



Chickadee Chatter

Volume 8 Issue 1

The Newsletter of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society

March 2009

www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org

Dear Members:

With the election of President Obama, we have been given a moment in history when we can use a popular surge of hope and respect for shared values to re-establish environmental regulations and strengthen agencies that have been disregarded and made impotent during the recent period of greed and neglect. Efforts to back green initiatives and fund environmental remediation are already emerging in proposed stimulus legislation as likely avenues for renewal for our floundering economy. For whatever reason, we're already seeing partisan bickering and attempts to thwart that trend. So it now becomes our responsibility, as informed and environmentally concerned citizens, to ensure that our legislators, congressmen and senators understand that we're willing to stand behind them when they're tempted to bow to the complaints of our strident detractors. Write your political representatives to let them know that we expect leadership, thoughtful but timely deliberation, and more attention to meaningful recovery than expediency. We must no longer allow them to ignore the wishes of the most well-informed and dedicated members of our society while pandering to the demands of the most narrow-minded and selfish. In a crisis, opportunities always accompany the obvious risks and threats. Now is the time to tell our new President and our political leaders that we support their use of the immense goodwill and the powerful tools we have put at their disposal to grasp those opportunities for the true betterment of our society and our world, not for the further advantaging of the already prosperous. While we're at it, let's remind them that, if they will only use their heads, we will continue to provide the backbone they sometimes seem to lack. Let's use the momentum we have gained to promote changes we can all be proud to pass on to our posterity as we move our economy back to an even keel. There needs to be no conflict between doing good and doing well. In this new era, acting on hope and the strength of our convictions, we can once again have an America with leaders who proudly portray our values to the world.



Dennis McNair, President

2008 Christmas Bird Count

Each year groups of brave APAS birders go into the field loaded with the anticipation of getting those "hard to find birds," but sober up quickly to the reality of winter scarcity. The 2008 APAS Christmas Bird Count was held on December 14, which was a relatively pleasant day weather-wise. Each year is different and unique; for instance, last year we had our highest count ever of 80 species, but no real rarities. This year we had a total of 74 species on count day with an additional four species in count week. But this time we had two rarities (birds seen only once before or seen for the first time) – Northern Shrike and White-winged Crossbills, each with interesting stories of discovery. Ron Rovanseck, our intrepid swamp birder, worked Sammy's Swamp (a large shrub/scrub swamp) and managed to find 26 species including the Northern Shrike. Eric Hall, another excellent birder, informed me the day before the CBC of the possible invasion of White-wing Crossbills. He was optimistic and, of course, it was Eric that got the 17 Crossbills. They flew out of a hemlock/spruce forest past Eric and over Ed Gowarty Jr. Lastly, we had two House Wrens in adjoining sectors that are rarely, if ever, reported in winter since they are neotropical migrants and insectivorous. However, as Debbie Bodenschatz pointed out, they were feeding on organic suet, which is a slab of fat and muscle from a cow. Could they be lured to stay behind since they have a source of animal fat and protein?

Following are the results of the 2008 CBC: Canada Goose 1245; Wood Duck 2; American Black Duck 34; Mallard 784; Ring-necked Duck 12; Greater Scaup 11; Lesser Scaup 5; Bufflehead 4; Hooded Merganser 16; Ruddy Duck 167; Ring-necked Pheasant 8; Ruffed Grouse 1; Wild Turkey 5; Pied-billed Grebe 9; Great Blue Heron 4; Northern Harrier 2; Sharp-shinned Hawk 5; Cooper's Hawk 5; Northern Goshawk CW; Red-tailed Hawk 50; Rough-legged Hawk 2; American Kestrel 15; American Coot 8; Ring-billed Gull CW; Rock Pigeon 963; Mourning Dove 262; Eastern Screech Owl 1; Great Horned Owl 1; Barred Owl 1; Short-eared Owl CW; Belted Kingfisher 3; Red-bellied Woodpecker 14; Downy Woodpecker 23; Hairy Woodpecker 7; Northern Flicker 1; Pileated Woodpecker

