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# PSO Pileated



March 2015

*The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology*

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## Annual Meeting Planned for May 29 - 31

Start making plans now to attend our 26<sup>th</sup> annual PSO meeting. PSO will be celebrating our first 25 years in West Chester at the Days Hotel West Chester - Brandywine Valley. This is our first meeting in the southeastern corner of the state. We are excited to be exploring new territory with the help of the West Chester Bird Club, the Birding Club of Delaware County, and the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club. A superb line-up of field trips includes Tinicum (aka John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge), Great Marsh, Ridley Creek State Park, and many others; see pages 10-11 for details, and be sure to check our website

([www.pabirds.org](http://www.pabirds.org)) for updates.

Just a few of the meeting's target species include Sora, Virginia Rail, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Marsh Wren, Pine Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Savannah Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, and Bobolink. At last year's meeting in Bradford, participants tallied 138 species.

We always see a great variety of birds, and we have a tremendous amount of fun on the field trips.

Once again this year Shonah Hunter is doing a fantastic job organizing the meeting and handling registrations. Be sure to make your hotel registrations before April 1 to obtain the conference rate. Many others are working



Pine Warbler is one of our meeting's target species.

Photo by Roger Higbee



Grasshopper Sparrow should be found on the grassland field trip, led by Brian Byrnes.

Photo by Margaret Higbee

behind the scenes to make sure that this meeting is one of our best!

We have a great afternoon program planned. The entire list of speakers and their topics will soon be available on our website. We are also fortunate to have Dr. Robert Curry, this year's Earl Poole Award recipient, as our banquet speaker. See page 9 for more information about Dr. Curry.

Once again this year Shonah Hunter is organizing the silent auction. If you have any birdy items you would like to donate for the auction, please notify her at [shunter@lhup.edu](mailto:shunter@lhup.edu). Proceeds will benefit our youth scholarship program.

If you know any youth who might be interested in attending our meeting, think about nominating him or her for our scholarship program. Details are available on the enclosed nomination form.

The annual meeting is a great opportunity to meet birders from across the state. We see many names on the listserv and on eBird, and our annual meeting gives us a chance to put faces with those names. It's fun meeting other birders, and birders of all calibers are welcome. So, send in your reservations. We look forward to seeing you in West Chester!

# Field Trip and Event Roster

**Sunday, March 22** – Spring hawkwatch trip to Tussey Mountain in Centre County. We will park at the top at Jo Hayes Vista and walk the trail to the power line. This outing will coincide with the Shaver's Creek Maple Syrup Festival. Meet at 11:00 a.m. to walk in, but you may come and go anytime on your own.

**Saturday, March 28** – Presque Isle waterfowl and gull tour. Join us to bird along our Lake Erie frontage. Weather permitting, so watch our listserv or website for updates.

**Friday & Saturday, May 1-2** – Shaver's Creek Birding Cup - Check out their website for areas involved and possibly help with the fundraiser. <http://shaverscreek.org/public-programs-and-events/birding-cup>

**Saturday, May 9** – Our annual Pennsylvania Migration Count is an all-day snapshot of birds that takes place in almost all 67 counties. We should be very proud of our participation. Our state is one of the few that still uphold this tradition that was previously known as the North American Migration Count. For more information, check out PSO's site, <http://www.pabirds.org/PAMC/Index.html>.

**Friday through Sunday, May 15 - 17** – Presque Isle field trip. Presque Isle is one of the best places to see spring migrants. Friday we will bird our way there; we'll spend all day Saturday on the isle; Sunday we will bird on the way home, stopping at some of the northwestern PA grasslands.

**May 27** – Fort Indiantown Gap in Lebanon county, led by Dave McNaughton. Details will follow.

**Friday through Sunday, May 29-31** – Our annual PSO meeting will be held at the Days Inn Hotel West Chester- Brandywine Valley in Chester County. For more information, visit PSO's website, <http://www.pabirds.org/>.

**Friday through Monday, June 19- 22** - Breeding Bird Blitz. This is our second annual Blitz, scheduled one week earlier than last year's so that we may include safe breeding dates and data.

**August** – Shorebirding trips. Details will follow.

**September 19-20** – Bake Oven Knob Hawkwatch. Come, join us with the hope of getting large numbers of Broad-winged Hawks, as well as other early migrants. If the winds and weather do not cooperate, we will bird other nearby locations.

**Saturday & Sunday, October 10-11** – *Birdwatcher's Digest's* Big Sit. Create your own 17-foot-diameter circle then count all the birds you see, or find a pre-existing circle to join. Our state has led the whole world with the most circles.

**Saturday & Sunday, October 17-18** – Stone Mountain Hawkwatch.– Join us as we sit at the platform for the 20<sup>th</sup> year. This watch splits the county lines of Mifflin & Huntingdon. More details will follow.

**Saturday & Sunday, November 7-8** – Waggoner's Gap Hawkwatch. This year we will visit this popular hawkwatch looking for the larger raptors, Golden Eagles and Northern Goshawks. Good parking lot and portajohn facilities. More details will follow.

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Please consider helping with these planned field trips. If you'd like to suggest others or lead your own, please contact me ([chadkauffman@earthlink.net](mailto:chadkauffman@earthlink.net)). We would be happy to discuss having joint outings with any birding group or club; it's all about having fun birding, getting people together to bird, going to new places, etc. Field trips may vary in length from single locations or partial day trips, full day trips to notable spots, and multi-day or out-of-state trips. Do you know of a good place or places in your county that you enjoy? Others might enjoy them as well; contact us about scheduling a possible field trip.



These are just a few of the intrepid PSO birders who faced -30° F. temperatures on the Ontario trip in February 2015.

Photo by Wayne Laubscher

# PSO 2015 Ontario Field Trip Revisited

by Wayne Laubscher

Early on the morning of February 13, sixteen hardy birders departed Hazleton for four days of birdwatching in cold and snowy Ontario. This was the first official Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology 2015 field trip. To say the participants were a hardy bunch would be quite the understatement, as we experienced nighttime temperatures averaging around -10° to -15° F. with -30° F. as a brief record low. Daytime high temperatures remained several degrees below zero all four days of the long President's Day Weekend.

Traveling north on I-81, our caravan of four vehicles crossed the border at Thousand Islands and headed for Amherst Island on Lake Ontario near Kingston, Ontario. Taking the ferry to the island, famous for its congregation of raptors during certain winters, we spent a good portion of the afternoon driving around the island looking primarily for birds of prey. Red-tailed Hawks were the most abundant raptor there. Numerous Snowy Owls were all over the island with ten being tallied, including one on the lake ice along the ferry crossing. Also, several in the group spotted a coyote crossing the ice.

Several Rough-legged Hawks were observed, as well as one Northern Harrier and a juvenile Bald Eagle. Two flocks of Horned Larks were seen in flight and did not allow for a closer inspection for buntings and longspurs. We had hoped to get into the famous Owl Woods in hopes of spotting owls, however the road was blocked at both ends by large snow piles and would have required a walk in of about one-half mile which the group decided against doing.

Leaving Amherst Island late in the afternoon, we headed to Ottawa, the national capital for our first night's stay. We had planned an early rise to bird Ottawa Saturday morning with a hired local guide, Ben Di Labio, who is a very experienced birder from the Ottawa area.



Two to three Boreal Chickadees were allowing not only up close views, but were coming in for hand-feeding.

Photo by Wayne Laubscher



Art Schiavo feeds one of the Gray Jays.

Photo by Wayne Laubscher

On Saturday morning, our group awakened to snowy and windy conditions. We met Ben at a nearby diner for breakfast. Ben rode with us as he took us around the Ottawa area, looking for winter specialty birds. The snow and wind made for some traveling challenges, but we eventually arrived at the Lafleche Road landfill east of Ottawa where a gray phase Gyrfalcon had been since early January. We thought we had briefly seen it when we arrived, but after about 30 minutes or so, this largest of falcons returned chasing crows and giving us extended looks as it perched on a utility pole. Unfortunately viewing conditions were poor.

The Gyrfalcon was a life bird for most of the people in our group and was at the top of our Ottawa "most wanted" list. This was fortunate because the rest of the day's birding provided major disappointments as all the birds, it seemed, were "no shows" at the other locations. The weather was atrocious, and birds were keeping

under cover. We missed Gray Partridge, Barrow's Goldeneye, and Black-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers that day. One person did see a few flyover Bohemian Waxwings. We were frustrated and none more so than Ben who tried very hard to get us more species. Ben offered to help us any way he could if we decided to bird Ottawa again on Monday while en route home. Late afternoon we headed to the Algonquin Park area about 2½ hours west of Ottawa, stopping in Whitney for a late dinner at the Mad Musher before continuing to our hotel in Huntsville.

Sunday morning brought a few challenges. It was the coldest morning yet and to add to that, one of our vehicles had a flat tire. I advised the other three vehicles in the caravan to continue on to Algonquin Park while we got the flat tire fixed at the local Walmart. Having done that, we lost only about two hours and caught up with the rest of the group at the park in the late morning.

