private farm located in the Kishacoquillas Valley (more commonly known as Big Valley) in early May. The owners of the farm are thrilled to have the pair residing in their silo. For him, it was exciting to see the pair appear in an opening in the top of the silo just as darkness fell.

The pair was quite vocal while flying back and forth between the silo and the adjacent barn.

The push for 200 picked up steam in April with the addition of 50 new species, including Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers. Everyone participating was happy to have these shorebirds added to the year's list. Heavy rains at the end of April and in early May resulted in flooded farm fields. Robert Hosler found one such field in Big Valley that produced both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and Least, Spotted, and Solitary Sandpipers. With spring migration really picking up in May, and even with the addition of a number of shorebirds, we came to the realization that we were going to need some rarities. Although we ended the month at 196 species, including a rarely seen Mourning Warbler and a first-ever Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, there was still some doubt whether we would reach 200, even with the inclusion of a very probable Northern Goshawk.

June did nothing to alleviate our doubt. No new species were found during the month, but things started to change in early July with the report of a county-first Dickcissel found by several Amish birders and a county-first Upland Sandpiper reported by two non-birding gentlemen from the Conservation Office. While visiting a farm in Big Valley, the pair observed a strange looking bird standing in a recently mowed field. They grabbed a picture of the bird, which was then identified. July ended with a total of 198 species.

August started with a report by a young Amish birder of the second county record of a Blue Grosbeak, bringing the total to 199 for the year. In September, the reports of rare birds continued. A Virginia Rail was found in the yard of the Swarey family of Belleville. Three days later, the hoped-for goshawk was seen at Jack's Mountain Hawkwatch when an immature was observed. This report was followed by Amish birder Henry Petersheim's spotting of a county-first Swallow-tailed Kite flying down the ridge in Lewistown. Amish birders outside Belleville found a county-first Clay-colored Sparrow, so we closed the month with a total of 203 species.

Nothing new was found in October, but in early November Nick Bolgiano spotted a group of nine Dunlin flying overhead at the Stone Mountain Hawkwatch – another first county record. A few days later a second county record of Dunlin was recorded when Jon Kauffman located two individuals in a flooded field outside Belleville. November ended with 204 species. The 205th county bird was found in late December when Joe Gyekis spotted two Short-eared Owls on Back Mountain Road

near Milroy. I had never birded Back Mountain Road north of Milroy until 2017, and it has turned out to be a fantastic stretch of habitat. (After the late December discovery, a second pair Short-eared Owls was found at the other end of the valley in January 2018 near Allensville.)

We ended the year with seven new county birds: Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (a second was found in September),

Dickcissel, Upland Sandpiper, Virginia Rail, Clay-colored Sparrow, Swallow-tailed Kite, and Short-eared Owl.

I would highly encourage starting a 200 eBird challenge for other counties, especially if the county is under-birded. You'll connect with other birders across the county whom you may know only by name. You'll escape your personal comfort zone to try new locations, often spots that out-of-county birders will discover. It's a tremendous amount of fun.

What is the Pennsylvania Migration Count?

The Pennsylvania Migration Count (PAMC) was established in 1992 to gather annual data on migratory bird populations. PAMC is an annual one-day snapshot of bird populations attempting to answer which species are present, where they are, and how many there are. It is a fun way to participate with others in your county when migration is at its peak. This count is no longer on the same day as Global Big Day and no longer will be associated with it; however, eBirders are still encouraged to participate.

How does it work? The Pennsylvania Migration Count takes place each spring on the second Saturday in May. It is similar to the Christmas Bird Count. The difference is that PAMC covers an entire county rather than a 15-mile diameter circle like the CBC. The rules are simple: spend some time in the field counting all birds in a specified area, and keep track of miles traveled and time spent counting. Participants are free to roam their favorite county birding locales at any time during the 24-hour period, starting at 12:01 a.m., counting every bird they find.

