

# The PSO Pileated



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## From the President's Desk

I joined PSO in 2005 after attending my first PSO Birding Festival (then called the annual meeting) in Clarion. On my first field trip, I heard multiple Henslow's Sparrows as soon as I opened the door after parking at the Piney Tract. That may have been the moment that hooked me on exploring the state, often by attending the Festival as it changes locations annually. It also may have been the following day, when the trip leader apologized to the group for the lack of birds that morning. Having just seen more Cerulean Warblers than I had in my life to that point, the thought of there being even better mornings awaiting me in every nook and cranny of the state was a



**Raccoon State Park Field trip during the PSO Festival. Photo by Charlie White.**

revelation. Since then, I've attended almost every Festival, enjoying each chance to explore new sites, learn from local guides and excellent speakers, meet new people, and connect with old friends.

This year's Festival in Washington County did not disappoint. The group combined to find 131 species over the weekend and (at least temporarily) vault Washington County up the list of counties with the most confirmed nesting species in the Pennsylvania Bird Atlas. We enjoyed an

incredible slate of speakers and honored exceptional award winners. It was, as always, an inspiring weekend. The 2025 Festival will provide

more of the same; stay tuned for details as we plan a fall festival in the Lehigh Valley.

While the Festival will remain a headline event for PSO, the event that started the following week may provide the best view of PSO's potential. Our 4th Annual Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation ran June 7-17 and was the biggest yet in terms of both teams participating and dollars raised. Twenty-six groups of birders spent one or more days tallying (and atlasing) as many species as they could at the height of nesting season. Each team member asked their friends to support their efforts with a donation. Those donations are then evenly split among conservation projects, with PSO covering the costs of running the program and any transaction fees for credit card donations. This year we ambitiously set a goal of raising \$20,240 to support three bird conservation projects. We surpassed the goal with a few weeks of fundraising remaining, having raised \$22,290 as this goes to press.

I am thrilled to see more teams engaging in the Blitz and prioritizing their fundraising efforts this year. Grassroots conservation groups are seeing the Blitz as a plausible funding avenue for targeted, well-designed bird conservation projects. Birders are seeing the Blitz as both a fun birding event and a way to engage their friends and family in supporting a cause that matters to them. Several new teams joined this year's Blitz, and many teams are returning year after year and expanding their fundraising efforts. If you were not involved this year, I hope that you and your birding friends will join the fun next year.

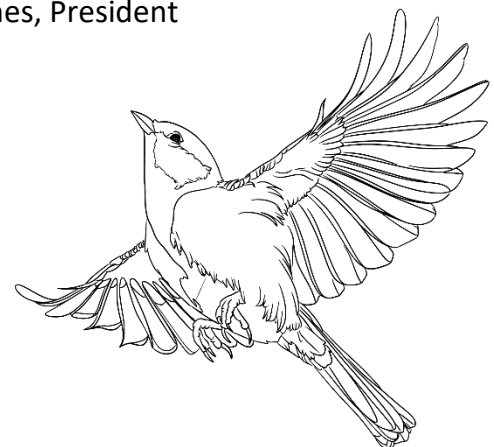
In four years, teams of birders have raised and PSO has donated \$67,318 in support of twelve

bird conservation projects in every region of the state. We look to expand Blitz participation and fundraising next year so that PSO can directly support critical bird conservation efforts.

It is worth taking a step back to recognize that just four and a half short years ago, the Blitz did not exist. PSO's Conservation Committee developed the concept for the event to inspire birders to keep birding into the nesting season and give PSO the chance to put its conservation priorities into action. The Board gave the event its full support and, thanks to the work of a few dedicated volunteers on the committee, the Blitz has blossomed into a force for bird conservation.

PSO is big enough to make a difference in birding and bird conservation, but small enough to try new things. We are limited only by the people power required to lead and organize programs. So, I urge you to do two things: First, if there is something you'd like to see PSO doing, reach out to me or any of the Board members to let us know. Second, think about your interests and volunteer to help PSO expand our programming. If you are interested in conservation, field trips, the Festival, education, fundraising, community science, or communications, PSO needs your help. The dedication of volunteers over more than three decades has sustained PSO and built what you see today - outstanding publications, engaging events, and impactful conservation efforts. With your help, we can expand our impact and make Pennsylvania a better place for birds and birders.

Brian Byrnes, President



## Forest County Birding Spotlight 2024

The first spotlight adventure of the year took us to the NW corner of the state into the PA Wilds, the very odd-shaped county of Forest. The 2020 census said the population was 6973, making it the 3<sup>rd</sup> least populated in the state. Additionally, it's 427 square miles, making it the 53<sup>rd</sup> in size in the state. Our 4-day window was March 15-18. The locals lined up 3 days of birding adventures for us. When we first planned this back at the end of 2023, many asked, "why the cold north in late winter?". We had hopes for winter finches, expecting some open water with the recent mild winters, and we tapered our expectations. What would mother nature offer us this weekend? In the weeks prior, the extended forecast was all over the place and as we know, weather is more unpredictable than ever now.

