From the President’s Desk....

The 2009 PSO Annual Meeting will be held in Morgantown, southern Berks County, May 15-17. “That’s not what I read in the last newsletter,” you may be thinking, and you’re right. In my last president’s message I said the meeting would in Bucks County, but things didn’t work out, to say the least.

Lest you think PSO waits until the last minute to plan these meetings, rest assured we don’t. We’re already working on the 2010 meeting. But our initial booking with facilities in Bucks County secured months earlier fell through in August. Then a second set of arrangements did the same thing in early February. I won’t go into detail except to say that the first situation was strange and the second one was bizarre.

Thankfully Frank Haas was able to secure the Holiday Inn in Morgantown. In 1999, in celebration of our tenth anniversary, PSO held our meeting there in the fall. So maybe now, 10 years later, it’s fitting that we once again have it at the same place. Perhaps the great birthing gods in the sky arranged the whole thing.

There are many great places to bird in this area, places like Struble Lake, French Creek State Park, Great Marsh, state game lands, and others. Most of the field trips, and thanks to Rudy Keller for picking up the ball there, will be to destinations in Berks and Chester Counties, but a few Lancaster County locales may not be out of the question for Sunday morning return trips home.

The three-day meeting agenda includes a short but required business meeting Friday night combined with a lot of social mixing to meet and greet old friends or new acquaintances. Field trip sign-ups and information about their destinations will be available then. The trips take place on both Saturday and Sunday mornings. On Saturday afternoon there are four half-hour presentations with a break in the middle for snacks and visits to the various vendors and silent auction tables. The Saturday night banquet will be followed by the presentation of awards and scholarships and a compilation of species seen on the field trips.

The afternoon presentations are always short, interesting, and full of useful information, and this year’s lineup will be no different. Steve Saffier of PA Audubon will discuss the qualifications for the Audubon at Home Bird Habitat Recognition program. Bert Filemyr and Jeff Holt of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club will talk about the composite prints of Audubon’s *Birds of America*. Todd Underwood of Kutztown University will address how egg recognition ejection works as a defense mechanism against cowbird parasitism. You know birds do this, but do you know which ones? And David Barber, biologist at Hawk Mountain, will cover data collected from studies on the movement ecology of vultures and other species in the state.

The annual meeting is more than worth its cost. Where else can you get to meet some of PA’s best birders, eat great food (can you say scrapple?), bird new sites, and take home original nature artwork, a new pair of binoculars, a bird screen, or some new books? The registration form is in this newsletter. Please join us.

Arlene Koch
Northampton County, Easton, PA
Struble Trail, Chester County, Saturday, May 16 –
The Struble Trail winds along the riparian corridor of the east branch of the Brandywine Creek near Downingtown. The wooded areas surrounding the trail attract a nice variety of spring migrants and breeding birds, featuring several species of flycatchers, vireos, warblers, thrushes, orioles, and Scarlet Tanagers. The area is well known for breeding Cerulean Warblers.

Leader: Holly Merker.

Hibernia Park (including Chambers Lake) and Coatesville Reservoir, Chester County, Saturday, May 16 – Hibernia Park, the largest Chester County park, and the new Chambers Lake are among the finest birding destinations in the county. The old oak woodlands and thickets of the park are a haven for migrant warblers, while Chambers Lake has produced many rare waterfowl and other species. We will scope the lake for waterfowl and terns before walking along the picturesque Brandywine searching for Mourning Warbler and other late migrating warblers. Hooded and Kentucky Warblers breed here. Afterwards, we will check Coatesville Reservoir for any additional waterfowl.

Leader: Larry Lewis.

Blue Marsh Lake, Berks County, Saturday, May 16 – Specific areas visited will depend on where the best birds are found on pre-trip searches, but most time will be devoted to fields and forests surrounding the lake. Very little time will be spent at the lake as it will be prime boating season. Some waterfowl and shorebirds are possible depending on water levels in smaller ponds. Besides later spring migrants, birds that we will probably find are Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, Indigo Bunting, Eastern Kingbird, Warbling, Red-eyed and White-eyed Vireos, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Scarlet Tanager, Eastern Towhee, Brown Thrasher, Willow Flycatcher, Field Sparrow, Yellow-breasted Chat and if we are really lucky, Blue Grosbeak. Please be advised that deer ticks are common, so tuck pants into socks and use repellent. We will try to stick to dirt or closed roadways whenever possible.

Leader: Joan Silagy.

French Creek State Park, Berks and Chester Counties, Saturday, May 16 – The centerpiece of the largest remaining block of contiguous Piedmont forest, French Creek State Park and surrounding lands have been designated an IBA by Audubon PA. The park attracts a variety of warblers and other migrant passerines and hosts healthy breeding populations of Veery and Wood Thrush, whose dawn chorus can be memorable, as well as Acadian Flycatcher, Fish Crow, Northern Parula, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Pine Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, American Redstart, Louisiana Waterthrush, Hooded Warbler, and Scarlet Tanager. Sharp-shinned, Cooper's, Red-shouldered and Broad-winged Hawks and Barred Owl are here in the breeding season and may be seen or heard. Walking will be on road sides and established trails, with some driving among locations within the park.

Leader: Rudy Keller.
Crow's Nest Preserve of Natural Lands Trust, Chester County, Saturday, May 16  – Well maintained trails through fields and woods include a boardwalk through riparian woods along French Creek and past a cattail marsh. A nice variety of edge and forest birds will be found on this fairly easy walk. The preserve headquarters will be open for participants. Some parts of the trail may be wet; bring waterproof footwear.

