

Contact Information:

Editor: wargo.apas@gmail.com

Website: www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org

Twitter: [audubon@apasnews](https://twitter.com/audubon@apasnews)

Contact APAS: jjulian.apas@gmail.com

Facebook: [Allegheny Front Hawk Watch](https://www.facebook.com/AlleghenyFrontHawkWatch)

Latest count data: www.hawkcount.org

Article submissions should be sent to the Editor at wargo.apas@gmail.com.

Officers

President: Brian M. Wargo

wargo.apas@gmail.com

Vice President: Bob Stewart

bob@stewart.net

Secretary: Debbie Bodenschatz

djb4apas@gmail.com

Treasurer: Jack Julian

jjulian.apas@gmail.com

Board Members

Chris Dick

Jeanine Ging

Adam Katrancha

Dave Poder

Rosemary McGlynn

Wayne Sierer

From the President

The pandemic feels like it is nearly over...it isn't...but for those who are vaccinated, it is time to come back out of our shells and integrate back into the world of others. For nearly a year-and-a-half, many of us have been trying our best to minimize our contact with others, at least physically.

Despite the isolation, some just kept going, and kept us going. Mike Jackson is one of those people. During the long spring, Mike (and his wife Laura) presented for the Allegheny Plateau Audubon...virtually. While Laura usually gets the spotlight, Mike is always there in the background. He is the one who is taking the photographs, helping to plan, doing some of the heavy lifting on our workdays, making sure everyone is where they need to be, and of course, doing much of the driving.

Mike also shows us how to be...he is a kind and gentle educator...literally...a retired schoolteacher, whose vast knowledge is nearly encyclopedic. He let us know when it was time to hide from everyone, and when it was safe to put ourselves back out there.

Thanks, Mike, for presenting to our membership during the spring and teaching us about the flora and fauna on our walk in the late spring. The picture above is emblematic of how many of us feel...happy to see Mike...happy to see this turtle...happy to be with others again...all while feeling a little trepidatious about it.

If you are vaccinated, and I hope everyone is, then it is safe for us to be together again. And there is no safer place during this pandemic than the great outdoors. I look forward to seeing you there!



Photo by BMW

Mike Jackson lets this wood turtle know it is safe to come out. He also lets us know, that if we are vaccinated, we are also safe around each other, especially outside.

Brian M. Wargo

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2021 Winter Outing

By Adam Katrancha

Once again members of the APAS and Beaverdale Sportsmen's Association interrupted the winter humdrum with a sled, ski, and snowshoe outing on February 7, 2021. With single digit temperatures forecast, the group was pleasantly surprised with an overcast sky and temperatures in the 20s. Supplemented with a light dusting of snow from the early morning hours, the steady compilation of minor accumulations over the past months provided the most bountiful snowpack in over a decade. The almost two feet of undisturbed snow, punctuated with the stately boles of the forest, dictated that the visitors to the Beaverdale Sportsmen's, perched atop Pleasantville Mountain, would have no option but to park along Skyline Drive and make the trek to the cabin part of the excursion. Once equipped, the skiers set out, led by Judy Johns breaking trail down the hill. Bob Stewart, adorned with a dapper salt and pepper rabbit fur hat and Adam Katrancha, sporting the classic red and black plaid Woolrich clothing, fondly recognized by the older generations, followed at a slower pace on snowshoes, accompanied by Theo, toting a snow tube in anticipation of the hills to come.



Photo by BMW

Adam pulls supplies down the hill while Bob snowshoes behind.



Photo by Jeanine Ging

Ed Paluch, Judy Johns, and Sandy Cline float atop the nearly two feet of snow! The skiers arrived at the camp before the snowshoers.

