



THE DRUMMER

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SRAS ~ PO Box 148 ~ Clarion, PA 16214

Editor, Jerry Cichocki

Annual Member Picnic



2026 Members Picnic at Clarion County Park; photo: Pat Conway /Audubon

It was a cool, cloudy evening, but the friendship was warm and bright as we SRAS members gathered for our annual picnic on August 12 at Clarion County Park. It's always a fun event and one of the highlights of the SRAS calendar.

Chapter President Alice Thureau welcomed everyone and recapped a few activities that chapter members participated over the summer. You will read about them in this edition. In particular, Alice announced the official dedication of the recently installed Chimney Swift Tower in the memory of former SRAS member and benefactor, Janice Horn. Everyone present had a good view of the tower, which is placed at the Clarion County Park inside the fence surrounding the Master Gardeners' demonstration garden. Read more about the tower in the article later in this edition.

With business concluded, everyone then enjoyed dinner and conversation. Everyone had brought a covered dish to share, making a buffet of delicious appetizers, fruits, salads, side dishes, and desserts. Mike Leahy grilled hamburgers and hot dogs for everyone.

The members' picnic is always a great way to kick off the new season of SRAS programs and events, which you can read about in the following pages.

Chimney Swift Tower Installed

It was a long time coming, but the Clarion County Park now boasts a Chimney Swift tower thanks to Seneca Rocks Audubon. The tower was funded with a Collaborative Grant from the National Audubon Society and a bequest by Janice Horn, a longtime officer for SRAS. Janice requested that SRAS create a Chimney Swift tower but died in 2024 before seeing it built. Mike Leahy obtained plans and educational panels for the structure with the help of the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania. Keith Hileman then swiftly (pun intended!) constructed the tower and installed it with the help of Don DeWolf. The Clarion County Commissioners gave permission to place it at the County Park. The Penn State Extension Master Gardeners of Clarion County graciously and enthusiastically allowed its placement in their demonstration garden at the park.



SRAS members who each played a role in planning, building, and installing the tower at the Clarion County Park, from left to right: Kay John (also a Master Gardener), Mike Leahy, Keith Hileman, and Don DeWolf; photo: Cindy Bonner/Audubon

Hopefully, the tower will eventually attract a pair of Chimney Swifts to nest in the structure. It's also possible that a group of chimney swifts might choose to roost in it after the nesting season. Historically these birds nested in hollow trees. When those became less prevalent, Chimney Swifts adapted to nesting and roosting in chimneys. A shift in chimney design and their capping have made chimneys less accessible to the birds. That's why Chimney Swift towers are being constructed. The towers mimic an actual chimney and provide the right shelter and interior surface for potential nesting and roosting.

Chimney Swifts are native to the eastern United States. They winter in South America and return to North America in late spring to breed and

nest. They are aerial insectivores, eating thousands of insects while flying each day. They appear to be “flying cigars” because of their curving wings and stubby bodies. They make twittering calls as they fly. When they aren't flying, they cling to vertical surfaces using spines on their tail feathers. They aren't able to perch like most birds. Their long claws are more suitable for clinging to vertical surfaces.

Unfortunately, there are 74% fewer Chimney Swifts since 1966 according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Their decline is attributed to the decrease in insects and a loss of nesting and roosting habitat.

The Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, based at Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve near Fox Chapel, has constructed nearly 150 Chimney Swift towers at municipal parks, county parks, and school grounds across Southwestern Pennsylvania. They monitor tower usage



Chimney Swift Tower; photo: Cindy Bonner / Audubon

and are analyzing data for 100 towers in the Allegheny County Parks to understand why some towers are more successful than others in attracting a nesting pair.

See the new Chimney Swift tower at the Clarion County Park, inside the fence of the Master Gardeners' demonstration garden. Side panels explain the life history of the Chimney Swift and the purpose of the tower. Anyone is welcome to visit the garden and see the tower up close. But please shut the gate after you leave!



Side panels explain the life history of the Chimney Swift and the purpose of the tower; photo: Alice Thureau / Audubon

Election of Officers

Thanks to our officers and congratulations to our new members at-large! At the June program meeting, our members unanimously re-elected President Alice Thureau, Vice-President Vickie Gotaskie, Secretary Kay John, and Treasurer Cindy Bonner for another 2 years of volunteer service.

They also elected Nancy Cichocki and Devin Smith as Members-at-Large to the Board or Leadership Team. Nancy and Devin will serve in that role for 2 years until June 30, 2028. Two more members-at-large will be elected next June and serve 2 years until June 30, 2029. We're hoping the newly created members-at-large positions will give the Leadership Team fresh ideas and perspective, while providing a way for members to get more involved with our chapter.

Audubon Chapter Leadership Award

Alice Thureau, President of the Seneca Rocks Audubon Society, has been honored as the inaugural recipient of the Pennsylvania Audubon Council's "Chapter Leadership Award!" This new award was established by the Council's Board of Directors to provide recognition to the special individuals, nominated by their chapter for their record of outstanding service and leadership.