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7; Northern Shrike 1; Blue Jay 199; American Crow 528; Common Raven 14; Horned Lark 198; Black-capped Chickadee 248; Tufted Titmouse 68; Red-breasted Nuthatch 2; White-breasted Nuthatch 39; Brown Creeper 2; Carolina Wren 2; House Wren 2; Winter Wren 1; Golden-crowned Kinglet 6; Eastern Bluebird 50; American Robin 4; Northern Mockingbird 5, European Starling 1434; American Pipit 4; Cedar Waxwing 9; American Tree Sparrow 102; Savannah Sparrow 3; Fox Sparrow CW; Song Sparrow 28; Swamp Sparrow 12; White-throated Sparrow 46; White-crowned Sparrow 7; Dark-eyed Junco 220; Snow Bunting 1, Northern Cardinal 107; Red-winged Blackbird 1; Eastern Meadowlark 5; Common Grackle 21; Brown-headed Cowbird 2; Purple Finch 3; House Finch 63; White-winged Crossbill 17, Pine Siskin 84; House Sparrow 494.

Thanks to all participants: Cameron Palmer, Linda Gilroy, Meg Moses, Jim Moses, Jeff Payne, Retta Payne, Chris Payne, Richard Akers, Tom Bodenschatz, Debbie Bodenschatz, Dave Escherich, Tim Fox, Tom Kuehl, Janet Kuehl, Tom Dick, Sally Dick, Mike Stibich, Mike Wolfe, Pat Wolfe, Daniel Wolfe, Rosemary McGlynn, Ev Merriman, Ed Gowarty Jr., Eric Hall, and Ron Rovanseck.



Tom Dick

2008 Fall Hawk Watch Count Results

The fall 2008 Allegheny Front Hawk Watch count totals were reasonable considering all the east wind rainy days. We depend on East winds, but hawks simply don't deliver big numbers when its raining. The number of hours last fall was 765. In busy seasons we've had up to 910 hours as in 2006. The count results are:

- Black Vulture - 15
- Turkey Vulture - 347
- Osprey - 111
- Bald Eagle - 69
- Northern Harrier - 52
- Sharp-shinned Hawk - 1000
- Cooper's Hawk - 194
- Northern Goshawk - 7
- Red-shouldered Hawk - 56
- Broad-winged Hawk - 3887
- Red-tailed Hawk - 1284
- Rough-legged Hawk - 4
- Golden Eagle - 154
- American Kestrel - 55
- Merlin - 29
- Peregrine Falcon - 15
- Unidentified - 206

Our total was 7485 raptors. Our Golden Eagle count was the second highest in the state second to Waggner's Gap but low for us.



Tom Dick

Spring 2009 Hawk Watch Season

Weather permitting, the Spring 2009 Allegheny Front Hawk Watch season begins on February 22 and ends on May 7. Following is the daily schedule of counters:

Sunday	Bob Stewart
Monday	Jim Rocco
Tuesday	Bob Gorsuch
Wednesday	Rosemary McGlynn
Thursday	Tom Dick
Friday	Eric Hall
Saturday	Ed Gowarty Sr.

Back-up counters (hopefully) are Karen Jackson and Kevin Georg. If you would like to volunteer to be a counter or an observer, please send me an e-mail at 51cecidio@libcom.com



Che Mincone

Kudos to Chris!

Kudos to Chris Payne for volunteering to construct a photography blind at the Dunnings Creek wetlands. This blind will be good for non-photographers as well since Bittern Pool holds many of the rarities that are easily spooked. This is a service scout project that will result in Chris attaining the rank of Eagle Scout, the highest rank in scouting. Chris is the son of Jeff and Retta Payne.



Tom Dick



2009 Calendar of Events

PROGRAMS & OUTINGS

Programs begin at 7:00 p.m. in the Engineering and Science Bldg., Room 200, University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown on the third Thursday of Sept., Oct., Nov., Mar., Apr. and May. Refreshments are served. Notice with the outings there are many "Date TBAs." When you sign up for a Date TBA, the leader will contact

you personally on the best time to have this outing. Unfortunately, in nature, weather is important to the success of the event and dates set in stone frequently

Tom and Sally Dick: 814-754-5727
Rosemary McGlynn: 814-255-5734

February 25 to May 10 - Spring Raptor Count at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch - Our spring count is one of the highest in the eastern United States (including Hawk Mountain). We love visitors and, if you want, you can learn to be an observer or a counter. The earliest birds are our Eastern Golden Eagles in late February, and the latest are our May Ospreys. The spring Osprey count is higher than the fall count when close to 30 Osprey are counted on some days.

of photos and discussion of their recent birding trip to Kenya. They happened to be there during the presidential election, which added to the excitement.