How can you help? Birders of all skill levels can help out with the count. Beginning at midnight with the songs of the Eastern Whip-poor-wills and the hooting of the Great Horned Owls, the PAMC is a great way to spend time outside. Whether you tally birds in your backyard, at your

feeders, the local little league ballfield, along the river, on a lake, at your camp, or spend time hiking through a state park, your observations count. Field checklists and information for PAMC participation are available online at <https://pabirds.org/index.php/projects/pa-annual-migration-count>.

Contact information for county compilers can also be found at pabirds.org. Please submit your sightings to your county compiler. Those using only eBird to record their sightings should discuss with their compiler who will put the data into a spreadsheet. As in the past, all the spreadsheets can be combined for comparison with other counties.

Some counties do not have a compiler. Anyone wishing to help can contact me (cnberthoud@gmail.com) or Frank Haas (fchaas@pabirds.org). If there is no one available, feel free to use and submit the Spreadsheet for County Compiler to Tabulate Data found on the PA Society for Ornithology links referenced above and send it to me.

Don't let the weather stop you from getting outside. Sometimes after a rain shower, migrants get active again, especially at good migrant traps. Good birding to all.

– Chuck Berthoud

Certificates of Appreciation Awarded

Since 2007, PSO has issued certificates of appreciation to individuals and organizations who have graciously allowed access to their properties to view rare or unusual

birds. The total number issued is now 150. The full list can be found on the PSO's website. The following Certificates of Appreciation have recently been awarded:

Western Tanager, Michael and Jeanne O'Shea, Bucks Co.
Harris's Sparrow, Mike Lucas, Bucks Co.
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, Bernard and Irene Frey, Crawford Co.
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, Shawn Collins, Crawford Co.

Central PA eBird Challenges

By Chad Kauffman

A few years ago, some of us in the PA Birders Facebook group thought it would be fun to challenge the whole state to see if we could get all of the counties to hit 150 species in a calendar year. That might not seem like that large a number for some counties, but it is very hard to get in others. After talking about it some more, I threw out the challenge so that we couldn't turn back. We kept track monthly, and the birdier counties hit 150 species within a few months while others took most of the summer and into fall. A handful of counties needed some help. We had some free-agent birders who went around the state to help in under-birded areas, and before the year was over we accomplished our goal. That is quite impressive when you think that we have 67 counties in our state, and some are sparsely populated and/or not heavily birded. I personally haven't heard any other state ever attempting such a thing.

In 2015, Vern Gauthier and I decided to make a wager between the two of us, while also trying to see if we could get Perry County over 200 species that year. Various birders helped and we reached the 190s, but then it dragged on. We finally hit 200 in December with the final tally reaching 204, so we accomplished our goal. We also got more birders to submit more checklists in the county and added a few new species. Perry County has 232 lifetime species on eBird, and the challenge added five new species that year.

In 2017, we attempted the 200 eBird challenge for Mifflin County, and as of December 31 we had 205 approved

species. We also lucked out with some skillful birders who birded only in Mifflin County for the Shaver's Creek Birding Cup. Rob Dickerson led the charge for this county (and it helps that he retired last year, too). Mifflin County has 238 lifetime species on eBird, and the challenge has added three new species.

In 2018, I have taken time off from leading PSO field trips to focus on my home county, Juniata, with a 200 eBird challenge. While I would love to personally reach 200, it will be enough of a challenge for the county with all the help I can get from other birders. Juniata County currently has 250 lifetime species on eBird. As of March 8, we have 109 species on our challenge.

For 2019, we will throw out a challenge to Snyder County, trying the 200 eBird challenge in that under-birded part of the state. Snyder has some great lakes and large expanses of fields and woodland. I usually start the year off there doing a Winter Raptor Survey. I also try to hit the lakes during waterfowl season, but other than that, I just don't get to visit it as often as I should or could. I know many people who have birded in Snyder, and we will need all to help us hit that goal. That will be the biggest challenge in the four counties with this venture. They currently have 224 lifetime species on eBird.

Here's a snapshot of total species for the last five years for each county:

COUNTY	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	Average
Perry	189	187	204	170	186	187.2
MIFFLIN	205	178	186	194	171	186.8
JUNIATA	187	171	170	176	175	175.8
SNYDER	154	157	165	163	163	160.4

How Many Birds Have Been eBired in YOUR County This Year?

