

# PSO

# Newsletter

*The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology*



December 2000

Volume 11, Number 4

## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK...

### So, What Is the PSO Anyway?

We are the Pennsylvania Society FOR Ornithology (my emphasis on the preposition). That is, PSO members study birds and help others to know birds better. That sounds simple enough. In 1990, our group grew out of the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas. Many of the original board members were Atlas coordinators who recognized that the coordinators' meetings were the first and only state-wide gatherings of birders. We didn't want it to stop. The Atlas started the momentum of what is now coined "citizen science." We continue it today.

Our own project, known as the Special Areas Project, was designed to give birders an easy avenue to inventory birds on public lands in all seasons, not just in the breeding season. Many of the best birders in the state have cut their bird inventory teeth with SAP. The database continues to grow as we find more ways to use the information collected at more than 110 locations.

On a parallel path, Frank and Barb Haas started the magazine *Pennsylvania Birds* in 1987 which grew out of their own Big Year project. At first, the goal was to give them the biggest single year list for Pennsylvania, but the means to do this, and the result, was a unifying network of birders that submitted records of birds to a common point.

The thread between us all was the desire to learn more about birds and share what we know with others. We also shared in the joy and thrill of discovering new birds in new places.

The two paths interweave in each issue of the magazine and newsletter. They interweave at each meeting and all our correspondence with each other. We do good data gathering. We have fun doing it. We share our discoveries with others. We all grow together as we do stuff for ornithology. *Pennsylvania Birds* has been the official journal of the PSO for several years, but has continued to be published and edited by Frank and Barb Haas. *PA Birds* and PSO are currently transferring the responsibility of the publication from the Haases to the society. The transition team has been ably headed by Dan Brauning. Katrina Knight, our current PSO Newsletter Editor, will take the unenviable job of Chief Editor of *PA Birds*. Frank and Barb Haas are a hard act to follow. We will also have a designated data-input person as this is the most work-intensive part of *Pennsylvania Birds* publication. Seasonal Editors will assist Katrina by summarizing the county reports each quarter. This is a big deal.

PSO has a great challenge before it. We will appreciate everyone's cooperation and understanding during and after the transition. The paths of all PA birders are going to be increasingly woven together in complexity and diversity. Everyone needs to help in their own way.

It is important to keep reminding ourselves of what we are and what we do. If you have any questions, just spend some time thumbing the pages of our publications. They are absolutely filled with information about birds, their environment, and the people who care enough to collect data about both. Thumbng through *Pennsylvania Birds*, I am always reminded of the tremendous energy and enthusiasm that travel through these pages. Backyard birds, hawk watches, migratory bird days, waterfowl counts, and many individual experiences distilled on a few pages.

If you look between the lines and in the margins, you'll find many adventures, personal discoveries, and shared excitement of growth and discovery. That's us.

And, we are having lots of fun. That's because we are also the Pennsylvanians FOR having fun birding.

Douglas A. Gross  
PSO President

## CONSERVATION CORNER

As PSO members are well aware, several species of neotropical migrants are experiencing a population decline. This includes both interior forest species and grassland species - sometimes referred to as area-sensitive species. Several research projects have and continue to focus on this decline and as a result, we are now gaining a better understanding of why these declines are happening.

The one primary reason for this decline is the loss of quality habitat. There are several factors that are involved in this decrement including direct loss through urban sprawl and habitat fragmentation resulting from sprawl, highways, etc. Of particular concern is habitat fragmentation that has been found to have not only the direct effect of habitat loss but also indirect effects such as increased nest predation and parasitism. In fact, some conservation biologists consider habitat fragmentation to be the major cause of population declines of not only neotropical migrants but of other area-sensitive species. These other area-sensitive species include important

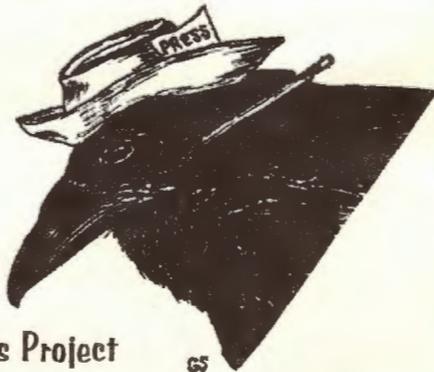
ecosystem species such as certain salamanders, reptiles and insects.

Highways in particular are fragmenting habitat across the country and in Pennsylvania. For example, the proposed I -99 highway along the Bald Eagle Ridge (a designated Important Bird Area) in Centre County is a highway project that will fragment unbroken forest. And as many of you are aware, this ridge route was selected by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation even though there is a perfectly good alternative route in the valley below the ridge.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, recognizing that habitat fragmentation is having such a deleterious effect on area-sensitive species, is developing a program that examines this subject, illustrates the impacts of fragmentation on these species and discusses the decisions that we, as a society, must make. The program is being developed such that arrangements for a speaker can be made with the Service OR the entire audio/video program can be sent to a group on a CD so that they can show the program themselves. The program is currently being finalized and will be available in early 2001. If you know a group interested in such a program, please contact Ed Perry at the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service office in State College, PA. His telephone number is 814-234-4090. If you are not able to contact Mr. Perry, please feel free to contact me and I will make the necessary contacts. My telephone number is 814-349-5774 and E-mail is <mshenry1@uplink.net>.

