

The

# PSO Pileated



June 2009

The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

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

On Monday morning following PSO's 20<sup>th</sup> annual three-day meeting I was still recuperating from the whirlwind weekend. But the physical aches and mental overloads that come from spending time with informed, involved, and dedicated birders are more than worth it. In spite of multiple problems before the meeting, the meeting was well attended and everything went well. And, for the last time, I owe sincere thanks to all the board members, especially Frank Haas, Rudy Keller, and Shonah Hunter, for helping to salvage what seemed at times to be a lost cause.

The current slate of officers, who serve two-year terms, was reelected, as were three-year board members Rob Blye, Deuane Hoffman, and Linda Wagner. On a high note, Frank said that our membership is currently over 400.

As of Saturday night the bird list total for the field trips was over 125, and I'm sure the final tally was higher.

Thanks to all the trip leaders who gave of their time. They did an exemplary job. It goes without saying that the biggest draw to this weekend event is seeing and birding new places, which is why its location is changed from year to year. Plans are underway for next year's May 14-16, 2010, meeting at Presque Isle.

The Saturday speakers covered a diverse set of topics. I admit to not having known about the 13 composite prints from Audubon's *Birds of America* series. Bert Filemyr and Jeff Holt's book accompanying their program is available on amazon.com. After listening to Todd Underwood and David Barber, the next two speakers, I thought, "Who knew cowbird and vulture data could be so interesting?" Do you know which species rid their nests of

cowbird eggs or how? Or do you know to where each of the six North American vulture subspecies migrates? And as I sat listening to Steve Saffier, I wondered how many PSO members have their property officially validated and recognized as bird habitat by PA Audubon.



President Arlene Koch addresses the group of stuffed, satisfied birders after the banquet.

When I sat down to write this message I found myself wondering what I could say that hasn't been said before. The president is supposed to inform and inspire, which isn't always easy to do. There are countless reasons why people attend the annual meeting or become involved with birding organizations like PSO in the first place. The only motivation I'm sure of is my own.

I don't know when but somewhere along the way in my birding career I realized that I began wondering about the "why" rather than the "what." Why do certain species migrate at certain times and what are they feeding on as they travel? Why are there more reports of fall vagrant hummingbirds or spring Mississippi Kites than there were years ago? Is it because of more birder

participation or due to climatic or other natural changes? And why, I wonder the most, does someone start birding in the first place?

The more I learn about birding, the more there is to know. It's an ongoing educational process, aided and abetted by those who study parts of the natural world I have no personal access to. When I was in high school, one of my teachers was fond of saying that when you stop learning, you might just as well roll over and die. And he was right.

Arlene Koch  
Easton, PA  
Northampton County

# 2009 Annual Meeting Revisited

by Mark McConaughy

The 2009 Annual PSO meeting was held 15-17 May 2009 in Morgantown, Berks County, Pennsylvania. Some birders found a Black-necked Stilt at a pond along Mt. Pleasant Road in Lebanon County on the way to the meeting on May 15. That was a wonderful way to jump start the meeting. The usual social and business meeting were held on Friday night. It is always great to see and meet birders from all over the state at the social. The business meeting was short, and we reelected the officers who were up for term renewals.

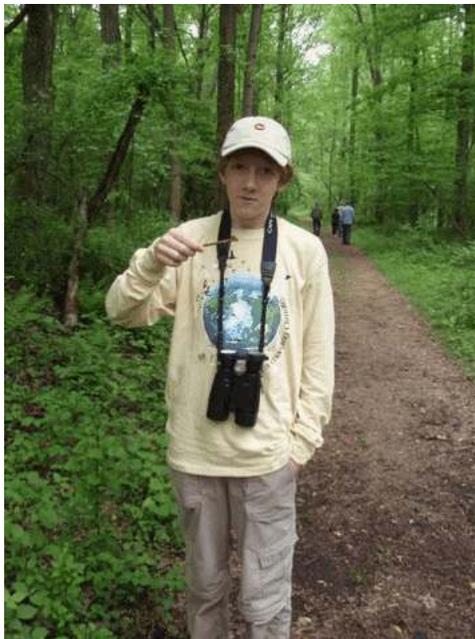
Saturday morning was rather foggy, but this did not detract from the scheduled field trips. These included trips in Chester County to Struble Trail, Hibernia Park, Crows Nest Preserve, and Great Marsh as well as outings in Berks to Blue Marsh Lake and Hay Creek south of Birdsboro. The French Creek State Park trip encompassed both Chester and Berks counties.

I attended the Hibernia Park field trip led by Larry Lewis. The trip included great views of a Green Heron looking for food, a Veery, and a Louisiana Waterthrush among the more than 70 species seen or heard at Hibernia Park. A number of Blackpoll Warblers were singing at various locations in the park. Larry then took us to Struble Lake and several other local spots to view birds. We observed at very close range, right under their nest box, a colony of Purple Martins at Kurtz's fish hatchery ponds. Our presence did not seem to disturb the Purple Martins in the least. They probably were used to people walking around the fish ponds. It was a wonderful morning viewing birds around Chester County.

