

The

# PSO Pileated



March 2021

*The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology*  
pabirds.org

Volume 32, Number 1

## From the President's Desk...

It is my sad duty to announce that we are once again cancelling our annual meeting, "All Things Birds," that was scheduled to be held in Lancaster, PA, on September 17-19, 2021. This decision was made by a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors at our meeting on January 26. It is a conclusion that came after careful consideration, a thorough discussion, and a great deal of disappointment. The two primary drivers of the decision were the continued uncertainty regarding the status of the coronavirus pandemic and the number of commitments we needed to make early in the calendar year.

The status of the pandemic appears to be improving with additional vaccines coming on line and the case, hospitalization, and death rates declining after the year-end holidays. The uncertainties about the efficacy of the vaccines on emerging mutant strains and the possibility that we may struggle to reach "herd immunity" given the hesitancy of some communities to vaccinate, make a return to normal by fall questionable. If we had waited a few more months to make our meeting decision, we would have had a better idea what September will look like.

The catch relates to the need to decide sooner rather than later. Our contract with the meeting site, which was rolled over from our cancelled 2020 gathering, has time fences in it that would have cost us increased amounts of money if we had cancelled later. Cancellation fees grow the closer to the meeting date were we to opt out. Our quoted rates for meeting rooms, food, beverage, and equipment were based on the number of overnight rooms your presence would generate. If our attendance was lower than expected because the Covid status did not improve, then costs would rise, and we would be billed for unused rooms. The good news is that while cancelling now could have cost us several thousand dollars, the facility in Lancaster has

released us from our contract with no penalty to the PSO. We are grateful to the Double Tree Resort by Hilton-Lancaster for their understanding.

More important than financial consequences, we did not want to encourage our membership to participate in an event that could potentially expose them to this virus. With the exception of the morning field trips, all activities take place in indoor community rooms. Many of us travel a distance to attend. Your Board of Directors weighed the risks and rewards and opted for safety.

We are grateful to the Lancaster County Bird Club and their many members who had signed up to lead field trips to show us the area's premier hotspots. We are thankful for the exhibitors who have been so loyal to these yearly events and supported us with their attendance. We are grateful for the understanding shown by our scheduled speakers.

My list of reasons for being a member of the PSO is a long one. I find so much to appreciate about this community of birders and our work together for our state's avifauna. For many of us one of the reasons close to the top of that list is the opportunity once a year to gather, to bird, to learn, to see old friends, and to make new ones. Regrettably Covid had other plans for us. A great deal of time and effort have gone into both of these cancelled meetings by a wonderful team we call the Annual Meeting Committee – Vern Gauthier, Annette Mathes, Ted Nichols, Chad Kauffman. Thank you for all you have done. We are truly grateful.

Evan Mann, President  
Susquehanna County

# THE INAUGURAL BREEDING BIRD BLITZ FOR CONSERVATION



PSO is launching a new initiative in 2021, the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation, which will turn the passion of Pennsylvanians for watching and counting birds into funding for bird conservation. Teams of birders across the state – following strict COVID protocols – will compete to identify as many

species as possible on one day between June 18 and June 21, 2021. Teams will enlist their friends to support their efforts with a donation to support three critical bird conservation projects. Bird-lovers of all ages and skill levels are invited to visit [www.breedingbirdblitz.org](http://www.breedingbirdblitz.org) to form or join a team or to make a donation. Our hope is that PSO members will take the lead in organizing teams in their areas to both collect valuable breeding season observations and raise funds for these worthy projects.

The Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation (or the B4C) will direct its efforts towards conserving two priority species whose populations are declining in Pennsylvania: Northern Harrier and Wood Thrush. Both species are listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan. The Northern Harrier is state-listed as “threatened” since its numbers are declining so rapidly. Funds raised for the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation will be used to protect habitat that these species need: extensive grassy fields for the Northern Harrier and unfragmented forest for the Wood Thrush.

PSO will be partnering with Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Manada Conservancy, and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. All three organizations protect natural habitats through land purchases, donations, and conservation easements and have identified projects that will utilize the donations from the B4C to protect bird habitat. Hawk Mountain will earmark the B4C funds for Northern Harrier habitat protection, while Manada Conservancy and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy will protect Wood Thrush habitat. Funds raised by the B4C will be split equally among the three organizations. Every penny of donations received will support these projects as PSO is covering all administrative costs associated with the program.

So how does the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation work? Teams of two or more birders register through the website and decide whether they will cover a single county or a region of the state. While drawing up the plans

for their “Big Day,” the team members will reach out to friends to tell them what they are doing and ask for their support with a donation. All donations are made through [www.breedingbirdblitz.org](http://www.breedingbirdblitz.org), where a donor can select a team to support. After the event, teams will submit their results, primarily through the eBird website. The teams that raise the most funds and document the most species will receive special recognition.