— Mark Henry, Conservation Chairperson

## THE RAVEN REPORTER



### Tales of Discovery from the Special Areas Project

The Special Areas Project continues to add more data to its "birds on public lands" database. At this moment, SAP has 4,612 trips from 111 locations in the database. Several new locations have been submitted to SAP, some of which have not yet been added. We are also making progress in converting our database files into a format more easily used for checklists. With the saw-whet summary report in this Newsletter, I have decided to abbreviate the usual SAP report. The project continues to be successful and we appreciate all the data you send into the project office. Recently, I shared SAP data from several natural areas in the north-central region with Pennsylvania Audubon's educational programs. Your data are being used in a variety of places for education, inventory, and research.

### Northern Bobwhite: Pennsylvania's Neglected Game Bird

The Northern Bobwhite, a quail, is one of Pennsylvania's few native upland game birds. It is considered a "Candidate - At Risk" by the Pennsylvania Biological Survey (the Ornithological Technical Committee). It probably deserves to be classified as Threatened or Endangered in Pennsylvania because of its rarity and reduced distribution. Nick Bolgiano has recently published an incredibly thorough and informative article about the history of this species in Pennsylvania (*Pennsylvania Birds* Vol. 14 (2): 58-68). This is one of the most outstanding papers ever written about any bird in our state. Please read it, then read it again, and tell everyone about what you have read. This charismatic bird is in deep trouble in Pennsylvania.

The Special Areas Project data bear out the impression that the bobwhite is a very rare breeding bird. Of the 4612 field trips in the database, only nine reported this species. Some of these reports were probably of released birds. A short list of SAP locations where Northern Bobwhites have been spotted: Marsh Creek State Park (Skip Conant), Chester County; Gifford Pinchot State Park (Grace Randolph), York County; Codorus State Park (Karen Lippy), York County; Game Lands 211 (Grace Randolph), Dauphin County; Game Lands 169 (Grace Randolph / Don Henise), Cumberland County; Nescopeck State Park (Alan Gregory), Luzerne County; Blue Spruce County Park (Margaret Higbee), Indiana County; and Beaver Creek Nature Area (John Fedak), Clarion County. The last three locations are surely out of the original range of the bobwhite, but I can remember bobwhite broods in farmlands in western Luzerne County from my youthful days in the early 1960s.

Pennsylvania lost two of its native game birds in the 19th century: Passenger Pigeon and Greater Prairie-Chicken (Heath Hen). Conservationists and historians often attribute these losses to greed and ignorance. What is our excuse for losing the Northern Bobwhite? Habitat fragmentation and loss of small farms are key reasons for its decline, but the real reason may be neglect. The bobwhite seems to be off our collective radar screen. Many sportsmen and birders do not even realize that it is a native species to the state and that it once ranged as far north as New England and southern Canada.

At first glance, the possibility of a successful bobwhite recovery in Pennsylvania may seem remote, but there are many land management practices and programs in place that would enhance future bobwhite recovery. Many agricultural practices advocated by the Pennsylvania Game Commission, the National Resources Conservation Service, the Penn State Agricultural Extension, and County Conservation Districts promote bobwhite habitat. Stream bank fencing, conservation buffers, warm season grasses, delayed field mowing and cover crops provide bobwhite habitat and corridors between population centers. Land use practices that reduce soil erosion and improve water quality can also improve our chances to enjoy native breeding Northern Bobwhites. The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) has the potential as a major avenue to improve bobwhite habitat in its original range. Because it uses a mosaic of habitats, the bobwhite represents two major habitat bird groups in decline: grassland birds and thicket / shrub-land species. Both habitats are great places for birding and deserve more attention for conservation action.

Birders can rally with sportsmen and other conservationists to bring back the bobwhite. One of the best things we can do is to gather data on the few bobwhites we observe. These sightings can be published

in *Pennsylvania Birds* and submitted to the Game Commission. SAP would appreciate more field trips at locations that support the few bobwhites that live and reproduce in the Keystone State.

#### Hay Creek, French Creek, and the Piedmont Forest Block

Quality riparian forest habitat is one of the most endangered Pennsylvania landscapes. It has been eaten up by massive development along flood plains, especially in the industrial southeastern counties. The Baird Ornithological Club has recognized this uncomfortable fact only too painfully. The club, led by Larry Lloyd, has adopted Hay Creek Watershed as a SAP. Rudy Keller and Rich Bonnet helped Larry collect data on several days, especially in spring and summer. The data certainly demonstrate that this is important bird habitat.

