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The Newsletter of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society

From the President

In every organization, how members contribute varies widely. Some simply pay their membership dues, while others may also attend events. Others take a more active role and volunteer at a workday, lead on an outing, or act as the project manager. Some go well above and beyond what is expected, completing a plethora of tasks. Some even volunteer for the dirty and undesirable work, like digging trenches, writing articles, looking into codes and laws, or whatever pops up as a problem that needs to be completed.

And then there is Adam Katrancha, who is involved in nearly every aspect of everything that the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society is doing. For at least half a decade now, Adam has been taking on more and more tasks and doing so in the background, always trying to stay under the radar.

For example, if you notice a new fundraising campaign for the Owl nets...that's Adam. If you see a bat box tower...thank Adam. If you are invited to a new outing during the winter...again, Adam was the catalyst. If you are a new member to the organization, I will probably hear that

Adam either introduced you to the group or was so helpful when you first arrived, that you decided to stay or come back.

Adam helps with counting hawks, acts as one of the core members of the owl banding crew, is on the board of directors for the APAS, is head of our informal maintenance and engineering crew, is a vital contributor to this newsletter, is part of the events committee... the list goes on and on.

What is most astonishing about Adam is that he is thought of in the same manner in other organizations that he is part of. But there is no need for organizations to get jealous, for Adam will inevitably bring both organizations together and make each one stronger.

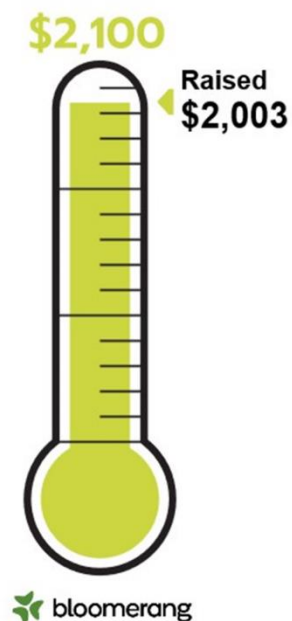
With that said...Adam is ours!

Photo by Brian Wargo



Adam Katrancha helping to scan the skies on a cold fall day at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch.

Owl Nets



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Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society
257 Krings Street
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Brian M. Wargo

A Pollinator Meadow at the Hawk Watch: Year 1

By Chris Dick

Visitors to the Hawk Watch may have noticed some landscape changes. Through a partnership with US Fish and Wildlife we are prepping the land for a native wildflower meadow, with the goal of creating habitat for native bees, butterflies, and plant watchers.

The trees were cut for the Hawk Watch in the 1990s. The laurel and rhododendron shrubs made a wonderful botanical garden, but the trees grew back and obscured the view of migrating raptors. As a favor to the APAS, the electric company sprayed the woodlot with chemicals they use for clearing the powerline easements. The dried vegetation and topsoil were then bulldozed, leaving a long mound of debris along the forest edge. I was saddened at the loss of the little botanical garden.



Photo by Bob Stewart

Figure 1. USFW Partners level the dirt mound on the meadow's edge.

Over the years APAS members have planted the field with native and exotic flowers. At some point some topsoil was added. During the summer the floral displays can be stunning. Unfortunately, the topsoil held seeds of invasive plants such as crown vetch, which has begun to take over the east side of the field. Another invasive, the mile-a-minute vine, has established on the slope and along the forest edge.

I reached out to Mark Johnson of the USFW's Partners for Wildlife program, to discuss ways to enhance the meadow for pollinators and reduce the impact of invasives. Mark was enthusiastic about helping the APAS to establish a wildflower meadow and committed the equipment, operating costs, and expertise to the project. In turn, APAS would pay a nominal fee for labor and fuel and buy the seeds.

The first step was to level the unsightly mound, which the USFW team tackled with an excavator in May. As they dismantled boulders and saplings, they uncovered a surprising amount of soil which they spread as evenly as they



Photo by Chris Dick

Figure 2. A landscape rake helped to level the site and remove small stones.

could (Figure 1). In late June and August, I spread the soil mix more broadly with my tractor (Figure 2).

When working after a rain, I had to carefully inspect before moving the tractor, as it turns out that wood turtles roam the field after a good rain (Figure 3).

I thought I did a reasonable job at removing stones, but new stones reappeared after each rain. On the Hawk Watch workday an enthusiastic team of volunteers hand-picked hundreds of the stones which we moved into piles. Although the soils are still a bit stony, they seem fine for a mountaintop meadow.



