

# PSO PILEATED



June 2011

The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

Volume 22, Number 2

## From the President's Desk.... Owls Are a Hoot!

Recent good fortune with Barred Owls at home reminded me what a hoot owls have played in my birding life. Owls have always been among my wife Janet's favorites, and my interest is not far behind. Just recently they have come front and center in my thoughts as we have been enjoying the company of a Barred Owl family, including three recent fledglings at our home in Murrysville, Westmoreland County.

While I was doing chores on Memorial Day weekend, I noticed a large white deposit on the driveway. I was thinking "big bird," but I should have remembered my training from a Cape May Bird Observatory winter raptor class given by *How to Find an Owl* authors, Clay and Pat Sutton. Look for white wash and look up. Well, I didn't look up, so maybe I missed finding these owls sooner.

However, the next day I was more alert when an adult Barred Owl ripped off a half call of "Who-cooks-for-you" at 9:30 in the morning. Janet and I had not heard Barred Owls from the house for several years; however we have a history of their presence in our home territory. Our lifer was on the 1998 Bushy Run Christmas Bird Count – a close view in daylight just a short distance up our road. We then spent many years without sight or sound of Barred Owls until we heard them regularly for several years. During those active years they responded day or night to a distant fire siren, or they sometimes gave what we interpreted as an irritation call when we flicked on the light for a late night visit to the bathroom. We thought they must be perched on the back fence just 25 feet from the house, and we presumed we were interfering with their hunting.

Back to the story.... Because I wanted to get an early start

to the work week, I walked out our side door at 6:00 a.m. I wasn't thinking about owls; but since migration was not quite over, I was still alert and heard a high pitched sound from the front of the house. I thought it could possibly be a Blackburnian Warbler, but as I made my way around the house, I started hearing loud hissing noises – not a warbler. I looked up and in spite of the many leaves, I quickly found three fledgling Barred Owls. They had quite a bit of definition, but to me, they still looked like balls of fluff. I had no problem rousing Janet out of bed for this, but it was still too dark for photos. Later that day, however, Janet was able to get a good picture of two of them.



Janet Kuehl photographed these young Barred Owls in their yard.

For the next two weeks we enjoyed the dawn and dusk hissing and antics of the fledging Barred Owls. More active at dusk, they performed flights across the yard, tree to ground, then tree to tree as darkness approached. From an ABA (American Birding Association) owl workshop led by Denver Holt and Terry McEaney, we had learned to watch for papa hanging around the nest, so we suspected that the parents were close by. We did not see the parents although Janet was scolded once by an adult when she ventured up the trail into our back woods.

And mentioning the back woods brings back another good home owl story. Trying to shake off the depression of a 2008

Steeler playoff loss, I headed up the back woods trail. A female cardinal, along with our many feeder-visiting chickadees and titmice, was raising a ruckus in a tangle of hawthorn trees and multiflora rose. Investigating, I found our first and only yard Northern Saw-whet Owl. I would still rate this above a Bald Eagle or Black Vulture as our best yard bird.

And back to the Barred Owl story again.... Alas, all good things must end, but at least they went out in a big way!

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# PSO Annual Meeting – A Bird's Eye View

By Ramsay Koury

This year's annual meeting was held in beautiful Bedford County. I had never spent much time birding in this area, so I was looking forward to experiencing migration in a new location.

I arrived Friday afternoon with a small group from the Harrisburg area: Chad Kauffman, Vern Gauthier, Annette Mathes, and Chuck Berthoud. Chad and Vern had been



It was great to hear and see Golden-winged Warblers.

Photo by Mark McConaughy

asked to assist with the field trip to the Dunning's Creek Wetlands, so we spent the afternoon there with a guided tour of the area. This fantastic wetland area was created by local veterinarian Tom Dick. This

area is not open to the public, but PSO members were fortunate enough to access it during the weekend. The ponds and numerous potholes attract a large variety of birds and other wildlife. Even in the middle of the afternoon we were treated to lots of singing birds. Many were common species, but it was great to see and hear many Willow Flycatchers and Golden-winged Warblers.

The highlight for me was the shorebird pond. Tom controls the water level on one of the ponds and had lowered it several inches to expose mudflats just for the PSO weekend. From the blind we were able to view well over 100 shorebirds including many Dunlin, Least Sandpipers, and yellowlegs and smaller numbers of Spotted, Solitary, and Semipalmated Sandpipers. The pond also hosted several Semipalmated Plovers and White-rumped Sandpipers, two Short-billed Dowitchers, and even a Ruddy Turnstone.

The meeting officially began with a social at the Bedford County Elks Country Club. It was great to reconnect with friends from around the state whom I only see at PSO meetings! President Tom Kuehl conducted a short and sweet business meeting where we re-elected the current officers and elected Mike Fialkovich and Scott Stoleson as new board members.

The evening ended for me as I listened to several American Woodcocks displaying behind our motel!