The rich bottomland forest hosts many Ovenbirds and Wood Thrushes. The canopy is home to Eastern Wood-Pewee and Acadian Flycatchers in abundance. In one morning of birding, observers found 66 Wood Thrushes, 70 Red-eyed Vireos, 56 Ovenbirds, 41 Scarlet Tanagers, and 37 Eastern Wood-Pewees in Hay Creek. Now, that is substantial forest bird habitat that really supports species for which Pennsylvania is key. Other forest birds like Carolina Chickadee, Blue Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Downy Woodpecker are also common. In pockets, Veery, Kentucky Warbler, and Louisiana Waterthrush can also be found. These may not be globally rare species, but they are much less common in the fragmented Piedmont than in other parts of their range in Pennsylvania.

The survey efforts did not stop at Hay Creek, but also extended to the adjacent French Creek State Park. In 1999, members of the Baird Ornithological Club conducted several SAP field trips here. As in Hay Creek watershed, the birders found many forest birds in good numbers. In addition to those already mentioned, Worm-eating Warbler was also found to be fairly common.

The Baird Ornithological Club successfully used SAP protocol to nominate the Hay Creek and Piedmont Forest Block in Berks County as an Important Bird Area. The entire forest block includes approximately 11,894 acres. That is a big block of bird habitat in the otherwise developed and fragmented Piedmont. Hats off to the great effort to establish a baseline of data in this refuge of good bird habitat.

#### Gifford Pinchot State Park: Thanks to Ed Bernot

From its inception, the Special Areas Project has really benefitted from the contributions of the Appalachian Audubon Chapter. Grace Randolph has coordinated several SAP collection efforts in Dauphin, York, and Cumberland counties. The Gifford Pinchot State Park is only a few miles from the Harrisburg metro area. It is a great escape for urbanites wanting to escape the hub-bub of our state's capital. Although there are many birders in the Harrisburg area, only one has regularly submitted SAP data for this great escape park - Ed Bernot.

With Pinchot Lake, some woods, and fields, Gifford Pinchot offers a variety of habitats to birders. Ed finds a wide variety of species in every trip he takes to the park. He regularly counts more than 50 species in each field trip. Not only that, he also pays great attention to breeding bird behavior, confirming a high percentage of the nesting birds of the park. State parks like Gifford Pinchot offer refuge not only for birders, but also for migrating birds trying to find a place to

rest and feed on their passage north or south. So, making confirmations of breeding behavior helps separate the local breeders from the species only stopping by for a few hours or days.

When it comes to bird data, the delight is in the details. Ed is not content to merely document the usual suspects like House Wren, American Robin, and Eastern Bluebird. His reports are rich in personal discoveries. He also found a bank-side Belted Kingfisher nest, fledgling Acadian Flycatchers, and an elusive Blue-gray Gnatcatcher nest. He also found a Wood Thrush nest in a landscape where that species is having an increasingly difficult time finding good habitat. Finding adults carrying food for young is one of the best ways to confirm breeding. Ed accomplished this with Baltimore Orioles and Gray Catbirds.

This state park is named after one of our state's premier conservationists. I think Mr. Pinchot would be proud of Ed's fine efforts to study birds at his namesake park. It is a gift to all of us.

For more information about the Special Areas Project:  
Douglas A. Gross  
PSO Special Areas Project Coordinator  
144 Winters Road, Orangeville, PA 17859  
or, Susquehanna SES Environmental Laboratory,  
804 Salem Boulevard, Berwick, PA 18603.  
office phone: 570-542-2191  
e-mail: douggross@sunlink.net

### **2001 Annual Meeting Preview**

The annual PSO meeting in May 2001 will provide birders an opportunity to sample the habitats in central Pennsylvania. During the third week of May, forest songbirds will be the dominant theme in the extensive State Forests here, which include Rothrock, Moshannon, and Bald Eagle State Forests. However, in addition to the maturing forests, there will be other habitats to explore

Passerine migration in general will be at or just past peak depending on the spring weather. Far-northern breeders which are late migrants will be passing through. Otherwise, a wide variety of warblers, vireos, flycatchers etc. will be getting serious about breeding.

One proposed field trip to a combination of Natural Areas (Detweiler Run, Bear Meadows, and Alan Seeger) will feature the usual Red-eyed Vireos and Ovenbirds - but will also provide a nice mixture of northern and southern species like Canada, Hooded, Blackburnian, Black-throated Blue, and Black-and-White Warblers, Louisiana Waterthrush, Winter Wren, Veery, Hermit and Wood Thrush, Blue-headed Vireo, Acadian Flycatcher, Pileated Woodpecker, Brown Creeper, Northern Juncos (in breeding habitat), Broad-winged Hawk, and Common Raven. These destinations feature modest patches of old-growth trees in Detweiler and Alan Seeger, and bog habitat at Bear Meadows found more commonly farther North.

