

Seneca Rocks Drummer



October 2003

Newsletter of the Seneca Rocks Audubon Society
A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Volume 20, No. 2

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

OCTOBER PROGRAM

Roger Higbee

by Gary Edwards

What do the names Arapaho, Arrowwood, Anahuac, Havasu, Dungeness, Seedskafee, Nine Pipe, Bowdoin, and Sheldon have in common? Here's a clue. The answer is the same as for the names Bombay Hook, Chincoteague, Eastern Neck, Tinicum, Santa Ana, Salton Sea, and J.N. Ding Darling. That's right, they're all National Wildlife Refuges and they've all (plus many more) been visited by our October presenter, Roger Higbee of the Todd Bird Club. Roger and his wife Margaret have spent many vacations visiting large and small, famous, not-so-famous and virtually unknown NWRs throughout the country. For the last 30+ years Roger has been documenting the trips with photographs of both scenery and birdlife. Now we get to share their bounty. Don't miss this opportunity to see a sampling of Nature's beauty



and the Higbees' insight and impressions of their favorite NWRs. Bring a friend, sit back, relax, and enjoy. You'll be glad you did.

Field Trips

by Ron Montgomery

By the time you read this, we will probably have completed both our **American Chestnut** collection and our night with the stars, but with the weather we have been having I cannot be sure! Recall that our **Night with Mars** and astronomer **Sharon Montgomery** is scheduled for the first clear night during the periods **September 22 through 25** and **September 29 through October 1**.

The **Forest Management Field Trip** is **Monday, October 6, at 8:45am** at the Clear Creek State Forest Headquarters, which is across Route 949 from Clear Creek State Park. October 8 is the rain date. Since we are close to the minimum number needed to provide this program, please let me know if you will attend, but did not sign up at our last meeting. We will spend an hour or so inside and then caravan to various locations within the Forest. Besides enlightening us about Forest Management practices, I am hopeful that wildlife biologist Scott Stoleson from the USFS Research Station in Warren will discuss his Cerulean Warbler project. They will also show us a Heron Rookery that they



have found. This 10,000 acre forest is of particular interest to us because it contains one of the IBA sites in our jurisdiction. Bring a bag lunch and perhaps a folding chair, as we will have lunch wherever we are at noon. I anticipate being finished by 3:00pm.

The field trip to **Allegheny Front Hawk Watch** near Johnstown is **October 27 and 28** (Monday and Tuesday). We will meet at the Exit 70 Shell/Keystone Truck Stop Parking Lot under the large Restaurant sign on Monday October 28, leaving at 7:00am. We will pick up the Brookville contingent at 7:15 at the abandoned Forest Way Inn parking lot on the strip in Brookville. You are free to return after the first day if you wish. Please arrange car pooling with someone whose return plans are compatible with yours. For those staying overnight, I recommend the Shawnee Motel in Shellsburg (814-733-2828, price \$34 - \$45). Please make your own reservations.

Last year we had 250 hawks on the first day! Jerry Stanley will be on hand both days to give tips on hawk identification and to settle disputes! Remember that you may borrow the video tape that Gary showed at our September meeting, if you would like to brush up on hawk identification.

The trip will take about 2.5 hours. Bring chairs, bag lunch, telescope, rain gear, thermos, water,



(Golden Eagle by Gloria Lamer)

and the warmest clothes you have. I will have a sign up sheet and more details at our next meeting. This was a great outing last year!

Crow's Nest

by President Deb Freed

On Tuesday, September 9 I experienced a whirlwind fallout in my yard. At about 11 a.m. I noticed waves of birds on the ground, in the low shrubs, perching in the tops of trees, chasing and landing in unexpected places throughout my yard. My head was spinning! The weather was calm, but the sky was dark and threatening. For about an hour I watched more species than I have ever had at one time. They were strangely close and low so I didn't get my binoculars out. Besides, their movements were erratic and nonstop and I felt I would miss something if I tried to focus on one area. Here are some of my observations: 30 Cedar Waxwings in the top of the cherry tree with a dozen American

