

PSO Newsletter



November 2002

The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

Volume 13, Number 3

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK....

Birders Leading by Example

Leading by example. It's easier said than done, but that is what birders need to do.

As a birder, sometimes I feel like I'm having fun. I wear binoculars almost every day of the year just trying to enjoy birds. I collect data and contribute to several scientific programs. Like many PSO members, I play the role of tourist and contributor. But, sometimes I feel like I have to step up and offer to lead the troop. It isn't always fun, but the rewards are rich. In the absence of leadership, sometimes you just have to lead the troop yourself.

Why do birders have to take the lead? One of the main reasons is that birding is such a popular and cross-cultural endeavor that those who excel at it are natural leaders. Supposedly, birding is one of the nation's fastest growing outdoor sports. Every time I log onto the internet, I am reminded how many people go birding; ten years ago, I was not aware of the number of birders. We have been birding a long time and have developed skills that we can share with people with the same interests.

While birding, we have learned only too much about the conservation needs of the birds and the places we need to preserve so that we can bird. We have led the conservation charge by feelings of necessity. We know what has to be done and who needs to be involved. So, often one of us just does it.

What are some of the important issues facing us today? I see a persistent lack of good environmental education, bird monitoring, and effective wildlife conservation as some of the state's leading challenges for ornithology and stewardship. I believe that the birding community can and should provide key leadership for better understanding of the state's birds and wildlife.

Local birders are often the best naturalists in their area. When others won't do it, we need to lead the bird and nature walks. It seems like small stuff, but that is how people learn about birds and habitat. It is one-to-one personal tutoring in the field. This is far better than the internet for really reaching people. You probably teach more people through a good bird walk than through just about any other birding activity. The professional environmental educators are not always the best birders nor do they have the time to lead every event. This is an opportunity to step in to provide some educational leadership with a pair of binoculars around your neck.

In local watershed groups and conservation organizations, I have noticed how some birders are key leaders. Others stay by the sidelines, and the effort suffers from their absence. Birders have a good perspective on local efforts for a variety of reasons. For one, they know how mobile creatures like birds connect distant landscapes so all good habitat seems local.

We know the stories of bird declines and extinctions by heart. Once abundant birds like Passenger Pigeon now are long gone. We cannot take anything for granted. Even "ordinary woods" are crucial for the continued existence of Wood Thrushes, a bird we took for granted only a decade ago but which is now in steep decline. We don't take anything for granted because we take the long view and see the bigger picture. Our birds have forced us to widen our horizons.

At the 2002 annual meeting, Dan Klem showed us how windows kill birds by the millions. The irony is that bird lovers are inadvertently participating in this slaughter by attracting birds to their windows and their subsequent deaths. We need to lead by example and decrease bird mortality at our own homes before lecturing to others about how they design and build their buildings.

The new breeding bird atlas project is approaching.

I am convinced that the PSO birders will be in the forefront of this endeavor, leading the charge and providing local leadership. After all, PSO grew from the Atlas and into the next Atlas we will continue to grow. PSO needs to lead by example.

— Douglas A. Gross, President

Coming Soon – The Second PA Breeding Bird Atlas

It was 1994 when I first considered moving to Pennsylvania for graduate school. I had been living for several years in Virginia, and had become quite enthralled with the many birding opportunities there. As a native upstate New Yorker, finding Anhinga, Mississippi Kite, and reliable Loggerhead Shrikes there, as well as the real rarities that showed up along the coast, was intoxicating. I moved north somewhat reluctant that I was moving back to someplace that was, well, “ordinary.” After all, my perception of Pennsylvania birdlife was similar to that of my family farm in New York and not nearly as exciting as that in “exotic” Virginia.

Of course, my ignorant impressions were way off base, and I found wonderful birding to be had in the Happy Valley and indeed, statewide. Three things opened my eyes to the joys of birding Penn’s Woods. First, I got into the field immediately after moving here and pretty much birded central PA full time from mid-May to early September. Then, in the mid-1990s, I signed onto my first birding listserv, and began to read reports of interesting sightings from all over the state, including the warbler-rich breeding bird communities from mountain forests. But the thing that impressed me most about Pennsylvania ornithology was the Breeding Bird Atlas.

Digesting Pennsylvania’s Breeding Bird Atlas gave me a better understanding of the Commonwealth’s birdlife than any of my prior birding experiences. I was amazed at the representation statewide of breeders from North, South, and West: Swainson’s Thrush, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Black Tern, Dickcissel – Really? In Pennsylvania? How about the mixed heronries along the Susquehanna? I had no idea. And the really weird stuff – Black-necked Stilt? Eurasian Jackdaw? I was floored. When people ask me why birding holds such great interest for me, I sometimes tell them it’s “because two English crows nested under a Spanish tile at the penitentiary in Lewisburg.”

