

The

PSO Pileated



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From the President's Desk...

The results are in. PSO again provided an excellent learning and networking opportunity with a spectacular annual meeting. Yes, it was virtual, but the planning team prepared carefully and pulled off a seamless meeting that included news, a mind-blowing presentation, and engaging social interactions in breakout groups! Of course we miss the face-to-face contact, group field trips, and local vendors. And it ended all too quickly! But given the constraints this year, we provided an engaging meeting that reflects our camaraderie around birds, and we experienced an important highlight of this organization for the year 2021. See Deb Grove's more detailed summary of the meeting on page 3.

As an active statewide organization, our virtual annual meeting was simply the latest example of engagement sponsored by the PSO. We have a long history of contributions to ornithology in the ethosphere. Our excellent newsletter and journal are on-line, fully available to members, with portions available to anyone. The PA Birds email listserv has been running for many years! We host facebook pages, a website, bird alerts. –



Dan Brauning, with David Yeany II in the background, is seen here conducting marsh bird surveys in Conneaut Marsh, Crawford County, 2021.

Photo by Dan Brauning

we're all over the internet. But of course, technology constantly changes, so we need to continue adapting to new tools that contribute to our mission of fostering the study and appreciation of birds and the natural world. That adaptation will take various forms, sometimes spurred on by crises as it was the past year and a half, other times just adopting new tools that are available. But change will come and PSO will rise to the challenge.

So, we need to continue adapting, because the birding community is growing. As summer seasonal editor, this becomes clear in the summary of summer birds. If eBird is representative, the number of bird records increased dramatically during the pandemic by more than 50%. In 2021, we are apparently returning to some new “normal” since that metric flattened. But, *spoiler alert here* (since I'm taking a

break from compiling the Birds of Note to write this), birders reported a record number of species, including high species counts in many species groups, like shorebirds and warblers, during the 2021 summer season. It was a remarkable summer season!

We, as the Pennsylvania Birds community, are continuing to grow and change, but our core mission remains the same. As your new president, I'm focused on the mission which we've embraced since our formation (before the Internet): to foster the study and appreciation of the birds of Pennsylvania and to promote the conservation of birds and their habitat (from our PA Birders Facebook page). Last year we reinforced that to state clearly, that we are inclusive of everyone! We have much to offer the birding community, and from what I've seen, this growing community is eager to gain from our experience and knowledge. The tools to meet these needs are in place: Our website is chock-full of content, the Facebook pages get tremendous traffic, and the newsletter and journal have proven track records of delivering excellent content in useable and attractive packages. We are well positioned as an organization, financially sound, and ready to contribute to the growing community that enjoys birds.

To step into this changing world, we may need to think carefully what the broader, growing community needs in order to "appreciate birds" more. That will become clearer in time; but together, we will continue to contribute to the interests and benefits of the birders – and birds – of Pennsylvania and beyond. So, I say, bring on the 21st century and let us see what we can do together! Oh – oops - we're 21 years into the 21st century! Got that. Showing my age a bit. But seriously, with nearly 10 thousand members of Facebook groups dedicated to birding in Pennsylvania, we as a society have a huge opportunity. So, just as society is changing, bird populations change, and there is always something more to learn about the bird life around us. Our mission includes sharing these passions and working to conserve the diversity of bird life that we enjoy. We have much to do.

Dan Brauning, President
Lycoming County

PSO Hawkwatch Outing

Saturday, November 6, and/or Sunday, the 7th, led by Chad and Noah Kauffman. This year's trip takes us to Waggoner's Gap for the peak time of the Golden Eagle migration. You may come on either Saturday or Sunday or both days.

Here is the link to their website, <http://www.waggap.com/Index.html> for more info and directions.

Quittapahilla Audubon Outings Open to the Public

The Quittapahilla Audubon Society has resumed offering field trips to the general public. Everyone is welcome. Please join us!

Sunday, November 7, led by Jim Fiorentino (717-269-0675). We'll bird State Game Land 145 looking for local birds. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the Colebrook Lebanon Valley Rail to Trail trailhead parking lot.

Sunday, November 14, led by Fritz Heilman (717-273-0487). We'll head to the Lebanon Valley Rail to Trail at Jonestown for the observation of late season flora and fauna. Meet at 2:30 p.m. at the Jonestown trailhead.

Saturday, December 18, is the QAS 42nd Annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC). This event includes walking and driving to count birds within the prescribed area. Contact Fritz Heilman (717-273-0487) to participate.

Welcome, New Board Members!

The December issue of "The PSO Pileated" will include short biographies of our new president and our three new board members. Meanwhile we welcome Dan Brauning, Brian Byrnes, Tony DeSantis, and Julia Plummer who bring their many talents to PSO. Welcome!

PSO Annual Meeting Revisited

By Deb Grove

The 2021 annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) was held virtually on September 29 at 7:00 p.m. More than 130 registered for the Zoom meeting with about 112 attending.

The meeting opened with a welcome by Vice President Deb Grove. She thanked those on the annual meeting committee: David Yeany II, Emily Thomas, Julia Plummer, Laura Jackson, and Chad Kauffman. Dave Yeany II reviewed the voting results, going over the slate of candidates and other statistics. The officers elected are President, Dan Brauning; Vice President, Deb Grove; Secretary, Roger Higbee; and Treasurer, Frank Haas. New Board members are Julia Plummer, Brian Byrnes, and Tony DeSantis. Board members re-elected for another term are Doug Gross, Laura Jackson, Wayne Laubscher, Emily Thomas, and Linda Wagner. Board members leaving are Vern Gauthier, Sandra Lockerman, and Holly Merker.

