

# Seneca Rocks Drummer



March, 2006

Newsletter of the Seneca Rocks Audubon Society

*A Chapter of the National Audubon Society*

Volume 22, No. 7

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

**Next Meeting – March 13  
Room 249, Peirce Science Center  
Social - 7:00 p.m. Program begins at 7:30 p.m.**

## **Following the Wandering Falcon: Peregrine Falcon Recovery Research**

by Gary Edwards

SRAS' long time friend, Dan Brauning, Section Supervisor, Pennsylvania Game Commission's Wildlife Diversity Section, will be here to educate us on the history of the Peregrine Falcon and its successful reintroduction program.

As most of you know, the Peregrine Falcon is widely considered the world's fastest flying bird. It stands as a symbol of both the threats to an endangered species and the opportunities for positive intervention. It recovered from near-extinction in the 20th Century.

The presentation will provide an overview of this magnificent bird's history in Pennsylvania -- the population collapse during the 1950s and its hard-earned recovery that started in the 1970s. Dan's 20 years of experience with Peregrine Falcons, ranging from reintroduction to yearly banding, adds a personal touch to this story. We know more about Peregrine Falcons than we do about many far more common species. Research that tracked young

birds for up to two years, from young nestlings to their deaths, provides new insight into the challenges facing this wanderer.

Bring a friend and join us for what surely will be an informative and fun evening.

## **Field Trips**

by Jim Wilson

Following are the dates for our upcoming field trips and activities:

Sat 4/1	Presque Isle
Sat 4/8	Conneaut Marsh & Pymatuning
April 20 – 22	National Wildlife Week
Fri 5/5	Oil Creek State Park
May 6 – 14	Birdathon
Mon 6/19	Block Busting in Region 45



Our Conneaut Marsh Field Trip is always a popular one – last year we tallied 61 species, including a Eurasian Wigeon and a Peregrine Falcon. Anything may turn up this year. Join us and see!

(Don't forget the Presque Isle Field Trip on April 1 – see your February *Drummer* for directions).

**Conneaut Marsh Field Trip Directions**  
Saturday, April 8, 2006 at 8:30 A.M.  
Led by Mike Leahy

We begin this outing at the spillway bridge at 8:30 A.M. at Custards, off Route 285. Follow Route 322 west from Clarion, through Franklin, to Route 173 near Cochranton. Turn left and follow Route 173 south about one mile, through Cochranton and across French Creek, to Route 285. Follow Route 285 about six miles to Custards and turn right on Mercer Pike Road. Follow Mercer Pike Road about a half mile to the bridge. The drive from the Clarion area is as long as to Meadville.

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### *In This Issue . . .*

Before you read the Crow's Nest, I think I speak for the entire chapter when I say that We are most grateful to Deb Freed – for her accomplishment and leadership, for her willingness to tackle new projects and see them through, for her motivational skills, and for her dedication. Deb's leadership has helped to make our chapter an effective organization, and she is able to focus the talent in a way that has made the organization unusually productive. We're proud of you, Deb!

Our "Birding Tail", by Publicity Chair/Secretary Dennis Beaver, will take you to Magee Marsh and bring on warbler nostalgia. Margaret Buckwalter's interesting summary of our 17<sup>th</sup> Christmas Bird Count will take you back to that snowy (owl) day. Greg Cain, a Slippery Rock University student who was awarded the 2005 SRAS scholarship to Audubon Camp, will tell us how Hog Island captured his heart. If you're tired of winter, you'll be happy to read Roger Higbee's hummingbird article. It is not too early to begin planning your garden.

Finally, regarding the article about the BBA, I must mention that if you are new to the jargon of "block 6" and "safe dates" and "adopting a block", please ask any Regional Coordinator or board member, or check the BBA website, <http://www.carnegiemnh.org/atlas/home.htm>. Atlassing really is as simple as taking a map and field card and going birding.