The rarities, though, only tell part of the story. Perhaps the most significant information to come from the

Atlas was a better understanding of the distribution of common birds. Pennsylvania sits on the front lines that sort Black-capped and Carolina Chickadees, Louisiana and Northern Waterthrushes, Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warblers, and two subspecies of Yellow-throated Warbler. Where else can one find all four eastern corvids (excluding Jackdaw!) breeding in the same square mile? A quick flip through the species accounts is all that is necessary to understand that Pennsylvania produces a significant number of the global populations of Red-eyed Vireo, Wood Thrush, and Scarlet Tanager, among others. Indeed, Pennsylvania’s avifauna intrigues, inspires, and imbues an awesome sense of responsibility.

That is where our *second* Atlas effort comes in. The information generated and compiled for the PA Breeding Bird Atlas propelled ornithology in the Commonwealth into the next century. Well, here we are in that next century, and it is time for us to revisit atlasing as a highly efficient means to assess breeding bird populations and distributions statewide. Our birding community, however, has charged us to do more in this second effort than merely replicate the first. Recognizing advances in communications, survey techniques, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technologies, and the ever-expanding importance of reliable population estimates for setting conservation priorities (e.g., for Partners in Flight), the 2nd Atlas “Steering Committee” has called for an effort to *quantify* breeding birds across the Commonwealth. The goal will be to produce an atlas that not only provides comparisons to distributions of birds as they existed 20 years ago, but also compares all species in terms of relative abundance right now. The conservation implications of these data are enormous, and applications run the gamut from better management of state endangered species to more informed estimates of total species population numbers for Partners In Flight.

Rest assured, purists can look forward to plenty of good old fashioned block busting in this new effort, but we first need to determine if it’s better to cover priority blocks more completely or have some data from every block. We will also incorporate networks of abundance sampling for common birds and targeted survey efforts for species felt to be “under-represented” in the first Atlas. For example, we will likely develop a number of species-specific survey methods, somewhat like the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology’s Cerulean and Golden-winged Warbler atlases, to ensure that our estimates of population density are as reliable for rare species as they are for abundant species. We will use modeled habitat distributions from the Pennsylvania Gap Analysis Project to guide abundance sampling for species associated with patchy or ephemeral habitats, such as regenerating forests or small wetlands. We may include something like Doug Gross’s “Toot Routes” to generate data on distribution and abundance of nocturnal birds. We may also target surveys toward

common birds in different regions (e.g., Dark-eyed Junco in the Allegheny Plateau, White-eyed Vireo in the Piedmont) to help ensure that our methods sample species in proportion to their abundance statewide.

To develop new survey methods, test their statistical rigor, and package them for use by volunteer atlasers will require a good bit of forethought and planning before the first records are submitted on January 1, 2004. I am excited to report that a team of scientists from the Penn State Cooperative Wetlands Center will take the lead on this "Design Phase" for the second Atlas Effort. We will do our best to root out and eliminate systematic biases in atlas sampling. In addition, we will work with the Laboratory of Ornithology to produce web-based tools for instruction, mapping, data entry, analysis, and archiving. We have a lot to do between now and then, and I know there will be days when we will wish we were "just" re-atlasing with the same methods as the first time. But we have the ability, the opportunity, and I think the responsibility to do more this time. If a second atlas is worth doing at all, it is worth doing to the best of our ability, with the intent that it will be at least as eye-opening as the first.

From the wonder of excitedly poring over those distribution maps when I first opened my copy of the Atlas book to the thrill I now feel at the prospect of intimate involvement with the 2nd Atlas, I seem to have come full circle. While I still wouldn't mind scoping out an Anhinga at Lake Raystown, the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas has helped me to embrace and cherish our statewide avifauna as unique and spectacular. As we prepare to scour the woods and coves for another round of atlasing, I hope you join me in recognizing that there will be more at stake in our efforts than a fancy new book or some slick graphics on a web page. We will also help to inspire future generations of birders to study and appreciate our remarkable communities of breeding birds. Perhaps they might even thank us for helping to ensure that those communities are still there to enjoy at all.

– Tim O'Connell
Centre County, PA

Notes from PORC

(Editor's note: This is a regular feature of the Newsletter in which the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee reports on its policies, procedures, and progress.)

As you have heard before, a major goal of PORC has been to cut the time between receiving documentation of a rarity and announcing a final decision on the record.

Progress has been made since special problems caused a period of particularly long delays several years ago, and we continue our efforts toward faster action.

Now a possibility for delay has arisen before your documentation even reaches us. In the new editing process for *Pennsylvania Birds*, when you send documentation to your county compiler, it must proceed through two more steps – going next to the seasonal editor and then to the chief editor – before it goes to PORC.

Chief Editor Katrina Knight emphasized the solution in the last issue of *PB*: "descriptions would be appreciated both by us and by PORC." If you submit a copy of your documentation to PORC at the same time you send it to your county compiler, the committee can begin circulating it among the members right away for a decision.

Since its last report in *Pennsylvania Birds* (Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 149-158), the committee has already voted this year on 88 documentations and about 10 are still in circulation, for which results will be announced in PORC's 12th annual report in 2003.

