Pennsylvania’s Boreal Conifer Forest – Birding Challenges and Opportunities

Our October program centers on the importance of Pennsylvania’s spruce- and hemlock-dominated forests, relics of former conifer forest and boreal ecosystems that are found primarily on glaciated parts of the Alleghany Plateau. Many of these are peat lands that are found at headwaters of high quality cold water streams. These areas support the most southerly extent of breeding Yellow-bellied Flycatchers and Blackpoll Warblers (both PA endangered) as well as several other species of concern. Although the timber era destroyed most of PA’s spruce forests, there has been partial recovery of boreal vegetation and bird communities, mostly through benign neglect. Unfortunately, factors such as isolation, forest fragmentation and general lack of appreciation continue to present challenges for conservation. Climate change and energy extraction are added threats. However, the ability to promote natural conifer regeneration does show management potential despite many obstacles.

Presenter Doug Gross is currently a Wildlife Biologist with the Wildlife Diversity Section of the PA Game Commission. His duties include the monitoring and management of the state’s protected birds, primarily the endangered, threatened, species of special concern, and Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

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Winter Raptor Survey

Greg Grove lives in Huntington county PA and works in the DNA analysis lab at Penn State. He and his wife Deb started birding as graduate students at Ohio State University in 1979. After he became proficient in bird identification he became interested in the dynamics of bird populations and the best ways to survey them. He founded the Stone Mountain Hawk Watch, the Lake Raystown Christmas Bird Count, the Pennsylvania Winter Raptor Survey, and three Breeding Bird Survey routes in Rothrock State Forest. He is also a past president of both the State College Bird Club and the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology and served as a Regional Coordinator during the PA Breeding Bird Atlas.

Greg’s program focuses on the Winter Raptor Surveys that have been conducted in Pennsylvania since 2001. The surveys include a census of open country species i.e., Red-tailed Hawk; American Kestrel; Northern Harrier; Rough-legged Hawk; and both Turkey and Black Vultures; however, all raptors seen during the surveys are recorded. Data is compiled by individual counties to produce a statewide winter distribution map for each species and detect fluctuations in their population over time.

Although birding tends to slow down during winter months, important information gathered in these surveys could be helpful in spotting and, hopefully, helping to stabilize those raptor populations that seem to be decreasing in number.
AAS Volunteers Help Make the Native Plant Sale a Success!

AAS volunteers and other nature lovers of all ages enjoyed the Native Plant Sale at Meadowood Nursery on September 14th.

We thank nursery owners Jan Getgood and Ernie Johnson for this fundraising opportunity!

OCTOBER Program continued

(State Wildlife Action Plan). He previously served as an environmental biologist with a private consulting firm in Northeastern PA where he conducted a number of Breeding Bird Censuses and seasonal bird counts, many of which have been published. He is well known for his research on the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and he also coordinated the Northern Saw-whet Owl breeding survey in PA. Doug’s credentials include degrees in Biology from Penn State and Bloomsburg Universities. He enjoys interacting with both professional biologists and “citizen scientists” for the study of avian species. In addition to serving as a Regional Coordinator and author for PA’s first and second Breeding Birding Atlases he was also a founding board member and president of the Pennsylvania Society of Ornithology (PSO). Doug’s program will provide us with a better understanding of the importance of boreal forest preservation as it relates to bird conservation.

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We thank nursery owners Jan Getgood and Ernie Johnson for this fundraising opportunity!
It was a small group of five hiking birders that gathered on June 1st for one in a series of “Bird the Ridge” hikes across the Kittatinny Ridge in PA. Bird the Ridge is a joint effort launched by the Kittatinny Coalition, led by Audubon Pennsylvania and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. The goal is to increase our knowledge of the Kittatinny’s bird life and introduce more people to birding opportunities on the ridge. It included a series of free bird hikes that were open to the public, hosted by local trail clubs and Audubon chapters.

Experienced birder Gary LaBelle and I, both members of the Appalachian Audubon Society and the Susquehanna Appalachian Trail Club, co-led this leisurely 5-mile hike, which took place on State Game Lands 211 — Cold Spring Trail to Rausch Gap, near Ft. Indiantown Gap. We were joined by three other early-risers whose love of nature matches their enjoyment of hiking. Aside from Gary, we were all “amateur” birders who learned a lot that day. Gary has taken part in citizen science bird counts on this stretch of the ridge previously.

Bird counts allow us to keep track of population trends and highlight the need to protect specific areas that are crucial to the successful breeding and/or migration of various bird species.

The Kittatinny Ridge as a whole has been designated an “Important Bird Area” by Audubon Pennsylvania and is an internationally-renowned location for viewing raptor migration. The ridge encompasses mostly uninterrupted deep forest habitat at higher elevations, which many bird species require in order to breed and nest successfully, and where they can feed their young from the plentiful caterpillars. The ridge encompasses about 520 square miles — stretching 185 miles from the Delaware Water Gap to the Mason-Dixon line.

