

PSO

Newsletter



December 2002

The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK....

The Second Atlas Will Build on a Strong Foundation

The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Pennsylvania, published in 1992, is still the most important and influential book ever written about Pennsylvania's birds. It was the product of every good birder in the state. Everybody pitched in, and everybody benefitted from the project.

Pennsylvania's first breeding bird atlas was fashioned after *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland*. As such, the state was divided into a grid of 4,928 blocks. Amazingly, we birded them all. County by county, coordinators and volunteers found a way to cover every block in the state. Complete coverage was a very ambitious common goal, and we met it. Besides all of the ornithological surprises, the biggest surprise of the first atlas was its complete coverage. We did it together.

The first Atlas served as a unifying force that pulled together local birding groups into one grand statewide network. The PSO grew from the community of Atlas regional coordinators and volunteers who wanted to keep the network alive and growing.

For the first time ever, there was a good map of the distribution of every bird that nests in the state. Prior to the Atlas, little was known of many rare breeding species. Unexpected discoveries were made in all corners of the state. Nesting Northern Shovelers, American Wigeons, Black-necked Stilts, American Coots, Black Rails, Dickcissels, Swainson's Warblers, Chuck-Will's-Widows, and Common Jackdaws shocked and delighted us all.

More surprises ensued. Atlas volunteers put Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and Swainson's Thrush back on the Pennsylvania map. Many metropolitan birders were surprised to

see the maps of "northern" birds like Dark-eyed Junco covering many of the mountains (not just along the New York border) down along the ridges to the West Virginia border. Mourning Warbler was found farther east than ever before. Louisiana Waterthrushes bobbed along streams much farther north than previously documented. The Atlas mapped the restricted range of Summer Tanager and Blue Grosbeak near the Mason-Dixon line, solving the mysteries of their undocumented distributions.

The biggest perceptual change came with the grassland birds. Many grassland species, formerly thought threatened, were found readily across the state in agricultural lands and reclaimed strip mines, especially in the western counties. Were Grasshopper and Vesper Sparrows in trouble? The scattered blocks across the state argued that they were not as rare as previously thought. Was Henslow's Sparrow rare and threatened in the state? A glance at the final Atlas map showed that Pennsylvania was one of the most important states in the Northeast for this diminished species. It was noted in many more blocks than anyone would have predicted.

The first Atlas also provided a historical document for the ranges of Pennsylvania's most charismatic avian species. Confirmed Osprey nestings were limited to the Poconos and the lower Susquehanna River. Bald Eagles were even rarer with most nesting confirmations in the Glaciated Northwest. Peregrine Falcons were confined to a few bridges in the Philadelphia area. Now all of these raptors enjoy a much broader distribution in the state because of concerted conservation efforts. The ranges of other rare breeders apparently have not changed appreciably since 1989, but perhaps concentrated efforts will reveal a different story.

The first Atlas could not answer all our questions about breeding bird populations. The grid design inherited from the British is basically a presence/absence map. Each

2003 Winter Raptor Survey

The 2003 Pennsylvania Winter Raptor Survey (WRS) will be conducted from January 18 through February 9. This will be the third year for this survey. In 2002, volunteers surveyed



routes in 56 counties covering more than 5,000 miles. Approximately 1,800 raptors of ten species were tallied. In addition, vultures were counted, and owls (6 species) and shrikes were also noted.

Why do this count? I will attempt to answer that question. By far (in 2001 and 2002), the greatest numbers of wintering raptors were recorded in the relatively mild southeastern portion of the state. Observers in northern counties recorded very few raptors. However, data from all parts of the state are equally important in providing the complete picture of our wintering raptors and vultures.

And more specifically (at the risk of belaboring this point) data from the "colder" counties with low numbers of wintering raptors and vultures may be the most important data we collect in this survey. These "low" numbers establish a baseline at the current time that may allow us to detect future trends as we face possible human-caused global warming. Implied in that statement is the assumption that greater numbers of raptors and vultures will winter farther north.

Will global warming really happen and lead to shifts in wintering ranges of birds? The WRS could provide a semi-rigorous documentation of trends that will be far superior to non-quantitative, anecdotal reports.

(Of course there are other reasons to monitor populations of these birds, and any trends noted cannot automatically be ascribed to climate change).

All interested birders are invited to participate in 2003. Contact me via e-mail (gw2@psu.edu). The surveys are done from a vehicle along a route designed by the participants in their own locales or potentially elsewhere.

In counties with previously established routes, I ask that new participants either join an established route or coordinate to ensure that new routes do not overlap established routes. I do, however, encourage development of new but non-overlapping routes. For new folks I will provide e-mail addresses of previous participants (if any) in your county so that all parties can coordinate their surveys.

block shown for Henslow's Sparrow only means that this species was found in that block in the breeding season in one of the seven survey years, 1983 through 1989. It could have been one territorial pair present only one year (as Henslow's Sparrows can be very irruptive and temporary), or it might be fifty pairs present each year of the survey. You just cannot tell by looking at the maps where there might be high concentrations of Henslow's Sparrows and how numerous they might be.

At this point, we would like to know a lot more about how many Henslow's Sparrows are in Pennsylvania. Its range-wide decline has focused more attention on locations that are important for its overall population. Pennsylvania is a "keystone state" for Henslow's Sparrow and for many other species. This state has a responsibility to the rest of the world to manage the habitats and potential habitats for species that are more common here than elsewhere. Conserving these populations will be vital for the continued health of the species at large.

Many questions remain about the populations and distribution of species that are more difficult to survey. The "difficult list" includes most night birds, marsh birds, diurnal raptors, early nesters, and species with limited distribution in the state. Project Toot Route showed that Northern Saw-whet Owls are much more common and widely distributed in the state than anyone imagined. Surveys designed and directed toward other "difficult" species could be as successful if implemented. How many Long-eared Owls are out there? Is the 18-block result from the first Atlas indicative of an extremely rare bird or an extremely secretive and hard-to-find bird? The Special Areas Project results seem to indicate that the first is true, but more intense, species-specific searches or surveys may be needed to resolve this and other questions about our "difficult list."

The first Atlas offered many surprises. Perhaps the most pleasant surprise was the overwhelming response of birders to the call for field work. The new Atlas will provide us with many new surprises and an unprecedented opportunity to build on the great successes of the first. Are you ready? I hope so. PSO members represent the top-notch birders of the state. PSO should be the key to the next Atlas's success.