A few tips for PSO members looking to make the most impact with their teams:

1. Organize your team as soon as possible. Once you register your team at the website you can begin to solicit donations from friends.
2. Keep separate eBird checklists at each site you visit during your “Blitz Day.” Make sure to record all species observed and record your effort. These “complete checklists” are a great resource for all those studying Pennsylvania’s breeding birds.
3. Invite someone who is not a PSO member to join your team. This is a great opportunity to introduce them to the organization and the great work that we do.
4. Use email and your social media accounts to let friends know about your effort and ask for their support with a donation towards these great conservation projects. Remember to tell your friends your team name; when they donate, they will select your team name from a drop-down list to “credit” your team with the funds raised.
5. Remember, birding is FUN! Don’t stress if that Blue-winged Warbler that was singing yesterday just won’t show when you want it to. If you can have fun, provide valuable citizen science data, and raise money for conservation in one day, that’s time well spent.

– Brian Byrnes  
B4C Committee  
[brianjbyrnes79@gmail.com](mailto:brianjbyrnes79@gmail.com)



# An Unexpected York County Visitor

By Jady Conroy

Late last summer I kept reading encouragements to leave hummingbird feeders up for any stray migrants, and, having just refilled mine in the third week of September, it stayed up. I saw our typical Ruby-throated Hummingbirds for the last time on September 22. I always miss their chattering and the buzz of their wings after they leave. The weather cooled and a month passed. Then, the first thing on the morning of October 23, I peered out the kitchen window as always, prepared to see the usual assortment of woodland feeder birds. Instead a tiny winged visitor rose up in front of the glass and there, looking in at me, as though he was showing up for a reservation, was the smallest hummingbird I had ever seen! I was shocked. I kept trying to imagine why this bird was here so late in the year. I assumed that I might get a late ruby-throat, but this would be the smallest one imaginable. Was it the runt of the brood? Did it lose its tail? Whatever it was, it certainly was a frequent visitor to the feeder and seemed to have some serious nutritional needs. At that time, it did not have any of the striking colors which make identification easier. I did notice that his bill was quite short and that he had a hunched posture with wings just a bit longer than his tail. I took lots of photos and shared them online asking for help to identify the bird. When someone suggested that it was a Calliope, I quickly dismissed that notion. Why would a bird that should have been in southern California or Mexico by then be visiting my yard? That idea seemed preposterous.

Within three days, bander Sandy Lockerman came to capture, weigh, measure, and band him. That was a most interesting process to watch, and the opportunity to hold him in my hand before he flew away was such an unexpected thrill!

Sandy pronounced the bird to be a hatch-year male Calliope Hummingbird (*Selasphorus calliope*), which was a record for York County where I live. At the time she weighed him, he was less than the weight of a dime and rated 'O+' on the fat scale. She had to create a special, tiny band for his diminutive size. Who knows how long he had been flying in the wrong direction before he descended into my little hole in the woods? And why here? My only assumption was that he had followed the bird activity to my feeding station. Lucky me! Sandy noticed that he was molting and suggested that he might stay with me for a while. I promptly ordered a heated feeder as it was starting to dip down below freezing some nights. Once word got out, I started to get requests to host visitors. So many people wanted to come and view this rare bird. I lost track of how many folks told me that this

was a life bird for them. I was fascinated to learn that the Calliope Hummingbird is the smallest breeding bird in North America. I have seen cicadas which were bigger than this bird.

During the eight weeks that we hosted this visitor, whom I named Marty McFly, we welcomed upwards of 140 guests onto our property, either in our backyard or on the screened porch. We had to schedule when they could come as we have limited parking and an obnoxiously friendly dog. We didn't want her to knock over someone's expensive optical equipment! Almost every person who made the trip was rewarded with excellent views of Marty. If he wasn't at a feeder, he was often found defending the entire back yard, perched in a viburnum bush or in the serviceberry tree near the feeders. We were amazed and entertained by his feistiness. He frequently flew right into the faces of larger birds and "invited" them to leave that particular perch. I'm glad to say that none of the feeder birds seemed to take offense and just let him be. It was like watching a Chihuahua command a pack of German shepherds.

During the time he was with us, we observed the magenta gorget feathers starting to emerge, and sometimes they would flash in the sun, giving us a glimpse of what his breeding plumage will look like. I would love to see him as an adult.

