

The

PSO Pileated



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From the President's Desk...

One of the things that makes birding such a great hobby is that there are always birds to be seen, something to observe. Everywhere! Birds are all around us – in town, in the country, during winter and summer, even if it's as simple as a junco and a titmouse fighting at the bird feeder! And, the simplest bird observation has a story. Why were they fighting? There's plenty of food!!! Wild bird behavior, beyond just the species' identification, enhances our curiosity and can break the monotony of a winter day. As we develop an appreciation and knowledge of birds, we delve into aspects of life beyond our own. It deepens our appreciation, and hopefully awe, of the natural world in which we live.

Birds also constantly challenge us to learn. Some friends and I saw an eagle soaring high over Barbour's the other day! I should (by now) be able to distinguish a Golden from the many Balds we see, but I wasn't sure! It was great – a challenge to my knowledge that sent me back to the books! This is part of the appeal of birding. Always learning.

Bird populations are constantly in flux, seasonally and geographically, and we get to experience the challenge and stimulation of change! "What's new?" For some reason, we humans are easily bored. Birds give us a constant challenge and the delight of discovery. Winter is the season in which birds are expected to stay put. Long-distant migrants have long since departed for warmer



Nesting Red Crossbills are showing up in eastern Pennsylvania.

Photo by Wayne Laubscher

climates (where food supplies are available). Winter residents have settled into seasonal territories to eke out survival in our land of frozen waste! (OK, I know, but I'm not tolerating these winters as well in my older age). One winter isn't the same as another, of course, but even during a relatively mild winter, we can observe shifting populations. In mid-January we saw a flock of juncos that easily numbered 190 individuals in one field. It struck me that, in "mid-winter," some-

thing different was happening. Looking at statewide eBird records for this winter, a big jump in the "frequency" and "birds per hour" of juncos occurred during the week of January 15. It reflected a mid-winter immigration of juncos into Pennsylvania, apparently in response to the "Arctic Blast" and heavy snow that passed north of us two days prior. I personally get a kick noting the life responses of common birds to natural events, that give insights into the adaptations birds make to their environment.

Birds are so accessible to us. They are visually appealing; we can learn to identify their vocalizations; and we even have insights into what they're saying. Of course, you can count on me to bring this around to Bird Atlas Projects. Probably the season with our lowest birding activity is summer, the other season in which the majority of species are settled into territories, diligently passing along another generation of their kind. Bird Atlases provide that added incentive to explore nooks and crannies of habitat close to home or explore unsettled

areas farther afield to gain new insights into birds' lives during the breeding season. I trust that the Third Breeding Bird Atlas will bump up birding activity during June and July since there's so much to discover and interesting behaviors to see, actual juvenile plumage, nesting behaviors, and the bold territorial singing that announces the presence of even "hard-to-see" skulking species.

Of course, this year it's really obvious that the "nesting season" isn't just June and July. How can I not mention nesting Red Crossbills showing up in many of the counties of the eastern half of the state? We're documenting an exceptional situation, with new insights into the extraordinary life-history strategies of the various populations (types) of this incredible species. Nesting in mid-January as long as there are pine seeds to eat?

Moving across the continent in response to available food supplies? These stories are amazing! And, diligent

observation is documenting a dark side of this incredible phenomenon, as these naïve birds (to human threats) carry on life without fear of us, alighting on roadways within feet of birders and carrying on business as if we weren't present (unlike almost all other birds around us) but at the same time being decimated by automobiles passing at high speeds. So tragic! I trust more will be written about population effects like this on these recent visitors to the East! And I thank Wayne, David, Bobby, Beth, and others for passing along these stories to me and providing an insight into what these birds are facing.

But by thrill of discovery or tragedy of loss, we birders are documenting the ongoing life and death of birds in the depth of winter when they also happen to be nesting!

Dan Brauning, President
Lycoming County

PSO Annual Meeting and Festival

The 2024 PSO Annual Meeting and Festival will be held Friday, May 31, through Sunday, June 2, in Washington County. All activities will be based at the DoubleTree by Hilton, Pittsburgh - Meadowlands. A pre-registration conservation project is being planned. Details will soon be available on pabirds.org. Three days of Pennsylvania birding at its best will be the main feature with guided field trips in the mornings and engaging speakers in the afternoons. The Saturday evening banquet will be followed by Katie Fallon's presentation entitled "Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird."

The PSO Birding Festival is the event to attend. Vendors will display products and services, and the conservation and Earl Poole awards will be presented.

The Allegheny Land Trust (ALT) has been selected as the 2024 recipient of the PSO Conservation Award. ALT's steadfast dedication to land conservation in Allegheny and Washington Counties in southwestern Pennsylvania has resulted in the preservation of many acres of invaluable bird habitat. Their mission, rooted in a commitment to the well-being of both current and future generations, is exemplified through their efforts to safeguard these critical ecosystems. ALT's Regional Conservation Agenda stands as a testament to their strategic approach, identifying and prioritizing lands that not only foster biodiversity but also play an integral role in managing water resources, and defining the scenic character of southwestern Pennsylvania. ALT is helping to create a resilient region, characterized by abundant green spaces that are easily

accessible, thereby not only protecting avian and wildlife habitat, but also ensuring a higher quality of life for all.

ALT's work extends beyond land conservation; its education and awareness programs foster a deeper understanding of regional environmental issues and offer viable solutions for both present and future generations. Their steadfast belief in the indispensability of green space to overall well-being underscores their significance in the conservation landscape. ALT's approach to conservation aligns well with the values and mission of PSO, making them an exemplary recipient for the 2024 PSO Conservation Award.

This year's Earl Poole Award recipient is Mike Fialkovich. In 2011 Mike received the well deserved Todd Award from the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania. Mike has served PSO in many positions, including as board member and as PSO president from 2016 through 2019, and prior to that, as vice president for two years. As an active birder for many years, he compiled bird reports for both Allegheny and Fayette counties as early as the 1990s. He was also a valuable member of PORC. During the 2nd Breeding Bird Atlas, Mike was a regional coordinator and also wrote species accounts for that Atlas. In addition, he runs a Breeding Bird Survey and Winter Raptor Survey routes. Mike has also been active in the Three Rivers Birding Club where he currently serves as president. His contributions to ornithology have been exceptional. We thank and congratulate him for his many accomplishments.

