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# PSO Pileated



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October 2012

*The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology*

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## From the President's Desk....

My first few months as president have served as an eye-opening experience. Do you realize how many dedicated members PSO has? Do you realize the amount of time that some of the members put into the organization? A few people put in an unbelievable amount of time. They don't grumble about it; they do it. PSO is a better organization because of it. What the organization would do without them is something that none of us wants to consider. I am not sure that PSO could survive without the things that are done by a few members. That needs to change.

Change is good, right?

Well, as we discussed at the last annual meeting and was posted on the PABirds list serve and on various Facebook pages, PSO is in the process of making some minor changes.

The Facebook page is one of the first of these changes. Not everyone may use or want to use Facebook, but millions of people and thousands of birders do use Facebook. Our page on Facebook is <https://www.facebook.com/pabirds>. It would be nice to see it as a portal to bird organizations across the state. If you use Facebook and would like to have a link to your organization on the page, let us know. If there is a birding event that you would like to publicize, let us know. We feel it is one more way to get the birding message to people who want to know more.

We would like to use our website – <http://www.pabirds.org> – in the same way! Links can be found to more local birding organizations ranging from smaller clubs to large Audubon groups. If yours is not on our website, it should be!

By promoting birding in our state, PSO is promoting itself. More birders will be able to see what PSO does for ornithology. The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology is continuing to work for ornithology in the state.

Another minor change, our by-laws state that there are standing committees. Not to worry, we have always worked – formally and informally – with these committees. But we are looking at ways to make PSO members feel more involved in the organization.

Ideally, the committees will include members of the Board of Directors as well as members of PSO at large. We welcome member participation! With more people working on the committees, there will be less work for each member.

Some members may have already noticed that the Functions (Field Trip) Committee, chaired by Ramsay Koury, has been active. PSO has already had one successful field trip to Waggoner's Gap. In fact, as of this writing, they are well into planning a second outing to Hawk Mountain.

Change is good!

On page 2 you will find a list of the committees and the responsibilities of each one. The committee chairs are also listed. Please take the time to look at the committees. If you feel that you can contribute to any of them, contact the chairperson listed to volunteer your help. You, the members, are PSO. Your opinions, suggestions, and comments are valued. Any help you can give the organization will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you!

– John Fedak, President

# Committee Responsibilities

## Awards Committee

Chair : Mike Lanzone, [mlanzone@gmail.com](mailto:mlanzone@gmail.com)

- Manage the Certificate of Appreciation program
- Manage the Conservation and Poole Award programs
- Prepare appropriate honor to members deserving recognition in PA Ornithology or for outstanding service within PSO

## Nominating Committee

Chair: Tom Kuehl, [tjkuehl@comcast.net](mailto:tjkuehl@comcast.net)

- Set goals for adequate talent and diversity for the slate of Directors
- Recruit new Directors
- Select and recruit officer candidates and all Committee Chair and Vice Chair positions
- Recruit committee members

## Publicity/Outreach

Chair: John Fedak, [jlfedak@atlanticbb.net](mailto:jlfedak@atlanticbb.net)

- Promote PSO and assign responsibilities to carry it out
- Promote meetings, counts and other PSO sponsored events
- Coordinate with Membership and Web/Social Committees
- Serve as liaison for bird and ornithological organizations
- Help manage website content and traffic generation
- Manage the Facebook page
- Manage relationships/links with other websites (PA eBird, Bird Clubs, etc...)
- Recruit new members, retain existing members, and promote PSO membership benefits

## Annual Meeting

Chair: Shonah Hunter, [shunter@lhup.edu](mailto:shunter@lhup.edu)

- Select meeting sites
- Plan and setup annual meetings
- Subcommittees – Vendors, Banquet Speaker and Afternoon Presentations (possibly combine with Research Committee), Registration, Silent Auction, PSO Sales, Field Trips

## Research and Conservation

Chair: Scott Stoleson, [sstoleson@fs.fed.us](mailto:sstoleson@fs.fed.us)

