

# PSO Pileated



October 2013

*The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology*

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

The plans for our next annual meeting, which will be held in Bradford next year, are progressing well. Field trips are being set up, and speakers are being contacted. The Allegheny Highlands Bird Club will be helping with this meeting. Bradford, right in the heart of the Alleghenies and very close to the Allegheny National Forest, is surrounded by forest that hosts a wide variety of breeding warblers, thrushes, and other passerines as well as Northern Saw-whet Owls. Nearby State Game Lands harbor grassland species, and waterfowl may be found on Kinzua Lake and a few other local swamps and reservoirs. Akeley Swamp in Warren County is an Important Bird Area. McKean County's PAMC consistently yields high numbers of Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Magnolia, and Blackburnian Warblers, as well as Ovenbirds and American Redstarts. Peruse the Breeding Bird Atlas to see the species that breed in the Northern Tier. We are excited that we will be able to show them to you! So, mark June 6, 7, and 8 on your calendars. Also, don't forget the 8<sup>th</sup> Wonder of the World – the Kinzua Bridge Skywalk! It really is nice. Watch for updates on the web page, the PABirds listserv, and on our Facebook page. Also, if you know any vendors who would like to display their wares for this event, please contact me!

Those who have attended previous PSO field trips know that they are awesome, but those of you who have not yet had the opportunity to attend one should plan to attend one. The members of the Functions Committee have been doing a great job! Committee chairperson Chad Kauffman has been working very hard to plan trips for

everyone. Field trips have included hawk watches, pelagic birding, and searching for warblers both in and out of state. I confess that I have only been on one field trip so far because of my schedule, but the timing of the Jacks Mountain trip could not have been better. I will even admit that I offered myself as the sacrifice by having to leave early – just before large kettles of Broad-winged Hawks began to move past the hawk watch! The things a president must do...(just kidding!). I hope to be able to attend more of our outings as the year continues and as the years pass.



This is one of the Broad-winged Hawks  
John missed by leaving early.  
Photo by Mike & Laura Jackson

Speaking of the field trip to Jacks Mountain, did you know that it may not be there in its present form in the future? The Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-Jacks-Mountain/401857016591293>) will provide more information about the proposed wind farm

placement and implications for the future of the site. Please take a look at the page and offer any support that you deem necessary. It would be a shame for birders in the state to stand by and let an important migratory corridor be destroyed by developers.

Jacks Mountain, however, is not the only incident of avian environmental concern occurring in the state at the moment. If you pay attention to the PABirds listserv, you will be familiar with HB 1576. Wind energy emits no air or water pollution. It requires no mining or drilling or transportation of fuel, uses virtually no water, and creates no hazardous or radioactive waste. With no fuel requirement, wind turbines avoid environmental risks or degradation from fuel exploration, extraction, transport, shipment, processing, and waste disposal. This bill was deemed the endangered species bill. However, everything about this bill is a danger to our endangered species. The

bill's main benefactors seem to be industry – specifically the oil and gas industry.

Another bill, HB 1681, ties bridge repair to gas and oil rights. It would force the DCNR to lease 300,000 acres of Bureau of Forestry lands. What does repairing bridges in Pennsylvania have to do with leasing land to the oil and gas industry? In the case of this bill, the industry benefits over the environment by getting a lease they couldn't receive and at the same time having the bridges they need to use repaired for them.

I find it frustrating when our state government bends to an industry over and over again. It would be nice to see some balance occur. It would be nice to not have to try to force balance. Our environment is both important for birds and important for us. If you feel that you should take a stand on these issues, I encourage you to do so.

On a different note, it is nice to be outside in the morning listening to migrating songbirds. This morning hundreds of birds of many species passed over my house in Bradford. The leaves are turning colors, daylight hours are shorter, night is longer, and Jack Frost is starting to play in the yard. Right now, it is hawk watching season, fall warbler season, and, if we are lucky, rare bird (to

chase) season. Soon, however, the white stuff will fall, and it will be time for the Christmas Bird Counts. Don't forget to participate in Citizen Science when you get the chance. Information that you contribute can be very important. Check out eBird if you haven't yet. Information on migration and nesting presence on eBird is adding to our knowledge base. Every little bit helps.

Pennsylvania is a wonderfully beautiful state that contains a great amount of animal and plant diversity. Birds are a huge part of that, but there is more to nature than birds. I notice the elk, the deer, and the trees. I've noticed that I have only seen three Monarch Butterflies and four Little Brown Bats so far this year. I've noticed that places where I used to hunt and hike are now being developed. But I like to dwell on the good I see – like the Merlin that just flew over my yard, or the Ruffed Grouse I spooked as I was walking. I think it would be a good time for you to do what I am going to do right now: get up, put on my shoes, and go outside.

Good birding!

– John Fedak, President  
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## Exactly What Comes to Your Feeders?

by John Fedak

Have you ever wondered how many birds of what species come to your feeders over the course of the summer?

This summer I decided to find out. My feeding station is not so different from those of other birders. I have black oil sunflower seed drop feeders, Nyjer socks, suet cages, and a platform feeder. I also have two hummingbird feeders which I mention because although I would like to know how many hummingbirds use the feeders, I didn't determine that this summer.

My feeders are located in a rather small yard between my house and driveway and my neighbor's house; this is a width of about 15 feet. They are also located between two crabapple trees about 15 feet apart. I live in town, but about a block away is a wooded hillside. I think my yard is not much different from many other

yards with feeders.

Why did I want to do this? I am not sure. I know that I see the normal feeder birds, House Finches, Purple Finches, and American Goldfinches. I have Northern Cardinals, Mourning Doves, and Song Sparrows. I get the occasional Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Baltimore Oriole. I even get House Sparrows, European Starlings, and Rock Pigeons. I am not counting these as I add these to another totally different type of list that I will not discuss in this article.



This Red-breasted Nuthatch was a recapture from 2012.