– Doug Gross, President

Routes should be located primarily in open country and should be designed with safety as the priority – in other words, routes should not be run on major highways.

Specific, but rather simple, guidelines for the WRS will be provided prior to January. Briefly, we are particularly interested in four open-country raptors: Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, and American Kestrel as well as the two vulture species. Other raptors, owls, and shrikes are also recorded.

In addition to monitoring their winter numbers in Pennsylvania, participants are requested to also record (whenever reasonably possible) age/sex/color-morph data as appropriate for harriers, red-tails, rough-legs, and kestrels (see forthcoming guidelines for details). In 2002 this sort of detailed data was collected for more than 80% of the recorded birds of these four species, providing quantitative data on the composition of wintering populations of these raptors.

Detailed results of the 2002 WRS will be published in the upcoming issue of *Pennsylvania Birds*.

– Greg Grove

PSO Bird Quiz

How well do you know our Pennsylvania birds?

1. What common migrant in PA lays the largest egg in proportion to its body size?
2. What cavity nester smears the edges of the entrance hole with pitch?
3. Which rare species on the Pennsylvania state list has a Latin name that translates as “marsh finch”?
4. Which bird in years past was called the “coffin bearer”?
5. Which of our winter birds shows a decided preference for maple and ash seeds?

(answers on page 16)

The Raven Reporter



Tales of Discovery from the Special Areas Project

SAP Database Update: More than 6,000 Field Trips

The Special Areas Project database now includes 6,031 field trips from 127 locations across the state. Recent additions to the SAP database include field trips from Forest Dutlinger Natural Area (Clinton), Game Lands 300 (Lackawanna), Hammersley Wild Area (Potter), Kirby Park Natural Area (Luzerne), Susquehanna Warrior's Trail (Luzerne), and Tionesta Scenic Area (McKean). A big thanks to all of you who have contributed to our burgeoning database of bird information about Pennsylvania public (and sometimes private) lands.

Special thanks go out to Bob Wasilewski for Kirby Park data and to Nick Bolgiano for the great data from some of Pennsylvania's wildest areas: Dutlinger Natural Area, Wolf Run Natural Area, and Hammersley Wild Area. I will have more to say about these important SAP efforts next time.

Owls and Other Nightbirds: A Summary of Discoveries

SAP volunteers have made special efforts to document the mysterious birds of the night for this project. Tallying all of the “special effort” hours reported from field sheets, birders have contributed 120 hours looking and listening for owls and other night birds during field trips. The greatest species-specific efforts have been for the ever-popular Northern Saw-whet Owl, followed by Barred and Long-eared Owls. Some SAP volunteers have camped in their SAP, listening for birds of the night.

Of course, birders can encounter some owls by being alert and keeping an ear out for owl sounds during daylight and crepuscular hours. I have heard many Barred Owls hoot mid-day, especially when it is overcast. Great Horned Owls conduct much of their courtship hooting in late afternoon before the sun goes down when all good owls are supposed to “hoot.” I have also heard surprised saw-whets and screech-

owls call in the middle of the day. You just have to be ready for them.

The table below summarizes the documentation of breeding owls and nightjars in Special Area locations. Since SAPs tend to be in wooded areas, the forest owls are well-represented by the survey. But many Special Areas, especially the state and municipal parks, are in fragmented landscapes that favor Great Horned Owls and Eastern Screech-Owls. Since there are not as many man-made structures in state parks, forests, and natural areas as there are on the agricultural landscape, the Barn Owl may be somewhat under-represented by SAP efforts. Yet, the lone SAP location has been abandoned by Barn Owls. Many SAP locations contain large trees and outbuildings that Barn Owls prefer for nesting. Why are more not found? Perhaps Barn Owls really are rare on public lands. I tentatively interpret the paucity of Barn Owls in SAP reports to a decline in Barn Owls since the first Atlas. Barn Owl is currently listed as Candidate-At Risk, a step below Threatened, but this species may be even more vulnerable to extinction. More surveys are warranted.

capture other Short-eared Owl locations. This species can sporadically use open fields for nesting.

Project Toot Route shed light on the diminutive Northern Saw-whet Owl. These little forest gnomes were found on about half of the “toot routes” run by Pennsylvania birders in 2000 and 2001. SAP volunteers have also found that saw-whets are much more widely distributed than formerly documented. This appealing species is no longer a mystery for state birders and banders. It is too common and widespread to be considered a “Species of Special Concern,” but it certainly deserves continued study as a member of our forest communities and as an intriguing migrating raptor.

The Long-eared Owl remains one of the state’s mystery birds. SAP volunteers have reported it in very few locations and confirmed nesting only once. It remains elusive for many reasons. The long-ear nests earlier in the year than most birds. It is even more nocturnal than most owls, rarely vocalizing or foraging during daylight hours. During the day, it sits erectly and blends in with the bark of the conifer in which it invariable roosts. So, many Long-eared Owls are probably overlooked. That being said, the Long-eared Owl likes landscapes where birders often prowl – conifer stands near grasslands. Long-ears nest on old stick nests, usually made by crows, and forage over open fields looking for rodents. This combination of habitat is fairly common in state and municipal parks as well as in agricultural areas where conifers are planted in windrows and erosion control groves. Such parks are well-represented by SAP field trips. Birders look for their winter roosts during Christmas counts and subsequently can discover nesting birds in spring. All of this leads me to suspect that Long-eared Owls are extremely rare in the state. The low number of reports is a result of both elusiveness and extreme rarity. We may need a species-specific project to determine the rarity and range of this enigmatic night bird.

Since we are talking about owls, it seems to make sense to talk about nightjars, too. Whip-poor-wills were the most commonly reported species on “Toot Routes” even though volunteers did not play its song. They were even more common than the target species, the saw-whet. The Whip-poor-will is much more common than many birders realize. SAP data bear this out with 16 locations showing whips.

On the other hand, the Common Nighthawk has been reported from only two SAP locations during its breeding season. Since this species is usually associated with more urban settings where flat roofs provide nesting substrate, the paucity of reports is not surprising. Yet, one wonders if this species has declined to the point of deserving special conservation attention. Nighthawks have been reported in Pennsylvania where there are cliffs and burned over areas.

