

PSO

Newsletter



December 2001

The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK....

Birders are Recreationists, Too

A few weeks ago I spent about a thousand dollars on a new scope. I know what you're thinking. Which one did he get? Does it have a zoom lens? How about ED glass? For my purposes today, what matters most is that I bought it to recreate. Like many of you, I spend lots of money to have fun watching birds.

I bought a 4-wheel drive vehicle so I can drive on snowy or gravel roads. I buy lots of gasoline to get me where there are birds. I drink coffee along the way and eat food when I'm done. I purchase bug repellent, hats, parkas, sun screen, packs, patches, and pins. I have a small collection of optical instruments and all kinds of boots, vests, cameras, and other gadgets tucked away in countless closets. I even bird while cross-country skiing, mountain biking, and snowshoeing. I can't help myself because I am a recreational beast that needs to be fed birds.

When I can't go to the birds, I try to bring them to me by spending hundreds of dollars on bird seed and bird-friendly plants in the garden. The rumors of Evening Grosbeaks have my accountant worried. They eat a lot of expensive sunflower seed.

And then there are the books. My wife is tired of picking up my bird books all over the house (that's her editorial). I'm afraid to figure out how much I've spent on books and magazines about birds. I might be able to retire earlier if I didn't insist on having so many field guides to places I may never go and books about birds that I probably will never see. I have catalogs of birding gear scattered through the house. All this stuff costs money!

Birders are an exploding recreationist group that has tremendous economic power as a result of our activities. You have read the facts and figures in the various birding magazines. I don't need to repeat them here. Just go around the house and add it up. You know the answer, and it's scary – at least for your personal finances.

As recreationists, birders do not get much respect in the keystone state. Hawk Mountain and Audubon Pennsylvania have helped change that perception a bit, but we still suffer from neglect. I think this is changing because of the growing economic power of birding as recreation.

I believe that Pennsylvania birders have only begun to be recognized as an economically powerful recreationist group. The problem is that we don't make enough noise in the woods. Guns and motorboats are much more effective attention grabbers than expensive, but quiet, optics. We are way too quiet and polite for our own good.

This is going to change because it has to change. When lake, park, game land, and forest managers need to take every group into account, they will have to include birders. We are getting too big to ignore much longer. Our dollars and our volunteer power will speak for us.

Pennsylvania will see its first birding trail fairly soon. I understand that it will stretch along the Susquehanna from border to border, highlighting good birding spots near the river. This is welcome news. A few meetings and road signs will bring long-overdue emphasis on our gentler and quieter recreational activities.

Don't be shy. Have fun birding, and let others know it. Think big. Be bold.

– Douglas A. Gross
PSO President

The Conservation Corner

Global Warming – It's for Real

Earlier this year, the National Academy of Sciences released a report on global warming entitled "Climate Change Science: An Analysis of Some Key Questions." This is an important document because, as the premier scientific organization in the country, the Academy has taken the position that global warming is for real and is not some nebulous theory. This clearly refutes those who claim that global warming is a "red herring" and there is nothing to worry about.

The report states that the accumulation of greenhouse gases is in fact causing a temperature change in the environment and that the global increase in temperature is a direct result of the greenhouse gases generated through human activity. This human-induced warming will increase through the 21st century and future generations will have to deal with the worst of the effects.

The Academy does acknowledge that because we don't have all the information, completely accurate predictions cannot be made at this time. However, the Academy does state that warming is happening and makes recommendations regarding further study and research in order to better predict the effects of global warming. For example, the report calls for additional research into the factors that determine atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases and aerosols. This, along with other research, will allow more accurate warming models to be developed and will give us a better understanding of what is happening.

Even with these uncertainties, the Academy made several predictions regarding global warming. These predictions include: the consequences of such a temperature increase will be an increased tendency toward drought; along with drought, there will be fewer storm events and storm events that do occur will be higher in intensity; even in non-arid areas where the effects of drought will not be as pronounced, there will be increased flash flood events; and if the production of greenhouse gases is not reversed, the implications of global warming and climate change will be vast.

Why should we care? A gradual warming will probably mean the loss of northern species but could mean the gain of more southern species. In Pennsylvania this may mean no net loss of species – just different species. But what about arctic nesting migrants and the changes to their habitat and food supply? And what about other far northern species such as ptarmigan and Snow Buntings and the impact of climate change on their habitat? Many scientists and

conservationists fear that global warming will contribute to the unnecessary loss of biodiversity – that global warming, along with sprawl, over-population, deforestation, and invasive species, will result in a great loss of biodiversity.

As birders and conservationists, we must be concerned about global warming and our government's failure to act to curb greenhouse gases. And we need to be willing to act when and where appropriate. This includes educating our friends and neighbors, using energy wisely in our personal lives, writing letters to our local news media and/or our elected officials, and supporting relevant programs at local nature/environmental centers. We all can do something, and now is the time to do it.

– Mark Henry
PSO Conservation Chairperson

Note: For those interested, the Academy report can be found at the following web site: www.nap.edu.

