

The

PSO Pileated



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The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

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From the President's Desk....

Even as I type these words in late January, the daylight hours are lengthening, temperatures are moderating, and the male chickadees visiting my feeders are adding territorial songs to their “chick-a-dee-dee” calls. The latitude at which the sun’s rays directly hit earth is moving north toward the Tropic of Cancer, wintering avian migrants are feeling *Zugunruhe*, birders are experiencing *Vorfreude*, and it is almost time to *Gökotta*. OK, OK, a linguist I am not, and the previous sentence is a blending of English, German, and Swedish. Chalk it up to my excitement that spring is coming.



Donald Kroodsma wrote, “Somewhere, always, the sun is rising, and somewhere, always, the birds are singing.”

Photo by Evan Mann

The first word is a fun one that I expect many of you already know. Migratory restlessness is the classic translation of the German word, *Zugunruhe*. It is a compound word comprised of *Zug* (to move) and *Unruhe* (restlessness) and describes avian responses to the changing seasons. The term was coined in the 1950s by the German ornithologist, Gustav Kramer. He had noted that caged birds fluttered in their confines at dusk in spring and fall, times when they would be migrating in the wild. Researchers found that these responses could be easily studied by manipulating the birds’ exposure to light. Scientific literature contains some fascinating experimental studies of avian response to photoperiod changes. If you are curious to learn more, consider taking a look at *The Migration Ecology of Birds* by Ian Newton, 2007. You may want to borrow this 400-page tome from your local college library to avoid the purchase price! So

if you will allow me poetic license, songbirds in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America are restlessly doing some “Pennsylvania dream-ing” as you read this.

Vorfreude is one of those lovely foreign words that is rich in meaning and is impossible to express in a single English word. A sense of the term is “the joyful, intense anticipation that comes from imagining future pleasure.” For those of us who relish the sight and sound of spring birds, this feeling is a familiar one. As warming temperatures awaken dormant plants and animals, nature begins the

process of annual renewal. With the melting away of snow and that scent of the thawing of autumn’s detritus, there comes a renewal of the spirit and an urge to take it all in to enjoy the passage of the season. The progression of the calendar can be marked by the return of our birds. The first to arrive are the nomadic migrants who went just far enough south to secure a winter food supply. Next the temperate migrants who have been wintering in Florida and the deep South arrive. Finally the neotropical species that have traveled vast distances, many over miles of open water, sometimes through perilous weather fronts, return to their preferred nesting grounds in our state. I have this fanciful way of expressing my own *Vorfreude*. It goes like this: “When birders get to heaven, there may be calendars, but as they leaf through the pages each will say “May.” My final language journey takes us to Scandinavia for *Gökotta*, a Swedish word, which essentially means “to rise at dawn in order to go out to listen to the birds sing.” Again, knowing that I am preaching to the choir, you

already know about dawn chorus. The quietude of first light is an ideal time for male songbirds to begin to advertise their availability to females and to alert other males that they need not consider this particular territory. This spring be sure to follow a flashlight's illumination through a dark forest landscape to a log suitable for seated serenity and await the chorus. It is an anthem that precedes us by eons and music that we hope will always succeed us into the future. As the earth endlessly continues its twenty-four hour rotation, it is also this very music that never ceases. When my own spirit needs some

first light, I try to recall these words of a preeminent authority on bird vocalization, Donald Kroodsma: "Somewhere, always, the sun is rising, and somewhere, always, the birds are singing."

Spring is upon us! Relish it! Think of a friend who will appreciate the symphony of the birds as much as you do, and invite him or her to join you as you *Gökotta* this spring!

Evan Mann, President
Susquehanna County

PSO to No Longer Sponsor PAMC

Travel back with me 50 years to the year 1970. I was then a boy of 11 years old who had a keen fascination with birds but did not know anyone else who was interested in them. I also wanted to take part in a Christmas Bird Count (CBC) more than anything but did not know of one in my home town. It would not be until many years later that I would find out that ironically, a CBC was begun in my home town of Lakeville, MA, in 1970 that has taken place ever since. Back in those days you had to be connected to someone involved with the count or see the small annual announcement in the local newspaper.

Travel ahead with me from there 35 years to the year 2005. I had been living in the small rural town of Newville, PA, for three years and decided it was time I find a local CBC. By this time with the advent of the internet, I looked online and found the Audubon website which informed me that there was indeed a local CBC and provided the email address and phone number of the compiler. As it turns out the compiler lived only one mile from me, but until that time I did not know he or any other birder existed in Cumberland County. How times had changed.

For better or worse, technology has changed how the world communicates and processes information including the birding world. In the past, one found out about rarities and vagrants by word of mouth, on the phone by calling to listen to a recorded message on a rare bird hot line, or maybe you would read about it in a journal three months after the fact. Today there are instantaneous alerts on all sorts of social media platforms, email alerts as found on the PA Birds list serve, and eBird alerts. Speaking of eBird, it too has changed the birding world. The existential question used to be, "If a tree falls in the woods and no one is there to hear it, did it really fall?" Now it is, "If you see a bird and did not report it on eBird, did you really see it?"

While the annual CBC is the longest running Citizen Science project, eBird now gathers more retrievable

information on birds on a yearly basis than any other platform. Since it came on line 17 years ago, eBird has continued to grow. According to eBird, "There are now more than 500,000 eBirders who have contributed sightings from out their windows, on the way to work, or at visits to parks, ponds, and fields and have collected more than 737 million bird observations." More than 5,200,000 people visited the eBird website in 2019, with 100,000 people downloading raw eBird data for analysis, with researchers publishing 58 peer-reviewed publications during the course of the year that incorporated eBird data. This brought the the total number of peer-reviewed publications using eBird data to over 300.

<https://ebird.org/news/ebird-2019-year-in-review>

Travel back with me now to May 9, 1992, when eBird wasn't even a gleam in the mind of a Cornell ornithologist. This was also the date of the first annual Pennsylvania Migration Count (PAMC). Despite bad weather across the state, 141 observers from 10 counties put in 718 hours, identified 182 species, and reported 34,497 individuals. (Iliff, M. 1992, Report on the First Pennsylvania Migration Count — May 9, 1992, *PA Birds*, 6 (2) 58-64.) I took part in my first PAMC in the spring of 2006 by which time it had grown tremendously with 900 total participants across the state, logging 3,087 hours, and reporting 215,295 birds. (<http://www.pabirds.org/pamc/PAMC2006.pdf>). Over time, however, with the advances in technology, fewer and fewer people took part in the PAMC, and the standardization of the count protocol from county to county also declined. The "snapshot" of spring migration from year to year was being carried by fewer people reporting less data, with less consistency of that data. Compare this with eBird's "Global Big Day" on May 4, 2019, which reported 229 species, with 2,168 checklists from 66 of the 67 PA counties. The reality is that eBird can gather more data more easily, making it accessible to any researcher in the world to aid in research. The PAMC data, while available on the PSO website, is dwarfed by the amount of data that is available to the

researcher. Furthermore, researchers looking for data on eBird have available to them, not just information from Pennsylvania, but each of the 50 states and an increasing number of countries around the world. Also the PAMC is more labor intensive as it took a small army of compilers from across the state to compile and report the data which eBird does automati-cally. The reality is that an increasing amount of the data used for PAMC reports was being retrieved from eBird rather than from county compilers.

Yes, some can't or won't use eBird, so their data will not be included in counts which use eBird to record their data, but for the reasons given in the previous paragraph, this is increasingly difficult to avoid. Individuals or local bird clubs and Audubon chapters can still keep track of their own data as was done in the past, keeping a local record of species and changes in populations. There is some value in this, but the downside is that this local data is not readily available to be used by others beyond that community, thus limiting its value. For these reasons, the PSO Board of Directors at its January meeting, on the recommendation of the PSO Citizen Science Committee, decided to stop its sponsorship and coordination of the PAMC. We on the board are grateful to the participants who over the years have spent many hours in the field in all types of weather conditions gathering data. A special thanks to the county compilers who spent hours upon hours tabulating and reporting the data as well. A record of the data from PAMCs will continue to be available in back issues of

the *PA Birds* journal which is also available online at the PSO website and through birding groups that have kept local records of past counts as well.

