

January, 1991

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK...

Happy New Year! I hope that each of you had a safe and joyous holiday season. And I wish you a healthy and prosperous new year!

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology passed an important milestone in October when we held our first general membership meeting. The meeting was very well attended; more than one quarter of our members showed up for the field trips, workshops, business meeting, and social hours. Everyone who attended felt that the gathering was successful and worthwhile. I would like to express our appreciation once again to our gracious hosts, Paul and Glenna Schwalbe; to our field trip leaders, Harry Henderson and George Young; and to our workshop presenters, Margaret Brittingham (Project FeederWatch), Jerry Hassinger (Woodworking for Wildlife), Ed Kwater (Shorebird Identification), and George Young (The Effects of Weather on Migration), for jobs exceedingly well done. On behalf of all the directors, I would like to thank you, the members, for your vote of confidence in reelecting us.

Those who attended the meeting also received a preview of our first project, the Special Areas Inventory, which is described elsewhere in this issue. I hope that you share our enthusiasm. Projects like this are the reason we organized PSO--to find out more about, and to promote an interest in, Pennsylvania birdlife. Let's go!

--Conrad Schmidt, President

FIRST ANNUAL PSO MEETING

A very successful first annual PSO meeting was held at Lock Haven University's Sieg Conference Center near Lamar on October 12, 13, and 14, 1990. A few dedicated members arrived Friday evening for socializing and a good night's rest aided by the falling rain. By morning much concern was expressed about flooding of the nearby creek.

On Saturday morning a good number of members attended the field trip to Bald Eagle State Park (see field trip article) while a few hard-working members participated in a meeting of the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee (PORC), which is a subcommittee of the Pennsylvania Biological Survey.

After lunch four top-notch workshops were held. The first was a presentation on Cornell's Project FeederWatch by Professor Margaret Brittingham, who began her workshop with a quiz. It showed our misconceptions concerning abundance of feeder species. Professor Brittingham described the mechanics of Project FeederWatch, reported participation levels and distribution of participants in Pennsylvania, and summarized results from the 1988-89 season.

The second presentation by Jerry Hassinger, Wildlife Biologist with the Pennsylvania Game Commission, was entitled "Woodworking for Wildlife." Mr. Hassinger discussed the Game Commission's Volunteer Program, including the results of the Grassland Breeding Bird Survey. His slide program illustrated the value of dead wood

for wildlife. With him he brought examples of various nesting boxes built from the plans in the Wild Resource Fund publication, Woodworking for Wildlife.

The third excellent workshop dealt with shorebird identification. Ed Kwater taught us to identify shorebirds beginning with the concept of aging. This technique, which to many of us previously had seemed impossible in the field, took on new meaning during the workshop. Ed taught us the terminology for various feather tracts and helped us to determine whether feathers were fresh or worn. Many of us studied his slides through binoculars and learned to look at individual feather patterns. In addition, Ed had borrowed specimens from Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum so we each had the opportunity to try to apply what he had taught us.

Professor George Young conducted the last workshop, The Meteorology of Raptor Migration. He discussed the value of thermals, cloud streets, and ridge lift to migrating raptors. He showed us how the strategy used by raptors varies from species to species. He also included how the time of day, the time of year, and the weather influences migration.

Saturday evening at our business meeting, our acting board of directors was elected. Doug Gross shared with us his plans for our first project.

On Sunday morning a few members traveled to Black Moshannon State Park for another field trip.

The following members or guests attended this historic first annual meeting:

Gloria Bickel	Shona Hunter
Charles Bier	Roy Ickes
Dorothy Bordner	Margaret Kenepf
Dan Brauning	Ed Kwater
Erica Brendel	Gloria Lamer
Margaret Brittingham	Bob Martin
Dick Byers	Madeline Miles
Bob and Ruth Cook	Linda Ordiway
Ed Fingerhood	Steve Santner

Alice Fuller	Conrad Schmidt
Doug Gross	Jocelyn Smrekar
Frank and Barb Haas	Georgette Syster
Jerry Hassinger	Dennis Smeltzer
Cecil Hazlett	Richard and April
Harry Henderson	Walters
Don and Robyn Henise	George Young
Roger and Marg Higbee	Eugene Zielenski



#### PSO FIELD TRIPS REVISITED

The field trip to Bald Eagle State Park on October 13, led by Harry Henderson and George Young, began with rain and fog. Our first view of the lake was very much obscured by heavy fog, but we spotted silhouettes of Great Blue Herons and one Ruddy Duck at our first stop. By late morning the skies began to clear. Waterfowl sightings were limited, but a single Black Scoter was the highlight of the trip. Other species observed include Sharp-shinned, Cooper's, and Red-tailed Hawks; Pileated Woodpecker; Solitary Vireo; Yellow-rumped, Pine, and Palm Warblers; Fox, Swamp, White-throated, and White-crowned Sparrows; and Pine Siskin.

