

THE

# PSO PILEATED



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The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

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

The five-hour drive home from the PSO meeting in Pittsburgh to my house two miles from the Delaware River and New Jersey was long and tedious. Rain, heavy most of the time, fell the whole way, but my mind was filled with good thoughts of how great the annual meeting had been. The efforts of the Three Rivers Birding Club and its members, in particular PSO board member Jack Solomon, field trip organizer Jim Valimont, and all of the trip leaders, made for an exemplary three days. I'm especially in awe of Sherron Lynch who not only baked cakes with the PSO logo on them for the Saturday afternoon sessions but also made 96 dozen bagged cookies for the field trips. I haven't baked that many cookies my entire life.

Also exemplary were the speakers, all conservationists whose names are already well known to PA's birders. Dan Brauning spoke of the population recovery of Peregrine Falcons; Dr. Todd Katzner's talk was about how increasing wind power locations affect migrating eagles; Doug Gross covered the technology involved with the state's *eBird* citizen science effort; and Brian Shema discussed artificial nest site fidelity in Barn Owls.

The annual awards are always extremely important because they recognize scientists, birders, or other environmentalists whose work often goes unnoticed by or unknown to the general birding public. This year's conservation award went to Dr. Dan Klem of Muhlenberg College in Allentown who has spent more than 30 years researching the effects of manmade structures on avian mortality. The Earl Poole award went to Jack Holcomb, a radio personality whose bird/nature show has touched and informed countless persons in southeastern PA for more than three decades.

Becoming president of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology is surreal to me. I vividly remember how I used to hide my binoculars in my purse when I first discovered birding. I also vividly remember the incredulous look on my mother's face when she found out what I was doing. I once took her to Hawk Mountain to show her what it was like and she said, "You drive all the way out here just to look at birds????!!!"



Too nice to cut! But too delicious not to!!! This is one of the cakes baked by Sherron Lynch for our afternoon break.

Never during those early days of my birding career, when I was wrong more than I was right, did I imagine that one day I'd be where I am now. And lest you think I'm boasting, I'm not. I say this only to encourage others who start with little more than an interest and a bit of enthusiasm to continue birding, learning, and asking questions. Participation in birding organizations, big or small, local or national, can not only lead to opening doors you'd never thought you'd pass through, but also to doors

you never knew existed. Your knowledge can then be passed on in the form of education to others. Like everything else, the more you do something, the better you become at it.

Almost 35 years have passed since I looked at a bird with my first \$45 Sears binoculars. PSO didn't exist then, but today it is a thriving conservation organization. Every member is important. The more there are, the better the chances that a combined chorus of voices can have an impact on how precious habitat, not just for birds but for all species of wildlife, is managed. Speak up. Get involved. Get active. Get your friends to join. But, above all, enjoy what you're doing. See you in the field.

Arlene Koch  
Easton, PA  
Northampton County

# 2008 Annual Meeting Revisited

by Jack Solomon

The 2008 PSO meeting was held in Allegheny County, at the Four Points Sheraton North in Cranberry, just north of Pittsburgh, May 16-18. The area is surprisingly bird-rich, considering the county's degree of development, and several of the outings were held within the city limits. Reasonable drives took us to outlying regions, as wild as many in the state, with a wide range of habitats.

The Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania and the Three Rivers Birding Club shared the local hosting duties, ably directed by PSO's then President Rudy Keller and Board member Shonah Hunter, the dean of PSO meetings. Shonah always knows just what to do to make our meetings special. Sincere thanks to Sherron Lynch of the local hosting committee. Sherron baked all the cookies everyone enjoyed on the outings as well as the fabulous cakes we ate on the Saturday break; she made all the maps we handed out, created all the big posters, contacted the hotel arranging myriad details, and designed and made the snazzy name badges.

I attended the two Friday, May 16, outings to the University of Pittsburgh, in Pittsburgh's Oakland section, to see 175 year-old Audubon prints and Peregrine Falcons. Eric Marchbein arranged the first one, meeting us there. Eric promised that the color and detail of the gigantic original set of prints, made around 1833 and beautifully preserved, would be orders of magnitude more impressive than any reproductions I had ever seen. Eric was right. Kate St. John led the second outing to look for the Peregrine Falcons nesting at the University of Pittsburgh. Kate took her laptop so we could watch the webcam that shows their nest. Several people brought scopes, and we all got good looks through the scopes.

Friday evening's registration provided all with name badges and fabric badge holders (provided by ASWP) with pockets for pens and other treasures. The social and short business meeting offered the chance to meet new friends, renew old acquaintances, and talk to many of the persons who report on the PABIRDS list serve. ASWP sponsored the evening's refreshments, including various beverages and a quantity of delicious hot and cold foods, so I deeply regretted buying dinner earlier at a restaurant.

The vendors arrived, including Aden Troyer with his quality scopes and binoculars from the Lost Creek Shoe Shop and Optical Supplies. Karena Gregg, former PSO

Youth Scholarship winner, now a high-school senior (and designer of the Peregrine Falcon head that adorned the pins we received with our registration materials) sold sweatshirts and other raptor adorned items. The PSO table, manned by Frank Haas, offered the official PSO hat, T-shirts, and other items. Frank also brought items from the Bird Screen Company. Amy Sobkowiak, representing

Women of the Cloud Forest, had popular handmade bags, field guide holders, and jewelry. Brad Wiley offered impressive carvings of birds. Sheree Daugherty sold beautiful nature paintings and prints. ASWP had optics and other items from its nature store.

Outgoing president Rudy Keller opened the brief business meeting at 7:30, so that we could attend the evening's outing. Rudy announced that the 2009 meeting will be in Bucks County.

