



THE DRUMMER



www.senecarocksaudubon.org

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Clarion River photo by Pat Conway

The Clarion River from Cooksburg to Mill Creek

February 14 meeting

We have contacted Gary Frank, District Forester with the DCNR Bureau of Forestry, for our February 14 program. This program will be presented by personnel from the Forestry Bureau at Clarion, and this meeting will be held AT THE FORESTRY BUILDING on 2nd Avenue in Clarion.

DIRECTIONS -- From 322 (Main Street Clarion) turn south at the light at 2nd Avenue. Travel .4 miles to the DCNR Forestry building just past the cemetery. Both the cemetery and the building are on the right. Parking is available in the front of the building along 2nd Avenue and on the side of the building from Chestnut Ridge Road. Enter the front door on the porch. The building is handicapped accessible and very close to the parking area. The conference room is very nice. Refreshments will be available at 6:30 and the program will begin at 7:00.

The Clarion River land exchange between the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) was finalized on June 24, 2010. The agreement transferred 4,800 acres of former Game Land # 283 along the Clarion River to DCNR.

The program will outline the background of the exchange, the Wild & Scenic River designation, the State Forest and State Park management responsibilities, and the recreational opportunities of the river lands.

In March our meetings will continue at the Science Technology Center, changing to Rm. 136.
Social & Snacks - 6:30. Program - 7:00.

Vanishing Vernal Pools

March 14 meeting



Now you see it, now you don't! Discover what a vernal pool is and which organisms depend upon this seasonal body of water to reproduce and cradle their young. Vernal pools appear in the spring and usually disappear by summer.

This vanishing act is critical to the survival of a multitude of fascinating organisms. Unfortunately,

this also causes these critical habitats to be overlooked and underappreciated, ultimately leading to their destruction. Learn how to identify vernal pools and meet the animals that spend part or all of their life in these ephemeral wetlands. Find out how you can help protect these imperiled habitats through a variety of conservation programs. If possible and weather permitting, we may take a field trip to a vernal pool.

Wil Taylor is the center manager at Jennings Environmental Education Center. Located in Butler County, Jennings is a resource-based state park that features the only protected and managed prairie in Pennsylvania, several endangered plants and animals and an abandoned mine that discharges severely degraded mine drainage. Wil has developed many educational and interpretive programs and materials centered around these resources. These programs have included teacher workshops, agency trainings, college courses, middle school and high school programs and community events and presentations. Wil is a graduate of Slippery Rock University and has been with the Pennsylvania Bureau of State Parks since 1994. He is the primary author of "Accepting the Challenge: a primer about the history, cause and solutions to abandoned mine drainage".



I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright.

~Henry David Thoreau



The Drummer is the bi-monthly newsletter of Seneca Rocks Audubon Society (SRAS), PO Box 148, Clarion, PA 16214. SRAS is a chapter of the National Audubon Society. The Drummer is published 4 times per year—September, November, February, and April.

The Drummer is available on our website in color in Adobe pdf and may be read or downloaded from the site – www.senecarocksaudubon.org.

Members are encouraged to contribute announcements, articles, photos, etc., to Editor Flo McGuire, 609 Ponderosa Lane, Tionesta, PA 16353 (814 755-3672) or email at fmcguire1@verizon.net.



BIRDING TRAIL

by Mike Leahy

We have made some progress on the birding trail to honor Margaret Buckwalter. Prior to Christmas I met with Deb Freed and Gary Edwards to start the process of establishing a “Birding Trail” here in Clarion County to honor Margaret Buckwalter. We had a productive meeting and came up with several ideas and established a direction for getting the ball rolling on the trail. Deb contacted PA Audubon about the possibility of some funding and they gave her some ideas including an application for a grant. Gary volunteered to work on the grant documents and he is in the process of completing those forms right now.

