

The

PSO Pileated



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The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

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From the President's Desk....

“We are here for you!” How many times have you heard that sentence?

We, the PSO board of directors, have heard what members have said, and we are doing our best to respond. Many students commented that they could not afford to become members of PSO. We looked at several options and decided to lower the cost for student members to \$10 a year. Students will receive their subscriptions on line. We can not lower it any further and still provide quality services to students. If you know a student who birds, bird watches, or is into nature, let him or her know about our drop in student membership fees. You might even want purchase a membership for a student for Christmas! This is an excellent example of an affordable gift.

We listened to members who wanted more opportunities birding in the field. PSO has offered a variety of field trips this past year – free of charge – in state, out of state, and even out of country! Numerous birders have attended these trips – both members and non-members. What a great way to share the love of birding and ornithological knowledge and deepen friendships! Chad Kauffman, the outings committee, and the many trip leaders have done a wonderful job. Thank you!

Years ago before my tenure on the board, we listened to members who were tired of meeting in dorms for the



PSO offered a wide variety of field trips this year, including this hawkwatch outing to Blair County on November 3.

Photo by Chad Kauffman

annual meeting. We moved the meeting places to facilities off campuses and tried to keep the rates down at hotels and minimize meeting costs. In some ways this was positive, but it also cut down on members' mingling and making friendships and connections. We managed to

keep the rates down giving members a better experience without having to share a common bathroom.

This year, with this economy, we opted for a little of both. We are able to have a meeting in a wonderful location on a college campus – the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford – and maintain privacy as well as economic benefits for our members. Let me explain a little further...

The last few meetings when I stayed in hotels, my rates averaged \$89 a night, but after taxes, I paid more than \$100 a night. I spent more than \$200 just for my room! This year we have better options that include three choices for members. UPB doesn't have dorm rooms for us; they have suites. Each suite has a private bath, a kitchenette/kitchen, and a lounge/living room, as well as private bedrooms. Two-person, four-person, and six-person suites are available. Respective costs including taxes are \$114, \$137, and \$195 per night.

The two-person suite has a bedroom with either a king or two twin beds. The four-person suite, has two double bedrooms; the six-person suite, three double bedrooms.

Of course, you may have different combinations of couples and single roommates. Depending on which suite

and roommates you choose, your rate can be less than \$33 per night! How is that for helping to keep your money in your wallet?

We also listened to members who said they would prefer that the meeting not be held during prime migration in the state. We moved the date to June last year and the meeting was well attended. We have kept the date in June for 2014, and I hope our membership will respond with a great attendance!

Remember, the Annual Meeting is for you. We have tried to move the meeting to various locations so members can meet and bird in different parts of the state. The meeting will be June 6–8, 2014, so please mark your calendar and plan to attend. The meeting will be held in a new location, Bradford, McKean County, located in the north-central part of the state. Bradford, the gateway to the Allegheny National Forest, has a lot to offer members. Bradford is known for many things, but three stand out:

1. It is the coldest part of the state. (We shouldn't have to worry in June, but bring a sweatshirt or jacket!)
2. ZIPPO Lighters (They are made in Bradford; would you like to have a PSO commemorative lighter? Let me know via email, and we will see what we can do.)

3. Nature. Bradford is near some of the largest blocks of contiguous forest in the state from the National Forest to State Game Lands and State Parks. It is also near to Kinzua Dam and the Allegheny Reservoir. Bradford boasts, deer, bobcats, bear, fisher and many other larger mammals as well as over 100 breeding bird species!



Mourning Warbler will be one of the target species for the 214 PSO meeting.

Photo by Scott Stoleson

McKean and Warren counties are home to breeding Merlins, Cerulean Warblers, Mourning Warblers, Swainson's Thrushes, Northern Saw-whet Owls, Winter Wrens, and many more species. The Allegheny National Forest has some of the highest populations of Black-burnian, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Magnolia, Canada, and Chestnut-sided Warblers in the state! The list goes on and on.

Allegheny National Forest still has lots of hemlocks without the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid! Don't miss the chance to see nature at its finest. Also, plan to stop at Kinzua Dam, Kinzua Bridge State Park, and Benezette before you leave after the PSO Annual Meeting. Make plans now to be in Bradford June 6–8, 2014! See you in Bradford!

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Birding Field Trips, Excursions, Surveys, Adventures and More

by Chad Kauffman & Committee

Below are the field trips we have planned. Please consider helping with any you can, suggest others, or even lead your own. We would be happy to discuss having joint outings with any birding group or club; it's all about having fun birding, getting people together for birding, going to new places, etc. Field trips may vary in length from single locations or partial day trips, full day trips to notable spots, and multi-day or out-of-state trips. Do you have a good place or places in your county that you enjoy? Others might enjoy them as well; contact us about scheduling a possible field trip.

December 14, 2013, through January 5, 2014, is this year's **Christmas Bird Count** season. If you aren't already helping with a count or thinking about doing another, please check pages 13-15 in this newsletter to

find a circle near you.

January 20 through February 11 are the dates available for the **Winter Raptor Survey**. For more information about

this survey, check out PSO's link at <http://www.pabirds.org/WRS.html>.

The 2014 **Great Backyard Bird Count** will take place Friday, February 14, through Monday, February 17. Please join us for the 17th annual count! The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are. See <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/whycount.html>.

March 1, 2014 – Berks county birding, led by Sarah Hungerford. Highlights include Blue Marsh, Lake Ontelaunee, and other hotspots in the area. Sarah is anxious to show off her county to us.

March 8, 2014 – Middle Creek Wildlife Refuge in Lancaster and Lebanon counties will be our destination. We hope to see huge flocks of Snow Geese and Tundra Swans as well as a few dozen other species of waterfowl. Other spots we may possibly bird that day are Memorial Lake and the Susquehanna River.