Leaders: Scott Stollery and Nikki Flood

State Game Lands #52, Berks and Lancaster Counties, Saturday, May 16 – SGL 52 consists of woods and brushy fields. It is located mostly on a ridge, which can be a good migrant corridor in spring. Nesting birds include Blue-winged, Chestnut-sided, Hooded, Kentucky, and Cerulean Warblers. The field trip will consist of a three to four mile hike along the ridgetop trail. We will park a few cars at the eastern end of the trail, drive to the other end, and hike back to the eastern end.

Leader: Frank Haas

Great Marsh, Glenmoore, Chester County, Saturday, May 16 and Sunday, May 17 – Great Marsh is the largest freshwater wetland complex in southeastern PA. It is surrounded by mature hardwood forest and provides a great opportunity to see all the typical migrants and breeders, plus some uncommon wetland birds such as Sora, Virginia Rail, Swamp Sparrow, Willow Flycatcher, Northern Harrier, and several species of waterfowl. Access to the marsh is via a catwalk and extensive walking trails. Bring knee-high waterproof boots.

Leader: Rob Blye.

Struble Lake, Kurtz Ponds, Crow’s Nest Preserve, and the Doe Run area, Chester County, Sunday, May 17 – The lakes of northern Chester County have hosted 11 species of gulls in the large flocks that congregate here in winter and spring. May often produces Black, Forster’s, Caspian, and Common Terns, while a variety of waterfowl may still be found. There are often some mud flats at Kurtz Ponds, where a nice variety of shorebirds can be seen. We will check nearby fields for Red-headed Woodpecker, Horned Lark and Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows. At Crow's Nest, we will look for migrant warblers and thrushes. And then we are off for spectacular Doe Run, where we will see Eastern Meadowlarks, Bobolinks, Bald Eagles, and more warblers.

Leader: Larry Lewis

Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area, Lancaster County, Sunday, May 17 – Though best known for its spectacular flocks of swans and geese in late winter, Middle Creek’s variety of habitats also provide good birding the rest of the year. We will walk some of the trails around the excellent visitor center to see migrants and edge species, then drive through the interior of the refuge looking for field and grassland birds, including Bobolinks and E. Meadowlarks. Woodlands can provide migrant warblers and nesting passerines. Ponds and wetlands should provide a variety of waterfowl.

Leader: Bruce Carl

Auction Items Needed

Again this year, we'll be collecting items for the silent auction at the annual meeting. It supports the Young Birder Scholarship Program. Please e-mail Shonah Hunter at shunter@lhup.edu if you have items you want to donate and suggest a monetary value if you would like. Then bring the item or items to the meeting with you. Shonah will send an e-mail reminder close to the meeting date.

Thanks for supporting our Young Birder Scholarship Program!

PGC Offers Nest Boxes for Sale

This year, for the first time, the Game Commission is offering for sale a variety of wildlife nesting structures for several species of birds from bluebirds to flickers, from ducks to owls as well as bats and squirrels. The entire selection are for sale on the Game Commission’s website (www.pgc.state.pa.us) by clicking on “Deals on Wildlife Homes” in the “Quick Clicks” box in the right-hand column of the homepage.
**PSO 2009 Award Winners Announced**

**2009 Earl Poole Award Winner**

Nick Pulcinella, a long-time contributor to Pennsylvania ornithology, has been selected as the 2009 Earl Poole Award winner. Perhaps Nick’s most notable contribution to Pennsylvania ornithology is his tenure as the Chief Editor of *Pennsylvania Birds* from 2002 to 2007. Playing catch-up at the start, Nick brought the magazine back to a timely publication schedule. He also introduced the color photo cover, pioneered the effort to add to the photographic content, and pushed to improve the content of the articles submitted for publication.

For many years Nick was also the Rare Birds Editor for *PA Birds*, and he has contributed many articles to our publication.

Nick has also served in several capacities for the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee (PORC), the organization that maintains the Official List of Birds of Pennsylvania. Nick served as chairman from 1994 to 1998 and continues as the non-voting secretary.

Nick has also contributed as a bird-bander and author. It’s not uncommon to find Nick on the scene when a wandering *Selasphorus* hummingbird makes an appearance in fall. Nick’s book, *Birds of Delaware County*, has been praised as one of the finest county-level publications in the state. With this publication Nick received the Witmer Stone Award from the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club for best publication in 1999.

Please join us as we thank Nick for his countless hours of service and congratulate him for being the Earl Poole Award recipient for 2009.

**2009 Conservation Award Winner**

The 2009 Conservation Award winner is the Bartramian Audubon Society. Bartramian Audubon was founded by students of Slippery Rock University. It serves as both a bird club and conservation organization for the northwestern Pennsylvania counties of Butler, Lawrence, Mercer, and Venango. Specifically we honor Bartramian Audubon for its Wildlife Sanctuary Program and its Bird and Butterfly Sanctuary Program. These programs qualify larger and smaller sites respectively as sanctuaries, and commits the landowners to maintain their land as a nature preserve. More than 100 sites have been qualified! The program and qualifying sites have been chronicled in Gene Wilhelms’s book entitled *Bartramian Audubon Society Sanctuaries, Including Important Bird Areas in the Eco-Region*. For more details please refer to the book review included on page 9 of this newsletter.

In addition to these sanctuary programs, Bartramian Audubon provides nature and environmental programs to the community. Their “Audubon Adventures” learning series provides programs to local classrooms, and a scholarship program provides support for sending teachers and students to the Audubon Summer Camp in Maine. Monthly meetings include educational programs, and Bartramian Audubon has provided field trip and workshop support for the Oil Region Birds and Nature Festival.