To see where your county stands in 2018, go to the PA portal for eBird, <https://ebird.org/pa/home>. Click on Explore, then Explore a Region, and type in the name of your county. Next change the year to "Current Year."

The Fifth Annual Breeding Bird Blitz (PAB3)

by Vern Gauthier

The fifth annual PA Breeding Bird Blitz will be taking place Friday, June 15, through Monday, June 18. This is another opportunity to add some great PA Breeding Bird data to eBird!

In our never-ending quest to change and enliven your gathering of PA breeding bird data, the PAB3 this year will take on a “**Big Day**” format. Don’t let that intimidate you as you can test drive a Big Day doing a county count in an hour or less, and you do not need to be an “expert” birder to take part!

A **Big Day Count** is a single-team effort in which the primary objectives are (1) to identify as many bird species as possible during a single calendar day and (2) to strive to have all team members identify all species recorded. Big Days for the PAB3 will be conducted by the following rules:

1. Counting

- A. Count only full species. Birds not on the PA Ornithological Records Committee (PORC) Bird List will not be accepted. The list can be found at <https://pabirds.org/records/index.php/pennsylvania-bird-list/>
- B. For a species to count for the team total, it must be identified by at least 2 members of the team during the count period.
- C. Birds must be conclusively identified by sight or sound. No generic species will be accepted.
- D. Birds counted must be alive, wild, and unrestrained. Birds at feeders may be counted.
- E. Only submit birds actually located within the boundary of the count. The location of the bird is where the bird is located, not where the observers are located. Be aware of county, region, and state lines.
- F. Since this is a Breeding Bird Count, use of recordings should be used only for nocturnal species (owls, rails etc.) whose presence would be difficult to detect otherwise. Pishing should be kept to a minimum.

2. Areas

- A. One of 3 geographic areas may be covered each day of the Blitz (County, Regional, or State).
- B. A county list will include all birds identified in a particular county (Example: Crawford

County).

- C. A Regional list will include birds identified from at least 4 counties of that region with a minimum of one hour spent birding in each county. See map on page 13. (Example: NE Region; Sullivan, Wyoming, Pike, and Carbon counties).
- D. A State list will include birds identified from at least 5 regions in the state with a minimum of one hour spent birding in each region (For example: SE, SC, SW, NC, NE).

3. Time

- A. All counting must be within a single 24-hour period, on a single calendar day.
- B. A County List can be any length of time.
- C. A Regional List must be at least 4 hours in duration
- D. A State List must be at least 5 hours in duration.
- E. Your time birding does not need to be consecutive as time out may be taken, but birds identified during the time out may not be added to the list.

4. Travel

- A. Travel may be by any means. When motorized vehicles are used, all participants must travel in the same vehicle, except during time-outs.
- B. All birds identified while driving may be included in the count list if positively identified by at least 2 team members.

5. Participants

- A. Two or more participants may constitute a team.
- B. All members of the team must start the count day with the team.
- C. Participants may bird only part of the day as long as there are at least 2 participants left on the team after they leave the team. A participant who leaves the team may rejoin the team later in the day.

6. Entries

- A. A day summary report from eBird is the preferred entry method as long as the other entry information that follows is also included. Using eBird will do the tallying for you (making it easier for you), give your data value, and standardize reports (making it easier for me).

- B. If you choose not to use eBird, you may use tally sheets that will be available for download on the PSO website.
- C. Note the date of the count.
- D. Note if it is a county, regional, or state list, along with the name of the county, counties, or regions birded in the count.
- E. Include the names of team members along with team name if there is one.
- F. Send all entries (no more than one per day of the Blitz) no later than 11:59 p.m. of the day following your count to breedingbirdblitz@gmail.com (Example: If you do a Regional Count on June 15, you have until 11:59 p.m. on the 16th to email the results).
- G. Only one eBird Summary Report or Tally Sheet will be accepted for each day of the Blitz. Multiple submissions for a particular day will not be accepted.

website, (2) click on “Summarize My Observations” on the side bar, (3) Select a “Week Report,” (4) Choose the correct month and day and press the “Continue” button,(5) Highlight the locations visited and press the “Continue” button, (6) Either copy and paste the information into an email or download the report and send it via email.

