

April, 1990

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK...

Welcome to the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology! You are (or can be!) part of the first state-wide organization for amateur and professional "bird-people" of Pennsylvania. The Society aims to foster the knowledge and understanding and the appreciation and conservation of Pennsylvania's birdlife. We are beginning on two very positive notes: the successful conclusion of field work for the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas Project and the gracious loan of a mailing address by the staff at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary.

We intend to be an active group, developing our own projects as well as supporting projects developed by others. We also plan to sponsor field trips to outstanding birding spots in Pennsylvania and to hold an annual meeting. This newsletter will be used to keep everyone informed of plans and progress and opportunities to help.

We want to build on and expand upon the success of the Breeding Bird Atlas Project. Proposed projects include:

1. Follow-up monitoring of special species or habitats, using the Atlas Project data as a baseline.
2. Survey of public lands. This could help parks develop checklists, or this data could be used by DER and the Game Commission to develop land-use policies for parks, state forests, and gamelands.
3. Winter atlas. This might be a cross between a Christmas Bird Count and the breeding atlas.

4. Owl census, perhaps using CBC circles. Owls are notably undercounted on most CBC's. Would more people owl if a night of owling needn't be followed by a full day of birding?

5. Assistance to the Game Commission's various programs. Possibilities include Colonial Nesting Bird Survey and Grassland Breeding Bird Survey.

6. Sponsorship of publication of out-of-print works on Pennsylvania ornithology, such as Todd's Birds of Western Pennsylvania.

7. Assistance in putting together a state bird-finding guide akin to Drennan's New York guide.

8. State checklist. Both a simple field card and an annotated list have been suggested.

9. Night bird survey. Suggestions included running sections of BBS routes at night or establishing mini-routes to be run at night.

We are looking for more potential projects; what are your favorites? Which of those listed would you help out with? Many of you were regional coordinators for the Atlas Project; are you interested in continuing to coordinate projects in your area? (If not, could you suggest someone else for your area?)

We are looking for more members! If you think that we have a good thing started, shouldn't you tell your friends about us?

Once again, I'd like to welcome you. If you are for the birds, you should feel right at home!

--Conrad R. Schmidt, President

FIELD TRIPS

SATURDAY, MAY 19--PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK, led by Jerry McWilliams (814-833-3169) from the Presque Isle Audubon Society. Meet no later than 5:30 a.m. at the Beach 10 parking lot for the walk out to Gull Point. For those wishing to spend the weekend, contact Jane Earle at 717-486-7964. Group reservations will be made at a nearby motel for Friday and Saturday nights.

Presque Isle is a jewel. Migrating warblers stop over on the peninsula on their way north and fuel up prior to their flight across Lake Erie. At times, warblers fill the trees like ripe fruit. Presque Isle is also the place for other unusual migrants and THE place where almost anything may be spotted. Of course, there are no guarantees, but a trip to Presque Isle is well worth the travel time from any location in the state. Mid-May is the peak of spring migration. Join us!

To reach Presque Isle, take I-79 north to Erie; exit at the end of the interstate (Exit 44); take PA Route 5 west to PA Route 832; turn right (north) on PA 832 and follow it to Presque Isle State Park. Once in the park, proceed on Peninsula Drive, Marina Drive, East Fisher Drive, and Thompson Drive to the Beach 10 (also called Bundy Beach) parking lot.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 25--TINICUM NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER, led by Johnny Miller. Meet at 9 a.m. at the information center. Wear comfortable shoes; the dike road around the preserve is closed to auto traffic and must be walked.

Tinicum National Environmental Center preserves the last remaining fresh water tidal marsh along the Delaware River.

The main attraction is the large impoundment near Darby Creek. When water levels are low, as they usually are in late summer, the marsh is a series of mudflats and isolated potholes which attract concentrations of migrating shorebirds.