The weather, although cold, was better than the previous day's. At the Visitor's Centre feeders, both Common and Hoary Redpolls were found, as well as a Pine Siskin. After lunch there, we visited the Spruce Bog boardwalk and found both Black-capped and Boreal Chickadees hanging around the suet feeder and accepting handouts. Two to three Boreal Chickadees were allowing not only up close views, but were coming in for hand-feeding. In the past, this was generally unheard of with the normally shy and uncommon Boreal Chickadee. But since the park started putting a suet feeder at the Spruce Bog, not only do they now come regularly to it but they have apparently learned from the bolder Black-capped to accept food from hands.

Our intrepid group then visited Opeongo Road where we hand fed Black-capped Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and everyone's favorite, Gray Jays. The Gray Jays were life birds for several persons and were, as usual, a great delight for us. Before leaving the park, we visited the Spruce Bog a final time. We got lucky with one of our target birds when Chuck Berthoud found a Black-backed Woodpecker along the boardwalk. The Black-backed was one of our main target birds for the trip.

We had dinner at Moose Delaney's and spent our final night in Huntsville. Monday morning the participants from western Pennsylvania elected to return home through the Niagara Falls area. The rest of the group began our trip home driving back through Algonquin Park where we were rewarded with excellent extended looks at a bull moose. The group had decided to bird for a few hours in Ottawa to try for some missed birds. The weather was great, sunny with no wind, and the birds were out. We did pass on looking for Gray Partridges as they were unreliable, and we were short on time. The Barrow's



We spotted Bohemian Waxwings feeding in the trees.

Photo by Wayne Laubscher



A male Three-toed Woodpecker was working the ash trees.

Photo by Wayne Laubscher

Goldeneyes that had been at Bate Island on the Ottawa River had gone elsewhere.

We returned to a residential location across the river in the Gatineau, Quebec, area where Ben had earlier taken us. Recently a pair of Three-toed Woodpeckers had been feeding in a woodlot there on dead and dying ash trees. Immediately upon arrival, we spotted Bohemian Waxwings feeding in the trees and shrubs all over the area. Honeysuckle fruit was their food of choice. Everyone had very close and extended looks.

A local birder who was already there informed us that he had seen one of the Three-toed Woodpeckers just before we arrived. An intensive search then commenced for this bird. Within a half an hour or so, the gentleman called out that he had relocated it, and we all had outstanding looks at it. It was a male working the ash trees, unconcerned with the human paparazzi. This was a life bird for many and one of our group's big target birds.

Our decision to return to Ottawa and revisit some birding sites paid off and was a fitting end to a busy and challenging weekend. Many people tallied several life birds with as many as six for some. With the successful birding in the Ottawa area on Monday, at midday the caravan then headed back home to Pennsylvania.

Winter birding in Ontario is more about quality than quantity. It is an opportunity to see species from the far northern boreal and arctic areas that every few years venture far south of their normal ranges.

Trip participants were: Chuck Berthoud, Rob Blye, Mary Brenner, Jon Dale, Jarrod Derr, Laura and Mike Jackson, Bruce Johnson, Kathy Kuchwara, Wayne Laubscher, Rhett and Eric Martin, Annette Mathes, Richard Nugent, Art Schiavo, and Susan Strassner.

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Go to this link, [http://www.algonquinpark.on.ca/news/algonquin\\_park\\_birding\\_report.php](http://www.algonquinpark.on.ca/news/algonquin_park_birding_report.php), to see Wayne Laubscher's photo of the hand-feeding of a Boreal Chickadee on the Algonquin Provincial Park website.

# Susquehanna River Tour Revisited

by Chad Kauffman

Even though Mother Nature let us know that she was in charge on March 7, we knew that open water would thankfully concentrate the birds. I left home early in the morning before the sun rose to pick up my two copilots, Rob Dickerson and Aden Troyer, and we worked our way south along the Juniata River. Between Millerstown and Newport a large area of open water produced a pair of Wood Ducks, my first of the year. As we approached Clarks Ferry Bridge, we took a slight detour on the road to Amity Hall where we noticed a large flock of Wild Turkeys in the trees near a cluster of pines. Upon exiting, we saw a small raptor dart in front of the windshield with an even larger raptor on its tail. We identified the larger one as an adult Bald Eagle. I thought it was chasing a small falcon, but Aden thought it was a Sharpie. Both of us saw the smaller bird for only a second. Either way it was an exciting adventure. We figured the smaller raptor had food or possibly had stolen it from the eagle.



We headed right for the John Wright Restaurant parking lot where we encountered large flocks to scan. We found two White-winged Scoters, Red-necked Grebe, two Horned Grebes, Pied-billed Grebe, and many gulls, among which Al found an Iceland. Ian spotted a Lesser Black-backed Gull while Mike Epler and Al noted a Glaucous Gull. There were so many good birds, and we tried to make sure everyone had good scope views.

Someone spotted a Peregrine, but after talking about its location, we realized that some of the birders were on one Peregrine and the rest on another. We ended up with a pair of them, squabbling over some food the male had. We met a lovely woman who mentioned she was in the market for a spotting scope, so we led her to Aden and she got to look through several of our scopes. She even got to see some of the good birds we were viewing. She also mentioned how she would like to hook up with a birding club, so we talked about PSO as well as some local groups in her Lancaster area.

We searched unproductively for the Peregrine Falcon at Clarks Ferry Bridge, but we did see our first Red-breasted Merganser for the day. As we got closer to Fort Hunter for the meeting with the group at 8 a.m., we noticed that most of the river was still frozen. We did have some reports from the day before to help guide us. Fifteen of us decided to change our original plan based on the reports, so we headed straight for H.C. Shrauder Park by the Rockville Bridge. Among the usuals Ian Gardner found a pair of Hooded Mergansers. Another highlight there was a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and for some of the northern birders, Carolina Chickadee was a fun find. Working our way to West Fairview, we met up with Al Guarente and Ramsay Koury, who were already birding there. Red-breasted Merganser and Tundra Swan were nice finds as well as a large flock or two of Common Goldeneyes. With a second pass of the goldeneyes, we caught a glimpse of a Long-tailed Duck, the only one of the day.

The point at City Island was our next destination, and the numerous waterfowl along the river's edge gave us nice looks at Canvasbacks, Redheads, more goldeneyes, and both Greater and Lesser Scaup. We then decided it was time to zip down to Wrightsville to check the big area of open water that had been producing for some time.

We then went to the other side of the bridge and birded from Lemon Street where there we found a hoard of gulls. Lisa from Lancaster County Bird Club got us on the day's only Great Black-backed Gull. Bald Eagles started to appear, causing the gulls to take flight many times.

Heading farther south, we visited Lake Clark and found many Canvasbacks, Redheads, scaup, and other waterfowl. We had good, close looks at these resting ducks.

We then turned around and headed north to West Fairview again where we got better looks at closer Red-breasted Mergansers. A cooperative Hermit Thrush was found by Rob, and some pics were obtained.

We had another great trip with a great crew. Thanks to those who came along as well as to those who helped to scout, making the day a success. Nine of us celebrated our great day with a late lunch at Big Woody's on Front Street in Harrisburg. In all our crew included 17 birders at times. I know the weather kept some away, but we were rewarded for making it through the cold morning. We tallied 63 species on the tour, and I personally added 11 new year birds.

# American Birding Association Mid Atlantic Bird Club Conference Summary

By Chad Kauffman, John Fedak, and Mike Fialkovich

Board members Chad Kauffman, John Fedak and Mike Fialkovich represented PSO at the Mid-Atlantic Bird Club Conference held by the ABA at their new headquarters in Delaware City, DE February 7. Participants were welcomed by a lighted sign when entering the town!

There were 50 attendees from 22 clubs/groups. Pennsylvania had the most participation of the six states represented. Twenty persons from seven bird clubs/organizations attended.

ABA Staff presenting included Jeff Gordon, Liz Gordon, George Armistead, Bill Stewart, Sally O'Byrne, and Kar DeGeiso.

The purpose of the conference was to discuss and generate ideas for improving communication, publications, retaining and recruiting new members, club promotion and use of social media, and to encourage cooperation between all birding organizations.

The meeting was broken into three sections:

- 1) Focused discussions covering social media, events (field trips, meetings, etc.), young birders, conservation, and publications.
- 2) Breakout sessions of smaller groups to discuss communications, strategies for recruiting young birders, and conservation and community action.
- 3) Reports on breakout sessions

Lastly a discussion on group cooperation closed the meeting.

**Social Media** – It is here to stay and those who embrace it are flourishing, as well as bringing in new younger members who live through social media. Some mentioned how well twitter is working to get the word out about birding news, rare birds, etc. Others mentioned rare text alerts and the various services that are offered. Problems included spam which occurred recently on the PA and DE text alerts.