- D. Please note that creating a Daily Summary should be done at the end of each birding day.

8. Results

- A. The results for all 3 categories (County, Regional, and State) will be posted by June 23 on the PSO Facebook Page, PSO website, and the PA Birds listserv.
- B. Results will be ranked according to the number of species reported.
- C. Top species count in each category will not receive any type of monetary or material prize, just the fame and glory for having topped the category.

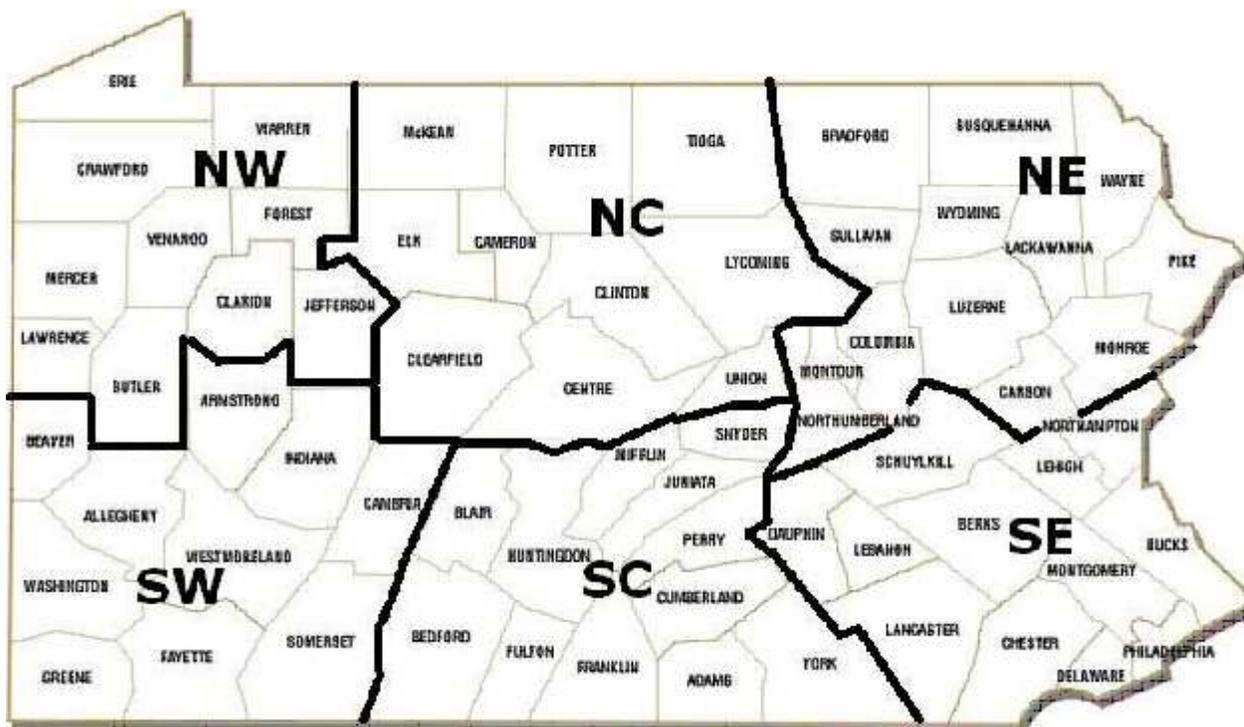
7. Using eBird

- A. If you use eBird (which you are highly encouraged to do), please keep checklists at 5 miles or less for traveling counts; otherwise the data you submit may become less useful or invalidated.
- B. You are also encouraged to use breeding codes as much as possible.
- C. To create a Daily Summary do the following:
 - (1) Go to the “My eBird” tab on the eBird

9. Send your Stories and Pictures

Send in your stories and pictures to breedingbirdblitz@gmail.com so we can include them in the next edition of *The Pileated* and/or post them on the PSO Facebook page.