The nomination noted that "Alice has been instrumental in setting up the Bird Friendly Habitat program and planting native gardens in Clarion and at the new Second Avenue Park. She is constantly looking for ways to draw more people to the chapter, especially younger people. She is always at tabling events promoting Seneca Rocks Audubon as well as the Bird Friendly Habitat recognition program. She has worked to expand the chapter coverage to include Jefferson County in addition to Clarion and Forest Counties. She has made the website easy to navigate and more interesting. She has introduced a 'member at large' addition to the Leadership Team, thus allowing more input from members who may eventually take over some of the roles of LT members who are bowing out due to age and health."

Congratulations Alice! Well deserved!

Pennsylvania Bird Atlas Project

by Carole Winslow



Birding at dawn at Piney Tract; photo by Carole Winslow / Audubon

After the third summer for the PA Bird atlas, I wanted to share a progress report for the county. As a refresher on what this project is meant to accomplish, it is intended to map the distribution and abundance of bird species over a specified geographic area. Specific data collection methods are used for analytical purposes, and the resultant database is then available for conservation and land management use, to help ensure the future of Pennsylvania birds.

Clarion Co has 69 blocks, each one roughly 9 square miles. At the end of this season, every block now has breeding data entered, with 145 species coded and 102 species confirmed as breeding. Of the total blocks, 47 now have at least 50 or more species found and coded, so a good start though not complete. The twenty-two remaining blocks need a good bit more work. There are a small number of regular atlasers like myself working on the project, including two local members who have contributed many hours of effort, Eric Schill and Paulette Colantonio.

Several statewide point counters have also come through the county to make a total of 180 participants that have contributed some data, which is a great help with coverage. Unfortunately many of these folks are primarily one time visitors to the two main birding sites in the county, PineyTract/SGL 330 area and the Cook Forest area. One of the big areas of missing data is nocturnal, with survey hours still quite low.

While it's early to start drawing any conclusions for individual species, there are several trends that stand out for me. Some of these are birds that are already known to be increasing in range, such as Common Ravens. Forty years ago for the first atlas, there were just 2 blocks with possible breeding activity. Twenty years ago, that had risen to 19 blocks, and already in this atlas there are 33 blocks with activity and I expect that to rise. Henslow's Sparrows are our county "specialty", and the results so far show a drop in the number of blocks hosting these birds.



Henslow's Sparrow; photo: Joshua Clark/Audubon Photography Awards

There were 31 blocks for the first atlas, and just a slight drop to 27 for the last. This atlas there are only 12 blocks so far. I'm not totally surprised by this because the strip mine fields where they are primarily found are rapidly growing up and becoming shrubland. But an effort to accurately document them will have to be made in the last two years to make sure we have a good handle on the true population. At this point, the only truly large protected area for them is SGL 330. The other species with a truly staggering decline so far is, unsurprisingly, our state bird, the Ruffed Grouse. This species was represented in almost every block 40 years ago, and for the last atlas it was already down to 31 blocks. For this atlas, it has only been reported in 3 blocks. Hopefully more will be reported in the next two years, but I will be anxious to see the final results when they come in.



Ovenbird nest with eggs; photo by Carole Winslow Audubon

Just a few other species with some interesting trends, we had our 2 Northern Saw-whet Owls that were confirmed in two blocks last year for a first. Louisiana Waterthrush are not a rarity, but had been fairly limited in range for the county in previous atlases, with just 3 blocks then 4, reporting the species. This time around they are already reported in 16 blocks and I expect that to rise as well. Not surprisingly, two more grassland species are showing some decrease, including American Kestrels, going down from 40 blocks to 26 so far this atlas, and Bobolinks, found in just 30 so far, down from 58.

Both of these are of course affected by agricultural land use, timing of early mowing for hay fields, etc. There are more species showing trends, but these are just a few of interest that I was able to pull out.

After spending many, many hours of walking, biking and driving through the county in search of breeding records, my appreciation of our beautiful area has only increased since the last atlas 20 years ago. We are fortunate to live in a county that holds such a diversity of habitat for birds, southern birds and northern birds, we are right on the dividing line it seems. I see changes that sadden me, with the loss of grassland and the increase of crop fields that have much less benefit to birds, as well as areas that have been logged but not done in any fashion to leave valuable habitat. But I also see some improvements in water quality in areas over the years, helping the return of bald eagles and osprey, many more accessible areas with the increase in rail trails now available to the public, and new species moving into changing habitats. I find that birds are sometimes more resilient than we imagine, despite the man made changes to their landscape.



Carolina wren young in nest; photo by Carole Winslow / Audubon

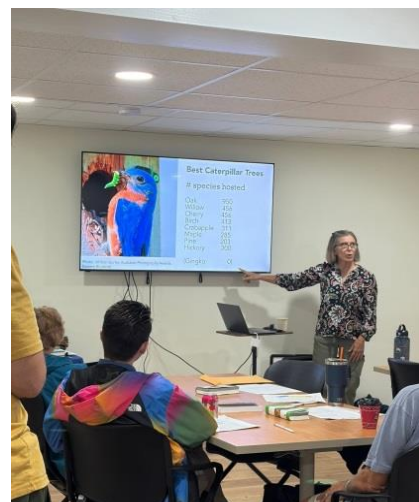
We still would welcome volunteers to the project for the last two years, and I have created a new eBird login for the general county, where if necessary I can enter some data from those that are not using the atlas web portal. Please contact me with any questions, and you can view the PA atlas website at this link: <https://ebird.org/atlaspa/home>

Rooted Solutions: Rain Gardens and Riparian Buffers

On June 27 Clarion County Conservation District hosted a workshop on nature-friendly solutions for land that may be prone to rainwater runoff and flooding. Participants had the opportunity to tour the Clarion Conservation District's public native rain gardens and learn all about the benefits of native plants, water infiltration, and how to install their own rain garden.

