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PSO Pileated



March 2017

The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

Volume 28, Number 1

From the President's Desk....

What? No Spring Meeting?

No spring meeting. That's right. We are trying something different this year. We are holding the annual meeting in the fall, more precisely, in September.

The board discussed trying a fall meeting, in part due to the request by several members of PSO. This isn't the first time PSO has had one in the fall, but it's been a long time. The last fall meeting was held in September 1999. We've had a long run of spring meetings, so we decided to give the fall a try once again.

Having a meeting in the fall allows more flexibility for a lot of schedules. In spring, we are all busy with the desire to enjoy the migration near and far. Those in academia are busy with finals; families have weddings and graduation parties traditionally in spring (despite birding family members' best efforts to reschedule); researchers are gearing up for the field season or have other commitments; there's the annual migration count, and the list goes on.

Migration is well underway in September but at a slower pace than in spring, allowing birders more time to enjoy it. Hawk migration picks up in September with large numbers of Broad-winged Hawks moving through, and there are still shorebirds to be found. Of course, there are the neotropical migrants. Our meeting location in



The fall meeting will give us an opportunity to witness and enjoy the Broad-winged Hawk migration.

Photo by Mike Fialkovich

Cumberland County will grant us access to all of the above.

One other change is a reduction in the number of afternoon speakers to allow us time to enjoy the Broad-winged Hawk migration, which kicks into gear in the late morning, so our talks will start mid-afternoon. While there are fewer speakers, the topics will still be interesting and informative. Detailed information regarding the meeting will be forthcoming.

You will notice a new feature in this newsletter – a summary of the minutes from the most recent PSO

Board Meeting. Board members decided we should share our meeting minutes with the membership, a common practice with many organizations and something we felt we should be doing. Our dedicated secretary Roger Higbee has submitted a summary of the topics discussed at the meetings. Many thanks to Roger for taking the minutes all these years and putting the highlights together for the newsletter. The PSO Board meets twice a year in spring and fall, and the minutes will be in the newsletter that follows each meeting.

I hope to see many of you at our next annual meeting!

Good birding,

Mike Fialkovich
PSO President
Allegheny County

Field Trip and Event Roster

Friday & Saturday, May 5-6 – Shaver’s Creek Birding Cup

The Birding Cup, Shaver’s Creek’s annual fund-raising tournament, is a contest among teams of birders to identify the most bird species in a 24-hour period in the central Pennsylvania region (Huntingdon, Centre, and adjoining counties). Teams must compete based on a set of Birding Cup rules, and the winning teams are awarded their prizes immediately following the contest at Shaver’s Creek Environmental Center in Petersburg, Pennsylvania.

<http://www.shaverscreek.org/public-programs-and-events/birding-cup/>

Saturday, May 13 – Pa Migration Count (PAMC)

Always held the second Saturday in May, the PAMC draws many birders from across the state. We always hope to hit the peak of spring migration. We run a finely tuned machine of organization with almost all the counties being compiled and organized. With the ease of eBird in our lives, almost all reporting can be done that way. Our state is one of the few left that has been doing this for years, on the tails of the North American Migration Count (NAMC), and now coincides with the International Migratory Bird Day. <http://www.birdday.org/>

<http://www.pabirds.org/PAMC/Index.html>

Friday, Saturday, & Sunday, May 19-21 – Presque Isle and northwestern PA birding

Our leaders for this trip include Mary Birdsong, Shawn Collins, Carole Winslow, and Chad Kauffman. This popular trip takes us back to the northwestern corner of PA to bird one of the premiere spots for warblers and late spring migrants. Presque Isle will be our destination on Friday and Saturday with leader Mary Birdsong. Sunday morning we will be heading to Crawford County to bird at several special spots, led by Shawn Collins. After that, we will meet Carole Winslow and explore the grasslands, heading east with the hope of finding a few notable birds like Upland Sandpiper, Clay-colored Sparrow, and Henslow’s Sparrow. This popular trip will be for PSO members, and the number of attendees will be limited. Check out the Facebook event page for more info or email Chad Kauffman at chadkauffman@earthlink.net.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/244828345927866/>

Friday, Saturday, & Sunday, June 2-4 –Bucktoe Shorebird & Kite Watch

Larry Lewis and Chad Kauffman will be our leaders. Join us for the second year as we look for kites and shorebirds at Bucktoe. During the days we will bird in the surrounding areas including John Heinz NWR and Bucktoe Preserve. The watch location is open to anyone, but bonus birding will be for PSO members only. More details and the bonus birding locations will be available later. Please check out the Facebook event page for more details, or email Chad at chadkauffman@earthlink.net.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1297165533699319/>

Friday through Monday, June 16-19 – Breeding Bird Blitz

The Fourth Annual PA Breeding Bird Blitz (PAB3) will run June 16 to June 19, 2017. The PAB3 is a great time to get out during the peak of the breeding season and is a means of gathering data on an annual basis of the breeding bird populations in PA. What's in it for you? You get to go out to find birds! There are prizes, too! But most importantly you help to add meaningful data about PA Breeding Birds! Click the link below for more information or contact Vern Gauthier at pabirder@gmail.com.

<http://www.pabirds.org/PABBB.php>

September 15-17 – PSO Annual Meeting in Carlisle, Cumberland County. There will be a great variety of field trips, including several that will cover the ridges along the Michaux and Tuscarora State Forests, hotspots for fall warbler migration. You will also have the opportunity to visit Waggoner’s Gap Hawkwatch, one of the best places in PA for fall raptor migration at the height of the Broad-winged Hawk season.

October 14-15 – The Big Sit, sponsored by *Bird Watcher’s Digest*. You may join or create your own circle and count what you see in a 24-hour time frame.

November 4-5 – Allegheny Front Hawkwatch. This is usually the peak for migrating Golden Eagles.

BB the Black-backed Oriole: What a Difference a Day Makes!