I was able to get in early Thursday afternoon and hook up with local Jim McGuire for some scouting of the Buzzard Swamp. It had been almost 20 years since I was last at this location, so it was nice to be able to visit it again. The walk in didn't offer much, but once we got to the water, we saw some waterfowl. Highlights were a Northern Shoveler and a Northern Pintail, which we never officially got during the spotlight. On the way back out, we saw a high-flying raptor that offered us an eagle vibe. After looking at it and discussing what it wasn't, we ended up calling it a Golden Eagle which was also not found during the spotlight. After a nice dinner in Marienville, we took a side road to a great American Woodcock site and saw several zipping around us. I had 95 species in Forest County before this trip and hoped I would get up to 100, which is my goal to do in all the 67 counties. I didn't think I would get to it the first evening of the trek.

The first morning, we headed to Cook Forest to meet our crew. I went with my fellow travelers Jeff Kenney and Angela Romanczuk for the day. Jeff was the madman behind all the checklists the whole weekend in the group settings, so thank you for that spicy endeavor, Jeff. It was raining when we got there. Parking below the building, we met our friend Alie, spoke to a park worker, and no one was showing up. "Did we go to the wrong spot?" we thought. No one was reaching out to us, so I decided to walk around the building, and there was the rest of the crew waiting for us on the top side. I was surprised I couldn't hear Tom K telling stories from around the building. The day started off with 14 people.

We decided to slow drive along the river road and pull over a few spots, adding birds to both the Jefferson and Forest counties from that drive. We were heading to Beaver Meadows, thinking the rain might bring in some goodies. As soon as we pulled in, we saw some distant waterfowl and noticed something different was out there with the Common Mergansers. Someone mentioned a gull, then an alcid, but finally got a scope view of a female Long-tailed Duck. A pair of adult Bald Eagles soon made its leave to us. As we started to walk around the lake, Alie was a straggler behind and was able to see a Ruffed Grouse get flushed by the dam. Further on our walk, our group got split into 2 and I thought I would try a screech owl call to see if anything would kick up in the pines. A Red-breasted Nuthatch kicked up, then a few birds flew overhead giving us "jip-jip-jip" calls. Carole Winslow and I looked at each other and yelled "Red Crossbills!". Two or three flew overhead and we were very happy as it was the first few reported in the county all winter. They

went towards the others who were busy looking at vernal ponds and we thought, "would they see or hear them?". Of course, Jeff K not only heard them, but he was also able to record them and get our proof. This even got a poke from our friend David Yeany II who couldn't join us, but we knew he was with us in spirit.

We then did some slow riding, birding, pulling off at various spots to kick up some birds when along Sheffield Junction Road, eagle eye Carole W, saw an American Woodcock along the road that hopped up and froze just a bit off the side of the road. Angela only knocked down about half of the group so she could see her beloved bird. All of us got great naked eye views as well as through bins. Jeff got some good pics and a video as well. As the day lingered on, we lost some people here and there, but a small group of us got to visit Cougar Bobs for a cold one and snacks.

Day 2 started with people meeting at Marienville. Joe G got up early to do some early birding in Cook Forest State Park but didn't realize that much of his birding was in the adjacent edges of Clarion County and not far from Jefferson County. There is some very cool habitat in those beautiful old growth forest stands.

Buzzard Swamp was our first destination of the day, and 15 people joined us. We were very fortunate to have the key to the gate and could drive our caravan around the area. This is probably the most famous spot in the county, certainly the hotspot with the most species. We had some nice waterfowl to pick through. Some raptors were hitting the sky, Eastern Meadowlarks were providing us some sunshine yellow from the trees and their song. Ducks were flying in and out. A group of ducks came around that everyone was trying to get on and ID. Michael David threw out an ID that later we were able to confirm was correct when they

landed in another pond: a Ring-necked Duck and Lesser Scaup.

Another trip back to Beaver Meadows left some new people to enjoy that gem of a spot in Forest County. As we were exploring that area, getting some lunch, then hitting various roads enjoying the day, we got a text from Kim Springer who just had a Tundra Swan in Tionesta by the boat launch. This is a good bird for that county, so we all zipped over there, and it was right there giving good looks for all. A quick visit to Dawson Run got us excited for our first Great Blue Heron during the weekend.

Our dwindling group enjoyed a dinner at Fox's pizza, and then we all went our separate ways. Tom K was able to snag an Eastern Screech Owl back near his cabin, while we were able to get a Barred Owl near Cooks Forest. Joe G brought along his night vision thermal scope, showing many mammals out and about but he couldn't find any feathered friends that night.

