

OUTDOORS

Jason Snyder



A sign of the times

Nobody wants a kid to carry a gun to school. Nobody even wants a kid handling a gun out of school without the proper training.

So, you might think a program designed to teach kids the proper respect for and handling of guns would be a positive thing.

But the Johnstown Rifle and Pistol Club has drawn some criticism because its shooting range is located in the basement of a school building, and a sign on the front of the Greater Johnstown Middle School proclaims the club's presence there.

To Tom DeStefano, president of the club, the entire situation arose from an idea of political correctness.

To district Superintendent June Merryman, the sign advertising the gun club puts the wrong emphasis on what the school is all about.

Merryman requested that the club's sign come down from the front of the middle school building.

The School Board last week voted to permit the club to maintain a sign outside its range, but the size and make-up of a new sign have not yet been finalized.

"The club is a wonderful thing. I'm not against the club," Merryman said Tuesday. "I think the club serves a very needed purpose in pointing out the proper use of weapons. But I just felt that (a sign on) the front of the school building was out of place."

But isn't a school all about education? According to DeStefano, it is written in the club's lease with the school that the club must make renovations to the part of the building which the club would be housed in, and the club must also offer some educational programs to interested students.

The club has renovated its part of the basement, including erecting a half-inch thick, 550 steel bullet trap backed by a brick wall at the end of the actual shooting range.

That 550 steel is so strong that it would take an armor-piercing bullet from a cannon to rip through it.

The club has also educated the kids of the school by opening its doors to the school's Outdoor Club and other youth programs. Safety is stressed to all of the kids, and not only in the actual shooting of the gun but also with eye and ear protection.

Not only should those on the school board be thankful for this club and its efforts, but so should the community.

This club is doing them both a service and if the school district wants the club to do more, DeStefano said it will be more than happy to oblige.

The School Board should be praised for realizing that a wooden sign doesn't suggest or promote violence.

The Johnstown Rifle and Pistol Club should also be praised for its efforts in educating not only kids but the public that using a handgun, with the proper education, is a positive thing.

At a time when so much violence is associated with guns and young people, a club which is projecting a positive image of gun use should be welcomed with open arms.

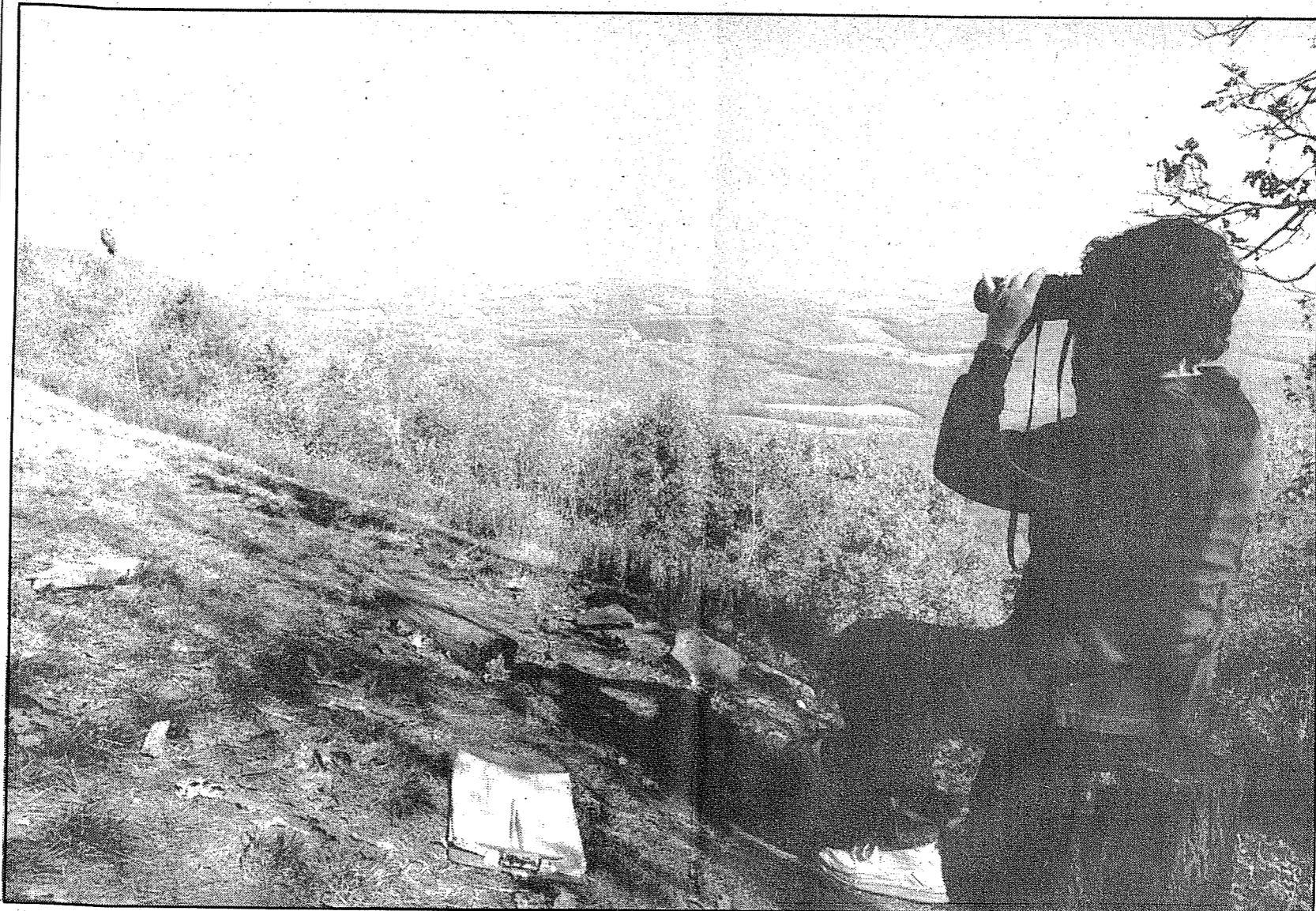
For the superintendent, the issue seems to be image, rather than function.