In all, we identified 19 species of birds along the ridge that day — and six other bird species at Memorial Lake, our meeting place. Ovenbirds were the most evident at 27. A highlight of the trip was hearing the flute-like songs of several Wood Thrushes and another time several Hermit Thrushes sang together. It is magical to stop and soak in the present moment in the quiet woods while bird song fills the air. We also had an excellent up-close sighting of a brilliant red male Scarlet Tanager and his mate.

We reported our bird counts to www.eBird.org, an online global database of bird observations. In addition to the birds, we got to experience being in the thick of the 17-year cicada population. None of us had ever seen anything like the grasses and low shrubs that were absolutely covered with newly-emerged cicada nymphs who had just climbed out of the soil after 17 years underground, ready to burst out of their exo-skeleton and fly to the tall trees to mate, lay their eggs, and die. All plants in one small open area looked as though they had been decorated for Christmas with hundreds upon hundreds of cicada ornaments. The high-pitched, non-stop drone of adult cicadas in nearby trees was haunting and mystical.

It is possible that “Bird the Ridge” will happen again in the future, and if so, we hope more of you will join us. In the meantime, if you would like to learn more about identifying birds by their sound, check out www.enature.com/birding/audio.asp or Audubon’s reasonably priced app for Smartphones “Audubon Birds – A Field Guide to North American Birds.”

For information on future walks, contact Lorrie Preston at lpreston5156@gmail.com.

**Bird List**
(19 species on the ridge)

- Ovenbird – 27
- Black-throated Green Warbler – 11
- Acadian Flycatcher – 10
- Red-Eyed Vireo – 9
- Hermit Thrush – 6
- Turkey Vulture – 6
- Wood Thrush – 4
- Louisiana Waterthrush – 4
- Scarlet Tanager – 4
- Blue Jay – 3
- Indigo Bunting – 3
- American Crow – 3
- Tufted Titmouse – 2
- Pileated Woodpecker – 2
- Black-and-white Warbler – 2
- Veery – 2
- American Redstart – 2
- Hooded Warbler – 1
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo – 1

Cicadas covered the grasses and low shrubs after emerging from a 17-year hiatus underground.
Falcons Enjoy Successful Fledging Season in Harrisburg

By Sue Hannon

Between May 27 and June 4, twenty-plus volunteers of the Harrisburg Falcon Fledge Watch and Rescue spent over 450 hours, providing dawn to dusk coverage for four juvenile Peregrine Falcons as they fledged and mastered the basics of flight. The Watch crew welcomed a number of new volunteers from the ranks of the Appalachian Audubon Society; their participation was an enormous boost for the Watch crew. Many thanks to AAS members for their assistance!

The sole male of 2013’s clutch fledged first, shortly after 8am on Friday, May 31, and absolutely smashed the record for earliest independent return to the nest ledge, managing the feat only four minutes later! That evening, the first female to fledge wound up on a ledge of the Harrisburg University, where she remained until late the following day. The remaining two females fledged half-an-hour apart the next morning, eventually making safe landings on the five-story apartment building on the corner of 4th and Market Streets. These very short fledging flights were followed by periods of rest and a series of short follow-up flights as the fledglings attempted to return to the nest ledge.

Four fledges within 24 hours led to a hectic weekend for the Watch crew as they attempted to keep track of the whereabouts of four brand-new flyers, traveling in four different directions. One young falcon made eight short flights from roof to roof over three hours, ending with several unsuccessful attempts to reach the University ledge before finishing on the same building she had fledged to that morning. Another flew briefly out of sight before reappearing on the roof of the Forum Place, where she rested briefly, then flew to the University ledge.

The week of Fledge Watch produced many exciting moments as we followed wherever the youngsters flew, including seven rescues and several close calls. Four of the rescues involved fledglings becoming boxed in on the balcony above the nest ledge. After an unprecedented triple rescue when the three females all got stuck at once, DEP staff improvised a set of stairsteps to provide an exit if any juvie landed there again. One fledgling was taken to Red Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation Center for observation and rehydration after crashing into a wall and becoming grounded. After a day of fluids, she returned fully rested and immediately made a strong flight to the top of the tallest building in the area. Another spent a night in the home of a conservation officer before being returned to the Carson building for release.

Within a few days, Falcon Watch gave way to falcon watching, as the juveniles and their parents spent many hours in the skies surrounding the nest ledge, playing chase or tag, performing dazzling aerobatics and exciting flight maneuvers, and beginning the serious business of learning to survive in the wild. For several weeks, the young falcons continued to develop their flight and hunting skills under their parents tutelage. As they became more independent they spent more time away from the ledge. One female fledgling continues to make occasional visits to the ledge, but she will stop soon; as summer draws to a close, she will follow her siblings, and set out to make her own way in the world.