By Tom Binder

It was Friday morning, February 3, 2017, and it started out like most others. My wife, Linda, has a weekday schedule that runs like clockwork; on Friday that means up at 6:30, downstairs ready to go by 7:30, and out the door at 7:45. That's how I know it was 7:45 on Friday morning that I first laid eyes on a "birder" outside our home at 21 Indiana Avenue in Sinking Spring.

Frank and Barb Haas were scurrying around with the tools of the trade – a pair of binoculars and a camera with a large telephoto lens – across the street in front of 20 Indiana Avenue as Linda pulled out of our driveway. I was left to wonder what they were doing, and after a few wild musings that didn't make much sense, I settled on, "Are you birders?" "Yes" came the reply, and then they sighted him - a Black-backed Oriole – flying into our back yard. Struck by their enthusiasm, I invited them into our garage to catch a glimpse through the rear garage door window. Shortly thereafter Frank emerged with two beautiful photos of this rare bird – only once before seen in the wild in North America.

That's how it all began for Linda and me, and it still hasn't stopped. I cannot recall when I was so completely captivated by an event – by a community surrounding an event – as I have been by the arrival of this elegant, beautiful bird from Mexico and the swarm of enthusiastic, passionate birders who have flooded our driveway. They came – 1,685 of them so far – from nearby and from Florida, Canada, Maine, California, Texas, Minnesota, to name a few. They flew, drove, or walked – or a combination – braved the cold, rain, and wind. They carried binoculars, spotting scopes, and cameras. They came alone, with friends and family, and with their dogs. And each of them had a story to tell. But first they wanted to see "the bird."

"Is he here?" "When did you last see him?" "Where does he usually feed?" "What is he eating?" "Thank you so much for letting us stand in your driveway!" As they gathered they set up their tripods, mounted their scopes and cameras, talked among themselves, always watching, waiting, hoping – and then it happens. The sound a crowd of birders makes when the object of their collective desire arrives – unexpectedly, suddenly visible, in an instant making their effort worthwhile – is impossible to describe, but unforgettable.



Tom and Linda Binder display their Black-backed Oriole T-shirts.

The Black-backed Oriole is endemic to Central Mexico but is not known to migrate, so how did this stunning black, yellow-orange, and white bird end up in Lower Heidelberg Township, Berks County, Pennsylvania? No one knows, but I have heard many opinions. In the end, we will probably never know, but the question on everyone's mind in the serious birder community is whether this bird will be "accepted" by P.O.R.C – The Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee. Why does that

matter? It turns out it matters mostly to "listers," a special breed of birder who lives to accumulate an impressive list of birds seen or heard in the wild. Unless the bird has been accepted by the people (all volunteer bird-enthusiasts) charged with the responsibility to study this bird to determine whether it has occurred here "naturally," it doesn't count. But for most of the birders I have spoken with casually while they waited in my driveway to get a glimpse of this rarity, it doesn't matter. So who are these birders, and why did they come?

Birds are everywhere! And judging from my experience in the past few weeks, so are birders – people with a passion for watching, chasing, identifying, listening to, wondering about, falling in love with birds. And like the birds they love, they come in all shapes and sizes. Some are "eco-birders" (my term, not theirs) who drive a Prius because they are concerned about the "footprint" they leave on the earth when they travel, to those high-tech, driven "Big Year" types who have rare-bird alert apps on their smartphone and grab a plane to wherever, gear already pre-packed, when one is posted on eBird. Some are professional birders – ornithology professors, bird tour guides, birding association executives, wildlife preservationists. Others are ordinary people with ordinary work-a-day lives, who find in birding a much-needed escape into something meditative, spiritual, even magical, or just plain enjoyable. They are hikers who fell in love with the birds they encountered along the way; extreme athletes who found a new challenge chasing rare birds in mountains and dense forests; bird-geeks (affectionately) who find in birding endlessly complex and fascinating details to gather and organize.

And then there are people like Linda and me and the Hybkis, our neighbors across the street who first noticed this unusual oriole when it appeared on the feeder outside

their window one morning – people who live our busy lives without much noticing the birds around us except when they visit our backyard feeders. But then, suddenly, one little bird changes everything. In the space of three weeks, we have had a whole new world revealed to us, the world of birders and birding, which we have experienced through the grateful words, the generous gifts, the boundless enthusiasm of birders who, for reasons all their own, gathered in our driveway one day to get a brief, but awesome, glimpse of an amazing little bird! Until it happens to you, there is no way to understand what it's like to have a crowd of birders standing in your yard, talking among themselves, hearing and seeing birds everywhere! So far, those who have posted on the eBird site for this Black-backed Oriole Stakeout have identified 59 different bird species from our home! That's amazing! And infectious! And they eagerly shared their knowledge with everyone around them, sharing a look through their spotting scope or binoculars (it cost how much???), or details about the



Frank Haas photographed this very striking Black-backed Oriole at Sinking Spring.

bird's markings, coloring, or its call that allowed them to identify this Yellow-rumped Warbler or that White-breasted Nuthatch. Further, the people who have come, out of the goodness of their hearts, have donated over \$1,400 to support The Nature Conservancy and local birding organizations by stuffing whatever they could afford into a coffee can we set out for that purpose.

In return, we marched out coffee, freshly-baked pumpkin bread (thank you, Jan Slater), hotdogs and sauerkraut. We provided bathroom facilities, chairs, and blankets. We

helped the newly arrived to get oriented and wished those heading home – or off to the next birding spot – farewell. I'm quite sure our neighbors think we have lost our minds, and maybe we have. But something has surely changed. Now, at the crack of dawn, I find myself padding out in my slippers and pajamas, loaner-binoculars in hand, to try to get a glimpse of our new neighbor – BB, the Black-backed Oriole.

Bird On!

PSO Fall Meeting Set for September 15-17



Hold the dates of September 15-17, 2017, when the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) will be holding its annual meeting in Carlisle, Cumberland County. Birders from all over the state will gather for a time of great birding, making and renewing friendships, and an opportunity to increase their knowledge about the birds they find so fascinating! There is something for everyone!

