

# PSO PILEATED



July 2005

*The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology*

Volume 16, Number 2

## From the President's Desk....

The 2005 members' meeting in Clarion was a huge success, possibly the best ever in terms of attendance. Tremendous thanks go to Flo McGuire and members of the Seneca Rocks Audubon Society for flawlessly arranging the details. As usual Shonah Hunter handled the registration smoothly. And I owe special thanks to VP Rudy Keller for presiding when a last-minute health issue prevented me from attending. I am sorry to have missed the presentations and field trips, details of which are reviewed elsewhere.

Nick Bolgiano deserves our appreciation as he completes his term on the Board. Nick's insight and well-reasoned judgment have been benefits on numerous matters. In particular, it was Nick who initiated changes in the Poole award selection and presentation process.

Most importantly, this included the advance notification of the award winner, thereby notifying family and friends to attend and share in the recipient's special moment.

John Fedak and Sandy Lockerman were elected to the Board of Directors for three-year terms.

I congratulate Margaret Buckwalter on receiving the Poole award this year and the entire Seneca Rocks group as recipients of the first PSO Conservation Award. Although a focus was the preservation of the Piney Grasslands,

Margaret's award was based on much more than that single issue. Her resume of birding achievements and contributions is impressive and represents the very essence of the concept of "birder-conservationist" whereby the second half of that term is just as important as the first part.

I would like to relate another example of selfless dedication to bird conservation. In the summer of 2004, Randy

Phillips located a pair of Sedge Wrens (rare breeders in Pennsylvania) attempting to nest in a hay field in York County. Realizing the field would eventually be mowed and the nest destroyed, Randy offered to pay the farmer to leave unmowed a few acres in the nest vicinity, and indeed Randy followed through, without fanfare, on his promise, paying the farmer \$200 and thereby saving the nest. PSO later reimbursed Randy half of that sum though Randy preferred we designate the \$100 for similar future purposes.



The PSO outing to Buzzard Swamp, led by Deuane Hoffman, yielded 80 species for the participants.

I salute their spirit and the dedication to conservation shown by Randy last summer and by Margaret over the decades spanned by her birding career. May they serve as examples to all Pennsylvania birders.

I close with a wish that you have an enjoyable and productive Atlasing season in 2005. The first year, perhaps not quite wrinkle-free, was nevertheless a big success and a great start to this five-year endeavor. Bob Mulvihill, Mike Lanzone, and the Powdermill crew have tackled a big job,

but they have shown they are up to the challenge. But of course they are the first to point out the Atlas can't happen without thousands of volunteers – and PSO members represent a critical core element of those volunteers.

Enjoy your summer birding!

– Greg Grove, President

## PSO 2005 Meeting Revisited

by Mark A. McConaughy

The 2005 PSO meeting was held from 20 to 22 May 2005 in Clarion, Pennsylvania. It started with a Friday afternoon outing to the Piney Tract and Mt. Airy for early conference arrivals. I did not attend that field trip but heard about it Friday evening. The attendees were impressed by the grassland bird species found at Piney Tract. However, they were all talking about seeing at least four Upland Sandpipers, a bird of special concern in Pennsylvania, calling and displaying at several different locations during the trip. It sounded like a wonderful way to start the meetings.

The Friday evening social at the Holiday Inn was well attended. Nearly 100 people registered for the meeting, and most arrived at Clarion by Friday evening. The social is a great place to meet and talk to birders from across the state. A PSO business meeting followed the social, and persons were given the opportunity to sign up for the Saturday and Sunday morning field trips

The field trips were scheduled to start at 6:30 on Saturday morning. One of the attractions of our PSO meetings is birding in areas that we may not have previously visited and seeing birds we may not see elsewhere. We bird these places with leaders who know the local species and their likely locations in the trip area. Conference attendees could choose to go on outings to Allegheny National Forest, Cook Forest State Park, Buttermilk Hill Nature Sanctuary, Buzzard Swamp, Clear Creek State Forest, Oil Creek State Park, and Mt. Zion (Piney Tract/Mt. Airy). I chose to go to Buzzard Swamp on a trip led by Deuane Hoffman. I had never been to this location, which was well worth the visit. Buzzard Swamp is part of a managed state game lands with ponds, grasslands, and forested sections. We saw or heard calling 80 species of birds during the hike around Buzzard Swamp. Some of the better birds seen included Bald Eagle, Alder Flycatcher, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler and Bobolinks. A complete list of birds seen on all the outings is presented elsewhere in the newsletter.