Saturday afternoon was devoted to presentations that were of interest to birders of any skill level. The first presentation by Jeff Holt and Bert Filemyr was titled "The Composite Prints of Audubon's Birds of America – the Rarest of the Rare." Holt and Filemyr have investigated the original prints made by Audubon and have documented how the prints were produced. The prints were originally sold under subscription to wealthy patrons. A series of black-and-white prints was produced from etched copper plates. Then the black-and-white prints were hand painted. A small set of finished prints were sent to patrons who would pay for them, providing

money to produce the next set of prints. However, several special sets were produced that used an original primary print merged with a portion of a secondary print. Fewer than 20 sets of these composite print sets were produced. Holt and Filemyr have researched these composite prints determining which original plates were used to produce them. It was a very interesting presentation.

The second presentation was made by Todd Underwood from Kutztown University titled "Egg Recognition Ejection Behavior as Defense against Cowbird Parasitism." Underwood explained several methods various species used to deal with eggs laid by cowbirds in the hosts' nests. Some species built new nests over ones with cowbird eggs, others punctured the eggs, some actually threw the eggs out of the nest, while others simply left the eggs alone. In the latter case, the host birds ended up raising the cowbird offspring as their own children. Underwood's own research concerned how Warbling Vireos dealt with cowbirds. He found that the eastern subspecies of Warbling



PSO Youth Scholarship Recipient Corey Husic accompanied the field trip to French Creek, led by Rudy Keller. Corey found a colorful millipede.



Vireos actually picked up cowbird eggs and threw them out of the nest. Underwood has photographed the vireos doing this.

However, the western subspecies of Warbling Vireos did not do this. They left the eggs in the nest to hatch and raised the cowbird

young. Underwood determined the reason for this difference in cowbird egg treatment was due to difference in bill sizes between the subspecies. The bills of the eastern subspecies of Warbling Vireo are larger and of sufficient size for them to pick up the eggs in their bills. The bills of the western subspecies are smaller, and they could not open their bills wide enough to pick up cowbird eggs. So the western subspecies allowed the eggs to remain in the nest and raised the cowbird chicks.

David Barber from Hawk Mountain Sanctuary then presented a report titled "Movement Ecology of Vultures and Other Birds in PA and the U.S." Barber was interested in the migration or non-migration of Turkey Vultures from around the Americas. Wing tags were affixed to a number of Turkey Vultures from various areas



Awards Committee Chairperson, Tom Kuehl, poses with Kathie Goodblood and Nancy Baker who received the Conservation Award for Bartramian Audubon.

in North and South America in an attempt to track their movements using visual observations. Also, a few Turkey Vultures had radio transmitters attached to their backs so movements could be traced over the landscape using satellite tracking. Study results showed that Turkey Vultures from the western United States and western Canada moved south through Mexico, some flying all the way to northern South America. Many Turkey Vultures in the eastern United States (particularly those from Pennsylvania and vicinity) moved around the state and northern Maryland. Most did not migrate; however, a few of them did move south into the southeastern United States.

Lastly Steve Saffier discussed the "Audubon at Home Bird Habitat Recognition Program." This is a program that any landowner can join, provided that at least twenty percent of the trees on his/her property are native species. The gradual grassification (my made-up term, not Saffier's) of Pennsylvania as people build homes and yards, along with the spread of invasive, non-native plant species, has decimated natural wild habitats. This program was developed to encourage landowners to plant native plant



Participants on the French Creek outing were treated to the songs of both Veeries and Wood Thrushes.

species that birds can use to nest and propagate. Saffier described how people can join and participate in the Home Bird Habitat Recognition Program.

Saturday evening was devoted to another social period followed by the annual dinner. At the dinner the PSO presents its annual awards. Nick Pulcinella was presented with the Earl Poole Award for his outstanding contributions to ornithology as editor of *Pennsylvania Birds*, secretary of the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee (PORC), and other bird-related work.

Fourteen year-old Cory Husic was introduced as the Youth Scholarship recipient for 2009 for his work as bird tour leader, participation in the World Series of Birding, and for teaching bird recognition and life histories to grade school teachers. Finally, the Bartramian Audubon Chapter was presented the PSO Conservation Award for their work establishing wildlife refuges around Butler County and vicinity.



Nick Pulcinella, former *Pennsylvania Birds* editor, received the Earl Poole Award.

Other field trips were scheduled for Sunday morning. Trips included visits to the Great Marsh, Struble Lake, Kurtz's Ponds, Crow's Nest Preserve and the Doe Run Area of Chester County, and to Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area in Lancaster County. I went on the Middle Creek field trip lead by Bruce Carl. We had a great view of a Gray-

cheeked Thrush and Northern Waterthrush while I was there. A total of 15 warbler species were seen or heard during the field trip. I had to leave early, but they saw an adult Bald Eagle and a Lincoln's Sparrow after I left.

