

# Summer 2017 Newsletter - Web Version

## Chickadee Chatter

electronic contacts:

website: [www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org](http://www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org)

twitter: APAS audubon@apasnews

contact APAS: [skylarkflex@gmail.com](mailto:skylarkflex@gmail.com)

Facebook: Allegheny Front Hawk Watch

Latest count data: [www.hawkcount.org](http://www.hawkcount.org)

Editor: Brian M. Wargo

Contact the president of the APAS at: [brianwargo@gmail.com](mailto:brianwargo@gmail.com)

All photos are taken by Brian M. Wargo unless otherwise specified.

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The Newsletter of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society

## *From the President*

As another fall season approaches, the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch again becomes the central meeting spot for the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society (APAS), and for good reason. This beautiful site is slowly becoming legendary! Allegheny Front is mentioned around the nation, on the internet, and in birding circles. Its record counts, its almost famous veteran counters, its longevity, its productivity, and its stability make it a mecca to every naturalist.

This season will introduce new events at the site. The Junior Hawkwatcher Program is now available, the first of its kind. Other hawkwatches will be following our lead. It is my hope that we not only attract young members, but also their parents. In addition, we will be holding the APAS annual meeting at the hawk site. This may encourage members, who might not otherwise attend a meeting, to participate. To encourage them, the meeting is on the same day as the annual picnic.

We are also bringing back presentations to the APAS. They, too, will be at the hawkwatch. Saturday evenings at dusk will be our target. To help communicate dates and times, our electronic messaging will be vital. Therefore, the website has been revamped and updated. If you have not visited the site lately, please do so.

While the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society numbers remain strong, the level of involvement, by active members, is decreasing. This is happening to other naturalist clubs across the nation. The advent of our own personal servant (smart phone) is a prime suspect. These phones are so powerful and addicting that they seem to be changing how society functions. Instead of meeting with others physically, it is now done electronically. The same goes for nature. Watching the great outdoors, as opposed to getting out into them, seems to count as being a nature lover.

I urge all of you to resist this temptation. Get out, explore, and learn through engagement. Most of all, interact with our older members, who are wise, and pioneered our current activities. I promise you, what they have to offer cannot be found on your phone.

*Brian M. Wargo*

# *From the Compiler – Spring 2017*

*by Bob Stewart*

Our hawk counters took advantage of unusually mild winter and began the spring watch on February 18, 2017, resulting in ten days of coverage in late February. This is a new February record, with 140 total raptors. February monthly records for six species were also set, including records for Red-Tailed Hawk, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, and American Kestrel. The 22 migrant Golden Eagles fell short of the 24 counted in February of 2000.



The site was manned for 377.5 hours this spring, giving a total migrant raptor count 1324. That is an average of 3.51 raptors per hour. Both the number of raptors and raptors per hour are the highest values in the past five years.

Bald Eagles numbers continued their seeming “annual climb.” This year’s record season count of 44 was helped with February’s record number of 10 Bald Eagles. This surpassed the previous February monthly record of three in 2016. Additionally, April’s record of 24 surpassed the previous mark of 14 in April 2009.

The Golden Eagle flight continued through April, with 30 Golden Eagles migrated over the site that month. Fifteen of the birds were counted in the last week of the month. A few other memorable days are given below:

On March 13, 2017, Debbie Bodenschatz was counting for the day in below freezing temperatures, with a strong South-southeast and Southeast wind. The sky was cloudy with haze. Debbie endured the cold and was rewarded with a flight that produced 15 Golden Eagles. One Golden Eagle went into a stoop! Other notable species that day included Turkey Vulture, Northern Harrier, Red-shoulder Hawk, and others.

The next day brought a late season winter storm with a large punch, accumulating many inches of snow. Poor weather continued for the next week, with more snow and winds, resulting in drifting snow. The count was suspended, only able to resume on March 21, 2017.

Counter Ed Gowarty reported to the watch on April 27, 2017. It was a cool day with dense fog covering the site. The fog lifted at 11:00 a.m. revealing a heavy cloud deck with reduced visibility of 4 -15 kilometers. But, the wind was from the east at 10 mph. This gave a record one-day Osprey flight of 82 birds.

The previous record of 67 Osprey was recorded on April 30, 2012. Other species noted that day included 9 Golden Eagles, 9 Bald Eagles, 2 Peregrine Falcons, 35 Broad-winged Hawks, and 18 Red-tailed Hawks. In all, 195 raptors were recorded on this day. A 5:00 p.m. thunderstorm terminated the count.