### **Crow's Nest**

by President Deb Freed

It takes a lot of people to keep **SRAS** going. In recent weeks many members have stepped up to help and I am most grateful. Flo McGuire and I will be representing **SRAS** at the PA Audubon Assembly on April 1 and 2 at Mill Grove. We expect to return with some useful resources for the coming year. New member Genny Nesslage and veteran Gary Edwards will be co-chairing a conference in Clarion on June 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007, titled "Bird Conservation on Non-native Grasslands". Sounds like our **IBA**, Mt. Zion/Piney Tract, is a perfect example! Ron Montgomery has patiently prepared and presented a variety of birding programs in our community and around the region. Dennis Beaver has increased our chapter visibility through publicity and has become our full-fledged secretary. Janice Horn, our steady treasurer, keeps the chapter engaged in our successful fund raising events. Gary and Ron keep our programming and field trips interesting and fun. Jim Wilson organizes our events and has also been busy in his woodworking shop making bluebird nest boxes and some decorative woodworking that we will sell at the **NWW** display. New member Jan Meyer will assist Pete Dalby with inspecting the nest boxes at Beaver Creek this spring. The efforts of Flo McGuire are appreciated by all of us who enjoy the Drummer and the website. Our **BBA** coordinators, Pat Conway, Flo McGuire, and Gary Edwards have committed to a five-year survey project and welcome help from the residents of our communities. **BBA** coordinator Mike Leahy will be handing over duties to Carole Willenpart to complete the remaining three years. Walter Fye and Margaret Buckwalter give faithful attention to surveys and our **CBC**. A network of on-line birders like Carole Willenpart go beyond our chapter projects and link us to a legion of birders including members of the **PSO**. Our long time members and former chapter leaders continue to support **SRAS** with their attendance, participation and enthusiasm for the birds. Those who host our meetings and volunteer to help at events extend a friendly welcome to join in our activities. While I often ask

for help I do recognize and appreciate the contributions that so many people make to keep SRAS an active and vital chapter. Thank you all.

P.S. You know you are an active chapter member if you know what all these initials (**SRAS, IBA, NWW, BBA, CBC, PSO**) stand for!

## Spring Wildflower Class at CUP



Dr. Charles Williams will be teaching a Spring Wildflower Class on 2 Saturdays – May 6 and May 13. Cost is \$45. Please call Gina Knox in the Continuing Education Department at (814) 393-2227 for more information.



## 2nd Annual Hawk Watch at Erie Bluffs State Park, Saturday, April 15, 2006

Imagine watching a black dot on the horizon materialize into a majestic hawk right before your eyes! This is HAWK WATCH - a FREE family event sponsored by Presque Isle Audubon and Presque Isle State Park at our newest park: Erie Bluffs, in Girard Township. Come to watch the raptors migrating north over Erie Bluffs State Park, get up close to live birds of prey from Tamarack Wildlife Rehab Center, take a walk along the bluff and old forest trails or participate in children's games and activities.

Meet at the Route 5 access of Erie Bluffs State Park. Kickoff is at 9 a.m. but come anytime between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. Bring a lawn chair and your own binoculars and spotting scope if you have them.

Experts with binoculars and spotting scopes will be on hand to ID hawks and other migrating birds. Raptors may include: Osprey, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk and American Kestrel.

Directions: Erie Bluffs State Park entrance is approximately 20 miles west of Erie on Route 5 and 100 hundred yards west of Elk Creek Access, turn right onto the farm field road look for HAWK WATCH signs. No restrooms - port-a-potty only. For more information call 814-835-8069, Ext. 102 or email [ssmith@lea.earthforce.org](mailto:ssmith@lea.earthforce.org).



Bird Tails

## Be Careful What You Say

by Dennis Beaver

If you have never been to Crane Creek State Park, and Magee Marsh near Toledo, Ohio, you may not realize how crowded the board walk at the Marsh is during the spring migration. The site is directly across from the well known Point Pelee in Ontario, and the spring migrants build up at Magee Marsh waiting for favorable winds to cross Lake Erie to Point Pelee. The boardwalk puts you at eye level with those elusive warblers, who are mainly concerned with feeding and preparing to migrate. As Magee Marsh becomes better known, there are increasingly large crowds on the boardwalk, and the skill of the birders ranges from expert to the most novice of bird watchers.