Besides the election of Arlene Koch as president and Tom Kuehl as vice president, we re-elected the current board members whose terms expired this year: Shonah Hunter, Mark

McConaughy, John Fedak, and Sandy Lockerman. Jim Valimont gave us a quick overview of Saturday's and Sunday's field trips, accurately predicting a bit of rain, lots of mud, and some good birds

After the meeting 42 birders headed to their cars to follow Bob Machesney to State Game Lands 203 to listen for Whip-poor-wills. We weren't disappointed.

Most of the Saturday morning field trips, except for the one to Raccoon Creek State Park led by Deuane Hoffman, departed at 6:30 a.m. from the hotel; Deuane's left at 6:00 because of the travel distance. Most of the outings were greeted with light rain, but as the morning progressed, the skies cleared. See the PSO website ([www.pabirds.org](http://www.pabirds.org)) for details of some of the meeting's field trips.

Throughout the three-day weekend, Scott Katzner and the staff at the National Aviary arranged for half-price admission for PSO registrants.

After the field trips, we lunched on our own, then returned to the hotel for the afternoon speaker sessions.

Todd Katzner, Director of Conservation and Field Research at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, spoke on "Migrating Eagles and Wind Power: Conflict Potential in



For many, the Henslow's Sparrows were the highlight of Chuck Tague's field trip to the Imperial Strips.

an Information Void.” Those following the news of the legal battles at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch between an electric power company desiring wind generating sites and locals concerned about killing birds and bats with turbine blades listened with particular interest. Todd has fitted eastern Golden Eagles with battery powered transmitters to learn their migration routes, where they travel, breed, and winter. He believes his research may indicate where it’s less harmful to locate wind turbines and which places are completely unsuitable.

Dan Brauning, Supervisor of the Pennsylvania Game Commission’s Wildlife Diversity Program, presented “A Story of Recovery: Peregrine Falcons in Pittsburgh and Beyond.” The “Beyond” part included the entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Most of the growing number of nest sites are on skyscrapers and bridges. Of special interest to me was the news of several pairs of Peregrines that have started to nest on cliffs, as they did prior to their annihilation by DDT.

An afternoon break between speakers featured two of Sherron Lynch’s wonderfully delicious cakes. One was chocolate with raspberry filling; the other lemon. Both cakes were decorated with our PSO Pileated Woodpecker logo flying over the state of Pennsylvania. Every one of the 67 counties was outlined in icing.  
[Editor’s Note: See photo on page 1.]

Doug Gross, Endangered Species Specialist for the Pennsylvania Game Commission, gave a talk entitled “Pennsylvania eBird: New Frontiers in Pennsylvania Citizen Science.” Wireless internet service allowed Doug to project the eBird web site on the screen and show us how to record our sightings and retrieve the data in many useful formats and arrays. He demonstrated that eBird is the way for birders to make their data useful and available to everyone, no matter where they are.

Brian Shema, Director of Conservation for the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, talked about “Developing Artificial Nest Site Fidelity in Barn Owls.” Brian is raising Barn Owls in a barn in Butler County. A pair of Barn Owls is raising their young in an enclosed area in a barn, with almost no human contact. When they’re old enough, the young will be allowed to leave the enclosure. Prior attempts to reintroduce this species have failed; the birds either quickly died or moved to very distant locations. By using owl parents to feed and raise the young, Brian hopes to demonstrate that the parents and/or young will develop a fidelity to the site and remain to breed there naturally in future years.

The traditional silent auction featured two copies of Todd’s *Birds of Western Pennsylvania*, many other rare and not-so-rare books, as well as other birding-related items, including a brand-new GPS system. Regrettably, there were no applicants this year for the PSO Youth Scholarship, so there will be a good fund available from silent auction proceeds for next year.

After I gorged on the all-you-can-eat buffet banquet, Flo McGuire made the awards presentations.

Jack Holcomb of West Reading was the 2008 Earl Poole Award winner for outstanding contributions to ornithology in Pennsylvania. Awards Committee Chair Flo McGuire states, “Jack is an institution in radio, and he made birdwatching and birds accessible and interesting to a wide and diverse public.” Since the 1960s Jack hosted a daily radio show called “Birdtalk” on station WEEU in Reading. Now in semi-retirement, he has a Saturday morning call-in show named “Jack’s Backyard.” His charming thank-you comments showed why he’s been on the air so long.



Birders at our PSO meetings are always willing to help each other and share information.

Photo by Chuck Tague

Dr. Dan Klem, Professor of Ornithology and Conservation Biology at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, won the 2008 Conservation Award. Dr. Klem is the foremost authority on bird window kills and has pioneered in research leading to architectural

designs to prevent bird collisions. His methods are being used increasingly for skyscrapers, towers, houses, and other structures.

The evening ended with tabulation of birds for the final trip list. Margaret Higbee, assisted by Carol Guba, tallied the field lists on a giant checklist, provided by ASWP, so that we could all review it afterwards. After the meeting ended, members socialized until it was time to retire in preparation for Sunday’s outings.

At 6:30 on Sunday morning, field trips began again, but the weather was a tad rainier, but that didn’t deter the participants on the various field trips.

The weather didn’t always cooperate with us at the 2008 PSO Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh, but the fellowship, programs, spirit, and, of high importance to me, the meals, the fare at the breaks, and the cookies, and, most importantly, the fact that it didn’t rain enough to stop us from birding, made it another in a series of great PSO events.

