

PSO Newsletter



July 2003

The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

Volume 14, Number 2

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK....

A Flute's Journey to Friendly Grounds

Early one morning in May, I heard flute-like notes of a Wood Thrush in the woods behind our house. He was declaring his return to our hill after several months of absence. It was the first one I had heard since last November when my wife and I encountered many in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. As we walked trails in the archeological zone of Palenque, I heard the distinctive "rat-a-tat" call notes of Wood Thrushes many times – much more often than I heard many of the local resident birds eagerly sought by birders visiting the tropics. I had similar experiences in the Lacandon rainforest near the Usamacinta River and in previous visits to Tikal archeological zone in the Peten state of Guatemala. Wood Thrushes are locally abundant in southern Mexico and northern Central America in winter months. The region is crucial to the continued existence of the species, one of the most characteristic and charismatic denizens of Pennsylvania's summer forests. Of course, Wood Thrush is not the only gringo bird found at places like Palenque. While sitting on our porch, we enjoyed Kentucky Warblers and Louisiana Waterthrushes flying and walking across our veranda. I enjoyed watching and taking notes on Yellow-bellied Flycatchers at Palenque and Yaxchilan where the "moss tyrant" is fairly common in winter.

Last fall, we spent a night in a native village in the Lacandon rainforest. It was a real adventure that sounds romantic, wild, and exotic. The cabin was damp, dark, and claustrophobic. We were awakened by the sounds of the village roosters, not native wild birds. The machete had done its work, so most of the surrounding landscape did not resemble a rainforest. The only Great Curassows to be found were caged in town, kept for a future meal. The macaws once regularly observed in the Lacandon, can be heard only in the

distance now. Roads were built deep into the rainforest. Shops (*tiendes*), loggers, and farmers followed. Where big forest once grew, mud and corn stubble cover the landscape. Where forest remained, trogons and Wood Thrushes shared the woods with the second species more common than the first.

The winds blowing across the Gulf of Mexico and the Yucatan brought thrushes back north to us. Wood Thrushes spend more of their life "down there" than up here. More than 420 species of birds found in North America spend part of their lives below the border. Like most Nearctic-Neotropical migrants, the range of the Wood Thrush is more restricted on the winter grounds than on the summer breeding grounds. No matter what we do to conserve the forests where they nest in North America, a concerted conservation plan for the winter grounds is necessary for the continued survival of this species.

Ecotourism is a powerful economic force in Meso-America. Planes and ships full of Europeans, Americans, and Canadians dump tourists on *El Mundo Maya* (the Mayan World) where toucans, tacos, and pyramids preside. My wife and I heard dozens of foreign languages in Palenque and San Cristobol de las Casas, favorite tourist destinations for many tour groups and independent travelers. The presence of so many tourists is a prime motivation for conserving forests that surround archeological sites. There are forests around Chichen Itza, Coba, Uxmal, Kabah, Labna, and Xunantunich. In fact, if you stand on top of El Castillo, the great pyramid in the middle of Chichen Itza, you can see forest for miles around. Motmots, tanagers, and thrushes abound. If given half a chance, aborigine cultures conserve natural resources, including birds. They can resist the many forces of our material culture if the opportunities are available. We can help make those opportunities happen either directly through organizational interaction or by the market forces of our trade and commerce (that is, birding down there where it counts).

Much of the landscape around each archeological zone is maintained as a park which is very convenient for the thousands of birders who visit the region every year. Where green tourism goes, green conservation follows. There are economic incentives to conserve the scenery and habitat supporting birds. Without it, exploitation of resources can go unabated. International conservation organizations work in partnership with many local and national groups in Latin America. Much of the good work is done independently of North American interests because of the stewardship fostered locally. Organizations like *Pronatura* and *Arcoiris* advance conservation on many levels including the all-important public education. Yet, the interaction between organizations fosters more progress. Cooperation is a key to successful conservation planning and implementation. Thus, we have so many organizations linked under the Partners in Flight umbrella.

After the September 11th tragedy, many Americans took an "us versus them" attitude toward the rest of the world. American tourists also have contracted a "fear of flying" condition that has nearly bankrupted many airlines and tour agencies. Many Americans have turned inward, retreating into isolationism. Our country cannot afford to take that attitude in any aspect of engagement. We share too much with our neighbors to be able to isolate ourselves. If nothing else, the economies of neighboring countries intertwine with ours too deeply. The United States is not an economic island, much less an ecological one. The ties that bind us are too numerous and strong to ignore. We cannot afford to hide behind our unreasonable fears and patriotic excuses. There is a big world out there, and most of it is safe for Americans to visit. This is especially true of this hemisphere which shares most of our birds and much of our culture.

More than ever before, we need to engage the rest of the world with open arms and good intentions. The world will treat us as friends if we act as friends. We cannot afford to do otherwise. We have too much to lose. In addition to the obvious economic and political benefits for remaining engaged in tourism throughout the hemisphere, our interactions with local commerce will help ensure that the forests of MesoAmerica will not be converted to maize fields or another Cancun. The forests of Tikal, the Yucatan, and the Puuc Hills will need to remain forested for Wood Thrush to survive.

Our own state has a vital role to play in the Neotropical bird connections. I am glad to see ecotour organizations based in Pennsylvania scheduling trips to the Neotropics. Each trip helps teach Americans the value of Neotropical habitats for "American" birds. Mark Bonta, a Pennsylvania native, just published a great birding guide to Honduras (*Birding Honduras, A Checklist and Guide*, co-written with David Armstrong and published by Honduras).

It is outstanding, not only for its well-organized information, but the insight Mark gives the reader into the geographical and cultural aspects of birds in that overlooked Neotropical paradise. Several Pennsylvania educational institutions are engaged in research and education in countries below the border. It would not have been possible without the support of the Republic of Honduras. Our own Terry Master of East Stroudsburg University (host of the 2002 PSO meeting) has produced a site checklist for Estacion Biologica La Suerte in eastern Costa Rica. The Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia has led the way for many decades in the study of Neotropical birds. The completion of *The Birds of Ecuador* by Bob Ridgely can be regarded as nothing less than a monumental achievement for ornithology and bird conservation in that hotbed of biodiversity. Conservation organizations that work in Pennsylvania have been crucial in the fight for Neotropical bird conservation and education. Chief among these have been the Nature Conservancy (Wings of the Americas program) and National Audubon. Both organizations work well in partnerships with a multitude of locally based organizations. No matter what the political climate, these efforts must continue.

I hope to hear the fluted song of the Wood Thrush behind my house for decades to come. For that to be the case, education of citizens and conservation of forests must take place, both up here and "down there." Without each, the flute's journeys will come to an end. Education and conservation are more likely to occur if we remain engaged with the rest of the world as friends and partners.