About 20 people attended the event. Alice Thureau represented SRAS and gave a prepared presentation on the connections with native plants and birds.

This was a cooperative event with participation of several other businesses and organizations: Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, PA Department of Environmental Protection, USDA Farm Service Agency, Ernst Conservation Seeds, and C&A Trees.



Alice Thureau, SRAS Presentation;
photo from CCCD Facebook page

Remember To Renew Your Membership

There are so many reasons to be a member of our local Audubon chapter, Seneca Rocks Audubon Society. Do it to support efforts to improve our community, to improve our environment, to improve your personal knowledge of our natural world, to enjoy the company of your neighbors, to make new friends, to just have fun.



It's easy to renew. Click here for a [SRAS membership form](#) and mail it with your check.



Alternatively, you can join the [National Audubon Society](#). If you live in Clarion, Forest, or Jefferson Counties, you'll automatically become a SRAS member.

SRAS Monthly Programs

May Program: “Butterflies of Pennsylvania”

Our monthly Audubon programs usually focus on some aspect of the subject of birds, naturally. But our May 2026 program addressed another favorite pollinator, butterflies. Dr. Brian Wargo wears many hats: he is a Science Educator, Director of Hawk Migration Association of North America, and President of Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society, among other distinctions. His interest in butterflies is a pastime, not a profession, but he shares his expertise with such zest and enthusiasm that his audience came away entertained as well as informed.



Brian Wargo, PhD.

Unfortunately, the butterfly population seems to be decreasing. The likely causes are familiar ones: pesticides, climate change, loss of habitat, etc. The problems are global, but Dr Wargo suggests that ordinary people can do some positive things: Cultivate native plants, do not spray pesticides or herbicides; generally, “keep it wild” -- for instance, dandelions are not such a bad thing.

Dr. Wargo shared photos and descriptions of many butterflies that we are likely to encounter around our homes and our forests:

- Swallowtails are very common; they are large and have an extended tail at the bottom end of each wing. Some varieties of Swallowtails – Pipe Vine, Red-Spotted Purple, Hackberry Emperor, Spicebush, Black, Tiger, Summer Azure, Eastern Tail Blue
- Bush-Footed is the category of most of our familiar butterflies, including Monarch, Emperor, Morning Cloak, and Fritillary
- Skippers look almost like a moth; they are smaller, with a thick thorax, and less colorful compared to swallowtails. Some Skippers are Silver Spotted, Chocolate
- Whites and Sulphurs are mostly pale-colored – white or pale yellow; including Cabbage White and Clouded Sulphur.

Two things were very clear from Dr. Wargo’s presentation: First, there is such a huge number of butterfly species that it’s almost impossible to identify very many species by sight. Second, butterfly identification is further complicated because the difference between species often comes down to very minor, barely visible physical features. To make an accurate identification, Dr. Wargo suggests we take a photo and do an image search, using a tool like Google Lens.



Great Spangled Fritillary; photo: Jerry Cichocki / Audubon

BIRDING EVENTS

Warbler Walk at Oil Creek State Park



Warbler Walk at Oil Creek State Park; birders, left to right: Martha Slaughter, Jim McGuire, Mal Hays, Mary Akers, Carole Winslow, Nancy Rosman, Nick Kolodnick; photo: Alice Thurau / Audubon

The Warbler Walk was held at Oil Creek State Park on cloudy, cool May 16, 2026. The walkers recorded 55 species! Here is the list, recorded by Nick Kolodick, in the order seen (or heard):

1. Tree swallow	19. Eastern bluebird	37. Bay-breasted warbler
2. American redstart	20. Red-bellied woodpecker	38. Black-capped chickadee
3. Baltimore oriole	21. American goldfinch	39. Blackburnian warbler
4. American robin	22. Common merganser	40. Blue-winged warbler
5. Common grackle	23. Great blue heron	41. Great-crested flycatcher
6. Scarlet tanager	24. Yellow-throated vireo	42. Rose-breasted grosbeak
7. Red-eyed vireo	25. Warbling vireo	43. Swamp sparrow
8. Red-winged blackbird	26. Gray catbird	44. Ovenbird
9. Northern cardinal	27. Song sparrow	45. Wood thrush
10. Tufted titmouse	28. European starling	46. Black-throated green warbler
11. Least flycatcher	29. Tennessee warbler	47. Black & white warbler
12. Yellow warbler	30. Magnolia warbler	48. Yellow-bellied sapsucker
13. Common yellowthroat	31. Yellow-rumped warbler	49. American crow
14. Blue-gray gnatcatcher	32. Cape May warbler	50. Pileated woodpecker
15. Chipping sparrow	33. Hooded warbler	51. Spotted sandpiper
16. Northern flicker	34. Turkey vulture	52. Belted kingfisher
17. Green heron	35. Red-tailed hawk	53. Downy woodpecker
18. Cliff swallows	36. Canada geese	54. Bald eagle
		55. Killdeer

Birds, Brews, and Ballads in Cook Forest State Park, May 30, 2026

Birds, Brews, and Ballads combined the birding skills of Carole Winslow and Mal Hays of Seneca Rocks Audubon, the brewing wizardry of Devin Smith of the Clarion River Brewing Company, and musical talent of Keridwyn into one package of events at Cook Forest on May 30.