After a short walk on the relatively level terrain, Theo, with a few strides and a leap, took aim for the downhill ride, only to have the snow tube burrow into the soft powder. Working towards a slightly steeper grade, Theo repeated his efforts with a duplication of results. How could there be too much snow for tubing? There was, as the abundantly soft powder devoured Theo and the tube at each try. But undeterred, Theo continued his tubing attempts for the entire downhill journey. The winter parade, now thoroughly warmed from their passage along the forest road, rallied at the camp under the snow-covered hemlocks. The skiers, after a short rest decided to continue their adventure and set out to circumvent a 16-acre fenced tract, an area maintained for Cerulean warbler habitat, checking for

winter fence damage. The others ignited fires in the massive stone fireplace, the only remnant of the original 1924 rustic log framed camp building, and the smaller, yet more efficient cast iron wood stove along the opposite wall of the building. Not be defeated, Theo continued to develop the slalom on the grade directly above the camp. After numerous tries and with his father's added weight, a course was developed, and the tubing continued with increasing speed and distance.

After circling the fence and reporting no damage, the skiers returned to the camp, where the warming fires enticed a break from the more strenuous travels. Unaccustomed to idleness, Brian Wargo and Sandy Cline departed on another jaunt on cross-country skies, as they offered to inspect another portion of fence for their hosts. They returned, again reporting of an intact fence, and joined everyone in jovial discussions, as turns were taken around the warming fire. After their earned respite and some extended dawdling, the snowshoers, with boastful enthusiasm set out to hike the mile-long perimeter of the lower fenced area. After a few hundred yards, their enthusiasm waned as the difficulty intensified with the deepening snow; almost 24 inches based on the number of obscured strands of fence. Vowing to walk to the property line, where they could look down an extended length of fence for damage, they trudged past the duck ponds, which were not quite frozen due to the continuous current, as the skiers merrily passed on a parallel trail leading onto the State Gamelands.



Photo by Jeanine Ging

Theo makes his own camp in the form of a snow cave!

With the reality of the deep snow accepted and the skiers having passed,



Photo by Jeanine Ging

Brian Wargo sinks into the snow.

the snowshoers were now in a position to return to the camp with limited embarrassment for the shortcomings of their walk. They skirted the duck ponds as they ambled along the ski trail back to the camp where Theo, in everyone's absence, had applied his igloo building skills to the pile of snow adjacent to the front porch. The skiers also found their enthusiasm thwarted by the deep snow and constant need to break trail as they too soon returned to the camp.

Muscles now fatigued and snacks consumed, the smiles of the morning were now replaced with looks of satisfied exhaustion from over three hours of woodland excursions. All agreed that the trek out would provide the last of the needed exertions as gear was gathered and the camp secured. Nearing the top of the hill, Theo looked back, contemplating one last ride on the snow tube, but nearly drained of energy, decided against repeating the walk up the steepest part of the hill.

As the line of skiers and snowshoers trickled towards their vehicles, gear was stowed, and goodbyes were said as vehicles slowly departed from another successful outing in Pennsylvania's glorious winter landscape.

Postcards from Ima Crazi

By Bob Stewart

Shown here is a postcard from our Allegheny Hawk Watch friend, Ima Crazi. Ima traveled frequently and sent post cards to Che Mincone, the compiler at the time. She was a frequent visitor to the hawk watch. She signed the visitor's book but NEVER revealed her identity. Che has shared many of these postcards and I am now sharing them with you.

Let us know if you remember these postcards!



APAS Board Member Wins National Award

By Brian M. Wargo

Jeanine Ging, ASAP board member, was nominated as the Earth Kind Harmony Hero for the month of May. This nomination is for her eco-education work with Monarch butterflies. One educator is nominated every month and in January the grand prize winner will receive a trip for four to the Kingdom of the Monarchs in Mexico to witness the mass migration. To see Jeanine's nomination video on YouTube, go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uz5-Iwv9kUM&t=2s>

The public is encouraged to witness and participate in the tagging of Monarch butterflies at Allegheny Front Hawk Watch this August and September on Saturdays. That is Jeanine's day for tagging.