Another likely field trip will be to the Lower Trail (near Alexandria, west of State College)- a Rails-to-Trails project which follows the Juniata River through a gap in Tussey Mt. This provides easy walking through a deep river valley which holds a healthy population of Cerulean Warbler as well as an isolated pocket of breeding Yellow-

throated Warblers. Also breeding here are Warbling and Yellow-throated Vireos, Acadian Flycatchers, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, American Redstarts, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Baltimore Orioles.

Bald Eagle State Park will be another possible destination - quite different from the forests. A large lake, open spaces, and brushy fields which contain early successional species (possibilities include Yellow-breasted Chat, Golden-winged, Blue-winged, and Prairie Warblers and Willow Flycatchers).

Yet another trip will be to the "Barrens" - a mosaic of forest in various successional stages - the site of a long-running Game Commission project on Ruffed Grouse habitat. These gamelands west of State College are a favorite location for local birders during migration. They feature healthy populations of Golden-winged Warblers and Whip-poor-wills. Other species include American Woodcock, Wood Thrush, Chestnut-sided and other warblers, flycatchers, etc.

-- Greg Grove

### PSO Board of Directors' Meeting November 11, 2000 (summary)

The meeting began at 1:00 p.m. The following members were present: Doug Gross, Frank Haas, Margaret and Roger Higbee, Shonah Hunter, Katrina Knight, and Eugene Zielinski. Also present was Greg Grove, representing the State College Bird Club, who will host the PSO annual meeting.

The annual meeting was discussed first and planned for May 18, 19, and 20, 2001. Possible locations were discussed, followed by field trip ideas and possible speakers for the afternoon talks and the banquet.

Gene reported that as of October 19, 2000, the PSO had \$10,342.88 in its treasury.

The *Pennsylvania Birds* transition was discussed, with the PSO agreeing to take over from the Haases. Margaret volunteered to take over the newsletter again since Katrina will be the Chief Editor and does not want to do both jobs at the same time.

Frank showed everyone a copy of the Media Guide which he obtained from Wisconsin. This is a booklet that lists people, by region, who are knowledgeable about birds within the state. Frank will begin editing the pamphlet to make appropriate changes to apply it to Pennsylvania. Once completed, PSO will send copies of it to all media in Pennsylvania so that when a question arises, someone with knowledge about birds can be contacted.

Gene is still working on non-profit status for PSO. He hopes to have this completed by Christmas.

Doug brought a proposal from Dan Brauning that PSO may want to offer a reward for the apprehension and conviction of persons suspected of killing certain species of birds. It was agreed that more information was needed on how this would work and in the meantime board members will deal with any such situation as it arises.

SAP - Doug informed us that 4,452 trips have been entered into the database from 110 different locations

It was agreed by all board members present that a synopsis of the Board of Directors Meeting should be included in the newsletter.

### A Summary of the Year 2000 Pennsylvania Breeding Survey of Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*), Otherwise Known as "Project Toot Route"

**Introduction:** The Northern Saw-whet Owl has been one of Pennsylvania's mystery birds, classified as a "Candidate - Undetermined" by the Pennsylvania Biological Survey (Ornithological Technical Committee) for several years. The Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas added considerably to knowledge of the breeding range of this species, but many questions remained (Brauning 1992). Project Toot Route, conducted in the spring and early summer of the year 2000, adds more quantitative data on the saw-whet's breeding population.

**Methods:** Project Toot Route used the Brinker-Dodge acoustic-lure protocol, modified for use by volunteer birders. More than 100 routes were randomly selected in appropriate physiographic provinces of the state (the Appalachian Mountains, the plateaus, and the Blue Ridge Province). Each route consisted of eight stops spaced at least one-half mile apart where participants conducted a listening / playing protocol to detect breeding saw-whets. The 15-minute stops included periods of saw-whet advertising song broadcast and quiet periods for listening. Volunteers only stopped in wooded habitat, skipping inappropriate habitats like open fields and noisy human habitations. The protocol also allowed participants to register other birds observed at the stops, providing data on other night birds which are under-surveyed in the state (Gross 1998). Birders also submitted incidental reports of saw-whet breeding activity that added to the toot route data.

The saw-whet routes were run during a period from late April to mid-June with a few routes delayed to late June and early July due to bad weather. Participants were encouraged to conduct the routes by June 15. Surveys began in the dark, usually one-half hour after sunset, and intended to be completed before 1:00 AM. Saw-whet owl banders have reported that migration continues in Pennsylvania through mid-April, so toot routes were not started until late April to avoid counting migrant non-breeding owls. It may be found in future studies that some areas could be surveyed earlier, especially in the southern counties or lower elevations.

**Results and Discussion:** There were 88 saw-whet routes completed and submitted to the coordinator. These routes represent more than 300 multiple-stop sample locations. Northern Saw-whet Owls were found on 39 of the routes at a 44% success rate (counting a route with a saw-whet as "successful"). Participants reported 85 saw-whets on these routes. There were 0.95 saw-whets detected per route and 2.15 owls detected per successful route.

