

# Seneca Rocks Drummer



December, 2004

Newsletter of the Seneca Rocks Audubon Society

Volume 21, No. 4

*A Chapter of the National Audubon Society*

[www.senecarocksaudubon.org](http://www.senecarocksaudubon.org)



**Next Meeting – December 13**  
**Room 249, Peirce Science Center**  
**Refreshments & conversation at 7:00 p.m.**  
**Program begins at 7:30 p.m.**

## Members' Night

The December meeting is traditionally an opportunity for our members to share a few of their own slides or otherwise entertain or enlighten us. This year, we will be hearing from Audubon scholarship winner Duane Laskey, on his trip to Maine this past summer. Fran Williams has offered slides and a book review, Mike Leahy is preparing some of his digital photos, Gil Twiest will be bringing slides plus a surprise (?), and Jerry Lucot also intends to make a short presentation. If you have a few slides or a story to share (five to ten minutes long), please bring them along and add your name to the list. This is always a lot of fun.



## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 2004

by Margaret Buckwalter



On Monday, December 27, SRAS members and friends will head out, on foot and by car, for National Audubon's 105th annual CBC. We will try to count every bird within our Clarion County circle using field observers and feeder watchers.

At our December meeting territories will be mapped for the best coverage. Please see the map on page 7 of this Drummer. We want those who have established territories to draw them on a master map at the December meeting. If you cannot attend, contact Deb Freed to describe the area where you typically count birds. New counters are encouraged to join an established team or choose an area not claimed by others.

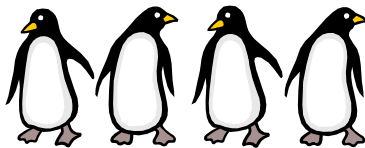
Margaret Buckwalter will coordinate the feeder watchers. Each kind of watcher needs to get the appropriate bird list and directions from the person

in charge. More information can be obtained from the CBC website [www.audubon.org/bird/cbc](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc). Team leaders can also profit from this website, especially the "Compiler's Pages".

On Count Day, remember, it will be Hunting Season – be sure to wear orange in the field! Birders may use all 24 hours on the 27th to count – think OWLS.

We will gather at BJ's Eatery next to the bowling alley at the Knox Exit 53 at 5 p.m. for the traditional Count Dinner. It is a warm and friendly location to tally our sightings and enjoy a tasty meal together.

SRAS welcomes newcomers and non-members to the CBC. SRAS will pay the \$5 fee for all members 19 and older. Feeder watchers and those 18 and under pay no fees. Contact information: W. Fye, 814-782-3925 or [waltfye@usachoice.net](mailto:waltfye@usachoice.net) - M. Buckwalter, 814-782-3925 or [buckwalter01@alltel.net](mailto:buckwalter01@alltel.net).



### SRAS Officers

President	Deb Freed	226-4719
Vice-President	Gary Edwards	676-3011
Secretary	OPEN	
Treasurer	Janice Horn	226-7367

### Committee Chairs

Armchair Activist	OPEN	275-2058
Beaver Ck Maint. ....	Walter Fye	797-1019
Conservation	OPEN	
Education	Paulette Colantonio	797-2031
Field Trips	Ron Montgomery	764-6088
Hospitality	Janice Horn	226-7367
Membership	Sherry Vowinkel	782-3294
Mill Ck/Piney Tract ..	Pete Dalby	782-3227
Newsletter	Flo McGuire	755-3672
Programs	Gary Edwards	676-3011

## Crow's Nest

by President Deb Freed

### How My Dog is Helping Me To Be a Better Birder

1. Getting out no matter what the weather,
2. Exploring new paths, &
3. Listening, watching and following movement just like a curious puppy.



At the prompting of Bridget, now a one year old Golden Retriever, I leashed her and we headed out through the garage where I filled a pitcher with sunflower seeds to scatter under the brush pile I have been building under the hemlock. We were within two feet of the brush when a bold little Red-breasted Nuthatch looked up at me. It was the first I have seen for two years. Bridget and I strolled around the yard and returned inside. I picked up my binoculars and went to the window to look for the nuthatch. There he was, chasing off chickadees and returning to the scattered seeds. I watched him off and on for the next fifteen minutes. The next day I saw him in the roofed ground feeder I fill with sunflower seeds. I approached the feeder and the confident little bird stayed in place until I got within two feet again. I have seen him for several days and hope he will be a regular at my winter feeding stations. I might have missed him had it not been for Bridget's unscheduled walk. I remember in early September when another unscheduled early evening walk gave me my first look at seven Common Nighthawks flying overhead. Getting out, exploring, listening, and watching for the unexpected will improve anyone's birding skills. My dog has shown me that!