Photo by Chris Dick

Figure 3. One of several wood turtles (*Terrapene carolina*) that roamed the meadow after a rain.



Photo by Chris Dick

Figure 4. APAS volunteers picked hundreds of stones to prepare the field for planting.



Photo by Chris Dick

Figure 5. Pollinator meadow at the Jackson farm in Everett.

Our next step is to plant a cover crop of annual rye grass and clover. These species will germinate in the fall and generate biomass and nitrogen while preventing erosion and inhibiting invasives. Then, in the spring, our USFW partners will treat the invasive species with herbicide, then seed the native species. We will purchase the seeds from Ernst Seeds, a Pennsylvania company that has native genotypes of important pollinator species.

What species will we select? Ernst has some prepared seed mixes for pollinator meadows, which we will likely use. Our ideal species are: (1) native to the region, (2) somewhat deer resistant, (3) will not outcompete other species, (4) visually attractive, and (5) important resources for pollinators. In addition to the wildflowers, we'll plant little bluestem grass to add stability and biomass.

Laura and Mike Jackson of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society have used Ernst native seed mixes on their farm near Everett. While the soil and climate of the Hawk Watch may produce a meadow of different abundances of species, we would be pleased to have a meadow similar to theirs (Figure 5). Laura and Mike have written up instructions on how to establish a pollinator meadow.

If anyone would like to participate in some way (e.g., weeding, building stone walls, controlling invasives, etc.), please reach out to Brian Wargo or to me.

Early Season Nightwork at the Hawk Watch

By Adam Katrancha and Jeanine Ging

The 2023 Northern saw-whet owl banding season commenced Friday October 13, 2023. It was early in the season, and the conditions were not quite optimal, but a group of owlers placed the nets with the approaching dusk and relocated their vehicles and chairs to the lane with the hope of netting their first owl for the season. In addition to Dave Darney, the certified owl bander; experienced owlers Jack Julian, Ed Gowarty Jr., and Greg Gdula provided assistance. Joining the group from afar were couples from West Virginia and the Pittsburgh area.



Photo by Brian Wargo

Owlers gather around the table to process an early November owl. The temperature was 32 degrees Fahrenheit on this evening about an hour past dusk.

After correcting some early season technical glitches, the recording of the saw-whet owl's aggressive call began to broadcast throughout the forest. After a 30-minute wait, the crew and guests followed the lane out of the woods to the opening, but soon returned disappointed...no owls. This process repeated itself several times. As early evening turned into late night, the veterans shared their knowledge of owls, the hawk watch, and other APAS initiatives with their novice guests. With the hopes of netting an early owl diminishing, distractions were sought to keep the bodies and minds active. The night view of Bedford County from the escarpment mesmerized the visitors. A new moon allowed the celestial bodies of the alluring night sky to sparkle with radiance.

Upon returning from a net check, the group deviated to the bat boxes and, flashlights pointing upward, were able to clearly see into the boxes without the overpowering backlight from the daytime sun. To everyone's surprise, two bats

were found roosting in the boxes, one in each box. The excitement of finding the bats quickly supplanted the lack of owls and provided satisfaction to the bat enthusiasts. But the questions arose, why were the bats tucked up into the boxes at night? Shouldn't they be out doing bat things? It is Friday the 13th after all. Without anyone offering a befitting answer, an inquiry was made in the following days with Heidi Mullendore, DCNR Environmental Educator at Canoe Creek State Park. Prior to white-nose syndrome, Canoe Creek State Park was once home to over 30,000 bats, so Heidi is batty with bat knowledge. While she was unable to provide a definite reason as to why the bats were in the roost at night, she speculated that they could have been sheltering in the roost due to the impending storm, being big brown bats seeking a reprieve during migration, or they're bats ...who knows? Heidi should also be recognized as a motivating force for the installation of the bat boxes with her prior presentation on bats at a hawk watch picnic and donation of the boxes. Apologizing for their brief intrusion into the bats' respite, the owling humans returned to their own resting spot along the lane to wait for another net check for owls.

With expanding cloud cover, increasing winds, and forecast rain, Dave decided to terminate activities around 1:30 AM in order to dismantle the nets and stow the gear before the storm's arrival.

While the season opener was disappointing from an owling perspective, the discovery of the bats made it a rewarding experience. Anticipating future success, the guests vowed to return not only for owls, but also for raptors, most notably the upcoming Golden eagle season.