Saturday and Sunday field trips will include, but not be limited to, birding the migrant rich ridges of the Michaux

State Forest (Cumberland and Franklin Counties), exploring the grounds of the former State Hospital and Wildwood Lake Park in Harrisburg (Dauphin County), venturing to Millers Gap and Little Buffalo State Park (Perry County), with a mix of history and birds on the battlefield of Gettysburg (Adams County), and the ever popular Hawkwatch at Waggoner's Gap at the height of the Broad-winged Hawk migration (Cumberland and Perry).

Speakers will include Ian Gardner on Friday evening, who will present "Fall Warbler Identification." Saturday afternoon Andy Wilson's topic will be "The Use of Drones in Bird Research" and Art McMorris will speak on "Peregrine Falcons in PA." Saturday evening our banquet speaker will be Ted Floyd, the editor of *Birding*, the American Birding Association's flagship publication.

Registration for the gathering will begin in May. More information will be posted on the listserv and on the PSO web site www.pabirds.org/Index.html closer to the time. I look forward to seeing you in September! Until then, good birding!

– Vern Gauthier

Sometimes It Pays to Stay Home!

By Vern and Janie Yutzy

On November 25, my wife Janie and her sister decided to drive to southern Lancaster County to look for the Tropical Kingbird. I stayed home to work in my office where I have a good view of the bird feeders.

Around mid-morning I noticed a larger, yellow bird with white wingbars eating black oil sunflower seeds at the feeder. I immediately began taking pictures. When Janie returned home, we looked at the photos and thought that it might be an oriole but couldn't imagine which one would be in Lancaster County in the late fall. Zach Millen confirmed that it was a first-year male Bullock's Oriole. Although we had seen the Bullock's in Texas in 2012, we never expected to see one in our front yard in Lititz.

We did not observe the oriole again until December 27, the morning after we had returned from spending Christmas in Colorado with our family. He came to the feeder several times that morning. We put out grape



Martin Stauffer photographed this Bullock's Oriole eating the homemade suet mix.



Martin Stauffer photographed this Bullock's Oriole at the Yutzy home.

jelly and oranges, but the oriole ignored them. We also filled a suet log, and the homemade suet quickly became his preferred food.

The Bullock's showed up again on December 28 and has been seen each day since then. He is at the feeder soon after daylight each morning and returns to the feeder periodically throughout the day. He is frequently observed in the maple tree in the front yard where he seems to like the sap. He is often observed chasing other birds from their perches in the tree. We have not heard him vocalize although someone has reported hearing his raspy call.

Our neighbor filled the suet log each day while we were on a birding trip in Costa Rica in January and again fed him while we were in Florida for several weeks. We have enjoyed welcoming persons who have come to see the oriole. With the Black-backed Oriole being relatively close by, some persons are choosing to make it a two-oriole day by stopping by to see the Bullock's as well.

According to eBird...

The top ten birding hotspots in Pennsylvania are:

Location	No. of Species	Location	No. of Species
1. Presque Isle SP (IBA)	316	6. Middle Creek WMA (Lancaster)	269
2. John Heinz NWR -impoundment	293	7. John Heinz NWR – wetlands (IBA)	268
3. Peace Valley Park (IBA)	290	8. Green Lane Reservoir (IBA)	266
4. Bald Eagle SP (IBA)	273	9. Conejohela Flats (IBA)	264
5. Yellow Creek SP (IBA)	273	10. Presque Isle – Gull Point	263

PA Birders Alert—Northern Goshawk Sightings Wanted

In 2016 the Ornithological Technical Committee of the Pennsylvania Biological Survey began a two-year initiative to collect data on nesting Northern Goshawks in Pennsylvania. From March through June 2017 we are seeking birdwatchers across Pennsylvania to assist in searching for and reporting sightings of goshawks. We need searchers to visit historical nest areas as well as large blocks of forest which serve as possible habitat.

If you would have a day or more to assist with goshawk searches, please contact Doug Gross at dogross@pa.gov, Laurie Goodrich at Goodrich@Hawkmountain.org (570-943-3411 x 106), or in the central counties, Margaret Brittingham (mxb21@psu.edu), as soon as possible. Late March to late May are great times to get out to look for this elusive bird!

If you are birding and encounter a goshawk or may have seen a nest, please report that sighting at [www.pabiologicalsurvey.org/goshawk/pa-goshawk-data-](http://www.pabiologicalsurvey.org/goshawk/pa-goshawk-data-form.pdf)

[form.pdf](http://www.pabiologicalsurvey.org/goshawk/pa-goshawk-data-form.pdf) or email a report to goshawk@psu.edu. Very soon we will have an online fillable form at the biological survey website to use for your reports. We also encourage everyone to take photos of possible nests or birds you see if you can, and to record (1) the location of sighting, using GPS coordinates if possible, (2) details of what was seen, (3) date, time, and habitat, and finally (4) your contact information (phone, email) so we can contact you if we have questions.

All locations of nests will be kept in a confidential database. If you have questions, please feel free to contact us.

Thank you!

Pennsylvania Northern Goshawk Project
Penn State University
goshawk@psu.edu

PSO Board of Directors Held Fall Meeting

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology Board of Directors met at Duffy's Tavern in Boalsburg on November 19, 2016, with 16 directors present for our fall meeting. We decided to include a recap of the board meeting minutes in the newsletter so that the general membership will be informed of the business that the board is conducting.

Frank Haas said that our finances remain pretty steady. We discussed the newsletter and decided to encourage members to receive the newsletter on line. We also discussed various options in the mailing of the newsletter.

A discussion of the *PA Birds* journal included Greg Grove's mentioning the unbelievable amount of work Geoff Malosh put into the journal. He also said that he is not yet ready to put the journal on line. To encourage grad students to contribute articles to the journal, a motion was made to provide one or two graduate students each year with a \$500 scholarship to conduct research on a bird associated with Pennsylvania. In return the grad student would be required to write an article for the journal summarizing his or her project.