A break between PSO workshops yielded Turkey Vultures and Common Ravens.

On Sunday morning, October 14, nine of us ventured to Black Moshannon State Park. Included in our group were Gloria Bickel, Dick Byers, Don and Robyn Henise, Margaret and Roger Higbee, Roy Ickes, Margaret Kenepf, and Dennis Smeltzer. Waterfowl listed included Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, and Wood Duck. The highlight was a flight of hawks seen from the boardwalk. In less than one hour we tallied 2 Sharp-shinned, 1 Cooper's, and 6 Red-tailed Hawks, and 1 American Kestrel.

Birds seen during the weekend outings by PSO members included 64 species. It was a very enjoyable weekend.

#### FIELD TRIPS

The PSO has been invited to participate in the following field trips sponsored by the organizations noted in parentheses.

Saturday, March 4 (Greater Wyoming Valley Audubon Society)--Bill Evans will lead this trip to Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area to see Tundra Swans. There might be ten, one hundred, or thousands of swans as they stop here on their migration north. A good variety of waterfowl is possible, and the visitors' center, a must. We will meet at 8 a.m. at the Wyoming Valley Mall in the Sears parking lot on the side by the mobile home dealer. For further information, contact Joyce Fino (717-829-3891).

Saturday, March 16 (Juniata Valley Audubon Society)--Middle Creek, led by Dave Kyler (814-643-6030). Meet at 7 a.m. in Altoona. Contact Dave for further directions.

Saturday, March 23 (Todd Bird Club)--Yellow Creek State Park in Indiana County. Meet at 8 a.m. at the park office, located just off Rt. 422 on Rt. 259. For further information, contact Roger or Margaret Higbee (412-354-3493).

Saturday, April 13 (Conococheague Audubon Society)--Newburg Game Lands, located west of Carlisle. For details, contact Dorothy Thomas (717-263-3072).

Saturday, April 13 (Presque Isle Audubon Society)--The heronry near Union City is our destination. Contact Dorothy Thomas (814-438-7074) for details.

Sunday, May 5 (Wyncote Audubon Society)--Carpenters Woods near Philadelphia will be the destination for this field trip. For more information, call 215-572-1175.

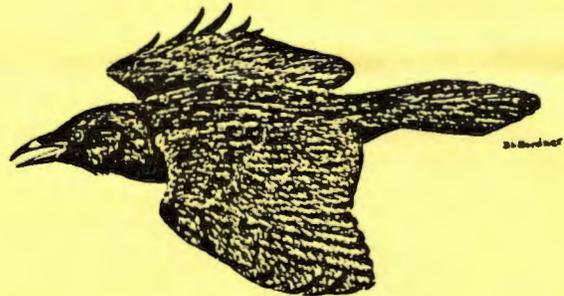
Saturday, May 11 (Appalachian Audubon Society)--Kings Gap, Huntsdale Fish Hatchery, Opossum Lake, and environs, led by Jane Earle (717-486-7964). Meet at the Kings Gap Pond parking lot at 7 a.m.

Sunday, May 12 through Tuesday, May 14 (Conococheague Audubon Society)--Presque Isle, led by Bill Hague (717-352-2647).

Friday, May 17 to Sunday, May 19 (York Audubon Society)--Presque Isle, led by Dick Humbert (717-266-1864).

Saturday, May 18 (Wyncote Audubon Society)--Bull's Island, led by Cliff Hence (215-438-1707). Migrant vireos and warblers are the targets of this outing.

Saturday, June 1 (Wyncote Audubon Society)--Ridley Creek State Park. Meet at 7 a.m. on Sycamore Mills Road. Call 215-572-1175 for further information.



#### SECOND ANNUAL MEETING

Shonah A. Hunter from Lock Haven University has graciously agreed to chair the second annual PSO meeting committee. Shonah would like volunteers and ideas for the fall meeting. We would like to hold the meeting at a location in central Pennsylvania. Additional information concerning this meeting will appear in your next newsletter.

If you would like to help, please contact Shonah by writing to Shonah A. Hunter, Department of Biological Sciences, Lock Haven State University, Lock Haven, PA 17745 or by calling (717) 893-2062.