At least 35 people joined the morning bird walk in the forest near the Fire Tower at Cook Forest State Park. Afterwards, handcrafted brews by CRBC and lunch were available near MacBeth's Cabins. To top off the day, the all-female band Keridwyn delighted 75 attendees with folk and Celtic music at the Sawmill Theater. The musicians generously gave all the door donations to Seneca Rocks Audubon.

It was a wonderful day in the Forest thanks to our volunteers, our partners, the nature-loving participants, and of course the birds!



Morning bird walk participants; photo: Alice Thurau / Audubon



Keridwyn entertaining the audience at the Sawmill Theatre. Photo: Beverly Mitchell Kirby.

Cook Forest Bird Walk

Mike Leahy led a group of about 12 birders, largely from Pittsburgh, and walked the Longfellow trail loop back to the Log Cabin Inn Environmental building via Tom's Run and Shelter #1. They enjoyed an excellent extended visit with a winter wren, and saw a probably-nesting Louisiana Water Thrush, and almost saw a few Blackburnian Warblers. One of the participants, Kelly Culbertson, says, "Our group picked up some more walkers as we went - weather was excellent. Mal Hays added additional information and helped identify birds by sound."



Cook Forest Bird Walk; photo: Kelly Culbertson . Audubon

Todd Bird Club Outing

On June 27th, Carole Winslow helped Jim McGuire lead a bird outing for the Todd Bird Club of Indiana, Pa. About fifteen members of the club made the two hour drive to bird Forest County. They started at Lighthouse Island and progressed North along the Allegheny River and caught up to Carole, who was finding their target bird, Mourning Warbler. Carole and Jim had been canvassing the area the previous couple of weeks and were pleased that the Mourning Warblers were cooperative and the group had two or three great sightings of the bird. Instead of hiding on the ground in the brush, they popped up into small trees fifteen feet away.



Todd Bird Club Outing; photo: Jim McGuire / Audubon

The group proceeded up the road and found Bobolinks and other field birds on their way to Heart's Content, which is actually in Warren County. They walked the one mile loop trail through the old growth area that had been set aside when the area was logged in the late 1800's and early 1900's. After adding a few woods birds the group went on up the road to Sheffield, where they had a nice lunch at the Shaw House restaurant. Everyone had a great time, seeing about fifty species and headed home.

Tabling Events

SRAS is sometimes invited to set up an informational display table at events conducted by other organizations around our local area. These events can be a good opportunity to spread the word about who we are and what we do, and about our messages of conservation. We usually offer educational materials about bird species, bird habitat preservation, mitigating bird-window collisions, and other related topics.

Please consider volunteering to join in with other SRAS members at some future tabling events.

Summer is a busy time for such events. In recent months, SRAS has participated in the following events:

- Brookville Laurel Festival, June 15; the highlight was Mal Hays teaching kids how to use binoculars for birding.
- PA Firefly Festival, June 26-27 at Tionesta Market Village.



SRAS table at PA Firefly Festival; photo: Alice Thureau / Audubon

BIRD-FRIENDLY HABITAT

Bird Habitat Recognition

Two more area residents, April Hileman and Ben Krupnik, received Bird Habitat Recognition signs through the PA Audubon Council. The Bird Habitat Recognition Program acknowledges the efforts of individual property owners who have made their gardens a welcoming place for birds and other pollinators. As the Pennsylvania Audubon Council says, the program “is designed to engage, educate, and empower individuals to rethink yards, balconies, and community green spaces, turning them into functional habitat that is both beautiful for you and beneficial for birds.”



April Hileman, Richland Township, Venango County; photo: Alice Thureau / Audubon

It's not too hard for a garden to qualify as a bird habitat. It only has to meet 4 basic criteria:

- Food – Bird feeders are acceptable food sources; but the natural environment may provide berries, seeds, nectar, insects, and more. Native plants are particularly good natural food sources.
- Water - For birds to drink, bathe, and preen. This might include natural streams and rain gardens, or bird baths and drip fountains.
- Shelter - Hedgerows, brush piles, and nesting boxes provide safe haven for nesting and protection from predators.
- Nesting - Natural and human-made materials for birds to construct their nests may include clusters of trees (even snags or standing dead trees), shrub thickets, and nest boxes.

See Ben Krupnik's [story](#) about converting his farmstead to a wildflower meadow later in this newsletter.

Click [here](#) to find more information and the application form on the Pennsylvania Audubon Council website. If you have birds visiting your garden, it could be recognized as a Bird Habitat.



Ben Krupnik, Legacy Acreage H&G, Clarion PA; photo: Alice Thureau / Audubon

Native Plant Sale

Scores of new and returning customers visited the Seneca Rocks Audubon table during the 2-day Herb and Fiber Festival, June 6-7. This year, after 4 years of experience, our set up was nearly perfect, including a space for customers to check out, making for an efficient flow around the tables. Prices for the potted plants had color tags which corresponded with 3 different prices. Additionally, our literature to promote native plants, bird-saving window treatments, and the Bird Habitat Recognition received a lot of attention.