- Identify conservation issues affecting PA appropriate for PSO involvement
- Identify and then communicate conservation issues resulting from data trends
- Actively communicate with PGC and PABS-OTC (nominations, concerns etc.)
- Write white papers/positions on issues in PA
- Write conservation articles for newsletter
- Solicit student speakers for PSO annual meetings to highlight current bird research in state and to provide a forum for ornithologists just beginning their careers
- Facilitate large-scale volunteer efforts for bird monitoring and research
- Provide small grants to student researchers
- Communicate with universities to solicit student members
- Review research/scientific papers submitted for publication
- Subcommittee – Education

## Finance/Fundraising/Membership

Chair: Frank Haas, [fchaas@pabirds.org](mailto:fchaas@pabirds.org)

- Develop and implement strategies to welcome new members
- Solicit comments and recommendations from membership
- Keep track of member data and provide monthly reports to the Board
- Develop annual PSO budget for board approval
- Prepare financial reports comparing actual expenditures to amounts budgeted
- Make recommendations to the Board regarding financial issues and fundraising efforts

## Functions (Field Trip) Committee

Chair: Ramsay Koury, [rkoury123@aol.com](mailto:rkoury123@aol.com)

- Coordinate field trips for the annual meeting
- Manage other PSO sponsored outings including shorebird outings, warbler outings, grassland outings, out-of-state trips (pelagic and winter boreal birds for example)
- Assist with PSO sponsored educational programs

## Newsletter

Chair: Margaret Higbee, [bcoriele@windstream.net](mailto:bcoriele@windstream.net)

- Obtain monthly summary report from each committee
- Solicit the Directors and Committees for inclusion of all activities and relevant information
- Solicit articles from Directors and membership showcasing PA ornithology

## Journal

Chair: Geoff Malosh, [pomarine@earthlink.net](mailto:pomarine@earthlink.net)

- Solicit articles from Directors and membership showcasing PA ornithology
- Coordinate with Research and Conservation Committees for peer reviewed research articles

## Records and Data

Chair, Mike Fialkovich, [mpfial@verizon.net](mailto:mpfial@verizon.net)

- Publish records in *Pennsylvania Birds*
- Assure that records are tabulated and archived
- Create and discuss new and innovative ideas on data collection, storage, review, and accessibility
- Subcommittees- PA eBird, PORC, Monitoring Data (WRS, PAMC, etc.)

– John Fedak, President



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## PSO Field Trip Committee

Over the summer, a number of new committees were created within PSO. The Field Trip Committee has two main functions this year: The first is to organize trips at our annual meeting in Wilkes-Barre this coming June. The second is to plan some trips during the coming year. By the time you read this, Chad Kauffman will have already led the first trip to Waggoner's Gap Hawk-watch in September. Chad is planning two more hawk-watching trips this fall, one in October, probably to Hawk Mountain, and another in November to the Allegheny Front Hawk-watch. Details will be provided on the PA Birds list serve, and the PSO and PA Birders Facebook pages.

Future trips are in the planning stages. Vern Gauthier is hoping to lead a trip to Cape Cod in October of 2013. We have had many suggestions for trips, but we need some LEADERS! The trip destinations do not have to be exotic

or out of state. If you have a favorite birding spot that you would like to share, consider leading a trip. You do not have to be an expert birder to do this!

Professional birder Bob Schutsky of BIRD TREKS is willing to lead a trip for PSO members. He would be willing to go anywhere in or out of the country, assuming he has experience with the location. We need ideas of possible locations where some of you might be interested in visiting. Please contact me with any questions, comments, suggestions, or especially if you are willing to lead a trip for us!

Thanks!

– Ramsay Koury  
[rkoury123@aol.com](mailto:rkoury123@aol.com)

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## Welcome, New Board Members!

At our business meeting on May 18, we elected six new board members including Mike Lanzone from Somerset, who is serving as VP and Wayne Laubscher from Lock Haven who headed up the field trips for the 2012 meeting. Both of these new board members were featured in our July *Pileated*. Brief biographies for Marjorie Howard from Waynesburg and Flo McGuire from Tionesta are included here on page 4. The December issue will feature our other two new board members, Cory DeStein from Pittsburgh and Emily Thomas from Brockway.

We appreciate their willingness to bring their individual talents to PSO. Welcome aboard!!!

## Marjorie Howard

We extend a warm welcome to Marjorie Howard, a long-time member of PSO from Greene County, who states that she “is looking forward to serving on the Board.”

