

PSO Newsletter



The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

February 1996

Volume 7, Number 1

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK...

I was listening to a discussion on National Public Radio the other day about the two opposing camps on conservation. The optimistic side believed that science would continue to find solutions to our energy needs as it has in the past, and we should therefore not be worried. The pessimistic side believed that science could not solve all of our energy need problems and the quantity of fuels on this planet are finite.

Of course, both camps are correct, and both camps are wrong. As a scientist, I firmly believe that science and technology will continue to come up with more efficient ways to use our existing energy sources and will also eventually make use of new energy sources (fusion, for instance, could run on just plain water). However, no matter what energy source is utilized, with the possible exception of sunlight, all resources on this planet are finite. And, the timing of the next great technological break-through cannot be predicted. Therefore, conservation is still in our best interests. It will widen the window of opportunity for that next technological miracle.

Conservation also reduces the amount of pollution and environmental damage. By slowing these processes, we also widen another window of opportunity—the one needed by wildlife to adjust to the

changing environment. Extinction takes place when a species cannot evolve fast enough to keep up with changing environmental conditions. Sometimes these changing conditions are natural (such as the meteor impact that many scientists now believe led to the extinction of the dinosaurs), but in recent history most have been man-made (such as destroying the old-growth forests in which Ivory-billed Woodpeckers nested). We can't control meteors (at least not yet), but we can control man-made influences on the environment—and it is in our best interest to do so.

Speaking of man-made influences, I am looking forward to our annual meeting in Slippery Rock this May. We will see some of man's influence on wetlands and grasslands and a program initiated by the Bartramian Audubon Society to bring together private landowners and conservationists (the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive) to preserve land for wildlife and the future.

There will be field trips to both of these kinds of habitats, programs on Purple Martins, Sandhill Cranes, wetlands, bird identification, and more. Hope to see you there!

--Franklin Haas, President

PSO ANNUAL MEETING

May 17-19, 1996

Slippery Rock University

Hosted by the Bartramian Audubon Society

FIELD TRIPS

WORKSHOPS

SOCIAL HOUR

BANQUET

TARGET SPECIES

Sandhill Cranes	Upland Sandpiper
Short-eared Owl	Sedge Wren
Marsh Wren	Yellow-throated Warbler
Henslow's Sparrow	Rails

Saturday's Field Trips (Leaders)

- ① Celery Swamp , Pennsy Swamp, Volant (Gene Wilhelm, Suzanne Butcher)
- ② Wolf Creek Narrows, Miller Tract (Mark and Sandy Swansiger)
- ③ Moraine State Park, McConnell's Mills State Park (Chuck Cornelius)

Sunday's Field Trips

- ① Volant (Bob Walczak)
- ② Shenango (Shirley McCarl)
- ③ Barkeyville Grasslands (Russ States)

Programs will include Purple Martin Research, presented by Jamie Hill; Special Areas Project Update by Doug Gross; Sandhill Cranes by the Bartramian Audubon Society; an Overview of the Area; and more. Details will be forthcoming in the next newsletter.

THE CONSERVATION PAGE

Anyone who believes that the current budget impasse is simply about balancing the budget within seven years has not been reading the fine print in the Contract on America or paying attention to the voting records of Congressmen from Pennsylvania. This debate is about the future direction of our country and where we should be spending our money--- not whether we're spending money.

To use just one example, let's look at Congress' efforts to essentially repeal the Clean Water Act's protection for wetlands. The Shuster bill (HR 961 as passed by the House in 1995) virtually eliminates wetlands protection by redefining how wetlands are identified. According to Congressmen/ women voting for the bill, the definition of a wetland is "exceptionally vague" and is merely a composite of various court rulings, agency negotiations and executive branch decisions. They believe that as a result, it seems that every last puddle has the potential to be labeled a wetland. Thus the supporters of HR 961 feel that the Shuster bill would fix that problem by defining a wetland using plants, soils and hydrology and requiring that a wetland be inundated with water for 21 days during the growing season.