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Robins, 10 Black-throated Green Warblers and several Scarlet Tanagers in the blueberry bushes and willows by our tiny pond and waterfall, 2 Black-and-white Warblers sitting on the water plants in the pond, a few Chipping Sparrows scratching around in the mulch, two Red-eyed Vireos in the viburnum bushes next to the house, dozens of Chickadees and American Goldfinches in the rhododendron, a family of Northern Cardinals in the black birch, a solitary Gray Catbird, 6 Blue Jays, a Downy Woodpecker, two White-breasted Nuthatches, two Flycatchers (not sure which ones), my best guess at a Nashville Warbler, so close I could see a distinct white eye ring, two Kinglets chasing and swooping, never settling down, three Ruby-throated Hummingbirds on the porch in the planter, and several Mourning Doves. My feeders have been empty since the bear tore them down and the activity in my yard toward the end of August was at a low point. I couldn't have been happier that day just to be able to sit and take it all in. The September migration and this unexpected fallout are like an Indian summer, an extension of the sweet pleasures of our natural world.

Little Gem #3: Clarion County Landfill

by Ron Montgomery

Getting there: Drive 1.6 miles north of Leeper on Route 66 to a left turn onto Arnold Avenue. Follow Arnold Avenue for 0.2 mile and turn right on Wally Road. Wally Road has the look of a business entrance, but it is public road. The headquarters of "County Environmental" (800-662-5222) is on the right after about 300 yds. You may wish to sign in there, particularly if you plan to stray from the highway. No roads are gated and you can visit on holidays. This is a convenient diversion for those who take their recyclables to Leeper.

Description: This Little Gem is mostly a drive-and-stop route. It fits the description of a Little Gem in that it is tiny, but it is a largely unstudied pond system within a few minutes of Clarion. The roads around the landfill are pretty good for dirt roads, but in inclement weather consider using a 4WD vehicle. The driving route is only 2 miles around, and brings you back to the County Environmental office. Site Manager Steve Lencer welcomes birders, but asks us to sign in at the office if we visit during working hours so they know who is out there.

There is a restaurant called The Sawmill at the junction of routes 66 and 36 in Leeper which has a restroom. A Uni-Mart and Leeper Market is also located at that intersection.



Details: Continue on Wally Road beyond the Office Building. The fenced-in landfill is on the left and a woods, that is posted with "Trespassing by written permission only," on the right. The woods on the right soon turn into an early successional shrubby field. At 0.5 mile, turn right on Mealy Drive. There is a small pond in a grassy field on the right, with parking for 1 or 2 cars.

Just past the pond, turn right onto Aaron Drive. There is a large cultivated field to the left of Aaron Drive, followed by a deep woods of hemlock and hardwood. At 1.3 mi (total from the office building), turn right into the pond area.

There are several ponds of various sizes with the largest being about 4 acres. In the spring there are ducks and geese, and later shorebirds and swallows. There are interesting cattail and reed marshes to explore. The pond area is 0.6 mile long and covers perhaps 15 acres. One then climbs a modest hill to a wet forested area. Continue a little further past the tank farm back to Wally Road.

Peregrine Games

by Kate St. John
Pittsburgh, PA

(This article was contributed to the PABIRDS listserv in July, 2003 and is reprinted here with the kind permission of the author).

As of July 15, the 4 immature peregrine falcons at the University of Pittsburgh were still in the vicinity of the Cathedral of Learning. Today (July 17), it's hard to be sure because they fly so well and have become expert at quick getaways and scrambles.

Meanwhile, the Gulf Tower peregrine chicks just fledged this week. These birds are very late compared to others in PA because their parents were involved in fierce territory battles this spring (<http://www.paconserve.org/pittfalcons/gulfdispute.htm> for details).

One of the chicks hatched later than the others and her development is a few days behind her nest mates. The PA Game Commission and the Canadian Peregrine Foundation were able to fit her with a telemetry device. PGC will put telemetry updates on their website at <http://www.pgc.state.pa.us/wildlife>

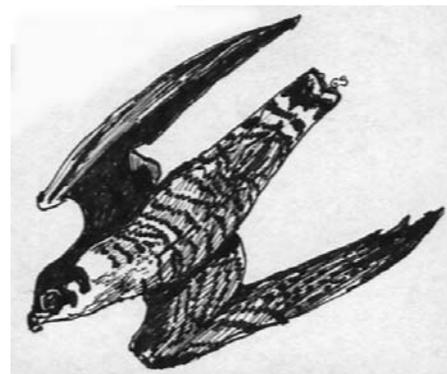
Here are some things I've noticed about immature falcons' behavior.