March 16, 2014 – Tussey Mountain Spring Hawkwatch near State College is one of the best areas in the eastern US to see and count migrating Golden Eagles. Last year's trip was scheduled on the right day, but most of us had already left and missed the final push of dozens of Golden Eagles. They start counting at Tussey Mountain at the end of February and continue for about two months. Bring out your winter coat and gloves and experience the northern push of raptors.

April 21-27, 2014 – Ideas are being developed for "Earth Friendly Birding Week," a Vern Gauthier production. Stay tuned for further details.

April 2014 – The last weekend of April we will host a trip to Derby Hill Hawkwatch in New York at the peak of the Broad-winged Hawk migration. We hope to see other raptors and include a trip to Montezuma NWR. Details will follow.

May 2-3, 2014 – Shavers Creek Birding Cup, a 24-hour birding fund-raiser with several categories. This is a lot of fun! For more information, check out their link <http://shaverscreek.org/public-programs-and-events/birding-cup/>.

May 10, 2014 – Our 23rd annual Pennsylvania Migration Count is an all day snapshot of birds that takes place in almost all 67 counties. We should be very proud of our participation. Our state is one of the few that still upholds this tradition that used to be known as the North

American Migration Count. For more information, check out PSO's site, <http://www.pabirds.org/PAMC/Index.html>

May 23-25, 2014 – The third weekend of May we are planning a trip to Erie County for a visit to Presque Isle for migrants. We also plan to bird the grasslands south-east of Erie for rare species including Upland Sandpiper, Clay-colored Sparrow, and Henslow's Sparrow.

June 6-8, 2014 – Our annual PSO meeting will be held at Bradford in McKean County. For more information, visit PSO's website at <http://www.pabirds.org/>.

June 13-14, 2014 – Mark your calendar! A Bioblitz is scheduled for Lackawanna State Park in northeastern PA. While this event will be open to everyone, with public field trips and other programs, we are looking for people with some expertise in identifying all forms of wildlife. These persons would spend at least part of one day wandering about the park looking for and identifying various species of plants, animals, mushrooms, etc. This event is now in the very beginning of the planning stages. If you would like to help or want additional information, contact David Trently at david@pibird.com.

Late June or July 2014 – PSO's Annual Summer Trip will be a Maine Birding Extravaganza. Join PSO for a five-day trip to Maine's northern coast, starting near Portland and ending near Cutler. We will bird various habitats, both inland and coastal. Several half- and full-day options for pelagic birding will also add potential species to our lists! Join us for the entire time or just a day or two. Details will be forthcoming. Target species include Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill, Common Murre, Arctic and Roseate Tern, Northern Fulmar, Great/South Polar Skua, Manx Shearwater, Red-billed Tropicbird, Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, Bicknell's Thrush, Spruce Grouse, and Yellow-bellied Flycatcher.

August 2014 – We hope to schedule a shorebird outing, possibly a weekend to bird Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, or Virginia.

September, October, and November 2014 – We plan to highlight hawkwatch trips to sites in Pennsylvania. Eventually every hawkwatch in the state will be visited by a PSO field trip.

October 11-12, 2014 – The Big Sit, a birding project of *Birdwatcher's Digest*, is a fun way to do a whole lot of nothing but birding. Check out their website at <http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/connect/bigisit/index.php>.

PSO Trip to Cape Cod Yields Jaegers, Seaducks, and Loons

by Frank Izaguirre

As dropping temperatures and seasonal changes brought about large movements of seaducks and other migrants along the New England coastline, heavy movements of birders accompanied them. A group of twelve Pennsylvania birders from across the state convened on Cape Cod for a weekend of seawatching, finding 82 species in total. The trip was led by Massachusetts native Vernon Gauthier and PSO Field Trip Committee Chair Chad Kauffman.

Vern's local experience was immediately on display as he picked out Parasitic Jaegers amid the masses of Common Terns and various gull species off Race Point, the very tip of the cape and a famously good seawatching site. The flocks of terns and gulls dove and dodged as three jaegers gave our group an excellent opportunity to study their textbook erratic flight

as they tried to get the other birds to give up their fish. In addition to the numerous Parasitic Jaegers that were seen on the trip, we also saw one Pomarine Jaeger and a possible Long-tailed Jaeger, though the identity of that bird could not be confirmed.

At Race Point, two somewhat obscured plovers resting on the beach provided momentary excitement as the idea circulated that they were American Golden-Plovers. Their dull fall plumage blended in remarkably well with the beach detritus littered around them. Eventually, with careful scrutiny and angling of spotting scopes, they were discovered to be Black-bellied Plovers, a species not encountered again on the trip.

Vern's skill again benefited the group as he noted a couple of Immature Black-legged Kittiwakes among the

offshore flocks, the characteristic black collar and "M" pattern on their wings and back standing out even from so far away. Part of the group split to move up the beach, finding multiple rafts of seaducks, including Common Eiders and all three scoters, with flyby flocks of all the same species adding to the impressive offshore numbers.



The PSO group pose in Provincetown before the whale watch trip. From left to right are Vern Gauthier, Sarah Maclellan, Jon Dale, Joan Renninger, Thyra Sperry, Annette Mathes, Sue Strassner, Kathy Kuchwara, Adrienne Rose Block and Frank Izaguirre. Missing from the photo are photographer Chad Kauffman and Dawn Osborne who was shopping in Cape Cod.

Adrienne Block and I caught up to this group a little later and admired the ducks as others headed back to the vehicles. Nearly just as they left, we were stunned to notice a male Common Loon bobbing not farther than twenty-five feet from us. We were close enough to stare into its blood red eye, which stared back into ours. The three of us stayed like that for a while.