PSO Annual Meeting Schedule

May 31 - June 2, 2024

DoubleTree by Hilton, Pittsburgh - Meadowlands

Friday, May 31, 2024

- 5:00 p.m. Registration opens - Vendors present
- 6:00 - 7:00 p.m. Social
- 7:00 p.m. Business Meeting
- 7:30 p.m. Social
- 8:00 p.m. Departure from DoubleTree for Nocturnal Field Trip

Saturday, June 1, 2024

- 6:30 a.m. Field Trip Departures

Lunch on your own following field trips.

- 12:00 p.m. Vendors present
- 1:00 - 1:40 p.m. Comparative vocalizations, genomic divergence, and demographic histories reveals asymmetric reproductive isolation in allopatric Nashville Warbler subspecies (*Leiothlypis ruficapilla*), presented by Lan-Nhi Phung
- 1:40 - 2:20 p.m. No Fool's Errand: New evidence suggests the persistence of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*) in Louisiana, presented by Steve Latta
- 2:20 - 2:40 p.m. Break - Vendors present
- 2:40 - 3:20 p.m. *Kicking Off the Pennsylvania Bird Atlas!* presented by Amber Wiewel
- 3:20 - 4:00 p.m. *East Coast Hawkwatching: Identification, Tricks, and Trends*, presented by Brian Wargo
- 5:00 - 6:00 p.m. Cocktail Hour
- 5:30 p.m. Doors open to DoubleTree junior ballroom
- 6:00 p.m. Dinner
- 6:30 p.m. Presentation of Awards
- 7:00 p.m. Keynote Speaker – Katie Fallon whose topic will be “Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird”

Sunday, June 2

- 6:30 a.m. Field Trip Departures

PSO Festival Field Trips

Friday, May 31 – Hillman’s Nocturnal Birds and Moths, led by Ryan Tomazin. Meet at the Five Points Extension Parking Lot at Hillman at 8:30. Coordinates for the parking lot are **40.454685, -80.417683**.

Note: This field trip is limited to 10 participants.

This is an undeveloped state park that is also a State Game Lands. The area features a variety of habitats including marshes, large ponds, pine plantations, grassland, shrub land, and woods. Birding is mainly done along the gravel roads through the area. There are numerous areas to explore. Grassland access is on dirt paths. Note the area has numerous ticks, so staying on the road and trails is recommended. The trail through the grassland may be muddy if we have rain.

The evening outing on Friday will focus on listening for Eastern Whip-poor-wills and American Woodcocks that are fairly easy to find. Barred Owls and Great Horned Owls may also be heard. For those interested in moths, a lighted sheet to attract them will also be set up. You will be surprised at the variety of amazing and beautiful moths to be found.

Saturday, June 1, 2024 – Boyce-Mayview Park and Wingfield Pines, led by Shannon Thompson. Meet at the hotel at 6:30.

Boyce-Mayview Park is on a former hospital property in southern Allegheny County that is now a public park in Upper St. Clair. Habitats include several ponds and wetlands, open fields, and forest. Spring offers a great display of wildflowers and migrating warblers. Some rare herons have occurred at this park including Little Blue Heron and Black-crowned Night-Heron (rare in southwestern PA). Barred Owls are residents. Trails vary from wide and level to narrow and hilly, so the difficulty is moderate in some places. Trails are all dirt and may be muddy in some places.

Wingfield Pines is just across the road from Boyce-Mayview and is connected to Boyce-Mayview by Chartiers Creek. Wingfield is owned by the Allegheny Land Trust, and the site was a former golf course. It’s now a nature preserve with numerous ponds and a cattail marsh. The ponds are used to treat acid mine runoff from the surrounding land. The settling ponds allow the iron oxide in the water to settle out before the water continues to flow into Chartiers Creek. The marshes featured breeding Sora and Virginia Rail in recent years. Yellow-throated Warblers breed in the sycamores. Both orioles

and Eastern Kingbird breed here. Rarities include Black Tern, American and Least Bittern, the first county record of Snowy Egret, and Prothonotary Warbler.

Restrooms are available at the center in Boyce-Mayview Park and at nearby gas stations a short distance from the park at the Bridgeville Exit of I-79.

Parking area GPS Coordinates: **40.336014, -80.111409**

Saturday, June 1 – Cross Creek County Park, Washington County, led by Fred Kachmarik and Alyssa Nees. Meet at Cross Creek at 6:30 a.m. at Boat Launch 3. See Google Map and coordinates: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/GJpC34Q1CgMUGn3L9>, **40.258515, -80.382666**

This county park features a lake and trails through various habitats. We will be walking the lakeshore trail. Walking is easy, but there may be mud if there is a lot of rain. The lake usually harbors Canada Geese, Mallards, and Wood Ducks along with Green and Great Blue Herons. Bald Eagles and Osprey are likely to fly over hunting for fish. We will walk along field habitat where Field Sparrows, Tree Swallows, House Wrens, Willow Flycatchers, Yellow-breasted Chats, Brown Thrashers, Northern Mockingbirds, Yellow-throated Vireos, etc. nest. We will then come to a wooded section of the trail where all your expected woodland birds also nest. (We had numerous White-eyed Vireos last year and a Black-and-white Warbler the last two years). Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers are likely, as well as numerous warblers.

Composting restrooms are available at the meeting location.

Saturday, June 1 – Enlow Fork, Greene County, led by Marjory Howard and members of the Ralph Bell Bird Club (rkbirdclub@yahoo.com). Meet at Enlow Fork parking lot at 7:30 a.m. Parking lot coordinates are **39.961263, -80.461824**.

Enlow Fork natural area is a beautiful stream valley known for the abundance of spring wildflowers and Ohio Buckeye, a rare tree in Pennsylvania. There is a brushy field near the beginning of the trail, and the remainder of the valley is forested. The stream supports various amphibians including Red-spotted Newt and American Toad.