Presentations about various aspects of avian life were made on Saturday afternoon. Bob Mulvihill's paper was titled, *Monitoring Pennsylvania Biodiversity: Reasons, Results, and Rewards of the 2nd PBBA*. Bob talked about the preliminary results of the first year's atlasing for the Second Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas, encouraging PSO members to participate in the atlas project. The second paper was by Scott H. Stoleson on Research on the Allegheny Plateau. Scott talked about studies being conducted on the effects of various forest management practices in Allegheny National Forest on avian populations (e.g., clear cut versus a forest managed so that there is an open canopy – I forgot the term he employed for this!). Clear cutting in Allegheny Forest can only be done on plots up to 40 acres in size. This produced some good edge habitat that was used by various warbler species. However, Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism was not a problem, apparently because the surrounding area was so forested that cowbirds were not attracted to the region. Nick Bolgiano followed with a paper about the 1970s spruce budworm infestation. Nick presented data showing that the spruce budworm was bad for trees, but it was great for boreal birds. Populations of Magnolia Warblers, Purple Finches, Evening Grosbeaks, and others rose during the infestation and crashed afterward. The decline in spruce budworm infestations may account for the decreasing sightings and numbers of these species. The last formal afternoon paper, which dealt with Golden-winged Warbler nesting success, was presented by Jake Kubel. Jake showed how an area managed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission for Ruffed Grouse propagation also had provided a great habitat for breeding Golden-winged Warblers.



Jake Kubel presented an interesting paper dealing with Golden-winged Warbler nesting success.

Nick Pulcinella followed the papers with a Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee (PORC) report. Even though computer problems did not permit him to show his

pictures, Nick's presentation was interesting. Nick explained how several difficult reports were resolved by consulting specialists on those species. A report of a possible White-tailed Eagle was based on a silhouette photograph of an eagle flying over Hawk Mountain. William Clark and other hawk specialists provided photographs that showed some immature Bald Eagles with that same silhouette. A possible Bicknell's Thrush was also reported. A recording of its call was made into a sonogram at Cornell, and it was determined to be from a Bicknell's Thrush. Another interesting report was of a large, swallow-tailed swift observed in Pennsylvania but not identified to species. The PORC committee has a difficult job, and we should all be grateful for their hard work.

The annual PSO banquet was held on Saturday evening, and we were treated to fine food, PSO awards, and an evening owl talk. The Seneca Rocks Audubon chapter was presented with the first PSO Conservation Award for their work preserving Piney Tract. Walter Fye accepted the award for Seneca Rocks Audubon. The Poole Award was given to Margaret Buckwalter for her contributions to Pennsylvania Ornithology.



Walter Fye accepted the PSO Conservation Award on behalf of the Seneca Rocks Audubon Society at our recent meeting.

Ross Gallardy was awarded the youth scholarship to attend the PSO meeting. Ross's team placed first in the youth division and third overall at the 2005 New Jersey Audubon Birdathon, beating even the adult team from Cornell!

Doug Gross was the dinner speaker and presented a summary of Northern Saw-whet Owl research based on the "toot routes" run in the state. Basically, Northern Saw-whet Owls are more common than what was previously known and believed. They are fairly common owls in the Poconos, north central Pennsylvania, and the highlands of

southwestern Pennsylvania.

A fine Sunday morning began with field trips leaving for Allegheny National Forest, Cook Forest State Park, Buttermilk Hill Nature Sanctuary, Clear Creek State Forest, Oil Creek State Park, and Mt. Zion (Piney Tract/Mt. Airy). I participated in the Mt. Zion (Piney Tract/Mt. Airy) trip lead by Mike Leahy.



Mike Leahy's field trip to the Piney Tract successfully targeted Clay-colored, Henslow's, and Grasshopper Sparrows.

This was largely a grasslands tour with a few patches of woodlands along the way. Mt. Zion/Piney Tract is a reclaimed strip mine area that has been preserved largely because of work by members of Seneca Rocks Audubon. The outing found all of the targeted grassland species, including many calling Henslow's Sparrows. A few even provided good views by perching on grass stems for the trip participants. A few Grasshopper Sparrows and Bobolinks were also seen. However, the big attraction at Piney Tract is the Clay-colored Sparrow. The first Pennsylvania breeding pair of Clay-colored Sparrows was found at Piney Tract in 1999. A pair of Clay-colored Sparrows was observed building a nest in a pine during the three field trips to Piney Tract during the 2005 PSO meeting.

Other Clay-colored Sparrows were present, and some of these probably were or will be nesting in the area. The tour continued to the Mr. Airy area where at least two Upland Sandpipers (and as many as four on other trips) were calling and putting on wonderful flight displays. Savannah Sparrows and many Bobolinks were also found at Mt. Airy. Mike's field trip topped off a great PSO weekend!

Seneca Rocks Audubon can be proud of their work organizing the 2005 PSO meeting. The field trips were great and the papers were very informative. I encourage everyone to come to next year's meeting at Powdermill Nature Preserve in Ligonier. Come and meet old friends, make some new ones, and have fun birding. See you there!

## Margaret Buckwalter Named Poole Recipient



Margaret Buckwalter was the recipient of the 2005 Earl Poole Award.

PSO member Margaret Buckwalter received the Earl Poole Award at our recent annual meeting in Clarion. Margaret, a long-time member and board member of Seneca Rocks Audubon, is a friend, an advisor, and an example to us all. Seneca Rocks members consider her to be the “conscience” of their group. Perhaps her best quality is her enthusiasm for introducing others to birding.

