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The Newsletter of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society

From the President

The Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society (APAS) is back in full swing after slowing down during the pandemic. The Allegheny Front Hawk Watch celebrates its 25th spring count, the Dunnings Creek Wetlands are open and thriving, our programs ranging from spring bird walks to winter gatherings continue and are expanding, our virtual meetings are easier than ever to attend, and our website is current, easy to access, and filled with videos, newsletters, and other information that used to be difficult to acquire. The one area that the APAS is having difficulty is in recruiting younger individuals. This is an issue that all organizations are struggling with and can partly be explained by the incredible computing power of smartphones.

At the tips of everyone's fingertips is the immense World Wide Web which connects everyone and everything. Apps teach us to identify bird calls, maps show us where our loved ones are in real time, and weather radar can pinpoint where and when rainfall will hit our location. This is all remarkable and wonderful, however, there is a real world out there, with smells and feels and experiences that phones are not providing. The older generation recognized this, but the younger generation might not quite understand. We need to try to attract them into this real world. Doing so may encourage them to stay. Even our not so young people are difficult to coax into coming out. This group might be our most important demographic for they are established, have agency over their schedules, and are responsible.

As the founders of this wonderful organization get older, we need others who can fill their roles. Our hawk watch is a good example. We will need counters to fill the void as our veteran counters rotate out of their positions. The same is true for our board...and our events coordinators...and our maintenance crew...and our... (insert other jobs here).

To help remedy our current situation, simply bring a young person with you to the next time you come to an event. And if you are not one that attends, then at least pass on the information to see if they are interested in what we are doing. Remember, most of us were introduced to this organization by someone else. It is your turn to pass it along.



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

Chris Payne, a young person, stands outside the duck-blind he built over a decade ago at the wetlands. It was part of his Eagle Scout project when he was an even younger person.

Brian M. Wargo

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Letter from Tom Dick (Circa 1997) Announcing the Opening of the Hawk Watch

Hello Fellow Hawk Watchers,

This letter is an update on the new (1997) Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society Hawk Watch. First for the uninformed, the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society now has its first no strings-attached hawk watch. This 6-acre property is adjacent to the old Col. Gage site. Property on the front is limited, and we were especially lucky to have the opportunity to pick up this site. We are now on the highest part of the ridge. Seventy percent of the property is on top and the rest on the slope continuing down to Lambert Mountain Road. Two thirds will be cleared and one third left in forest. On the cleared property a large patch of mountain laurel will be carefully managed for enhancement and appearance. In keeping with our wilderness theme, a parking area is planned that will be planted in grass instead of covered with limestone chips as originally designed. For esthetic enjoyment cars will not be allowed at observation areas near the overlook. The tree removal is, at present, not a group project but rather being carefully managed by Dave Escherich. The process is deliberately set at a slow pace to avoid unnecessary impacting and to be able to change directions when necessary. We have eliminated the cumbersome and unsightly cable connecting our lane from Lambert Mountain Road. It has been replaced with a great (easy) swinging gate with a combination lock. The lock combination is ----. Once you put those numbers together you simply press the u-bar against the lock housing and it opens. If you forget the combination, just find a phone, call information for the ----
----- listing or check the following directories: Bedford, Cambria and Somerset. You'll find that ---- is the last 4 numbers of our ----- telephone.

This site, as with any hawk-watch site, is unique in its own way. It has its own peculiarities and character which make it distinctive. The new site has the best west view of any site thus far. The east watch is unblemished and undoubtedly the most perfectly cleared. With this site you cannot see the "knob" that so many cherished with the Gage watch. The knob was a recreational feature of impending anticipation and very frequently disappointment as birds disappeared to the west and were never seen again. The advantage of this new watch is that while you can't be entertained with a long approach, the bird will not escape you on the west. The end result: more birds! We are holding off one season on a platform to see if we actually need one, or if we do, where we will place it. We will concentrate this year on clearing and parking.



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

Jim Rocco has been sitting on downed trees at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch since its opening 25 years ago. Ed Gowarty Sr. arrive a few years later. They both are current counters at the hawk watch.

Another new item is that groups who wish to use the facility must first have previous arrangements. In the past we've had museum groups, Powdermill, community colleges, etc. Additionally on a day where a group is entertained, we need two members of the hawk crew, one to facilitate the group and one as the official "counter". We intend to request donations from these groups. We will have a special hawk-watch fund that will help to finance maintenance, platforms, insurance, outhouse etc., etc. Anyone else wishing to make a donation including groups, friends of Audubon or hawk watchers should send the check to the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society, ~~1003 Eisenhower Blvd, Johnstown, Pa. 15904~~. Make sure you indicate the check is for the hawk-watch fund.