One recent spring, I was at Magee Marsh with two friends who are both excellent birders. One of these friends has a unique sense of humor, and while wearing a vest covered with patches from birding sites all over the world appears to be an authority. These two friends were watching an influx of female redstarts, which were everywhere you looked. We were seeing little else than female redstarts, when the friend with the vest flippantly said, "Oh, look! There is a yellowstart!" About six feet away from this "expert" were two people with new binoculars, and new bird books, who appeared to be in the novice category. Upon hearing the announcement about "yellowstart" they were frantically paging through the index of a brand new Roger Tory Peterson eastern field guide, obviously looking for "yellowstart".

Since then, any time I see a female redstart, or a juvenile in the fall, I always remember that perhaps I am really seeing a "yellowstart".



## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, 12/17/05

by Margaret Buckwalter

**O**ne Snowy Owl and 83 Red Crossbills were the biggest surprises on our recent Christmas Bird Count. The owl was found by Ron Montgomery's team at Mt. Airy and the crossbills were found on Popetown Road near Wentlings Corners by Walter Fye.

The Snowy Owl was the first ever for our count circle. It was the second flock of Red Crossbills seen here over the years.

Sunshine, but temperatures in the low 20's, greeted the members of SRAS as they set forth on their 17th Christmas Bird Count, Audubon's 106th Count. During the day it warmed to about 35 degrees but the weather had a distinct nip in places exposed to the north wind.

The goal was to find as many individuals of as many species in the Clarion Circle as possible. Searchers were divided into parties and sometimes subdivided into teams in order to cover the maximum area possible. Feederwatchers were appointed in the area also. Altogether 57 species of birds were reported, about average for this count.

This was the Year of the Blue Jay. We tallied 954 of this species, in contrast to 774 in 2001, the next highest. Four Northern Mockingbirds were also the highest so far. Song Sparrows were up to 99 this year; the previous high was 29. White-throated Sparrows were also highest at 162, previously 75 in 1998. Unusual species were: the Snowy Owl, of course, and the 83 Red Crossbills, also two Eastern Meadowlarks. Two species seen in the count week

(but not on the count) were Belted Kingfisher, 1, and Snow Bunting, 1. Notable downtrends were Kestrels, 5, and Ruffed Grouse, 4.

Without a doubt, highest honors went to the team led by Ron Montgomery, including Deb Freed, Pat Conway, Ann Hunt; and Gary Edwards and Jim Wilson later in the day. They saw 42 species of birds, 1178 individuals, including three Short-eared Owls and one Common Redpoll. The Walter Fye team was second in individuals seen, 1144, but placed 3rd in number of species, 30. His team included Evelyn Myers and Shirley Monrean. The Williams/Willenpart team, consisting of Jack and Fran Williams and Michelle Vensel, and Carole Willenpart were 2nd in number of species, 34. Pete Dalby's team, including Ernie Aharrah and Richard Raucci were 3rd for number of individuals, 885, not surprising because they covered the town of Clarion with all its sparrows and starlings.

Many thanks go to the following participants: Ernie Aharrah, Ted Buckwalter, Greg Cain, Pat Conway, Pete Dalby, Erik Dowlan, Gary Edwards, Deb Freed, Walter Fye, Janice Horn, Ann Hunt, Charles Marlin, Flo & Jim McGuire, Ray McGunigle, Wayne Meier, Shirley Monrean, Ron Montgomery, Evelyn Myers, John & Kathy Pokrifka, Richard Raucci, Carl & Joan Rowe, Karl & Ruth Schurr, John Street, Gil Twiest, Michelle Vensel, Carole Willenpart, Fran & Jack Williams, James R. Wilson.

Special acknowledgement goes to the feederwatchers who added substantially to the total: Patty Bell, Ron & Bonnie Black, Hendrika Bohlen, Tami Dearth, Mary Emerick, Layne Giering, Harry & Jeanne Hakenson, Dixie Humphrey, Reba Klingler, Jane Magistrella, Gerry McCall and Lorna Vowinkel.