We commend the Bartramian Audubon for their contributions to conservation in Pennsylvania, and we look forward to honoring them at our spring meeting in Morgantown.

– Tom Kuehl, Awards Committee Chair

**Certificates of Appreciation – An Update**

The Board of Directors for PSO has voted to send Certificates of Appreciation to the following persons:

Leroy Troyer – Bullock’s Oriole
Aden and Mary Troyer – Bullock’s Oriole
David Troyer – Bullock’s Oriole
Stephen and Mary Ann Belin – Lark Sparrow
Stephen and Mary Ann Belin – Red Crossbill
Melvin and Armetta Rhoads – Rufous Hummingbird
Sondra and Donald Cannon – Rufous Hummingbird
Joan Wagner – Rufous Hummingbird
Jean Stull Cunningham and Toby Cunningham – Western Tanager

I would like to remind all county compilers and other interested parties that PSO is still awarding Certificates of Appreciation to persons who allow birdwatchers on their properties to view a reported and confirmed rare bird. Please email me the dates the bird was present (First Day, Last Day), the full name of the host, and his or her US postal mail address.

John Fedak (jlfedak@atlanticbb.net)

This Bullock’s Oriole appeared at a feeder near Oakland Mills. The homeowners received a COA from PSO.

Photo by Bob Moul
Using PA eBird to Track Bird Hotspots

Over the decades, many of the quantitative bird studies have concentrated on either breeding birds or winter birds. These targets seem to stand still long enough that we can take good aim at them. At least nesting birds stay in an area for a few weeks. You can have a few shots at finding and counting them. It’s the same with wintering birds for the most part. For more than a century, we have been counting birds during the holiday season for the Audubon Christmas Counts and comparing results over the years. But, those migrating birds just keep moving. It’s hard to really get a handle on trends, priorities, and strategies for these constantly moving targets.

One day you can find hundreds of Snow Geese and the next day: Gone! The woods can be alive with warblers and thrushes one May morning while the next day the woods are quiet.

Birders just go birding where they think they can find the most birds or at least the ones they want to find. This leads to many good days afield, but it also can lead to some answers to important bird conservation.

What are the most significant stopovers sites in Pennsylvania for passage migrants? The hope of finding a rarity might take you there, but you find much more. All of it is good. The great stopover places are good for the rarities but also for the regulars that you might expect; however, you’d miss them if you weren’t there. These common and regular species may need particular spots for critical resting or feeding. Pennsylvania may have the equivalent of Delaware Bay for shorebirds obscured in the blur of bird reports.

Which are the most critical spots in our state for birds that are common but declining? Now is the time to find these areas before they are lost or change enough that they no longer offer what it takes to support the declining birds in the future. One of the next frontiers in bird conservation is better understanding of which sites are the ones that count the most. Each one of us does not visit enough places at once to figure this out. It must be a team effort, or at least a collaborative one.

A possible solution, and a fun one, is to log your migration season into eBird. Each field trip adds to the common pool of information. Who knows what we will find out together? I think we will learn much more than we can ever imagine.

Participation in eBird is easy. The Pennsylvania eBird site is found at: www.ebird.org/content/pa. For additional stories and news, visit the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's e-Bird site: http://ebird.org. The PA Game Commission website has a portal for PA eBird right on the front page (look for the Peregrine). Visit it soon.

Rusty Blackbirds – How Does Pennsylvania Fit In?

This enigmatic but charismatic boreal icterid is finally getting some attention. First, a meeting held in Pennsylvania. Second, a “Blitz” of its winter populations. That’s a good start. Now, let’s find out how our state really fits in the natural history or conservation of Rusty Blackbird.

Pennsylvania’s great potential role in conservation of the declining Rusty Blackbird is as a migrant stopover. This state is right on the main highway from the Dixie states where it winters to the boreal wetlands where it nests. Thousands of them pass through Pennsylvania and a few of the Great Lakes states, using wetlands and wet woods as their key stopover spots.

By number, the big wetlands of our northwestern counties may be just as critical for this species as it is for many of our breeding wetland birds. These wetlands – Geneva, Pymatuning, Conneaut marshes – may be important stopover sites for Rusty Blackbirds. More data collected at these and other wetland and riparian areas would help us better understand where Rusties migrate through our state and in what numbers.

There is much more to the Rusty Blackbird story, and we are only in the beginning stages of finding out more about this species. Rusties have declined dramatically in the last decades, but apparently this decline has been uneven. Declines have been much greater in the eastern part of their nesting range than in the west – places like New England and the Canadian Maritimes. We have not tracked this migration bird by bird, but drawing a few
lines on the map is instructive. Those east coast Rusties surely travel down the eastern seaboard. They belong to the Atlantic Flyway like so many waterfowl and shorebirds. Many probably travel through the Delaware River valley and the Susquehanna watershed. The scattered and beleaguered wetlands and riparian woods of eastern Pennsylvania and adjacent New Jersey may be critical for this declining Rusty Blackbird population that may spiral out of control without some kind of course adjustment. This area is on the path from the Maritimes down to the swamps in the Southeast. So, even if there are fewer Rusties there, the smaller wetlands of the East might actually be more critical to the future of the species. Keep tuned in and keep those records coming.