The PSO meeting is a wonderful place to meet other birders whose names you may recognize from posts on the PABIRDS listserv or other message boards. Birders of all skill levels attend and are welcome to attend the meeting. We always have a great time on the field trips, and these give folks a chance to bird in places they may not have visited before. The 2010 PSO meeting will be held in Erie, Pennsylvania, with field trips on Presque Isle and other nearby places. The PSO meeting will be held 14 -16 May 2010. Presque Isle is one of the great warbler and bird hot spots during migration. Set aside the third weekend in May and plan to attend next year's PSO meeting!

## Ornithological Literature Notes – Part 1

Avian research in Pennsylvania and studies conducted by Pennsylvanians elsewhere received international attention at the joint meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Society and Association of Field Ornithologists in Pittsburgh in April 2009. This is the first in a series of articles summarizing these scientific presentations. Complete abstracts of the presentations are available on the Three Rivers Birding Club website <[www.3rbc.org](http://www.3rbc.org)>.



Researchers at Villanova University reported on a variety of studies involving chickadee species in Pennsylvania and Canada:

! Robert L. Curry examined patterns of natal dispersal among chickadees within the Black-capped and Carolina hybrid zone at Nolde Forest in Berks County. He found evidence that many young male chickadees remain within the forest, whereas many young females probably disperse away from the site.

! Stephanie G. Wright and Curry learned that hybrid chickadees have higher average survival rates than Carolina Chickadees in southeastern Pennsylvania, a result indicating “hybrid vigor”– an intriguing phenomenon with evolutionary implications, in which hybrids may be genetically superior to their parent species.

! Jessica Trout-Haney and Curry studied Boreal Chickadee breeding biology in Nova Scotia, discovering that pairs of this species occasionally rear two broods in a year – first in late May and then in July.

Important research by associates of the Powermill Avian Research Center in Westmoreland County focuses primarily on acoustic and telemetry tracking of migrants:

! Emma DeLeon, Lewis Grove, Andrew Vitz, and Michael Lanzone compared acoustic monitoring of nocturnal flight calls with results of banding data to evaluate the two methods' results in sampling nightly passages and overall migration patterns.

! Tricia Miller and Lanzone were joined by Robert Brooks of Penn State University and Todd Katzner of the National Aviary presenting expansive results of their Golden Eagle tracking project, which shows the eagles' paths down the Appalachians between the breeding grounds and the wintering areas.

! Lanzone cited the Golden Eagle tracking project as an example of new technology being used to map migrants' paths via the Global System for Mobile Communications.

! DeLeon and Grove participated in a study with Deanna Dawson of the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and Tim Jones of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, using sound recording to analyze nocturnal migrations in the mountains of Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia.

! Vitz, Bob Mulvihill, and Robert Leberman evaluated songbird population declines and breeding productivity based on fall migration banding data at Powdermill.

– Paul Hess

### PSO Quiz

1. You're watching an apparent Snowy Egret in the spring, but you notice two long plumes hanging from its head. Why would this send your pulse racing?
2. Digital audio was cited last year as an important factor in the records committee's acceptance of a rarity. Which species?
3. Three common woodpeckers' center of winter abundance in North America shifted more than 100 miles northward since 1966, according to the National Audubon Society. Which species?
4. Nine wood-warblers are named after people. Which five are on Pennsylvania's list. For a bonus, what are the other four?
5. Which of the two kinglet species breeds farther north?

(Answers on page 5.)

# Birds Listed at 2009 PSO Meeting at Morgantown

Snow Goose	Rock Pigeon	Black-capped Chickadee	Worm-eating Warbler
Canada Goose	Mourning Dove	<i>Chickadee sp?</i>	Ovenbird
Mute Swan	Black-billed Cuckoo	Tufted Titmouse	Northern Waterthrush
Wood Duck	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	White-breasted Nuthatch	Louisiana Waterthrush
Mallard	Chimney Swift	Carolina Wren	Kentucky Warbler
Ring-necked Duck	Ruby-thrted Hummingbird	House Wren	Common Yellowthroat
Ruddy Duck	Belted Kingfisher	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Hooded Warbler
Wild Turkey	Red-headed Woodpecker	Eastern Bluebird	Canada Warbler
Common Loon	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Veery	Yellow-breasted Chat
Double-crested Cormorant	Downy Woodpecker	Swainson's Thrush	Scarlet Tanager
Great Blue Heron	Hairy Woodpecker	Wood Thrush	Eastern Towhee
Great Egret	Northern Flicker	American Robin	Chipping Sparrow
Green Heron	Pileated Woodpecker	Gray Catbird	Field Sparrow
Black Vulture	Eastern Wood-Pewee	Northern Mockingbird	Savannah Sparrow
Turkey Vulture	Acadian Flycatcher	Brown Thrasher	Grasshopper Sparrow
Osprey	Willow Flycatcher	European Starling	Song Sparrow
Bald Eagle	Eastern Phoebe	Blue-winged Warbler	Lincoln's Sparrow
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Great Crested Flycatcher	<i>Brewster's warbler</i>	Swamp Sparrow
Cooper's Hawk	Eastern Kingbird	<i>Lawrence's warbler</i>	Northern Cardinal
Red-shouldered Hawk	White-eyed Vireo	Nashville Warbler	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Red-tailed Hawk	Yellow-throated Vireo	Northern Parula	Blue Grosbeak
American Kestrel	Warbling Vireo	Yellow Warbler	Indigo Bunting
Virginia Rail	Red-eyed Vireo	Chestnut-sided Warbler	Bobolink
Sora	Blue Jay	Magnolia Warbler	Red-winged Blackbird
Semipalmated Plover	American Crow	Cape May Warbler	Eastern Meadowlark
Killdeer	Fish Crow	Black-throated Blue Warbler	Western Meadowlark
Black-necked Stilt	Horned Lark	Yellow-rumped Warbler	Common Grackle
Greater Yellowlegs	Purple Martin	Black-throated Green	Brown-headed Cowbird
Lesser Yellowlegs	Tree Swallow	Blackburnian Warbler	Orchard Oriole
Solitary Sandpiper	N. Rough-winged Swallow	Pine Warbler	Baltimore Oriole
Spotted Sandpiper	Bank Swallow	Blackpoll Warbler	House Finch
Semipalmated Sandpiper	Cliff Swallow	Cerulean Warbler	Pine Siskin
Least Sandpiper	Barn Swallow	Black-and-white Warbler	American Goldfinch
Red-necked Phalarope	Carolina Chickadee	American Redstart	House Sparrow
Ring-billed Gull			