"A rifle and pistol club sign is not part of that school," Merryman said. "I think it should be downplayed. I would prefer to see them put up a smaller sign."

"The club members have proposed a smaller sign with the club's initials and its NRA (National Rifle Association) affiliation. That would be more appropriate."

A smaller sign is still a sign. Perhaps that compromise is the answer.

Jason Snyder is a journalism major at the University of Pitt-Johnstown and an intern with The Tribune-Democrat. Joe Gordon, the regular outdoors writer and columnist, is on vacation.



Shirley Huston of Cairnbrook looks for a hawk flying overhead in state game lands near Central City. Fourteen members of the Allegheny Plateau Chapter of the Audubon Society have been watching for migrating hawks along the Allegheny Front.

High fliers

Audubon members keeping eyes open for migrating hawks

By JASON SNYDER FOR THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT

Fall marks the time of year when hawks and other majestic birds begin their annual migration south to warmer climates. And what better place to witness this flight than 2,800 feet above sea level along the Allegheny Front.

That is exactly where 14 members of the Allegheny Plateau Chapter of the Audubon Society have been coming for the past seven years to collect data on these birds and marvel at the beautiful path they have chosen for their trek.

The purpose of the hawk watch, according to Tim Fox, president of the local Audubon Society, is to collect data for the North American Hawk Migration Association. Data collected includes trends of populations from year to year among different breeds of hawks. Problems with nesting areas can also be addressed.

"They can figure out if this is a good year for a species compared to last year. You also know which ones are in trouble with population decline," Fox said.

Sky conditions, wind velocity and the number of birds are also noted, according to Tom Dick, founder of the Allegheny Plateau chapter.

Information gathered from the watch is also sent to the Game Commission and the Federal Fish and Wildlife Service so an ongoing record can be kept and the hawks progress or decline within a certain species can be monitored.

Right now is peak migrating time for the hawks. Members of the Audubon Society, who monitor the watch seven days a week from September to November, can expect around 100 birds to pass by on a good day. However, previous years have had as many as 2,500 broad-winged hawks pass by at once. These hawks, according to Fox, gather in big congregations,

which is the reason for such high numbers. Another year saw 90 golden eagles riding the crest of the ridge.

"This is when you get the most variety. The biggest cross section of all the hawks can be seen right now," said Fox.

Other common birds that fly by the ridge are bald eagles, sparrow hawks and osprey.

The birds spend their summers in northern North America. Fall, which signifies to the hawks and eagles that it's time to leave the coldness of mid-west Canada and the northern Atlantic states and head for the warmth of northern South America and Florida.

"They don't like to go across the water so they come through the spaces between the Great Lakes," said Fox.

If they're not coming from Canada, the birds need not worry about crossing waters until the southern most part of their trip. But wherever they come from, the hawks coming through Pennsylvania eventually hit the Appalachian trail and follow it the whole way south to Georgia.