Margaret writes, “Our family was always an ‘outdoor’ family – camping, hiking, canoeing, biking, fishing and the like. I’ve been interested in birds since the age of ten or so. My first set of birding pictures was by R. Bruce Horsefall and I had the paintings stuck up all over my room. Somebody gave me a set of small birding guides by Chester A. Reed, and those were my standbys until Peterson came out in 1934.”

In 1942 Margaret married Tracy Buckwalter, a fellow geology student. Her husband taught at Pitt when he first finished graduate school, so she joined the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania and had the advantage of learning birds again under Joe Grom and Dan Pfoutz. Later, after moving to Clarion, she transferred her Audubon membership to Seneca Rocks Audubon Society where she continues to be extremely active. She has been birding for more than 60 years.

She helped Seneca Rocks organize the Christmas Bird Count which she still co-coordinates. She has served as President, Treasurer, and Conservation Chair of Seneca

Rocks Audubon. Amazingly, she has contributed interesting articles to almost every issue of the chapter newsletter, *The Drummer*, which is in its 21<sup>st</sup> year. She has handled the Summer Camp Scholarship applications and awards for many years and she actively participates in the group’s bird seed sales.

Margaret chaired the Seneca Rocks’ Birdathon, the chapter’s primary fundraiser, for many years. Through her leadership and enthusiasm the SRAS Birdathon won second place nationally (behind Last Chance Audubon Society of Helena, Montana) for raising the most money for chapters of their size, every year since 1999. Last year they finally won first prize, allowing them to contribute about \$2,000 per year for six years to PA Audubon from the Birdathon, for a total of \$13,105. This success would not have happened without Margaret’s guidance and enthusiasm.

In addition, she has served as the *Pennsylvania Birds* compiler for Clarion County since the journal’s inception. She is an active member of PSO and a familiar face at our annual meetings. During the first PA Breeding Bird Atlas, Margaret served as the Regional Coordinator for Clarion County, and she is currently contributing to the second Atlas. She organized and religiously led outings for PSO’s Special Areas Project at Cook Forest and handled the input of the data. Since 1987, Margaret has participated in the Game Commission’s Grassland Bird Survey. She has also worked with Project FeederWatch.

Margaret loves birding with new birders – she is a true educator. She has presented birding programs to many groups, including the Knox Nature Club, Clarion County Garden Club, various school classrooms, Todd Bird Club, and Seneca Rocks Audubon. She coached the birding portion of the Clarion High School Science Olympiad, and her team won this part of the contest. She recruits and encourages participation in bird-related activities and possesses endless birding resources which she willingly shares with others.

But Margaret has not only been an active birder, but she has been an active conservationist as well, avidly reading various conservation publications and sharing that information with other persons. She has served as a board member of the Clarion County Conservation District, as the SRAS representative to the Mill Creek Coalition (concerning abatement of AMD in the Mill Creek watershed), as the League of Women Voters’ representative to the Clarion County Planning Commission, and as a

member of MAGIC – Mid-Atlantic Grasslands Initiative. She has worked with organizations interested in Piney Tract (Mt. Zion) from the beginning and is largely responsible for its Global IBA status.

Margaret is an excellent bird and nature photographer and past member of the Oil City Slide Club.

She has traveled widely including all of the states except Hawaii. In addition, she has visited the Galapagos Islands, Iceland (3 times), Antarctica, Mexico, Canada, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Belize.

Margaret is a deserving recipient of the Earl Poole Award, and we commend her for all she has done.



## Thank you, Nancy and Bob!

Thanks to Nancy Dennis for the Short-eared Owl pins. As she did last year for the Montour meeting, Nancy Dennis again created beautiful commemorative pins especially for those attending the 2005 annual meeting. We thank Nancy for her efforts.

We also extend our thanks to Bob Moul. Nancy's Short-eared Owl reproduction was based on a photo taken by Bob last winter in Adams County. He has a photo gallery website at - [www.pbase.com/rcm1840](http://www.pbase.com/rcm1840); he may be reached by e-mail at [yellowlegs@suscom.net](mailto:yellowlegs@suscom.net).

## Welcome New Board Members

Our two new board members elected at our annual meeting at Clarion are John Fedak from Bradford, PA, and Sandra Lockerman from Harrisburg. We are glad that you're aboard!

## John's the Winner!

John Tautin of Conneautville was the winner of the Snowy Egret print at our recent meeting.

## A Note from Margaret Buckwalter

As the recipient of the Earl L. Poole Award at the PSO meeting, I want to thank the PSO board for honoring me in this way. I was both humbled and elated to stand with the likes of Frank and Barb Haas. Thank you very much.

I knew I was getting the award, but the extra American Birding Association gift certificate was totally unexpected. After giving the matter some thought, I decided to donate the amount back to ABA expressly for their Birders' Exchange program. I trust PSO will approve.

The local feedback is that PSO had a very successful meeting. Seneca Rocks Audubon Society was proud of the way everything went so smoothly. Flo and Jim McGuire deserve a lot of credit for their part in the event. Shonah Hunter was busy and much appreciated for her experience and coping abilities. I hope PSO gets a lot more members from around here. And thank you again.

Sincerely,

Margaret Buckwalter

## Special Thanks

Thanks to Mark McConaughy for providing the photographs of the annual meeting for this newsletter.