Native plant sale at Sawmill Herb & Fiber Festival; photo: Jerry Cichocki / Audubon

We sold at least 400 native perennials, grown from seed or nurtured by Alice Thureau and Liz Brocious.

Many thanks to our hardworking festival volunteers Liz Brocious, Vickie Gotaskie, Nancy and Jerry Cichocki, Keith Hileman, Kelly Culbertson, Peggy Butler, Lynn Giering, and Pamela Clarke. It wouldn't have been possible or as much fun without their teamwork.

New Native Pollinator Garden

Another native pollinator garden has been planted by our Bird-Friendly Habitat Promotion team in downtown Clarion. This garden is on 6th Avenue and replaces a wide swath of lawn along the wall of the Mechanistic Brewing Company. After sheet mulching it last fall, the Bird-Friendly Habitat Promotion team planted it on May 19 with 14 varieties of native perennial flowering plants. Since then, the team has taken turns watering the plants on an almost weekly basis until the plants' roots are well established. Some of the flowers are already blooming, eliciting compliments for the garden.



6th Avenue Pollinator Garden; photo: Jerry Cichocki / Audubon

This marks the third native garden planted by Seneca Rocks Audubon in Clarion to demonstrate the beauty and value of native flowers. Jim Crooks, owner of Crooks Clothing, kindly offered the space and made a generous donation to Seneca Rocks Audubon for the plants and for the team's labor. He previously provided garden space to SRAS in 2023 for a "pocket pollinator garden" also on 6th Avenue.

Stop by the gardens to see their progress when you're in Clarion!

Native Plant Garden Tour

Our inaugural native garden tour on July 11 was a success! About 35 persons from 4 counties participated in the free, self-paced tour of 7 Clarion area native gardens. Some visitors clearly wanted more information about native plants. Everyone seemed to enjoy seeing gardens that are beautiful and valuable to wildlife.

The tour was organized by the Bird-Friendly Habitat Promotion team with the leadership of Nancy Cichocki. "I was very pleased with the turnout for our inaugural tour. The interest in native plants and their benefits to both birds and pollinators was apparent in the questions and the number of handouts taken," Nancy said.

We couldn't have held the tour without the generous cooperation of our partners: the Clarion Conservation District, the Clear Creek State Forest District Office, C&A Trees, and the Penn State Extension Master Gardeners of Clarion County. We thank each of them. Thanks also to the County Seat Restaurant of Clarion who donated 30 box lunches that we were able to offer for a small donation.



One of the native pollinator gardens on the tour; photo: Alice Thureau / Audubon

Help Prevent Bird Window Collisions

Human-built environments generally pose many dangers to other species in so many ways. One feature of human-built buildings that is a particular threat to birds is a reflective exterior surface – a window. According to the National Audubon Society [website](#), “A 2014 study by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Smithsonian Institution estimated that between 365 million to one billion birds are killed annually by building collisions in the U.S.” That is a staggering thought! Especially considering how easily we could take steps to prevent many of those strikes.

Some actions that will help mitigate the problem: Install external screens on the outside of windows; close blinds or curtains; move interior plants away from windows; place bird feeders directly on windows, or no more than 3 feet away.

Those suggestions will work in some instances, but not all. A more effective solution is to place markings on the exterior of windows that are visible to the birds to alert them to the fact that it is a solid surface and not an open space.

There is a variety of products made for such an application.

- Tempera paint or soap. Mark the outside of the window with soap or tempera paint, which is inexpensive and long lasting. You can use either a grid pattern of 2 inches by 2 inches, or get creative and paint patterns or artwork on your window.
- Decals. Put decals, stickers, sun catchers, mylar strips, masking tape, or other objects on the outside surface of the window. These are only effective when spaced very closely and cover the entire window to convince birds they cannot fly through.
- Dot Patterns and Tape. Long-lasting tape products offer an easier way to apply the correct spacing of dots across your window. Products such as those available at [Feather Friendly](#) work well in preventing collisions.
- Acopian BirdSavers. Also known as “zen curtains,” these closely spaced cords hang down over windows. They do the work of tape or decals but may be easier to install and can be aesthetically pleasing



Feather Friendly dot pattern on windows; photo: Jerry Cichocki / Audubon

Read more about these solutions [here](#) at the Cornell Labs All About Birds website.

A Bird and Pollinator Habitat on Honest Soil

by Ben Krupnik

On our homestead in Clarion County the soil has always been honest and humble. As a geologist and biologist who also farms, I’ve learned to watch what the land itself is telling me. Here the message was straightforward and hard to ignore: an overgrown, invasive-dominated field under constant browsing pressure from deer and other large mammals made it impossible for young native plants to get a foothold. That observation became the starting point of a fruitful project. Could we establish a functioning pollinator and bird habitat on this clay-loam soil without adding any nutrients, without herbicides, and without trying to “improve” what the soil already was? The answer, it turned out, depended on three things working at once: physical exclusion of the large browsers, the right native seed mix, and timing.