# Birds Listed at 2008 PSO Meeting at Pittsburgh

Canada Goose	Rock Pigeon	Blue Jay	Blue-winged Warbler	Canada Warbler
Wood Duck	Mourning Dove	American Crow	Tennessee Warbler	Yellow-breasted Chat
Mallard	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Fish Crow	Nashville Warbler	Scarlet Tanager
Common Merganser	Eastern Screech-Owl	Tree Swallow	Northern Parula	Eastern Towhee
Wild Turkey	Whip-poor-will	N. Rough-winged Swallow	Yellow Warbler	Chipping Sparrow
Great Blue Heron	Chimney Swift	Barn Swallow	Chestnut-sided Warbler	Field Sparrow
Black-crowned Night-Heron	Ruby-thrted Hummingbird	Carolina Chickadee	Magnolia Warbler	Vesper Sparrow
Turkey Vulture	Belted Kingfisher	Black-capped Chickadee	Cape May Warbler	Savannah Sparrow
Osprey	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Tufted Titmouse	Black-throated Blue Warbler	Grasshopper Sparrow
Bald Eagle	Downy Woodpecker	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Yellow-rumped Warbler	Henslow's Sparrow
Northern Harrier	Hairy Woodpecker	White-breasted Nuthatch	Black-throated Green	Song Sparrow
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Northern Flicker	Carolina Wren	Blackburnian Warbler	White-throated Sparrow
Cooper's Hawk	Pileated Woodpecker	House Wren	Yellow-throated Warbler	White-crowned Sparrow
Red-shouldered Hawk	Eastern Wood-Pewee	Golden-crowned Kinglet	Prairie Warbler	Northern Cardinal
Broad-winged Hawk	Acadian Flycatcher	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Bay-breasted Warbler	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Red-tailed Hawk	Alder Flycatcher	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Blackpoll Warbler	Indigo Bunting
American Kestrel	Willow Flycatcher	Eastern Bluebird	Cerulean Warbler	Bobolink
Peregrine Falcon	Least Flycatcher	Veery	Black-and-white Warbler	Red-winged Blackbird
Killdeer	Eastern Phoebe	Swainson's Thrush	American Redstart	Eastern Meadowlark
Solitary Sandpiper	Great Crested Flycatcher	Hermit Thrush	Worm-eating Warbler	Common Grackle
Spotted Sandpiper	Eastern Kingbird	Wood Thrush	Ovenbird	Brown-headed Cowbird
Semipalmated Sandpiper	White-eyed Vireo	American Robin	Northern Waterthrush	Orchard Oriole
Least Sandpiper	Yellow-throated Vireo	Gray Catbird	Louisiana Waterthrush	Baltimore Oriole
Dunlin	Blue-headed Vireo	Northern Mockingbird	Kentucky Warbler	House Finch
American Woodcock	Warbling Vireo	Brown Thrasher	Mourning Warbler	American Goldfinch
Ring-billed Gull	Philadelphia Vireo	European Starling	Common Yellowthroat	House Sparrow
Herring Gull	Red-eyed Vireo	Cedar Waxwing	Hooded Warbler	

**Total = 134 species**

What a great meeting and what fabulous field trips!!! Special thanks to all the trip leaders for sharing their special spots and knowledge. We appreciate your Pittsburgh hospitality. Check our website for field trip details ([www.pabirds.org](http://www.pabirds.org)).

## Notes from Our Award Recipients

At our annual meeting, Dan Klem, Professor of Ornithology and Conservation Biology at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, was presented with the PSO Conservation Award. The Earl Poole Award went to Jack Holcomb, a Reading radio personality who introduced countless persons to birding.

Please extend my thanks to the committee and all PSO members for their kindness in considering me for the award. It was a wonderful weekend and the opportunity to meet so many great people was frosting on the cake. Folks like you and all of the members are the reasons I was honored.

Thanks again and good birding.

Jack Holcomb

Dear Ms. McGuire and the entire PSO Awards Committee:

I am flattered, deeply honored, and optimally humbled by your kind and thoughtful attention. Thank you all so much for this distinguished recognition, and I am certain that through this award you will bring added and needed attention to this important conservation issue for birds and people; in one way or another you will contribute and be party to saving more bird lives from glass. For my long-standing but modest role in this life-saving course, I could not be more proud or grateful for your special recognition. I look forward to being with you all at our upcoming annual meeting.

As a member from what I believe was the beginning of PSO, I continue to be sincerely and respectfully yours,

Dan Klem

# 2008 Meeting Participants

Sarah Armstrong  
Linda Bazan  
Carolyn Blatchley  
Rob Blye  
Rae Boulden  
Dan Brauning  
Brian Byrnes  
Bob Cook  
Ruth Cook  
Jim Dennis  
Nancy Dennis  
John Fedak  
Mike Fialkovich  
Dianne Franco  
Joan Galli  
Greg George  
Randi Gerrish  
Sarah Gerrish  
Donald Gibbon  
Laurie Goodrich

Doug Gross  
Carol Guba  
Barb Haas  
Frank Haas  
Ian Haigh  
Margaret Haigh  
Chris Hamilton  
Paul Hess  
Margaret Higbee  
Roger Higbee  
Deuane Hoffman  
Jack K. Holcomb  
Jerry Howard  
Marjorie Howard  
Shonah Hunter  
Dory Jacobs  
Debbie Kalbfleisch  
Todd Katzner  
Chad Kauffman

Rudy Keller  
Ed Kern  
Kathy Kern  
Margie Kern  
Jan Kingery Held  
Scott Kinzey  
Dan Klem  
Renne Klem  
Arlene Koch  
Kathleen Konechny  
Janet Kuehl  
Tom Kuehl  
Sherri LaBar  
Mike Longdon  
Pat Lynch  
Sherron Lynch  
Bob Machesny  
Dianne Machesny  
Terry Master

Mark McConaughy  
Carol McCullough  
Fred McCullough  
Flo McGuire  
Jim McGuire  
Neil Nodelman  
Dawn Osborne  
Carol Reigle  
Bob Ross  
Leanne Saenger  
Peter Saenger  
Sarah Sargent  
Jayme Schaeffer  
Carol Schaffer  
Jeff Schaffer  
Betty Scott  
Brian Shema  
Tiffani Shema  
Kathy Sieminski