-- Doug Gross, President

Thanks to Todd Bird Club and the Meeting Committee

On behalf of the PSO membership, I thank the Todd Bird Club, hosts of the 2003 Annual Meeting at Indiana, Pennsylvania. It was a seamless affair thanks to impeccable preparation, hard work, and cooperation. Margaret Higbee organized an exciting set of field trips. Carol Guba handled our hotel arrangements. As always, Shonah Hunter did a great job of registration. Nick Bolgiano organized a very successful series of presentations Saturday afternoon. Past President, Bob Ross, did a great job of coordinating the Earl Poole award.

A big thanks to all of the many contributors to a very successful and enjoyable 15th Annual Meeting.

– Doug Gross

Tiadaghton Audubon Awarded Sweet Foundation Grant to Provide Public Access to IBA Marshlands

The Tiadaghton Audubon Society (TAS) was recently awarded an \$11,500 grant to construct a trail, boardwalk, and wildlife viewing/photography blind on IBA #27, Marsh Creek Wetlands, locally known as The Muck. TAS and former PSO President Bob Ross wrote the grant proposal with a view toward both conservation and public education for the sensitive wetlands, only four miles from Wellsboro and subject to future developmental pressure. The project is consistent with management actions called for by the IBA program. Representing the Sweet Foundation based in Wellsboro, Attorney Lowell Coolidge told Ross the proposal was viewed favorably by the trustees and an award of \$11,500 was granted with the understanding that it will be matched by the Pennsylvania Game Commission (cost and labor for parking lot), PA Audubon (\$5k commitment), and the TAS (\$1k awarded by vote of board). Total request was for \$27,500 including the parking lot, so essentially \$17,500 is available to complete the job, in addition to PGC's contribution of the parking lot.

In addition, the Wellsboro Chamber of Commerce would like to help promote the trail/blind for wildlife/bird watching. Thanks to all who supported the project. Additional help from volunteers will be needed, so let's do what the IBA program calls for, with the Game Commission as a partner. Here is a model for other Audubon, birding, and ornithological clubs to use to generate public support for protecting IBAs in their regions. For more information contact Bob Ross at 570-724-3322x239 (o) or 376-5394 (h).

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Breeding Bird Atlas Coordinator Selected

The Second Breeding Bird Atlas is gaining steam in Pennsylvania. President Gross's editorial in the December 2002 newsletter looked back at our first bird atlas, and speakers at our recent annual meeting addressed various aspects of bird atlasing. Are you getting the idea that this atlas project will be a consuming activity? It's true, but for no one more than for Bob Mulvihill.

I am pleased to formally announce, on behalf of the Steering Committee, that Robert Mulvihill of Powdermill Nature Reserve has been selected as the Project Coordinator for the second Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas! Bob is well known to many of us and should be a familiar name among most of Pennsylvania's active birders. Bob was born, raised, and educated in Pennsylvania, with degrees from the University of Pittsburgh and Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He is currently employed at the Powdermill Nature Reserve as one of two (with Bob Leberman) full-time banders.

Not content with banding, Bob was an active partner in a statewide Louisiana Waterthrush research project involving population biology and foraging ecology. Bob conducts grassland bird surveys as part of the Game Commission's CREP project, and his field experience includes work in the tropics. Bob is a man of many talents. He developed and maintains Powdermill's engaging web page, is an instructor at college-level environmental courses, and has published many papers and book chapters.

Best of all, Bob was an active regional coordinator and worked in nearly 100 atlas blocks during the first atlas. He will be sympathetic to the demands that this project will place on many of you, starting next year!

We are extremely fortunate to have Bob Mulvihill take on the job of Atlas Coordinator. He will be working with Tim O'Connell during this planning phase and will transition from his banding duties to full-time Atlas coordination in September of this year. The Atlas Project will be based at Powdermill, with offices provided by Carnegie Museum!

— Dan Brauning

PSO 2003 Annual Meeting Revisited

by Mark McConaughy

The PSO held its annual meeting in Indiana, Indiana County, on 16 through 18 May 2003. Todd Bird Club hosted the meeting, and they did a wonderful job of organizing the meeting, field trips, attracting good vendors, and providing refreshments (the cookies were great!). Indiana, northern Westmoreland, and Cambria Counties also cooperated by providing a wide range of bird species during the outings.

People started congregating at the Holiday Inn in Indiana on Friday, May 16. (See page 8 for a list of the meeting participants.) It was a time to renew acquaintances and to meet other birders from around the state for the first time. The Friday reception is a great time for folks to meet in person those whom they have known only through their posts on PABIRDS. Everyone is friendly and always happy to talk about birds! The vendor room was also open on Friday night, and there was a nice range of birding related materials available for purchase. These included various types of handmade bird feeders and birdhouses, basketry and ceramic objects with bird themes (e.g., basketry waste baskets, trays with painted bird decorations, plaques, pins, ceramic feeders, ceramic soap dispensers, mugs with bird motifs, glasses, etc.), PSO T-shirts, stuffed (fabric) birds that made the appropriate bird call when squeezed, and nature artwork. On Saturday, Aden Troyer arrived with his display of binoculars and spotting scopes that could also be purchased. After a short business meeting with the election of board members, Friday evening ended with people choosing which field trips they would join on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

Saturday morning arrived, and the weather looked threatening. However, it only occasionally sprinkled on us during the morning field trips, and all were very successful outings. I went on the Yellow Creek hiking field trip that was led by John Taylor, and during the morning's trek through the back woods of the park, we recorded 80 species including 20 species of warblers. Marcy Cunkelman's field trip to West Lebanon-Elders Ridge strip mines was even more successful and recorded 90 species of birds including all of the target grassland species such as Henslow's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Bobolink. They also found many species of warblers in the wooded areas they visited. Other Saturday outings included visits to Blue Spruce County Park, led by Steve Graff; Yellow Creek State Park recreational areas, led by Gloria Lamer and Georgette Syster; Blacklick Valley Natural Area, led by Lee Carnahan and Dory Jacobs; SGL 273, led by Carol Guba;

and the West Penn Trail, led by Len and Linda Hess. Everyone on the field trips had a great time, and the vast majority of the listed target species were found. Check the bird list on page 9 for a list of the species found during the outings.

The Saturday afternoon paper sessions focused largely on the upcoming breeding bird atlas project, and all PSO members were encouraged to participate in the project. Dan Brauning started things off with a description of the original breeding bird atlas project that he led and provided background for the upcoming project. Dan reviewed some of the unexpected discoveries of the first atlas and what might be found during the new project.

Tim O'Connell followed, discussing how the new atlas project will be conducted and how birders can and must help in order for it to be a success. Tim clarified the differences between the two projects emphasizing the importance of checking remote blocks that were only visited a few times during the first atlas project and to make special trips to find nocturnal and other rarely seen species in Pennsylvania.