Besides PSO, she is a member of the National Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology. She has participated in the Pennsylvania Migration Count and the Christmas Bird Count since 1995. As a volunteer on the Great Blue Heron Survey, she has spent a lot of time in the field. She also participated in PSO’s Special Areas Project and the 2<sup>nd</sup> PA Breeding Bird Atlas. In 1998 Marjorie organized and started the Ryerson CBC. In 1999 she worked for Cornell Lab on the Cerulean Warbler Project. Since 2002 she has served as the coordinator of



IBA #14 (Enlow Fork). Six Winter Raptor Survey routes in Greene, Fayette, and Washington counties have been laid out and run by Marjorie.

Seeing the need for a birding organization in Greene County, in 2006 she founded the Ralph K. Bell Bird Club and currently serves as its president.

## Flo McGuire



Flo McGuire has always loved birds, but she became more involved in the 1980s when she joined National Audubon and the Todd Bird Club and began to meet other birders. (There was no internet!) She was recruited for the 1<sup>st</sup> PA Breeding

Bird Atlas as a block owner and also had some great times and great learning experiences atlassing with other birders.

After moving to Tionesta, she joined Seneca Rocks Audubon and soon became their newsletter editor and also the webmaster when the chapter created a website in 2003. SRAS was privileged to host the PSO Annual Meeting in Clarion in 2005, and Flo played an instrumental part in the organization of that meeting.

Since 1999 Flo has been the PA Birds compiler for Forest County. She served on the PSO board from 2003 to 2008 and was a Regional Coordinator for the 2<sup>nd</sup> PA Breeding Bird Atlas.

Flo and her husband Jim have taken many camping/ birding trips, particularly to southeast Arizona, the Rio Grande Valley, and the Gulf Coast. They have enjoyed Toot Routes, Winter Raptor Surveys, many Christmas Bird Counts, Breeding Bird Surveys, PA Migration Counts, and Birdathons. Perhaps her favorite pastime is helping at research banding stations in the Allegheny National Forest.

We extend our welcome as Flo returns to the board.

## Bird Quiz

How well do you know your Pennsylvania birds?

1. Of *Spizella* sparrows and *Melospiza* sparrows, birds of which genus have notched tails and which have rounded tails?
2. Of all gull species on the Pennsylvania list, which one does not have “gull” in its name?
3. Which two hummingbirds not yet confirmed in Pennsylvania have the largest breeding ranges in the western U.S. and might likely be our next hummer species?
4. Quick! Answer this within two seconds: Which shrike on Pennsylvania’s list has a mask extending thinly across the top of its bill?
5. If you see a swallow with a prominent white area behind and above its eye, why should you report it to our records committee?

(See Answers on page 10)

# Ornithological Literature Notes

Can you believe that a Peregrine Falcon is more closely related to a Yellow Warbler than to a Red-tailed Hawk? According to three independent genetic studies of the avian family tree, that is indeed the case. Falcons are closer relatives to songbirds than to the other birds we call hawks.

The result of that research is a major departure from the long-established checklist sequence that placed falcons immediately after hawks. In July 2012, the American Ornithologists' Union checklist committee moved the falcons away from the other raptors to a new placement far down the list, following the woodpeckers.

That's not all. Genetic research also indicates that falcons and parrots are more closely related to each other than to any other avian group. Thus, the parrots accompany the falcons down the list and are placed between falcons and songbirds.

So, if we want to be taxonomically "official," we must now use a new sequence for our checklists. After Piciformes (woodpeckers) come Falconiformes (falcons and caracaras), next Psittaciformes (parrots, parakeets, and allies), and finally Passeriformes (songbirds).

This is especially surprising because we have long assumed that falcons were closely related to other raptors. It was logical. Falcons are raptors, and they have been classified as part of the raptorial order since the first American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) Check-list in 1886. In fact, falcons were classified within a single large group of diurnal raptors much longer ago than that.

Evidently, everyone was wrong in the era before genetic research into avian evolutionary relationships, when morphology and behavior were the keys to taxonomic classification. After all, before the emergence of relevant genetic research less than a quarter-century ago, those were the only factors ornithologists could observe.

It has been nine years since we had such a large-scale change in taxonomic sequences. That was when waterfowl and grouse moved up to the beginning of the checklist, replacing the loons and grebes we had always been accustomed to seeing first.