Photo by John Fedak

I guess it all started when I caught a totally unexpected bird in my banding net this past spring, one that I had never seen before in my yard. It was a Savannah Sparrow. My feeding station is not located in what I would call prime habitat.

In all honesty, I expected to catch the same 30 birds of various species over and over again during the summer, but this was not what occurred. I am a sub-permitted bander, newly sub-permitted within the last two years, so I am very curious about bird behaviors – including those at my feeders. I started to keep records at the end of May as spring migration was winding down, and I just finished during the middle of September. Basically, I was counting summer resident birds.

Here are the birds that I banded – 377 birds of 25 species:

1 American Redstart  
107 American Goldfinches  
1 Eastern Phoebe  
2 Dark-eyed Juncos  
1 Least Flycatcher  
25 Chipping Sparrows  
8 Black-capped Chickadees  
4 Tufted Titmice  
40 Song Sparrows  
63 House Finches  
2 Scarlet Tanagers  
3 White-breasted Nuthatches  
2 Downy Woodpeckers  
1 Brown-headed Cowbird  
2 White-crowned Sparrows  
20 Northern Cardinals  
22 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks  
5 Gray Catbirds  
4 Red-winged Blackbirds

4 Tree Swallows  
2 Red-eyed Vireos  
35 Purple Finches  
1 Blue Jay  
6 American Robins  
16 Mourning Doves

I recaptured 30 birds of 8 species – some from last year:

9 Black-capped Chickadees  
1 Mourning Dove  
1 Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
11 American Goldfinches  
4 Song Sparrows  
1 Northern Cardinal  
2 Purple Finches  
1 Red-breasted Nuthatch

What did I find out? Well, I am still not sure, but I plan to do this again next year. What I am sure of is that not all of the dozen or so goldfinches at your feeders are the same. My occasional Rose-breasted Grosbeak sightings included more birds than the few I thought. Where did the Least Flycatcher and American Redstart come from? They were hatch year birds, so I surmise that they were moving through. The real surprise to me was the high counts of some of the species. 107 Goldfinches, 35 Purple Finches, 22 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, 40 Song Sparrows. All I can say is “Wow!”

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## Welcome, New Board Member!

New board member Drew Weber comes to us as chairperson of the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee. We appreciate his willingness to serve bringing his special talents to PSO.



Drew Weber is a birder and ornithologist living in central New York, but he is originally from PA. Drew is active in the Pennsylvania birding community as chairman of the Pennsyl-

vania Bird Records Committee and as an eBird reviewer.

Drew also enjoys developing apps for birders, and he currently manages the development of BirdLog and BirdsEye which let you submit eBird sightings from the field and see others' sightings as well. His passions include introducing people to birding and getting more people to use eBird. Drew hosts the [Nemesis Bird](#) blog where you can find the writings and adventures of several young birders.

We extend a warm welcome to Drew and look forward to working with him.

# Proposed Bills May Hamstring Wildlife Conservation in Pennsylvania

by Scott Stoleson

Recent bills introduced into the state senate and legislature (HB1576 and Senate Bill 1717) would fundamentally change the review and designation of threatened and endangered species in Pennsylvania and would immediately eliminate hundreds of species from environmental permit reviews. Conservationists fear their passage would allow industry to run rampant over the state's species of concern. The Game Commission and Fish and Boat Commission are concerned that they would lose millions of dollars in federal wildlife funding, up to a third of their current budgets. Further, Pennsylvania could lose eligibility for two federal grant programs geared toward preserving, restoring, and protecting wildlife, according to a letter the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service sent to PGC's executive director.

These proposed bills would require both the Game Commission and the Fish and Boat Commission to go through the Independent Regulatory Review Commission (IRRC) and the related House and Senate committees when attempting to list a species as endangered or threatened. By law, all new regulations within the state must be vetted by the IRRC. Currently, only the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is required to make listing designations (for plants) by regulation. For the two Commissions, the process used for listing or delisting species involves an independent review of existing data by the technical committees of the PA Biological Survey (such as the Ornithological Technical Committee). These technical committees include experts from universities, agencies, and NGOs. The technical committee evaluates proposed listings based on objective scientific criteria, and makes a final recommendation to the respective Commission, which can then approve or reject that recommendation. Note that this process simply involves the implementation of existing regulations governing listing species, not the creation of new ones, and so legally should not be subject to IRRC review.

In addition, the bill would require the DCNR to maintain a database of all threatened and endangered species within the state. Such a database already exists (PNDI), and is maintained by the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. The bills also would require our state agencies to remove any species from the endangered or threatened

lists within two years if the agencies cannot produce "acceptable data" that the species' numbers remain weak – although what would qualify as 'acceptable data' is not made explicit. Further, agencies could not list new endangered or threatened species if their numbers are acceptable outside of Pennsylvania, or if they are not already covered under the federal Endangered Species Act. The latter stipulation would severely inhibit the Commonwealth's ability to protect those species that truly require protection in Pennsylvania even though they are stable elsewhere, or to protect rare habitats required by species if that species is common elsewhere.

Proponents of the bills claim it will make the listing process more consistent with other state regulations as well as more transparent. It is felt it would also expedite the permitting of industrial projects.

Opponents of the bill (which includes both Commissions) point out that the IRRC has no scientific expertise with which to evaluate listing proposals, that the Commissions already employ public comment on all decisions, and that the technical committees provide objective external review. Financial impacts to the state are also a concern: in addition to the loss of federal funding programs and the consequent budgetary shortfalls of the agencies, opponents have pointed out that the increased bureaucracy would carry significant costs to taxpayers. Additionally, the increased bureaucracy would slow the listing process and make decisions subject to political road blocks.