I have to say something else about all the birders we met. Especially in these days of social distancing, when we are not going out and gathering in groups, it was so rewarding and nourishing to have human contact with like-minded people. It seemed that as soon as I introduced myself to the folks I met in my driveway and we began to talk about our woodsy property and all it offered, we were no longer strangers. I could lead them past the messiest part of our property, the storage area under the porch, without really worrying what they would think because, "Oh, look, there's the hummingbird!" It was the perfect sort of entertaining for me since I would rather pull weeds or plant flowers than clean the house. Everyone we met was so nice, genuinely enthusiastic about birds, native plants, travel, etc. I enjoyed talking to people and sharing stories of birding adventures. Some visitors helped me to pick out some bird songs they heard on my property which I did not recognize. Someone helped me with technical eBird issues and guarding my privacy. Some coached me on how to manage a large volume of strangers asking to visit. Others checked in on me periodically to see how I was coping. I felt surrounded by the community and lifted up

by the connections. Now when I see people's posts on social media, I have faces to accompany the names (at least what I saw above the masks -- lol). I even got appreciative cards in the mail from people who visited. It was very touching and made me glad that I had agreed to let people come to share in this little wonder with my husband and me.

As the weather turned colder and the flowers Marty had been enjoying finally faded, I began to worry about how he would survive. And yet, every day he was still here. I had left all the flower stalks up this year, and I often saw him picking his way through them, gathering insects or spiders. He also picked things directly off the bark of some of the trees. He seemed very resourceful. I had gotten used to seeing him perched in the bush outside the bathroom window. If I sat on the deck to take photos, he would frequently buzz right over my head to get to his feeder. He was such a unique little friend.

Finally, in mid-December, a snowstorm was scheduled to dump heavy snow on our part of the state. I have a video of Marty at the feeder with snow falling all around him. We got about eight inches, and there he was the next morning, December 17, right back at the feeder. We noticed that he fed heavily that day and seemed to have put on a lot of weight. I even remarked to my husband when Marty was still coming to the feeder nearer to sundown, that was the latest we had ever observed him feeding. The next morning he did not show up as usual for breakfast, so we don't know exactly when he left, but we have not seen him since. Perhaps he decided that he had enjoyed as much winter weather as he was prepared to tolerate and decided to get out of town before it got any worse. We surely miss him and hope he is sipping from tropical flowers now. We felt very lucky to have been chosen by this rare western vagrant, and you can be sure that our hummingbird feeder will stay out next fall as well!



Jady photographed the Calliope on her Gartenmeister Fuchsia.



Jady's Calliope Hummingbird was photographed by Ross Gallardy.



Jady is depicted here holding the Calliope Hummingbird. She was so entranced that she has no idea who took the photo!

---

## Certificates of Appreciation Awarded

PSO issues 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 since 2007 is now 175. The full list can be found on the PSO's website. The second hummingbird listing was the remarkable reappearance of the Allen's Hummingbird 18 days later and 11 miles due east. Certificates of Appreciation recently awarded were:

Townsend's Solitaire, Caledonia State Park, Franklin Co.

Snowy Owl, Rachele Heffner, McKean Co.

Allen's Hummingbird, Adrian Binns and Debby Beer, Delaware Co.

Allen's Hummingbird, Pete and Kat DeStefano, Philadelphia Co.

Hoary Redpoll, Susan Braun, Centre Co.

# The Raven Reporter

## Tales of Discovery about Pennsylvania Birds

### PGC Wildlife Diversity Seeks Long-eared Owl Information

The Long-eared Owl is a mysterious bird in Pennsylvania. Now considered a state Threatened bird species, it has long baffled bird biologists and conservationists. It has a wide distribution through North America, Europe, Asia, and even northern Africa, but it seems nowhere common. The Long-eared Owl is near the southern edge of its breeding range in Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Game Commission's (PGC) Wildlife Diversity staff wants to learn more about the Long-eared Owl, its habitat, and distribution. This is a tricky proposition because Long-eared Owls are vulnerable to disturbance at their roost and nesting sites. Information about these roosting and nesting sites will help the agency in a future study of the species and will be kept confidential.

One of the reasons that the Long-eared is so mysterious is that it is very nocturnal in its habits, quite unlikely to be seen during daylight unless it has been flushed by humans or crows. They hide by perching in dense growth of evergreen conifers, sometimes right next to a tree trunk which they imitate with their mottled brown plumage. Long-eared Owls often stiffen up straight to make themselves even more camouflaged. One way they can betray themselves is by leaving a pile of pellets and their white excrement at their roost. These rodent predators invariably leave fur-covered pellets full of mouse bones. They also are quite faithful to a roost location so the telltale white signs accumulate.



They can be loyal to roost sites over the years. Long-eared Owls usually nest in conifer stands, sometimes dense plantings. Another possibility in Pennsylvania are the stands of Virginia pine, scrub pine, and eastern white pine that occupy old burn sites on hillsides and ridgetops. They sometimes nest at the same location of a winter roost, but in smaller numbers. Long-eared Owls often hunt in open habitats especially fields near a stand of evergreens.