Mike Fialkovich stepped down from the Past President position after serving several years as President and Past President, lending valuable experience to the Board. Evan Mann moved into the Past President position. Continuing Board Members are Eli DePaulis, Carole Winslow, and David Yeany II. Ad Hoc members are the editors of the publications, Greg Grove and Marg Higbee, and State Ornithologist Dr. Sean Murphy was welcomed as liaison from the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Attendees were informed of the available committees and reminded that a person does not have to be a board member to be on a committee. The Board welcomes people with talents and interests to help PSO move forward. Committees include Education, Conservation, Membership and Outreach, Awards and Nominations, Events and Field Trips, Annual Meeting, and Citizen Science.

Treasurer Frank Haas presented slides showing membership numbers and finance numbers during the last 10 years. The finance graph showed that the organization is doing well.

Deb Grove announced the two student research awardees and gave brief accounts of their projects. A separate article in this newsletter summarizes these. See page 6.

Greg Grove, editor-in-chief of the journal *Pennsylvania Birds*, summarized this publication as well as Marg

Higbee's work as editor of *The PSO Pileated* newsletter. Both are published four times a year.

Information about the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation was presented by Laura Jackson, chair of the Conservation Committee. PSO sponsored the first annual Blitz on June 18-21, 2021. The event raised \$10,645 that was split among three conservation partners: Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Manada Conservancy, and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. More information about the Blitz is on page 12 of this newsletter and may also be seen at www.breedingbirdblitz.org. Next year's Blitz is already scheduled for June 17-20, 2022.

At 7:30 David Yeany II introduced the speaker Matthew A. Young M.A., President and Founder of the Finch Research Network (FiRN), whose topic was "From Finches to the Launching of the Finch Research Network (FiRN)."

Matt gave a history of how he started birding and how he found that he had a strong interest in finches. Matt focused on several species of eastern finches in his talk: Red and White-winged Crossbills, Pine Siskins, Common and Hoary Redpolls, Purple Finches, and Evening and Pine Grosbeaks.

One of Matt's favorite finches is the Red Crossbill. An amazing feature of the talk included videos of both types of crossbills feeding on pine seeds. Slow motion sections demonstrated how they used their crossed beaks to remove seeds from the cones.

His discussion on Red Crossbills showed maps of where all 10 are found. He pointed out which types could be found in the east and how they are differentiated by their distribution and ecology and by flight calls. He showed various audio spectrograms, displays that picture a sonogram with the sound. He contrasted the various types by playing their calls.

A superflight of finches occurred in the winter of 2020-2021 with every finch species moving southward looking for food. Matt showed eBird maps that indicated how far south each species advanced and discussed reasons for the causes of irruptions. The main driver of such irruptions is seed shortages of boreal trees. Many of these trees produce food in cycles and supply an abundance of seeds in good "mast years" and very little in other years. When there is a heavy cone crop, birds don't have to move

because enough food is available to get them through the winter. Years when there are a large number of fledglings and a small seed crop also cause birds to fly south. Many PA birders, both veteran and novice, were fortunate to observe redpolls, including 12 Hoary Redpolls as reported in eBird this past winter.

Matt also discussed citizen science opportunities. Attendees were urged to get involved by looking for and observing these species during the winter.

The FiRN site can be reached at <https://finchnetwork.org/>. You can support their research by contributing or by purchasing clothing or other items at <https://finchnetwork.org/shop>.

After a few questions for the speaker, David explained how the Breakout Rooms worked and posted a list of

topics for the rooms and the moderators. Attendees were free to join any that interested them.

- 1) Winter Finch Irruption – Matt Young
- 2) Fall Migration – Deb and Greg Grove
- 3) Bird Photography – Dave Brooke
- 4) Rarity Chasing – Chad Kauffman
- 5) Using eBird – Holly Merker
- 6) Brainstorming Future PSO Field Trips – Tony DeSantis

Because we could not get together person-to-person, these rooms gave everyone a chance to socialize. The breakout rooms were very popular, and people were reluctant to leave at 9:30, the closing time.

Thanks to all who attended and provided comments about this meeting that can be used to help plan future events.

Dear PA Birders:

We need your help to look carefully at kestrels!

To help assess the movements of American Kestrels and better understand why they are declining, the science team at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary has deployed over 100 color bands with a number and letter combination (both red and green) on both fledglings and adults. Some sport tiny backpack radio transmitters as well. As kestrels are starting to disperse out of the study area, we are seeking your help in re-sighting these tagged birds.

If you are in the Hamburg, Lancaster, or State College area especially, but really anywhere in PA and beyond, keep a look out for kestrels sporting these accessories.

Report any sightings to Mercy Melo, Hawk Mountain PhD student working on the kestrel project (mlmelo@umass.edu<<mailto:mlmelo@umass.edu>>).

THANK YOU for your help -- Together we can learn more about these little falcons and figure out how we can reverse their continental population decline!

Laurie Goodrich, PhD
Sarkis Acopian Director of Conservation Science
Acopian Center for Conservation Learning
Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association

Sincere Thanks

Thanks to outgoing president Evan Mann who put his heart and soul into PSO and to our former board members, Vern Gauthier, Sandra Lockerman, and Holly Merker for their many contributions over the years. We will miss all of you!

Sincere thanks to all who organized the virtual annual meeting and to those who manned the breakout rooms. Great job!!!

Hawk Mountain's Dr. Laurie Goodrich Receives Celebrating Women in Conservation Award

Posted on June 11, 2021 in [Science](#)

Dr. Laurie Goodrich, Sarkis Acopian Director of Conservation Science at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, received PennFuture's 2021 Woman of Lifetime Achievement in Conservation Award.