Sam Sinderson  
Jim Smith  
Rita Smith  
Jack Solomon  
Sue Solomon  
Kate St. John  
Claire Staples  
John Tautin  
Steve Thomas  
Sheila Thorpe  
Clark Trauterman  
Jim Valimont  
Kim Van Fleet  
Bob Van Newkirk  
Michelle Vensel  
Linda Wagner  
Larry Waltz  
Carole Willenpart  
Frances Williams  
Alan Winslow



## The Raven Reporter

### Tales of Discovery about Pennsylvania Birds

### Pennsylvania eBird Arrives



The new Pennsylvania eBird website is ready for public use. Many of you got a sneak peak at the PA clone site at the PSO annual meeting. It is ready for regular public use.

eBird is the premier birding database. It is a real-time, online checklist program that has revolutionized how the birding community reports and accesses information about birds. eBird was launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society and has generated tremendous participation, both nationally and internationally, since its inception. The Game Commission is partnering with the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology and Audubon Pennsylvania to bring about Pennsylvania eBird. The stories featured on the PA eBird home page reflect the interests of these organizations. The PA eBird project melds very well with the Game Commis-

sion's commitment to conserve and manage our bird species of greatest conservation concern as outlined in the Wildlife Action Plan.

Featured stories for the initial PA eBird home pages include the following:

- Pennsylvania as a Migrant Hot Spot/Migratory Bird Day
- The Annual PSO Meeting at Pittsburgh
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> PA Breeding Bird Atlas
- The Important Bird Areas Project Featuring Audubon Volunteers
- How eBird Helps the Wildlife Action Plan
- Information about Data Quality and the PA State Bird List

We anticipate having regular new stories and welcome interesting news about birds, birding, and bird conservation for the PA eBird Home Page. Send your ideas to Doug Gross at the address below.

The website can be found at <http://ebird.org/content/ebird/pa> Or, go to the Game Commission's homepage – [www.pgc.state.pa.us](http://www.pgc.state.pa.us) – and click on "Pennsylvania eBird" in the right column. The Wildlife Action Plan also can be accessed from the homepage. Click on "Wildlife" in the left column, then select "Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan" under the "Wildlife Grants and Programs" box.

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# Pennsylvania's *Empidonax* Flycatchers

*Note: This is a shortened and updated version of a handout developed for the Audubon-PGC birding workshops. It is intended as an aid to identification of one of the most difficult group of birds for the last year of the 2<sup>nd</sup> PBBA and first year of PA eBird.*

The *Empidonax* flycatchers (Family Tyrannidae, the American or Tyrant Flycatchers) pose identification challenges for birders. They are a group of very similar-looking, closely related species. Most of our tyrants spend over half their lives in Neotropical forests, visiting us for only a few weeks each year. The breeding period is necessarily brief because of the long journey back to the wintering ground where they fiercely compete with other insectivores. The nesting season is the best time to become familiar with our little tyrant flycatchers because it is when they are most vocal, most likely to be found in their stereotypical habitat, allowing for ease of study and surety of identification.

Field identification of flycatchers has come a long way since the days when bird guides used the same illustration for several species. Current field guides have done a remarkable job of showing the nuances of posture, plumage, and vocalizations in the *Empids*. With careful study, they really can seem distinct and familiar. Since these species are so similar in appearance, we should ask ourselves how flycatchers tell each other apart. After all, tyrants have do not have field guides, much less multi-media computers to check things out. What do they use to make sure of each other? Let's try to think like a flycatcher. Tyrants think and move fast; they are intense by necessity and restless by disposition. After all, they live by catching small flying insects. Short, abrupt vocalizations are "just what they are."

All of our *Empidonax* flycatchers have a distinctive set of vocalizations that help them defend their turf and keep in touch. It has been written a few times that the vocalizations of tyrant flycatchers are neither musical or varied, but this may be as much a comment on the lack of human understanding of these sounds that may be rich in information to the mind of a hyperactive little bird. In this summary, I will emphasize vocalizations and habitat. The plumage details will wait for a more detailed publication.

## **How to Learn *Empidonax* Flycatcher Identification: Some Rules of Thumb**

Spend time to study breeding pairs, not birds in migration, because their identification is more certain.

Become familiar with neighborhood birds, studying their behavior and appearance.

Record and study all vocalizations, keeping them in context of behavior.

Transliteration of bird vocalizations are quite varied. Many birders have their own renditions of *Empid* songs that help them remember them. Use what is helpful to you.

Do not emphasize plumage color due to its variability with wear, molt, and lighting.

*Empidonax* flycatchers are fairly habitat specific in the nesting season, so take that as an important clue in identification.

Different species are rarely at the same location, but this situation provides an opportunity to compare them.

Nests are fairly specific and species can be differentiated by their nests and nest sites.

There are many ways to catch a fly. Many *Empids* actually forage by upward striking, sally gleaning, or hawking within the dense foliage they occupy rather than open hawking from a conspicuous perch back to the same perch like kingbirds, phoebes, and pewees.

## ***Empidonax* Vocalizations**

The so-called "calls" are the key to *Empidonax* identification. The vocalizations of tyrant flycatchers are innate or "hard-wired" and not learned to any extent like true songbirds such as sparrows or warblers. They seem "to know what they are going to say" when they hatch out of the egg. Fledglings utter many of the various vocalizations soon after they are out of the nest, but a pattern in the use of the various vocalizations does not emerge until they are older.