Bring some holiday cash to the December meeting...



Give a beautiful Audubon calendar, at \$10 each. The following will be available:  
2 - page-a-day Audubon Birds,  
2 - Audubon Nature,  
2 - Audubon Wildflowers,  
and

3 - Audubon Highways /Byways

Buy a raffle ticket for The Snowy Egret print by artist Taylor Aughton given to us by Walt Pomeroy at our 20th year anniversary. This signed and numbered print (14 "X 21 ") can be yours. Beginning at the December membership meeting, raffle tickets will be sold (\$1 each or 6 for \$5). The winner will be drawn at the May membership celebration at Timberwolf Lodge. The proceeds will be used to defray the cost of renting Timberwolf Lodge.

Also available for sale at the meeting will be the beautiful "Susquehanna River Birding and Wildlife Trail" Guides, created by PA Audubon. The books retail at \$9 - we will offer them to members for \$6.

### *Cornell's Project Feederwatch*

It's fun. It's easy. Count birds at your feeders 2 days in each 2-week count period, and send in the totals. There is a \$15 fee to participate in this citizen-science project. For more info, see <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw> or Project FeederWatch, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Rd, Ithaca, NY 14850. If your last name starts with A-K, Nov. 13-26 was the first counting period. For last names L-Z, Nov. 20-Dec. 3 is the first counting period.

**Those submitting data online have the option to count each week, starting November 13.**

## **Allegheny Front Hawk Watch October 25 & 26, 2004**

Day 1 by Deb Freed

Watchers: Jerry Stanley, Eric from Penn Hills, Joe from Greensburg, a couple from Lawrenceville, Ron and Judy Montgomery, Joan and Karl Rowe, Mike Leahy, Janice Horn, Deb Freed, Linda and Gil Twiest.

Driving in and out of fog all the way to Central City kept Janice and me guessing about the weather we would find at Allegheny Front. We arrived at 10 a.m. to a mostly foggy valley, 50 degrees and very little wind. The tally of sightings until 3:15 p.m. included: 1 Golden Eagle, 15 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 33 Red-tailed Hawks, 1 Red-shouldered Hawk, 4 Osprey, 4 Northern Harriers, 4 Coopers Hawks, 4 Turkey Vultures, 1 Tree Swallow, 1 Raven, flocks of American Robins, 2 flocks of Cedar Waxwings, Goldfinch, Purple Finch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Slate-colored Junco, American Crows, 1 Horned Lark, Blue Jays, Winter Wren, Carolina Wren, Chickadee, Ruffed Grouse, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Eastern Bluebirds, Downy Woodpecker, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, & Common Yellowthroat.

This watcher left at 3:15 p.m. under cloudy skies. The tally sheet was passed to the Twiests to complete the sightings for the remainder of the day and day 2.

Day 2 by Gil and Linda Twiest

This was our first Hawk Watch. The weather was a bit overcast and foggy in Clarion on the first day so we didn't start down until about 10 AM. We got there about 12:30, had lunch and started to watch. Hawks were farther away than I had anticipated. Many were only visible with binoculars so I didn't bother to get the big lens out. Big mistake! Late in the afternoon, a beautiful red-tailed hawk was soaring in circles

right close off the ridge and at eye level or a little lower. As all wildlife photographers preach, be ready just in case. I wasn't.

The motel was very nice for the price and supper at the restaurant down the road was great. Good food, fire in the fireplace, good company and ghost stories plus a tour by the innkeeper all made for a lively evening.



Next morning it was foggy in the valley, but sunny on the ridge. The action started about 9 AM and kept up all day. Many visitors at the site. At one time there were at least 50 people watching and many calling out hawks. During the middle of the day, birds were coming at an average of about 8 birds a minute. Many times there were 25 or 30 birds in the air over the ridge at once. Jerry, Mike and several other people were calling them out with ease when they looked to me like they were several miles away, that is, when I could see them at all. One lady was standing down by the edge of the valley and several times she called out golden eagles so far up the valley that it took several minutes before they came into view for the rest of us. It was a glorious day; warm and sunny, hundreds of hawks, and a sprinkling of variety. By the time we left at about 3 PM the count was up to 1700 birds. By the end of the day it was 2000. About half were red-tails with sharp-shins, coopers, turkey vultures, and red-shouldered very common. About 20 golden eagles came through. Other hawks spotted were osprey, goshawk, and harrier. No falcons.