All of this sounds reasonable until one looks closer at the legislation and discovers that these Congressmen/women support an extreme view regarding wetlands protection and failed to incorporate sound science into the legislation.

For example, the definition of a wetland is not exceptionally vague and is not the "...composite developed from court rulings, agency negotiations and executive branch decisions" that is claimed. The definition of a wetland was developed by scientists in the mid 1970's and published in July, 1977 as a federal regulation governing wetlands.

To understand how extreme their view is, scientists using the new wetland delineation methodology in HR 961 at numerous locations around the country, found that 75 to 90 per cent of our Nation's wetlands would no longer be defined as a wetland. Pennsylvania would lose about 85% of its 320,000 acres of vegetated wetlands. Portions of nationally recognized

wetlands such as the Florida Everglades and the Great Dismal Swamp would no longer be wetlands. Here in Pennsylvania, portions of Bear Meadows Swamp (Centre County), as well as other obvious marshes and bogs in Pennsylvania would no longer be considered wetland. Obvious floodplain wetlands along the Susquehanna River that routinely store vast amounts of water during early season floods would no longer be wetland under the Shuster bill.

Supporters of the Shuster bill claim they have convincing bipartisan support. What they fail to say is that the extremists of both parties favor eliminating protection for water quality and wetlands. This is not quite the same as having common-sense, bipartisan support for good legislation--which this bill does not.

To illustrate, a July 5, 1995, OP/ED piece in the *NY Times* by one of the moderate Republicans in the House, Representative Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY), chair of the House Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Environment, decried the extremists attacking the Clean Water Act, saying that this Congress is made up of "...an increasingly strident conservative vanguard, which believes that extremism in the defense of libertarianism is no vice and moderation in the pursuit of deregulation is no virtue." Congressmen/women supporting HR 961 are part of this crew.

Representative Boehlert advocates basing wetland regulations on science. Yet this Congress views scientific research as suspect because its findings are politically uncomfortable. As Representative Boehlert reports, during the House debate on the Clean Water Act, proponents of the Shuster bill attacked a report on wetlands prepared by the National Academy of Sciences, who was asked to prepare the report by Congress, because the report inconveniently stated that the scientific definition of wetlands and the accompanying delineation manual were scientifically valid.

During the last election, we thought we were sending to Congress people interested in balancing the budget and fine tuning our government. Instead, it appears we have given an opportunity for extremists who have lain in wait for over 40 years to attack environmental laws that have made our country one of the most prosperous and healthiest in the world. I am sorry to report that several of these members of Congress are from Pennsylvania. They are Congress-

men Shuster, Clinger, English, Gekas, McDade, Walker, Doyle, Holden, Klink, and Mascara.

I believe it is time to let these Congressmen know that as PA residents and voters, we know the value of our environment, and we do not want our elected representatives voting to weaken environmental protection.

If you would like to comment or offer suggestions, concerning *The Conservation Page*, contact Mark Henry, PSO Conservation Editor, P.O. Box 873, State College, PA 16804.

contact Dan Brauning, R.R. 2, Box 484, Montgomery, PA 17752.



Raven Reporter

News of the Special Areas Projects

Following Through on Christmas Bird Counts

Pennsylvania has seen another Christmas Bird Count come and go. It was another successful year for many bird clubs and Audubon chapters. With the increasing popularity of birding, there are more experienced observers in each circle every year. The numbers of new birders continue to swell.

Each Christmas Count has its memorable birds. This year there have been several reports of Northern Shrike, perhaps more than in any previous year.

It is important that we follow through on two different fronts after Christmas Counts. We need to continue to involve the new birders in our trips and other activities. New Christmas Count participants are potential SAP volunteers and *Pennsylvania Birds* contributors.