Bob Mulvihill then talked about changes seen in the species captured during 40 years of bird banding at Powdermill Nature Preserve including the commonest and rarest species captured. Mulvihill also presented a nice tribute to Bob Leberman and his contributions to bird banding through 40 years of work at Powdermill. Bob Mulvihill will be the coordinator for the new atlas project, and it will be interesting to see if the changes noted at Powdermill during the last 40 years apply to the state as a whole.

Michael Carey, who presented the last paper, studied one species, the Field Sparrow, during a period of 15 years in a restricted old field area. The males exhibited a remarkable loyalty to their territories, even when natural plant succession found portions of the field and their territories turning into forests. Young Field Sparrows usually moved away from where they were raised. There also was an interesting lack of cowbird parasitism in the study area. The paper session was well attended, and I'm sure we all learned something new about the birds of Pennsylvania from the presenters.

The Saturday evening banquet provided plenty of good food for all the hungry birders. It was a time to get

together to talk about the events of the day. The after dinner program started off with the presentation of a well-deserved Poole award to Paul Hess for his contributions to Pennsylvania ornithology. Next came the evening tabulation of species seen during the morning field trips. By Saturday evening 136 bird species had been noted by participants on the Saturday field trips. John Dunn from the Pennsylvania Game Commission was the dinner speaker, and he discussed his work with migrating geese and swans on their Canadian breeding grounds. Migrant Canada Goose, Snow Goose, and Tundra Swan populations were examined. He showed the impact that large numbers of breeding Snow Geese are having on the food resources around Hudson Bay. Migrant Canada Geese do not appear to have the same effect on vegetation due to differences in how they feed. It was a very interesting talk. Finally, plans for the Sunday field trips were confirmed, and we all headed for bed.

Sunday morning field trips included visits to State Game Lands 273, led by Carol Guba and Patrick Snickles; Conemaugh Floodlands, led by Lee Carnahan; Blue Spruce County Park, led by Ray Winstead and Steve Graff; Bow Ridge and Conemaugh Dam, led by Len Hess, Linda Hess, and Marcy Cunkelman, and to Prince Gallitzin State Park, led by John Salvetti and Dave Gobert. I went on the trip to Bow Ridge and Conemaugh Dam, where we tabulated 65 bird species including 13 species of warblers. The field trip to State Game Lands 273 found 20 species of warblers including the rarest find of the weekend, a Kirkland's Warbler.

The annual PSO meeting is always fun. Attendees see plenty of birds and learn about the local birding hot spots. There is always something for birders of all levels at the PSO meeting. The Todd Bird Club worked extremely hard to make this year's meeting a great success. I wish to thank them for a wonderful time and for all their efforts organizing the meeting and field trips. Finally, I encourage folks to come to the 2004 meeting at Montour Preserve. You will have a great time!

Paul Hess Receives Earl Poole Award at Annual PSO Meeting

The PSO recognizes, on a annual basis, ornithologists and/or amateur birders who have made outstanding contributions to Pennsylvania ornithology. The Earl Poole Award was established in 1995 and first presented at the Society's Annual Meeting at Penn State Hazleton.

This year's winner of the Earl Poole Award is Paul Hess of Natrona Heights, PA. Paul has made many contributions to our understanding of Pennsylvania's birds during the past several decades. He has published an astonishing 17 feature articles in *Pennsylvania Birds* through 2001, more than any other author. The topics of his articles range from American Tree Sparrow and Red-bellied Woodpecker annual population fluctuations to status of neotropical migrants in Pennsylvania to crossbill and shrike invasions to unusual Pennsylvania records (such as the Hawk Mountain petrel).

Other accomplishments include County Compiler (primarily Butler) for *Pennsylvania Birds* since its beginning; chair of the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee (PORC) 2000 to present; editor of bird occurrence summaries for *Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania (ASWP) Bulletin*; News & Notes column for *Birding* (current); editor of *The Peregrine*, newsletter of the Three Rivers Birding Club; editor of *ASWP Bulletin* in 1970s-1980s; seasonal report contributor for *American Birds*; and Bird Quiz contributor for *PSO Newsletter*. In addition Paul was a mentor to many young birders in western Pennsylvania in the 1970s and 1980s. He also co-produced a checklist of the birds of Butler County. Paul has clearly enriched Pennsylvania ornithology. In addition to the award plaque, the PSO presented him a gift certificate to Barnes and Noble in appreciation of his contributions. His bibliography in the Society's journal is printed below.

Paul Hess's Bibliography

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(continued on page 6)

Paul Hess's Bibliography (*continued from page 5*)

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PSO Bird Quiz

How well do you know your Pennsylvania birds?

1. Three large, similar shorebird species (one with just a single Pennsylvania record) can be identified in flight by their underwing color – one white, one black, and one cinnamon. Name the species and their underwings.
2. What familiar "tyrant" has been known not only to scoop insects from the surface of a pond but also to pick berries from bushes while hovering?
3. Earl Poole in *A Half Century of Bird Life in Berks County* accused the European Starling of being "largely responsible for the marked decrease of several of our native species." What were the species?
4. We know the Laughing Gull by its English name, but another gull is the "laughing gull" in its Latin name. Which species?
5. Name five raptors, three diurnal and two nocturnal, that have notably paler subspecies elsewhere than those we customarily see in Pennsylvania.

(Answers on page 13)

Minutes of the PSO Annual Membership Meeting

May 16, 2003

President Doug Gross called the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology to order at 8:08 p.m. on Friday, May 16, at the Holiday Inn in Indiana, PA.

The minutes of last year's meeting were read. Jack Solomon made a motion to accept the minutes as read. The motion was seconded and approved.

Margaret Higbee reported on the newsletter and asked the field trip leaders to keep a list of birds seen so that the complete list can be published in the June Newsletter. She also asked for members to write articles for the newsletter. Doug thanked Margaret for the excellent newsletter and for publishing it on time.

Gene Zielinski gave the treasurer's report. He stated as of May 5, 2003, there was \$16,819.38 in the checking account. This amount should increase as renewals are received. The approximate breakdown of the sources of income follow:

77% Dues
7% Contributions
12% Annual Meeting

Our expenses are:

58% <i>Pennsylvania Birds</i>
17% Newsletter
8% Annual Meeting
5% Brochures
5% Website

Frank Haas made a motion that the treasurer's report be approved. The motion was seconded by Chris Turn and passed.

Dan Brauning, as the chairman of the transition committee for *PA Birds*, thanked Frank and Barb Haas for their continuing help with the journal. Dan stated that there will be some changes coming. Nick Pulcinella will be the new editor as Katrina Knight will be resigning. The spring 2002 issue will be published soon, and the next issue will combine the summer and fall seasons for 2002 so that the journal can get back on schedule.