**Total = 134 species plus 2 hybrids**

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 Berks-Chester hospitality.



Tom Johnson photographed this Black-necked Stilt found by Ramsay Koury, one of the many meeting's highlights.

## Answers to Bird Quiz

(page 4)

1. It could be Pennsylvania's first Little Egret.
2. Bicknell's Thrush
3. Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, and Pileated Woodpecker
4. Townsend's, Kirtland's, Swainson's, Wilson's, and MacGillivray's are on the PA list. The others are Bachman's, Virginia's, Lucy's, and Grace's.
5. Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

# 2009 Meeting Participants

Nancy Baker	Doug Gross	Donna Kempf	Carol Reigle
David Barber	Deb Grove	Gary Kinkley	Steve Saffier
Chuck Berthoud	Greg Grove	Arlene Koch	Jayne Schaeffer
Barry Blust	Carol Guba	Ramsay Koury	Carol Schaffer
Rob Blye	Barb Haas	Janet Kuehl	Jeff Schaffer
Brian Byrnes	Frank Haas	Tom Kuehl	Jack Solomon
Chuck Chalfant	Margaret Higbee	Sherri LaBar	Sue Solomon
Elaine Chalfant	Roger Higbee	Wayne Laubscher	Thrya Sperry
Susan Comfort	Jeff Holt	Gary Lockerman	Robyn Underwood
Bob Cook	Jerry Howard	Sandy Lockerman	Todd Underwood
Ruth Cook	Marjorie Howard	Dick Martin	Larry Usselman
Jane Earle	Shonah Hunter	Mark McConaughy	Marjorie Van Tassel
Mike Fialkovich	Corey Husic	Betsy Mescavage	Linda Wagner
Bert Filemyr	Jessica Jopp	Herbert Meyers	Ellie Wolf
Kathie Goodblood	Chad Kauffman	Nick Pulcinella	Rick Wolf
Debra Grim	Rudy Keller	Sharon Pulcinella	



## Conservation Corner

Since the last Conservation Corner, several exciting conservation developments have taken place at the federal level. One giant step for conservation was the passage of the Omnibus Lands Bill in March. This bill designates two million acres as wilderness, protects rivers and trails, and gives permanence to the National Landscape Conservation System.

In another conservation victory, the Obama administration revoked a controversial last-minute rule change imposed by the Bush administration, which effectively gutted critical protections offered by the Endangered Species Act for threatened and endangered wildlife on the brink of extinction.

But most promising is the introduction of the American Clean Energy Act in Congress. Briefly, this proposed legislation will establish a new U.S. energy policy that

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avoids continuing dependence on foreign oil and builds a new, domestic clean technology manufacturing base to supply renewable energy. The Act further takes significant steps toward limiting greenhouse gases.

In regards to limiting greenhouse gases, the Act establishes a cap and trade program with the goal of reducing greenhouse gases by set percentages in 2012, 2020 and 2050. The Act has proposals to speed the transition to clean energy. For example, utilities are to generate 25 percent of their electricity from renewable resources by 2025.

Further, the Act promotes green jobs and provides relief to businesses to help them cover the increased energy costs that may result from reducing greenhouse gases and utilizing renewable energy sources. And the Act establishes an interagency council to coordinate efforts and provides for funding. All in all, although the Act isn't perfect, if passed, it will go a long way to address this country's energy needs while reducing greenhouse gases and reducing our dependence on fossil fuels.

