

PSO

Newsletter



October 2001

The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK....

Birds without Boundaries

The recent interest in Game Commission land management has brought many important land use issues to the table. I have been very encouraged by the dialogue between the many people who enjoy game lands and wildlife in Pennsylvania. I congratulate the Game Commission for involving more of the public in addressing usage problems on game lands through their recent open houses. The entire process has been a healthy step in the right direction of open dialogue. In my own interactions with Game Commission employees, I sense that they strive to strike a balance between land usage and wildlife habitat protection. The game land usage ad hoc advisory committee has done a commendable job of addressing the many complex issues involving game lands use by the general public although these lands are primarily funded by hunters. Many of the proposed regulation changes will protect wildlife habitat, promote safety, and allow the continued use of these lands by many who enjoy wildlife and open spaces. That includes us!

Yet, I have been stricken by the restricted scale of the discussion and by the categories of usage pinned on outdoor recreationists in Pennsylvania, especially between hunters and non-hunters. These are artificial dichotomies since many birders are also hunters or have hunters in their families. Many consider themselves both birders and hunters. I often joke that birders are hunters who have less to clean up when they get home. Why draw the boundary line? These classifications impose barriers to progress in bird conservation.

Despite the progress made in dialogue about game lands usage, many uninformed hunters claim that they are the only ones who care about and financially support wildlife habitat. Hunters certainly make a substantial contribution to wildlife habitat, but they are not the only ones who make

substantial contributions. This false claim imposes a barrier for more dialogue and cooperation between hunters and birders.

The Game Commission owns only a small percentage of the total lands in our state. There is much more land in private hands. Since non-hunters outnumber hunters almost by a ratio of about 10 to 1, it is clear that much of the land is owned by non-hunters. Besides, the Game Commission receives some funding from cooperative land conservancies with the common goal of aiding wildlife habitat. If you don't believe me, check out the [Pennsylvania Game News](#) which regularly reports on land acquisitions. To the credit of the Game Commission, it seeks out partners for land acquisition. These partnerships benefit all of us interested in wildlife habitat.

There are lots of ways to pay for wildlife. Everyone pays for wildlife who pays state taxes which support DCNR lands, or who owns property with wildlife habitat, or who owns stock in a public utility that owns land, or who belongs to a land conservancy that purchases wildlife habitat. Whether or not these lands are managed explicitly for wildlife, they often contain good habitat and, therefore, are important to bird population health. Even small wooded parks and private woodlots are locally important migrant stop-overs. So, many people who do not buy a hunting license actively support wildlife habitat in these and other ways.

Wildlife does not care about budgets. Neither does it care who claims to "own" each piece of land. Mostly, wildlife cares about habitat – where it eats, drinks, and sleeps.

Bears are unable to read the signs that say "Posted – Private Land" or "Game Lands." A bear that is shot on game lands may have been digging for grubs or eating berries on private land many miles away a few days or hours before.

That land owner may not have been a hunter. The bear benefitted from all the lands it ever roamed, and the hunter who shot it benefitted in turn from the lands that supported his trophy bear while it was still alive. Due to this mobility, anyone who owns land used by wildlife pays part of “the wildlife bill.”

When a deer bows its head and eats, it does not ask if it is on land owned or paid for by licensed hunters. It just eats. And it eats and eats and eats. For that simple reason, deer herd management is everybody’s business.

Anyone who owns property that supports wildlife deserves to have a say in wildlife management in Pennsylvania. That includes many non-hunters.

Turkeys benefit from a wide diversity of plants and animals in their environment, not just those planted by the Game Commission in food plots. They eat hundreds of different species of insects and plants. Any turkey management plan must manage for biological diversity, including the crickets and grasshoppers that are favorite foods of turkey poults. In turn, these multi-legged and diverse organisms are tied together in a larger food web of thousands of species. Even a Blue Jay can plant an acorn that grows into an oak tree that in turn produces mast eaten by turkeys many years later.

So, the category of “game species” versus “non-game species” is an artificial construct based on human use, but it is meaningless in the natural food web. So, managing “game lands” for only game species is short-sighted and ill-founded. It is thinking small when nature lives big.

Managing for "game species" should mean that we manage not only for the handful of game species but also for the nearly infinite number of plants and animals that link with them in the natural food webs. Game land management should include managing for the natural biological diversity that supports the game species for which hunters buy licenses. By claiming that "game lands" are only for "game species" draws false and meaningless boundaries around wildlife and land ownership types that do not make ecological sense. In the real "bird eat worm" world out there, the food webs that tie thousands of species together in an infinitely complex web of interrelationships make these boundaries meaningless.

For the sake of making certain points, I have used bear, deer, and turkey as examples of how the boundaries we impose on nature are inappropriate for wildlife conservation. We birders know that it is even truer of our migratory birds. The Swainson’s Thrushes that are peeping high over my house tonight will pass over our southern states, the Gulf of

Mexico, and many miles of South America to spend the winter in forests thousands of miles from where they nested. They cross many human boundaries as they fly hundreds of feet overhead. Thrushes may seem like inconspicuous “little brown birds” to some, but when it comes to geographical scope, our intercontinental thrushes live very big indeed. That’s why the Audubon Society, Partners In Flight, and Nature Conservancy think big scale when it comes to bird conservation.