- 10. Questions? Contact Vern Gauthier at breedingbirdblitz@gmail.com



Birding Blitz Photos



Ted Nichols photographed these confirmed Black-crowned Night-Herons in Lancaster County.



Catbirds confirmed breeding in Lebanon County when Ted Nichols found this young Gray Catbird..

Welcome, New Members!

The following members have joined since November 29, 2017.

Dale Beitzel, Fleetwood, PA

Jeff Boltz, Glen Rock, PA

Devich Farbotnik, Quakertown, PA

Leslie Ferree, South Park, PA

Judith Foulke, Warminster, PA

Louise Gensemer, Pottstown, PA

Timothy Grover, Mountainhome, PA

Claus Herrmann, Effort, PA

John Holback, Philadelphia, PA

Kurt Hummel, Glen Mills, PA

George Linz, Bismark, ND

Wes Peterson, Newville, PA

Kenneth Pinnow, Meadville, PA

Madelyne Ray, Ambler, PA

Kim Van Fleet, Carlisle, PA

Nick Voris, Punxsutawney, PA

How Well Do You Know Your Pennsylvania Birds?

1. Least Terns have nested twice in Pennsylvania. Where?
2. Which warbler's white-lored subspecies is called the "Sycamore Warbler"? For a bonus, why?
3. Can you guess which gull species was first recorded in Pennsylvania in 1979 when a moribund bird was found on a beach at Presque Isle?
4. A large raptor from the far north spent a month feeding on Ring-necked Pheasants at a state game farm in Crawford County. What species? For a bonus, what color morph was it?
5. Between our first and second breeding bird atlas periods, the southern breeding range limits of two familiar forest species withdrew northward 10 to 12 miles. Which two species?

(Answers on page 20)



Kids Talk on Birds: Part 2

by Nick Kerlin

A few years ago, I submitted an article on what 4th graders had to say about my school visits to present bird banding programs. Here are some of the latest ones, continuing the saga of future birders to come.

“Do you know how many blue jays are in the world?”

Yes, a lot!

“I liked that you showed us the cardinal other than just the house sparrow.”

Yes, I like them better too, although my wife thinks I’m prejudiced.

“My bird that I studied was the Great Blue Heron. Did you know that ‘Rok-rok’ means ‘this is my place’?”

Wow, a kid who can speak Heron!

“Did you know that a Pileated Woodpecker can drum 9,000 times in ten minutes?”

I didn’t know that either. Let’s see that means 900 times/minute, 15 times/second. I wonder who counted?

“I thought it was funny when the bird kept biting you.”

Yeah, easy for you to say.

My mother thinks that cardinals are a sign of hope and peace, but after seeing one at your visit (biting), I know my mother thought wrong.”

Oops!

“I have facts to share with you (on Black-capped Chickadees). Did you know they fly across roads?”

So that’s why that chicken crossed the road!

“I LOVED the birds. I LOVED you coming here. I LOVED your birds and banding equipment. I LOVED you weighing the birds and holding them. I LOVED

every second of it.... I was never bored even for a second.”

I LOVE this kid!



“Pileated Woodpeckers have a red kind of beard.”

Avian Nomenclature 101

Pittsburgh Birder to Compete in Champions of the Flyway

by Aidan Place

Each March, in the desert of southern Israel, teams from around the world come together to compete in an event known as Champions of the Flyway. It’s an adrenaline-fueled, nonstop, 24-hour big day competition during the peak of migration at one of the world’s top birding spots.

The goal of the event is to support conservation efforts to combat bird poaching in the Mediterranean Basin. Teams raise awareness and money for this cause, and this year’s funds are going to BirdLife Serbia and BirdLife

Croatia, two great organizations working hard to combat poaching in the Balkan Peninsula.

Growing up in Pittsburgh, it was always a dream of mine to participate in Champions, and wistful thoughts of Israeli birds often helped get me through a long Pennsylvania winter. I am consequently pleased to announce that this year my dream is coming true, and I am headed to Israel as part of the newly formed team known as The ABA-Leica Subadult Wheatears!

The team is, as the name implies, sponsored by the American Birding Association and Leica Sports Optics. It is also entirely composed of young birders (none of us are older than 20).