An article in the October 2002 issue of the American Birding Association's magazine *Birding* is titled "Bird Records Committees: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" (Vol. 35, No. 5, pp. 460-467), and PORC emerged from author David B. Freeland's analysis in the first category.

A survey of observers, records committee members, and editors of the journal *North American Birds* throughout North America placed the Pennsylvania committee among those that were "cited specifically as examples of BRCs that work well, although not universally applauded." It is unreasonable for records committees to expect universal applause, so PORC is happy to receive the positive rating.

From the opposite direction, Freeland surveyed members of records committees and editors of *North American Birds* for their views about observers. The results were overwhelmingly positive that typical observers were "honest," "cooperative," "knowledgeable," and "sincere." PORC certainly echoes that positive view of typical Pennsylvania birders.

– Paul Hess, PORC Chair

The Raven Reporter

Tales of Discovery from the Special Areas Project



Soooo Close

The Special Areas Project continues to add field trips to its inventory. We are awfully close to 6,000 field trips in the database. Right now we have 5,992 trips entered in the database at 123 locations. By the end of October, we will certainly pass the 6,000 trip mark and add a few more locations. The SAP office has received data on a few more exciting locations, but more about that in the next newsletter.

A B-Rated Mistake

I should really know better, but the past coordinator of SAP trips to Raccoon Creek State Park is Bill Hintze. I typed "Bob" instead of Bill for the last Newsletter. Sorry, Bill. I apologize for the silly error and would like to publicly thank Bill again for his significant contributions to our knowledge of the birds of southwestern Pennsylvania through his SAP inventories. When Bill is not in Poland, he checks out birding hotspots in the Pittsburgh region. We wouldn't know much about Quebec Run or Brady's Run without him. He also pointed out that there were some breeding Cerulean Warblers reported from Brady's Run County Park in Beaver County. This adds to the pattern of cerulean distribution.

More Ceruleans

In continuation of the last column that featured Cerulean Warbler breeding sites on SAPs..... Birders of Lehigh County sent me messages that there have also been some ceruleans on Blue Mountain above Leaser Lake. Since this location has not been adopted as a SAP, I did not have that location in the database. Bernie Morris says that there have been some ceruleans there for at least 25 years, a testament to their persistence even at low densities and to Bernie's persistence as an observer. The pattern of ceruleans along Blue Mountain is intriguing. There have been ceruleans reported from places like Fox Gap and Tott's Gap in northern Northampton Co. as well. There are many ceruleans in the Delaware Water Gap area, including

the New Jersey side (but, of course, we don't actually go over *there*). As such, there seems to be a string of cerulean clusters associated with the Kittatinny Ridge that might be protected through forest conservation practices. I wonder if there are other cerulean clusters scattered along the Appalachian Trail that go undetected because they are a bit remote. Thanks to Bernie Morris and Peter Saenger for giving me the word on this great spot.

Marsh Birds on the Edge

One of the main objectives of the Special Areas Project has been to document critical locations in the state that support our rarest breeding birds. Many SAP locations have now been recognized as Pennsylvania Important Bird Areas. Few habitats are more crucial to birds and more critically threatened than wetlands. The majority of Pennsylvania's Birds of Special Concern are wetland birds.

There is something that "doesn't like a bog." The bulldozer. So, marsh birds are rare.

Wetlands are critical to the state's biodiversity. SAP has given birders an excuse to get mucky with the marsh birds. Almost two decades since the first Breeding Bird Atlas, marsh birds are still among the most poorly inventoried and monitored birds of the state. One of the reasons is that marshes are hard to get into. It's wet in there! There are bugs! It is tough to walk around in mud. It is hard to see the birds in all that vegetation. What do rails look like anyway? So, many good wetlands remain poorly covered even in this day of birder saturation.

There is another good reason that wetland birds are poorly understood. The larger wetlands needed to provide sufficient habitat for *breeding* birds are a relatively rare commodity in our state. And if they are large enough to accommodate many marsh birds, they are large enough to make them difficult to access. There just are not many good marshes. Sure, there are lots of one or five acre cattail marshes along roadsides where birders go to tick off some species each spring migration, but these are not sufficiently large enough to maintain breeding populations of the larger marsh birds. For example, Pied-billed Grebes need a few acres of open water with some emergent vegetation around the edge. Each of the other marsh species has its own set of requirements. Some of these birds are slowly edging downward in breeding population as their isolated habitats get farther and farther apart, making it harder for them to emigrate to new breeding grounds. If you live the life of a rail, there are just not enough places to build a home for your family. There is now a bass lake, a road, or a mall where the swamp used to be.

The Special Areas Project has been somewhat successful at documenting locations where uncommon birds breed. Although many locations have been surveyed only

one or two years, this gives some indication of where these elusive marsh birds can be found. For all the emphasis on wetlands, it also shows that really good breeding locations are pretty rare in the state.

