

December, 1991

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK....

I appreciate the opportunity to serve as the second president of PSO and hope that together we can promote ornithology in Pennsylvania.

Credit must be given to our first President, Conrad Schmidt. Without his stepping forward at the end of the Breeding Bird Atlas Project, it is unlikely that PSO would exist today. His enthusiasm kindled the flame for PSO in many of the early members.

Also, Margaret Higbee is commended for her efforts to produce our newsletter. She has done an outstanding job! And Doug Gross has successfully developed the SAP Project through many hours of hard work. Our second annual meeting was successful due to the efforts of Meeting Chairperson Shonah Hunter as well as Doug Gross, Wes Egli, Nancy Dennis, Frank Haas, and all the other members who helped.

Presque Isle State Park has been selected as the site for our third annual PSO meeting, May 15-17, 1992. The meeting will include birdwatching and banding at the park. Presentations will deal with the ecology of Presque Isle and the impact of white-tailed deer on vegetation and wildlife. Please mark your calendar! Details on the meeting will be provided at a later date.

1992 GOALS

MEMBERSHIP--To double our membership. Although we have done well during our first two years, it should be possible to make this goal if we each invite a new member. Also if PSO develops a relationship with PA Birds this will provide an opportunity for increased contact with birders in Pennsylvania.

PROJECTS--Promote the SAP and Game Commission Projects. SAP will provide a valuable data base for future decisions. Wild Resource Fund Projects are opportunities to demonstrate our support for ornithology to the Game Commission, and to encourage future efforts by the Commission.

NEWSLETTER--To produce an interesting newsletter, four times a year, with a mixture of scientific articles, updates on what is happening within our state, interesting observations, etc. This is your newsletter; I encourage you to contribute by sending information to:

Margaret Higbee
Newsletter Editor
R.R. 2, Box 166
Indiana, PA 15701

Please send me any ideas or questions concerning PSO. Together we can produce a positive impact for ornithology in Pennsylvania.

--Bob Martin, President

1992 PSO ANNUAL MEETING

- LOCATION: Presque Isle State Park
- DATE: May 15, 16, and 17, 1992
- AGENDA: Birding
- Bird Banding
- Presentations

CRYSTAL LAKE--OUR SECOND MEETING

The second annual meeting of the PSO was held September 13-15 at Crystal Lake Camps near Hughesville, PA. Over forty individuals spent the weekend enjoying the relaxing mountain and lake atmosphere. Friday evening was unstructured during which registrants socialized and became reacquainted with other members. Karl Striedieck, Tim Becker, and Tal Wenrich talked informally about the Golden Eagle and Zoo America at Hershey Park. Saturday began early with Doug Gross leading a field trip around Crystal Lake grounds. After breakfast, three groups took off for field trips to surrounding state parks and returned in time for lunch and the afternoon programs.

In the afternoon, Tim Kimmel from Pennsylvania State University gave a talk on the breeding status of Northern Goshawks in Pennsylvania; he has been studying these birds for the past three years. Judy Wink of the Carbon County Environmental Education Center in Jim Thorpe, PA, gave a wonderful presentation on the Great Horned Owl in PA. Judy has been studying these owls and compiling data on them for more than 20 years. Ed Kwater from Pittsburgh gave the field identification talk on the challenging group of gulls. If you recall Ed's shorebird talk from last year, this was equally informative; and I maintain that you can never look at birds the same way again after hearing Ed and his attention to detail. It was wonderful. Doug Gross filled the group in on the Special Areas Project and explained the forms that must be filled out and the kinds of information the Project is intending to compile on the sensitive areas of our state.

For information on the Saturday evening program, see Eugene Zielinski's following article.