Tom Dick and Bob Stewart counting hawks this spring.

I [Bob Stewart] would like to express my gratitude for each of our counters who contributed to another successful spring count. These include Deb Bodenschatz, Jim Rocco, Rosemary McGlynn, Ed Gowarty, Tom Dick, Brian Wargo, and Bob Stewart.

## *Spring Break at the Beach – Fort Smallwood*

For spring break this year, we decided to visit one of the most productive spring hawk sites on the East coast, Fort Smallwood Park in Pasadena, Maryland. The hawkwatch is right on the water. This was great for the kids, who would rather play than scan the skies. For those that have never hawkwatched from the beach, it is different from the mountainous terrain of the Allegheny Front. Raptors can be seen far out, with plenty of time to get on them before they pass.

At the helm was Sue Ricciardi, who was the official counter of the day. Sue is an excellent hawkwatcher and it is a joy to watch her work. Hal Wierenga, the sites founder, stopped by to help spot birds. Bob Rineer was also counting as well as a few other regulars (Chris Reed, Dan Walker, and Lynn Davidson).



Brian M. Wargo and Hal Wierenga at Fort Smallwood Park Hawkwatch.

The flow of birds is usually pretty good at the site, making for a quick day. The views are also awesome, as can be seen in the picture (below) of this Osprey that was hovering right above us. The days total was 107 migrating raptors, with 63 of them being Turkey Vultures. The next day they had a total of 379 raptors.

Fort Smallwood is a great hawkwatch that has turtles, waterfowl, fish, and a beautiful view. Consider taking a trip next spring—we might see you there!



An Osprey hovers about the water of Fort Smallwood.

## *Golden Eagle Statue Gets Lots of Love*

The raising of the Golden Eagle statue at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch is the unofficial kickoff to the fall hawkwatching season. The sculpture was designed and carved in 2003 by Charles Voytko, who continues to maintain it. Each year, he fills in cracks, restrains it if needed, and brushes the base.



Charles Voytko gives his work of art some tender loving care.

As Charlie was working, I asked if he wanted to say anything about his work of art.

We chose the Golden Eagle because it represents the significant flyway migration here. For this particular piece, we wanted to give a sense of place, when you first enter, and again when leaving. It gives a site memory.

I used red spruce for this particular item. I had a nice log for it and the red spruce weathers nicely. Other sculptures I've done were made of poplar. It carves easy but also rots easy. That is why I did not use it here.

I make a small model, called Marquette before carving with the chain saw...it [the eagle] was carved oversize for more impact in the panoramic outdoor setting of the entrance area. When I sculpt, I try to capture the gestures of the bird from real life before I sculpt it. So, I looked at the birds for my inspiration.

The original design [shown below] had the eagle soaring, but this would be vulnerable to breakage and radial cracking. Tom Dick said he liked the perching statue, and we went with that.



The original design of the Golden Eagle statue.

I asked Charlie how long the statue could last. He stated that we have been doing a good job by keeping it inside when the season is over. He added that as long as it is maintained well, it will last for a long time.



## *Allegheny Front Hawk Watch Receives National Attention with Raptorthon*

Raptorthon is a fundraising endeavor that helps shine light on hawkwatching, by counting every migrating raptor a 24-hour period. Sponsored by Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA), the money raised is split between the host's site and HMANA.

The Allegheny Front Hawk Watch's team, called Dr. Wargo and the Eaglets, was selected as the Featured Raptorthoners by HMANA, and was prominently displayed on their web site.



AFHW Raptorthon team: Breanna Leasure, Kayla Carpenter, Brianna McKee, Peyton Zankel, and Brian M. Wargo

The count began Friday afternoon on April 14, 2017, where the Eaglets (Breanna Leasure, Kayla Carpenter, Brianna McKee, and Peyton Zankel) met with some of our veteran hawkwatchers, including Ed Gowarty and Tom Dick. The team caught the tail end of the day's flight.

That evening, the team camped at Shawnee State Park, where the Eaglets witnessed something none of them had witnessed before—an Osprey catching a fish and a Bald Eagle swooping in to steal it.

The weather forecast for Saturday was dim and expectations were low. Thankfully, the weather unexpectedly changed to a warm, partly sunny day with east winds. This helped the group count 90 total raptors, with a wonderful variety of species including a Golden Eagle, a Bald Eagle, and an Osprey. It was a fantastic 24-hours!

The total money raised was \$507.75. Special thanks to Bob Stewart, Jeanine Ging, and Dave Poder for their participation and support.