Doug briefly discussed SAP. There are now 6,315 field trips from 118 locations in the database. He encouraged everyone to continue gathering data for their area and any

other areas of public land not currently surveyed. The next checklist to be published will be for Cooks Forest State Park.

Steve Hoffman presented the nominations for the Board of Directors positions that need to be filled. The following names were presented:

Linda Wagner
Deuane Hoffman
Rob Blye

Flo McGuire was added as a candidate by a nomination from the floor. Frank moved that the nominations be closed. Chris Turn moved that the candidates be accepted by acclamation. Frank seconded the motion, and it was approved.

Steve mentioned that anyone involved with an IBA will be receiving a packet that explains how to enter the information on E-bird.

Jon Beam of Montour Preserve presented some basic information about next year's meeting site. The preserve is owned and funded by PPL. Lands accessible for the meeting include 966 acres in the preserve and an additional 5000 acres owned by the company. Meeting facilities are available at the preserve, but it will be necessary to leave the premises unless the banquet is catered.

Shonah Hunter explained the silent auction. Bids will be taken through the social hour on Saturday and then the highest bidder will be informed at the banquet. Six items have been donated. Tim O'Connell donated four books; Len Hess, a print from the Wild Turkey Federation; and the Dill-weed Bed and Breakfast, one night's accommodation.

The field trips were then discussed to acquaint everyone with the various habitats, trip leaders, and target species for each outing.

At the end of the meeting, all persons present introduced themselves and stated the county he or she is from.

The meeting adjourned at 9:04.

Respectfully submitted

Roger V. Higbee, Secretary

PSO Annual Meeting Participants

Jon Beam	Sarah Gerrish	Ramsay Koury	Nancy Smeltzer
Joe Bishop	Cindy Gilmore	Janet Kuehl	Julia Snickles
Rob Blye	Shirley Glessner	Thomas Kuehl	Monica Snickles
Jean Blystone	David Gobert	Sherri LaBar	Patrick Snickles
Vernon Blystone	Steve Graff	Gloria Lamer	Jack Solomon
Nick Bolgiano	Phil Grant	Robert Machesney	Sue Solomon
Dan Brauning	Doug Gross	Eric Marchbein	John Somonick
Margaret Buckwalter	Carol Guba	Mark McConaughy	Scott Speedy
Dick Byers	Michael Guba	Carol McCullough	Claire Staples
Michael Carey	Barb Haas	Fred McCullough	Georgette Syster
Lee Carnahan	Frank Haas	Flo McGuire	John Taylor
Roger Carnahan	Len Hess	James McGuire	Aden Troyer
Robert Cook	Linda Hess	Ronald Montgomery	Chris Turn
Ruth Cook	Paul Hess	Marilyn Moore	Genevieve Tvrlik
Dan Cunkelman	Margaret Higbee	Bob Mulvihill	Jim Valimont
Marcy Cunkelman	Roger Higbee	Sue Myers	Mary Walsh
John Dunn	Steve Hoffman	Tim O'Connell	Philip Walsh
Betsy Fetterman	Shonah Hunter	Willis Ratzlaff	Larry Waltz
Jed Fetterman	Dori Jacobs	Carol Reigle	Brenda Watts
Wendy Fetterman	Joe Jacobs	Peter Robinson	Don Watts
Michael Fialkovich	Patricia Johner	Bob Ross	Ray Winstead
Bruce Fortman	Linda Jones	John Salvetti	Greg Zawrotny
Kevin Fryberger	Sharon Kanareff	Allen Schweinsberg	Robin Zawrotny
Randi Gerrish	Rudy Keller	Joanne Schweinsberg	Gene Zielinski

Coming Events

Monday, July 7 – 7:30 p.m. at the Phipps Garden Center in the Shadyside section of Pittsburgh. Jerry McWilliams will present a slide show featuring his best slides from various areas of the United States including Machias Seal Island in New Brunswick, the Dry Tortugas of Florida, and the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Three Rivers Birding Club.

Saturday, August 16 – 9:00 a.m. Shorebird outing. Meet leader Mark McConaughy at 9:00 a.m. at the rest area on I-79 between Exit 130 and Exit 141. We'll travel to Miller's Pond and other points north in search of shorebirds. Bring lunch. Westmoreland Bird and Nature Club.

Tuesday, September 2 – 7:30 p.m. Members' Night Meeting at Blue Spruce Lodge in Blue Spruce County Park. Bring slides, photos, or a story to share. For more information, contact Roger Higbee (724-354-3493). Todd Bird Club.

Monday, September 8 – 7:30 p.m. at the Phipps Garden Center in the Shadyside section of Pittsburgh. Steve Hoffman will discuss hawk identification. Three Rivers Birding Club.

PSO T-Shirts for Sale

At our annual meeting we sold PSO T-shirts. These Fruit of the Loom T-shirts are 50 percent cotton and 50 percent polyester; the color is natural. On the front is the circular PSO emblem. The state with the Pileated Woodpecker flying across it adorns the back below the print "Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology." The pileated's red crest adds a bit of color to the shirt. Still available are sizes large, X-large, and one 2X. Please contact Linda Wagner (724-657-0867 or lwagner342@aol.com) if you are interested in ordering one of these shirts. Cost is \$19.50 including shipping.