Each year PennFuture honors the accomplishments of women conservationists in Pennsylvania. The [2021 Celebrating Women in Conservation Awards](#) are designed to recognize excellence in conservation and to forge a stronger network of women who are deeply committed to working to protect Pennsylvania's environment.

The Woman of Lifetime Achievement in Conservation Award celebrates the lifetime accomplishments of a remarkable woman who has made a difference by devoting significant parts of her life to protecting and enhancing Northeastern Pennsylvania's natural greatness and for her tireless dedication to environmental advocacy and justice. Nominees should have dedicated at least 25 years of work to conservation in Pennsylvania.

Dr. Laurie Goodrich has worked in virtually every aspect of raptor conservation at Hawk Mountain, from overseeing its long-term migration counts, to directing its education program and developing the first education plan, to conducting scientific research and publishing more than 50 peer-reviewed papers. In addition to currently leading Hawk Mountain Sanctuary's local-to-global research and professional international training program, Goodrich co-published Hawk Mountain's first scientific paper on raptor migration trends, co-wrote the Hawk Mountain Land Management Plan, and helped to develop the nationally award-winning Raptor Population Index Project. She also helped establish the first raptor migration monitoring and conservation site in Mexico, which records more than 4 million migratory hawks each autumn.



Laurie Goodrich scans for raptors at the North Lookout.
Photo provided by Hawk Mountain

"Many visitors to the Sanctuary know Laurie from the North Lookout, where she is always at home, sharing her contagious enthusiasm for hawk watching and the natural world," explains Sanctuary President Sean Grace.

"Laurie's conservation accolades are simply too numerous to mention, but we are lucky to have a colleague who is so exceptional in her accomplishments and who continues to serve as a conservationist, scientist, teacher, and outstanding female mentor to all," he adds.

Goodrich expresses her gratitude for being selected as a Woman of Lifetime Achievement in Conservation Award recipient: "I am extremely honored by both the nomination and the award. All my accomplishments have been largely the result of Hawk Mountain encouragement, support, and the other great staff behind the scenes. So, I salute all present and past staff for their roles in conservation success as well."

Old Newsletters Available Online

Thanks to Frank Haas, you can now read about the early days of the PSO! *ALL* of the old PSO newsletters – from the first one in 1990 – are now available on the PSO web site (pabirds.org). Just click on Publications/Newsletter. They are PDF files, so you can save them to your computer if desired. Also, they are searchable.

Student Research Awards Update

By Deb Grove

In 2019 PSO initiated student research awards of \$500 for students to use for projects. Proposals for research are requested as well as a letter from the applicant's advisor. The Awards committee reads the proposals and determines to which projects the grants should be awarded. The awardees are also asked to write an article for the *PA Birds* journal and/or attend the PSO annual meeting to present their results. Two students, Annie Lindsay and Ty Basinger, received awards in May for use for their research over the summer.

Andrea "Annie" Lindsay at Powdermill Nature Reserve in Westmoreland County is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Toledo under advisor Dr. Henry Streby. Her dissertation topic is "Using Stable Isotope Analysis of Subcutaneous Fat to Identify Distance of Migratory Flights in Songbirds." Her studies are based on fat samples which will reflect the ratio of stable isotopes in isotopically distinct landscapes. This summer she collected subcutaneous fat samples from 11 species while banding at Powdermill Nature Reserve in Westmoreland County, PA. The tissues underwent lipid extraction, and this was used for stable-hydrogen and stable-carbon

isotope analysis. The stable-hydrogen analysis was finished during the summer, and she is waiting for the results of the stable-carbon isotope analysis. By using these isotope analyses, the isotope signatures should reflect the geographic region and habitat in which a bird refueled during a migratory stopover event.

Ty Basinger is a Masters candidate at Bloomsburg University and a student of Dr. Lauri Green. His thesis title is "Tree Swallow Prey Selection in Artificial Wetlands." His work is continuing at several sites that Dr. Green established several years ago with Tree Swallows. His work will look for correlations between prey availability and the timing of reproductive events. Tree Swallows were monitored as to when they initiated their clutches, when the eggs hatched, and finally when they fledged. In addition, fecal samples were collected. Ty collected insect samples at the four sites using sweep netting trapping. These samples, which are mainly Dipterans, will be analyzed down to the lowest taxonomic order. DNA bar coding procedures using the fecal samples will be performed to determine if the birds are selecting aquatic or terrestrial insects.

PSO Quiz

(Answers on page 10)

1. A remarkable rarity appeared on the Susquehanna River in 2007 as the first fully documented record for Pennsylvania. Which species?
 2. Which warbler would you expect to see nesting higher in a tree: Cerulean or Black-throated Blue?
 3. Among Roger Tory Peterson's famous "confusing fall warblers," which has yellowish undertail coverts: Nashville or Tennessee?
 4. Which hawk is called "the ultimate forest raptor" in our second breeding bird atlas?
 5. In his classic *A Report on the Birds of Pennsylvania* (1890) B. H. Warren gives the alternate name "Ground Chippy" to which species?
-
-

The Raven Reporter



Tales of Discovery about Pennsylvania Birds

Northern Goshawk Listed Endangered by the PGC

On September 11, the Board of Commissioners of the PA Game Commission announced that the Northern Goshawk is now considered Endangered in Pennsylvania. A comment period preceded this decision. Several ornithological and conservation organizations voiced support for listing. I am grateful for their support. Since the comments are not revealed to the public, I do not know what comments have been made in opposition, but some that have been made publicly represented false comments about the supporters of the listing, the goshawk sub-committee, and about the goshawk population. This decision comes after considerable effort by members and partners of the Ornithological Technical Committee that went above and beyond their roles as advisers to the PGC by conducting an in-depth study of the goshawk population and its threats.