1. When the young are about to fledge, the parent birds encourage them to fly by zooming past them – loop-the-loops, upside down flying, etc. The aerial maneuvers are quite remarkable. It takes your breath away.

2. A few days after fledging, the immature falcons begin to practice food exchange. Two young falcons fly together, then one flips over and pretends to grab food upside down from the other. This is a useful skill because the parents soon require it of them. The parents hold the prey down away from their bodies while the young come up from below to flip over and get it. If the young are vocal at all, they making begging calls during all of this. "Begging" sounds a little like a whining version of the normal peregrine call, but

if you're not used to it you may think someone is hurt.

3. The young falcons will spend a lot of time checking out all the cache areas. If you know where the parent birds store food, you can often find the young sitting there munching.



(Peregrine Falcon by Georgette Syster)

4. One of the young falcons' favorite things to do after they're pretty good at flying: One flies close on the tail of the other, then they both fold their wings and dive for 20 stories. At the bottom of the loop they soar up high together in a path like a huge U. The better they get at flying, the better they look when they do this.

5. They also play Chase Me: One young falcon pretends to be prey (or maybe doesn't know the other has started the game, but the game is the same). The other falcon circles above and dives on it or comes up fast from behind. The "prey" falcon flips over (sometimes squawks) or zooms away fast. They'll do this for at least 15 minutes at a time. My cats do this too. It looks like they're going to hurt each other -- and sometimes someone yowls because he wants the game to stop -- but they don't "mean" it. They're just practicing predator skills. It isn't fighting.

The only true peregrine-to-peregrine dog-fight I've ever seen looked vicious and relentless. No pause, no mercy, lots of talons, and lots of driving away from the territory. There was also some screaming (not begging). Fighting peregrines are determined to win.

6. Another "game": When an immature falcon is perched on a high spot with a good view, another immature may zoom at it and make it give up its perch. I've seen the adult pair do this. For the pair at Pitt, normally the female takes the male's perch away, not vice versa. ❖❖



Some Auduboners observing grassland birds at a blueberry bog with Kenn Kaufmann (white hat).

Audubon Camp in Maine

by Flo McGUIRE

I was delighted to be selected as the SRAS scholarship recipient this year – I attended Field Ornithology Camp at Hog Island, Maine, in June. Just imagine, eating your meals and going birding every day with authors Scott Weidensaul, Kenn Kaufmann and Stephen Kress! Dr. Sara Morris, an ornithologist from Canisius College in Buffalo, who bands birds every spring and fall on Appledore Island in Maine, Greg Budnay, the curator of the Library of Natural Sounds at Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and Tom Leckey, a world-traveling naturalist, rounded out the staff. We saw active Bald Eagle and Osprey nests, a Great Blue Heron rookery at Wreck Island, with 150 to 200 nests. We saw Puffins flying, we saw Puffins swimming, we saw Puffins standing on Eastern Egg Rock. They had been extirpated by the turn of the 20th century and were brought back through the work of one of our instructors – Stephen Kress. We walked and birded at Medomak, a village on the mainland, tracing the footsteps of the camp's first ornithology instructor in 1936 – Roger Tory Peterson. Camp Director Seth Benz has put together an impressive program.

Thank you for this wonderful opportunity! I have some photos (but I am not Gil!) and will be glad to share some of my experiences on Members' Night at our December meeting.

Creating Youth Stewardship for Our Natural World

Audubon Adventures

by Deb Freed

Seneca Rocks Audubon Chapter is committed to increasing awareness and appreciation in children about birds, wildlife and the natural systems of the earth. We do this by providing Audubon Adventures to area classrooms. Audubon Adventures is an educational resource kit for grades 3 through 6 that offers action-oriented content about healthy habitats, essays, puzzles, word challenges, games and web site links.



The 2003-2004 Audubon Adventures topics are: Grasslands, Nature in Your Neighborhood, Coniferous Forests and Fresh Water Environments. More information is available at www.audubon.org. Check out the on-line Owl Prowl Adventure.