**Events** – discussed how to promote field trips, meetings, how often to have trips, etc. Many groups are doing what we do, using newsletters, listservs, facebook, etc. Other suggestions included placing membership flyers in stores

that sell birdseed. The West Chester Bird Club did that in Agway and those who joined the bird club received a discount coupon for birdseed in the store. It was a successful campaign for both organizations. Other suggestions included promoting easy counts like Big Sits and the Great Backyard Bird Counts in which all levels of birders can participate (something PSO has promoted). Another great idea shared was getting media allies to join with us to promote anything we do. One group produced business cards with the club's website and mailing address.

**Young Birders** –During the discussion we shared ways to encourage young birders, both in school years as well as those in college and just a bit older who are birders or at least have some interest. Suggestions included having programs or trips where young people can join with their parents, and to have these activities around noon and less than two hours in length so new people would not be discouraged by rising so early. Some said to target home schooled children, thereby helping the parents to fulfill science credits. Good discussion included the college students who felt left out when people talk about young birders as the focus groups seem to be grade school children. A project called ICON is used in colleges and schools to network about birding, clubs, ornithology, etc.

**Conservation** – It was suggested we use the word conservation as opposed to environmental, as it is more popular and not as polarizing in today's society. Non-consumptive use needs to be pushed and promoted more. Hunter numbers are decreasing; the number of conservationists and people interested in nature are increasing.

**Publications** –Most bird club websites are old and need to be updated for both looks and to be made more user friendly. A suggestion that ABA considers generating a website template for groups and clubs to use was discussed, so there is some uniformity for those people connected and part of ABA. Word Press has become very popular, but Lehigh Valley suggested to stay away from it for security reasons and went with Square Space. WIX, Google, and Yahoo were also mentioned as free resources for creating websites, each with different features and options (i.e. appearance, fonts, etc.).

As Jeff Gordon stated, we did not expect to have all the answers from a single meeting, but it was good to get together to discuss these topics.

welcome the visitors, and both expressed their enthusiasm about the ABA's setting up headquarters in their town. This shows the impact birding has on local communities.

Two guests stopped at the meeting briefly. The Chief of Police and the Mayor of Delaware City appeared to

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## Great Backyard Bird Count Revisited

The Great Backyard Bird Count 2015 was held from Friday, February 13, to Monday, the 16<sup>th</sup>. While more checklists may still be submitted, as of February 20, the number of checklists submitted worldwide was 137,751. The total number of species reported was 4,798 while the number of individuals tallied was 17,751,038 birds. In our Keystone state, 6,769 checklists including 141 species were entered in eBird.

The top hotspot in PA was Middle Creek with 43 checklists.

The top five counties in the state were Allegheny – 101, Chester – 99, Lancaster – 93, Bucks – 86 and Cumberland – 84.

The top 5 ebirders for species were Bruce Carl – 65, Ted Nichols II – 57, Brian Henderson – 57, Pat & Dick Williams – 56 and Vern Gauthier – 56.

I think that in the coming years, we as a state organization should publicize this enjoyable birding venture more by inviting newbies to join us. Maybe we could sponsor bird counts at public places where they could learn what we are doing and enjoy the thrill of a public bird count. For more information on this count, check out <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>

– Chad Kauffman

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## New Project OwlNet Established in Allegheny County

This past fall saw the establishment of a new Project OwlNet station in southwestern Pennsylvania. After submitting a research proposal and being granted the required sub-permit, the new station was established in Boyce-Mayview Park in Upper St. Clair, and was up and running by the end of October. In twelve nights of banding, three Northern Saw-whet Owls were netted and banded. The first owl graced the nets on the second night of banding, which seemed a good omen for future nights. Alas, between rain, high winds, and schedules, only eleven other nights were monitored. Despite one night with temperatures dipping to 14 degrees, we persevered.



Although I was hoping to catch some birds banded to the north of us, all of the birds netted were “new” birds. I anticipate continuing the project at the same site and hope to offer some public nights in the future. I thank Powdermill Nature Reserve; the environmental research station of Carnegie Museum, located in the Laurel Highlands; and Upper St. Clair Township for their support in this endeavor. I also have to thank my family for their worthy assistance and willingness to sit in a cold car in the dark park!

– Gigi Gerben

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## Did you know?

A group of murre is known as a bazaar of murre. How bizarre!



# Pennsylvania Migration Count 2015

This year the PAMC will be on Saturday, May 9. Everyone is encouraged to try to get out there to help this year! For anyone new to PA birding or just unfamiliar with PAMC, here's what it's all about:

The PAMC (formerly the North American Migration Count) has taken place in Pennsylvania on the second Saturday of May since 1992. Birders across the state go out into the field to count all the birds they find; it's very similar to the Christmas Bird Count. Results are sent to a county compiler or just sent to me if there is no compiler. We've averaged about 1,000 participants and 3,000 field hours over the past several years. Last year nearly 190,000 birds of 236 species were counted. Not bad! Results are compiled and published annually in PSO's *Pennsylvania Birds* journal.

Birding for the PAMC isn't difficult...you just need to do what you usually do, but keep track of your totals. You can go out for a few hours, or do a 24-hour county Big

Day. In counties with high participation, areas are assigned to avoid double-counting. In other counties, there are only one or two participants. Some birders go for maximum species; others bird within a specific area, like an IBA, a state park, or even their own property. All have a good time birding, and the resulting data are of great value.

To find out who your county compiler is go to the web site <http://pabirds.org/PAMC/Index.html> to obtain his or her email address. You will also find checklists, forms, and instructions there. If there is no county compiler, please contact us.

Good birding to all!

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## Certificates of Appreciation Awarded

PSO issues certificates of appreciation to individuals and organizations who have allowed access to their properties to view vagrants. The total number issued is now 107. The full list can be found on the PSO's website. Since November, the following Certificates of Appreciation have been awarded:

Selasphorus Hummingbird, Bill and Sue Keim, Bucks County  
Rufous Hummingbird, Bruce and Sherri Carl, Lancaster County  
Harris's Sparrow, Lee and Doris Mae Kennedy, Cumberland County  
Evening Grosbeak, The Yeany Family, Forest County

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## Conservation Award Winner For 2015

The Conservation Award is presented to an individual or organization that has made significant contributions to the preservation of birds in Pennsylvania.

The PSO is pleased to announce the winner of the 2015 Conservation Award is the **Brandywine Conservancy**. Located in Chadds Ford, the Brandywine Conservancy was founded in 1967 and is an advocate for land and water preservation in southeastern Pennsylvania and northern Delaware. Through its Land Stewardship and Municipal Assistance programs, the organization works with government, individuals, and private organizations to conserve natural, cultural, and scenic resources. The

conservancy also incorporates innovative Mapping for Conservation and Conservation Design as part of their efforts to preserve critical habitats as development occurs. The Conservancy holds more than 440 conservation easements and has protected more than 45,000 acres in Chester and Delaware Counties in PA and New Castle County in DE that includes the Laurels, King Ranch, and Stroud IBA. The King Ranch in particular holds some of the best grassland habitat in the region. The goal of an ambitious reforestation project is to plant 50,000 trees by the Conservancy's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017. Visit the informative website at [www.brandywineconservancy.org](http://www.brandywineconservancy.org).

# Poole Award Recipient Announced

by Andy McGann and Scott Stoleson

This year's Poole Award, for significant contributions to ornithology in Pennsylvania, goes to Dr. Robert L. Curry, PhD.

Dr. Curry is a Professor of Biology at Villanova University, where he has fostered the development of undergraduate and masters students since 1991. His areas of ornithological contribution are diverse but include animal behavior, ecology, evolution, and conservation science. He is especially interested in avian mating systems, cooperative breeding, and the ecology of species that hybridize where their populations come into contact. His academic pedigree is top-notch, earning a BS at Dartmouth and his PhD at the University of Michigan, in 1979, with a dissertation titled "Evolution and Ecology of Cooperative Breeding in Galapagos Mockingbirds (*Nesomimus* spp.)." Dr. Curry's doctoral advisors included the famed Peter Grant, who with his wife Rosemary, conducted award-winning research on evolution, studying Darwin's Finches. (Even the book written about their work was award-winning. Jonathan Weiner's *The Beak of The Finch* (1994) won the Pulitzer Prize, and Dr. Curry makes a cameo on page 102.)

After earning his PhD, Dr. Curry went on to study cooperative breeding in Florida Scrub-Jays as a post-doctoral fellow at Archbold Biological Station (1998-90). Florida Scrub-Jays are a highly endangered species, and the population at Archbold is one of the most-studied and well-known systems in the world.

Dr. Curry's longest-running project—and the one that matters most to our own backyard bird observations—explores the mechanisms at play in the contact zone between Carolina and Black-capped Chickadees. These two species can hybridize where they overlap, and simply identifying the species in the field can be a complicated matter. Indeed, Dr. Curry employs genetic tests to confirm not just the species, but also the individual paternity and maternity of the color-banded chickadees at his study sites. This project began back in 1997, and in his continuous effort he has amassed one of the longest and most complete databases of nesting ecology in American ornithology. Over time he has seen the hybrid zone shift north, an effect that relates to climate change. His recent publication titled "Climate-mediated movement of an avian hybrid zone" was published in *Current Biology* in 2014, and subsequently picked up by the mainstream media, with articles in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The New York Times*.