We have pretty much finalized the stops on the trail as follows:

- Piney Tract/SGL330 – 2 or 3 stops.
- Beaver Creek Nature Area.
- Kahle Lake – 2 or 3 stops.
- Cook Forest – several areas in the forest.
- SGL 63 (Shippensburg Area) – 3 or 4 stops.

I have gotten some interest from many people who would like to help with the trail project and I'll try to keep everyone informed on the details. Anyone who would like to help in any way should contact me at my e-mail, leahym@windstream.net.

The major thing that we need to do ASAP is finalize a name for the trail. Please feel free to submit any suggestions to me at my e-mail or call me at 814-229-1648. Some of the names under consideration right now are:

- The Margaret Buckwalter Birding Trail
- The Margaret Buckwalter Memorial Birding Trail
- The Margaret Buckwalter Memorial, Clarion County Birding Trail

Please submit your ideas ASAP so that we can keep the momentum going on this great project. We have set a tentative completion date of the spring of 2012.



This White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) is aptly named.
Photo by Flo McGuire

What's in a Bird Name?

by Pat Conway

Over the years I've often pondered where birds, like the red-bellied woodpecker, which has a red head and a barely visible red belly, that you can't see unless you have the bird in your hand and turn it upside down, acquire their names.

I've read that when America was first discovered, and the explorers were documenting everything, they named the birds after themselves, Wilson's warbler, Le Conte's Sparrow, Barrow's goldeneye, Cooper's hawk and Audubon's warbler. No offense to any of these people, but it's much easier for me to remember a bird if the name fits its description. What were these people thinking? When I see a bird like the Wilson's warbler, I automatically think..."This bird has a little black

hat on its head and it's a warbler!" Why not call it a "Black-capped warbler"? This would be much easier to remember than a man's name. The Indians probably had a name for it long before he ever showed up. They might have named it something like "Little Singing Bird with Black Top." Indians were great for studying people, then giving them a name that fit, like "Dances with Wolves", "Sitting Bull", or "Cornplanter". These names make much more sense to me. They described the person.

I borrowed a book, *The Dictionary of American Bird Names*, from the Brockway library recently. I was at a workshop and naturally perused their bird books. The purpose of this little book is to promote an appreciation of the common and scientific names of North American birds by exploring their meanings in the past. It's quite an interesting book and I recommend it. It explains (in layman's terms) how birds get their names, whether I like it or not.

"The scientific name of a bird has two parts: first, a group or generic name and second, a trivial or individual name. Somewhat the same scheme is used for the identification of individual persons. John Jones is a complete name made up of a personal name, John, and a family name, Jones.

The generic term, the first one given, is a noun and is capitalized. It means that any bird having this name in common with another one has some characteristics which both share."

The scientific names for birds are important and they have their place in education, but honestly, how many birders do you know that point up into a tree or the sky and say, "Oh look, it's an *Accipiter striatus* or a *Nycticorax nycticorax*!"

The following is of a list of bird names that in my opinion fit the bird:

Mountain Bluebird; they live in the mountains and are totally blue.

Red-headed woodpecker; they have a solid red head and peck on trees.

Ivory-billed woodpecker; their bill was the color of ivory and they used to peck on trees.

Blue Jay; it is a jay and it is blue.

Black-capped chickadee; has a black cap and sings "chick-a-dee-dee-dee!"

Long-eared owl; has very long ear feathers and a round face.

Indigo bunting; is a bunting the color of indigo.

Yellowlegs; its legs are yellow.

Common Yellowthroat; its throat is yellow and it's fairly common in these parts.

One of my co-workers brought me the January edition of *Audubon Magazine* today, and said, "Look at this beautiful bird, Pat, what is it?" I looked at the cover and said, "It starts with a P and has an x and y in the name but I can't spell it or pronounce it. It looks like a two-tone cardinal." I had to look at the inside cover to tell her it was a "pyrrhuloxia."