The final account may be found online at [www.audubon.org/bird/cbc](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc), check under Current Year's Results for Clarion Count (PACR). I will be happy to furnish a similar print-out to those without computer access.

– Margaret Buckwalter, Co-compiler with Walter Fye



## Hog Island

Article and Photo by Gregory Cain

Hog Island is one of those places you see once and fall in love with. Whether it is the beauty of the ocean and the island with all its calm rhythms, the friends you make along the way, instructors or fellow campers, or the amazing food prepared freshly each day, Hog Island has me wanting to return.

I originally envisioned the island miles off shore for some reason, but upon arriving at the camp I found it only a few hundred yards from the shore. With no computers, televisions, or phones, it was amazing how much less stressful the day seemed without these daily nuisances. It made the island so much more enjoyable with not a worry in the world.

Usually each morning I would wake up early and go bird watching with some very fun and enthusiastic birders, including Tom Leckey, Mark Garland, and Sue Schubel. It was funny since the birding was supposed to cover a large area of island but the diversity in the 200 yard radius from the starting area would hold our attention for and hour or more. One morning I decided to go for a run and take a look at some of the other areas of the island which we had not had the opportunity to explore.

During the day there was always a program planned to deepen our understanding of the environment that surrounded us. We explored the inter-tidal zone at low tide learning about this interesting and productive zone of the ocean. We found crabs, starfish, jelly fish that had become stranded, algae, kelp, sponges, and many other interesting organisms. I'll admit some things are not for me, like the two and a half hour talk on the reproductive life of ferns. Rather than be distracted by the

environment around me I decided to explore the island that day. I spent the day birding and exploring the diversity of the ecosystem on the main part of the island.

One of my favorite days was the day we took the boat trip to Eastern Egg Rock, where the American Puffin has been reintroduced. On the boat ride we were lucky enough to see fin back whales, sea porpoises, and harbor seals. On some of the islands that we passed we saw nesting eagles and osprey. There were also an incredible amount of sea birds that were new to me and very interesting to watch and learn about. It was fun to be out on the ocean with the boat rocking and watching the waves crash on the shore. The puffins were in the water around the boat and flying through the air – one of them cut in front of me, maybe 5 feet away. On our way back we stopped at an island that is owned by Friends of Hog Island, and explored its coast. The island was very unique, possessing its own qualities not contained in Hog Island's boundaries, including an osprey nest. The cliffs of rock looking out over the ocean were one of my favorite features on the island. There was also a cave to be explored up in the woods, which I would have never even imagined. But I have to say, Maine and Hog Island surprised me in so many ways.

The first few days I was not used to the sound of the Lobster boats. I frequently mistook them for airplanes or ATVs, because that is what I am used to at home. By the end of the week I no longer mistook them. I just got used to living on the island with its amazing food, great friendships, and its wealth of information. I would like to thank those who made it possible for me to attend this camp; it is something that I will have with me for the rest of my life.

## To Feed and What to Feed or How to Increase Your Chances of Attracting Hummingbirds

by Roger Higbee

**A**s you walk through your flower garden during the warmer months, a green missile goes whizzing past you and suddenly stops to gracefully hover in front of one of your salvias to sip the nectar that the plant has produced for this tiny visitor. As the visitor does its merry dance around each blossom, you realize that your green missile is a Ruby-throated Hummingbird. These feisty little jewels of the avian world are one of the few birds that can truly hover to feed and can fly backwards.

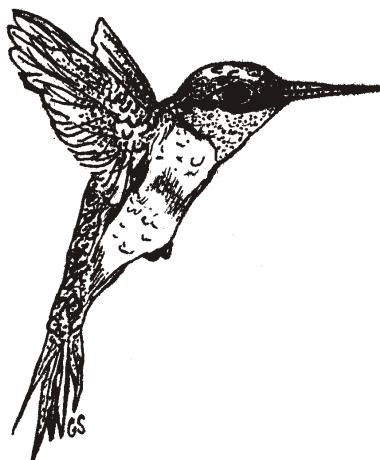
They capture the imagination of most gardeners, birders, and the population in general because of their quick darting motions, their hovering, bickering, and small size. Everyone seems to like these butterfly-sized birds, and many people feed them. There are two ways to do this. One is to put out a hummingbird feeder, and the other is to plant the correct flowers for them to feed naturally. I suppose this corresponds to our staying home to prepare a meal or going out to eat at a restaurant. I will touch on both aspects with perhaps a little more emphasis on the natural food.