PSO Outing to Buzzard Swamp

## Birds Listed at 2005 PSO Meeting at Clarion

Canada Goose  
Wood Duck  
Mallard  
Hooded Merganser  
Common Merganser  
Ring-necked Pheasant  
Ruffed Grouse  
Wild Turkey  
Northern Bobwhite  
Great Blue Heron  
Turkey Vulture  
Osprey  
Bald Eagle  
Northern Harrier  
Cooper's Hawk  
Red-shouldered Hawk  
Broad-winged Hawk  
Red-tailed Hawk  
American Kestrel  
Killdeer  
Spotted Sandpiper  
Upland Sandpiper  
Rock Pigeon  
Mourning Dove  
Black-billed Cuckoo  
Yellow-billed Cuckoo  
Eastern Screech-Owl  
Barred Owl  
Common Nighthawk  
Chimney Swift  
Ruby-throated Hummingbird  
Belted Kingfisher  
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker  
Red-bellied Woodpecker  
Downy Woodpecker  
Hairy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker  
Pileated Woodpecker  
Olive-sided Flycatcher  
Eastern Wood-Pewee  
Acadian Flycatcher  
Alder Flycatcher  
Willow Flycatcher  
Least Flycatcher  
Eastern Phoebe  
Great Crested Flycatcher  
Eastern Kingbird  
Yellow-throated Vireo  
Blue-headed Vireo  
Warbling Vireo  
Red-eyed Vireo  
Blue Jay  
American Crow  
Tree Swallow  
N. Rough-winged Swallow  
Bank Swallow  
Cliff Swallow  
Barn Swallow  
Black-capped Chickadee  
Tufted Titmouse  
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
White-breasted Nuthatch  
Brown Creeper  
House Wren  
Winter Wren  
Golden-crowned Kinglet  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher  
Eastern Bluebird  
Veery  
Swainson's Thrush  
Hermit Thrush

Wood Thrush  
American Robin  
Gray Catbird  
Northern Mockingbird  
Brown Thrasher  
European Starling  
Cedar Waxwing  
Blue-winged Warbler  
Tennessee Warbler  
Nashville Warbler  
Northern Parula  
Yellow Warbler  
Chestnut-sided Warbler  
Magnolia Warbler  
Black-throated Blue Warbler  
Yellow-rumped Warbler  
Black-throated Green Warbler  
Blackburnian Warbler  
Yellow-throated Warbler  
Pine Warbler  
Prairie Warbler  
Blackpoll Warbler  
Cerulean Warbler  
Black-and-white Warbler  
American Redstart  
Ovenbird  
Louisiana Waterthrush  
Kentucky Warbler  
Mourning Warbler  
Common Yellowthroat  
Hooded Warbler  
Scarlet Tanager  
Eastern Towhee  
American Tree Sparrow  
Chipping Sparrow  
Clay-colored Sparrow



This is one of the Clay-colored Sparrows that was observed nest building at the Piney Tract during the PSO meeting.

Field Sparrow  
Vesper Sparrow  
Savannah Sparrow  
Grasshopper Sparrow  
Henslow's Sparrow  
Song Sparrow  
Swamp Sparrow  
White-throated Sparrow  
Dark-eyed Junco  
Northern Cardinal  
Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
Indigo Bunting  
Bobolink  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Eastern Meadowlark  
Common Grackle  
Brown-headed Cowbird  
Orchard Oriole  
Baltimore Oriole  
Purple Finch  
House Finch  
American Goldfinch  
House Sparrow

**Total = 131 species**

## PSO Bird Quiz

1. We know that the orange patch on an Orange-crowned Warbler is seldom visible, but neither is the small rusty crown patch on two of its close relatives. What are these two species?
2. Which wren are we most likely to hear singing in the middle of the night?
3. Pennsylvania's first Redwing astonished birders in Bucks County on February 5, 2005. In what avian family

is this super-rare visitor from Eurasia?

4. Which of our common breeding birds sometimes has orange instead of normal yellow tail tips? And how does this happen?
5. Name a large gull from western North America that was never known to occur in Pennsylvania until recent years.

(Answers on page 11)

## Meeting Participants

Chuck Berthoud  
 Carolyn Blatchley  
 Nick Bolgiano  
 Bruce Bonta  
 Marcia Bonta  
 Pat Bontinen  
 Margaret Buckwalter  
 Ted Buckwalter  
 Brian Byrnes  
 John Byrnes  
 Michael Carey  
 Lisa Cass  
 Mark Cohen  
 Bob Cook  
 Pamel Cote  
 Peter Dalby  
 Gary Edwards  
 John Fedak  
 Mike Fialkovich  
 Bruce Fortman  
 Alice Fuller  
 Roana Fuller  
 Walter Fye  
 Ross Gallardy  
 Joan Galli