Beyond Pennsylvania, Dr. Curry also studies the ecology of Black-capped and Boreal Chickadees, which live side by side in Nova Scotia, but which have never been known to hybridize. Dr. Curry is also an expert in island biogeography and the conservation issues facing small, isolated populations of birds. His studies in these areas include Socorro Mockingbirds and Cozumel Thrashers in Mexico, White-breasted Thrashers on St. Lucia, and all of the Galapagos mockingbird species.

As you may have guessed, Dr. Curry wrote the chapters on Black-capped and Carolina Chickadees for the *Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in Pennsylvania*. Dr. Curry also authored the species accounts for Western Scrub-Jay and Island Scrub-Jay in the *Birds of North America* series, in addition to co-authoring the BNA account for Carolina Chickadee. In all, he has written over 45 peer-reviewed articles, published in a variety of scientific journals.

However, his published work should not overshadow his achievements as a teacher and a mentor. Dr. Curry goes the extra mile to take his Villanova students outside, observing the natural world with their own senses and thinking scientifically with their own brains. He takes his Intro Ecology classes on mandatory overnight camping field trips to places like Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Elk Neck in Maryland, and Cape May, New Jersey. This effort is increasingly important, as it becomes more and more common for college students to never have spent a single night camping in their lives...until Dr. Curry delivers one of the most unexpected and singular experiences of their college careers. His Field Ecology & Evolution class takes a two-week expedition to places such as the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, the scrublands of central Florida, or the islands of Nova Scotia. It's no easy feat to take a bunch of college students abroad and bring them back in one piece!

Among the student body, he is regarded as one of the most demanding professors in the Biology Department. It's true as he expects more than most professors and he pushes his students to write better and deliver more effective presentations. One consequence of his demand for excellence is that Curry's students win a disproportionate number of student presentation awards at meetings. Speaking from experience, there are few things about which Dr. Curry is a stickler: 1.) The word "data" is plural. 2.) Approximately 1 in 12 men are color-blind and he is one of them, so you should never use red-green or red-blue color schemes in presentations and 3.) Charles

Darwin was NOT inspired by Darwin's Finches. He didn't even notice them, and he certainly didn't name them after himself. It was the Galapagos **mockingbirds** that caught his eye and inspired the man who changed the world.

His favorite quote, as any of his students will tell you (because it appears at the bottom of each of his emails) is, "My attention was first thoroughly aroused by comparing together the various specimens ... of the mocking-thrush" ~ C. Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1839).

Among American ornithologists, Dr. Curry is a leader. He is an active member of ten professional societies, current president of the Wilson Ornithological Society, and serves as Chair of the Ornithological Council, the consortium of twelve North and Central American professional ornithological societies.

Perhaps unexpectedly, Dr. Curry is also a technophile. Beyond the fact that he creates his own websites and is the webmaster for a few ornithological societies, he also compels his students to truly learn the ins and outs of the software they use in his classes and beyond. If he can learn to use new software for managing libraries of scientific literature and properly formatting citations in Microsoft Word documents, he expects his students to learn it too. He is an aficionado of GIS and relational databases, and he convinced the Biology Department to supply him with an entire computer lab of Apple iMac's long before they were again considered "cool" by the students.

Dr. Curry brings his entire career of research experience into the classroom to make the Galapagos Islands, Peter and Rosemary Grant, and even Charles Darwin feel not so far away. He is generous with his students, both as a teacher, and as a mentor. He is extremely active in ornithological societies, and in turn does all that he can to help his students connect with and participate in the community of academic ornithology. Not only does he urge and guide his students to apply for student travel awards to attend the scientific conferences, but he also comes through with free road trips cross-country in the Biology Department's 12-passenger van. (And plenty of birding along the way!)

It's difficult to summarize an entire career of achievement, but perhaps the title of his 2005 paper best encapsulates his ornithological philosophy and the reason why Dr. Robert L. Curry is a treasure for Pennsylvania ornithology: "Hybridization in Chickadees: much to learn from familiar birds."

[Note: I had the fortunate experience of having Bob Curry as my undergraduate advisor at Villanova University (2003-07), and while the Poole Award is presented by the entire PSO Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to write the biographical article along with PSO board member Scott Stoleson, who has been best friends with Bob since their days together at Dartmouth; serving as each other's best man, etc. – Andy McGann]

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## Annual Meeting Field Trip Descriptions

**John Heinz/Tinicum** (led by George Armistead on Saturday; Debbie Beer on Sunday)

Nearly 1,000 acres of diverse habitats, including the largest freshwater tidal marsh in the state, sustain a huge variety of resident and migratory birds. Visitors barely realize the refuge is situated next to mega highways and a busy airport, and become immersed in the urban oasis of Philadelphia's wildest backyard, where more than 320 bird species have been recorded. Spring bird walks highlight a myriad of warblers, orioles, vireos, and flycatchers, as well as waders, woodpeckers, wrens, swallows, and Bald Eagles engaged with their 6th consecutive nesting season.

Meet at Heinz Refuge Visitors Center parking area, near the stone building. Bring binoculars, water bottle, and trail snack. Note that the Visitor Center opens at 8:30 a.m.,

with full restroom facilities, water fountains, and beverage machines. There are porta-johns on refuge trails. Heinz Refuge phone is 215-365-3118. Leader: Debbie Beer ([dbeer@natlands.org](mailto:dbeer@natlands.org), 610-955-4098)

**Nottingham/Goat Hill** (led by Holly Merker on both Saturday & Sunday)

Nottingham County Park/Goat Hill Preserve, our Serpentine Barrens region, boasts specialty birds like breeding Yellow-breasted Chat, Pine Warbler, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, White-eyed Vireo, among others. Also, this area in the evening is the area's only stronghold for Eastern Whip-poor-will. The ecology of this area differs markedly from the rest of the county and most of the state. Hence, it could be interesting for visiting birders.

**Grasslands of the Laurels, King Ranch, and Stroud IBA** (led by Brian Byrnes on Saturday & Sunday)

This Important Bird Area in central Chester County is a stronghold for grassland-nesting bird species in southeastern Pennsylvania, thanks to tens of thousands of acres of protected lands. Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Savannah Sparrow are typical nesting birds. Dickcissel and Blue Grosbeak are also possible. Scrub/shrub nesting species of note include Blue-winged Warbler, Field Sparrow, Willow Flycatcher, White-eyed Vireo, Chestnut-sided Warbler, and Brown Thrasher. The area supports at least 43 species of birds listed in the Pennsylvania State Wildlife Action Plan, many of them in significant numbers. Among our stops will be the premier privately-owned property in the IBA, generally inaccessible to the public.

We will spend a lot of time on foot, but hiking will not be strenuous. Restroom facilities are scarce; we will make a gas station stop when needed. Limited to 20 participants.

**Great Marsh** (led by Barry Blust on Saturday; Rob Blye on Sunday)

Great Marsh, located in northern Chester County, is located about 30 minutes from West Chester. The IBA is about 3400 acres of freshwater marsh, open water, ag fields, and hardwood forest.

Target birds are Sora, Virginia Rail, Marsh Wren, Swamp Sparrow, Willow Flycatcher, and Green Heron. All the forest breeding birds of Chester County are also likely.

Knee high waterproof boots are recommended. We'll hike trails through marsh and forest. A catwalk crosses the middle of the marsh. Bathrooms may be available.

**Ridley Creek State Park** (led by Al Guarente on Saturday)

Ridley Creek State Park is a 2,600-acre tract of deciduous woodlands and brushy fields located in the northwest section of Delaware County in Edgmont Township. The park offers excellent birding throughout the year. There are two areas of the park that are a must for visiting birders: the Bridle Trail north of Gradyville Road and the Lower Sycamore Mills Road. Other areas of the park that offer good birding are: the park office area, Forge Road, the Colonial Pennsylvania Plantation, and the Blue Trail.

**Westtown School & Exton Park** (led by Brian Quindlen on Saturday)

Seated among 600 acres, the Westtown School is rich in both species diversity and ornithological history. Old-growth forests, rich wetlands, and the Westtown Lake offer a variety of habitats for a well-rounded checklist which includes marsh birds and a variety of warblers. Also, the Westtown School is the alma mater of famous ornithologists Townsend, Say, and Cassin.

Featuring one of southeastern Pennsylvania's top emergent wetlands, Exton Park is a birding gem. Exton Park's 12-acre pond attracts a variety of both waterfowl and shorebirds, and the surrounding wetland area provides great habitat for marsh birds. Matched with sprawling corn fields lined by hedgerows, this location offers up a wide variety of habitats. Species typically include Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Indigo Bunting, Green Heron, White-eyed Vireo, Warbling Vireo, and Wood Duck.