Perhaps ironically, the House Bill was written by Rep. Jeff Pyle, partly in response to local issues with the Indiana Bat, which as a federally listed species would be unaffected by the proposed regulations. The passage of these bills might actually backfire on its advocates, as one of the criteria used by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in determining whether to pursue federal listing of a species is the sufficiency of state protection laws. By curtailing the authority of the Commissions, this proposed legislation could prompt a more active federal role in species protection.

Write to your state representatives and senators if you have strong feelings about this proposed legislation!

# The Raven Reporter

Tales of  
Discovery about  
Pennsylvania  
Birds



## PGC Staff Is Recommending State Delisting of Bald Eagle

In August, I made a formal recommendation to the Pennsylvania Board of Commissioners to remove the Bald Eagle from the state's Threatened species list because it no longer meets the criteria for the Threatened status. This charismatic species would still be protected like other migratory land birds under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, a Federal regulation. The Bald Eagle also receives a lot of protection under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the Lacey Act. Under the Eagle Act, those that harm or disturb eagles are subject to a civil penalty of up to one year in prison or a \$5,000 fine for their first offense and up to \$250,000 for criminal convictions. Additionally, state penalties for disturbing protected wildlife include fines of up to \$1,500, bolstering protection for Pennsylvania eagles.

The PA Board of Commissioners (BOC) heard our recommendations from Patti Barber at the public BOC on September 23 and then voted to approve this recommendation to change the status of Bald Eagle from "Threatened" to "protected." This vote opens up a period of public review for this proposal. After review of these comments, the BOC will vote again on the recommendation at its January public meeting. This process is open to the public, including the BOC Working Group meeting where I made my initial proposal in August. There already has been ample media coverage of the proposed status change.

Why delist the Bald Eagle? It no longer meets the (abbreviated) definition of "Threatened" in Pennsylvania: "Species that may become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout their range in this Commonwealth unless the casual factors affecting the organism are abated. (Title 58 § 133.4 "Definitions"). The agency feels that it is not only important to list species that deserve the extra protection of endangered or

threatened status, but it also is important to remove species from the list when they no longer meet the definitions. It is critical to the integrity of the listing process to make this change in the Bald Eagle's status.

The PGC set criteria in its Bald Eagle Management Plan for delisting that now have been met for the fifth consecutive year. The Plan set the standards for delisting as: at least 150 active nests statewide; successful pairs in at least 40 counties; at least a 60 percent success rate of known nests; and productivity of at least 1.2 eaglets fledged per successful (known) nest. Three of the criteria were met for five consecutive years in the 2012 nesting season, and the geographical distribution criterion of "at least 40 counties" was met for five consecutive years in 2013. As of this writing, there are more than 271 active nesting pairs of Bald Eagles nesting in Pennsylvania. This represents approximately a 10% annual increase in population over the last 30 years, an astonishing recovery.

The upward trajectory of this population is propelling it toward 300 or more nesting pairs in the near future. The greatest potential for additional nests is probably in the Southwest counties where eagles have still not established populations along the shorelines of most major streams. The recent nest in Pittsburgh shows the tremendous potential for Bald Eagles' nesting in the green belts of urban and suburban areas with good riparian forests and fish availability. The newer nesting pairs are much more tolerant of human activities, being raised in nests closer than ever to humans, and are being productive close to towns. The Bald Eagle now is showing us how much suitable habitat we have in Pennsylvania. A lot! Thanks to protections for water quality, for Endangered species, for riparian forests, fishing regulations, and other environmental protections, it is a great state for eagles and for humans who enjoy the outdoors. The recovery of the Bald Eagle is a very big story that goes far beyond one charismatic bird species. It demonstrates that teamwork and cooperation can really bring back species and entire ecosystems.

It is time to celebrate! This delisting action is the result of a long-time recovery of the Bald Eagle resulting from a cooperative effort of many agencies, organizations, and individuals. The PA Game Commission has been a leader in the recovery effort in the state, protecting eagles and their nests for the last decades. The restoration program launched by the PGC 30 years ago brought eaglets to hacking towers in the Poconos and along the Lower Susquehanna to supplement the tiny nesting population of three nests in the northwestern part of the state. For more information about the history of Bald Eagles, their

recovery, eagle viewing areas, and good eagle etiquette, please check out the PGC's Bald Eagle Watch pages in the Wildlife section under Birding and Bird Conservation.

The PGC has been promoting "eagle etiquette" and voluntary protections of eagles and nests, knowing that protecting each nest with law enforcement officers is not possible. Fortunately, the Bald Eagle has a tremendous amount of public support which should allow continued success of this species despite less regulatory oversight by the agency.

The PGC will continue to monitor Bald Eagle nests in the immediate future. We will especially be interested in locating new nests and learning whether nests are reoccupied each year. These nest surveys can be conducted in late winter and early spring when the lack of leaves makes finding an eagle nest fairly easy. We will rely increasingly on volunteers to monitor nests. There will be less emphasis on monitoring productivity of nests, but observations will be gladly received. We will still keep an eye on the Bald Eagles, but just with less emphasis and time spent per nesting pair. The Bald Eagle serves well as an "umbrella species" for riparian forests and wetlands. Finding and protecting these nests will also serve other kinds of wildlife.

Those wishing to submit comments on the proposal to remove the Bald Eagle from the state's threatened species list may send them by email to [BaldEagleComments@pa.gov](mailto:BaldEagleComments@pa.gov). Those who are without email may mail their written comments to the Pennsylvania Game Commission, ATTN: Bald Eagle Comments, 2001 Elmerton Avenue, Harrisburg, PA 17110-9797.

## **Cerulean Warbler Management Document Now Available**

This valuable document was completed and made available in March, but we did not mention it at the time with so many preparations being made for the nesting season. The Cerulean Warbler is a high priority for Pennsylvania's Wildlife Action Plan as a reflection of its declining population and the state's importance to the species.

