

### **Excuses, Excuses, Excuses**

My Newsletter is later than usual this year. I got distracted! The biggest distraction has been the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas Project. The Atlas Project is a five year effort to determine which species breed in each of the nearly 5000 blocks into which the State has been partitioned for this purpose.

I have committed to inventory several of these blocks. Although the effort is interesting and enjoyable, it is requiring more time than I expected. Oops! That is especially true during the actual breeding season, which began about a month ago. So I have been spending a lot of time in the woods!

### **Proceeds Support Charity**

You all know Seneca Rocks Audubon Society uses money raised through the Birdathon to provide *Audubon Adventures* to local elementary schools (25 classrooms last year) and a local scholarship for a one week nature-oriented camp in Maine.

Our new project is to assist in acquiring a large block of reclaimed strip mine called Piney Tract. If you are curious where Piney is, take Canoe Ripple Road south from Route 80 at Exit 53. After Crossing the Clarion River, take the first left (Elliot Road) and continue to Mt Zion Road. You're there!

Piney is an unusual place. The vast expanse of grassy fields reminds me of the Dakotas and I can easily imagine a herd of buffalo coming over the horizon.

After strip-mine reclamation in the area some 30 years ago, grassland birds typical of the Midwest began to appear. That is important because Midwestern grasslands have largely been converted to agriculture, and grassland birds populations are in decline.

Piney Tract is becoming well known as a refuge for grassland birds and people are beginning to visit for a few days just to experience it! This past weekend I showed the area to a group of 16 people from the Philadelphia area, who traveled 600 miles and spent considerable money in Clarion, just to see Piney Tract.

The Alliance for Wetlands and Wildlife and the PA Game Commission are the key acquisition players, and 965 Acres were purchased this year and converted into State Game Land 330. This new SGL is likely to grow over the next few years.

Our initial financial contribution was to make the payment-in-lieu-of-taxes to Piney Township for the property, but we expect to be involved both financially and philosophically in the future.

### **This is “for the Birds!”**

Our team treats the Birdathon as a competition, mostly to increase the challenge. Team members are Pat Conway (Brookville), Deb Freed (Clarion), Jim Wilson (Seneca), Gary Edwards (Seneca) and I.

The effort involves identifying as many birds as possible in a 24 hour period. We appropriately started in Piney Tract on the morning of May 10. To get the most out of the allowed time, we decided to start the moment we located a Clay-

colored Sparrow. We had developed a detailed route, complete with time limits, to keep from dallying and to get us into as many different habitats as possible.

At 8:10AM, while standing deep in the wet grass at Piney, we heard the “buzz, buzz, buzz” song of the Clay-colored, yelled, “there it is!” and our 24-hr adventure was underway.

We had 17 species in the next 30 minutes before leaving Piney, including such other grassland species as Henslow and Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink, and Prairie Warbler.

Our next stop (9AM), Mt Airy (East of Sligo), is at another grassland. In 45 minutes, we had 29 new birds, including the very uncommon Upland Sandpiper (a chicken-like bird with long legs) and we were on our way to Parker for birds attracted to water or a riparian habitat.

Just before the bridge at Parker there is a dirt road to the right that circles down under the bridge and continues about 2 miles downstream. We found a lot of birds there last year, but a developer has started putting in river-front property, so the birding was not as good as expected. Nonetheless, we got 18 new birds there and along the River Road to Foxburg, including an adult Bald Eagle. 64!

We saw 3 more species in Foxburg and found a picnic table under the bridge for a quick lunch. 67.

Next came Kahle Lake, but we did not find as many new birds as we expected; only 8, including a loon. Spring was late this year and as a result some of the spring migrants had not yet arrived! 75.

We now needed to work our way back toward my house, where Judy was preparing one of her famous soup suppers for us. On the way, we stopped at Beaver Creek (2), Kossuth (Purple Martins), and SGL 63 (4). My back yard provided another 4 rather good birds, including a White-crowned Sparrow. 86.

After supper we made a couple of stops near Brookville, but we got only 5 more birds in two hours. New species were obviously coming more slowly now. Night was falling as we made our way to the secluded confines of Clear Creek State Forest. In the process of spooking around in the dark in some remarkably remote places, we found only one new species, a Screech Owl, but we did have a good look at it. 92.

We were tired as we headed home, and I knew I would be birding alone the next morning! It was well after midnight when I found my pillow, but I was on the road again at 5:30AM, eagerly clutching a breakfast bar and a cup of coffee. I spent the morning around one of my favorite spots, Beartown Rocks in Clear Creek State Forest. I located 6 new birds, including a cuckoo and a Golden-crowned Kinglet. 8:10! My adventure was over. We had 98 species.

**Thank you Sponsors:** Kathy Wilson, Sharon Montgomery & Andy Turner, Highland Oaks of Clarion, Ruth Ann & Charlie McChesney, Eleanor Moore, David & Lauren Montgomery, Anita & Joe Michael, Wendy & Dave Lavey, Cheryl & Duncan Lane, Pam & John Zahoran, and Judy Montgomery.