**Longwood Gardens** (led by Carol Majors on Saturday)

Longwood is a renowned botanical garden, featuring acres of mixed habitats, extraordinary flower gardens, water gardens, vegetable gardens, native plant gardens, and more. The birding (and photography for those interested) there can be fantastic. They recently opened a new, impressive "Meadow Garden" featuring native landscapes designed specifically for grassland birds. For more information visit their website:

<http://longwoodgardens.org/>

**Bucktoe Creek Preserve**

Sunday

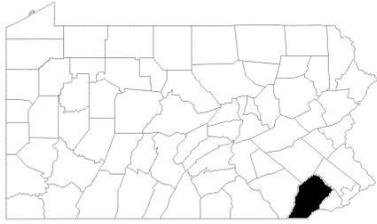
Bucktoe Creek Preserve is a 297-acre, privately-owned natural area located near Kennett Square in Chester County, Pennsylvania. The preserve is managed to enhance biodiversity and promote sound ecological stewardship through forest, meadow, and wetland restoration. The primary goals are to provide a stable location for long-term environmental monitoring and ecological research, a refuge for threatened flora and fauna, and a site for educating naturalists at all levels of expertise. Target species here include shorebirds and a possible kite.

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Space is available for vendors at our annual meeting in West Chester. If you know of any possible vendors, please let Shonah Hunter . ([shunter@lhup.edu](mailto:shunter@lhup.edu)) know.

# BIRDING PA -CHESTER COUNTY

(Each edition of *Birding PA* highlights birding hot spots from one of our 67 counties.)



I had never been to Chester County. Oh, I had driven through it on the turnpike, but that's like saying you've been somewhere because you've spent a two-hour layover at the airport.

No, I had never been to Chester County, and the words that came to mind for this southeastern PA county were construction and congestion. Now that I have been there two other words that come to mind are conservation and care.

Yes, I could see how construction due to a growing population had changed the area and led to congestion in many parts of the county, but I also experienced conservation efforts that have led to a series of county parks such as the unique pine barrens of NOTTINGHAM COUNTY PARK and community parks like EXTON, a "natural oasis" in an increasingly developed area. I learned about the NATURAL LANDS TRUST, an organization that purchases, sets aside and maintains parcels of land like the CROW'S NEST PRESERVE (which I birded), and some other 41 preserves (totaling 22,000 acres) in eastern PA and southern NJ, a number of which are prime birding locations in Chester County. I learned of the BRANDYWINE CONSERVANCY which works with everyone and anyone in protecting and restoring 59,000 acres of land in southeastern PA and northern DE.

I saw the care taken by county and local communities in setting aside and preserving land for future generations, and I heard the care and concern in the voices of West Chester Bird Club members as they spoke to me about topics such as land preservation, educating the public on conservation issues, and of course, birds and birding!

The WCBC by the way is one of the oldest in the nation, founded in 1910.

On my first day I was met by PSO and WCBC member and field trip leader Denice Hardtmann for a tour of some of the lakes and reservoirs of which Chester County has many, providing some great spots to find migrating and overwintering waterfowl, gulls, and terns. I sampled just a few of these including STRUBLE LAKE, which is a 386-acre impoundment in western Chester County, KURTZ'S FISH HATCHERY, and HONEY BROOK WATER TREATMENT PLANT. We met up with veteran Chester Birder, George

Tallman at CHAMBERS LAKE, which is part of HIBERNIA COUNTY PARK. George is a wealth of information concerning the Whys? Whens? and Whos? of Chester County Birding. The week prior to my visit the county's first **Sedge Wren** in fifty some years had been seen at Hibernia. We tried to find it, but we came up empty. My last stop with Denice was at COATESVILLE RESERVOIR, another place good for wintering waterfowl and, according to Denice, has harbored **Cackling, White-fronted, and Pink-footed Geese**. Over the next couple of days I visited the largest body of water in the county, the 535-acre MARSH CREEK LAKE which once again is great for wintering waterfowl and gulls.



This is only one of up to 30 Red-headed Woodpeckers found at Crow's Nest Preserve during the fall of 2013.

Photo by George Tallman



This Sedge Wren was found and photographed by Arthur Steinberger.

On my second day, I met Environmental Educator, PA eBird Guru, and PSO Chester County Compiler Holly Merker at NOTTINGHAM COUNTY PARK (NCP) in the southwestern corner of the county on the Maryland border. NCP is a 651-acre Pine Barrens on an outcropping of serpentine stone which provides unique habitat in the county. Holly told me that **Blue-winged, Pine, and Prairie Warblers** breed there along with **Yellow-breasted Chat** and **Eastern Whip-poor-wills**. She also indicated that

**Summer Tanagers** had been found there during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Breeding Bird Atlas.

While birding with Holly, the educator came out in her as we spent an enjoyable 2 ½ hours hiking the trails at NCP in which we examined a piece of serpentine stone, I learned about the Rough Green Snake which is very rare in PA being confirmed only in Chester and Lancaster Counties, and heard from Holly how the flight call of a **Pine Siskin** sounds “sneezy” compared to a goldfinch. When I played siskin on my phone to hear the sneeziness, seemingly on cue a small flock of siskins flew in and circled us before flying off. At one point the view opened up to a section with a bunch of snags which Holly mentioned was a spot from which **Olive-sided Flycatcher** is reported. Not surprisingly she also said that the place is where to find **Red Crossbills** during invasion years and that some winters **Long-eared Owls** could be found.

On my third day, I met a group of birders at **EXTON PARK** for their weekly walk and then brunch at a local restaurant. I was told by one of them that the bird walk was “just an excuse to eat!” Exton Park itself, according to the excellent 5<sup>th</sup> edition of “Chester County Birds: A Site Guide and Annotated List” (available through the WCBC), is a 713-acre tract that provides a variety of bird habitats in a relatively small area just east of Exton. The park includes a pond, streams, emergent wetlands, wooded areas, and open fields. Looking over the “Birds of Exton Park” checklist, I found **Ross’s Goose, Anhinga, Glossy Ibis, Rough-legged Hawk, Sandhill Crane, Black-necked Stilt, Caspian Tern, Golden-winged Warbler, Kentucky Warbler** and **Nelson’s Sparrow** among more than 200 species that have been observed there over the years. On the day I was there none of the above showed up, but we did get quite a few species of birds including a couple of **Bald Eagles** flying overhead. And yes, I felt it my duty to accompany my fellow birders over to Bistro 24 for a very nice lunch following the walk. It’s a tough job but someone has to do it!

Later that same day I met with Birding Club of Delaware County president Brian Quindlen (a.k.a. BQ) at the **WESTTOWN SCHOOL**. According to Brian, the school was established in 1799. The school is rich with both species diversity and ornithological history. Alumni of the institution include notable ornithology icons such as Townsend, Say, and Cassin. The 600-acre campus offers a wide variety of habitats for some very productive birding. Westtown Lake was constructed in 1912 and hosts an array of winter waterfowl. To the east of the lake, rich, saturated wetlands provide a safe haven for sensitive marsh birds. To the north, relatively old-growth deciduous and coniferous trees bring in the



George Tallman photographed this Little Blue Heron at Exton Park.

warblers, thrushes, and birds of prey. All throughout campus, mixtures of hedgerows provide ample habitat for flycatchers and sparrows, (just like the two unexpected **Vesper Sparrows** we found that day). Today, Westtown School is a private day and boarding school. Access to the property is restricted to members of the WCBC or by getting in touch with the headmaster. So if you want to bird there, you have to make prior arrangements to do so.

This brief article cannot even begin to do justice to the birding opportunities in Chester County. I’m very much looking forward to birding with my Chester County friends and with you at the May PSO meeting in Chester County. I hope to see you there!

Good Birding, PA!

Vern Gauthier

*(Please contact me at [pabirder@gmail.com](mailto:pabirder@gmail.com) if you would like your home county featured in a future edition of Birding PA.)*

**More Chester Co. information on page 14 bottom.**

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## Bob Cook, Long-time PSO Member, Passes

One of our first PSO members, Bob Cook of Elverson, passed away on February 3, 2015, at the age of 89. He and his wife Ruth have been active members, attending almost all of our annual meetings, since our founding. Bob was a gentle soul who was always welcoming, caring, and outgoing. He will be missed.

# Butler County Field Note

by Gene Wilhelm

There is an axiom in field ornithology that states “often the worst weather produces the best birding.” Violent thunderstorms consisting of lightning, strong winds, and downpour rains occurred in the late hours of May 9, 2014, in northern Butler County, extending from Moraine State Park, to State Game Land 95, to Barkeyville, that resulted not only in flash flooded streams and closed roads but also a major avian fallout on May 10, 2014 – Pennsylvania Annual Migration Count (PAMC) – a rare phenomenon not observed in many years.

The extraordinary occasion was a genuine delight when we counted mostly terrestrial migrants including 8

flycatcher, 6 vireo, 32 warbler, and 9 sparrow species accompanied by Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings, and Orchard and Baltimore Orioles resting, eating, and singing close or even on the ground for an extended period of time. Only missed were Golden-winged, Worm-eating, Connecticut, and Mourning Warblers. Observers were ecstatic, literally dumbfounded by the intimate experience of a lifetime.