## THE PSO SPECIAL AREAS INVENTORY

We invite all Pennsylvania birders to join us in an exciting new activity--the Pennsylvania Special Areas Project (or SAP), an inventory of birds found on public lands throughout the state. This project is the next logical step for Pennsylvania birders to take after completing the Breeding Bird Atlas. We will focus on specific areas that deserve our attention.

Where are these areas? State Parks, PaDER Natural Areas and Wild Areas, State Forests, and State Game Lands. These places are heavily used by birders and other outdoor enthusiasts; however, they frequently lack a site checklist or published inventory of any kind.

It is the goal of the PSO SAP to collect information on the breeding status and seasonal abundance of the birds that use these areas. This information will then be analyzed and used to help educate the general public about Pennsylvania birds and help manage and conserve the habitats these birds need to survive.

At first, we will concentrate on State Parks and PaDER Natural Areas. The PSO is asking local bird clubs, Audubon Societies, nature clubs, and other conservation organizations to adopt a local "Special Area." Volunteers will be asked to visit the area at least six times a year with at least two visits during the breeding season and at least one in the winter. Volunteers will be encouraged to visit the Special Area as often as twice each month in order to accurately depict its bird community.

During each visit, birders will comb the Special Area in much the same way that groups survey a Christmas Bird Count circle, identifying and counting all birds encountered. Extra efforts will be encouraged to find rare species, especially those which may be nesting nearby. After a year or more of visiting the Special Area, we will have

accumulated enough data to evaluate the status and abundance of most species found there.

The information from the Special Area will prove to be very helpful for land management, conservation, and education. We hope that most Pennsylvania State Parks and Natural Areas can be inventoried within the next eight years.

The PSO will need people to coordinate efforts in each Special Area and to report results. For more information about the Pennsylvania Special Areas Project, write to the PSO for instructions and field sheets. Our address is Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology, c/o Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association, R.R. 2, Box 191, Kempton, PA 19529.

### QUESTIONS, ANYONE?

Here are some questions which we have received or anticipated about the project and its methods.

What is so special about "Special Areas"?  
The term "Special Areas" may seem a bit vague to some, but it was chosen to include the many locations that this project will encompass. Good birding spots, especially those on public land, are special for a variety of reasons.

First, they are special to birds. State Parks and other preserved or managed areas offer habitats that are important feeding, nesting, resting, or hiding places. Many Special Areas that we will survey represent one of the few good places where a variety of birds can live in an otherwise inhospitable landscape.

These places are also special to people. State Parks are one of the places where you are "supposed" to see birds, and many rank as top birding hotspots. They contain forests and other prime habitats; the atmosphere favors nature study. Many parks have lakes that attract a variety of waterfowl. The general public expects to observe and learn about birds in

these places. Beginners go there to seek out information about nature; they expect guidance from more experienced persons. The PSO should be able to offer that guidance.

What do you mean by "status"? For the most part, status refers to breeding status. Does the species regularly nest in the Special Area? Does it only migrate through the area? Does it overwinter? We will need to substantiate our claim about the status of each species, especially those that are more uncommon. We will be documenting our observations of breeding behavior in much the same way we did during the Breeding Bird Atlas Project.

Why count birds? The field ornithologist captures a great deal of meaningful and interesting information by simply keeping track of how many individuals of each species he has seen. Birders who put only checkmarks on a species list miss an important aspect of each species--its abundance at that time and place. A field trip's experiences can never be duplicated. Take good notes.

Simply evaluating or estimating species' abundance is never a substitute for counting birds. Each of us bird-watchers has different ideas concerning the meaning of the terms "common" and "rare." And, memories often serve us poorly; we confuse different field trips and conveniently forget those times when we did not find as many birds as we expected. It is easy to argue with impressions and old memories of others; it is difficult to argue with good, hard data.

It is easy to count birds, as simple as "1, 2, 3." However, we must admit that we never "get every one" and routinely miss some species more than others. In spite of this, our counts serve as good indices of species' abundance. It is sometimes tempting to count only rare or unusual species and not to quantify the more common species. Actually, changes in the numbers of common species probably more reliably

indicate changes in the environment than changes in transient or rare species.

How do we count birds in this kind of study? Count birds as you go, because by the end of the day it is too easy to forget how many you have encountered. Just make it a habit to count birds; it should be second nature to an experienced field ornithologist. Large or moving groups of birds are the biggest challenge to count, but make an effort. As a flock moves in front of you, count them from one end of the flock to the other. Then try to count them again to check for accuracy. If there is more than one person in your party, each should try to count the flock; then, average the counts of all the observers. When in the woods, it is sometimes helpful to count moving flocks as they pass a certain point--perhaps over the trail or past a prominent tree.