Goshawks have been falling off the cliff for the last 20 years or so. The Pennsylvania decline seems to be part of a regional decline with our state being at the leading edge of its eastern breeding range. The difficulty in making this assessment is that goshawks are elusive with a reputation of being overlooked. Even in the best of times they can be hard to find, and their populations can be somewhat cyclical. They also are inherently uncommon due to their biology. They have very large home ranges, so even when they fill their habitat, their population is fairly low and widely dispersed. This also makes it difficult for them to recover from additional pressures on their population. These limiting factors include human

interference, habitat reduction, increased nest predation, and increased mortality from disease (West Nile Virus). These factors may overlap and influence each other. For example, forest fragmentation and human interferences could increase the chances for nest predation by fishers, Great Horned Owls, and others.

Another challenge for recovery will be to overcome the prejudices against predators. At various times, goshawks have been persecuted by hunters, wildlife agencies, and even conservationists defending “good” or “game” species against their predators. Studies have demonstrated that goshawks like other accipiters are generalists with a varied menu. They hunt crows, squirrels, chipmunks, woodpeckers, and larger songbirds as much as grouse and doves. Their fate may be linked with Ruffed Grouse in the way that both species are so vulnerable to West Nile Virus. And if certain prey populations have decreased or have severe cyclical down years, the goshawks may abandon areas where they normally can find sufficient food for other areas, perhaps out of the state.



Steve Gosser found this Northern Goshawk in Jefferson County in May 2015 and comments that it was one of the most thrilling birds that he'd ever come across.

The next steps will be taken by the Wildlife Diversity section of the PGC. Sean Murphy, our state ornithologist, is leading an effort to write a management plan for the Endangered Northern Goshawk.

Learning more about the limiting factors will certainly be a big part of the initial efforts. If goshawks are nesting in Pennsylvania outside the Allegheny National Forest, it would be critically important to locate the core territories and the nests of these pairs. Then, the remaining nesting habitat can be protected. Another challenge will be to learn more about its diet and how the populations of those prey species vary and can be improved. I suspect that some of our best chances for goshawk territories sit in the very highest elevation forests in remote locations with less exposure to West Nile Virus and with minimal human disturbance.

Goshawks nest in fairly mature forests. Their large territories can include a variety of forest types. They often hunt prey in younger forests and along trails and roads near their nests. A few will nest in red pine plantations, but the majority nest in fairly remote conifer-dominated woods. Some nests are near unimproved roads and trails. I have seen adults forage along old railroad grades, forestry roads, and trails. Birders can be part of the effort

to find breeding goshawks and to learn more about their limiting factors. Announcements will be made, but I feel certain that the PGC will welcome help finding and protecting the “ultimate forest raptor.”

Decline of the Rarest Boreal Forest Birds: Is the Moss Tyrant Gone?

As many of you know, I have been studying the state’s rarest forest birds for a few decades, focusing on the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, the Blackpoll Warbler, and a few other northern species including Swainson’s (Olive-backed) Thrush. These are tough times to study boreal forest birds as they seem to be on a slippery slope of decline.

No Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were found on territory in 2021. I surveyed the boreal forested wetlands that I have monitored faithfully since the late 1980s. This is the first year since my studies began that I have not found any male Yellow-bellied Flycatchers singing on territory in Pennsylvania. This small boreal Empidonax flycatcher is very faithful to its breeding grounds, returning not only to the same wetland but within a short distance of the former year’s nest. Male “moss tyrants” can be counted on to sing persistently as soon as they arrive north from their wintering ground. They declare themselves quite continuously in the early mornings in late May and early June – just like Least, Acadian, Willow, or Alder Flycatchers. And you can hear them on a quiet morning at a fair distance because the males often perch rather high in trees when advertising their availability. When in nesting mode, males usually sing less frequently and from lower perches, hence the vocals are a bit muffled by vegetation and are not as conspicuous to the ear. Yet, they can be found and mapped while nesting.

The current PA habitat looks quite acceptable despite its limited size and rarity. Many acres of spruce and hemlock wetland look much like they did when I discovered these populations back in the 1980s and 1990s. The spruce forests are slowly maturing and getting larger on state properties. The canopy is now more closed, but canopy breaks have occurred due to blowdowns and soil conditions. Conifer forests, especially wetlands, are quite dynamic. The conifer swamps have mixed ages with many trees falling during storms and wet weather events.

Most Yellow-bellied Flycatcher territories in Pennsylvania have had plenty of shrubs and saplings as well as mature trees. This boreal forest bird is at the edge of its range in Pennsylvania. The nearest breeding population is in the Catskills, then the Adirondacks, and Tug Hill. Often bird species do not occupy all available habitat because other limiting factors cause a decrease in their population size besides breeding habitat availability. In full life cycle considerations, passage migration dangers,



Yellow-bellied Flycatchers are very faithful to their breeding grounds.

Photo by Steve Gosser

such as storms, windows, towers, and limited stop-over habitat, all take their toll on the population size.

In winter, Yellow-bellied Flycatchers live in forests of Mexico and Central America as far south as Panama. Massive forest destruction has occurred in the lowlands of eastern Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. Residential development, cattle pasturing, date palm farming, and sugar cane agriculture are

among the human uses that have replaced forests. I have encountered Yellow-bellied Flycatchers in many places in Mexico and Central America from the northern extent in Tamaulipas to the Darien in Panama. Deforestation is quite extensive near Veracruz, Mexico, and anywhere that bananas and date palms grow. The farthest south I have found Yellow-bellied Flycatchers in Panama was very close to a teak plantation where no understory existed for a little flycatcher to forage. They are not that finicky about their winter wooded habitat and often occupy second growth forest where you also can find Wood Thrushes, Louisiana Waterthrushes, and many warblers as well as local resident species. Yet, the various forces at play are reducing the size and quality of winter habitat and most certainly the size of the breeding population as a consequence of stress on their health and resulting mortality.