Later I looked up the origin of the word "pyrrhuloxia" in *The Dictionary of American Bird Names*. It originated from the Greek words pyrrhos, which means "flame-colored" and pyrrhoulis, which means "bullfinch." Further research on the internet described the Pyrrhuloxia (*Cardinalis sinuatus*) as a medium-sized North American bird in the same genus as the Northern Cardinal with a finch-like beak. Nothing confusing about this!

I smiled and thought to myself, "How much easier it would have been if I could have said to my co-worker, 'Sure, I know what that bird is, it's a finch-billed, flame-colored, two-toned cardinal, found in Arizona!'"

Birding Trivia Quiz

1. The most abundant bird in North America north of Mexico is: a) European Starling; b) Red-winged Blackbird; c) House Sparrow.
2. What new-world bird has the largest breeding range: a) Chipping Sparrow; b) Mourning Dove; c) Great Horned Owl.
3. The smallest North American waterfowl is: a) Ruddy Duck; b) Green-winged Teal; c) Bufflehead.
4. The only hummingbird to regularly winter in the U.S. is: a) Anna's; b) Ruby-throated; c) Rufous.
5. Which country has the most breeding warblers: a) Canada; b) United States; c) Colombia.



American Pipit by Pat Conway

The 2010 Christmas Bird Count: A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood

by Ray McGunigle

Conditions:

A near perfect day for winter birding, December 18th dawned clear, calm and at 14 degrees, a bit above the brass monkey cold of some previous CBCs. That morning 11 field teams totaling twenty birders fanned out and, with less than 2 inches of accumulated snow in most areas, began their surveys by car and on foot under excellent conditions. Their effort was augmented by individuals at over a dozen feeder sites around the area.

Some slight breezes and light high cirrus did move in during the day but that only added some fantastic swirling and lacy cloud patterns to the bright sky. The afternoon was graced with a show of some striking rainbow-colored sun dogs as well as a picture-perfect sunset: In sum, a truly splendid day to be outdoors!

Highlights:

Among the highlights of the count was the sighting of an American Pipit by Pat Conway and Ann Hunt. This was a first for the Clarion CBC, and fortunately Pat took some excellent photos to document the sighting. Such is the advantage of having a good camera with you on your quest. Congrats to these ladies and their team on this extraordinary sighting! Incidentally, sightings of pipits have been increasing

in recent years in the PA/NJ area. Last year nearly 500 were reported on various counts. They were seen both as individuals in widely scattered areas and, in a couple of instances, in flocks of over 100. This would be a good occasion for members to review identifying marks on this subtly colored bird.

Ron Montgomery's team's spotting of a Winter Wren was another highlight of the count, as was the Rowes' recording of a flock of 45 Snow Buntings. But all the teams encountered enough interesting critters to make the day fun and satisfying. A couple of Northern Shrikes were spotted separately, by Carole Winslow's and Pat Conway's teams. Mike Leahy's team found a Bald Eagle near Canoe Ripple Bridge as well as a couple of Saw Whet Owls. Ron and Gary Edwards also recorded a Short Eared Owl. Fran and Jack Williams got up close and personal with a Great Blue Heron watching it from less than 20 feet away as it calmly took a fish out of a stream and downed it. We also had a couple of sightings of Horned Larks, one Meadowlark and one Northern Mockingbird.

It also seemed to be a day to see some large flocks of birds confined to one or two areas. In addition to the Rowes' spotting of 45 Snow Buntings in Knox, Montgomery's team spotted 55 Wild Turkeys together in Cullsville. Curt Crosby recorded 22 Bluebirds in one area. Mike Leahy also noted 44 Canada Geese in his area, that being one of the few places in the region with open water.

Statistical Significance:

Apart from the unusual sightings noted above, the data appears much in line with previous counts. One trend noted by Ron Montgomery is the rise in the number of American Tree Sparrows. Could this be related to the decline of House Sparrows in the region? This will be interesting to watch in future counts. There was some speculation that Purple and House Finches might be decreasing in this area. With totals of 26 and 61 spotted this year, it may also be something to keep an eye on.