Selfie by Jeanine Ging

Monarch Migration Station

By Jeanine Ging

With the reopening of Allegheny Front Hawk Watch, we will also be continuing our Monarch tagging station. Allegheny Front Hawk Watch has gained the status of a certified Monarch waystation. Throughout August and September, we will be netting and tagging Monarchs as they migrate south to Mexico alongside our raptors. Small, numbered tags will be placed on the Monarchs wings to help identify them if they are recaptured during their migration. Data such as weight, wing length, sex and wing conditions are collected. This year, cell samples from the abdomen will also be taken and analyzed for the Oe Parasite under a microscope. (An accessible research paper on Oe is listed on our website under the Monarch Migration Station tab.) Come visit on Saturdays and help collect Monarchs for the tagging station and see how you can become a citizen scientist and make a difference with Monarchs. Another way you can help Monarchs is to plant milkweed, or if you have milkweed, do not treat it with pesticides, for habitat loss is one of the largest contributing factors to the decline of our Monarchs. There are many species whose status is becoming threatened or endangered. Most of us will never come face to face with a Polar Bear or be able to feed a Panda bamboo, but we can tag and monitor Monarchs and make a real difference to this creature.



APAS Members Help with Grassland Survey

By Wayne Sierer

Several members of APAS participated in grassland birds transect surveying in Gallitzin State Forest (GSF) on June 10, 2020 and June 11, 2020. They were part of a group of birders of varying degrees of skill that assisted DCNR Forestry biologist Aura Stauffer in the surveys. It was Aura who initiated managing a reclaimed strip mine area in the Babcock Division of the GSF for grassland bird species.



Board Members Adam Katrancha (left) and Wayne Sierer (right) are accompanied by longtime member and active birder Janet Kuehl as they survey the Gallitzin State Forest.

The grassland area, between PA 56 and Dunlo near Pot Ridge, had been strip mined in the 1960s. Following its reclamation, the tract has become home to a multitude of species of grassland birds including a large number of sparrows – among them Henslow’s, Grasshopper, Savannah and Vesper Sparrows along with the more common species. Sharp-eyed (and eared!) observers will also note numerous other less common species like Horned Larks and Bobolinks. Also using the tract are at least two Pennsylvania Species of Special Concern – the Northern Harrier and the Upland Sandpiper. Other common species of the grasses and scrub were numerous, like Brown Thrashers, Eastern Meadowlarks, Indigo Buntings and Chestnut-sided Warblers. Canada Warblers and Sora have also been noted.

APAS members helping with the surveys were Adam Katrancha, Dave Poder, Tom & Janet Kuehl, Dr. Jeff Payne, Sandy Kline, Kim Van Fleet and Wayne Sierer. Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) Biologist Tammy Colt joined in with three PGC interns. Dr. Christine Dahlin of UPJ, who has presented before at APAS, also participated.

Teams used GPS units to guide them along straight line transects running across the Babcock grasslands, counting birds along the way. Each transect ran between 400 and 900 meters in length. At the ends of transects, members were treated to a multitude of sounds from woodland birds – Scarlet Tanagers, Ovenbirds and both Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoos.

The data gathered is used to guide DCNR Forestry in managing the area in a grassland state. Vegetation removal, new plantings and prescribed burns are all techniques which have or can be used to keep the area in upland grass habitat.



Photo by Dave Poder

This Savannah Sparrow was a difficult shot due to the distance.



These are the actual GPS tracks of the groups’ transects. They run parallel, sampling transects 400-800 m long and about 250 m apart to prevent double counting, meaning birds seen or heard on transect B3 (the first vertical red line) would not be seen or heard on B2 (left of the first vertical red line) or on B4 (the next vertical red line to the right).

2020 Allegheny Front Hawk Watch Spring Count

By Bob Stewart

The watch commenced on February 24, 2020 and continued through May 2, 2020. The total migrant count was 795, with 324.5 hours of observation. This calculates to 2.45 raptors per hour. Note: In the last eight years there were only three years with 1,000 or more migrants.

There was no season record high count, but there was one season record low count of 109 Broad-winged Hawks. There were 22 days of west winds in April and four days of no count due to poor weather, possibly contributing to the low numbers. Red-tailed Hawks (247) and Red-shouldered Hawks (37) rebounded well over the previous spring. No Rough-legged Hawks were observed this year and only one has been observed in the last nine years.