The group stopped at various other sites,

including First Landing Park, Herring Cove Beach, Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge, and Cape Cod National Seashore. Shorebirds were remarkably absent during much of the trip, the only commonly encountered species being Greater Yellowlegs. Notable at Monomoy, three Sharp-shinned Hawks were observed migrating overhead just as the group was returning to the parking lot. A significant mammalian highlight was a group of more than a hundred gray seals, which have apparently had a recent population explosion along the cape. Individuals moving alone or in small groups were sighted throughout the trip at various sites. At the Cape Cod National Seashore, the group encountered the most passerines of the trip, including several Yellow-rumped Warblers and a Common Yellowthroat.

The trip climaxed with a whale-watching excursion into

Stellwagen Bank, where we got good looks at several Great Shearwaters, Bonaparte's Gulls, more Parasitic Jaegers, and for some, Manx Shearwaters. Chad Kauffman spotted a Razorbill, adding to the trip list total. Seaducks were also plentiful on the ride out to sea. A single humpback whale was also found, and everyone was able to see it well. The naturalist on board, although obliged to cater to the many non-PSO passengers, was kind to our group and helped as much as he could, pointing out birds to everyone. As we returned to shore, he explained that soon many people on the cape would leave as the weather turned even colder.

That was an interesting subplot of the weekend: many of the businesses frequented by the group, such as the hotel and various restaurants, were about to close for the season. Cape Cod was emptying. One can't help wonder how such a beautiful place can experience such a drop in tourist numbers just as so many interesting birds are passing through. Perhaps too few people who visit stop to admire the squadrons of seaducks distantly streaming past the shoreline, only to find themselves transfixed by an unmistakable red glare.

PSO Field Trip to Second Mountain at Fort Indiantown Gap.

by Chad Kauffman

On October 6, Alex Lamoreaux and I ventured from central PA heading east to pick up Ian Gardner. We then met with David McNaughton for some early birding before the official field trip started at 10 a.m. at Fort Indiantown Gap and Second Mountain Hawkwatch in Lebanon County. We started at the middle boat launch and found a few small flocks of warblers. Next we headed to Marquette Lake where Mallards, an early Ring-necked Duck, and two American Wigeons were present. From there, we drove to Swatara State Park which yielded more small flocks of migrants. While walking over some dried up vernal ponds, we flipped over a rock and found a small young female Black Widow. This early birding

turned out to be the best birding of the day since the fog didn't lift at the hawkwatch until after lunchtime. It was a very slow day at the watch with fewer than two dozen raptors counted. Approximately 24 persons came for actual hawkwatching. The weather was beautiful, but the winds didn't really pick up as we had hoped until we were ready to leave. The raptor highlights included Sharp-shinned Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, and Red-tails. We also caught a brief glimpse of an adult Bald Eagle that flushed all of the vultures. Planning a hawkwatch trip in the distant future always risks weather and winds; sometimes we get lucky while other times we just enjoy a nice social.

PSO Bird Quiz

How well do you know your Pennsylvania birds?

1. Which small white-spectacled vireo, yellowish below, should you rush to photograph if you see it in Pennsylvania?
2. A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in Philadelphia delighted birders this fall. Where and when was Pennsylvania's first to be confirmed by a specimen?
3. No peeking: On which covert is a House Sparrow's white wingbar: lesser, median, or greater?
4. Which three warblers are commonly known as the "spruce budworm specialists"?
5. Pennsylvania's last confirmed nesting of this sparrow was in Washington County in 1937. Which species?

(Answers on page 10.)



PSO Field Trip to the Allegheny Front

by Chad Kauffman

I was eagerly awaiting our Sunday, November 3, field trip to the Front, hoping to see a few Golden Eagles. I made plans to stay at the Whitetail Wetlands, a bed and breakfast, the night before, so I enjoyed birding with a few friends there on Saturday evening and the following morning before the field trip. Mike Lanzone & Trish Miller provided dinner for us at the home of Andy McGann. The weather canceled our plans for owling and banding that night.



We had nice looks at this Red-shouldered Hawk.

Photo by Alex Lamoreaux

Sunday turned out to be nice, but the winds were out of the west, not an ideal situation for the Allegheny Front.

Nevertheless, we all had a good day as some of us had never before been to these locations, and it was a beautiful day to be out and about birding.

We had nice looks at Red-shouldered Hawks and Red-tailed Hawks. After remaining there until almost noon, we decided to go across the valley to Dunnings Mountain, which afforded us more raptors and better views. We saw only one Golden Eagle, but we spotted several other species and enjoyed a new Blair County spot for hawkwatching. We picked the wrong day for the field trip as high counts of Golden Eagles occurred the next several days at the Front.

Nevertheless, we all had a good

PSO's Annual Meeting 2014

In 2014 PSO will hold its annual meeting June 6-8 in Bradford, McKean County, PA, deep in the heart of the PA Wilds. The recently-published *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Pennsylvania* revealed McKean County to be a hotspot for the Commonwealth's forest interior birds. Surrounded by over a million acres of federal, state, and private forest lands, Bradford will serve as an ideal base from which to explore some of the wildest – and birdiest – places in the state.

Field trips will highlight some of our north-country specialties, including breeding Northern Saw-whet Owl, Winter Wren, Brown Creeper, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Swainson's Thrush, Least Flycatcher, Northern Water-thrush, White-throated Sparrow, as well as Mourning, Yellow-rumped, Blackburnian, Black-throated Blue, and Canada Warblers. More than 15 additional warbler species breed here, including Cerulean, Pine, and Hooded. Both Merlin and Northern Goshawk are possible, as they both nest locally. We'll also visit local wetlands to find Virginia Rail, Sora, Hooded

Merganser, Alder Flycatcher, Osprey and Bald Eagle.

Late migrants such as Blackpoll Warblers, Olive-sided Flycatchers, or shorebirds are possibilities, too.

