

PSO

Newsletter



The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

July 1996

Volume 7, Number 3

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK....

At the May PSO meeting in Slippery Rock, the gavel was passed to me by vote of the members present. Frank Haas's two-year tenure as president will be difficult to follow as his knowledge of Pennsylvania's birds is keen, continually sharpened by coeditorship of the state's ornithological journal. We owe a lot to Frank for agreeing to lead the Society for the past two years with so many other responsibilities. Let us all do our share to serve the Society as our past leaders have done, whatever our talents may be.

As an ecologist with the U.S. Interior Department (initially with Fish and Wildlife Service, then National Biological Survey, now National Biological Service, and in October, the Biological Resource Division of the U.S. Geological Survey), I hope to bring a somewhat different set of skills and perspective to the PSO. I am not among the state's "Top 10" birders for any of the various lists that are published, either geographic, annual, or lifetime. Nor am I doing "cutting edge" research on bird populations as are some of our members and directors, present and past.

I do bring a lifelong interest in birds to the table;

however, my interest developed as an early teenager with the fortune of meeting people like Bob and Ron Leberman of Meadville and the Stulls of Presque Isle at an early age of life. Christmas Bird Counts in the Pymatuning area and spring migrations at Presque Isle were extremely stimulating experiences for me as a young teenager. (I fear that our young people today are not being enriched with these experiences, and thus our society today is lacking that environmental conscience we so desperately need.) I also began to make regular contributions to the regional bird monitoring journals during the mid '60s, including *The Sandpiper* (edited by Bob Leberman) and the *Audubon Field Notes* (regionally edited by George Hall).

After writing a bachelor's degree thesis on communication behavior in nuthatches at Thiel College, Greenville, PA, I moved out of the state for military service and to pursue graduate work in the behavior and ecology of coral reef fishes, first on Guam and then in Hawaii. After 12 years in the tropics and completion of my MS and Ph.D. degrees, I returned to my home state to teach at Thiel College for five years. During this period I worked with Ed Brucker to save the state's largest rookery for Great Blue Herons from chain saws and to found and develop the Brucker Great

Blue Heron Sanctuary of Thiel College. I also served as regional coordinator for Mercer, Lawrence, and half of Butler Counties for the Breeding Bird Atlas Project. I then took a research position with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Wellsboro where I now live and work. Though mostly involved with fishery and aquatic ecology, my projects include a determination of the diet of Double-crested Cormorants in Lake Ontario (recently published in Great Lakes Research Review and available from me on request). Many of you are aware of my diet (studies of the Great Blue Heron presented at the PSO annual meeting at Rector), so what is my perspective? I hope to bring organizational skills to the Society that may broaden our capabilities and interests somewhat. I have numerous contacts with environmentalists, consultants, government officials, and programs, universities, and industry at local, state, and regional levels. We have a request from the Ecological Services Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at State College to comment on proposed goals and strategies for timber harvesting on Pennsylvania's state forests. I expect to develop our response shortly. I will be writing to our counterpart societies in neighboring states to determine what they are doing for ornithology at the state level. We should not be isolated. I believe we should continue our interest in (1) the enjoyment of birds and their habitats, (2) the monitoring of bird populations as an important management tool (e.g. our Special Areas Project), (3) ecological research, and (4) limited advocacy of environmental protection policy.

What do you think? Your views and suggestions for guidance are welcome. Let me or other directors know.

--Bob Ross, President

BOB LEBERMAN RECEIVES EARLE POOLE AWARD

Bob Leberman, long-time bird bander for Carnegie Museum's Powdermill Nature Reserve in Westmoreland County, received the second annual Earle Poole Award at the PSO's annual meeting in Slippery Rock this year. Bob was recognized for his long-term efforts to band migratory birds of the Allegheny Plateau and at additional stations in Crawford County and at Presque Isle. To date Bob has banded over 400,000 birds in Pennsylvania and has provided one

of the largest data bases for migratory bird movement studies in North America.