A Summary of Nesting Nightbirds Observed During SAP Trips		
Owl or Nightjar Species	Pennsylvania Status	No. of Locations With Breeding Code
Barn Owl	Candidate - At Risk	1
Barred Owl	Secure	35
Great Horned Owl	Secure	36
Long-eared Owl	Candidate - Undetermined	3
N. Saw-whet Owl	Candidate - Undetermined	10
Short-eared Owl	Endangered	1
Common Nighthawk	Secure	2
Whip-poor-will	Secure	16

It is not much of a surprise that the Endangered Short-eared Owl is rarely reported on SAP trips. The only report came from the well-known population at the Piney Tract, Clarion County. More large grasslands and open marshes should be surveyed with the SAP methodology to

Where are those booming nighthawks of yore?

The continued attention given to our elusive nightbirds will yield more interesting results. I invite you to give more attention to our state's owls and nightjars. Great Horned Owls are already singing their courtship "songs." Long-eared and Barred Owls will not be far behind.

For more information about the Special Areas Project, please contact:

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: dougross@sunlink.net

Annual Meeting

Plans are well underway for our 2003 spring meeting which will be held at the Holiday Inn in Indiana, PA, on May 16-18. The theme of this meeting, hosted by the Todd Bird Club, will be the new Atlas Project which is scheduled to begin in 2004. Four afternoon sessions and a banquet have been planned. Check the February 2003 Newsletter for details.

Field trips planned for Saturday include two trips to Yellow Creek State Park (an easy one for those who do not wish to hike and a more rigorous one covering the back areas of the park), Blacklick Valley Natural Area, Blue Spruce County Park, Conemaugh Floodlands (Virginia Farms), and Elders Ridge and West Lebanon Strips. Sunday's field trips will include Conemaugh Dam and environs, Little Mahoning Creek and Gipsy Strips, Prince Gallitzin State Park, SGL 273, West Penn Trail, and possibly repeat trips to areas birded on Saturday. Details, including outings' leaders and target species, will be included in the next newsletter.

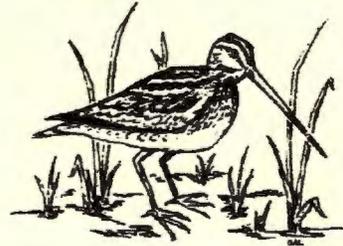
For those who do not want to stay at the Holiday Inn, other accommodations are available, including a bed and breakfast and several campgrounds.

Be sure to mark your 2003 calendar now for May 16-18. We hope to see you in Indiana!

Changes in AOU & ABA Checklists

After half a century, our Wilson's Snipe is back. The venerable old name was resurrected in the 43rd Supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union *Check-List of North American Birds*, published in July.

The AOU Committee on Classification and Nomenclature split the North American and Eurasian subspecies of what we have called the Common Snipe into two different species. The Old World bird now has the name Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), and our bird is "officially" called Wilson's again (*Gallinago delicata*) as it was in field guides and ornithological texts until the 1950s. The committee decided that the two races deserve full species status because of differences in their outer tail feathers and their winnowing display sounds.



For various reasons, the committee changed the scientific names of four other species on the official Pennsylvania bird list: Roseate Spoonbill becomes *Platalea ajaja*, Purple Gallinule becomes *Porphyrio martinica*, Red Phalarope becomes *Phalaropus fulicarius*, and Blue Grosbeak becomes *Passerina caerulea*.

Among many other changes beyond Pennsylvania, the committee split Tufted Titmouse into two species – the Tufted Titmouse and the Black-crested Titmouse of southern Texas. And the Eared Trogon is now named the Eared Quetzal.

The complete reference is: R.C. Banks, *et al.* 2002. Forty-third Supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union Check-List of North American Birds. *Auk* 119: 897-906.

Meanwhile, the American Birding Association's official checklist has grown, not only because of the AOU splits but also because of the newly confirmed occurrence of several species in the ABA Area. Five more species and a species-complex are "countable," including Band-tailed Gull and Yellow-chevroned Parakeet. For all the changes, see <http://www.americanbirding.org/checklist/update.htm>

– Paul Hess

Nominate a Youth to Attend PSO Meeting

At a recent board meeting, PSO decided to sponsor a student 18 years old or younger to attend our annual meeting. If you would like to nominate a young person, please explain why you believe this person should attend, his/her accomplishments, interests, etc. 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 completing the form below and sending it to Alan Gregory (meg5@psu.edu or alangregory@standard_speaker.com), P.O. Box 571, Conyngham, PA 18219-0571, before March 1, 2003.

PSO Student Nomination Form

I would like to nominate _____ to attend the annual PSO meeting in Indiana, PA, May 16-18, 2003. I would like to nominate this person because he/she _____

Name of Student

I understand that I will be responsible for _____ en route to and from the meeting and at the meeting.

Name of Student

Signature of Person Nominating Student

Name Printed

Address of Person Nominating Student

Phone No. and e-mail address

New Book of Interest to PSO Members

Somerset County Naturally: A Guide to Enjoying the Wildlife of Somerset County, Pennsylvania is now available through mail order. Scott Bastian, a resident birder and PSO member of Somerset County, wrote the hard-bound book in order to inspire other county residents to conserve and protect the natural resources found there. The book is divided into chapters covering and listing the major biota found in the county. Chapters are arranged to familiarize readers with the flora or fauna discussed and also to direct them on how to learn more. In addition to sections on local birds, trees, reptiles, wildflowers, fish, ferns, etc., there are also chapters discussing skies, soils, and watersheds. In traditional bird checklist fashion, the creatures and plants are each given an abundance code.

Almost 400 color photos are presented in a gallery to accompany the text. The book is unusual in its local focus, and all of the photographs were taken in Somerset County, most of them by the author. But even though written for one county, much of the text is useful throughout the Commonwealth. Authoritative review was solicited for each chapter to insure accuracy.