Our venue for the meeting and banquet will be the beautiful University of Pittsburgh-Bradford campus, nestled in the hills just west of town. For non-birding spouses, local attractions include the Zippo Lighter Museum, the World War II Museum in Eldred, the Kinzua Dam, and the Kinzua Bridge Skyway in

Kinzua Bridge State Park. Seneca Allegheny Casino is also located in nearby Salamanca, NY. There are unlimited opportunities for hiking, fishing, kayaking, photography, and canoeing.

Depending on the direction you arrive from, you can bird Presque Isle, see the elk at Benezette, or take in the scenery at the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon. Plan on an enjoyable weekend in the Northern Tier June 6-8!



Merlins nest locally, so it is a possibility.

Photo by Scott Stoleson

The Raven Reporter

Tales of
Discovery about
Pennsylvania
Birds

Rusty Blackbird Spring Bioblitz Being Planned



There is growing concern for the Rusty Blackbird, perhaps the North American songbird experiencing the most dramatic decline in the last several decades. One of the challenges with this species is that it nests in the remote boreal conifer forests and spends the winter in fairly inaccessible wetlands and wet woods of the South. In between, they migrate through states like Pennsylvania where many people either ignore them or mistake them for grackles or Red-winged Blackbirds. A drab Icterid is easy to ignore, But, Rusty Blackbirds are not birds of the suburbs or agricultural habitats but prefer wet areas instead.

Although the decline of Rusty Blackbirds is one of the most dramatic of any bird species of the continent, it is poorly understood. Since its breeding and wintering grounds are so inaccessible, there is really no regular and reliable monitoring program for this species. The road-based Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) barely touches its breeding ground which lies primarily in roadless areas of the vast north. The limited BBS data indicate a population trend that averages a decline of more than ten percent per year for the last 30 years.

There is a lot of information about Rusty Blackbirds including research conducted on its winter and nesting grounds at the Smithsonian migratory bird website: http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/research/rusty_blackbird/twg.cfm. Thanks to the research efforts of the International Rusty Blackbird Working Group and its members and the volunteers who have participated in projects like the Winter Blitz. Many records have been entered into eBird for Pennsylvania, but our state is certainly not one of the major wintering areas for the “boreal oriole.” Yet, when the weather gets warmer in late February and early March, many Rusties move northward quickly into PA, including the northern counties.

We will be taking the next steps toward a better understanding of the migration ecology of Rusty Blackbirds and how each state plays a role as stopover and fueling habitat for this species. Pennsylvania has many miles of streams with forest margins, some fairly good sized wetlands, and many wet woods where Rusties can stop on their way north. We suspect that Pennsylvania may be an important place for Rusties because it lies between the expansive northern nesting ground and the wintering ground in the southeastern states. The shape of North America and the Great Lakes migration barrier funnel northern birds through the Mid-Atlantic states with Pennsylvania having a big piece of the action. That many of our larger streams flow in a north to south direction may act as corridors for Rusties to move through the state while easily visiting foraging areas close to roosting sites.

There already are many eBird records for Rusty Blackbirds, but there are few records for many of the counties with overall few eBird records. This is especially true in the northern counties which certainly have a lot of appropriate habitat. Birders should take the challenge to visit out-of-the way places and new spots to discover Rusty hotspots. A new Blitz website is now being constructed with data sheets and instructions for participation. The main avenue for contributing data remains through eBird. Please use the Pennsylvania portal which will have more information about the Spring Blitz as it develops and approaches the migration period. The biggest rush of Rusty Blackbird migration passes through Pennsylvania from mid-March through mid-April, but some are observed in the two weeks before and after that period; some are found in early May in our northern counties.

Rusty Blackbird records submitted to eBird can be more valuable with a few tweaks. First, the basic count of the birds is very valuable – numbers, even estimated, are much better than an “X.” This basic quantitative information helps us to better understand the importance of each location. Rusties often forage and roost in different locations. They forage in shallow waters in which they can easily wade turning over leaves for arthropods and other food items. But, they generally roost in taller trees often quite a distance away. So, simply noting their behavior as foraging or roosting in the Notes section helps us understand how they use that location. More information will be available when the Rusty Blackbird Spring Blitz announcements are made later.

There are many possible causes, probably multiple factors, for the Rusty Blackbird decline, including the reduction of nesting and wintering habitat. A particularly strong conversion of bottomland forest to agriculture has

occurred in the Mississippi Valley where many Rusties spend the winter. At least 80% of this habitat has been lost to agriculture since European colonization. This conversion started early and emphatically in the East, including Pennsylvania, when the new colonists settled the river valleys quickly. The emphasis on mill power in early America certainly contributed to the loss of bottomland forest habitat for Rusties as well as the many birds that nest in that valuable habitat.

The effects of this habitat conversion were probably profound, but their effects on birds are undocumented. It probably had immediate negative effects on many riverine species from Bald Eagles to flycatchers. The long-term and more recent conversion of wooded wetlands to agriculture has been well documented. At least 80 percent of the bottomland hardwood habitat has been converted since European colonization. Whether the rate of habitat conversion in the past 30 years is sufficient to account for the recent declines in Rusty Blackbirds is unclear. Other possible causes include acid precipitation deposition, the accumulation of mercury and other toxic pollutants, diseases, past blackbird depredation, and climate changes to the nesting ground quality. Migration habitat may be one of the limiting factors that we can learn more about by simply birding and recording our results. We can at least learn what areas are most important to the migrating Rusty Blackbirds. The wet woods and wetlands can be great spots for many bird species besides this one making any visit even more worthwhile.

Thanks for the Photos on PA eBird!