Male *Empids* are quite vocal when establishing and defending their territories and sing from fairly conspicuous perches even in densely vegetated habitat. We tend to describe the vocalization used to declare and defend territory as the "advertisement song." For the many students of Peterson's guides, this would apply to the familiar "FITZ-bew" of Willow Flycatcher or the "che-bek!" of the Least Flycatcher. Females tend to call back to their mates with other calls, keeping contact through the egg brooding and nestling period. There is on-going study of bird vocalizations, and I have discussed a few themes in the literature and among *Empidonax* aficionados. First of all, there probably is more than one "advertisement song" for each species, sometimes called "Type 1" and "Type 2" songs. These seem to vary by individuals or perhaps by situation/status, or both. The type song given may indicate if a male is mated or still searching for a mate. There are records of female *Empids* singing the "advertisement song," but usually these have occurred under some kind of stress. It seems that almost all the time, the "advertisement song" is given by the male on territory either on the breeding ground or on the wintering ground. The *Empid* vocalization scenario may be more complicated than is portrayed in any of our texts or field guides. There is still much to learn about these species.

Some field ornithologists feel that the “real advertising song” of each *Empidonax* species is the pre-dawn or flight song that is not described in field guides but mentioned in other literature, including the Birds of North America accounts. The pre-dawn or flight songs tend to be complex and a mix of several vocalizations in succession. For some species, there are few good recordings or descriptions of the pre-dawn song and other vocalizations. The transcriptions of bird vocalizations are helpful, but sometimes can contribute to the confusion. They are perhaps less useful for the brief calls given by tyrants than for longer songs. In this summary, I have borrowed freely from guides and publications listed at the end that are considered standard references. It is very helpful to listen to the commercial discs and tapes to get a better idea of what the written descriptions of vocalizations in field guides are referring to. However, these recordings and the field guides are highly edited, necessarily incomplete, and often neglect the behavioral context of vocalizations and do not indicate the frequency of the sounds. Some commercial recordings are condensed with less time between vocalizations than naturally occurs in the field.

Some cautionary notes: Respect the need for birds to maintain territories, pair bonds, and care for their dependent young with minimal interference. If you choose to study nesting behavior, minimize visits to the nest and do not leave evidence of your presence that may cause a nest to be predated. Tyrants are quite vocal on territory, so audio-lures (tapes, CDs, mp3 files) are usually not needed to locate birds, especially early in the breeding season, in the morning or evening. Repeated and prolonged playing of audio-lures may cause undue stress on birds and disrupt behavior (the male needs to defend the territory and provide for the female and young). Continual distractions may cause birds to abandon territory, especially early in the season, or become non-responsive to audio-lures (so they won't work when you really need them). Please remember that these birds, unlike some of the tropical species you may have enjoyed on a tour, are not permanent residents with a prolonged nesting season. Our flycatchers are long-distance migrants that pack their nesting season into a short period. An interrupted nesting season is a missed season.

**Acadian Flycatcher, *Empidonax virescens* (ACFL)**  
The silky *Empid* of tall trees and streamside: the largest and most pewee-ish of the *Empids*.

**PA Breeding Habitat and Distribution:** Mature riparian forest with full canopy. Statewide, but more common in south. More widespread in wooded hollows than generally appreciated. In North, prefers hemlocks.

**Nest Site and Description:** Lower branch of large tree, shaded site, sometimes over water. Shallow, delicate basket hanging in fork; fibers hang down, sometimes several inches. Uses a lot of caterpillar silk.

**Behavior:** A bird of the forest canopy. Less active and sings less frequently than other *Empids*, often sitting for longer periods in canopy. Hawks more than most *Empids*.

**Vocalizations: Song:** Explosive hiccup *peet-sah!* or *spit-*

*chee!* or *whicky-up!* (2-4/min). Also the male utters twittering notes, like an excited ‘ti-ti-ti-titi-ti...’, referred to as the “flutter call” or flicker call. **Call Note:** Loud, flat peek! An assertive, squeaky *pweest!*, or *pree!* (a sharp chirp). **Additional Vocalizations:** A pre-dawn song when it can be very vocal, alternating the hiccup song and abrupt, harsh *queep-queep*. This has been written as metallic *seet, speet, spake, or speak* notes interspersed with *tee chup* phrases. An evening song is also given that is similar but reportedly more spectacular and ringing in quality. Females are reported to call *tee chup* from the nest or near the nest. While scolding intruders, calls sound like *wee weet, weel chur* or *weeuh kip kip, wheeus seet seet*, and *shee uh wheet*. Near the nest, contact calls that sound like a *whew*, or *pee-oo* or *see-ou*. And, a variety of chattering calls and a short *whoty-whoty*.

**General Notes on Appearance:** Long-winged, peaked head (slightly crested) with flat forehead. The bill is long and wide with pinkish-yellow lower mandible. The eye ring is well defined. Our only *Empid* that regularly molts on the summer ground. It is a larger, longer bird than Yellow-bellied with a longer bill, wing, and tail. Throat is more “contrasty” than Yellow-bellied Flycatcher’s.

**Willow Flycatcher, *Empidonax traillii* (WIFL).** The sneezy FITZ-bew of lowland scrub and pasture. This and the Alder Flycatcher were known as “Traill’s Flycatcher.”

**PA Breeding Habitat and Distribution:** Usually, lower elevation streamside brush, wood edge, and pasture. Statewide, but mostly west and south. Habitat is a bit more open than Alder generally chooses.

**Nest Site and Description:** Low in fork of shrub or sapling, often in crotch of vertical stems. Neat, compact cup with fine fibers, similar to Yellow Warbler.

**Vocalizations: Song:** Sneezy, snappy, clear, and quick *FITZ-bew!* (16-24/min.). Note that the accent is on the first syllable. Sometimes abbreviated. Also a *FIZZ-bew* and a *creet!* **Call Note:** A thin *wit!* rising slightly at the end. (Distinctly different from Alder). The song is crisp 2-syllabled compared to the Alder’s burry 3 syllables, but can sound 3-parted in some individuals.