New Bird Club Formed in Pittsburgh

The Three Rivers Birding Club, centered in Pittsburgh, was formed in July 2001 and within three months grew to more than 80 members from southwestern Pennsylvania. The club's mission is "to gather in friendship, to enjoy the wonders of nature, and to share our passion for birds." Beginning birders and young people are especially welcome to join and learn from the more advanced and expert members.

Foremost among club activities are outings to locations throughout western Pennsylvania, and eventually trips beyond this region. Bi-monthly meetings that feature programs by experts in birds and birding are held in the Frick Park Nature Center, opposite 1960 Beechwood Blvd., in the city's Squirrel Hill section. Members receive a bi-monthly newsletter, *The Peregrine*. The club's website offers detailed information about activities, plus links to other bird and nature-oriented groups: <http://www.3riversbirdingclub.org>.

Membership categories are Individual \$12, Family \$15, and Student/Youth \$5. Checks should be made payable to "Three Rivers Birding Club" and mailed to:

Three Rivers Birding Club
c/o Bob Machesney, Treasurer
105 Lindley Lane
Pittsburgh, PA 15237

Coming Soon: PSO Website

Frank Haas and Deuane Hoffman recently met to work on ideas for the PSO website which should be operating in a few months. The server space is being provided at cost to PSO by Bob Brown. The address will be www.pabirds.org.

Frank has volunteered to be the webmaster with Carolyn Blatchley and Deuane as assistants. The site will contain membership information, a list of board members, the history of PSO, and a previous copy of the newsletter. In the future a searchable database of *PA Birds* beginning with Issue No. 1 will be added. Other features will include links to other state organizations and to a variety of bird related sites. Online downloadable forms will be available to include checklists on both a county (in the future) and state level. An online media guide and a list of local birder contacts will be compiled. The most intensive and ongoing project will be the on-line site guide. This will be a statewide county by county interactive guide to birding locations statewide. An educational section will provide information concerning ongoing conservation issues. Finally an entire section will feature the various volunteer projects that are available for birders statewide, including CBCs, BBS routes, IBAs, Toot Routes, North American Migration Counts, etc.

Bald Eagle Shot in Bradford County

The immature Bald Eagle found shot in mid-October at Wyalusing, Bradford County, is now being cared for by the staff of the Carbon County Environmental Education Center at Jim Thorpe. The injured bird had surgery at the St. Francis Animal Hospital at South Tamaqua, Schuylkill County, and was then turned over to Susan Gallagher, chief naturalist at the Carbon center and a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Gallagher said the veterinarian surgeon inserted a pin in the bird's wounded wing, and the bird was doing well several days after arriving at the Carbon center.

The Carbon center is now caring for three eagles – two Bald and a Golden. The other Bald Eagle in its care, also an immature bird, was recovered from Route 93 on State Game Land 141 in Carbon last spring after it apparently was struck by a vehicle while hunting in the area of Hughes Swamp, a historic location on the Audubon's Lehigh Tour. Gallagher said that this bird apparently suffered damage to that part of its brain that controls flight so it does not appear to be releaseable into the wild. The Golden Eagle, meanwhile, has been at the center since last April after it had been wounded by a gunner in the sky over private property in

Sullivan County. The golden, too, probably won't be released because it has not relearned how to fly. "It flaps its wings," but is unwilling to fly any distance, Gallagher said.

Both the first Bald Eagle and the Golden Eagle will probably become educational birds, Gallagher said, pending the receipt of the required federal permits. The Carbon center staff performs raptor education programs each year at many elementary and middle schools in Carbon, Schuylkill, and Luzerne counties and also hosts many students at its headquarters within Mauch Chunk Lake Park at Jim Thorpe.

The Wyalusing Bald Eagle suffered a gunshot wound to its wing. According to Pennsylvania Game Commission Wildlife Conservation Officer Vernon Perry III, "X-rays taken of the injury indicate a small bullet fragment lodged within the wing of the bird. This is just one piece of the puzzle that hopefully will lead to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible." The bullet fragment was later identified as a shotgun pellet, Gallagher told the *Standard-Speaker* newspaper of Hazleton, Luzerne County.

"In order to solve this case, I am asking the public for help," Perry said. "If anyone knows or hears anything about illegal shooting, I would encourage them to call our regional office. Any information we do receive will be held in the strictest confidence." The Game Commission's TIP Hotline number is 888-PGC-8001. Callers are eligible for a reward of \$100 from the Hotline. Informants also can contact the agency's regional office in Dallas, Luzerne County, at 877-877-9357.

As they did in the shooting last spring of the Golden Eagle in Sullivan, the PSO and Audubon Pennsylvania have already pledged hundreds of dollars in reward money to aid the Game Commission in catching the eagle-shooter. Confidential informants were instrumental in helping the agency catch and convict the man who shot and killed a Bald Eagle in Franklin County in 2000. Two informants stepped forward to provide information that solved that case, Barry Warner, the PGC's regional director in Dallas, said. "If it had not been for these two informants stepping forward, that case may have stalled," Warner said in a PGC news release. "If we are to properly prosecute those responsible for this heinous act, we need to hear from those who may knowingly or unknowingly have important information about this case."