The accipter numbers continued their decline from last spring. Both the Sharp-shinned Hawk count of 28 and the Cooper's Hawk count of 21 were a record low since the year 2000. There were 15 American Kestrel and only two Merlins. No Peregrine Falcons were seen this spring. Golden Eagles (101) and Bald Eagles (35) continued to show strong numbers. The Osprey count of 22 was low.

Rosemary McGlynn recorded the two highest day counts of Golden Eagles. She noted 24 and 25 respectively on March 10 and March 17. Wind was out of the SSE and SE on those days with moderate velocity.

Due to Covid-19 precautions the site was closed to visitors. The counters for the spring included: Debbie Bodenschatz, Erica Bowman, Ed Gowarty, Sr., Rosemary McGlynn, Dave Poder, Jim Rocco, Bob Stewart, and Brian Wargo.



Photo by Dave Poder

© David Poder

A Sharp-shinned Hawk circles before flying north.

Two Virtual APAS Meetings

By Brian M. Wargo

Zoom meetings are now ubiquitous and the APAS has jumped on board. This winter, Jason Beale presented on Wildlife Corridors, which stimulated a prolonged discussion on this important topic.

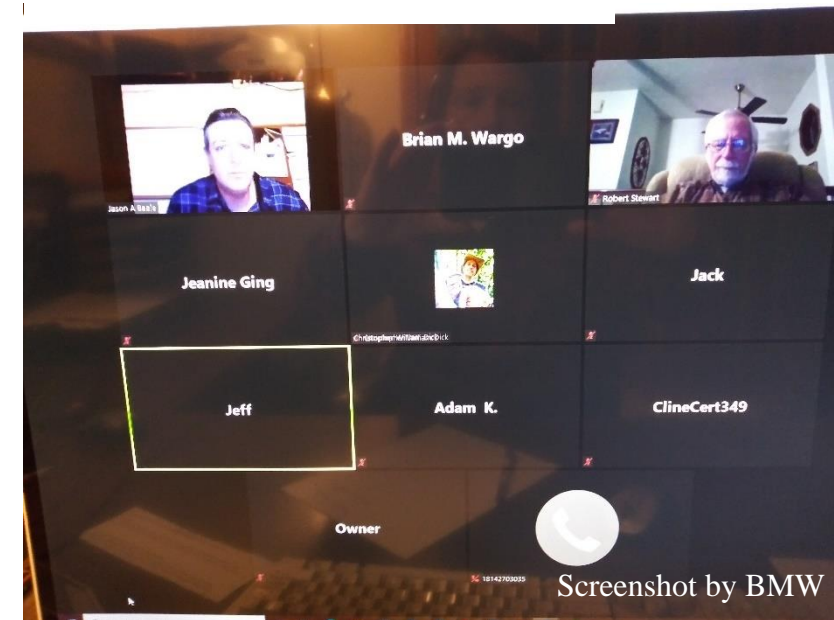
For those who missed it, Jason is an excellent speaker and educator, who balanced his many roles as part of the various organizations that he represents. He also encouraged questions from the viewers and paused several times during his slides to take questions.

Overall, it was an interactive, informative, and wonderful presentation. Special thanks to Chris Dick, board member of the APAS, who ensured the zoom session went on without a hitch!

Here is what Jason Beale looks like in person (right) and virtually before the start of the virtual program (below).



Photo courtesy of Jason Beale



The second presentation was delivered by Laura Jackson (pictured wearing a visor and muck boots in the upcoming photos), entitled, "Saving Monarchs, One Yard at a Time." This presentation documented the migration of the Monarchs and the Jacksons (Mike is her husband) down to Mexico. There they witnessed the culmination of the wondrous monarch journey.

As usual, Laura's depth and breadth of environmental knowledge made for an invigorating session, with many members feeling envious that they could not be with the Jacksons on their journey.