Wildlife knows no boundaries. People draw most boundaries for lack of insight, understanding, and imagination. I hope that these limitations imposed on the world do not prevent us from making progress toward more integrated and effective wildlife conservation.

My point is this: all of us who love wildlife are in this together. Everyone who cares about wildlife does and should contribute in his or her own way. This means tearing down barriers made by boundaries created only in our minds. It is satisfying to see that our chief state wildlife agency is beginning to break down some of these barriers. We birders should reach out and crash through a few barriers ourselves. The first step is to not allow ourselves to be defined by the boundaries imposed on us by others.

Think big and be bold.

– Douglas A. Gross, President

The Conservation Corner

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge – A Unique National Treasure or An Oil Drilling Site?

Birders and wildlife watchers across the nation have supported the protection of our natural resources for decades and have demanded that our elected officials do likewise. However, once again greed and special interests have “won the day” in the U.S. House of Representatives when the House passed the energy bill that contains a provision that will allow oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

What does this mean to birders and wildlife watchers? It means that the more than 135 bird species that breed here, including several species of waterfowl that winter in the mid-Atlantic states, could very well be negatively impacted. It means that the caribou that calve here every year could be negatively impacted as well as the polar bears’ denning areas. It means that a national (and international) natural treasure, that has been protected since the Eisenhower administration, will be “developed” for no good reason!

Special interests claim that the oil is needed to meet our energy demands. However, before we accept that claim, let's examine the situation a little more closely. First, almost 95% of the potential oil reserves of Alaska's north coast are already open to exploration and drilling. Are we so desperate that we can't save just 5% of the north coast in its natural state?

Second, if we need the oil so badly, then why are the oil companies exporting some of the current Alaskan oil supplies to foreign countries? Even if we do allow oil drilling in the Arctic Refuge, there is no guarantee that the oil will be used in the United States. The oil companies could just as easily export it like they do the current Alaskan oil.

Third, according to recent government estimates, "there is a 50% chance of finding a 9 months' supply" of U.S. oil demand in the Arctic Refuge. This will hardly meet the nation's energy demands. Plus, are we so greedy that we must risk damaging a national and international treasure? If this were a building containing world famous art such as the Sistine Chapel, would we risk drilling for oil inside it even though we would only drill in a small part of it? I think not – so why are we risking the Arctic Refuge?

The answer of course is money for the energy companies not the nation's energy needs. If we truly want to meet the nation's energy needs over the long term, then let's consider long-term solutions. Solutions like increasing the gas mileage of vehicles just a few miles per gallon. This will save more oil than the Arctic Refuge contains. Consider developing alternative energy sources like wind power and solar power. These alternatives are being used more and more around the world as well as in the United States and they are much more environmentally friendly. So we have alternatives; we just need to pursue them with the same vigor that the energy companies are pursuing the oil in the Arctic Refuge.

If you feel as many other outdoorsmen and women feel, that the House of Representatives made an error in allowing the drilling for oil in the Arctic Refuge, let them know. More specifically, if your U.S. Representative voted to allow the drilling, call and tell him/her that he/she made a mistake. On the other hand, if your Representative voted to disallow the drilling, then please call to thank him for his courage to protect a national treasure. The voting record is listed below along with the PA District number and telephone number for your information.

U.S. Representatives voting to allow drilling:

Brady, Robert A. PA 1 (202) 225-4731
Hart, Melissa A. PA 4 (202) 225-2565

Peterson, John E. PA 5 (202) 225-5121
Weldon, Curt PA 7 (202) 225-2011
Shuster, Bill PA 9 (202) 225-2431
Sherwood, Don PA 10 (202) 225-3731
Kanjorski, Paul E. PA 11 (202) 225-6511
Murtha, John P. PA 12 (202) 225-2065
Toomey, Patrick J. PA 15 (202) 225-6411
Pitts, Joseph R. PA 16 (202) 225-2411
Gekas, George W. PA 17 (202) 225-4315
Platts, Todd Russell PA 19 (202) 225-5836
Mascara, Frank PA 20 (202) 225-4665
English, Phil PA 21 (202) 225-5406

U.S. Representatives voting to prohibit drilling:

Fattah, Chaka PA 2 (202) 225-4001
Borski, Robert A. PA 3 (202) 225-8251
Holden, Tim PA 6 (202) 225-5546
Greenwood, James C. PA 8 (202) 225-4276
Hoeffel, Joseph M. PA 13 (202) 225-6111
Coyne, William J. PA 14 (202) 225-2301
Doyle, Michael F. PA 18 (202) 225-2135

And finally, the energy bill passed by the House is now in the U.S. Senate. Now would be a good time to call Senator Specter (202-224-4254) and Senator Santorum (202-224-6324) to urge them to not support the energy bill as long as it allows for drilling in the Arctic Refuge. If you prefer to write, letters can be addressed to the Senators and sent to the Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. Please take the time to write or call. One of America's natural treasures is under "attack" and it is up to us to stop the threat or we may lose it forever.

