

Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society
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APAS 2012 Spring Newsletter

From The President's Desk

Over the years, the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Chapter has undertaken a lot of projects and developed a reputation for both studying and protecting biodiversity. Way back in 1983, when Tom Dick decided we should begin a chapter (we officially became one in 1984), it was decided that we should be more than a birding club, as many chapters of Audubon are. Birds certainly haven't been ignored, and the members of the chapter can be very proud of our accomplishments there. This season, during the fall migration, there were more Golden Eagles officially identified soaring over the Allegheny Front than anywhere else, or anywhere ever for that matter, in North America. Our Hawk Watch has become famous throughout the Northeast if not the entire continent. The Saw-whet Owl banding program has become a favorite of chapter members and others to the point that its popularity has sometimes almost compromised its scientific purpose. Waterfowl at Dunning's Creek Wetlands (DCW) are a sight to behold during their migrations and the breeding populations of several species have become increasingly more abundant. It's a great example of "if you build it, they will come." Efforts of the membership to restore that area to its historical levels of species richness have paid off splendidly.

Besides birds, the species plants and insects of DCW are proliferating with abandon. There have now been 17 species of dragonflies and damselflies reported as new to Bedford County because of that new habitat and our investigations there. Some native plants have been intentionally planted to help the maturity along, but others have simply shown up just to make use of the habitat. With those plants came the butterflies and moths that feed on them as caterpillars and adults. (And, of course, the critters who eat those caterpillars and adults—fellow insects, amphibians, birds, bats, and others.) Neighbors of DCW, who were at first skeptical of its use, are now among our biggest fans because of the beauty and abundance of wildlife of all sorts they have at their doorsteps.

And don't forget the support we've had on outings from members in Somerset and Cambria Counties sharing their interests in amphibians, reptiles and the rest of the wonders laid out for us in the Allegheny Plateau. We've even investigated our fossil record, geology and geography along the way.

From modest beginnings, with faith and enthusiasm from local members and with patience and persistence in our efforts, we've collectively opened up and protected the loveliness and splendor our surroundings. It didn't all come about suddenly with the idea in the '80s, but, as a result of everybody's hard work and devotion, it's here for us to revel in now in the 21st century and will be for future nature lovers too. To quote my favorite Lake Country poet, John Wordsworth, "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her."

Dennis McNair
President
Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society

Results

Allegheny Front Hawk Watch for Fall 2011

There is little doubt that this was the most exciting year ever for the AFHW when compared to the last ten years. Surprisingly for such a great year we only had two species in 2011 that broke our previous records. In addition, it was not the highest total count of raptors we have ever had so why the accolades? First, we broke the Golden Eagle count by 57 birds and secondly, we beat the Bald Eagle record by 16 birds. The most outstanding record is for the Golden Eagle.

The Golden Eagle is our signature bird, a powerful bird associated with wilderness and strong migrations along the rugged Allegheny Mountains. Our previous record for the Golden Eagle was 222 and this year was 279.

We'll get into more details later on the Golden Eagle, and readers will be surprised about the ramification of these numbers. The total count is as follows: **Black Vulture** 34, **Turkey Vulture** 543, **Osprey** 76, **Bald Eagle** 119, **Northern Harrier** 47, **Sharp-shinned Hawk** 1605, **Cooper's Hawk**: 244, **Northern Goshawk** 11, **Red-shouldered Hawk** 75, **Broad-winged Hawk** 7620, **Red-tailed Hawk** 2327, **Golden Eagle** 279, **American Kestrel** 54, **Merlin** 54, and **Peregrine Falcon** 30. The unidentified (UI) accipters were 13, UI Buteo 29, and UI falcons were 7. The total was 13,219, which was the second highest count in the 11 years counting at our present location.

Significance of the Golden Eagle Flight of 2011

The first two Golden Eagle singletons were counted on 9/18 and 9/24. October had **47** Golden Eagles with its big day Oct. 31 with 25. November had 187 Golden eagles. November 1st started the big push with a whopping **Eastern US Fall record big day of 61 Golden Eagles**. The day ended with a total of 708 raptors which included: 157 Turkey Vultures, 2 Bald Eagles, 2 Northern Harriers, 31 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 10 Cooper's Hawks, 3 Northern Goshawks, 32 Red-shouldered Hawks, 409 Red-tailed Hawks, 61 Golden Eagles, and 1 Rough-legged Hawk. Jim Rocco was the compiler of the day with many counters present. Mike Lanzone, with his superior vision, was pointing out eagles in every corner of the sky. Our hawk watch is usually at its best with East winds, but on this day the wind was from all directions. November would finish with a total of **187** Golden Eagles. December produced 105 raptors of which **41** were Golden Eagles. The new record of **279** Golden Eagles not only broke our records (previously 222) but also **broke all records from the Eastern US to the Western Rockies**.

This record number might connote to some that Golden Eagles are becoming more common, but actually, if anything, they are on the decline due to neonatal mortality, lead poisoning, collision, and inadvertently getting caught in steel traps designed for mammals (especially in Canada). Much of what we know about Golden Eagle migration comes from data collected from hawk watches across the US and Canada. Considerable information comes from the Eastern Golden Eagle Scientists: David Brandes, Todd Katzner, Mike Lanzone, Trish Miller et.al. This team has pioneered our understanding of

Golden Eagle natural history and pushed for better conservation protection. As for the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch it already has a strong reputation for Golden Eagles and our chapter will continue its strong efforts in manning the hawk watch and collecting important data.