Fifty-three pairs of adult Bald Eagles nested in Pennsylvania last year; 48 of the nests produced 41 eaglets. More than half the nests are in the state's northwestern counties. Some of them are located on protected public lands, while others are on privately-owned land. The state's largest colony, according to the Game Commission, is in Crawford County.

The wounded eagles being cared for by Gallagher and her staff are fed a regular diet of laboratory rats and other small mammals. Bald and Golden Eagles are federally protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The law provides for fines of up to \$250,000, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

– Alan Gregory

The Raven Reporter

Tales of Discovery from the Special Areas Project



The PSO Special Areas Project continues to expand its “birds on public lands” database thanks to the great contributions by hundreds of birders throughout the state. SAP now has 5,483 trips from 119 locations in the database file. There are more than 1.3 million individual birds counted in all these trips. We are decreasing a backlog of data submitted late from 1998, 1999, and 2000. We also have been checking very good files of data submitted for early 2001, including an exciting new SAP that I will review later. Thanks for all of your contributions.

Reaching Out to the “Keepers” of Your SAP

Our allies in conservation of birds are the people with the responsibility of working at Pennsylvania’s parks, forests, and game lands. Some of these professionals are teaching the public about the environment, including birds and wildlife. They would benefit from your experiences and knowledge.

Sharing your discoveries with park managers, environmental educators, rangers, land managers, and conservation officers is part of our mission to learn more about birds and educate others about them. It is smart policy. I heartily recommend it.

Environmental educators are often so busy giving and preparing for programs that they don’t get much time for

birding. Your Bald Eagle or Evening Grosbeak sighting might be big news to the local naturalist. By reporting bird sightings to the park office, you can open some doors of communication. They might, in turn, be able to supply information about birds of the park on the days you did not visit. In turn, the park staff often help SAP Coordinators with incidental reports, especially of rare nesting species or vagrants. You can never have enough eyes and ears around to observe birds and other wildlife. You might even learn of other birders who visit the park who would otherwise be unknown.

There is another issue that we address by communicating with our environmental educators. Sometimes we have to “educate the educators.” Each environmental educator has his or her own strengths and weaknesses in knowledge about local nature. Not all of them are birders. They may be great at wildflowers, local history, or astronomy. Each environmental educator has a wide view of nature and often tailor their programs toward youth. Recently, I told a state park naturalist about a Swainson’s Thrush that I thought was on territory – big news for bird conservationists! I realized after a few minutes of conversation that she did not even know what a Swainson’s Thrush was, much less the significance of the sighting. I often have the same problem with Game Commission land managers who are very experienced in other aspects of their job. We have a lot to do in educating the public about birds and can do it best by obtaining data and communicating with others about what we find.

Many SAP coordinators take their completed SAP Daily Field Trip forms into the park office to have a copy made for the park files. This is a good way to share the trip report and keep your own hard-earned birding data. Volunteering to lead field trips or give programs about birds gives you a ready-made forum for educating the public about birds and their habitats.

It all adds up to getting the PSO’s message out to the public.

Enlow Fork: A Crown Jewel in Southwestern Pennsylvania

For me, the field trip to Enlow Fork was the highlight of the 1999 PSO meeting in Greene County. Our local host, Marjorie Howard, shared this crown jewel and other birding gems with us through the whole weekend. Our PSO field trip “ringer” Deuane Hoffman enthusiastically led one trip there, too. Marjorie recently sent in a new batch of SAP data collected at Enlow Fork. Thanks, Marjorie, for sharing with us some riches from Greene County.

Like many others, I was really blown away by the

beauty and richness of the woods at Enlow Fork. It is one of the most outstanding riparian forest areas of the state. As good as it is for birds, Enlow Fork is known even more for its amazing diversity and richness of wildflowers. We enjoyed some of those wildflowers during our field trips.

Forming the border between Greene and Washington counties, Enlow Fork is a tributary of Wheeling Creek. It is technically known as Game Lands 302. This location has been designated as a Pennsylvania Important Bird Area because it is an exceptional representative of a characteristic native habitat. That native habitat is high quality riparian forest dominated by mature deciduous trees. It is one of the most precious and threatened habitats in Pennsylvania. As Europeans claimed what is now Pennsylvania as their own, they cleared forests, built roads, and developed land. The first lands to be claimed and used were the lowlands along streams. They were very accessible and enticing because of their proximity to streams and the richness of soils. Big trees were needed for building houses, barns, and bridges. Thousands of trees were cut for the charcoal trade that grew from demands of the iron furnaces. Of course, large-scale coal mining has had a devastating effect on the forests of the Ohio River drainage, too. Coal mining still threatens virtually every forest in southwestern Pennsylvania.