Perhaps it is annoying to confront another major rearrangement, but let's face it—the change represents an advancement of scientific knowledge. When three studies use different mitochondrial and nuclear DNA characteristics, their consistent results are generally considered to be convincing. The AOU committee was certainly convinced in this case. Its vote was unanimous to accept

the new placement of Falconiformes and Psittaciformes.

Ted Floyd, a Pennsylvania native who edits the American Birding Association's *Birding* magazine, commented recently on the ABA Blog: "So we move them around. Fine with me. I like change. I like the idea that we don't know everything, and that there's always more to learn. To me, checklist changes are a breath of fresh air."

Scientific papers will use the new AOU checklist sequences, and the American Birding Association will accept them for consistency. Will future field guides tear the falcons away from the other "hawks"? That will be the authors' and publishers' choice. There is currently disagreement about whether identification guides should be concerned about official taxonomic sequence. Should the guides, rather, place look-alike species together for identification purposes no matter what the genetic and evolutionary evidence shows? We shall have to wait and see.

For a general summary of the molecular research involved in the falcon/parrot taxonomic shift, see an article in the January 2009 issue of *Birding* magazine <[www.aba.org/birding/v41n1p26.pdf](http://www.aba.org/birding/v41n1p26.pdf)>.

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Further, for scientifically-oriented readers who want to delve deeply into these genetic studies, the following papers convinced the AOU to take action:

Ericson, P.G.P., et al. (2006). Diversification of Neoaves: integration of molecular sequence data and fossils. *Biological Letters* 2:543–547.

Hackett, S. J., et al. (2008). A phylogenomic study of birds reveals their evolutionary history. *Science* 320:1763–1768.

Suh, A., et al. (2011). Mesozoic retroposons reveal parrots as the closest living relatives of passerine birds. *Nature Communications* <[www.tinyurl.com/ParrotGenes](http://www.tinyurl.com/ParrotGenes)>.

Another relevant paper, not evaluated by the AOU, is:

Wang, N., et al. (2011). Testing hypotheses about the sister group of the Passeriformes using an independent 30-locus data set. *Molecular Biology and Evolution* <[www.tinyurl.com/WangEvol](http://www.tinyurl.com/WangEvol)>.

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# The Raven Reporter

Tales of  
Discovery about  
Pennsylvania  
Birds



## Dickcissels Invade Pennsylvania in 2012

The Pennsylvania Endangered Dickcissel is a rarity in the state as a breeding species. This year, however, birders are finding this obligate grassland species on territory in several southern, central, and western counties across Pennsylvania. This irruption is apparently driven by drought in the Midwest where most Dickcissels nest. A long history of such grassland bird invasions into Pennsylvania goes back to colonial days when this species founded populations in the newly-developed Philadelphia area.

Since early May reports of singing males and small populations have graced county lists from Berks County in the southeast to Crawford County in the northwest with most reports coming from Lancaster County. More than 180 separate reports were submitted of Dickcissels in the state as of a month ago when we compiled the nesting season data. Dickcissels have been reported from at least 19 counties in the 2012 breeding season. In some counties, there have been multiple locations of nesting season Dickcissels.

Thanks to all the Pennsylvania birders for adding your observations. These records have helped flesh out this phenomenon. Many observers added information to their reports including numbers observed, breeding codes, and habitat information. Multiple observers logged in data from some locations; the independent observations added to the veracity of the initial observations. Some return visits and multiple observers helped determine that some Dickcissels apparently attempted to nest. Confirmation of breeding behavior was reported for Clarion, Indiana, Lancaster, and Montgomery counties. The new features of eBird including breeding bird codes allow better documentation of this event. One weakness of the 2012 season, however, was that many observers did not include breeding codes in their reports.

Although the heart of its breeding range currently spans central North America, Dickcissel invasions and erratic

movements sometimes occur in eastern states when natural events such as drought or human-related influences disturb breeding habitats in the Midwest. The Dickcissel's former breeding range included the Atlantic Coast states and in years such as this, the species reoccupies many historic sites as well as new areas. Some sites are extensive grasslands found in reclaimed surface mines of Pennsylvania's coal field regions, but many locations are roadside fields and meadows that may not be large or extensive. True to form, Dickcissels wandered into several southeastern Pennsylvania counties where they found patches of agricultural and roadside grassy habitat. Most remaining reported counties were in the southcentral and northwestern regions.