– Mark Henry
PSO Conservation Chairperson



Special Birthday Wishes to Blanche Bordner!



Members of the State College Bird Club have the distinction of having as their member the oldest birder in the state. Blanche Bordner turned 100 years old on Wednesday, September 26. Blanche also has been a member of the State College Bird Club longer than anyone else. She joined in 1950, only a few years after the Bird Club was founded.

Blanche and her late husband, Earl Bordner, both grew up in the state of Indiana. Earl came to State College to work as an instructor in physics at Penn State. Two years later in 1925, he and Blanche were married and he brought his bride in a Model T Ford to State College.

Blanche's daughter, Dorothy, received a bird banding permit, and her mother received a sub-banding permit which she uses under Dorothy's permit. For six years in the 1960's Dorothy and her mother banded birds at a banding station at Island Beach State Park in New Jersey for two or more weeks every September.

While Blanche can no longer be a very active birder, she still observes birds in her backyard and goes out regularly with Dorothy around Centre County and birds from their car. When recently asked if she has a favorite bird, she shook her head "no."

Her birdwatching days are not yet at an end, and we congratulate her on her many years of dedicated birdwatching. Happy birthday!

— Alice Fuller

PSO Acquires Federal Tax Exempt Status

In early August, PSO received a letter that read, in part: "...assuming that your operations will be as stated in your application for recognition of exemption, we have determined you are exempt from federal income tax...as an organization described in section 501(c)3." This is not especially exciting wording but very exciting news, since this means PSO is a federally recognized tax exempt organization. And, since the application was submitted within 15 months of our incorporation, the tax exempt status is retroactive to that date (March 20, 2000).

What this means for PSO members is that any contributions above and beyond dues and *PA Birds* payments are deductible from your federal taxes, within the limits of the law, of course. PSO can qualify for certain grants to help us carry out our projects. It also means that we'll get a break in our postage costs, and it should make it easier for us to get a sales tax exemption from the state. The downside is that we'll have to submit more paperwork to the federal government, but the benefits should far outweigh the costs.

-- Gene Zielinski, Treasurer
eez55@earthlink.com

PA Birds Is Coming Soon

As Chief Editor of *Pennsylvania Birds*, I'd like to let you know that publication of the first issue of the magazine has been delayed by the fact that we are all struggling to learn how to do the job right, and we are striving to produce an accurate and well-written magazine. Frank Haas has been a great help, but his good advice is not a complete substitute for my not having all the knowledge and skill that he accumulated in his 14 years of hard work. The first issue is almost ready to go to the printer, and the second issue should be not far behind it.

-- Katrina Knight, Editor
knight@epix.net

Reminder to Reporters and to County Compilers:

Please submit your quarterly bird reports as soon as possible, so that our data entry technician, Wendy Jo Shemansky, may complete her task in a timely fashion. If you have any questions, you may contact Wendy Jo at pabirdsrus@adelphia.net or at (412) 244-3318. Her address is: 1613 Aurelius St., Apt. 1
Swissvale, PA 15218

The Raven Reporter



Tales of Discovery from the Special Areas Project

PSO birders keep adding to the Special Areas Project "birds on public lands" database by sending in Seasonal Field Reports. We now have 5282 trips from 118 locations in the database file. There are more than 1.25 million individual birds counted in all these trips. We are dealing with a back-log of data submitted late from 1998, 1999, and 2000, but data entry is proceeding fairly well. We also have been checking very good files of data submitted for early 2001. Thanks for all of your submissions.

Randolph "Gracefully" Retires from SAP: Thanks for Great Leadership!

One of the premier leaders of our core of SAP birders has been Grace Randolph of the Appalachian Audubon. Grace has been a champion of bird data collection in the Harrisburg area for many years. Her contribution to the Special Areas Project has been considerable. We are very grateful for all her contributions. She has not only collected data from many birders in the Harrisburg area, but verified rare bird reports and handwritten many notes about the many exciting finds uncovered by field trips. Grace has often posted results on the PA Bird server to share her findings with others.

A quick look into the SAP database reveals that Grace has coordinated data collection for at least 365 field trips to nine locations. This includes Dauphin County's expansive Game Lands 211 (St. Anthony's Wilderness); York County's Gifford Pinchot State Park and Game Lands 243 (Franklinton); Cumberland County's Colonel Denning State Park and Game Lands 169 (Newville); Perry County's Little Buffalo State Park, Hemlocks Natural Area, and Frank Masland Natural Area; and Lebanon County's Swatara State Park. This great diversity of locations gives birders of the Harrisburg area many opportunities for birding recreation.

Grace has done a wonderful job of recruiting birders and teaching neophytes the basics of bird inventory. To be

a good SAP coordinator, you have to be a good leader, a great organizer, and a patient teacher, too. Grace has been all of these.