Some expected birds include Bald Eagle, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-

throated Vireo, Wood Thrush, Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Louisiana Waterthrush, Ovenbird, Black-and-white Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

Saturday, June 1 – Hillman State Park, Washington County, led by Adrian Fenton. Meet along Steubenville Pike at the following coordinates: **40.435710, -80.406611**.

This is an undeveloped state park that is also a State Game Lands. The area features a variety of habitats including marshes, large ponds, pine plantations, grassland, shrub land, and woods. Birding is mainly done along the gravel roads through the area. There are numerous areas to explore. Grassland access is on dirt paths. Note the area has numerous ticks, so staying on the road and trails is recommended. The trail through the grassland can be muddy if we have rain.

Saturday will be a driving tour of the area. Birding will primarily be along the paved and gravel roads through the park and on trails through grasslands.

The grasslands are home to grassland sparrows while the shrub areas feature Black-billed Cuckoos, White-eyed Vireos, Blue-winged Warblers, and Brown Thrashers. Prairie Warblers may also be found. Typical forest birds include Wood Thrush, Scarlet Tanager, Hooded Warbler, Ovenbird, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, etc. A large Great Blue Heron Rookery is easily accessible.

Many years ago a large pine plantation was found to support breeding Red-breasted Nuthatches, Blue-headed Vireos, Hermit Thrushes, and Pine Warblers. This is very unusual for a low elevation location. The pines give birders the feeling of being in the northern woods.

Saturday, June 1 – Mingo Creek County Park, Washington County, led by John Flannigan. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Mingo Ebenezer Covered Bridge parking lot. Coordinates: **40.1917524,-80.0413572**

Second part of the outing will begin at Mingo Observatory Parking Lot, Coordinates: **40.2096770,-80.0188170**.

We will bird two sections of the park. The first is a wooded trail that passes through a pine forest, brushy habitat, and crosses a creek. Next is Chapel Hill Road then a deciduous forest ascending in elevation. This trail is probably two miles one way. It is moderately difficult with some rocky areas and exposed tree roots to navigate. Birds expected are: Yellow-throated, Red-eyed, and

White-eyed Vireos; Scarlet Tanager; Rose-breasted Grosbeak; Wood, possibly Hermit, and Swainson's Thrushes; Field Sparrow; Indigo Bunting; Common Raven; Red-tailed and Broad-winged Hawks; Ovenbird; American Redstart; Cerulean, Kentucky, and Hooded Warblers; plus possibly late migrants such as Black-throated Blue and Black-throated Green, Blue-winged, Blackpoll, Tennessee, and Bay-breasted Warblers. Location is the parking lot after passing through the Ebenezer Covered Bridge.

The second section is the Observatory which consists of a large brushy field with level pathways bisecting bushy habitat that supports Common Yellowthroat, Brown Thrasher, Field Sparrow, Yellow-breasted Chat, Blue-winged Warbler and possibly Prairie Warblers (bred here recently). This trail is level for the most part and about one mile in length. Location is off Mingo Creek Road, the main road through the park. Turn up Mansion Hill Road just past the Henry Covered Bridge. Drive nearly all the way to the end where a parking lot will be visible shortly after passing Shelter #10.

Saturday, June 1 – National Aviary, Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, 700 Arch Street, Pittsburgh, PA led by Bob Mulvihill (Robert.Mulvihill@aviary.org) Meet at the Aviary at 9:30 a.m. Cost: \$17.00 per person.

This is a special tour of the National Aviary that features three exciting experiences.

1) 9:30 a.m. National Aviary Ornithologist Robert Mulvihill will greet you before you take a special tour of the National Aviary, led by either our head of Animal Programs or Animal Collections (based on their availability) that will include feedings in habitats (Wetlands, Tropical Rainforest, and Grasslands) as they give insights into our habitats and conservation work.

2) 11:00 a.m. Habitat Heroes, a live bird show where Bald Eagles and Eurasian Eagle Owls fly overhead as audience members learn about their amazing adaptations and their importance on our shared ecosystem in our theater.

3) 11:30 a.m. An exciting Animal Ambassador Meet and Greet in our theater. You are welcome to tour habitats on your own after the tour, or have lunch at Atria's Café in the aviary.

Saturday, June 1 – Panhandle Trail, Midway, Bulgur Area, Washington County, led by Michelle Kienholz and Dan Mendenhall. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the hotel.

The Panhandle Trail is a 29-mile rails-to-trails passage-way from Collier Township, PA, to Colliers, WV. Between Midway and Bulgur, the trail passes by grassland and shrub habitats and is an excellent place to find flycatchers, vireos, both oriole species, mimids, and grassland species, including Henslow's and Grasshopper Sparrows, Eastern Meadowlark, and the featured bird of the meeting, Bobolink. Northern Harrier and Short-eared Owls are found here in winter.

This is an easy, level walk along a paved trail. There is a port-a-john at the parking lot and a Valero gas station nearby in Midway. If you arrive late, simply turn right on the trail from the parking lot and walk west until you meet the group. This is approximately a two to three hour out and back outing, about a three-mile round trip. There is minimal shade, so dress for the weather, and bring water.

Parking lot coordinates: **40.3695523, -802924633**
(Midway Mile 10.6 parking lot off Prospect Street, not off N. Main Street).

Saturday, June 1 – Raccoon Creek State Park, Beaver County, led by Eric Hall and Mark VanderVen

Meet at the Wildflower Reserve Parking Lot along Route 30 at 7:00 a.m. Coordinates: **40.5071308, -80.3638852**

Raccoon Creek State Park is one of Pennsylvania's largest state parks. It features a variety of habitats and a 101-acre lake as well as a wildflower reserve with over 700 plants on the list. The wildflower reserve is a good place to find Cerulean Warblers, Yellow-throated Warblers, and Louisiana Waterthrush along Raccoon Creek. Other warblers that breed in the park include Ovenbird, Northern Parula, American Redstart, Hooded Warbler, Yellow Warbler, and Blue-winged Warbler. Black-throated Green Warbler and Kentucky Warbler are possible. Osprey are often seen at the lake. Red-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireos and Wood Thrushes should be easily found. The trip leaders will try to visit as many habitats as possible during the trip.