Shirley Glessner  
 Kathie Goodblood  
 Debra Grim  
 Doug Gross  
 Paul Hess  
 Deuane Hoffman  
 Janice Horn  
 Bob Houck  
 Nancy Houck  
 Jerry Howard  
 Marjorie Howard  
 Shonah Hunter  
 Bonnie Ingram  
 Galen Ingram  
 Mick Jeitner  
 Patricia Johner  
 John Karian  
 Chad Kauffman  
 Rudy Keller  
 Nick Kerlin  
 Nancy Ellen Kiernan  
 Arlene Koch  
 Jake Kubel  
 Jane Kuehl  
 Tom Kuehl

David Kyler  
 Trudy Kyler  
 Sherri Labar  
 Patty Laswick  
 Mike Leahy  
 Gary Lockerman  
 Sandy Lockerman  
 Bob Machesney  
 Dianne Machesney  
 Mark McConaughy  
 Carol McCullough  
 Fred McCullough  
 Flo McGuire  
 Jim McGuire  
 Betsy Mescavage  
 Shirley Monrean  
 Judy Montgomery  
 Ron Montgomery  
 Bob Mulvihill  
 Nick Pulcinella  
 Regina Reeder  
 Bob Ross  
 Keith Russell  
 Carol Schaffer  
 Jeff Schaffer

Sam Sinderson  
 Stacy Small  
 Jim Smith  
 Rita Smith  
 Daniel Snell  
 Jack Solomon  
 Sue Solomon  
 Joanne Sora  
 Jerry Stanley  
 Bob Stewart  
 Scott Stoleson  
 John Tautin  
 Gilbert Twiest  
 Kim Van Fleet  
 Mary Walsh  
 Phil Walsh  
 Larry Waltz  
 Beth Watts  
 Don Watts  
 Steve Wildasin  
 Carole Willenpart  
 Richard Willenpart  
 Fran Williams  
 Jack Williams  
 Beth Zbegner

## The Great Monroe County Snipe Hunt

The Great Monroe County Snipe Hunt is an exciting birding event for birdwatchers of all ages and abilities. Teams of birders compete against each other as they traverse the county looking for as many different species as they can. At the end, the teams meet at the Kettle Creek Wildlife Sanctuary to tally the birds they have seen while enjoying a catered buffet dinner. The Monroe County Environmental Education Center and the Pocono Avian Research Center sponsor this yearly event.

In 2004, the Great Monroe County Snipe Hunt (October 1-2) hosted four local teams. The PEEC Moo Ducks, The Triple B's, The Weekend Warblers, and the Haunted Snipe competed for prizes and glory during the 24-hour competition. Combined, the four teams located an

incredible 110 different species of birds in Monroe County. Participant Sherri LaBar said, "I think this might be a record." All the teams were awarded prizes for their efforts, and the Pocono Environmental Education Center "MOO Ducks" identified the most birds.

Now is the time to get your ready for this year's competition to be held September 30 - October 1, 2005. For more details, call the Monroe County Environmental Education Center at 570-629-3061.

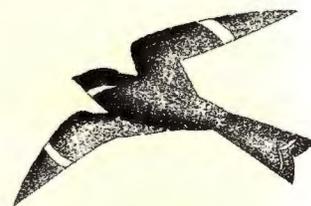



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Did you know that the White-breasted Nuthatch was known in years past as the "devil downhead"?

# World Series of Birding Summary

by Ross Gallardy



For the second year in a row, the Nikon/Space Coast Coastal Cuckoos competed in the World Series of Birding (WSB). Members included Andy Bankert (FL), Tom Johnson (PA), Zach Baer (MD), our driver Ramsay Koury, and me. With last year's disappoint-ing total of 183, we prepared well for this year. We felt we had gained enough information to break our new goal of 200 in 2005.

Throughout the week leading up to May 14, our team scouted intensely in northern and southern NJ. With the help of the Nikon/DVOC adult team and a few other people, we were able to put together a streamlined route with the possibility of getting 200 species. Once again, we decided to take a western route (starting in northern NJ, driving south along the western side of the state, and ending at the finish line in Cape May). We finished with an amazing 212 species for the day and raised over \$7,800 for various conservation organizations. We placed first in the youth division breaking the old youth record by 20 species. We also tied Pete Dunne's team for third in the overall category.

It was 11:30 p.m. Friday night; our team was standing in the middle of the Great Swamp talking to the Nikon adult team, waiting for midnight to arrive. As soon as the clock hit 12:00 a.m. Saturday, an American Bittern started to thunder pump. We took this as a good omen. We quickly added more species to our list including Eastern Screech-Owl, Barred Owl, Least Bittern, King Rail, Swainson's Thrush, and a Yellow-breasted Chat. We left Great Swamp by 1:30 a.m., heading north to find more owls. We dipped on Long-eared Owl but heard our staked-out Northern Saw-whet Owl. From there, we walked to the top of a hill where we listened for nighttime migrants and hoped the grassland sparrows would start calling early. Nighttime migrants included Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Grey-cheeked Thrush. To our surprise the Grasshopper Sparrow sang at 4:20 a.m. and the Vesper Sparrow, at 4:45 a.m. We continued driving around the grasslands picking up Savannah Sparrow, American Kestrel, Wild Turkey, Ruffed Grouse, Willow Flycatcher, White-crowned Sparrow, and Hooded Merganser (at a beaver pond).