We also should return to the locations of rare bird sightings and find out if the birds stayed in the area. Do we know much about the survival rates or fidelity of Northern Shrikes to areas where they are found in early winter? How many Hermit Thrushes and Yellow-rumped Warblers stay the winter where we find them in late December? What about the stray Gray Catbird or House Wren?

Let's get out there and verify the rare bird sightings

PSO BROCHURES AVAILABLE

PSO has recently produced a brochure about our organization. If you visit a sanctuary, state park, or any other place birders frequent, we would be glad to get some to you. Contact Alan Gregory.

Thanks for your help in spreading the word about PSO!!!

(717) 788-1425
or e-mail at meg5@psu.edu

NOMINATIONS BEING SOLICITED

Nominations are currently being solicited for PSO's second annual Earl Poole Award. If you would like to recommend someone as the next recipient, please

and check on our Christmas Count finds. There is very little information on how long some of these good finds lingered in the state.

Following through is often difficult to accomplish, but the benefits can be great.

New Special Areas Projects

We would like to welcome Lackawanna Audubon Society to the Special Areas Project. The Society is taking on a few SAPs in Lackawanna and adjacent counties. We are very pleased to add this Scranton-based group to our list because of the particular importance of the Pocono Northeast to Pennsylvania's natural heritage and birding traditions. Lackawanna Audubon is adopting at least four SAPs: Lackawanna State Park, Gouldsboro State Park, Promised Land State Park, and the Society's nature preserve. We have already received data for Promised Land from stalwart birder, Rosann Bongey.

As those who attended the Long Pond field trip at the last PSO meeting can readily attest, the Poconos are a fascinating area. I am sure that the Lackawanna Audubon and Pocono Audubon Societies are going to make interesting discoveries as they explore the areas they have adopted as SAPs. Anyone who is interested in contributing to the Special Areas Projects in the Pocono Northeast should contact me or the SAP local coordinators. In addition to those listed above, Chris Turn and Bernie Morris are also leading SAP efforts in that region.

Use SAP Data for the IBA Project

The National Audubon Society is launching the Important Bird Areas Project in Pennsylvania. An IBA is a "site of special significance to breeding or non-breeding birds and which, on some basis, can be distinguished from surrounding areas." Most IBAs will be protected or managed areas in public ownership. The Audubon Society is currently soliciting nominations for IBAs in Pennsylvania. Everyone involved with the Special Areas Project should be aware of the IBA Project and consider nominating a location as a Pennsylvania IBA. If you have not yet received a package from Audubon, please request one from Gary

Crossley at the Camp Hill office. I will provide his address later.

IBAs must qualify for at least one category with a given set of criteria:

Category PA-1: Sites where birds concentrate in significant numbers when breeding, in winter, or during migration.

Category PA-2: Sites for endangered and threatened species.

Category PA-3: Sites for Pennsylvania species of special concern.

Category PA-4: Sites containing representative, rare, threatened, or unique habitats, with characteristic birds.

Category PA-5: Sites for long-term avian research or monitoring.

There are quantitative and qualitative criteria for each of these categories which I will not list here to conserve space. Anyone who would like to nominate a specific place as one of the state's Important Bird Areas must justify this nomination with data. These data may come from published reports of field observations. They might also originate from Breeding Bird Atlas, Breeding Bird Surveys, Christmas Counts, Grassland Surveys, Shorebird Surveys, Colonial Waterbird Surveys, or Special Areas Projects. Personal notes are also acceptable, but perhaps not as organized as data obtained in one of these projects.

There are many ways that SAP data can help qualify a location as an IBA. The **Category PA-1** requires data concerning the number of migrant birds that use the location. Waterfowl, shorebird, wading bird, and raptor migration numbers are easily extracted from SAP trip or seasonal summary forms. Look for peaks in the numbers, especially of the first two categories. Raptor bottlenecks are most likely to be nominated from regular hawk watch sites (which include a few SAPs). The exact dates and numbers for each species are easily found in the SAP format.