Just because PSO is no longer organizing the event does not mean local bird clubs and Audubon chapters cannot continue to carry on the tradition of the PAMC locally. It is hoped by the PSO board that if you do, as many people involved as possible report their birds on eBird to maximize the usefulness of the data. In place of the PAMC, you could also choose to take part in the eBird Global Big Day in May and October, and the First Annual Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation in June, where you will not only have the opportunity to add PA breeding bird data to eBird but also raise funds for some important PA conservation projects. The Citizen Science Committee will also publicize other counts and projects in which PA birders can participate, in regards to particular species or locations in the state.

Birding, like the rest of the world, is changing. Some changes we will like; others we might not be too crazy about. Whatever the changes and however fast they come, PSO pledges to continue to work with PA birders to foster the study and appreciation of the wild birds of Pennsylvania and to promote the conservation of birds and their habitats.

Vern Gauthier, PSO Board

PSO Pileated Quiz

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

1. Which of the three jaeger species most recently joined the state list?
2. Which owl species has only two confirmed records in the state, one in 1896 and one in 2001?
3. Which species in the *Corvidae* family was reported in at least five counties but never confirmed for the state list?
4. Which wren species was said to be "a common breeder" in Fayette and Greene counties but has long been extirpated from the state?
5. Which kingbird from much farther south joined the state list from Chester County in 2004?

Answers on page 14.

A Note from Bob Ross

Friends at PSO and PSU,

This is just a note to let you know that my book, *Birds of the Whitewater River, Southern California: A Disturbed Environment*, is now published (with the help of Greg Grove and Nick Bolgiano recommending a very capable publishing consultant) and available (see website below article on page 12). I am happy to have completed something definitive of this kind of professional contribution on birds. See you all at meetings and on the trail!

Of tech. committee infamy, and now snowbird,

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BREEDING BIRD BLITZ FOR CONSERVATION

(B4C)



1. When is the B4C?

The B4C is being held Friday, June 12, through Monday, June 15, and is being sponsored by the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) and our partners.

2. What is the B4C?

The B4C is part contest, part fundraiser. Teams of birders across PA will compete to find the most birds in different categories. It is a fundraiser for three of PSO's partner conservation organizations (Hawk Mountain, The Manada Conservancy, and the Western PA Conservancy) that preserve habitat vital to the preservation of PA bird species.

3. How do teams compete?

Teams are formed of two or more people. Team composition may vary on different days as long as B4C rules are followed. Teams go birding on one or more days of the B4C identifying all the birds they can in a particular county or region of PA. They then submit checklists to the B4C to see how they did in comparison to other birders in the same region and across the state.

4. What are the categories of the competition?

The competition includes Low Carbon and Youth Teams, County and Regional Teams, Teams that find the most of our 2020 Mascot Birds – the Wood Thrush and Northern Harrier – and in raising the most funds for conservation.

5. What is the funding goal of the B4C?

The B4C looks to raise at least \$3,000 to be split evenly between our three Conservation Partners. PSO is covering the administrative cost of each donation to ensure that 100% of money donated goes to our partner organizations and to preserving habitat vital to our birds and other wildlife.

6. How can I participate in the B4C?

You can participate in a number of ways:

- a. Form a team and participate on one or more of the days of the B4C reporting the birds you identify to eBird. Doing this helps to provide valuable data on the breeding population of PA birds.
- b. Teams also help by having people sponsor them to raise conservation funds for PSO's three partner conservation organizations.
- c. Donate money in support of a team by either giving a direct donation to a team member or by going to the B4C website www.breedingbirdblitz.com and making a donation there.

7. How can I find out more about the B4C?

You can find out more about the B4C by reading the article on pages 5-7 or going to www.breedingbirdblitz.com.

If you have a specific question, you can email blitz4conservation@gmail.com.

THE FIRST ANNUAL BREEDING BIRD BLITZ FOR CONSERVATION (B4C)

It is well known by birders that our bird populations in the United States, like many places in the world, have been in steep decline. In 2019, what has been known to birders became known to the general public as well: 25% of our birds have disappeared from North America since 1970. That is almost a three billion plunge in the overall North American bird population in the last 50 years! There have been many reasons for this, with one of the main reasons being habitat loss.

In an effort to help turn this trend around, the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) has created the first annual Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation (B4C). The B4C is about conserving habitat for our beloved birds.

This is our first attempt at such an endeavor, and our success depends on birders like you. We hope you will dedicate one or more days during the B4C to observe and count birds from **Friday, June 12, through Monday, June 15**. Before, during, and after the Blitz, take time to get pledges and donations. Help us show the conservation community that birders are not just all about the “act” of birding, but that we also care enough to raise funds to protect bird habitat. PSO is covering all administrative fees associated with B4C donations, so 100% of your donations will go to actual land conservation.

You can get more information and register for the B4C at www.breedingbirdblitz.com. Let's work together to preserve all our Pennsylvania birds.

Our Partners

PSO will partner with Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, and the Manada Conservancy. All three organizations protect natural habitats through land purchases, donations, and conservation easements and have agreed to utilize the donations from the B4C to protect bird habitat. Two of the organizations are directly tied to the Kittatinny Ridge, a global IBA that spans more than 185 miles in our state – from the Delaware River to the Mason-Dixon Line. The Ridge spans 12 counties and stretches across more than 360,000 acres of Pennsylvania. Both the Manada Conservancy and Hawk Mountain are effective members of the Kittatinny Ridge Coalition, a consortium of government and non-profits that work together to protect farmland, forests, and other natural areas in the Kittatinny Ridge

Corridor. Not only is the Ridge important bird habitat, but it also serves as a key ridge for migrating raptors and songbirds.

Hawk Mountain will earmark the B4C funds for Northern Harrier habitat protection, while the Manada Conservancy and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy will protect Wood Thrush habitat. Each of these conservancies depends on private donations for their conservation work. Funds raised by the B4C will be split equally between Hawk Mountain, the Manada Conservancy, and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

Our Flagship Birds

The B4C has identified two flagship birds whose populations are declining in Pennsylvania: Northern Harrier and Wood Thrush. Both species are listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the 2015 Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan.

Northern Harrier (*Circus hudsonius*) has the state legal status of Threatened due to loss of breeding habitat and declining populations, including a 43% decrease in breeding range based on PA Breeding Bird Atlases. Their dependency on extensive, open, grassy fields and low

shrub wetlands makes them scarce in Pennsylvania. Harriers are a slender bird with a long tail and distinctive white rump patch that make them easy to identify as they glide low over open fields. The silvery gray adult males are often called Gray Ghosts, while the adult females (shown on the artwork on page 4) are brown above and lighter below. Juveniles are darker brown above with cinnamon undersides. Northern Harriers have an owl-like facial disk that allows them to hunt by sound and sight. They hunt on the wing, flying in a slight dihedral to help with stability, as they soar back and forth over fields, searching for small mammals and birds. In Pennsylvania, reclaimed strip mines provide the largest expanses of suitable habitat and are the best areas to document this species since many wetlands and old fields have been lost to suburban sprawl and intensive farming. Other birds that can benefit from protecting Northern Harrier habitat are wetland and upland grassland birds including Upland Sandpiper, Short-eared Owl, and Henslow's Sparrow.

The Wood Thrush is one of our most widespread forest interior birds, yet the U.S breeding population declined by



Juvenile Northern Harriers are darker brown above with cinnamon undersides.

Photo by Roger Higbee

60% over the last half century. Unlike the Northern Harrier, the Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*) is not a state-listed bird, but its population is also dropping in Pennsylvania. According to the Breeding Bird Survey, almost half of the Wood Thrushes have disappeared over the last 50 years. Wood Thrushes are still widespread, but research shows that they depend on large forest blocks to withstand nest predation. Brown-headed Cowbirds, raccoons, chipmunks, and other predators prey on Wood Thrush nests near forest edges. Pennsylvania is particularly critical to Wood Thrush survival since 8.5% of the global population is found in our forests. During the spring and summer, the Wood Thrush's magical "ee-oh-lay" flute-like song echoes through the forest, instilling delight in even the most casual visitor. The cinnamon brown upperparts are good camouflage, since it feeds mostly on the forest floor, scratching in the leaf litter as it searches for snails and other invertebrates. Other birds that can benefit from protecting Wood Thrush habitat are forest interior birds like Eastern Whip-poor-will, Winter Wren, Louisiana Waterthrush, and many wood warblers.