The next annual meeting will be in Cumberland County on September 15, 16, 17, 2017. The banquet speaker will be Ted Floyd. A meeting T-shirt will be sold this year which will have to be pre-ordered at the time of registration.

The Conservation and Education committee is considering having a page on the website to inform others about conservation issues. Also, they decided to focus their education efforts on young birders. A new website is in the works and could be operational as early as March.

It was decided that inactive committees would be disbanded and new committees could be considered if someone has an idea or project in which he or she is willing to invest the time.

It was also mentioned that personal "evangelizing" and contact by PSO members with nonmembers may be more effective than just writing articles about PSO to encourage others to join.

– Roger Higbee, Secretary

The Raven Reporter

Tales of Discovery about Pennsylvania Birds



Osprey Is Officially Upgraded from Threatened to Protected

After receiving the report of the Wildlife Diversity Bird section in the August Working Group meeting, the PGC Board of Commissioners (BOC) made its decision official at the January public BOC meeting to upgrade the Osprey from Threatened to Protected status. As discussed in the September 2016 Raven Reporter column, the Osprey has met the criteria for delisting and no longer meets the definition of Pennsylvania Threatened. It is still protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and has great public support for protection.

The future of the Osprey looks very bright. The Osprey population of approximately 150 pairs actually is very clustered with over 10 nesting pairs in six different HUC6 watersheds. The clusters are centered around reservoirs, impounded sections of flowing rivers, swamps with open water, and dam complexes. The majority of Osprey nests are built on human-made structures whether or not they are intended for nesting birds. Ospreys are demonstrating an increased tolerance of human activities where they are not directly persecuted. As long as pollution prevention laws protect our water quality, Ospreys should benefit from the good fishing available. The PGC has many partners in Osprey conservation including power companies that provide nesting platforms and our sister agencies in state and federal government that protect Ospreys and promote nesting structures.

There will be an added measure of protection for Ospreys from direct persecution. The PGC BOC approved a heightened, \$2,500 replacement cost to be paid by anyone convicted of killing an Osprey in Pennsylvania, a penalty that serves to provide the species additional protection. The PGC staff will continue to monitor Osprey nests to ensure that this species does not regress toward endangerment. Birders are encouraged to include Osprey nesting areas in their eBird reports and keep an eye on the breeding Osprey population. We would love to see the "fish hawk" continue in its recovery. Like the Bald Eagle, it is a flagship species for quality aquatic habitats and a

symbol of quality wildlife habitat and the successes of wildlife management programs.

2017 Working Together for Wildlife Patch Supports Wildlife Diversity

The 2017 Working Together for Wildlife patch features the charming and popular Eastern Chipmunk. The "chippy" is a popular mammal of the eastern deciduous



forest and is widespread in our state. Chipmunks may be found in almost any visit to a state game land, a state park, or a state forest. We have several in our own backyard raiding our garden and our feeders.

They may be in hibernation in the cold winter months, but expect to see some poke their heads out of their den holes in late February or March. When they do emerge from hibernation, chipmunks are very comical and fun to watch; but they really are very territorial animals, fighting off intruders to their territories. Unlike many mammals, chipmunks are diurnal with most of their activity in mid-day.

They have an extensive vocal repertoire that any birder should get to know to avoid misidentifying this rodent as a bird. Of course, they "chip" as their name suggests, but they also utter a low "chuck" call, frequently misidentified as a songbird. Its "chip-trill" call is often given with a tail twitch when it is disturbed by hawk, cat, or perambulating human. Broad-winged Hawks, accipiters, owls, foxes, and cats often prey on chipmunks. On the other hand (or paw), chipmunks have a varied diet that includes many nuts, fruits, mushrooms, insects, earthworms, salamanders, and small snakes, as well as the contents of bird nests. Despite some of their predatory habits, it is hard not to like chipmunks.

Your purchase of a Working Together for Wildlife patch supports the Pennsylvania Game Commission's Wildlife Diversity program and its many projects. Some of the

projects conducted by the PGC Wildlife Diversity in the last few years include:

- Endangered and threatened species protection through research and management.
- The State Wildlife Action Plan implementation for Species of Greatest Conservation Need.
- Bald Eagle nest monitoring.
- Osprey nest monitoring and recovery.
- Peregrine Falcon monitoring, research, and eyrie protection.
- Colonial water bird monitoring and protection (including Great Egret, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and Great Blue Heron).
- Wetland bird monitoring and management including bitterns and rails.
- Rare beach bird monitoring and conservation including Piping Plover and Common Tern.
- Rare mountain forest bird monitoring, research, and protection including Blackpoll Warbler, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, and Swainson's Thrush.
- Golden-winged Warbler monitoring and management.
- Northern Goshawk monitoring and protection.
- Forest interior and peatland bird monitoring.
- Barn Owl conservation including banding, landowner support, and public education.
- Appalachian Bat Count, a citizen science project for all the bats.
- Bat hibernacula surveys including many declining bat species.
- Research on White Nose Syndrome in bats.
- Allegheny woodrat surveys and management.
- The Pennsylvania Mammal Atlas.
- Bat acoustic surveys.
- Water shrew surveys.
- Northern flying squirrel research and management.

Many of these projects involve volunteers who are greatly appreciated. We could not do our work with Wildlife Diversity species without "citizen scientists." Thank you so much for your considerable contributions.

Red-breasted Nuthatch and Other Boreal Bird Invasions

This winter was a good one for the cute, cone-loving boreal nuthatch, the Red-breasted. Many birders who documented their sightings in eBird showed that Red-breasted Nuthatches spread south quickly and thoroughly into the southeastern United States, much less the southern tier counties of Pennsylvania. From my own anecdotal observations, they seemed to depend almost entirely on the presence of seed cones, particularly Norway spruce. I checked many conifer stands and found Red-breasted Nuthatches only where there were many seed cones. They persisted where the cones persisted through the winter. After a few weeks my own population of Red-breasted Nuthatches visited the suet and seed feeders more frequently but could be counted on to check out the seed cones no matter what. They also forage on many other conifer seeds, including exotics like Scotch pine and the overlooked Virginia (scrub) pine. Let's be alert to Red-breasted Nuthatches staying and nesting in areas where they do not normally nest. With a big, local cone crop we could see some "hanging on," so to speak.