And on an encouraging note, the House Energy and Commerce Committee approved the Act in May. Now we need the rest of the Congress to act so that this country can begin to address the energy crisis.

– Mark Henry, Conservation Chairperson

# The Raven Reporter



Tales of  
Discovery about  
Pennsylvania  
Birds

## Pennsylvania's Species of Special Concern Update

In this mop-up year of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Breeding Bird Atlas we have tremendous opportunities to add considerably to our better understanding of our rarest birds. There are hundreds of records from the first five years of our "Species of Special Concern." Most of these records are partial reports, lacking key components to ascertain that a record constitutes a breeding record. And, we need more information to make these reports useful for protection of sites through the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program.

In many cases, a singing bird was heard or an adult bird or perhaps a pair seen, but no nesting confirmation was achieved. The record is much more valuable if nesting and reproduction are confirmed.

Summer populations of birds comprise a variety of individuals. Many, if not most, are paired off and nesting somewhere. When birds are rare or have spotty distributions, many individuals detected may not actually be nesting. Males may not be paired with females, but comprise what are considered "floater" populations. In fact, in many songbird species the most persistently singing males, especially later in the nesting season, are generally the unmated males. The mated males are busy tending to their progeny. On the other hand, I have discovered that some males that are single in early June persist on territory for many days and sometimes weeks before a female is attracted to the territory and they begin nesting, late but successfully.

The pattern of many rare birds, especially those at or near the edge of their breeding range, is that there are many single, unmated males attempting to attract females. There also is a pattern of "winking out" of small populations – that is, a pair nesting at a location one year but not returning in subsequent years. It takes "two to tango," so to speak, and if one of a pair does not survive from one season to the next, the location may not support a nesting pair consistently – thus, a "wink out." Birds sometimes wander around from place to place in search of a mate. So, what may seem like a good record of a singing bird may not constitute a viable breeding

population. It pays to stay around to attempt to detect the female when she takes a recess from incubating or tends to the young.

In our rush to cover many blocks, we often didn't have the time to follow up on a sighting the way we would like to. It is not too late to obtain more details about a local nesting population and upgrade an observation to confirmed status. Many bird species can be confirmed nesting in late June and in July by observing adults feeding young or fledged young. So, don't give up. Persistence often pays off for both birds and for birders.

Some of our goals for the 2009 season are to:

- Determine if recent PBBA reports constitute real breeding records and they indicate nesting populations.
- Determine if breeding pairs are persistent at locations.
- Better determine size of the breeding populations.
- Describe habitat attributes associated with nesting populations of our rarest species.

One of the other benefits of the new surge of bird data is that it allows an evaluation of the status of our rarest species. Some species like Bald Eagle and Osprey have increased dramatically since the 1980's and their official state status also has changed (Endangered to Threatened). We already are evaluating the 2<sup>nd</sup> PBBA data to determine if more changes in the Species of Special Concern list are warranted. Some species now listed as Candidates may be more appropriately classified as Threatened or Endangered.

The PA Game Commission Wildlife Diversity section is working with the Atlas team (Bob Mulvihill and all) to obtain as much data about our Species of Special Concern. Data sent to one of us is shared among us. In turn, these records become part of the Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Heritage database that gives nesting sites some protections through the environmental review and planning process. The 2<sup>nd</sup> PBBA has been a wonderful source of rich information about our breeding bird populations. The basic stories of our breeding bird distributions have also been very transparent ones. You can look up the current distribution of our breeding species on the PBBA website quite easily. However, we keep the information given for most of our Species of Special Concern proprietary in order to protect the sites and those nesting birds. Some species and circumstances are not as sensitive as others, but most of these rarest bird species are fairly sensitive to human attention. And, in some cases we need to respect the privacy of private landowners.

Please keep the safety of the nesting birds and quality of the habitat in mind when sharing information about the location of a rare breeding bird species. We want future generations of Pennsylvanians including its birders to

have the opportunity to enjoy these birds as we have been so fortunate to enjoy ourselves.

Please help by searching for some of these species and documenting your observations using the PBBA Special

Species Report Form. If you have been contacted by the PBBA or one of the PGC diversity team (Doug Gross or Cathy Haffner), please cooperate as much as you can.

## Pennsylvania Bird Species of Special Concern

Endangered	Candidate – At Risk
<b>American Bittern</b>	<b>Northern Bobwhite (native breeding)</b>
<b>Least Bittern</b>	<b>Northern Harrier</b>
<b>Great Egret</b>	<b>Common Moorhen</b>
<b>Black-crowned Night-Heron</b>	
<b>Yellow-crowned Night-Heron</b>	Candidate – Rare
<b>Peregrine Falcon</b>	<b>Green-winged Teal</b>
<b>King Rail</b>	<b>Pied-billed Grebe</b>
<b>Common Tern</b>	<b>Northern Goshawk</b>
<b>Black Tern</b>	<b>Sora</b>
<b>Short-eared Owl</b>	<b>American Coot</b>
<b>Yellow-bellied Flycatcher</b>	<b>Wilson’s (Common) Snipe</b>
<b>Sedge Wren</b>	<b>Barn Owl</b>
<b>Loggerhead Shrike</b>	<b>Marsh Wren</b>
<b>Blackpoll Warbler</b>	<b>Swainson’s Thrush</b>
<b>Dickcissel</b>	<b>Prothonotary Warbler</b>
	<b>Summer Tanager</b>
Threatened	
<b>Osprey</b>	Candidate – Undetermined
<b>Bald Eagle</b>	<b>Long-eared Owl</b>
<b>Upland Sandpiper</b>	<b>Red Crossbill</b>
	<b>Pine Siskin</b>