Restrooms are available at the Wildflower Reserve and at the Park Office.

Saturday, June 1 – SGL 117, Washington County, led by Mike Fialkovich. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the game lands parking area with the following coordinates: **40.406233, -80.383525**.

This extensive game lands in the northern part of Washington County features grassland, shrub habitat, and forest.

A great variety of birds breed here. Specialties of this habitat include Henslow's Sparrow, Prairie Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, both cuckoo species, Wild Turkey, Eastern Kingbird, Orchard Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, and many more.

Walking will be easy on a level gravel road with one minor slope. No restrooms are available at the site, but there are gas stations and a McDonald's nearby at the Imperial Exit of Route 22/30.

Saturday, June 1 – SGL 232, Greene County, led by Jeff Kenney and Angela Romanczuk, (610-804-4634). Meet at 7:00 a.m. at a roadside pull-off at the gamelands with the following coordinates: **40.1780846, -80.4409822**.

This game lands offers a variety of breeding birds. The habitat is wooded riparian hillside. Target species include Cerulean Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, and other forest birds. Walking will be on a road.

There are no restrooms at the site.

Sunday, June 2 – Boyce-Mayview Park and Wingfield Pines, led by Shannon Thompson. Meet at the hotel at 6:30. See description on page 4 of this newsletter.

Sunday, June 2 – Cedar Creek Park, Westmoreland County, led by Alex Busato (724-963-6612). Meet at the lower parking lot and Great Allegheny Passage trail access (**40.176282, -79.770165**) at 8:00 a.m.

This will be an approximately 2.5-mile round-trip hike through a variety of forest and meadow habitat.

We'll first walk along the Great Allegheny Passage trail along the Youghiogheny River west toward its intersection with the Cedar Creek Gorge. Spotted Sandpiper, Common Merganser, Cedar Waxwings, and Tree Swallows are common along the Yough riverfront. We will then ascend the Cedar Creek Gorge trail along the stream (some wet and muddy spots and moderately steep) through deciduous forests and past scenic cascades. In the forest we are likely to encounter Baltimore Orioles, Scarlet Tanager, Acadian

Flycatcher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Louisiana Waterthrush, Yellow-throated Warbler, American Redstart, Warbling Vireo, and Yellow-throated Vireo, among others. From here we will ascend a short section of uneven and rough trail to a field with a mowed path along the Mon-Valley RC Airfield. In the field we are likely to see Field Sparrows and other sparrows, Eastern Meadowlark, Eastern Bluebirds, Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Yellowthroat, and more. Lastly, we'll make our way back down the roadway to the lower parking lot.

There are restrooms in the park.

Sunday, June 2 – Cross Creek County Park, Washington County, led by Fred Kachmarik and Alyssa Nees. Meet at 6:30 a.m. at Boat Launch 3. See details on page 4 of this newsletter.

Sunday, June 2 – Enlow Fork, Greene County, led by Marjory Howard and members of the Ralph Bell Bird Club, rkbirdclub@yahoo.com. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Enlow Fork parking lot. See pages 4-5 of this newsletter for details.

Sunday, June 2 – IBA 80 - Greencove Wetlands, led by Larry Helgerman (412-508-0321). Meet at 7:15 a.m. at the Historic S-Bridge parking lot on SR-221. Coordinates: **40.140717, -80.349963**

From the S-bridge, we will carpool five miles to our birding areas. We will begin birding in the upper fields of PA Game Lands 232 (1,250 ft elevation) and work our way down to Buffalo Creek (850 ft elevation). We will be carpooling through our birding route, stopping in the various habitats, walking short distances at each stop. Walking will be mostly on stone roads, some with gentle grades.

Habitats include upland fields, early successional forest, mature woodlands, riparian zones, and lowland wetlands.

Outing difficult rating: 3 or less (1 to 5 scale). Be prepared to walk with sturdy shoes/boots. Bring water and snacks if you like. There are no restrooms in the game lands. Target birds include four species of swallows including Purple Martin; both species of cuckoos; Acadian and Willow Flycatchers; Brown Thrasher; Wood

Thrush; White-eyed, Warbling, and Yellow-throated Vireos; warblers including Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Blue-winged Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Cerulean Warbler, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Warbler; Scarlet Tanager; Rose-breasted Grosbeak; Indigo Bunting; Bobolink; Eastern Meadowlark; and both orioles that nest in the area.

Sunday, June 2 – Mingo Creek County Park, Washington County, led by John Flannigan. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Mingo Ebenezer Covered Bridge parking lot, with the coordinates **40.1917524, -80.0413572**. See page 5 of this newsletter for details.

Sunday, June 2 – Panhandle Trail, Midway, Bulgur Area, Washington County, led by Ezra White and Michael David. Meet at the hotel at 7:30 a.m. See top of page 6 for details about this area.

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Note: Several other outings have been scheduled but details are not yet available. Saturday and Sunday outings to Settlers Cabin Park, led by Malcolm Kurtz, and a Sunday outing to Peters Lake Park and Canonsburg Lake are in the process of being planned. Check pabirds.org at a later date for details.

Speakers at Our Annual PSO Festival

Lan-Nhi Phung was awarded a PSO Student Research Grant in 2022. Her research as a Ph.D. student focuses on understanding “the role of vocalization as a mechanism of premating reproductive isolation, which could be examined by observing the territorial reaction of one group to the song of another group.” Her subject species is Nashville Warbler and uses playbacks to assess reactions from both male and female birds. Her adviser Dr. David Toews in the Biology Dept. of Penn State has pursued various research projects to learn more about the genomic influence on many aspects of the lives of wood warblers. Phung was born and raised in Hanoi, Vietnam, and obtained a B.S. in Biology at Mercyhurst University in Erie PA. Driven by her passion for science communication, Lan-Nhi enjoys talking about biology and is an advocate for making ornithology/biology more equitable and accessible.