## Pennsylvania Christmas Bird Counts

Count	Compiler/Contact Name	phone number	e-mail address	Date
Audubon (Valley Forge)	Tony Fernandes	610 647-7868	fernandes@suburbanwater.com	12/30/2000
Bald Eagle State Park	Eugene Zielinski	814 353-8212	eez55@juno.com	12/31/2000
Beaver	John Cruzan	724 846-5342 724 847-6726(w)	jcruzan@geneva.edu	12/23/2000
Bedford County	Janet Shaffer (unconfirmed)	814 356-3553	kgshaffer@juno.com	??
Bernville	Ed Barrell	610 926-2962	ebarrell@early.com	12/31/2000
Bethlehem-Easton	Don & Elaine Mease	610 346-7754	measede@enter.net	12/30/2000
Bloomsburg	Bob Sager Dave Unger	570 925-6461 570 672-3254	david_unger@merck.com	12/17/2000
Buffalo Creek Valley	George Reese	724 353-9649		12/16/2000
Bushy Run State Park	Dick Byers	724-593-3543	otusasio@tcsinternet.net	12/17/2000
Butler County	Ruth Crawford Suzanne Butcher	724 794-5688 330 759-1945	sarbie@msn.com	12/16/2000
Central Bucks County	Ken Kitson	610 847-2968	kkitkraft@aol.com	12/30/2000
Chambersburg	Joan Bowen	717 264-9493		12/16/2000
Clarion	Walter Fye (comp) Margaret Buckwalter	814 797-1019 814 797-1800(w) 814 782-3925	mbuckwalter@usachoice.net	12/30/2000
Clarksville	Ralph Bell	724 883-4505		12/30/2000
Culp (Blair County)	Debora Wentz	814 692-4224	dtw1999@home.com	12/16/2000
Curtin (upper Dauphin Co)	Scott Bills (comp) Deuane Hoffman	717 896-8859 717 564-7475	srbills@paonline.com raven@paonline.com	12/27/2000
Dallas Area (Luzerne County)	Jim Hoyson	570 696-4925	birdder@aol.com	12/16/2000
Dingman's Ferry	Tom Shimalla	570 828-9281	shimalla@peec.org	12/31/2000
DuBois	Harold "Hank" Webster	814 375-0709 814 375-4739(w)	hw1@psu.edu	12/30/2000
Elverson	Bob Cook	610 286-9919	dunlin50@aol.com	12/23/2000
Emporium	Bob Martin	814 486-1990	fd13.dcnr.state.pa.us	12/17/2000
Erie (Presque Isle)	Joan Howlett	814 734-1765	howlett@velocity.net	12/16/2000
Gettysburg (South Mtn)	Art Kennell	717 642-6995		12/16/2000
Glenolden (Delaware County)	Nick Pulcinella	610 583-3201	nickpul@bellatlantic.net	12/16/2000
Hamburg	Laurie Goodrich	610 756-6961 610 756-6000 ext230	goodrich@hawkmountain.org	12/30/2000
Harrisburg	Bill Tripp	717 737-8808	trippfw@juno.com	12/16/2000
Huntingdon	Dave Kyler	814 643-6030	kylerdw@vicon.net	12/17/2000
Indiana	Roger & Marg Higbee	724 354-3493	bcoriola@twd.net	12/26/2000
Johnstown	Tom & Sally Dick		watchbirds@compuserve.com wetmeadow@aol.com	12/17/2000
Lake Raystown	Greg Grove	814 667-2305	gwg2@psu.edu	12/30/2000
Lancaster	Chris Peterson	717 295-2607		12/30/2000
Lebanon County (Quittapahilla)	Fritz Heilman	717 273-0487	fth1vw@aol.com	12/16/2000
Lehigh Valley	Dennis Miller	610 759-7514	autumnwood@enter.net	12/16/2000