Then there is the “breeding habitat assessment by proxy” factor. Apparently females can appraise the quality of a breeding habitat and their likelihood of adopting it by the number of males advertising in the area. Fewer males imply poorer nesting habitat. Very few males mean “skip it and move on” for prospective colonizing females. In this case, they may keep moving north to the Catskills, the Adirondacks, Maine, New Brunswick, or Nova Scotia. Pennsylvania is in the moss tyrant rear view mirror for those birds heading north where there is more boreal

forest. So, the southernmost populations decline and disappear as a result.

More surveys will be conducted for Yellow-bellied Flycatchers at the regularly used locations with an expansion of efforts in nearby and similar areas. Given the migration route of this species mostly through the western side of the Appalachians, there may be breeding locations in northwestern Pennsylvania needing surveys. Considering the persistence and resilience of its long-lasting breeding clusters, there certainly is hope for Yellow-bellied Flycatcher to return to good locations and persist and to establish new clusters of nesting pairs. They have shown us that the state has good breeding habitat and that they are capable of colonizing good sites and reproducing fairly well. When they have nested in Pennsylvania, some pairs have managed a second nest. So, possibilities are good for a fairly rapid recovery. I am keeping my eyes and ears open. I have heard of birds observed in migration, but lingering birds could nest in new places. *Please let me know privately if you have any Yellow-bellied Flycatcher encounters next summer in good habitat.*

Blackpoll Warblers also have slipped in population size in the last decade. After colonizing some spruce and blueberry swamps, they seem to be retracting from our state, the southern extent of their breeding range. For the last few years, I have found singing males without females, and then the following years I have found fewer males. This year and last, I found only one pair that I determined nesting by observing breeding behavior. In each case, I observed an adult carrying food for young. This year I observed this behavior on June 17. I usually confirm nesting in July when the young might even be out of the nest. When the young are mobile, their parents need to fly farther to provide food, so it is easier to confirm nesting later in the cycle. I did not find any evidence of breeding at several locations where I had found them in recent past years. They have nested in at least four forested wetlands on North Mountain in

SGL 57, but only in Tamarack and Coalbed Swamp lately. It is not known how long Blackpoll Warblers have nested in Pennsylvania because these wetlands were not explored by ornithologists for several decades. They may have been in the Dutch Mountain region for decades before we confirmed nesting in 1984.

It seems that some of the Blackpoll breeding activity represented colonization events because they appeared in locations in years after surveys had been conducted in previous summers. Like Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, Blackpolls are very loyal to their nesting ground. Females are notorious for site fidelity, so the absence of Blackpolls from previously occupied areas suggests mortality occurring away from the breeding grounds and an inability of the species to colonize the margins of its breeding range regularly. If the breeding habitat remains, the Blackpolls may return in force. We could count more than 20 territories in some years when fuller coverage was possible. And they usually returned exactly where they had been found previously. At some points, we could hear two or three counter-singing males. The good news is that Blackpoll Warblers can be found in boreal wetlands where there is little canopy, dominated by shrubs like highbush blueberry and mountain holly as well as small trees. Many of these wetlands are owned by either the PGC or the

Bureau of Forestry. So, Blackpoll Warblers have many opportunities to reestablish populations in northern counties. Let's see if they do.

Swainson's Thrush clusters seem to be disappearing despite the widespread occurrence of mature conifer evergreens and an increased intensity of survey effort. My results were mixed this year with one spruce-hemlock forest supporting several pairs of Swainson's Thrush and a couple families found in post-nesting dispersal. They seemed to be more often found where highbush blueberry shrubs grew in addition to the mature conifers. However, the population clusters in Ricketts Glen State Park seem to be contracting. One location where I have found them



Populations of Blackpoll Warblers, too, are shrinking, but habitat is available for a comeback.

Photo by Doug Gross



Special efforts are needed to monitor the population status of Swainson's Thrush clusters in off-road areas.

Photo by Doug Gross

since the 1990s did not seem to produce any young this year. The remaining clusters of Swainson's Thrushes are not monitored very well by the Breeding Bird Survey road routes. If this and other northern forest birds are to be monitored, special efforts are needed in off-road areas. These are the front lines of global climate change bird monitoring.

Red-breasted Nuthatches Nested in Hemlocks and Spruces.



Red-breasted Nuthatches have a varied diet.

Photo by Doug Gross

The breeding populations of Red-breasted Nuthatches were found in mature hemlocks and red spruces in 2021, not exactly where they had been feeding in fall and winter. These adaptable conifer specialists switched from white pines to other food sources. Red-breasted Nuthatches also are resourceful and flexible in their diet. Not only do they pry open hard seed cones and extricate seeds, but they also chase down all kinds of insects while climbing up and down tree trunks. Comically they will flit out and snatch insects mid-air, even a few feet from the head of a field ornithologist leading a bird walk. I encountered Red-breasted Nuthatch pairs in the old growth hemlocks of Ricketts Glen State Park and red spruce stands in several swamps and remote conifer stands on North Mountain. Almost all of them were off-road. I wonder how many other birders have had that experience.

Red Spruce Cone Crop Looks Very Promising.

Pennsylvania has two native spruce tree species, the Black Spruce of bogs and swamps and the Red Spruce that lives not only in wooded wetlands but also in upland forests. Red spruces tend to look like our idealized version of a Christmas tree with a somewhat pyramidal, sharp-looking shape. Good crops of red spruce occur every three to eight years. Every year larger trees will produce cones. It has been four years since we saw a big native spruce cone crop. This year's crop looks pretty good on North Mountain. I've seen several trees laden in sappy cones in SGL 57 especially. Many of these spruce stands are off the beaten path, often back game land roads behind the gates or around forested wetlands.