Birds Listed at 2003 PSO Meeting

Common Loon	Chimney Swift	Carolina Wren	American Redstart
Double-crested Cormorant	Ruby-thrtd Hummingbird	House Wren	Worm-eating Warbler
Great Blue Heron	Belted Kingfisher	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Ovenbird
Great Egret	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Northern Waterthrush
Green Heron	Downy Woodpecker	Eastern Bluebird	Louisiana Waterthrush
Turkey Vulture	Hairy Woodpecker	Swainson's Thrush	Kentucky Warbler
Canada Goose	Northern Flicker	Hermit Thrush	Common Yellowthroat
Wood Duck	Pileated Woodpecker	Wood Thrush	Hooded Warbler
Mallard	Olive-sided Flycatcher	American Robin	Wilson's Warbler
Green-winged Teal	Eastern Wood-Pewee	Gray Catbird	Canada Warbler
Red-breasted Merganser	Acadian Flycatcher	Northern Mockingbird	Yellow-breasted Chat
Osprey	Willow Flycatcher	Brown Thrasher	Scarlet Tanager
Northern Harrier	Least Flycatcher	European Starling	Eastern Towhee
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Eastern Phoebe	Cedar Waxwing	Chipping Sparrow
Cooper's Hawk	Great Crested Flycatcher	Blue-winged Warbler	Field Sparrow
Red-shouldered Hawk	Eastern Kingbird	Golden-winged Warbler	Savannah Sparrow
Broad-winged Hawk	Blue-headed Vireo	"Brewster's" warbler	Grasshopper Sparrow
Red-tailed Hawk	Yellow-throated Vireo	Tennessee Warbler	Henslow's Sparrow
American Kestrel	Warbling Vireo	Nashville Warbler	Song Sparrow
Ring-necked Pheasant	Philadelphia Vireo	Northern Parula	Swamp Sparrow
Ruffed Grouse	Red-eyed Vireo	Yellow Warbler	White-crowned Sparrow
Wild Turkey	Blue Jay	Chestnut-sided Warbler	Dark-eyed Junco
N. Bobwhite	American Crow	Magnolia Warbler	Northern Cardinal
Killdeer	Fish Crow	Black-thrtd Blue Warbler	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Solitary Sandpiper	Common Raven	Yellow-rumped Warbler	Indigo Bunting
Spotted Sandpiper	Tree Swallow	Black-thrtd Green Warbler	Bobolink
Least Sandpiper	N. Rough-winged Swallow	Blackburnian Warbler	Red-winged Blackbird
Dunlin	Bank Swallow	Yellow-throated Warbler	Eastern Meadowlark
Ring-billed Gull	Cliff Swallow	Pine Warbler	Common Grackle
Forster's Tern	Barn Swallow	Kirtland's Warbler	Brown-headed Cowbird
Black Tern	Black-capped Chickadee	Prairie Warbler	Orchard Oriole
Rock Dove	Tufted Titmouse	Bay-breasted Warbler	Baltimore Oriole
Mourning Dove	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Blackpoll Warbler	Purple Finch
Black-billed Cuckoo	White-breasted Nuthatch	Cerulean Warbler	House Finch
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Brown Creeper	Black-and-white Warbler	American Goldfinch
Common Nighthawk			House Sparrow

Total = 141 species + 1 hybrid

Bird Walk

by Alan Gregory

Twenty-some of the last 30 days were rain days. Finally, Friday afternoon brought sunshine. It was time for a long walk – a “power walk” some might call it. The start time? Six p.m.

“Kestrel” the Sheltie already had her afternoon walk. Now it was time for me to solo. This didn’t start out to be a bird walk. Anytime I can get out for a long, fast walk, I take the opportunity. My desk-bound job provides plenty of finger exercise but little else. Down the street I head. A left turn at the corner, then another right and I’m walking by the little unnamed tributary to Little Nescopeck Creek.

There are still fish in the stream – dace perhaps – despite all the insults townsfolk hurl at it: lawn fertilizers, petroleum residue, salt and rocks from snowmelt, litter, grass clippings. Soon I turn left and begin a 200-yard dash down to an old stone bridge that crosses the Little Nescopeck – dead for nearly a century from acid mine drainage.

Along the way I catch bits of birdsong above the racket of passing cars and trucks. On the left are robin, Chipping Sparrow, starling and a Carolina Wren. On the right are phoebe, more chippers and more robins – and a flock of Cedar Waxwings. This species began nesting commonly in town five or six years ago, and now a few

nesting pairs are evident along each street in the one square-mile borough. Across the bridge now, a House Wren belts out its song from within the jungle of silky dogwood, multiflora rose, skunk cabbage, and spicebush abutting the upstream guardrail.

Now the road, a busy two-laner, begins a gentle climb out of town into a rural area of farmland and a few scattered homes. The sun is shining brightly now and I'm watching – without luck – for butterflies. Perhaps the almost daily rain storms have killed developing larvae, shutting the spring flight of roadside species like the Cabbage White. Off to the left – from somewhere in the stubble of a developing no-till cornfield – a Killdeer calls while in flight. I'm not wearing the glasses prescribed to me more than a year ago, and thus I'm unable to spot the bird above the horizon. Now at the T-junction with Frederick Road, I turn left. Ahead is the best part of the route, some grassland, shrub, and forest habitat. But this isn't part of a Breeding Bird Survey route. And there are no Breeding Bird Census plots nearby. No point counts, no transects, no roadside survey. Still, this forgotten corner – a mix of human-manipulated habitats and natural woods, shrub rows, and streams – has its own mix of birds and other wildlife.

Now, another home behind me, I stride past a row of hemlock trees. All are infested with the woolly adelgid; and despite the shiny green sprigs of new growth, all are dying a slow death. What will happen in the coming years to the remaining brook trout streams in these parts – waterways shaded by the cooling boughs of hemlocks?

Now I break out into an open area – a 15-degree hillside sloping up and away on the right and a field of grasses and wildflowers on my left. Up springs a Red-winged Blackbird, no doubt from the very spot where a nest overflowing with nestlings sits amid the stalks of grass and flowering yellow hawkweed. Further away from the ribbon of asphalt, a Bobolink calls. And there's the faint sound of a Savannah Sparrow ("take, take, take it eassyyyyy," is the apt way a friend who calls the Adirondacks home once described this species' song. I think he's right).

Now I approach a right-hand turn in the road and enter the cool confines of a woodlot – studded with big white oaks, a few eastern white pines (including one giant with a girth of 12 feet), and smaller white ashes, hickories, and other oaks. A catbird calls from the shrubby understory, replaced a few yards further by a yellowthroat. Up in the canopy, are chickadees, a White-breasted Nuthatch, and a Downy Woodpecker. This woodlot is increasingly one of the few spots in our valley where one can find a half-dozen bird species. Increasingly, the natural countryside of the Nescopeck Creek valley is giving way to the sterile manmade landscape of lawns, parking lots, and expensive-looking homes with three-car garages and mulch volcanoes. From the

front lawns of some, fly the American flag. I wonder what these people think patriotism is all about. To me, the native land is America, and those who're striving to save it – conservationists – are far more deserving of being called "patriots" than the bumper sticker crowd.

A hundred yards later, I break into the sunshine, and the road veers left and begins a swing through the Haz-Wald Farm of Dale "Spike" Frederick and his wife, Eunice. Good people, the Fredericks are. The meadow on the left – behind a horse-proof fence – shelters a few meadowlarks. I hear one now. There's the plaintiff song echoing over the waves of grass – grass made tall and thick by all the rain that's fallen this spring. Now I'm hiking uphill again – past a field newly planted with potatoes and a hedgerow of mature maples. Two winters ago, the Fredericks harvested sap from these and other trees on their family's heirloom land. I wonder how much syrup they got from the task of boiling down the sap? Finally, an orange sulphur butterfly jets past me – flying over the tops of mustard plants growing in the roadside ditch. Then a cabbage white follows suit. Two butterfly species. It's been a slow spring for butterfly watchers.