To obtain *Somerset County Naturally*, please send check or money order for \$34.00 (including tax and postage) to:

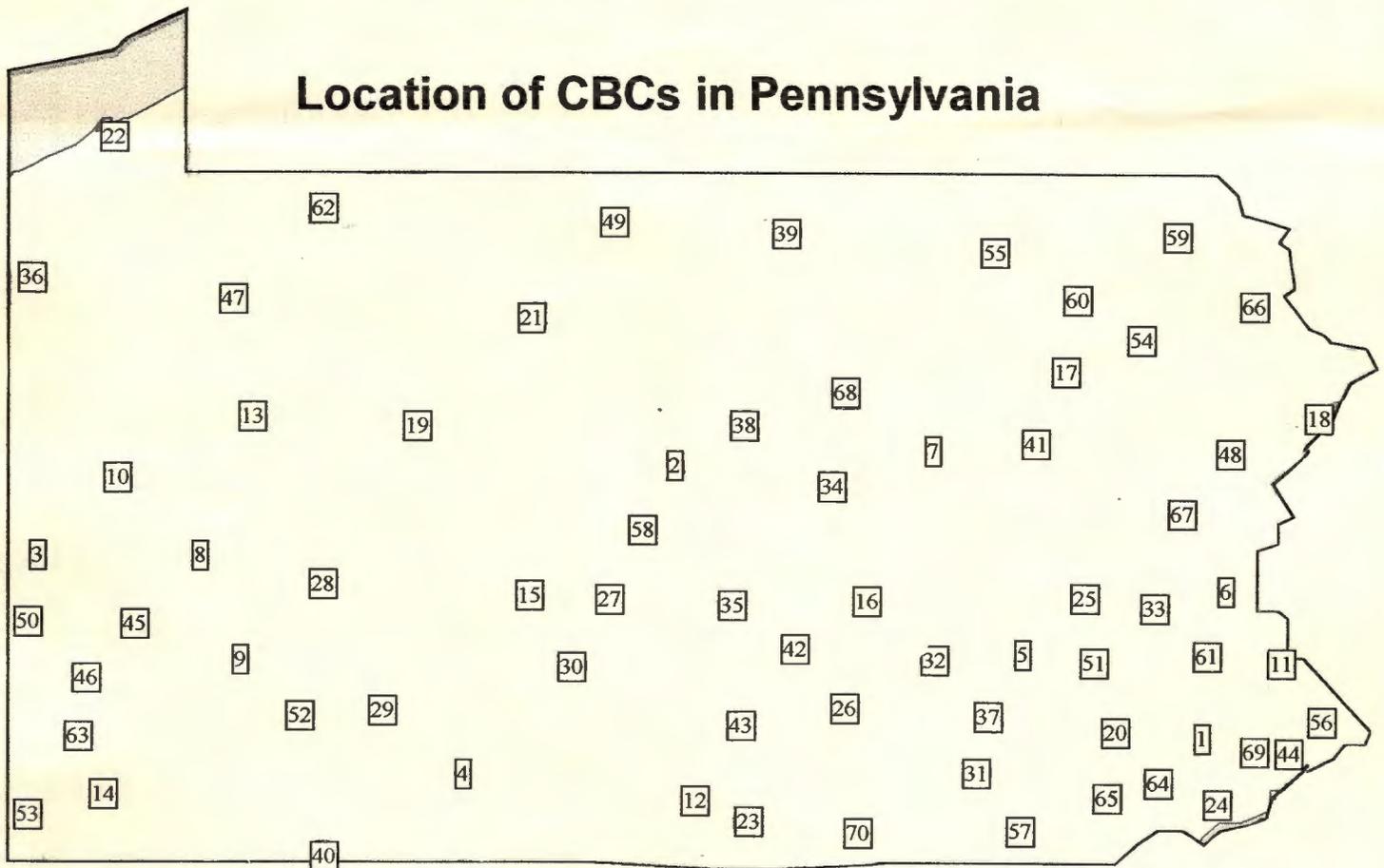
Scott Bastian
172 Bethany Road
Somerset, PA 15501
(814) 445-6727

Christmas Bird Counts Held in Pennsylvania

Map Key	Name of Count	County	Compiler	Phone Number	E-mail Address	Date
1	Audubon	Montgomery Delaware Chester	Edie Parnum		Eparnum@aol.com	12/28/02
2	Bald Eagle	Centre	Eugene Zielinski	814-353-8212	eez55@earthlink.net	12/29/02
3	Beaver	Beaver	John Cruzan	724-846-5342 (h) 724-847-6726 (w)	jcruzan@geneva.edu	12/21/02
4	Bedford	Bedford	Janet Shaffer	814-356-3553		12/21/02
5	Bernville	Berks	Ed Barrell	610-926-2962	ebarrell@early.com	12/22/02
6	Bethlehem-Easton	Northampton	Elaine and Donald Mease	610-346-7754	measede@enter.net	12/28/02
7	Bloomsburg	Columbia	Dave Unger	570-672-3254	unger@evenlink.com	12/15/02
8	Buffalo Creek Valley	Butler Armstrong	George Reese	724-353-9649	gtreese@msn.com	12/21/02
9	Bushy Run S.P.	Westmoreland	Dick Byers	724-593-3543	otusasio@lhtc.net	12/15/02
10	Butler	Butler Lawrence Mercer	Suzanne Butcher	330-759-1945 724-794-3534	sarbird@hotmail.com	12/21/02
11	Central Bucks	Bucks	Diane Allison	610-847-2085	dalliso@postoffice.ptd.net	12/29/02
12	Chambersburg	Franklin	Joan Bowen	717-264-9493		12/14/02
13	Clarion	Clarion	Margaret Buckwalter Walter Fye (computer down)	814-782-3925 814-797-1800	mbuckwalter@usachoice.net waltfye@usachoice.net	12/28/02
14	Clarksville	Greene	Ralph Bell	724-883-4505		12/28/02
15	Culp	Blair	Debbie Wentz	814-692-4224	dtw1999@home.com	12/21/02
16	Curtin	Dauphin	Scott Bills	717-896-8859	sbills@pa.state.us	12/27/02
17	Dallas Area	Luzerne	Jim Hoyson	570-696-4925	birdder@aol.com	12/14/02
18	Dingman's Ferry	Pike	Tom Shimalla Patrick Scheuer	570-828-9281 570-828-2319	quantumhop@hotmail.com	12/15/02
19	DuBois	Clearfield	Harold Webster	814-375-0709	webs@adelphia.net	1/04/03
20	Elverson	Chester	Robert Cook	610-286-9919	dunlin50@aol.com	12/21/02
21	Emporium	Cameron	Bob Martin	814-486-1990	bmartin@adelphia.net	12/22/02
22	Erie	Erie	Joan Howlett	814-734-1765	howlett@velocity.net	12/14/02
23	Gettysburg	Adams	Arthur Kennell	717-642-6995		12/14/02
24	Glenolden	Delaware	Nick Pulcinella	610-583-3201	nickpul@bellatlantic.net	12/14/02
25	Hamburg	Berks Schuylkill	Laurie Goodrich	610-756-6961 570-943-3411 x106	goodrich@hawkmtn.org	12/29/02
26	Harrisburg	Dauphin	Deuane Hoffman	717-564-7475	raven@paonline.com	12/14/02
27	Huntingdon	Huntingdon	Dave Kyler	814-643-6030	davidkyler@pennswoods.net	12/15/02
28	Indiana	Indiana	Roger & Margaret Higbee	724-354-3493	bcoriole@twd.net	12/26/02