Early Saturday morning I was back at Dunning's Creek, along with 25 others. We divided into two groups and spent the entire morning exploring the wetlands complex. Unfortunately most of the shorebirds were gone, but the birding was still

very good. A very cooperative Least Bittern was a great find. It simply sat in a bush and allowed long looks. One of the best migrants we saw was an Olive-sided Flycatcher that put on a show for us. It rotated between several dead snags giving us killer looks. Other good finds were Alder Flycatcher and Wilson's Warbler.



One of the best migrants was an Olive-sided Flycatcher.

Photo by Mark McConaughy

Besides the birding, it was very interesting listening to Tom Dick discuss the history of the wetlands' creation. It is really great to see that human beings can actually improve the environment when we want to.

There were several excellent speakers on Saturday afternoon, but I have never been able to tear myself away from birding in May to sit inside! For this I have been labeled an "Outlaw Birder." While playing hooky several of us birded the road up to the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch. The birding along this road was excellent. The biggest surprise was a singing Henslow's Sparrow right along the road. This was not a bird I had expected to see in Bedford County. We had great looks at a number of warblers, found a singing Purple Finch, and spotted a Ruffed Grouse sitting in the middle of the road! I had never been to the hawkwatch and was very impressed by the magnificent view. I must go back sometime during the fall. We had a very nice conversation with Che Mincone, one of the hawkwatch regulars, who gave us a lot of useful information about the site.

The annual banquet that evening included great food, interesting conversation, and two award presentations. Gary Edwards received the Earl Poole Award for his lifelong contributions to the birding community. It took several minutes for John Fedak to list all of Gary's many accomplishments. The Conservation Award was presented

to Mike Lanzone, Trish Miller, Todd Katzner, and David Brandes for their work on the eastern Golden Eagle Project which monitors the eagles' migratory movements. The evening was capped off by a very concise and interesting talk by Tom Dick about Dunning's Creek.

The next morning Wayne Sierer led eight of us on a tour of Blue Knob State Park. This interesting park has a variety of habitat and the second highest point in Pennsylvania. We had great birding throughout our long hike, finding a nice variety of warblers, including several singing Ceruleans, a Kentucky, and a Tennessee. Several singing Winter Wrens and a couple of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers gave a northern flair to the hike. The most challenging part of the morning was helping our president, Tom Kuehl, to get a look at a Blackpoll Warbler! It took several of us working hard, and a lot of pishing, but he finally got the bird. The view from the ski resort at the top of the mountain was impressive and a great way to end the PSO weekend.

For those of you who have never been to a PSO weekend, I would strongly urge you to consider coming next year. There were birders of all ages, two youth scholarship winners, ages 12 and 14, and some enjoying their golden years. There are birders of all skill levels, too. No one is too much of a beginner to enjoy this weekend. For seasoned, more experienced birders it is an opportunity to see birds in locations you may never visit and to connect with birders from around the state. It is always fun meeting for the first time someone whose name you know from the list serve or magazine. Next year's meeting is in Lock Haven. Please consider joining us!

## Bird Quiz

How well do you know your Pennsylvania birds?

1. What feature of its bill during the breeding season usually distinguishes an adult female European Starling from an adult male?
2. The first record of a very rare shorebird in our state was mislabeled as a "Piping Plover" for many years in the Reading Public Museum. What was the species, and who correctly identified it?
3. Of the three jaegers, which has the most Pennsylvania records?
4. Which is our only cavity-nesting flycatcher?
5. The state bird of Utah, said to have saved Mormon pioneers' food supply from a "plague of locusts" in 1848, has been recorded in Pennsylvania more frequently in recent years than in the past. What species is it?

*(Answers on page 10)*




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## PSO 2011 Meeting Attendees

Diane Bierly  
 Barry Blust  
 David Brandes  
 Kate Brandes & sons  
 Kris Brockes  
 Sally Dick  
 Tom Dick  
 Jane Earle  
 Gary Edwards  
 Mary Edwards  
 Erin Estell  
 John Fedak  
 Mike Fialkovich  
 Vern Gauthier  
 Doug Gross  
 Deb Grove

Greg Grove  
 Carol Guba  
 Margaret Higbee  
 Roger Higbee  
 Marjorie Howard  
 Shonah Hunter  
 Laura Jackson  
 Mike Jackson  
 Luke Gerben Kaspar  
 Mark Kaspar  
 Todd Katzner  
 Chad Kauffman  
 Rudy Keller  
 Nick Kerlin  
 Kathy Kern  
 Arlene Koch

Ramsay Koury  
 Janet Kuehl  
 Tom Kuehl  
 Sherri LaBar  
 Mike Lanzone  
 Gary Lockerman  
 Sandy Lockerman  
 Pat Lynch  
 Sherron Lynch  
 Francesca Massaratto  
 Annette Mathes  
 Mark McConaughy  
 Flo McGuire  
 Jim McGuire  
 Betsy Mescavage  
 Trish Miller

Ron Montgomery  
 Tom Pearson  
 Mary Jane Seipler  
 Wayne Sierer  
 Jim Smith  
 Rita Smith  
 Scott Stoleson  
 Jeff Territo  
 Kim Van Fleet  
 Marjorie Van Tassel  
 Linda Wagner  
 Daniel Winstead  
 Ray Winstead  
 Eleanor Wolf  
 Richard Wolf

# PSO Annual Meeting Presentations

by Mike Fialkovich

The Saturday afternoon sessions featured three excellent presentations about research projects conducted right here in Pennsylvania. Two were about Cerulean Warblers, a species of concern in Pennsylvania and beyond, and the other covered Golden Eagles. The banquet program was a fine overview of habitat restoration and its success.