The following individuals attended the meeting: Tim Becker; Dan Brauning; Margaret Brittingham; Dick Byers; Robert and Ruth Cook; Dennis DaSilva; Jane Earle; Wes Egli; Pauline England; Ted

and Alice Fuller; Carol Getz; Susan Goodrich; Alan and Monica Gregory; Doug Gross; Frank and Barb Haas; Don and Robyn Henise; Roger, Margaret, Rob, and Jonathan Higbee; Helen Hobbie; Shonah Hunter; Roy Ickes; Larry Jackson; Tim Kimmel; Ed Kwater, Bob and Patrick Martin; Bob Meredith; Bernard Morris; Patricia Reese; Edward and Margaret Reiman; Bob Sager; Conrad Schmidt; Paul and Glenna Schwalbe; Karl Striedieck; Georgette Syster; Neal Thorpe; Philip and Mary Walsh, George Weidner; Tal Wenrich; Judy Wink; Amy York; Eugene Zielinski.

--Shonah Hunter, Meeting Chairperson

THE PSO ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

The general membership organizational meeting was held Saturday evening, September 14, 1991. Before the meeting began, Dan Brauning talked to the audience about the activities of the PA Game Commission including projects in which PSO may want to become involved. He also discussed the status of the PA Breeding Bird Atlas, which should be out in 1992.

Outgoing president, Conrad Schmidt, began the official meeting by thanking the people who helped him during his term and those who helped organize the annual meeting. He then turned our attention to a topic that had been debated the previous evening, the hacking of Golden Eagles in Pennsylvania. The ensuing discussion was lively with many comments concerning the merits, drawbacks, and suitability of introducing species that have not historically bred in the state.

The meeting was then turned over to Doug Gross, who had prepared a slate of officers for the coming year. The nominees were: Robert Martin, Jr., President; Douglas Gross, Vice President; Eugene Zielinski, Treasurer; and Roy Ickes, Secretary. In addition to the officers, Doug stated that additions could be made to the board. Frank Haas, Roger Higbee, and Shonah

Hunter were nominated, and the slate of officers and new board members was passed by unanimous voice vote.

Shonah Hunter, who had done most of the work in organizing this meeting, asked whether those present would prefer to hold the next general membership meeting in the spring or fall. The general consensus was to have a spring meeting. The ideal meeting would be held at a birding "hot spot" during the height of migration; the board agreed to try to arrange this.

--Eugene Zielinski

PSO ANNUAL MEETING FIELD TRIPS

Many PSO birders got their first taste of "ridgerunning" at the 1991 annual meeting at Crystal Lake Camps, a place "where few bird-watchers had gone before." Near the southern edge of the Allegheny Plateau, the camp sits astride the Lycoming/Sullivan County line at about 1800 feet. Here northern hardwoods and hemlocks predominate the rather extensive forest surrounding two lovely highland lakes. It was a scene somewhat reminiscent of Maine, minus the moose and loons.

The Raven Reporter (alias Doug Gross) led a pre-breakfast field trip around Crystal Lake early Saturday morning. The trail around the lake proved a good vantage point to observe many species. At 7 a.m. sharp, a raven flew directly over the lake in fulfillment of a prophecy made by the field trip leader the previous evening. In case there were any doubts about identification, the ravens gave a show complete with croaks and a display of their wedge-shaped tails and shaggy throats. The ravens were up and about camp in the pre-dawn, waking up cabin-dwellers with their loud calls. By sitting out on a snag, two Scarlet Tanagers provided some color, a reminder that most neotropical migrants were well on their way south. On the other side of the lake, Blue Jays mobbed a Red-shouldered Hawk perched in a hemlock

grove, and a Cooper's Hawk whizzed by. A seemingly out-of-place Carolina Wren announced its presence at this relatively high elevation. Two other wrens seen that morning, House Wren and Winter Wren, seemed more at home here.

The group took a cross-country ski and hiking trail around the lake's perimeter. Unfortunately, there weren't many warblers sighted, but five woodpecker species were spotted including a pileated and two sapsuckers. In the lakeside vegetation, we found Common Yellowthroats and Swamp Sparrows. In the woods on the east side of the lake, a young female Blackpoll Warbler and an immature Hermit Thrush posed interesting identification challenges. The two most common species in the camp were Cedar Waxwing and Dark-eyed Junco. Overall, 36 species were reported at Crystal Lake that day, not including a possible Least Flycatcher.