We are the first youth team from North America to ever compete in Champions, and my two teammates (Johanna Beam from Colorado and Marky Mutchler from Missouri) and I are extremely excited to be representing the young birders of the ABA Area.

However, we need your help. Over the past couple of months, we've been fundraising hard, working slowly

towards our goal of \$5,000 raised. With just a few weeks left until race day, every cent counts.

Over 50,000 Common Quail are shot during migration in Serbia and Croatia each year as they battle to reach their breeding grounds. Countless passerines, ducks, and raptors are gunned down or captured for the illegal pet trade while corrupt police and politicians shrug their shoulders and look the other way. These birds can really use your help, and so can we. Any donation that you can spare is going not just to support the birds of the Balkans but the young birders of North America as well. With your support, we can provide a model for future generations of young birders, *and* help ensure that those generations have birds to see.

To donate to the team go to:

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/aba-leica-subadult-wheatears>

You can also follow the team on our Facebook page as well as our Twitter (@ABAWheatears) and our Instagram (@subadultwheatears).

Recap of the PSO Board Minutes

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology Board of Directors met on March 3, 2018, with 13 directors present for their spring meeting.

The 2015 PORC report will be published in this issue of *Pennsylvania Birds*. Greg Grove would like to print an updated bird list of the state.

Holly Merker said that only one application was received for the summer birding camp scholarship. She thinks this may be because PSO is only providing half the funds. She would like to provide a full scholarship by possibly asking for donations on the annual meeting registration form.

We will be asking RockJumper Tours if they will support the annual meeting youth scholarship again this year. The State College Bird Club will contribute \$500 toward an annual meeting youth scholarship for a youth from either Centre or one of the adjacent counties.

At a recent PORC meeting a 21-day deadline was established for the review of submitted records. PORC will attempt to complete a review of all backlogged records by June of this year. A new email address has been created to notify those who have submitted records.

Frank Haas gave the treasurer's report and said that there was nothing unusual about the PSO finances. The membership has remained fairly steady.

The annotated list of birds for Pennsylvania will not be reprinted because it is already on the website. The board decided to have a printable checklist on the website, but it will be available only to members.

The next annual meeting will be held in Meadville, Crawford County, September 14 to 16, 2018, at the Italian Civic Club. Accommodations will be on your own. Possible speakers were discussed. Annette Mathes constructed a list of tasks that are necessary to complete for the meeting.

The new website is up and running. A temporary fix to allow access to the county site guides will be completed soon. A permanent fix will be established as time permits. The validity of voting by email was discussed. The final consensus was that it is OK as long as no legal matters are involved.

The complete transcript of the board meeting minutes may be found on the PSO website.

– Roger Higbee, Secretary

Ornithological Literature Notes

Light-level geolocators – miniature devices attached to birds that enable ornithologists to track the birds’ travels year-round – have taught us aspects of breeding, migratory, and winter behavior that would once have been impossible to know.

For ornithology, they were first engineered in the 1990s by the British Antarctic Survey and used to track movements of Wandering Albatrosses across their vast oceanic journeys. These devices, attached to birds by small harnesses, were relatively heavy at first – hardly suitable for species lighter than an albatross. As the decades passed, smaller and smaller versions of the devices enabled tracking smaller and smaller birds.

Now scientists can use them to follow long-distance movements of birds as small as a Cerulean Warbler. This ecologically troubled species can be tracked from its breeding grounds, along its migration routes and stopover locations, to its wintering grounds, and back again. The result is a technological treasure helping ornithologists to learn how and where to prioritize conservation efforts for the Cerulean Warbler and other small species.

A nagging question has bothered researchers: When geolocators are attached to very small birds, could the extra weight harm the birds’ ability to migrate long distances and perhaps even drain the energy required every day when seeking food for their young?

Douglas Raybuck and Than Boves at Arkansas State University, Jeffery Larkin of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and Scott Stoleson at the U.S. Forest Service Northern Research Station in Irvine, Pennsylvania, sought an answer for the Cerulean Warbler. They reported their findings in 2017 in *The Condor: Ornithological Applications* (vol. 119, pp. 289-297).