As we entered High Point State Park, we added Common Raven and Purple Finch. Driving through the park we quickly started listing warblers, vireos, and woodpeckers. One surprise was a Wilson's Warbler singing at our Canada Warbler spot. High Point State Park runs into Stokes State Forest. As we entered Stokes, a black bear with her cub was at the side of the road. Everyone wanted

to stop, but we knew we couldn't sacrifice the time on the Big Day. At Steam Mill campground we found a Lincoln's Sparrow hiding in a bush and had a fly-by Rusty Black-bird. We then entered our first big pine grove of the day. In a five-minute stop, we picked up Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Northern Parula, followed by Cooper's Hawk and Broad-winged Hawk on the nest.

Next, we went to Culver's Lake. There were a lot of migrants around the lake, but the diversity was low. New birds for the list included Purple Martin, Blackpoll, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. We only had a few more spots to cover in the north, mostly targeting specific birds. We found Golden-winged Warbler on Van Ness Road and spotted Magnolia Warbler and Hermit Thrush on Mettler Road. The next stop was at a pond at the side of the road. Although this particular spot has a good history of attracting migrants, I hadn't seen too much there during our scouting. But to our surprise, we added White-throated Sparrow and Black-throated Blue Warbler. It was then that I decided to take a small gamble. While talking with Will Russell the day before, he told me about a good spot for Common Merganser. The whole detour should only take three minutes, but on a Big Day that can be more then you want to spend. On the other hand, if we got the Common Mergs at this spot, it would save us a ten-minute detour for it later in the day. Since we were on time, I decided to take the risk and to our surprise, it paid off. A pair of Common Mergansers was sitting at the river's edge. We had just saved seven minutes! One more quick stop to get Cliff Swallow and Winter Wren, and we were officially done with the north. We crossed I-80 (the unofficial line for the north) at 9:36 a.m. with 134 species on our list! My job was now done, and it was Tom's turn to navigate us through Salem and Cumberland Counties.

On our way to the south, we picked up Red-headed Woodpecker and a bonus Northern Bobwhite. The first stop was at Birch Creek in Salem County. This spot was amazing; and we had Pied-billed Grebe, Common Moorhen, and American Coot almost in the same scope view. As we traveled through Salem County, we picked up Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Pectoral Sandpiper, a Caspian Tern flying over Mannington Marsh, and a Barn Owl in a box. Cumberland County was impressive. We

(continued on page 11)

# The Raven Reporter

## Tales of Discovery from the Special Areas Project



As SAP Coordinator, I would like to especially thank Seneca Rocks Audubon for doing a fantastic job of hosting the PSO meeting at Clarion. Many of the field trip locations were SAP sites that I have visited vicariously through data sheets. For me, it was particularly rewarding to visit the Forest Cathedral of Cook Forest State Park that I had heard so much about. It exceeded my expectations. A fantastic place! I also really enjoyed talking with many owl fanatics at the meeting who contributed so much to the success of Project Toot Route and the current Breeding Bird Atlas.

### Special Areas Project Update

Through the Special Areas Project (SAP), volunteer birders have collected quantitative bird data in 136 locations throughout the state. At this point, there are 6,947 field trips in the SAP database. This is a tremendous achievement through 19,868 "party hours" of birding in these locations. Since Atlas parties often consist of two or more people and many additional hours are contributed through transportation and data organization, I conservatively estimate that approximately 80,000 volunteer hours have been contributed to the project. Thanks to all of you for making this contribution.

The effort made by SAP is typical of the contributions "citizen scientists" make toward bird projects – terrific and overwhelmingly unselfish contributions to our knowledge of the state's avifauna. In our own state, we are fortunate to have several worthy projects supported by the birding society. Among these are the current Breeding Bird Atlas, Cornell's Birds in Forested Landscapes (including projects on tanagers, thrushes, Golden-winged Warblers, and Cerulean Warblers), and Pennsylvania Audubon's Important Bird Areas surveys. With owl netting and Powdermill Nature Reserve as motivators, bird banding seems also to be getting the attention it deserves. Although these projects compete somewhat for the time and energy of volunteers, they also feed into each other and generate a vibrant community of projects and contributors. I invite you to become active in at least one of these projects.

The SAP data collected since 1990 are now being collated into draft checklists for some sites with more than 50 field trips. Thanks to funding from Wild Resources Conservation Fund, we are generating draft checklists that will serve as a basis for high quality site checklists based on field experiences of birders who have visited the sites. For each location, a spreadsheet is being prepared with the "ease of finding" codes for each species (based on frequency and abundance observed on SAP trips), as well as the first and last dates the species was observed for each month. At this point we have produced draft lists for

the following locations:

- Alan Seeger Natural Area, Huntingdon Co.
- Bear Meadows Natural Area, Centre Co.
- Black Moshannon State Park, Centre Co.
- Bruce Lake Natural Area, Pike Co.
- Cook Forest State Park, Clarion Co.
- Detweiler's Run Natural Area, Huntingdon Co.
- Gifford Pinchot State Park, York Co.
- Keystone State Park, Westmoreland Co.
- Little Buffalo State Park, Perry Co.
- Nescopeck State Park, Luzerne Co.
- Prince Gallitzen State Park, Cambria Co.
- Promised Land State Park, Pike Co.
- Whipple Dam State Park, Huntingdon Co.