### Are Crossbills and Other Rare Boreal Birds Nesting in Our State?



Yellow-crowned Night-Heron is on the Endangered list.  
Photo by Bob Moul

This last winter provided many persons with their lifer White-winged Crossbill. It gave many others a reason to take out a loan at the bank to pay for all the nyger seed gobbled up by Pine Siskins. Who says birding isn't good for the economy? Those finches stimulated many local economies by inducing travel to conifer groves, buying coffee wherever it could be found, and purchasing many bags of thistle and oil sunflower seed to feed the scavenging hordes of finches.

The question now is whether some of those wacky birds from the North have stayed to nest somewhere in PA. White-winged Crossbills have been reported recently at several locations. These

may constitute the first recorded nesting of this species in the state. Red Crossbills also have been reported from at least one site. The interesting news is that both species are nesting with some regularity in central New York, not far from the Pennsylvania border as the raven flies. Many sites in our state contain good-sized stands of native red spruce, white pine, and large eastern hemlocks that could support nesting crossbills. And, the New York crossbills are nesting in Norway spruces. So, the stands of Norway spruce in towns, parks, cemeteries, and out in the country may be hosting nesting crossbills.

Crossbills have a “finchy” song and diagnostic chip notes that could alert



White-winged Crossbills invaded the state in record numbers this past winter. Did any remain to breed?

Photo by Steve Gosser

you to their presence. Finding nests or breeding evidence probably will require patience to follow crossbills and watch for nest-building, food carrying, and caring for dependent young. It often is stated that crossbills can nest at any time of the year. This includes the summer months! Also keep your mind open to the possibilities of other boreal species finding nesting habitat in Pennsylvania. Ruby-crowned Kinglets are another intriguing possibility for nesting in dense conifer plantings or native stands, especially of spruces or firs. Olive-sided Flycatchers have not been confirmed nesting in the state for at least 70 years. Confirming any of these species would be especially sweet in the last year of the Atlas.

### 2009 Mid-winter Bald Eagle Survey Results

The 2009 eagle survey was a real success. The 2009 team of cooperating eagle-watchers observed a record number of 185 Bald Eagles, including 108 adults and 77 immature or unknown aged eagles in more than 137 hours spent in the field. This is an increase in the number of hours spent in the field and a slight increase in the number of eagles observed in the 2008 winter survey (183 eagles in 114 hours). The 2009 survey period included 31 December 2008 through 14 January 2009 with target dates of 9 and 10 January when most surveys were conducted. Pennsylvania contributes to the formal USFWS winter eagle survey with some established long-term USFWS routes run again this year. There were nine USFWS stations identified around the Pymatuning Reservoir and eight along the lower Susquehanna as part of the National survey that now is coordinated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACE).

A variety of organizations and individuals surveyed other sites across the state to provide a statewide approximation of the winter eagle population. These included members of PSO, Audubon Pennsylvania chapters, and watershed protection organizations. The connection between water quality, riparian forest protection, and eagle populations is appreciated by watershed advocates and birders alike. Many of the routes in western and central counties are

conducted by ACE staff because a large number of the dams and reservoirs are under its jurisdiction. Personnel from New York DEC surveyed the Delaware River above Matamoras, and New Jersey FGW coordinated the survey on the Delaware south of Matamoras.

The higher number of eagles found in 2009 is certainly a product of greater coverage as well as possible increase in eagle population over the decades. When compared to 2008, the number of eagles observed per survey hour actually decreased from 1.6 to 1.3, probably reflecting greater difficulty in finding eagles at ice-covered waterways. Many rivers and most reservoirs were covered with ice during the survey period.

As is often the case, the highest tallies observed along streams were registered along the Lackawaxan River (Lackawanna and Pike counties); the Lower Susquehanna River, especially Lancaster County; the Shenango River (Mercer County); and the upper North Branch Susquehanna River (Bradford County). Larger bodies of still water were particularly attractive to eagles including the Raystown Dam (Huntingdon County); Foster Joseph Sayers Lake, Bald Eagle State Park (Centre County); the Kinzua Dam (Warren County); and Little Pine Creek Dam (Lycoming County). These larger reservoirs seem to be increasing in their relative importance for over-wintering eagles, perhaps because of the stability of water conditions. Other eagle winter hot spots included two roost sites, one in Mercer County and another in Lancaster County. There is an increased tendency for eagles to roost in woodlots in the agricultural landscape of Lancaster County several miles from the Susquehanna River as well as in woodlots of northwestern Pennsylvania that are near wetlands.