Yes, there were a few Evening Grosbeaks reported, but not as many as we hoped. David Yeany made some fine reports from the Yeany homestead in Marienville. David teamed up with Matt Webb of Powdermill Nature Reserve to capture and band some in the big woods of north-western Pennsylvania. As the media pointed out, the eastern population of this big-billed finch has declined by 97%. It would be great to find more Evening Grosbeaks in future winters and to attach some transmitters to a few so we can learn more about their movements and the origins of our Pennsylvania visitors.

A very few Pine Siskins also sneaked into northern Pennsylvania as the winter unfolded, but they were sparse and scattered this winter. With the lengthening days, the Pine Siskins also may stay to nest in a few well-provisioned woody yards and forests.

Northern Goshawk: Reports Needed for "the Ultimate Forest Raptor"

On behalf of the Pennsylvania Goshawk Project, a subcommittee of the Pennsylvania Biological Survey (PABS)/Ornithological Technical Committee and the PGC Wildlife Diversity section, I invite birders to contribute Northern Goshawk sightings to our research efforts. The state's birders have contributed a great deal to our knowledge of Northern Goshawk primarily through their reports to the two breeding bird atlas projects. The maps

of these two projects, separated by 25 years, seem to indicate a smaller population occupying less of the state than previously. The Northern Goshawk is one of the rarest nesting raptors in PA and notably elusive and secretive. So, we always wish for more information about the goshawk's range. For more information about the PABS goshawk committee, see the website, www.pabiologicalsurvey.org/goshawk. There you can find images and audio to aid identification as well as forms, instructions, and contact information.

The Northern Goshawk is a large accipiter that nests in the forests of North America, Europe, and Asia. They require large forest tracts in Pennsylvania, mostly at higher elevations. Goshawks begin nesting in early April through May and may be active when you are doing your spring migration birding or spring gobbler hunting. We have often called the goshawk the "ultimate forest raptor" because of its size and fierceness as a forest predator. Goshawks have a varied diet that includes large birds like turkey, grouse, crows, and woodpeckers, as well as medium-sized birds like jays, doves, and robins. They also prey on squirrels, rabbits, hares, and rodents of all sizes. Their nests are large stick constructions, often in a large tree, but can be difficult to see through the leaf and needle cover in the expansive canopy in which they are built. It is sometimes necessary to walk from tree to tree to check out the upper limbs of each one to find a nest. They also betray their presence with plucking perches and "kill stumps" including logs where they pluck or dismember their prey. Finding a pile of feathers and fur could be an important clue to the presence of goshawks nesting nearby. Goshawks demonstrate remarkable site fidelity and persist for many years at locations with good habitat and prey populations. They often nest within a few hundred feet of a previous nest in the same tree stand.

Although they can aggressively defend their nests, goshawks are very secretive and difficult to detect during the nesting season. It is helpful to start searches early in the morning and to know their vocalizations. Many of my observations have depended on my hearing their loud, rhythmic "kak" alarm calling or the wail call. They can be confused with the sounds made by other hawks and large



Doug Gross photographed this Northern Goshawk nest.



Wayne Laubscher found this very cooperative "ultimate forest raptor."

woodpeckers, so it is good to study the vocalizations.

The Northern Goshawk is now considered a "Near Threatened" species by the OTC, a small step from "Threatened." It has never been common in the state and is mostly confined to the larger forest blocks including the Allegheny National Forest, the Black Forest of Potter County, the North Mountain, and a few areas in the Seven Mountains and Pocono regions. During the first Atlas some were reported along the Kittatinny Ridge and in other forested blocks in the southern counties. And, there were more goshawks reported in the Pocono region than during the second Atlas. Basically, in the second Atlas there were few reports south of I-80 and east of I-81. Do these differences reflect a real change in goshawk population and range or just a lack of reports of an elusive species in some parts of the state with less coverage by birders in the deep woods? We all know that falconers will rarely reveal the

location of a nest that they have worked hard to find for their own source of goshawk nestlings, and the birders that know of a goshawk nest consider it confidential information to avoid disturbance of the birds. So, it is a challenge for researchers and conservationists to obtain the site information necessary to study the birds and to protect them. We need to overcome these challenges to have a chance with goshawk conservation in our state.

One of the pertinent questions for anyone interested in Northern Goshawks is what are the limiting factors for this raptor in the state? Or, why are there not more goshawks nesting in more areas than currently known? A partial list of possible reasons for goshawk territory abandonment and range contraction includes: 1. forest fragmentation, 2. human development (residential, energy, road-building), 3. timbering activities, 4. tree pests and diseases (e.g. hemlock woolly adelgid, gypsy moth infestations), 5. West Nile virus and other diseases, 6. nest predation increase (fishers, Great Horned Owls), 7. human disturbance (hikers, vehicles, falconers, birders, photographers), 8. winter and spring weather patterns (snow & ice cover, precipitation totals), 9. falconer take of nestlings, 10. direct persecution of goshawks (shooting,

(continued on page 12)

The Ups and Downs of Snowy Owl Hosting

by Diane Davis

I live on a farm near LeRaysville, PA. My family was fortunate this year to have a Snowy Owl visit us for two months. I'd like to tell you about my experience.

Near the end of December, I was driving home from a meeting. The snow was flying around, and it was very windy. Suddenly I saw an owl watching me from the yellow shed across the road. He seemed very big and sat proudly on the corner as if he owned the joint. "Crazy owl," I thought, "what are YOU doing out in this storm?" It was dark, so I couldn't make out any coloring, but I didn't think anything of it because we're on a farm and there are always lots of birds around. Little did I know....

A couple of days later, we saw people in cars and trucks pull up and stop. They had big expensive cameras and were taking pictures of what we thought was the land. Our family thought "Why are they photographing the land?" Little did we know....