These spruce cones are ready food for Red and White-winged Crossbills, Pine Grosbeaks, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Black-capped Chickadees, and other birds. They are also a main food item of red squirrels which are in turn a prey of several forest raptors. Many red spruce forests and wetlands are in the Poconos which are fairly easily accessed by birders who live in the southeastern counties. I recommend that birders start planning trips this fall and winter to investigate them for invading finches and other boreal forest birds.

Good birding!

Doug Gross
Pennsylvania Boreal Bird Project
Ricketts Glen State Park Bird Project
Dagross144@verizon.net

Answers to Bird Quiz (page 6)

1. Yellow-billed Loon
2. Cerulean
3. Nashville
4. Northern Goshawk
5. Song Sparrow

Did You Know?

Ruddy Ducks have been known to nest on floating logs. What an amazing little duck!

Pennsylvania Ornithological Research

Think about nest sites: Canada Geese on the ground near water. Bald Eagles on a strong tall tree near water. Eastern Bluebirds in a nest box. Piping Plovers on a sandy beach. Ovenbirds in an oven-shaped nest on the ground. Easy. All of those are generalities.

More fascinating questions arise in the particular behavior of species when searching for an optimal place for a nest, such as in woodland understory. For example, precisely what particular spot does a Black-and-white Warbler choose within this overall habitat?

Justin T. Mann at Binghamton University in New York, his father Evan A. Mann (PSO Past President), and Ann B. Clarke at Binghamton University sought an answer to how that choice is made.

The team's research was conducted at three locations: the Binghamton University Nature Reserve in New York and at Salt Springs State Park and State Game Lands 35 in Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, each site within 20 miles from the others.

Their findings were published in 2020 in the British ornithological journal *Ibis* in a paper titled "Social information affects prospecting, but not settlement, by Black-and-white Warblers (*Mniotilta varia*)."¹ A key to their results was the use of "playbacks," when a recorded male's song is broadcast to learn how the local males respond.

This title refers to two successive stages in Black-and-white males' selection of a nest site within the species' typical woodland habitat: a "prospecting" period when the males search for suitable habitats and begin singing to establish territories, and a "post-settlement period" after territories have been selected and established.

The first stage involves what the authors call "social cues" when new arrivals hear songs by males that had already returned from migration and found good-quality



This Black-and-white Warbler is foraging for insects and spiders, working both the main trunk as well as the larger branches.

Photo by Roger Higbee

nesting vegetation. As the authors had predicted, the warblers' abundance was significantly greater at sites where playbacks were used. Perhaps the played songs are especially instructive to year-old males returning from their first migration and unfamiliar with the area's habitats.

The second stage involves what the authors call "personal information," in which males had already established their territories and social cues were no longer important. During the post-settlement period, playbacks were no longer associated with the warblers' abundance. These males had used their own observations to eventually settle on a preferred nest site.

Justin Mann's team also addressed concerns about the frequent use of playback as an investigative tool.

Artificial songs are sometimes said to interfere with breeding success by expending a male's energy in response to a nonexistent intruder.

The study found no evidence that playback influenced these Black-and-white Warblers' choice of appropriate breeding sites, but the authors noted that studies of other species have suggested such harmful effects. Their point is that we know little about the case for most species.

Even in an unscientific birding context, we are often reminded to limit broadcasting songs from a cell phone to entice a male into view from its territory. A bird's responsive energy might be wasted. That's one thing we can do to help our breeding birds.

It's worth mentioning that the two decades between Pennsylvania's first and second Breeding Bird Atlas showed a 22 percent decline in confirmed Black-and-white Warbler nesting. Let's take care of them.

Paul Hess
Natrona Heights, PA
phess@salsgiver.com

Conservation Chat Room

The Breeding Bird Blitz Will Be Back in 2022: Mark Your Calendars!



The 2nd Annual Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation is scheduled for June 17-20, 2022 (Friday – Monday). More details concerning the event will be available at <https://www.breedingbirdblitz.org/> in the coming months.

We are looking for a sponsor to cover the PayPal fees and website expenses for next year. If your organization or company would like to make a tax-deductible donation to help cover Blitz expenses, please contact Laura Jackson at jacksonlaura73@gmail.com.

Highlights of the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation 2021

The first-time effort of PSO to sponsor the 2021 Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation (Blitz) was wildly successful on many fronts. Thanks to the many who generously contributed, we raised \$10,645 – more than doubling our original goal of \$5,000! PSO covered the cost of the website and PayPal fees, so 100% of the donations were used for bird conservation.

Not only did birders raise significant dollars for conservation, but the Blitz also inspired 22 teams comprised of 89 people to bird in 30 counties in Pennsylvania. The check lists were generated by one Youth Team, eight Low Carbon Counts, seven Regional Counts, and 23 County Counts. Pennsylvania was divided into six regions to encourage coverage across the state and every region was represented in the Blitz.

The 30 counties covered during the 4-day Blitz (June 18 - 21, 2021) were Adams, Allegheny, Armstrong, Bedford, Berks, Cameron, Cambria, Carbon, Centre, Chester, Crawford, Cumberland, Dauphin, Elk, Franklin, Fulton, Indiana, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, Luzerne, Mifflin, Monroe, Northampton, Perry, Pike, Potter, Schuylkill, Susquehanna, and Westmoreland.

The Blitz incorporated a sense of competition by recognizing top teams in fundraising, species counts, and low carbon birding (bird counts done on foot, bike, kayak, etc.) but also encouraged teams to submit their findings to eBird. The eBird data are invaluable to our understanding of bird dynamics. Since the Blitz occurred in mid-June, many participants documented breeding birds and made some surprising discoveries.