## **The Effects of Partial Harvest on Cerulean Warblers**

Scott Stoleson presented results of his studies on the effects of harvesting timber on Cerulean Warblers in the Allegheny National Forest in northern Pennsylvania. The results were surprising because Cerulean Warblers are considered a forest interior species, requiring unbroken tracts of forest. Scott's research found the birds prefer openings in the forest, whether manmade (powerline cuts and timber harvesting) or natural (tree falls). Data was collected from uncut and timbered forest, and the results showed greater nest success in forests that were partially timbered.

A brief video during the presentation demonstrated how the birds are mist netted for banding using playback and a model of a male Cerulean Warbler to attract the resident male. Scott and his team devised a method of hoisting a mist net high into the trees to capture the birds. This visual provided insight to the methods used in the study. Another video of a female nest building and a pair feeding young in the nest gave the audience an intimate view of family life high in the canopy, something that we may never have the opportunity to witness.

## **Cerulean Warbler Research on the Allegheny Front**

Kim Van Fleet from Audubon Pennsylvania also spoke about Cerulean Warblers. She provided an overview of research conducted at Blue Knob State Park. The distribution of Ceruleans at the park was systematically determined by running transects up and down the slopes of the study site, a physical challenge for the study team who did this on foot. This hard work paid off with a thorough mapping of Cerulean Warblers at this location. The results of this study will be important as wind turbine development continues in the state.

## **Golden Eagle Project**

Mike Lanzone and Trish Miller presented results of their ongoing Golden Eagle research. The study continues to provide important information about how these eagles use

the ridges during their migration. This will be invaluable with respect to the impact of wind turbine installation on this species.

Birds fitted with transmitters are sending signals with regular frequency. A map of the location of the birds during the presentation showed details of their movements. An interesting piece of information obtained by satellite tracking was the avoidance of a wind farm by one of the birds. Whether other birds will exhibit this avoidance behavior and what the energy cost demands are when a bird takes a detour remain to be determined.

One of the other concerns discovered during this project was incidental capture of birds in leg hold traps meant for mammals. A tale of one bird captured in West Virginia and rehabilitated at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh had a happy ending when the bird was rehabilitated successfully and released back into the wild.

In addition to migration data, behavior and range information during winter is being assessed. Birds were discovered to inhabit forests during this season where they feed on the carcasses of deer and other animals. Mike and Trish also shared video of the capture of a Golden Eagle that was "baited" with a deer carcass. The audience was transported to the blind with the researchers waiting for the bird to get into position before the rocket net was fired.

The dynamics of the eastern population of Golden Eagles is being revealed as this work continues.

## **The Story of Restoration Ecology**

Our banquet speaker was Tom Dick who presented the history and an overview of the impressive Dunnings Creek Wetlands. The tract of land was formerly a farm which is hard to believe after seeing what it is today. Tom's photos during the presentation showed the first stages of pond construction in which the hydrology of the land was used as an advantage, a reason why farming the land was not very successful. Habitat restoration included planting thousands of native wetland plants and installing systems for controlling water levels in the ponds. Tom's presentation featured highlights of the wildlife documented there over the years including rare birds, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals and how he cooperated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Ducks Unlimited throughout the process of wetland restoration. What a great success in creating and restoring wildlife habitat!