The party returned in time for breakfast and some much-needed tea and coffee.

After a hearty breakfast, we broke into two parties--one led by Doug Gross; the other, by Bob Sagar. In these morning tours, the parties sampled some of the scenery of the local highlands and saw a few birds along the way. This area is better known for its summer and winter birds than for its migration.

Doug's party first visited the Kettle Creek Bog, a wetland near Eagles Mere at the edge of Wyoming State Forest. This spot is one of the few places in the state where you can hear Virginia Rails and Red-breasted Nuthatches at the same time. Both species nest there. However, the most common birds that day were Cedar Waxwings, which were eating leftover blueberries. A Sharp-shinned Hawk skimmed over the treetops east of the bog. The next stop was the Loyalsock Creek gorge in World's End State Park. The Loyalsock, one of the loveliest streams in Pennsylvania, was alarmingly low as a result of the long drought. Here a family flock of Common Ravens provided the entertain-

ment. A grander view of the park was afforded from Canyon Vista. Few birds were seen here, but most agreed that this spot had potential as a hawk migration station.

Bob Sagar's group started the trip by touring some back-roads until they found a large blow-down area by the roadside, caused by a rare visit from a tornado. Although this is a mecca for Chestnut-sided Warblers in the summer, few birds were seen that day. The group toured the Wyoming State Forest along the Brunerdale and Dry Run Roads, crossing the famous Loyalsock Trail. They ended their trip by enjoying the vista from High Knob, one of the highest points in the area.

SUNDAY'S FIELD TRIPS: MONTOUR PRESERVE AND CREVELING PONDS

Fog settled on the plateau Saturday night and clouded our Sunday morning plans. Socializing became the main event of the breakfast hour and delayed the field trips. Due to the fog, almost everyone decided to go to the lower elevation Montour Preserve.

Frank and Barb Haas led the caravan to Montour Preserve, one of the best birding spots in the state. North Branch Bird Club members joined the group at the preserve. This preserve, owned by Pennsylvania Power and Light Co., includes Lake Chillisquaque (an Indian name meaning "song of the wild goose). The settling pond behind Montour Steam Electric Station remains warm year round, providing a great place for vagrants even in cold weather. The PSO group visited some of the highlights before heading home. Birding was a little slow, but several Double-crested Cormorants provided evidence of this site's potential.

Doug Gross and Bob Sagar went to Creveling Ponds, a site on the State Game Lands north of Rickett's Glen State Park. Dense fog dampened the field trip but did not eliminate the birds. Three Wild Turkeys walked by Bob's car while he waited for the PSO group. At the

ponds they witnessed a small warbler fall-out in which they observed nine warbler species in a small thicket around an apple tree. Some immaculately marked definitive juvenile-plumaged Cape May warblers were especially enjoyable. The PSO contingent met volunteers from the Hunter's Lake Ducks Unlimited Chapter who were working on the water-fowl propagation area. The Creveling Ponds provide breeding habitat for American Black Ducks, Wood Ducks, Mallards, Hooded Mergansers, Green-winged Teal, and perhaps others.

--Douglas A. Gross



THE RAVEN REPORTER

News of the Special Areas Project

A Call for Special Areas Project Data

Please send your Special Areas Project Seasonal Field Trip Report to Doug Gross (c/o Ecology III, R.R. 1, Berwick, PA 18603). I have received lots of great data already, but only from a few Special Areas Coordinators. Use the Seasonal Field Trip Reports to summarize your totals for each species and any evidence of nesting. The Seasonal Report also allows the Local Coordinator to summarize the field conditions of the trips and list the volunteers who have helped with the effort. Please send in these reports on a quarterly basis. It is not necessary to wait until your group has run ten field trips in the Special Area. We appreciate being able to see and review the data.