Day 3 started off with a big owl for Tom K. He was able to report 2 Barred Owls near his camp in the morning. We all then met Kim and Jim Springer at Tionesta Lighthouse Island for a wonderful walk. We were able to get many birds on the island walk, including a Redhead, an American Wigeon, a Bufflehead, a Bonaparte's Gull, a Rusty Blackbird and a Purple Finch. There were many Bald Eagles around in various ages and looks.

A repeat visit to the boat launch found the Tundra Swan still in view. It actually lifted up while we were there and took off, at first heading downriver, but then curving around and heading north out of sight. Many of us finished our day at Dawson Run, which was another wonderful place to get some new birds on the weekend. Scott Stoleson told us some stories of his work there studying Cerulean Warblers and how Don "One Shot" Watts earned his nickname. Getting a Cerulean for banding is pretty tough because they like to stay high up, so their team pioneered

a method of raising mist nets very high in the trees using a bow and arrow to pass a line over a high branch before attaching a heavier rope and hoisting the nets. Don's excellent aim helped them get very high hang points quickly and easily, and this was especially important when certain birds were both wary from prior experience being captured and desperately needed to be captured to recover geolocators that would tell which part of South America these birds had been in the prior winter. Once the bird walk commenced, we found many birds around the marshy floodplain, including Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Swamp Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow White-throated Sparrow (which we had not found in the mountain spots) and a very obliging Ruddy Duck.

On Monday, the last day, Mark Nale and Darla Shank found a Pied-billed Grebe, new for the weekend at Beaver Meadows to add our last bird for the spotlight in number 80. Our crew

produced 73 checklists hitting so many wonderful spots in this under visited and under birded county in the state.

I am told this is the last county to have zero intersections with red lights, so if you want to get away from it all, this is a good place to consider. We were able to add 21 new year birds for the county. For anyone who wishes to see our complete trip report, check out this link <https://ebird.org/tripreport/194653>

We couldn't be successful in these types of birding adventures without locals putting in their time, wisdom and friendship and I have to put in extra thanks again to Scott Stoleson who really helped get this all off the ground, Jim McGuire, Kim & Jim Springer, Carole Winslow and Tom Kuehl.

Chad Kauffman, Juniata County

## Fulton County Birding Spotlight

For our 2nd of 3 installments of spotlights this year in the state, PSO ventured to south central PA to visit Fulton County. I had just found out the week prior that Fulton and Juniata County are the only 2 counties in the whole state that have more cows than people in population. Being from one and traveling to the other last weekend almost seemed like it was fitting knowledge to gain that week. Moooooo.

I poked my friend Vern Gauthier about the county since I knew he was working it well and doing

official birding work there lately and for the atlas. He let me know that we couldn't attempt such a thing without the help of one of the (if not THE) Queen of Fulton County Birding, Tracy Mosebey.



**Golden Winged Warbler in Fulton County. Photo by Mark Nale.**

On Friday 4/26, Vern led the charge from Buchanan State Forest with Tracy co-leading. We were met by several friends who joined us kickstarting our weekend spotlight. The birds were loud and active right from the get-go. We had a nice fallout through the day. I thought I

kept hearing a buzzing bird call, but those with

better ears than me weren't getting on it. Finally everyone heard a good call, and we knew we had a winged warbler. But you have to see them, as they can learn each other's call and do have hybrids of several levels. No one got great looks and no pics, but we were excited to have them there already in a nice clearcut by a weather station setup. We didn't have to wait too long until we got it, or another one appear at point blank looks, singing and perched for maybe 5 minutes. Mark Nale got some amazing photos of the bird and we felt like our spotlight was off and running successfully. Deuane Hoffman had stayed in a cabin with Magpie and they were able to get some owls and whips at dawn. In our visit to SGL 128 at Moss Rd after lunch, we were able to see and get great looks at a Worm-eating Warbler as well as Scarlet Tanager. We also enjoyed hearing Chestnut-sided Warbler. Checking out some fields near Warfordsburg, we were able to find Eastern Kingbird. In the later afternoon, we made a preview visit to Meadow Grounds and were able to find the recurring Common Loon, Red-breasted Merganser and much to our delight, we heard two different Barred Owls calling across the lake and the dam. Coming in late that night Jeff Kenney and Angela Romanczuk were able to find some whips and woodcock calling at the same time (of course they did, she woos them in with her love of the timber doodle). Our day ended with 99 species.