Despite that the Long-eared Owl has a more northerly distribution and prefers conifers, most of the breeding records from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Atlas of Breeding Birds of Pennsylvania (2PBBA) were in the southern counties. This may be due to better coverage or the greater availability of the mosaic habitats where they are more frequently found.



Wayne Laubscher photographed these Long-eared Owls on their winter roost.

Of course, it is good to learn the sounds made by the Long-eared Owl. Unlike a Barred Owl that will hoot almost any time of the day or night, Long-eared Owls hoot usually at dusk and in darkness. The short hoot is easily missed because it is so brief and sounds like just part of a call by one of the other owls or a distant

canine. Long-eared Owls are early nesters, another reason that they are easily missed. By June, they have young ready to fledge, so March and April are probably the best months to find active nesting pairs.

To review more about the Long-eared Owl nesting in Pennsylvania, please review the species account in the 2PBBA (pages 210-211), the PGC website pages in the Endangered / Threatened species section, Cornell Lab's All About Birds, or your favorite bird reference book. We all need to learn more about this elusive and mysterious owl.



Long-eared Owls hide by perching in dense evergreen conifers.

To quote the PGC:

Photo by Joe Kosack *"To protect the location of the birds, we are asking birders not to post their observations on eBird or other platforms at this time but instead to send all observations -- past or present--to Game Commission Wildlife Biologist, Patti Barber, at patbarber@pa.gov with "LEOW Observations" in the*

*subject line. The Game Commission is working with eBird to develop a process to allow these observations to be entered while also protecting these sensitive locations. Observations submitted should include date, location, number of owls, and evidence of owls in the area (seen, heard, pellets, feathers, heard etc).*

*Pictures are welcome. However, if taking a picture, please maintain enough distance as to not disturb the birds. Long-eared Owls often abandon roosts when disturbed. Please do not walk on private property without owner's consent. Thank you, in advance, for your help."*

## **National Wetland Inventory Maps Are an Underutilized Tool for Birders**

Over half of the state's Endangered and Threatened birds depend on wetlands. Various bird species live in different kinds of wetlands, so if you want to find the birds, it really helps to know which wetlands to visit. So, where do you get this kind of information? Although a lot of digital maps are available, such information is actually not easy to find. The various readily available paper maps or those on the internet usually do not give much of a clue concerning the type of wetland that is mapped. The answer is to access the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) maps that are available on line. These are some of the most underutilized tools for birders.

I personally have a long history with the NWI maps. Finding them was "a light bulb over the cranium" moment for me. In the early days of my research on Yellow-bellied Flycatchers (YBFL), I was experiencing many challenges figuring out which wetlands I should visit to search for the elusive "moss tyrant." So few previous records existed, so it was difficult to have a good search image, much less a mappable target. We always have limited time for such projects, and my time for this project was even more limited then because I was employed full time as a biologist, preoccupied at study sites far from YBFL habitat. And with time taken on BBS routes and other projects, my search time was very limited to weekend mornings in June and early July. The answer was to get a fine-tuned search "image" of which wetlands to search. I found the NWI maps which then were only available as large paper maps published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Now it is much easier to explore wetlands on line and target wetland types for bird surveys and other projects. The variety of wetlands are mostly divided into two types in our state: freshwater emergent wetlands and freshwater shrub/forested wetlands. Many secretive wetland birds of concern live in emergent wetlands while the YBFL lives in forested wetlands,

especially those dominated by evergreen conifers. You can discern these by looking at the classifications of wetland type on the NWI maps. A series of codes are used to classify the wetlands in a concise way. So, I looked for wetlands designated by the code PF04, designating that it is a Palustrine Forested (PF) wetland dominated by evergreen conifers (04). These conifer swamps are also good for locating Northern Waterthrushes, Blackpoll Warblers (especially where there also is shrub scrub), White-throated Sparrows, and Canada Warblers. Some of the most productive forested wetlands have a mix of vegetative types. The codes associated with the wetlands also suggest the understory of the vegetation, sometimes a shrubby one, by showing a variety of wetland types in one "blob." The maps do not have a lot of detail otherwise but indicate stream names and county lines that are helpful to identify the locations.

If you were looking for hotspots for Alder Flycatcher, you would look for wetlands marked as "PSS" which designates that the wetland is a Palustrine "Shrub Scrub" wetland. If you were lucky, you might find a Northern Harrier around, too. Looking for American Bitterns? They most often are found where there is a "Freshwater Emergent Wetland" (PEM) with some open water and shrubby vegetation. American Coots and Pied-billed Grebes need some open water for their foraging, so look for a wetland that has some areas colored in blue labeled as "Freshwater Pond" (PUBH). The maps also indicate the kind of bottom and whether the pond is permanent or seasonal. If you are looking for Prothonotary Warblers and other birds of riverine forested habitats, these riparian habitats also are mapped on the NWI.