Lewisburg	Dick Nickelsen	570 524-9833	nickelsn@bucknell.edu	12/16/2000
Lewistown	Linda Whitesel	717 436-8048	lkwhitesel@jc-net.com	12/16/2000
Linesville	Ron Harrell	814 337-5445	rharrell@alleg.edu	12/17/2000
Lititz	Bruce Carl	717 859-4179	carls@desupernet.net	12/31/2000
Lock-Haven-Jersey Shore (West Branch Bird Club)	Wayne Laubscher	570-748-7511	wlaubsch@cub.kcnet.org	12/23/2000
Mansfield-Wellsboro	Bob Ross	570 376-5394 570 724-3322 ext239	rossr@usgs.gov	12/16/2000
Mount Davis-Grantsville	Dale Jeffrey	814 662-4291	yughwtch@wpia.net	12/19/2000
Nescopink Mountain	Alan Gregory	570 788-1425	meg5@psu.edu	12/23/2000
New Bloomfield	Ramsay Koury	717 761-1871	rkoury123@aol.com	12/23/2000
Newville	Bill Frantz	776-4463	franzw@kns.net	12/30/2000
Pennypack Valley	Pete Kurtz (comp.) Brian Schutz (additional contact at PEC)	215 342-3638(h) 215 685-0470 (PEC)		12/16/2000
Pittsburgh	Jim Valimont	412 828-5338 412 820-8630(w)	valimont@bellatlantic.net	12/30/2000
Pleasantville	Russ States	814 676 6320		12/31/2000
Pocono Mountain	Chris Turn	570 588-6850		12/31/2000
Potter County	Dave Hauber	814 274-8946	Haubers3@penn.com	12/31/2000
Raccoon Creek State Park	Bill Smith Chuck Tague	724 375-9613 412 488-8760	bluejay@city-net.com	12/27/2000
Reading	Bill Uhrich	610 373-8109	buhrich@readingeagle.com	12/17/2000
Rector	Bob Mulvihill	724 238-2716 724 593-7521(w)	mulvipnr@westol.com	12/31/2000
Ryerson	Marjorie Howard	724 499-5624	birdwatcher@alltel.net	12/16/2000
Scranton	Rosann Bongay	698-8266		12/16/2000
Southern Bucks County	Bob Mercer	215 785-1177	slnc@bellatlantic.net	12/16/2000
Southern Lancaster County	Bob Schutsky	717 548-3303	birdtrek@epix.net	12/17/2000
Southeastern Bradford Co.	Bill Reid	570 836-2734 570 822-8433		12/30/2000
South Hills (Mayview Wetlands)	Nancy Page	412 221-4795		12/23/2000
State College	Nick Bolgiano	814 234-2746	nbolgiano@minitab.com	12/17/2000
Thompson	Katherin Shelly Cameron	570 756-2429		12/17/2000
Tunkhannock	Rick Koval	570 829-4381	unibirder@aol.com	12/15/2000
Upper Bucks County	Hart Rufe	215 257-8677	wrufe@tradenet.net	12/17/2000
Warren	Michael Toole	814 723-4714	toole@allegany.com	12/16/2000
Washington	Roy Ickes	724 228-3552 724 223-6118(w)	rickes@washjeff.com	12/16/2000
West Chester	Barry Blust	610 458-5616	BarryBlust@icdc.com	12/16/2000
White Mills	Voni Strasser	570 226-8847	sawwhet@ptdprolog.net	12/16/2000
Wild Creek-Little Gap	Joel & Brad Silfies	610 826-3817	bsilfies@aol.com	12/30/2000
Williamsport	Kathleen Marabella (unconfirmed)	570 323-4008		??
Wyncote	Martin Selzer	215 233-9090	mselzer@prius.nj.com	12/16/2000
York	Bill DelGrande	717 854-6728		12/17/2000

Routes completed on the plateaus had greater success than those completed in the Ridge and Valley (Appalachian Mountain) or the South Mountain (Blue Ridge) Provinces (Table 1). Participants found saw-whet on 50% of routes conducted on the Appalachian Plateaus (Allegheny Mountain, Glaciated Pittsburgh Plateau, High Plateau, Mountainous High Plateau, Glaciated Low Plateau, and Glaciated Pocono Plateau Sections, n=44) and 67% of the Pittsburgh Low Plateau (n=12). (Although the Pittsburgh Low Plateau is a plateau, it is separated for the sake of analysis from the other plateaus because of its lower elevation and more fragmented landscape.) Only 28% of the Ridge and Valley routes (n=29) yielded saw-whets and only 33% of the Blue Ridge Routes (n=3) were successful.

Observers also found more saw-whets per route on the plateaus than in the Ridge and Valley or Blue Ridge. There were 1.05 saw-whets reported per Appalachian Plateau route and 2.08 saw-whets per Pittsburgh Plateau route. When considering only the successful routes, there were 2.09 saw-whets on the Appalachian Plateau and 3.13 on the Pittsburgh Plateau. On Ridge and Valley routes, volunteers reported 0.41 saw-whets per completed route and 1.50 saw-whets per successful route. On the three routes conducted on the small section of the Blue Ridge (South Mountain) in Pennsylvania, observers reported 0.33 saw-whets per route and one bird on the only successful route. Of the successful toot routes, 16 had one saw-whet reported while 10 routes reported two or three saw-whets. The top three routes had five, six, and seven saw-whets each. The highest number of saw-whets was reported for the Red Rock route on North Mountain in Luzerne, Wyoming, and Sullivan counties. There were clusters of successful routes on North Mountain and in Venango County, indicating possible "hot spots" for saw-whets. Several saw-whets were found on routes conducted in Venango County where saw-whets were confirmed breeding for only the first time in 1999 (G. Edwards, personal communication). Observers found saw-whets on the Mercer County route, Sandy Lake, near Sandy Creek and SGL 130. The successful Mercer, Venango, and Forest county routes form a cluster of saw-whet occurrences outside of its known range (Gross 1992).