Below is a table with locations where some marshland species have been reported breeding in Special Areas. The species listed are Pied-billed Grebe (PBGR), Common Moorhen (COMO), Sora, Virginia Rail (VIRA), and Marsh Wren (MAWR). I have elected not to list locations where Pennsylvania Endangered and Threatened species have been found, but many of you know where American Bittern and Least Bitterns have been known to breed, at least in years past. Again, I apologize if I have misrepresented any bird species or location. I will gladly accept any corrections and additions to these lists. A quick perusal of the list will reveal why some locations have been so highly esteemed for their wetland birds.

The Importance of Breeding Codes

One of the most powerful and useful aspects of SAP documentation is the application of breeding codes. These codes are shorthand ways to describe the breeding behavior of birds observed at any location. SAP has bor-

rowed the Atlas codes for the sake of simplification and uniformity. In fact, the use of these codes should familiarize SAP volunteers with the Atlas format, preparing them for the next Atlas project. SAP is a training ground for other birding projects.

Registering the breeding codes is an important role of the Local Coordinators. Even the "X" and "T" codes are helpful to understanding which species are local breeders and which are just traveling through. The summaries of breeding species like those given in the last newsletter depend on breeding code submission. I search the database for the breeding codes for the species reported. No breeding codes means no report. So, if your SAP location does not appear in any of these summaries it might be due to the fact that you did not fill in breeding codes for those species.

For more information about the Special Areas Project, please contact Douglas Gross at the following addresses:

804 Salem Boulevard
Berwick, PA 18603
Phone: 570-542-2191 (day), 570-458-4564 (home office)
e-mail: dougross@sunlink.net

Some Rare Breeding Marsh Birds Found in Special Area Projects

PBGR	COMO	SORA	VIRA	MAWR	SAP Location	County	Coordinator
			X		Francis Slocum State Park	Luzerne	J. Hoyson, J. Fedak
X					Gifford Pinchot State Park	York	G. Randolph
			X		Keystone State Park	Westmoreland	R. Byers
				X	Moraine State Park	Butler	D. Yovanovich
				X	Presque Isle State Park	Erie	None
		X	X		Prince Gallitzen State Park	Cambria	Lamer, Syster
			X		Game Lands 13	Sullivan	Gross, Conant
X					Game Lands 57	Wyoming	Gross, Conant
X				X	Game Lands 95	Butler	S. Butcher
X		X	X		Game Lands 151	Lawrence/ Mercer	B. Dean
X	X	X	X	X	Game Lands 213	Crawford	J. Fedak, M. Byler
	X	X	X	X	Game Lands 284	Lawrence/ Mercer	L. Wagner
	X	X	X	X	Game Lands 313	Tioga	R. Ross
X					Yellow Creek State Park	Indiana	M. Higbee

Remembering Phil Street: A Magical Poconos Night

Phil Street was the 2002 recipient of the Earl Poole Award for his considerable contributions to Pennsylvania birding. Unfortunately for Phil and all his friends, he is no longer around to accept congratulations for this award. Since Phil was Dean of Pocono birders, East Stroudsburg was an appropriate place to announce our selection of Phil. However, none of his family were able to attend the meeting. So, we arranged to make another presentation of the award to immediate family in the summer.

Pocono Lake Preserve was Phil Street's home away from home. Following his father's boot prints, Phil spent as much time at the lake as he could. Cajoling and inspiring generations of new birders, Phil led many bird hikes and scavenger hunts for young and old at PLP.

Thanks to Bud Cook of the Nature Conservancy, I had the opportunity to make the presentation to Phil's family on the shore of Pocono Lake on a magical evening in August. I know that Phil was a well respected and beloved figure at the Preserve, but I was not really prepared for the reception we received. More than 60 people of at least three generations attended the lakeside presentation. After words of remembrance from his mountain friends, I presented the Poole award to Phil's widow, Babs Street, and his children, Fletcher and Margie. They were very touched by PSO's honoring Phil. To conclude the ceremony, John and Lisa Confer released a recently rehabilitated Barred Owl. The handsome owl flew to a tree, paused dramatically on a branch, then flew across the lake to everyone's delight. It was a scene from a story book.

Thanks to Bud Cook and the TNC staff, the Confers, Lynn Megrane, and everyone else who shared in a magical evening. I think Phil would have approved.

Simplicity, sincerity, and service – we can only hope to live up to the standard.

– Doug Gross



'Tis the Season!

Each year's Christmas Bird Count brings new questions from folks who moved into the count circle during the 12 months between last year's count and this year's.

"Can I help you?" "Need help with your car?" Those are the easy ones. While scouting an area in the Bloomsburg circle in Columbia County one year, we were greeted by a shotgun blast from a chicken farm 100 yards off. The lesson we learned on that day was, "Let's never stop along this stretch of road again."