I would like to thank those who have posted photos on the Pennsylvania eBird website pages. These images are valuable documentation of rare birds. They really lend credence to reports of rare and sometimes difficult to identify species. Many of these photos also are great lessons and reminders of what some species look like. Hummingbirds, sparrows, and sandpipers are particularly tricky challenges, so it is appropriate to remind ourselves of how each species appears. But, more than documentation, these photos are a shared story to enjoy.

The PA eBird portal photos link to a Flickr page that stores many images of Pennsylvania birds. Check out these photos and add your own!



Rusty Blackbirds are not birds of suburbs or agricultural habitats but prefer wet areas instead.

Photo by Matt Stratmoen.

The fall and winter hummingbird story is amazing. Recent sightings of Black-chinned and Rufous Humming-birds and the spectacularly rare Bahama Woodstar were documented by eBird photos. Clay-colored Sparrows can be confused with other species, especially Chipping and Field Sparrows, so those recent images help to clarify any doubts about such claims.

I particularly like to thank Nick Pulcinella for several excellent photos that have documented the magnificent Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at the Bartram Gardens of Philadelphia. Nick has consistently shared his excellent finds and images at the PA eBird website.

We encourage more PA birders to post their photos on PA eBird. Please share your riches with others for all to enjoy. This is a special feature of the PA eBird portal that makes it YOUR link to Pennsylvania birding news and information.

More Upcoming Bird Projects

The PGC and its partners are anticipating several bird monitoring projects in 2013. I already have mentioned the Rusty Blackbird Spring Blitz. We are also planning a statewide wetland bird survey in the spring and summer. The agency will conduct some concentrated surveys of our most important wetlands, but we also will appreciate learning of other wetland bird populations. Some wetlands that are not well-known support populations of endangered, threatened, or species of special concern. As the 2013 meeting's field trips showed, if birders look in the right places they can find American Bitterns and Northern Harriers on territory in new places.

We also anticipate the delisting of Bald Eagle as a PA-Threatened species. This does not mean that the agency will abandon eagle nest monitoring. However, with more than 270 nesting pairs in the state, there is a need for more volunteer monitoring of nests. So, information about new nests and the results of nesting attempts will be very much appreciated – and needed to keep the pulse of eagle population health.

The state's Osprey population continues to grow with many pairs nesting at human-made structures near

reservoirs. Their nests can be relatively easy to see and monitor. News of nests is welcome.

As always, we will monitor colonial waterbirds, especially the night-herons and egrets (all endangered in the state). Both night-herons can colonize new locations and remain undetected because of their nocturnal and crepuscular behavior. Yellow-crowned Night-Herons can nest right behind people's homes, but we may not know about these nests unless the folks are birders or conservationists involved with an organization that cooperates with our programs.

With an increase in energy development in the mountains, it is increasingly important to collect data in the most remote and under-surveyed parts of the state – our mountain forests. We encourage birders to adopt state forests, state parks, and game lands in the mountains as

their own “hot spots” to visit and report to eBird. We endorse the approach of making local hot spots along a road or an easy to translate location within any particular management area (state forest, game lands, etc.). It would be great to see birder blitzes into our larger forest blocks to document the richness of Pennsylvania's avifauna. Adopt a forest today!

Good Birding!

Doug

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Recent Changes to Avian Taxonomy That Might Affect Your Bird List

by Scott Stoleson

Well, they've been at it again. Who? Specifically, the North American Classification Committee of the American Ornithologists Union (AOU-NACC), the group that functions as the official arbiters of taxonomy for the birds of North America. In the past six years they have made a number of changes that may affect how many birds you have seen. Fortunately for listers, most recent changes involve splits into new species, and most involve species that don't occur regularly in Pennsylvania. The majority of these recent decisions have resulted from advances in DNA analysis, although increasingly other traits, such as morphology or behavior, are being used to corroborate DNA results. The Committee also has made a multitude of changes to genus and family assignments that don't affect actual species status – I'll ignore most of those here. As just one example, everyone's favorite warbler genus, *Dendroica*, has been eliminated, lumped in with the American Redstart into *Setophaga*. As a response, at a recent ornithological conference in Vancouver, a wake was held for the genus *Dendroica*, where attendees dressed in the colors of their favorite species!

What follows are recent changes that affect species' status of birds within the U.S. (with my personal commentary).

For more info, to see recent changes to species found south of the border, or just to keep up with the ever-changing taxonomy of birds, visit the AOU- CCN's website: <http://www.aou.org/checklist/north/print.php>

The Blue Grouse is no more. Now those birds found in the interior mountain west are considered **Dusky Grouse** (*Dendragapus obscurus*), while those of the Pacific coastal ranges and the Sierra Nevada are called **Sooty Grouse** (*Dendragapus fuliginosus*).

The **Common Moorhen** is now considered strictly an Old World species. Ours has been split off as *Gallinula galeata*, the **Common Gallinule** – exactly what it was called 30 years ago! I refused to call them “moorhens” anyway.

Our **Black Scoter** keeps that name but with a new scientific name (*Melanitta americana*), separated from the Old World's **Common Scoter** (*M. nigra*).

Similarly, the flamingos in Florida and southward are now recognized as the **American Flamingo** (*Phoenicopterus ruber*), separate from the Old World's **Greater Flamingo** (*Phoenicopterus roseus*).

Not sure which species the plastic ones found on lawns belong to.

The Sage Sparrow has been split as well: into **Bell's Sparrow** (*Artemisiospiza belli*), of the west coast and **Sagebrush Sparrow** (*Artemisiospiza nevadensis*) found mostly in the Great Basin. The new genus name translates as “sagebrush sparrow,” appropriately enough.

Gray Hawks (*Buteo plagiatus*) of the American Southwest, south to northwestern Costa Rica, are now considered a distinct species from **Gray-lined Hawk** (*Buteo nitidus*) of South America north to eastern Costa Rica. Go to Costa Rica to see both!