The highlight of the day for me was having my camera ready when an accipiter dove on a red-tail twice while I photographed it. They were close enough so that the birds can be seen in the resulting photos. All in all it was a great day and a fantastic introduction to hawk watching.

### More about the Hawkwatch

by Mike Leahy

The hawk watch field trip was absolutely wonderful. Monday was somewhat slow but we did see some birds (129) and made the best of a not-so-perfect day. We enjoyed each others' company and learned some ID tips from Jerry Stanley.

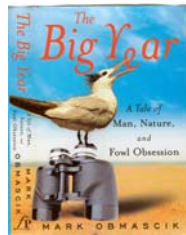
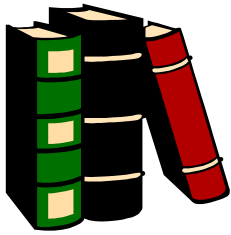
Tuesday, though, was another story. I don't think there was a 10 minute time period from 10 am to 5 pm that there weren't hawks in the sky. It was truly a "river of raptors" because there was a steady stream coming from the north. Many of the birds were somewhat far off or high but we also had some really good looks, particularly of several red-tails, a couple of Golden Eagles and even a red-shoulder or two. Many times the counters had to ask some of us to count the birds coming from a direction other than the one they were watching because they couldn't see them and count them all at once. One time I had two mixed kettles of birds to the east over the valley, with over 50 TV's and numerous red-tails and red-shoulders in each one. I had to try to count all these while a Golden Eagle was passing over behind me.

My back, shoulders and neck are killing me today, but I don't care. The pain was worth it. Tom Dick and Che Mincone commented that it was a record October day for the watch.

Did you know?

The largest tree nest is built by the Bald Eagle. The largest recorded Bald Eagle nest, at St. Petersburg, Florida, was occupied for many years. It had a depth of 20 feet, was 9.5 feet across and weighed nearly 3 Tons.





## **Christmas Wish List of Birding and Nature Books**

Several SRAS members have offered a few lines about some of their favorite books. You might choose a few for your own “Wish List”.

From Deb Freed –

*Private Lives of Garden Birds* by Calvin Simonds is an easy, enjoyable read for backyard bird watchers. Illustrated by Julie Zickefoose, this book devotes each chapter to one of eleven common backyard birds. Mr. Simonds shares personal stories and observations about the behavior of some of our best known birds, all brought to instant recognition by Ms. Zickefoose's penned drawings.

From Ron Montgomery –

*Sibley's Birding Basics* by David Sibley, 150pp, 2002. It is not just a basics book of how to bird, but also on layman ornithology.

*Home Study Course in Bird Biology*, 2nd Edition, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, copyright 2001. This is really 2 books; maybe 1000 pages. It is a difficult and rather complete course. It is presented in the manner of an advanced course, in that they expect the student to read other material as required to understand what is being presented. For example, I am currently reading a chapter about the evolution of birds during the Mesozoic Era, and they talk about dinosaurs as if the reader already understands how they are related (subclass Sauriurae & Ornithurae, the Enantiornithines, etc.) and give details of competing theories of the descent of birds rather than just one. Tests are open book, but difficult and time consuming..

From Carole Willenpart –

*For the Beauty of the Earth: Birding, Opera and other Journeys* by Thomas Urquhart. This is a new book I am presently reading which was reviewed in Audubon magazine, September-October, 2004. It combines music and birding interests – I'm an opera fan – and seems like it's going to be a great book so far. (From the Audubon review: Urquhart thinks everyone should “carry nature like music in the heart”).

*Northern Farm* by Henry Beston, tells about a year on a farm in northern Maine. It describes the natural seasons and changes, wildlife, living closer to the natural world. The book was written in 1948 and is hopefully still in print! (Editor's note – *Northern Farm* is available on-line through Barnes and Noble's Used and Out-of-Print section, and also through amazon.com).

*The Outermost House* by Henry Beston, describes a solitary year spent on a Cape Cod beach. The book goes through all seasons, highlighting bird migration. This is a classic and is still in print, written originally in 1928.

*Arctic Dreams* by Barry Lopez – hard to describe, but details the author's travels through the Arctic. It describes the landscape, bird, animals, history, culture, all combined. Although the book is non-fiction, it's not just about facts, but the whole picture, written beautifully. The subtitle is *Imagination and Desire In A Northern Landscape*, so that gives you an idea.

From Margaret Buckwalter –

*The Geese of Beaver Bog*, Bernd Heinrich's latest book, is getting rave reviews in the media. Any new book by Heinrich always gets my attention because he is one of our best nature writers. Here he carefully observes a flock of geese in his favorite New England habitat then proceeds to charm us with his wit and humor and scientific understanding.