The Wood Thrush is one of our most widespread forest interior birds.

Photo by Roger Higbee

Wood Thrush, Broad-winged Hawk, and a stream with native brook trout.

Hawk Mountain also seeks to work with landowners to put neighboring farmland under easement to maintain the rural character and keep native habitats intact. All this work is supported with private donations gifted to the Hawk Mountain Land Conservation Fund.

Manada Conservancy

Manada Conservancy is a land trust dedicated to preserving the natural, historic, agricultural, and scenic resources of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, through land conservation, environmental education, and community engagement. Named after a local watershed, Manada Conservancy was formed in 1997 out of concern about the loss of farmland and wildlife habitat in the region. Since its inception, Manada Conservancy has grown from a seed of hope in the minds of a few individuals to a community of nearly 500 members.

In 2019, Manada Conservancy protected a little over 400 acres. This included the fee acquisition of the 44.3-acre Elizabeth Woods property in Lower Paxton Township located on the Kittatinny Ridge. Two other easement projects within the Kittatinny Corridor preserved 130.85 acres in Rush and Jefferson Townships, Dauphin County, with the help of the Army Compatible Use Buffer program through Fort Indiantown Gap and 225.63 acres in Halifax, Dauphin County, with the help of DCNR grant funding.

In 2020, Manada Conservancy will be celebrating the milestone of 2,500 acres preserved of valuable farmland, forests, creek sides, and wetlands with unique and threatened species. Just recently, Manada Conservancy obtained a 30-acre conservation easement project in a Lower Paxton Township, Dauphin County, wooded property within the Kittatinny Ridge Corridor. Another 165-acre easement project is also within the corridor, in Middle Paxton Township, Dauphin County. Future easements will protect important Wood Thrush habitat within the Kittatinny Ridge corridor.

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

Nearly 60% of Pennsylvania's landscape consists of forests that provide essential habitat to a diversity of wildlife, including birds. In fact, more than half of Pennsylvania's breeding birds are dependent on large, intact forests. Birds face many threats, but likely the most

Hawk Mountain

Founded in 1934 as the first sanctuary to conserve birds of prey, Hawk Mountain has grown from 1400 acres in the 1930s to 2500 acres in 2020. In 2019 most of the land was put under conservation easement with The Nature Conservancy. Research suggests raptors and other birds seek out natural habitats along the base of the Ridge on their migration south for stopover and refueling. As development accelerates along the slopes of the Mountain and in farming areas to the south, the landscape is rapidly changing.

Hawk Mountain seeks to work with neighboring landowners to keep key properties in forest, wetlands, and grasslands. Twenty-two acres of farmland were recently purchased, and this property is being restored to grasslands. In 2018, 78 acres were purchased and donated to the Game Commission to manage in native grasses and flowers. In both sites, habitat for nesting or migrating Northern Harriers and Bobolinks, as well as other grassland birds, is being developed. Countless warblers that may feed on stopover sites along the riparian and woodland edges will benefit as well.

In 2020, Hawk Mountain is raising funds to purchase 43 acres along their border that would protect a forested stream ravine that harbors nesting Louisiana Waterthrush,

severe threat to forest interior bird populations is the fragmentation and loss of forested land due to energy and land development. The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC), established in 1932 as Pennsylvania's first land trust, is a nonprofit conservation organization proactively addressing the issues facing forest birds by protecting important high-quality forests, conducting science-driven ecological studies of priority bird species and their habitats, and assembling powerful conservation partnerships.

WPC is working on three different forested land conservation projects in the Ligonier Valley that may benefit the Wood Thrush, one of the flagship birds identified by the PSO for the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation (B4C). The three potential forested properties, ranging from 50 to 188 acres, were identified as likely containing habitat for

the Wood Thrush, along with other species of greatest conservation need and sensitive species of concern. These species were identified in the 2015 PA Wildlife Action Plan, through the Conservation Opportunity Area Tool, and in consultation with WPC biologists.

With funding awarded through the B4C program, WPC has a goal to permanently protect at least one of these forested properties within the year through a donated or purchased conservation easement, and/or possibly the purchase of a property, with a later sale, subject to a conservation easement.

Chair
Laura Jackson, Conservation Committee
Bedford County
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What You Can Do on the PSO Website

pabirds.org

Frank Haas - psa@pabirds.org

The PSO website has a bunch of resources for birders in Pennsylvania. Today's topic is the County Bird Lists.

Go to Birding/County Lists. Then click on the county of interest. A list of all of the birds on the Official State List will be shown. This includes subspecies and hybrids. The list is in American Ornithological Society's (AOS) order. Subspecies and hybrids are listed at the end of the list.

Next to each species is either a "-", "Yes,", or "B."

"Yes" means it has been recorded in that county. "B" means it has bred or currently breeds in the county (based

on the Breeding Bird Atlas or other reports). The "-" means there is no record for the species in that particular county. You can print the list by clicking on the gear icon in the upper right corner of the list.

Although I try to keep up with reports of new species for each county, it is a daunting task. I need your help. Please review the list for your county (or counties) and report any omissions or corrections to me at PSO@pabirds.org.

Coming up next: **Bird Lists**

Certificates of Appreciation Awarded

Since 2007, PSO has issued certificates of appreciation to individuals and organizations who have graciously allowed access to their properties to view rare or unusual

birds. The total number issued is now 165. The full list can be found on the PSO's website. The following Certificates of Appreciation were recently awarded to:

Jolene Hallock and Family, McKean County, for Varied Thrush
Brian Shema, Allegheny County, for Painted Bunting
Eva Zimmerman, Lancaster County, for Dickcissel

Did you know?

The Wood Thrush was designated the official bird symbol for the District of Columbia on January 31, 1967.



PSO

LANCASTER
SEPTEMBER 18-20 | 2020

ALL THINGS BIRDS

What do we mean when we say that PSO 2020 is “All Things Birds”? Well, **field trips** of course – field trips to a wide variety of birding hot spots in the area, planned by the members of the Lancaster County Bird Club, the folks who know birding in Lancaster best. Field trips are an opportunity to build county and state lists, maybe even to get a lifer or two. They are also an opportunity to meet new folks from across the state who share the same interest in birds that you do and to learn informally from one another.

Speaking about learning, **Saturday afternoon seminars** are where you can get your bird nerd on and learn from experts about particular species of birds, where to find them, how their populations are doing, and what field work and research are telling us about them. You may even learn how you can participate in conservation efforts through Citizen Science opportunities.

Of course there are also **social events** – opportunities to meet old friends and make new ones, too. The Friday night social includes a birding trivia contest, adult beverages, and a chance to mingle. The Saturday night banquet offers good food, award presentations, and a Banquet Speaker who we hope entertains and makes learning fun. There are also informal opportunities like Saturday lunch where many birders flock to a local pub or restaurant for a pint and a laugh or two.

Did I mention **shopping**? Yes, we have exhibitors who range from birding related groups providing information, to those selling optics, to all kinds of birding related art work, and the like. This is a great opportunity to buy some early Christmas gifts for birders in your family or among your friends or to treat yourself!

And before I forget, we are not just talking about all things birds but also all types of birders – from beginners to experts, from feeder watchers and those who bird their local patch to those who chase vagrants throughout the state, and those who enjoy the social aspect of birding to those who are really just about the birds.

So make plans now to join us in Lancaster, one of the top birding destinations in the state, **September 18-20**, at the Double Tree Hotel. Look for more information in the months ahead and registration which opens in June of 2020.

If you have any questions please contact me at verngauthier14@gmail.com.

Vern Gauthier
PSO 2020 Chairperson

The Raven Reporter

Tales of Discovery about Pennsylvania Birds

PGC Volunteer Birding Opportunities



The PA Game Commission is the state wildlife agency with the mission “to manage Pennsylvania’s wild birds, wild mammals, and their habitats for current and future generations.” It could not do that well without obtaining information about the populations of the species it manages as part of an adaptive resource management approach that uses data from a variety of sources, including the interested public to implement its management decisions. For example, bird data collected on game lands informs the PGC of the best possibilities for success there. The PGC cannot meet its mission without volunteers, the community of scientists.