For more information on Rusty Blackbird:

http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/MigratoryBirds/Research/Rusty_Blackbird/

2nd PBBA Follow-up: Special Species

The 2nd PBBA has been one of the greatest successes in bird monitoring and “citizen science” in our state. We discovered a lot of great bird records in the last five years. Some of it was pretty amazing stuff. Each Atlas is, however, a short-term picture of bird distributions, and this picture can change soon after the project is completed.

The PGC Wildlife Diversity group is following up on the PBBA discoveries in 2009. Our target species are the state’s Endangered and Threatened species including Osprey, American Bittern, and Black-crowned Night-Heron to name just a few. We will ask some observers and coordinators to recheck sites where they were reported in the last five years. One of the objectives of this survey is to ascertain the size and persistence of these populations. We also would like to learn more about the habitat and threats to these sites. Too often, a lack of follow-up fails to determine whether some reports truly reflect viable breeding populations. In many cases, rare bird reports merely document a single male declaring territory. Some local populations are short-lived while others are quite persistent. Most Atlas reports did not include information about the size of that population. In addition, it is important for us to submit information to the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program that should help protect the habitat that supports the species. It is important to complete a follow-up survey very soon.

Cathy Haffner will be helping me with this survey. We may be contacting you soon. Please help the birds by giving us a hand.

“They Came, They Saw, They Conifered” Revisited

Who has not seen flocks of Pine Siskins hanging on a birch branch or thistle feeder this winter? And, how about those White-winged Crossbills? If you never saw one before, this was your great chance to see them and hear their jittery calls and songs.

Pine Siskins nest erratically across the state, often reacting to seed availability. Perhaps conifers, perhaps weed seeds will keep them around long enough to nest. White-winged Crossbills are another story. I don’t know of a single breeding record for this species in Pennsylvania. They do nest in adjacent New York, mostly in the mountain forests of the Adirondacks and the Catskills. They have been found in New York not too far from the Pennsylvania and New Jersey border.

This might be the year to find White-winged Crossbill nesting here. White-winged Crossbills are much smaller beaked than the Red Crossbill. They tend to feed on smaller coned evergreens like larches (tamarack), spruces, hemlocks, firs, and Douglas-firs. A diversity and abundance of cone crops in an area might be necessary to allow nesting. Observers should check some of the native conifer areas for crossbills as the days get longer. Crossbills sing even in winter so that behavior is not necessarily critical for locating nesting birds. Watch for crossbills carrying plant material for nest-building. Persistent behavior-watching and visitations to more remote conifer forests may be necessary to find a nesting crossbill. But, they might very well nest right in somebody’s home town.

2009 Mid-winter Bald Eagle Survey

In the next Raven Reporter, I will report on results from the 2009 winter eagle survey. Some results are still coming in, but it looks like a very successful count with more routes run than in any previous year. At least two new eagle nests were found as a result of these surveys.

The nesting population of Bald Eagles reached 156 active nesting pairs in 2008. There were found in 46 counties. Several new nests already have been found in 2009. A fuller report will be provided soon.

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Hummingbird Bait: Ten Good Plants

by Rudy Keller

I'm a “planthead” who likes hummingbirds. During a typical summer, I grow 20-30 kinds of plants in large containers on my deck, most of them chosen to attract hummers. In its August effulgence, this jolly neon jungle barely leaves room for a few deck chairs from which to enjoy the in-your-face encounters with hummers that it is designed to provoke. There are even more hummer plants out in the garden. While cutting down frost killed plants and moving heavy containers off the deck last fall, I tried to decide which I would keep if I wanted to reduce their number (unlikely). In keeping with similarly futile lists I've made, I chose ten.

Half are native plants with which Ruby-throated Hummingbirds evolved, long-lived perennial plants of easy culture that provide a season-long succession of flowers and won't outgrow a small property. I've grown them all in Berks County, and they should thrive in most of PA.

I've often seen my first hummer of the year in late April working a patch of Virginia bluebells (Mertensia virginica), whose ribbons of blue in floodplains evoke both sky and water. This summer dormant wildflower likes moisture but adapts well to drier shady gardens.

A tree just for hummers? Why not? Red buckeye (Aesculus pavia) matures at the size of a flowering dogwood and blooms well in sun or in dappled light under shade trees. The spires of red flowers (darkest red in the 'splendens' form) cause dogfights among territorial and migrant hummers in May.

Red buckeye bloom may overlap the first and biggest flush of flowers on trumpet or coral honeysuckle (Lonicera sempervirens), a vine which will produce smaller flushes of tubular orange flowers at intervals all season. Let it twine up a fence, trellis, or porch post, or grow it up a big shrub or small tree. A wild plant near my house has coexisted with a blackhaw (Viburnum prunifolium) for at least 30 years.

If you don't grow any other plant on this list, grow bee balm (Monarda didyma). If its tiered heads of red flowers produced from late June into August don't pull in hummers, they probably don't nest in the neighborhood. The cultivar 'Jacob Cline' is resistant to the non-lethal powdery mildew that turns susceptible plants dirty gray in dog day humidity. Moist soil and full sun produce the most flowers, but mine blooms well in bright shade.

The spiky pink flower heads of obedient plant (Physostegia virginiana) are much visited by migrant hummers in late summer and early fall. It likes the same conditions as Monarda but tolerates drier soil. Grow Monarda and Physostegia in patches of their own. Both are aggressive mint family spreaders that quickly take over mixed flower beds.