Other notable achievements in Bob's career include publication of both research papers and regional bird guides. His research has focused on body size in hummingbirds, cranial air sacs, and the migration and distribution of birds in Pennsylvania and Belize. He authored 23 species accounts in the *Atlas of Breeding Birds in Pennsylvania*. He has published checklists of birds of the Ligonier Valley and Belize. In 1988 he completed *A Field List of the Birds of Western Pennsylvania and Adjacent Regions*.

Bob began his ornithological career with the Meadville Bird and Tree Club, serving as president from 1955 to 1965. He obtained his federal banding permit in 1958 and worked with Jean and Jim Stull in the early years at Presque Isle Banding Station. He has done field work with the well known nature entertainer, Hal Harrison. Few people have monitored and documented bird occurrence, migration, and distribution at the local and regional levels as has Bob. He served as editor-in-chief and publisher of *The Sandpiper*, covering western Pennsylvania, northeastern Ohio, and western New York during its 17-year run (1957 to 1974). Since 1953 Bob has been sub-regional compiler for *American Birds* (now *Audubon Field Notes*) and since inception Westmoreland County's compiler for *Pennsylvania Birds*. His Christmas Bird Counts for Linesville span a 30-year period dating to 1955.

Bob has served on the Pennsylvania Biological Survey, Ornithological Technical Committee, and Records Committee (1988-91) as well as the Eastern Bird Banding Association Council as Memorial Grants Chair (early 1970s). He speaks to about 1,000 students/visitors each year in Rector and Pittsburgh and has played a prominent role in the training of several prominent ornithologists including Tom Bancroft, Mary McKittrick, Angelo Caperello, and Bob Mulvihill. Pennsylvania and the region truly have benefited and continue to benefit greatly from his work and commitment to ornithology.

The award recipient was chosen among many other candidates by PSO's Earle Poole Award Committee and presented by outgoing and incoming presidents, Frank Haas and Bob Ross at the PSO banquet on May 18.

1996 PSO Meeting Participants

The following 64 people registered and attended the annual meeting May 17-19.

Anna Bert	Margaret Kenepf
Dennis Bert	Kathy Kern
Gloria Bickel	Candy Krenzer
Dan Brauning	Scott Killam
Dick Byers	Wayne Laubscher
Margaret Buckwalter	Bob Leberman
Suzanne Butcher	Karen Lippy
Bob Cook	Bob Martin
Harry Cunningham	Shirley McCarl
Jane Earle	Carol McCullough
Wes Egli	Fred McCullough
John Fedak	Cathy Miller
Ken Gabler	Grace Randolph
Randi Gerrish	Kathy Reeves
Sarah Gerrish	Bob Ross
Alan Gregory	John Salvetti
Monica Gregory	Glenda Sarver
Doug Gross	Matt Sarver
Carol Guba	Glenna Schwalbe
Barb Haas	Paul Schwalbe
Frank Haas	Mary Jane Seipler
Devon Halterman	Lisa Shannon
Kammy Halterman	Dennis Smeltzer
Mark Henry	Don Snyder
Margaret Higbee	Georgette Syster
Roger Higbee	Genevieve Tvrdik
Jamie Hill	Peter Vickery
Rob Hilton	Linda Wagner
Deuanne Hoffman	Don Watts
Shonah Hunter	Gene Wilhelm
Hal Kaufman	Deb Yovanovich
Rudy Keller	Gene Zielinski

others talk all afternoon about birds? And then attending a banquet and again listening to people talk all evening about birds? This can be a tiring experience for even the most dedicated of ornithologists.

To anyone participating in the seventh annual PSO meeting last month at Slippery Rock University and not noticing a certain six-year-old young lady in attendance with her mother--through all the early morning field trips, the afternoon sessions, and the evening banquet--you weren't very observant. Although I did not formally meet her, I enjoyed watching and being with her during both the Saturday and Sunday morning field trips. She helped me to be more conscious of our more common birds and not to take them for granted. She was quiet, observant, and interested. My birding hat is off to you, young lady, and to your mother for bringing you with her. I was pleased to be part of your birding weekend, and I hope you enjoyed yourself and the birds. I hope to be able to meet you some day--perhaps at next year's meeting in Shippensburg--where you can teach me a few things about birds!