Dr. Steven C. Latta is the Director of Conservation and Field Research at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh. A native of Michigan, he was educated at Kalamazoo College obtaining a B.A. in Biology, an M.S. in Natural Resources at the University of Michigan, and a Ph.D. in Avian Ecology at the University of Missouri-Columbia. After graduating in 2000, he was a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Missouri-St. Louis where he studied the evolution and diversification of avian malaria across Caribbean islands with Dr. Robert Ricklefs. He then served for four years as the Director of the Latin American Program at Point Reyes Bird Observatory in California where he developed long-term monitoring programs in many countries and trained hundreds of locally-based biologists and naturalists in standardized bird monitoring techniques. Since joining the National Aviary team in 2006, his current research has used the Louisiana Waterthrush as a model species to study population dynamics and carry-over effects on both the temperate breeding and Neotropical overwintering grounds. And more recently well known is his research with the Project Principalis team about their observations of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Louisiana. Understanding the distribution and ecology of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker will lead to protocols for protection of the woodpecker and other species in critical bottomland habitats.

Amber Wiewel grew up in Missouri where she first fell in love with birds in the Ozarks. She received a B.S. in Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences from the University of Missouri and an M.S. in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from Iowa State University. She worked as a

wildlife biologist in a partnership with Penn State University and the US Geological Survey in which she did amphibian surveys, endangered species monitoring, and disease surveillance. In 2023 she took on the role of Pennsylvania Bird Atlas Coordinator. In her new position she has taken on the immense job of directing the 3rd PA Bird Atlas that will run over the next five years. Nearly 5000 3-mile x 3-mile blocks will be surveyed for confirmation of breeding birds that reside in the state. Thousands of birders will be following protocols to enter the data about what they observe in the field. Amber resides in Boalsburg with her husband Dr. David Miller and two children.

Dr. Brian M. Wargo is a physicist by training, a decorated science educator, and a hawk counter at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch. He is the Director of the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA), chairs of the Data Committee and Education and Conservation Committee for HMANA, and is the Eastern Flyway editor for *Hawk Migration Studies*, the official journal of HMANA. In his committee roles, he reviews policies and procedures for data acquisition and writes, reviews, and disseminates educational and conservation materials related to the hawk migration endeavor. He is an instructor for the University of Pittsburgh, teaching a practicum in secondary Science, and has been an instructor in Physics for the Freedom Area School District from 1995 to the present. Wargo has had extensive education in Science Education with a B.S. in Secondary Education (a focus on Science) from the University of West Virginia, an M.A. in Physics from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and a Ph.D. in Science Education from the University of Pittsburgh.

Katie Fallon, our keynote speaker, is the author of the nonfiction books *Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird* (2020, 2017) and *Cerulean Blues: A Personal Search for a Vanishing Songbird* (2011), as well as two books for children. Her book on the Turkey Vulture explains why this overlooked bird is so important to our environment, while her book on the Cerulean Warbler chronicles the decline and threats to this beautiful wood warbler. Besides her books, she has published several essays and writes the column WINGBEATS for Bird Watcher’s Digest. Because writing is an important part of her life, she has taught writing at West Virginia University, Virginia Tech, and elsewhere. She not only has a passion for writing, but also teaching with nature and art manifested in all that she does. Because of her passion for birds, she founded and serves as “Executive Director of

the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving wild birds through research, education, and rehabilitation. The ACCA is based near Morgantown, WV, and each year treats more than 500 injured wild birds, conducts dozens of environmental education programs with twenty non-releasable raptors, and sponsors conservation research projects.”

A less-known fact is that in 2022 she ran for a seat in the West Virginia state legislature and was narrowly defeated (by just 138 votes!).

Katie holds memberships in several professional organizations, including the Associated Writers & Writing Programs, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, the Appalachian Studies Association, and the International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators.

Katie has a B.A. in English from Penn State University and an M.F.A. in Creative Nonfiction from West Virginia University.

Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology Announces Fourth Annual Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) proudly announces that its Fourth Annual Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation will occur from June 7-17, 2024, and support three projects across the Commonwealth.

Mark your calendars for **April 1, 2024**, as this is when team registration will go live! The registration page, along with information on our 2024 conservation partners and conservation funding goal will be updated at <https://www.breedingbirdblitz.org>.

We are adding some new features to the Blitz this year! In response to feedback we have received from our teams, we will be adding a “Cumulative Count” option, where species totals are counted over two or more days during the 11 day period. This is in addition to our traditional “Big Day Count” category. We will also be adding an “Atlasing” category in recognition of the 3rd PA Bird Atlas (PBA3). More information can be found at <https://www.breedingbirdblitz.org> as we update the website.

In its first three years, the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation has raised more than \$45,000 in support of nine projects. The 2023 Blitz featured more than 100 birders competing on 21 teams. Those birders raised \$19,310 for conservation while documenting 175 species over 11 days in June.

We are excited to be organizing this event for its fourth year and are proud of the conservation projects we help fund. We hope you will consider registering a team and will join us for the Fourth Annual Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation!

Visit www.breedingbirdblitz.org for updates on the event and all the details and stories from the event’s history. Questions about creating a team can be directed to blitz4conservation@gmail.com where a member of the PSO Conservation Committee will be excited to answer. Conservation Committee members are Laura Jackson, chair; Brian Byrnes; Vern Gauthier; Carolyn Hendricks; David Barber; Mary Alice Koeneke; and Karter Witmer.

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization founded in 1990 to foster the study and appreciation of the wild birds of Pennsylvania and to promote the conservation of birds and their habitats. PSO organizes and supports several bird monitoring projects, hosts field trips, an annual meeting, and publishes the quarterly journal *Pennsylvania Birds*. More information about PSO can be found at www.pabirds.org.

Media inquiries about the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation should be directed to Karter Witmer, 570-439-4787, gw5107@psu.edu.

Pennsylvania's Third Bird Atlas Has Fledged!



Since launching on January 1, over 600 birders have submitted more than 15,000 checklists to the Atlas from more than 40% of the

state's 4,938 blocks. About a dozen species have already been confirmed breeding during the Third Atlas, including Bald Eagle, Great Horned Owl, Barn Owl, Red-tailed Hawk, and Red Crossbill!