Participation is easy. Place your order with your school's contact person or e-mail Deb Freed at dhfreed@csonline.net with the following information:

Participation is easy. Place your order with your school's contact person or e-mail Deb Freed at dhfreed@csonline.net with the following information:

- 1) School
- 2) Teacher's name and contact (phone or e-mail)
- 3) Mailing address of classroom
- 4) grade level
- 5) number of students

SRAS will place your order the week it is received and materials will be mailed to you the following week. Have fun!



OWL PROWL

Dale Luthringer will be holding an Owl Prowl at **Cook Forest on Oct. 3 at 7 pm**. Please bring your flashlight and meet at the Log Cabin Inn Environmental Learning Center.

August Picnic

by Deb Freed

August 12 was a perfect day for a picnic at the Mehrten. Twenty-four members gathered under the pavilion to enjoy some summertime favorites like Jim McGuire's fresh tomato gazpacho and Linda Twiest's blueberry pie. Joan Rowe walked the edge of the pond to find the remnants of the blackberry patches where she remembered gathering huge berries as a youngster. In twos and threes, individuals picked up binoculars and headed to the pond to enjoy the bird activity there. No one bothered to make a list on this casual and relaxed evening outing. Walter's oak molding campfire set the stage for sharing stories of summer travels and local birding adventures. It had all the makings of a family reunion: good food, good company, shared memories. Seneca Rocks is a kind of family and we hope it continues to grow. SRAS family in attendance: Linda and Gil Twiest, Margaret Buckwalter, Ruth and Karl Schurr, Fran and Jack Williams, Pat Conway, Ann Hunt, Cathy and Pokey Pokrifka, Judy and Ron Montgomery, Flo and Jim McGuire, Sherry Vowinckel, Mark Aites, Joan and Carl Rowe, Walter Fye, Gary Edwards, Deb and Ben Freed.



LAKE ERIE SHORE BIRDS

by Margaret Buckwalter

Lots of shorebirds feeding, loafing, bathing and preening on the sunny mud flats invited us to tote our scopes a good ways out to the edge of the water at Lake Erie Beach, Conneaut, Ohio, on Saturday, September 13. The field trip was led by Jerry Stanley for members of Bartramian, and Seneca Rocks Audubon Societies and Three Rivers Birding Club. Mike Leahy and Margaret Buckwalter from SRAS were among the participants.

All morning we wandered over the beach, in small groups and large, excited by the good finds and gossiping in the lulls. It was fun to compare equipment and gear with other birders too. Jerry was a good leader and made sure everybody got "on" each different species. He was most generous with field mark tips and explanations of behavior. Altogether Mike and I saw 51 species of birds. The list included: pied-billed grebe, double-crested cormorant, great blue heron, great egret, green heron, turkey vulture, Canada goose, wood duck, American wigeon, American black duck, mallard, blue-winged teal, green-winged teal, bald eagle, red-tailed hawk, American kestrel, merlin, American golden plover, semipalmated plover, killdeer, both greater and lesser yellowlegs, ruddy turnstone (dead), whimbrel, sanderling, semipalmated sandpiper, western sandpiper, least and pectoral sandpipers, both short-billed and long-billed dowitchers, Bonaparte's and herring gulls, Caspian and Forster's terns, rock pigeon, mourning dove, chimney swift, belted kingfisher, barn swallow,

Hosting our meetings this year:

September 8: **Judy Montgomery & Deb Freed**
October 13: **Kathy and Pokey Pokrifka**
November 10: **Ruth and Karl Schurr**
December 8: **Linda and Gil Twiest**
February 9: **Hendrika Bohlen**
March 8: **Joan and Carl Rowe**
April 12: **no refreshments**

May 10: **SRAS 20th Year Celebration Event.**
Looking for ideas and help!



eastern bluebird, American pipit, yellow warbler, common yellowthroat, song sparrow, red-winged blackbird, goldfinch. Mike found the only whimbrel far out on the breakwater just as we were leaving.

TWIST PHOTO WINS FIRST PRIZE

by Margaret Buckwalter

An action shot of two Wandering Albatrosses fighting over fish scraps won First Place in the International Class of *WildBird's* annual photo contest which drew 899 entries from all over.