Xantus' Murrelet has been split in two: **Scripps's Murrelet** (*Synthliboramphus scrippsi*) primarily breeding off of southern California and northern Baja, and **Guadalupe Murrelet** (*Synthliboramphus guadalupe*) mostly off of southern Baja. That leaves just a single North American bird starting with an “X,” I'm afraid (Xantus' Hummingbird of Baja) – bad news for alphabetical listers.

Whip-poor-wills in eastern North America are now considered **Eastern Whip-poor-wills** (*A. vociferous*), distinct from the form found in the Southwest and Mexico, **Mexican Whip-poor-will** (*A. arizonae*). Apparently genetic work has finally confirmed the differences birders have suspected for decades based on the distinct vocalizations of the two populations.

Our Winter Wren has been split from the Old World “Wren” (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) and from the form found on the Pacific coast of North America, Pacific Wren (*Troglodytes pacificus*). Its scientific name is now *Troglodytes hiemalis*, but it's still **Winter Wren** in English. Note that if you've ever seen “Winter Wrens” during winter in New Mexico, Arizona or

California, they were Pacific Wrens – or are now, anyway.

Higher Order Changes and Other Disconcerting Things

Falcons are no longer considered related to other diurnal raptors and are placed in their own order, Falconiformes, closely related to both parrots and songbirds (!). The remaining diurnal raptors are grouped in the new order Accipitriformes, which includes the Cathartidae (New World vultures), Accipitridae (hawks and eagles), and Pandionidae (Osprey). Note that vultures are no longer considered cousins of the storks but are back with their raptor buddies – at least for the time being.

The predatory skuas and jaegers have been separated from the gulls and terns (Laridae) into their own family, the Stercorariidae. Probably safer for the gulls and terns that way.

Longspurs and Snow Buntings have been found to be genetically distinct and not closely related to other sparrows, so now are placed in their own family, the Calcariidae, which should translate as “little pale seed-eaters of the blowing snow.”

The *Piranga* tanagers (Scarlet, Summer, Western, and Hepatic) are not even considered tanagers (family Thraupidae) anymore! They have been moved to the Cardinal, Grosbeak and Bunting family (Cardinalidae), but retain the name “tanager.” The AOU-NACC probably assumed (correctly) that no one would tolerate their changing the common names to “Scarlet Grosbeak” or “Summer Bunting.”

I wouldn't get too attached to any of these species or other categorizations – they're likely to change yet again sometime soon.

Answers to Bird Quiz

(page 5)

1. Bell's Vireo
2. Lancaster County in 1942
3. median
4. Tennessee, Cape May, and Bay-breasted
5. Bachman's Sparrow

First Fall Sandhill Crane Survey – USFWS Cooperative Effort

For the first time, Pennsylvania participated in a fall Sandhill Crane survey which I coordinated in our state. It was organized hurriedly and had limited participation. Sandhill Cranes have been expanding eastward into the Mid-Atlantic states including Pennsylvania. The Atlas results inform us of their breeding distribution, but we lack a good picture of how Sandhill Cranes migrate through the state. Please see the PA eBird story about the survey for more information.

Thanks to those who participated in the first PA Sandhill Crane Fall Survey effort. Between October 27 and November 2, twenty-seven observers (PGC personnel and citizen observers) spent 66.75 hours surveying known staging areas, locations with recent crane sightings, and areas of suitable crane habitat. Survey effort occurred in 22 counties, and cranes were observed in 5 counties (Bradford, Sullivan, Lawrence, Crawford, and Lackawanna).

A total of 98 cranes were spotted during this survey: 79 adults; 11 juveniles; 8 of unknown age. Observations of known age birds reflect an age ratio of 0.14 juveniles per adult. Total survey effort (including surveys with no cranes as well as replicate observations) resulted in an overall observation rate of 1.92 cranes per hour. The 2013 survey year has provided important baseline information for tracking changes in staging populations of Sandhill Cranes over time.

We appreciate the participation of all involved!

– Lisa M. Williams
Wildlife Biologist
PA Game Commission
137 Woodward Lane
Spring Mills PA 16875



Lisa Williams coordinated the first Sandhill Crane survey in PA.

Photo by Steve Gosser

Ornithological Literature Notes

Nick Bolgiano, one of Pennsylvania's foremost analysts of avian trends and other phenomena, has found a fascinating contrast in eastern Red-tailed Hawks' distribution during the past four decades. In different regions, numbers have been declining at many eastern hawkwatches, while increasing on Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) and North American Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS).

He wondered what might account for those opposite trends, and he sought an answer by studying geographic patterns in breeding, wintering, and migration data since the 1970s at locations east of the Mississippi River. Nick suggests a possible reason in a 2013 paper titled "Evidence for changed migration of Red-tailed Hawks in eastern North America" (*Hawk Migration Studies* 38:16–24).

The patterns are consistent with two behaviors. More and more Red-tails may be staying on their northern breeding grounds for the winter, and/or more and more may be "short-stopping" during migration—that is, migrating shorter distances south than in the past.

Nick's migration data came from 35 fall sites and 14 spring sites located in the eastern and central flyways. Fall sites in Pennsylvania were at Allegheny Front, Bake Oven Knob, Hawk Mountain, Jacks Mountain, Little Gap, Militia Hill, Rose Tree Park, Second Mountain, Stone Mountain, Tuscarora Summit, and Waggoner's Gap. Spring sites were at Allegheny Front, Presque Isle, and Tussey Mountain.

Band encounters—5,426 in all—were studied at clusters of sites including one cluster along the Kittatinny Ridge in Pennsylvania. The purpose was to determine predominant migration corridors in the eastern and central flyways. In addition, Nick examined statewide and province-wide CBC trends from 1970 to 2011, as well as Breeding Bird

Survey data from most eastern states and provinces in the 1966–2010 period.