I come now to the junction with East County Road. It's a busy thoroughfare that feeds new home after new home that have sprung up on former farmland in Butler Township. Once a pretty valley of farmland and historic farm houses, only one dairy farm is left. And the Christmas tree farm of Bob Kashubski and his family is now hemmed in on three sides by sprawling subdivisions. Kashubski has talked recently of preserving his land by selling development rights. But it's a gamble of time and money. Luzerne County gets only about \$500,000 a year to preserve farms. That's barely enough to save two, perhaps three spreads. Many times as much is spent to build and maintain new roads in the valley. A right turn, and I begin trekking uphill a bit before going down the other side of a small hill. Off to the left I hear a mockingbird. A glance reveals its song post – the top of a Norway spruce growing on the edge of a three-acre lot of house and barnyard. Now I step out on the level and eventually arrive at the turnaround point – two miles from home. A riding mower plies its way across a lawn at the intersection with Walp Road. I put my index fingers in my ears to keep the noise from penetrating too much and make my 180-degree turn.

Had I kept notes, I suspect I could have logged 30 or more bird species. This isn't the best place to go birding. It's not on the local map of hotspots. And a rare species here would be a common one elsewhere. But it's still country. And it's a rapidly disappearing corner of America. We could do ourselves – and wildlife – a lot of good by saving such places. With the sun sinking ever lower on the horizon toward Bloomsburg, I head home, straining all the while to catch a snippet of birdsong not heard on the way out.

The Raven Reporter

Tales of Discovery from the Special Areas Project



Volunteers of the Special Areas Project have contributed more than 6300 field trips for 128 locations throughout the state. In this issue of the *Raven Reporter*, I will review a few of the DCNR Natural and Wild Areas that have been explored by birders contributing to this project database. This is just a taste of the wildest parts of Pennsylvania. It should give you an appetite to do some of your own exploration. We hope that you also contribute some bird inventory data to the database. Bird data would be appreciated for any of DCNR Natural and Wild Areas, including those briefly described here. For most of these sites, we have fewer than ten field trips. In 2003, the PSO urges you to explore more of the state in anticipation of next year's breeding bird atlas. Making a few field trips to a remote natural area is a great tune-up for Atlas work and an escape from the doldrums of your regular summer routine.

Wolf Run Wild Area

The Wolf Run Wild Area is one of the most remote and wild areas of the Commonwealth. It lies in the Pine Creek watershed north of Cammal in the northern limits of Tiadaghton State Forest. It contains 7,716 acres in northwestern Lycoming County. Near Pine Creek, the streamside forest is dominated by sycamore, black walnut, and red maple. Most of the wild area comprises several hollows of tributaries to Pine Creek. This includes Wolf Run, Bonnell Run, and the Sebring Branch. In the hollows, hemlocks, white pines, oaks, ashes, and sugar maples prevail. In fall, the golden leaves of sugar maple cast a magical spell and make this one of the most scenic areas of the state.

The Golden Eagle Trail provides access to most of Wolf Run Natural Area. The Golden Eagle makes a loop up Wolf Run and down Bonnell Run through the natural area and part of adjacent Game Lands 68. Two vistas, appropriately called Wolf's Rock and Raven's Horn, give great views of the magnificent upper Pine Creek landscape. In addition to the natural features, there are remnants of an old quarry, an old camp stove, and log skids. According to Tom Thwaites, this is one of the best day hikes in Pennsylvania.

I have taken it a few times and would have a hard time disagreeing with Tom's assessment.

When Nick Bolgiano visited Wolf Run last July, he found lots of vireos and warblers. The most common species was Red-eyed Vireo followed by Black-throated Green Warbler. Hermit Thrush was the most common thrush. Cosmopolitan forest birds like Eastern Towhee and Dark-eyed Junco were among the most common species, but the species list was rounded out by conifer specialists like Blue-headed Vireo as well as Magnolia, Blackburnian, and Yellow-rumped Warblers. The species list included the Watch-Listed Black-throated Blue Warbler. In my own hikes along the Golden Eagle, I distinctly remembered the Winter Wrens hiding among the rocks and trees of Bonnell and Wolf Run. Ravens croaked overhead each time I have visited Wolf Run. I won't ruin the fun by giving you the whole list. Visit the site yourself and contribute data to our limited records.

Hammersley Fork Natural Area

Shared by Potter and Clinton Counties, the huge Hammersley Fork Wild Area comprises 30,253 acres of Pennsylvania wilderness. As such, it is one of the largest blocks of forest in the state. It is part of Susquehannock State Forest near Cross Forks along Route 144. The wild area was timbered in the period from 1906 to 1910. As a testament to that era, there are many old logging railroad grades and roads crisscrossing the wild area, providing access into almost every hollow. It is a hiker's dream since no motorized vehicles are allowed in the area. This area is a popular destination of fly fishermen who want to experience the wildest cold water trout streams in the state.

Despite its compelling features, little is recorded about the birds found at Hammersley Wild Area. There is only one field trip in the SAP database provided by Nick Bolgiano. This one trip was a real eye-opener. Hammersley is chock-full of forest interior birds. This is the kind of place where you can reacquaint yourself with those warblers that may just pass through your neighborhood and nest somewhere else. Nick found ten species of warblers breeding in just one trip on foot. Black-throated Green Warbler, Ovenbird, and American Redstart were the most common warblers. Like other wild areas, conifer species were well represented by good numbers of Blackburnian and Magnolia Warblers. Nick found four breeding tyrant flycatchers with Least Flycatcher the most common. There aren't many places in our state where Least is the most common tyrant. As for thrushes, there were four species with Veery as the most common! (I suspect there might be Swainson's Thrushes, too, if more territory were covered.) To tempt flatlanders to this mountain retreat, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was the most common woodpecker, and Common Raven the most common corvid.

Many Aprils ago I camped with friends along the Hammersley Fork. I did keep my field notes from that trip, but I distinctly remember seeing and hearing numerous Louisiana Waterthrushes and Winter Wrens along the streams.

More trips to the Hammersley will undoubtedly yield much more. With that much mature forest, this wild area is undoubtedly very important to Pennsylvania's birds.

Forrest Dutlinger Natural Area

It was a happy day for me when I received from Nick Bolgiano data that he collected in this fascinating natural area. Forrest Dutlinger comprises 1521 acres in northern Clinton County near the Potter County line. It also has been known as "Beech Bottom Hollow Natural Area" and is accessed on a same-named trail. On the west side of Hammersley Fork stream, most of the natural area is mature second-growth northern hardwoods, especially American beech and oaks. The Wild Area includes a 160-acre old growth forest with several ancient hemlocks. Some of these hemlocks exceed 40 inches in diameter and stand over 100 feet high. Literature published by DCNR states that there are white (or canoe) birches here as well.