# Birds Listed at 2011 PSO Meeting at Bedford

Canada Goose	Spotted Sandpiper	Red-eyed Vireo	Yellow-throated Warbler
Wood Duck	Upland Sandpiper	Blue Jay	Pine Warbler
American Black Duck	Ruddy Turnstone	American Crow	Prairie Warbler
Mallard	Semipalmated Sandpiper	Fish Crow	Palm Warbler
Blue-winged Teal	Least Sandpiper	Common Raven	Bay-breasted Warbler
N. Shoveler	White-rumped Sandpiper	Horned Lark	Blackpoll Warbler
Green-winged Teal	Baird's Sandpiper	Purple Martin	Cerulean Warbler
Ring-necked Duck	Pectoral Sandpiper	Tree Swallow	Black-and-white Warbler
Hooded Merganser	Dunlin	N. Rough-winged Swallow	American Redstart
Common Merganser	Short-billed Dowitcher	Bank Swallow	Worm-eating Warbler
Red-breasted Merganser	American Woodcock	Cliff Swallow	Ovenbird
Ruddy Duck	Ring-billed Gull	Barn Swallow	Northern Waterthrush
Ring-necked Pheasant	Rock Pigeon	Black-capped Chickadee	Louisiana Waterthrush
Ruffed Grouse	Mourning Dove	Tufted Titmouse	Kentucky Warbler
Wild Turkey	Black-billed Cuckoo	White-breasted Nuthatch	Common Yellowthroat
Common Loon	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Brown Creeper	Hooded Warbler
Pied-billed Grebe	Barn Owl	Carolina Wren	Wilson's Warbler
Horned Grebe	Eastern Screech-Owl	House Wren	Canada Warbler
Double-crested Cormorant	Great Horned Owl	Winter Wren	Yellow-breasted Chat
Least Bittern	Barred Owl	Golden-crowned Kinglet	Scarlet Tanager
Great Blue Heron	Common Nighthawk	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Eastern Towhee
Green Heron	Whip-poor-will	Eastern Bluebird	Chipping Sparrow
Black-crowned Night-Heron	Chimney Swift	Veery	Field Sparrow
Black Vulture	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Swainson's Thrush	Savannah Sparrow
Turkey Vulture	Belted Kingfisher	Wood Thrush	Grasshopper Sparrow
Osprey	Red-headed Woodpecker	American Robin	Henslow's Sparrow
Bald Eagle	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Gray Catbird	Song Sparrow
Northern Harrier	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Northern Mockingbird	Swamp Sparrow
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Downy Woodpecker	Brown Thrasher	White-throated Sparrow
Cooper's Hawk	Hairy Woodpecker	European Starling	White-crowned Sparrow
N. Goshawk	Northern Flicker	Cedar Waxwing	Dark-eyed Junco
Red-shouldered Hawk	Pileated Woodpecker	Blue-winged Warbler	Northern Cardinal
Broad-winged Hawk	Olive-sided Flycatcher	Golden-winged Warbler	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Red-tailed Hawk	Eastern Wood-Pewee	"Brewster's warbler"	Indigo Bunting
American Kestrel	Acadian Flycatcher	Tennessee Warbler	Bobolink
Merlin	Alder Flycatcher	Nashville Warbler	Red-winged Blackbird
Virginia Rail	Willow Flycatcher	Northern Parula	Eastern Meadowlark
Sora	Least Flycatcher	Yellow Warbler	Common Grackle
Common Moorhen	Eastern Phoebe	Chestnut-sided Warbler	Brown-headed Cowbird
American Coot	Great Crested Flycatcher	Magnolia Warbler	Orchard Oriole
Black-bellied Plover	Eastern Kingbird	Cape May Warbler	Baltimore Oriole
Semipalmated Plover	White-eyed Vireo	Black-throated Blue Warbler	Purple Finch
Killdeer	Yellow-throated Vireo	Yellow-rumped Warbler	House Finch
Greater Yellowlegs	Blue-headed Vireo	Black-throated Green	American Goldfinch
Lesser Yellowlegs	Warbling Vireo	Blackburnian Warbler	House Sparrow
Solitary Sandpiper			

**Total = 180 species+ 1 hybrid**

What a great meeting and what fabulous field trips!!! We broke the record on the number of species ever recorded at a PSO meeting. This is six more than were seen last year at Erie. Special thanks to all the trip leaders for sharing their bird-finding talents and knowledge.



# Welcome, New Board Members!

At our business meeting on May 20, we elected two new board members, Mike Fialkovich from Pittsburgh and Scott Stoleson from Sugar Grove. Welcome aboard!

**Mike Fialkovich** has been an active birder for the past 25 years, having started birding as a child. He received his first pair of binoculars when he started high school.

Mike writes: “When I was in college I spent two summers at the Pymatuning Laboratory of Ecology, and I met others interested in birds so I saw a lot of new species during those summers (1986-1987). When I graduated and bought my first car, I had the ability to travel around to see more birds so that's when I started birding more intensively. I met other birders, learned a lot from them, made new friendships, and continue to do so to this day.”



Mike Fialkovich attended the recent PSO meeting at Bedford.

He joined the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania in 1991. He has led numerous field trips and has been a Christmas Bird Count leader since 1992. He compiled and authored ASWP's bird reports from 1995 through 1999 and conducted a breeding bird survey on their property at Todd Sanctuary during the summer of 1994. He was a member of the winning Birdathon team in 1994 to support education programs at ASWP.

Mike was also instrumental in the founding of the Three Rivers Birding Club, serving on the steering committee, leading field trips, and giving programs. In addition, he is the club historian and the bird reports editor.

In 2000 he joined PSO and assumed the responsibility of seasonal editor the following year. Prior to joining, however, he compiled the bird reports for *PA Birds* for two counties – Allegheny and Fayette – and he has been doing this for the past 17 and 16 years respectively. Five journal articles also bear his name. A seasoned and popular field trip leader, Mike led PSO members on outings at both Pittsburgh and at Erie.

Mike has participated in many other research projects. He has run a Breeding Bird Survey route in Butler County since 1995 and Winter Raptor Surveys in Butler and

Allegheny Counties since 2001. During the second PA Breeding Bird Atlas he was the coordinator for Region 71. Since 1995 he has participated in the Pennsylvania Migration Count, and he helped with the fall migration count in 1997 and 1998. He began serving as the eBird editor for Allegheny County in January 2011.

