



Kingfisher Courier

Newsletter of Appalachian Audubon Society

December 2011 / January 2012

December 8 AAS Holiday Social

Note early date this month!

Food, music, games, prizes, crafts, bird talk, and more! Sound like a holiday party? It is! Plus, a brief presentation about the upcoming Christmas Bird Counts.

This is an AAS first, providing an opportunity to meet new members, reconnect with those you haven't seen for a while, and participate in a few planned activities. Make and take a pine cone feeder, bid on a small selection of silent auction items, enjoy a variety of delicious snacks, win a door prize, and collaborate with others to identify birds from provided clues – something for everyone.

This is guaranteed to be a fun evening, so plan to join us beginning at 7:00 pm. If you would like to bring a plate of your favorite treat to share you are welcome to do so, but this is not necessary. As usual, Audubon coffee will be available for purchase if you need some holiday gifts and you may also pick up your pre-ordered Audubon calendars.

Hope to see you on December 8th.



*Program time, location
and driving directions
are on back page*

Dan Kunkle (right) surveying grasslands of the Lehigh Gap Nature Center.

The transformation has been dramatic (below) from barren rock to a prairie teeming with life.



January 19 “Superfund to Super Habitat”

In 1983, the area around the town of Palmerton, Carbon County, received the dubious distinction of being one of the largest Superfund (toxic chemical contaminated) sites east of the Mississippi River.

The toxic, acidic, air pollution caused by zinc smelting operations was being trapped in a barrier formed by the Kittatinny Ridge, leaving more than 2,000 acres a barren moonscape.

But a group of environmentally-minded citizens began the miraculous transformation of this wasteland into the Lehigh Gap Nature Center, a refuge for wildlife and people.

Dan Kunkle, Executive Director of the Lehigh Gap Nature Center, will share the story of how this area has been restored as an important migration corridor and stopover site for raptors, Neotropical songbirds, and monarch butterflies.

It's sure to be an uplifting evening!

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President's Perch

Annette Mathes

True Meaning

There was a time that I wouldn't have considered doing anything in December that didn't involve decorating, baking, cleaning, shopping, wrapping presents, or maybe a holiday performance. Then I discovered the Christmas Bird Counts. Now I can't imagine a December that doesn't include waking up well before dawn, piling on layer after layer of clothing, and spending the entire day outside counting birds. Sometimes it's snowy, sometimes rainy, sometimes amazingly cold, and sometimes delightfully sunny and mild. But it's always wonderful to be out enjoying the singular beauty of a winter day.

How exhilarating it is to start in the frosty early morning, with you and your team eagerly anticipating what species you'll be adding to your list that day, whether it's the Mourning Dove that you can't believe took so long to find, the Swamp Sparrow that's always in the same spot, or the totally unexpected Wood Duck that you miraculously found hidden in one of the coves of the creek. Who would think it could be so exciting to find a European Starling, House Finch, or a House Sparrow? But each one adds to the day's count, and sometimes are just as welcome as a Brown Creeper, Northern Harrier, or Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

As the sun starts to set, the teams come together at a pizza shop or other gathering spot to hear the list of the birds found that day. It's so much fun to share the day's experiences with your fellow citizen scientists and listen to the list of the great birds that were found. And what a thrill it is to hear that your relatively inexperienced team found the only Wood Duck of the day!

So this December, give yourself a break from the holiday madness and join a Christmas Bird Count. You can participate in one or all of the counts. (See page 3 for list of counts and contact information of count leaders.) You'll be assigned to a team based on whether or not you have experience and the need for coverage of the count areas. Remember to bring \$5 for the participation fee to National Audubon, bring a few more dollars to share the cost of gas with the driver, and ask your team leader if you should pack a lunch. And dress warmer than you think you need to!

At the end of the day, I think you'll find a new gladness and meaning in the holidays that will inspire you to start a wonderful new tradition.



Eastern Bluebird

Check out the Christmas Bird Count Website

Volunteers have been counting birds on the CBC for over 110 years, and their contributions represent a tremendously valuable resource for learning more about bird behavior and bird conservation. All the data collected by tens of thousands of volunteers is available on the National Audubon website, and simple tools enable you to see the list of species found in specific locations or examine trends of specific species with graphs. Take a look: <http://birds.audubon.org/historical-results>

Seasonal Sightings Ramsay Koury

As we enter the winter season the pace of birding definitely slows down. There are far fewer birds, in both variety and total numbers. The birds that are here, however, are somewhat easier to find. One reason for this is that there are no leaves on the trees! Another reason is that many birds are grouped together in feeding flocks.

