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The Newsletter of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society

From the President

The Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society (APAS) is continuously moving forward. We hold events, take care of business, and stay true to our foundation of scientific and educational stewardship for the environment. Most people see the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch, Dunnings Creek Wetlands, or participate in our owl or monarch banding programs, or possibly join in one of our guided events without thinking about how all of this comes about. I can tell you that it is the work of our members.

Each season, visitors from far and wide come to visit us. They normally share time with us and then return back to their lives. They take with them a sense of wonder, joy, and hopefully new knowledge. For those that stay and continue this work, they know they have helped brighten someone's day using nature and community.

We also partner with our fellow organizations, hosting and are hosted by groups that specialize in a particular aspect of the natural world. By doing so, we have a broader reach and continue to broaden our own horizons.

Behind the scenes, we have phone calls being made, emails being sent, conversations happening during meetings, planning committees, donation programs, etc. This is the part that is unseen. That is, until it becomes seen. For example, when you come to the hawk watch this fall, you may notice some differences in the meadow, the restroom facility, the landscaping, etc. If you come to one of our wetlands walks, you will notice cut paths, newly surveyed portions, or maybe a chunk of invasive species missing. Or if you stay for an owling event, you might notice new audio or lighting equipment, innovative sterilization techniques, or new nets. This is because many of our members keep working on projects after everyone is gone. This may include securing grants, improving our capabilities, writing reports, preparing for a presentation, cutting the grass, visiting neighboring chapters, learning as a means of staying current, securing permits for an outing, purchasing nets, filling holes, planting native plants, etc.

All of this work requires all of us. So, get involved. You'll notice that everyone that does has a smile.



Photo by Richard Akers

Richard Akers, son of Dick Akers, took this picture of a Baltimore Oriole

Brian M. Wargo

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Wayne Sierer Awarded

By Aura Stauffer and Adam Katrancha

On May 16, 2023 friends, family, dignitaries, and conservationists gathered at Little Buffalo State Park for the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation's 14th Annual Awards Banquet. The banquet was especially noteworthy this year, with APAS's own Wayne Sierer being recognized for his contribution to education. DCNR Wildlife Biologist Aura Stauffer nominated Wayne for the Volunteerism Award in 2021. However, due to Covid protocols and precautions the annual banquet was canceled. With gatherings resumed, the Parks and Forests Foundation awarded Wayne the more fanciful Education Award in 2023.



Photo by Aura Stauffer

APAS's Wayne Sierer stands and receives Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation's 14th Annual Education Award.

Aura's nomination is a testament to Wayne's character as well as his commitment and contribution to science education.

I would like to volunteer Wayne Sierer for the volunteerism award. Wayne is a retired science teacher who taught for over 30 years at Wilson High School near Reading. However, Wayne has not slowed down since his retirement several years ago. He gets around and has been an incredible volunteer for decades giving thousands of hours of his own time and using his own money while traveling to multiple state parks and state forests. Wayne is an amazing birder and guru of all things technical. For example, he knows the perfect piece of equipment or software to use to broadcast bird calls or to map survey points. His help has been invaluable to me and my duties as a wildlife biologist as well as others within DCNR, Bureau of Forestry.

Wayne has conducted countless Breeding Bird Atlas surveys and point counts in Bald Eagle State Forest, Moshannon State Forest, Sproul State Forest, Black Moshannon State Park., the Quehanna Wild Area, the West Rim Trail in Tioga State Forest and Colton Point State Park. He helped with surveys for cerulean warblers at Blue Knob State Park and marsh birds at Moraine State Park.

In the spring of this year, when I put out the call for assistance to conduct northern goshawk surveys in the Tioga State Forest within a proposed timber sale, Wayne dropped everything and answered the call. With Wayne's and the PA Game Commission's help, we were able to run transect surveys (many of which went through thick brush) to determine that no goshawk nests were located within the timber sale area.

Several years ago, myself and Andy Wilson from Gettysburg College established a series of transects to survey and monitor grassland birds at a reclaimed strip mine in the Gallitzin State Forest. Since the beginning, Wayne has helped almost every year to conduct surveys on the transects. He has been an integral part of collecting data that DCNR land managers can use to determine where to focus projects that will improve habitat for several T&E grassland bird species. Also, Wayne helped to facilitate getting assistance for bird surveys from members of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon; an organization where Wayne serves as a board member. With Wayne's help, I am hopeful that the Allegheny Plateau Audubon will continue to help monitor this site on the Gallitzin State Forest.