Raptorthon support staff (Bob Stewart, Jeanine Ging, and Dave Poder).

# *Summer Picnic 2017*

*By Bob Stewart*

A picnic as held at the hawk watch on Sunday, June 25, 2017. Approximately twenty people attended on a beautiful summer day. Members brought a box lunch and an item to share. Everyone enjoyed each other's company.

One surprise visitor brought much excitement. A flying squirrel peeked out of the Blue Bird box immediately behind the picnic table. The squirrel never came out to enjoy our picnic with us.



A Flying Squirrel took up residence in one of the Blue Bird boxes.

Photo by Rosemary McGlynn

# *Butterfly Count Turns Sweet 17*

*By Sally Dick*

Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society held its 17th Fourth of July North American Butterfly Association butterfly count on July 9, 2017. (Note: This was our 18th year of counting.)

Twelve enthusiasts enjoyed a day chasing, counting, and identifying butterflies. After a week of rain, the butterfly counters enjoyed a sunny day.

Throughout the years, 71 different species have been identified. The total this year was 46 species. This is not unusual, but the total number of individuals was much less than on previous counts. Over the past several years, heavy, spring rains seem to be keeping the populations down.

Regardless, it was a wonderful day, ending with a potluck dinner. Stories were shared and new memories made. We invite everyone to join us next year in July.

Thanks to our participants: Rosemary McGlynn, Tom and Janet Kuehl, Walt and Dana Shaffer, Sally and Tom Dick, Kim Moore, Bill and Wendy Zamaitis, and Curt Lehman and daughter Annie.



Variegated Fritillary taken on Shaffer Mountain Road

Photo by Tom Kuehl

## *Kittatinny Roundtable*

On July 24, 2017, hawkwatchers from Pennsylvania and the surrounding states met at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary's Education Center for a day of hawkwatching seminars. Several board members of the Hawk Migration Association of North America presented information concerning new initiatives.



An eagle attempting to reach Theo at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary.

The most exciting was presented by Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society's own, Brian M. Wargo—the unveiling of the Junior Hawkwatcher Program. Wargo, who developed the program, took the participants through the rationale of the program, its implementation, and the expected outcome. Feedback was positive and other hawk

watches hope to mimic Allegheny Front Hawk Watch with their own site specific Junior Hawkwatcher Program.

In addition to the Junior Hawkwatcher Program, the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch was given its own section for the spring count of 2017. This is because Allegheny Front nearly stands alone in terms of hours and bird numbers in spring. Only Hawk Mountain Hawk Watch in Kempton, PA and Fort Smallwood in Maryland had data to share.

An afternoon session was held to discuss fall migration numbers. Eight other hawk sites offered numbers, including Waggoner's Gap, Little Gap, Rose Tree Park, and Jack's Mountain. This open discourse concerning migration numbers is a staple of the meeting. It is enjoyable to hear some of the best hawkwatchers in the Eastern Flyway share their theories concerning high and low counts.

The Kittatinny Roundtable is open to members of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society. Consider joining us next year when will again be representing as one of the best hawk watches in North America.



HMANA board members visit the hawkwatch at Hawk Mountain. From left to right: Dr. Laurie Goodrich (Director of Long-term Monitoring), Meadow Ging-Wargo, Julie Brown, Brian M. Wargo, Theo Ging-Wargo, Jane Ferreyra (HMANA's new executive director), and Carolyn Hoffman.

# Hawk Eyes Back on November 23, 1997

Hawk Eyes ran in the Sunday edition of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. The article, written by Vicki Rock, documented a group of hawkwatchers (she spelled it the traditional way - hawk watchers) as they stood on the edge of the hillside of the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch.

*"Sometimes you only see four to eight hawks all day.  
Other days you'll see thousands."*



Tony Tye/Post-Gazette

Dean Jobe of Johnstown, left, and Tony Barle of Finleyville watch for raptors on Shaffer Mountain in Somerset County. They are part of a group that keeps track of the fall migration of birds.

## HAWK EYES

By Vicki Rock

Tom Dick points to a line of trees from his vantage point on top of Shaffer Mountain in northern Somerset County.

"When the wind blows, it hits the mountain," he says. "Hawks glide on the wind just over those trees. They're too big to flap their wings constantly."

Dick is chairman of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society's annual hawk watch. He and other volunteers stake out the mountain in the spring and fall, searching the sky for the 16 types of hawks that migrate over the northern Somerset County mountain range.