On Saturday 4/27 we met at Meadow Grounds Lake and a few more people had come into the county and were able to join us. Tracy led us again around to many places in the on again off again rain all day. Haines – Seville Wetlands proved to keep its reputation of having good birds. We were able add a lifer for Tracy with the Northern Waterthrush. Another excitement for everyone was an all-time eBird first for the county Marsh Wren, found by Michael David, with some awesome looks and calls. Together with the waterthrush and the wren, a White-

eyed Vireo helped carry Tracy over the 200 species mark for Fulton County which is a real achievement especially in the rural and mountainous regions. Something that stumped us all was many of us were hearing what we thought was Common Raven, but after seeing and knowing it was coming from an entirely different species, a Hooded Merganser hen. She seemed nervous, as if so many people around a probable nest site was causing agitation. It was so similar to a raven sound that we were all humbled and laughed at being fooled. Some late evening birding around a Cemetery in McConnellsburg gave us Horned Larks, Savannah Sparrow, and a pair of Bald Eagles coming into a nest across the valley.

That night, as we ended touring the county, the fog/clouds were really getting thick, making it hard to see very far driving. After doing dinner in our Airbnb, Joe G and I decided to make a nighttime run to Tower Road, in the fog in fading light, and we got rewarded with an adult American Woodcock on the road with 3 little cotton balls following her and they were making little chink noises back and forth. We ended day 2 with 112 species combined across all participants.

On Sunday 4/28 our day started off with Joe G leaving the rental at 4am and walking towards and on Tower Rd off Aughwick Rd, which we had planned on meeting Tracy at 5:30am. As soon as we drove onto the road, we could hear the Whips going, saw a woodcock fly across the windshield, and Prairie Warblers and Eastern Towhees were calling out. The heavy fog from the night before was not on the top of the ridge thankfully and when we got to the end at the vista viewing platform, all of our jaws dropped with the view. The ocean of fog and clouds made the mountain tops look like islands in the sea. The clouds were moving like waves. We got so many great shots and videos as the sun was coming up and changing our view. We were able to hear and feel a Ruffed Grouse doing its thing.

The morning flight of birds was also tremendous, and we hated to leave, but we had to get ready to pack up and meet our crew at 8am at Cowans gap for our planned walk. As we were getting lower in elevation, the clouds got thick again and until I pulled into the parking lot, I couldn't see either end or the lake. As we were waiting for others to arrive, the birds showed us that there was a fallout, as we were getting species we hadn't gotten yet on the weekend, including Black-throated Blue, Nashville and Cape May Warblers. A nice walk around the lake gave us a fantastic list to add to our spotlight. A few more peeled away from our crew while the rest of us headed south to Tower Rd, just before route 30. Some of the crew had been on part of that road, but most didn't go to the end at the vista. After a nice lunch in the shade, I had to head home while some of the others went their separate ways to continue birding in various places. The day ended with 129 species.

On Monday 4/29, Tracy met some others at Meadow Grounds Lake and then did some cleanup of lingering species and to re-find some for some of the newbies who came into the spotlight. Their big news blast for us all was finding a Surf Scoter on the lake. That is always a fun bird to find anytime. Mark and Darla were able to find Red-headed Woodpecker. After missing out on a Cliff Swallow, Tracy was able to find it for the weekend as well.

So, our final numbers came out to be 133 which is just fantastic to allow some fallouts of the

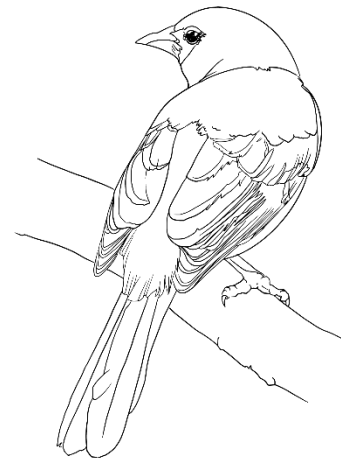
spring migration land right where we were at. We had 117 checklists, 52 species with photos and 31 with audio. Julia Plummer did her own thing solo so she could get better quiet audio. Will Krohn also did some on his own and with our group Sunday. Joe Gyekis and Jeff Kenney were able to add several pics and audio to our effort too.

To enjoy our official eBird trip report, here is that link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/199085>

Fulton county just isn't visited enough or appreciated enough. It offered all sorts of habitats, terrain, elevations and views. It has some great game lands and state forests. I have been lucky enough to have visited it several times either camping, doing the hawk watch, driving through, chasing birds or just visiting with friends. I was personally able to add 22 new species to my county list which is now at 146.

Our last spotlight for 2024 is back up to the northwestern end of the state to Warren, October 11-14. Yes, Warren County is in the state and no passports or Real ID's are needed, they just let you in. We are working with some local friends right now lining up some trips. As we have said before, if you can join these spotlights, feel free to run to spots on your end, visit hotspots, join up with some friends or official trips, just share your checklists with PSO Birding Data and we will get everyone's effort.