The Cerulean Warbler management guidelines for enhancing breeding habitat in Appalachian forests are completed and available to download from the Appalachian Mountain Joint Venture (AMJV) website in the Library section. "The Cerulean Warbler Management

Guidelines for Appalachian Hardwood Forests" provides land managers in this region with recommendations for retaining and enhancing habitat for Cerulean Warblers and a diverse bird community based on the best available science. The guideline's recommendations are intended for use by federal, state, and private foresters, biologists, and other land managers. These guidelines will be adopted by our agency and promoted through our many partners. The approaches used are much like some of the standard harvesting done in the state to stimulate forest regeneration and increase age and structural diversity. The fact that the silvicultural practices promote small gap creation and oak regeneration make them easy to promote for a variety of species and a variety of interests in forest wildlife. The greater structural diversity created by limited timbering creates visible and tangible results. In the Appalachians, Ceruleans are strongly associated with large-scale forests with large, mature trees especially oaks and hickories. Grapevines are often used as nest material and the grapevine gaps were often used for nesting and foraging habitat. Although Ceruleans are usually considered canopy birds, they often forage in the mid-story and under-story so shrubby under-stories are great for this songbird. With even-aged forests so typical of Pennsylvania forests, a little timbering can be very helpful to make a more diverse forest better for songbirds and other wildlife.

The Cerulean Warbler management guidelines are based to a large extent on the recently completed Cooperative Cerulean Warbler Forest Management Project but also incorporate relevant findings from other research projects. Guidelines apply primarily to upland oak-dominated habitats where the majority of the research reported was completed. The plan is fairly short and easy to read and print off.

Management for Cerulean Warblers has potential to be beneficial to other deciduous forest species of conservation concern. Although these species do not use the habitat in exactly the same way, they often co-occur with Ceruleans because of the overlap in habitat needs. So, management practices that target Ceruleans could benefit not only canopy species such as Scarlet Tanager but also songbirds of the mid- and under-story such as Wood Thrush, Worm-eating Warbler, Hooded Warbler, and Kentucky Warbler.

Birders can certainly play a very positive role in Cerulean Warbler monitoring and management. What we know of Cerulean populations has come from Breeding Bird Surveys, the Atlases, the Cerulean Warbler Atlas, and point counts conducted in Important Bird Areas. Many

off-road forests are ripe for surveys. Some narrow forest roads and trails create minor gaps in forests that make pockets of good Cerulean Warbler forest structure. Trail-side surveys along ridges and fronts might reveal more populations and high-density pockets.

Pennsylvania has great potential for Cerulean Warbler management. Although Cerulean Warblers have been declining in our state, a gradual range expansion and population increase have been occurring in the northern and eastern parts of the state where there is mature forest. Our challenge is to also address forests with potential for Cerulean Warblers where timbering is not the best or appropriate approach to management. Expansion of the riparian forest rather than silviculture is sometimes the best option to increase Cerulean Warbler habitat. Unlike much of the Appalachian Mountain region, Ceruleans occupy many riparian forests not dominated by oaks or where timbering is not possible. We can take different approaches in such cases and there will probably be a variety of ways to advance Cerulean Warbler habitat where there are opportunities. The trajectory of Ceruleans along the Allegheny Front, some eastern ridges, and into the Delaware River Watershed shows that the population has some positive momentum and potential for growth. I have hope for Cerulean Warblers despite their challenges, and this management plan is a great tool for managers to use to benefit this delightful forest songbird. Birders can share it with others interested in bird conservation on private lands.

### **Partner in Flight V Conference on Full Life-Cycle Stewardship**

The 5th International Partners in Flight (PIF) Conference took place in Snowbird, Utah, in late August. It truly was an international conservation rally to “bring back the birds.” The American Bird Conservancy (ABC) organized the meeting and included many organizations in key conference roles and in the many working groups. The theme of the meeting was creating a unified vision for full life-cycle needs of our migratory birds. With their broad geographical migration patterns, birds can bring like-minded people together on behalf of birds and their habitats. Therefore, it was great to see very diverse participation and state representation. Participating were more than 225 people including 45 from Latin America and the Caribbean, and those representing 120 agencies and organizations and 14 countries. Considering the conference theme, the geographical representation was appropriate, gratifying, and inspiring. The Conference went beyond being a pure “passive listening” meeting and was truly a “conservation workshop” with geographic

working groups and theme-based committees working on projects.

Among the presentations given there, George Fenwick pledged that ABC will raise \$50,000,000 for migratory bird conservation over 10 years with the strong support of its many partners. For ambitious projects needed to bridge the gap between needs and application, we must set high goals and work together to meet these goals, including the fiscal needs for effective bird conservation projects on an international scale.

Pennsylvania was represented at the PIF V by Dan Brauning and me of the PGC, Jeff Larkin of Indiana University of PA, Laurie Goodrich of Hawk Mountain, and Sarah Sargent of Audubon Pennsylvania. Our broad interests in migratory birds kept us all very involved and connecting to people from several states, provinces, and countries. We all were very engaged in the various committee workshops with an international scope and participation that reflected the broad geographical needs of the birds we are attempting to monitor and conserve. It was delightful to visit with former PA Audubon staffer, Steve Hoffman, who has recovered well from recent health issues.

The recognition of the significant contributions to bird conservation also were made at the historic meeting, some with connections to our state and region. The 2013 award winners included George Angher, Panama Audubon and the Smithsonian; Barbra Besson, U.S. Forest Service; David Buehler, University of Kentucky; National Trust for the Cayman Islands; Jennie Duberstein, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); and Thomas Will, USFWS. Dave Buehler has been essential to the success of the Cerulean Warbler Forest Management Project in the Appalachians. At the award banquet, all attendees who have been part of the Cerulean project were honored including our own Jeff Larkin. Tom Will works in Minnesota as a USFWS wildlife biologist, but functions on an international scope on behalf of birds especially Golden-winged Warblers. Tom is a native Pennsylvanian! His previous work in Chiapas, Mexico, and Nicaragua have informed him of potential opportunities for partnerships in Latin America. He was stationed at Gettysburg for a short while. I’ve had the pleasure to work with Tom on several projects, and it was great to see him be so honored.