We have found over the years that letting folks know ahead of time about the count and where it takes place is a good gesture that pay dividends later on. The dividends could include increased participation by feeder-watchers and, perhaps more importantly, a willingness by some landowners to let us onto their land on count day.

One easy way to spread the word about your count is with a brief news release. You can use the one that National Audubon supplies with the count packet provided to compilers, or you can write your own. We've found that the latter works best, at least in the Bloomsburg area.

Like a basic news story, the news release you send to your local newspaper should touch on the who, what, when, where, and how angles. For example:

"The 2002 Bloomsburg-area Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held this Sunday, according to Dave Unger, compiler for the long-running winter bird census. "The Bloomsburg count is just one of many hundreds of similar CBCs scheduled to be held across the continent between mid December and early January, including more than 60 others in Pennsylvania alone."

That's enough for starters, but you can add information concerning the number of observers who will be in the field and the specific areas that will be targeted.

"CBC participants – each individual count varies in the number of participants – are assigned specific sections of a 15-mile-wide circle, and count every wild bird they see or hear within their assigned area of the count circle."

Oh, and be sure and let the public know the location of your count circle, where the center is, what some of the major geographical features are, etc. This is a great opportunity to focus people's attention, if just for a

moment, on some of the outstanding natural areas within your count circle.

But most importantly in this time of increased security and neighborhood watch committees, it just makes good sense to let people know what's coming up in their corner of the countryside. Besides, the local police will appreciate knowing what's going on – before count day. Many compilers place phone calls to the local and state police whose jurisdictions fall within the count circle.

One more thing. Let people know, through your news release, who they can contact for more information. And if your count is sponsored by a bird club, mention the organization's name. You might even get a new member afterwards.

And finally, don't be shy about calling the person at your local newspaper who takes care of getting notices like yours into the paper. You don't need to be a pest, but a polite phone call can work wonders.

– Submitted by Alan Gregory, a CBC participant and veteran daily newspaper journalist and editor, who lives near Hazleton, Luzerne County, where he writes for the local daily newspaper.

Cooking on the Front Burner

Cooking on the 'Front' Burner, a unique collection of favorite recipes of the hawk watchers at the Allegheny Front is now available by mail order. The Allegheny Front, the hawk migration site of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society, is located on the border of Somerset and Bedford counties in south-central PA.

A brisk wind on a cool fall day inspires hawk watchers to prepare a hot and hearty casserole or scrumptious dessert and head for the front, where good eating and streaming hawks abound. Recipes found in this complete cookbook include such titles as Raven Reuben Casserole, Screech Owl Bouncers (an appetizer), and Chachalaca Brownies. Mmmmm.

Proceeds from the sale of the cookbook will be used to maintain the road and parking area and to pay the port-a-potty rental, taxes, insurance, etc. *Cooking on the Front Burner* is available for \$10.00 plus \$3.00 packaging and postage. Please mail your check for \$13.00 to:

Karen Jackson	or	Lee Tosh
RD 3 Box 530		5812 Irishtown Rd
New Alexandria, PA 15670		Bethel Park, PA 15102

The Conservation Corner

In October, the National Audubon Society released their Audubon WatchList 2002. This WatchList contains 201 species of North American birds that are significantly declining in numbers. Further, there are some very disturbing trends for certain species. Examples include the Painted Bunting which shows a population decline in excess of 50 percent since 1970; the Cerulean Warbler has declined by more than 70 percent; and the Henslow's Sparrow has declined by 80 percent.

What is ironic about this is that these population declines are occurring at the same time that birding is increasing in popularity. In fact, the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment reports birding as the fastest growing outdoor activity in the U.S. Audubon hopes by publishing this information that people will care enough to take action to prevent further population declines of these species. But Audubon also believes that birds are like the canary in the coal mine. What hurts birds can also hurt people, and we need to pay attention to what is causing these declines and fix the problems. The complete WatchList can be found at Audubon's website at www.Audubon.org.

Unfortunately, the current administration does not seem to be fixing the problems. Instead, we appear to be headed in the opposite direction and making matters worse. A couple of examples will illustrate the concern of many birders (and conservationists) with the actions of the administration.

Recently, US Representative Edward Markey released a study that reported enforcement actions by EPA. This report found that EPA's enforcement actions were down by 50 percent under the current administrator as compared to actions under the previous administrator. Further, penalties and remedies recovered dropped by 80 percent. This is a real concern because this indicates that polluters are not being watched very closely, and/or the regulations aren't being enforced. The report can be found at www.house.gov/markey/iss_environment_rpt_021001.pdf.

Another example of not fixing problems involves the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. In fact, in this example, we appear to be headed in the opposite direction from conserving our birds. Presently, the Bush administration is supporting a bill that would exempt the Department of Defense from complying with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. This Act protects more than 850 species of migratory birds, and it must not be allowed to be weakened at a time when numerous populations of

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Request for Information: Reports of Rare Breeding Birds

The Ornithological Technical Committee (OTC) is reviewing the current Breeding Birds of Special Concern List which includes those species that are listed as Endangered, Threatened, and Candidates to the E/T list. The Extirpated species are considered a sub-category of Endangered for the purposes of legal listing of birds. We are considering several changes to the list. In order to conduct such a review, it is very helpful for us to have as much information about the breeding populations of rare birds in the state as possible.