**Dr. Scott Stoleson** is the Research Wildlife Biologist with the Forest Service's Northern Research Station in Warren, PA, and a Research Associate of the Roger Tory Peterson Institute, Jamestown, NY. An avid birder since the age of nine, he has turned his childhood interest into his profession. He received a B.A. in Biological Sciences from Dartmouth College and his M.S. and Ph.D. in Wildlife Ecology from Yale University. He has published more than 45 scientific papers and



Scott Stoleson was one of the afternoon presenters at the Bedford meeting.

book chapters on avian biology and conservation based on research in Pennsylvania, the western U.S., Mexico, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and the Galápagos Islands.

Scott has led natural history tours for the National Audubon Society to the Caribbean, Central and South America, and leads tours and workshops for the Roger Tory Peterson Birding Festival in Jamestown, NY. He served as a field consultant for David Attenborough's "Life of Birds" series on BBC. He was a regional co-coordinator for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas, serves on the PA Biological Survey's Ornithological Technical Committee, and runs a BBS route in north-western PA.

Scott came to PA from New Mexico, where he served on the state's Partners in Flight committee, the NM Bird Records Committee, the NM Important Bird Areas committee, the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Recovery Team, and worked on the first New Mexico Breeding Bird Atlas. He is also an elected member of the American Ornithologists' Union, and a regular member of the Cooper and Wilson Ornithological Societies and the Association of Field Ornithologists. His research currently focuses on Cerulean Warbler biology, post-breeding behavior of forest birds, and the impacts of energy development on Pennsylvania's forest birds.

# The Raven Reporter

## Tales of Discovery about Pennsylvania Birds



### New PGC Endangered Bird Biologist

We are excited to add a new staff member to the Wildlife Diversity team. Patti Barber is the new Endangered Birds Specialist, replacing me in that position. Patti has been involved with the Wildlife Diversity team as the State Wildlife Grants coordinator, chomping at the bit to get out to do some bird stuff instead. She will be coordinating the Bald Eagle monitoring projects as well as surveys for colonial waterbirds, Ospreys, and other endangered birds. Please welcome Patti to our team and share with her your Bald Eagle and other endangered bird observations. She can be reached by e-mail at: [patbarber@state.pa.us](mailto:patbarber@state.pa.us).

### Focus on Golden-winged Warblers

The Golden-winged Warbler (GWWA) is one of the breeding birds of greatest interest in Pennsylvania. It seems to be disappearing rapidly from areas where it was found only a few years ago. It has been on the state and national Watch List and Red Listed as one of the Highest Continental Concern species. This species is in dramatic decline in our state as the recent Breeding Bird Atlas demonstrated. However, GWWA responds to various disturbances so its range and occurrences are constantly changing. It is a moving target. We invite all PA birders to go out to check for GWWA in PA. Check out the places where you located them during the recent Atlas, on any birding outing recently, or places you have heard about GWWA or think they might occur. We want to find out about the new places and whether the old Golden-wing territories are still occupied.

Some populations, now well-known, resulted from fires, timbering, and various management but did not exist before those events. For example, the Sproul State Forest population, which resulted from a fire in the 1990s, was found by Audubon IBA surveys. Many of the Delaware

State Forest GWWA hotspots were originally located by the Cornell GWWA surveys and PBBA volunteers a few years after timber sales. The more we learn about GWWA, the better we can respond to its needs and manage habitat in appropriate places. We have learned that GWWA are not only thicket, old field, and early successional species but also nest in scrub barrens and some wetlands. At this point, almost all GWWA are nesting above 1100 feet in Pennsylvania.

Please enter your observations in eBird, particularly using the PA portal: <http://ebird.org/content/pa/>. Please also take advantage of the Comments field and the new Breeding Codes when entering data. Of course, we also are interested in records of Blue-winged Warblers and the hybrid warblers. For more information about GWWA, check out the Golden-winged Warbler Working Group's website: <http://www.gwwa.org/>.

Some suggested strategies: check out places where you have found GWWA in the last few years and include a wide search area, going off-road and back trails. They often are associated with a new clear cut, canopy removal, or shelterwood cut in a forest, sometimes behind gates and deer enclosures. Stick to higher elevations, very few GWWA are found below 1100 feet these days. Check out wetlands and wet meadows, especially red maple swamps and tamarack bogs, within a forest. Scrub barrens with some trees and edge also can host Golden-winged Warblers. Think about places that resemble the ones that get reported regularly on the list serve, but are not reported. We want to learn of *new* sites.



This Golden-winged Warbler was photographed at Reserva El Jaguar.

Photo by Georges Duriaux

In my own experiences, I have found GWWA in a recent clearcut that was in one of my Breeding Bird Atlas blocks. I may have missed the GWWA previously because they were more than a quarter-mile off the trail. I found plenty of species near the trail during the Atlas but not GWWA. Or maybe I missed them because I got there too late in the breeding season. In this case, some of the timbering also occurred after my Atlas surveys, and there have been vegetative changes each year. In any case, I found GWWA in a place where it was not found in recent years. It sometimes takes extra effort and a revisit to well-trodden places with more focus on the target bird species.