Woodland flocks consist of chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, woodpeckers, kinglets and wrens. Looking through flocks like these you may find a nice surprise like a Hermit Thrush, Eastern Towhee or a Yellow-rumped Warbler.



Eastern Towhee

On the river and ponds, waterfowl should be in groups also. Concentrations of Buffleheads, Common Goldeneye, and Common Mergansers can be expected on the Susquehanna River. Lakes and ponds like Wildwood Lake should have Gadwall, Green-winged Teal and Black Ducks, among other species. Large groups of geese and other waterfowl typically winter at Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area.



Horned Lark

Another habitat to check during the winter, especially if we have snow on the ground, is agricultural fields. Several species of field birds can be reliably found in these areas, especially in fields that have

recently been spread with manure. Large groups of Horned Larks are usually easily found. Among them, look for Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs and American Pipits.

All of this birdlife also attracts predators, and these open areas will draw in a fair number of raptors. Red-tailed Hawks and American Kestrels are the most common, but look also for Northern Harriers, Rough-legged Hawks and Merlins. If we are really fortunate this winter a Snowy Owl may even pay



Long, glider-like wings and an owl-like face make the Northern Harrier an easy bird to identify as it hunts low over grasslands.

us a visit from the far North! The most productive agricultural areas in past winters have been in western Cumberland County and the Amish farmlands of Lancaster County.

Snowy Owls periodically visit central Pennsylvania in the winter, and are usually found in large, grassy areas, such as agricultural fields or airports, in search of meadow voles.



If you are willing to drive a few hours during these cold months consider a day or week-end trip to the coast. Large numbers and a variety of wintering waterfowl and seabirds along the New Jersey or Delaware shore can make such a trip rewarding.

Wherever you go, have great birding and great holidays!

Area Christmas Bird Counts

Contact one or all of the circle compilers for a team assignment and details:

Harrisburg CBC — Saturday, December 17, 2011. Contact Deuane Hoffman at 564-7475 or corvuscorax@comcast.net

New Bloomfield CBC — Monday, December 26, 2011. Contact Ramsay Koury at 761-1871 or rkoury123@aol.com

Curtin CBC — Thursday, December 29, 2011. Contact Scott Bills at 896-8859 or sbills@state.pa.us

Newville CBC — Monday, January 2, 2012. Contact Bill or Linda Franz at 776-4463.

Thank you to our newsletter sponsor:

LOST CREEK SHOE SHOP

QUALITY OPTICAL EQUIPMENT



Aden Troyer
David Troyer





Kingfisher Courier

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AAS monthly programs typically take place on the 3rd Thursday of each month at the **Christ Presbyterian Church, 421 Deerfield Road, in the Allendale neighborhood of Camp Hill.** Join us at **7:00 pm** for socializing and refreshments. **The program begins at 7:30.**

Directions to Christ Presbyterian Church:

I-83 Southbound, take exit 40B towards New Cumberland. Stay straight, cross Carlisle Road to Cedar Cliff Dr. 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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FIELD TRIP REPORT -- WAGGONER'S GAP

A few beginner hawk-watchers assembled at Waggoner's Gap on October 22 to find out about the site improvements and enjoy a couple of hours of tranquility on the Hawk-Watch rocks. With a heavy cloud cover and light breeze from the northwest, we had a steady passage of birds our whole time there. Sharp-shinned Hawks (or "sharpies") were definitely the migrating bird of the day. However, as we were making our way up to the site along the trail below, we heard shouts that a Golden Eagle was going by in the distance, but we couldn't get up on the rocks fast enough to see it.

In our first hour, 73 sharpies went by, with 4 Cooper's Hawks, 3 Red-tailed Hawks, and 2 Turkey Vultures. From noon to 1:00, there were another 90 sharpies, with a smattering of other birds, including a Northern Harrier and an American Kestrel. By the end of the day, the counters logged 328 sharpies out of 364 total birds seen -- whew! — P. Zeph

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Short-eared Owl

JANUARY FIELD TRIP

January 14, 2012

Juniata County Winter Birding

Join **Aden Troyer** and **Chad Kauffman** in search of Short-eared Owls, Lapland Longspurs, Pine Siskins, and other winter birds. Contact Aden at 463-3117; or Chad at chadkauffman@earthlink.net, or 994-6715. Meet at the Lost Creek Shoe Shop (643 Oakland Road) near Mifflintown, where you can browse their extensive selection of birding optics with hands-on testing and expert advice from the owners. The field trip will start at about 12:30, so arrive earlier if you want to shop. Carpooling is encouraged. Those who want may bird until dusk.