Special Area Project forms highlight Pennsylvania's Species of Special Concern. This list includes the Commonwealth's Endangered and Threatened bird species and Candidates to the Endangered /Threatened list. A couple of these species have also been listed as Federal Endangered or Threatened species (Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon). So, **Category PA-2** and **PA-3** are both easily accessible in SAP forms.

Many SAPs are being conducted at locations that contain unusual or threatened habitats for the general

area. The swamp, mudflats, bog, or grassland that your group concentrates on during certain field trips might make your SAP qualify as a PA IBA.

Some groups are committed to doing SAP as a long-term project or have set up Breeding Bird Census or Winter Population plots at their SAP location. These projects might qualify your location as an IBA.

What if your SAP does not qualify as an IBA? Does this mean that your data are worthless and your efforts meaningless? Certainly not. There are actually only a few locations in the state which are sure bets as IBAs. Many locations might have local importance to birds but not qualify on a state-wide basis. It is also important to remember that the most important result of the SAP is education of the general public about birds. This does not necessarily happen at locations which might qualify as IBAs. People are most likely to learn about birds in the places close to home that host some birds, whether or not the numbers of birds there are exceptional. So, if your SAP does not happen to qualify as an Important Bird Area, it might qualify as an "Important Birder's Area" or an "Important Educational Experience Area."

On the other hand, if you think a location in your area qualifies as an IBA, but you do not have very much data on the birds there, perhaps you should adopt that location as a Special Areas Project. There's no time to start like the present.

Please feel free to contact:

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National Audubon Society
1104 Fernwood Ave., #300
Camp Hill, PA 17011

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Internet address: gcrossley@audubon.org

Have you renewed your subscription to *PA Birds* and PSO yet?

Request for Assistance: SAP Slides Wanted

Does anyone have slides of their Special Area or the local SAP team?

The Raven Reporter would like to have a set of slides available for public programs about SAP. By pouring over hundreds of field sheets, I feel as if I have been to many Project areas even if I have not set foot in the place. The birds tell us a lot about what habitats are at each Special Area, but there is nothing like pictures to show what our project does.

Bird pictures would be appreciated, too. However, good slides of the Special Area and birders having fun would be the best thing you could send us (besides the data).

Everyone has their opinions about such things, but I think birdwatchers are better looking than other people. Just an opinion. It's just something that I have noticed.

Prove me right.

Send any extra slides to Doug Gross at the address provided in the Raven Reporter column. We would be glad to compensate anyone for slides used for the PSO Special Areas Project.

Data Management Progress

Tons of bird data have been collected by teams of birders at Special Areas throughout the state. A year ago, we started managing the data a little more seriously with the help of a Wild Resource Conservation Fund grant. Since January 1995, we have entered bird data of 1800 field trips into the SAP database. This includes

data submitted for 52 Special Areas from the years 1991 through 1994 and most of 1995. The data are being managed with a Windows database program. At this point, we are doing a thorough proofreading of the data input. This is a grueling, time-consuming process that is necessary to maintain integrity of the information. All of the data were also checked before data entry.

Thanks to all of you who have contributed to the data pool of the Special Areas Project. It is big and growing a little bit bigger every week.

Wayward Special Areas Projects

Many enthusiastic birders enlisted as Special Areas Project coordinators. Only about two-thirds of them have ever sent in any data to the SAP state coordinator. Please retrieve any old data forms that you filled out and send them in now. Do not worry about being late; all will be forgiven! (This is sort of like overdue books at a public library. After a while, they are just glad to see them returned.)

Just send in any SAP data that you have been hanging onto or forgot to send in. SAP depends on volunteer hours, so we are glad to get any data that you might send our way. It is not too late to contribute data to the SAP, or to begin inventorying an area that you wanted to start long ago. The first trip is the hardest one to make. Just get started.