Nesting can be interrupted by mowing or other farming, roadside maintenance, or other human activities. So, many records may be futile breeding attempts by the Dickcissels. Since confirmations occurred in only four counties, many of these other reports may have been nesting birds, but the documentation does not provide adequate information. Some records may have been of successful nesting events. A pattern of return visits by the Dickcissels at a few locations has justified their Endangered status in the state. Some of the 2012 observations were apparently returns, but most are new locations. Although erratic in their wanderings, some Dickcissels return to good habitat fairly regularly in Pennsylvania.

Grassy fields, meadows, hayfields, roadsides, and lightly grazed pastures attract Dickcissels. Males are fairly easy to spot as they usually sing their "dick-dick-dick-ciss-ciss-ceel" from a conspicuous perch overlooking the territory. High points such as utility wires, tall saplings, or the tops of prominent weeds may serve as singing perches. If conditions are suitable, Dickcissels may nest multiple times in a breeding season. So, it is important to revisit known sites and surrounding grassland habitat well into the summer. It seems this year any unmowed field across much of the state could hold Dickcissels. For a full species account of the Dickcissel, visit the Endangered Species section of the Pennsylvania Game Commission website. See:

<http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=621014&mode=2>

Many birders logged their observations into eBird and included details about locations, behaviors, and numbers of birds seen. These reports are very much appreciated and make a significant contribution to our knowledge of this event. However, not all observations may have been entered into eBird or reported in a public forum where the PA Game Commission staff can incorporate the data into their records.

Additional information about Dickcissel breeding events is very much appreciated. The nesting season may be long over, but there may be some evidence in notebooks not reported. If anyone still has not documented breeding behavior of Dickcissels, especially confirmations, please log your Dickcissel observations to eBird. We ask for the following: coordinates (latitude/longitude in digital degree format), address or driving directions to site, county/township, a brief habitat description, date of visit(s), behavior of birds (Atlas breeding code), number of birds (pairs), persistence of occurrence, possible reason for abandonment. For those that were involved with the Atlas, that project's rare bird form is familiar, so feel free to use it for any nesting season report to the agency. Please send this information to Kathy Korber, a biological aide of our Wildlife Diversity section at: [kkorber@embarqmail.com](mailto:kkorber@embarqmail.com)

– Kathy Korber and Doug Gross

## The Boreal Bird Highway

The great boreal forest of North America is one of the largest and most intact forests in the world and a virtual nursery for a large percentage of the continent's bird species. The vast numbers of birds that nest in the boreal forests of Canada and the northern United States migrate south each year. This large avifauna includes a wide diversity of species that migrate through our state, ranging from waterfowl like American Black Duck, shorebirds like Solitary Sandpiper, and many songbirds including Philadelphia Vireo, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Swainson's Thrush, Rusty Blackbird, and Blackpoll Warbler. Many of these birds have been declining, including the Olive-sided Flycatcher and the Buff-breasted Sandpiper. It is very difficult to survey these species on their northern nesting grounds in remote and inaccessible locations with few or no roads. Their migratory paths often do not take a linear course along a strictly north-south direction but curve across the continent to their various wintering grounds. Bird migration routes often cross the Great Lakes region and central Appalachians including Pennsylvania. So, counting birds as they cross the state in fall and spring is a surrogate for counting them during the nesting season. You may not be able to visit the Great North's vast forests and wetlands, but you can experience and count those birds as they cross our state in migration.

The birds of the great northern forests of Canada and the United States have a variety of destinations south of their nesting grounds. Many migrate to the southern United States, others go a bit further to the Caribbean Islands, others join the "Yucatan express" across the Gulf of Mexico to southern Mexico and Central America, while a

few others cross the Caribbean or the Atlantic to South America. These various routes often take a curved route through the northeastern United States, especially the Appalachian Mountains which act as a giant funnel for this huge migration phenomenon. This effect is a partial result of the geography of North America which widens substantially north of our state as well as the distribution of habitats across the continent. Banding records collected at Powdermill Nature Preserve and the Allegheny Front Migration Observatory in eastern West Virginia have demonstrated this funnel effect with empirical data. Even widespread and familiar songbirds like Dark-eyed Junco and White-throated Sparrow are primarily birds of the boreal forest.