The rest of the season was slow with only a handful of owls until November 11th and 12th when 37 Saw Whets migrated through the hawk watch over the weekend. We usually see the peak of migration close to Halloween, but our surge was a few weeks late this year. We extended the banding season through to Thanksgiving with the hopes of a few more stragglers moving through. The season ended with a total count of 57 Saw Whet owls including 5 foreign recaptures. This was down significantly from 2022's count of 91 owls.

Follow the APAS Facebook page and website for the latest owling schedule and other activities.

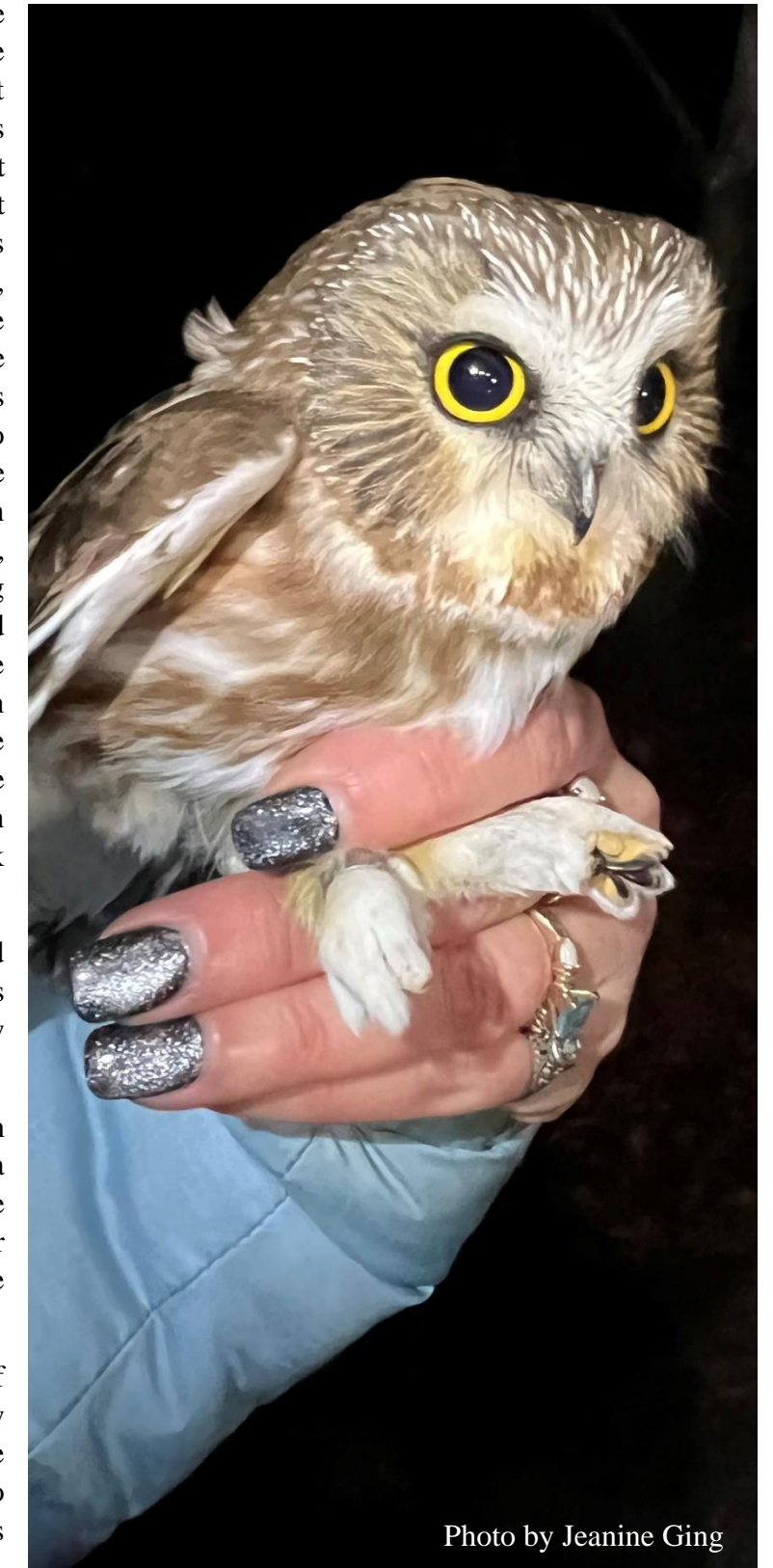


Photo by Jeanine Ging

A Saw-whet Owl waits to be measured.