Chad Kauffman, Juniata County





# Special Birding Opportunities for PSO Members

PSO is excited to announce two incredible out of state birding adventures for our members. Hillstar Nature, owned and operated out of southeastern Pennsylvania, is offering **two upcoming trips exclusively to PSO members** that you will not want to miss! If you want to attend, please register soon as registration will open to the public if the trips do not fill with PSO folks.

The first offering is a 16-hour **deepwater pelagic trip leaving from Ocean City, Maryland**, on Sunday, September 8, 2024. This trip will focus on finding deepwater specialties in the warm waters 70-75 miles off the Maryland coast. The birds targeted include Wilson's Storm-petrel, Band-rumped Storm-petrel, Great and Cory's Shearwaters, and could also see Audubon's Shearwater, Leach's Storm-Petrel, and Manx Shearwater. Both Red & Red-necked Phalarope are possible, and this is a good season for jaegers (all 3 species possible). At the Continental Shelf and just beyond, we can hope for rare species such as Black-capped Petrel or South Polar Skua, and even other oddballs. This is also prime season and habitat for White-faced Storm-Petrel, which is a primary target but will require some luck. As an added bonus, cetaceans such as Bottlenose Dolphin, Short-finned Pilot Whale,

Cuvier's Beaked Whale, Fin Whale, Humpback Whale are possible encounters. You never know what you will encounter out on the open ocean.

Visit <https://www.hillstarnature.com/md-deepwater-pelagic-sept-8-2024> for details and to register.



**Long-billed Curlew photo by Josh Covill, courtesy of Hillstar Nature**



**Elk Landscape Photo by Josh Covill, courtesy of Hillstar Nature**

The second offering is **Montana: Glacier to Grasslands**, an 8-day/7-night trek across the Treasure State starting June 25, 2025. Montana is a large, ecologically diverse state with a wide array of habitats, with a correspondingly diverse array of birds. Lead Guide (and Montana resident) Josh Covill will begin the tour in Glacier National Park, legendary for its immense natural beauty. A great diversity of birds is possible in Glacier, from boreal specialists like Spruce Grouse, Pine Grosbeak and Boreal Chickadee, to more 'Pacific' birds like Varied Thrush and Chestnut-backed Chickadee, and 'Mountain West' classics like Western Tanager, Lazuli Bunting, Townsend's Warbler, and Dusky Grouse. The second portion of the tour will focus on the seemingly endless shortgrass prairies of the northern Great Plains. This region is a bird factory, with many species nesting here during the short summer breeding season. Birds calling the prairies home include Chestnut-collared and Thick-billed Longspurs, Ferruginous



Hawk, Black Tern, Long-billed Curlew, Burrowing Owl, Sprague's Pipits, Baird's Sparrow, Upland Sandpiper, Golden Eagle, and many more.

Visit <https://www.hillstarnature.com/glacier-grasslands-psy-2025> for details and to register.

Registrations from each tour include a donation to support PSO. You will not want to miss out on these exciting birding opportunities!

Jeff Kenney

## 4th Annual PSO PA Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation

### Event Summary ( June 2024)

This year the Pennsylvania Society of Ornithology hosted its 4<sup>th</sup> annual Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation from June 7<sup>th</sup> through June 17<sup>th</sup>. The Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation is an eleven-day long event each June where PSO invites birders to join the Blitz by forming a team, raising funds, and competing in friendly birding competitions to document birds during nesting season by completing eBird checklists. Teams enlist their friends to support their efforts with a donation; all donations are evenly split among three conservation projects. This year we had 26 teams compete across the state, completing big days and cumulative counts including low carbon teams, youth teams, and atlas block boosting birding trips. Teams together tallied 183 species of birds in eleven days, with \$22,290 dollars raised for bird conservation! This is \$2,050 more than our goal, which was only possible by the generosity of our donors!

This year the funds raised by the PSO Breeding Bird Blitz will be split evenly among the following conservation projects:

- **Rider Park**, Lycoming County: *Habitat management and public education at*

*Rider Park north of Williamsport PA. Four acres of meadow habitat will be turned into a mosaic of multi-stem shrubs and trees to benefit American Woodcock populations in the park. In addition to habitat enhancements, several interpretive signs describing American Woodcock behavior, nesting needs, and habitat requirements will be installed along a trail passing through the habitat, and the park will organize public programs to experience American Woodcock spring courtship displays.*

- **Pocono Environmental Education Center (PEEC)**, Pike County: *Bird safety improvements to existing architecture at the center's passive solar Visitor Activity Center. This sustainably constructed building is an important asset for PEEC's educational programs, seasonal community dinners, and festivals. The building however has north, south, east, and west facing windows that cause fatal bird strikes each year. PEEC is working with artist Eurhi Jones to conceptualize an art installation project in an effort to deter bird strikes at the Visitor Activity*

Center and educate the public on bird window strikes through its creation.