Sixteen images were picked for publication in the September/October, 2003, issue. The finalists were congratulated by the judges for “combining interesting avian behavior with masterful photographic skills”. Our own member, Gil Twist, caught the two birds facing off against each other in churning foam and flying spray. A flock of Cape pigeons dots the deep blue ocean as the somber cliffs of South Island, New Zealand, loom in the distance. Action, indeed!

When asked for details, Gil revealed that the captain of the pelagic trip had been “chumming” the water with bait and the two albatrosses were only part of the flock of 23 that had been attracted to the scene. “First the Cape Pigeons (petrels) arrived, then all the gulls, and finally the Wandering Albatrosses”. Gil and his wife, Linda, took their birding tour of New Zealand last winter in a rented motor home. SRAS members were lucky to see his slides this May when he presented his show.

Wildbird is one of the most popular bird watching periodicals. Look for some sample issues at our next meeting.



Community Program Offerings

We are often asked to supply bird-related programs to adult organizations in the community. Since one of



our goals is to “promote education that fosters appreciation of the natural environment”, the Board decided to develop a ready response and Ron Montgomery has agreed to handle such requests. Ron will either provide presentations to adult organizations within the area of our membership or direct the request to other members of SRAS.

While Ron will not accept expenses or a speakers fee, we have decided to encourage a contribution to SRAS in return for supplying a program. Ron already has given some programs and several others are scheduled. Seven different programs are available and are offered in poster, slide or Powerpoint format. Most are approximately 45 minutes long, but one (Principles of Birding) is a multi-session instructional program.

If you know of church, civic or other organizations who are looking for an Audubon-sponsored program, feel free to direct them to either Deb Freed or Ron. An informational bulletin is available upon request.

You Might be a birder if...

- ◆ Your spouse/significant other thinks “DEEP WOODS OFF” is your cologne.
- ◆ You think ripping open owl pellets is NOT gross.
- ◆ You have been seen looking out of restaurant windows with your binoculars.
- ◆ You don't think of elections when you hear the word primaries.
- ◆ You are sure that in heaven there are six months of May and six months of September.



(Photo from Powdermill Website)

Saw-whet Banding Demo

by Flo McGuire

It was a cold and rainy October morning as my husband and I prepared for our 3rd annual trip to the Ned Smith Center near Harrisburg, PA, for Scott Weidensaul's Saw-whet Owl banding demonstration. We hoped that we would see an owl this time. On the previous two trips, we stood in the frigid darkness for hours as Scott talked about birds and banding, as the "toot-toot" of the tape called from the woods and the volunteers returned time and again from the mist nets, empty-handed. As I said, we had already spent two wonderful evenings at the Ned Smith Center, and were not about to be discouraged by a little humidity.

This year, the typical assortment of curious people – including a lot of youngsters – gathered around Scott as he talked of how little we know about these tiny creatures of the night that are migrating through Pennsylvania. The Northern Saw-whet Owl also breeds in Pennsylvania, and researchers are finding that it is much more common than previously thought. When asked how fast they fly, Scott related that a particular saw-whet was banded at two different banding stations hundreds of miles apart – if it had flown for 10 hours straight, it would have averaged 45 miles per hour! He described how radio transmitters are sometimes being used in addition to banding – and researchers are sometimes found on back roads at night waving things that look like parts of old tv antennae. Soon it was 10:00, time to turn off the tape and bring in the nets, and no owls had been caught.

As the flashlights returned from the woods this time, we heard excited cries: "We got one! We