Backyard Chimney Swift Conservation

By Adam Katrancha

Dunlo and Llanfair, two villages located along a stream formally known as Yellow Run, now identified as Sulfur Creek, in Adams Township, southeast Cambria County, PA, were established by enterprising timber and coal industrialists. These communities, once home to over 3,200 hard-working and often grizzled eastern European immigrants, developed into bustling communities of their own and offered public services and amenities including an electric light plant, rail service, the commercial enterprises of any respectable town, and, of course, public schools. The Dunlo-Llanfair Public School, located along Llanfair Road, once enrolling several hundred students, now sits abandoned by the educational consolidation process. But even in its dilapidated state, with partial collapse in recent years, is not entirely vacant. Since shortly after the school's formal closure, migratory residents, traveling from South America, arrive each spring following the seasonal emergence of insects. These summer residents, Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*), have entertained onlookers with aerial acrobatics and served as insect control agents for the neighborhood; and have made the chimneys of the old Dunlo School their roost throughout the breeding and migratory seasons. Fortunately for this scream of swifts, they also found members of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society (APAS), renown for raptor monitoring and Saw-whet owl banding at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch, as adoring neighbors to their currently deteriorating abode.



Photo by Dave Poder © David Poder

Chimney Swifts are shaped like a flying cigar.

Prior to European colonization, Chimney Swifts roosted in hollow trees, caves, and on cliff faces. With expanding human settlements, forests were cleared of the old growth nesting sites, but ready replacements were found in the stone and masonry chimneys that supported the growing populations of both humans and the accompanying birds. Unfortunately, recent shifts in human behavior are now having detrimental effects on the swifts. In addition to climate change, pesticide use, and plummeting insect populations, recent cultural and technological changes in residential and commercial heating methods are reducing available roost sites due to the transition towards covered, narrow flues that are unsuitable for nesting. In an effort to ensure the annual return of their summer visitors, the neighbors in Dunlo began their investigation into the swifts and potential means to support their livelihood.

Typically insectivores, Chimney Swifts feed on the wing, taking insects in flight or snagging them from branch tips, with the reported occasional consumption of an elderberry or two, but never feeding from a stationary position. The Chimney Swift will never sit on a perch like most birds. Their long claws are suited only for clinging to the walls of chimneys and other vertical surfaces and are supplemented with spines on the end of their tail feathers to stabilize them. They forage mostly over open terrain but also over forests, ponds, and residential areas, anywhere with an adequate insect population. Wintering in Amazonian South America, they again roost in chimneys, caves, and similar vertically surfaced buildings.

Fortunately, the needs of the swifts are few. The vast acreages of woodlands, expansive wetlands, or complicated management plans are not requirements for their neighborliness. They only desire a safe roost and adequate insect population, and often acclimate to manmade structures. As overseer of a vacant lot about 500 feet away from the school building, APAS member Adam Katrancha offered the 1/3-acre site, now a coal mine refuse dump reclaimed to an urban meadow with warm seasons grasses and a collection of young trees, as an available location for a Chimney

Swift tower. The towers, usually wood or masonry structures, provide protection and mimic the vertical faces provided by hollow trees and chimneys. With a firm place and purpose, in-depth investigations into tower construction were required. A brief search yielded *Chimney Swift Towers: New Habitat for America's Mysterious Birds - a Construction Guide* (Kyle, 2005), which offered a variety of designs with detailed construction drawings. Now with a plan, and hoping to attract summer tenants with luxury accommodations, the human builders decided upon the construction of a masonry tower that will hopefully serve as shelter for the foreseeable future. In order to ensure acceptance by the community and adherence to local ordinances, Adam attended the township planning commission meeting where the proposed project was explained and curiously received by the commission. As should be expected, the accepted building codes did not contain requirements for bird houses, but a building permit was still required. With a few modifications to provide a footer below the frost line, construction drawings from the *Chimney Swift Towers* book were submitted and a construction permit issued.



Photo by Adam Katrancha

Bob Stewart supervises Greg Gdula as they begin working on the roof.