Spring Meetings and Outings

Meetings: Room 200 E&S Building 7 pm

Spring hawkwatch---February 25 to May 10- The AFHW is one of the few Spring Hawk Watches in the Eastern US. The first birds to come through are Golden Eagles and the last are Broad-winged Hawks. It's also a time of year that we can really use spotters (it's a big sky and it's easy to miss high flying birds) so we welcome anyone who will help.

March to May 5—Waterfowl Outings-- Join Tom Dick for this seasonal phenomenon! We visit Dunnings Creek Wetlands and Shawnee State Park three times weekly, spending about three hours on each survey. It's a great way to learn to your ducks and geese. There are days when the number of waterfowl exceeds 2000. Call Tom at 814-754-5727

March 30—April 1—Audubon Chapter Assembly—Chapters representatives from throughout Pennsylvania will meet at UPJ's Conference Center to share ideas and discuss shared concerns. Field trips to the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch, Dunning's Creek Wetlands and Allegheny Ridge Wind Facility will be held. More details will be available on the web site closer to the date.

April 14—Dunnings Creek Wetlands Invasive Plant Removal, cleaning bluebird and wood duck boxes-- Garlic mustard has infiltrated approximately ¼ acre and needs pulled. This is a dangerous invasive capable of out-competing the surrounding native plants and we need lots of people to help. Please notify Tom Dick at 814-754-5727 if you can help. We also need to clean out nesting boxes for wood ducks and bluebirds.

April 19---- (Meeting ES Bldg.): Dunnings Creek Wetlands Update—This will be a presentation by Tom Dick with important updates on the wildlife of Dunnings Creek Wetlands and what we've learned over the years about this extremely successful USFWS project.

April 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. This will be a night foray and boots, flashlights, and rain gear are usually in order. Call Debbie at 814-495-5252 or email debbodenschatz@hotmail.com. When the weather is just right, she will notify us

April 22—Earth Day 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. We've already had Bald Eagles, Osprey, and Forster's Terns flying around as we ate. Dunnings Creek is a great stream for kids to net crayfish, fish, and get soaked.

Nature Photography—(throughout the year)—APAS has several nature photographers and field trips will be oriented to them and others interested in APAS sites geared to nature photography. Our sanctuaries and natural areas are a nature photographer's dream—contact Tom Dick at 814-754-5727.

May 12 —Pa. Migratory Bird Day--- This event takes place in Bedford Co. where we count all the migrants and resident birds for one day. This is a state-sponsored event to gather information on all species for conservation purposes. Join us for a fun filled day. Contact: Tom Dick or Sally Dick at 754-5727.

May 17—(Meeting) The Everglades--- Gene Wingert (if you remember, our great speaker on Vernal Ponds) will give an unusual presentation that links the Everglades to our area and beyond. Gene is one of our favorite speaker-naturalists.

May 22-- Shorebirds of Dunnings Creek Wetlands---Bittern Pool is drawn down to accommodate the potential 22 species of shorebirds. Thanks to Chris Payne's blind we can stay dry during rainy days while observing. Shorebirds travel thousands of miles from the tropics to their arctic breeding grounds and may stop over for a short stay to rest and feed. Call Tom Dick (814-754-5727) to make arrangements.

Mid-June to July ---Moths-- Join Dennis McNair on these unique outings. In previous seasons this outing produced large varieties of beautiful moths including the large Luna Moths. Weather is a big issue so Dennis picks the right night and calls up those who signed up. Previous locations have been at the hawk watch and Hidden Acres Farm. Call Dennis at 814-255-4088 for details and proposed times.

May to September: Birds, Dragonflies, Damselflies, Butterflies and plants of Dunnings Creek Wetlands --- If you wish to accompany Tom Dick on these weekly forays please call 814-754-5727 to get on the list of people we will call. You will be notified usually a day or two ahead. During most occasions we will also be looking at other species, specifically birds and flowers. The information from these outings makes its way into the Pennsylvania Society of Ornithology journal entitled [Pennsylvania Birds](#).

June TBA kayaking--- There can be kayak/ canoe trips to local lakes and dams and possibly a river trip. Kayaking is a good way to get close to aquatic nature and many of our kayakers are good naturalists. In the past we've inspected old beaver dams, shoreline botany, observed Black-crowned Night Herons and spawning carp, observed large colonies of encrusting bryozoans on submerged logs and many other aspects of nature that only be seen by a canoe or kayak. Contact Tom Dick (754-5727) or Jack Julian at 814-242-5131 for details.

July 1- Bog Outings on Shaffer Mt.---In this outing we will be looking at several sphagnum bogs with their associated carnivorous plants, dragonflies and birds. We will also discuss when and how the bogs may have developed. See interesting dragonflies such as Ski-tipped Emeralds and Hudsonian Whiteface. If time permits we will visit some of the string bogs lining creeks. Call Tom Dick for details at 814-754-5727

July 8- North American Butterfly Count: As most of you know our count is one of the highest counts in the Northeast. The count circle includes the high Allegheny Plateau and the hill and valley region of Bedford County. Contact: Tom or Sally Dick at (814)-754-5727. This is a great outing to learn about butterflies and it includes a potluck picnic.

August 5 - Audubon Picnic at Hidden Acres Farm – This outing is great for both children and adults. We collect snakes, fish, butterflies, and other insects only to be released unharmed later. There will also be fund raising events, book sales, great food, camaraderie and, hopefully, a beautiful day. This is our most attended event of the year and all are welcome. Bring a Covered Dish. Contact Sally Dick at 814-7545727

August 15 to December 20 -----Fall Hawk Watch----4000 visitors yearly!!!!
The view from the hawk watch is one of the best scenic views in the state and it is totally accessible. No climbing over rocks, just park and look.