Our hawk site goal is three-fold: education, recreation, and science. We intend to schedule 7 days of full coverage and are now asking for counters to contact us with their preferences of days for counting. We would also like to hear from those who can't commit to specific days but are willing to be standbys (fill-ins). By doing this early, the schedule will be in your hands by the first of August. Additionally, for those of you that are coming the distance feel free to call 814- --- ---7 for weather reports on the mountain. Our farm is awake by 5:30 am.



Photo by Adam Katrancha

The Allegheny Front Hawk Watch is timeless! Its legacy is built on those who founded it, those who maintain it, and the who continue its purpose.

Weather reports will carry more accuracy since we are maintaining a small weather station at the farm, have access to local NOAA forecasts, and we know how to look out the window. Send in your willingness to participate and times to our new mailing address Tom and Sally Dick, -- ----- ----- ----, Pa. 15---.

Looking forward to hearing from all of you,

Tom Dick (circa 1997)

Editors Note: Tom is no longer counting at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch, but many of the younger people he invited, inspired, and taught continue his work.

Spring Count – 2022

By Bob Stewart

This spring watch started in 1998, making this year our twenty-fifth anniversary. The watch commenced on February 16, 2022 and continued through May 8, 2022. The total migrant count was 1569, the second highest since 2005. With 335.5 hours of observation, there were 4.68 raptors per hour, the highest since 2009.

Ninety Bald Eagles represented a new season high, surpassing the old record of 44 in 2017. Sharp-shinned hawks, 135, recovered over last year's numbers. Red-shouldered Hawks numbered 25, are near the ten-year average. However Red-shouldered Hawk numbers remain greatly below the flights of 10-15 years ago. The Broad-Wing Hawk flight of 757 individuals was our second highest count exceeded only by the migration of 853 in 2009. The Red-Tail Hawk flight of 238 was near the ten-year average. The Golden Eagle flight, with 105, was second only to 124 recorded in 2003.

The month of April was a major contributor to our success. There were 1109 migrants for the month, which exceeds the ten-year average of 603. The Bald Eagle flight numbered 34, our highest ever. The Sharp-Shinned Hawk flight of 113 was the second highest count in ten years. The ten-year average for Broad-Winged Hawks is 260. This year we counted 752! American Kestrel numbers continued their decline. Only five were noted for the month. Also noteworthy, no Merlins were counted.

Rosemary McGlynn was the counter for the day on March 16, 2022, when she recorded a new single day record of 24 Bald Eagles breaking the previous record of 15 from April 29, 2020. It was cloudy in the morning on April 23, 2022, when Brian Wargo started the count with wind out of the east with a steady velocity of 10 mph. It became sunny in the afternoon with high barometric pressure and temperatures reaching 70 degrees. Accompanying Brian were four students from the Freedom Area High School's Naturalist Club participating in HMANA's Raptorthon. The students were assisting in the count and absorbing details about raptor identification and behavior. With the perfect weather, the Broad-Winged Hawks flew by in great numbers. By the end of the day, 532 were counted. This represented the second highest daily count, only exceeded by 650 on April 24, 2009. Additional species that day included, 13 Bald Eagles, 18 Ospreys, 35 Sharp-Shinned Hawks, 13 Red-Tailed Hawks, 2 Golden Eagles, and 4 American Kestrels. The daily count total was 630, only surpassed by Eric Hall with 735 on April 24, 2009.

There were three days of the count in May. It is interesting to note that four Golden Eagles were migrating through at such a late date. In addition, there were 11 Osprey and 10 Red-Tailed Hawks. The total migrant count for May, with 17 observation hours was 37 raptors, all on an east component wind.

The counters for this spring included Debbie Bodenschatz, Erika Bowman, Ed Gowarty, Sr., Rosemary McGlynn, David Poder, Jim Rocco, Bob Stewart, and Brian Wargo. The counters did a great job and appreciated the assistance from the observers and interested public. Everyone is looking forward to the fall migration. See you then.



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

This dark morph Rough-legged Hawk was the only one counted this spring at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch

Winter Outing - 2022

By Jeanine Ging

Board member Adam Katrancha hosted another perfect winter event at the Beaverdale Sportsmen's Association (BSA) on Sunday, February 6, 2022. The day was filled with cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and sledding. Participants toured the property appreciating the snowy landscape and searching for rabbit scat.