The Third Bird Atlas will provide valuable updates to our knowledge of the distribution and abundance of birds breeding in Pennsylvania. Over the next five years, birders will document when and where the state's approximately 190 species of nesting birds are breeding by recording observations of breeding behaviors such as territoriality, courtship, and nest building. So far, atlasing for breeding birds has been restricted to a small number of species that are very early breeders in Pennsylvania. As spring arrives over the next two months, breeding will slowly pick up until we hit our peak atlasing period from April to August, when the majority of species across the state will be breeding. However, this relatively calm period we're in now is the perfect time to start exploring the Atlas protocols and tools, if you haven't already!

Here are some guidelines and resources to help you get started:

- The PA Bird Atlas Volunteer Handbook, the breeding guidelines chart (shows when species are breeding), and other resources can be found under the "Atlas Essentials" tab on the Atlas website (<http://ebird.org/atlaspa>).
- All Atlas data must be submitted via the 'Pennsylvania Bird Atlas' portal in eBird. Instructions for switching to the portal in eBird on your mobile device can be found at <http://ebird.org/atlaspa>, or data can be entered via a web browser at <http://ebird.org/atlaspa/submit>. Using the portal on your phone is very convenient, as it tracks important information for you and even gives an alert if you approach a block boundary.

- Stay within the boundaries of a single block for a checklist. PA is divided into 4,938 blocks that are each about 3 miles by 3 miles. If you are crossing a block boundary, start a new checklist. To explore blocks and download block maps, see the Atlas Map Tool: <https://arcg.is/1H40Xm0>.
- Keep checklists short. Aim for starting a new checklist every 30 minutes or 1 mile, or when entering a new habitat. This helps link the birds you observe with a more precise location and habitat.
- Record breeding behaviors when you see them, every time you see them (in appropriate habitat and during the breeding season for the species). Definitions of the breeding codes can be found in the PA Bird Atlas Volunteer Handbook.
- Everyone is welcome to participate and you can bird anywhere in the state, but if you are interested in dedicating more time to the Atlas, consider signing up as a Principal Atlaser for a block! Becoming a Principal Atlaser means that you will take responsibility for ensuring a block is well surveyed for breeding birds, by spending about 20 daytime and two nighttime hours birding in accessible habitats in the block between April and August (in one year or cumulatively for more than one year) and will regularly submit your data to the PA Bird Atlas portal in eBird. To look for open blocks and sign up as a Principal Atlaser, visit the Atlas Map Tool: <https://arcg.is/1H40Xm0>
- Have fun and enjoy watching the birds, while knowing that you are contributing to bird conservation in Pennsylvania!

Amber Wiewel, PA Bird Atlas Coordinator
Hawk Mountain Sanctuary
Acopian Center for Conservation Learning
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The Raven Reporter

Tales of Discovery
about Pennsylvania
Birds



The Owls Next Door

There has been a spotty history of Barn Owls in Columbia County and adjacent areas of Luzerne, Montour, and Northumberland counties where there are small family farms with many old buildings. Not only have the Barn Owls nested in barns and silos, but a few have nested in large trees, particularly sycamores, for multiple years. In one sycamore, there were several feet of owl pellets from many years of occupancy. That tree has long since fallen and so also has the local population of these grassland nocturnal raptors. Since barns and silos are on private property, the occurrence of Barn Owls has been a bit of a mystery. Where were they and where have they been recently?

The PA Game Commission has been studying and promoting Barn Owls for several years now. Most Barn Owls have been found in the southern agricultural counties, but a few in the Upper Susquehanna Valley. The local bird club also assisted by offering a few owl boxes to private property owners with no known results. It took a few years, but one of the recipients of a Barn Owl box contacted me this year. Peter Mastroianni thought that there were Barn Owls in their large old barn only a short distance away from our house. A few years ago, we gave Peter an owl box because their barn is ideal for Barn Owls in size and position. And Peter and his wife were very willing to host owls. From their yard, you can see many acres of open fields. Thanks to cooperation from the Columbia County Conservation District, we had learned of Barn Owls nesting in a silo only a mile south about a decade ago. There has been no news of those owls in recent years, but we always held on to hope, knowing that a lot of good Barn Owl habitat exists in the area. When I visited the barn, I found several owl pellets. This nest box was not in the barn facing inside, but rather was built into the barn with its opening facing out. Another neighbor about a mile away also found owl pellets in his barn, deepening our suspicion that Barn Owls were around.

Peter tried to contact me soon afterwards about a crazy emergency he had with the owls. One of them got stuck in the gutters of the barn. How does that happen? Its neck

was fixed between two drainage gutters, and the owl could not get out. With some quick thinking, Peter separated the gutters to capture and release the owl into the barn. Not only did he save the owl, but this incident certainly confirmed that Barn Owls were living in the barn. I checked out the Barn Owl which seemed a bit ruffled (and perhaps embarrassed?), and I asked the Game Commission's Wildlife Diversity biologist to get involved with the situation. Wildlife Biologist Rich Fritsky has been working with Barn Owls in the Region for several years and has handled Barn Owls on a few properties with good results. Within a couple days, Rich visited the site and climbed a ladder up to the box entrance. Rich found a box full of baby Barn Owls bursting to get out. A great discovery, but the owlets were old enough to fly right out of the box and to nearby woods out of reach. So these owlets were not banded. They slipped away, but the new nesting site was really good news. We will be watching for a return of Barn Owls in 2024.

It pays to pay attention to the neighbors and to keep a good dialogue about birds. We are keeping an eye and an ear out for our neighborhood. We hope they stay around and return to the barn. And, we intend to look for more in our valley. Not only will it be an Atlas record, but a step forward in bird conservation in an agricultural landscape.