PIF was launched in 1990 in response to growing concerns about declines in the populations of many land bird species and to emphasize conservation of birds not covered by existing initiatives. For more information see

<http://www.partnersinflight.org>.

## **New Geographically Focused Bird Conservation Business Plans**

At the PIF V Conference, the many participants engaged in building “business plans” for advancing full life-cycle stewardship of birds in eight different geographical regions. Birds that nest in USA and Canada tend to link to certain areas of Latin America and the Caribbean region. For Pennsylvania, there are strong links to the Gulf Coast of Mexico and Central America, the Central and South American Highlands, and the Caribbean.

These new “business plans” for geographical focus areas are a new, direct approach to bird conservation. For Pennsylvania, the wintering grounds of Golden-winged Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Canada Warbler, and Wood Thrush are the highest priority for conservation work. Thirty participants worked on the Central and South American Highlands area. The group identified several broad-scale threats to bird populations in this region and focused on four of these at the meeting. These included: mitigating the conversion of forest to agriculture; sustaining the status of protected areas, increasing the value of forestry practices for birds, and increasing government and popular support for biological

conservation. One proposed project is a bird fair in Central America that will first be held in Nicaragua in December 2014. The idea is to use this as a prototype for more bird fairs in Central American which deserves more attention by birders and more acceptance by the public concerning the importance of the countries for biodiversity and birds. By connecting the financial benefits of tourism to bird conservation initiatives, we can break down some of the false dichotomies between economic and ecological considerations. The Caribbean basin plan also calls for more ecotourism. The geographical working groups are continuing to develop bird conservation business plans and drafts of these plans will be widely released for review and comment fairly soon. It is interesting and fun to work with people from several countries for common goals. It is a new era in bird conservation. Keep tuned!

Good Birding!

Doug

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## **Special Thanks!**

Sincere thanks to leader Mike Lanzone, PSO’s VP, who led the North Carolina pelagic field trip. Mike went above and beyond the duties of a trip leader. Mike set up a website to aid in participants’ carpooling. He took care of all the accommodations, paying out of his own pocket to ensure lower prices for participants who would later reimburse him. In addition, he cooked dinner three nights for the entire group! We enjoyed spaghetti and meatballs with three different sauces the first night, pizza the second

night, then the following evening, leftovers plus the wahoo that Brian Patteson caught on the pelagic and gave to Mike.

Mike did an exceptional job organizing the North Carolina trip. We appreciate all of Mike’s work and his attention to details. As a result, we had a very successful four-day trip. Everyone had a fantastic time, and most of us, if not all, came home with life birds. Thanks, Mike!!!

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## **Promote PSO**

Do your birder friends know about PSO? If not, maybe you should tell them. Our group has a lot to offer – field trips, an annual meeting, projects, etc. For a printable brochure, go to [http://www.pabirds.org/forms/PSO\\_Brochure\\_2012.pdf](http://www.pabirds.org/forms/PSO_Brochure_2012.pdf).

# PSO Field trip to Jacks Mountain Hawk Watch

## September 15, 2013

by Laura Jackson



About 40 PSO members participated in the field trip to the Jacks Mountain Hawk Watch.

Photo by Mike & Laura Jackson

A big thanks to Chad Kauffman for organizing another successful PSO field trip! About 40 hawk watchers were on the mountain – many of them PSO members. President John Fedak made the three-hour trip with his wife and two children; members came from the Harrisburg area, points west, and there were local members, too. It was also great to see a number of young birders.

John and I commented that this just might be our lucky day since we've never been at a hawk watch for a big count day.

Would our luck change today? The conditions were just right. The wind was out of the southeast and blowing 8 - 12 mph. It was sunny and surprisingly warm, so the conditions seemed right for a big migration day. Our backup plan was to enjoy the camaraderie of friends and family if we didn't see many birds. The day got off to a slow start. A few birds dribbled by in the morning – Broad-winged Hawks, every now and then an Osprey, even a Bald Eagle.

It was easy to get distracted. John's daughter, Bailey, caught a praying mantis, then she needed to find crickets to feed it. John hoped to catch some eastern fence lizards to show his students. Warblers zipped in and out of nearby treetops. It was hard to stop gazing at Big Valley

on our left. The patterned farm fields, red and white barns, and country roads were strikingly beautiful.

By 10 a.m., we'd counted only 38 Broad-winged Hawks and one Osprey. The next hour was better – 5 Osprey and 23 Broad-winged Hawks. Maybe we would get a good Osprey tally.

A little flurry of Broad-winged Hawk activity kept our attention just before lunch, as 82 flew by between 11:00 and noon. Add one Osprey, 2 Bald Eagles, one Northern Harrier, and 2 Sharp-shinned Hawks, and that made it a pretty good hour!



Danny Fedak, son of PSO President John Fedak, checks out migrating raptors over Big Valley.

Photo by Mike & Laura Jackson

Lunchtime for us was downtime for the birds – not much activity in early afternoon. Maybe the flight was over – there just wasn't much wind. Three Ospreys did fly by as well as another Northern Harrier, a Cooper's Hawk, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, and 21 Broad-winged Hawks keeping us awake from noon till 1:00 p.m.

Suddenly, from 1:00 to 2:00, the battalion of Broad-winged Hawks arrived. We watched distant kettles of 15 to 30 birds, counting them as they broke ranks and streamed by the hawk watch, some of them appearing to fly in formation. It was an exciting hour as 237 Broad-winged Hawks sailed by, in addition to 3 Ospreys, one Bald Eagle, another Cooper's, and one more Sharp-shinned Hawk. Unfortunately, John and his family

missed some of the big kettles since they had a three-hour drive home and wanted to see some elk in Benezette, but most of us were able to stay. It was exhilarating to see so many raptors in such a short amount of time.