The authors evaluated possible effects on adults’ within-season survival, rate of feeding nestlings, overall nest survival, and return rates to the breeding range after

wintering in the tropics. Geolocators were attached to 19 adult male Ceruleans at breeding sites on the Allegheny Plateau in northwestern Pennsylvania and 20 males on the Ozark Plateau in Missouri and Arkansas. As “control” individuals for comparison, similar numbers of adult male Ceruleans were not fitted with the devices.

Geocator and harness weight totaled 0.36 grams, 4% of the birds’ body weight. The results showed no significant effects on adults’ within-season survival, nest survival, and rates of feeding young. But the findings also indicated that geocator-tagged birds were less likely to return to breeding sites in the year after capture. The return rate averaged 35% for the untagged controls but only 16% for the tagged birds. The authors call this a “cause for some concern.”

There are many other reasons, of course, why birds could have been affected negatively by factors unrelated to the geolocators’ weight, such as differences in weather and habitat quality during migration, winter, and/or spring migration.

From that viewpoint, the authors conclude: “Although the potential for increased mortality during the nonbreeding season, or alterations to migratory timing or pathways, is of some concern, the fact that reproduction does not appear to be hampered is encouraging...Spatial and temporal data acquired from the use of geolocators has enormous conservation potential, and these benefits likely outweigh the potential cost of a relatively small number of individuals being negatively affected by carrying geolocators.”

Paul Hess
Natrona Heights, PA
phess@salsgiver.com



Did you know...

The Tundra Swan has as many as 25,000 feathers while hummingbirds have fewer than 1,000.

A bird’s feathers weigh more than its skeleton.

Conservation Chat Room

Recovering America's Wildlife - How you can help



I imagine that our Neotropical migrants are getting restless in their early spring habitats in Central and South America. Photo receptors in their brains trigger hormonal changes, so the males will molt their winter feathers to appear their brightest and best to attract a mate. Timing and degree of molting vary among bird

species, but many molt before they migrate, since newer feathers help with flight. Their hormones also trigger a huge increase in appetite so they start eating voraciously and gain significant amounts of weight. They'll need that stored energy to travel the thousands of miles back to their breeding grounds.

Birds that survive the long journey north will likely return to a changed landscape in North America. The tree they nested in last year might be gone – cut down because it was in the way of a pipeline – or a wind turbine – or a coal strip mine. Perhaps a new shopping mall replaced the forest that supported a diverse group of bird species, or maybe a farmer decided to enlarge his soybean field by clearing an adjacent five-acre woodlot. If those birds have high site fidelity, they may have problems adapting to habitat changes or finding suitable breeding habitat.

While Ovenbirds don't nest in trees, they still depend on intact forests where they find food and cover to hide their forest-floor nests that are shaped like Dutch ovens. A 12-year study of 132 male Ovenbirds, in a healthy forest at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, that looked at site fidelity and territorial consistency showed that return rates were high and that birds rarely moved far from their first territory during their lifetimes. The authors pointed out that the forest was a homogeneous, high-quality habitat where reproductive failure was infrequent.¹

An earlier study in Canada, from 1996-1999, studied the survival of 398 male Ovenbirds in fragmented forests compared to continuous boreal forests. This study showed that survival was lower in smaller fragmented forests. It also suggested that Ovenbirds had lower nesting and pairing success that caused individuals to permanently disperse in search of new territories.²



According to the **Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in Pennsylvania**, Ovenbirds are our most abundant warbler, but degradation of forests and forest fragmentation make this species vulnerable to future declines. It is also one of the most numerous birds killed by towers, windows, and other manmade structures.

Photo by Laura Jackson

I'm interested in Ovenbirds because they nest in our forests. Luckily for us, as well as Ovenbirds and many other birds, our property sits within a 9,620-acre block of unfragmented forest on Tussey Mountain in Bedford County. Approximately 5,000 acres within the forest block are part of State Game Land 97. It's a good feeling to have that much forest protected from development and to know that the Pennsylvania Game Commission works hard to protect habitat so greatly needed by "our birds."