Then more members of my family arrived. I was getting ready to leave for a meeting, and they stopped me. "Look at that snowy white owl! He's from the Arctic!" So of course, we all went down into the field to take a look. I'm sure the photographers were horrified, but we didn't know any better. Now we do.

The owl stayed on the roof of the yellow shed where it sat, watching us (probably wondering what we were and why we were in that field looking at him). Then he gracefully flew over to a tree in the field and perched on a branch. All the photographers raced to their cars and backed up their vehicles so they could get "better shots."

When I came home, sure enough, that beautiful Snowy Owl was perched back on the roof. I was able to get a few photos, and then more photographers came. I decided to go down in the field again, but this time I was told not to go down. I thought to myself, "I live here; it's my field; I can go down if I want." Little did I know....

Well, the photographers kept coming and news of our little Snowy Owl spread like wildfire. WNEP news came on a cold day and interviewed my cousin's son and some of the photographers, including the one who "found" the



This beautiful Snowy Owl spent a good portion of the winter in Bradford County.

Photo by Wayne Laubscher

catch a mole or a vole. Sometimes he'd wake up and take a little walk around, so people could admire his back as well as his front.

Our family was fortunate enough to connect with Wayne Laubscher in the beginning of this experience. He came and talked to all of us about the ins and outs of Snowy Owls. We learned about Project Snowstorm and about how the Snowy Owls are involved in it. Wayne warned us about people possibly baiting the owl, trying to get close to get better pictures, and about falconers who might try to catch the owl for their own purposes. We were told that the main thing is not to stress the owl. (Of course, it wasn't mentioned that the host family could become stressed, too!) Wayne said that he would put us in contact with Scott Weidensaul from Project Snowstorm and they would try to trap the owl if we all agreed. Of course, we did. We thought it would be great if a transmitter could be put on him to track his whereabouts.

A few weeks later, the day arrived. Scott had planned to arrive in the late afternoon, so there wouldn't be a crowd present as he felt it would be easier to catch the owl without a lot of people around. "Brick," as my great niece had named him, performed to his utmost. We saw him in the morning, so I contacted Scott to tell him that he was still there. In the afternoon, when Scott arrived, he came to the house and talked to my mom and me about the traps he was going to use and left a walkie-talkie so we could be part of the experience. Scott proceeded to go down into the field with his traps. He set one up, then the owl decided that it was time to eat.. However, it was not the pigeon in the trap that interested him but a vole. So Scott set up a second trap with more pigeons in it. Apparently

owl. Of course, according to the owl, he was never lost, he just came for a visit.

The owl thoroughly enjoyed himself. There were many moles and voles to catch and eat. He had quite the personality. He would find a place to settle and take a little owl nap. However, when a car pulled up (this was more in the beginning), he would straighten himself up and ruffle his feathers as if to say, "I have people. I must pose." Then, if whoever was watching him was fortunate, he might even take a little flight and

that was more to Brick's liking, because all at once, Wayne yelled, "Here he comes!" The first time he missed both being caught and the pigeons as well; but the second time the bal-chatri trap did its job and caught him on his foot. I saw his wings flutter from our front window and called Scott on the walkie-talkie, "What's happening???" He said very happily, "We've got an owl, and it's a boy!"



Wayne Laubscher poses with "Brick," the Bradford County Snowy Owl.

Scott talked to the people who were present about the owl. He let them all get a close look at him and then brought him up to our house, where he measured to see if Brick was big enough for a transmitter. In the garage, along with my family were Scott and Wayne, Wayne's driver, and my cousin's son's friend, who also lives on the farm. We all got to pet Brick, and then he was measured and photographed. However, Brick was too small for a transmitter. He will always be our special owl. He was banded, so now if he is caught again, he might be large enough for a transmitter. When it was time to release him, Scott asked my mom if she would help and she gladly said she would. So we all walked down to the road. Mom and Scott each grabbed a leg and tossed Brick into the air. He sailed gracefully away to check out the fields for more mice and voles.

Brick stayed for a few weeks more after he was banded. We were afraid that he would leave that night, but the next morning, he was right back on the electric pole. He tended to stay farther from the road after he was banded. I think he got a little leery of the people then, but he still posed and straightened himself up when people came by.

This was a very magical experience for all of us. Just seeing the Snowy Owl was a gift. Watching him gracefully soar across the land to catch a vole and to

return with it to a perch is something that I will never forget. Those beautiful wings and the agility were wonders to view! And the way he strutted around when he was on the ground! Another of my favorite memories is the day that he hunted in the field next to our house. It was a sight to behold. I loved his beautiful eyes, and how he would turn his head almost completely around. Such a lot of personality for a little bird!



Scott Weidensaul talks to the people who were present about the owl after he was banded.

One of the biggest lessons that I learned was how peaceful the owl could be. Most of the photographers and visitors were very good about not trying to go near the owl to get "the best picture." I would like to stress to the photographers that it's not YOUR land. If people who live in the houses, suddenly go onto the land to get a better view, don't yell at them. It might be their first time to experience this, and they don't know any better. Secondly, please respect the land and people who live there. This farm has been in our family for more than 100 years, and while we were glad to

have people taking pictures, we really didn't want people going into the fields. Thirdly, please remember that other people live on the road, so please don't block traffic. Unfortunately during Brick's stay, we had a snowstorm, and the plow had to dodge the photographers at one point. And most of all, please don't bait the owl or use squeakers to try to get the owl to come near. The Snowy Owl came here to feed and to get a little rest, and it was important that he did. We were very fortunate in that, for the most part, people did show respect. It was very interesting talking to the photographers and seeing all their cameras and the pictures that they had taken. Our family truly appreciates all the pictures that we were given. We were fortunate that the owl decided to stay as long as he did. It proves to me that Brick enjoyed his stay as much as we did!

The Raven Reporter – Northern Goshawk: Reports Needed for “the Ultimate Forest Raptor”

(continued from page 9)

nest destruction). Some of these potential factors certainly overlap. By gathering more information about goshawk nesting territories past and present, we may be able to figure out the most important factors on which goshawk conservation can concentrate.