Collecting scat was part of a DNA study for Jeff Larkin of IUP to determine which species of cottontail it came from, the Eastern Cottontail or the the Appalachian Cottontail. Note: Most of the rabbits in Pennsylvania are Eastern Cottontails.

A potluck lunch and warm fire energized everyone before the long trek up the hill to our cars. If you enjoy winter outdoor activities join us this winter. All ages and abilities are welcome. Our youngest participant was 12 years old learning how to cross country ski for the first time with others being very experienced at skiing and snowshoeing.



Photo by Brian M. Wargo



Photo by Jeanine Ging

Above: Marks in the snow from sleds, skies, and snowshoes indicate that a large group worked their way down the long mountain road towards the camp at Beaverdale Sportsmen's Association.

Left: Theo Ging-Wargo leads his dad through the wooded wonderland on his first cross-country adventure. His assessment was that this type of skiing is easier than he originally thought.

Spring 2022 APAS Birding Events

By Dave Poder



Above: Snow Geese at Middle Creek. Below: Female American Redstart at Canoe Creek.

Above: Female Cerulean Warbler jumps off a perch. Below: Female Orchard Oriole.

This year's first APAS birding event was the March 2nd visit to Middle Creek WMA in Lancaster County. As a stopover point for many migrating waterfowl, there were huge numbers of birds present. Snow Geese predominated with over 10,000 present that day, and we saw at least 3,000 of them. Many Tundra Swans were at the site, and we saw more than 150. One notable species we observed was a very rare Tufted Duck. After sunset our visit ended on a high note with the sighting of two Short-eared Owls.

March 12, 2022, was the Shawnee State Park/Dunnings Creek Outing in Bedford County, which is described in detail in Brian Wargo's article elsewhere in this newsletter.

A bit later, May 17, 2022, was the APAS Outing to Lower Trail-Mt Etna Trailhead and Canoe Creek State Park in Blair County. On that warm spring day, we observed 38 species which included fifteen Baltimore and two Orchard Orioles, and two Olive-sided Flycatchers. Five warbler species were counted that included seven Cerulean Warblers, one Magnolia Warbler and a female American Redstart that was seen tearing apart a spider web for nesting material (see the picture to the right).



Three days later, May 20, 2022, was the outing to the Beaverdale Sportsmen Association in Cambria County. Despite the fact that trees had leafed out substantially, which made sighting and identifying the birds rather difficult, we still managed to reach a total of 32 species that day. One notable species sighted that day was a very uncommon Gray-cheeked Thrush.

Laurel Summit State Park in Somerset and Westmoreland Counties was our final trip which took place May 24, 2022. Overcast skies, and a lot of leaves on the trees and bushes made it difficult to locate any birds. In spite of those difficulties, however, we still managed a count of 22 species.

These APAS birding trips offer an opportunity to see quite a wide variety of birds in different locations. I'm looking forward to more activities like this where there's always a chance of seeing a new species, or maybe seeing a familiar one engaged in an unusual activity.



Jeff Payne Leads Another Duck Walk

By Brian M. Wargo

Anytime there is a waterfowl walk, many birders feel a bit of anxiety about their identification skills. This is because waterfowl can be tricky to distinguish. In addition, they often stay on the water far from peering eyes. Thankfully, the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society has many members with expertise in this area. Whenever we schedule such a walk, I also see if Jeff Payne is available. When he is out in the field, I know I am going to learn something new.

Photo by Brian M. Wargo



Jeff Payne instructs the group about the migration of waterfowl.

While the weather is usually cold, the sun can make you feel warmer. That is not the case in the picture above. This was due to the strong wind that was blowing near the beach at Shawnee State Park.

If you are new to birding for waterfowl, join us next time. I promise that you will enjoy adding another branch to your repertoire.

Wetland Pictures

By Brian M. Wargo

During one of our late winter Dunnings Creek Wetlands walks, this Great Blue Heron landed directly in front of the duck-blind. Below us, a muskrat came within 10 feet of us. Be sure to attend our wetlands walks so that you can also experience wildlife up close.



Photo by Brian M. Wargo



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

Another Troubling Tick Disease

By Bob Stewart

Most of us enjoy being out in nature taking a walk in the forest, observing birds and other wildlife. But, we have to venture out with fear or concern over diseases with an animal vector. We must be concerned about contracting Lyme disease from infected deer ticks as well as West Nile virus from infected mosquitos. There is also a new kid on the block! That is Powassan virus, also known as Deer Tick Virus, which is also carried by the infected female black legged tick, also know as a deer tick (*Ixodes scapularis*).