April 25 - Earth Day Week Celebration at the Wetlands - A no work day! We will eat, enjoy being with fellow conservationists, and tour the wetlands (uplands, impoundments and stream). Bring a covered dish and meet around 10:00 a.m. at Jerry's barn.

March through May - Dunnings Creek Waterfowl Survey - Join Tom Dick for this seasonal phenomenon! We visit the wetlands and Shawnee State Park three times weekly, spending about three hours on each survey. Please call 814-754-5727 if you would like to participate. The more people the better the count. It's a great way to learn to ID waterfowl.

May 2 - Nocturnal Rail Survey at Dunnings Creek Wetlands - This will be an early evening survey for Sora and Virginia Rails. We will walk the trails at night and play tapes to hear the responses of rails. Occasionally, the rails can get quite bold and come out of hiding. Bring a flashlight and wear boots! Notify Tom Dick if you're interested.

March (Date TBA) - Help clean wood duck and bluebird boxes at Dunnings Creek - Help clean wood duck and bluebird boxes at Dunnings Creek Wetlands. If interested, contact Tom Dick at 814-754-5727 to get on the list. We always need help!

May 9 - Migratory Bird Day - This is a fun filled day greeting all the returning birds. Our location is Bedford County where we separate into teams and scour the county for species. We meet back at the Wetlands where we tally and eat. If you have never participated in this outing, it's a great way to learn your species and see them in their colorful new spring molts. Call Rosemary McGlynn, Tom or Sally Dick. Please contact us a full week prior to the event since many of us will be away the week before.

March 19 - Audubon Meeting - Dunnings Creek Wetlands - Tom Dick will give highlights of the last 18 years at the wetlands. Learn what we've discovered about restoration, bird memory, and the things they eat. Also, it would be a good time to sign up for the Spring waterfowl and shorebirds counts.

Date TBA - Astronomy Field Trip - Since we need clear skies, the date, location and leader will be announced at the May 15 meeting.

March 28 - Tree Planting at Dunnings Creek Wetlands - The Eastern meeting of Quakers was held at UPJ last year and they contributed \$1,500 to the APAS for white pine seedlings to be planted in a field at Dunnings Creek Wetlands. This provides us with a new tool for managing the rapidly declining Pennsylvania Quail. We need volunteers to help in this effort. Please contact Tom Dick at 814-754-5727.

May 21 - Audubon Meeting - Vernal Pools by Harold Eugene Wingert - Eugene is a biologist from Dickinson College and also a past president of the Appalachian Audubon Society. He has a long resume within the state in the field of conservation biology. His presentation on vernal pools will be very timely considering the growing interest in preserving these ephemeral ponds within the state.

March (Date TBA) - Wilmore Dam - Join Debbie Bodenschatz on an outing to Wilmore Dam to search for the many species of salamanders and frogs. Wilmore is rich in wetlands, and Debbie knows the frogs and salamanders extremely well. This is also a great outing for kids and grandchildren. Call Debbie to get on the list. When the weather is just right, she will notify us. This will be a night foray and boots, flashlights, and rain gear are usually in order. Call Debbie at 814-495-5252.

May 28 - Spring Shore Birds at Dunnings Creek Wetlands - Depending on the migration, other dates will also be considered. We draw down Bittern Pool by several inches of horizontal retreat to lure shorebirds from the migration. Over the years we've had 22 species of shorebirds.