Several eagle routes were unsuccessful because the water surface was frozen, not allowing eagles to forage. Ice-cover was commonly reported even in the usually mild southeastern counties where water usually is open in early January and other waters are iced-over. Almost all of the USFWS routes were so affected, and many of the routes in northern counties or in highlands were ice-covered and did not yield eagles as a result. Temporary food bonanzas like carcasses also drew eagles away from areas where they normally are seen in winter.

An important aspect of the winter eagle surveys is public participation. One of the strategies of the new Bald Eagle management plan is to involve the public in more winter eagle surveys as well as nest-monitoring. New winter eagle surveys were started along the Schuylkill River, Berks and Montgomery counties; Penn's Creek, Centre County; Conodoquinet Creek, Cumberland County; Pymatuning Dam and Tamarack Lake, Crawford County; French Creek, Erie County; a roost area in Mercer County; and sections of the West Branch Susquehanna River in Lycoming and Clinton counties. These additional surveys helped account for the growing eagle population in these areas. Some routes in the Southeast were not run

in 2009, resulting in fewer survey hours and fewer eagles counted in that region for lack of cooperators. This affected the total results, but the total count of eagles was still very good and the overall effort greater than previous years.

One of the benefits of conducting the winter survey is that we get a leg up on the eagle breeding season. Most eagle pairs are on territory and either repairing their old nests or building new ones. Pairs that are claiming new territories often are building nests in January or before. Winter eagle volunteers observed breeding behavior, checked nest sites, and searched for new nests. The scouting paid off because many winter eagles were observed as pairs, apparently already on nesting territories, but several territories were empty, apparently due to ice-cover. A few territories may have been abandoned or shifted to the point where the eagles were not observed at their usual locations. These observations also help us better understand the dynamics of eagle territory occupation. At least two new eagle nests were found as a direct result of these surveys. Information about communal roost sites also is very much appreciated.

We very much appreciate the contributions of the many volunteers who assisted the survey in 2009 and all previous years. The extra observations of nests also are very valuable and very much appreciated. As the eagle population grows, we will be increasingly dependent on volunteers and cooperators. The success of the eagle program has benefited from the unselfish contributions of many people and organizations. Thanks to all of you who helped.

The nesting population of Bald Eagles reached 156 active nesting pairs in 2008. They were found in 46 counties. This is a minimum estimate because we know that some nests were not found. Several new nests have been found in 2009, but the season's survey is far from complete. A fuller report will be provided soon. Please report new nests and results of eagle nests to Doug Gross at the e-mail address listed below.

### **Pennsylvania Joins the United States Nightjar Survey Network**

The United States Nightjar Survey Network and the Pennsylvania Game Commission are eager to announce a new partnership that merges the Commonwealth into the national Nightjar Survey Network. As most of you know, nightjars are the group of nocturnal, insectivorous birds including the Whip-poor-will and the Common Nighthawk among others. In recent years, conservationists and the general public have come to share a general sense that nightjar populations are declining dramatically. However, prior to this Nightjar Survey Network, no widespread or long-term monitoring strategy to gather the vital population information to guide conservation actions existed. The core objectives of the Survey Network are to monitor and assess nightjar populations across the United States.

The U.S. Nightjar Survey Network and the Pennsylvania Game Commission invite all Pennsylvania birders and conservationists to participate in the program by adopting Nightjar Survey Routes in 2009 and beyond. The windows of coverage correspond to the best times in the lunar cycle to hear nightjars (mainly Whip-poor-wills in PA).

The U.S. Nightjar Survey Network was introduced in the southeast in 2007 and has continued to expand to gain full coverage across the conterminous United States. We are extremely grateful to the number of participants already involved in the program. The early years of data collection have already helped to explain how the composition of habitats in local landscapes influences nightjar abundance. In turn, these data will one day help to explain population declines. However, more routes need to be surveyed with greater geographic and species coverage, and longer-term count data. North of our state, the range of Whip-poor-will becomes much more restricted and localized. The "toot route" project of 2000 and 2001 revealed that Whip-poor-wills are locally common at many locations where they were not suspected.

Nightjar Surveys are standardized counts conducted along census routes during bright moonlit nights. Observers count all nightjars seen or heard for a six-minute period at each of 10 stops along the route. The entire survey will not take much more than one hour to complete and only needs to be conducted once a year. We have produced a series of routes in Pennsylvania that need adoption by survey participants.

Please consider adopting a Nightjar Survey Route in your area. The continuing success of U.S. Nightjar Survey Network relies entirely on volunteer participation. Visit: <http://www.ccb-wm.org/nightjars.htm> for information on vacant routes, survey methods, and more. Or you can visit the PA specific site at: <http://www.ccb-wm.org/nightjar/PAmain.htm>

I am the PA contact for the PA Nightjar network (see below for my contact information). We especially ask those of you who run BBS routes or participated in the saw-whet owl surveys to consider running a route or more. Should be fun!