What will happen with the count data? A committee of ornithologists will review the count data to evaluate what abundance category should be given each species in each season. This will be done by one group of experienced people for the sake of treating the data consistently. Bird numbers can be compared to those of other species (relative abundance), or to their numbers at other times (indicating phenological changes or trends). The numbers of birds can be analyzed as "birds per party hour," or birds per area covered (density). This information will be transformed into a field checklist or report for each Special Area.

The Bureau of State Parks has already agreed to publish park bird lists for those parks for which we submit sufficient data. Reports about particularly interesting findings may be published in our PSO newsletter or in journals like Pennsylvania Birds.

Which Special Area should I work in? First, find out if your local bird club or Audubon Society is working in a local park or other Special Area. We will need coordinators for each Special

Area's inventory effort. This coordinator will oversee the effort and be in charge of reporting results to the PSO Special Areas Project Committee. The PSO will provide some guidance in selecting Special Areas to work in by providing lists of possibilities within the club's area. Very few State Parks have accurate or current checklists, so almost all of them are choice candidates.

State Parks with a wide variety of habitats will attract the most birds and the most birders. No doubt some parks, especially those with lakes or other wetlands, could produce lists of more than 200 species. However, let's not forget about those parks without the already established good birding reputations--Pennsylvania's "best kept secrets."

Many remotely located State Parks and Natural Areas are infrequently visited by birders but offer many species that are hard for urban birders to find near home. And, these remote areas offer a quiet retreat from the rush of modern life. Try adopting a Special Area that is a longer, but worthwhile, drive from home.

#### AVAILABLE PUBLICATION

The publication, Woodworking for Wildlife--Homes for Birds and Mammals, published by the Pennsylvania Wild Resource Conservation Fund and the Pennsylvania Game Commission, is available at a cost of \$3 each. Cost includes postage. Order from either:

Pa. Wild Resource Conservation Fund  
Room 101  
Evangelical Press Building  
Third and Reily Streets  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

or

Pennsylvania Game Commission  
Publications Unit  
2001 Elmerton Avenue  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-9797

#### SPOTLIGHT ON CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS: THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

The Nature Conservancy, an international organization committed to the preservation of natural diversity, was incorporated in 1951 in the District of Columbia for scientific and educational reasons. Its stated purpose is to find, protect, and maintain rare species and natural communities by preserving the lands they require to survive.

The Nature Conservancy maintains over 1,200 sanctuaries; this is the largest private system of nature preserves in the world. This organization has been responsible for the protection of more than 5 1/2 million acres in 50 states and Canada. In addition, it has helped sister organizations preserve millions of acres in Latin America and in the Caribbean. Some of these acquired areas are transferred to other public or private conservation groups for management.

Several of the Conservancy's projects in Pennsylvania have included management agreements with Pennsylvania Bureau of State Parks to protect various features. For example, in French Creek State Park, located in Berks and Chester Counties, 88 acres of hardwood bottom-land swamp is protected for its prairie blue grass. In Bucks County, a 25-acre area in Neshaminy Creek State Park that harbors seven rare plants has been preserved.

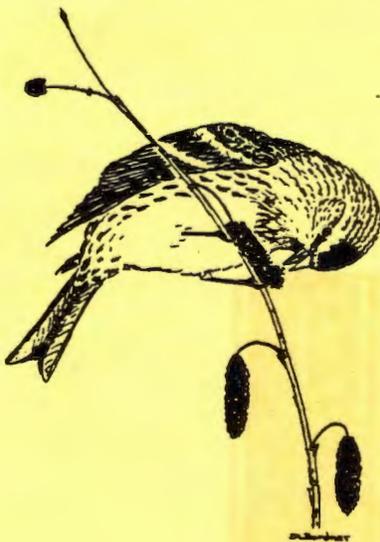
The Acopian Preserve in Lancaster County is a 55-acre plot purchased by the Conservancy and managed for Pennsylvania's largest population of Bog Turtle, which is listed as endangered in Pennsylvania. Other purchases include Adams Swamp located in Monroe County, Bristol Marsh in Bucks County, and Goat Hill Serpentine Barrens in Chester County.

The Nature Conservancy keeps members apprised of its accomplishments, plans, and programs through its bi-

monthly magazine, The Nature Conservancy News. Our local Pennsylvania Chapter also publishes a newsletter and sponsors outings to its various preserves.

