

PSO Newsletter



The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

April 1999

Volume 10, Number 1

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK. . . .

The Pennsylvania conservation community scored a major victory on February 25, a victory that should be remembered for a long while. On that day, conservationists--including hunters, birders, wildlife biologists and others--turned back an initiative put forward by a Pennsylvania Game Commission commissioner that would have allowed the taking of Red-tailed Hawks and Great Horned Owls at two PGC sites in the southeastern region.

Speaker after speaker spoke from the heart against the proposal, which, as it turned out, had already been dropped earlier that day, in part because of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's expected denial of Commissioner Vernon Shaffer's petition to allow the killing of raptors.

Arlene Koch, a fellow member of your PSO board of directors, and I were among the speakers. It was an honor for us to represent the society at this special meeting of the PGC commissioners. And it was an even greater honor to have had a role in helping turn back this ominous threat to two raptor species.

The Pennsylvania conservation community, however, should not be content to allow this victory to be seen as a "high water mark." The momentum that was established that night must be sustained over the next year--indeed over the next decade and on--for this was just one skirmish in a continuing conservation campaign. In fact that was the message passed on to us by friendly employees of several state agencies (and a PGC commissioner!) following the celebratory dinner many of us attended after the PGC meeting.

The same coalition-building that occurred in the days leading up to the February 25 meeting can and will help win higher levels of funding for non-game wildlife projects; for the acquisition of natural lands for both game and non-game species; for a level of funding for the Wild Resource Conservation Fund that is commensurate with its importance to non-game species; and for meaningful land-use controls that will lead not just to the slowing of habitat destruction but its restoration wherever possible.

Already, a coalition calling itself the Habitat Alliance has formed and is meeting regularly in Harrisburg. Its mission, in part, is to push for land acquisition through the Heritage 21 Initiative and other funding measures such as that now being employed in New Jersey. And the Conservation Network, an ad hoc assemblage of environmental and conservation organizations, is pushing hard for more than just the "voluntary" land-use control measures that Gov. Ridge called for in the wake of the 21st Environment Commission's final report. The challenge before us, then, is to sustain the momentum we set in motion on February 25.

We are grateful to the leadership of naturalist/author/bird-bander Scott Weidensaul for alerting birders, naturalists, and the conservation community at large to the danger of Commissioner Shaffer's proposal. Scott was very much like a general marshaling the troops, and we are all grateful for his leadership. Another key partner in the skirmish was the Pennsylvania Audubon Society, its state office staffed by Cindy Adams Dunn, and all the Audubon chapters and affiliated bird clubs across the state who submitted written comments and/or dispatched someone to speak at the meeting. They and many others are colonels on the frontline of the

conservation campaign under way in Pennsylvania today. They need our support and our participation. Let's give it to them.

Above all, this battle showed what the Pennsylvania conservation community is capable of--producing a loud and concerted outcry when needed.

Our Special Areas Project continues to press ahead, despite the lack of funding this year from the Wild Resource Conservation Fund. New sites are being picked up (such as Black Moshannon State Park near State College), and the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is moving ahead with the publication of the first bird checklists to be produced through SAP data. This is an exciting time to be involved in SAP. If you're not already involved in collecting data at a state park or other public land, please consider starting now. It's simple arithmetic: The more birders out collecting data on birds, the more comprehensive the database will become.

The society's annual meeting will be held at Morgantown near Reading in Berks County this year. The dates are September 24-26. The irrepressible Pete Dunne (whoever doesn't know who Pete Dunne is, please raise your hand) will be our banquet speaker. We're also planning an exciting group of speakers for the Saturday afternoon lecture program, and a wide assortment of field trips are planned to key birding spots in the Berks region.

Look for the registration form in the PSO newsletter and in the next issue of *Pennsylvania Birds*, which is expected out by early April. This will be our 10th anniversary meeting, and we hope and want the crowd to be large. Plan to attend and send your registration form in early. See you there.

Best to all.

--Alan Gregory, President

The Conservation Corner

FUNDING FOR WILDLIFE AND WILD PLACES

Presently, there are several bills in Congress that will provide permanent funding for wildlife and conservation programs. This is an opportunity that every conservationist needs to support because we may not get another chance like this for many years. The bills include the Resources 2000 proposal, H.R. 798/S.446, which would provide \$2.3 billion annually from offshore oil and gas lease revenues for ocean conservation, Land and Water Conservation Fund, wildlife conservation, urban parks, endangered species and other conservation programs.

Another proposal is the Conservation and Reinvestment Act of 1999, H.R. 701/S.25. These bills, rather than provide a set amount of money, provide for a percentage of money from offshore oil and gas leasing revenues to be directed to conservation programs and coastal impact assistance. The main concerns with these bills are that they will create financial and political incentives for coastal states to promote inappropriate offshore oil and gas development and would allow the use of impact assistance funds to subsidize potentially damaging environmental projects. However, these objections can be corrected relatively easily if Congress chooses to do so.

PSO members can write their members of Congress and express their support for appropriate funding of wildlife programs. This is an excellent opportunity to obtain such funding because there is bipartisan support as well as presidential support. Please take the time to write your members of Congress; future birding opportunities may well depend on what we do now. On the next page is a sample letter for those who wish to use it.

--Mark Henry
Conservation Chairperson

With our next issue, we welcome on board Katrina Knight from Reading, PA, as our new PSO editor. Many of you probably know Katrina as the transcriber for the Berks County Rare Bird Alert, but she is also the president of the Baird Ornithological Club. Katrina has been birding for more than 20 years. Welcome, Katrina!

The Honorable (full name)
United States Senate (OR U.S. House of
Representatives)
Washington, D.C. 20510 (Senate)
OR 20515 (House)

Dear Senator/Representative:

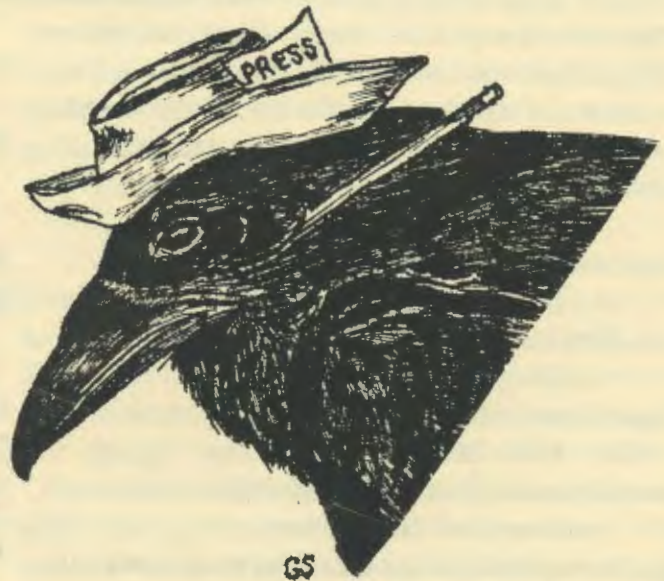
I am asking you to support permanent conservation funding legislation that is currently being debated before Congress. Pennsylvania has seen a dramatic increase in the loss of open space due to urban sprawl and related development. The result has been an unprecedented destruction of critical wildlife habitat and prime farmland especially in and around Pennsylvania cities.

This year, Congress has a historic opportunity to restore these damaged resources. New proposals, S.25 and S.446 OR H.R. 701 and H.R. 798, that would establish permanent funding for wildlife habitat, coastal resources, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), are being considered by Congress. As these initiatives are being debated, I ask you to support passage of conservation funding that conforms to five basic principles:

- 1) assures automatic, permanent, dedicated funds for conservation that do not require annual Congressional appropriation
- 2) provides funding for state fish and wildlife agencies that would support conservation, recreation, and education programs with emphasis on nongame species,
- 3) funding should not be at the expense of other conservation programs,
- 4) full funding for LWCF at \$900 million divided equally between federal and state programs,
- 5) funding for the restoration of coastal natural resources that do not create incentives for inappropriate new offshore oil and gas drilling.

I urge you to make passage of permanent conservation funding a priority in the 106th Congress.

Sincerely,



Raven Reporter

News of the PSO Special Areas Project

The Special Areas Project Approaches New Milestones

We are about to pass another set of amazing milestones. The total number of SAP field trips is approaching 4000. We now have over 3930 field trips in the SAP database. That includes trips from 99 locations. The large number of new SAP locations pushes us toward that magical three-digit figure. So, your next SAP trips could be the ones that put us over the top. We've heard rumors of SAP locations that have not been sent in yet. Don't hold back! A spilled coffee pot or desperate housecleaning could eradicate your valuable bird data forever. Send it in!!!

Going Where No Birders Have Gone Before: New and Invigorated SAPs

As a starship commander would say, "There are new worlds out there to discover!" Pennsylvania birders are finding new birding spots and new challenges. In response to the call for new Special Areas, a few adventurous birders have adopted new areas to explore and record their findings. Grab your binoculars, your tricorders, and put your phasers on stun. You don't have to go into another galaxy or venture through an interspatial worm-hole, just jump out of bed and get off the interstate to find a new birding place. In these and other locations, you can make personal discoveries about birds--not just read about it on the internet.

Here is a list of new Special Area Projects and their respective "away team" leaders (local coordinators). They include some real out-of-the-way places and the far corners of the state. If you would like to join them in the field or by contributing independent observations, please contact them or SAP Central.

Algerine Natural Area, Lycoming Co.

Doug Gross

Big Flat Laurel Natural Area, Huntingdon Co.

Greg Grove

Bruce Lake Natural Area, Pike Co.

Edith Parnell

Greenwood Furnace State Park, Huntingdon Co.

Lewis and Greg Grove

Jennings Environmental Education Center, Butler Co.

Deb Yovanovich

Nolde Forest Environmental Education Center, Berks

Larry Lloyd

Quebec Run Natural Area, Fayette Co.

Bill Hintze

Raccoon Creek State Park, Beaver Co.

Bill Hintze

State Game Land 66, Sullivan Co.

Skip Conant

State Game Land 110, Berks Co.

Kerry Grim

Whipple Dam State Park, Huntingdon Co.

Greg Grove

Wolf Run Wild Area, Lycoming Co.

Doug Gross

In addition, some SAPs have been "revitalized" by renewed interest by the local club or interested individuals. Here are three SAPs that have been restarted with local vigor!

Bald Eagle State Park, Centre Co.

Suzanne Rencil, Mark Henry



Bear Meadows Natural Area, Centre Co.

Nick Bolgiano

Moraine State Park, Butler Co.

Deb Yovanovich

State Game Land 169 "Newville," Cumberland Co.

Ron Freed

AOU Never Gives Us Time to Sleep: New SAP Forms in the Works

We are making some changes to the SAP Daily Seasonal Form right now to adjust to the newest AOU Checklist changes. It seems that as soon as any project reprints its forms, a new checklist comes out with just enough changes to make your list out of date. The "new" 1998 blue or yellow SAP forms are being changed a little and being reprinted. The new ones will be out soon. In the meantime, please take advantage of the long winter and spring nights to fill in some SAP forms that you already have to send in. If you have been derelict from past seasons and years, please consider yourself forgiven and welcomed back into the fold. Your bird data are valuable; please just don't let it rot in your files.

State Park Checklists on the Horizon

One of the uses for SAP data will be higher quality site checklists for the state parks. PSO has been discussing the use of SAP data with the Bureau of State Parks in the last few months. A new graphical design will be used in these checklists that will show the presence of each species as a bar graph across the page, somewhat like those in the Lane ABA Birder's Guides and the Pennsylvania Annotated Checklist. Birders within the State Park system such as Frank Haas and Nick Kerlin were very supportive of a redesign. We are working with State Park staff on how to convert SAP data to checklists. This promises to be a very fruitful project that will serve to educate the general public about the distribution and seasonality of the state's birds. The Pennsylvania Audubon office has been very supportive of these efforts. Many SAPs are being conducted by Audubon Chapters as projects.

SAP Time is Conservation Volunteer Time at State Parks

The Bureau of State Parks is very eager to have more birders volunteer in parks. *SAP TRIP TIME*

COUNTS AS STATE PARK VOLUNTEER HOURS. It is "birding with a purpose": collecting data on our state's public lands. We are working on the method for reporting SAP trip time to the Bureau for their records. This is a great opportunity for birders to demonstrate how much they give to the general public by gathering bird data. It is always a good idea to make contact with the park employees to let them know your local bird club's activities in the park or any interesting bird findings.

State Parks are also very interested in ways to improve birding recreational opportunities and conservation of bird habitat in parks. If you have specific questions or problems about birding opportunities in state parks, please let me know.

Sharing Data with Those Who Care about Birds

In the last year, SAP Central has shared its data with the Important Bird Areas Project, the PA Audubon Office, DCNR, Game Commission biologists, the Ornithological Technical Committee, and the Nature Conservancy. SAP data are often used in *Pennsylvania Birds'* Seasonal Reports, too. We are glad to share the data.

Springtime Is Owl Time

For those who give a hoot about owls, springtime is owl time. Most owls are either courting or nesting by the end of April. So, a few nocturnal trips to your SAP area can be both fun and profitable in the spring. You might be surprised at what owls will turn up with a little effort. Please be cautious with tape/call back efforts. Small owls might betray their presence to larger owls that act as their own predators. It is certainly not good to pull owls off their nest eggs by playing a tape for a long period of time. So, be careful and conservative about tape playing.

Sometimes playing tapes is not necessary. Many owls call spontaneously during the breeding season. Just this week I heard a Barred Owl hooting in the middle of a cloudy day in Ricketts Glen State Park. Check out the owl vocalizations in the birding literature, too. Owls "say" more than we think they do.

Some other owling tips: split up the party a little bit. Sometimes the owls can be heard or seen better if

you look and listen in different directions. Keep your eyes open and your horizon low. I have spotted owls by kneeling down on one knee and looking across the horizon. Saw-whets will often approach low and keep quiet. I've only been able to see their silhouette when they cross the horizon in front of me.

Long-eared Owls are one of the most mysterious breeding birds of the Commonwealth. Right now, they are categorized as "Candidate-Undetermined" on the Species of Special Concern (SSC) list. When the SSC list was recently reviewed, some birders suggested that this species was rare enough to be classified as "Threatened." We certainly need more information about this conifer-nesting nocturnal predator. Please make an extra effort to find Long-ears in your SAP location, and let us know if you have any success.

Odd Ducks: That Is, the Ones in the Water

One of the information gaps of Pennsylvania birding is the distribution and population of those uncommon breeding ducks—our odd ducks. Many more waterfowl breed naturally in the state than is generally appreciated. They tend to nest fairly early in the season, too. So, they are easy to miss or overlook as migrants.

Did you know that Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, American Wigeon, Redhead, and Ring-necked Duck all have a history of nesting in the odd corners and wetlands of the state? Many of you already know of the recent findings of Ruddy Duck and Hooded Merganser in some new locations. Please check out the Breeding Bird Atlas for a quick review of the historical locations and habitat of our "odd ducks."

Many thanks to the many SAP volunteers for making the project a success. The PSO Special Areas Project has been generously supported by the Wild Resource Conservation Fund.

Make your own birding discoveries. Participate in the PSO Special Areas Project.

Send your SAP data and inquiries to:

Douglas A. Gross

The Special Areas Project

R. R. 1, Box 1795

Berwick, PA 18603

570-542-2191

e-mail: dougross@sunlink.net.

Forest Bioblitz Planned in June

What is a bioblitz? It is an event aimed at obtaining a snapshot of a particular region's biological wealth within a predetermined period of time. A bioblitz is a gathering of preeminent biologists, life scientists, and dedicated volunteers who have an interest or expertise in properly identifying plants and animals. A bioblitz is also a "media-event" that calls attention to a region's richness of species, and the need to properly conserve and manage that richness. A bioblitz can be a powerful tool for biodiversity education and awareness. It is a unique opportunity for educators, students considering a nature oriented career, and resource managers to watch naturalists and scientists in action--outdoors.

Interest in bioblitzes is on the rise. Even the Guinness Book of Records now has a category for the most organisms identified during a bioblitz. Bioblitzes have been held in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia Parks. But this will be the first Pennsylvania bioblitz in a relatively remote forested area.

This event is being scheduled in northeast of Harrisburg on State Game Lands 211 in Lebanon County. It will be rain or shine, noon to noon on June 4 and 5, 1999. This is a few days after a full moon--good for nighttime insect collecting. It's co-organized by the PA Game Commission and Biological Survey, this collaborative effort is dependent on the participation of the Wild Resource Conservation Fund, resource management agencies (both state and federal), the National Guard, educational institutions, museums, conservancies, non-government organizations, individual specialists, and the media (e.g., PA Outdoor Writer's Association).

The objectives of the bioblitz are to:

1. To implement a geo-spatial inventory of all species on a section of State Game Lands # 211.
2. To establish a long-term research site for the purpose of monitoring the wild flora and fauna of a forest ecosystem actively managed by the Game Commission.
3. To develop a century's-end snapshot of species richness in deciduous forest interior. What is a base-

datum of normality?

4. To focus attention on the scope and nature of biodiversity protected on public lands.
5. To trial run a prototype bioblitz that can be used on other sites, e.g., State Parks.
6. To compare the results of forest and city park bioblitzes: variety? Native vs. exotic species? Species overlap?
7. To assist the National Guard with inventory and impact assessment planning.

Inventories are the eyes of the biologist and resource manager. Without inventories we're managing blind. By and large, inventories have been confined to trees and larger vertebrates. As a result we are aware of the decline of desirable species or the increase of less desirable species, and we can redirect research and management accordingly. But these larger species make up less than one percent of the 25,000 wild species known from Pennsylvania. Where are the other species? How common are they? How many are declining or even endangered? Have important species, e.g., pollinators, retreated from "ecologically functional" to "minimally viable" populations? What are the processes threatening suites of species? Rapid assessment in the form of a bioblitz is the first step in answering such questions.

A bioblitz is a high profile event. It's a unique opportunity for the media, teachers, selected students, and resource managers to see scientists and dedicated amateur naturalists in action. Guided tours (mini-expeditions) will introduce participants to botanists, herpetologists, mammalogists, ornithologists, mycologists (fungi), and other specialists. This will promote appreciation of forest diversity, and give students and teachers take-home ideas for finding and appreciating the wildlife diversity in their own "backyards."

A report of our results will distributed later this summer.

--Jerry Hassinger
Wildlife Diversity Coordinator
Pennsylvania Game Commission

PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY FOR ORNITHOLOGY

10th Anniversary Meeting

24-26 September 1999

Holiday Inn

Morgantown, PA

FRIDAY, September 24, 1999

5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.	Registration
7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.	Social
8:00 p.m. to 8:45 p.m.	PSO Business Meeting
8:45 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.	Field Trip Overview

SATURDAY, September 25, 1999

6:30 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.	Field Trips (*see below)
12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
	Afternoon Programs
1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.	Louis Bevier <i>Hummingbird Identification</i>
2:00 p.m. to 2:45 p.m.	Scott Weidensaul <i>Saw-whet Owl Banding in Pennsylvania</i>
2:45 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.	Break
3:00 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.	Dave Brandes <i>Solving the Puzzle of the Spring Golden Eagle Migration through Pennsylvania</i>
3:45 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.	Scott Klinger <i>The Impact of Agriculture and USDA Programs on the Abundance of Grassland Birds: Can We Restore Declining Grassland Bird Populations on Pennsylvania Farmland?</i>
4:30 p.m. to 5:15 p.m.	Paul Rodewald <i>Habitat Use and Foraging Behavior of Neotropical Migrant Songbirds during Migration in Central Pennsylvania</i>
6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.	Social including Book Signing with Pete Dunne
7:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.	Banquet—Our banquet speaker will be Pete Dunne presenting "Spishing 101"

SUNDAY, September 26, 1999

6:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. Field Trips (*see below)

*Field Trips will include the following locations:

Saturday

Carr's Park - This will be an all-walking trip around Morgan Lake in Carr's Park. This has the largest colony of breeding Pied-billed Grebes in the state and has had Ruddy Ducks nesting the past two years. We will look for waterfowl and migrant passerines. There is an entrance fee, therefore we ask that you register for this trip on your registration form.

Lake Ontelaunee - A drive and walk trip around Lake Ontelaunee, one of the premier birding spots in Berks County where many of the records in *A Century of Birdlife in Berks County* came from. We will look for waterfowl, shorebirds, and migrant passerines. If conditions warrant, there will be an approximate 2-mile roundtrip walk to look for shorebirds.

Blue Marsh Lake - This will be a drive and walk trip to Blue Marsh Lake - a Corps of Engineers impoundment - with a great variety of habitat. We will look for waterfowl, shorebirds, and migrant passerines. No strenuous walking.

Rte 183 Hawk Watch - One of the easiest hawk watches to get to. Located about 15 miles downridge from Hawk Mountain, it gets great hawk flights. For those who cannot or do not wish to walk far, this trip will be easy on the legs. The hawkwatch is just off the side of the road. Bring a folding chair and sit back and enjoy the flight. The hawk flight will be weather-dependent, of course.

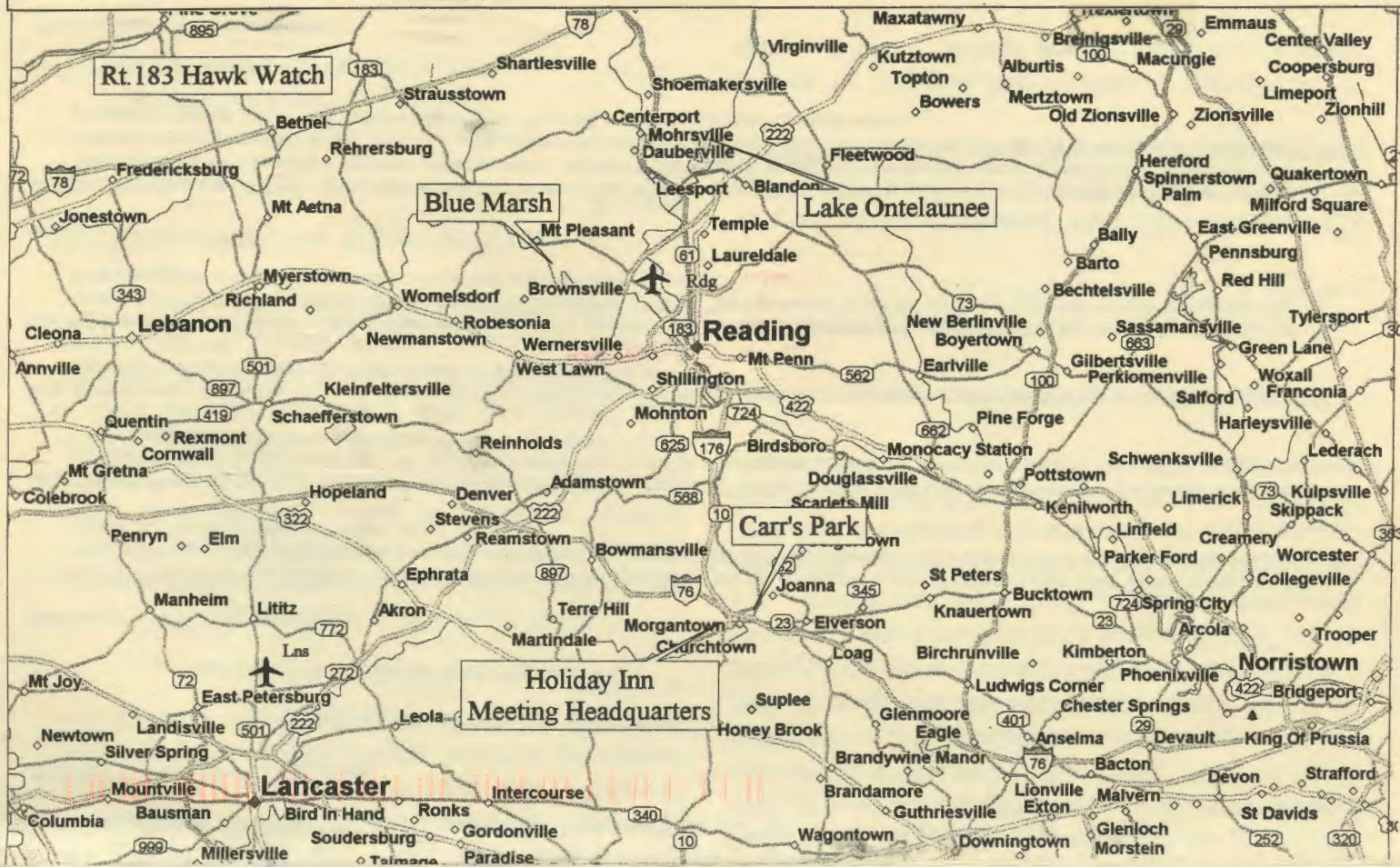
Sunday

SPECIAL SUNDAY FIELD TRIP - Sharp-tailed Sparrow quest - This trip will consist of being taken by boat out to several islands on the Susquehanna River renowned for Sharp-tailed Sparrows in fall migration. Because of the logistics (boats, etc.) this trip is limited to 20 participants. Participants will be chosen on a first-come-first-served basis. You must register for this trip on your registration form so that we can be sure of the number of participants. Be prepared to get wet. Wear either sneakers or waders. There will be walking through knee-high water.

Carr's Park - see description above.

Other Sunday trips to be determined.

10th Annual PSO Meeting



15701-7934

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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Indiana, PA 15701-7934

Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

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