Atlas Challenge: All Green Blocks

About 60 percent of Pennsylvania is forested. Most birds live in the big woods of the state. They will be a challenge for the third Atlas, because so few birders live in the rural, forested counties. Fortunately, a very generous road system in the state provides a lot of access to these wooded blocks. For birders, the rural dirt roads are a gateway into some of the best birding spots of the state and allows coverage of most blocks fairly easily. It helps to plan bird surveys in these forested blocks. Fortunately, many tools are readily available to plan ahead. Studying the block map is a good start to understanding where to concentrate your efforts. Even an "all green" block offers subtle clues about habitats. A topographic map will show most wetlands, and a National Wetland Inventory map will reveal what kind of wetland it might be (NWI maps are available on line). Any wetland will probably offer different species than are found elsewhere.

Streamside woods, especially with tall trees, are special areas that offer a variety of species that prefer tall tree canopy. Here you might find Cerulean Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Northern Parula, and Yellow-throated and Warbling Vireo. Of course, good quality streams will feature birds such as Louisiana Waterthrush, Belted

Kingfisher, Spotted Sandpiper, and Common Merganser even in a highly forested landscape. The south and east sides of hills and mountains often will be dominated by drier forest types, mostly oaks, hickories, maples, and pines. The north side of terrain often has forest more typical of northern climates so you might find groves of hemlock, beech, and sugar maple instead of oaks. Cool, shaded forests are often homes to more northern species even in the southern counties. It can be surprising to find Hermit Thrush, Dark-eyed Junco, Black-throated Green Warbler, and Canada Warbler in the cool glens of a forested block.

It is a good strategy to touch on all types of forest types when you cover a forested block. The aerial view map shows the conifer evergreen forests in a darker shade. That is where you want to pursue those northern species such as Blackburnian Warbler, Winter Wren, and Blue-headed Vireo. Any timbered area may provide habitat for those “young forest birds” and early successional species. You might be surprised by Field Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Alder Flycatcher, Nashville Warbler, American Woodcock, and

other transitional forest species there. Of course, Golden-winged Warblers are the prize in young woods. While driving along the dirt roads, keep an eye out for black-berry thickets, especially where the purple-flowering raspberry grows. That is where I find Mourning Warblers even in freshly timbered woods. Evergreen conifer stands are key hotspots for bird diversity. Even exotic conifer plantings can host locally uncommon species such as Merlin, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Golden-crowned Kinglet.

One of the best approaches is to get out of the car and walk. Almost any public trail will do. It also is helpful to just walk along the roads, make lingering stops at bridges, and get away from traffic to listen and look for more birds. An “all green” block certainly offers challenges, but also many rewards. You will make many interesting discoveries by tackling one of the big green blocks. Good birding!

Doug Gross
Pennsylvania Boreal Bird Project,
Ricketts Glen State Park Project

Because We Care: PSO Supports Funding for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act

By Laura Jackson

Since PSO is a member of the Endangered Species Coalition, we are asked to support various initiatives to protect animals, especially birds and their habitats. One example is the Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act of 2023 (H. R. 4389). It would reauthorize the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) at a higher appropriations level, as well as lower the match requirement. This federal grant program is critical for conserving migratory birds across the Americas. Seventy-five percent of the grants through NMBCA go to projects abroad, ensuring that critical wintering habitat is conserved, which helps birds thrive before moving to their breeding ground in the U.S. and elsewhere. The updates proposed by this bill would allow for more diverse



Conservation projects to help migratory birds, like Golden-winged Warblers, along their migration routes depend on funding from the NMBCA.

Photo by Mike Jackson

projects to be funded, with the net benefit of conserving more birds.

According to the American Bird Conservancy, which co-lead this initiative with the National Audubon Society, more than 350 species of migratory songbirds are in perilous decline. Some face a projected 50% loss within the next 50 years without immediate intervention.¹ Funding for the NMBCA would continue international conservation efforts started in 2002. Since then, NMBCA has funded 717 projects in 43 countries. It is important to

note that this is a cost-effective program; for every \$1 invested, \$5 has been spent by partners involved in the conservation projects.

PSO signed on to the letter of support in late November 2023, along with over 210 other organizations, which means the Act has broad support across the United States. The letter was sent to the bill's sponsors, Representatives María Elvira Salazar (R-FL), Rick Larsen (D-WA), Dave Joyce (R-OH), and Mary Peltola (D-AK). Their continued leadership is needed to move the bill forward.

The letter and signatories can be found here:

<https://abcbirds.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/NMBCA-organizational-sign-on-letter-2023.pdf>

1. <https://abcbirds.org/news/nmbca-2023/>

Dark Skies for Happy Birds

Growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, I was lucky to live in a rural part of Pennsylvania, where birds flocked to my family's property. One summer, a Baltimore Oriole built its nest outside our living room window, and a few years later, a Cerulean Warbler flit down to investigate our backyard. More recently, my family woke one Christmas morning to a pair of Great Horned Owls conversing close to the house. We bundled up, slipped out into the darkness, and watched the owls' silhouettes against the predawn sky.

Notice that I wrote "darkness." It was dark at night where I grew up. I never appreciated how dark until I moved to a small town. At first, the light at night was minimal. Over the past ten years, though, the night has grown brighter, thanks to unshielded lights on neighboring properties and ever more lights installed on the nearby college campus. The last straw came in September when, without warning, the town installed a super bright LED streetlight on the telephone pole directly in front of my bedroom window.

Perhaps you can sympathize. Light pollution worldwide has increased 9.6% *each year* over the past decade. Put another way, light pollution doubles every eight years. New cheaper, but brighter, LED lights mean people can put up more lights and still save money. All of this comes with a troubling cost to the orioles, warblers, and owls we love.

I'm sure many of you remember the horrible event in October 2020 when over a thousand migrating birds died on one night in Philadelphia. Drawn to lights, the birds hit the buildings with fatal consequences. Flying into windows isn't the only hazard of light at night for birds. Studies have suggested that light pollution can cause birds to shift the timing of their migrations, start singing earlier in the morning, change when they lay their eggs, harbor viruses longer, and suffer sleep deprivation.

What's a safety-conscious bird lover to do? First, if you're concerned about safety, note that the [relationship between lighting and crime](#) is complicated, with no one-size-fits-all

solution. In fact, some studies link increased light to *increased* crime. After all, a person has to see what they're doing to cause mischief. The point is to use lighting responsibly and with care.