An organizing and planning document for the state wildlife and fish agencies is the Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan. Here can be found a treasure trove of information about the higher priority bird species and the threats that face them. Please see the following: <https://www.pgc.pa.gov/Wildlife/WildlifeActionPlan/Pages/default.aspx>

Secretive Marsh Bird Survey: Over half of the endangered and threatened bird species in Pennsylvania live in wetlands. It is a critical habitat for state bird conservation. The PGC owns some of the best wetlands in the state, so it has a particularly key role in wetland bird management. Every five years, PGC Wildlife Diversity coordinates a statewide survey of rare wetland birds, and the next survey is in 2020. All the pieces are not yet in place for a final announcement about the project which will come before the breeding season. The surveys will run from 1 May – 15 June and will include visiting a location three times to conduct a playback point count survey. Although these are challenging surveys occurring at dawn or dusk, they will provide an opportunity to observe some of the most cryptic and interesting birds breeding in PA. Volunteers will be required to register prior to the beginning of the survey. PGC will circulate survey information, protocols, and locations in early April. To be added to the volunteer list, contact Patti Barber (PGC), patbarber@pa.gov.

Bald Eagle Nests: The Bald Eagle is a symbol of wilderness, freedom, and successful wildlife management. Pennsylvania’s Bald Eagle recovery has been a huge success. Although the Bald Eagle has been upgraded from Threatened to Secure status, there is great interest in monitoring and protecting nests. Many want to keep an eye on Bald Eagles as an indicator of habitat quality (lead and various kinds of water pollution remain threats). Volunteers can participate in this annual survey (observations at nests may occur year round) by accessing the PGC Bald Eagle nest monitoring website: <https://pgcdatacollection.pa.gov/baldeaglenestsurvey>.

Here the volunteer should be able to find a nest on an interactive map and report the activity status of the nest and number of nestlings and fledglings as well as his or her information. It helps to know the coordinates of the nest or where you stand to see it. The PGC contact is Sean Murphy, semurphy@pa.gov.

Peregrine Falcon Nest Activity: The Peregrine is a state Threatened species that nests on cliffs, tall buildings, bridges, towers, and quarries. Although the Peregrine is one of the most iconic and spectacular birds in the world, their eyries can be difficult to find and monitor. Volunteers need to spend time looking at cliffs, buildings, and bridges. As this listed species continues to recover, PGC is particularly interested in the discovery of new cliff site nests. Many cliffs have a history of hosting Peregrines which seem to be selecting nest sites using the same search image they did decades ago. Some cliffs that they have adopted lately were a bit of a surprise to us but were found by diligent searching by volunteers and agency staff. If you have the time and interest to observe large, rocky outcrops in your area, let the PGC know. Site reports will be treated with confidentiality if they are sensitive. The agency and its partners are committed to the recovery of this magnificent raptor. The PGC contact is Art McMorris, mcmorris@mac.com.

Colonial Waterbird (Heron) Survey: Colonial waterbirds are particularly vulnerable to human disturbance and natural calamities because they put their eggs in one basket, or colony, to be exact. Three colonial waterbirds are listed as Endangered in the state: Great Egret, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. Each year the PGC monitors all known colonies of these three herons and the larger colonies of the Great Blue Heron. The agency is particularly interested in learning about any new colonies. The PGC contact is Patti Barber, patbarber@pa.gov. Website for this survey is found at: <https://pgcdatacollection.pa.gov/HeronColonyForm>

Northern Goshawk Observations: The Northern Goshawk is a PA Near-Threatened breeding species that is in decline. The goshawk, a raptor of the deep forest, is sensitive to disturbances around the nest. It is very challenging to find and monitor nesting territories of this species. A Northern Goshawk project team organized by the Ornithological Technical Committee as a subcommittee has been studying Pennsylvania goshawks in recent years. This team includes Penn State, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, DCNR Bureau of Forestry, Allegheny National Forest, PA Game Commission, the Central Appalachian Goshawk Project, PSO, and some falconers. Any observations of goshawks in Pennsylvania should be submitted to Hawk Mountain Sanctuary (HMS) which is working in collaboration with the PA Game Commission and DCNR on goshawk surveys. The team works to avoid disturbance of active nesting pairs. Any report will be treated as confidential. Submit reports to:

<https://www.hawkmountain.org/conservation-science/active-research/raptor-conservation-studies/northern-goshawks>

Observations of goshawks on PA Game Lands can be submitted to a PGC e-mail: pgcgoshawk@pa.gov.

Golden-winged Warbler (GWWA) Survey: Although there will be no formal GWWA breeding survey this year (because PGC is gearing up for a statewide survey), the PGC is interested in conducting the survey at locations that had positive detection in the past. It always is a good idea to search for new GWWA breeding populations and to log any GWWA sighting into eBird: <https://ebird.org/pa/home>. Young forest management can be employed close to GWWA sightings for better effectiveness. Many GWWA positive detections are in timbered areas, scrub barrens, wet meadows, and forested wetlands. Although declining, GWWA are capable of colonizing new locations which are being created every year by various disturbances. The PGC contact is Sean Murphy, semurphy@pa.gov.

A special thanks to Sean Murphy, Patti Barber, and Laurie Goodrich for their assistance. Some of this text came directly from the PGC staff by request.

Department of Conservation of Natural Resources (DCNR) Volunteer Birding Opportunities

Bureau of State Forests: This bureau protects Endangered and Threatened species and other Environmental Review species. So, submissions to the agency can assist their protections. The biologist to contact for bird volunteer opportunities is Aura Stauffer, astauffer@pa.gov. Thanks to Aura for being such a great partner for conservation.

Volunteer opportunities, especially in Pinchot, Gallitzen, and Michaux State Forests, will be available to birders.

The Pinchot State Forest surveys include some grassland and early succession birds. Gallitzen State Forest focuses mainly on grassland birds. In Michaux, there is interest in Wood Thrush and early succession species. In all forests, observations of Cerulean and Golden-winged Warblers are valuable. I invite any birders to look at their nearest state forest to see if it is well covered by eBird. Many are not and could really use more attention from birders since those larger forest blocks hold large populations of forest interior and area-sensitive species. Timbering activities, which are often shelterwood or thinning cuts, benefit an array of young forest species including Ruffed Grouse, American Woodcock, Blue-winged Warbler, Golden-winged Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Eastern Towhee, and Field Sparrow. DCNR also protects goshawk nests where they are found and is part of the PA Goshawk project, so any goshawk observations can be contributed to the HMS website listed previously. We mentioned three state forests above, but birders are welcome to assist in the surveys of the other state forests.

Bureau of State Parks: The State Parks are always looking for more birding volunteers. I would recommend birders to introduce themselves to the nearest park's Environmental Education Specialist and ask how you can help out. Just leading a few educational bird walks for adults or kids would be an asset to the park. The parks sometimes have extra binoculars to share with beginners and other resources to complement the local bird club, Audubon Chapter, or individual birder who wants to team up to educate new birders. As I have mentioned, I have initiated a bird project at Ricketts Glen State Park with the intent of building information about the bird community at that PA Important Bird Area. We intend to produce an annotated checklist and a site guide to the park and vicinity. In the meanwhile, we are spreading the word about the park on a public Facebook page. Others could take the same approach at other parks and state forests. To be a state park volunteer, check out the website at:

<https://www.volunteers.dcnr.state.pa.us/VolunteerApplication.aspx>

State Parks especially emphasize their Cavity Nesting Trails Program for volunteers. Nest boxes have been placed in parks for several species including Barn and Eastern Screech-Owls; American Kestrels; Black-capped Chickadees and Tufted Titmice; House and Carolina Wrens; Purple Martins; and Tree Swallows. Other species are possible. In 2019, the program recorded 7,848 nestlings from 2041 nest boxes. The program registered mergansers and Great Crested Flycatchers as well as the target species. Some parks have well-established programs while others need a good start. So volunteers have lots of opportunities there. I found that my local Environmental Education Specialist (EES) was flexible

about moving boxes for better results and expanding the program into more locations. Time is often the limiting factor, and volunteers can help with that. I know that volunteers also have contributed boxes to parks especially the atypical sizes for owls and ducks. You can find out more about the Cavity Nesting Trails Program at the following:

<https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Education/LandConservationandStewardship/Pages/default.aspx>

Birders have ready partners in bird education and conservation at their local state parks. The EES of your favorite park would love to have a birder lead walks, do workshops on bird identification and basic birding techniques, give programs on bird conservation, as well as a long list of other subjects. Park offices have public bathrooms, street addresses (easy for directions), trail maps, and sometimes even extra binoculars to lend out. I recommend that local bird clubs seek out partnerships with a local state park for doing public programs. More than that, birders could reach into the rural mountain areas for parks with less local support and volunteer some time to lead walks there as well. After all, that's where the birds are in the spring and summer.