The teams recorded a total of 152 species during the four-day event. Teams documented nesting behaviors by many species, including adult birds building nests, incubating eggs, and feeding young birds. A team in Westmoreland County (the Kuehl Bird Magnets) discovered a previously unknown nesting location for American Coots, a rare nesting bird in the state. American Coots are a Species of Special Concern in Pennsylvania and are ranked S2B (Imperiled) in our state, so a documented observation like this caught the attention of conservation ornithologists who were eager to add this observation to their database!



Some very cool cootlings at Donegal Lake were discovered by Tom and Janet Kuehl.

Photo by Tom Kuehl

Across Pennsylvania, birders submitted more than 4,500 complete checklists to eBird during the third week of June, which included the four days of the Blitz, a 9% increase over the same week last year. Unfortunately, one of the focus species, the Northern Harrier, was not reported by any team.

Several teams earned special recognition for their efforts, both in finding birds and raising funds for conservation. The Grey Ghosts, a team of Lehigh Valley Audubon Society members, took home the PA Peerless award for the top single day species count; the Ghosts observed 105 species in a day in the northeast region. The state's top fundraisers were the Brandywine Breeding Bird Blitzers, who raised \$1,623 for conservation while recording 93 species in Chester County in one day. Four teams in Cumberland County participated, with the Cumberland Crossbills ticking 101 species for the top single county effort in the state, and the Crazy Cuckoos raising more than \$1,000. A full list of award winners can be found at www.breedingbirdblitz.org/post/results

A special shout-out goes to the Franklin County team, The Blue Mountain Avian Seekers, the only youth team that participated in the Blitz. This truly intergenerational team ranged from age 14 to 71. We hope to see more youth teams in the 2022 Blitz.

Our partners, Hawk Mountain, Manada Conservancy, and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, were very eager to be part of this conservation effort. The partners will use the funds to protect bird habitat for our focal species: the Wood Thrush and/or the Northern Harrier. We have asked each non-profit to provide detailed documentation on how the funds were used to protect the habitat of these species.



A special shout-out goes to the Franklin County team, The Blue Mountain Avian Seekers, the only youth team that participated in the Blitz. From left to right: Bob Keener, Sammy Keener, Dan Keener, and Jefferson Shank.

Photo by Bob Keener

Finally, we'd like you to know that we owe the success of the 2021 Blitz to Vern Gauthier (mastermind of the website and the Blitz protocol) and Brian Byrnes (publicity chair). Vern and Brian dedicated a lot of time and effort to make this event a success. In addition to Vern and Brian, other Conservation Committee members who helped with the Blitz were Annette Mathes, Eli DePaulis, David Yeany II, and Laura Jackson.

Taxonomic Order of Reported Species 2021 PSO Blitz

- | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Canada Goose | 20. Chimney Swift | 39. Cooper's Hawk |
| 2. Mute Swan | 21. Ruby-throated Hummingbird | 40. Bald Eagle |
| 3. Trumpeter Swan | 22. American Coot | 41. Red-shouldered Hawk |
| 4. Wood Duck | 23. Killdeer | 42. Broad-winged Hawk |
| 5. American Wigeon | 24. Semipalmated Sandpiper | 43. Red-tailed Hawk |
| 6. Mallard | 25. Spotted Sandpiper | 44. Barn Owl |
| 7. American Black Duck | 26. American Woodcock | 45. Great Horned Owl |
| 8. Hooded Merganser | 27. Herring Gull | 46. Barred Owl |
| 9. Common Merganser | 28. Common Loon | 47. Belted Kingfisher |
| 10. Ruffed Grouse | 29. Double-crested Cormorant | 48. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker |
| 11. Wild Turkey | 30. Great Blue Heron | 49. Red-headed Woodpecker |
| 12. Pied-billed Grebe | 31. Great Egret | 50. Red-bellied Woodpecker |
| 13. Rock Pigeon | 32. Green Heron | 51. Downy Woodpecker |
| 14. Eurasian Collared-Dove | 33. Black-crowned Night-Heron | 52. Hairy Woodpecker |
| 15. Mourning Dove | 34. Yellow-crowned Night-Heron | 53. Pileated Woodpecker |
| 16. Yellow-billed Cuckoo | 35. Black Vulture | 54. Northern Flicker |
| 17. Black-billed Cuckoo | 36. Turkey Vulture | 55. American Kestrel |
| 18. Common Nighthawk | 37. Osprey | 56. Peregrine Falcon |
| 19. Eastern Whip-poor-will | 38. Sharp-shinned Hawk | 57. Eastern Wood-Pewee |