In all, we reported 51 species and a total of 5391 individual birds counted during the day.

The “Aww Ratz!!” factor:

We've all had those breathtaking moments when we believe we have spotted a true rarity but when we focus, what we glimpsed turns out to be a plastic bag blown into a tree, a clump of leaves or an odd shaped log.

So this year's Hope Springs Eternal award goes to the CBC member who spotted a Snowy Owl that turned out to be the top of a snowman ("with two eyes made out of coal"??) peeking over a little hill. Sigh ...

SRAS thanks all those who participated in this year's count:

Feeder Watch: Hendrika Bohlen, Bonnie Black, Ron Black, Mary Emerick, Sally Hockman, Dixie Humphrey, Dorothy Flick, Harry Hakanson, Rheba Klinger, Bill Kodrich, Henrietta Kodrich, Charles Marlin, Jerry McCall, Kathy Pokrifka, Carol Riffer

Field Teams: Gary Edwards, Ron Montgomery, Jack Williams, Fran Williams, Ruth Schurr, Kurt Crosbie, Joanne Crosbie, Pat Conway, Ann Hunt, Shelly Gracey, Carl Rowe, Joanne Rowe, Wayne Meier, Carol Winslow, Alan Winslow, Flo McGuire, Jim McGuire, Mike Leahy, Paulette Colantonio, Janice Horn, Ray McGunigle

Good birding, all.

CBC 1987-2010

A Word from the Bird Nerd

by Flo McGuire

The December 18 Christmas Bird Count was the 24th time Seneca Rocks members have gone out and counted birds for this citizen-science project. The CBC section of National Audubon's website gives totals we reported of each species for each year. For some of us who like numbers, it is interesting reading.

Note - CBCs are referred to, for example, as "2010-2011" because they can be run in December or January; for simplicity I'll refer to 2010-2011 as 2010, since the majority of ours were done in December.

Over the years, we have tallied 98 different species, while the most species seen in a single CBC was 72, in 2001. Our average is 52 species per count, and this year we tallied 51, just 1 below average. Although 5,391 birds sounds like a lot, it was our third lowest count of total birds; our average is 7,986.

Wild Turkeys made a good showing, our fifth highest report of 136. This is the fifth time that Bald Eagle made the list, each time since 2004, and each time a single eagle. Northern Harriers, however, were a disappointment; this was the first year that SRAS found no Northern Harriers. In 1999 and 2008, we tallied 19, and our average is 6.7. Eight Red-shouldered Hawks is an all-time high, with the previous high, in 2008, being only 3, and the average is only .9.

In SRAS's first CBC in 1987, 19 Short-eared Owls were tallied, and we have had them consistently on every count, but this was only the fourth time we had only 1 Short-eared Owl; our average is 5.7. Good news for Northern Saw-whet Owls, though -- this was only the fourth time this species was found on the Clarion CBC, and 2 were reported.

Our count of 2 Pileated Woodpeckers was well below our average of 9; one year we had only 1, and this is the third year we had only 2, but twice we counted 20. I was surprised to see that 1 or 2 Northern Shrikes have been reported in 14 of our 24 CBCs, so although they seem rare, they make an appearance most of the time. American Crow numbers were low, at 675; our average is 1066. In 1992, the tally of crows peaked at 2815. The American Pipit, of course, was our well-documented first!

This was our fifth lowest tally of European Starlings, which won't upset too many folks; we had 884, compared to an average of 1355. This was also our second lowest tally of Cedar Waxwings, at 6; our average for waxwings is 219, and the high was 835 in 1999.

American Tree Sparrows were abundant, as counters found 419, our third highest report, and well above the average of 232. White-throated Sparrows, curiously, have been below average for the past 3

years. We tallied 18, while the average is 30; in 2005, a high of 162 were counted.

The Snow Buntings were a good find -- 45 is an all-time high (previous high was 12), and only the fifth time we found them at all. The single Eastern Meadowlark reported was also good news -- only the fourth time for this species, all since the year 2000.