Over winter we installed an 8-foot deer fence to exclude heavy browsing pressure over one acre. This is a demanding project—subsoils are thin and rocky, equipment can be difficult to obtain, and the barrier of cost can mount up. Once the pressure was off the meadow we terminated the existing vegetation mechanically using a rototiller at 2 inches deep. We spaced the passes over the meadow two weeks apart. This ensured that the second tillage pass caught any new germination from the seed bank over winter. We also abstained from using any NPK fertilizers or limestone in order to maintain the native soil chemistry and biology. Our observation at this time was a clay-like mess, low in nutrients, and completely void of life.

That low-nutrient, slightly acidic condition is actually one of the reasons the project works. These native mixes do not need extra fertility. In richer soils, faster-growing plants quickly outcompete the slower-establishing natives. Here the competition is lower, so the wildflowers and grasses have time to settle in and claim their space. We sourced our seed from a reputable native mix company, Ernst Conservation Seeds, and received enough flower mix to broadcast over half an acre. We used the Showy Native Wildflower Mix and combined it with concrete sand at a 1:5 ratio. The dry sand acts as a carrier because the tiny, lightweight seeds will not travel very far in a spreader or by hand. I walked in a hashmark pattern, crossing paths at 90 degrees, broadcasting by hand before a good rain in May. The clay soil was then culti-packed with tractor tires to ensure the seed had good, even contact with the soil.

The first year the mix did not look very good and we had our doubts. The annuals came up, but the gaps between the plants left the soil exposed. This ended up being a good place for plants to spread via rhizomes and biennial seeds in the following years. Many of the biennials waited until late in the second year to bloom, which is typical. By the third growing season the stand had filled with more than twenty-eight wildflower species and three native grasses. The structure is continuous enough that pollinators move through it all season and goldfinches are already working the seeding heads of the tickseed and coreopsis.

The habitat does what it was meant to do: provide nectar, pollen, seed, and cover on ground that previously offered little of either. It also serves as a quiet place for observation. Photography is donation-based—you're welcome to come take photos.



Ben Krupnik, Legacy Acreage Home & Garden

Find us at www.legacyacreagehg.com/flowergarden. Toward the end of fall we will also have donation-based seed packets available at the farmstand, collected from this same pollinator and bird habitat, for anyone who wants to help spread the beauty a little farther.

That is the whole experiment so far: clear the competitive vegetation, exclude the large mammals, put the right native seed on unaltered clay-loam, and give it time. The plants and the birds that use them are still writing the results.

Data Centers-Yes? No?

by Kay John

Data centers are not new to PA, but the much larger-hyperscale-ones being proposed now are new to the state. Taken from an article written by Liz Brensinger, Conservation Chair, Lehigh Valley Audubon Society, the following information may help you better understand this new situation in which we find ourselves and also help you protect yourself, your community and the birds.

What are Data Centers? Data centers are buildings that house computers and other infrastructure to process, store and share data. You know that "cloud" where some of your bird photos might live? It's not really in the sky; It's in buildings like these.

Why the need for more and larger centers? The main reason is the proliferation of artificial intelligence, or AI.

What is the problem? Data centers pose numerous threats to environmental quality/quality of life. Examples include:

- Off-the-charts energy consumption. One large AI-focused data center can consume as much electricity as 100,000 homes. To meet the demand, utilities typically have built new power-generation facilities, with the cost often footed by all of us. Utilities may use eminent domain to take property from landowners for transmission lines.
- Consumption of massive amounts of water for cooling. One large facility can use as much water as 4,000 homes.
- Constant noise and vibration from cooling fans and mechanical equipment.
- Air pollution from diesel backup generators and the release of waste heat.
- Habitat and open-space loss.
- Light pollution.
- Stormwater runoff.

Keep aware and alert as to what is happening in your neighborhood and work towards keeping a healthy environment for yourself, our birds and others with whom we share this planet.

For birds, some of the worst effects are habitat loss; noise/vibration, which reduces reproduction rates and disrupts bird navigation; light pollution, which disorients migrating birds and increases the risk of collisions with buildings; potential depletion of water sources such as streams and wetlands.

Can my municipality prohibit data centers? No. The PA Supreme Court has ruled that every municipality must provide for every legitimate land use. Municipalities can, however, regulate the where and how via zoning ordinances. Data centers are relatively new, so many zoning ordinances do not explicitly mention them. If a data center developer submits a proposal to a municipality that has not enacted data center regulations, that municipality has virtually no ability to regulate how the center is built and operated. If a municipality does have data center regulations and an applicant meets all the requirements, stopping even a very unpopular project would be difficult.

What can I do?

- Contact your state senator and representative and ask that they support a moratorium on development of hyperscale data centers in PA.
- Urge your township, borough or city to pass an ordinance regulating data centers ASAP.
- Call your state lawmakers and request that they support bills designed to help municipalities and the state adequately regulate data centers.

September-December Programs

NOTE: ALL 2026 PROGRAMS BEGIN AT 6:00 P.M. and

Occur in the basement meeting room of the

Clarion Free Library

For more information about each of these programs, click [here](#).