For the state parks, a process is already in place for producing bird checklists. The Bureau of State Parks has an electronic template for a high quality bird checklist using "phenograms" that graphically show the presence of the bird species through the year. Each state park works with a local volunteer to fill in the template with information for each bird species. The SAP "draft checklist" facilitates this process. Birders are free to amend information that was collected on SAP trips with additional observations. In this template, there also is adequate space for describing the bird watching opportunities at the site and give credit to the local organization and its leaders who collected the bird data.

We are looking for people to take the lead in working with DCNR's State Parks to produce these checklists. Of course, the past SAP Site Coordinators are taking this role in many cases. For instance, Poole award-recipient Margaret Buckwalter is working on the Cook Forest State Park list with the help of her Seneca Rocks Audubon friends. Monica and Alan Gregory (past PSO President) are working on the Nescopeck State Park checklist with that park's environmental education specialist Diane Madl. Greg Grove and Nick Bolgiano will help with checklists for locations around State College. In some cases, another birder is more appropriate for producing the checklists because of his or her interests. Please contact

us if you are interested in helping with the above-mentioned areas or additional locations. We do not have a lead person for a few of these sites. SAP plans to produce more “draft lists” by the end of the year. There will be some time available for adding more data to our database, but we are concentrating on producing lists this year.

## **Bald Eagle Nests In Pennsylvania**

We are witnessing a tremendous resurgence of the Bald Eagle in Pennsylvania. Last year, there were 78 active nests in the state. In 2005, it looks like we will surpass that total quite easily. At present count, we have found 92 active Bald Eagle nests in 2005. The number is growing almost weekly. Many of these have eaglets that will fledge later this summer. Of course, we also have witnessed some natural nest failures, especially along streams that have been subject to flooding.

As the number of nests increases so has the challenge of monitoring these nests. Many nests are checked by local PGC Wildlife Conservation Officers. However, there sometimes is the need for volunteer eagle nest watchers. Please let me know if you are interested in helping with this worthwhile project. Be advised that some nests are fairly remote and need a boat or a lot of rugged walking to be checked.

## **Nocturnal Bird Surveys: Toot Route Plus!**

One of the goals of the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas is to achieve better understanding of the populations of nocturnal birds. The birds of the night include most of our owls and nightjars. They are, indeed, our birds of mystery. For the first Atlas, all of our night birds were under-represented by survey effort. Although we tried to change this in SAP, the problem persists. We often have a pretty good idea about the range and relative abundance of owls and nightjars, but lack good hard data.

Intense, directed night bird surveys always give surprises. During Project Toot Route, volunteers found that Northern Saw-whet Owls were much more common and widespread than previously documented. Yes, we had some idea of its general range, but the Atlas map just showed when one owl was found in each of the blocks in one of the seven-year period. Project Toot Route data showed that this little owl was locally common in many of the state’s forests. Project Toot Route also found that Whip-poor-wills were much more common than previously documented. Many Whip-poor-wills were found on some routes in out-of-the-way places like Snowshoe in Clearfield County. It was an “ear-opening” experience for many toot route runners.

I would like to point out that we lack information even about our so-called “common owls” like Great Horned, Barred, and Eastern Screech-Owl. How do we really know

if there are trends or distribution changes? Has West Nile Virus affected these owls? As so many of our songbirds and diurnal raptors are trending up or down, how are our night birds doing? Where are concentration areas for Whip-poor-wills? Are the Whip-poor-will populations related to moth densities or diversity? With the decline of Common Nighthawks in urban areas, where are the nighthawks out there in the “natural world”? During toot routes, some volunteers found nighthawks flying over reclaimed strip mines. Some were observed over Pine Creek canyon in summer SAP surveys. Are nighthawks nesting on cliffs or rocky outcrops?

Two owls may be in deep trouble in Pennsylvania. Long-eared Owl is listed as a Candidate – Rare, but may be rare enough to be considered Endangered or Threatened in the state. It nests in conifers but forages in open areas. The Barn Owl seems to have disappeared from many of its old haunts. Both owls may deserve more protection and conservation initiative than they now receive. Both owls and nightjars also have the potential to act as biomonitors of our ecosystem health. Although sometimes cute and cuddly – as in the saw-whet or screech-owls, owls are voracious predators that forage on small mammals and birds. Therefore, they can accumulate and concentrate toxins that exist in the natural environment. Coordinating banding projects with breeding bird survey projects should be encouraged.

The Atlas has adopted a shortened version of the Northern Saw-whet Owl breeding survey used in 2000 and 2001 in Pennsylvania (Project Toot Route). The goal of this “Atlas toot route” is to obtain some population data for forest night birds. Since the advertising song of the saw-whet does not inhibit other birds from vocalizing, the toot route broadcast (CD or tape) can be used in a general nocturnal bird survey. Just chose randomly selected spots along roads in the priority blocks and run a toot route. Please avoid “cherry picking” as this could bias your survey results toward higher density estimates. Each survey should take less than two hours for each block. The instructions and forms are available from the Atlas website or your Atlas Regional Coordinator. If you need a tape rather than the CD that is offered, please contact me at the address below.