When the Ohio River valley was first colonized, settlers found huge trees along streambanks where there was rich, deep, loamy soil. It was a practice to use large sycamores as temporary pigsties or blacksmith shops. When sycamores are very large, they often are hollowed out in the center. If the hollow was wide enough to accommodate the swinging of a ten-foot metal rod, then it could be used as a smithy. It is hard to imagine forests with trees of this scale. Even relatively large forests of today pale by comparison with the forests of yesteryear. These giant trees were not mere curiosities. The huge canopies created by these monstrous trees certainly harbored large densities of treetop birds like Cerulean Warbler and Yellow-throated Warbler. The mast produced by large old oaks, hickories, chestnuts, and beeches were a cornucopia for game birds and mammals. The well-shaded forest protects and moderates the temperature of the stream so trout and other fish can thrive even in summer. Enlow Fork and places like it give us hope that some forests might regrow into their former glory.

Nearly the full complement of riparian forest birds nest at Enlow Fork. Marjorie reports Yellow-throated Warblers, Louisiana Waterthrushes, Warbling Vireos, and Cerulean Warblers along the stream. During the PSO field trip two years ago, it was a real treat for me to hear Yellow-throated Warbler song since that species is quite rare where I live. If we had more places like Enlow Fork the emphatic song of this species would be better known. By collecting

bird data here, we help ensure that more will be known about the inhabitants of good riparian forests and those we need to protect.

Winter SAP Trips: Get Those Finches!

If things go the way they have started, it might be a finchy winter. Everyone seems to be reporting a variety of finches from feeders to hawk watches. It isn't every winter that we get to be put near bankruptcy supporting our local Evening Grosbeak population with sunflower seeds. With the price of niger seed, I almost dread to hear more Pine Siskins flying to our birch trees. This might be a good winter to go into the woods and count finches where they eat wild seeds. In past finch invasion years (long before "citizen ornithology" on the web), I found the biggest flocks of redpolls and crossbills well back in the woods crunching on the catkins of various birches or on hemlock cones. Grape arbors and riverside hackberries are secret spots for Evening Grosbeaks and Purple Finches. The winter of 2001-2002 might be a good one to add several species to your SAP winter list.

Owling in Winter

Want another great birding adventure? Try owling in winter!

Our night birds are creatures of mystery. Despite recent successes with "Project Toot Route" for nesting saw-whets and the Saw-whet Owl banding project for migrating saw-whets, we have much to learn about owls. The Long-eared Owl remains a big mystery in our state and any discovery of a roost would be exciting. Many of us wonder if Boreal Owls overwinter in the state right under people's noses (provided that their noses are in conifers).

Trying to find owls in your SAP area is a great activity if you are looking for something exciting and intriguing to do on a long, cold winter night. You can watch just so much cable television. Why not go out for a little fresh air? The longer nights are foraging time for hungry owls. They are more easily seen on moonlit nights. I find that standing or sitting quietly while maintaining a low profile is just as important as playing a tape or doing a good imitation of its calls. Check out conifers or thickets with dense cover. Owls often sit tight next to the tree trunk. Others will sit in a cavity or duck box, sometimes sunning themselves in the opening. Many people walk right by roosting owls without noticing. Their plumage is brown for a good reason. Owls are wonderfully camouflaged, making them a great challenge.

Owls have their own predators, especially the little owls. So, it is a good idea not to overdo tape playing. You

might expose an enthusiastic small owl to its enemy. But, light tape playing can be a good way to stimulate some owl action without endangering the birds you want to enjoy and protect. If you do use tapes, start with the smaller owls first.

They often attract or stimulate the larger owls. Many owls also respond to a mouse squeak. You might want to check with the park staff or game lands people before you go out. It is good policy not to disturb our night friends any more than necessary to identify and count them. Harassment of owls is not only bad ethically but also illegal in state parks.

Prepare yourself by doing a little research before you go out. It is a good idea to review the various vocalizations of owls before getting out there with them. They make more sounds than the ones that are mentioned in the popular field guides. Go to the more detailed reference books and recordings for more owl sounds. There is an abundance of materials about owls, and you can get a lot of advice from more experienced birders.

Even daytime trips can yield some owls. I have heard Barred Owls calling on cloudy days in winter several times in Ricketts Glen State Park and Wyoming State Forest. Occasionally saw-whets will call spontaneously on a cloudy day. I have suspected that they call when they are surprised by a sound or an intruder.

The saw-whet banding project and Project Toot Route have proven that night time bird work is both exciting and rewarding. Some Project Toot Route participants looked around in their SAPs for saw-whets and other night birds with good success. We make many new discoveries by doing the unconventional. Why not get out of the rut and find some "furballs" in the dark.

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.
or, 144 Winters Road, Orangeville, PA 17859

office phone: 570-542-2191
e-mail: douggross@sunlink.net

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.

Tracking the Tooting Legions

by Scott Weidensaul

Even out in the boondocks, you have neighbors. My closest, Harold and Jeanne, live about a third of a mile away from my old Schuylkill County farmhouse. After almost 15 years, they've learned not to jump to conclusions when odd things happen around here.

One October evening a couple of years ago, they heard a strange sound coming across the twilight air – a weird, rhythmic tooting, a little like the back-up alarm on a garbage truck, but which went on and on, in fits and starts, for several hours. Jeanne found Harold standing outside the front door, arms crossed, listening intently.

"What do you think it is?" she asked nervously.