	"Birding Pennsylvania's State Parks" with Chris Kemmerer (via Zoom) September 9 Join Chris Kemmerer, Education and Interpretation Section Chief for Pennsylvania State Parks, on a tour of the best birding spots in PA's state park system.
	"Nature Lessons at Audubon's Hog Island, Maine" with Dana Hannibal October 14 Seneca Rocks Audubon proudly awarded Dana Hannibal with a scholarship to attend Sharing Nature: An Educator's Camp at Audubon's legendary Hog Island camp off the coast of southern Maine in August this year. In this program, Dana Hannibal will tell us about her experiences, learning, and adventures on Hog Island with other nature-loving educators.
	"Conservation of PA Grassland Birds" with David Yeany II November 11 David Yeany will present results of fieldwork done for the Pennsylvania Game Commission and updates to that work. The 2018 study is called "Evaluating Pennsylvania's Grasslands to prioritize Conservation for Grassland Nesting Birds." David Yeany II is a Senior Vertebrate Zoologist and Avian Ecologist for the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program (PNHP) at the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC).
	Members' Night December 9 Close out the SRAS program year with this social gathering of members to review the year's events and activities, look ahead to next year, and just enjoy each other's company.

More Upcoming Events

Aug 14/15 to Sep tbd	<u>Nighthawk Watch</u> In 2000, Russ States began an informal Common Nighthawk migration count at the Oil City Marina from mid-August to mid-September. For the first several years, the watch was manned on a sporadic basis. For the past 20+ years, however, the number of observers has gradually increased and there has been daily coverage, and birders also now gather at a second location, Mill Creek Boat Launch. The counts begin on August 14 at the Oil City Marina and August 15 at Mill Creek, and every night until the second week of September from 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM. Bring a chair and binoculars if you have them. There's more information on our website – click here.
Sep	<u>Fall Bird Seed Sale</u> SRAS holds a Bird Seed Sale in September and January for everyone, member or not, who feeds birds. The sale is held in cooperation with J&J Feeds of Shippenville and Brookville. Announcement of the Fall sale will be coming soon.
Nov 4	<u>Owl Prowl</u> It's always a fun and interesting event, so don't miss this year's Owl Prowl the evening of Wednesday, November 4. Led by Mal Hays, we will carpool to several locations south of Shippenville and stop to listen and watch for owls. No preregistration required. There's more information on our website – click here.
Dec 19	<u>Christmas Bird Count</u> The 2026 Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 19. Please consider joining in to participate in this fun and important initiative. There are 2 ways to participate – it's your choice: You can join a team of watchers out in the field, or you can watch at your own home. If you are interested in participating in the field watchers, contact Mal Hays. If you would like to participate in the feeder watch, contact Cindy Bonner. There's more information on our website – click here

Seasonal Sightings (June-August)

Birds, Flora & Fauna



Red-headed Woodpecker; photo by Ray McGunigle and Susan Zeff / Audubon



Mourning Warbler; photo by Roger Higbee



Bluebird; photo by Cindy Bonner / Audubon



Left to right: Goldfinch pair, Evening Grosbeak with fledgling, Fledge Cardinal; photos by Jerry Cichocki / Audubon



The Poetry Corner

All poems are from Beak Bone & Feather.

You can purchase the book at any of our events or programs or on [Amazon](#).



*European Starling; photo: Yasmin
Namini/Audubon Photography Awards*

Dear Starlings

*by
Karen Weyant*

Big bullies, my mother called you,
detesting the way you clung

to her bird feeders. She hated
your gangly flutter that scattered
birdseed, the way you chased

away chickadees with a flick of feathers
and scattered sunflower seeds.
But even when you drove off
the pudgy junco, my favorite,
I couldn't learn to hate you --

in those moments of early spring
your black feathers iridescent, shining
purple and green. I had forgotten
your Autumn ugliness, strutting
proudly in a dull coat, stout and hunched,
your song just a series of harsh whistles.

Bewildering Birds

Why Are Birds Less Active In Late Summer

As we get into late summer, it seems that there are fewer birds visiting our feeders. The songs of wrens and robins have quieted down. It's a seasonal pattern, and there are several possible reasons for it: The breeding season is past, the time of molting and regrowing feathers has begun, and natural food is more abundant.

Birds sing for two basic reasons: to attract a mate and to defend a territory. By July, many baby birds in North America have fledged, and even birds that have multiple nests per year have finished by early August.

[Cornell Lab](#) says "Some birds may continue singing for a while to help their young learn their local song dialect. But many birds, such as American Robins and Red-winged Blackbirds, stop holding territories and start to join flocks—and territorial singing just isn't compatible with flocking. One by one, each species drops out of the morning chorus."



House finch, adult and chick; photo: Cole Parks/Audubon Photography Awards

Once the young have fledged and become more independent, family groups may disperse from the immediate nesting area. This reduces competition for resources within the family and encourages young birds to find their own territories. Some adult birds may also move to more secluded areas with abundant food resources to recover from the breeding season. (Read it on [BirdwatchingDaily.com](#).)

As summer goes on, it brings a wealth of natural food sources for birds. Insects proliferate, berries begin to ripen, and seeds appear, offering a more diverse menu of softer foods compared to our backyard feeders.