The National Wildlife Federation states that one third of all bird species in North America are in need of urgent conservation action. In fact, one third of all U.S. wildlife species are already in trouble. We can do something about this, however. The "Recovering America's Wildlife Act" is currently before Congress. H.R. 4647 was introduced in the House in mid-December 2017 and was referred to the Subcommittee on Water, Power, and Oceans on December 20, 2017.

You can read the bill here: www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/4647/text?format=txt

According to the Wildlife Society, which supports H.R. 4647, the Act would dedicate \$1.3 billion annually to fund State Wildlife Action Plans from existing oil and gas royalties. Prioritizing Species of Greatest Conservation

Need, these plans would ensure such species remain abundant, off the endangered species list, and managed by the states.

H.R. 4647 would also require states to contribute a 25% non-federal match which encourages partnerships and community support for wildlife conservation.

In Pennsylvania, H.R. 4647 would allocate **\$34,308,595 to protect wildlife**. This would be the most significant investment in wildlife conservation in a generation. In the last issue, I wrote about Pennsylvania's Wildlife Action Plan, which is a blueprint for conservation. If enacted, H.R. 4647 would dramatically increase funding for the plan, and thus provide much needed conservation measures for many birds and mammals in Pennsylvania. Skopos Labs (a company that formulates strategic predictions), however, gives the bill just a 24% chance of being enacted, so this is where our challenge begins:

Action Request:

Please ask your federal Representative to co-sponsor the Recovering America's Wildlife Act H.R. 4647. If you need their name and contact information, type in your zip code here: www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative

Here is a sample message from the National Wildlife Federation,

"Please co-sponsor the Recovering America's Wildlife Act H.R. 4647, which provides dedicated funding for

proactive conservation measures that will secure the long-term future of all fish and wildlife.

The conservation funding would not come from new taxes, but rather from a portion of existing annual leasing and royalty revenues from federal lands and waters. It would complement effective existing programs and provide the states, territories, and the District of Columbia with desperately needed financial resources to effectively implement their Wildlife Action Plans and conserve the thousands of species at greatest risk through collaborative, proactive efforts, rather than more expensive and often litigated emergency room measures.

I urge you to create a bright future for America's wildlife and rich natural heritage by putting your full support behind the bipartisan Recovering America's Wildlife Act H.R. 4647."

Please take a few minutes to push for this legislation. Our wildlife depends on PSO members to take action. Our legislators need to hear from PSO members. Let them know that you care about wildlife.

1. <http://www.bioone.org/doi/abs/10.1525/auk.2011.10206>
2. http://www.biology.ualberta.ca/faculty/erin_bayne/uploads/papers/bayne&hobson-2002-Ecology.pdf

Laura Jackson
Bedford County
mljackson2@embarqmail.com

Plan Now to Attend Our Annual Meeting

Italian Civic Club, Meadville, PA

September 14, 15, & 16

This year's annual meeting will be held in Crawford County. Field trips will target wetland species, including American Bittern, Least Bittern, Virginia Rail, Sora, and Marsh Wren. Red-headed Woodpeckers are also probable. Possible migrants include nice varieties of shorebirds, warblers, and other passerines.

Friday evening will start with a friendly bird ID competition. Field trips will be held on both Saturday and Sunday mornings. A great line-up of speakers is in the works for the afternoon sessions.

The banquet will be held at the Italian Civic Club on Saturday evening. Don't miss this meeting! Details will be included in the June issue of "The PSO Pileated." We hope to see you in Meadville in September!

Answers to Bird Quiz

(page 12)

1. Both times at Tinicum
2. Yellow-throated Warbler; for its frequent preference to nest in tall sycamores.
3. Sabine's Gull
4. Gray-morph Gyrfalcon
5. Carolina Chickadee 12 miles, Brown Creeper 10 miles



Ducks, like this Northern Pintail, are finally starting to move through our state.

Photo by Roger Higbee

PSO Newsletter

This newsletter is published four times a year by the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology. To renew your membership, either pay on line or send your check made payable to "PSO" to:

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Family	\$ 35.00	Electronic Student	\$ 10.00
Sustaining	\$ 45.00		

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