"Either the mother ship's landed," he said, "or Weidensaul's doing something with birds again."

Though there weren't any Martian invaders, Harold *was* right in more ways than one. There was a silent army crossing Pennsylvania that night, as is the case on most nights each autumn – an army of migrating Northern Saw-whet Owls, their numbers and their movements almost completely unguessed until recently, even by ornithologists. Like a number of other people, I was trying to learn more about them.

Each year, a growing number of bird-banders across the state play tape-recordings of the musically tooting call of the male saw-whet to lure the nocturnal migrants down into mist nets, to be banded and released. And thanks to a fast-expanding network of owl-banding stations across the U.S. and Canada, a surprising number of those owls are recaptured many miles, and sometimes many years, later, adding to our meager understanding of this mysterious bird.

Saw-whets are at once the most ubiquitous and most enigmatic of Pennsylvania's night hunters. Ubiquitous because this is the species that has served as a symbol of the Wild Resource Conservation Fund (WRCF) since its inception in 1982, and which graced Pennsylvania's first conservation license plate. Enigmatic, because what little we thought we knew about saw-whets was based on incomplete or (it often turns out) incorrect information.

Weighing about three ounces and not much larger than a big man's fist, Northern Saw-whet Owls are the smallest species in the East. Usually associated with cool forests, they breed as far north as central Canada, south in

Mexico in the Rockies, and to the North Carolina/Tennessee border in the Appalachians. In Pennsylvania, it has traditionally been considered quite rare as a breeder, and at best uncommon as a migrant from the north. But even earlier observers acknowledged that its small size and secretive nature might make it appear less abundant than it actually was. (And in fact, Doug Gross' "Project Toot Route," which enlisted volunteers to comb the state the past two summers for nesting saw-whets, found the owls on a surprising 44 percent of the routes surveyed in 2000.)

Breeding or migrating, saw-whets have been largely overlooked by researchers – a problem for most of our nocturnal birds. Dave Darney has been banding migrant and wintering saw-whets at Presque Isle State Park for many years, but a statewide effort to net and mark large numbers of saw-whets did not begin until 1996, when Eric and Melonie Atkinson and Todd Bauman began a banding project in Lehigh County using mist nets and an audiolure, which plays a loop-tape recording of the male advertisement call. The next year, with start-up funding from the WRCF, the Atkinsons, Bauman, and I helped launch a loose network of fall banding stations across Pennsylvania. By autumn 2001, that network had grown to more than a dozen stations, including three that I coordinate through the Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art in Schuylkill, Dauphin, and Cumberland counties.

The Pennsylvania effort, in turn, is part of a much larger national network of independent banding sites stretching from California and Alberta to eastern Canada, the Great Lakes states, New England, and the mid-Atlantic region. Because there are now several dozen banders luring saw-whets, the chances of banded birds being recovered are extremely high, and in the fall, hardly a week goes by that I don't learn of one or two of our birds being picked up by someone else, or discovering several previously banded owls in our own nets. We've had recent recoveries from as far afield as the Bruce Peninsula in western Ontario, and the coast of southern Maine, with many of our owls netted again in Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia.

What we've learned, through this whole process, is that the Appalachians are a major migratory route for saw-whet owls. Given the large number of diurnal raptors that use the ridges and plateau country, this should be no surprise, but as recently as 1993, the most exhaustive reference work on saw-whet owls listed the Great Lakes region and the Atlantic coast as the principal migratory paths for saw-whets, and said nothing at all about the Appalachians.

Most rainless nights from late September through early December, I suspect large numbers of saw-whets are moving across virtually every corner of Pennsylvania. How

many? In 1999, which saw an unusually heavy flight of owls (there is some indication their numbers in the East may be cyclical), our three Ned Smith Center stations banded more than 850 saw-whets in about 40 nights of operation. Even this year, when the cycle is at a lower point, we've netted as many as 41 owls in a few hours at just one location. Nor are the owls restricted to forested ridges. I've caught more than a dozen in a few hours in my backyard, which is in a wide, agricultural valley surrounded by hundreds of acres of soybeans, pasture and cornfields – hardly the habitat you'd expect for a forest owl.

This raises one of the many questions we're hoping to answer about saw-whet migration: Are they generally following ridges, like hawks, or moving broad-front across the landscape, as do songbirds and waterfowl? The most successful banding stations in the state have generally been those on or along mountains in the ridge-and-valley system, perhaps because the very linear ridges tend to concentrate the owls. But because owls are not soaring or gliding fliers like red-tails or sharpies – and because the heaviest migration appears to be on calm nights -- they probably gain no aerodynamic benefit from sticking with the ridges, though proximity to forest cover may give them protection from larger owls.

The fact that I routinely catch so many owls in open country, on both windy and calm nights, suggests to me that they often migrate in a broad front, with little regard for the vegetative cover below. There have also been cases like the owl banded by Todd Bauman in Berks County a few years ago, which made a two-night beeline from the Kittatinny Ridge to Assateague Island, Maryland -- a trek across a heavily farmed and urbanized landscape, which would have required the owl to fly an average of about 45 mph, with no wind those nights to help it along.