29	Johnstown	Cambria	Sally Dick	814-266-7912	watchbirds@compuserve.com	12/15/02
30	Lake Raystown	Huntingdon Blair	Greg Grove	814-667-2305	gw2@psu.edu	12/22/02
31	Lancaster	Lancaster	Chris Pederson	717-295-2607	pederson@epix.net	12/28/02
32	Lebanon	Lebanon	Frederick Heilman	717-273-0487		12/14/02
33	Lehigh Valley	Lehigh	Dennis Miller	610-759-7514	autumnwood@enter.net	12/14/02
34	Lewisburg	Union Northumber- land	Richard Nickelsen	570-524-9833	nickelsn@bucknell.edu	12/15/02
35	Lewistown	Juniata	Linda Whitesel	717-436-8048	lkwhitesel@acsworld.net	12/21/02
36	Linesville	Crawford	Ronald Harrell	814-337-5445	rharrell@allegheny.edu	12/29/02
37	Lititz	Lancaster	Bruce Carl	717-859-4179	carls@desupernet.net	12/29/02
38	Lock Haven-Jersey Shore	Clinton Lycoming	Wayne Laubscher	570-748-7511	wlaubsch@cub.kcnet.org	12/29/02
39	Mansfield	Tioga	Robert Ross	570-376-5394 570-724-3322 x239	rossr@usgs.gov	12/21/02
40	Mount Davis	Somerset	Dale Jeffrey Chuck Tague	814-662-2904 412-488-8760	mtdavisdj@pennswoods.net bluejay@city-net.com	12/16/02
41	Nescopeck Mt.	Luzerne	Alan Gregory	570-788-1425	meg5@psu.edu <a href="mailto:alangregory@standard
speaker.com">alangregory@standard speaker.com	1/04/03
42	New Bloomfield	Perry	Ramsay Koury	717-761-1871	rkoury123@aol.com	12/14/02
43	Newville	Cumberland	Bill and Linda Franz	717-776-4463	wlfantz@earthlink.net	12/29/02
44	Pennypack Valley	Philadelphia	Peter Kurtz	215-342-3638 215-685-0470		12/21/02
45	Pittsburgh	Allegheny	Jim Valimont	412-828-5338	valimont@bellatlantic.net	12/28/02
46	Pittsburgh South Hills	Allegheny Washington	Bill Judd	412-571-2057	wmrjudd@earthlink.net	12/21/02
47	Pleasantville	Venango	Russ States	814-676-6320	russ@csonline.net	12/29/02
48	Pocono Mt.	Monroe	Chris Turn		birder@ptd.net	12/15/02
49	Potter County	Potter	Dave Hauber	814-274-8946	haubers3@penn.com	12/29/02
50	Raccoon Creek	Beaver	William B. Smith Chuck Tague	724-375-9613 412-488-8760	bersmith@tristate.pgh.net bluejay@city-net.com	12/27/02
51	Reading	Berks	Bill Uhrich	610-371-5090	buhrich@readingeagle.com	12/15/02
52	Rector	Westmoreland	Robert Mulvihill	724-593-7521 (w) 724-238-2716 (h)	multipnr@westol.com	12/22/02
53	Ryerson	Greene	Marjorie Howard	724-499-5642	birdwatcher@alltel.net	12/21/02
54	Scranton	Lackawanna	William Speare			12/21/02
55	Southeastern Bradford	Bradford	Bill Reid	570-836-2734		12/28/02
56	Southern Bucks	Bueks	Robert Mercer	215-785-1177	slnc@verizonesg.net	12/14/02
57	Southern Lancaster County	Lancaster	Bob Schutsky	717-548-3303 (9 a.m. to 9 p.m.)	info@birdtreks.com	12/15/02

58	State College	Centre	James Dunn Bob Fowles	814-238-2122 814-238-1990	jwd6@psu.edu rbf@psu.edu	12/15/02
59	Thompson	Susquehanna				
60	Tunkhannock	Wyoming	Rick Koval	570-829-4381	unibirder@aol.com	12/22/02
61	Upper Bucks	Bucks Montgomery	Hart Rufe	215-257-8677	wrufe@starband.net	12/15/02
62	Warren	Warren	Michael Toole Don Watts (Organizer)	814-723-4714 814-723-9125	toole@kinzua.net	12/14/02
63	Washington	Washington	Roy Ickes	724-228-3532	rickes@washjeff.edu	12/14/02
64	West Chester	Chester	Barry Blust	610-458-5616	BarryBlust@icdc.com	12/14/02
65	Western Chester	Chester	Larry Lewis	610-518-7242	Earlybirdtours@aol.com	12/15/02
66	White Mills	Wayne	Voni Strasser	570-226-1460	sawwhet@ptd.net	12/21/02
67	Wild Creek- Little Gap	Carbon Monroe	Joel Silfies Brad Silfies	610-826-3817	jss48@cornell.edu bsilfies@aol.com	12/15/02
68	Williamsport	Lycoming	Dave Ferry	570-323-1590	lycohawk@aol.com	12/22/02
69	Wyncote	Montgomery	Martin Selzer	215-233-9090	msselzer@janus.inj.com	12/21/02
70	York	York	Bill Del Grande	717-854-6728	yorkies17403@yahoo.com	12/14/02



Special thanks to Roger Higbee for plotting the locations of the Christmas Bird Count circles!

PSO Web Site Requests Photos

The PSO web site (www.pabirds.org) has a section called "What's Hot!" This is a place where photos of current rarities can be posted to share with the bird/internet community. During the past few years, many photos of rare birds have shown up on numerous other web sites in the state, but they have not been sent to the PSO site. It would be nice if there were one central site that anyone could access to see these photos. That is the purpose of the PSO site. However, we need your cooperation.

If you take photos of any recent rarity in the state, please send them to me at fbhaas@ptd.net, and I will put them on the web site immediately. Also, if you know of someone who has photos, please ask them to send them so that everyone can see them.

Our purpose is not to prevent others from posting the photos on their web sites also, but we want to make it easier for the birding community to find the photos.

I will post the photos that are sent to me. I am also willing to post one or two photos and then provide a link to your web site for additional photos. Just let me know when you send the photos to me.

With your cooperation, we can make this site an archive of all the rare bird photos for the state. In addition to "What's Hot," there is also a photo gallery of rare birds under the PORC section of the web site. This is where the "What's Hot" photos will go once they are no longer current.