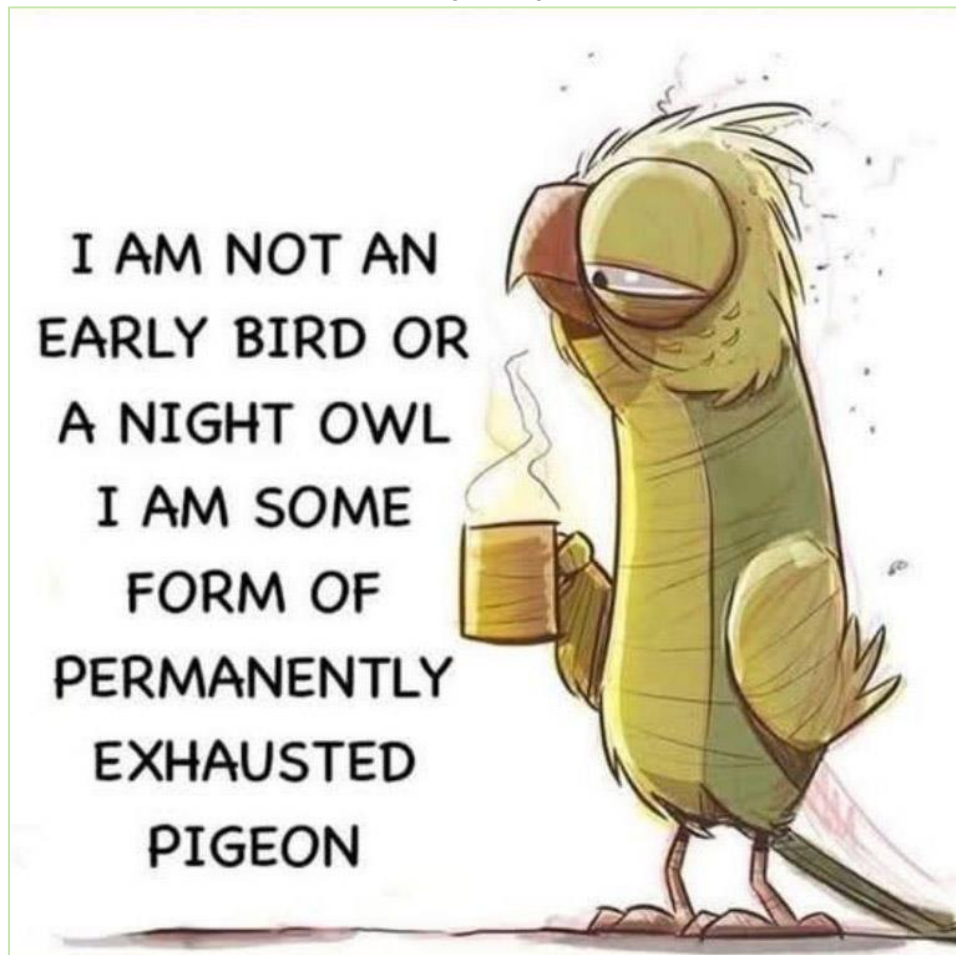
After breeding, the molting season kicks in. As described by [Cornell Lab](#), "Molt is the systematic replacement of feathers. All birds do it—from hummingbirds to penguins. They have to molt in order to survive, because feathers wear out from physical abrasion and bleaching from the sun. Once a year (in the late summer for temperate species) birds grow an entirely new set of feathers through a complete molt."

As birds grow new flight feathers, they are particularly vulnerable to predators. During wing molt, several of their flight feathers will be less than full length, producing gaps in their wings that render them less maneuverable and powerful in flight. To avoid attracting the attention of predators, many birds—such as sparrows, warblers, and thrushes—lie low, calling infrequently and hiding in vegetation."

Send Your Articles and Photos

Attention Readers! Surely you have information that you find interesting, and would make a good topic in a future edition of *The Drummer*. Or you have a bird photo that you would like to share. We are always looking for material to include in our quarterly newsletter. Do it! Send a photo, document, or link in an email to senecarocksaudubon@gmail.com and mention what it is and tell us something about it.

Just For Fun



Submitted by Cindy Bonner / Audubon

	LEADERSHIP TEAM	
	TEAM MEMBER	ROLE
	Alice Thureau	President, Webmaster & Bird-Friendly Habitat (BFH)
	Vickie Gotaskie	Vice-President, BFH
	Cindy Bonner	Treasurer, CBC Feeder Watch
	Kay John	Secretary, Membership & Conservation/Advocacy
	Peggy Butler	Education
	Nancy Cichocki	Member at-large, BFH
	Pat Conway	Facebook & History
	Gary Edwards	Outreach Programs
	Mal Hays	Outings & CBC
	Nick Kolodick	Outings & CBC
	Michael Leahy	IBA 21 Piney Tract
	Jim McGuire	Education
	Ron Montgomery	Outreach Programs
	Larry Towse	Outings
	Carole Winslow	CBC Compiler, PA Bird Atlas
	Devin Smith	Member at-large
To contact one of the team members, send an email to their attention to senecarocksaudubon@gmail.com		

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

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	<u>Submission Deadlines</u>
Vol. 1 Winter (December-February)	November 15
Vol. 2 Spring (March-May)	February 15
Vol. 3 Summer (June-August)	May 15
Vol. 4 Fall (September-November)	August 15

Members are encouraged to contribute announcements, articles, photos, etc. to Editor, Jerry Cichocki, or email senecarockaudubon@gmail.com, attention Editor

Become a Volunteer for SRAS: <https://www.senecarocksaudubon.org/volunteer>

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