From that immense combination of databases, he suggests that Red-tailed Hawks' migration strategies have changed, at least since the mid-1990s. He emphasizes, however, that we don't know what is happening to boreal populations of Red-tailed Hawks and how they contribute to migration counts.

Nevertheless, Nick's graphic illustrations always add substance to his articles in *Pennsylvania Birds* and other journals—and that is the case here. For example, one graph depicting the following trends shows distinct patterns in CBC counts of Red-tailed Hawks since 1970.

Trends in relatively northern CBC counts (Ontario, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey) show a conspicuous average linear uptrend in Red-tailed numbers. In contrast, Red-tailed counts in relatively southern CBC regions (Kentucky, Tennessee, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, Mississippi, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia) show a conspicuous uptrend until roughly 1990 and, since then, a leveling-off or a decline.

That example illustrates only one aspect of Nick's detailed findings, but it points to a plausible indication that Red-tails increasingly tend to remain farther north for the winter. A warming climate providing more winter food? Some other factor or factors? We don't know, but recognizing the pattern is at least the first step toward knowledge.

Paul Hess
Natrona Heights, PA
phess@salsgiver.com

"The Hummers Keep Coming"

As of November 25, the total count of fall hummingbirds, mostly Rufous, in PA had reached 28. According to Scott Weidensaul, this is "behind last year's record pace but above average."

A Black-chinned Hummingbird, a second state record, visited Dale Gearhart's feeders in Franklin County from

early November through November 25. Sandy Lockerman had the privilege of banding this rarity on November 13.

Special thanks to Dale and all the other hummingbird hosts who welcomed birders to their yards!

Christmas Bird Counts Held in Pennsylvania

	Name of Count	County	Compiler	Phone Number	E-mail Address	Date
1	Audubon	Montgomery Delaware Chester	Vincent Smith	610-983-8539 484-410-1157	Nyctea34@aol.com	12/21/13
2	Bald Eagle	Centre	Bob Snyder	814-863-6168	rhs2@psu.edu	12/29/13
3	Beaver	Beaver	Rick Mason	724-847-0909	richarddmason@gmail.com	12/21/13
4	Bedford	Bedford	Laura & Mike Jackson	814-652-9268	mljackson2@embarqmail.com	12/28/13
5	Benezette	Clearfield, Elk	Mark Johnson	814-546-2886	kathyandmarkj@yahoo.com	12/29/13
6	Bernville	Berks	Ed Barrell	610-926-2962	ebarrell@epix.net	12/28/13
7	Bethlehem-Easton	Northampton	Elaine & Donald Mease	610-346-7754	measede@enter.net	12/28/13
8	Bloomsburg	Columbia	Cathy Haffner	570-275-3934	cdhaffner@yahoo.com	12/15/13
9	Buffalo Creek	Washington	Larry Helgerman	412-508-0321	bobolink1@earthlink.net	12/15/13
10	Buffalo Creek Valley	Butler Armstrong	George Reese	724-353-9649	g.reese@gaiconsultants.com	12/14/13
11	Bushy Run S.P.	Westmoreland	Dick Byers	724-593-3543	otusasio@lhtot.com	1/05/14
12	Butler	Butler Lawrence Mercer	Suzanne Butcher	330-759-1945 724-794-3534	sarbird@hotmail.com	12/21/13
13	Central Bucks	Bucks	Diane Allison	610-847-2085	dalliso@mail.ptd.net	12/29/13
14	Chambersburg	Franklin	Valerie Barnes	717-352-4397	vbarhen@pa.net	12/14/13
15	Clarion	Clarion	Gary Edwards Michael Leahy	814-671-1273 814-229-1648	gedwards@csonline.net leahym@windstream.net	12/28/13
16	Clarksville	Greene	Terry Dayton	724-627-9665	tdayton@windstream.net	12/28/13
17	Culp	Blair	Steve Bonta	814-684-1175	stevebonta@yahoo.com	12/21/13
18	Curtin	Dauphin	Scott Bills	717-896-8859	sbills@pa.gov	12/27/13
19	Dallas Area	Luzerne	Jim Hoyson	570-696-4925 570-371-6581 (w)	birdder@aol.com	12/14/13
20	Dingman's Ferry	Pike				
21	DuBois	Clearfield	Marianne Atkinson Jocelyn Smrekar		marianne5@windstream.net	12/14/13
22	Elverson	Chester	Robert Cook	610-286-9919	dunlin@dejazzd.com	12/22/13
23	Emporium	Cameron	Bob Martin	814-486-1990	bmartin@zitomedia.net	12/22/13
24	Erie	Erie	Michelle Franz		isomorphun@roadrunner.com	
25	Gettysburg	Adams	Mike O'Brien	717-642-6676	maddogobrien@gmail.com	12/14/13
26	Glenolden	Delaware	David Eberly	610-543-3499	david.eberly@gmail.com	12/15/13
27	Hamburg	Berks Schuylkill	Laurie Goodrich	610-756-6961 570-943-3411 x106	goodrich@hawkmtn.org	12/29/13