— Franklin Haas

Needed: Artwork

If you are of an artistic bent, why not sketch a bird or two for use in the PSO Newsletter? Artwork can be scanned and returned. Thanks in advance for your contributions! Please mail to:

Margaret Higbee, PSO Newsletter Editor
3119 Creekside Road
Indiana, PA 15701-7934

Ed Perry Retires

In conservation, many caring folks make a difference in some form or fashion. But only a handful, it seems, make the kind of lasting contribution that puts them above the crowd.

What's more, today's big conservation and sportsmen's groups claim tens of thousands of members in most cases but have activist bases of only a tenth as many people.

Those who pursue conservation (a conservative idea if ever there was one) as their life's cause only rarely receive just compensation. But they would have it no other way.

Too often these days, financial riches and personal wealth seem to be the only measurements worthy of attention from average folk. The rich and powerful – those who chew up the most natural resources and drive the biggest and hungriest automobiles – are held up as models of virtue, people to emulate. Meanwhile, those who put the welfare of nature ahead of all else are viewed askance by others whose knowledge of fish and wildlife is limited mostly to what they see on TV rather than in the woods a mile from the nearest road.

More than a century ago, Scottish immigrant John Muir was laughed at by the uninitiated – those ignorant of the ways of nature. They called Muir a wild-eyed fanatic, a man who foolishly "talked" to big trees and conversed with the wild trout running in the streams beneath their branches. But the man from the forest outlasted his skeptics.

Few in number are the real heroes of wild America. Their careers often are marked with disappointments – with memories of a wild place lost to road builders, dam builders, or industrialists. But there are victories, as well.

Conservation, after all, is about saving habitat for wild critters. It's about putting the long-term needs of nature above the short-term greed of a corporation.

Ed Perry, the just-retired assistant field supervisor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Pennsylvania Field Office in State College, is a modern hero of nature – both to his friends and colleagues and the wild places of Pennsylvania he helped save. Here's a man who has gone all out, every day of his career, to keep trout and bass streams wild and free. As a public servant, he saluted when he had to but always worked on the public's behalf, not for politicians

(continued on page 13)

Forest Fragmentation Rampant

by Alan Gregory

Now that the leaves are down, the results of the most recent building season are evident on the ridges surrounding our valley in southern Luzerne County.

When we moved here more than a decade ago, the forests of the ridges to the south and north of our town were still largely intact. Except for utility corridors and a radio station tower, these ridgetop forests offered thousands of acres of contiguous woods. Now these big blocks of forest have been sliced into small woodlots that serve as "sinks" for birds like the Wood Thrush - birds whose breeding productivity increases with the size of the forest in which they attempt to nest.

It is now a well-known fact that the fragmentation of large tracts of forest into smaller tracts leads to, among other things, a decrease in the nesting productivity of species like Ovenbird, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Hermit Thrush, and Veery. Studies have shown that when a 5,000-acre forested tract is sliced into two smaller blocks of 2,500 acres each, the nesting success of such species inhabiting the forest declines precipitously.

Some considerations:

- ▶ Many conservation biologists believe that habitat fragmentation is the most serious threat to biological diversity and is the primary cause of the present extinction crisis.
- ▶ Wildlife research has shown that many forest and grassland birds require large blocks of habitat, and avoid the edge, or don't successfully nest there. Species that generally do poorly where habitat is broken into small, isolated blocks are called "area sensitive" species. Area-sensitive species are intolerant of habitat fragmentation, as opposed to species considered tolerant of fragmentation.

Fragmentation harms wildlife, including songbirds, in a number of ways. They include:

- the creation of partial or total barriers to overland movement by the building of roads;
- reduction of the habitat value for some of the more specialized species adjacent to where the fragmentation occurs;

Building projects – big and little – are carving up wildlife habitat across Pennsylvania and the Northeast.

- The new road that cuts across the riparian zone of the stream outside town.
- The bulldozing of a hillside forest to make way for upscale "trophy homes" and expansive (and sterile) lawns kept alive by monthly visits from the turf chemical guy

Perhaps nowhere else in the state are the cascading effects of mechanized man more apparent than on Bald Eagle Mountain – the long and oftentimes steep-sided ridge that runs roughly north to south through the forested heart of Pennsylvania.

Here are some of the largest remaining forests still alive in our state. Here is some of the highest-quality habitat needed by a whole host of critters, including the songbirds of the Appalachian Mountains.

One project in particular epitomizes the threats facing our remaining big forests.

Driving south through the Altoona area, it's hard not to notice the clear-cut scar on the west-facing slope of Brush Mountain (a spur of sorts of Bald Eagle Mountain). The trees were cut and left to rot on the ground – as if they were just so many soiled hamburger wrappers tossed willy-nilly across the sloping terrain.

The "scar" on this forested hillside is the proposed home for something a roadside sign declares will be called the Logan Town Power Centre Mall.

Like all big-time construction projects, this one would have significant "detrimental" impacts on the fish and wildlife resources of the Bald Eagle valley – especially forest-interior songbirds. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Juniata Valley Audubon Society, and individual conservationists have already weighed in with letters opposing the issuance of a wetland encroachment permit.

These are the practical questions:

- Just why does Altoona – or any other place – need yet another shopping mall?
- Haven't we given away enough of our natural resources already?

- creation of patches too small, isolated, or otherwise unsuitable to support certain species that have very specific habitat requirements, such as some amphibians, whose local survival depends on recolonization from larger regional breeding populations;
- it allows more tolerant, nuisance or exotic species to infiltrate and colonize an area; and
- it increases mortality of intolerant species due to predation or parasitism by the invading tolerant species.

With development come new roads. In both the short and long term, transportation corridors (such as the roads leading to homes built in forests) disrupt wildlife movement by imposing physical barriers to normal diurnal or nocturnal movement patterns. Migration corridors and dispersal routes are altered or blocked. This disruption fragments and thus isolates wildlife populations and their gene pools.

Studies have shown that the probability of finding area-sensitive species such as the Black-throated Blue, Cerulean, and Canada warblers approaches 100 percent when the forest size exceeds 3,000 acres. In contrast, when the forest size is 1,000 acres, the chance of finding these species drops by 50 percent. In a nationwide study of tanagers, researchers confirmed that all three forest-breeding tanager species are negatively affected by habitat fragmentation.

In short, the presence of roads in an area severely disrupts wildlife communities and often leads to the building of more roads over the long term to serve sprawl and the resulting development.