Project Toot Route increases the breeding range for saw-whet in the state, but generally observers found saw-whets in cooler, higher elevation forests as expected. Building on the success of the Atlas (Brauning 1992), toot routes added Lawrence (as an independent report), Mercer, Venango, Armstrong, Clearfield, Luzerne, and Wyoming counties to those reported during the 1983-89 Atlas effort. Saw-whets were found in all physiographic provinces surveyed including locations on South Mountain (Iron Springs route), Evitts Mountain (Bean's Cove route), and Negro Mountain (Meyersdale route) within ten miles of the Mason-Dixon line. Recent discovery of a saw-whet owl nest on Catoclin Mountain in Washington County, Maryland, lends more credence to the Adams County observation as a breeder (D. Brinker, personal communication).

The cluster of saw-whets on routes in Fayette, Somerset, and Bedford counties provide evidence that the Allegheny Plateau saw-whet population of West Virginia is not isolated as claimed by Milling et al. (1997). In addition, R. Paine (a toot route cooperator) reported a territorial saw-whet owl near Raystown Branch of the Juniata near Breezewood (Bedford County) in 1999 and a territorial saw-whet in their backyard two miles east of Roxbury (Somerset County). With the fairly large-scale forest at high elevations on Chestnut Ridge,

Laurel Hill, Negro Mountain, and nearby ridges, this area has potential for a higher saw-whet population than reported. The five routes not completed in the region may have yielded saw-whets if they had been run.



During toot routes conducted in the year 2000, saw-whets were encountered at 72 different stops (or "calling sites" of Millings et al. 1997). Alone, these points probably represent more than 70 breeding pairs. Since these routes are only samples (randomly chosen) of the larger scale forested habitats where saw-whets are found in all three physiographic provinces, the total population of breeding saw-whets probably exceeds a few hundred pairs in the state (subject to more in-depth population estimates based on geographical information collected in this study). Personal observations of saw-whets near the Red Rock, Lopez, and Dutch Mt. routes recorded over several years, indicate that the occurrence of saw-whets on these routes is not strictly limited to these sites but can be generalized to a several square mile area (including Coalbed Swamp, Ricketts Glen State Park, and Splashdam Pond areas).

Project Toot Route has revealed that the number and distribution of saw-whets is greater than previously documented in the literature (Poole 1964, Gross 1992). The accumulated data from the Breeding Bird Atlas and Project Toot Route substantially improve published accounts (Johnsgard 1988, Cannings 1993, Milling et al. 1997). Most Northern Saw-whet Owls live up to their reputation of breeding in cool, higher elevation forests with a well-diversified foliage structure. The higher vegetative cover enables saw-whets to forage low near its rodent prey without detection (Cannings 1993). The dense vegetation also enables this diminutive night bird to hide from predators such as Barred and Great Horned Owls. The results of this study, even without thorough statistical, vegetative, or geographical analysis confirm the collective impression of saw-whet habitat use and distribution in the state. Virtually all saw-whets found on "toot routes" were in large-scale highland forests. It is not known whether this reflects the range of the Northern Saw-whet Owl each year, or if it is an exceptionally large range for a variable population. Saw-whet breeding range and populations vary on a yearly basis, perhaps in a 4-year cycle (Cannings 1993, Swengel and Swengel 1997).

One of the most interesting and successful components of Project Toot Route was the inclusion of other bird species in the sampling scheme. Five other species of owl and nightjar were reported on routes: Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Common Nighthawk, and Whip-poor-will. At least 20 other bird species were also recorded on toot routes, although the reports of these species were less consistently recorded on forms. Many diurnal species like Yellow-billed Cuckoo (nine birds), Black-billed Cuckoo (8), and Ovenbird (21) were reported.

Other than the saw-whet, Barred Owl was the most frequently reported nightbird, recorded on 31 routes. This is not surprising, given the known distribution and habitat preferences of Barred Owl. The total number of Barred Owls (65 birds) paled by comparison to the Whip-poor-will. Observers counted 147 Whip-poor-wills, finding them on 28 routes. Whip-poor-will has a clustered distribution with three routes in the center of the state having more than 10 Whip-poor-wills (Snow Shoe, Howard, and Ramey routes). With several birds calling at some points, observers may have underestimated Whip-

poor-will numbers due to auditory confusion. Common Nighthawks were reported on two routes at locations far from any flat roofs where they usually nest in Pennsylvania (suggesting ground-nesting at abandoned strip mines, clear cuts, or graveled areas). Two common owls, Eastern Screech-Owl and Great Horned Owl, were also reported (20 and nine, respectively), but far less commonly than Barred Owl in the forested landscapes covered by this project. Long-eared Owl (Candidate - Undetermined), a forest species, was not detected on any of the toot routes. The surveys may not have sufficiently sampled its coniferous habitat or been conducted too late in the year to record it. However, the lack of Long-eared Owl reports on this and other surveys suggests that this species is an extremely rare breeding species in Pennsylvania.