At Powdermill near Rector, Westmoreland County, 32 bird species associated with boreal habitats comprise about 50 percent of the birds caught at that banding station. At the Allegheny Front station, 35 species of boreal songbirds comprised 62 percent of the birds captured there. The pattern of birds recovered from these banding operations shows that many have migrated from points northwest and northeast of these stations, not just directly north, and the distribution of these birds suggests that the region is a bottleneck for migrating boreal songbirds.

Pennsylvania is at a crossroads for boreal songbird migration and assumes high responsibility for their stewardship. The forest birds are searching for good habitat where they can refuel for the long migration south, perhaps over water, to distant parts of the hemisphere. Many of these boreal songbirds are denizens of the forest and seek forest and forest edge for migration stopover habitat. Pennsylvania has a lot of forest, so it is a natural stopover for many of these species. Therefore, it is critical that Pennsylvania protects habitat that provides stopover food and resting stops for the millions of birds that migrate through our state.

There is a hypothesis that the circuitous migration routes of several of these species reflect their former nesting range that was delimited by the glacial coverage during the last ice age and subsequent range expansion northward and westward from their ice age refugia. These migration routes also somewhat reflect a fairly direct route to winter grounds after the cross-country adjustment, once the earth's curvature and stopover habitats are accounted for. So, populations of Swainson's Thrush, Connecticut Warbler, and Blackpoll Warbler in western Canada and Alaska travel east across the North American continent before turning southward toward their southern destinations across the off-shore waters. This takes them across the Appalachian Mountains and the forest migration crossroads of the Great Lakes region in large numbers.

In a recent report about [The State of Canada's Birds](#), it was reported that, for species with sufficient data to monitor their status, 44 percent have decreased, 33 percent have increased, and 23 percent have shown little overall change. Some groups, such as aerial insectivores, shorebirds, and grassland birds, are demonstrating major declines. Other groups such as waterfowl, raptors, and colonial seabirds are increasing, due to careful management, changes in habitat, and reductions in environmental contaminants. Many of those declining species such as Olive-sided Flycatcher, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, and Rusty Blackbird have become priority conservation species, and their sightings are considered notable in Pennsylvania and in other migratory stop-over states. Even fairly common species like Canada Warbler and Northern Waterthrush are demonstrating negative declines.

This migration funnel phenomenon is described well in a chapter written by Adrienne J. Leppold and Bob

Mulvihill, *The Boreal Landbird Component of Migrant Bird Communities in Eastern North America*, in [Boreal Birds of North America: A Hemispheric View of Their Conservation Links and Significance](#), edited by Jeffrey V. Wells. An example of the indirect migration route was provided in "Not as the crow flies: a historical explanation for circuitous migration in Swainson's thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*)" by Krista C. Ruegg and Thomas B. Smith. *Proceedings of the Royal Society* Volume 269: 1375-1381.

For more information about birds of the boreal forests, especially the songbirds, visit the [Boreal Songbird Initiative](#).

Good birding!

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## Red Crossbill Irruption in 2012

by Matt Young and Doug Gross

Some Pennsylvania birders have been experiencing crossbills in odd places lately. Since mid-August there's been a significant easterly movement of Red Crossbills into the Great Lakes and Northeast including Pennsylvania. This crossbill irruption is a reaction to cone crop failures and gives many birders an opportunity to encounter crossbills in new areas. For the sake of crossbill research, recordings for this species are sorely needed across much of its range. Additionally, it would be great to get data about this phenomenon in eBird, so it can be tracked by birders and researchers alike! If recordings are obtained, data can actually be logged in eBird by call type (see below for directions). Recordings obtained so far (North Dakota, Wisconsin, Minnesota, New York City, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Quebec) have all involved the Type 3 Red Crossbill. One state sighting by Holly Merker was identified by Matt Young of Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology as a Type 3. The core of this small-billed crossbill is in the Pacific Northwest where it is efficient at feeding on western hemlock. Failure in the western hemlock cone crop triggered an exodus from the Northwest. There have also been some sightings of Red Crossbills at Hawk Mountain and other locations in recent weeks.