- **Allegheny Land Trust (Wingfield Pines),** Allegheny County: *Habitat management and educational outreach at the Wingfield Pines green space in the Chartiers Creek floodplain.* The land was historically strip mined, and later used as a golf course. Allegheny Land Trust has restored the historic wetland habitat of the area and Wingfield Pines is now utilized by more than 200 species of birds each year. This project will restore approximately 4 more acres of wetland and increase the total area of the Wingfield Pines wetland to 30 acres. The Allegheny Land Trust also plans to fund multiple educational programs, including world migratory bird day counts, bird banding programs, songbirds professional development workshops, and multiple bird day webinars. These programs will be funded and provided to the public for free.

The Breeding Bird Blitz for conservation has steadily grown in participation and fundraising since its inception in 2021. Here is a summary of our progression based on fundraising totals:

- 2021 - \$10,645
- 2022 - \$15,072
- 2023 - \$19,311
- 2024 - \$22,290

This \$22,290 is our highest fundraising total yet. This is due to the amazing teams who joined us for this year's Blitz. In 2024 we had a record breaking 26 teams participate, 16 of which raised over 500 dollars, and a whopping 7 teams raised over 750 dollars to support bird conservation. Thank you to all team members and captains for making this year's Breeding Bird Blitz the most financially productive for bird conservation yet.

Over the course of June 7<sup>th</sup> – June 17<sup>th</sup> teams from across Pennsylvania managed to document 183 species in Pennsylvania. This is an increase from our previous record of 175 species in last year's Blitz! These species are documented during the peak of bird nesting season in Pennsylvania. This means that many of the 183 are breeding in PA. This is a substantial amount of valuable data to be added to eBird and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas and is one of the major purposes of the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation. To briefly summarize the trip report, of the 183 species, Canada Geese were the most numerous, totaling 1556 individuals. Red-eyed Vireos were the most numerous native songbirds with 1292 individuals. Twenty-six different species of warblers were reported, and a black tern was reported in Chester County for just the second time to date. This is a brief and by no means all inclusive summary. The full trip report can be found at [4th Annual Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation: Cumulative results - eBird Trip Report.](#)

Our 26 teams competed fiercely in many different competition categories, with some teams even participating in multiple categories. We wish to congratulate the winners of each category and congratulate all teams for completing their bird outings. We know it isn't easy and we thank you all for collecting this valuable data. Here are the statewide results for our competition categories:

- **Big Day Category:**
  - County Count - Piping Hot Plovers (130, Captain Katie Anderson)
  - Regional Count - Crazy Cuckoos (101, Captain Vern Gauthier)
- **Cumulative Count Category:**
  - County Count - Todd Towhees (116, Captain Roger Higbee)
  - Regional Count - Crazy Cuckoos (120, Captain Vern Gauthier)

- **Low Carbon Category:**
  - Birding While Biking (77 Species, Captain Brian Miller)
- **Youth Team Category:**
  - Delco Dowitchers (95 Species, Captain Ethan Kang)
- **Block Boosting Category:**
  - Crazy Cuckoos (101 Species, Captain Vern Gauthier)

A full breakdown on the competition rules, category descriptions, and location information can be found at our website <https://www.breedingbirdblitz.org>. A more in depth breakdown of the competition results can be found in a standalone article titled “4<sup>th</sup> Annual

PSO PA Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation Contest Results (2024)” in this or an upcoming PSO Pileated Newsletter and at <https://www.breedingbirdblitz.org/post/2024-results>.

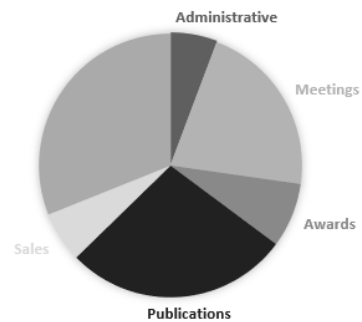
**A BIG THANK YOU** to all B4C teams for collecting valuable Bird Atlas data and receiving donations to raise funds for 3 bird related conservation in the state. The PA Breeding Bird Blitz is a team effort between our teams and donors, and together we make a difference for all our PA Birds!

Karter Witmer

## A Reflection on PSO’s Annual Financial Statements

Many stories are needed to provide the whole picture of a person, their birth and upbringing, relationships and values, activities, and work. The same is true of an organization. How did it get started? What is its mission and where does it put its money? The PSO is a mature organization, approaching 40 years of age. Over those years, we have many stories to tell.