The OTC has access to some important data sets such as the *Pennsylvania Birds* seasonal reports, the PSO Special Areas Project database, and various Game Commission projects. Yet, we always like to get more data, especially when making important decisions. Many of the rarest breeding birds are elusive and hard to find. People do not always report rare breeding birds for a variety of reasons, including the protection of the birds and sensitive habitat. For those and other reasons, we ask PSO members to share some of their observations with our committee so we can make more informed decisions. The OTC will keep any information confidential upon request.

Below is a list of the current Breeding Birds of Special Concern in Pennsylvania. For a better understanding of the various categories, I refer you to the PABS and PNDI web pages that are part of the DCNR Bureau of Forestry web site: (<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/pabs/PABS.htm>).

In addition to the current list, there are several species that are under consideration for listing. Many of these are listed at the end. Please keep in mind that this list is restricted to species with a regular history of breeding in the state. The OTC uses 10 consecutive years of breeding activity as minimum for eligibility to the state list.

We are requesting information about breeding populations of these species that has not been documented by the above means. The location, numbers, nesting success, and other pertinent data should be included in any report.

The Ornithological Technical Committee is also interested to hear from experienced observers about their observations of trends or range changes of these and other species that might be considered for the state list. We appreciate any documented information that might help the committee better understand how to categorize these species. Such a list helps prioritize conservation efforts in

the state, so it is important to take an objective view of the information.

Please send in any observations from the last five years concerning these species, especially data not in the public view, to me at dougross@sunlink.net or Dan Brauning at dbrauning@state.pa.us. Thank you for your assistance.

– Douglas A. Gross
Ornithological Technical Committee
804 Salem Boulevard
Berwick, PA 18603

The Current PA List of Breeding Birds of Special Concern and Species under Consideration:

Endangered: American Bittern, Least Bittern, Great Egret, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Peregrine Falcon, King Rail, Common Tern, Black Tern, Short-eared Owl, Loggerhead Shrike.

[Extirpated: Greater Prairie Chicken, Piping Plover, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Bewick's Wren, Bachman's Sparrow]

Threatened: Black-crowned Night-Heron*, Osprey, Bald Eagle*, Upland Sandpiper, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Sedge Wren, Dickcissel.

Candidate At-Risk: Northern Harrier, Northern Bobwhite, Barn Owl.

Candidate Rare: Pied-billed Grebe, Green-winged Teal, Northern Goshawk, American Coot, Wilson's Snipe, Marsh Wren, Swainson's Thrush, Prothonotary Warbler, Summer Tanager.

Candidate-Undetermined: Long-eared Owl, N. Saw-whet Owl, Red Crossbill.

Some species under consideration for listing: Sandhill Crane, Ruddy Duck, Virginia Rail, Sora, Common Moorhen, Red-headed Woodpecker, Golden-winged Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Pine Siskin.

* Decisions not yet officially accepted by the PA Game Commission.

Bird Feeding vs Bear Feeding: New Rules Confront a Problem

Birds and bears, we usually don't think about them together. I've had close encounters with bears while looking for birds in Pennsylvania's big woods, and I've had bears in my back yard. Not a problem! But the growing population of black bears in Pennsylvania, particularly in the northeastern counties, has linked bears and birds together in a way that could involve your bird feeding activities in the future.

What has this to do with bird feeding? We are probably all aware that black bears are notorious for raiding bird feeders. While unintentional, bears eating food placed for birds is expensive for the birder (replacing feeders), habituates bears to people, and creates an unsafe situation.

In October, the Pennsylvania Game Commission proposed new regulations that are designed to reduce conflicts between bears and people. If given final approval in January, these regulations will prohibit the intentional or unintentional feeding of bears. The new regulations would make it unlawful, with certain exceptions, to intentionally "lay or place any food, fruit, hay, grain, chemical, salt or other minerals anywhere in the Commonwealth for the purpose of feeding bears, or to intentionally lay or place food, fruit, hay, grain, chemical, salt or other minerals that may cause bears to be attracted to or frequent an area."

If bird feeders are attracting bears, the proposed regulation would enable Game Commission Wildlife Conservation Officers to issue a written notice prohibiting the unintentional feeding of bears at that location if nuisance bear problems are developing in the area. The occasional visit from a passing black bear is not the target of this regulation. Hence, the regulation should have little if any impact on bird feeding or feeding of other wildlife, unless the feeding is attracting nuisance bears. In those cases, the regulation would help to resolve conflicts, unlike other alternatives such as trap and transfer or euthanasia, which tend to be temporary because the attractant remains. Violation of the notice could result in a fine.