Having reliable natives in place doing their work frees up time and money to play with more exotic hummer bait. I've tested dozens of mostly tropical and subtropical plants in my deck containers and gardens over the years, but keep hearing about more from fellow addicts like Arlene Koch, list serves like HUMNET, nursery catalogs, and plant societies. Here are five that are so good that I grow them every year. All bloom for many weeks during the time that Ruby-throats are here, and all get regular visits from the birds, sometimes in preference to other hummer plants growing beside them. They're easy to get from nurseries (see below) and several are easy to grow from seed to flowering in one season. All grow well in containers or in the garden, and they're not all red.

The best of the group is Salvia guaranitica, whose de facto common name of Black and Blue Sage is really the name of one cultivar whose deep blue flowers are set off by charcoal colored calyces and stems. In my deck jungle, hummers consistently visit this species more than all others. It has survived recent mild winters in sheltered microclimates in several southeastern counties. One planted five years ago by my friend Joan Silagy in a sun trap against the south wall of her house in central Berks County now grows five feet tall and wide and produces hundreds of flowers for months. Started from seed in a warm room in March, it can grow to three feet and flower heavily by late July.

Texas sage (Salvia coccinea), aka Lady In Red Sage after the most popular cultivar, is a true annual widely sold in six packs by bedding plant growers. Allow it to seed itself into bare ground and you'll never have to buy it again. I include it over fancier plants because it's cheap, reliable, and easy. The lady is scarlet, but coral and peachy pink varieties are sometimes available.

The fuzzy fire engine red flowers of Belize sage (Salvia miniata) glow like coals above its cool, deep green leaves on the shadier parts of my deck where the sun lovers don't bloom well. It, too, is easy from seed.

The hybrid Salvia 'Phyllis Fancy,' tall and handsome with elegant gray-green leaves and pale lavender flowers, comes into full bloom in August, just in time for the main...
wave of southbound hummers. It must produce copious nectar because birds regularly stage dogfights over it and often perch in it, trying to defend the wealth. To keep it, you'll need to root cuttings in fall or buy a new one in spring, though in Joan Silagy's favored garden, a plant has survived the last two winters under a pine needle mulch.

Firecracker plant or Mexican cigar (Cuphea 'David Verity') may be in bloom when you unpack it from the shipping box in spring and will stay in bloom till killed by frost. Its tubular orange flowers look good in combination with the blue flowers of Salvia guaranitica in large deck containers. Root cuttings in fall or buy fresh each year.

Would I be content with just these steady regulars? No way. Neither will you. After growing them, try Salvia 'Mulberry Jam' or 'Waverley,' ember hot Salvia greggii hybrids, cool pink Salvia involucrata, salmon Salvia oppositifolia, scarlet Salvia subrotunda, purple Stachytarpheta jamaicensis (pronounce that).... so many plants, so little time.

SOURCES: The annual fundraising plant sales of land conservancies and other conservation groups are good sources of native plants. Watch for their announcements in your area. For exotic hummer plants, I've found the following to be reliable sources, but there are many others.

www.avantgardensne.com
www.thecrownsvillenursery.com
www.canyoncreeknursery.com
www.highcountrygardens.com

– Rudy Keller, Berks County

Fledging New Birders
by Nick Kerlin

Today’s children have become the first generation to be isolated from nature to such a degree that it has been given a label – “Nature Deficit Disorder” (Richard Louv, in his 2005 book, Last Child in the Woods). All of this really made an impact when I discovered that only about five young people in the past 10 years have applied for the free scholarship opportunity to attend the annual PSO Conference. That averages less than one a year!

Birding demographics tell us there are three periods in people's lives when they are likely to become interested in birds. Two are as adults; home ownership or the empty nest/retirement stage. The first is childhood. Most of us have been missing a great opportunity to make that happen!

How does one start? Simple. Find a kid! You have to know a few – grandkids, nieces or nephews, children in the neighborhood.

My wife and I run “Granny Camp” each summer with our two grandchildren – now ages six and three. I am the “assistant camp director” because as the six-year-old puts it, “Granny works and Grandpa Nick plays.”

“I know what a cardinal is,” she pointed out in school one day, then drew a picture of one. This was followed by her asking if she could “go birding with you (grandpa) to see more birds?” So we did, and it was a revelation!

She remembered much more than I thought she would while we walked, saw, and talked birds. I initially gave her a kids’ birding book (sections by color, i.e. red pages are red birds, etc.). A few months later she asked for a “grownup bird book.” It had more species pictured. What I thought then might only be a passing interest is still going strong after two years. She stayed hours with me during bird banding sessions. She even passed up an opportunity for the midmorning cookie snack at the local coffee shop. Later several of the coffee shop crowd arrived, whereupon she expounded on her knowledge of banding techniques, birds, etc. I was amazed!

What’s it cost? A bird book, a pair of binoculars, and some fun time. Like me, you have more than one field guide that sits on the shelf, rarely opened. Give your young birder that one. For binocs give them your old pair or buy them a decent “adult” model, not the cheap colored plastic lens ones you got in a promotional offer. And don’t worry, kids can handle a real pair of binocs. Remember, they know how to manipulate iPods, video games, and cell phones. Take a few minutes to make sure they have the binoculars in focus by practicing on stationary objects. The first birding trip should start with easy to see, big, colorful, close-in birds, i.e. the local pond Mallards, robins on the lawn, pigeons atop the silo. This gives kids a chance to learn how to use the binoculars without getting frustrated.