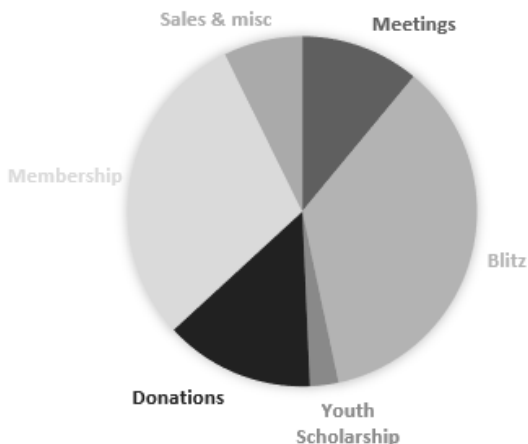
PSO 2023 EXPENDITURES SUMMARY



The PSO’s financial life provides one perspective, part of the big picture that provides insight into who we are. This update is being provided to reflect on the organization we have become and help you be proud of the organization’s financial position.

First, we are financially strong. Our annual bank balance has grown over the past ten years under the careful stewardship of our long-time treasurer. (See “Bank Balance at end of ‘Fiscal year’” chart) The chart tells a great story. And it’s

PSO 2023 INCOME



pretty simple: we don't spend more than we bring in. Our income has come from various sources. At one time, our annual meeting covered a little more than expenses. Now, the meeting breaks even (more on that below), but our members are generous, so costs are more than covered. Donations, above and beyond membership dues, have helped carry us "into the black" for several years.

And during the past ten years, we have taken much more onto our plate. Financially, our annual expenditures have grown from about \$21,000 in 2013 to \$62,000 in 2023. That's way more than inflation. A large part of this is the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation, summarized as B4C, which collects over \$20,000 in donations from a wide range of individuals for conservation projects benefiting birds. Those funds are passed through PSO's accounts with no administrative overhead. That's unheard of. We just reached that threshold again this year. Other areas of benevolence include donations by generous individuals to provide scholarships for young people to attend our conference and for research grants. See the pie charts (previous page) showing a summary of this year's income and expenditures. The details are provided elsewhere. They should make you proud to be a member of PSO.

Another way to look at our finances is from the standpoint of what makes and costs us money. The B4C, as described above, involves a broad network of donations from friends (and members) of PSO. It breaks even. It requires a

lot of work to make that happen, including advertising, website management, and meetings. Of course, the B4C also involves a lot of birding! That's a win-win, when that birding also contributes to Pennsylvania's Third Breeding Bird Atlas! The point here is, as an organization, we receive and distribute funds totaling nearly

\$25,000 annually, contributing substantively to bird conservation through direct contributions, and immeasurably through bird projects, ornithology, the core of our identity.

Our publications and birding festivals go back to the very beginning of the PSO. Like the B4C, the annual festival is self-sufficient. Registration fees cover most of the costs of the event (again, supported by many hours of volunteer effort by Directors and local birders). The Festival has broken even each year since the pandemic, when in-person meetings began again.

Pennsylvania Birds, our journal, and The Pileated, our newsletter, are core products of PSO. They fill a relatively small part of our annual budget, again because of the vast amount of volunteer effort taken to compile bird observations, write summaries and articles, and edit and produce them. But these are at the heart of our contribution to ornithology and represent a unique contribution to our knowledge of the birds of Pennsylvania. With the rising costs of printing and mailing, membership dues don't cover the costs of these publications. A steady increase in the number of memberships (see "PSO Total Memberships since 2012" chart) is helping to offset that.

Dan Brauning & Frank Hass



# Raven Reporter

Tales of Discovery  
about Pennsylvania  
Birds



## Fidelity

One of the most intriguing and interesting attributes of migratory birds is their fidelity to breeding locations known as philopatry or site fidelity. It is simply extraordinary that birds can find their previous nesting grounds after migrating hundreds of miles away. Many species do this. I have been witnessing this behavior for many years and in many circumstances. For 16 years, I conducted Breeding Bird Censuses on study plots where I mapped the locations of territorial birds and their behaviors (called “spot-mapping”). Not only do the birds sing, build nests, and chase others out of their space, but they counter-sing with their neighbors and rivals. All of this can be mapped and the behavior and locations determine the bounds of a territory. The maps were similar year-to-year with birds apparently reacting to micro-habitat features they preferred, and individual birds returned to a nesting location. Observing and mapping these birds and their interactions made me very aware of their lively and intelligent behaviors, leading to fidelity to a good nesting habitat. I could predict fairly accurately that certain species would be found not just in a study



**Male Blackpoll Warbler, taken by Doug  
Gross**

plot, but in the exact cluster of trees or shrubs as found previously. When there were banded birds, I found some of these marked birds back in the same spot each year as long as they lived. Those that have banded bluebirds, swallows, and wrens will report the same kind of results. Research projects much more sophisticated than mine have recorded remarkable fidelity of birds to their breeding grounds with the obvious changes year-to-year due to mortality and competition. They can find previous mates and pair up in successive years, but the short lifespans of songbirds really prevents long-term paired bonds that can be found in larger birds like eagles.