Recently when Wayne learned that the saw-whet owl banding station at King's Gap State Park was in desperate need of volunteers, he eagerly volunteered to help. He did this even though he would have to travel over an hour there and back each time, often leaving the site well after midnight to return home.

In conclusion, I feel that Wayne exemplifies the spirit of the Parks and Forest Foundations Volunteerism award. With his volunteer efforts at many state parks and state forests over the course of many years, he has helped to advance the mission of the PPF and DCNR in many ways. Gifford Pinchot wrote 11 maxims. Number 6 says to "get rid of personal arrogance or pride of attainment or superior knowledge." While number 9 states to "not be afraid to give credit to someone else even when the credit belongs to you." Wayne is often the smartest person in the room, but he does not flaunt this knowledge and instead chooses to be a patient teacher. I have often marveled at his willingness to serve without complaint or desire for recognition or personal advancement. He also helps to facilitate relationships between DCNR staff and other organizations that he is involved with including Audubon and the Wildlife Leadership Academy. His "can do" attitude and enthusiasm for conservation are infectious. Although Wayne would downplay his achievements, I feel it is time to finally give Wayne some recognition through the PPF Volunteerism Award.

Congratulations Wayne!

If you have never met Wayne, he is a regular visitor and participant in APAS activities. Wayne serves as an APAS board member and is a substitute hawk counter, offers astronomy night presentations, and is a Saw-whet owl banding team member at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch. Come join the fun, meet Wayne and get to know the other APAS volunteers at any of APAS's activities and events.



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

Wayne, volunteering to be in the cold all night, in an effort to collect owl data.

2023 Allegheny Front Hawk Watch Spring Count

By Bob Stewart - (AFHW Compiler)

This spring the watch started on February 14, 2023, and continued through May 7, 2023. The total migrant count was 880, which is well below the five-year average of 1119. There were 360 hours of observation, which is above the five-year average of 327. This gives a rate of 2.44 raptors/hour.

There were no new season records in the spring. The Broad-winged Hawk count was below average, and there were only two days above 20 individuals for the day: 52 on April 17, 2023, and 58 on April 20, 2023. Red-shouldered hawks numbered 31, which is near the five-year average. We recorded 181 Red-tailed hawks, which is below the five-year average of 205. No Rough-legged hawks were seen this year.

The Northern Harrier count of 11 matched the five-year average. The Bald Eagle count of 53 was well below last year's count of 90, but still above the five-year average of 40. Golden Eagle numbers remain strong with the count of 94 being lower than the two previous years, but still greater than the five-year average of 87.



Photo by Dave Poder

A close-up view of a juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk as it passes the Allegheny Front.

The accipiter species were near or greater than the five-year average. The counters notched 83 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 33 Cooper's Hawks, and a juvenile Northern Goshawk. The Goshawk was the first in four years.

On March 6, 2023, Nancy Ott and Peter Livengood were the counters at the watch. There was moderate wind out of the southeast. The cloud cover was around 50% with visibility at 25-30 km. The 86 raptors that migrated through on their day, included 32 Golden Eagles, 23 Red-tailed Hawks, 3 Bald Eagles, 5 Cooper's Hawks, and a Peregrine Falcon.

Then again on April 3, 2023. Nancy and Peter were rewarded with another great flight. The wind was out of the southeast for the entire day, even though forecasters were calling for a southwest wind. Hazy clouds provided a nice backdrop for spotting raptors. There was a large diversity - 13 species. Highlights included 6 Golden Eagles, 5 Bald Eagles, a juvenile Northern Goshawk, a Peregrine Falcon, and 3 Merlins. There were also 3 Black Vultures flying south and a Cooper's Hawk in flight display. The raptors were high, some large birds were seen only with 10X power binoculars.

I would like to thank our counters and observers for their contributions to a successful season. The counters included Deb Bodenschatz, Erika Bowman, Greg Gdula, Ed Gowarty, Sr., Peter Livengood, Rosemary McGlynn, Nancy Ott, Dave Poder, Jim Rocco, Bob Stewart, and Brian Wargo. We hope to see all our friends at the fall hawk watch!