(Editor's Note: The young lady is Devon Halterman, daughter of new member Kammy Halterman from Mt. Pleasant. We were happy you both attended!)

HANDY FOUR-LETTER CODES FOR BIRDS

by Doug Gross

Many field observers have been using a set of four-letter codes for birds which was invented by bird banders (called alpha codes on banding forms). It is a fairly easy system to use and makes field note-taking simple. Since it is standardized, anyone can read your notes if they know the system (including yourself many months later). I use these abbreviations for taking notes on bird walks, and many field observers use the system for point counts and other survey methods.

Many people use their own abbreviations for birds. Most systems lack consistency and uniformity which do not make the notes clear. For instance, if someone writes "CH 5" for a field trip did that birder see five chats or chickadees? What kind of chickadee? So, try this system out. It works for hundreds of field ornithologists.

The system is fairly simple. If the bird name is

Special Feature

Birder of the Weekend

by Wesley Egli

What were your favorite activities when you were six years old? As for me, I know what I was doing at this time of year--playing baseball--every day after school then all day during summer vacation. For a change of pace, I'd throw in a few other games and activities.

How many of us would have considered attending a weekend ornithological conference with mom or dad and doing nothing except watching birds and listening to

BIRDS SPOTTED DURING THE MAY 1996 PSO MEETING

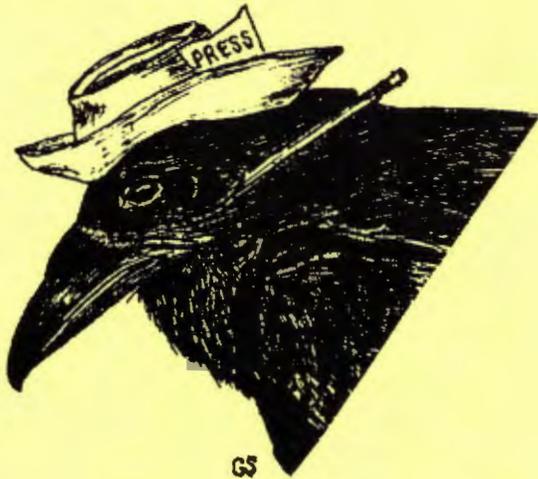
Pied-billed Grebe	Rock Dove	House Wren	Ovenbird
Double-crested Cormorant	Mourning Dove	Marsh Wren	N. Waterthrush
Great Blue Heron	Black-billed Cuckoo	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	La. Waterthrush
Green Heron	Great Horned Owl	E. Bluebird	Connecticut Warbler
Tundra Swan	Chimney Swift	Veery	Common Yellowthroat
Canada Goose	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Swainson's Thrush	Hooded Warbler
Wood Duck	Belted Kingfisher	Wood Thrush	Wilson's Warbler
Mallard	Red-headed Woodpecker	Am. Robin	Canada Warbler
Blue-winged Teal	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Gray Catbird	Yellow-breasted Chat
Hooded Merganser	Downy Woodpecker	Brown Thrasher	Scarlet Tanager
Common Merganser	Hairy Woodpecker	Cedar Waxwing	N. Cardinal
Turkey Vulture	N. Flicker	European Starling	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Osprey	Pileated Woodpecker	White-eyed Vireo	Indigo Bunting
Bald Eagle	E. Wood-Pewee	Solitary Vireo	Eastern Towhee
N. Harrier	Acadian Flycatcher	Yellow-throated Vireo	Chipping Sparrow
Cooper's Hawk	Alder Flycatcher	Warbling Vireo	Field Sparrow
Red-shouldered Hawk	Willow Flycatcher	Philadelphia Vireo	Vesper Sparrow
Broad-winged Hawk	Least Flycatcher	Red-eyed Vireo	Savannah Sparrow
Red-tailed Hawk	E. Phoebe	Blue-winged Warbler	Grasshopper Sparrow
Am. Kestrel	Great Crested Flycatcher	Tennessee Warbler	Henslow's Sparrow
Ring-necked Pheasant	E. Kingbird	Nashville Warbler	Song Sparrow
Ruffed Grouse	Horned Lark	Yellow Warbler	Swamp Sparrow
N. Bobwhite	Purple Martin	Chestnut-sided Warbler	White-throated Sparrow
Virginia Rail	Tree Swallow	Magnolia Warbler	White-crowned Sparrow
Sora	N. Rough-winged Swallow	Cape May Warbler	Bobolink
Common Moorhen	Bank Swallow	Black-throated Blue Warbler	Red-winged Blackbird
Am. Coot	Cliff Swallow	Yellow-rumped Warbler	E. Meadowlark
Killdeer	Barn Swallow	Black-throated Green Warbler	Common Grackle
Lesser Yellowlegs	Blue Jay	Blackburnian Warbler	Brown-headed Cowbird
Solitary Sandpiper	Am. Crow	Prairie Warbler	Orchard Oriole
Spotted Sandpiper	Black-capped Chickadee	Bay-breasted Warbler	Baltimore Oriole
Upland Sandpiper	Tufted Titmouse	Blackpoll Warbler	Purple Finch
Least Sandpiper	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Cerulean Warbler	House Finch
Bonaparte's Gull	White-breasted Nuthatch	Black-and-white Warbler	Am. Goldfinch
Ring-billed Gull	Brown Creeper	Am. Redstart	House Sparrow
Common Tern	Carolina Wren		