#### CAVE CREEK CANYON THREATENED

In the near future, Pennsylvania birders will have an opportunity to participate in preserving one of the most unique and irreplaceable bird sanctuaries in the country--Cave Creek Canyon in southeastern Arizona. Under an 1872 mining law, anyone may stake a claim and mine on public land. A large foreign mining company has staked a claim in Cave Creek Canyon to mine gold. Congressman Joe Kolbe of Arizona will introduce legislation in the 102nd Congress to withdraw this land permanently from mineral exploration. Only with a nationwide outpouring of letters to their own Congressmen can birders hope to defeat the lobbying of the mining companies who will oppose this bill. Please plan to support Congressman Kolbe's bill when it comes up. For further information, contact Timmi Jones at (412) 465-4006.



*Special thanks to Dorothy Bordner for contributing artwork for this newsletter.*

#### BIRDERS DIVIDED OVER CATS

--by Gloria Winger

Birdwatchers fall into two categories when it comes to considering the common house cat. Type L (for "loves cats") is able to justify the existence of both in our world. Type H (for "hates cats") feels the inclusion of cats in our world is one of those unpleasanties they will inquire about when faced some day by God.

Which are you? A simple test will tell. Imagine trying to keep a cat from preying on your bird feeder. How does the idea of wiring it with 110 volts sound? If anything over the few ounces a bird weighs comes near it, the offender is put into orbit. If you're laughing, you're Type H. If you think this is appalling, you're Type L. My husband is Type H. The 110 volts was his idea, of course.

Realistically, it's hard to keep cats and birds apart. Putting your feeder in the open could help. At least the cat doesn't have any place to hide close to the feeder. The cat could have a bell put on its collar, but most cats learn to stalk without ringing the bell. You could put the feeder where you are more apt to be watching, and go out to shoo the cat away. (Type H's will have some creative variations of this technique, I'm sure.)

I don't know how to keep cats and birds apart. I keep two of my cats in the house full time, but I have an outside cat, too; it adopted me. And it gets a bird about once every two months. It makes me feel terrible, especially when the poor little victim is a chickadee; but I don't know how to stop it. I love birds, but I love cats, too. I tell myself that a cat can't catch a healthy bird or a smart bird. Type L's tell themselves things like that. I can't put into print what Type H's say about the whole thing.

REMINDER

William J. Boyle, Jr., our regional editor for the Christmas Bird Count issue of American Birds, has requested that compilers mail him a copy of their CBC results as soon as possible. Audubon does not send him the official lists until June or July. He then has only a few weeks to enter all the data into his computer. We can help him out by sending our data now. Mail to:

Mr. William Boyle  
12 Glenwood Road  
Denville, NJ 07834

OFFICERS

President Conrad Schmidt  
Vice President Robert Martin  
Secretary Eugene Zielinski  
Treasurer Jocelynn Smrekar

BOARD MEMBERS

Margaret Brittingham  
Jane Earle Margaret Higbee  
Douglas Gross Roy Ickes

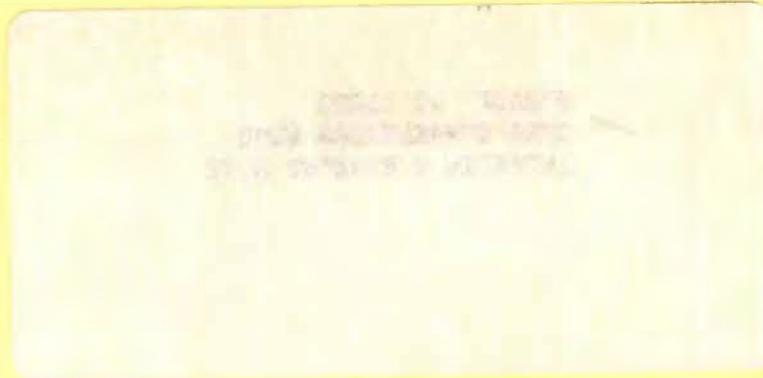


MAILING OUR NEWSLETTER

We were hoping that the front page of our third newsletter would display our new logo and title. We have received a number of suggestions for our title, but only two logos were submitted. The Board recently decided to vote first for a name. We then narrowed all the entries to the five we liked best. These five are listed below.

- 1. The Grouse Log
- 2. The Chestnut-sided Warbler
- 3. Bird Call
- 4. The Flight
- 5. For the Birds

We then voted by mail on these five. Unfortunately, we ended with a three-way tie for first place. Since the Board could not reach a consensus, we decided to turn the matter back to the general membership. Do you like any of these names, or do you have a better idea? We do not want our newsletter to be nameless indefinitely, yet we do not wish to rush into choosing an unsatisfactory title. Help!



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