Any report sent in to the PABS goshawk page (the “PA Goshawk Project”) or the PGC Wildlife Diversity anonymous goshawk e-mail account *will be kept confidential*. The driving force behind this effort is that we cannot protect a goshawk nest if we do not know where it is. We suspect that goshawk nests are lost simply through human interference or habitat destruction that could be prevented with seasonal or permanent protections on the location, especially on government property. The members of the PA Goshawk Project are listed on the PABS goshawk website. This committee includes researchers, birders, government agency biologists, and some falconers interested in goshawk conservation. Penn State, Allegheny National Forest, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, PSO, the Pennsylvania Hawk and Falcon Trust, DCNR, and PGC have joined together through the OTC in this effort.

Any report about goshawk breeding activity or nesting should include details about the location including the coordinates of the observation. In the “old days” much

goshawk research was done with map and compass without the advantage of modern technology. Now it is much easier. With GPS units and smartphones with geolocation applications (like Google Maps), there should be adequate means to document the necessary information about the sighting. It is helpful to use the convenient Atlas breeding codes, but describing the field marks for identification and behavior notes to determine breeding status, including photos, are helpful.

Goshawk reports can be e-mailed to goshawk@psu.edu or sent by postal mail to Goshawks, c/o Dr. Margaret Brittingham, OTC Chair, Wildlife Resources, 409 Forest Res. Bldg., Penn State University, State College, PA 16802. Phone reports may be made to Laurie Goodrich of the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary at: 570-943-3411x106. Website: www.pabiologicalsurvey.org/goshawk. And, goshawk observations on State Game Lands should be sent to pgcgoshawk@pa.gov.

Good Pennsylvania and World Birding!

Doug Gross
Endangered and Non-game Bird Section Supervisor
106 Winters Road, Orangeville, PA 17859

PA Game Commission, dogross@pa.gov

Certificates of Appreciation Awarded

The following persons have received Certificates of Appreciation since November 2016 for allowing birders onto their properties to view rarities:

Tom & Linda Binder
Brennan Coates
Diane Davis
Georgia and John Garbini
Sue and Richard Hybki
Michael Kovach, Walnut Hill Farm
Mike and Jan Slater
Southeast Chester County Refuse Authority

Lisa and Doug Strouse
Delmas and Ruth Witmer and Family
The Yeany Family
Katie Yelinek
Janie and LaVern Yutky

Berks Co.
Bradford Co.
Bradford Co.
Berks Co.
Berks Co.
Mercer Co.
Berks Co.
Chester Co.

Lycoming Co.
Lancaster Co.
Forest Co.
Columbia Co.
Lancaster Co.

Black-backed Oriole
Snowy Owl
Snowy Owl
Rufous Hummingbird
Black-backed Oriole
Cattle Egret
Rufous Hummingbird
Iceland, Glaucous, and
other gull species
Rufous Hummingbird
Rufous Hummingbird
Evening Grosbeak
Townsend’s Warbler
Bullock’s Oriole

Welcome, New Members!

The following members have joined PSO since November 2016:

Tina Alianiello, Cresson, PA
Paul Brown, Pittsburgh, PA
Jane Earle, Mechanicsburg, PA
Julia Ecklar, Trafford, PA
Kathleen Epler, Blandon, PA
Arlene Gmitter, Connellsville, PA
Amanda Kavitt, Bethlehem, PA
Scott Keys, Allentown, PA
Aaron Lapp, Rebersburg, PA
Keith Lutz, Robesonia, PA
Lauren Nagoda, Heidelberg, PA
Laura Palmer, Altoona, PA
Steve Pinkerton, Williamsport, PA
Kevin Raymond, Stevensville, PA
Ramona Sahni, Pittsburgh, PA
Joe Southerton, Lewisburg, PA
Fred Stiner, Williamsport, PA
Patricia Verbovszky, West Chester, PA

PSO Quiz

(Answers on Page 16)

How well do you know your Pennsylvania birds? These are proposals to the American Ornithological Society's official checklist of North American birds. The first three could affect the number of species on our state list.

1. For the second consecutive year, two coveted winter visitors from the north are proposed for merging into a single species. Which two?
2. Two shorebirds whose subspecies identification is sometimes confused could be split into separate species. Which two?
3. Two warbler species formerly merged as one species are suggested for separation into eastern and western species again. Which two?
4. The English name of a familiar migrant is proposed to change from Ring-necked Duck to what name?
5. A wood-warbler that does not look like or sound like a wood-warbler is suggested for separation from the wood-warblers into its own unique family. Which species?

It's Rusty Time

Reminder: It's time to start looking for Rusty Blackbirds. When you see them, please enter your sightings on eBird.

Electronic or Printed Newsletter?

If you are now receiving a printed copy of "The PSO Pileated" and would prefer to receive it on line, please notify Frank Haas at fchaas@pabirds.org.

The Genius of Birds

A Book Review by Tom Glover

The Genius of Birds by Jennifer Ackerman, was published in the spring of 2016 by the Penguin Press, New York, New York.

“For a long time, the knock on birds was that they’re stupid. Beady eyed and nut brained. Reptiles with wings. Pigeon heads. Turkeys. They fly into windows, peck at their reflections, buzz into power lines, blunder into extinction.”

The above is a quote from the very first paragraph in the introduction of Ackerman’s book. She starts out with all the negative reflections directed toward birds, all summed up with the expression “bird brain.” But she quickly turns to the facts that different bird species are capable of mental feats comparable to those found in primates. And she goes into birds’ capabilities that surpass those of humans.