A study of 76 forest-interior bird species in 469 mature wooded sites ranging from 0.25 to more than 7,500 acres in Maryland and adjacent states found that 32 species were strongly correlated with the size of the forest. Five species of warblers and vireos did not maintain a breeding territory on any of the 156 sites that were smaller than 50 acres. There is no way for the habitat that was lost to these houses and their attendant roads and driveways to be replicated elsewhere as mitigation.

This is not a "NIMBY" issue. It is an issue of conservation. Pennsylvania is already so heavily roaded that it is impossible for one to hike more than a mile or two from a road anywhere in the state. Getting lost in Pennsylvania while hiking through the woods is a near impossibility. One is never far from a road.

Finally, because so much of the natural countryside of northeastern Pennsylvania has already been ruined by road building, industrial, and housing development and high-impact recreational development, the time has come to draw a line in the sand, so to speak. Just knowing that the forest of Moosic Mountain in Lackawanna County is still there is reason enough to want to protect it from fragmentation and degradation from all development.

This new chunk of Asphalt Nation would have such severe, long-lasting effects on wildlife habitat that no amount of mitigation would ever be able to make up for the loss.

Conservationists are increasingly concerned about the long-term cumulative impacts of projects like this. Each time a new road, a new mall, a new housing subdivision, or a new industrial park is constructed, additional fragmentation of habitat occurs.

Many conservation biologists believe that habitat fragmentation is the most serious threat to biological diversity and is the primary cause behind decreases in the nesting productivity of forest-interior species including our most beloved songbirds.

Wildlife research has shown that many forest and grassland birds require large blocks of habitat and avoid the edge, or they don't successfully nest there. Species that generally do poorly where habitat is broken into small, isolated blocks are called "area sensitive" species. Area-sensitive species are intolerant of habitat fragmentation, as opposed to species considered tolerant of fragmentation.

Fragmentation harms wildlife, including songbirds, in a number of ways.

Among them:

- It allows more tolerant, nuisance or exotic species to infiltrate and colonize an area; and
- It increases mortality of intolerant species due to predation or parasitism by the invading tolerant species.

We can reasonably expect these impacts to occur concurrent with the construction of the Logan Town Power Centre Mall. The tiny cattail marshes built as mitigation wetlands along the existing stretch of Interstate 99 in Blair County are examples of this type of mitigation – mitigation that cannot replace what has been lost. These manmade wetlands have almost no ecological value. It would be presumptuous of anyone to claim otherwise.

The conservation vision of tomorrow is to stop this fragmentation and to reconnect our ridgetop forests with corridors of wildlands.

Many PSO members are likewise familiar with such places close to their home towns. Activists should be standing in opposition to development on our ridgetop forests. But more than that, we should be vocal advocates for public acquisition of these remaining high-quality forests.

Most of us may never visit the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. But it still holds intrinsic value to us. The same could be said of the great sweeping Appalachian forests still extant in Pennsylvania.

Research on the effects of habitat fragmentation tells us unequivocally that the value of a chopped-up forest is substantially less for many species than it is when whole. A good bird-watching site is not necessarily the same as a good place for birds.

We need to pull together on this and other conservation issues. Too much has already been lost. We need to reach out to other outdoor lovers – whether angler, hunter, spelunker, wildlife photographer, or hiker. We need to be vocal advocates for the preservation of wild Pennsylvania.

Conservation biologists agree that connecting wildlands with corridors is the best way to protect our natural heritage and breeding habitat for migratory birds.

Giving up the high-quality forest of Brush Mountain and its dependent fish and wildlife populations solely to support new retailing opportunities is clearly not in the best interest of the Commonwealth's fish and wildlife resources – resources that belong to all Pennsylvanians



Birders' Workshops Offered

Audubon PA will again be offering Birders' Workshops for intermediate and advanced birders to gain identification skills and learn monitoring protocols used in conducting studies of bird identity, abundance, distribution, and productivity on Pennsylvania's Important Bird Areas.

A workshop will be held on March 8 in the Pittsburgh area and on April 5 at Montour Preserve in Montour County. Presenters will include Steve Hoffman, Director of Bird Conservation and Rob Blye, IBA Coordinator, Audubon, PA; and Mr. Empidonax, aka Doug Gross, our own PSO president. More details will follow but mark these dates on your calendar.

Pennsylvania Wildlands Conference 2003

The Pennsylvania Wildlands Conference will be held on February 1, 2003, at the Penn Stater Conference Center in State College. Speakers include Dave Foreman, chairman of the Wildlands Project, and Ed Perry, retired assistant supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Pennsylvania Field Office. Advance registration fee \$30. Display space available for conservation groups. For information and registration forms, contact Alan Gregory, PO Box 571, Conyngham PA 18219-0571; e-mail meg5@psu.edu.

Ed Perry Retires (continued from page)

whose "special" interests, more often than not, collide with those of their constituents. Perry has always put science ahead of bunk, hard data ahead of clamor, fish and wildlife ahead of profit and greed.

When Nescopeck Creek in Luzerne County was threatened, he came to its rescue – along the way guiding local folks who correctly believed that too much would be lost should a dam shackle the stream. These lands are protected today as Nescopeck State Park, a PSO Special Area Project site.

Countless wetlands would have been lost to the boosters of economic growth and job creation had this federal scientist with a white hat not ridden to their rescue. When PennDOT placed a bullseye on Bald Eagle Mountain, one of the prettiest and greenest ridges anywhere in the Appalachians, it was Ed Perry who led the conservation charge.

Here's to Mr. Ed Perry, a friend and a hero of wild Pennsylvania. May more heroes of nature follow.



The Conservation Corner

As members of PSO already know, the PA General Assembly adjourned for the year but not without some attempted last minute shenanigans. Attempts to get a bill passed that would have prevented local government from passing controls on factory farms failed in the House even though it had passed in the Senate. Thus, local communities can still choose to regulate these factory farms and try to prevent the pollution of waterways from periodic manure spills.

Another bill that was advanced by the PA Builders Association would have restricted the ability of local governments to buy open space. The conservation community opposed this bill and notified the members of the House of their concerns. When it became apparent to the House leadership that there weren't enough votes to pass the bill, the bill was not brought up for a vote. And finally, an amendment to a homeland security bill that would have exempted oil and gas operations from some provisions of the Clean Streams Law and would have allowed drilling in high quality and exceptional value watersheds was defeated in the House.