(continued from page 3)

composed of one word, use the first four letters of the word. (Ovenbird = OVEN). If the bird name is composed of two words, use the first two letters of each word (Eastern Meadowlark = EAME). If the name is composed of three words, including a hyphenated words, use the first letter of the first two words and the first two letters of the third word (White-eyed Vireo = WEVI). If the name is composed of four words, use the first letter of each word (Black-throated Green Warbler = BTGW). After a while, the codes become second nature. I have heard a few people say they saw a TuVu as their first sign of spring.

There are a few exceptions to these easy rules. The following regular PA birds include the few exceptions: Bank Swallow (BANS), Barn Swallow (BARS), Cedar Waxwing (CEDW), Cerulean Warbler (CERW), Blackburnian Warbler (BLBW), Blackpoll Warbler (BLPW).

It is also good to take notes to a subspecific level when that is possible. Banders do this all the time. So, write MYWA if you see a "Myrtle" Warbler or YPWA for Yellow Palm Warbler (the eastern subspecies). I took these codes out of the 1988 North American Bird Banding Manual. I can furnish a copy to people who need one.



The Raven Reporter

News of the Special Areas Project

Have You Made an IBA Nomination Lately?

The Important Bird Area Project is giving Pennsylvania birders a great opportunity to be the first state with an IBA list. We can set the tone and the trend for the whole country's Important Bird Areas. It is time to get involved with the project in the most meaningful way. Nominate a worthy location as an IBA.

Do not wait for somebody else to nominate the local top bird location. It probably has NOT been done. I have been fortunate to see a list of the locations nominated as of mid-May. It does NOT include MANY of the best bird places in the state. When I read *Pennsylvania Birds*, certain migrant traps and rarity hot spots are mentioned repeatedly in the county reports. Most of them are NOT nominated as IBAs so far. You would be amazed at how many places have not been entered into the IBA nomination list. For instance, few of the large marshes of the northwestern counties and very few Poconos locations have been nominated.

Don't wait for somebody else not to do it. Write up an IBA nomination and mail it in to Gary Crossley as soon as you can. If there is some doubt about a location being nominated yet, just ask if it has been submitted. That only takes a phone call.