To reach Tinicum from I-76, take the City Line Avenue Exit. Drive 5.2 miles on U.S. 1 South (City Line Avenue) to the intersection with Route 3 (West Chester Pike). Go through this intersection and travel another 0.1 miles to the next light. Turn left on Lansdowne Avenue and follow it for 3.7 miles to MacDade Blvd. Turn right onto MacDade, staying in the left lane for 0.25 miles to the second light. Bear left onto Chester Pike and proceed another 0.45 miles to the second light which is Calcon Hook Road. Turn left onto Calcon Hook and proceed 0.9 miles to the next light, which is Hook Road. Turn left onto Hook and loop around the oil tank farm. After 0.55 miles, you will come to another light where you will see the Cobblestone Apartments. Here turn right and continue for 0.2 miles to Tinicum which will be on your right. Pass through the gate and park near the visitors' center.

One purpose of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology is to promote the enjoyment of birdwatching in Pennsylvania. We would like to schedule trips throughout the state. If you are willing to lead an outing or if you know of a place in your home county or elsewhere that has special nesting, migrating, or wintering birds which you would like to share with the group, contact Jane Earle at 717-486-7964.

ASSISTANCE REQUESTED

Jan Blew has contacted the PSO requesting help censusing birds in the Kutztown area. If you can help, contact him at Rodale Research Center, R.D. 1, Box 323, Kutztown, PA 19530, or call 215-683-6383 (office) or 215-683-8170 (home).

REPORT ON THE FIRST PSO FIELD TRIP

--by Jane Earle

On March 17, 1990, a small group of PSO and Appalachian Audubon Society members and their guests braved the rain and thunderstorms to visit Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area. The fourteen participants were rewarded with excellent views of swans, geese, ducks, owls, and song birds.

At first arrival, the group walked the trail near the visitors' center, where we were fortunate to spot three Long-eared Owls. Although appearing to be sleepy, they did peer down at us from their perches.

The large pond closest to the visitors' center harbored the majority of swans and Am. Black Ducks. Canada Geese and their droppings seemed to be everywhere. A highlight of the outing was a flock of 200 Snow Geese flying overhead. Most of the puddle ducks were present, although not in high numbers. Green-winged and Blue-winged Teal, Mallards, N. Pintails, N. Shovelers, and Gadwalls were observed on various ponds. The only diving ducks spotted were one Ring-necked Duck and one female Common Merganser.

We were surprised to see that the Tree Swallows had returned. Prior to the rain, many were swooping over the ponds in search of insects. Several were already staking their claims to some of the many nest boxes along the roads, often fighting with bluebirds over boxes while many other boxes were available farther down the road. Bluebirds were pairing off, claiming nest boxes, and establishing territories. Several male pheasants were seen walking through the fields. Woodpeckers, robins, starlings, meadowlarks, blackbirds, cardinals, and Song Sparrows were also observed.

Around 11 a.m., the skies let loose with heavy rain and thunder, causing us to flee to the visitors' center for our lunch break. The rain continued to fall and cut short our first official PSO trip.

NAME THE NEWSLETTER CONTEST

If the front page of this newsletter looked strange to you at first glance, we're glad. That's because we do not yet have a name for our newsletter or a logo for our Society, and we need YOUR help! We have left space in the banner area for our newsletter title and for our logo. Do you have a suggestion? Send your ideas to PSO Contest, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, R.D. 2, Box 191, Kempton, PA 19529. Entries must be postmarked no later than May 25, 1990. The winner of this contest will have the honor of seeing his or her title and/or logo published regularly in our newsletter. The winner will be announced in our next newsletter, so enter today!



The original artwork in this newsletter was contributed by Dorothy Bordner from State College.

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AN UPDATE--THE PENNSYLVANIA BREEDING BIRD ATLAS PROJECT

--by Dan Brauning, Managing Editor

Good progress has been made in 1989, the first full year of preparation of The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Pennsylvania and in early 1990. Fundraising efforts were completed successfully early in 1989 with a total of \$130,475 contributed from diverse sources. In addition to the publication budget, the Wild Resource Conservation Fund awarded the Project \$9,500 to subsidize publication enhancements, and the Gladfelter Paper Company agreed to donate the paper to publish the book.

The Verification Committee reviewed Atlas data and screened out unreliable records. The total number of species to be included in the Atlas with full accounts is 189, plus two hybrids. A scaled-down field season was implemented in 1989 to obtain data for the last 182 blocks, completing our goal of field work in all 4,929 blocks in Pennsylvania. A total of 318,302 records of breeding birds were generated during the Atlas Project, for an average of 65 species per block statewide.