If you missed Laura's presentation, don't worry, she is involved with so many organizations and gives so many presentations that another will surely pop up soon enough. The APAS is lucky to have her as a member and an advisor.

Pennsylvania Game Commission Shares Habitat Initiatives with Audubon/Sportsmen's Group

By Adam Katrancha

On an early June morning members of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society (APAS) and Beaverdale Sportsmen's Association (BSA) rose before the sun, as hunters do, to take advantage of wildlife's active early-morning hours. Arriving from all directions, and some from distant counties, this diverse group of men and women rendezvoused at State Game Lands 026 in northern Bedford County along the Allegheny Front, where they met Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) Land Manager Jonathan Zuck.



Photo by BMW

Jonathan Zuck of the Pennsylvania Game Commission (far left) gives introductory remarks at the prescribed fire zone.

This outing, the most recent between the collaborating organizations, gathered on SGL 026 near the end of the annual songbird migration to explore an area where a prescribed fire was conducted the previous year in support of oak regeneration management practices. After brief introductions in the parking area, Mr. Zuck provided an overview of management practices used to enhance wildlife habitat in the region. Mr. Zuck explained that a prescribed fire, conducted several years after a shelterwood harvest, will kill thin-barked, early successional woody vegetation such as black birch and striped maple, while allowing more desirable trees, especially the target oaks to resprout and thrive without the competition. He also added that the prescribed fire adds nutrients to the soil and enhances the herbaceous

layer of the forest. After this short orientation, the guests readied their gear in preparation of their quest for the avian residents. Armed with binoculars, cameras, and a few with specialized audio enhancing equipment, these experienced and amateur ornithologists quietly walked along the forest road paralleling the prescribed fire project area, which was still surrounded with deer exclusionary fence to help ensure the maturation of the tender sprouts. With the intensity of champion dogs, the birders looked and listened, quietly consulting one-another on the songs and flashes of colors flitting through the woodlot.



Photo by Adam Katrancha

Resprouting Oak trees after the prescribed burn.

After an hour of scrutiny under the rising sun, and with a cache of birds in their mental game bags, the group rallied at their vehicles as the caravan then followed Mr. Zuck along the normally gated road deeper into the Game Lands to the area locally known as The Forks, which is recognized as the headwaters of the South Fork of the Conemaugh River. Once again on foot, the party followed the meandering forest road searching for the avian quarry, but also indulging in the colors and textures of the other flora and fauna along the way. Ms. Heidi Mullendore, Canoe Creek State Park Naturalist provided an update on Brood X cicadas now emerging in the valley below. Mary Paoli, a park volunteer and guest from Blair County, shared her knowledge on the wild hyacinth and choke cherry now in bloom.



Photo by BMW

Heidi Mullendore (left), Canoe Creek State Park Naturalist, speaks about the cicadas.

With tiring legs and increasing perspiration, thoughts of retreat began to emerge when Mike Jackson and Brian Wargo, leading the entourage, halted progress due to a blockage of the road. As the rest of the group gathered on the leaders, they were all pleasantly surprised to see that a wood turtle chose to reward them with its quiet companionship at the apex of the walk. While somewhat camera shy, the turtle retreated within its carapace as Mike Jackson shared his knowledge of the turtle, its lifestyle and habitat. After the minor interruption, the turtle was placed back on the road, pointed in his original direction, and allowed to go about his turtling business, while the bipedal visitors reversed direction and now pointed back towards the parked vehicles.