Some other tips: Keep it simple at the beginning. Don’t overwhelm children with too many species, jargon, or too much time. A half hour or so is plenty long the first time out. You don’t need a “lesson plan.” Kids are naturally curious about the outdoors and its critters. Let them (not you) use the field guide to find the birds they see. Let kids make up their own mnemonics of what a bird call sounds like. Kids are great finders of things outdoors. They’ll probably spot more birds than you will. Kids will be quiet and attentive. Give them the chance. Consider bird-related gifts for birthdays and holidays. There are plenty of other informational sources on the Web. Type “birding with kids” into a search engine for more ideas.
Don’t feel that you have failed if the birding bug doesn’t catch hold right away. You are after all competing with companies that have multi-million dollar budgets for marketing research and advertising. But you have the birds, live and in full color and song.

One six-year-old summed it up on a birding web site: “It is fun to watch birds because I like the sounds that birds make. I also like seeing the colorful feathers of birds. I like robin red breasts the best because I see them the most.”

Sounds an awful lot why adults go birding!

Inspiring Story of Conservation


In 64 fact-filled pages, a new publication of the Bartramian Audubon Society (BAS) describes a remarkable quarter-century of volunteer conservation efforts and achievements in western Pennsylvania.

How many of us realized that these committed conservationists have fostered the designation and preservation of 40 large Wildlife Sanctuaries and 65 smaller Bird and Butterfly Sanctuaries in Butler, Lawrence, Mercer, and Venango Counties (as well as several in Elk and Erie Counties)? I didn’t know, and what a gratifying surprise it is to learn the story.

BAS became an official Audubon Chapter in 1983, and a major part of its mission from the outset has been to conserve ecological communities – particularly in habitats that harbor vulnerable, rare, threatened, and endangered life forms. Gene Wilhelm explains how the mission took a significant step forward in 1995 with a project “to encourage property owners to commit their land to nature and thus providing a natural preserve for wild native plants and animals.” BAS Wildlife Sanctuary status for a property usually requires at least 20 acres that contain biological diversity and other outstanding natural qualities. Further, the property owners must allow natural processes to continue unabated in perpetuity. Because of the Chapter’s efforts, a total of 3,845 acres are now being conserved in this way.

Two years later the BAS decided to extend its outreach by certifying Bird and Butterfly Sanctuaries for owners of less extensive properties. Wilhelm expresses the goal colorfully as aiming “to develop a natural system of mini-sanctuaries to help wildlife survive the battle of the bulldozer.” These sanctuaries, adding up to 338 acres, are as tiny as a tenth of an acre. It is easy to imagine how pleased the property owners are to participate in this conservation program.

There is still more to tell about the volunteers’ attention to habitat. A long-term strategy seeks to establish a series of natural riparian greenways – wildlife corridors that connect Audubon Important Bird Areas (IBAs): Goddard, McConnell’s Mill, and Moraine State Parks, Jennings Environmental Education Center, State Gamelands 95 (Glades), Barrows Heronry/Brucker Sanctuary, Shenango Reservoir, and Pennsy/Black/Celery Swamps. Such corridors are increasingly recognized as important both to breeding birds and migrants. Wilhelm nicely summarizes the habitats and the important plants and animals in these eight IBAs monitored by the chapter.

The book not only contains Wilhelm’s detailed descriptions of the properties but also features many photographs of the sanctuaries’ habitats as well as fine maps by Sarah Sargent pinpointing the locations of protected sites. Especially notable is her cartographic illustration of the riparian corridor system, which would otherwise be impossible to visualize. An added attraction is a delightful poem by Linda Lenz, “A Summer Day,” capturing the animation and beauty of wildlife communities. Salutes are in order also to Melanie Petridis and Todd Stevenson for their 108 beautiful sanctuary signs, to Joanne Wilhelm, who proofread the manuscript perfectly as far as I can tell, and finally to the Butler Rotary Club for helping to defray the cost of printing.

Bartramian Audubon Society Sanctuaries is an eye-opening and inspiring little book, which points valuably to the Chapter’s name and purpose. The Bartramian Sandpiper, a bird we now call the Upland Sandpiper, is classified as Threatened in Pennsylvania. Birders always speak with sadness about how severely the species has dwindled here. What an appropriate name for a Chapter committed to conservation! If BAS had existed fifty years ago, this wonderful species might still be common in the Chapter’s counties.

–Paul Hess
Delete Me If You Want

by Arlene Koch

For the 1999 meeting in Morgantown that commemorated PSO’s 10th anniversary, the Haases created a mock edition of *PA Birds* magazine with tongue-in-cheek articles. I forgot about the article I wrote for this mini-magazine until recently when the tiny book fell off my office shelf. I found myself laughing at my own words, not because I found them particularly well written or insightful, but because I was struck by how little things in the birding world have changed. These days birders wax eloquent about digital cameras, scope adapters, and BirdJams instead of scopes and high end binoculars, but the people doing the talking haven’t changed much.

There’s no room in this newsletter for the article but basically I created a self-proclaimed, Johnny-come-lately bowler turned birding expert that I called I. M. McDowitcher. I spent a fictitious afternoon with him looking for rare birds, trying to find out how he had exploded onto the birding scene and climbed to the top of the state’s bird lists in a few years’ time. Obviously, I was making him up, or was I?

I don’t think there’s a more skeptical group of people on earth than birders. But I’m not so sure that’s a bad thing, especially with today’s instant information glut. Cell phones, blackberries, and the internet have made it possible to relay sightings information anywhere anytime. And while this can be a very good thing, it can also be a very bad thing. Recently in *Birding* magazine former editor Paul Lehman addressed the very sticky issue of the pros and cons of today’s technology, and I’m not about to steal his thunder. But he hit the nail right on the head when he said that there’s not enough questioning of unusual or obviously incorrect species reports on list servs. I don’t know, though, how this is ever going to change unless you change human nature. People don’t like to be corrected, nor do people like to correct.