**General Notes on Appearance:** A largish *Empid* with flat forehead and slight crown, and brownish back. The bill is wide and pale while the eye ring is usually indistinct and narrow with a distinct pale loreal line. Generally, Alders have slightly greener crown, more pointed wings, slightly shorter bill, and slightly longer tail than the eastern populations of Willow.

**Alder Flycatcher, *Empidonax alnorum* (ALFL).** The burry “fee-BEE-o” northern half of Traill’s Flycatcher complex.

**PA Breeding Habitat and Distribution:** Higher elevation streamside brush, shrub swamps, dry upland scrub. Really is found in alders. Tends to be found in North or highlands of southern mountains. It is quite common in Poconos.

**Nest Site and Description:** Low in fork of shrub or sapling, sometimes very close to the ground but not over

water. Loosely built cup, untidy with cottony materials, similar to Song Sparrow.

**Vocalizations: Song:** Burry fee-BEE-o, *fe-BAY-oh*, *rre-BEEah!*, or *way-BEE-oh!* (12-24/min.). The emphasis is on the second syllable, not the first (as in Willow's *FITZ-bew*). In some birds the last note can be very brief so as to not be well-heard. **Call Note:** A husky, somewhat loud and musical *kep!*, *peek!*, *pip!*, *peep!* *bic!* (falling off at the end). This is distinctly different from Willow's sharp *wit!* and has some of the qualities of the call note of Downy Woodpecker. **Other Vocalizations:** Other *Empid* chirps and *kitter* calls. Also a *weee-ooo* or *zweee-ooo* call somewhat like *kep*, but ending in a buzz (superficially like the Willow's *FITZ-bew* song).

**General Notes on Appearance:** Same as Willow, but usually more greenish on back. Other differences are too insignificant to mention and not reliable.

**Additional Notes:** A very late migrant, usually arriving on breeding ground in last week of May, some as late as early June. They can stay on breeding ground well into August, keeping in contact with each other in the dense shrubbery of their territories (a good bird to hear while picking blueberries). At a distance, the 3-syllables and the burry quality are harder to hear.

**Least Flycatcher, *Empidonax minimus*, (LEFL).** The most diminutive of our tyrants, often found in clusters.

**Breeding Habitat and PA Breeding Distribution:** Open woods with clear mid-story, parklands. Plateaus and mountains, more common in north.

**Nest Site and Description:** On horizontal tree limb, small crotch. Compact with deep cup, with plant fibers.

**Behavior:** Very active and restless. Often nests in clusters of territories, surrounded by similar but unoccupied forest. When you are within a LEFL cluster you can hear the contact calls freely given between pairs as well as the snappy song. This species competes directly with American Redstart for resources and actively replaces it.

**Vocalizations: Song:** Incessant, frequent (50-70/min), dry, snappy *che-BEK!* **Call Note:** Assertive, repeated *whit!* Commonly given by female near nest. **Additional vocalizations:** Rapid chatter notes, *weep-weep-weep-weep*.

**General Notes on Appearance:** Compact with stubby bill, bold and complete eye-ring.

**Additional Notes:** Usually our first migrating *Empid* in spring and last in fall. Sings much more frequently than Yellow-bellied and sometimes occupies the edges of bogs, swamps, and streamsides at the high elevations where the other species might be expected (a possible cause for confusion).

**Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, *Empidonax flaviventris*, (YBFL).** The moss tyrant of cool, moist northern conifer forest and wetlands.

**Breeding Habitat and PA Distribution:** Shady, cool conifer woods, swamps with dense undergrowth. Very rare and local in high elevation forested wetlands. ENDANGERED in PA.

**Nest Site and Description:** Our only ground-nesting *Empid*. Nest placed deep in moss, base of tree or fern clump, in a root tip-up, or under tree roots or log. Mossy cup well-hidden from above, lined with fine grasses, needles. Dense vegetation (ferns, shrubs, low saplings) to waist or chest height seems to provide camouflage for female's travel routes to and from nest. Can be double-brooded in PA; the male tending the first brood while the female starts the second nest.

**Behavior:** Forages in dense vegetation, often upward-striking or sally-gleaning from vegetation above its perch, flying to another perch after each sally. Females sit very tight on nest and will flush only when intruder is almost on top of her. Quite vocal and feisty on its breeding ground. They attack other species that get too close to nest. Males defend territory stoutly, and females call regularly when not on nest. Pairs keep in vocal contact with call notes. In migration, they seem to keep space with "tu-wee" or similar call note. On breeding ground, often associated with Northern Waterthrush, Canada Warbler, and White-throated Sparrow.

**Vocalizations: Song:** Leisurely *che-bunk!*, *killink!*, *kiik!* (6-10/min). Much less frequently given than Least's frantic "che-BEK" song, given about 60 times/minute. Some males can sound very abrupt with a one-syllabled, liquid *kiik!* note (almost like Downy Woodpecker), particularly after paired up. **Call Notes:** *Chu-wee*, *tu-wee*, *twee!* *chiu!*, *etc.* (Calls given mostly by female on breeding grounds but both sexes in migration). The call is reminiscent of the Semipalmated Plover or Eastern Wood-Pewee's calls. (There may be more than one vocalization involved.) **Additional Vocalizations:** A variety of burr and chip notes given when capturing prey or encountering intruders. Flight or pre-dawn song is a rapid, excited series of alternating *che-bunk*, *tu-wee*, *brrrt*, and other calls given before sunrise or at dusk; sometimes given during the day particularly by unmated males.