The Habit of Habitat

It is easy to become complacent and believe that all the work we have done and all the educational programs about conservation have taken hold in the outdoor community. Is the time for quoting Aldo Leopold over? I am often told it is "time to move on to the next great project."

Occasionally, we get reminded that we need to keep up the good, meaningful messages about bird and wildlife conservation practices.

On a few of my many field trips to a local state park, I encountered a few pheasant hunters who were hunting an area called a "field" which really is a blueberry meadow with acres of goldenrod and asters. It is great early succession bird and butterfly habitat. The PGC released farm-raised pheasants there each fall, and the local hunters responded eagerly at the chance to hunt them. When I chatted with the returning successful hunters, I learned that these outdoorsmen had the erroneous idea that they were hunting in good pheasant habitat. It was not, at least not for sustaining a nesting or wintering population. There are no viable nesting pheasant populations over 1000 feet in our state, and this area was over 2000 feet above sea level and had pretty tough winter weather that was inhospitable for farm-raised grassland birds. Pheasants need expansive grasslands with lots of cover. The surrounding landscape is about 95% forest, very inappropriate for an obligate grassland bird. It was not pheasant habitat for sustaining

the population but perhaps for easy shooting. This was a put-and-take operation where 100 birds were released from crates on a truck. Some hunters were shooting birds as they flew from the truck over the meadow. It was nice woodcock habitat, but most of these hunters did not seem to know that. For days after release, pheasants walked around lost along the roads, wandered back into the woods, and even traveled into campsites over a mile from the release site and any real grassland habitat. They were getting hit by cars and trucks, flying over and into water, and getting lost trying to find some place that seemed like home. It was pathetic to see this. There is no chance for long-term survival for these birds. But, the hunters there insisted that it was "good habitat" for pheasants. Even the pheasants didn't think so. Well, it is great habitat for Song Sparrows, Alder Flycatchers, Common Yellowthroats, and American Woodcock but not pheasants. I hear Northern Saw-whet Owls there in the spring. They do not live in grassland! Unfortunately, old habits prevail when we need new habits.

We really need to find "the habit of habitat" in Pennsylvania. I do see great strides being taken by our wildlife agency, DCNR, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Nature Conservancy, and some partnering organizations that promote grouse, turkey, Wood Duck, and woodcock habitat. The training and implementation for Golden-winged Warbler and Cerulean Warbler surveys have had positive effects on management. It is rewarding to see grouse and woodcock being mentioned in the same sentence as Golden-winged Warbler and Wood Thrush. That is the direction we need to go, and we need to get on that train together. Most of the wildlife in Pennsylvania live much of their lives in forests. These forests can be young or old, deciduous or evergreen, but they are wooded habitats – the bigger, the better the block of forest for wildlife.

I urge the Pennsylvania birders to go out into those woods and learn more about them. Adopt more areas in a variety of forested habitats as personal birding spots. Take your friends along. Bring beginners along. Organize more bird walks there. Do not get hung up on total species counts, just total bird experiences. Get there as often as possible and record the birds there. We are losing even the more common birds of woodland at an alarming rate. One reason is that we have lost sight of what it takes to maintain healthy bird populations. Raising birds in cages and releasing them for a shooting gallery is not a path toward successful wildlife management, much less good habitat.

(continued on page 12, bottom)

Member Bob Ross Publishes Book on California Birds

Former full-time Pennsylvania resident Bob Ross, known by many in PA as a bird ecology researcher, technical committee member, former PSO president, and trail-happy birder, has just published a volume entitled *Birds of the Whitewater River, Southern California: A Disturbed Environment*. It contains 300 pages in color, including over 200 photographs by the author of 134+ species of birds.

The Whitewater River is a 60+ mile-long waterway draining the San Bernardino Mountains of southern California to the south, and it is a principal tributary of the Salton Sea, California's largest inland body of water. From its headwaters, the perennial coldwater stream reaches seven desert cities, with a combined winter population of half a million people, as an intermittent waterway with flood-control dikes before becoming a perennial stream again for the final 20-mile run to the Salton Sea. Bird communities in headwater sections of the river are comprised largely of native desert species inhabiting intact ecosystems, but the (sub)urbanized midsection of the stream is populated with a more mixed assemblage of non-native and native birds tolerating stormwater drains, golf courses, and housing developments. Agricultural drainage (from the Colorado River) and treated domestic wastewater flow year-round into the lower section of the river, resulting in a desert oasis and an important migratory pathway for both neotropical and nearctic migrants, essentially moving this part of the Pacific Flyway from the lower Colorado River and its delta to the Salton Sea, Coachella Valley, and the Whitewater River. Were it not for these sources of water and flows, the Whitewater River would be reduced to a

large desert wash with only periodic, seasonal stormwater runoff to the Sea.

In his book Ross found 134 species of birds during two years of sampling 15 sites along the river, plus four additional nocturnal species using a nighttime recorded-sound protocol. Why did he choose this location/subject for another bird book? There was no single source of bird occurrence information published for this important part of the southern California desert, other than a lot of eBird reports. (There is a treatise on birds of the Salton Sea). In addition, a planned 50-mile walking/biking/golf cart trail along the River (called the CVLink) for residents and visitors would provide another recreational option (birding from it) to golf culture in the Valley (>120 golf courses now populate the Coachella Valley). And Bob needed a project in retirement!

"How did Bob end up in California?"

For those who don't know Bob very well or of his whereabouts over the past decade or so – when he was still working for the USGS in Wellsboro, he was sent to southern California to help with aspects of the Salton Sea restoration. There he met Dianne Franco, a fellow bird enthusiast and educator, while on a bird walk that Dianne led. After retirement they began traveling and eventually sharing summers in PA and winters in CA with two-week treks across the country, camping in national parks, forests, and grasslands. Many of us know Dianne from our annual PSO meetings which both Bob and Dianne have attended.

For more information, see:

www.birdsofwhitewater.com

The Raven Reporter *(continued from page 11)*

It is very encouraging to see independent projects by Audubon Chapters and bird clubs that are instituting their own wildlife habitat improvement programs and educating the public, especially the young, about birds and their habitats. Even education about backyard native plants is a great way to impact bird habitat improvement.

I believe that PSO members could do much more to participate in bird and habitat monitoring and education. You can not do that enough.

Good birding,

Doug Gross
Dagross144@verizon.net

Henry David Thoreau believed that the Wood Thrush has the most beautiful of all avian voices.

Welcome New PSO Members

We extend a warm welcome to our newest members who have joined PSO since May 21, 2019.

Connie Andrascik, Brush Valley, PA
David Andre, Montrose, PA
Harry Armistead, Philadelphia, PA
Kathy Arnold-Yerger, Pottstown, PA
Paul Bahr, Pittsburgh, PA
Justin Berkheimer, Erie, PA
Mary & Chuck Blakinger, Lititz, PA
C. Mark Bowers, West Newton, PA
Jo Ann Bowes, Lock Haven, PA
Marie Clark, Bethel Park, PA
JoAnn Cooper, Lewisburg, PA
Maria Dodson, Blain, PA
Linda M. Ingram, Douglassville, PA

Glenn Jayne, Sr, Clarks Summit, PA
Andrew Mack, New Florence, PA
Heidi Macy, Royersford, PA
Patrick McGill, Philadelphia, PA
Dennis McGillicuddy, Reading, MA
Emma Newswanger, Shippensburg, PA
Tom Norville, Montrose, PA
Karen Peterson, Butler, PA
David Poder, Johnstown, P
Angela Rudy, Thompsontown, PA
Eric Schill, Clarion, PA
Edwin Shafer, Haverford, PA

Youth Meeting Scholarship

The PSO Board of Directors and the PSO Education Committee are pleased to announce that we will be offering a youth scholarship for at least one young person to attend our three-day annual meeting in September 2020.