As someone who’s been writing a newspaper nature column for 14 years, I know all too well how often incorrect information appears publicly but is taken as fact. And in some ways a list serv is like a newspaper without an editor. At the last PSO board meeting I commended Carmen Santasania for his hard work as list owner for PABirds and told him I wouldn’t want his job for all the money in the world. It’s a classic case of “you’re damned if you do and you’re damned if you don’t.”

I don’t know how to change any of this. I’m not that smart. If you know a report’s wrong and you nicely tell the poster privately, that’s fine, but then it almost never gets corrected publicly and some people take the report as fact.

For instance, at this time of the year a report of a Broad-winged Hawk is almost certainly incorrect, but there are very few people willing to say that. My feelings, and these are mine alone, are that birding lists are for everyone, regardless of birding ability, but a certain amount of personal responsibility for educating and disseminating correct information and knowing the list rules comes with using them. On a personal note, I hate it when people don’t put the county location of a sighting in the subject line as the rules say you’re supposed to. And I’m sure that now that I’ve confessed that, some of you will probably automatically hit the delete key the next time you see the words, “Koch property, Northampton County,” because I’ve been guilty of that same thing at times myself.

Board Nominations

The PSO Board of Directors is always looking for qualified applicants when a position on the Board of Directors becomes available. Service terms are for three years. Open nominations are held during the business meeting at the Annual Meeting in May. Interested parties should contact any current member of the Board of Directors for more details.

PSO Bird Quiz

How well do you know your Pennsylvania birds?

1. Hurricane Abby in 1968 and Hurricane Agnes in 1972 devastated our state’s breeding population of a bird that has never returned to its pre-disaster numbers. Which species?

2. Which of these warblers would you be likely to see foraging on the ground: Kirtland’s, Ovenbird, Kentucky, Connecticut, Mourning?

3. Which *Empidonax* flycatcher would you be more likely to encounter before the second week of May: Yellow-bellied or Acadian?

4. A “string of pearls” was an important plumage character that helped to document which species for the first time in Pennsylvania?

5. Which species on the Pennsylvania list have common names honoring the great ornithologist Alexander Wilson?

See Answers on page 20.
Another Viewpoint

[Editor’s Note: The following letter was received in response to the Conservation Corner printed in the December 2008 PSO Pileated. The opinions expressed within do not necessarily reflect those of the PSO board.]

Sam Sinderson has degrees in both Chemical and Nuclear Engineering from Kansas State (1956) and MS (1964) and PhD (1966) from the University of Pittsburgh. He retired in 1998 from Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory. He’s been birding since 1949 and has been active in the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, holding various positions, including that of Conservation Chair. He was also a recipient of ASWP’s W.E. Clyde Todd Award.

I am dismayed that our conservation editor has bought into man-made global warming. Powerful forces around the world are pushing the idea that man is destroying our planet by emitting carbon. There simply is no empirical evidence that carbon dioxide or any other greenhouse gas is the cause of climate change. That sounds rash, but if real evidence of climate change were there, we would have seen it and we haven’t. All we have are billion-dollar climate models that can’t calculate the past, that essentially assume that carbon is the cause of climate change, and predict catastrophic future temperatures. Scientists who use unverified models to predict the future are fools. There are lots of studies showing what might happen if the earth does warm without justifying any cause, which may be fine science, but the implication in the alarm that they project is that the cause is man.

It is now well known that the earth has cooled over the last ten years despite increasing releases of carbon. The models do not calculate that. The greenhouse theory demands that there be a hot spot in the atmosphere over the tropics. Despite a decade or more of searching, none has been found. There are many such anomalies that are summarized in an article by Dr. David Evans (“No Smoking Hot Spot,” The Australian, July 18, 2008).

Al Gore used a chart that purported to show that when carbon in the atmosphere rises, the earth’s temperature rises in response. It was well known before Gore produced his film, that the data he used from ice cores shows just the opposite. In fact, rises in atmospheric carbon levels lag the earth’s temperature by hundreds of years. This misuse of the data was virtually the sole basis of Gore’s claims that man is causing climate change. Gore lied.

There is an alternative theory that can explain the earth’s changing temperature. It has been ignored and suppressed by the alarmists for more than a decade. In all probability, and supported by real scientific evidence, the sun is the controller of our climate. The alarmists say that the change in the sun’s output is not enough to explain the changes we have seen, but Dr. Svensmark in Denmark has shown how they are wrong. “Unstoppable Global Warming Every 1500 Years” by Fred Singer and Dennis Avery shows how the earth’s temperature for at least the last million years correlates very well with the sun’s activity but poorly with carbon in the atmosphere. “The Chilling Stars, A New Theory of Climate Change” by Henrik Svensmark and Nigel Calder shows how cosmic rays cause the formation of low-level clouds, which reflect a large part of the sun’s energy striking them. When the sun is active, increased solar wind results in fewer incident cosmic rays and fewer low-level clouds, and the earth warms more than expected. Cosmic rays are leveraging the sun’s energy! This effect explains nearly all of the climate change we have seen. It is the sun that controls our climate, not man. When the earth warms because of the sun, carbon is released from stores on earth, especially the ocean. It takes a long time for the ocean to catch up to the atmospheric temperature. As it does, CO₂ is released thus explaining the long lag time between the atmospheric temperature and carbon peaks.