GWWA really quiet down after June 15 or June 20, with those at lower elevations becoming "quiet" earlier than ones at higher elevations. Please get out there soon to find some Golden-wings! Previously collected field trip data also are appreciated.

## **Good Spruce Cone Crop Anticipated – Crossbill Year?**

A few field trips to higher elevation forests and wetlands indicate that there could be a good spruce cone crop this summer. If there is a good cone crop, it could attract crossbills to areas in Pennsylvania where they have not been reported recently. Crossbills can respond to such cone crops. These invasions can occur in mid- to late-summer, even in July and August. So, please include some spruce areas in your later summer field trips.

We are working with Matthew Young of Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology in studies of crossbills in Pennsylvania. He has been studying the Red Crossbills in New York for several years and has been seeking crossbill reports in Pennsylvania. The Red Crossbill species is divided into several “types” based on their calls. These “types” almost function as species. For positive identification of each type, a recording is almost necessary. Birders are urged to make recordings, preferably digital, of any crossbills encountered. Please let us know if you encounter any crossbills and where you found them. Not only will crossbills feed on native conifers but also exotic species such as Norway spruce. In New York, Red Crossbills nest regularly in Norway spruce forests. So, larger spruce plantings in Pennsylvania also should be targeted for surveys this summer, even late in the summer and early fall.

Please contact Doug Gross about any observations of summer crossbills so we can learn more about their distribution and occurrence in our state. Matt Young and I welcome collaborators.

## **Pennsylvania Supports the Southern Wings Project in Nicaragua**

The PA Game Commission includes all wild native bird species in its conservation planning. It supports “full lifecycle stewardship” of migratory species. In a nutshell, this means we need to work with people in locations on the wintering grounds of our high priority conservation species to conserve and manage for the habitat necessary for the continued survival of that species. Southern Wings is an umbrella organization for connecting wildlife agencies and NGO’s in the United States with partners in Middle and South America where our birds spend the winter. It provides a funding mechanism for bird conservation in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The PA Game Commission supports Southern Wings and has contributed \$4950 so far to a project in the highlands of Nicaragua known as Reserva El Jaguar. This reserve supports a population of wintering Golden-winged

Warblers. The project is being coordinated with the American Bird Conservancy. Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America but lacks the support and conservation infrastructure that some other countries have developed. We see this as an opportunity to support willing partners in bird conservation in this country with so much potential for birding and conservation.

Reserva El Jaguar is an ecolodge, a shaded coffee plantation, and research station in the highlands of northern Nicaragua. Lily and George Duriaux-Chavarría of El Jaguar are committed to sustainable agricultural and forest conservation using shade-grown coffee and other techniques to benefit migratory and resident birds in the Nicaraguan highlands. They have just been featured in an article entitled “Gold Standard” in the May-June issue of *Audubon* magazine. The shade-grown coffee plantation is good habitat for many wintering Nearctic migrants because it approximates the structure of a natural forest, retaining a tree canopy rather than a full-sun coffee farm which lacks the canopy. In the Central American highlands, the conversion of forest to ranchland and other human developments greatly decreases the habitat values for birds. This is a significant limiting factor for several of our Neotropical migrant forest birds including Olive-sided Flycatcher, Cerulean Warbler, and Canada Warbler. The owners of El Jaguar have planted a nursery of appropriate shade trees for use as canopy trees in coffee farms. They have also developed an educational program for school children and adults about sustainable agriculture and bird conservation. Reforestation also augments moisture retention in these seasonally tropical forests. The program also includes initiatives to establish more corridors of woody vegetation in the agricultural areas where open areas are usually devoid of migrant birds.

The El Jaguar Reserva conducts research at their facility. Point count surveys have shown that this is a significant GWWA wintering location. Their banding station (a MoSi station) has banded several Golden-wings and contributes data to the international GWWA research conservation program.

El Jaguar also includes several acres of a cloud forest, a threatened habitat in Middle America and home to many resident bird species of conservation concern. In addition to Golden-winged Warbler, other species at this site that link it to Pennsylvania include Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Acadian Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, Worm-eating Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Hooded Warbler.

A webinar was conducted about the Southern Wings program that is part of the Bird Conservation Committee

of the Partners in Flight / Waterbird / Shorebird Committee and sponsored by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. If you would like to listen to this webinar, please follow this link to hear the recording and presentations: <http://breeze.cce.cornell.edu/p42231093/>.

To learn more about the Southern Wings, please see: [http://jjcdev.com/~fishwild/?section=southern\\_wings\\_program](http://jjcdev.com/~fishwild/?section=southern_wings_program). To learn more about Reserva El Jaguar please visit its website: <http://www.jaguarreserve.org/>.

### **Wanted: Loggerhead Shrikes**

One of Pennsylvania's rarest and most elusive breeding species is the Loggerhead Shrike, a Pennsylvania Endangered species due to its extreme rarity. There have been some scattered reports of Loggerheads in some of the southern tier counties and near the Ohio border. We have had surprise reports from new locations in Franklin, Adams, and Mercer counties. If anyone has good sightings of Loggerhead Shrikes, please let us in PGC Wildlife Diversity know. We would like to check on any possible nesting pairs. We also are rechecking some locations where shrikes have been reported in recent years.