The Red Crossbill complex is made up of ten different

North American call types which function as biological species (Groth 1993, Benkman et al. 2009, Irwin 2010). Ongoing research may prove that some of these call types are separate species. Getting audio recordings is essential to solving the crossbill puzzle. These many types are very similar in appearance, a so-called "cryptic species," but can be separated by call type. When anyone obtains a crossbill recording, an audiospectrographic analysis can be run to get a signature of the bird's voice, which then can be used to identify the individual (or flock) to call type. This can be done by some individuals, but we advise getting these done by Matt Young who is very experienced with crossbill sounds. These recordings will help us to better understand their ecology and distribution. Birds can be recorded by video camcorders with audio, expensive recording equipment, and even most cell phones. Spectrograms can usually be made even from low quality cell phone recordings. In the past year Young was able to easily identify a Type 1 in Tennessee that was recorded via cell phone. Past methods of taping sounds and sending recordings by mail also have worked, but current technology makes the process even easier.

The Red Crossbills that are most common in Pennsylvania are Types 1, 2, 3, and 10 (Young 2011b). Type 1, largely an Appalachian bird (Young et al. 2011a), is the call-type

that is most typical in Pennsylvania in most years and is the most likely to nest in the state. Types 3 and 10 are smallish-billed with Type 3 having the smallest bills in North America and Type 10 being the next smallest-billed. These two types are most common in coastal areas of the Pacific Northwest, with Type 3 most associated with western hemlock and Type 10 most associated with Sitka spruce. Type 3, and Type 10 to a lesser extent, are highly irruptive in the Northeast and often forage on spruce and eastern hemlock.

Crossbill dietary overlap can be great in the East, especially when very hungry irruptive birds appear. It is not uncommon to find all call-types in spruce, occasionally white pine, or even other conifers. They also will take advantage of ornamental conifer plantings and occasionally will visit bird feeders or snack on aspen and birch catkins. In the finch super flight of 1997-98, many crossbills were noted in Pennsylvania, particularly at Cook Forest State Park. They took advantage of other large, mature hemlocks that produced an abundance of seeds available at old growth hemlock groves. Paul Hess and others (1998) summarized the call types involved in that irruption, most of which were Type 10 (identified as Type 4 at the time); but in recent years Type 10 was split from Type 4 (Irwin 2010) with several Type 3 involved as well. Many of the birds in that irruption were noted to be feeding on eastern hemlock.

Type 1 Red Crossbills have attempted to nest near Lopez, close to the Sullivan and Wyoming County line on Dutch Mountain. These crossbills originally appeared in August 1992 and ate a succession of different conifer seeds ranging from white and red spruce to hemlock and the much larger eastern white pines. They were singing and displaying from phone lines and the tops of trees. Some crossbills were killed by vehicles that winter while they were feeding on road salt. The Dutch Mountain nesting attempt was interrupted by the “blizzard of the century” in March 1993, but it could happen again with the right conditions of conifer cone availability.

Conifer species to watch in Pennsylvania during the coming months are: red and Norway spruce, eastern white pine, eastern hemlock, and various hard-coned pines like pitch, red, and Virginia. The hard-coned pines and Norway spruce should particularly be watched as we get into the heart of the winter and early spring – these species hold their seeds longer. However, much of what crossbills use will be determined by where the cone crops have formed and where the cones have retained their seed. With the drought conditions plaguing much of the East, it would be great to hear which tree species formed cone crops in Pennsylvania this year. From reports, white pine sounds like it’s good in parts of the East. Is this true for Pennsylvania as well?

Birders who obtain any recordings of Red Crossbills should contact Matt Young directly at [may6@cornell.edu](mailto:may6@cornell.edu). Doug Gross of PGC also would like to hear of any Red Crossbill reports, especially if breeding behavior is involved. It is imperative that birders help document the irruption, with or without recordings, by entering their crossbill observations into eBird. Anyone who has confirmation to call type can enter the call type by clicking “add a species,” type “Red Crossbill” and you’ll see a list of the possible types from which you can select.

Matt Young promises to have a guide to Red Crossbill types coming out on eBird very soon. You may check out a former eBird story about some of the crossbill types: <http://ebird.org/content/ebird/news/introduction-to%20crossbill-vocalizations>. For a summary of information about Red Crossbill call types, please also see <http://research.amnh.org/vz/ornithology/crossbills/diagnosis.html>. Also look here for differences in some of the types: <http://madriverbio.com/wildlife/redcrossbill/>.