Among other things, Grace is a doggedly persistent birder. This gal just does not give up easily. During the Breeding Bird Atlas, the Atlas head office posted a bulletin that many grassland birds, including rarities like Sedge Wren, might actively be nesting well into late summer especially in drought years. While many other experienced birders pooh-pooed this claim, Grace charged ahead and looked in many odd places for grassland rarities. Her persistence paid off handsomely when she made the only confirmed nesting for Sedge Wren away from the northwest counties during the Atlas Project. That is not easy. Many of you may know that her determination also uncovered the Swainson's Warbler of Game Lands 211 fame. On a field trip, she heard a song she did not recognize. Instead of shrugging it off, she listened to her tapes back home and identified it. Grace returned and found the bird and shared her discovery with many others. This is typical of her best qualities for which we have grown to appreciate and admire her. She has been a big contributor to Appalachian Audubon's many programs, including its field trips and newsletters.

We thank Grace for her dedication to our project, but even more for being such an inspirational example and (may we say it) a gracious leader.

Any More Graces Out There?

Who will take up the challenge of being a coordinator of the areas that Grace Randolph organized? Grace is really impossible to replace. It will take more than one person to fill her field sneakers. We need a team of Graces!

Pat Sabold goes birding regularly at Gifford Pinchot and has volunteered to coordinate the SAP there, but we need more help at the other locations. If you are interested in becoming a SAP Coordinator for any of the locations mentioned above, please contact the SAP office at the address listed below.

Oil Creek State Park: A Great New SAP Location

In Venango County, there are not many large stretches of forest. Oil Creek State Park is one of the few places west of Allegheny National Forest where you can find many forest interior species. This is one of the reasons it was designated as a state Important Bird Area. Size matters when it comes to bird conservation. Generally, bigger is better for forest birds.

At 7,026 acres, Oil Creek is one of the largest state parks in the system, so it has the potential to be regionally important for bird populations and for birding. Yet, there is little published on the birds found there.

Thanks to Gary Edwards and other top birders from Seneca Rocks Audubon Society, we now have some bird data from Oil Creek State Park. Gary is conducting a field trip almost every week. This is reaping a lot of information on birds at a park that has not been well-represented in checklists or literature. These data are also useful to establish a baseline on the bird community of this Important Bird Area. The first sets of data indicate that the Oil Creek valley has a good diversity of warblers and other neotropical migrants. We'll report more later.

PA Breeding Bird Atlas Challenge: SAP as Training Ground

In the years 1983 through 1989, Pennsylvania birders took on the seemingly impossible task – conducting the first Breeding Bird Atlas for the state. Using a grid-pattern survey method, we surveyed 4928 blocks, each a sixth of a U.S. Geological Survey topographic map. Many states are undergoing a second round of Atlas surveys to track how breeding bird ranges have changed in the period since the first Atlas. Our time for Atlas work is coming soon, maybe in 2004. Those of us who were involved with the first effort are looking forward to the second one with some excitement and a fair bit of anxiety. We know what it took to do the first one.

One of the big challenges of the first Atlas was teaching birders about making bird breeding behavior observations and the using letter codes to describe these behaviors. The Special Areas Project has adopted the standard set of Atlas codes in order to facilitate data collection and teaching volunteers the basics of this survey methodology. SAP has been and intends to continue as a training ground for bird survey methods.

Since we have a new round of SAP coordinators, I thought it appropriate to review some of the fundamentals of breeding codes. On the "green sheet," the breeding codes are listed in approximate order of confidence the observation gives us that the species nested at that location. The lower designations are given in one letter and the higher designations are two-letter codes (confirmed observations). The most basic indicators are the presence of the species during its breeding season (the "Z" code) or a singing male present in suitable nesting habitat in the breeding season (the "X" code). The "safe dates" for the breeding seasons of each species are given in Appendix C of the Breeding Bird Atlas. We will provide these safe dates for anyone who needs them. In addition, the local coordinator should make

some of his or her own judgments concerning breeding seasons based on personal experiences locally. The seasons are affected by latitude, elevation, weather, and other factors. It is fairly easy to find pairs of most species, designated as code "P." When you find birds at the same location on separate occasions at least 7 days apart, you can upgrade the "X" code to the higher "S" code. If you observe territorial defense, you can use the "T" code. With many feisty songbirds, this is easy. Return visits in late June and July often result in upgraded codes including many confirmed codes.

We ask that coordinators provide dates for the confirmed codes on the Seasonal Form so we can accumulate more information on the phenology of the breeding season for each species. You do not need to provide dates for the single letter codes (possible or probable nesting).

I have noticed that many of the newer SAP Seasonal Reports lack "Z", "X", "P", and "S" codes when they easily can be recorded. For instance, I rarely find a single silent Tufted Titmouse or seldom see a Red-eyed Vireo or Carolina Wren in summer without hearing one sing on territory.

Observing breeding activity adds another dimension to your birding experience and sharpens your skills. This is a challenge that makes birding such a fascinating avocation. With another Atlas on the horizon, it is good to start "gearing up" for breeding codes.