We have only one field trip in our data base from this remote and ancient forest. Nick found Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, and Magnolia Warblers to be quite common. Other typical old growth forest birds like Brown Creeper were also discovered. Many birders would be surprised to find Acadian Flycatcher. This *Empidonax* flycatcher can be found in high quality riparian forest this far north. More visits would certainly add to the species list. I suspect that this might be one of the places where the rare Swainson's Thrush could be found breeding.

Algerine Swamp Natural Area

High in the Pine Creek watershed, Algerine Swamp is a boreal wetland with black spruce and balsam fir. It is an 84-acre area in the extreme northwest part of Tiadaghton State Forest next to Gamble Run Road on the Lycoming - Tioga county border. It is a fragile ecosystem that does not support much foot traffic. Sphagnum moss covers most of the ground making it a challenge for the walking birder. The sphagnum quakes beneath your feet like jello. It is easy to fall through the peat and get sucked down into wetness below. Among the wetland plants dotting the mossy ground are predatory sundews and pitcher plants.

I have visited Algerine Swamp only a few times. On one of my trips, I spotted a Bald Eagle circling overhead. I was searching for Yellow-bellied Flycatchers here but found

breeding Least Flycatchers instead. There are nesting Red-breasted Nuthatches, Purple Finches, Magnolia Warblers, Blackburnian Warblers, and others. This swamp supports many birds associated with conifers. A few rarities can be found here, including Mourning Warbler and White-throated Sparrows. If you arrive early enough, you will be greeted by the ethereal song of the Hermit Thrush, one of the swamp's most common birds. Indeed, when you walk (or bounce) across this peatland, you feel as if you were visiting a "little bit of Maine" in Pennsylvania. It is such a rare habitat in our state that it deserves more visits from adventurous birders. It is worth the trip just to smell the odor of young balsam firs in Pennsylvania. Quite a treat!

Reynolds Spring Natural Area

Paul Schwalbe used to say that it was odd that the "southern style" bog is north of the "northern style" bog. Reynolds Spring is adjacent to and north of Algerine. Just across the Tioga County line, it is at the intersection of Gamble Run Road and Reynolds Spring Road. A bit larger than its neighbor, this natural area is 1302 acres. Reynolds Spring is a botanist's playground with a big assortment of sedges and orchids. Parts are very shrubby with highbush blueberry bushes providing late summer snacks to all visitors, whether furred or clothed. You can find mountain holly and wild raisin, a Viburnum, here, too. Some boreal treats include bunchberry, the miniature boreal dogwood. Like Algerine Swamp, you have to be ready to walk through quaking wet sphagnum ground. A second set of dry footwear is suggested gear for the car.

Reynolds Spring has a more open character than Algerine. The vegetation is shrubbier at Reynolds Spring than at Algerine and supports fewer conifer specialists. The mix of bird species and habitat types provide many surprises to visiting birders (what few there are). Deep forest birds like Black-throated Green Warbler mix with Indigo Bunting. Yet, it is a treat to hear Nashville Warblers singing in Pennsylvania. The habitat here resembles Canada's taiga forest. Alder Flycatchers will give visiting birders an identification challenge. The swamp has a few "ear birder" challenges of a different type: an assortment of trillers. I found Chipping Sparrows, Swamp Sparrows, and Pine Warbler here in close proximity. Surprising to many, Eastern Bluebirds nest in the snags so common in boreal swamps. Overturned root balls can provide nest support for Eastern Phoebe nests, normally found on cliffs or window ledges.

Quebec Run Wild Area

This location was featured in a previous column, but the timing seems right to focus on it again. It deserves more attention from birders. Nudging the Mason-Dixon line in

The Special Areas Projects invites birders to contribute more data to our database of Pennsylvania's public lands. We especially are interested in obtaining more data on the state's designated wild and natural areas. Ecological reserves and high quality habitats found elsewhere also are very desirable sites for SAP surveys. The technique is easy. For one-time visits to natural and wild areas, we are glad to accept Daily Forms with a little extra annotation. Some participants have e-mailed their field notes to me. Each field trip to these special places makes our understanding of natural Pennsylvania a bit richer. Please help out and have a birding adventure while you are at it. A list of some locations on our "hit list" was provided in the last edition of the "PSO Newsletter." If you have any questions, please contact Doug Gross, the state coordinator. See contact information listed below.

Fayette County, Quebec Run Wild Area has a very northerly feel that its name suggests. On the eastern slope of Chestnut Ridge, this Forbes State Forest site comprises 4765 acres. In moist areas, the wild area is covered by mesophytic forest of sugar maple, red maple, black cherry, and tulip poplar. There are scattered hemlocks, especially along the rushing brooks. Mixed oak forest grows in drier areas. Mountain laurel and rhododendron are prominent and sometimes dominant in the understory. According to Marcia Bonta's *More Outbound Journeys in Pennsylvania*, Quebec Run Wild Area is a veritable wildflower garden. An extensive trail system gives access to many hollows and ridges in the forest interior. This includes Mill Run Trail, Rankin Trail, and Quebec Run Road.

Quebec Run treats its summer birding visitors to a variety of warblers including many typical of northern forests. Black-throated Green Warbler, American Redstart, and Ovenbird are among the most common breeding birds. Black-throated Blue, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Black-and-white, Hooded, and Canada Warblers are all easily found here. There even are a few Cerulean Warblers. Acadian Flycatcher is the most common breeding flycatcher, found in riparian zones, but Eastern Wood-Pewee and Least Flycatcher are also present. Wood Thrush, Hermit

Thrush, and Veery are all fairly common. It is not surprising that Red-eyed Vireo and Scarlet Tanager are among the most common species, but Blue-headed Vireo is also present in good numbers. Other "northern" birds like Winter Wren and Brown Creeper round out a very impressive breeding bird community.

The Quebec Run Wild Area is near the

village of Elliotsville, just down Route 381 from Ohiopyle State Forest. Thanks to Bill Hintze, we have a good start at a bird list for this intriguing place. From the data I have seen, this wild area deserves serious consideration as a Pennsylvania Important Bird Area. With more data, that case might be made. SAP also would welcome bird data for other Forbes State Forest locations: the 3090 acre Roaring Run Natural Area (which includes an entire watershed); Mt. Davis Natural Area (includes the state's highest point); and Spruce Flats Natural Area (which includes a boreal forested wetland).

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Answers to Bird Quiz (page 8)

1. Black-tailed Godwit, white; Hudsonian Godwit, black; Marbled Godwit, cinnamon.
2. Eastern Kingbird.
3. Red-headed Woodpecker, Purple Martin, and Eastern Bluebird.
4. Black-headed Gull. Its specific name, *ridibundus*, means "laughing."
5. Red-shouldered Hawk (*extimus* of southern Florida), Red-tailed Hawk (*krideri* of the Great Plains), Merlin (*richardsonii* of the northern prairies), Eastern Screech-Owl (*maxwelliae* of the eastern Rocky Mountain foothills and adjacent plains), and Great Horned Owl (*subarcticus* of the far north).