Wonderful weather, lots of birds, and good friends contributed to a very enjoyable day on Jacks Mountain. It was a good day for Osprey with a total count of 16. The total of 450 Broad-winged Hawks was respectable and brought the day's grand total to 480 raptors. What a good day to be on the mountain!

Although September 15, 2013, wasn't the BIG DAY – we came close! The BIG DAY on Jacks Mountain occurred just a few days later: September 18, 2013. I hope PSO plans a field trip to Jacks Mountain for September 18, 2014, as that day seems to be a special day for raptor migration on Jacks Mountain. Read "The People Behind Jacks Mountain Hawk Watch" to find out why.

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## PSO Field Trips

**October 12 or 13** – The Big Sit will be held either on Saturday, the 12<sup>th</sup>, or Sunday, the 13<sup>th</sup>. This is another excuse to promote birding in PA. This annual, international, noncompetitive birding event, hosted by Bird Watcher's Digest and founded by the New Haven (CT) Bird Club, is a lot of fun, and many PSO members have been participating for years. Just register your 17-foot-diameter circle, invite your friends, then bird. For instructions and to register, go to [www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/connect/bigsit/rules.php](http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/connect/bigsit/rules.php) or contact Chad Kauffman (717-994-6715).

**October 18 to 20** – Cape Cod trip, led by Vern Gauthier and assisted by Chad Kauffman.

**November 3** – Hawk Watching at the Allegheny Front. This is a prime time to see migrating Golden Eagles.

**November 17** – Bald Eagle State Park, led by Robert Snyder and the State College Bird Club. Meet at McDonald's in Milesburg at 8:00 a.m.

**April 2014** – Plans are underway for a trip to the Derby Hill Hawkwatch in New York at the end of April 2014. Possible leaders are Mike Lanzone and Drew Weber.

## First of the Season



The season's first Rufous Hummingbird arrived in Watsonstown, Northumberland Co., on August 15.  
Photo by Wayne Laubscher



This beautiful male Rufous Hummingbird is still present in Northumberland Co.  
Photo by Wayne Laubscher

# The People Behind Jacks Mountain Hawk Watch

by Laura Jackson

Drive to the top of Jacks Mountain, on the road aptly named Jacks Mountain Road, that crosses Jacks Mountain between McVeytown and Belleville, in Mifflin County, and you'll see something unusual: two parking lots on the very top of the mountain. The parking lot on the south side is where hang glider pilots take off, riding the air currents for hours over Jacks Mountain. On the other side of the road, a short set of steps leads from the parking lot to a large altar. Peek behind the large altar and you'll see dedicated birders, recording the raptor migration every year, starting in mid-September.



Big Valley, with its many well-tended farms, is the epitome of Pennsylvania's rural agricultural landscape.

Photo by Mike & Laura Jackson

Ron Singer is the official counter for Jacks Mountain Hawk Watch. He has been counting raptor migration on Jacks Mountain for about 40 years. Ron's a quiet, steady guy, who doesn't say much, but then again, he is too busy counting raptors. It takes someone like Ron to make a hawk watch happen. He has dedicated his life to collecting data that show Jacks Mountain, like several other ridges in south central Pennsylvania, is an important bird migratory flyway. Ron's dedication is a special type of commitment that very few of us are willing to make.

Ron recalls, back in the early days of his hawk watching – more than a decade after Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*, "DDT was taking a serious toll on raptors. It has been great to see them come back. It would be awful to kill them now with windmills."

Another regular counter, Gloria Bickel, has been observing raptor migration with Ron for more than 30 years. Despite health problems, she is there almost every day, recording the data.

Darrell Smith is also a regular counter, driving over an hour from his home to Jacks Mountain Hawk Watch. He remembers September 18, 2002, when he was part of the biggest day at Jacks Mountain. "We saw 1,625 Broad-wings between 12 noon and 1 p.m. and recorded a total of 2,900 Broad-wings for the day along with 11 Ospreys, 4 Bald Eagles, 9 Northern Harriers, 8 Sharp-shins, 2 Cooper's, 5 Red-tails, 5 Kestrels, for a total of 2,944

raptors."

The PSO field trip on September 15, 2013 missed the BIG DAY by just 3 days. Darrell Smith, official counter, and Cindy Harvey, Gloria's daughter, will remember September 18, 2013, as a special day, "We had 887 Broad-wings from 9 to 10 AM and a total of 1,848 for the day, along with one Osprey, 4 Bald Eagles, 4 Sharp-shins, 2 Cooper's, 2 Red-tails, one beautiful immature Golden Eagle and one Kestrel, for a total of 1,863 raptors."

"I am not sure where this ranks for day highs. Ron keeps those figures but this has to be one of the best, if not the second best to September 18, 2002 – exactly 11 years ago. This was also a special day," said Darrell.

Other days are special because birders from all over the world visit Jacks Mountain Hawk Watch. Some are regulars who come to see the migration, birders like John and Jen Baker and the Shellys from England, and many other countries. Other visitors stop to see the beautiful scenery and are amazed when they learn about the raptor migration.

Some days, dozens of hang gliding pilots, who travel from all over North America to jump off Jacks Mountain, distract the counters. Even sailplane pilots cruise the sky over Jacks Mountain. Their gliders can float on the same winds that the raptors use. Pilots consider the day special when they glide with the raptors. They all share the "ocean of air" that flows over the mountain.

Rachel Carson described her experiences watching hawks in an essay found after her death, "And always in these Appalachian highlands there are reminders of those ancient seas that more than once lay over all this land...These whitened limestone rocks on which I am sitting... Now I lie back with half closed eyes and try to realize that I am at the bottom of another ocean--an ocean of air on which the hawks are sailing."