**General Notes on Appearance:** The "cutest" of the *Empids* with compact, stocky profile and big white/yellowish eye-ring, short tail. The wing bars are particularly contrasty with dark wings. The yellow throat contrasts with darkish green chest band. Young have buffy wing bars and eye ring and sound like adults but notes are liquidy. Note that this species molts on its winter ground while Acadian molts on nesting ground. Late summer and fall adults of this species have worn plumage compared to Acadians. Migrates late in spring and early in "fall." Birds encountered as late as 10 June may still be en route to distant nesting ground. Some pairs do not seem formed until late June, the females arriving later. Some YBFL are migrating south in mid-July (so care must be taken with breeding status). A singing bird is no guarantee of breeding as some males defend territories through the summer without a mate.

*Note: If you encounter a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher acting territorially in appropriate habitat in PA, please contact the author as soon as possible. He is conducting a long-term study of the species and rewriting the BNA account.*

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## Conservation Corner

With all the recent news about the legislation in Congress regarding controlling greenhouse gases to deal with climate change, there have been some other positive actions regarding bird protection. Recently, Audubon California and five other environmental groups reached an agreement with the Tejon Ranch in California that will protect up to 240,000 contiguous acres. This area is ecologically significant and has extensive habitat for wildlife including the California Condor.

Other positive news is the recent settlement between Audubon and the National Park Service to protect wildlife including Piping Plovers from the impacts of beach driving at Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The number of water birds nesting at Cape Hatteras has declined significantly in the past several years. In 1997, there were 1508 nests but only 212 nests in 2007. This settlement will provide more protection for nesting birds and hopefully will reverse this decline.

And here in Pennsylvania, the last season of the Breeding Bird Atlas is underway. Volunteers across the state are taking to the field and recording breeding species and their locations in Pennsylvania. As PSO members know, this is a five-year project and a tremendous amount of data have already been collected, but there are many areas in the state that still need surveyed. Hence, there is a big effort to get volunteers into areas that have not been adequately covered for the atlas. PSO members are encouraged to make an extra effort this year to help "fill in the gaps," so if you have some extra time, please help. Information regarding the atlas and what areas still need surveyed can be found at [www.carnegiemnph.org/atlas](http://www.carnegiemnph.org/atlas).

– Mark Henry, Conservation Chairperson

# Orioles, Orioles, Orioles

by Arlene Koch

In the years that I've been writing a newspaper nature column I've been asked many questions I couldn't answer. But a question I recently got was easy.

A woman sent me a recording of a singing bird to identify. She said it was at the top of a tree, and it had a dark head, black wings with white on them, and an orange front (her words). She also said it looked like an oriole but it wasn't singing the song she was used to hearing and was surprised when it continued singing as it flew away. "Our birds aren't supposed to do that," she said. "What could it be?"

It was pretty obvious that the bird was a Baltimore Oriole, and the song seemed normal to me. Apparently, though, what she heard wasn't a "normal" oriole song to her ears. Not being an experienced birder, she didn't know that songs can vary with individual birds even as they follow a basic pattern, cadence, pitch, or level of loudness. It was also obvious that she meant Baltimore, not Orchard, when she called it an "oriole." It's been my experience that most people who aren't really into birding often don't know there are two kinds of orioles commonly found in PA.

I myself wasn't all that familiar with Orchard Orioles until about 10 years ago. One time I even went all the way to Higbee Beach in Cape May because I had heard there were three of them there. Little did I know then that down the road I'd have three or four pairs of them nesting within eyesight or earshot of our deck along with multiple Baltimore Orioles. Orchard Oriole nests aren't as pendulous as those of Baltimore's, and they're shallower although both are difficult to find amongst the leaves.

Thirty years ago when we built our house in an old pasture, our habitat resembled the tundra. Both species of orioles probably nested somewhere in this big valley, but I wasn't aware of them. But by the time trees and shrubs actually started looking like trees and shrubs in early 90s, my property list began expanding exponentially. Then we acquired more land, started converting farm fields to wildlife plantings, and stopped plowing or cutting close to fence rows. And it was at about this time that I first started noticing how many Baltimore Orioles were around.

I had planted some "fast growing hybrid" poplars on the southwestern end of the yard even though I was warned against doing so. It has been those poplars that both the Baltimore and eventually Orchard Orioles have mostly

nested in, along with other tree species. Orchard Orioles began showing up each spring in the late 90s and have, at times, built nests on low branches of both a spruce and a Bradford pear. One year the yard alone had six oriole nests.

A few years ago something must have happened to the young birds in one of the Baltimore nests because an adult male Baltimore began feeding the young in a nearby Orchard Oriole nest. The adult male Orchard and the adult male Baltimore would fight from treetop to ground, let go, and then both would take food into the nestlings along with the adult female Orchard. It was an odd ritual that repeated itself over and over again and even continued for a while after the nestlings fledged.



The Baltimores are always the first to return.

Photo by Brian Herman  
[www.brianherman.com](http://www.brianherman.com)

During May and June my yard is filled with oriole song. The Baltimores come first and are the loudest. The Orchards, however, sing more often and all during the day. The Orchard Oriole's song is faster, longer, higher pitched, and more musical than that of the Baltimore's. Sometimes I can tell that the bird singing is a first-year male Orchard, not an adult male, but I'd be hard pressed to explain how I can tell this, and I'm not always right. By the end of June the yard gets quiet and only then do I realize that oriole nesting season is mostly over. And already by July I miss them.

## Welcome Our New VP

Always a nature lover, birding came a bit later in life for new board member and vice president Tom Kuehl. Along with wife Janet, Tom, an active citizen scientist, has participated in several Christmas Bird Counts (Buffalo Creek, Bushy Run, Allegheny Plateau, Indiana), the Winter Raptor Survey (*Somerset*), and the PA Migration Count (*Westmoreland*). Tom and Janet serve as Region 73 co-coordinators for the 2<sup>nd</sup> PA Breeding Bird Atlas, and participate in Project Feeder Watch and the Great Backyard Bird Count. Local birding organizations are supported by membership in the Westmoreland Bird and Nature Club, Three Rivers Birding Club, Todd Bird Club, and the Allegheny Plateau and Western Pennsylvania Audubon Societies. Statewide memberships include Pennsylvania Audubon and of course PSO. He also served as a counter at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch.