This tendency of fidelity can be a great advantage to the field observer including researchers and Atlas volunteers. I took my own experiences with spot-mapping into the boreal forests of Pennsylvania. The Yellow-bellied Flycatchers that I studied for several years were remarkably consistent in their occupation of certain areas of the swamps they colonized. I could go back to the same “watching post” or open area in a hemlock or spruce stand and find Yellow-bellied Flycatchers singing nearby very consistently. I often sat down at the same spots and had a female flycatcher “visit” me that was curious about the new creature in her domain. Individuals become familiar with human observers. They occupied the same peaty area every year with some shifts and new territories added as the populations grew. There was no need for audiolures. They vocalized their advertising song and called consistently often as a contact call. They also minded their territories, flying perch to perch and counter-singing with any neighbor as



do other Empidonax flycatchers. When my studies expanded to Blackpoll Warblers found in some of the same boreal forested wetlands, they also demonstrated a remarkable fidelity to locations. In fact, Blackpoll Warblers are notorious for their site fidelity. This is especially remarkable considering the length of their migration to South America. To a lesser extent, Swainson's Thrushes also demonstrate site fidelity but they seem to shift around more than Blackpoll Warblers. I have lots of company in these experiences. Some species will reuse a nest --- and not just the nests built on human structures. We have seen Eastern Wood-Pewees reuse a nest along a trail at Ricketts Glen State Park. Many other bird behavior-watchers have had similar experiences including the very different colonial seabirds and herons.

This year my own experience were compounded by finding Blackpoll Warbler males singing at precisely the same spots that I have found them for over 10 years in a Dutch Mountain wetland. I follow my GPS readings through the dense thickets of highbush blueberry, mountain holly, swamp azalea, and spruces to openings where I can look around at the neighborhood. This is the sort of habitat where you often need to crawl on your knees to get through the wall of vegetation. There are fewer such spots because the Blackpoll Warbler population seems to have shrunk after several years of growth and expansion on Dutch Mountain. But, the few that

can be found are found predictably at the same spots. I also have had good success with Swainson's Thrushes returning to the same location as previous years. So, I have been able to add them to the Atlas maps where they still persist. I have not been so fortunate with Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (PA Endangered) which has disappeared from all locations where I found and tracked birds for years.

We also have been fortunate to have returnees elsewhere that are "completely different" kind of birds. Northern Harriers have extensive home ranges, flying long distances from their nest. This year I found a pair in the same wetland where they were found two years ago. And, a pair of Barn Owls (PA - Near Threatened) have returned to a barn in our farming neighborhood. By paying attention to site fidelity, a few

conservation priority birds were found in year one of the Atlas. I am sure that other observers have had similar success. By following our old tracks, we can make new discoveries. There are more discoveries to be made especially in the northern, mountainous counties that have more acres of forest than birders. Where else are Blackpoll Warblers nesting out of human sight and hearing?

Let's hope that the birds can continue to return where we have grown accustomed to finding them.

Good Birding!

Doug Gross,  
[Dagross144@verizon.net](mailto:Dagross144@verizon.net)

**Documentation of barn owlet nest in Greenwood Township, Columbia County. Taken by Doug Gross.**





## Editor's Column

You may have noticed some formatting differences in this newsletter. Since 1990, Margaret Higbee has been the PSO Pileated editor. She has since retired from the position and I, Kaitlyn Stouch, will be taking over the task. We appreciate her hard work over the years, and I appreciate her help training me.

Let me, however, introduce myself so I am not so much of a stranger to you all. I am a marketing manager for a property management company in State College. I manage all facets of their marketing—including newsletters, which is where I got a lot of my writing and editing experience.

In terms of birding, I have only been birding for about a year now. I have always had an interest in animals, having worked as a veterinary assistant and at a pet store in college. I also volunteer at Centre Wildlife Care.

I got involved in PSO and birding when I heard the festival was going to be local to State College last year, and after attending, it plunged me into a new favorite hobby.

Even if I am a little wet behind the ears, I have felt very welcomed into the PSO and have learned so much from you all already. I am looking forward to being more involved with both birding and the PSO for the years to come.

Kaitlyn Stouch, Centre County

### Are you Moving?

Don't miss out on the next issue of the "PSO Pileated" or Pennsylvania Birds. Log into your account in [pabirds.org](http://pabirds.org) and update your address there, or email it to [pso@pabird.org](mailto:pso@pabird.org). Alternatively you can send a note to:

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

### PSO Newsletter

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

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

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