UPDATE

Four juvenile peregrine falcons fledged from the 15th floor ledge on the Rachel Carson Building in downtown Harrisburg on May 31/June 1. By mid-July, three of them had apparently dispersed. The 4th fledgling, the red-banded female, continued to make regular appearances on the ledge through August and into September, frequently bringing prey to the ledge to eat, or to “yell at” the adult falcons. She showed no sign of any illness or injury that would impair her independence, but the adults continued to tolerate her presence at the ledge. In previous years, the adults have driven reluctant youngsters away from the adults’ territory much earlier in the summer.

It appears that she has finally dispersed. She was last observed at the ledge on September 4.

The latest in the summer I had ever seen a youngster near the ledge before dispersal was August 8, and at that, the adults did not allow him to land on the ledge, but tolerated his presence on the University building next door. I don’t guess we’ll ever know what caused this unusually late dispersal, but it has been a pleasure to have such a long summer for observing one of the Harrisburg young.
Help Preserve a Birding Treasure
By Jane Barnette and Kathy Kuchwara

Anyone who has birded South Eastern Arizona has probably stopped at the property of Wally and Marion Paton in Patagonia. They spent years creating a lovely haven for hummingbirds and other species on their property. A large canopy, protecting a grouping of chairs underneath, sits in their backyard for the enjoyment of birders from around the world. Many of the feeders are numbered to aide in hummingbird identification. Both of the Paton’s have passed on and their children are planning to sell the property. Tucson Audubon Society is attempting to buy the property and keep it as Wally and Marion would want it preserved.

Unfortunately, there is a possibility that it might be sold to someone who would not have their commitment and birds and birders alike would be the losers. There is a move afoot to help raise funds to assist the Tucson Chapter achieve their goal. This is time-sensitive as a decision regarding the sale will be made sometime in mid-October.

Because of the importance of preserving the Paton property the Appalachian Audubon board has approved a $200.00 donation towards this end. To learn more about the Paton Property and how you can help in this worthwhile cause visit www.abcbirds.org/paton where there is a link for credit card donations.

Please send any checks to Paton’s Bird Haven, c/o American Bird Conservancy, PO Box 249, The Plains, VA, 20198. The check should be made out to American Bird Conservancy with Paton’s Bird Haven written on the memo line.

Kingfisher Kids
By Gabe Tiday, age 12

Cut out the bird parts., and glue them together on a new piece of paper.

Bird beaks and feet tell us about what a bird eats. What would the bird you made eat?
Appalachian Audubon Society
P.O. Box 234
Camp Hill, PA 17001-0234
www.appalachianaudubon.org

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2013
AAS monthly programs typically take place on the third Thursday of each month at the Christ Presbyterian Church located at 421 Deerfield Road, in the Allendale neighborhood of Camp Hill. Join us at 7:00pm for socializing and refreshments. The program begins at 7:30pm.

DIRECTIONS
I-83 southbound — take exit 40B towards New Cumberland. Stay straight, cross Carlisle Road to Cedar Cliff Drive. Turn left onto Allendale Way and turn left onto Deerfield Road. The Church is on the left. Park in the second lot.
I-83 northbound — take exit 40B, turn left onto Carlisle Road/Simpson Ferry Road and go under I-83. Turn left again at the light onto Cedar Cliff Drive. Turn left onto Allendale Way and turn left onto Deerfield Road. The Church is on the left. Park in the second lot.

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The Paton property needs our help

Birdseed Sale Reminder
Don’t forget that our annual birdseed sale will be held on Friday, October 4th, from 3–7pm, and Saturday, the 5th, from 9am–2pm. The sale will again be next to Boscovs at the Camp Hill Mall.

If you have preordered seed please be sure to pick it up as we cannot hold seed after the sale. However, if you didn’t get a chance to preorder we will have additional supplies of many types of seed available on a first come, first served basis for walk-in customers.

Looking for a new birdfeeder? We’ve got you covered with a complete selection to meet the needs of your feathered friends. There will be volunteers available who can help answer any questions you may have.

Please remind your family and friends that they are welcome to stop by too. Help us make this, our major fundraiser, a success. See you there!

JOIN OUR NEW FACEBOOK GROUP PAGE!
Our new FB page not only will inform and remind you of our events, it also will allow you to post your comments and photos and see what other AAS friends are up to! Please go to the following link https://www.facebook.com/groups/515034908575016/ and click to join the group. An administrator will add you to the group promptly.

MARK THE DATE!
October 20th Owl Banding Field Trip with Sandy Lockerman.
If interested contact Rick Price at 657-1950. Space is limited to 10 participants.