This young birder and one accompanying parent/guardian will have all of their expenses paid (hotels, travel, meals) when attending the meeting. This is a great opportunity!

If you know a young birder who would benefit by attending (and what young birder wouldn't?!?), please nominate him or her for this scholarship! Deadline for submission is **August 1, 2020**.

The Annual Meeting provides the opportunity to explore avian habitats as well as to attend presentations and to meet many birders from around Pennsylvania and beyond. Please see the inserted nomination form.



Frontiers in Ornithology: A Symposium for Youth

How it started...

As with many great visions that come to fruition, Frontiers in Ornithology was hatched on a cocktail napkin one evening during the 2018 American Birding Expo. The founding members happened to cross paths at the event and discovered we share a common passion to encourage and help future conservationists take flight.



Why it happened...

There are many enthusiastic and motivated youth and young adults across the nation looking for opportunities that will enable them to make future contributions in conservation science. More than 125 youth (and supportive parents/mentors) from 14 states attended the symposium in 2019.



What made it possible...

The symposium became a reality due to the thirty-five sponsors, 18 speakers, and over twenty volunteers that understand the importance of investing in the next generation. We could not have done it without your generous contributions and willingness to share your time and talent with symposium participants.



We hope you will consider sponsoring the next symposium scheduled for September 26, 2020 at the Ashland Nature Center.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Research

Some of us have enjoyed—yes, enjoyed—awakening bleary-eyed long before dawn each June to conduct a 25-mile roadside Breeding Bird Survey for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Some of us have also tested our ears’ limits eagerly by trudging along census transects in state and federal forestry projects trying to get some sort of handle on local bird populations.

Rewarding and important as those efforts are, there is always a caveat: How many singing birds might we be missing, simply out of our own or beyond anyone’s earshot? Many studies, some in Pennsylvania, have assessed that difficulty. As a whole, the USFWS compiles such an immense array of data from thousands of these survey routes that reasonable estimates of general population trends for some species are considered acceptable.

Now something new comes along. A research team led by Justin Kitzes at the University of Pittsburgh is adding a new dimension to such efforts. The team has strapped 200 tiny acoustic devices to trees in the Sprout State Forest in central Pennsylvania, and is developing machine learning models with the automated ability to identify the vocalizations of up to 600 species.

Such vocalizations and their sound-spectrograms are available online and widely consulted by birders at websites such as Xeno-Canto and Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Macaulay Library.

But what the Kitzes Lab does, working with Pitt’s Center for Research Computing, is to assemble those vocalizations into an advanced picture of which and how many of each species are present in a broad study area—an expanse of area surveyed far beyond what an individual listener could cover.

It is an example of “macroecology,” an investigation examining the distribution of organisms—in this case, birds—at large spatial scales to determine patterns of abundance, not only for individual species but also the diversity of species in an area.

The Pitt team identifies and analyzes its thousands of hours of vocalizations in a computing method unavailable until recent years. In an interview with *Pitt Magazine*, Kitzes says he “sees the project as part of a fundamental shift in the field of ecology, from relying on direct human observation to using tools like sensors and artificial intelligence to generate crucial data quickly and cheaply.”

The focus of that effort is on large-scale patterns of species’ presence, abundance, movements, and diversity,

especially as related to human interference—and, thus, pointing to paths of conservation.

This does not diminish the value of birders’ extensive and valuable service in Breeding Bird Surveys, Christmas Bird Counts, eBird reporting, and other measures of long-term changes in species’ diversity and presence/absence in local areas. Think about the population crashes of Golden-winged Warblers and Yellow-breasted Chats, for example, which we have documented by ordinary birding efforts.

What’s notable is that the Pitt team’s new approach adds a remarkable new large-scale dimension to what we have or haven’t been seeing and hearing in our local birding.

Incidentally, Tessa Rhinehart will describe the research in detail at the Three Rivers Birding Club meeting in Pittsburgh on Wednesday, April 1. She is a computer programmer working with the Kitzes Lab to develop the machine learning models. She is also an active birder. See www.3rbc.org for information about the program.

And for more about Pitt’s path-breaking project online, see these three websites:

www.pittmag.pitt.edu/news/listening

Kate St. John’s report in her “Outside My Window” blog from Pittsburgh:

<https://www.birdsoutsidemywindow.org/2019/03/11/tell-me-whos-singing>

The Kitzes Lab website:

<https://www.kitzeslab.org/research>

Paul Hess
Natrona Heights, PA
phess@salsgiver.com

Answers to PSO Rare Bird Quiz

(Quiz on page 3)

1. Long-tailed Jaeger
2. Boreal Owl
3. Canada Jay (formerly known as Gray Jay)
4. Bewick’s Wren
5. Gray Kingbird



A Call for Applications

Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology Student Research Grant Deadline: March 31

Awardees will be notified by May 1

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) is sponsoring up to two \$500 student research grants in support of research on Pennsylvania's avifauna. We invite anyone to pass this news along to any students involved in research, as well as 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 their work, AND/OR the student must submit an article to the *Pennsylvania Birds* journal, not more than two years after the award of the grant, describing their study and findings to 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 eventually published. The student's academic institution does not need to be 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 corresponding department at the institution, the degree the student is pursuing, and the name of their academic or research advisor.

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 and Use Committee approval has been or will be obtained. Each proposal should include a section on how the results of the proposed study will 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 they are receiving the advisor's support for the proposed project.

Submissions will be evaluated by a PSO committee. Submissions must be sent as pdf email attachments by March 31. Please send submissions or questions to Deb Grove at dsg4@psu.edu.

Want to Make a Difference in 2020? Make a Phone Call!



Please let your federal Representative know that you value birds as an integral part of a healthy environment. Ask them to support H.R.5552, the **Migratory Bird Protection Act**.

Just go to <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>. All you need to provide is your ZIP code and you'll be directed to your representative.

Asking your Representative to vote for H.R. 5552 might be the most far-reaching thing you do to help birds in 2020. Keep reading if you want to know why.

On January 30, 2020, my husband and I were thrilled to see an adult Golden Eagle in one of our mountain fields above Black Valley south of Everett. We watched in awe as it flew higher and higher – the light reflecting off the golden feathers on the back of its neck. There are only about 5,000 Eastern Golden Eagles in the world – and a few of them winter in Bedford County.

We knew seeing an eastern Golden Eagle was a special moment that was connected to a long history of federal laws enacted to safeguard birds and other wildlife. The Lacey Act, passed in 1900, was one of the first federal laws that started a national movement to protect wildlife instead of exploiting it. This act was championed by sportsmen and a Congress who understood that intelligent use of natural resources was paramount if we wanted to have healthy wildlife and human communities. The Lacey Act made it a federal crime to ship game killed in violation of one state's laws to another state. It also regulated the introduction of non-native species and prohibited shipment of wildlife without clear identification of the contents and shipper. One of the key outcomes of the Lacey Act was the prohibition of killing birds for the feather trade. Even today, poaching Golden Eagle feathers for sale on the black market adds pressure to a population that is already facing many threats.

As a result of the Lacey Act, the United States and Great Britain (representing Canada), passed even tighter international legislation protecting migrating birds. In

1916, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) was signed to further protect birds from unregulated hunting. It's one of the oldest wildlife laws in our country, and it protects more than 800 species of migratory birds. Since the early 1900s, Congress continued to pass legislation – many of which were bipartisan – to protect overexploitation of wetlands, wildlife, water, and air, knowing that the very health of all of us depends on a clean and balanced environment.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, as well as the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, protect birds – but that doesn't stop industry from killing them. Over a two-year time, 232 Golden Eagles and dozens of other migratory birds were electrocuted on PacifiCorp power lines in Wyoming. Since equipment to prevent raptor electrocutions had been readily available for years, PacificCorp was fined and agreed to repair or replace power lines so electrocutions would stop. Without the MBTA, such enforcement would not have been possible.