2023 Spring Count Continued

By Bob Stewart - (AFHW Compiler)

Comparative ALLEGHENY FRONT HAWK WATCH - Spring Totals											
YEAR	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
HOURS	328.75	328.5	271.75	374.5	377.5	285.25	345.75	344	324.5	335.5	360
LOCATION	AF-Dick	AF-Dick	AF-Dick	AF-Dick	AF-Dick	AF-Dick	AF-Dick	AF-Dick	AF-Dick	AF-Dick	AF-Dick
BV	16	0	16	8	16	5	13	10	2	6	3
TV	183	286	218	54	76	112	189	117	119	50	81
OS	61	52	10	34	160	42	64	87	22	73	25
BE	16	13	14	23	44	5	42	29	35	90	53
NH	11	10	12	13	15	3	17	13	11	13	11
SS	94	88	59	70	132	45	88	64	28	135	83
CH	31	26	24	25	55	25	50	29	21	32	33
NG	4	2	1	5	1	1	3	0	0	0	1
RS	42	13	14	14	27	16	52	13	37	25	31
BW	181	312	197	168	316	477	375	307	109	757	224
RT	213	222	141	146	334	123	275	144	247	238	181
RL	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
GE	49	56	66	65	89	35	103	89	101	105	94
AK	18	18	11	12	8	8	12	4	15	10	11
ML	3	4	6	5	9	2	2	4	2	2	4
PG	2	4	0	2	4	1	5	12	0	5	3
UA	2	2	4	4	3	2	5	10	1	4	2
UB	13	10	4	1	13	3	18	5	3	7	17
UF	0		0	0	1	1	3	2	1	2	1
UE	0		0	0	0	2	3	0	7	1	4
UR	27	24	22	23	21	18	28	16	34	13	18
TOTAL	967	1,142	819	672	1,324	926	1,348	955	795	1,569	880
B/HR	2.94	3.48	3.01	1.79	3.51	3.25	3.90	2.78	2.45	4.68	2.44
=RECORD											

2023 APAS Winter Outing

By Adam Katrancha

An unseasonably mild winter supplied the picturesque backdrop for the 2023 APAS winter outing. Even though Mother Nature was working overtime providing record snowfalls in the western states, she still ensured the Beaverdale Sportsmen's and surrounding environs were supplied with a dose of winter for the February 5th APAS gathering. With a recent blanket of snow covering the forest floor, six adventurers, including new APAS members Keith and Heather Kaufman, assembled with sunny smiles on the otherwise overcast day. Unlike the past two years, where the ski and snowshoe outing started with the abandonment of vehicles on Skyline Drive, this year's exploit began at the camp with only the need for winter boots and a warm cap.

Following a round of introductions, Greg Gdula constructed and banked fires in the wood stove and century-old stone fireplace with the expectation of returning from the hike to a warmed building and a substantial bed of coals ready for cooking. With a mere inch of snow making ideal conditions for an overland journey, the group decided on a walk that would follow Camp Run to Glade Run. Then, going off-trail though State Gamelands, the group climbed the short, yet steep, incline onto Briar Ridge where they again picked up an abandoned skid trail that led them to Bear Wallow and the upper reaches of the South Fork of the Little Conemaugh River. Along the way, the recently fallen snow provided the perfect medium for observing the tracks of many forest residents. With Greg leading the way, the walk was frequently paused for a discussion on animal track identification and, quite often, reminiscence about a woodland foray from decades past. While only a few winter birds were observed, the animal tracks included those from mouse, weasel, squirrel, rabbit, fisher, porcupine, fox, coyote, and deer. Bob Stewart, the always optimistic APAS hawk watch compiler, was disappointed with the absences of monarch butterflies or their lilliputian footprints.

With the intended destination being a glen at the confluence of the stream's upper forks, the group again meandered off-trail to an assemblage of beaver ponds. Not wanting to disappoint, the beavers had constructed two lodges and a series of impoundments for their curious visitors to contemplate. A few slides were also found where the semi-aquatic mammals made repetitive ingress and egress from the ponds. With the ponds explored, and after a short respite, the hikers ambled along the snaking stream, across wooded slopes, and through hemlock groves to Glade Run's union with the main branch of the Upper South Fork. The hikers, after the mildly perilous water crossing on a dilapidated wood bridge and fallen tree, again relaxed on the log benches at the venerable Boy Scout camp and fire ring. Beginning to feel the chill of the winter air and sodden feet, the fatigued explorers proceeded up the long-abandoned railroad grade that supported the late 1800s virgin forest clearcuts to the Sportsmen's property and back to the camp.



Photo by Adam Katrancha

APAS Winter Outing Participants from left to right: Keith Kaufman, Bob Stewart, Greg Gdula, Heather Kaufman, and Judy Johns.