From Janice Horn –

*Birding on Borrowed Time*, by Phoebe Snetsinger, was published by the American Birding Association in 2003. The author began birding at the age of 34

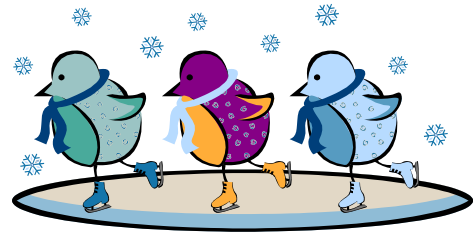
when she was inspired by a resplendent Blackburnian warbler. She began a quest to see as many birds as possible and began to travel the world to achieve that. In the midst of this search she was diagnosed with cancer and given only a year to live. She did not give in, but strove to locate more species, and did so for 17 more years. Other adventures and hazards confronted her over the years, but she persisted, and became the person who has seen more species than any other human being – over 8,000 of the world's birds. If you like maps as well as birding you will want to have an atlas handy to find the locations where she saw different species.

From Flo McGuire –

*Birds of Eastern and Central North America*, Roger Tory Peterson, Fifth Edition, was published in 2002. Experts were assembled to complete the final 15% of this book after the author's death in 1986. To me, this book seemed to come on the scene with very little fanfare, although I had been anticipating its arrival for years. It is the newest edition of "The best-selling field guide of all time" – I particularly like the arrows marking significant field marks, and the range maps, showing state boundaries. In addition: the range maps are now cross-referenced to the text; a "thumbnail" range map for each species has been inserted next to the text for quick reference; and, as anyone who has birded in Texas will be happy to know, birds of the lower Rio Grande Valley are now included.

*The Big Year – A Tale of Man, Nature, and Fowl Obsession* by Mark Obmascik is the true story of three men who attempted a "Big Year" in 1998. That is, they each wanted to see more ABA birds than anyone else in one year. The winner's total of 745 species may never be beaten, because 1998 was the year of El Nino (blowing a lot of Asian birds off-course), and air travel was simpler and less expensive than it is today. This book reads like a good novel – Mr. Obmascik develops each character's personality, so that, as you read it, you may pick your own favorite, or you may, as I did, hate to see any of them "lose" after sharing so many experiences with them. The book gives a lot of interesting background on the development of birding itself. I found it to be delightfully entertaining and informative.

*Gift from the Sea*, by Anne Morrow Lindbergh, was first published in 1955 and has endured. It can be described as a series of essays on womanhood, but I find it to be much more than that, and not really gender specific. Ms. Lindbergh finds her inspiration in the sea, as each chapter draws an analogy from a different seashell. She speaks of the human need for solitude and how we can find solitude in nature.