### **PA eBird Ramps Up**

We started Pennsylvania eBird last year but are really gaining momentum in 2009. Our PA birding community has been giving the Atlas its well deserved attention. For those looking for a new way to channel their citizen ornithology, check out the Pennsylvania eBird page and participate.

The Pennsylvania eBird site is found at: [www.ebird.org/content/pa](http://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 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker). Visit it soon.

We also are looking for good stories about PA birding and bird conservation that would be good features for the website. Please feel free to send me suggestions and stories.

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## Poison Ivy Tree

by Arlene Koch

Outside my bedroom window is a dead 15-foot tall pine tree that by late May is completely covered with poison ivy and wild grape vines. I was never sure what kind of pine it was because I rescued it and others from a “nursery” an ex-brother-in-law started many years ago. He was one of those idea-of-the-month guys whose ideas never went anywhere. So when he said he was going to mow down the unmarked saplings he had just planted the year before, I took as many as I could fit in a bucket.

Through the years those trees and others, acquired in odd but legal ways, have served me well birdwise. But one of the pine species began dying off a few years ago and now all of them are either dead or on their way. They obviously weren't hardy in this part of the country, but I got almost 30 good years out of them for free. We cut down three completely dead ones that anchored the driveway and fronted the road, but we let the others die at their own rate. They'll eventually be canopied by other evergreen or deciduous trees, so they'll stay where they are and serve the woodpeckers well.

Anyone who's visited our property knows how fond I am of dead trees. My husband even plants them for me on special occasions, even though once in a while it would be nice to get flowers or be taken to dinner on Mother's Day. One snag in the yard that he surprised me with looks so much like an upside down femur that we call it the “bone” snag. But I'm not complaining. These snags are invaluable for birds.

But getting back to the poison ivy tree, let me state that I'm certainly not advocating letting poison ivy grow wherever it wants. I know all too well how painful the rash caused by the plant's oil - urushiol - can be. But when you have a good-sized property in eastern

Pennsylvania and it's surrounded by hundreds of acres of preserved farm fields and woods, you take the bad with the good. Dealing with poison ivy and invasives like multiflora rose, autumn olive, and garlic mustard is all just part of the normal routine.

I've had some great bird sightings on poison ivy, in the foliage as well as on its berries. So when David and I had to decide what to do with this tree near the bedroom window, we let the vines continue to grow on it because its trunk is in the middle of a wildflower patch and unreachable by little or big hands. We also know that anytime we want to get rid of it, we can. At countless places on our property where poison ivy grows rampantly that's not possible and, besides, the birds would replant it again anyway at spots nearby.

Managing more than 25 acres just for birds and wildlife quickly teaches you that not everything is as easy or as great as some of the natural habitat books make it seem. But, on the other hand, some things turn out to be much better. It's an ongoing decision process. We let sheep sorrel and curly dock, two plants most people would consider weeds, grow because they're host plants for American copper butterflies. And we take a hands-off policy toward poison ivy at places where it's not bothering anyone because it's easier that way.

## Calling All Birders: New Initiative for *Birding* Magazine

*Birding* magazine, published by the American Birding Association (ABA), will soon publish regular compilations of very short (~150 words) announcements and summaries of news stories with broad interest to the North American birding community. Possible topics include recent conservation successes (and failures), new bird initiatives by NGOs and government agencies, and human interest items. These compilations reflect the vision of the ABA's new President & CEO Rob Robinson to strengthen the ABA's partnerships with birding and bird conservation organizations throughout the Americas.

Please send announcements and summaries to Ted Floyd, e-mail submissions only. Please include your name and place of residence, and please keep your submission as close to 150 words as possible.

To learn more about *Birding* and the ABA, please check us out online. Selected articles from recent issues of *Birding* are available online:

[<http://aba.org/birding/archives.html>](http://aba.org/birding/archives.html)

– Ted Floyd  
Lafayette, Boulder County, Colorado

# Rebuttal Letter

In the March 2009 newsletter we published a letter to the editor from PSO member Dr. Sam Sinderson. In that letter Dr. Sinderson took exception to PSO's support for dealing with the global warming problem. In his December 2008 Conservation Column Mark Henry, conservation editor, ran National Audubon president and CEO John Flicker's statement concerning efforts slated to be undertaken on the conservation front by the administration of then President-Elect Barack Obama. Global warming was one of the issues addressed. A rebuttal letter to Dr. Sinderson's letter was subsequently received. It was written by Dennis M. McNair, PhD and President of Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society, and supported by Mark Henry of PSO, Tom Dick, VMD, of Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society and PSO, and Ed Perry of the National Wildlife Federation. Due to the length of the rebuttal letter and the fact that it is best read in relation to Dr. Sinderson's letter, both of these letters have been placed on the PSO web site. I urge everyone to read them. This will close the discussion of this issue at this time.



## PSO Newsletter

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

PSO	Membership Categories:
2469 Hammertown Road	Individual \$ 28.50
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