The Conservation Corner

With the Bush Administration actively reversing years of slow but steady improvements in environmental protections and conservation, we are seeing “trickle down” effects at the state and local levels. One of the latest Administration attacks is the complete reversal on designating wilderness. Secretary of Interior Gale Norton has withdrawn 2.6 million acres located in Utah from possible wilderness designation. She went further by renouncing the department’s authority to conduct wilderness reviews anywhere in the country. Another blow against conservation.

But what also concerns me is that this lack of environmental leadership and attacks on conservation programs are “trickling down” to the state and local levels. For example, why is the state DEP continuing to allow coal companies to destroy private property, water supplies, and aquatic resources through long-wall mining? Is it because DEP representatives are busy meeting with the coal companies and asking for their diligence in efforts to restore and repair surface features and water supplies damaged by undermining?

Why are we asking for their diligence? Why isn’t the DEP demanding that the coal companies comply with the Clean Water Act and the department’s own clean water regulations and adequately compensate private property owners for damages?

Regionally, PSO members may be aware that a section of I-99 is scheduled to be built along the Bald Eagle ridge (an IBA area) – an environmentally damaging route. The Corps of Engineers and the DEP have issued permits for this route even though there is a less damaging alternative. Also, Governor Rendell had a brief “window of opportunity” to correct these egregious decisions but, with weak excuses, failed to do so.

And, we will be continually facing other environmentally damaging projects. For example, in the Altoona area, a developer is planning to level 150 acres of forest along the same Bald Eagle ridge for a mall. And once again, there are alternatives, but the DEP has “cowered” to political pressure and indicated they will issue the necessary permit.

I have heard some people state that local government, through zoning and planning, can protect the environment. But again, the vast majority of local officials will rezone and re-plan to satisfy the “rich and powerful” – especially now that the federal and state governments are not providing leadership.

So where is the environmental leadership in this

country? Where is the fortitude and courage to curb these environmentally destructive activities? Where are these politicians who claim to support environmental protection?

From my viewpoint, the answer is nowhere!

With too few exceptions, our elected and appointed officials have lost the courage, are lacking the leadership, and are too interested in kowtowing to the wealthy, the powerful, and the greedy. They are “selling” off our environment one piece at a time because of money and greed, and then they insult us by calling it “progress.”

So where are the courage, fortitude, and leadership to protect the environment going to come from? In my opinion, with governments failing to do the right thing, we at the grassroots must provide the fortitude, courage, and leadership. We must talk with our neighbors and friends, attend public meetings, and voice our opinions. We must write our elected/appointed officials, involve the news media, and we must vote. And, on occasion, we must sue the government when they fail to enforce their own laws/regulations.

I believe it is up to us, as individuals, to promote conservation and protect the environment the best we can. And yes, we will lose many ‘battles,’ but we must persevere. For if we persevere, someday maybe, just maybe, the elected and appointed officials will realize the “error of their ways” and begin to do the right thing.

– Mark Henry, Conservation Chairperson

2004 PSO Annual Meeting

Montour Preserve



Montour County

May 2004

Notes from PORC

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

This month I will attend my sixth and last meeting as a PORC member, and I decided that it might be worthwhile to pass along some of what I've learned during five interesting, challenging, and gratifying years on the Committee. Here are some thoughts.

PORC members work hard. In the last five years alone we have evaluated 324 reports, voting on some of them more than once before reaching a final decision. Nick Pulcinella, the Committee's non-voting Secretary, deserves special credit for an almost superhuman effort compiling the scores of submissions, mailing ballot forms, tabulating the results, writing the framework for the reports of our decisions in *Pennsylvania Birds*, and juggling a multitude of other details.

Pennsylvania's conscientious observers have made significant contributions to the state's ornithological record. During my term-and-a-half, we have received documentation excellent enough to establish first state records of Greater Shearwater, Pink-footed Goose, Long-tailed Jaeger, Black Guillemot, Hammond's Flycatcher (to be published officially in PORC's next report), and Ash-throated Flycatcher. White-tailed Tropicbird was another addition, based on our evaluation of two old records.

More birders than ever fortunately are going beyond written descriptions and documenting rare birds with physical evidence in photographs, video, and audio recordings. Many recent records might not have been accepted without that evidence, including Rufous Hummingbird, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, Bewick's Wren, and LeConte's Sparrow among many examples that could be cited.

Written descriptions to accompany physical documentation remain essential, and PORC urges observers to devote some worthwhile time to writing and submitting them. For example, photographs of a Black-legged Kittiwake in Bedford County in 2001 were not diagnostic of the species – but the Committee was happy to find that the accompanying description was good enough to confirm the record. A handy documentation form is provided on the PSO website, downloadable, and easy to use.

Aspects of PORC's activities that seemed inconsistent to me before I joined the Committee (such as adding and removing species to the list of birds requiring documentation) now emerge in a better perspective. Times change, birds'

distributions change, and the Committee's opinions must change with them. Reconsideration of past policies is a continual process from another viewpoint: Identification criteria change as we all learn about new field marks. One example was a seminal paper in *Birding* that offered us guidelines for separating first-winter female Baltimore Orioles and Bullock's Orioles. In contrast, some problems are becoming more difficult. For example, as we learn more about gull relationships, an attempt to separate relatively pale Thayer's Gulls from relatively dark Iceland (Kumlien's) Gulls is raising new questions about the validity of some supposed Thayer's records. State committees in the east are beginning to wonder whether a re-evaluation of Thayer's status is warranted.

The great majority of Pennsylvania birders respond gracefully to nonacceptance of their records, even though they are inevitably disappointed and sometimes disagree with the Committee's reasoning. PORC attempts to explain to each submitter individually by letter the reasons why the documentation was considered insufficient. From the Committee's viewpoint, we appreciate understanding, we accept your disagreement, we realize that we are not infallible, and we try hard with research and study to make the proper decision in every case. See the PSO website for tips on how to improve your documentation and increase its chance of acceptance.

Finally, keep your documentations coming! You will continue to make an important contribution to the scientific knowledge of Pennsylvania's bird life. In fact, a great deal of new knowledge will be lost without you.

-- Paul Hess, PORC Chair



PSO Newsletter

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PA Game Commission Seeks Information Concerning Nesting Ospreys

The PA Game Commission through the nongame bird program wants to know about all the Osprey nests in the state. If you are aware of an active nest, please contact Deb Siefken (717-677-4830 or siekend@cvn.net) who will send you a survey form via e-mail or regular mail.

This information is very important since it is placed into a database, which is reviewed when an area is slated for development or land use changes.

Your field work could add valuable information to this database.

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