### **Focus on Cerulean Warbler**

It was certainly appropriate for the PSO to highlight the Cerulean Warbler at its May meeting. Not only did the meeting feature two presentations on Ceruleans by Scott Stoleson of Allegheny National Forest and Kim Van Fleet of PA Audubon, but the field trips to Blue Knob State Park featured multiple Cerulean Warblers. I located at least a dozen males singing myself and others found more.

The Cerulean Warbler is one of the most imperiled forest songbirds of the eastern deciduous forest. It has declined about 70% since 1966 when the Breeding Bird Survey program began, and perhaps even more from the period before that. Due to these severe declines, it is considered a Yellow List species on the USA Watch List. Its

declines are greatest in the center of its breeding range, the Mississippi River Valley. The Pennsylvania story is a bit more mixed. The Cerulean seems to have declined in the western part of the state, especially the southwest, but also has increased along some of our ridges, the Allegheny Front, and in some eastern counties. From the 1<sup>st</sup> Atlas to the 2<sup>nd</sup> the decline has been about 32 percent.

Oddly, the history of the Cerulean is one of expansion into eastern Pennsylvania forests as well as losses elsewhere. Some of the highest densities known are found on the New Jersey side of the upper Delaware River. It is hard to say why this has occurred, but much good Cerulean Warbler habitat exists in the state where we have maturing forests and an increasing tendency to protect riparian forests to prevent erosion.

The Cerulean is certainly a forest canopy songbird that tends to be found in larger scale forests. It does seem to like spaces between trees, often the natural spaces found where the trees are large, some windfall-created openings occur, or where trails or some timbering makes small gaps in the tree cover. Paradoxically, they are found in mature riparian forests and also on mountainside and ridgetops. Some of the largest populations occur where there is fairly unbroken canopy from the streamside up the mountain to the ridgetop. This is what we've seen along the Lower Trail, for instance.

Pennsylvania is a really critical state for Cerulean Warbler because of its commanding position in the Appalachian Mountains and its many miles of riparian forest and ridgetops. We certainly could learn a lot from field trips recording Ceruleans. Good Birding!

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## **Owls Are a Hoot** *(continued from page 1)*



Tom Kuehl was able to photograph one of the fledglings.

The dusk activity started early one evening. The hissing was at full tilt when I came outside to light the grill. One of the fledglings flew across the open space and landed on a convenient ash branch that hung over the

driveway. With plenty of light left, I was able to get a good photo of one of the owls. We had held ourselves in check during the visit and minimized our disturbance of their activity, but we needed to light the grill. The owl stuck to his position on the branch until dark. It was fun while it lasted, but now a week later that remains our last encounter.

Many of you are certainly owl experts, but to make this a bit educational, here is a recap of the owling tips:

1. Look for white wash in areas that hold good potential for owl roosts (and look up when you find it!)
2. Be alert and follow those scolding passerines and corvids as they quite often will lead you to an owl or other raptor, and
3. Remember to look and be alert when you find those branchers, as the parents may not be far away.

I have many more owl stories to tell, but they have to wait for another time. Good birding!

Tom Kuehl, President  
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## The Side Benefits of Birding

by Arlene Koch

Do you know what phenology is? Well, if you don't, you're probably not alone. I didn't know what it was either until after I was birding for a long time although I'm sure that at some point I had heard the term in college. However, it sure wasn't something that English majors studied.

Phenology is the relationship of biological phenomena such as flowering, breeding, and migration to climactic conditions. But if you want any further explanation, you should talk to a biologist or other scientist because I'm not qualified to explain it in depth. I just know that one natural occurrence always precipitates another.

I never thought about anything like phenology before I started looking seriously at birds. Growing up with a mother whose idea of the great outdoors was walking from the kitchen door to the car, I knew almost nothing about natural phenomena. The one thing I do remember, even when I was very young, though, was that I noticed when spring arrived and the apple trees blossomed, suddenly loud black and orange birds would be in them. Somehow I learned that they were orioles but I thought they were smelling the flowers, not eating the insects in them.

It was becoming a birder, not college and certainly not working in Washington, D.C., that taught me how the natural world works. The more birds I learned to identify, the more I learned about everything else. The first time I found myself looking at a male Eastern Bluebird, I distinctly remember thinking that before I discovered birds I had lived in a very closed world indeed.

Birding knowledge has in turn taught me about plants, trees, climate, clouds, insects, weather, conservation, and too many other things to list. Birds don't exist alone. As a birder if all you do is look at a species, tick it off, and move onto another one, then you're missing the whole picture. I have no problems with listing; I chased new species and listed for years and will continue to do so. But somewhere along the way the chase became more about the experience than the actual quarry.

There are, of course, many other benefits to being a birder, especially if you let yourself become an active part of the birding community. First and foremost, you meet other people of like mind, people you actually want to be around, not the ones, other than your family, that you have to be around on a daily basis.