Tom grew up in Gettysburg. He was introduced to nature with the Boy Scouts, which meant summers at Camp Tuckahoe, and hiking on the Appalachian Trail in the Caledonia State Park area. Tom's an accountant by trade. Formerly a CPA with an audit firm, a CFO for a glass manufacturer, he presently does financial consulting with a turnaround firm in Pittsburgh. Welcome aboard!

## Ornithological Literature Notes

Two recent ecological studies in Pennsylvania shed new light on effects of habitat fragmentation and alteration on individual bird species and entire avian communities.

1—“Seasonal forest-patch use by birds in fragmented landscapes of south-central Pennsylvania” by Gregory S. Keller and Richard H. Yahner (2007; *Wilson Journal of Ornithology* 119:410-418).

Keller and Yahner surveyed birds during breeding, migration, and winter seasons from May 1994 to May 1996 at two locations that differ in degree of forest fragmentation: an area of the Great Valley in Cumberland and Franklin counties, where isolated forest patches are only 15% of a landscape dominated by farms and pastures; an Appalachian Mountain area in Perry and Juniata counties, where 40% of the landscape is forested.

Analyzing seasonal distributions of more than 60 species, the authors found that many species' presence differed significantly among seasons in their use of more-fragmented and less-fragmented landscapes. Two examples: Northern Flickers were likely to be found in more-fragmented areas in winter and spring but showed no association with either habitat in the breeding season and fall. White-breasted Nuthatches were likely to be found in more-fragmented landscapes in fall but not in the other seasons.

Seasonal variations also occurred in species' presence in small, medium, or large forest patches. For example, Blue-headed Vireos, Black-throated Blue Warblers, and Black-throated Green Warblers tended to be found in relatively large forest areas in spring migration but showed no association with forest patch size in fall migration.

Noting that many such responses to landscape fragmentation and forest patch size are not consistent among seasons, Keller and Yahner urge researchers to include multiple seasons when analyzing avian habitat usage, rather than focusing on only a single season.

2—“Long-term effects of wastewater irrigation in habitat and a bird community in central Pennsylvania” by Adam T. Rohnke and Richard H. Yahner (2008; *Wilson Journal of Ornithology* 120:146-152).

Rohnke and Yahner studied long-term effects on a forest bird community resulting from a Pennsylvania State University wastewater irrigation system at Toftrees in Centre County. As many as 3,100 rotating sprinkler heads apply more than twice the average annual rainfall onto forests, fields, and farmland at the site. The new research compares habitat characteristics and bird species' abundance in 2003-2004 with findings of a similar study conducted at the site in 1987.

A major decline in density of understory trees and short shrubs has occurred since 1987, while tall shrubs, herbaceous ground cover, and leaf litter have increased many fold. The accompanying changes in bird species' abundance between the 1987 and the 2003 surveys are dramatic, as measured by observations per 10 hectares along survey transects. Among declines, Eastern Wood-Pewee observations fell by 90%, Ovenbird by 83%, Red-eyed Vireo by 72%, and Eastern Towhee by 71%. In contrast, observations of some species showed tremendous increases: 11,112% for Gray Catbird, 7,482% for Song Sparrow, 1,743% for American Robin, and 733% for American Crow. [Those huge percentages are correct.]

The authors emphasize that a report by L. M. Kelso and T. W. Bowersox in 2004 (*Journal of the Pennsylvania Academy of Science* 78:43-52) concluded that the forest community cannot be sustained under the present wastewater regime at Toftrees. Rohnke and Yahner foresee continuing declines in Wood Thrush, Ovenbird, and other forest species, mostly leaving birds of secondary-successional habitats such as Gray Catbird, Common Yellowthroat, and Song Sparrow. Further, they predict that habitat changes caused by the flood of wastewater will cause a decline in overall bird species richness at the site.

—Paul Hess

### PSO Quiz

In this final year of our second Breeding Bird Atlas, how well do you know Pennsylvania's breeding warblers?

1. Which is the most common warbler reported during the current atlas project, and which is the least frequently observed?
2. Which warbler's confirmed breeding range in Pennsylvania is restricted entirely to the state's northwestern quadrant?
3. The confirmed breeding range of the “Sycamore Warbler” has advanced northward since our first atlas. What species is this?
4. In North American Breeding Bird Survey data for 1966–2006, eight warblers show statistically significant population trends upward in Pennsylvania. Which species?
5. During that same Breeding Bird Survey period, four warblers show statistically significant downtrends in Pennsylvania. Which species?

(Answers on page 12.)

## Answers to Bird Quiz

(page 11)

1. Common Yellowthroat (3,955 atlas blocks) and Blackpoll Warbler (3 atlas blocks) through April 2008.
2. Mourning Warbler.
3. Yellow-throated Warbler.
4. Pine (up 8.3% per year), Hooded (5.3%), Magnolia (4.8%), Yellow-rumped (4.6%), Black-throated Blue (3.0%), Black-throated Green (2.3%), Ovenbird (1.9%), Chestnut-sided (1.8%).
5. Golden-winged (down 9.2% per year), Yellow-breasted Chat (5.4%), Cerulean (2.8%), Black-and-white (2.5%).

## Dues Reminder

Has time run away from you? Please check your mailing label to ascertain whether your dues are due. If you have not renewed for 2008, this is your last newsletter.

Please use the enclosed form to renew your membership!

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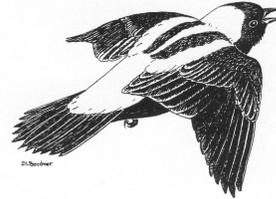
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