SAP Data as Baseline Inventory for Important Bird Areas

The Special Areas Project was started in 1990, long before the Important Bird Area project was initiated in Pennsylvania. We are honored and pleased that the IBA program started in our Keystone State as the first in the nation. More than 70 locations have been designated as IBAs. Several locations were selected based on SAP data that included quantitative information on the migrant traps and breeding bird communities not found elsewhere.

We continue to welcome data for locations that have been designated as Important Bird Areas. SAP inventory data establishes important baselines from which to monitor bird populations and habitats. The data establish benchmarks. SAP data are also helpful for site species lists and educational materials that are bound to come out of the great interest in these locations. So, although IBA is rightfully and wisely starting breeding bird point count surveys and mini-atlases at many IBA locations, the SAP methodology is still very helpful to the process of learning more about each area. The two programs overlap and compliment each other. We urge all of you to do SAP trips

at IBA locations and also contribute to the volunteer network of Audubon Pennsylvania. Several SAP volunteers are sending SAP data to IBA and also to our office. Sharing makes us all stronger.

State Park Checklists: Progress Made with Yellow Creek Data

Putting together high quality bird checklists takes a lot of work and coordination. PSO is working with the Bureau of State Parks and the Todd Bird Club on a very detailed, high quality bird checklist for Yellow Creek State Park. The checklist will use data collected on hundreds of field trips conducted by the Todd Bird Club. More than 460 of these field trips are in the SAP database.

With the help of ornithologists and birders, the Bureau of State Parks has designed a template for a checklist that will be used for some state parks. This template includes all the regularly occurring birds of the state. It is a graphical design that will show the seasonal occurrence of each species as a horizontal bar graph (or "phenogram"). The phenogram will show the ease of finding each species through the year in the categories: "Probably will find," "Might find," and "Lucky to find." This design is a modification of the old "Birds of Southeastern Arizona" checklist by James Lane and others since then. For each park, the "ease of finding" codes will be achieved using bird data as much as possible. In this case, SAP compiled its Yellow Creek data in monthly summaries of "birds per party hour" and "frequency of occurrence" for each species. SAP then converted these data into "ease of finding" codes by a formula. After checking to see that the system worked, Margaret Higbee is using these codes and her own data to fill in the blanks for each species in each month. She finds them very helpful and easier to use than it would be to come up with codes from scratch.

This is a slow and tedious process, but it will be worth it when we have a great checklist in hand for Yellow Creek State Park. It is our intention that Yellow Creek is the first of several such projects. When we have completed this park checklist, we will move on to another state park. The first one might be the hardest one.

Project Toot Route: Learning More about Breeding Saw-whet Owls

The Northern Saw-whet Owl Breeding Survey, better known as Project Toot Route, had another successful year in 2001. We have received the route data but have not yet done much analysis of the data. What we see looks terribly interesting and impressive. This is not actually a part of Special Areas Project, but I am including it in this

column because many birding volunteers participate in both.

Since the Toot Route protocol and results were discussed last year, that does not require repetition. Here is a quick summary of some of the project's highlights. More will come later as we dig into the results. Of the 100 routes assigned in 2001, 79 routes were conducted (a phenomenal 79% participation rate). Of the routes completed, saw-whet owls were detected on 40 routes, a 51% success rate. This is even higher than in 2000. The total number of saw-whets detected on routes was 107. This calculates to 1.4 saw-whets per route or 2.7 saw-whets per successful route.

The highest success rate (71%) was experienced in the Appalachian Plateau section with 2.1 saw-whets per route and 2.9 saw-whets per successful route. The Ridge and Valley section had a lower success rate (26%) but had nearly as many saw-whets per successful route (2.7). The Low Pittsburgh Plateau did not have the rate of success found in 2000 with only a 40% success rate as well as 0.7 saw-whets per route and 1.7 saw-whets per successful route. The 2001 results do NOT point to 2000 as a peak year as some owlers predicted. The results seemed fairly similar to those in 2000, but we need to do more analysis to make comparisons. The Venango County saw-whets that surprised local birders in 2000 seemed to have moved out in 2001. But, the 2001 results do NOT show the big year-to-year fluctuations in breeding populations found elsewhere (it rather looks like shifts). The results also suggest that saw-whets are much more widespread and common in Pennsylvania's forests than previously documented. High elevation routes on Chestnut Ridge and the Allegheny Mountain section (Laurel Hill and nearby mountains) have saw-whets fairly close to the Mason-Dixon line.

I would like to publicly thank all those who participated in the 2001 Saw-whet Owl study. It was a tremendous success thanks to a cadre of dedicated people. I would especially like to thank the many of you who conducted more than one route or ran a route twice. I hate to single out any particular volunteers, but I wanted to publicly thank Dick Byers and Chuck Tague (new toot route runners) for filling in a big gap in Fayette and Somerset Counties. The data collected by Dick and Chuck as well as by Retta and Jeff Payne and Tom Dick in the Allegheny Front/ Chestnut Ridge region will amaze you. I would also like to especially recognize the intrepid Stan Kotala who did his toot route on mountain bike in the moonlight (a highly recommended activity) and the McCulloughs who had the misfortune of having a deer run into their vehicle while returning from their route – yet another reason to reduce the deer herd. I will share more names and dirty details in the future.