On a 15-degree morning last week, a flock of large crows — "something out of Edgar Allen Poe," Dick joked — were the

only birds visible overhead. Then a majestic steel-gray hawk about two feet in length skimmed the treetops. It turned its head and appeared to be looking straight at the watchers.

It was a Northern goshawk, an unusual sight and "of special concern" because its numbers are declining, Dick said. The trip to the snow-covered mountain top had become worthwhile.

"We may now consider ourselves privileged to be freezing on top of the mountain," Dick said. "The major reason we count hawks is that the species are in a decline and we don't know why. Raptors are barometers of the health of the environment. We can't say something — like DDT — just affects birds. It can harm humans,

too."

There are 500 members of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society, and 17 regularly volunteer to spend hours on the mountain counting hawks. Among the watchers are doctors, a dentist, steel workers, teachers, housewives and an FBI agent. Some of the volunteers are from the Pittsburgh area and may be on duty alone or in small groups. The hawk watch has been a tradition since the local Audubon society was formed in 1986.

Che and Marian Mincone of Elizabeth Township have been driving to Somerset County every Tuesday from September

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The weather was cold, with snow on the ground. Nevertheless, when reading the quotes from Tom Dick, Jeff Payne, Chi and Marian Mincone, and Chuck Tague, you could feel the excitement.

Dean Jobe and Tony Barie made the front picture of the article. Surprisingly, everything looks nearly the same, except for a few trees that were cut and laying on the ground that have since disintegrated.

PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE ■ SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 1997

**STATE / REGION**



The picnic table and fire pit look the same today as 20 years ago.

Hawkwatchers today carry on the legacy that was started back in 1986. Allegheny Front Hawk Watch today stands as one of America's great hawkwatches.

Hopefully, in 2036, we will look back at the October 1, 2016 article written by the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette entitled, Rapt for Raptors (2016) with the same nostalgia.

A copy of Hawk Eyes is at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch.



## *New on the Web*

### *Hawkwatching is now on Wikipedia*

The term hawkwatching is now on Wikipedia. Earlier this spring, Brian M. Wargo took the time to get the term entered, uploaded, and modified. Since then, others have been able to add to this page.

Prominently displayed is the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch. The goal is to shine light on the hawkwatching endeavor. Hopefully, others will join in and add relevant information about hawkwatching and other hawk sites.

If you would like to modify something on Wikipedia, but are not a comfortable doing so, send a request to me at [brianwargo@gmail.com](mailto:brianwargo@gmail.com).

### *Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society Website Updated*

The Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society website has been updated. Almost all of the numbers, dates, policies, links, forms, and pictures have been reviewed, corrected, updated, or changed. The overall site may look the same, but there are differences. If you find anything that is incorrect, that needs modification, or simply looks dated, please let me know. Send me an email at [brianwargo@gmail.com](mailto:brianwargo@gmail.com).

# *Membership Dues*

Membership for the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society runs from September 1 through August 31 of the following year. This year, the rates were modified to include different types of memberships, including youth (\$0), Student (\$5), Individual (\$15), Family (\$20), and an exemption for anyone in financial distress. The newest forms are on our website, under membership. A direct link is:

<http://www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org/membership-donations.php>.

Also, understand that there are two ways to become a member.

1. You can join our local chapter for only \$15.00 for an individual membership (other membership types exist). You will become a member of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society and you will receive The Chickadee Chatter newsletter. All \$15.00 of this individual membership goes directly to the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society. Please view our membership rates on our [membership application](#) on the web site.
2. You can join the National Audubon Society for \$20.00 as a new member (\$35.00 if you are renewing your membership). You will become a member of both the National Audubon Society and a member of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society. You will receive both the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society's seasonal newsletter, The Chickadee Chatter, as well as the National Audubon Society's Audubon magazine. Your dues (\$20.00 for a new membership) will go to the National Audubon Society. The Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society will receive a small percentage of the \$20.00.

In both cases, send your completed application with the appropriate dues to:

APAS Membership, c/o Bob Stewart  
257 Krings St.  
Johnstown PA, 15904

(Make checks payable to the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society.)

# *Somerset Lake to be Drawdown*

*By Dr. Jeff Payne*

Somerset Lake will be drawdown this fall at which time, a fish salvage will most likely occur. To help prevent erosion, the lake may then be partially filled. However, once work on the dam begins, the lake will be drained for an estimated two years.