Adult Chimney Swifts are most commonly observed in flight. Scythe shaped, their wings span slightly over a foot, supporting a proportionally short, cigar shaped body. Sooty-gray to black, the “flying cigars” exhibit a flickering bat-like flight accompanied by “chipping” or “ticking” vocalizations. Their annual migrations bring them to the United States in late March and they are quick to depart, returning south again by November, with a later arrival and earlier departure in the northern states. Nesting begins in May and continues through August in the warmer climates. In cooler seasons, an aggregation of swifts will roost together to share in the warmth of numbers. Even in summer, unmated swifts will roost together. Other nonbreeding residents may be tolerated, but there will only ever be one mating pair nesting in a chimney.



Photo by Adam Katrancha

Daniel Omasta places concrete blocks for the tower.

Recognizing the limited flexibility in the bird's spring flight schedule, Adam solicited construction help from APAS colleagues and neighbors while still seeking a masonry contractor willing to undertake such a unique project. Local resident Wayne Berkey graciously offered an evening of backhoe services to dig the footer, replacing evenings and weekends of manual excavation with a shovel and digging bar. With a hole of satisfactory dimensions, Daniel Omasta, proprietor of Concrete & Masonry Inc. of Johnstown was informed of the progress so he could commence construction of the footer and masonry block walls. Knowing the seasonal limitations of the region, Dan quickly moved in and began a series of regular weekend visits to the site. With raised eyebrows and skeptical inquiries from material providers and neighbors, he completed the footer and began laying concrete blocks. As blocks were placed Adam offered limited assistance by backfilling around the rising

Backyard Chimney Swift Conservation continued...

tower and infilling with gravel for drainage. The tower soon rose above ground-based accessibility and scaffolding was erected. As Dan continued his Saturday morning work schedule from the scaffolding, Adam kept him supplied with blocks and mortar. With winter temperatures fast approaching, the tower achieved the twelve-foot height and 4-inch solid blocks were placed as the cap to exclude the winter precipitation from the block cavities. The solid cap also serves as a durable anchor for the planned wood framed roof.

As winter arrived, construction of the tower's wood components, an access door and roof, commenced indoors. With the intent of creating a long-term low maintenance structure, weather resistant hemlock, salvaged from a windfall, was milled to various thicknesses by hobbyist sawyer Rich Strayer. Adam then petitioned neighbor and APAS member Judy Johns and woodworking partner Ed Paluch for assistance with fabrication. Working in Ed's woodshop, a slightly pitched roof was constructed to shed water, but more importantly, to shade the tower interior. The thick masonry walls help regulate temperature, but direct sun can still overheat the interior so a roof, covering most of the tower throat, is provided with only a 16"X16" opening on the northern edge for avian access. On alternately designed wooden towers, rigid foam insulation is sandwiched between interior sheathing and exterior siding to aid in thermal regulation. A scaled-down access door is also provided at ground level. This door also serves a dual purpose of providing access for maintenance as well as containing screen covered ventilation holes, to again, aid in temperature

control. With lengthening daylight and warmer temperatures, Adam called upon APAS members Bob Stewart and Greg Gdula to help with carpentry work and the final assembly of the tower's components. The prefabricated components, a snug fitting door that inhibits predators and the protective roof, were installed as soon as the weather allowed. Understanding the swifts' modest tastes, 5/8" T1-11 sheathing was installed on the interior walls to mimic the natural material of the hollow trees used where manmade homes are not available. The T1-11 is left untreated, cut and installed with the textured grooves oriented horizontally to offer a slight ledge for nest building. With the roof now anchored in place and the door and interior finished in rustic décor, the tower was now available, offering vacancy to the early spring arrivals.



Photo by Adam Katrancha

Bob Stewart stands inside the structure.

The Chimney Swifts courtship display, two birds flying close together while calling, then with the snap of wings into a V shape, gliding together in downward curves, typically begins within two weeks of their return to the northern breeding grounds. Once mated, only for the season, the pair will scout nest locations until a suitable site is found. Shallow, half saucer shaped nests are built from loosely woven twigs. The nests are attached to vertical surfaces with the bird's glue-like saliva. Both parents share in the incubation and, after about 18 days, the catching of insects for the young. At times, unmated adults will also contribute to the rearing of another's young. At one-month young Chimney Swifts will leave the nest for their first flight. Young return to the nest for a few days but are eventually pushed out by the parents to begin their adult lives. After the breeding season, Chimney Swifts join larger flocks in

migration to South America. During migration, as many as 10,000 swifts may circle in a tornado-like flock at dusk and funnel into a roosting colony to spend the night. Surprisingly, the lives of these widespread urban adapted birds are unstudied due to their inaccessible nesting and roosting sites and their aerial lifestyle.