Anticipating a warmed camp interior, the group was greatly dismayed to find a lifeless fireplace and stove. Once again, Greg, assisted by Bob Stewart, reignited fires, with the wood stove rapidly developing into a comforting glow and warming heat source. As the room warmed with the cheer of conversation, lunch provisions were unpacked and shared. Judy Johns provided a variety of appetizers including cookies, nuts, and chips. Hot cider enlivened spirits while Greg prepared a pork loin for roasting. Following a series of culinary experiments earlier in the year, Greg also directed Adam Katrancha on the peeling and slicing of apples for the side of baked apples spiced with butter and brown sugar. Even without formal assignment, Bob Stewart ensured all courses were adequately supplied with his baking of homemade cinnamon rolls that were warned on the wood stove. With preparation completed and cooking underway, the group surrounded the fireplace, sharing stories of past winter exploits. In typical fashion, Greg's camp cooking and the ceremonious fire resulted in a meal unrivaled in sapidity and ambiance, with Bob's sweet rolls suppling the sweetest of endings to the potluck feast.

As the last of the provisions were consumed, the fires ebbed with the spirits of the adventurers. With everyone pitching in to tidy the camp, it was returned to a state of seasonal hibernation. Appreciative farewells, shared among the group, expressed everyone's pleasure with the day. The vehicles, once loaded, proceeded up the camp lane to their diverse points of origin. Only the resident mice, seeking the missed crumbs, remained to provide liveliness to the otherwise desolate camp as they await the company of the next group of winter enthusiasts.



Photo by Adam Katrancha

The Beaver Pond was only partially frozen.



Photo by Adam Katrancha

The group warms inside the camp!

Accessibility at the Hawk Watch

By John "Jack" Julian

Accessibility to nature sites can be challenging for people with mobility and other handicap issues. At the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch, we have been working to accommodate those who may need help at our site. One issue is the ground is uneven and rocky, so we have been trying to remediate this hazard by filling in any "holes" with gravel. As far as parking is concerned, we allow anyone using mobility devices to pull close to the viewing field or even drive their car onto the site to reduce the distance to the watch area.

This fall, we are glad to announce that we will have a handicapped accessible porta-john available at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch for the fall migration season. It is our hope that this will make it easier for people with physical and mobility issues to enjoy activities at the hawk watch and not have to leave when nature calls.

Please let us know if there is anything we can do to help alleviate any issues you may have when visiting the hawk watch. Just speak to one of our counters or helpers at the site.

Photo by Brian M. Wargo



A picture with founding or long-time members, taken at last August's workday, who might appreciate the new accessibility improvements at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch.

From the top row moving left to right: Ed Gowarty Sr., Deb Bodenchatz, Jeff Payne, Kevin George, and Bob Stewart.

Bottom row from left to right: Chi Michone, Gene and Nancy Flament, Jim Rocco, Rosemary McGlynn, and Joe Sabo.

Summer Picnic and Meeting

By Debbie Bodenschatz

Please join us Sunday, August 6th, for the APAS annual picnic and meeting, being held at pavilion #3 in Shawnee State Park.

We'd love to see you there, to give us the opportunity to meet you, hear your ideas for the growth and improvement of our organization, and provide you with information about ongoing projects and plans for both the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch and the Dunnings Creek Wetlands.

The picnic will be a covered dish event, with APAS providing the main course and drinking water. Attendees are also free to bring any additional non-alcoholic beverages they may wish to enjoy.

We will be having a Trash to Treasures silent auction. Any items you'd like to contribute to the auction would be greatly appreciated.

APAS T-shirts, featuring designs that are always stylish and popular, will be available for purchase.

Please feel encouraged to bring children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, as Shawnee State Park is a safe, lovely, open area with lots to see and do.

There is plenty of vehicle parking available at pavilion #3 and there is a nearby restroom. Both the pavilion and the restroom are handicap-accessible.

Again, we hope to see you there!



Photo by Jeanine Ging

The group listens to a butterfly identification presentation at the 2022 summer meeting.

APAS Summer Outings

By Dave Poder

Participants in this spring's APAS Bird Outings were able to observe many migrating warblers and other birds as they made their way northward. Leaves appeared early this year which made the birds more difficult to locate and identify, but despite this, the species total for each outing was very good.



SP / Lower Trail in Blair Co, and Linn Run SP in Westmoreland Co. Remember, APAS announces its events via its website, Facebook and Twitter.