The wetlands mapper even allows you to see the size of the wetland and the size of the vegetative types found there. Some species tend to be found where a mix of habitat types exist with the diverse vegetation found in such ecotones. Some bodies of water have wetlands around the edge or floating in the middle. Of course, this information changes over time, and these maps are a bit dated; but I find the basic information is very useful for pre-surveying areas. The wetland maps are organized around the old tried and true USGS topographic maps, but the website allows you to search seamlessly across these maps.

There are many good sources of information about wetland birds so I will not give you a complete list. One of them is a chapter that Cathy Haffner and I wrote in the book *Avian Ecology and Conservation: A Pennsylvania Focus with National Implications* for the PA Academy of Science. It is called "Wetland Bird Communities: Boreal Bogs to Open Water." This should be available in most academic libraries. We included a lot of useful informa-

tion about the various types of wetlands found in the state and the birds and other wildlife found there.

The National Wetlands Inventory Mapper is found here: <https://fws.gov/data/mapper.html>. Explore and enjoy!

## Pining for Irrupting Boreal Birds to Stay Around

It has been a wild and crazy winter of irruptive birds and fabulous finches. Although this may be one of the biggest irruption events in recent years, my own memories of Evening Grosbeak past flights far exceed those that have been reported in Pennsylvania this winter. Many reports of the irrupting finches are brief encounters, not lingering flocks that stayed for weeks. There are several reports of Common Redpolls and a few Hoary Redpolls, some with large flocks staying for longer periods where abundant birch catkins provide food. That cannot be denied, but no broad irruption of species, filling all the woods and feeding stations of willing finch watchers, has occurred. Many of my own observations of boreal birds visiting the areas I survey were brief and not repeated.

The wild resources seem to be the limiting factor for these observed winter irrupting birds. The maps of boreal bird irruption reflect the abundance and persistence of the foods required by the birds. The availability of these resources changes each year. In my own case, only Red-breasted Nuthatches were retained where I study birds, and they focused on one species, the eastern white pine, for most of their foraging. Where the white pines did not produce cones, no Red-breasted Nuthatches could be found. The Red Crossbills came and left quickly because there simply was not enough seed. Perhaps many continued south away from prying optics. Did they continue to the Central and Southern Appalachians? Perhaps eBird data will tell us eventually, but many mountain forested areas are not well covered by birders.

As spring approaches, we should be aware of the possibility that some of our winter visitors will stay to nest in a few places. There is a thin history of Evening

Grosbeaks nesting in the state, and David Yeany II is on their trail right now. (Go, David!). Finding a nesting population of Evening Grosbeaks in Forest County or in any other part of the state would be exciting. Since Evening Grosbeaks have responded in the past to elm spanworm infestations, perhaps they will respond to another insect outbreak at another place in the state? I will be looking for them.



This Common Redpoll was one of many in a flock found by birders near Glade Lake, SGL 95 in Butler County.

Photo by Steve Gosser



Evening Grosbeaks were present at various locations, including Yellow Creek State Park in Indiana County, where this male was photographed.

Photo by Steve Gosser

What about Red Crossbills nesting in Pennsylvania? When they have attempted to nest, the crossbills responded to a set of conifers producing seed cones into March. Birders are advised to look in places where persistent seed cones are available for the crossbills to find. Most of the Red Crossbills that have been identified to their call type were "Type 10" which typically feed on Sitka spruce cones in the West but feed on a variety of seed cones when they wander eastward. They seem to be cone generalists. I saw them foraging on seed cones of eastern white pine and a very small crop of eastern hemlock, but I have seen evidence that they feed on cones of Virginia pines and some exotic species including Japanese black pines at Cape May Point. The Type 10 birds that I have heard sounded more like a flycatcher call note than the sharp "kip, kip, kip" flight notes of the Type 1 crossbills that I have heard more commonly. It is worth playing recordings of these just to become familiar with the sounds.

Please remember that in the distant past, Red Crossbills have nested in pine groves around Philadelphia and on Long Island where the seed cones were plentiful. They are not necessarily confined to the "Big North." Lots of pitch pine cones might do!

The Virginia pine, also known as scrub pine or Jersey pine, is one of the most underappreciated wildlife plants. They grow quickly on ground disturbed by fire, plow, or bulldozer. It is really a transitional species between an old field type habitat and a mature forest of oaks, hickories, maples, cherries, and taller growing pines like the eastern white pine which often grows in the same places. An attribute of Virginia pine that makes it particularly attractive to conifer-loving birds is long seed cone retention. Long after white pines have lost their seed

cones or the seeds with them, Virginia pine cones are still hanging for months. They are scruffy little trees with needles bundled in pairs and only two or three inches long. They are somewhat similar to Scots pines but do not have the orange upper bark that so distinguishes the exotic but common species. The humble and neglected Virginia pines may be the ones that retain crossbills, nut-hatches, and others around long enough to nest away from their usual areas. I have documented Red-breasted Nuthatches nesting in a Virginia pine grove after a big irruption south in fall and winter. Since Virginia pines often grow on ridge tops, mountainsides, and on private property where few birders go, they and their bird communities can be easily overlooked. I certainly will look for Red-breasted Nuthatches nesting in both Virginia and white pine woods. And, meanwhile, I also will look for them in the boreal spruce forests of the state. I hope that you do, too.