April 16 - Audubon Meeting - Birds, Mammals and Scenes of Kenya - Join Sally Dick and Ev Merriman for a presentation

June (Date TBA) - Hiking Charles Lewis Natural Area - This is an extremely interesting location in the Conemaugh

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The Jeweled Net of Indra, or Suicide by Neglect

In Buddhism the understanding of the inter-connectedness of all things, living and nonliving, is a fundamental and powerful concept. One of its most vivid and understandable representations is the jeweled net of Indra. Indra was an important god in the Indian pantheon, and the net above his palace contained a jewel of many facets at each intersection of its connected threads, each jewel reflecting the image of each other jewel. Much like a person between two mirrors sees the reflection of himself looking at himself in a mirror containing the reflection of himself looking at himself in a mirror, ad infinitum, each jewel contains the image of the other jewels which, in turn, contain the image of the first, which contains their image, etc. In that way all things reflect, interpenetrate and "contain" all other things.

This idea comes up in many different contexts and is portrayed by many thinkers, ancient and modern. For example, the 20th century British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead speaks of the reflection of humanness in all humans. Chaos theory leads mathematicians to model fractals, shapes and patterns that contain their own shapes and patterns repeated on smaller and larger scales. Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, writes beautifully of the "interbeing" of all life on earth and of all matter, an idea that is also developed by cosmologist Brian Swimme and Father Thomas Berry. In short, the idea, in various forms, is a pervasive one among respected thinkers and a useful one for all of us.

Ecological theory and field studies have reinforced the concept. The recycling of nutrients, the continuity of genetic information within populations, species and related groups, the coordinated and efficient movement of energy through ecosystems from photosynthesizers to carnivores and decomposers, all these modes of thought are bound up in the idea of interconnectedness. It has been my observation that ecological thought is largely cautionary, however, and I derive from this particular idea a warning or lesson for us all: that as we lose some species through extinction, we

lose some jewels of the net and ultimately we lose parts of ourselves with the disintegration of the net in which we are all inextricably bound.

I envision this as the old animated cartoon image of a sailor throwing the anchor off the side of a ship with the rope wrapped around his ankle. As the anchor sinks it pulls the rope after it, tightens the loop, and finally pulls him into Davy Jones's locker along with the anchor he's dropped. Likewise, we are pushing species into the sea of their extinction, and their loss pulls that part of the net under, along with our reflections in their jewel of existence. In fact, it will eventually pull us after them as our part of the net and our particular jewel is dragged away. Our inability to see our reflections being diminished by the drowning of those other precious jewels will be our undoing. More importantly, we seem unable or unwilling to recognize that the diminishment of those jewels is a shared loss. The jewel that represents us gradually loses its meaning and essence as the reflections and contributions of all other beings decline. The interconnectedness of all entities is what gives richness and meaning to our jewel in the net. The process of life is a shared one that is at first less rich and eventually impossible without the processes of all other living things. As such, our life is diminished as all life deteriorates when any single expression of that process is lost.

Tree huggers suddenly appear less ridiculous when we see them as holding on to the very thing that gives our lives meaning and substance. The shared process, the mutual reflection, the repeated image, all these metaphors arise from the ultimate realization that all living beings, and especially all living species, are simply patterns in the continuous shared process of life in the biosphere. When we lose other life forms and processes through neglect, we neglect ourselves. As a result, their loss is actually just a slow and protracted form of suicide.



Dennis McNair

APAS Website News

We have added a bulletin board on the website for members to post and discuss ideas, happenings, topics and pictures. Check out the APAS bulletin board by clicking on the bulletin board link on our home page, (<http://www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org>). You can leave replies to any of the topics and if you get a membership, you can start your own new topics.



Jack Julian

(Programs and Outings continued from Page 3)

Gap, home to interesting plants, mammals (Pa. Woodrat), and reptiles such as timber rattlesnakes and copperheads. The emphasis of this trip will be on the rattlesnakes. We will meet at 9:30 a.m. in the parking lot. Directions will be provided at meetings or via e-mail for participants who sign up. Jim Pemberton is the naturalist for this outing.

Note: The Summer programs will be in the May newsletter. They will include the butterfly count date, dragonfly outings, kayaking, stream and pond insect assessments, and other outings.



APAS Conservation Page

You, Too, Can Be A Conservationist - Drink Shade Grown Coffee!