Reporting and Documenting Rarities

One of the most important aspects of the Special Areas Project is the reporting and documentation of rarities. Potentially, this project should have a big impact on the number of rarities

sighted in our state. The project stimulates many of us to get out in the field more often. And, we are birding more consistently in some of the state's hotspots. This greatly increases the chances for observing rare birds, especially vagrants. By bird-watching in groups, we also increase our opportunities for getting help from other observers in confirming the identity of difficult species and for corroborating our observations. Too many great finds of rare birds were seen by single observers without corroborating witnesses or photographs.

Reports of rarities for the Special Areas Project must comply with the guidelines set by the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee (PORC). Send records of rare birds to Barbara Haas, PORC Secretary, 2469 Hammertown Road, Narvon, PA 17555-9726. I would appreciate a copy of any SAP rare bird reports sent to PORC. These records do not need to conform to any particular form or layout but need to convincingly describe the bird sighted. For a guideline in what to write up, please review the Rare Species Report form presented in Pennsylvania Birds, Volume 2 (4), p. 134, that was contributed by Kerry Grim to accompany Barb Haas's article, "Keeping Records."

If you see a rare or extremely unusual bird, call your Pennsylvania Birds county editor or a PORC representative within 24 hours. If in doubt of the need for documentation or verification, contact PORC Secretary, Barb Haas at (215) 445-9609. The April-June issue of Pennsylvania Birds included a listing of the state's hotlines (page 64). Basically, get the word out fast. Call someone! The chances for documenting rarities and witnessing interesting birds can be very fleeting. Don't be shy or too proud; just call.

Special Areas Project Progress

It has been a great quarter for SAP. We have more local groups inventorying Special Areas, including the Valley

Forge Audubon Society. After a few phone calls and meetings, this very large group decided to tackle Evansburg State Park along Skippack Creek near Audubon. There are several good birders in the Valley Forge area, and I know they will do a "bang-up" job.

The Special Areas Project is already making history in Pennsylvania ornithology. At least one important county record was made in Indiana County due to the efforts at Yellow Creek--a Hudsonian Godwit observed for two days. The Codorus Creek State Park team may have added another species to the state list. Their observations and video are currently being reviewed by PORC, so I do not want to spill the beans. I can only say that their video was quite exciting to watch and convincingly and dramatically documented some unusual, perhaps definitive, behavior of a vagrant gull (a species that some would travel hundreds of miles to see). Karen Lippy's group had the presence of mind to tape their immediate verbal observations of the unknown bird (invaluable documentation) and to videotape the bird flying over Lake Marburg. Great work!

Margaret Higbee and her Todd Bird Club SAP team continue to turn in tons of terrific bird data from Yellow Creek State Park. They are certainly documenting the importance of this reservoir to migrating water birds. On one count, they saw 65 Ruddy Ducks and 45 American Coots in addition to good numbers of several other species. This effort regularly recorded over ten Pectoral Sandpipers during a field trip as well as several other shorebirds. The Yellow Creek data is rich in detail and will prove extremely valuable to anyone interested in the phenology of birds in Indiana County.

Karen Lippy is leading the efforts at Codorus State Park near Hanover, York County. Karen has already proven to be a very effective organizer. She has divided the park up into sections which groups of birders are to visit and report on. This ensures wide coverage of a park with a variety of habitats.

The data from this park will prove that its Lake Marburg is another terrific birding spot which may not be generally appreciated by the birding community. I won't go into too much detail, but keep your eyes peeled on the York County reports in Pennsylvania Birds!

--Douglas A. Gross, SAP Chairman

SPECIAL AREAS PROJECT AT SUSQUEHANNA
STATE PARK, WILLIAMSPORT, LYCOMING
COUNTY

--by Wes Egli, Susquehanna SAP
Coordinator

When I first decided to participate in SAP, I wanted to survey a park close to my home in Picture Rocks. There were several reasons for this; first, I was without reliable transportation at the time, and secondly, I wanted to do less traveling and spend more time in the field. Therefore, Susquehanna State Park in Williamsport was my choice, even though I knew it did not contain a diverse habitat.