Depending on the level of fill, this may be the last big opportunity for shorebirds. If grass seed is planted to prevent erosion, shorebirds will most likely not be attracted. As shorebirds make their migration from the Arctic to their southern wintering grounds, they are attracted to mudflats where they can find food to refuel. Grass is, therefore, not appealing to these birds.

The Somerset Lake Action Committee is working to provide bird habitat in the north end of the lake after the drawdown. Hopefully, long-term habitat improvements will attract shorebirds during and after the drawdown. We are working hard to create a mud habitat.

Somerset Lake has attracted 30 shorebird species since 2012 when intermittent drawdowns have occurred due to the unsafe dam.



A Northern Pintail sitting on the frozen Somerset Lake.

## *Pictures*



A Box Turtle sitting on the lane of the Hawkwatch.



The birdboxes were very busy this spring! There are three birds in the picture. Two are Tree Swallows and one is a Blue Bird.

## *Workday Pictures*



Mike Jackson, Wayne Sierer, Jim Rocco, and Ed Gowarty work to raise the owl.



A workday lunch at the hawkwatch.

## *Workday Pictures*



Gene Flament, Rosemary McGlynn, Nancy Flament, Ed Gowardy, and Jeanine Ging help clear brush.



Brian M. Wargo, Bob Stewart, Denny McGlynn, and Jack Julian set the eagle.

## *Outings and Events*

### **August 15 - December 15 - Fall Hawkwatching and Eagle Counting**

The Allegheny Front Hawk Watch provides incredible views of the migrating raptors and is one of the most important ridges for Golden Eagle. East winds are usually the best days, but you can never tell what will be flying! Always check the weather before visiting. If it is raining, the birds are not flying, so the gate will be closed.

### **August 15 - December 15 – Junior Hawkwatcher Program**

Kids of all ages can learn about hawkwatching by working through the nation's first Junior Hawk Watcher program. Participants earn an official certificate of completion, a sticker and/or a patch.



Bob Stewart swearing in four new Junior Hawkwatchers

### **September and October - Saturday Night Presentations at the Hawkwatch**

Join us each Saturday night at dusk for a presentation at the hawkwatch. Each week, the presentation title, the presenter's name, and the time of the presentation will be posted on both our twitter site and on the front page of our website under News Feed. If there is no posting, then there is no presentation, and the gate will be closed. Always check the site before coming out. Also, pack a chair and a blanket. If the weather permits, marshmallows and s'mores will be roasted over the fire.

### **Late August - Early September – Moth Lighting**

Moth Lighting is another way to appreciate biodiversity. Setups will be at Windber Recreational Park or at the Quemahoning Family Recreation Area. Past events were highly successful, but are dependent on the weather. Check the chapter website ([www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org](http://www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org)) for exact times, dates, and cancellations.

### **October 8, 2016 - Audubon Picnic at the Hawk Watch**

All APAS members are invited to this wonderful event. Bring your own drinks, a covered dish, and lawn chair or blanket, and binoculars. A great way to celebrate the fall foliage and reacquaint with fellow members.

### **October 8, 2016 - Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society Fall Meeting**

The fall meeting will coincide with the Audubon Picnic. Please arrive at 9:30 a.m. for the 10:00 a.m. meeting which will be held at the hawkwatch. If needed, the meeting will be moved indoors, depending on the weather and our need for audio/visual equipment. If you have something for the agenda, please email [brianwargo@gmail.com](mailto:brianwargo@gmail.com).

### **Oct. to Nov. - Owl Banding at the Hawk Watch**

Dave Darney, the official bander of the APAS, will be banding Saw-whet Owls on weekends this fall. Members are welcome to observe. Dress warm, bring a folding chair, and a flashlight. Enjoy your nocturnal experience! Park along Lambert Mountain Road and walk in the lane. Banding starts around 7:00 p.m. Late night helpers are particularly valuable on busy nights. Banding usually starts early in October and extends into the first part of November. Be sure to check our website and twitter feed before coming out.

### **December 17, 2016 - Christmas Bird Count**

The APAS's annual Christmas Bird Count will be here sooner than you think! Our 15-mile diameter "Johnstown-circle" extends from Somerset Lake, north to above Quemahoning Reservoir. Team members will scour one (or more) of the eight sectors, counting all the birds encountered during that day. Most sectors already have a leader, but a few sectors remain unfilled. New members can be paired with experience folks, so anyone interested is encouraged to participate. We meet after dark at a local Somerset restaurant for food and to compile the count. This event is filled with birds, comradery, and food. Contact Jeff Payne at [paynemt@gmail.com](mailto:paynemt@gmail.com) by the beginning of December if you can participate.