One of the biggest side benefits of birding for me has been the excuse to travel. My husband's idea of a vacation is being on the tractor in our fields, and it was birding that gave me the opportunity to go to Ecuador, Mexico, and other tropical places. All he ever asks is where I'm going and when I'm coming back.

Probably some of the biggest pluses to birding are eating new foods, visiting new places, and experiencing new cultures. Although it wasn't a new culture, I had no idea that by attending the PSO meeting in Bedford I'd be in the town where Bad Boyz Bistro, a place I had seen featured on the Food Network because of its incredibly hot sauce, was located.

I have a bumper sticker on my car that says, "A closed mind is a wonderful thing to lose." And that to me is one of the best side benefits that there is to being in the birding world.

### Answers to Bird Quiz *(page 3)*

1. A female's bill is nearly always pinkish at the base, and a male's is nearly always bluish at the base.
2. Snowy Plover. It was collected in Berks County in 1886, and the museum's curator Earl L. Poole correctly identified it.
3. Parasitic Jaeger
4. Great Crested Flycatcher
5. California Gull

# Ornithological Literature Notes

Most PSO members are aware of significant research projects linking Louisiana Waterthrush breeding success to water quality in the state's streams—but the story has not been told so eloquently as it is by Felicity Newell in the May 2011 issue of the American Birding Association's *Birding* magazine. The article is available at <http://aba.org/birding/v43n3p32.pdf>.

Her article is not only a report of the research but also an inspiring look at the efforts by professional ornithologists and amateur volunteers for nearly three decades at Powdermill Nature Reserve in Westmoreland County. Felicity emphasizes that this and companion projects in central and eastern Pennsylvania provide essential information about effects of stream pollution. She also explains how birders can help to collect further data.

See articles about Felicity's background and early studies in the March 2008 *PSO Pileated* at [http://www.pabirds.org/Newsletter/PSO Newsletter 2008\\_01.pdf](http://www.pabirds.org/Newsletter/PSO_Newsletter_2008_01.pdf) and the April 2005 issue of *The Peregrine*, Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Birding Club newsletter, at <http://www.3rbc.org/newsletters/newsapr05.pdf>.

She has completed her graduate work for a Master of Science degree in Natural Resources at Ohio State University, where she studied effects of forest management on canopy-nesting songbirds including the Cerulean Warbler. Her work also included studies of Ceruleans on their wintering grounds in Venezuela and Colombia.

Currently Felicity is a Research Biologist at the Klamath Bird Observatory in Oregon and is "enjoying learning western birds and ecosystems." Eventually she hopes to continue research in Latin America, possibly for a Ph.D.

The ABA's website supplements Felicity's article at <http://aba.org/birding/v43n3p5w1.pdf> with perspectives by Pennsylvania ornithologists Robert Mulvihill, Steven Latta, and Terry Master, who have been deeply involved in waterthrush research.

Mulvihill, who initiated the Powdermill project in the mid-1990s and is now Director of Education at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, explains how the studies expanded in scope and in importance of the findings. "Fifteen years later," he writes, "I am heartened to see that our studies of the Louisiana Waterthrush have contributed directly to the setting of conservation priorities and land management recommendations."

Latta, who is the Director of Conservation and Field Research at the National Aviary, discusses his studies of waterthrush ecology on the species' wintering grounds in the Dominican Republic. He explains how environmental factors during migration and on the wintering grounds are also critical to the birds' survival and reproductive quality.

Master, who is Professor of Biological Sciences at East Stroudsburg University, initiated his waterthrush project at the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and eventually collaborated with Mulvihill in federally-funded investigations of whether the species is a useful "bio-indicator" of streams' ecological quality. Master emphasizes both the study's results and its valuable scientific training for his students.

—Paul Hess

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Gary Edwards, our 2011 Earl Poole recipient, poses with wife Mary and VP John Fedak at Bedford meeting.



Youth scholarship recipient Daniel Winstead studies a Cliff Swallow nest at Shawnee.



PSO birders enjoy the morning at Dunning Creek Wetlands.

# A Note of Thanks

First of all I would like to thank Margaret Higbee for nominating me for the youth scholarship at PSO, and I would like to thank PSO for giving me the scholarship. I was really excited when I heard I got the scholarship. On Friday morning my dad and I went birding with the Todd Bird Club group at Yellow Creek State Park, Blue Knob State Park, and Prince Gallitzin State Park. We saw some nice birds like Northern Parulas, Chestnut-sided Warbler, and Purple Martins. The real excitement came when Margaret spotted a Least Bittern. It was concealed in the marsh brush very well and hard to spot, but we all got scope views. The next day we went to Dunnings Creek Wetlands. There we saw a Common Moorhen, Osprey, an Orchard Oriole, Golden-winged Warblers, a Wilson's Warbler, and many other good birds.

On Sunday we went to Shawnee State Park. There I saw a White-crowned Sparrow, Blackpoll Warbler, and American Coots. That weekend I saw 24 lifers! All in all, that weekend was better than anything I could have expected. Thanks!

– Daniel Winstead

## 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:

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