The most important result of the 2000 Pennsylvania Northern Saw-whet Owl survey is that volunteer Pennsylvania birders will participate enthusiastically in a nocturnal bird acoustic-lure survey. Project Toot Route has proven that a volunteer-based nocturnal breeding bird survey is not only possible, but capable of great success. The Brinker-Dodge tape-playback method works well using volunteers. The successful implementation of this protocol is the biggest success of the project.

**Recommendations:** Based on one year of data, this study suggests that the Northern Saw-whet Owl may be too common and widespread to be classified as any of the Species of Special Concern categories (Brauning et al. 1994, Gross 1998, Hassinger 1998). Year-to-year changes in saw-whet owl breeding populations, however, decrease confidence in a one-year assessment of its relative abundance and distribution in Pennsylvania. It is fairly well known that saw-whet populations are variable on a year-to-year basis (Cannings 1993). Auditory surveys in southern Wisconsin have demonstrated “dramatic and regular” changes in call detection in an apparent 4-year cycle (Swengel and Swengel 1997). Owl banders have reported a big flight year in 1999 that might lead to more detection of breeding birds in spring and summer of 2000 (D. Brinker and S. Weidensaul, personal communications). So, the apparent range and distribution of Northern Saw-whet Owls found in 2000 may represent a high end of a regular population fluctuation. In low population years, this small forest owl may be more rare and locally distributed. Only regular repeats of the routes established in this project will give us the kind of information needed to assess population and range changes of this enigmatic and charismatic night bird. In other years, the Northern Saw-whet Owl may be less widely distributed and common, deserving a Candidate-Rare ranking (Brauning et al. 1994, Gross 1998, Hassinger 1998).

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Table 1. Summary of Northern Saw-whet Owls reported on Toot Routes conducted in 2000.

Physiographic Province	Number of Routes			Mean per Route	
	Assigned	Completed	Successful	Completed	Successful
Appalachian Plateau	55	44	22	1.05	2.09
Pittsburgh Plateau Section	12	12	8	2.08	3.13
Ridge and Valley	33	29	8	0.41	1.50
Blue Ridge	3	3	1	0.33	1.00
Total	103	88	39	0.95	2.15

Total # of Saw-whets = 85 from table 4

### Calendar of Events

**January 27** - Wild Pennsylvania Conference 2001 - Penn State Conference Center, State College - The Wild Pennsylvania Conference is a grass roots effort arranged by conservationists, bird-watchers, hunters, naturalists, etc., who advocate a plan that links wildlands in Pennsylvania and neighboring states. The daylong conference will feature an address by Dave Foreman, chairman of The Wildlands Project and publisher of "Wild Earth" magazine. Registration (\$30) required by 12/20 (extra fee for late registrations). Contact Alan Gregory meg5@psu.edu or 570/788-1425 for information.

**January 27 & February 25** - Eagle Foray - Delaware Water Gap, Bushkill Access 8:30 AM - contact Chris Turn at 570-588-6850 or birder@ptdprolog.net for more information.

**February 11** - Northern Berks/Middle Creek field trip - Baird Ornithological Club - meet at the Shur-Fine store, Rte 422, Sinking Spring at 7:30AM - contact Ed Barrell 610/926-2962 for more information. The BOC has a variety of trips and programs. Contact Katrina Knight for other event information at 610/372-3671 or kkinght@epix.net.

**February 17** - Yellow Creek State Park field trip - Todd Bird Club - meet at the park office at 8 AM - contact Dory Jacobs, 570/349-2876

**February 17** - Amish farmland field trip, Lancaster County - Birding Club of Delaware County - meet at McDonald's/Holiday Inn parking lot, Morgantown - contact Bill Barber 610/444-0822. For more field trips and other programs see <http://www.jl-studio.com/BCDC/>.

**March 17** (at Nolde Forest Environmental Education Center), **March 24** (at Beechwood Farms Nature Preserve) & **April 7** (at Shaver's Creek Environmental Center)- Workshops on bird identification and survey methods offered by PA Audubon and the PA Game Commission. Registration (\$15) required. Contact Deb Siefken at 717 677-4830 or siefkend@cvn.net for information.

**March 19** - Marci Mowery speaks on Habitat Gardening with Native Plants - Greater Wyoming Audubon Society, Dallas United Methodist Church, 730 pm. For more information about this and other GWAS events, contact Sandra Goodwin at 570/639-5785 or chickadd@epix.net or check the GWAS website: <http://clubs.homeearth.com/GWVAS>.

**March 21** - Daniel Edelstein speaks on "Wood Warblers Threatened Beauties" Gmeiner Art Center, Wellsboro (Tioga County) - contact Bob Ross rossr@usgs.gov or 570/724-3322 for information on this and other Tiadaghton Audubon Society events.

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.



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