Right now, we have more questions than answers – which makes any scientific project fun. For instance, why are migrant saw-whets, which are assumed to be solitary, attracted to the sound of a male's call outside the breeding season? And why do we catch almost 80 percent females? As for the latter question, many folks assume it's because we're using a male vocalization, but Katy Duffy, a bander who began netting saw-whets at Cape May more than 20 years ago, also caught few males even before she started using an audiolure. It may be that males tend to stay farther north than females, or there may be another explanation we haven't yet discovered.

In addition to banding, we're also fitting some owls with tiny, 2-gram radio transmitters so we can learn more about their movements and behavior, especially those that are taking a stopover break from migrating. We've also

cooperated on several other research projects, including examining blood samples for West Nile virus, and tick-borne pathogens like Lyme disease (no sign of either, incidentally).

As with most of the saw-whet banding stations, ours is an all-volunteer operation. I'm assisted by nine other licensed banders and a dedicated crew of nearly 70 volunteers, all of whom cooperate to run three sites seven nights a week from the beginning of October until about Thanksgiving each fall. It's a herculean task, and all the more impressive when you consider that almost everyone on our project works a fulltime job. Each year, my crew logs an astounding 4,500 man-hours to keep the study going – and if they get a little cranky and sleep-deprived by the middle of November, their employers and spouses tend to be forgiving.

They do it, of course, because we have a chance to add to our understanding of a little-known member of Pennsylvania's birdlife. But we also do it because it's exciting – and because saw-whets are among the most appealing animals in the cosmos. Every time I reach the nets and see a half-dozen of these cute little fuzzballs hanging there, staring at me with those huge yellow eyes while they clack their bills in agitation, all the sleepless nights seem a small price to pay for the privilege.

For more information about the Ned Smith Center's saw-whet research, go to www.nedsmithcenter.org and click on "Saw-whet Owl Project."

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.)

In previous articles in the PSO Newsletter, PORC Chairman Paul Hess wrote about standards the state records committee attempts to uphold when assessing reports and about the committee's voting process. In this article I will bring you up to date on how the voting process has recently been proceeding.

In July 2000, the committee started first-round voting on 110 reports, most of them documenting birds observed during 1999 and early 2000. A number of documentations in this round have been quite time-consuming because they contained several videos and a few very difficult reports. This round of voting on all 110 reports should be completed by next month.

The committee's quickness in dealing with the first round enabled us to start simultaneous second-round voting, where necessary, on some of the reports. Second-round voting is required when a report has received four or five affirmative votes but not the necessary six or seven needed for acceptance. This second round was completed in October.

In June 2001 a new batch of first-round voting began, consisting mostly of birds reported in 2000 but also a few reports from 2001. To date, 64 ballots are in circulation. This round is moving very quickly and may be completed as soon as next month. We hope that the next annual committee report will be ready for publication in early 2002.

Species involved in the current round of voting include Pacific Loon, Greater Shearwater, Great Cormorant, Neotropic Cormorant, Anhinga, Glossy Ibis, Wood Stork, Trumpeter Swan, Ross's Goose, Barnacle Goose, "Common" Green-winged Teal, Tufted Duck, King Eider, Mississippi Kite, Swainson's Hawk, Gyrfalcon, Clapper Rail, King Rail, Black Rail, Purple Gallinule, Piping Plover, Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwit, Purple Sandpiper, Ruff, Red-necked Phalarope, Pomarine Jaeger, Parasitic Jaeger, Long-tailed Jaeger, Franklin's Gull, Little Gull, Black-headed Gull, Black-tailed Gull, California Gull, Thayer's Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Slaty-backed Gull, Sabine's Gull, Arctic Tern, Least Tern, Sooty Tern, Black Skimmer, Black Guillemot, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Common Ground-Dove, Northern Hawk-Owl, Boreal Owl, Chuck-will's-widow, Rufous Hummingbird, Allen's Hummingbird, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Hammond's Flycatcher, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, Cave Swallow, Bewick's Wren, Sedge Wren, Townsend's Solitaire, "Audubon's" Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Kirtland's Warbler, Swainson's Warbler, Western Tanager, Summer Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Spotted Towhee, Lark Sparrow, LeConte's Sparrow, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Seaside Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow, Painted Bunting, Western Meadowlark, Brewer's Blackbird, Bullock's Oriole, and Hoary Redpoll.