Mark Ternent, Game Commission black bear biologist, points out that "Pennsylvanians need to understand that habituating bears to humans can lead to conflicts and the potential for serious injury." Feeding wildlife, whether the activity is intended for birds or other wildlife, has the potential to draw bears into a certain area. Once bears become habituated to an area where they find food, they will continue to return to this area, which is

when the bear becomes a problem for homeowners and neighbors."

"We recognize that people enjoy viewing wildlife, and the proposed regulatory change would not impact that activity," said Vern Ross, Game Commission executive director. "But, in light of the growing bear and human populations, we have an obligation to take action to reduce conflicts when and where we can. All too often, human complaints about bears can be traced back to intentional or unintentional feeding of bears. To protect the public, as well as bears, we need to avoid the dangers of conditioning bears to finding food around homes."

For more information on the agency's Nuisance Black Bear Management Committee report, please refer to Game Commission News Release #81-01, Oct. 2, 2001 on the agency's website (www.pgc.state.pa.us) under the "Newsroom" section.



PSO Bird Quiz

How well do you know our Pennsylvania birds?

1. Roger Tory Peterson described the calls of what rare breeder as "a catlike whine and a doglike bark"?
2. During surveys for the Breeding Bird Atlas in the 1980s, which two water birds were confirmed as breeding only in Philadelphia County?
3. What uncommon nester was known for quickly occupying areas devastated by tornadoes in northwestern Pennsylvania in 1985?
4. What abundant breeder in our woodlands is named for the shape of its nest?
5. In the 2001-2002 Christmas Bird Count, Pennsylvania CBCs reported the highest numbers of two species in the United States and the highest counts of four species in all of North America. Can you name the birds?

(Answers on page 12)

Wildlands Conference Planned

"Pennsylvania has the potential to be a center of wilderness in the Northeast. It has more public land than any state in the region (4,397,921 acres) and is second only to New Hampshire in percentage of land in public ownership (15.3 percent) . . . So, even though today Pennsylvania is the Northeast's most disappointing state in terms of protected wilderness, it is the state that has the most potential for expanding wilderness on lands already owned by the public" - Christopher McGrory Klyza in "Wilderness Comes Home, Rewilding the Northeast"

"PA Wildlands 2003: Prospects for Recovery and Rewilding," the second conference of the PA Wildlands Recovery Project, will be held on Saturday, February 1, at the Penn Stater Conference Center, State College.

Some Background

More than 150 people attended the first conference in January 2001 – a conference organized on a grassroots level. The excitement and energy generated by that event spurred the creation of the PA Wildlands Recovery Project, a new 501(c)(3) educational and scientific organization dedicated to the science-based development of a comprehensive conservation network plan linking Pennsylvania wildlands with each other and with lands in other states.

Several such plans have already been developed by conservation biologists and citizen conservationists in other regions of North America. Some are already being revised to reflect new biological data and research. They include Yellowstone to Yukon (Y2Y) and the Maine Wildlands Network.

Regional groups across the continent, including PWRP, will be researching, writing, and introducing additional conservation plans in the coming years.

These are visionary long-term network proposals with an overall goal: the rewilding of the land. Most, if not all, of the many regional organizations behind the creation of these plans are working in cooperation with The Wildlands Project office in Vermont. Wildlands Project board members include such well known conservation biologists as tropical ornithologist John Terborgh of Duke University and Reed Noss, co-author of "Saving Nature's Legacy." The Wildlands Project is widely considered to be the most visionary and noble conservation initiative in North America today. It has been endorsed by E.O. Wilson, the noted Harvard University professor and biodiversity advocate.

The PWRP Web site, wildpennsylvania.org, is under construction. Registration for the conference will be available through it within the next few weeks.

The registration fee is \$30 (early) and \$35 for those who register the day of the conference. The fee covers the cost of refreshments, a continental breakfast, and buffet lunch.

For more information, contact:

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Tonya Boston-Sagar – t.bostonsagar@worldnet.att.net

Dave Bonta – bontasaurus@yahoo.com

Conference Presenters Include:

- ◆ Dave Foreman. The chair of The Wildlands Project and publisher of "Wild Earth" journal is also a birder. He was named by *Audubon* magazine as one of the 100 most influential conservationists of the 20th century.
- ◆ Steve Hoffman, bird conservation director, Audubon Pennsylvania. He will discuss landscape-scale conservation in the context of Audubon's Important Bird Area program.
- ◆ Susan Hagood, Humane Society of the U.S. ("Wildlife Corridors, Passageways in Developed Landscapes")
- ◆ Clare Billet, The Natural Lands Trust ("Mapping for Conservation and Rewilding")
- ◆ Robert Lonsdorf, Brandywine Conservancy, ("Conservation in Fragmented Landscapes")
- ◆ Bob DeGroot, Maryland Alliance for Greenway Improvement and Conservation (MAGIC), ("Interstate Wildlife Corridors")
- ◆ Author and cougar fancier Chris Bolgiano
- ◆ Ed Perry, retired assistant supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Pennsylvania Field Office ("Prospects for Wildlands Recovery in Pennsylvania")

There will be plenty of space for tabletop displays and associated information.