And the icing on the cake included a Green Heron chasing an American Bittern in a wetland, two Red-necked Grebes, and 12 Common Loons that swelled the PAMC to a total record 168 species.

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## Breeding Bird Blitz

Mark your calendar now for the 2015 Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Blitz which will be held June 19 through 22. More detailed information will be posted in the June

*Pileated* along with the PA Birds Listserve and Facebook page. Contact Vern Gauthier at [pabirder@gmail.com](mailto:pabirder@gmail.com) for more information.



### **Links and e-mail for more on Chester County Birding**

*PSO Site Guide* – <http://www.pabirds.org/SiteGuide/PACountyPage.php?CountyID=15>

*West Chester Bird Club* - <http://westchesterbirdclub.org/>

*Valley Forge Audubon* - <http://valleyforgeaudubon.org/>

*PSO County Compiler / Holly Merker* - [HCybelle@aol.com](mailto:HCybelle@aol.com)

*West Chester CBC Compiler / Barry Blust* - [BarryBlust@comcast.net](mailto:BarryBlust@comcast.net)

*Valley Forge CBC Compiler / Edie Parnum* - [eparnum2@verizon.net](mailto:eparnum2@verizon.net)

*Western Chester CBC Compiler / Larry Lewis* - [earlybirdtours@comcast.net](mailto:earlybirdtours@comcast.net)

*Brandywine Conservancy* - <http://www.brandywineconservancy.org/>

*Natural Lands Trust* - <http://www.brandywineconservancy.org/>

*Birding PA Culinary Tip* – Iron Hill Brewery and Restaurant, just 2 miles from the hotel where PSO will be meeting.

[www.ironhillbrewery.com/westchester/](http://www.ironhillbrewery.com/westchester/)



## Conservation Chat Room

What would you say if someone asked you, "What is the No. 1 reason why birds are at risk?"

Perhaps you might say, "Pesticide poisoning," or maybe, "Pollution." Would global warming be at the top of your list?

There are also the direct mortality threats to consider: window and building collisions, hits from communication towers, wind turbines, and large solar arrays. Add death by predators, including the ever-growing problem of free-roaming cats. The impact of non-native plants and animals directly threatens bird survival. Then there are all the pathogens like West Nile Virus, Bird Flu...the Risk List goes on and on. These risks occur not only at our local level, but on a global scale as well. The severity of the risk can vary from one location to the next, but most experts agree that habitat loss is the number one reason why birds are at risk. Habitat loss is a symptom of a larger problem. It's important to determine why habitat loss is occurring and take steps to stop it.

Fortunately, it isn't all that hard to help birds. There are a lot of things that we can do, but here are just five easy ones:

1. If you have a cat, keep it indoors. According to the American Bird Conservancy, cats have caused the extinction of 33 species across the world. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature now lists domestic cats as one of the world's worst non-native invasive species. Sure, we love our cats, but keep them indoors!
2. Introduce native plants to your yard. Native plants are hosts for many insects, which, in turn, provide food for many birds. Huge tracts of the suburban landscape have been converted to sterile lawns with non-native plants, which provide limited sustenance for birds. An excellent resource is Doug Tallamy's book, *Bringing Nature Home*. Visit a native plant nursery or attend a native plant sale this spring and start adding native plants to your yard. If you live near State College, plan to attend **Shaver's Creek Native Plant Festival** on Saturday, May 2, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Vendors will have a lot of native plants, good food, and there are special activities like bird walks and educational programs. More details may be found on [www.shaverscreek.org](http://www.shaverscreek.org). Go to [www.plantnative.org](http://www.plantnative.org) for a list of native plant nurseries in Pennsylvania.

3. Check your windows. Millions of birds die each year by flying into windows. Dr. Daniel Klem, Jr., a biologist at Muhlenberg College, estimates that 100 million birds die as a result of hitting glass each year in the Untied States alone. Birds don't know that the trees, plants, and sky are reflections, so they fly right into the window. Check to see which of your windows are most reflective and closest to where birds are active. I admit it – the windows on the west side of my house kill birds, so I plan to try yet another solution. Earlier solutions haven't worked because I did not space the tape or the decals close enough (they should be no farther than 4 inches apart), so this time I'm going to try either bird screens or CollidEscape. Hawk Mountain uses CollidEscape on the windows of their Education Building. According to the makers of CollidEscape, this product will "permanently stop all migratory, startled flight, and territorial aggression bird collisions with glass." Mary-Therese, Hawk Mountain's Bookstore Manager, verified that CollidEscape does stop window bird hits.

Another solution to bird strikes would be to use bird screens that allow birds to bounce off the screens, instead of hitting the window. My online research led me to the Bird Screen Company website, which is owned by Frank Haas, our PSO Treasurer! I was surprised at first, but doesn't it make sense that a dedicated birder and longtime member of PSO would be inspired to pursue a solution to bird strikes? I plan to cover some of my windows with Bird Screens from [www.birdscreen.com](http://www.birdscreen.com). Thank you, Frank!

Please contact me if you have tried Bird Screens or CollidEscape. I'd like to hear about your experience.

4. Join Bird Conservation organizations. In addition to being a PSO member, join other conservation groups that work to save birds and habitat. American Bird Conservancy, Audubon, Center for Biological Diversity, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, The Nature Conservancy, and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy make the world a better place for birds. There are other groups, too, so if I missed one that should be listed, let me know.

5. Feed the birds. Black oil sunflower seeds are the #1 preferred food by most birds. Few birds eat red millet and oats, so when you purchase bird seed, buy the best and ignore the rest. If you want to attract American Goldfinches and Pine Siskins, buy fresh niger seeds. Niger, also known as nyger, or nyjer, is also marketed as Nyjer®, a trademarked name to keep people from confusing it with thistle seed, but many birders still call it thistle. Imported niger is heat-treated to kill the exotic weed seeds mixed in with imported niger seeds. Inspect

the niger seed before you buy it – make sure the seeds are a shiny black, as those seeds still contain the oil that birds want. Birds won't eat dried out or moldy niger. We put out fresh niger seed in mid-October, after seeing seven Pine Siskins in our back yard. More than 30 Pine Siskins were dining each day by early November, and now in late February we have more than 50 Pine Siskins each day. Unlike many of the other birds, Pine Siskins will stay on the feeder if I walk slowly nearby. Perhaps they don't have much contact with humans most of the year.

"Miracle Mix" is highly prized by birds. We have seen all the species of woodpeckers except Northern Flickers, feeding on our "miracle log." Blue Jays, Tufted Titmice, Black-capped Chickadees, Carolina Wrens, and White-breasted Nuthatches love this high fat food. So do flying squirrels, raccoons, gray squirrels, and opossums. While there are various versions of the recipe, here is the one we use:

Heat in a microwave for 3 minutes: 2 cups of crunchy or creamy peanut butter & 2 cups lard. Stir, then add: 4 cups cornmeal, 4 cups oatmeal, 1 cup white flour, 2/3 cup sugar. Mix thoroughly, then pour into a container and store in a cool place until firm. Form a small ball to fit in each hole of the log.

There are some who feel that feeding birds is more for our benefit than the birds', but Cornell Lab of Ornithology says otherwise. Just remember to provide water and clean the feeders on a regular basis. Winter is a difficult time for birds. Setting up a backyard bird feeder not only enriches our lives but also helps our backyard birds.

– Laura Jackson  
Bedford County  
[mljackson2@embarqmail.com](mailto:mljackson2@embarqmail.com)  
814-652-9268



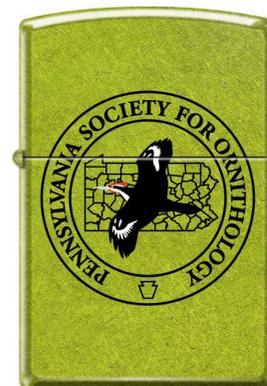
Tufted Titmice and many other birds crave the peanut butter mix that is stuffed into our "miracle log."  
Photo by Laura Jackson

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## Collectible Green PSO Zippo Lighters Still Available

Go to [www.pabirds.org/sales/](http://www.pabirds.org/sales/) or send \$32.50 (ea.) to:

PSO  
2469 Hammertown Road  
Narvon, PA 17555



# The Raven Reporter

Tales of Discovery about Pennsylvania Birds



## Improving on our Rusty Blackbird Spring Blitz

Thanks to an enthusiastic crew of birders, Pennsylvania was one of the many states that participated in the first Rusty Blackbird spring blitz last year. The results were pretty amazing considering what an obscure bird the Rusty is reputed to be, and not to mention that they can occupy some pretty obscure places.

For a quick review, Rusty Blackbirds are among the highest priority conservation songbirds of North America. Their decline is tough to measure because most of their nesting range is beyond where breeding surveys go and they spend the winter in swampy areas in the deep South. Rusty Blackbirds get their toes wet when they forage. They can be found along ditches; wet woods; the edges of streams, ponds, swamps; and almost anywhere there is shallow water. They roost in tree groves, sometimes far away from their foraging location.