The park consists primarily of Black Cherry and Silver Maple with the remainder being maintained turf. I had hopes of perhaps finding a casual breeder or two here on the bank of the West Branch of the Susquehanna River. An important point to remember about this park is that it is primarily used by the city as a recreational facility for fishing, boating, and picnicking. The Hiawatha Paddle Wheeler is docked here during the tourist seasons to provide visitors the opportunity to cruise the river on a river boat. I contacted Stan Rohrbach, superintendent at Shikellamy State Park, Sunbury, which maintains Susquehanna S.P., to inform him of the project and to ask permission to conduct the survey at Susquehanna. His response was positive; he wished me well and asked to be kept informed of the results. Communication between managing agencies, supporting organizations, and interested individuals is an important factor in the success of this project. Lycoming Audubon Society provided the needed

financial support which helped to get SAP off the ground. At this time, 38 species have been recorded at Susquehanna; however, only four of these have been confirmed nesting.

I will continue the SAP at Susquehanna into 1992 with the hope of finding and confirming additional nesters. I thoroughly enjoy participating in the SAP and hope that more birders throughout PA will realize the importance of such a project in pinpointing critical habitats which must be preserved for those species that are threatened or endangered. Checklists, another result of conducting these projects, will be welcome sights to birders visiting these areas in years to come.

BIRDING GUIDE PLANNED

Paula Ford, a birder from Hollidaysburg, recently signed a contract with Gulf Publishing in Houston, Texas, to write Birder's Guide to Pennsylvania. Her manuscript is to be delivered in March, 1993. In the meantime, PSO members can participate in this project by sending Paula information about their favorite birding places. Especially useful will be information about state parks, state forest natural areas, nature preserves, and other areas open to the public.

Paula is planning to visit as many of these areas as possible during the next year, and your background information will help her to plan these trips. To facilitate the collection of data, she has developed a questionnaire that asks for information on directions, habitats, trails, notable birds (by season), whether regular surveys have been done, and other information. Birders who are able to help with this project should contact Paula Ford at P.O. Box 674, Hollidaysburg, PA 16648 or call her at (814) 695-4799.

HAVE YOU PAID YOUR PSO DUES YET?

ENDANGERED RAPTOR NESTING SEASON VERY SUCCESSFUL

Pennsylvania's Bald Eagles, Ospreys, and Peregrine Falcons have recorded their most successful nesting season in more than 40 years. There were more nests with more young than before 1950, lending great hope for a dramatic recovery of these large raptors by the turn of the century.

"Our endangered raptors have had a good year," said Dan Brauning, a PA Game Commission wildlife biologist. "We're looking at a probable production of 12 young Bald Eagles," continued Brauning.

Seven Peregrine Falcon territories were observed in the state, six in the lower Delaware Valley and one in downtown Pittsburgh.

Pennsylvania's Osprey population produced 13 active nests, more than were ever documented in one year in the state's history. Included was the remarkable discovery of a nest in Somerset County, the first nesting Osprey in western Pennsylvania since 1910.

Five young Bald Eagles have fledged from two Crawford County nest sites this year. A Butler County nest produced three young. Two young Bald Eagles fledged from a nest located on Haldeman Island in Dauphin County. Nests in Tioga and York Counties each produced one young eagle. A pair of Bald Eagles established a nest near the Delaware Water Gap in New Jersey, supporting speculation that there was nesting activity along the upper Delaware River. PA began a Bald Eagle reintroduction program in 1983. Between 1983 and 1989, Game Commission personnel brought 91 eaglets to PA from the Churchill River Valley of Saskatchewan. Removed from Canadian nests at about five weeks of age, the young eaglets spent a month and a half in artificial nests located atop 30-foot high hacking towers in the Delaware and Susquehanna River valleys. All but three of the 91 Churchill River Valley eaglets survived, were banded, and were released into the wild. PA's

eagle reintroduction program received financial support from the Richard King Mellon Foundation, endangered species funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Game Commission's Working Together for Wildlife program.