As some of you may know, PORC receives the majority of its reports from the editors of *Pennsylvania Birds*, who in turn received them from county compilers. With the monumental task of transferring editorship of the journal this year, it is understandable that the flow of reports to the committee has been delayed. As a reminder to the avid Pennsylvania birding community, when sending your rare bird report to your county compiler, consider sending a copy directly to PORC. This will help speed up the voting process considerably. For reports not submitted directly to PORC, the *Pennsylvania Birds* editor and the Committee must rely on compilers to make certain that the observers want their documentation to be submitted to PORC. Another reminder

(continued on page 11)

Christmas Bird Counts Held in Pennsylvania

Name of Count	County	Compiler	Phone Number	E-mail Address	Date
Audubon	Montgomery Delaware Chester	Tony Fernandes Edie Parnum	610-647-7868	fernandest@suburbanwater.com Eparnum@aol.com	12/29/01
Bald Eagle	Centre	Eugene Zielinski	814-353-8212	eez55@earthlink.net	12/30/01
Beaver	Beaver	John Cruzan	724-846-5342	jcruzan@geneva.edu	12/22/01
Bedford	Bedford	Janet Shaffer	814-356-3553	jgshaffer@juno.com	12/29/01
Bernville	Berks	Ed Barrell	610-926-2962	hawkman501@yahoo.com	12/23/01
Bethlehem-Easton	Northampton	Elaine and Donald Mease	610-346-7754	measede@enter.net	12/29/01
Bloomsburg	Columbia	Dave Unger	570-672-3254	D_Unger@compaq.net	12/16/01
Buffalo Creek Valley	Butler Armstrong	George Reese	724-353-9649	gtreese@msn.com	12/22/01
Bushy Run S.P.	Westmoreland	Dick Byers	724-593-3543	otusasio@lhrc.net	12/23/01
Butler	Butler Lawrence Mercer	Suzanne Butcher	330-759-1945	sarbird@hotmail.com	12/15/01
Central Bucks	Bucks	Diane Allison	610-847-2085	dalliso@postoffice.ptd.net	12/30/01
Chambersburg	Franklin	Joan Bowen	717-264-9493		12/15/01
Clarion	Clarion	Margaret Buckwalter Walter Fye	814-782-3925 814-797-1800	mbuckwalter@usachoice.net waltfye@usachoice.net	12/29/01
Clarksville	Greene	Ralph Bell	724-883-4505		12/29/01
Culp	Blair	Debbie Wentz	814-692-4224	dtw1999@home.com	12/15/01
Curtin	Dauphin	Scott Bills	717-896-8859	srbills@paonline.com	12/27/01
Dallas Area	Luzerne	Jim Hoyson	570-696-4925	birdder@aol.com	12/15/01
Dingman's Ferry	Pike	Tom Shimalla Patrick Scheuer	570-828-9281 570-828-2319	quantumphop@hotmail.com	12/16/01
DuBois	Clearfield	Harold Webster	814-375-0709	webs@adelphia.net	
Elverson	Chester	Robert Cook	610-286-9919	dunlin50@aol.com	12/22/01
Emporium	Cameron	Bob Martin	814-486-1990		
Erie	Erie	Joan Howlett	814-734-1765	howlett@velocity.net	12/15/01
Gettysburg	Adams	Arthur Kennell	717-642-6995		12/15/01
Glenolden	Delaware	Nick Pulcinella	610-583-3201	nickpul@bellatlantic.net	12/15/01
Hamburg	Berks Schuylkill	Laurie Goodrich	610-756-6961 610-756-6000 x230	goodrich@hawkmountain.org	12/30/01
Harrisburg	Dauphin	Bill Tripp	717-737-8808	trippfw@juno.com	12/15/01
Huntingdon	Huntingdon	Dave Kyler	814-643-6030	kylerdw@vicon.net	12/16/01
Indiana	Indiana	Roger & Margaret Higbee	724-354-3493	bcorirole@twd.net	12/26/01
Johnstown	Cambria	Sally Dick	814-266-7912	watchbirds@compuserve.com	12/16/01