And an easterly wind makes for an ideal day for the birds to continue on their journey.

"As the wind hits the ridge, it shoots up and makes them have to work less hard," Fox said. "They follow the ridges the whole way down and just kind of cruise on that updraft."

Once they've reached the southern states, birds such as the red-shouldered hawk and the broad-winged hawk opt for Florida as their winter home while other birds fly onward to South America.

Those who continue to fly won't cross the Gulf of Mexico. Instead, they'll fly through Mexico and cross the Isthmus of Panama, avoiding any bodies of water, and finally perch in northern South America.

The time involved to complete this flight varies. One of the biggest determinants is weather.

"It all depends on fronts that come down," Dick said. "The hawks ride the leading edge of the front. They require thermals. It becomes kind of a free ride. But if there's no wind or thermals, they'll just hang around for days until better conditions prevail. It totally depends on weather conditions."

The Allegheny Chapter of the Audubon Society has been together for about 12 years and has been monitoring the hawks on this particular ridge for about seven years. The hawk-watchers used to collect their data on Tussey Mountain before Colonel George Gage realized how beneficial the Audubon Society's work was and allowed them to use his property for their watch, which lies on the part of the ridge near Central City.

"It's cut out and right on the Allegheny front so you can see very far to the east and north," Fox said. "It's been very productive there because the hawks like to ride that front. After Colonel Gage passed away, his son inherited it and kept the same open-door policy to Audubon members."

Since the land where the hawk watch is set up is private, individuals hoping to catch a glimpse of these migrating birds should contact the Audubon Society. And anyone who does can expect a vast array of Pennsylvania laid out before them.

Gage's property overlooks a checker board pattern of fields and forests. New Paris lies directly in front of the ridge while Shawnee State Park's waters can be seen looking south.

Blue Knob can be spotted to the north. Combine that with the noticeably colder air and soaring hawks and the spot becomes ideal for fall hawk watching.

Fishing picking up around the area

By JASON SNYDER FOR THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT

Now is the perfect time to take advantage of area lakes that have become less congested as the woods are becoming more crowded.

Raystown Lake is the place to be for strippers, according to Shy Beaver Pro Shop's Shawn Bernecky.

"Striper fishing is the best it has been in five years," said Bernecky. And they're being caught mostly on live bait. The strippers especially seem to be hitting live trout used as bait.

As for bass fishing, Bernecky said it is a little slow now but predicts it will pick up within the next two weeks due to drops in water temperature.

"Right now the bass are just kind of hanging around," said Bernecky. "But when the water hits the mid-50s, the shad that the bass feed on, will start to move into the coves and provide some fast and furious action for bass fishermen."

Bernecky explained that the bass will follow these shad into the coves so fishing there will prove most successful. He suggests using spinner baits to entice the bass to bite.

As for Raystown's lake trout, they, like the bass, are somewhat idle now but should start picking up in a week or two. As the water levels start getting lower, lake trout action should get better. Trolling with a downrigger is the best bet for these trout.

Heading over to Cambria County,

Brothers Sport Shop's Scott Kubat said the few people fishing in his area are catching mostly bass.

"They're catching a lot of bass right now mostly on nightcrawlers and rubber worm jigs. People aren't using too many lures, though," said Kubat.

The Ebensburg Reservoir is producing these bass. However, Ebensburg's Lake Rowena, which was stocked October 3, isn't seeing many trout fishermen.

"There are a few here and there but not many at all. There are a few diehards out there but trout fishing seems to have died down. Bass is the big thing right now," according to Kubat.

The few diehards out there, though, are using mostly nightcrawlers to land any trout. Kubat

attributes the small number of fishermen to the hunting seasons beginning and the steelhead and salmon action up north.

"A lot of people now are going up to Canada and Erie to fish for salmon and steelheads," he said.

The fish commission's southwest region manager Tom Qualters agrees with Kubat in that he has seen few fishermen as well.

Somerset Lake has seen as few as two people fishing on any given day. But Qualters suggests anyone looking for good fishing should try their luck below the breast of the dam on the Youghiogheny River.

In addition, lakes in Fayette and Westmoreland counties which were stocked with trout this fall have had anglers pulling out what Qualters called big and beautiful fish.