Northern Goshawk has apparently declined since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Atlas and has abandoned many recently occupied locations.

Photo by Jake Dingel

### **OTC Recommends Endangered Status for Northern Goshawk**

The Northern Goshawk is an iconic forest raptor with a reputation for fierceness and mystery. Unfortunately, it also has declined in population and range over the last several years. The Ornithological Technical Committee (OTC) has been keeping an eye on this species for many years. It was listed as a Species of Special Concern as early as 1985, Status-Undetermined due to its elusiveness and because much of the big forest of Pennsylvania was not well surveyed by ornithologists at that point. The first Breeding Bird Atlas helped define the range of Northern Goshawk (NOGO) in the state, but it remained a bit of a mystery. The first PBBA was greatly supplemented by research conducted by Penn State graduate student Tim Kimmel working with Dr. Rich Yahner, 1988 – 1993. A definite decline in the number of blocks reported by volunteers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Atlas of Breeding Birds of Pennsylvania (2<sup>nd</sup> PBBA) occurred despite that much had been learned about goshawks in the intervening years, and several goshawk nesting sites had been found by birders since the first PBBA. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> PBBA (2004 – 2009), Northern Goshawks were detected in 86 (1.7%) blocks, 33 fewer than the 119 of the first PBBA (1984-1989) as well as a dramatic retraction in range. It really looked like goshawks had disappeared from previously occupied areas south of Route 80 and east of Route 81. The breeding

range of a species is a very important consideration concerning the status and vulnerability of the species to eradication. The OTC had decided that the Northern Goshawk deserved a “Near-Threatened” status after seeing the results of the 2<sup>nd</sup> PBBA. Some of us thought it should have been given Threatened status then, but the committee was concerned that NOGO was overlooked in areas, and its population may have been underrepresented by both Atlases.

In response to these concerns, the OTC formed a sub-committee to study the goshawk and better determine its status, range, habitat associations, limiting factors, and natural history. It invited two falconry groups to participate in the project since falconers had knowledge of the goshawk nesting population and are important stake-holders in raptor management. Concentrated studies were conducted by Penn State, Hawk Mountain, the Central Appalachian Goshawk Project (Dave Brinker), and the institutions represented by members of the sub-committee in the next four years. Standard and revised protocols were used for NOGO searches which were well informed by a database of recent NOGO nest and territory records provided confidentially by the participants. I personally visited NOGO sites I found in years previously and was disappointed to not find NOGO where I had found them recently. Sites were visited repeatedly because it is easy to overlook an elusive goshawk.

A report was written by the sub-committee for the OTC and PGC which is advised by the committee. After all this species-specific work, NOGO has apparently declined even more since the 2<sup>nd</sup> PBBA and has abandoned many locations occupied recently. NOGO seemed imperiled in the state as a viable breeding species. Not only that, but the hawk migration data and Atlas data from neighboring states show a recent regional decline. This is another important factor in its vulnerability in the state because the potential source populations of a “rescue” of the PA breeding population is much less likely with a reduced regional population. In December, the OTC voted to recommend to the PGC that the Northern Goshawk should be listed as Endangered in PA. Now it is up to the PGC to react to this recommendation and begin a recovery of the species as it has tackled the recovery of Bald Eagle, Osprey, and Peregrine Falcon so successfully. It will be a great challenge, and PA birders will certainly be a part of

*(continued on page 11)*

# Recap of Board of Directors' Meeting

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology Board of Directors met on January 26, 2021, with 17 directors present for the teleconference meeting.

The fall meeting was discussed with three options considered:

- Move the meeting to 2022 at the Double Tree
- Plan to have the meeting this year with fewer people
- See what it would cost to cancel the meeting

Because of all the uncertainty, a motion was made that the 2021 fall meeting be postponed until 2022. The motion passed unanimously.

It was called to the board's attention that directors' and officers' terms are expiring this fall, and this needs to be addressed along with awards and scholarships.

It was reported that after some discussion the Conservation Committee decided to go ahead with the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation (B4C). Some of the rules will be modified and participants will have to follow Covid guidelines. A disclaimer will be added saying that PSO will not be responsible if someone gets Covid if they participate.