The Pennsylvania portion of the Blitz officially starts on March 15, but there are many reports of Rusties spending the winter in the state. So, there is incentive to look for Rusties as early as possible. There are lots of pictures of Rusty Blackbirds walking on frozen mud and at the edge of icy pools. They can be very early migrants.

The 2015 Spring Blitz has been improved with the addition of some neat features on the website. It has made some progress by identifying “Areas of Interest” and a section on our website devoted to them: <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/2015-areas-of-interest/> and a “Frequently Asked Questions” page, which is now available online: <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/faq/s>

The Areas of Interest are places where several Rusty Blackbirds were reported in last year’s blitz. More information on bird numbers and the time of use of these locations would be appreciated. The places found last year may harbor more Rusties longer through spring than originally found. We may have found some key stop-overs. They deserve revisiting. Many blackbirds were

reported from wetlands that are not generally visited by birders at that time. Many surprising locations were found last year.

For some states including Pennsylvania, the distribution of Rusty Blackbird reports somewhat matches the distribution of active birders who submit to eBird. Looking at the map of Area of Interest, there are many sections of our streams that had no Rusties reported. I know of many ponds and small lakes with muddy shores where no Rusties were mapped. Let’s try to get to more of these spots for a more complete distribution map of Rusty stop-overs! I’d love to see more bird clubs and Audubon chapters involved with the blitz to fill in the blanks.

We encourage participants to use the Rusty Blackbird blitz option in the eBird dropdown list of field trip options. Negative data also are valuable. It is important to know that you looked hard and did NOT find Rusties where you looked, too. Any habitat data are greatly appreciated.

With the many hundreds of miles of riverfront in Pennsylvania, we should have lots of passage migrant habitat for a northward-flying riparian bird like a Rusty Blackbird. Sometimes it is a matter of looking in different places than usual. Does our state have hot spots where many individuals congregate during migration? Are these hotspots or stopover areas used by Rusties each year? Are stopover areas protected, or might availability of these areas be limiting Rusty Blackbird survival? A curious bird deserves more curious seeking birders.

Identifying Rusty Blackbirds can be tricky business. I recommend the Rusty Blackbird website for tips on identification. They provide fine photographs to help separate this wetland bird from look-alikes.

Remember the Boreal Oriole! Let’s beat last year’s blitz!

## The Invasion of the Pointy-beaked Finches: Pine Siskins Are Here!

Pine Siskins are here! Pine Siskins are here!!! Dozens of Pennsylvania birders and bird photographers are declaring and showing their backyard siskins. For lack of Snowy Owls, these streaky finches will have to do. They are cooperative and photogenic visitors from the north. They pose. They fight. They twitter in the pre-dawn light while waiting for the feeders to be filled. Perhaps they’re not the most glamorous winter bird, but charming and feisty nonetheless. Pine Siskins are here and getting a lot of attention. They also are gobbling up all the nyjer seeds hanging in feeders everywhere. For the last week, I have had a difficult time finding any nyjer seed in my own

town. I'd like to blame the empty shelves on the siskin invasion. They've cleared out inventory!

Pine Siskins may be tiny but they are fierce and feisty fellows. They often are dominant over other seed-feeding finches including American Goldfinches and the noticeably larger Purple Finch. They will even challenge Evening Grosbeaks and Northern Cardinals.

This invasion may last a bit longer if everything falls into place. Some of these irruptive siskins many stay to nest in the state. Pine Siskins can begin to nest as early as mid-February and often March in Pennsylvania and even in more northerly places like Washington and British Columbia. Full-grown fledglings have been found in late March in Washington. As a conifer species, the Pine Siskin responds to seed availability of our native conifer trees like eastern hemlock, red spruce, and several species of pines, especially eastern white pine. They are not fussy, however, and will also respond to exotic and ornamental conifer plantings in parks, yards, and cemeteries. Early nesting siskins also will opportunistically forage on dandelion seeds and any other small seeds they can find from early blooming plants. Pine Siskins may respond to cone crops in mature conifer forests, but also to ornamental conifer plantings almost anywhere. In fact, there were as many Pine Siskins found in southern counties as in the more forested northern counties during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Breeding Bird Atlas. They can be a common breeder in one year and absent for many others. The banding data indicate that siskins are fairly nomadic, capable of wandering from one coast to another from year to year.

Although Pine Siskin nesting records can be reported in almost any year, if not most years, they tend to be made during invasion years, like this one. Siskins also tend to nest in clusters or colonies. They have been labeled "tribal nesters" by Harlowe who wrote about their tendency to nest together in 1951. They can be multiple-brooded, going well into June to nest multiple times if the resource allows. Nests are usually built in conifer evergreens but also a variety of deciduous trees including exotics. Nests are often well-hidden in foliage on a horizontal limb.

Nesting events of Pine Siskins are easy to miss. Siskins are far from obvious once they are away from the feeder. Their little twitters can be easy to miss in the dense conifer forest or pine grove. Birders should look for the showy courtship flights and listen for siskin singing bouts. Male siskins often sing from a nearby perch while the nest is being constructed. Keep an eye out for birds carrying nesting material. Finding siskins nesting could be even more exciting than watching them gobble up your bank account worth of nyjer seed.

Good Birding!

Doug Gross, PA Game Commission, Non-game and Endangered Bird Supervisor, 106 Winters Road, Orangeville, PA 17859; E-mail: [dogross@pa.gov](mailto:dogross@pa.gov)



## PSO Pileated Quiz

### ***How well do you know your Pennsylvania birds?***

1. Which woodpecker species showed the highest percentage increase between our first and second breeding bird atlases?
2. You're looking at either a Mourning Warbler or a MacGillivray's Warbler. The bird has conspicuous white eye arcs. Which species is it?
3. George Miksch Sutton, in his 1928 *Introduction to the Birds of Pennsylvania*, said this shorebird species' young "can swim readily and run with amazing rapidity." He added, "Even the adult can swim and dive if necessary."

What species?

4. A photograph of a raptor flying over Hawk Mountain in October 1986 was labeled as a White-tailed Eagle in the Academy of Natural Sciences files. The Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee reviewed the photo and concluded in 2005 that it was what other species?
5. Which wood-warbler, a regular migrant through Pennsylvania, characteristically builds its nest near the top of a tall conifer?

(Answers on page 20)

# Ornithological Literature Notes

Pennsylvania birders who live within or near the zone where the Carolina Chickadee and Black-capped Chickadee ranges meet and overlap have had a rare opportunity. If these observers paid close attention to their local chickadees during the past two or three decades, they may have noticed Carolinas gradually replacing Black-capped. The Carolina range limit has been advancing northward, and the Black-capped range limit has been correspondingly withdrawing.

In areas of southeastern and southwestern Pennsylvania where only Black-capped Chickadees were once present, now only Carolinas – or, at least, Carolina-like chickadees – are observed. As the transition has taken place, some observers have noticed an intermediate period when chickadees with abnormal vocalizations and subtly unusual plumages are evident, seeming to mix both species' characters. Where molecular research has been undertaken, it has been shown that in these overlap zones the DNA of virtually all individual chickadees have had signatures of both species—in other words, hybrids or descendants of hybrids.

Factors possibly responsible for Carolinas' northward advance have received intense study, with various investigators focusing on effects of warming winters that enable Carolinas' metabolic limitations to extend northward, competitive dominance by Carolinas, and mate choice in which Black-capped females may prefer Carolina males. Robert L. Curry, his associates, and his students have contributed importantly to this knowledge in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Scott A. Taylor at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and five coauthors including Curry offer new evidence relating to climate change in a 2014 paper in the journal *Current Ornithology* (24:671–676). Their findings show a strong

association between warmer winters and the Carolina Chickadee's advance northward. Thus, the authors propose climate warming as a key factor mediating the genetic, metabolic, and competitive advantages Carolinas may have.

Taylor's group compared mean minimum winter temperatures and genetic signals in the hybrid zone between two periods: 2000-2002 and 2010-2012. The results indicate that the zone shifted north by approximately 11.5 kilometers during that decade as winter temperatures warmed. Thanks to birders' observations posted on eBird, the authors were able to map the contact zone's advance more extensively than the genetic transects could provide.

The Carolina range advance reported in that study, approximately 1 kilometer annually during the 10-year period, is the same rate calculated previously in a 25-year analysis spanning 1970–1995, which covered both southeastern and southwestern Pennsylvania (P. Hess, unpublished). This analysis uncovered evidence that an uptrend in mean temperatures was also associated with Carolina advances northward in neighboring New Jersey and Ohio.

Taylor and his coauthors comment about their findings that the influence of climate on hybrid zone movement “will be complex and hard to predict, always influenced by species interactions and ecology.” However, they note that “climate change is having an impact, direct or indirect, on species' interactions.”

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## PSO T-Shirts Restocked

We have a great variety of PSO T-shirts for sale. Check out our website at [www.pabirds.org/sales/](http://www.pabirds.org/sales/). Order yours now so you'll have it to wear to the annual meeting! They come in a variety of colors, both short- and long-sleeved.