Lake Raystown	Huntingdon Blair	Greg Grove	814-667-2305	gwg2@psu.edu	12/22/01
Lancaster	Lancaster	Chris Pederson	717-295-2607		12/29/01
Lebanon	Lebanon	Frederick Heilman	717-273-0487		12/15/01
Lehigh Valley	Lehigh	Dennis Miller	610-759-7514	autumnwood@enter.net	12/15/01
Lewisburg	Union Northumberland	Richard Nickelsen	570-524-9833	nickelsn@bucknell.edu	12/15/01
Lewistown	Juniata	Linda Whitesel	717-436-8048	lkwhitesel@acsworld.net	12/15/01
Linesville	Crawford	Ronald Harrell	814-337-5445	rharrell@allegheny.edu	12/16/01
Lititz	Lancaster	Bruce Carl	717-859-4179	carls@desupernet.net	12/30/01
Lock Haven- Jersey Shore	Clinton Lycoming	Wayne Laubscher	570-748-7511	wlaubsch@cub.kcnet.org	12/29/01
Mansfield	Tioga	Robert Ross	570-376-5394	rossr@usgs.gov	12/15/01
Mount Davis	Somerset	Dale Jeffrey Chuck Tague	814-662-4291	yughwtch@wpia.net bluejay@city-net.com	
Nescopeck Mt.	Luzerne	Alan Gregory	570-788-1425	meg5@psu.edu	1/05/02
New Bloomfield	Perry	Ramsay Koury	717-761-1871	rkoury123@aol.com	12/22/01
Newville	Cumberland	Bill Franz	717-776-4463	wlfantz@earthlink.net	12/29/01
Pennypack Valley	Philadelphia	Peter Kurtz	215-342-3638 215-685-0470	pennycnter@yahoo.com	
Pittsburgh	Allegheny	Jim Valimont	412-828-5338	valimont@bellatlantic.net	12/29/01
Pittsburgh South Hills	Allegheny Washington	Nancy Page Bill Judd	412-221-4795 412-571-2057		12/22/01
Pleasantville	Venango	Russ States	814-676-6320	russs@csonline.net	12/30/01
Pocono Mt.	Monroe	Chris Turn		birder@ptd.net	12/16/01
Potter County	Potter	Dave Hauber	814-274-8946	haubers3@penn.com	12/30/01
Raccoon Creek	Beaver	William B. Smith	724-375-9613	bersmith@tristate.pgh.net	12/27/01
Reading	Berks	Bill Uhrich	610-373-8109	bmuhrich@msn.com	12/16/01
Rector	Westmoreland	Robert Mulvihill	724-593-7521	mulvipnr@westol.com	12/16/01
Ryerson	Greene	Marjorie Howard	724-499-5642	birdwatcher@alltel.net	12/22/01
Scranton	Lackawanna	William Speare			12/15/01
Southeastern Bradford	Bradford	Bill Reid	570-836-2734		12/29/01
Southern Bucks	Bucks	Robert Mercer	215-785-1177	slnc@bellatlantic.net	12/15/01
Southern Lancaster County	Lancaster	Bob Schutsky	717-548-3303	info@birdtreks.com	12/16/01
State College	Centre	Nick Bolgiano	814-234-2746	nbolgiano@minitab.com	12/16/01
Susquehanna	Susquehanna	Jerry Skinner	570-278-3384	jskinner@epix.net	01/05/02
Tunkhannock	Wyoming	Rick Koval	717-570-4381	unibirder@aol.com	12/23/01
Upper Bucks	Bucks Montgomery	Hart Rufe	215-257-8677	wrufe@starband.net	12/16/01

Warren	Warren	Michael Toole	814-723-4714	toole@allegany.com	12/15/01
Washington	Washington	Roy Ickes	724-228-3532	rickes@washjeff.edu	12/15/01
West Chester	Chester	Barry Blust	610-458-5616	BarryBlust@icdc.com	12/15/01
Western Chester	Chester	Larry Lewis			12/16/01
White Mills	Wayne	Voni Strasser	570-226-1460	sawwhet@ptd.net	
Wild Creek- Little Gap	Carbon Monroe	Joel Silfies Brad Silfies	610-826-3817	jss48@cornell.edu bsilfies@aol.com	
Williamsport	Lycoming	Dave Ferry		ferrydavid@hotmail.com	12/22/01
Wyncote	Montgomery	Martin Selzer	215-233-9090	mselecter@janus.jnj.com	12/15/01
York	York	Bill Del Grande	717-854-6728	wdelgrande@desupernet.net	12/15/01

Attention All CBC Compilers: Compilers do not need to mail results to Nick Bolgiano, the *Pennsylvania Birds* CBC editor, if data are entered on the website by mid-January.

Notes from PORC (continued from page 8)

to all observers: The more documentation we receive, the easier our job becomes. Don't expect the other birders to do it.

Thanks for your continuing involvement in this process. All documentation can be sent to me.

– Nick Pulcinella, PORC Secretary
210 Welcome Avenue
Norwood, PA 19074
nickpul@bellatlantic.net

PSO Bird Quiz

How well do you know our Pennsylvania birds?

1. Which shorebird, a common migrant through Pennsylvania, lays its eggs in old songbird nests in trees?
2. A large passerine that was restricted a century ago to the major rivers in southeastern Pennsylvania is now found in western Pennsylvania, but at only one location – a university campus. Which species has this oddly disjunct distribution, and what is the campus?
3. Which two species on the Pennsylvania state list, one an extremely rare migrant and one an uncommon breeder, share the Latin scientific name for New York?
4. Which diurnal raptor was called the "Winter Falcon" by some Pennsylvanians in the 19th century – a name definitely not appropriate?
5. Which sparrow species very common in Pennsylvania has the greatest geographical variation of any sparrow in North America?

(answers on page 12)

Answers to Bird Quiz on page 11:

1. Solitary Sandpiper.
2. Fish Crow. The campus is Indiana University of Pennsylvania.
3. Yellow Rail and Northern Waterthrush. They share the scientific name *noveboracensis*, referring to New York.
4. Red-shouldered Hawk. The name was noted in B. H. Warren's 1890 *Birds of Pennsylvania*.
5. Song Sparrow. The 1957 AOU Check-List listed 31 subspecies, and the recent *Guide to the Identification and Natural History of the Sparrows of the United States and Canada* lists 29.

Nominate a Youth to Attend PSO Meeting

At our March board meeting, PSO decided to sponsor a student 18 years old or younger to attend our annual meeting. The student's food and lodging will be paid, but the person nominating the youth will be responsible for transporting the student to the PSO meeting. You may nominate the student of your choice by sending his/her name to Alan Gregory (meg5@psu.edu or alangregory@standardspeaker.com), P.O. Box 571, Conyngham, PA 18219-0571, before March 1, 2002.

PSO Newsletter

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

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