Fourteen young Osprey were removed from Chesapeake Bay nests this year and relocated to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Tioga-Hammond Dam in Tioga County for hacking.

PA's Peregrine Falcons have demonstrated a liking for nesting sites located on man-made structures such as tall buildings, high bridges, and towers. The nesting pair in Pittsburgh chose the Gulf Tower building for their home. First sighted in 1990, the pair nested on the 37th floor of the building early this spring. Four eggs were laid by April 2 in a nest box located on a narrow ledge. The eggs hatched May 3. Brauning related that the nest was located just outside an unoccupied section of the building. Windows in the immediate area were blocked off to provide additional privacy to the adult birds and their young. Brauning attached U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service identification leg bands to the young prior to their fledging. Records show that the female of the adult pair was hacked from a Virginia cliff in 1989. By mid-summer, two of the four young Pittsburgh peregrines had suffered fatal injuries, believed to have been caused by in-flight collisions with buildings and other man-made obstructions. A third young falcon was missing from the nest location. Brauning pointed out that young peregrines and indeed, all young raptors, are at high risk in their first full year after hatching. The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and the Allegheny Conference on Community Development joined the Game Commission in the Pittsburgh peregrine project.

Brauning's records show that peregrine nesting in southeastern PA has primarily taken place on bridges spanning the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers. Seven resident adult pairs of peregrines have been identified on the lower

Delaware in New Jersey and PA. Peregrines have set up housekeeping in the Philadelphia area on the PA-NJ Turnpike Bridge, the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge, the Girard Point Bridge, and the Walt Whitman. The Commodore Barry Bridge at Chester is home to an adult pair. Brauning said that in most cases, peregrines nest on sections of a bridge span below the roadway deck. Common locations are in openings in box beam supports. Nesting boxes have been placed in strategic locations on many of the bridges to promote successful fledging. Young peregrines hatched from bridge nest sites face many hazards, including encounters with bridge traffic, disease, and disturbance. Brauning said that most bridge authorities have altered and, in some cases, rescheduled planned maintenance programs in an effort to avoid disturbing nesting peregrines.

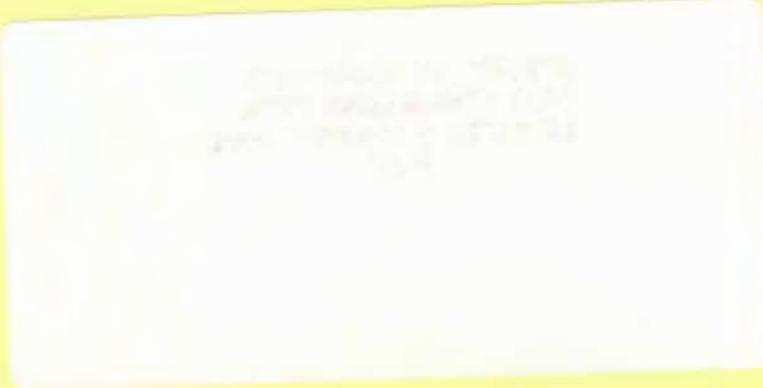
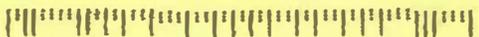
Repeated observations of a bird on a historic cliff nest location in Bucks

County raise the hope that a natural site may be reoccupied for the first time in PA since the decline of the species in the 1950s.

CHECKLIST ORDER

People looking through checklists are often surprised to find that the birds are not listed in alphabetical order and wonder what, if any, meaning the chosen order has. Just as there are official common and scientific names of birds, there is also an official checklist order provided by the AOU. The checklist order is based on evolutionary history and ancestral relationships. The most ancient or "primitive" birds are listed first and the most recent or "advanced" birds are listed last. Species that are near each other on the list are more closely related than species that are far apart.

--Margaret Brittingham



Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology
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