A few birders ran additional unofficial routes, often in SAP areas. They found saw-whets, often where never recorded previously. This is just great! Please include owl data in your SAP reports if possible. I have already seen some saw-whet special efforts as a results of added toot routes. It also gives us a few more data points to fill in the saw-whet owl distribution map.

There will be more about the saw-whet owl surveys in future Newsletters.

For more information about the Special Areas Project:

Douglas A. Gross
PSO Special Areas Project Coordinator
Susquehanna SES Environmental Laboratory
804 Salem Boulevard
Berwick, PA 18603.

Update: Audubon PA's Important Bird Area Program

After leaving my home state for more than 26 years, I returned to Pennsylvania from Utah to further Audubon-Pennsylvania's Important Bird Area (IBA) program. I have been on the job now for 20 months, and have found the work to be both challenging and fulfilling. I am gratified by the tremendous public interest and involvement in the IBA program. Audubon chapters, bird clubs, and many other organizations and individuals have been extremely supportive and helpful. Let me take this opportunity to provide you with an update of our recent progress.

Stewardship Adoption Program

With 74 IBA sites encompassing over one million acres of public and private lands scattered across the state, the protection and conservation of habitats on IBAs will depend largely on our ability to attract local community support and stewardship. To help facilitate such involvement, Audubon has initiated the *IBA Stewardship Adoption Program*. Our goal in the next two to three years is to find local conservation organizations to "adopt" all 74 IBAs.

Adoption of an IBA by an institution involves three distinct activities: 1) recruitment of volunteers to conduct bird inventories and annual monitoring of bird populations; 2) cooperative efforts with landowners to ensure long-term protection of critical habitats; and 3) active involvement in the development of a conservation plan for the site. In most cases the adopting organization establishes an "IBA

Committee" or contact person to coordinate communications and activities for each site adopted. Thus far, nine different organizations have officially adopted 15 IBAs in PA.

Breeding Bird Survey Efforts

Monitoring of bird populations on IBAs will focus primarily on the breeding season. At most sites "point counts" will be employed to assess the numbers and variety of birds breeding in a particular habitat.

This summer volunteers and field workers visited 7 IBAs in north-central and western PA to conduct breeding bird inventories and surveys. A total of 160 sites were visited by 60 volunteers, spending over 300 early morning hours counting birds along 295 miles of trails and backcountry roads. In addition, 450 permanent bird census points were placed in 10 different IBAs. Approximately 250 points were run once this season. Data entry is nearing completion, and the results will be summarized in a report later this fall.

IBA Nomination Process

Although more than one million acres of land in PA have already been identified as Important Bird Areas, we know that many high quality sites that meet the strict scientific criteria were omitted. Thus, we are working vigorously with the conservation community statewide to identify additional sites that were overlooked in the first round. The Ornithological Technical Committee makes the final decision on all IBA nominations. If you have a site in your area that may qualify,* please contact Audubon for more information.

Program Funding

I have spent much of my time during the past year writing grants for the IBA program, and we recently learned that many of these grant applications were successful. The following major grants will provide substantial funding for Pennsylvania's Important Bird Area program during the next two years: 1) Kittatinny Ridge conservation planning (\$275,000 from DCNR, and \$250,000 from the William Penn Foundation); 2) Statewide IBA conservation planning (\$60,000 from DCNR, \$126,000 in federal funds from the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Account); 3) IBA conservation planning in southeastern PA (\$120,000 from the William Penn Foundation); 4) IBA Watershed Assessment Project (\$79,500 from PA Dept. of Environmental Protection); and 5) IBA bird inventories, monitoring, and volunteer training (\$40,000 from the Wild Resource Conservation Fund). These funds will be used to develop an IBA database, write conservation plans,

implement conservation actions, develop volunteer training for monitoring programs, and engage local communities in conservation activities. Of particular significance is the fact that Audubon will be able to hire a full-time Assistant IBA Coordinator to accelerate progress with the IBA program.

Audubon-PA has recently assumed ownership of the Waggoner's Gap Hawk Watch site north of Carlisle. A grant from DCNR will provide funds to develop a parking lot, trail to the lookout, and an educational kiosk at the site. Construction of the parking lot is now complete, and the trail work is nearly finished! We are very excited about this new development, and look forward to expanding educational activities at the site.

We have applied for additional grant funds for IBA work from the Wild Resources Conservation Fund. If funded, it will support additional IBA inventory and monitoring, as well as a literature review on forest bird habitat needs in relation to logging practices. It would also provide support for direct habitat protection through more intensive networking with local land trusts.