Pictures starting top right and moving clockwise: Swainson's Thrush, Cerulean Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, and Golden Winged Warbler. All photos by Dave Poder.



The accompanying photos give an example of some of the many species that were observed. I was very pleased to get these shots of birds that I find so interesting. It's always worthwhile to be outdoors walking and sharing the experience with other bird enthusiasts, and I am looking forward to taking part in future outings. These events took place at Shawnee SP, Quemahoning Dam / Birdman RD in Somerset Co., Beaverdale Sportsman's Assoc. in Cambria Co, Canoe Creek

Sometimes They Come Close

By Dave Poder

Last fall's total raptor count was below its average at the AFHW, but there were excellent opportunities to see raptors fly close by. Always exciting to witness, and personally, even more exciting to capture that moment with my camera.

No matter if it's a falcon, hawk or eagle, it's very exciting to see them fly so near, even though it happens so fast, especially if it's a Merlin. I'd like to add the two Northern Goshawks in last fall's count weren't nearly as close as other raptors sometimes come, but they were the closest ones I had ever seen, and so it was still a big deal for me.

When new visitors come to the Hawk Watch, I like to help orient them with our site's general layout and explain the sighting reference spots such as the Point, Volcano, Saddle, and Shawnee. I also mention the raptors can be high in the sky or far out in the valley. Much of the time, however, they are not, and sometimes, they do come close!



Editor's Note: The Northern Goshawk is now a very rare bird in the Eastern Flyway. This shot is not that close, but Dave's steady hand and excellent camera set-up allows us to see fine details in this elusive raptor's plumage.

Donation Update

By Jeanine Ging

Allegheny Front Hawk Watch had a great year of Saw-Whet Owl banding in 2022. The 91 total owls almost doubled the 2021 value of 51 owls. We also had five foreign recaptures. A recapture means that we captured a bird that was already banded. If that bird was banded by a site other than ours, it is considered a foreign recapture.

The APAS is in the process of replacing all 15 nets that are used nightly during owl banding season. The current nets are over 20-years old and are pricey to replace. Therefore, we began asking for donations in the fall of 2022, and thanks to several donors, we currently have about \$1000 donated specifically towards the nets. This is about halfway to reaching our goal before the owling season starts.

If you would like to donate any amount toward net replacement, it would be appreciated.

Make checks payable to:

Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society

c/o Bob Stewart

257 Krings St.

Johnstown, PA 15904



Photo by Jeanine Ging

This owl already had a band on its leg, making it a recapture.

Include a memo that states: Owl Net Donation.

Come owling with us starting weekend nights October through November. Please check the website and social media for updates and bring warm clothes.

Editor's Note: We also had a strong storm this spring that not only blew over some of our trees, but also snapped our metal pole that holds the weather station. Several donors stepped up and helped pay for the new environmental apparatus.

"How Did You See That Bird?"

By Greg Gdula

It was a spring day, and I was driving down the road at the Beaverdale Sportsman's Club when a group of robins flew up. There were two birds that did not fly that were standing next to the fence line, so I got out of the truck and walked towards them. To my surprise there were two woodcocks. Now, everyone keeps asking how I saw them. I think the snow might have helped.

The American Woodcock is not here through the winter but migrates back here in the spring. You can hear them in early April, usually in the evening. When they flush, they make a distinctive fluttering sound, almost like a twittling sound. They also do an elaborate mating ritual.

I took the picture with a little point-and-shoot camera that I keep in the vehicle in case something interesting shows itself. The woodcocks were really photogenic, and I kept getting closer. They did not seem to mind. I must have got within 15 feet, got too ambitious, and they flew away.

Editor's note: American Woodcock are among the most camouflaged species. They blend right into the surroundings so well, even if someone points to them on the ground, you may not be able to see them. I know this because it has happened to me several times!



Photo by Greg Gdula

An American Woodcock is spotted at the Beaverdale Sportsman's Club.

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 22, 2023 - 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 23, 2023 – ABA 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.

Sunday, August 6, 2023 – APAS Annual Meeting - Shawnee State Park - Pavilion 3

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

Sunday, August 6, 2023 – 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 short 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 12, 2023 - 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 12, 2023 – 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.

Tuesday, August 15, 2023 - Fall Hawk Watch Begins

The hawk watch opens for regular counting.

October 2022 - Hawk Watch Picnic – Information forthcoming.

October to November 2023 - 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

Memberships Dues

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**