Laura and Mike Jackson spotted and photographed this Golden Eagle near their home on January 30, 2020.

Recently, a new interpretation of the MBTA has been promoted, so radical that industry is given a free pass. Unless a company "deliberately" kills birds, the MBTA can not be used to protect birds from industrial exploitation. Throughout its history, the MBTA has protected billions of birds under both Democratic and Republican presidential administrations, but now that protection is drastically weakened.

In early 2018, former top Department of Interior officials from both parties spanning back to the Nixon Administration sent a letter to the department and Congress condemning the new legal interpretation, stating in part that "the MBTA can and has been successfully used to reduce gross negligence by companies that simply do not recognize the value of birds to society or the practical means to minimize harm. Your new interpretation needlessly undermines a history of great progress, undermines the effectiveness of the migratory bird treaties, and diminishes U.S. leadership."

Fortunately, H.R.5552 was introduced by Congressman Alan Lowenthal (CA) on January 8, 2020, as bipartisan legislation to codify important protections for millions of migratory birds. The legislation would reverse the flawed interpretation of the MBTA and replace it with the Migratory Bird Protection Act (MBPA).

The Migratory Bird Protection Act would reaffirm decades of practice and policy of the MBTA by every previous Republican and Democratic administration; uphold our international treaty obligations regarding bird conservation; help minimize certain industrial hazards and incentivize best management practices; and allow for financial resources to recover from incidents that impact birds, such as oil spills.

“Under previous administrations’ incidental take policies,” Congressman Lowenthal said, “BP was fined tens of

millions of dollars after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill killed more than a million birds protected under the MBTA. A similar incident happening today, under the current Administration policies, would not result in a single dollar’s worth of fines. That is simply wrong.”

Call your legislator and ask them to vote for H.R.5552. Over 800 species of migratory birds will benefit from a simple phone call or letter. Let’s do it!!

Snyder County eBird 200 Challenge

by Chad Kauffman and Joe Gyekis

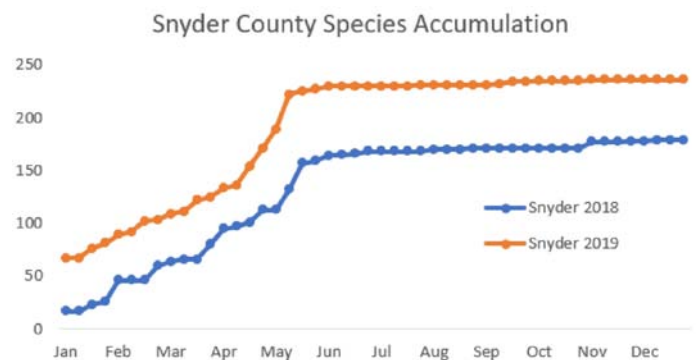
In 2019, we conducted our last of four eBird challenges in central PA. We tried to get 200 species in a single year in counties that hadn’t ever accomplished this. We were successful in Perry, Mifflin, and Juniata in prior years, but could it be done in Snyder County? We noticed the number of birds reported and checklists submitted on eBird was sad in the last few years. Lack of enough promotion and few visits had occurred, so it was time to change that.

We spread the word as much and as often as we could by promoting it in PA Birds list serve, State College Bird Club list serve, various Facebook pages, and even by creating a new page called Snyder County Birding to help keep track and promote our efforts. We created flyers that we emailed, mailed, and hung up at various businesses around the area, hoping to promote birding, birds, and our challenge.

We organized a series of group outings in the first half of the year:

- A group of us started off the year on January 1, 2019, touring the county to kickstart the count. We were able to list 43 on the first, including the year’s only Golden Eagle.
- We led an Appalachian Audubon field trip on January 12 for folks who like to break the cabin fever and get out. Seventeen people joined us on the tour of the county, and we finished again with 43 species but we added one for the year.
- On March 2 & 9, we led PSO field trips for waterfowl and gulls, but we didn’t add anything new.
- By getting permission from the fine folks at Shaver’s Creek, we were able to include Snyder County in their Birding Cup competition the first weekend of May for Friday and Saturday birding. We tallied 147 on the cup between two groups.

The following weekend, May 11, several groups moved their PA Migration Count (PAMC) to Snyder County to help with the cause. Chad’s crew counted 106 that day. During the PAMC Joe led a bird walk on the grounds of the Susquehanna University that was well attended by people of all ages enjoying the beautiful day and a few spring migrants. They noted more than 90 species.



We were able to add the many following species to the all-time eBird list, documenting them for the first time ever in the county.

- Brant, found by Jason Weller on Middleburg Lake; it stayed for several weeks and was very cooperative hanging out with the Canadas in town.
- Dickcissel, found by Charlene Wenger at their feeder in Port Trevorton; this bird stayed for a couple weeks and was also seen by many.
- Lapland Longspur, found by Deuane Hoffman in Richfield.
- Sora, found by Chad Kauffman at Snyder County Birding Trail.

● Western Kingbird, reported to us by Dwight Brubaker on their farm; he was able to obtain a picture, but the bird was a one-day wonder. This was the only spring record entered into eBird for the state of PA and the rarest Snyder County bird of the year.

● Surf Scoter, found by Andy Keister on Faylor Lake.

● Marsh Wren, found by Toby Petersheim at Snyder County Birding Trail.

● Kentucky Warbler, found by Deuane Hoffman on SGL 194.

● Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, found by Deuane Hoffman at Faylor Lake.

● Gray-cheeked Thrush, found by Deuane Hoffman at Swift Run campground in Bald Eagle Forest.

Other highlights included Red-necked Grebe on 3/12, Yellow-throated Warbler on top of Jack's Mt at the East Kettle Lot on 4/16; it stayed until at least mid May.

An immature Little Blue Heron was found by Deuane Hoffman at Faylor Lake and seen by many observers through most of September. In late November the Martin family on Hoffer Rd. in Port Trevorton listed the last species addition – a Short-eared Owl, a lifer for the father, Wayne Martin who spotted it, and also for his children, Brandon, Rodney, Waylon, Stanley, and Jeanette who ran for the binoculars and each other to enjoy the views of the owl as it hunted over a sheep pasture in the late afternoon/early evening light.

Chad had an exciting moment of birding when he visited Faylor Lake on 4/16 with his son Noah. Chad writes in his own words, "While scanning the west side of the lake, I saw something lift up all of the birds and saw a small tern flying along the far side of the lake, while trying to get it in a scope, I heard a call of a bird not heard often in PA, and it was a the rattle of a Sandhill Crane. I ran towards the vehicle to get the camera, scaring Noah into thinking something was going to get us; and he started crawling into the vehicle. I had to inform him that I was just trying to get the camera and everything was all good. So while laughing at that situation, I was able to get two identifiable pics of the Sandhill Crane. The crane made two laps of the lake and kept flying towards the eastern side of the lake. A lap over there wasn't able to relocate it. Till this was all done, I wasn't able to relocate the tern, but I initially called it a Forster's, but the eBird reviewer said a Common Tern was possible so it went down as tern species."



This one-day wonder Western Kingbird was found and photographed by Dwight Brubaker.



Jeanetta Wanner photographed this Brown Booby with her cell phone while fishing with her husband on the Susquehanna near Selinsgrove in Northumberland County on July 6.

Other birds challenging to identify were also reported but not included in the final list because of lack of photo proof. These included a probable spring flyby Ross's Goose found by Deuane Hoffman, a probable Carolina Chickadee or hybrid at the Wenger family feeders at the same time as their Dickcissel in January, and a Snowy Owl reported by a local farmer but never relocated. We also learned about an old record that hadn't been publicized--a Chuck-will's-widow heard for an entire breeding season about 10 years ago at the base of Shade Mountain. A local family, familiar with the species, had found it.

A variety of interesting species were recorded by Joe Gyekis at a Nocturnal Flight Call Station he had set up at Tut Woelfel's place on the Isle of Que running intermittently between January and June. These included the only eBird records this year of Barn Owl (4/6), Dunlin (4/9), Short-billed Dowitcher (5/17), Pectoral Sandpiper (5/17), Semipalmated Plover (5/17), and Black-bellied Plover (a flock at 11:30 p.m. on 5/27, a single note at 4 a.m. on 5/28).