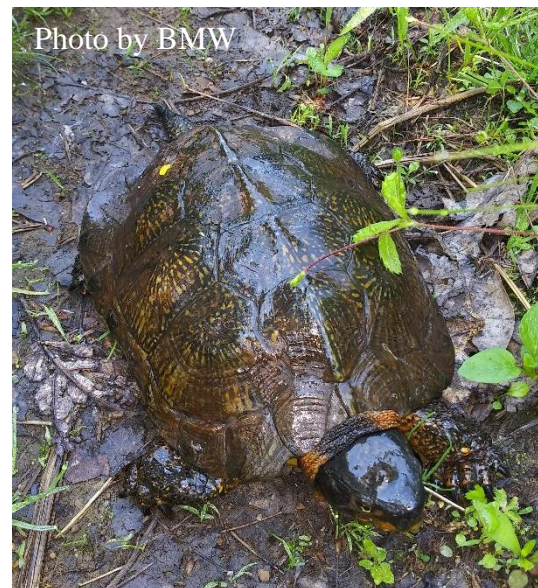
Ever mindful of ecosystem health, several of the visitors noticed small patches of Japanese Knotweed along the road and near the parked vehicles. Recognizing the quick spreading invasive plant as unwanted, Adam Katrancha, always seemingly equipped with forestry accouterments, and Mr. Zuck provided a dose of herbicide to stem the spread of this herbaceous bane while the patches are still manageable in size.

With Mr. Zuck's presence now required at another event, the less hurried of the group drove the short distance back to the Beaverdale Sportsmen's property where the back porch of the clubhouse, overlooking the conifer-encircled pond, provided the idyllic setting on which to enjoy lunch. With restless feet and inquisitive minds, individuals and small groups roamed about with reports of amorous toads, hungry hummingbirds and pools teeming with tadpoles and newts. As the remaining wanderers returned, gear was stowed and the last of the visitors began their journeys back to their early morning points of origin.

APAS and BSA sincerely thank Mr. Zuck, Ms. Mullendore and their respective agencies for sharing their knowledge and resources on another collaborative outing between the like-minded outdoor enthusiasts and organizations.



Mike Jackson (right) explains how to sex wood turtles (notch in the carapace) as Bill Cline (left) and Brian Wargo (center) look on.



Topside of the male Wood Turtle.

Passing of Dick Byers

By Brian M. Wargo

Dick Byers was a regular counter for the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch, from 1998-2005, well before my time. He is listed as a qualified observer for the first time on October 18, 1997, and the last time on September 17, 2017. This last date is when I began to correspond with him. Dick liked the graphs I made from data, and I was always grateful for his invitations to the APAS from the Westmoreland Bird & Nature Club. We also admired each other's writing. He was intrigued about my writing on artificial intelligence and its relation to counting birds and birds themselves. He wrote me, "A hawk is probably self-aware, but is it also conscious and knows what it is doing? There we all hesitate. I doubt I live long enough to find out the difference." Dick was clearly a contemplative guy and he will surely be missed.