Why mention these bills? Because birding by itself isn't enough to protect and promote our hobby and the birds we care for. Action on our part is called for, and clearly we can make a difference. By joining with other conservationists, we can and do make a difference as illustrated by the defeat of these bad bills.

So in closing this Corner, I would like to quote Kenn Kaufman's thought- as stated in a recent Conservation Through Birding e-mail. Kenn wrote, "Yes, monitoring is important, but you don't just monitor the patient so that you'll know when they've died. Monitoring is not the same as taking action. My fear is that birders will say that they don't have time to write to their congressperson, write to the newspaper, attend that public hearing, teach that beginners' class, track down that shade-grown coffee, pull invasive plants, support that candidate, or write that check for land preservation, because they're too busy counting birds. Monitoring is meaningless without real action. Let's have both."

Kenn, I couldn't have said it better. Thanks to all PSO members who have written letters, made calls, or in some way taken real action. We did make a difference in Pennsylvania, and we can in the future if we keep taking action.

- Mark Henry

Bluebird Annual Conference to Be Held in the Poconos

The Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania (BSP) will host its fourth annual statewide conference on March 8, 2003, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at The Shawnee Inn and Golf Resort, Shawnee-on-the-Delaware, PA. Anyone interested in attracting bluebirds is welcome to attend. In addition to the featured speakers listed below, informal roundtable discussions will cover everything you need to know to experience success with bluebirds. Topics will include the natural history and habits of the bird, nest box placement and design, predator control, and other beneficial birds such as chickadees and Tree Swallows that might use your box. Wildlife exhibits, live and silent auctions, a raffle, vendors, food, and the good company of fellow birders will make this an enjoyable and informative day. Our featured speakers are:

Keith Kridler - "For the Love of Bluebirds"
Brian Hardiman - "Wanderings of a Naturalist"
Karen Lippy - "Twenty Years on the Trail - An Ongoing Comedy"

Keith Kridler has been an active bluebirder since age 10. He has been involved with national research on nest boxes, predator guards, traps, winter feeding, and many other issues that affect bluebird survival. He has written hundreds of articles for newsletters and co-authors the monthly newsletter, "The Bluebird News." He is the co-author of the recent book, *The Bluebird Monitor's Guide*, written in conjunction with the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and The North American Bluebird Society. He has also appeared on The Nashville Network to discuss bluebird conservation issues.

Brian Hardiman is a Naturalist with the Monroe County Environmental Education Center. He has served as Interpretative Ranger with the National Park Service at Delaware Water Gap National Recreational Area and has been part of research projects relating to Bald Eagles, Spotted Owls, and Peregrine Falcons throughout the continental United States. His presentation will highlight the birds, flora, and fauna of the Pocono Mountains area during all seasons of the year.

Karen Lippy is the BSP Newsletter Editor and Education Chair. She has been a trail monitor at Codorus State Park since 1983, coordinating 14 monitors for the park's 170 nest boxes that have fledged more than 3,000 bluebirds over the years. Her presentation is a mostly humorous look at the strange critters that have inhabited boxes at the park.

The conference registration fee is \$22 per person (\$25 after 1/15/03). For further information about this event or more information about bluebirds, please contact: BSP, PO Box 267, Enola, PA 17025-0267, on the web at <http://www.users.voicenet.com/~cnsnum/> or call 717-432-2647 or 717-938-4089.

Coming Events

If your club has any events you would like to see included on this page, please mail details to bcoriole@twd.net.

Monday, December 9 – Members' Night in Room 244 of the Peirce Science Center at Clarion University. Meet at 7:00 p.m. for conversation and refreshments. Program starts at 7:30 p.m. (Seneca Rocks Audubon Society)

Thursday, December 19 – *Waterbirds of the American Southeast* will be presented by Chuck Tague (412-488-8760) at the Community Presbyterian Church, 7501 Church Avenue in Ben Avon. Covered dish dessert will be served at 7:00, followed by the program at 7:30 p.m. (Wissahickon Nature Club)

Saturday, January 11– Birding Outing to Peace Valley Park, Bucks Co., led by Rick White (215-483-9321). Beginners welcome. Meet 8:00 a.m. at the Peace Valley Nature Center on Chapman Road. (Wyncote Audubon Society)

Saturday, January 11– The West Penn Trail in Westmoreland and Indiana counties, led by Len and Linda Hess (724-639-3236). Meet at the Windmill Restaurant located on Route 22 about 4 miles west of Blairsville at 8:00 a.m. This will be a 1.75 mile flat, easy walk along the Conemaugh River. (Todd Bird Club)

Wednesday, January 15 – *Important Bird Areas* will be the topic of Steve Hoffman's talk at Botany Hall next to Phipps Conservatory in Schenley Park, in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh at 7:30 p.m. (Three Rivers Birding Club)

Monday, January 20 – Members' Night. Our members share their slides, poetry, etc. at Dallas United Methodist Church, at 7:30 p.m. (Greater Wyoming Valley Audubon)

Sunday, January 26– Winter Ecology Walk, led by Tom Pearson. Meet at the causeway parking lot in Keystone State Park at 9:30 a.m. In case of inclement weather, check with Karen Jackson (724-668-7421) for possible cancellation. (Westmoreland Bird Club)

Saturday, February 8 – Cook Forest and the Piney Tract, led by Mike Leahy (814-797-2287). Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the Cook Forest park office. (Three Rivers Birding Club)

Friday, February 21 – Program entitled *E-Birding* will be presented by Mike Powers, Coordinator of Cornell E-birds Project. Birding Hotlines, Specialized Listserves, Rare Bird Reports and various Citizen Science Projects have grown tremendously in the past few years thanks to the networking possibilities of the internet. Learn more about this exciting aspect of birding at the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education, located in the Roxborough section of Philadelphia at 7:30 p.m. (Wyncote Audubon Society)

Data Needed

Tom Dick is compiling a checklist for Shawnee State Park for park visitors. If you have any bird

records for this park, please mail the information to him at 123 Hummer Lane, Cairnbrook, PA 15924 or e-mail it to thomasd102@aol.com.



PSO Newsletter

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2469 Hammertown Road
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Answers to Bird Quiz on page 11:

1. Ruddy Duck.
2. Red-breasted Nuthatch
3. Swainson's Warbler, *Limnothlypis*. From the Greek *limne*, meaning "a marsh" and *thlypis*, "a type of finch."
4. Great Black-backed Gull was named for the slow, deliberate pace it sets.
5. Evening Grosbeak.



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