The simplest way to attract hummingbirds is to buy a hummingbird feeder and fill it with appropriately prepared artificial food (sugar water). This can be done by mixing 4 parts water with 1 part sugar. This mixture should be boiled for 1 to 2 minutes to kill bacteria which will make the "nectar" last longer. Use only white sugar and never brown sugar, molasses, or honey as these can cause problems with fungal infection in the birds' mouths. Also, never use artificial sweeteners as these have no food value. Do not use red food coloring as this could be harmful to hummers. It has been suggested that the food coloring could have adverse effects on the birds' kidneys. If you want to increase the amount of red around your feeder, use strips of red ribbon or plant red flowers. The sugar water should be changed every 3 to 4 days and more often in hotter weather. Feeders should be rinsed with hot water and scrubbed to remove any mold that may be growing inside them each time they are filled. I have found the easiest feeders to clean are the saucer type that look like a

flying saucer. These feeders allow the whole top to come off so that all parts can easily be inspected and cleaned. It might be wise to only partially fill your feeder so that you will have to fill it more often; this will keep the nectar fresher.

As with any bird, if natural food is available, the bird will choose the natural food more often than not. So it is also with these little green acrobats. If you want to provide them with natural nectar and also increase your chances of attracting them to your feeders, plant a hummingbird garden. There are a number of flowers, shrubs, and trees that produce more nectar than others. These are the ones to choose should you try to plant to attract these gems. Some of these plants are bee balm, blazing star, scarlet sage, anise sage, standing cypress, red cardinal flower, Mexican cigar plant, oswego tea, penstemon, pineapple sage, and red buckeye. There are more than these, but this gives

you some idea of the type of plant these birds prefer – a tubular flower that has no fragrance, that is usually bright in color, and produces much nectar. Other considerations when choosing plants are the length of time that the plant blooms and when it blooms. More than one type of flower should be planted to have nectar producing plants constantly in bloom.



Also, do not use pesticides, herbicides, or fungicides on or around your garden. For the hummingbird this would be equivalent to your spraying your dinner with ant and roach killer. Not very appetizing! Most of these plants can be grown from seed or purchased from a nursery.

For more information you can go on the internet to <http://mywebspace.wisc.edu/mjrock/web/>. Under the *Dane County Nectar News* the very last item is "Hummingbird Gardening for Northern Gardeners" which lists plants and other information. Or you can do a search for hummingbird plants using a search engine such as Google. So if you want to attract these green acrobatic, feisty, territorial, twittering missiles to your yard, start planning now so that when they begin their northward migration, you will be ready for them. Until then, good birding!

## Breeding Bird Atlas Update

by Flo McGuire

**O**n February 25, a meeting for Regional Coordinators of the Second Breeding Bird Atlas Project was held at Clarion University. There were a series of 4 meetings in different areas of the state in an effort to accommodate all of the coordinators. Jocelynn Smrekar, faculty member and new coordinator for Region 46, hosted this event at Clarion. Project Coordinator Bob Mulvihill and his assistant Cokie Lindsay represented Headquarters. There were 23 RC's, representing 19 regions. Our local RC's were all in attendance.



Bob reported that we have come a long way, but there is still a lot of work to be done. He would like all of the block 6's to be adopted soon, and, of course, to be atlassed. If

you are atlassing a block and have not adopted it, please adopt it. From Bob's standpoint, when a block has an owner, he can assume that the owner is taking the responsibility to check out all the habitats, while this may not be so with an unadopted block.

One new development in this, the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the project, is that there are 2 separate **Owl Surveys** (of about 2 – 3 hours each), and they would like them to be run in every block 6. There are also **Marsh Bird Surveys** being developed that should be run where there is marsh habitat.