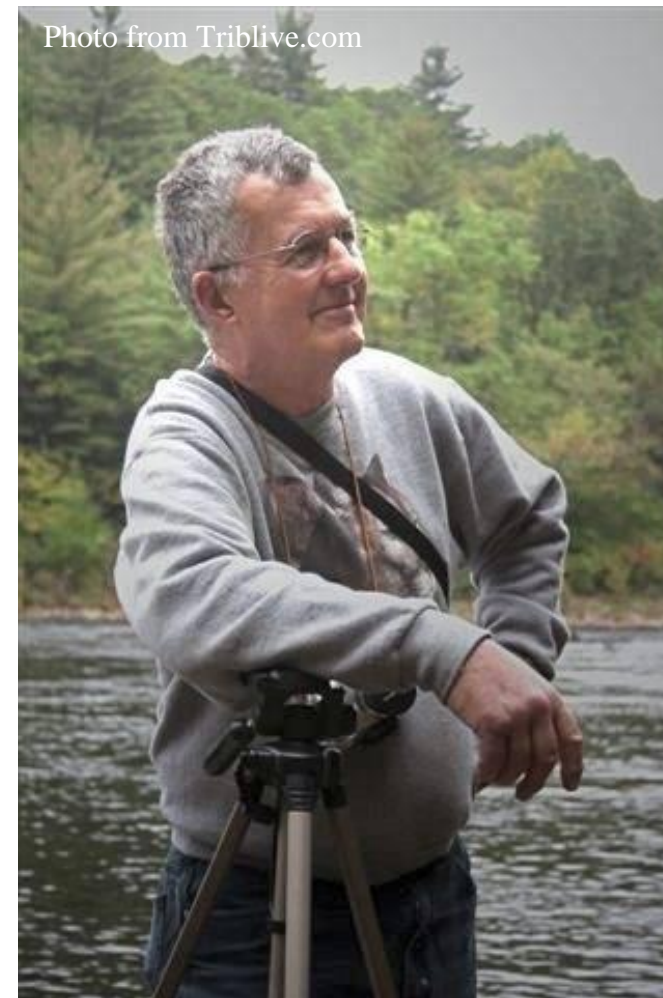
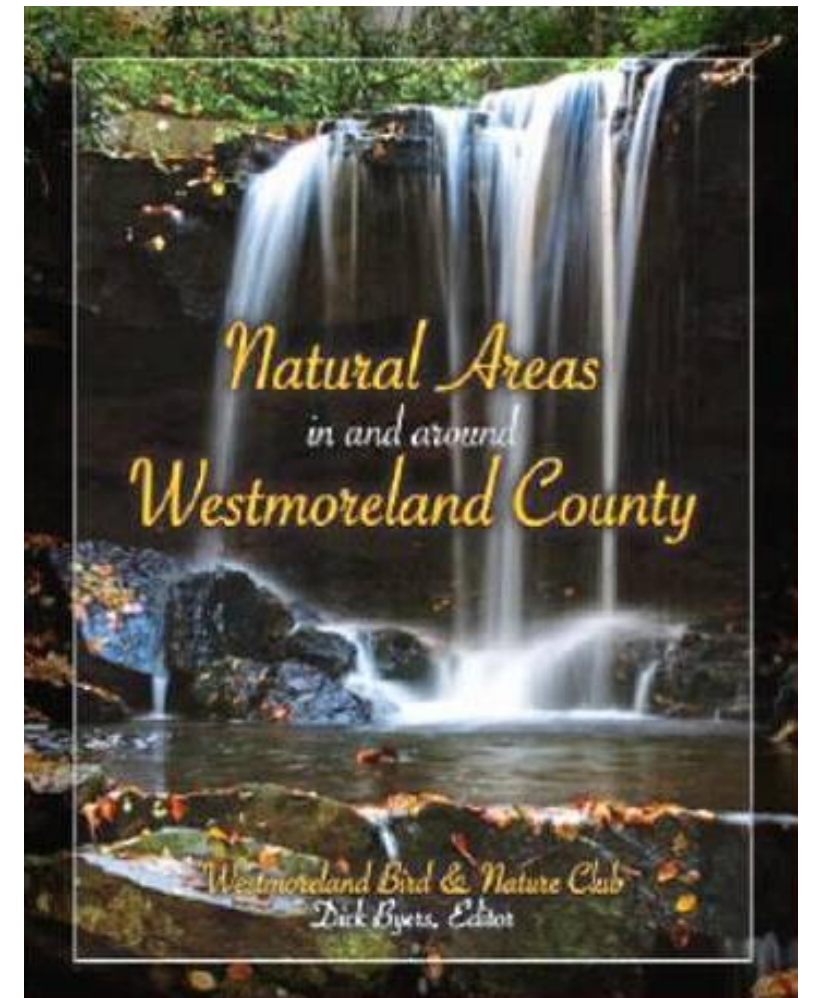


Photo from Triblive.com



Dick Byers was a naturalist and a regular at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch. His book is a testament to his love of nature.

This obituary is from Hartman-Graziano Funeral Home Inc.:

Charles Richard "Dick" Byers, 83, of Stahlstown, formerly of Latrobe, passed away Wednesday, June 16, 2021 in Excelsa Health Latrobe Hospital. He was born December 21, 1937 in Latrobe, a son of the late Charles V. and Ruth (Stewart) Byers.