The New Official List of Pennsylvania Birds

The Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee (PORC) published its revised Official Pennsylvania Bird List in the most recent issue of *Pennsylvania Birds*. It is a milestone achievement for Pennsylvania ornithology. The members of PORC, past and present, deserve our thanks for a splendid job of reviewing the bird literature, submitted records, and birds in the field to arrive at the latest version of the Official List. This short document published in *Pennsylvania Birds* (Volume 9, No. 2, pages 118-123) is valuable to all those who birdwatch in the state. Please take the time to look it over in detail.

The PSO Special Areas Project recognizes PORC as the records committee for Pennsylvania bird records. It always has! (Please refer to the SAP instructions). All

records must comply with the standards set by that committee. Observers should make sure that any species submitted as a record to SAP must be on the PA Official List and that additional documentation is required for species as indicated on the Official List.

What does this specifically mean? The **bold-faced/underlined** species and any species not listed require documentation or proof that the bird was observed. The documentation required for some species varies by county. For instance, Summer Tanager should be documented in all counties except Greene.

There are many ways to document bird sightings. Some of these are reviewed by Ed Kwater in an article published in *PA Birds* (Volume 8, No. 2, pages 63-65). Such descriptions can be a photograph, recording, or a written account of the bird observation (the bird, itself). In some cases, a specimen might be appropriate, but most records are made by less lethal methods. A hand-drawn sketch of the bird is a good start at describing the bird. Independent descriptions are another method worth considering. The first observer could just ask another birder to check out the mystery bird and, without prejudicing the second observer, ask for a second opinion and description (a Class II record). Of course, photographs are a great way to document a sighting. Take several photos. Tape recordings are also very helpful for many species. The different Red Crossbill types (species, subspecies?) are told apart best by their call notes, for instance.

One of the most interesting and satisfying documentations of a rare bird in the state was made by Karen Lippy at Codorus State Park. She videotaped a Ross' Gull at the park on 10 October 1991 after spotting it the previous day. As Local Coordinator for the Codorus State Park SAP, Karen submitted the tape to the Special Areas Project as documentation of the sighting. I checked the tape, but felt that this was documentation for PORC, so I forwarded it to Barb Haas, then PORC Secretary. The rest is history, well-recorded by Ed Kwater in another *PA Birds* article (Volume 8, No. 2, page 87). Karen's documentation is unique and valuable, demonstrating how important independent observations and visual documentation can be. It is much more credible and substantial than a simple claim that you saw a Ross' Gull or some other rare bird.

Remember the burden of proof lies on us who claim to find rarities.

Thanks to all of you who have taken the time to submit documentation of SAP sightings to PORC or written up rare bird sightings for *PA Birds*.

Potential Long-term Monitoring at SAP Sites

The Special Areas Project is exploring the possibility of setting up long-term monitoring of breeding birds at some project locations. This would require the commitment of experienced birders who are familiar with the identification of all birds that nest in the area.

The SAP is a good starting point for long-term monitoring. The main SAP effort is in basic inventory of bird populations and documenting breeding evidence.

The SAP permanent monitoring sites are part of a Partners In Flight Monitoring and Inventory Committee agreement. Breeding Bird Surveys (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Survey road routes) and Breeding Bird Censuses are very helpful but do not cover much of off-road Pennsylvania. The PIF Monitoring and Inventory

Committee feels that point-count surveys are an appropriate method for monitoring birds at such locations. The methodology is becoming fairly standard among monitoring efforts, especially of forest birds. We are still working out the details of the technique but feel as if this can be started in the next year. Point counts are most appropriate where there is a fairly large area of forest or old field habitat. Several Special Areas are being conducted where there is sufficient habitat for such an effort.

Anyone who is interested in participating in the surveys should contact Doug Gross.

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NEEDED: Artwork for PSO Newsletter

If you have any artwork you are willing to share with PSO for publication in the newsletter, please mail to:

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

Thank you!!!



Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology
c/o R. V. Higbee
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