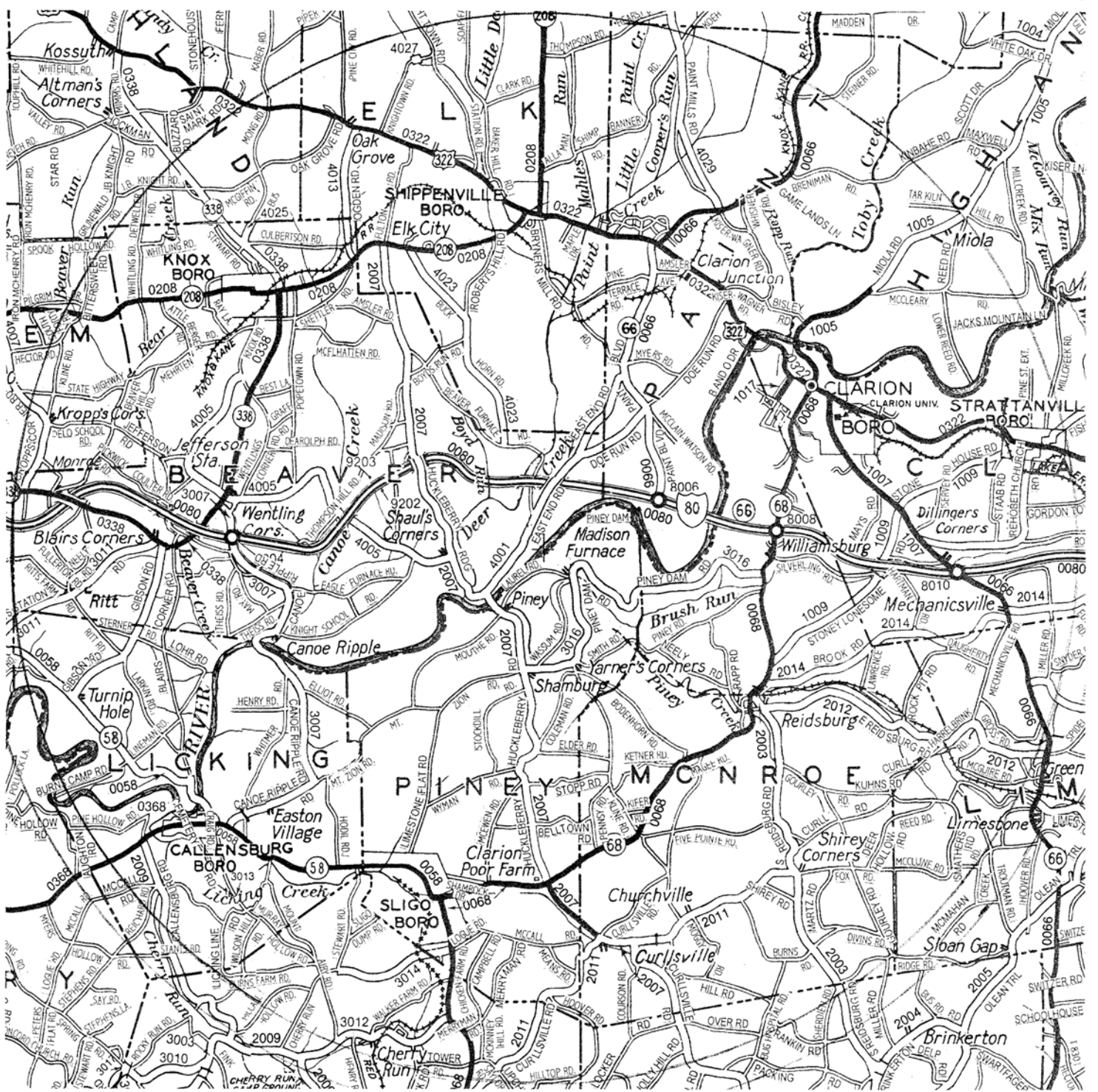
## Fall 2004 Bird Seed Sales

by Treasurer Janice Horn

This fall's bird seed sales had the same problem of getting black oil sunflower seed as last year. Agway has difficulty finding truckers who are willing to drive to North Dakota with empty trucks to bring back the sunflower seeds for their customers. Other than that well-known problem please let us know what you think of the arrangement we made with Agway for picking up your orders.

Although all the information about this fall's orders is not available yet, it seems that we did not reach the amount of sales that we have for the past couple years. The totals are respectable, though, for number of orders (about 70), the amount sold (in the area of 5 ½ tons), and profit for SRAS (approaching \$600). Once again we are grateful to everyone who placed an order.







## Caterpillar sighting

by Janice Horn

While waiting for raptors to appear on the first day of our watch at the Allegheny Front, I looked at the ground and noticed an all black caterpillar similar to the Woolly Bear in size. It curled up when I picked it up and Jerry Stanley pointed out the red skin showing between the black fur. At the time no one was able to identify it. Back at home I checked the Golden Guide's Butterflies and Moths and found that it is the larvae of the Great Leopard Moth and feeds on plantain. The Woolly Bear is the larvae of the Isabella Moth and both are Tiger Moths.

**Don't Forget –  
Christmas Bird Count  
on Monday, December 27**



### Looking Ahead - Field Trips

March 26 – Conneaut Marsh, PA  
April 2 – Presque Isle  
April 25 – Oil Creek State Park  
May 14 – Mt. Zion and Mt. Airy  
June 20 – Atlas Block-busting



### Upcoming Programs & Events

December 13 – Members' Night  
February 14 – American Chestnut Foundation  
March 14 – Scott Stoleson, "Birds of New Mexico"  
April 11 – Dave Brinker, Northern Goshawks  
May 9 – Membership Celebration, Timberwolf Lodge  
*May 20-22 – PSO Annual Meeting in Clarion*

### Hosting our upcoming meetings:

December – Ruth and Karl Schurr  
February – Jim Wilson and Gary Edwards  
March – Fran and Jack Williams  
May – Kathy Pokrifka

SENECA ROCKS AUDUBON SOCIETY  
C/O SHERY VOWINCKEL, MEMBERSHIP CHAIR  
59 MAPLE DRIVE  
SHIPPENVILLE, PA 16254