– Alan Gregory
Pennsylvania Wildlands Recovery Project

Ornithological Literature Notes

(Editor's note: This is the fifth in an occasional series highlighting recent publications of interest to Pennsylvania ornithologists and birders.)

Two papers stemming from research in Pennsylvania appeared in the March 2002 issue of *The Wilson Bulletin*:

* Habitat use and behavior of mixed species landbird flocks during fall migration, by Paul G. Rodewald and Margaret C. Brittingham (Vol. 114, pp. 87-98).

The studies were conducted from August to October 1998-1999 in Centre and Huntingdon Counties at Rothrock State Forest, State Game Lands 176, suburban forests in the State College area, and private land. The authors compared abundance of migratory flocks and individual species, species richness and composition, and movement rates of mixed species flocks among various types of forest and forest edge habitats.

The results suggested that migrating flocks selected forest edges over other forested habitats, that food availability may have been higher in edge-dominated habitats than in other forest types, and that edge habitats provide important resources for many species during migration. At the same time, the authors noted that forest edge is not considered high-quality nesting habitat for many species. They emphasized that migratory landbirds' needs for high quality breeding-season habitat should also be considered in land management.

A sidelight of the study supported a method that birders often use to find flocks of migrants: listening for noisy parids (chickadees and titmice). Parids were observed in more than 80 percent of mixed species flocks and often were leading the flocks to new areas. The authors speculated that arriving migrants may use resident parids that are familiar with local habitats as a selection cue to locations with the best food resources.

* Opportunistic polygyny in the Louisiana Waterthrush, by Robert S. Mulvihill, Amy Cunkelman, Laura Quattrini, Timothy J. O'Connell, and Terry L. Master (Vol. 114, pp. 106-113).

This latest publication from ongoing studies of Louisiana Waterthrush ecology and nesting biology in Pennsylvania documents opportunistic polygyny in the species for the first time, confirming it in 4 of 283 paired males. At each of two sites, Laurel Run and Gardner Run

in Huntingdon County, a male was observed in association with the nesting attempts of two different females during one season. At Powdermill Run in Westmoreland County one male was polygynous during two successive years.

Because their observations spanned several nesting seasons and many sites, the authors confidently concluded that polygyny is very rare in Pennsylvania populations of the species. They believe that this rarity likely stems from greater selective advantages in monogamy for both sexes in better nest defense and care of young by both parents, as well as shorter re-nesting intervals following nest loss. The latter advantage might avoid possible negative results of late breeding such as reliance on off-peak food resources, delayed molt, and delayed migration.

The polygyny was confirmed during an intensive study investigating the Louisiana Waterthrush as a bioindicator of the ecological integrity of forested headwater streams. The research was conducted at as many as 25 streams in three major river drainages in western, central, and eastern Pennsylvania. Depending on the site, waterthrush populations were studied for 3-6 consecutive years between 1996 and 2001.

In an important previous publication stemming from the research, Mulvihill described effects of stream acidification on the species' breeding biology. It was described in September 2000 issue of the *PSO Newsletter* (Vol. 2, No. 3).

— Paul Hess

Thanks, Autumn!

Our society's new membership recruiting brochure was crafted by professional graphics designer Autumn Pfeiffer of Luzerne County. Autumn is a veteran birder, as well. Her travels over the years have taken her to Antarctica, among other locales, where she and her husband worked — and birded!

Autumn put our new brochure together on a "pro bono" basis, and we're extremely grateful for her special — and free — contribution. Thanks, Autumn!

The Conservation Corner (continued from page 7)

migratory birds are declining. Further, many military bases provide critical habitat for some of these species; and in some cases, the military has helped birds by setting aside an area for the birds to breed. To weaken the Migratory Bird Treaty is not the direction we should head. Concerned members of PSO should contact their members of Congress and voice their opposition to this bill before it becomes law. Contact can be through the National Audubon's website at www.capitolconnect.com/audubon/contact/default.asp?subject=51.

– Mark Henry, Conservation Chairperson

Answers to Bird Quiz on page 9:

1. Long-eared Owl.
2. Northern Shoveler and Black-necked Stilt.
3. Mourning Warbler.
4. Ovenbird.
5. Highest in the U.S. were Upper Bucks County's 106 Eastern Screech-Owls and Bloomsburg's 20 Long-eared Owls. Highest in all of North America were Glenolden's 45 Sharp-shinned Hawks and 2,136 Cedar Waxwings, as were Southern Bucks County's 192 Lesser Black-backed Gulls and 5,711 Great Black-backed Gulls. (*American Birds* magazine credited Pittsburgh South Hills for the most "Red" Fox Sparrows, currently considered a subspecies, but other CBCs reported greater numbers of the same bird simply as Fox Sparrows.)

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