28	Harrisburg	Dauphin	Deuane Hoffman	717-564-7475	corvuscorax@comcast.net	12/14/13
29	Huntingdon	Huntingdon	Deb Grove	814-667-2305	dsg4@psu.edu	12/15/13
30	Indiana	Indiana	Roger & Margaret Higbee	724-354-3493	bcoriole@windstream.net	12/26/13
31	Johnstown	Cambria	Jeff Payne	814-279-8142	paynemt@gmail.com	12/15/13
32	Lake Raystown	Huntingdon Blair	Greg Grove	814-667-2305	gw2@psu.edu	12/22/13
33	Lancaster	Lancaster	Barbara Hunsberger Roger Stoner	717-393-4091	phunsberger@comcast.net	1/05/14
34	Lebanon	Lebanon, Dauphin	Fritz Heilman	717-273-0487	volks5@verizon.net	12/15/13
35	Lehigh Valley	Lehigh/Berks	Stephen Kloiber		skloiber@frontier.com	12/14/13
36	Lewisburg	Union, Snyder, Northumberland	Allen Schweinsberg	570-524-0432	aschwein@bucknell.edu	12/14/13
37	Lewistown	Juniata	Elmer Petersheim Chad Kauffman	717-535-5926 717-994-6715	chadkauffman@earthlink.net	12/21/13
38	Linesville	Crawford	Clare Nicolls	814-587-6395	tcnicolls@windstream.net	12/15/13
39	Lititz	Lancaster, Lebanon	Bruce Carl	717-368-4824	carls94@ptd.net	12/29/13
40	Lock Haven-Jersey Shore	Clinton Lycoming	Wayne Laubscher	570-748-7511	wlaubsch@kcnet.org	1/4/14
41	Mansfield-Wellsboro	Tioga	Gary Tyson	570-724-5789	gnats3@ptd.net	12/14/13
42	New Bloomfield	Perry	Ramsay Koury	717-761-1871	rkoury123@aol.com	12/21/13
43	Newville	Cumberland	Bill and Linda Franz	717-776-4463	wlf Franz1@yahoo.com	12/28/13
44	Northern Lycoming	Lycoming	Nate Fronk	570-916-1406	mnrf5017@psu.edu	12/28/13
45	Pennypack Valley	Philadelphia	Peter Kurtz	215-342-3638 215-685-0470	peter.kurtz@phila.gov	12/14/13
46	Philipsburg	Centre Clearfield	Greg Kojadinovich	814-237-5964		
47	Pittsburgh	Allegheny	Brian Shema	412-963-6100	bshema@aswp.org	12/28/13
48	Pittsburgh South Hills	Allegheny Washington	Nancy Page	412-221-4795		12/14/13
49	Pleasantville	Venango	Russ States	814-676-6320	pabirder@verizon.net	12/29/13
50	Pocono Mt.	Monroe	Brian Hardiman		bhmccd@ptd.net	12/15/13
51	Potter County	Potter	Dave Hauber	814-274-8946	haubers3@penn.com	12/15/13
52	Reading	Berks	Ken Lebo	610-856-1413	klebo@dejazzd.com	12/15/13
53	Rector	Westmoreland	Amy Tegeler	724-593-5521	Amy.Tegeler@gmail.com	1/4/14
54	Ryerson	Greene	Marjorie Howard	724-852-3155	birdwatcher108@comcast.net	12/21/13
55	Scranton	Lackawanna	Paul Mundy		Pmraptors@aol.com	

56	Southeastern Bradford	Bradford	Trudy Gerlach	570-746-9270	tgswoods@epix.net	12/28/13
57	Southern Bucks	Bucks	Robert Mercer	215-785-1177		
58	Southern Lancaster County	Lancaster	Bob Schutsky	717-548-3303 (10 a.m. to 9 p.m.)	info@birdtreks.com	12/15/13
59	State College	Centre	Jim Dunn Bob Fowles	814-863-8625 814-238-1990	jwd6@psu.edu rpf@psu.edu	12/15/13
60	Tamaqua	Schuylkill Carbon	Jonathan DeBalko		jonathan.debalko@wilkes.edu	12/27/13
59	Thompson	Susquehanna	Stuart Slocum			
61	Tunkhannock	Wyoming	Rick Koval	570-829-4381 570-696-1691 (w)	pocononaturalist@yahoo.com	12/15/13
62	Upper Bucks	Bucks Montgomery Lehigh	Bill Etter	215-964-3613	billetter01@gmail.com	12/15/13
63	Warren	Warren	Michael Toole	814-723-4714	m_t_toole@verizon.net	12/14/13
64	Washington	Washington	Tom Contreras	724-223-6118	tcontreras@washjeff.edu	12/14/13
65	West Chester	Chester	Barry Blust	610-458-5616	BarryBlust@comcast.net	12/14/13
66	Western Chester	Chester	Larry Lewis	484-340-7672	earlybirdtours@comcast.net	12/28/13
67	Western Schuylkill	Schuylkill	Dave Krueel	570-622-3704	dkrueel300@comcast.net	12/21/13
68	White Mills	Wayne	Barb Leo	570-253-2364	barbaraaleo@earthlink.net	12/15/13
69	Wild Creek– Little Gap	Carbon Monroe	Joshua Nemeth Dustin Welch	610-573-8577	allroy1313@rcn.com	12/15/13
70	Williamsport	Lycoming	Nate Fronk	570-916-1406	nrf5017@psu.edu	12/21/13
71	Wyncote	Montgomery	Andy Fayer		AndyFayer@aol.com	12/21/13
72	York	York	Bernie Frick	717-843-6675		
73	York Springs	Adams, Cumberland, York	Vern Gauthier	717-385-9526	pabirder@gmail.com	12/30/13

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Order soon and you'll have them for Christmas!

Quotes

Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, things aren't going to get better, they're not!

– Dr. Seuss in *The Lorax*, from the Onceler

Not all is doom and gloom. We are beginning to understand the natural world and are gaining a reverence for life – all life.

– Roger Tory Peterson

PSO Newsletter

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The Year of the Snowy Owl

Snowy Owl reports have been more numerous than usual so far this season. Birders have found them in Berks, Philadelphia, Lebanon, Lebanon, Center, Crawford, and Erie counties. At least two have been found in Center while Erie has hosted five different Snowies in a ten-mile stretch of lakefront from Walnut Creek to the tip of Presque Isle.



Steve Gosser photographed this Presque Isle Snowy on November 29.



Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

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