[Darksky.org](#) provides tips for homeowners on how to install responsible lighting, based on five principles:

1. Use light only if it's needed.
2. Shield any needed light so it shines only where it has to go.
3. Use the lowest level of light to avoid excessive brightness.
4. Install timers or motion detectors so the light turns off when it's no longer needed (if you're concerned about safety, motion detectors have the bonus of alerting you to a potential problem, which constant lighting does not).
5. Choose warmer, yellower light to reduce the use of harmful blue light.

If you want a fun family project, DarkSky.org lets you complete a home lighting assessment and print out a [Dark Sky Friendly Home Certificate](#), which you can display next to any Better Backyard or Wildlife Habitat certificates you already have.

Interested in doing more? If you live in or near Harrisburg, Philadelphia, or Pittsburgh, you can join in those cities' Lights Out Campaigns. [Lights Out](#), a national program of the Audubon Society, works to convince building owners and managers to turn off excessive lighting during peak migration times (April 1-May 31 and August 15-November 15). If your local municipality or township has installed super bright streetlights like mine did, the [Pennsylvania Outdoor Lighting Council](#) provides information and tips on how to work with local governments on more responsible public lighting. You might also want to follow the progress of [H.B. 1803](#), a bill

currently in committee before the Pennsylvania House of Representatives that, if passed, would be the first responsible lighting law in the state. Finally, check out the [DarkSky Pennsylvania chapter](#) to see how your fellow

Pennsylvanians are banding together to keep the skies dark for birds.

Katie Yelinek
Columbia County

Join us to help under-birded counties with the PA Bird Atlas Project

In 2024 we have planned three more County Birding Spotlights. The next three counties are Forest in March, Fulton in April, and Warren in October. As we have in the past, we will plan outings with the local birders, but you may also bird on your own and submit your data to eBird and share it with the PSO Birding Data site.

Enthusiastic atlasers will be happy to use the opportunity to collect data for the Pennsylvania Bird Atlas portal on eBird using the Atlas protocols.

Tony DeSantis, Chad Kauffman, Joe Gyekis, and Brian Byrnes originally organized these County Birding Spotlights to obtain more data for eBird. Participants who keep county lists have enjoyed them to help them increase the numbers of species they have in each of PA's 67 counties.

The first three took place in 2022 in Cambria, Adams, and Cameron; 2023 highlighted Columbia, Greene, and Union. Continuing with three per year, Chad has once again organized our three county spotlights.

Special thanks to Chad Kauffman for all his work on this great project!



Bobolink Is Bird of the 2024 PSO Festival



Photo by Court Harding



Photo by Court Harding

Every year we select a bird for the PSO pin that attendees receive when they register at the annual meeting. This year the bird of the meeting/festival is the Bobolink. The Bobolink will be depicted on a pin the shape of our hosting county, Washington.

Conservation Chat Room



In case you are wondering if the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation really makes a difference for birds, here's proof that it does. In 2022, the Blitz generated over \$15,000 that was divided evenly among three partner conservation groups. Here's a report from one of our partners, the

Erie Bird Observatory, showing how their grant was used to train a seasonal intern who did a lot of important work in bird conservation.

PSO Partner Report from the Erie Bird Observatory

The 2022 grant from the PSO Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation enabled Erie Bird Observatory (EBO) to hire a seasonal intern for 10 weeks in May-July of 2023. The EBO intern, Ripley Kindervater, is an undergraduate at Penn State Behrend with a strong interest in the natural history of birds, insects, herptiles, and plants. He plans to work in a natural resources field in the future, possibly conservation, and this internship gave him the opportunity to experience a range of field projects relating to bird conservation. While gaining hands-on experience and developing field skills that are important in ornithology, he also provided an extra pair of hands and eyes to ongoing bird and habitat monitoring work conducted by EBO.

Ripley received valuable training in bird banding techniques, including net extractions, aging by molt limits, taking measurements, and banding procedures at the EBO migratory bird banding station at Fry's Landing on Presque Isle State Park and also with the MAPS banding operation for breeding birds in Crawford County.* He assisted with shorebird monitoring, conducted marsh vegetation surveys, monitored Bank Swallow colonies at Presque Isle, and helped coordinate the EBO's team for the PA Society for Ornithology's annual "blitz4birds" fundraiser.

Shorebird monitoring was a big introduction to conservation management for Ripley since EBO monitors nesting Piping Plovers on a daily basis during their nesting season. As an adept birder, he was able to cover additional critical monitoring shifts as a PA Game Commission-approved secondary observer. He also assisted with direct management efforts such as relocating a Piping Plover nest from a poor location, a first for the Great Lakes population in the United States.

At the Presque Isle banding station, and at times in shorebird monitoring, he had the opportunity to interact with the public, helping them to better understand birds and the need for protecting the habitat upon which they rely. He also assisted park staff with installing psychological fencing around Bank Swallow colonies to educate the public about the birds' presence.

In summary, this grant greatly assisted both EBO and this specific intern in a mutually beneficial experience. EBO provided exciting hands-on field training and unique experiences for the intern, while Ripley was an enthusiastic learner and keen observer providing assistance on a variety of tasks for EBO.

* Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship is a program of The Institute for Bird Populations and was created in 1989.

Laura Jackson
Bedford County



The bird banding station at Presque Isle State Park is an important part of the bird research conducted by EBO. Ripley on the right is recording data for this project.

Are You Moving?

Don't miss the next issue of "The PSO Pileated" or Pennsylvania Birds. Log into your account in pabirds.org and update your address there, or email it to psop@pabirds.org or use the USPS and send a note to : PSO, 2469 Hammertown Road, Narvon, PA 17555-9730.



This past winter was a great year to see Red Crossbills in PA.
Photo by Wayne Laubscher

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:

PSO, 2469 Hammertown Road, Narvon, PA 17555-9730

Membership Categories

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Family	\$ 35	Electronic Student	\$ 10
Sustaining	\$ 45		

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