For more information about the PSO Special Areas Project, Bald Eagle and other Species of Special Concern, and nocturnal bird surveys, contact:

Douglas A. Gross, Wildlife Biologist  
Endangered Bird Specialist  
PA Game Commission  
Coordinator of the PSO Special Areas Project  
144 Winters Road, Orangeville, PA 17859  
Phone: 570-458-4109 (or 458-4564)  
E-mail: [dogross@state.pa.us](mailto:dogross@state.pa.us) or [dougross@sunlink.net](mailto:dougross@sunlink.net)

## World Series of Birding Summary

(continued from page 8)

picked up all the southern breeders including Summer Tanager, Prothonotary Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler (our 29<sup>th</sup> warbler species of the day), and Blue Grosbeak. At Bivalve, we saw Wilson's Phalarope, Red Knot, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, and Peregrine Falcon. Next, we headed to a spot near Heislerville where we added White-rumped Sandpiper, both Night-Herons, Black Skimmer, and Blue-winged Teal. Tom then switched seats with Zach, and all that was left was Cape May County.

We crossed the county line at 4:35 p.m., and everyone was studying the list. We all knew that we would reach 200, so our new goal became 210. Our first stop at the ocean was Poverty Beach. As we started scanning the ocean, the names Royal Tern, Least Tern, Common Loon, Sanderling, Northern Gannet, Piping Plover, and Common Tern came out of our mouths. Wait! Was that number 200? Somewhere in that group of birds was number 200. I don't know for sure, but I think it was the Common Tern. After that we drove around, listing American Oystercatcher, Brant, Purple Sandpiper, Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow, and Great Cormorant.

Towards dusk we stopped at Nummies Island where we saw Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Tricolored Heron, and Little Blue Heron. We then raced to the Cape May Meadows for dusk. We saw the reliable pair of Gadwalls sitting in one of the ponds, and then we waited for darkness to arrive. Our target bird, Wilson's Snipe, never appeared, but we were rewarded with a fly-by Great-horned Owl (which we had missed in the morning). After dark, we heard Chuck-will's-widow and Whip-poor-wills singing. After missing Black Rail at Turkey Point, we reluctantly decided to call it a night. We arrived at the finish line at 11:30 p.m. Our total was 211 and we were all happy with it. As we were walking into the building to hand in our check list, a bird called over head. We all stopped in our tracks. Was that really a Common Night? Then, it called again and again, and a few more times. It was a Common Nighthawk!!!! That bird was number 212 and made the very last memorable moment to a very memorable day.

## Blue PSO T-Shirts Now for Sale

PSO T-shirts are available for sale in either pale green or light blue. Sizes range from small to XXL. The fabric is a blend of 50% cotton, 50% polyester. A few off-white

shirts are still available in sizes small, medium, and XL. These shirts all feature the PSO Pileated logo in a three-inch diameter circle on the left front. On the back is an outline of the state with the counties outlined as well. Superimposed on the state is the flying Pileated Woodpecker. Bold letters declare "Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology."

These great shirts cost \$19.50 which includes postage and handling. Send your order with a check made out for the appropriate amount to the "Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology" to PSO, 2469 Hammertown Road, Narvon, PA 17555-9730.

### Answers to PSO Bird Quiz on page 6

1. **Tennessee Warbler** and **Nashville Warbler**.
2. **Marsh Wren**. (Sedge Wrens also are known to sing at night, but not as often.)
3. **Turdidae**. It is a thrush.
4. **Cedar Waxwing**. The orange pigment, occurring primarily in juveniles, comes from honeysuckle berries eaten at the time of molt.
5. **California Gull**.

## The Annotated List of the Birds of Pennsylvania Soon Available

Under the auspices of the Ornithological Technical Committee of the Pennsylvania Biological Survey, Barb and Frank Haas have been revising and updating the *Annotated List of the Birds of Pennsylvania, Second Edition*. The first edition was issued in 1992. It should be ready for sale later this summer. Cost will be \$7 including tax and postage. They will be available from PSO. Check our website to see a sample ([www.pabirds.org](http://www.pabirds.org)).

Send your order with a check made payable to "Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology" to PSO, 2469 Hammertown Road, Narvon, PA 17555-9730. You may contact Frank Haas at [fbhaas@pabirds.org](mailto:fbhaas@pabirds.org) for availability.

## PSO Newsletter

This newsletter is published four times a year by the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology. To renew your membership, send your check made payable to "PSO" to:

### Membership Categories:

PSO	Individual	\$ 28.50
2469 Hammertown Road	Family	\$ 32.50
Narvon, PA 17555-9730	Sustaining	\$ 42.50

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Saw-whet Owl research was the topic of Doug Gross's banquet talk at the annual meeting.

Photo by John Lapin



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