Conservation Efforts

Ultimately, our goal is permanent protection of all 74 IBAs in Pennsylvania. In many cases Audubon must work closely with local and regional land conservancies to help achieve this goal. One example of an IBA that we are working collaboratively with a land trust to protect is the Piney Tract, a grassland site in Clarion County. The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy is currently negotiating with the landowner (a coal company), DEP, and the Game Commission to secure permanent protection of this valuable habitat for grassland species.

A similar effort will be required to protect Glen Manor Lake, a privately-owned IBA in southern Berks County. This wetland is extremely valuable habitat for nesting Pied-billed Grebes, Ruddy Ducks, coots, and many more state-listed and declining species. Bald Eagles and Ospreys regularly search for prey on the lake, and a tremendous variety of waterfowl use the site as stop-over habitat. We must find a way to permanently protect this important wetland. The Berks County Conservancy and Natural Lands Trust have both expressed interest in assisting Audubon with this effort.

I look forward to providing regular updates for you on the IBA program. Thanks very much for your strong commitment to the IBA program and bird conservation.

– Steve Hoffman
Director of Bird Conservation, PA Audubon

* The following criteria are used to objectively evaluate all IBA nominations received by Audubon-PA:

- ✓ Any site having exceptional concentration and/or diversity of birdlife when breeding, in winter, or during migration.
- ✓ Sites supporting state or federal endangered or threatened species.
- ✓ Sites supporting one or more species on Pennsylvania's "special concern" list.
- ✓ Sites containing representative, rare, threatened, or unique habitats, with birds characteristic of those habitats.
- ✓ Sites where long-term avian research or monitoring is in process.

Notes from PORC

(Editor's note: This article is a regular feature of the Newsletter in which the state records committee reports on its policies, procedures, and progress.)

With a few substitutions, the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee couldn't have said it better:

"The Committee is fully conscious it must command the ongoing confidence of the birding community including county recorders or it would not be able to function. [PORC] has no automatic or legal expectation that birders submit records to them. We can only perform our task of record assessment and keeping of the [state] record with the good will and cooperation of the majority of birders in [Pennsylvania]. Confidence in the Committee's fairness and efficiency is essential. Any suggested improvements in its operation are always welcome and should be sent to the Secretary."

That statement was made by the British Birds Rarities Committee, which is 30 years older than PORC and faces the same needs from birders throughout the United Kingdom as our committee does from birders throughout

Pennsylvania. From PORC's viewpoint, several very important words are "good will," "fairness," and "efficiency." Taking them in order:

1. Good will is sometimes difficult to achieve by state, provincial, regional, and national records committees. Problems faced by many committees include a perception – or a reality – of ivory-tower distance from the birding community, disappointment or disgust from observers whose records are not accepted, and the view that a rarities committee is above all meant to be an adversary.

The committee cannot always overcome ill will from birders who were unsuccessful in obtaining acceptance of their records. The best we can do is to explain exactly why the documentation failed to pass muster, and we always try to offer an adequate explanation in a personal letter to the observer. To the extent that our assigned purpose is to evaluate documentation impartially, we are inevitably in one sense adversarial. Yet our genuine goal is to work *with* the birding community in improving documentation of rarities. In future articles in the PSO Newsletter and *Pennsylvania Birds* we will recommend important identification resources and use fictional examples built on actual cases to explain various reasons why records were not accepted.

We are attempting to maintain a close relationship with the birding community with several approaches including these "Notes from PORC" articles in the PSO Newsletter; postings on the PAbirds e-mail list; increased presence and opportunities for personal interaction at PSO annual meetings; postcards to observers acknowledging receipt of their documentation and informing them when their records are accepted; and in the same spirit as the British statement, an invitation to birders to send suggestions about how our operations could be improved to Nick Pulcinella, Secretary, 210 Welcome Ave., Norwood, PA 19074 nickpul@bellatlantic.net.

2. Fairness is essential or the committee's reason for existence, the integrity of the state bird list, will be compromised or destroyed. The specter of unfairness most often arises when an observer whose record is not accepted learns of another person whose record of the same species is approved.

There are good reasons why that may occur, and they will be the subject of a future "Notes from PORC" installment. Meanwhile, we assure every birder that committee members themselves are held to exactly the same standards and receive exactly the same treatment by their colleagues as anyone else. In fact members generally hold their counterparts to an especially strict standard, with a

view that "you ought to know better."

PORC's bylaws require a member to abstain from voting when the member was one of the primary persons to discover the bird and considers the identification to be accurate. A member who merely traveled to see a bird found by someone else remains eligible to vote for acceptance, and in all cases, a member who observed the bird is allowed to vote *against* acceptance.

3. Efficiency is a constant goal of PORC, although sometimes it is difficult to achieve. An unfortunate example happened in the last three years when a series of members suddenly had to leave the committee, one each year, and there were delays in replacing them. We gradually fell so far behind that the committee's last report published in March dealt with reports submitted three and four years ago. By our next annual report in 2002 we should be in step with the submissions.