Conventional, "modern" coffee plantations are displacing wildlife habitat at an alarming rate and, as a result, the population of songbirds across South America is in significant decline. Two million acres have already been clear-cut for sun coffee. Shade grown coffee, the traditional method of coffee farming, offers a promising alternative and has great benefits:

- Taste. As the coffee beans mature more slowly in the shade, natural sugars increase and enhance the flavor of the coffee.
- Healthier. Next to tobacco, coffee is sprayed with more chemicals than any other product consumed by humans. Shade grown coffee is most often organically grown, free of chemical use.
- Promotes healthy environment. Shade grown coffee requires little or no chemical fertilizers, pesticides, or herbicides. The shade trees filter carbon dioxide, which causes global warming, and aids in soil moisture retention, which minimizes erosion.
- Provides bird habitat and greater biodiversity - as many as 150 species of birds have been identified

on shade coffee farms. Migrating bird populations have been in rapid decline since the introduction of sun coffee and the consequent destruction of rainforest for more coffee plantations.

- Helps sustain rainforests. Coffee plantations, which are chemically dependent, suffer from soil depletion and increased erosion. Rainforest is stripped to provide fresh growing ground. Shade coffee farms are, for the most part, organic and sustainable.
- Reverses the trend of using chemicals. Shade coffee farms traditionally use little or no chemical fertilizer.
- Increases the number of native pollinators and seed dispersal is accomplished by warblers such as the Chestnut-sided Warbler.
- Drinking shade coffee gives you a warm feeling knowing you are helping to protect birds.

We strongly urge you to buy only shade grown coffee. You can Google "shade coffee" to view all the websites on shade coffee and see all the bird-friendly brands.



Tom Dick

Rusty Blackbird Decline

The Rusty Blackbird, which was frequently seen at our feeders and counted on past Christmas Bird Counts, has undergone a dramatic decline of 85 to 95 percent. While many neotropical migrants such as warblers and thrushes are declining, the percentage of their decline is much less. The Rusty Blackbird breeds in boreal forested wetlands from New England to Alaska, with strong breeding density (historically) in the east where the greatest decline is occurring.

Some of the factors associated with this decline are climate change and bottomland forest drying up; lumbering which changes the hydrology and eliminates breeding; and the latest theory is the concentration of mercury in aquatic invertebrates, which the Rusty Blackbird eats. So, what can we do? The first thing is to report the date and number of Rusty Blackbirds that visit your feeders and any other sightings. Contribute your sightings (if you participate) in the Great Backyard Bird Count or simply field sightings. To learn more visit the Boreal Song Initiative web site.



Tom Dick

Secretary Bird - Kenya, Africa November 2008



Ev Merriman Photo

Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society
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Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society Mission Statement

The APAS was founded in 1984. We are dedicated to protection and understanding of the earth and all its inhabitants. Through our series of meetings, programs, and outings, we hope to reach individuals of all ages to understand, respect, and protect the earth.

Through such activities as the Breeding Bird Survey, raptor counts, the Christmas Bird Count, and outings, members can do field work and learn first-hand about the wonders of nature.

Our Allegheny Front Hawk Watch count has become an important tradition over the past decade. We have 10 dedicated counters who cover the site daily during the Spring and Fall migration seasons. Currently we are participating in an important research project in cooperation with Powdermill Nature Reserve and Carnegie Mellon University to band Golden Eagles as they fly our ridges.

We also maintain the Dunning's Creek Wetlands, a Wetlands Restoration Project. Interest in local bogs, wetlands, and riverine habitats has led us to promote outings such as the annual Butterfly Count, dragonfly outings, and more recently, family outings to encourage the involvement of children.

Officers

Vice President - Gil Weakland	President - Dennis McNair
Recording Secretary - Shirley Houston	Corresponding Secretary - Sally Dick
Fundraising - Rosemary McGlynn	Treasurer - Retta Payne
Conservation/Activism - Jeff Payne	Programs and Outings - Tom Dick, et.al.
Hospitality - Wanetta Escherich	Newsletter Editor - Ev Merriman
IBA Coordinator - Neil Woffinden	Hawkwatch Compiler - Che Mincone
Nature Photography - Dave Escherich	Sanctuaries - Tom Dick
Web Master - Jack Julian	Membership - Bob Stewart

Contact the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society at: wetmeadow@aol.com
or visit us on the web at: alleghenyplateauaudubon.org