This virus was first detected in 1952. Between 2008 and 2017 most cases of Powassan were detected in the Great Lakes region. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) conducts the Tick Surveillance Program year-round because deer ticks are active all year. In 2021 at Lawrence Township Recreation Park in Clearfield County 25 ticks were sampled and 92% tested positive for Powassan virus. This high rate of infection is causing much concern for state officials.

The virus can be transmitted within 15 minutes of a tick bite, much faster than Lyme disease where the tick needs to be attached to a person for more than 24 hours for to transmit the disease. While most cases are asymptomatic, those that are symptomatic can be deadly, according to the CDC. Initial symptoms include headache, fever, and vomiting. More severe cases may involve hospitalization. Severe cases may involve encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) and meningitis. One in ten persons with severe neurology symptoms suffer death. About half of the survivors suffer with long term neurological effects. Currently there are no vaccines or medications to treat the virus.

According to the CDC annual cases of tick-borne diseases have more than doubled between 2004 and 2019. It is postulated that the expansion of the deer tick has played a part in the increase. According to a study in the Canadian Journal of Infectious Diseases and Medical Microbiology, cases of Lyme disease will continue to increase. Increased temperatures and humidity will contribute to increased reproduction, survival and expansion of ticks. A 2021 review in the journal Insects predicts deer ticks will continue to expand further northward towards Minnesota, the Dakotas and Alaska by 2050. Another possible contributing factor to tick increases is urbanization. Urbanization has led to an increase of populations of deer and mice, which are used by the ticks for blood meals, and that in turn increases the tick population.

For years I resisted walking in the forest for fear of Lyme disease. Now I wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts, wear long socks with pants tucked in, and spray DEET or Picardin on my clothing and shoes. Checking for ticks on the body the same day is still required. Please adopt these protective measures when you wander outside.

<https://www.dep.pa.gov/OurCommonWealth/pages/Article.aspx?post=93>
<https://www.cdc.gov/powassan/statistics.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/powassan/statistics.html>



Photo by PA DEP

Raptorthon 2022

By Brian M. Wargo

On April 23, 2022, three members of the Freedom Area High School Naturalist Club traveled to the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch for Raptorthon, which is a joint effort between Freedom Area High School's Naturalist Club, the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch (AFHW), and the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA). It is a citizen science fundraiser that is split between HMANA and the AFHW.

The indications were that it was going to be a good day. But no one knew beforehand how good the day would be. The barometric pressure was high and hardcore hawkwatchers were showing up, a sign that the east wind was going to be productive.

An Osprey started the day, which was followed by a Broad-winged Hawk. From there, it was a steady day of raptors. The total count ended with 630 raptors, and not all of these birds were Broad-winged Hawks. There were 18 Ospreys, 13 Bald Eagles, 3 Northern Harriers, and 2 Golden Eagles.

The best part of the day was seeing the younger naturalists learning from our veteran hawkwatchers. Hopefully, someday, they will be our veteran hawkwatchers.

Overall, \$700 was raised, the weather was perfect, the crowd was fairly large, and the birds were spectacular as always at the Allegheny Front. A perfect day for all at the hawkwatch.



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

Carter, Carter, and David use a spotting scope to identity birds at the Allegheny Front's Raptorthon.

APAS Joins the Fight – Invasive Species

By Adam Katrancha

Most folks wouldn't think of southwest Pennsylvania as a likely battleground for an alien invasion, but it is. And APAS is joining the fight. On June 18, 2022, APAS board members Bob Stewart (right) and Adam Katrancha (below) rallied with a diverse group of motivated combatants at the Johnstown Flood National Memorial in St. Michael, PA to skirmish against invasive plants such as giant knotweed, exotic honeysuckle, autumn olive, and multiflora rose. The field of battle was actually the Walk Through the Ruins Trail along the South Fork of the Little Conemaugh River near the ruptured embankment that caused the Johnstown Flood of 1889. The group cut, pulled, dug, and carried a seeming mountain of undesirable plant material from along the trail and river to a staging area for disposal. The warriors also replanted the riparian buffer with over 700 native seedlings



Photo by Margaret L. Speicher

that will help stabilize the streambank and provide food, forage and cover for wildlife. Friends of the Johnstown Flood, a volunteer group helping to keep the history alive, braved the damp, windy day to provide refreshments for the workers.

<https://www.facebook.com/Friends-of-the-Johnstown-Flood-National-Memorial-134354226640129/>

Margaret L. Speicher, Interpretive Park Ranger/Volunteer Coordinator for the Johnstown Flood National Memorial and the Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site is looking for volunteers to help with an array of projects supporting the local National Park sites. Anyone interested in volunteering their time can contact Margaret at 814-886-6137 or by email at margaret_speicher@nps.gov.