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## Local Bird Clubs Helping with PSO Meeting

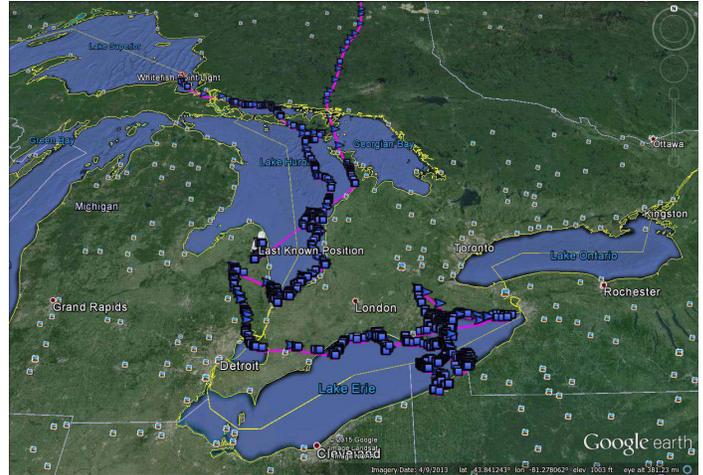
Did you know that two of the groups assisting with the 2015 annual PSO meeting are more than 100 years old? The Delaware Valley Ornithological Club was founded in 1890; the West Chester Bird Club, in 1910! Also helping out is the Birding Club of Delaware County.

## From the President's Desk...

Ice and snow are quickly melting here in Somerset County; ducks and geese are on the move. It won't be long now until the songbird migration is in full swing and neo-tropical migrants begin to arrive! I know we can't wait for the warmth. I have heard many birders complaining about this cold, cold winter. Well, for birds and birders, it is actually good to have extremely cold winters now and then. For one, ducks and gulls get pushed into PA in greater numbers as the Great Lakes freeze over. The Pittsburgh area was especially good birding this winter because of that. But one other thing you might not be thinking of is that it's also good for our breeding birds. You may be asking yourself, "Well, how could it be that cold winters help our breeding birds?" Extremely cold winters help reduce invasive species, especially invasive insects. This is good news, for example, for our breeding birds that depend on our hemlock forests.

Pennsylvania's state tree, the Eastern Hemlock, has been quickly dying off across the state because of hemlock woolly adelgid infestations. The adelgid is an invasive insect from Asia. In some areas of eastern PA hemlocks have all but disappeared. Species like Blackburnian and Black-throated Green Warblers, Blue-headed Vireo, and Acadian Flycatcher depend on hemlock forests, and there is nothing that can really replace this habitat. Luckily the adelgids have been severely knocked back by two successive cold winters and in some areas of Somerset and Westmoreland Counties, heavy infestations that were clearly visible a few years ago now appear to be gone, though I imagine that some of the bugs have survived. With treatment options expensive and not effective enough to treat larger groves of hemlocks, a few very cold winters every so often will help to keep the invaders at bay. So as you think of how cold you were this year, think of the positives as well, and the next time you are walking through a hemlock forest in the summer, be grateful for the cold!

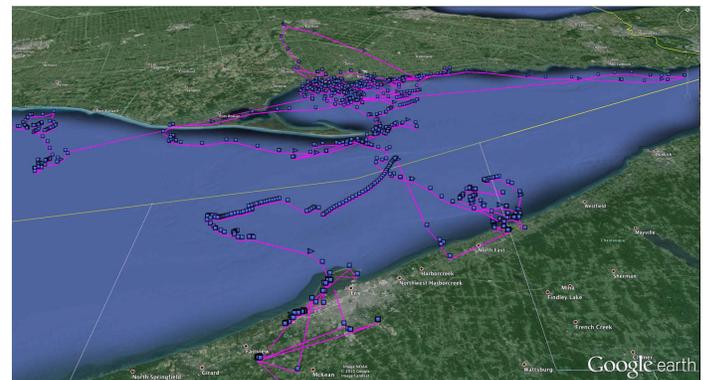
Spring will be here before we know it and so will our annual meeting! This year, as you all probably know by now, it's in West Chester. We are hoping to see all of you there. Please read about the annual meeting in this newsletter; it will be a great meeting. We have a lot of excellent field trips lined up, and soon we will open up the website so you can sign up for these trips. Many of the trips will be limited to 20 participants so be sure to read about the trips and sign up early for the ones you would like to attend. We still have a few slots open for speakers and vendors. Please contact me if you are interested in giving a short talk or being a vendor. Registration for the



PSO sponsored Snowy Owl Erie's data from last winter to present. View all the data at [projectsnowstorm.org](http://projectsnowstorm.org).

meeting is open, so go to the website to register. See you in West Chester!

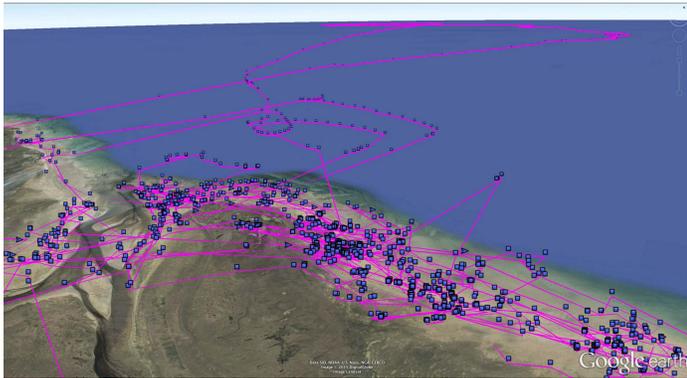
Lastly, I will take you once again back to winter. Remember Erie, the Snowy Owl PSO sponsored? The Owl was caught last winter in Erie, Pennsylvania, on January 19, 2014. It was very cool to watch how Erie used ice floes to hunt as he spent time on Lake Erie. Snowy Owls eat waterfowl during the winter months, and hunting from ice floes is a very effective means of catching them. As the owls sit on ice floes, the telemetry data show the direction and speed of the wind pushing the ice. These remarkable data have not been previously observed, adding to our knowledge of how these owls spend their time and conserve energy.



Erie extensively used ice floes to roost and to hunt from last winter. The lines on Lake Erie show Erie floating with the wind on the ice.

On April 14, Erie migrated north into Canada, and since the data are sent over the cell phone network, this was the last time we heard from him in 2014 until January 6 of this year when I received a text message on my phone. It was Erie, back in cell coverage! How excited we all were to

hear from him again! He started to dump all the data his transmitter had collected since April. And slowly his migration track and summer data filled in as he sent more than 6,000 fixes the transmitter collected while he was offline. Erie migrated north to the southern shores of the Hudson Bay and spent the summer in Polar Bear Provincial Park. At the end of December Erie started flying southward through central Ontario to the Georgian Bay. He spent a lot of time in that part of Ontario before making his way to Michigan, not too far away from the area where he was last March. Any day now Erie could once again leave for northern Canada, and we will anxiously wait until next year when we will get the next data dump to find out where he spent his summer.



Erie in Polar Bear Provincial Park on the southern Shore of the Hudson Bay this summer.

The importance of Project Snowstorm's study and the amount of critical data it provides for our understanding of the Snowy Owl is unparalleled. Just this one owl that PSO sponsored sent more data than nearly all of the Snowy Owls that had previously been tagged!

As Project Snowstorm continues their work on Snowy Owls, more knowledge is obtained, filling in the gaps concerning their movements and their habitats. This information is very important, especially for management issues as owl collisions with aircraft at airports become more increasingly common.

The data Erie, as well as the other project owls, have provided, will be used for many scientific publications for years to come. PSO is very proud to have sponsored this owl, and we were happy that we could help to add this piece of the ecological puzzle to this important study. For those of you who haven't checked out the SnowStorm website, more info on Erie and the other owls can be found at [www.projectsnowstorm.com](http://www.projectsnowstorm.com).



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Are you interested in getting more involved with PSO? We are always looking for good volunteers, board members, and writers/proof editors for the journal. If you are interested in helping in some way, please contact the president, Mike Lanzone, at [mlanzone@gmail.com](mailto:mlanzone@gmail.com).

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## ATTENTION VENDORS

Space is available for vendors at our annual meeting in West Chester. If you would like to have a table, please notify Shonah Hunter ([shunter@lhup.edu](mailto:shunter@lhup.edu)). If you know of any possible vendors, please let Shonah know.

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## PSO Newsletter

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

Membership Categories:

PSO	Individual	\$ 30.00
2469 Hammertown Road	Family	\$ 35.00
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## Answers to Bird Quiz

(page 18)

1. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, with a 99% increase in total observations and a 151% increase in confirmed breeding records.
2. MacGillivray's Warbler
3. Spotted Sandpiper
4. juvenile Bald Eagle
5. Cape May Warbler



Marsh Wren is another target species for our annual meeting. This Marsh Wren was photographed by Howard Eskin at Green Lane in Montgomery County.

***Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology***

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