The publisher, the University of Pittsburgh Press, and the Atlas office have finalized design specifications for the book. The species accounts, which will constitute the main body of text, are almost completed. As of April 2, 170 of the 191 accounts were drafted; 120 of these have undergone the first major editing. Eighty percent of the publication will be composed of these species accounts, one page of text and map for each of the 189 species. Two-color maps (black and one other color) will greatly enhance the readability and aesthetic appeal of the book. At least eight transparent overlays will be included as part of the publication. These will include maps of elevation, public lands, land use, forest type, average temperature, average rainfall, and river systems.

Fifty illustrations have been received to date, with eight artists actively working to complete the balance. The completed manuscript is

scheduled for delivery to the publisher by the summer of this year.

The completed Atlas will provide a baseline from which to examine major changes in the state's bird communities. Statewide ornithological efforts in Pennsylvania have been coordinated as a result of the Atlas, including the formation of a state journal, Pennsylvania Birds; a state society, the PSO; and an activated Ornithological Technical Committee of the Pennsylvania Biological Survey. Finally, the published Atlas will stand as a monument to the efforts of the thousands who contributed time and expertise, to the Wild Resource Conservation Fund, and to the Pennsylvania Game Commission for their financial and moral support.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS IN PENNSYLVANIA

--by Conrad Schmidt

The 90th Audubon Christmas Bird Count was held from December 16, 1989, to January 3, 1990. The one trial count and 58 official counts held in Pennsylvania reported finding a total of 157 species. This is the total before editing by American Birds so the official results may vary slightly. This complete list will appear in a future issue of Pennsylvania Birds. Honors for the most species (95) were shared by Lower Bucks and Southern Lancaster.

The main theme in the compilers' commentaries was the weather; one compiler noted that the day began with a temperature of -23 degrees Fahrenheit and 8 to 14 inches of snow on the ground! Many others noted snow, bitter cold, wind, fog, or icy roads. Party-hours, especially on foot, were curtailed; and totals were generally down, but many reported that species numbers matched or even exceeded those in 1988.

Just a few comments. Bald Eagles sounded an "up" note with 52 reported on 11 counts. Barn Owls surprised me with 19 on 9 counts. Bluebirds looked good. (Do you have your houses up?!) A number of compilers noted greatly increased

HELP!

Membership support is most important for survival of this fledgling organization. One of our goals is to involve every member in at least one Society activity. I would like to obtain the names of members willing to assist with Society activities or serve on Society committees.

Please complete the questionnaire below and indicate your interest in Society participation.

Thank you.

Bob Martin, Vice President

Yes, I would like to participate in the activities of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology. I have checked the items below in which I would like to assist.

ACTIVITY	LEAD ACTIVITY	WORK ON ACTIVITY
Field Trips	_____	_____
Annual Meeting	_____	_____
Publicity	_____	_____
Membership	_____	_____
Bird Atlas of State Forest Natural Area, State Park, State Game Land, etc.	_____	_____
Night Bird Survey	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone: Home _____

Office _____

Announcing a NEW organization for people who like to read about, watch, feed, or study BIRDS. For people who provide houses for homeless bluebirds. For people who go broke feeding starving grosbeaks. For people who drive to the lake in a sleet storm to see the ducks. For people who are FOR THE BIRDS!

Announcing the

PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY FOR ORNITHOLOGY

At the last Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas Project coordinators' meeting, it was resolved to form a state-wide ornithological society to carry on the work. A group of volunteers has been laboring to get things off the ground, and so...the PSO. Our goals are knowledge, understanding, appreciation, and conservation. We intend to be an active society, organizing projects, conducting field trips, and having an annual meeting plus a newsletter. Several potential projects have been suggested, including bird-use surveys of public lands, night bird surveys, publication of out-of-print works on Pennsylvania ornithology, and a state bird-finding guide. We would like your suggestions and your membership help!

To join, send your ideas, along with your \$10 dues, and this form to:

Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology
c/o Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association
R.D. 2, Box 191
Kempton, PA 19529

Spread the word!