Let Gary know you are interested in the IBA. He is at the Mid-Atlantic Office, National Audubon Society, 1104 Fernwood Ave., #300, Camp Hill, PA 17011. Phone: 717-763-4985. Fax: 717-763-4981. Internet: gcrossley@audubon.org.

Marshes and Grasslands Galore!

Bartramian Audubon Society really did a great job of showing off the marvelous marshes and grasslands of Butler County. The Slippery Rock meeting was a terrific eye-opener and ear-opener for me. There are no marshes in my area the size of Celery Swamp and Pennsy Swamp. Hearing Common Moorhens (I'll always think of them as gallinules) and Marsh Wrens was a special treat for me as I believe it was for many birders visiting there for the first time. The sight of Upland Sandpipers flying over a grassy knoll was also a wonderful experience.

When certain habitats are easily accessible to you, it is very easy to take them for granted. This certainly is not the case in Butler County. It was very reassuring to see that the Bartramians are so familiar with the neighborhood and so friendly with their neighbors. They certainly do not take their valuable bird areas casually. Instead, they keep a wary eye and ear trained on the local hot-spots for bird diversity. We certainly enjoyed the fruits of the many years of labor. Congratulations to Bartramian Audubon on not only giving us a delightful meeting, but knowing and watching their bird areas so vigilantly.

Best of luck with those Sandhill Cranes!

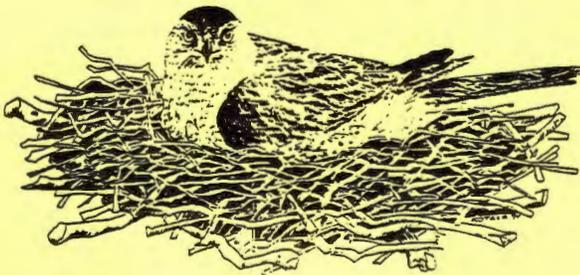
It's Summertime and the Grasses (and Sedges) are High

Ira Gershwin knew a good lyric about the lazy summer months. Late summer sometimes is a time of anticipating the autumnal migration. It is also a great time for grassland and sedgeland birds. Some meadow and prairie species do not seem to move into Pennsylvania's fields until July or August. Ornithologists speculate that some Sedge Wrens and Henslow's Sparrows nest twice—in different places. The second nesting place

might be in Pennsylvania after the birds have nested in the Midwest or South. Sedge Wrens and Dickcissels may also react to drought conditions in the Midwest by invading eastern seaboard states more.

Even if it seems late in the summer, try out the open fields and meadows. Many species resettle in fields a few weeks after they have been mowed. Just because there was "nothing there" in June, does not mean that grassland birds might not move in later.

Who will be the next birder to find a new Henslow's Sparrow colony? Perhaps the birder who keeps trying throughout the summer.



Breeding Bird Checklist

Summer is also a great time for upgrading the SAP breeding bird list. I advise all Local Coordinators to make a list of the species for which they have breeding codes in their Special Area. Then, they should compare this list to the list of species found in that part of the county during the Breeding Bird Atlas. Make a "hit list" of the birds found in the Atlas but not confirmed in the SAP so far. Target the habitats where most of those species live and schedule a few field trips around them.

Whip-poor-will Wonderings

Where are those Whip-poor-wills and is anybody listening? Have you heard a Whip-poor-will in your Special Area? Or, for that matter, anywhere in Pennsylvania?

The Whip-poor-will is one of the state's mystery birds. Do we have much information about the numbers and distribution of this night bird? No, not much besides

the Atlas data. Although a few of us get Whip-poor-wills on our BBS routes, they are not well-covered by this (mostly) day-time counting technique. We need to look and listen for them at nighttime when they are actively singing.

Whips call most frequently and reliably during and near the full moon phase of the lunar cycle. Give them a listen in your SAP. You might even glimpse one flying around the lights of the parking lot or office building at your favorite park. If ever there was a species worthy of a SAP special effort, this is it!