Thanks in advance and enjoy your crossbills!

Our thanks for most of this text to Matt Young, Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

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# A Golden Fall: A Primer to Golden Eagle Watching in PA

by Mike Lanzone

In the fall Pennsylvania has some of the best hawk-watching in the eastern United States. Our state also boasts the best Golden Eagle watching in the East and records more Golden Eagles migrating by hawk-watches each fall than any other state or province east of the Rockies. The unique combination of its position between summering and wintering grounds and the funneling effect of the Appalachians, especially in the Ridge and Valley physiographic provinces, are two driving factors helping to make it a great place to see migrating Golden Eagles. Pennsylvania watch sites also play a very important role in the conservation of the eastern population. Hawk-watches provide a mechanism to track the population of this and other geographically remote breeders.



Golden Eagles migrate into and through Pennsylvania from about the middle of September through December. Although some isolated individuals may move as early as mid-August and as late as January, large numbers of eagles are not recorded until the middle of October. Statewide, peak movement usually occurs from the last few days of October through the first week of November. Geographic variation in peak flights follows an east to west gradient. In eastern Pennsylvania, Hawk Mountain's peak is usually the last several days of October to mid November, whereas at the Allegheny Front, in the western part of the state, counts peak from early to late November.

So, when are the best days to visit a hawk-watch? Sometimes that can be the million dollar question! With most sites, it's a little luck and a lot of planning and scrutinizing weather forecasts. Even with perfect weather conditions, the birds don't always cooperate! But for the best chances of success a little planning can go a long way. The first step is to figure out which site(s) you want to visit. The number of birds seen can vary with wind conditions and is site specific. Visiting during the best wind(s) for a site makes a big difference in whether or not you see a few or a lot of birds. Short of asking a veteran watcher, you can make an educated guess by looking at the ridge orientation of the hawk-watch.

Most ridges in Pennsylvania run generally northeast to southwest; when winds are perpendicular to the ridge and

blowing toward the same side of the ridge on which the watch is located, the greatest lift is produced as the wind is deflected upward. In contrast, lee winds form eddies on the opposite side of the ridge which create unstable conditions for migration along the leeward side. At most sites in PA, winds from the northwest usually produce the best migratory conditions and generate the highest numbers of birds because they are not only perpendicular to our ridges but also work as a tail wind.

During fall, winds with a southerly component (S to SE) are worse for migration but some-times allow the best looks as birds tend to fly

lower, hugging the ridges. Obviously, this is a general guide, and local site conditions may vary. In addition, the best Golden Eagle watching occurs just after a major cold front as high pressure moves in. Strong northwesterly winds usually predominate after fronts, and you can almost be assured of seeing goldens. Not all sites follow this convention though; notably the Allegheny Front in western PA gets its biggest flights on easterly winds because the escarpment faces east. On the "big" days there, eagles fly low and close to the watch.

A great starting point to read about hawk-watches in PA is on [www.Hawkcount.org](http://www.Hawkcount.org), run by the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA). There are clickable overview maps of all the sites in North America, and you can zoom in on PA. Once you locate a hawk-watch that you want to visit, you can go to its page to read about it. In particular you can get driving directions, see graphs on migration timing, and look at the current counts. The main page will usually list the best winds for that site which can be a huge help for beginners. If you live near a ridge that does not have a hawk-watch, don't let that deter you. Some very good sites are not manned hawk-watches, most notably Bald Eagle Ridge near State College. It is one of the top places to watch eagles in fall. If you watch at a new site, make sure you tally what you see and submit it to eBird!

I hope this article inspires you to get out and watch some eagles this fall, but I must warn you, it is addicting and you might find yourself yearning to go back for more!

## PSO Newsletter

This newsletter is published four times a year by the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology. To renew your membership, either renew on line at [pabirds.org](http://pabirds.org) or send your check made payable to "PSO" to:

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A drought in the Midwest caused many Dickcissels, like this one at West Lebanon, Indiana County, to fly to Pennsylvania to nest. Read more about it on page 6.

Photo by Marcy Cunkelman



Since mid-August there's been a significant easterly movement of Red Crossbills into the Great Lakes region and the Northeast. Read more about this influx on pages 8-9.

Photo by Karl Egressy

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