House Finch numbers have been dropping from the highs of the early 1990s. Our high tally was 1326 in 1991, and they have been almost steadily dropping ever since. The only years they were below 100 were 2009 and 2010, with 28 and 61 respectively. American Goldfinch numbers have been below their average of 296 for the past 2 years, at 167 and 160, while in 2007 we counted 1205 of them.

I wonder what next year will bring -- wouldn't it be nice to see some Evening Grosbeaks again?



Red-breasted Nuthatch by Gloria Lamer

Make Your Own Suet Cakes

We are re-printing Margaret Buckwalter's recipe for "Miracle Meal", which she used since the early 1970s. Margaret had success in attracting woodpeckers, nuthatches, chickadees and especially brown creepers. For creepers, it must be on a holder right on a large tree trunk, or they will never find it.

Ingredients: 3 cups of cornmeal
1 cup peanut butter
1 cup lard
1 cup flour

Optional: Add raisins, peanuts, dried fruit, etc.

Method: Mix cornmeal and flour. Heat peanut butter and lard on top of stove or in microwave 3-4 minutes until melted together. Mix dry ingredients into lard and peanut butter. Makes 4 cakes if you put it in old commercial suet mixture small plastic dishes or put it into an 8x8 cake pan and cut as needed. Store in refrigerator or freezer.



*Little Blue Heron is a possibility on this trip -
photo by Flo McGuire*

Delaware Bay/Cape May BIRDING TRIP

by Mike Leahy

I am thinking about organizing a birding trip to the Delaware Bay and Cape May, NJ areas for this spring and wanted to see if there was any interest in the area for people to go.

I am thinking of trying to go around the end of May or the beginning of June in order to take advantage of the shore bird and warbler migration back north. I would especially like to time the trip to view the Horseshoe Crab spectacle and the Red Knot migration.

Many of the details remain to be worked out and they will depend on the interests of the group that will be going. At this time I just want to see if there are enough people interested in going to make the trip feasible. We could probably go with as few as 4 people or as many as 12 people.

Some of the places I would try to include in the itinerary would be: Bombay Hook and Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuges, Port Mahon and Cape Henlopen on the Delaware side of the bay and the areas in and around Cape May, Stone Harbor and possibly Forsythe (formerly Brigantine) NWR. The trip could be anywhere from 3 to 6 days long, depending on the interests of the group.

If this is a trip that you might be interested in, please send me an e-mail to leahym@windstream.net and include your name, phone number and names of others going with you.

I plan to finalize the details by the end of March.



What is the GBBC?

The 2011 GBBC will take place Friday, February 18, through Monday, February 21. Please join us!

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

Participants count birds anywhere for as little or as long as they wish during the four-day period. They tally the highest number of birds of each species seen together at any one time. To report their counts, they fill out an online checklist at the [Great Backyard Bird Count website](http://birdsource.org/gbbc) -- <http://birdsource.org/gbbc>

As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported from their own towns or anywhere in the United States and Canada. They can also see how this year's numbers compare with those from previous years. Participants may also send in photographs of the birds they see. A selection of images is posted in the [online photo gallery](#).

SRAS meetings are held on the second Monday of each month on the Clarion campus
Room 136, Science Technology Center
Social & Snacks – 6:30 p.m.
Program – 7:00 p.m.



We appreciate our Hosts & Hostesses –

February - Gary Edwards and Jim Wilson.
March - Kathy Pokrifka and Joan Rowe.
April - Joan Magistrella and Carol Riffer.
May - Ruth Schurr.

Thank you!



Don't forget the Great Backyard Bird Count, February 18 through 21.



SRAS Board Members

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History - Pat Conway	849-6315
Beaver Creek -Walter Fye	797-1019

Answers to Trivia Quiz:

1. b 2. c 3. c (female weighs only 11.5 oz.) 4. a 5. b

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