More on A.O.U. Checklist Changes

In the last Raven Reporter I reviewed some changes in the A.O.U. Checklist, especially those changes with the greatest implications for the Special Areas Project. For a complete list of changes, please check out Barb Haas's article in *Pennsylvania Birds*.

Some changes are reversals of old taxonomic decisions. The eastern race of the Northern Oriole seems to be a species separate from the western subspecies. So, we can go back to calling "our" oriole the Baltimore Oriole. If you see a Bullock's Oriole in Pennsylvania, make sure that you document the observation thoroughly (get pictures, witnesses, recordings, etc.) and get it approved by P.O.R.C. For SAP forms, all "Northern Orioles" will count as "Baltimore Orioles" unless the Coordinator proves otherwise.

Another change involves the taxonomically complicated towhees. The common towhee of Pennsylvania is now called "Eastern Towhee" rather than good old "Rufous-sided Towhee." For now, please just include your Eastern Towhee observations in the Rufous-sided Towhee rows of the daily and seasonal SAP forms.

We plan on making some slight improvements and changes to the SAP forms. This will be done very carefully so as not to throw our Coordinators off too much. If you have any suggestions in changing the forms, please send me a note.

SAP Wish List Update

Some PSO members and Pennsylvania birders have expressed interest in conducting SAPs at the locations mentioned in the April Newsletter. We invite more of you to review that list and consider conducting a SAP in one of these locations. We are also open to suggestions. The list is meant just as an inspirational starting point. As we receive data from the new SAPs, I will report on the progress made.

Good Summer Birding!

Send your SAP data and ideas to:

Douglas A. Gross
PSO Special Areas Project
Susquehanna SES Environmental Laboratory
R. R. 1, Box 1795
Berwick, PA 18603

THE CONSERVATION PAGE

TEAMING WITH WILDLIFE

As many PSO members already know, *Teaming with Wildlife* is a proposal to provide continual funds for programs for "nongame" species of wildlife. Programs which historically are chronically underfunded yet impact the majority of species of wildlife—species such as the neotropical migrants that desperately need conservation programs to slow or halt their population declines. The initiative, if approved by Congress, could provide up to \$13.4 million annually for "nongame" species programs. Eligible programs include conservation of birds and their habitats, population surveys, habitat assessment, and habitat enhancement. Also, monies would be available for educational programs so that more Pennsylvanians can be made aware of wildlife and in turn, support wildlife programs.

The money would be generated by a small user fee attached to outdoor equipment such as camping

gear, binoculars, field guides, wild bird seed and bird houses. The fee would be built into the price of the equipment and would be no more than five percent—a small price to pay for helping the thousands of "nongame" species of wildlife.

The proposal is spearheaded by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and is supported by such national groups as the National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, and American Birding Association. In Pennsylvania, groups such as the Audubon Council of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs are supporting the effort.

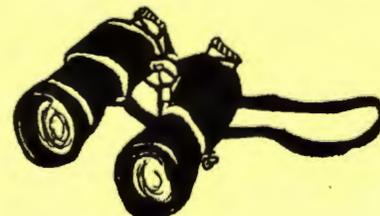
Reports from Washington, D.C., say that many members of Congress support the concept but what is needed now is for the outdoor equipment manufacturers to support the idea. This is where PSO members can help by writing manufacturers and telling them that, as a consumer of outdoor products, you support the initiative and ask them to do the same. Congress may start considering this legislation in June/July so now is the time to act.

Members who want additional information can write to the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, 450 Robinson Lane, Bellefonte, PA 16823-9620, Attention Lisa Williams.

Action Needed:

Please write outdoor equipment manufacturers and ask them to support the Teaming with Wildlife proposal. Companies such as Cabela's, L.L. Bean, and Bushnell need to hear from us.

If you would like to comment or offer suggestions, contact Mark Henry, PSO Conservation Editor, P.O. Box 410, Pine Grove Mills, PA 16868.



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One year individual membership in PSO	\$10.00
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