It is the "ocean of air" that also brings the industrial wind developers. Jacks Mountain has the road, big electrical transmission lines, and more wind than the valley – three features that make Jacks Mountain potentially feasible for wind development. As a result, the hawk watchers, the hang glider pilots, the sailplane pilots, and valley residents are joining forces to protect Jacks Mountain from industrial development. Tall turbine towers with moving blades that stretch close to 400 feet tall will create hazards for birds, bats, monarch butterflies, and pilots. Jacks Mountain will be transformed into an industrial power plant.

Jacks Mountain is steep on top, so construction will drastically impact the topography and how the watershed and forests function. Two German companies, Volkswind and E.ON have developed wind projects in other parts of the United States. Both depend on federal subsidies to make their projects lucrative, and both are willing to damage the top of Jacks Mountain to get that subsidy. Volkswind wants to build turbines northeast of the hawk watch, and E.ON wants to construct turbines southwest of the hawk watch. A cut-and-fill operation, not as drastic as mountaintop removal for coal, but similar in many ways, will be required to make the top of the mountain wide enough to accommodate many miles of wide roads, heavy equipment and dozens of huge wind turbines. Trees will be cut, the rocks will be dynamited, and dirt will be leveled for construction. The forest will be fragmented, impacting birds like Scarlet Tanagers and Wood Thrushes that need large blocks of intact forest. Jacks Mountain will be changed forever.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) has collected data from wind projects in Pennsylvania. Although this data is limited, there is sufficient evidence to show that some raptors do see turbines and avoid them – sometimes. Other times the birds fly directly into the turbine towers or blades. Sometimes the birds are caught in the disturbed vortex around the turbine and are killed. Bats are especially vulnerable. In 2010, the 420 turbines in

operation in Pennsylvania killed more than 10,000 bats, according to the PGC. That's an average of 25 bats per turbine per year.

The Nature Conservancy predicts that almost 3,000 turbines will be operating in Pennsylvania by 2030. If ridge after ridge is covered with turbines, raptors will expend critical fat reserves to avoid the turbines. Cats, cars, and windows are already killing millions of birds. Constructing wind turbines in migratory pathways puts eagles, hawks, and many other birds at additional risk.

Since neither company appears to have enough leases to actually construct the projects, it is a race against time. Concerned citizens have formed the "Friends of Jacks Mountain" group, to organize opposition and to plan strategies to educate landowners so they understand the impacts of wind development. The group is also encouraging township supervisors to enact ordinances that will mitigate and minimize impacts to communities, wildlife, and watersheds.

It is illegal in Pennsylvania to actually prohibit industrial development in a township, but if an ordinance is restrictive enough, some companies choose to build elsewhere. Unfortunately, six different townships are involved in the proposed wind projects, so it is a challenge to enact uniform regulatory restrictions.

If you are concerned about the impact to migrating birds and bats, we encourage you to join the **Friends of Jacks Mountain**. Membership is free, but donations are accepted to help cover educational efforts.

If you'd like to join, please send your name, address, phone number, and email address to Darrell Smith, 567 Mile Long Lane, Martinsburg, PA 16662. Tax-deductible donations should be made payable to **Save Our Allegheny Ridges (SOAR)** which is a 501(c)3 partnering with **Friends Of Jacks Mountain**.



Red-tailed Hawk photos by Chet Gottfried.

# Ornithological Literature Notes

Have you heard of the University of Pittsburgh's Pymatuning Laboratory of Ecology in Crawford County? Gradually, since its founding more than half a century ago, the lab's research opportunities have grown to attract ornithologists and other ecological researchers worldwide.

The lab announced a huge boost this August: a new \$1 million, 3,600-square-foot laboratory building is being constructed at the site. Rick Relyea, director of the lab, told the *Pitt News* about the building's purpose:

"This new space will provide scholars with the necessary tools to perform cutting-edge ecological research during the spring and summer. During the fall and winter, when our researchers are not in residence, the lab will serve as a new hub for outreach to bring science to many younger students throughout the region."

The expansion, funded partly funded by a \$350,000 grant from the National Science Foundation, supplemented by funding from Pitt, will enable the lab to expand beyond ecological studies to research many other fields including genetics and wildlife diseases.

A history of remarkable growth brought the lab to its present status. "In the past 64 years, the facility that began as a primitive, 13-acre biology field station grew to include 360 acres of forest, fields and wetlands that are home to an office complex, library, cabins and dorms to house up to 120, plus five labs," according to the *Pitt News* announcement. Read more about the institution at [www.biology.pitt.edu/facilities/pymatuning](http://www.biology.pitt.edu/facilities/pymatuning).

A prominent ornithological research project at the lab has been a study of Song Sparrow vocalizations. William A. Searcy, then a Pitt associate professor and now a professor of ornithology at the University of Miami, pioneered the research back in the 1980s. For years, I've followed progress of the sparrow studies by Searcy, his colleagues, and graduate students, and I summarized some recent results in *Birding* magazine (January/February 2013, p. 33).

Among the most fascinating aspects of their findings is that a Song Sparrow, when defending its breeding-season territory from intruders, does not sing loudly to scare the intruder away. It may seem counterintuitive to us, but it sings a special "soft song" that serves as an effective threat. Not only that, but the intruder itself may sing softly to threaten—and sometimes attack—the territory holder.



A Song Sparrow, when defending its breeding-season territory from intruders, does not sing loudly to scare the intruder away.  
Photo by Margaret Higbee

Maybe that behavior isn't counterintuitive after all. Doesn't it bring to mind Teddy Roosevelt's "Speak softly, and carry a big stick"?

– Paul Hess

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## PSO Quiz

How well do you know your Pennsylvania birds?