HMANA Virtual Conference

By Brian M. Wargo

The Allegheny Front Hawk Watch is one of the premiere hawk watches in North America and we are inextricably linked to the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA). Since 1974, HMANA has hosted a conference every three-to-four years and this year's conference will be online. Speakers include:

| | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Dr. Kenneth D. Meyer | Dr. David Brinker | Dr. Dave Oleyar | Dr. Alejandro Onrubia |
| Matias Juhant | Ryan Phillips | Dr. Nat Seavy | Dr. Brooke Bateman |
| Dr. Jean-Francois Therrien | Neil Paprocki | Dr. Laurie Goodrich | David Barber |
| Dr. Ben Skipper | Dr. Carol McIntyre | | |



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This is a great opportunity to hear renowned speakers talk about migration. Each day will have themed daily topics covering a variety of species. You can sign-up for a single session, a day, or the entire conference. The Kittatinny Roundtable will also be part of the conference this year. Take advantage of this virtual conference that relieves you from having to pay for travel and lodging costs.

Correction

By Brian M. Wargo

In the article "The History of the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch" by Jim Rocco, there was a small error caught by one of our readers, Jack Solomon, who wrote,

Jim Rocco lists people who were instrumental in establishing the hawk watch and "have passed on," and he includes "Chuck and Joanie Tague." Chuck, indeed passed away 5 years ago, but I can assure you Joan is alive and well in Florida. <https://www.ormondbeachobserver.com/article/a-big-scamper-hunt-ormond-beach-master-naturalist-leading-spring-bird-walks>. Here's hoping the hawk watch opens this fall.

Thanks for catching that one Jack! And yes, the hawk watch is to open on August 15, 2021.

Outings, Meetings, and Events

As with all outings, presentations, walks, meetings, talks, etc., always check the APAS website for updates or cancelations before leaving home. Our website is www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org.

Sunday, July 18, 2021 – NABA Butterfly Count

Just like counting birds, except with butterflies! Each team will have at least 2 people and we will need at least four teams. Contact Debbie Bodenschatz (djb4apas@gmail.com) if you are interested in participating this year.

Wednesday, July 28, 2021 – Saturday, July 31, 2020 - HMANA Virtual Conference

Allegheny Front Hawk Watch is a sponsor of this conference! An amazing list of names in the hawkwatching community will be presenting. Don't miss this opportunity. Go to hmana.org to register.

Saturday, July 31, 2021 - 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. - Kittatinny Roundtable

Virtual - so no need to drive anywhere! But we will share our experiences just the same. RSVP is necessary to get the zoom link. This can be done through the HMANA conference registration.

Sunday, August 1, 2021 – APAS Annual Meeting - Shawnee State Park - Pavilion 3

An in person APAS meeting will take place at 11:00 a.m.

Sunday, August 1, 2021 – APAS - Summer Picnic - Shawnee State Park - Pavilion 3

Bring a covered dish and your own beverages, and we will provide a main dish. We will begin eating at noon. A Native Americans presentation will be delivered by our guest speaker at 1:00 p.m. There will be the "renown" Trash to Treasures Auction, so members are welcome to bring items to donate.

Saturday, August 7, 2021 - Work Day at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch

Mowing, trimming, weeding, clearing, placing signs, etc. in anticipation of the opening of the hawk watch. We will have a fire for the grill and provide burgers and hotdogs, but bring your own drinks. Contact Bob Stewart for further information.

Saturday, August 7, 2021 - Astronomy Night at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch

Join us at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch slightly before dusk to get set up for a program by Wayne Sierer. If you have a telescope...then bring it. If not, there will be plenty to share!

Sunday, August 15, 2021 - Fall Hawk Watch Begins

The hawk watch opens for regular counting. Unless new restrictions occur, the hawk watch will be open to the public.

October 2021 - Hawk Watch Picnic – Information forthcoming.

October to November 2021 - Owl Banding

Dress warm, bring a folding chair, and a flashlight. Enjoy your nocturnal experience! Park along Lambert Mt. Road and walk in the lane. Banding starts at dusk. Late night helpers are particularly valuable on busy nights. Usually, the banding starts around the beginning of October and extends into November. Always check the website before coming out.