BRIEFLY

Proposal would reduce safety zone

In an effort to address the growing problem of urban deer herds, State Rep. Rich Kasunic (D-Fayette/Westmoreland) has introduced legislation that would reduce the hunting safety zone for archers in urban and suburban areas to 50 from 150 yards. The safety zone is the area around occupied buildings where no one except the land's resident can hunt without the resident's approval. "There are many areas in Pennsylvania that require hunting to control the deer herd and where property owners welcome hunters," said Kasunic. "However, some do not have the 150 yards of property required to allow hunting on their property. This measure is intended to address this situation."

Turkey season extended a week

The Game Commission has extended the fall turkey season by one week in several of its management areas, including the one that covers Cambria and Somerset counties. Turkey season opens Oct. 29 in most management areas. Turkey season is scheduled to end either Nov. 5 or Nov. 12, depending on the management area. However, it has been extended through Nov. 12 in areas 2-A and 2-B. Area 2-B includes part of Indiana County north and west of routes 422 and 119. The season has been extended through Nov. 19 in area 6, which includes the remainder of Indiana County, all of Cambria and Somerset counties, Westmoreland and Fayette counties east of Route 119, and Bedford and Blair counties west of Route 220.

Squirrels abundant in area counties

Game Commission officers in several area counties have reported good to excellent populations of squirrels in their districts this fall, prior to last Saturday's opening day of squirrel season. Former Cambria County wildlife conservation officer Richard Weaver reports that squirrel numbers in his southern Armstrong County district are the highest in his five years there.

Commission OKs Bismuth/tin shot

The Game Commission has given final approval to a proposal to allow small game and turkey hunters to use Bismuth/tin shot not larger than No. 4, in addition to the current options of lead and steel.

Penn State projects win approval

The Game Commission has approved \$145,000 in funding for a Penn State project that would attempt to reintroduce fishers to the state.

Waterfowl (Proposed) South Zone

Ducks: Now-Sunday and Nov. 21-Dec. 24
Regular Canada geese: Now-Monday, Nov. 19-Dec. 31, Jan. 2-19

Trout Stockings Cambria County

This week: Duman Dam, Lake Rowena.

Blair County

This week: Canoe Lake, 3,000 rainbow.

Waterfowl (Proposed) North Zone

Late squirrel, grouse: Dec. 26-Jan. 28.
Late rabbits: Dec. 26-Feb. 4.
Snowshoe hares: Dec. 26-31.
Deer damage areas: Dec. 26-Jan. 21.
Spring turkey: April 29-May 27, 1995.

Waterfowl (Proposed) West Zone

Turkey: Opens Oct. 29.
Bobwhite (Closed in 13 counties): Oct. 29-Nov. 26.
Bear: Nov. 21-23.
Buck: Nov. 28-Dec. 10.
Doe: Dec. 12-14.

Waterfowl (Proposed) East Zone

Atlantic brant: Now-Dec. 5
Snow geese: Now-Jan. 31

Fishing Seasons

Trout, salmon: Now-Dec. 31.
Walleye, muskie, pike, pickerel: Now-Dec. 31.
Bass: Now-Dec. 31.

CALENDAR

Fishing Tables

The Universal Fishing Tables list top fishing times and days in the lunar month. For best results, begin fishing one hour before and continue one hour after the times given. The week's best times are marked with an X.

	Major	Major	Minor	Minor
Today.....	X 12:20a	12:40p	5:50p	7:25a
Thursday.....	1:05a	1:25p	6:20p	8:25a
Friday.....	1:50a	2:10p	6:50p	8:25a
Saturday.....	2:35a	3:00p	7:30p	10:25a
Sunday.....	3:25a	3:45p	8:15p	11:20a

Activities
Tonight: Johnstown Sports-

men's Association meeting, 7 p.m., Menoher Heights Sportsmen's Club

Nov. 6: Chickaree Ridge Runners Snowmobile Club drag races. Information may be obtained by calling 322-1552 or 749-9931.

Nov. 8: Mountain Laurel Chapter, Trout Unlimited, meeting at 7 p.m., Hart's Sporting Center, Tire Hill. Open to the public.

Hunting Seasons
Mourning doves: Oct. 29-Nov. 26.
Virginia, sora rails: Now-Nov. 5.

Moorhens, gallinules: Now-Nov. 5.
Archery deer: Now-Nov. 12
Early squirrel, grouse: Now-Nov. 26.

Woodcock: Saturday-Nov. 5.
Common snipe: Saturday-Nov. 26.
Rabbit, pheasant: Oct. 29-Nov. 26.

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