1. Which two members of the family Laridae on our state list have the world's largest populations?
2. If you see an egret about the size of a Snowy, but with three long plumes hanging from the back of its head, why should you try hard to photograph it?
3. Franklin's Gull and Laughing Gull have white eye crescents that are notable in breeding plumage. Which has the more prominent crescents?
4. In what way are the Blue-winged Warbler and the Ovenbird alike on Pennsylvania's warbler checklist?
5. In his little classic *An Introduction to the Birds of Pennsylvania*, George Miksch Sutton mentioned a vernacular name "Plum Pudd'n" for the call of which species?

# Hatteras Pelagic Trip

by Mike Lanzzone, Alex Lamoreaux, and Andy McGann

On August 9-13 the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology held an out-of-state field trip to the Outer Banks. Thirty-five participants ventured to North Carolina for several days of land birding followed by two days of pelagic trips out of Hatteras.

Friday through Sunday the group birded from Bodie Island to Hatteras. The early part of Friday afternoon and Saturday we spent a lot of time near Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge. Birding in late summer was fairly good on the refuge with decent numbers of shorebirds, terns, and herons. Several highlights included two Reddish Egrets at the Pea Island Visitors' Center, Blue Grosbeak at Bodie Island, and Gull-billed Tern and many shorebirds at the Salt Flats.

On Sunday we started the day on Cape Hatteras Island near the lighthouse. Although the day began slowly, birding quickly picked up near the Salt Pond. Good groups of terns, herons, and shorebirds were present and gave everyone plenty to see. It was nice for the group to get good looks at species they rarely, if ever, see in PA. The numerous Royal Terns alongside Caspian gave us great comparative views.

One definite highlight was the groups of terns flying around us at the Salt Pond, totaling seven species. An adult and juvenile Black Skimmer seemed oblivious to our presence. The adult bird seemed to be showing the juvenile how to skim. These two made countless, very close passes to our group, at times only several meters in front of us!!! Quite amazing looks!



This Wilson's Storm-Petrel was just off the side of the boat.

Photo by Mike Lanzzone



Mike Lanzzone photographed this Great Shearwater about 25 miles ESE of Hatteras.



Alex Lamoreaux got this shot as a Band-rumped Storm-Petrel passed by the boat.



This Audubon's Shearwater was particularly close to the boat.

Photo by Alex Lamoreaux

On Monday our group met Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, Bob Fogg, and John Puschock at the dock and a short time later headed out the the Gulf Stream. On the way out we saw several Cory's and Audubon's Shearwaters to kick off our pelagic birding. Activity was good, with numbers in the morning already better than the regular trips Brian had run on the three days prior to our two trips.

We arrived at the Gulf Stream a bit after 8:00 a.m. and quickly began seeing Black-capped Petrels along with many Cory's and Audubon's Shearwaters. Some of the birds came in quite close and offered excellent looks. Kate started to lay a chum slick behind the boat, and we were soon joined by many Wilson's Storm-Petrels.

The day continued to get even better with three to four Trindade Petrels at the boat in an hour! One of the birds came in hot, flying directly at us, only to adjust its course at the last second, flapping uncharacteristically in order to avoid colliding with the boat. Andy McGann was able to capture the moment and the excitement in a quick video clip. Another one coursed back and forth several times right in front of us, allowing us quite amazing looks!

Throughout the day we continued to see large numbers of Black-capped Petrels and Wilson's Storm-Petrels. There were a couple of rather cooperative Band-rumped Storm-Petrels at the boat's stern, providing excellent comparisons to the more common Wilson's. Other shearwaters present in decent

numbers for most of the day were Cory's, Great, and Audubon's.

The highlights of the afternoon were an immature Long-tailed Jaeger and the tropical terns along a Sargassum seaweed line, which is typically a feature of the western boundary of the Gulf Stream. We had distant looks at a few terns before getting great looks at a Sooty and then later a Bridled, which both came right past the boat! A few Red-necked Phalaropes were also seen, usually foraging near little clumps of Sargassum.

One of the exciting aspects of pelagic journeys far offshore, is that you can have bizarre and memorable encounters with land birds and coastal birds that are well outside their comfort zones. We had such an encounter with an apparently lost Great Black-backed Gull. Someone observed that it had been following a commercial shipping vessel, until it spotted us and flew over to join us. It stayed with us for well over an hour and seemed to make the small storm-petrels a bit uneasy.

On Day 2 of the pelagics the seas were much heavier, so we needed to work a bit harder for some species. However, with the stronger winds, the numbers of Black-capped Petrels observed were much higher— simply amazing. Seeing so many Black-caps gave us a great opportunity to observe their impressive plumage variation. We had a few surprises including a Sooty Shearwater, a pretty rare bird for August in the Gulf Stream!

Although birding was a bit slower the second day, we were lucky enough to also get an intermediate type Trindade Petrel. The bird passed very close to the boat and gave everyone very nice looks!

Although we saw only one Great Shearwater on Tuesday, we got some excellent looks at it, along with many Black-capped Petrels and Wilson's Storm-Petrels that were hanging out near the boat.

Throughout the course of the two days, we managed to get some excellent looks at every species encountered, as well as seeing all the expected species plus some added bonuses!



Andy McGann took these two photos of a few of the PSO birders at Hatteras.



Some members of the group birded the observation platform near Bodie Lighthouse.

Photo by Mike Fialkovich



Herald "Trindade" Petrel (dark type) – This was the first Herald of the two days and the highlight for many participants.

Photo by Alex Lamoreaux

## PSO Newsletter

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

Membership Categories:

PSO	Individual	\$ 30.00
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## Answers to Bird Quiz *(page 9)*

1. Sooty Tern (~22 million) and Black-legged Kittiwake (~18 million)
2. It might be a Little Egret, a rare vagrant from the Old World, and Pennsylvania's first record.
3. Franklin's Gull
4. Blue-winged Warbler has long been the first species on our warbler checklist. The American Ornithologists' Union has rearranged the species sequence on the official AOU checklist, and now the Ovenbird is first.
5. American Bittern



Mike Lanzone photographed this Least Tern at Pea Island on the PSO field trip in August.

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