Ackerman divided her book into eight chapters. Each chapter covers different aspects about birds’ behavior and physical makeup. Chapter 1 starts with Betty and 007, New Caledonian Crows, that not only used tools in solving complex problems but created tools to aid them in the retrieval of food like nice juicy grubs. And she noted that further research into these birds in the wild showed that young New Caledonian Crows learned how to make tools from their elders. Chapter 8 begins with how the nondescript House Sparrow has spread everywhere in the world except for Antarctica. Before 1850 you would not have found a House Sparrow in the New World. Now they number in the millions, all from a few introduced in the New York City area. This bird was thought to hitch a ride with humans starting 10,000 years ago with the advent of agriculture. House Sparrows can quickly adapt to new environments and the changing environments created by man.

She is not afraid to compare birds to us humans. Yes, we have skills that birds do not possess, but birds have behaviors that we struggle to understand. The author in Chapter 7 goes into great detail on research and theories on how birds navigate over long distances. One interesting note that I found was her review of how the hippocampus (part of bird’s brain) played in the navigation of different species. It appears that birds with exceptional navigation skills, like homing pigeons and those that make long migrations, have larger hippocampi. As a sidebar she also gave examples on how the hippocampus played a role in human ability to navigate. She used the example of how studies were done on

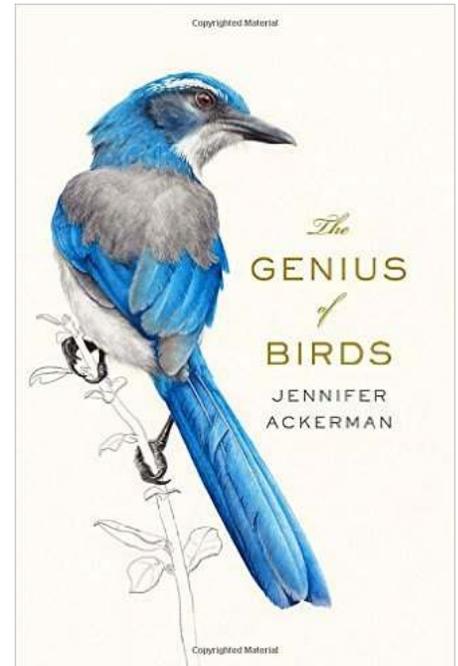
cabbies in London, England. It was found that as they learned to navigate the streets of London over the years, the gray matter of their hippocampi increased with experience. Now here is one for all you who depend on GPS units for navigation.

Ackerman cites a study by researchers at McGill University.

They found by using brain scans that older adults who relied on GPS units had less gray matter in their hippocampi than those older adults who navigate on their own. And as a further note, those who were not GPS dependent showed less overall cognitive impairment compared to those GPS dependent for navigation.

The book’s main theme is the genius of birds supported by numerous literature sightings on bird research and anecdotal observations. But she also intertwines the storyline with her own birding experiences and that of others. The birder in me found this refreshing. But the scientist in me was also satisfied by her detailed inspection of bird behavior supported by numerous publications. The book is an excellent summary of past and recent research into bird behavior. It gives the reader a glimpse into the world of bird research. She provides the reader with a wealth of cited resources for further study. For me personally, I found her coverage of Black-capped Chickadees fascinating. These little birds that we hand feed at Blue Spruce County Park in Indiana County have a complex interacting behavior that warrants more investigation.

In summary, as you can see, I found the book of great interest that has given me new insights into different bird species’ behaviors. It has also provided me with new talking points about birds. We all need new talking points when it comes to birds. So I highly recommend *The Genius of Birds* by Jennifer Ackerman.



Call for Applications

Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology Student Research Grant

Deadline: Friday, 24 March 2016

Decision: Awardees will be notified by 22 April 2016 (Earth Day)

This is the first year that the PSO is sponsoring one or two \$500 student research grants, in support of research on Pennsylvania's avifauna. We hope to make this an annual PSO activity. We invite anyone to pass this news along to students involved in research, as well as to any professors who could share this announcement with their students.

If selected, the student must travel to the PSO Annual Meeting to give a talk (~30 minutes) about his/her work, AND/OR the student must submit an article to the *Pennsylvania Birds* journal, not more than two years after the granting of the award of the grant, describing the study and findings for the PSO membership. The recipient will also be awarded a one-year membership in the PSO.

Eligibility

The award is designed to provide support to either graduate or undergraduate students in pursuit of a bachelor's degree, master's degree, or doctorate. The research should be conducted in support of a thesis or dissertation and should eventually be published. The student's academic institution does not need to be located in Pennsylvania. The field work does not need to occur in the Commonwealth; however, there is a preference for projects with a Pennsylvania field work component.

Criteria

Proposals will be judged for their scientific merit and the likelihood that the work will make a meaningful contribution to our understanding of Pennsylvania avifauna.

Submissions must include the name of the student's academic institution, the degree the student is pursuing, the corresponding department at the institution, and the name of the academic or research advisor. If the student has a thesis or dissertation committee, each committee member should be listed with corresponding title and institution.

Research Proposal Document

The body of the proposal should be a condensed version of the student's thesis/dissertation proposal, not to exceed 5 pages in length (not including any figures or tables). Please note whether "Institutional Animal Care & Use Committee" approval has been or will be obtained.

Each proposal should include a section on how the results of the proposed study could be helpful to future scientific understanding, conservation efforts, and/or land management implications.

Signed Letter Indicating Student's Advisor's Approval

In addition to the proposal document, each submission should include a brief, signed letter from the student's academic advisor verifying that the applicant is a student in good standing, and that he/she is receiving the advisor's support for the proposed project.

Submission Guidelines

Submissions will be evaluated by a committee of PSO trustees. Submissions must be sent as PDF email attachments by Friday, 24 March 2016. Please send submissions or questions to Andy McGann, at andrew.mcgann@gmail.com.

Answers to Bird Quiz

(page 13)

1. Common Redpoll and Hoary Redpoll
2. Eastern and Western Willet
3. Myrtle Warbler and Audubon's Warbler
4. Ring-billed Duck
5. Yellow-breasted Chat



Maybe you were there waiting for the arrival of the Black-backed Oriole.

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
Narvon, PA 17555-9730	Sustaining	\$ 45.00
	Student	\$ 25.00
	Electronic Student	\$ 10.00

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