One reason this work is ignored is that most of the alarmists around the world are being funded by government grants and are afraid to get off the gravy train. Another is that the green movement sees climate change as a wedge to achieve their socialist agenda. There is real danger to humans lurking here. If we attempt to control carbon emissions as the alarmists want, we will limit energy production around the world limiting economic growth everywhere. In the coming decades there simply is no substitute for oil, coal, natural gas and nuclear energy. It is foolhardy to cut our fossil fuel use, especially based on an unproven theory, until we have proven alternatives that can sustain a growing economy.

There is nothing that we can do about the sun, except to adapt to any changes it brings. We will be better off with a vibrant and growing economy with which we will be able to meet our financial obligations, our adaptive needs and, indeed, have the funds to develop alternative energy sources for the future when fossil fuels actually become scarce.

– Sam Sinderson
PSO Annual Meeting Itinerary
Morgantown, PA

Friday, May 15, 2009

6:00 p.m.  Registration begins at Holiday Inn.
7:00 p.m.  Social at Holiday Inn
7:30 p.m.  Business Meeting at Holiday Inn

Saturday, May 16, 2009

6:00 a.m.  Holiday Inn open for breakfast.
6:30 a.m.  All outings depart from Holiday Inn.
12:00-1:00 p.m.  Lunch on your own. Arrive at Holiday Inn by 1:00 p.m. for afternoon sessions.
1:00-1:40 p.m.  *The Composite Prints of Audubon’s Birds of America – the Rarest of the Rare*
Jeff Holt and Bert Filemyr, long time active birders and officers of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, are passionate about early American ornithology. Jeff works in the legal field and Bert, a retired teacher, is a member of the winning “Lagerhead Shrikes” World Series of Birding team.
1:45-2:25 p.m.  *Egg Recognition Ejection Behavior as Defense against Cowbird Parasitism*
Todd Underwood, Assistant Professor of Biology at Kutztown University, received his Ph.D. from the University of Manitoba studying host defense mechanisms against cowbird parasitism as a natural progression from Master’s degree work with Wood Thrushes at the University of Delaware.
2:25-3:15 p.m.  Break. Visit the vendors and organizations represented.
3:15-3:55 p.m.  *Movement Ecology of Vultures and Other Birds in PA and the U.S.*
David Barber is a nine-year research biologist and GIS specialist at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary. He has a Master’s in science from the University of Arkansas and is a certified beer judge.
4:00-4:40 p.m.  *Audubon at Home Bird Habitat Recognition Program*
Steve Saffier, of PA Audubon, is an environmental educator whose long Audubon association includes the Red Rock chapter in Las Vegas and ten years with the Los Angeles Audubon Society where he frequently led bird walks.
6:30 p.m.  Social at Holiday Inn.
7:00 p.m.  Banquet at Holiday Inn
Presentation of Poole Award to Nick Pulcinella
Presentation of Conservation Award to Bartramian Audubon Society

Sunday, May 19, 2009

6:00 a.m.  Holiday Inn open for breakfast
6:30 a.m.  Outings depart from Holiday Inn
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Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology
Annual Meeting Scholarship Program

In order to foster an interest in, and appreciation for birding and ornithology in Pennsylvania, each year the PSO will provide a scholarship for a person 18 years of age or younger OR an undergraduate college student who wishes to attend the PSO annual meeting. (You may not nominate someone without his/her knowledge or permission)

-The person must be nominated by a current PSO member.

-If the nominee is younger than 18, the nominating PSO member must be attending the meeting and must be responsible for transportation to/from the meeting and must be responsible for the youth during the meeting (see below) if a parent/guardian is not accompanying the youth.

-The youth’s parent/guardian must sign below giving the youth permission to attend the PSO meeting with the sponsor.

-PSO will pay the recipient’s meeting registration, food (banquet, lunch, 2 breakfasts), and lodging (up to 2 nights), and transportation costs incurred by the recipient.

In order to complete your nomination, please send this form to Shonah A. Hunter (shunter@lhup.edu), or by land mail to: Dr. Shonah A. Hunter, Department of Biological Sciences, Lock Haven University, Lock Haven, PA 17745 by April 15, 2009. Selection will be conducted by a committee.

Name of Nominee: __________________________________________

Address: ___________________________________________________

Age ___________________ Birth Date __________________________ Nominee’s Phone No. __________________________

Email address: ____________________________________________

If a college Undergraduate student, College Attending: ______________________________________________________________________

Nominee’s Involvement with Birding (Please describe, providing as many details as possible. Attach a page, if necessary)

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Name of nominating PSO Member: ___________________________ Phone No. __________________________

Email address: ____________________________ Relationship (if any) to Nominee __________________________

If the nominee is younger than 18, the nominating PSO member must sign the following statement: In nominating this youth, I understand that I will be responsible for the youth at the annual meeting and for his/her transportation to and from the meeting.

_________________________ (Signature) __________________________ (Date)

If the nominee is younger than 18, the parent/guardian must sign the following statement: In allowing my child to be nominated, I understand that PSO is providing the scholarship for my child to attend the annual meeting. The person nominating my child has my permission to transport him/her to and from the meeting and to be responsible for her/him during the annual meeting.

_________________________ (Signature of Parent/Guardian) __________________________ (Date)
**Answers to Bird Quiz**

*(page 10)*

1. Purple Martin  
2. All five  
3. Acadian Flycatcher  
4. Slaty-backed Gull  

Wilson’s Plover is one of the species named after Alexander Wilson.  

Photo by Margaret Higbee