got one!" Scott held the cloth bag gingerly, set it on the scale, and pronounced the weight as 128. Grams, that is. After subtracting the weight of the bag, the bird was found to weigh 88 grams, or about 3 ounces. Scott delicately removed the owl from the bag as 50 people held their breath. It did not look much larger than a robin – its warm brown plumage was accented with white, while the its round head and large eyes contributed to its "cute factor". Scott determined that it was a 2nd year female and placed a band around her right leg. We had just learned that 80% of saw-whet owls do not survive their first year, so we knew that she was one of the lucky ones. For unknown reasons, the majority of saw-whets captured in mist nets are females. Scott measured her wings, her beak, noted her plumage and eye color as an assistant recorded these vital statistics and cameras continually flashed – this bird will be immortalized in a lot of scrapbooks. Scott had told us that when he does demonstrations such as this one, he sometimes places the saw-whet on a youngster's shoulder at release time – it's fun to see what the owl – and the child – do in this situation. One lucky girl was chosen, the saw-whet was placed on her shoulder, and immediately the owl disappeared through the nearby trees. The crowd was silent. I don't think I was the only observer who felt immeasurably enriched by the few moments shared with this tiny wild creature before she returned to her mysterious life in the darkness.

While this short demonstration is held once a year for the public, the Ned Smith Center also operates three regular Saw-whet Owl banding stations throughout the fall at less accessible locations in the mountains. Since 1997 they have banded hundreds of saw-whets. For more information: www.nedsmithcenter.org

As many of you know, Scott Weidensaul is a Pennsylvanian, a prominent naturalist, and author of over two dozen books on natural history. He presented a very popular program for SRAS in March 2001 based on his book *Living on the Wind*, which was a Pulitzer Prize finalist. His latest book, *The Ghost with Trembling Wings*, concerns man's search for extinct species.

SRAS Bird Seed Sale

Dear Members and Friends,

Seneca Rocks Audubon Society is sponsoring its 20TH Bird Seed Sale. This is your opportunity to purchase quality bird seed from our local Agway dealer and support the conservation, education and environmental activities of the Seneca Rocks Audubon Society. You will notice a new list of products with improved formulas.

ORDER BY FRIDAY, OCT 24, 2003

PICK-UP SATURDAY, NOV 8, 2003

9am – Noon at Clarion Agway

Mail this order form with check (payable to SRAS) to:

Seneca Rocks Audubon Society
c/o Janice Horn
32 Barber St.
Clarion, PA 16214

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ SRAS member Y___ N___

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Quantity	Seed Type	Lbs	Unit Price	Total
	Classic Blend 50% Sunflower	40 lb	\$20	
	Premium Blend 35% Sunflower	50 lb	\$15	
	Deluxe Blend 25% Sunflower	50 lb	\$13	
	Economy Blend 12% Sunflower	50 lb	\$10	
	Finch Treat	50 lb	\$30	
	Sunflower Blend	50 lb	\$14	
	Black Oil Sunflower	50 lb	\$13	
	Grey-Striped Sunflower	50 lb	\$15	
	Cracked Corn	50 lb	\$ 7	
	Peanut Hearts	per lb	\$.85	
	Cracked Corn	per lb	\$.35	
	Thistle Seed (10 lb minimum)	per lb	\$.80	
	Beef Suet	12 oz each	\$1.25	
	Peanut Butter Suet	12 oz each	\$1.25	
	Assorted Suet (fruit, nut, insect)	12 oz each	\$1.75	

Make checks payable to:
Seneca Rocks Audubon Society

	Subtotal	
	6% tax	
Donation to Seneca Rocks Audubon		
	Total	



Audubon Adventures Gift

by Janice Horn

Once again the **Garden Club of Clarion County** has made a generous donation toward putting Audubon Adventures into more classrooms in the county. Seneca Rocks Audubon Society is very grateful for their support of this project. Please extend your thanks to the Garden Club members among your acquaintances.

SRAS Bird Seed Sale! Order by Oct. 24

Order Form for Clarion Agway is on p 9.
To order from Oil City Agway,
please contact Gary Edwards at 676-3011

Not a Member?

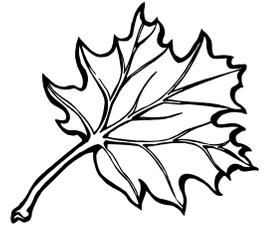
Join **Seneca Rocks Audubon Society** and

- Enjoy the world of birds
- Protect wildlife & its habitat
- Promote education that fosters appreciation of the natural environment.

To join, please contact

Membership Chair

Sherry Vowinckel at 814-782-3294 or
svo@mail.usachoice.net.



Meetings are held on the second Monday of each month and are open to the public.



*Mark your calendar –
Allegheny Front Hawkwatch
on October 27 and 28*