**Local Atlas News** – Mike Leahy is handing over the reins of Region 44 to Carole Willenpart. Carole will be the Regional Coordinator for the remaining 3 years of the Atlas. Everyone should welcome Carole and help her by adopting a block today! Mike, of course, will still be an active volunteer in Region 44. He will continue to atlas his 4 blocks and plans to adopt more.

One of Carole's first priorities will be to get more block 6's adopted in Region 44. So far, 4 of the 12 block 6's have been adopted, and 19 of the total 84 blocks have been adopted. Anyone can

contact Carole if they are not sure where the block 6's are, or if they are interested in an Owl or Marsh Bird Survey.

When you adopt a block, plan to spend about 25 hours birding in that block. You aren't expected to cover every square inch, but you should canvass the block to find its different habitats, and try to bird in each habitat. You can check out the block early in spring, while keeping an eye out for large stick nests. Great Horned and Barred Owls are nesting now, and any large nest you find may be used later by a hawk – you can mark it on your map and check it in the summer.

Rock Pigeons, House Sparrows and Common Ravens are safe now, and Tufted Titmice, Northern Cardinals and most of the woodpeckers will be safe on March 15. It's not too early to get out there!

Atlassing Trivia (or, some random things we learned at the meeting) :

- A Regional Rarity is a species that was found in 7 or less of that Region's 84 blocks in the First BBA.
- Only 2 birds were found in the First PBBA and have not been found yet – the Loggerhead Shrike and Swainson's Warbler.
- Given GPS coordinates, it is possible to find that location on a PA map, at this website: <http://gis1.pasda.psu.edu/website/2ndPBBA/MappingTools/Viewer.asp>. Or, from the Atlas homepage

<http://www.carnegiemnh.org/atlas/home.htm> click on "Block Finder/Custom Mapper" (on the right), then "2<sup>nd</sup> PBBA Mapping Tools" (in the text). This site, developed by Penn State Institutes of the Environment, has many capabilities, with a Help screen to explain them.

In closing, I want to mention the sense of pride I had when reading the March/April 2006 *Bird Watcher's Digest* article, "Golden-winged Warbler", and finding that the author referenced the 1992 *Atlas of Breeding Birds of Pennsylvania*. I played only a small part in the first BBA, adopting a few blocks and helping in some others. In fact, I had been reluctant to volunteer at all, thinking I wasn't knowledgeable enough, until (my Regional Coordinator) Margaret Higbee handed me a block map and a field card and said "Just go birding and mark what you see!"

It takes a lot of people playing small parts to make a project like this successful.

## Future Programs -

April 10 - John Karian, "Western Pennsylvania Nature Scenes"

May 8 - Linda Ordiway, "Spring Amphibians"

Don't forget -

Birdseed pick-up at Clarion Agway,  
Monday, March 6 through Saturday, March 11



Thank you to the following hosts  
for the coming meetings:

Mar 13 Jim Wilson & Gary Edwards  
Apr 10 Jan Meyer

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## SRAS Board Members

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Gary Edwards, Vice-president, programs ..... 676-3011

Dennis Beaver, Secretary/Publicity ..... 676-6564

Janice Horn, Treasurer, Birdseed, Birdathon 226-7367

Flo McGuire, Website, Drummer Editor ... 755-3672

Ron Montgomery,

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Jim Wilson, Events ..... 676-5455

Paulette Colantonio, Education ..... 797-2031

Pat Conway, History ..... 849-6315

Margaret Buckwalter, Mill Creek Coalition . 782-3925

Walter Fye, Beaver Creek ..... 797-1019

## BBA Regional Coordinators

Gary Edwards, Region 43 676-3011

Carole Willenpart, Region 44 745-3818

Pat Conway, Region 45 849-6315

Flo McGuire, Region 30 755-3672

Ruffed Grouse artwork in masthead  
by George Miksch Sutton, used with permission.

Seneca Rocks Audubon Society  
c/o Deb Freed  
208 Briar Hill Drive  
Clarion, PA 16214