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 58. Acadian Flycatcher | 90. Carolina Wren | 123. Ovenbird |
| 59. Alder Flycatcher | 91. European Starling | 124. Worm-eating Warbler |
| 60. Willow Flycatcher | 92. Gray Catbird | 125. Louisiana Waterthrush |
| 61. Least Flycatcher | 93. Brown Thrasher | 126. Northern Waterthrush |
| 62. Eastern Phoebe | 94. Northern Mockingbird | 127. Blue-winged Warbler |
| 63. Great Crested Flycatcher | 95. Eastern Bluebird | 128. Black-and-white Warbler |
| 64. Eastern Kingbird | 96. Veery | 129. Prothonotary Warbler |
| 65. White-eyed Vireo | 97. Hermit Thrush | 130. Nashville Warbler |
| 66. Yellow-throated Vireo | 98. Wood Thrush | 131. Mourning Warbler |
| 67. Blue-headed Vireo | 99. American Robin | 132. Kentucky Warbler |
| 68. Warbling Vireo | 100. Cedar Waxwing | 133. Common Yellowthroat |
| 69. Red-eyed Vireo | 101. House Sparrow | 134. Hooded Warbler |
| 70. Blue Jay | 102. House Finch | 135. American Redstart |
| 71. American Crow | 103. Purple Finch | 136. Cerulean Warbler |
| 72. Fish Crow | 104. American Goldfinch | 137. Northern Parula |
| 73. Common Raven | 105. Grasshopper Sparrow | 138. Blackburnian Warbler |
| 74. Carolina Chickadee | 106. Chipping Sparrow | 139. Yellow Warbler |
| 75. Black-capped Chickadee | 107. Field Sparrow | 140. Chestnut-sided Warbler |
| 76. Tufted Titmouse | 108. Dark-eyed Junco | 141. Black-throated Blue Warbler |
| 77. Horned Lark | 109. Vesper Sparrow | 142. Pine Warbler |
| 78. Northern Rough-winged Swallow | 110. Savannah Sparrow | 143. Yellow-throated Warbler |
| 79. Purple Martin | 111. Henslow's Sparrow | 144. Prairie Warbler |
| 80. Tree Swallow | 112. Song Sparrow | 145. Black-throated Green Warbler |
| 81. Barn Swallow | 113. Swamp Sparrow | 146. Canada Warbler |
| 82. Cliff Swallow | 114. Eastern Towhee | 147. Scarlet Tanager |
| 83. Golden-crowned Kinglet | 115. Yellow-breasted Chat | 148. Northern Cardinal |
| 84. Red-breasted Nuthatch | 116. Bobolink | 149. Rose-breasted Grosbeak |
| 85. White-breasted Nuthatch | 117. Eastern Meadowlark | 150. Blue Grosbeak |
| 86. Brown Creeper | 118. Orchard Oriole | 151. Indigo Bunting |
| 87. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher | 119. Baltimore Oriole | 152. Dickcissel |
| 88. House Wren | 120. Red-winged Blackbird | |
| 89. Winter Wren | 121. Brown-headed Cowbird | |
| | 122. Common Grackle | |

Board of Directors' May 2021 Meeting Recap

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology Board of Directors met on May 25, 2021, with 13 directors present for the teleconference meeting.

David Yeany made a motion which Laura Jackson seconded to approve the minutes of the March 30, 2021, board meeting.

Mike Fialkovich reviewed the changes he proposed to the bylaws. Everyone agreed that they look good, but more changes still need to be made.

Deb Grove reported on the student research grants offered by PSO. There were four applications with two being stronger than the other two. The review committee

recommended the two strongest candidates, and the board agreed.

Evan Mann reported on the search for new board members. After some discussion, it was decided to limit new members to three and ask Brian Byrnes, Tony DeSantis, and Julia Plummer to run for the board of directors. Further discussion concerned the bylaws requiring 10% of the membership to be present to have a valid vote. It was decided to have a vote by email which would require about 45 members to respond. A concern was expressed that we have no presidential candidate.

Evan led the discussion about how we should hold the annual meeting this year. It was finally decided to have a

Zoom meeting. The first part would be the business meeting as usually followed by a speaker.

It was suggested that PSO hold webinars once or twice a year, even after returning to face-to-face annual meetings.

Evan said that the preparations for the B4C are going well. Laura informed us that money has already been raised toward our goal of \$5000.

Margaret Higbee reminded everyone that the annual meeting needs to be promoted in the June newsletter as it will be the last one before the September annual meeting.

David gave a brief updated on PORC's recent activities.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Roger Higbee, Secretary

Board of Directors' July 2021 Meeting Recap

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology Board of Directors met on July 27, 2021, with 14 directors and four probable new directors present for the teleconference meeting.

Deb Grove announced that Dan Brauning has agreed to be a candidate for PSO president.

Dan gave the board his take on what he would like to see PSO accomplish. One of his primary goals is to advance bird knowledge in the state through partnering with other organizations in the state. He then outlined how he thinks this can be accomplished.

Frank Haas gave the treasurer's report and said that we are still solvent but membership is down slightly.

The annual meeting will be virtual. It was agreed that everyone should be able to see each other. It was mentioned that webinars should be planned throughout the year.

David Yeany II said that Matt Young will present the program on winter finches at the annual meeting. The business meeting should include election results, B4C report, treasurer's report, and the student scholarship awards. It was also suggested that we could have breakout rooms after the program presentation. The

election ballot is ready and will be emailed prior to the meeting.

Laura Jackson provided a recap of the B4C. The highlights were that \$10,645 was raised for conservation. Motions were made, seconded, and passed to distribute the money raised, have the B4C again next year, and have PSO cover all expenses for the B4C.

Frank said he has revised the PORC voting system. This includes the ability of the public to input sightings on the appropriate forms for review by PORC.

David gave a brief update of PORC's activities.

It was suggested that the board consider another communication platform instead of Google Groups because of recent problems. Several board members said they would look into changing to another communication platform. One caveat could be that people may have to be educated on how to use it.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Roger Higbee, Secretary

Board of Directors' September 2021 Meeting Recap

The entire meeting on September 29 was devoted to planning the annual meeting's agenda. All of this information is included in Deb Grove's recap of the annual meeting.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Roger Higbee, Secretary

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 | | |

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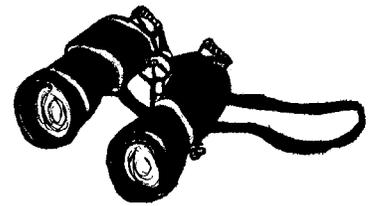
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Be sure to check any American Kestrel you see for color bands.
See note from Laurie Goodrich on page 4.

Photo by Dave Brooke



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