Photo by Margaret L. Speicher

Butterfly Count 2022

By Brian M. Wargo

The Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society's (APAS) butterfly count was held on Sunday, July 17, 2022. Four teams collected data on every butterfly encountered within a set radius. The results are submitted to the North American Butterfly Association (NABA). The APAS has been conducting this butterfly count for more than two decades. On this day, the conditions were not optimal. The sky was overcast and the humidity was high. Eventually, by around mid-afternoon, the count was stopped by a strong downpour.

While the weather was not ideal, five car loads of Pennsylvania Master Naturalists joined the Ging-Wargo team. Ging, who completed her master naturalist certification in the spring, organized for her classmates and other soon-to-be graduates, to come out and enjoy the day.



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

This picture captures many of the PA Master Naturalists at the APAS NABA Count.

The goal for the day was to not only get an accurate count of the butterflies, but to help those less experienced at butterflying see the diversity of these amazing insects. The group was supportive, lively, and gregarious. With the help of binoculars and cameras, the total number of species identified was 14, totaling a 134 total butterflies. Combined with the other teams, 33 total species with over 1021 butterflies were counted for the day.

If you have not partaken in our butterfly count, consider doing so. It is just like birding with the thrill of seeing a new species, naturing with knowledgeable others, all while helping citizen science. Most of all, it is fun.

Outings, Meetings, and Events

As with all outings, presentations, walks, meetings, talks, etc., always check the APAS website, the Facebook site, or the Twitter account for updates or cancelations before leaving home. Our website is www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org. The APAS adds activities on a weekly basis. Regularly check under the Events tab for the full array of APAS events.

Saturday, July 23, 2022 - 10:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. - Kittatinny Roundtable – Hawk Mountain Sanctuary

In-person and Virtual – Presentations, sharing of seasonal data, etc.

Sunday, July 31, 2022 – APAS Annual Meeting - Shawnee State Park - Pavilion 3

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

Sunday, July 31, 2022 – 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 butterfly presentation will be delivered 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 6, 2022 - 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 provide and grill burgers/hotdogs but bring your own drinks. Contact Bob Stewart for further information.

Saturday, August 6, 2022 – Astronomy Night at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch

The gate will be open from the workday and the program will begin as it gets dark. Feel free to bring binoculars, a spotting scope, or a telescope. Wayne Sierer will be our guide to the stars.

Monday, August 15, 2022 - Fall Hawk Watch Begins

The hawk watch opens for regular counting.

October 2022 - Hawk Watch Picnic – Information forthcoming.

October to November 2022 - 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.

Mid/late December – Christmas Bird Count

Sunday, February 5, 2023, – Winter Outing at the Beaverdale Sportsmen's Association (BSA)

Winter Outing at the Beaverdale Sportsmen's Association – If conditions allow, this will be a snowshoe/cross country ski/sledding excursion. If there is insufficient snow, we will rendezvous at the cabin and explore the winter landscape on foot. The cabin and accompanying inside fireplace will provide shelter, warmth, and cooking capabilities and, if conditions allow, we may also have an outdoor fire at the pavilion for cooking and warming. Plan to carry in your lunch and any other provisions you wish to share at your comfort level. Spring water is available and camp coffee can be brewed for those that wish to enjoy the nostalgia. Unfortunately, at this time, we must ask everyone to use their best judgement concerning the weather and their attendance. Also, due to the unforeseeable, ongoing Covid precautions may still be employed if warranted. Everyone is welcome. Even those that do not ski, snowshoe or hike are encouraged to visit, tend the fires and enjoy the camaraderie of their fellow outdoor enthusiasts.

Memberships are Due

Membership is from September 1st to August 31st of the following year. Forms may be printed off our website: www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org. The Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society also relies on donations to manage the hawk watch, the wetlands, and our other activities. Please consider donating at whatever level is appropriate. See the Donation tab of our website.

Local Membership Form

Select membership type:

_____ **Age 21 and Under: (Free)**

_____ **Individual: (\$15)**

_____ **Family: (\$20)**

_____ **Any Individual or Family that is Economically Challenged (\$0)**

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

County: _____ **State:** _____ **ZIP:** _____

Telephone H or C () _____

email 1: _____ **email 2:** _____

Make checks payable to:

Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society. (The abbreviation of APAS may be used.) Hand this form to the official counter of the day or mail to:

Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society

c/o Bob Stewart

257 Krings St.

Johnstown, PA 15904