No grants were awarded last year because of a lack of applicants, probably due to Covid. We will try again this year. This will be the second year that we have not awarded the Conservation and Earl Poole awards. It was proposed that we consider choosing award winners but wait to make the presentations when we have a meeting.

PORC is now running smoothly with no backlog of records to review. Eleven boxes of old PORC records have been digitized. They will eventually be put on the PSO website as a searchable database.

The treasurer's report was given and a slight downturn in membership was noted, possibly due to the coronavirus. Otherwise PSO is still in good shape financially.

Some background information was given on why the Pennsylvania Audubon Council was formed and how local chapters fit into this arrangement.

A few issues have arisen with the Pennsylvania listserv recently. We discussed what steps we could take. This issue will be delved into further.

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

– Roger Higbee, Secretary



Bloodroot - *Sanguinaria canadensis*

***The Pennsylvania Native Plant Society  
advocates  
conservation of native plants and their  
habitats and promotes the increased  
use  
of native plants in the landscape.***

Do you know about Professor Douglas Tallamy's new project to enlist native plant enthusiasts across the country to build a Homegrown National Park? To learn more about this and the Pennsylvania Native Plant Society, see <http://www.panativeplantsociety.org>.

# Conservation Chat Room

## It's Time to Order Native Plant Seeds – Gardening for Birds



It's a winter wonderland – the snow looks like it is crusted with diamonds brilliant in the sunshine. The sky is a vivid blue never seen in the summer, and the cardinals are such a striking red against the snow. It's a red, white, and blue winter day with temperatures in the teens.

Even in the midst of enjoying the winter day, my thoughts coalesce on gardening. Maybe it's because I'm getting bombarded with gardening catalogs. The colorful fruits and vegetables almost seem too gaudy – are tomatoes really that red, and is it possible to grow such orange carrots? I better start putting my seed order together.

Some of the other gardening catalogs go in a different stack. These catalogs don't sell vegetables or fruits but rather food for birds. To be exact, these catalogs sell native plants, which either feed birds directly by providing fruit or seeds, or the plants are hosts for insects that birds need.

Here are some tips if you'd like to garden for birds:

### ☼ **Plant a native meadow in your side yard.**

My favorite source of native seeds is Ernst Seeds in Meadville, Pa. Call for a free catalog: 800-873-3321. Website: <https://www.ernstseed.com>

The catalog is a wealth of information on how to grow and maintain native plants in a variety of different habitats, including wildflower meadows. The catalog has specific information on how to prepare the site and what to grow in different habitats. Various seed mixes are designed to grow in a variety of different lighting and moisture conditions. I can't stress enough that site preparation is key to success. The grass needs to be killed, so the seeds can be spread on bare soil.

I've had really good results with these mixes from Ernst:  
Showy Northeast Native Wildflower Mix  
Northeastern U.S. Roadside Native Mix  
Xerces Mid-Atlantic Pollinator Mix

The last part of the catalog is a great resource, with a photo of each species and detailed descriptions of their habitat requirement and growth characteristics.

**WARNING:** Ernst also sells non-native seeds, so be careful what you order. If you decide to purchase one of their seed mixes, make sure that "native" is in the name of the mix, or verify it with the sales team before you order.

You can design your own seed mix, or just buy individual packets of seeds to plant drifts of native plants.

To complicate things further, the meaning of "native" is fluid. Ernst calls some species "native," because they grow in the U.S., but research shows they don't occur naturally in Pa. For example, a wonderful pollinator plant called Anise Hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) is listed as "native" in the Ernst catalog, but some sources don't consider it native to our state.

My go-to resource for native plants in our state is "The Pennsylvania Flora Project of Morris Arboretum." Website: [paflora.org](http://paflora.org). This website shows you a state map, so you can see if the plant species is native to your county. It also describes the habitat, growth habit, and explains if it is a wetland plant and listed at the state or federal protection level. According to this website, *Agastache foeniculum* is not native to Pa., but has escaped cultivation.

### ☼ **Add native plants to your flower garden.**

If you are staying home due to Covid, and don't want to visit plant nurseries, you can order seeds or plants from Prairie Moon Nursery. Call for a free catalog: 507-452-1362 or visit their website: [prairiemoon.com](http://prairiemoon.com)

Since many of their plants are not native to Pa., do your homework before ordering. If you see a flower you want, check it out on [paflora.org](http://paflora.org) to make sure it's native to Pa.

If you are willing to visit plant nurseries, go to <https://www.audubon.org/PLANTSFORBIRDS>. Type in your zip code and Audubon will provide a list of nurseries in your area that carry native plants. You will also see lists of plants native to your area that are recommended for birds, filtered by plant type.

## ☼ Read *Nature's Best Hope*

If you aren't really sure why it's important to garden for birds using native plants, I highly recommend that you read Doug Tallamy's newest book, *Nature's Best Hope*.