Members receive packets of documentations in round-robin fashion and try to tackle each packet as soon as possible, but we are all volunteers and sometimes other pressures prevent us from doing it as quickly as we would like. We can assure you that we are striving to keep pace with the increasing rate of submissions. When members see that they will not be able to fulfill their responsibilities for several months, they ask for a leave of absence and are temporarily replaced on the committee.

A current example is Paul Rodewald, who has accepted a teaching and research position at Ohio State University, while at the same time completing work for his doctorate from Penn State. We are fortunate to have the temporary service of Bob Leberman, one of PORC's charter members 12 years ago, who is chief of the bird banding program at Powdermill Nature Reserve in Westmoreland County, field station of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History.

– Paul Hess, PORC Chairperson



Trivia

Did you know that several centuries ago in England the storm-petrels were known as storm witches because mariners believed that they remained invisible until the approach of a storm or tempest?

Coming Events

October 7-13 – Hawk Watching Week in Pennsylvania, as proclaimed by Gov. Tom Ridge.

October 8 – Bartramian Audubon Society meeting at the United Methodist Church in Slippery Rock at 7:30 p.m. Bob Baldesberger, winner of BAS's Mike Starker Scholarship in environmental studies at Slippery Rock University, will present a slide program featuring his bird banding station.

October 13 – Todd Bird Club outing to Yellow Creek State Park, led by Gloria Lamer (724-349-1159). Meet at the park office on Route 259 just off Route 422 east of Indiana at 8:00 a.m.

October 13 – Bartramian Audubon outing to Polk Wetlands for migrant sparrows, led by Russ States (814-676-6320 or russ@csonline.net) and Jerry Stanley. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the wetlands parking lot. Contact Russ for directions.

October 14 – Westmoreland Bird Club outing to the Tussey Mountain Hawk Lookout. Meet Jim Pemberton (412-736-4240) in Shawnee State Park at the second pit stop parking lot at 10:00 a.m.

October 15 – Greater Wyoming Valley Audubon Society meeting; *Public Lands Ranching: Environmental Destruction at Taxpayer Expense*, presented by Mike Hudak, at Dallas United Methodist Church, 7:30 p.m.

October 17 – Westmoreland Bird Club outing to the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch. Meet leader, Ken Byerly, at the Jenners Crossroads Burger King on Route 30 at 10:00 a.m.

November 6 – Todd Bird Club, Indiana County, meeting at 7:30 p.m. at the Blue Spruce County Park lodge. Mike Fialkovich's slide presentation will take us to the state of Washington where we will visit many habitats including the arid sagebrush hills in the southeastern part of the state, the alpine habitats at Mt. Rainier, the recovering ecosystem of Mt. St. Helens, and the coast and rain forest of the Olympic Peninsula.

November 12 – Bartramian Audubon Society meeting at the United Methodist Church in Slippery Rock at 7:30 p.m. *Raptor Identification*, presented by Steve Hoffman, Director of Bird Conservation for PA Audubon.

November 17 – Greater Wyoming Valley Audubon outing for local waterfowl. Contact: Sam Merrill (570-696-3753). Meet at Dallas United Methodist Church, 8:00 a.m.

November 18 – North Branch Bird Club waterfowl outing to Montour Preserve, led by Dave Unger. Meet at the visitors' center at 8:00 a.m. The Wildlife Art Expo will be held that afternoon, so plan to stay and see the artwork on exhibit.

November 19 – Greater Wyoming Valley Audubon Society meeting; *To the Edge of the Earth*, presented by Roy Smith, at Dallas United Methodist Church, 7:30 p.m.

Note: This calendar is intended as a sampling of birding related activities in Pennsylvania. To have events included, please submit the information to bcoriole@twd.net or mail to the return address on this newsletter.

Answers to Bird Quiz on Page 12:

1. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Great Crested Flycatcher.
2. Barred Owl, White-winged Dove.
3. Northern ("Yellow-shafted") Flicker. In some areas it is called a Yellowhammer, which is also the name of the widespread bunting *Emberiza citrinella*.
4. Franklin's Gull. Its winter range reaches southern Chile. (In second place is Sabine's Gull, which reaches central Chile.)
5. The head: *corniculata* is "horned," *coronata* is "crowned," and *cristata* is "crested."

PSO Newsletter

This newsletter is published four times a year by the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology.

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Annual Meeting

Our 2002 Annual Meeting will be held May 17-19, 2002, in the Poconos near the Delaware River. Details will be included in future newsletters.

PSO Bird Quiz

How well do you know our Pennsylvania birds?

1. A two-part question about our flycatchers: Which builds its nest on the ground? Which often uses an abandoned woodpecker hole?
2. Which two completely unrelated North American birds, one common in Pennsylvania and one recorded only twice here, have calls that are often written as "who-cooks-for-you"?
3. What common woodpecker's colloquial name in parts of eastern North America is the same as the English name of a common Eurasian bunting?
4. Which breeding gull of the U.S. and Canada, a rare but increasingly regular visitor in Pennsylvania, winters the farthest south of any North American gull?
5. To what part of a bird's body do all of the following Latin names refer: *corniculata*, *coronata*, *cristata*?

(answers on page 11)

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