--Conrad R. Schmidt, President

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, ZIP _____

Telephone _____

Amount Enclosed _____

Please complete the form on the back of this sheet.

THE GAME COMMISSION WELCOMES THE PSO

--by Jerry Hassinger, Non-Game Biologist

The Game Commission program for Pennsylvania's native endangered, threatened, and protected wildlife is intended to preserve and enhance 288 species not defined in the Game and Wildlife Code as game animal or fur-bearer. This includes 44 kinds of mammals and 244 bird species. Of these, 59 species are of special management concern, including 5 endangered and 7 threatened bird species, 2 endangered and 2 threatened mammals, and an additional 43 species that are candidates for such status.

Other than for game birds, including migratory waterfowl, and perhaps, endangered birds, the Game Commission has neither the staff nor the expertise to adequately accomplish its stated mission to "manage wildlife and their habitats to perpetuate a diversity of species with densities and distributions that provide ecological, recreational, scientific, educational, aesthetic, and economic benefits." This is why the new PSO is welcome. You can help the Pennsylvania Game Commission to accomplish its stated mission. How? By volunteering, as many of you have already done, to inventory or otherwise monitor the welfare of this state's avian resource.

Following is a list of projects where birders have provided the Pa. Game Commission with valuable assistance in the past. Many of these projects are still active.

Breeding Bird Atlas. A complete atlas of this state's breeding birds would never have been possible without the assistance of hundreds of volunteers. On the horizon: Perhaps an atlas of wintering species?

Breeding Bird Trend Survey. This survey sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service annually tracks the ups and downs of bird populations. Some survey routes have been run since 1966. Dr. Paul Schwalbe, Pennsylvania Coordinator for this survey, is always looking for expert help to survey "currently vacant" routes.

Pennsylvania Cavity Nester Cooperators. These volunteers are dedicated to the welfare of bluebirds and other cavity-using wildlife. In 1988, for instance, cooperators monitored the use of 1,305 nest boxes distributed in 23 counties. They noted birds fledged in relation to box type and placement. This program is described in detail in the publication, "Woodworking for Wildlife." New volunteers sign up every year.

Locating Migratory Shorebird Concentration Sites. This project is temporarily on hold pending analysis of data already provided by volunteers. Results of this survey could be surprising.

Mid-winter Bald Eagle Survey. This is an annual survey with a low turnover of volunteers. The survey is coordinated by the Pennsylvania Game Commission for the National Wildlife Federation.

Colonial Nesting Bird Survey. In the past, this survey made maximum use of Pennsylvania Game Commission's wildlife technicians and minimal use of volunteers. As a result, most colonies were not surveyed annually. We will be exploring the feasibility of using more volunteers to produce annual data for each colony.

Grassland Breeding Bird Survey. This is a new survey with only one year behind us. Because many grassland-dependent species are declining, annual surveys, necessary for the estimation of trends, are important. Over 50 volunteers completed survey routes in 1989. The Game Commission will always welcome interest in this survey.

As you can see from the above partial listing, there are many opportunities for enjoying Pennsylvania's bird life. At the same time, you can be assisting the Game Commission to keep track of the welfare of our avian species.

Thank you for your past assistance. And the Pennsylvania Game Commission is looking forward to working with many of you in the future.

SPOTLIGHT ON CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS:
HAWK MOUNTAIN SANCTUARY ASSOCIATION

A MORNING AT LAKE SOMERSET

--by Tony Marich

Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association has agreed to act as the mailing address for our newly formed Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology.

Hawk Mountain Sanctuary was established in 1934 to prevent the slaughter of migrating hawks as they passed a rocky promontory on Kittatinny Ridge in eastern Pennsylvania. Conservationist Rosalie Edge, who headed a nebulous group called the Emergency Conservation Committee, leased the original property in the fall of 1934 and hired Maurice and Irma Broun to keep gunners off the sanctuary. During that first autumn, about 500 people visited the sanctuary to watch hawks rather than shoot them. Maurice Broun spent 32 years as Hawk Mountain's first curator, but he was not there full-time until 1948. Today about 48,000 people visit annually, and there are 10 full-time staff members and 175 volunteers.