Dr. Tallamy shows how homeowners can provide food, water, and space for birds, all based on the foundation of providing native plants. He makes the case that it's really up to us to help insects and birds. The same ecosystems that support birds also support us. Our life support is growing weaker as we lose more birds. Planting native flowers, shrubs, and trees does truly make a difference for birds.

### Resources

Tallamy, Douglas. 2019. *Nature's Best Hope*. Timber Press. Portland, Oregon.

<https://www.ernstseed.com>

[paflora.org](http://paflora.org)

<https://www.prairiemoon.com>

<https://mtcubacenter.org/research/trial-garden/>

<https://www.audubon.org/PLANTSFORBIRDS>



Native flowers like Ox Eye Sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*) are important food sources for many birds, including this American Goldfinch. These plants are easy to grow from seed and create bright spots of color in your flower beds.

(Photo by Laura Jackson)

Laura Jackson

Conservation Chair

Bedford County

[mljackson2@embarqmail.com](mailto:mljackson2@embarqmail.com)

## PSO Pileated Quiz

(Answers on page 12)

How well do you know your Pennsylvania birds' names?

1. What is the "Gyr" in Gyrfalcon?
2. Why is this duck named a Harlequin Duck?
3. Why are jaegers called a jaeger?
4. What is "poll," as in Blackpoll Warbler and Common Redpoll?
5. Why is this goose called the Barnacle Goose?

## The Raven Reporter

(continued from page 8)

this recovery phase. I am sure that you will hear more about the NOGO status and challenges ahead.

Good birding!

Doug Gross

Pennsylvania Boreal Bird Project

Ricketts Glen State Park Bird Project

[Dagross144@verizon.net](mailto:Dagross144@verizon.net)

## Participate in the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation

June 18-21, 2021

See page 2 of this newsletter for details!

## Answers to Bird Quiz

(page 11)

1. It depends on which reference you check. One says “Gyr” refers to an Old High German language word for “spear”; another, to an Old High German word for “vulture.” You decide.
2. The male’s impressive coloration refers to the old-time stage buffoons who were dressed in a multi-colored costume.
3. The origin is the German word *Jaeger* for “hunter.”
4. It refers to the top of the head.
5. A very long time ago, it was thought to hatch from the shell of a barnacle. Let the *PSO Pileated* know if you can think of some even crazier names.



## 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:

PSO  
2469 Hammertown Road  
Narvon, PA 17555-9730

### Membership Categories

Individual	\$ 30	Student	\$ 25
Family	\$ 35	Electronic Student	\$ 10
Sustaining	\$ 45		

### PSO Officers and Directors

Evan Mann – President [7evanmann@gmail.com](mailto:7evanmann@gmail.com)  
Deb Grove – Vice President [dsg4@psu.edu](mailto:dsg4@psu.edu)  
Mike Fialkovich – Past President [mpfial@verizon.net](mailto:mpfial@verizon.net)  
Roger Higbee – Secretary [rvhigbee@windstream.net](mailto:rvhigbee@windstream.net)  
Frank Haas – Treasurer [fchaas@PAbirds.org](mailto:fchaas@PAbirds.org)  
Greg Grove – *PA Birds* Editor [gwg2@psu.edu](mailto:gwg2@psu.edu)  
Margaret Higbee – Newsletter Editor [bcoriole@windstream.net](mailto:bcoriole@windstream.net)

Eli DePaulis – [elidepaulis1@gmail.com](mailto:elidepaulis1@gmail.com)  
Vernon Gauthier – [verngauthier14@gmail.com](mailto:verngauthier14@gmail.com)  
Doug Gross - [dagross144@verizon.net](mailto:dagross144@verizon.net)  
Laura Jackson – [jacksonlaura73@gmail.com](mailto:jacksonlaura73@gmail.com)  
Chad Kauffman – [chadkauffman@earthlink.net](mailto:chadkauffman@earthlink.net)  
Wayne Laubscher – [wnlaubscher@comcast.net](mailto:wnlaubscher@comcast.net)  
Sandra Lockerman – [sandylockerman@yahoo.com](mailto:sandylockerman@yahoo.com)  
Holly Merker – [hcybelle@gmail.com](mailto:hcybelle@gmail.com)  
Emily Thomas – [eht5002@hotmail.com](mailto:eht5002@hotmail.com)  
Linda Wagner – [lwagner342@msn.com](mailto:lwagner342@msn.com)  
Carole Winslow – [cjwinslow94@gmail.com](mailto:cjwinslow94@gmail.com)  
David Yeany – [DYeany@paconserve.org](mailto:DYeany@paconserve.org)

***Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology***

c/o R. V. Higbee

3119 Creekside Road

Indiana, PA 15701-7934

Non-profit Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
Creekside, PA 15732  
PERMIT NO. 2

***ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED***