

# PSO Newsletter



The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK...

### **Birding Alone? Not if you are in PSO.**

The author of a recently published book, *Bowling Alone*, presents a convincing case of how Americans are becoming increasingly disassociated from each other. Instead of bowling, or doing almost anything, in organized groups, more people are going out to the alleys to bowl alone.

Less interaction. Fewer associations. Reduced commitments. Less emotional involvement. Not much chance for mentoring or sharing experiences if you always go alone. It is one symptom of the disintegration of community spirit among modern Americans.

Pennsylvania birders are a kind of community. Yes, there are different styles of birding interest, but that is what makes any community interesting. One of the main threads that has tied us together has been the publication, Pennsylvania Birds. It began independently of the PSO, but has become integrated into the organization in the spirit of community.

Pennsylvania Birds is more than Pennsylvania's bird journal. PB provides a framework for our birding community and a unifying force among like-minded people. It pulls us together. Birders share their bird sightings with others through the quarterly county reports. This not only produces a tremendous amount of bird data, but it also provides a structured network of people who produce those records. The county editors become mentors and organizers. Being a county editor or project report writer takes more than knowing bird identification. It is about being a local leader and teacher.

For Frank and Barb Haas, the magazine has been a labor of love. They have sacrificed many nights and good birding mornings keeping the feathered presses rolling. Many others have helped by compiling reports for the hawk migration watch, Christmas counts, and many other summary reports.

Without Pennsylvania Birds, where would we read the Rare Bird Reports and see the pictures of the birds we missed? A quick perusal of the Table of Contents page and the list of county report contributors shows that the journal has truly been a team effort with many players.

After over a decade of leading the charge, the Haases are passing the reins to somebody else. We don't know who will be the next Editors and Publishers of the journal. But, we do know that we need Pennsylvania Birds.

Dan Brauning is heading a committee overseeing the transition. Not only has Dan been a Coordinator of the Breeding Bird Atlas, a unifying force in state birding, but he has actively sought cooperation between the state's birders and professionals. His own publication (with Jerry McWilliams) of *The Birds of Pennsylvania* benefitted from the thousands of bird records published in PB. If you are interested in keeping the PB publication going strong, please volunteer to help out. We need all the help we can get to keep us together.

Douglas A. Gross  
PSO President

## PSO Annual Meeting Speaker Session

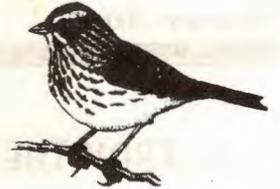
The Saturday afternoon speakers at the 2000 PSO meeting in Greene County addressed a wide variety of issues related to birds. Two graduate students from West Virginia described results of their research projects with forest birds in that state. Kathy A. Weakland studied the effects on Allegheny Plateau bird populations of two logging methods: diameter-limit harvesting, in which all trees above a certain trunk diameter are cut, and two-age harvesting, in which, unlike clear cutting,

some trees are left. She divided songbirds into three communities forest interior (such as Black-throated Green Warbler and Blue-headed Vireo), interior edge, as might be found along a forest logging road (Red-eyed Vireo, Dark-eyed Junco and others), and edge (as Chestnut-sided Warbler). Both harvesting methods decreased tree density and high canopy cover, while increasing shrub growth. In both cases, overall bird abundance increased, with interior edge and edge spp. especially benefitting. Weakland detected no negative effects on the most common species of all communities. She did note, however, that Black-throated Green Warbler decreased with a decrease in canopy cover, and that on a landscape scale, Ovenbird, Veery and Scarlet Tanager tended to be more common in unfragmented forests. Rarer species might be adversely affected by these logging methods, but too few were present to tell, she said. Both harvesting methods can encourage Brown-headed Cowbirds, which use the remaining trees as perches to find nests, Weakland noted.

Christopher R. Showalter, MS student in the WVU Dept. of Forestry, studied the response of bird communities to gypsy moth defoliation. Birds on his study plots were censused from 1984 through a major defoliation (1987-88) to the present. The moths caused canopy gaps by killing trees, which encouraged brush growth and caused a significant increase in populations of 21 edge community bird species. There were no significant population changes in 12 forest interior bird species, as enough canopy remained to support them. Four interior species (Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Acadian Flycatcher and Eastern Wood-Pewee) declined in the most heavily defoliated areas. Showalter's focus group, woodpeckers and other cavity nesters, increased because defoliation produced many dead trees. A lively question and answer exchange during Showalter's talk brought out interesting information on the effects on birds of gypsy moth spray programs. No pesticide kills only gypsy moths. Spraying also kills caterpillars of other moths and butterflies, forcing birds to shift to sub-optimal prey and defend larger territories to find enough prey. This reduces their fat levels and results in fewer nesting attempts in sprayed areas.

Dan Brauning, PA Game Commission biologist and PSO board member, spoke on the value of reclaimed strip-mines for grassland birds. These birds weren't here before agriculture, Brauning said, and agricultural land is itself declining. Intensive farming methods practiced on the remaining land have made this habitat inhospitable, contributing to the rapid decline in this group. Why grassland birds have widely colonized reclaimed mines with their poor, rocky soil (if the substrate can even be called soil) covered with exotic grasses is not completely understood. But according to the PA Grassland Breeding Bird Survey, these birds are three to ten times more common on reclaimed mines than on all other open

land surveyed. Random mines monitored under Brauning's supervision had Henslow's Sparrow on 48%, Grasshopper Sparrow on 66% and Savannah Sparrow on 32% of transects monitored. Sites in Clarion County (such as Piney Tract, previously the subject of a site guide by John Fedak in Pennsylvania Birds) stand out, reflecting the density of grassland birds found in prairie. Questions raised by Brauning show that conservation issues on these trashed lands are surprisingly complex. Can grass species be manipulated to make the mines more attractive? How large do the areas have to be? What happens when succession to brush and trees occurs? Can conversion to agriculture or urban development be prevented? Will mine reclamation regulations allow grassland conservation? The studies have only begun.



Ralph Bell, Greene County farmer, birder and recipient of PSO's Earl L. Poole Award, briefly discussed his Brown-headed Cowbird reduction strategy. Using white millet as bait, he has been trapping and dispatching female cowbirds since 1971. Initially, he caught as many as 200 in a year, but numbers have decreased to 32-65 per year recently. Since a female cowbird can lay 30-40 eggs in a season, Bell maintains that trapping them should reduce brood parasitism and help raise local populations of host songbirds. Don't try this at home, at least not without a permit. The cowbird is protected under migratory bird laws, and Bell has a depredation permit for his trapping.

Doug Gross, who coordinates PSO's Special Areas Projects, gave a status report on the SAPs. He said that the mass of data received reconfirms that Pennsylvania is a major reservoir of the world populations of many forest birds that winter in the neotropics, such as Wood Thrush and Scarlet Tanager. Gross also urged birders to keep better track of species of special concern and declining species in the state. One of the former (Northern Saw-whet Owl) and one of the latter (Whip-poor-will) may be better understood when results of Gross' Toot Routes, targeting the owl, are published.

- Rudy Keller  
Boyertown, PA

**Note:** Classified ads are available free of charge to members for non-business, bird-related purposes. Contact the editor for more information.

## CONSERVATION CORNER

At the risk of sounding like a broken record (for those of us who remember records), I feel it is critical to update PSO3 members on the status of the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA). CARA recently passed the U. S. House of Representatives (H.R. 701) and the bill is now in the U. S. Senate (S.2123). The bill is in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and all members of PSO are encouraged to contact Senators Specter and Santorum urging them to support this Senate version of CARA. This bill will provide a permanent source of funds for conservation with Pennsylvania receiving up to \$50 million per year for wildlife, conservation and related programs. This means money for non-game species programs that has been neglected in the past.

This legislation is probably the most important conservation legislation to be considered by Congress in several decades. It is critical that our Senators hear from us they need to know that we expect them to support this legislation.

Please write Senators Specter and Santorum. Their addresses are Senator Arlen Specter /Rick Santorum U.S. Senate Washington, D.C. 20510.

A sample letter is below for your information and use. Please write today we may not have this kind of opportunity for conservation funding again for a long time.

Dear Senator Specter/Santorum

I am writing to urge you to support the Conservation and Reinvestment Act that was recently passed in the House of Representatives (H.R. 701) by a 31 margin. This bill (S. 2123) provides the Senate a historic opportunity to create a source of funding for recreation and conservation that will provide quality programs and experiences for all Americans for now and in the future.

This bill wisely creates a source of funds that will allow states to continue and even expand their programs in preserving open space, investing in conservation and recreation and restoring our natural resources. And this is clearly in line with the beliefs of the vast majority of citizens. Polls continue to show that nationally, 3 out of 4 voters support a permanent land and water conservation fund such as the one proposed in CARA

Further, Pennsylvania is in a position to receive up to approximately \$50 million annually for conservation,

recreation and wildlife should this bill pass. This will greatly benefit all areas of the Commonwealth, both rural and urban, leaving a legacy that will benefit current residents, future generations and our rich natural heritage.

This bill is critical for conservation and if passed, will clearly demonstrate that Congress is truly interested in investing in our nation's natural resources. Please support this bill and urge your colleagues to do likewise.

Sincerely,

– Mark Henry, Conservation Chairperson

[Editor's Note: Since this column was written, CARA has passed through the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and must be brought up to the full Senate for debate in September.]

### THE RAVEN REPORTER



#### Tales of Discovery from the Special Areas Project

##### Keeping an Eye on the Species of Special Concern List

Appropriately, this column will always emphasize the Species of Special Concern list. If we don't keep an eye on our rarest breeding birds, who will? For a summary of the state's SSC list, visit the PA Biological Survey web site: [www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/pabs/PABS.htm](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/pabs/PABS.htm). It contains a rich compendium of information, almost encyclopedic in depth, on the state's biodiversity.

The Pennsylvania SSC List is presented as a table in this Newsletter. The SSC list is dynamic. The current version was compiled in 1997 by the OTC (the bird committee of the PABS), but not enacted by the Game Commission until 1998. There inevitably will be changes to the list, perhaps in the near future. The more data we have, the better the SSC list will

reflect the true status and vulnerability of the state's breeding birds. Reports of nesting SSC listed species are always appreciated and will be taken in confidentiality, if appropriate.

The year 2000 seems to be a big year for Dickcissel, a Threatened species with a history of erratic and opportunistic occupancy of the state's grasslands. The Dickcissel has sometimes been associated with the Northern Bobwhite, especially in the southern tier counties. The bobwhite is our state's forgotten game bird with a very small breeding population. Any reports of successful nestings would be great news. With the moist early summer, one also wonders about Sedge Wren sneaking into hayfields, marshes, pastures, and sedge meadows that it has not occupied for many years. Sedge Wrens can nest as late as August, so mid- and late-summer searches might be rewarded with a great find.

Now is a good time to confirm nesting by several species on the list. Areas adopted by the PSO as Special Areas for study are often good places for SSC birds. Since most SAPs are public lands, there should not be private land or permission issues related to SSC documentation. Send your SSC reports to Dan Brauning of the PA Game Commission or to the SAP office. SAP reports of SSC listed birds are shared with the PGC Non-game unit.

#### Saw-whet Owl Breeding Survey: Some Preliminary Results

I have been fortunate to be involved with another exciting state-wide bird project this year: the Northern Saw-whet Owl Breeding Survey 2000. Perhaps you know it as "Project Toot Route." In some ways, the two projects work together because of the overlap in participants and the joint concern for our underappreciated non-game birds. Project Toot Route is still gathering data from the 100 road routes scattered across the forested parts of the state. A few routes are still out there. There is a lot of data checking, logging, and analysis to do yet. But, even at this stage I can share some of the lessons we have already learned from the effort.



1. Many birders are very willing to do night bird surveys. The enthusiastic response has been absolutely breathtaking. Who would

have thought that so many people would stand around in the dark listening for little owls go toot in the night? The variety of people doing toot routes would be a lesson for those that think that only certain kinds of people are "hard core" birders. What is more hard core than doing an owl route in the middle

of the night on strange dirt roads many miles from home? Many of the routes were done by teams or pairs of friends. Lots of team work. The owl banders of the state were a big help with toot routes, often filling gaps in the state coverage and driving many miles from home to cover the more remote places (where there can be lots of owls). Even those participants that did not get a single owl on the route often wrote how they had a wonderful time doing it. There is something magical about the cool, star-lit evenings in Penn's Woods.

2. Doing an owl route is a great way to gather data on all kinds of night birds. Most toot routes reported other night birds and even many traditional diurnal songbirds. An owl survey seems to be a great way to get cuckoos and night-singing ovenbirds. I don't want to give away all the goodies, but the saw-whet survey is revealing that Whip-poor-wills are much more common than many people realize. Several routes reported whips, sometimes more than any other night bird. On the other hand, nobody has yet to report a Long-eared Owl on a toot route. That is a really rare breeding bird!

3. The season for surveying saw-whets probably extends further into the summer than currently realized. The taped calls probably really make a difference. One route got saw-whets to respond as late as 1 July. That may not be the optimum time to survey this early nesting owl, but you can do it that late in the higher elevated forests. I have personally had saw-whets spontaneously sing within a few feet of my tent in Wyoming State Forest in late July. This was very confusing to my dog that was sleeping in our tent with us.

4. Northern Saw-whet Owl is more widely distributed and more common in our forests than current publications indicate. Some saw-whets were found within a few miles of the Maryland border. Yet, it is absent or uncommon on routes that appear to have good habitat. Even after this ground-breaking project, we will have many questions about saw-whet distribution in the state. From anecdotal reports, it seems that saw-whets are common in areas one year, but not others. Prey availability, nest success in the previous year, winter snow-cover, migration phenology, and other factors may cause year-to-year fluctuations in distribution and populations. But, now we are getting a clearer and broader picture of saw-whet range in the state. They are in more places than we thought and in higher numbers than known before.

Please make a special effort to look for saw-whets in your SAP areas this year. The young birds are distinctly plumaged chocolate brown fluff balls. The nests are hard to find, but the juveniles can be spotted nestled together on a limb. I have heard saw-whets singing the advertising song into early August. It is not too late to look for breeding saw-whets.

**Pennsylvania Breeding Birds of Special Concern**  
**By the Ornithological Technical Committee, 1997**

**Extinct**

Passenger Pigeon

**Extirpated**

Greater Prairie Chicken

Piping Plover

Olive-sided Flycatcher

Bewick's Wren

Bachman's Sparrow

**Endangered**

American Bittern

Least Bittern

Great Egret

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron

Bald Eagle

Peregrine Falcon

King Rail

Common Tern

Black Tern

Short-eared Owl

Loggerhead Shrike

**Threatened**

Osprey

Upland Sandpiper

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher

Sedge Wren

Dickcissel

**Candidate - At Risk**

Black-crowned Night-Heron

Northern Harrier

Northern Bobwhite

Barn Owl

**Candidate - Rare**

Pied-billed Grebe

Green-winged Teal

Northern Goshawk

American Coot

Common Snipe

Marsh Wren

Swainson's Thrush

Prothonotary Warbler

Summer Tanager

**Candidate - Undetermined**

Long-eared Owl

Northern Saw-whet Owl

Red Crossbill

## Field Trip species list - 2000 PSO Annual meeting

Great Blue Heron  
Green Heron  
Turkey Vulture  
Canada Goose  
Wood Duck  
Mallard  
Sharp-shinned Hawk  
Cooper's Hawk  
Red-tailed Hawk  
American Kestrel  
Ring-necked Pheasant  
Ruffed Grouse  
Wild Turkey  
Killdeer  
Spotted Sandpiper  
Rock Dove  
Mourning Dove  
Yellow-billed Cuckoo  
Eastern Screech-Owl  
Great Horned Owl  
Chimney Swift  
Ruby-throated Hummingbird  
Belted Kingfisher  
Red-bellied Woodpecker  
Downy Woodpecker  
Hairy Woodpecker  
Northern Flicker  
Pileated Woodpecker  
Eastern Wood-Pewee  
Acadian Flycatcher  
Willow Flycatcher  
Least Flycatcher  
Eastern Phoebe  
Great Crested Flycatcher  
Eastern Kingbird  
White-eyed Vireo  
Yellow-throated Vireo  
Warbling Vireo  
Red-eyed Vireo  
Blue Jay  
American Crow  
Common Raven  
Purple Martin  
Tree Swallow  
Northern Rough-winged Swallow  
Barn Swallow  
Carolina Chickadee  
Tufted Titmouse  
White-breasted Nuthatch  
Carolina Wren  
House Wren  
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

Eastern Bluebird  
Veery  
Wood Thrush  
American Robin  
Gray Catbird  
Northern Mockingbird  
Brown Thrasher  
European Starling  
Cedar Waxwing  
Blue-winged Warbler  
Northern Parula  
Yellow Warbler  
Chestnut-sided Warbler  
Magnolia Warbler  
Black-throated Green Warbler  
Yellow-throated Warbler  
Prairie Warbler  
Blackpoll Warbler  
Cerulean Warbler  
Black-and-white Warbler  
American Redstart  
Worm-eating Warbler  
Ovenbird  
Louisiana Waterthrush  
Kentucky Warbler  
Common Yellowthroat  
Hooded Warbler  
Canada Warbler  
Yellow-breasted Chat  
Summer Tanager  
Scarlet Tanager  
Eastern Towhee  
Chipping Sparrow  
Field Sparrow  
Grasshopper Sparrow  
Song Sparrow  
White-crowned Sparrow  
Northern Cardinal  
Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
Indigo Bunting  
Bobolink  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Eastern Meadowlark  
Common Grackle  
Brown-headed Cowbird  
Orchard Oriole  
Baltimore Oriole  
Purple Finch  
House Finch  
American Goldfinch  
House Sparrow

## My Own Birding Adventures: Full Immersion Into a Special Area

For those that do not know me very well, it might be surprising that I do go out birding sometimes. I was not able to report this one particular fun trip in a timely fashion because PA Birds email discussion group was down during this period. On 7 April, my wife and I went on a raft trip down Pine Creek Gorge which is both a SAP and an Important Bird Area. This is great fun for anyone with a little sense of adventure and a tolerance for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Being a committed bird enthusiast, I wore my water-proof binoculars over my wet suit. It probably isn't appropriate to discuss brand names, implying endorsement, but I will reveal that my glasses started with an "S" and ended in a "ski." They proved to uphold their reputation as water-proof, rugged bins. I was ready for birds, even bobbing in the waves of the great Tiadaghton.

We had a great trip leader on a well-organized local tour. So, I cannot blame him for what happened next. He warned us about a log that blocked the middle of the stream across the top of an island. A sweeper to avoid by going right (starboard) into a little rapids. We did as suggested, but did not anticipate a new sweeper log that stuck out from the right. The flow was fast and we were suddenly rushing into a log at about chest height. Everyone ducked but me. I had wrestled with many trees on creeks and ski trails, so I was confident from many arboreal entanglements. In the few micro-seconds of reaction time, I thought that I could bounce right off the log using my hands as a brace. But, I just didn't bounce; I flew backwards right off the back of the raft and into the chilly Pine Creek waters.



Bobbing down the creek on my back gave me a merganser's view of the gorge. The fall wasn't too bad. My hat was still on my head and my binoculars around my neck. The wet suit and life preserver did their job and kept me floating head up. I was wet, cold, and ready for warm blankets and a hot mug of cocoa. But, a friend's extra fleece jacket had to suffice. My bins were wet on the outside, but survived full immersion in cold Pine Creek with no ill effects. (My camera did not fare as well.) After a little help and some kidding, I got back in the raft and continued down the creek with my friends. It was a delightful trip despite my little dip in the creek.

The birding was great for early April. All were delighted by the Bald Eagle nest with both adults near the nest. We drifted by just when the parents were interchanging at the nest. The

eagles are fairly used to humans floating by the nest and gawking at them. They were a magnificent sight. A fitting scene for one of Pennsylvania's wildest natural areas.

My bird totals? I got 31 species floating down Pine Creek including at least 93 Common Mergansers and 13 Belted Kingfishers. Pine Creek Gorge is a mecca for nesting mergs.

It must be something about that cold mountain water. The gorge is raven and goshawk country and I saw a pair of each circling the rim of the gorge. I even had some terrestrial songbirds including a creek side Pine Warbler singing in a tall Eastern White Pine, appropriate for the canyon.

Boats of all kinds are great ways to get a different perspective on a bird's environment. Just make sure you take waterproof binoculars and good friends along.

## Blackpoll Warbler: Nesting Again In Pennsylvania

The Blackpoll Warbler, the migrant songbird distance champion, nested in Pennsylvania again this year. There were at least four territorial males in Coalbed Swamp, part of the SGL 57 Special Areas Project. I found one pair carrying food for young on 5 July. Once I spotted the female flitting from spruce bough to spruce bough, I knew I had a score. This event confirms nesting for the Blackpoll Warbler for the seventh straight year, starting in 1994. The good news is tempered somewhat by the discovery that Blackpolls seem to have abandoned the nearby Tamarack Swamp. In some years, I have found 2 or 3 territorial males in this boreal acidic swamp dominated by red spruce, blueberry, and mountain holly. But, this year I found none in Tamarack Swamp. So, the Blackpoll population seems healthy, but may be retracting.

## Quicky SAP Reports for Peregrinating Pennsylvanians

We are always glad to receive SAP reports for locations that you visit once or only occasionally. This is particularly true of those remote natural areas or state parks that rarely get visited by birders. One field report in the summer is better than no reports at all. A good, thorough walk through a natural area can canvas most of its breeding birds.

Just fill out a PSO SAP Daily Survey Field Form and send it in. You could write a quick summary of the habitats you visited with the approximate amount of time spent in each. For many natural areas, you will probably only visit one or two kinds of habitat. This will help us build a database on the breeding communities found at each natural area. It is particularly important to contribute data for those NAs listed as Important Bird Areas. A tip of the old birding field cap to

Nick Bolgiano for sending in a SAP report for his trip to tamarack Swamp Natural Area in Clinton Co. His field notes are a valuable contribution to our knowledge of this state IBA selected because of its unique character, representative of a declined bird habitat.

SAP volunteers have sent in lots of data for the year 2000. Thanks to all of you that have contributed bird population data to our growing database.

Douglas A. Gross  
PSO Special Areas Project  
144 Winters Road, Orangeville, PA 17859  
E-mail: dougross@sunlink.net  
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Please note that this is a new USPO address.

## ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE NOTES

[Editor's note: This is the third in a periodic series highlighting recent publications of interest to Pennsylvania ornithologists and birders.]

\* Mulvihill, R. S. 1999. Effects of stream acidification on the breeding biology of an obligate riparian songbird, the Louisiana Waterthrush (*Seiurus motacilla*). Chapter 9, pp. 51-61 in *The Effects of Acidic Deposition on Aquatic Ecosystems in Pennsylvania* (W. E. Sharpe and J. R. Drohan, eds.). Proceedings of the 1998 PA Acidic Deposition Conference, Vol. II, Environmental Resources Research Institute, University Park, Pa.

This is the first publication from an ongoing study that began in 1996 at Powdermill Nature Reserve, a field biological station of Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Westmoreland County, where Bob Mulvihill is a field ornithologist. Ecological differences between unpolluted streams and those acidified by drainage from abandoned mines were analyzed in terms of Louisiana Waterthrush breeding biology and foraging ecology.

Acidified streams were found to have reduced abundance, biomass, and/or diversity of aquatic macroinvertebrates, the principal prey of waterthrushes. The number of waterthrush territories and nesting pairs on the polluted streams averaged only about half the number on unpolluted streams. Yet nesting success and the birds' annual return rates did not differ between

the stream categories. Mulvihill found that waterthrushes compensated for reduced food resources by including novel items in their diet, such as young salamanders, and by foraging at peripheral unpolluted aquatic sites.

Acidic mine drainage into streams has long been one of the state's most widespread environmental problems. A continuing goal of the study is to determine whether the waterthrush can be used effectively as a bioindicator of the ecological condition of acid-impacted streams.

The Powdermill study was funded partially in 1997 and 1998 through grants from the Wild Resource Conservation Fund. An expanded three-year project funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency began collecting additional data in 1998 from southwestern, central, and eastern Pennsylvania. Directed by Mulvihill, Rob Brooks of Penn State University, and Terry Master of East Stroudsburg University, the study is assessing the prospects for bioindicator use on a statewide scale.

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\* Ammer, F. K., and M. S. Capp. 1999. Song versatility and social context in the Bobolink. *Condor* 101: 686-688.

This study analyzed data collected by Michael S. Capp in 1987-88 near the University of Pittsburgh's Pymatuning Laboratory of Ecology in Crawford County, during his University of Pittsburgh dissertation research on Bobolink song function.

Ammer found evidence in the data that male Bobolinks sang short repetitive songs in male-male contexts and longer, more versatile songs in male-female contexts. These results contrasted with previous analyses that had shown no direct evidence supporting a relationship between song type and intrasexual or intersexual function. The authors interpreted the results as suggestive that males encode aggression in song through shorter, less complex songs that are highly repetitive, and that greater versatility of performance with a potential breeding partner present may convey valuable information to females about individual male quality and/or experience.

The paper stemmed from an undergraduate research project by Frank Ammer at Carlow College, Pittsburgh, under Capp's mentorship. Ammer received a B.S. in biology from Carlow in 1997, then earned an M.S. in biology from Clarion University of Pennsylvania this year with a molecular ecology project examining genetic variation in brook trout. He is currently a first-year Ph.D. candidate at West Virginia University in the Division of Forestry (Wildlife and Fisheries Resources). His doctoral research, to be conducted in Baja California Sur under the direction of Robert C. Whitmore, deals with avian communication in the Mangrove Warbler and

the Gray Thrasher.

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\* Behrens, K. 1998. White Wagtail in South Carolina: first record on US Eastern Seaboard. *Chat* 62: 149-152.

Even the most famous birders may spend a lifetime without finding a rarity to equal the discovery Ken Behrens made at age 15. It was the first White Wagtail ever verified on the east coast.

Ken, an Allegheny County resident who was vacationing in South Carolina, spotted the bird on 16 April 1998 during a visit to Huntington Beach State Park. He quickly made contact with other birders who verified and photographed it, and the record was widely noted as one of the continent's top rarities of that year. *Chat*, where the record was published, is the Carolina Bird Club journal.

Subscribers to the Pabirds discussion list may recognize Ken's name from the migration-season lists that he has posted as a daily record of observations near his home at West Mifflin. He is a freshman biology major at Grove City College, Mercer County.

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\* Seitz, L. C., and D. A. Zegers. 1993. An experimental study of nest predation in adjacent deciduous, coniferous and successional habitats. *Condor* 95: 297-304.

Three locations in York County, Pennsylvania, were the sites for this study assessing potential nesting success of songbirds in adjacent deciduous, coniferous, and successional habitats. Predation of quail eggs in artificial nests was measured in simulated 12-day incubation periods at sites in Gifford Pinchot State Park, William H. Kain County Park, and a privately owned tract along the Conewago Creek.

Survival of nests was greater in the successional habitats than in the coniferous and deciduous stands, which the authors said may have resulted from greater concealment of nests in denser growth of shrubs and ground cover in the successional sites. In contrast to a number of other studies of nest predation, survivorship of above-ground nests was found generally to be greater than that of ground nests. The authors suggested a number of possibilities for this rather surprising result, including the types of predators present and various factors involving the vegetational structure.

The authors made the study while at Millersville University of Pennsylvania.

## Calendar of Events

**10/26/00** - Book signing appearance by Kenn Kaufman - Wild Bird Center, 3452 Pennell Road Aston PA - For more info - 610/497-9453.

**10/28/00** - Bake Oven Knob (hawk watching) field trip - Lehigh Valley Audubon Society - Contact Fritz Brock 610/797-2675. For information on other field trips see [www.lehigh.edu/~bcm0/lvas.html](http://www.lehigh.edu/~bcm0/lvas.html)

**10/30/00** - Saw-whet Owl banding demonstration - the Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art, Millersburg, 8 PM. For more info: [www.nedsmith.org](http://www.nedsmith.org) or 717/692-3699.

**11/10/00** - Chickadee hybridization program by Dr Robert Curry - Baird Ornithological Club - 7:30 PM at Nolde Forest Environmental Education Center's McConnell Hall (south of Reading) - Contact: Katrina Knight 610/372-3671 or [kknight@epix.net](mailto:kknight@epix.net) for info on this and other programs and field trips

**11/15/00** - "A Nest, an egg, a life" program on the nesting birds of Western PA by Dr Joe Panza, Audubon Society of Western PA - 7 PM, Beechwood Farms (Pittsburgh area) 412/963-6100 or [www.aswp.org](http://www.aswp.org) for info on this and other programs and field trips

**12/13/00** - Rose Tree Hawkwatch Roundup - Birding Club of Delaware County - Marple Township Library, Broomall, 7:30 PM - [www.jl-studio.com/BCDC/](http://www.jl-studio.com/BCDC/) for info on more programs and field trips

**4/21-29/01** - Trinidad and Tobago trip - Pennsylvania Audubon Society - Contact Marci Mowery, [mmowery@aududubon.org](mailto:mmowery@aududubon.org) or 717/213-6880.

**Note:** This calendar is meant to be a sampling of birding-related activities in Pennsylvania. To have events included submit the information to the editor. Other events will be included at the whim of the editor as space allows.