The purpose of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association "is to foster the conservation of birds of prey and other wildlife and to create better understanding of the environment." Today the sanctuary is maintained as a high-quality natural area open to the public. Thirteen kilometers of hiking trails provide access to various habitats, including the River of Rocks, a large, exposed boulder field, and pristine Kettle Creek. Bordering the sanctuary are thousands of acres of Pennsylvania state forest and gamelands. Opportunities for birding and hiking abound. Permanent residents include Pileated Woodpecker and Barred Owl. Common breeding species include Wood Thrush and Ovenbird. Migrating passerines can be found in large numbers and great variety.

To reach Hawk Mountain from I-78, take Route 61 north through Port Clinton to Molina. Turn right onto Route 895 and follow it to Drehersville. Turn right in Drehersville and follow the signs to the top of the mountain.

Today Hawk Mountain is supported by about 8000 members. Membership benefits include free admission to the sanctuary and the semi-annual Hawk Mountain News.

It's May 7, and the weatherman has predicted snowshowers. The apple trees are in bloom. This morning it sounded like the kind of weather that would bring some unusual waterfowl migrants to the local wetlands.

I had chosen Lake Somerset for my morning outing since it has a good reputation for waterfowl. Since this is a Pennsylvania Fish Commission lake which gets a considerable amount of boating usage during the daytime hours of the fishing season, it's important to arrive early before the birds are roused. Even though this is the opening weekend of walleye season, there are only a few vehicles in the parking lot. Maybe the snow squalls discouraged most of the fishermen.

Lake Somerset has three good spots which I usually check. The first is the deep, open water by the dam, which is good for locating fish-eating divers and the more nervous species. The second is a shallow cove which opens into the widest part of the lake, where the water is of medium depth. This cove is remote from footpaths; with the open waters at its mouth, it makes a good site for finding plant-eating divers and puddle ducks. The third location is a shallow cove which is developing into marshland as the two major inflows drain agricultural areas and deposit sediment. The easy access of this third spot and its good vantage points probably make it the most frequently visited cove for the majority of waterfowl watchers. A seasonal drawdown for fish management provides an added bonus; large mudflats are exposed attracting a variety of shorebirds besides the usual dabbling ducks.

My first stop this morning is at the end of the lake, which is strangely vacant except for the ever-present swallows. My initial glance is mid-lake; but, as I look further up toward the dam, I spot a string of large, dark birds flying single file. Almost immediately they disappear out of sight over a jetty. Sometimes it seems as though I arrive just a few seconds

too late.

Hoping I can catch up to the mysterious birds, I arrive at my second location to find only Ruddy Ducks, coots, a Horned Grebe, and the resident Mallards. The swallows are present, but the snow squall has worsened, and they have taken shelter on the shoreline. The gathering includes four species--Tree, Barn, Cliff, and Bank--and no single species significantly outnumbers another.

By now, I have developed the feeling that the waterfowl migration is probably over and that it could be a boring morning. The snow squalls have intensified. The shallows yield a pair of Gadwalls and a mixed flock of gulls and terns. Visibility is extremely poor, so I stay in the comfort of my vehicle at a pondside vantage point until the squall finally stops. Now I see Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls and Common and Caspian Terns.

Next, I scope the mud flats in search of two flocks of shorebirds that had swerved into view briefly during the

peak of the storm. How can flocks of birds disappear so completely? I decide to walk the shoreline. Spotted Sandpipers bob along the edge, and I am able to approach to within ten feet of a very tame Dunlin. I can identify shorebirds at ten feet with 10X binoculars. But, when I find that flock of eleven little shorebirds at a distance of 100 feet, all I know is that they are brownish; they are smaller than the two Spotted Sandpipers bobbing past and pecking at them. I must remember to carry that field guide when I go for these little walks! Leaving it in the pick-up just doesn't work.

There is no sign of that larger flock of shorebirds, and there is more shoreline than I can walk this morning. It's starting to flurry again, and I want to check the open water by the dam again. Good luck is with me this time; seven large birds are sitting on the water. The spotting scope confirms my earlier suspicion--Double-crested Cormorants. I think I'll go to the market for my Sunday paper now.



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c/o Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association
R.D. 2, Box 191
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