These birds deserve an asterisk on the county totals because they were so close to the river, flying at night, so there was no way to know for sure if they were over the water (Northumberland County airspace) or straight up above the mic (Snyder County airspace). Other interesting calls recorded include a very early Grasshopper Sparrow (4/7), a good candidate for a Bicknell's Thrush but it might have been a very high/sharp-peaked Gray-cheeked call (5/13), a summer Dickcissel (6/8), and some late spring migrant thrushes (two Swainson's 6/16, Gray-cheeked 6/17). However, the most exciting was the recording of several calls that even expert groups online could not identify which species made them. There's still so much to be learned about bird vocalizations, especially at night!

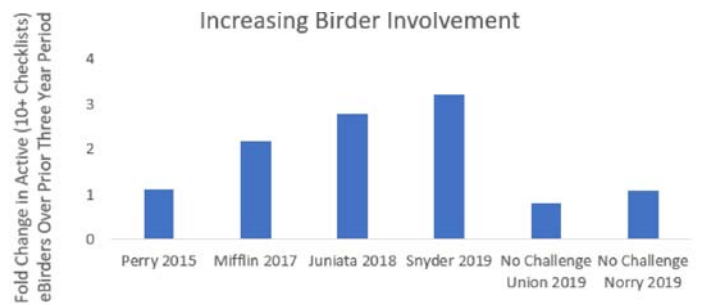
Our Snyder County birders also found a few excellent Northumberland County birds on the Birding Cup Friday evening. A large flock of scoters was seen flying north over the river-- the next morning many Surf Scoters were found farther north on the West Branch. At the same time, we also saw an American Bittern flying downriver.

However, by far the best Northumberland County bird of the year was a Brown Booby, seen and photographed by Snyder County birder, Jeanetta Wanner. She is one of Alvin Wenger's daughters, who was fishing with her husband on the Susquehanna near Selinsgrove on 7/6. The Brown Booby approached their boat. Jeanetta wrote, "We were out fishing and the bird tried to attack

us...trying to get our lures and get in the boat." This was the first record ever of the species in central Pennsylvania. By the time she got word to Chad and other birders started looking, it had moved on, but it was still an incredible find.

We were very happy about the number of people that we got together. Many of us who knew each other through online use of eBird met face to face for the first time. We also met and made friends with other local birders who didn't use the electronic system but share the joy of birding. Across all the years of eBird challenges, each time we've been able to reach the 200 species desired and also get more people involved in eBird. With Mifflin and Juniata County challenges, the number of people using eBird in the county was doubled or almost tripled. In Snyder, it more than tripled. See Figure 2.

Thanks to all who spent time birding, reporting, sharing, etc. We had a great time exploring old haunts as well as learning new ones. The county has so much wonderful habitat that isn't visited enough. When Chad first started birding, he hit the lakes as much as he could in waterfowl season, but that was it. Waders would also be a draw at times and maybe gulls or terns.



The number of people submitting at least 10 complete eBird checklists in the year of the challenge went up compared to the three years leading up to the challenge. In Snyder County, we saw triple the number of active eBirders during the challenge year. [Editor's Note: "Norry" is a nickname for Northumberland County.]

So many counties haven't been challenged to enter a record number of species in eBird. Several years back we did something unique; as far as we know, no other state in the country had challenged birders to hit 150 species on eBird in all counties. With PA's 67 counties, that was no small feat. Do you have a county challenge that should be made? It's never too late to start. PSO would be glad to help promote it and possibly help in other ways.

Recap of the January Board Meeting Minutes

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology Board of Directors met on January 28, 2020, with 13 directors present for the teleconference meeting.

Vern Gauthier reported that things are moving along well for the PSO 2020 meeting in Lancaster. Most field trips have been arranged. Speakers have not yet been contacted for the meeting except for the banquet speaker. It was suggested that a student poster session may be of interest for Friday evening along with the trivia contest.

Deb Grove said that students applying for the Student Research Grant need to have their applications in by March 31. A decision on the recipient or recipients will be made by May 1.

Holly Merker reporting for the Education Committee asked the board if PSO could budget for at least two students and maybe three for the Student Scholarship for the annual meeting each year. The general consensus of the board was that this would be possible. Further discussion regarded who should be able to nominate a student to receive a scholarship to the annual meeting. Vern made a motion that the wording of the Student Annual Meeting Scholarship application be changed to say that a person may be nominated by a PSO member, Pennsylvania bird club, Audubon chapter, conservation

organization, or an educator. Eli DePaulis seconded the motion which passed.

Vern has created a website for the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation (B4C) which includes information and rules for the event. Laura Jackson said that PSO will be partnering with several conservation organizations to which any funds raised will be donated. Prizes were discussed and will be awarded in various categories. The board thought that it would be a good idea to try to get other birding and conservation organizations to advertise the B4C and reciprocate by including their news in our newsletter.

Frank Haas gave the treasurer's report and said that we are doing well and have as much money now as we did at the beginning of the fiscal year. Ordinarily the funds are down at this time of the year.

The highlights of Holly's PORC report included that reviews are up to date, Mike Fialkovich completed the 2018 report, the PORC bylaws have been revised, eBird has helped to streamline reviews, and a new member will be elected in the next several weeks.

Vern reported for the Citizen Science Committee that the future of the Pennsylvania Migration Count is in question. After further discussion, it was decided that PSO would no

longer sponsor the PAMC and instead encourage people to participate in other bird data gathering efforts such as the Global Big Day or the B4C.

Greg Grove suggested that PSO add its name to the list of organizations that support the American Bird Conservancy. Vern made a motion which David Yeany seconded that PSO add its name to the list of organizations that support the American Bird Conservancy. The motion passed. Laura mentioned that it might be appropriate to make a monetary donation to the ABC. Other board members agreed. Laura moved that PSO make a \$100 donation to the American Bird Conservancy. Vern seconded the motion which passed.

Frank made a motion that all the votes that were taken on line and were recorded in the November 26, 2019, minutes be confirmed. David seconded the motion which passed.

A complete transcript of the meeting minutes may be found on the PSO website.

Roger V. Higbee, Secretary
Indiana, PA



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:

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Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology Annual Meeting Scholarship Program

In order to foster an interest in and an appreciation for birding and ornithology in Pennsylvania, each year the PSO will provide a scholarship for a person 18 years of age or younger OR an Undergraduate college student who wishes to attend the PSO annual meeting.

(You may not nominate someone without their knowledge or permission)

- ❖ The person must be nominated by a current PSO member, a bird club, an Audubon chapter, a conservation organization, or an educator.
- ❖ If the nominee is younger than 18, the nominating sponsor must attend the meeting and must be responsible for transportation to/from the meeting and must be responsible for the youth during the meeting (see below) if a parent/guardian is not accompanying the youth. The youth's parent/guardian must sign below giving the youth permission to attend the PSO meeting with the sponsor.
- ❖ PSO will pay the recipient's meeting registration, food (banquet, lunch, 2 breakfasts) and lodging (up to 2 nights), and transportation costs incurred by the recipient.

In order to complete your nominations, please send this form to Holly Merker (hcybelle@gmail.com), or by land mail to: Holly Merker, 520 Baintree Run, Downingtown, PA 19335. Selection will be conducted by a committee.

Name of Nominee: _____

Address: _____

Age _____ Birth Date _____ Nominee's Phone No. _____

Email address (print clearly): _____

If a college undergraduate student, College Attending: _____

Nominee's Involvement with Birding (Please describe, providing as many details as possible. Attach a page, if necessary)

Name of nominating sponsor: _____ Phone No. _____

Email address: _____ Relationship (if any) to Nominee _____

If the nominee is younger than 18, and a parent or guardian is not accompanying the youth, the nominating sponsor must sign the following statement.

In nominating this youth, I understand that I will be responsible for the youth at the annual meeting and for his/her transportation to and from the meeting.

(Signature)

(Date)

If the nominee is younger than 18, the parent/guardian must sign the following statement.

In allowing my child to be nominated, I understand that PSO is providing the scholarship for my child to attend the annual meeting. The person nominating my child has my permission to transport him/her to and from the meeting and to be responsible for her/him during the annual meeting.

(Signature of Parent/Guardian)

(Date)