The swifts did return to Dunlo after completion of the tower. Eight were regularly counted. However, they returned to the comfort and protection of the old school's venerable chimneys. Even without first-year occupancy, the builders of the tower are proud of their project and enjoyed the comradery of working towards a common conservation goal. As Chimney Swift populations decline, the robust, nearly maintenance free, nature of this tower will ensure a safe summer roost for a young, mated pair or as alternate lodging should the school's ongoing deterioration or demolition render it uninhabitable. Adding a final compliment to the whimsical structure, Greg, Bob, and renowned APAS vintner Ed Gowarty Sr. joined efforts in late fall to plant a variety of trees and shrubs on the formerly vacant site. The rocky mine spoil and limited soils will challenge the hardiest of plants, but over time and with persistence, new growth will support the insects, birds, mammals, and their curiously supportive human neighbors in the community.

While not everyone has the means to construct a Chimney Swift tower, conserving this threatened species is something anyone can support. As migratory birds, they and their nests sites are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is illegal to harass, remove, or in any way disturb a nesting pair of Chimney Swifts. A proactive supporter can help identify roost sites and, as old chimneys are lost to modernization, share information and campaign for their conservation. The Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania has a Chimney Swift Tower Initiative and numerous other websites and Audubon chapters offer ideas and resources to help inform and protect this species.

As a predictor of warmer days, the residents of Dunlo and Llanfair eagerly look forward to the swift's seasonal return. While there is some doubt as to whether a "vacancy" sign will entice residency in the newly constructed tower, there is always enjoyment in watching the acrobatic displays and the satisfaction of contributing to the conservation of an important species.

June 2023 Update - Upon hearing rumors of the impending demolition of the Dunlo School, Adam contacted the current owner and shared the chimney swift's story. While preserving the school's chimneys was not practical, the owner recognized the swift's migratory schedule and worked to complete demolition prior to their return. The school was demolished in April 2023. The swifts did return on schedule and have been observed entering three neighboring house chimneys, with the tower still appearing unoccupied. The chimney swifts, undeterred by the new roosts, still provide daily entertainment and insect control. With time, it is hoped, the tower will be accepted, and the supporting community can boast of successful conservation efforts.

<http://www.chimneyswifts.org/>

<http://aswp.org/pages/audubon-s-chimney-swift-tower-program>

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Chimney_Swift/overview



Photo by Adam Katrancha

The structure is open and waiting for occupants.

Discovering the Tiger Spiketail Dragonfly

By Adam Katrancha and Bob Stewart

In June 2023 several APAS members volunteered their time to assist DCNR and PGC Biologists Aura Stauffer and Tammy Colt with grassland bird surveys on Gallitzin State Forest in Cambria and Somerset Counties. As part of this expedition, Northern Harriers (*Circus hudsonius*) and American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*) were observed and became the highlight on day two of the surveys. Mentally noting the location, Bob Stewart, Dave Poder and Adam Katrancha returned on June 18 with the hopes of repeat observations as they again searched for raptors and passerines.

Photo by Dave Poder



Tiger Spiketail (*Cordulegaster erronea*) is considered in peril throughout much of its range in the eastern United States and Canada.

The observation area was near Dutchies's Knob at the top of the hill above the Dunlo area. The terrain, which was previously strip mined, has, except for the knob, revegetated to a grassland and upland scrub shrub environment. Even after wind turbine development, the Knob itself has remained wooded.

The crew, arriving slightly before noon, birded for over an hour on the grasslands with observations of Bobolinks (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), Meadowlarks (*Sturnella magna*) and a magnificent display by a pair of Harriers being the highlights. With a cessation of grassland activity, the crew ambled across the grassland until happening upon an ATV trail. Following the trail, they surmounted Dutchie's Knob and continued along the forested border.

While traversing the ATV trail, Adam noticed a large brightly colored dragonfly. He alerted Dave of the stationary sighting perched on an upright plant stem, whereupon Dave stealthily approached. Equipped for distant grassland photography, Dave adjusted for the up-close shots. None of the group thought they had previously observed this species. This was a large stunningly beautiful dragonfly. The dragonfly was blackish in color with bright yellow rings around the abdomen and two wide yellow stripes on the thorax. With the photographer's acumen, Dave adjusted for position, shadows, and light. Unsure of his success, Dave returned home and subsequently shared his amazingly detailed photos with Adam and Bob.

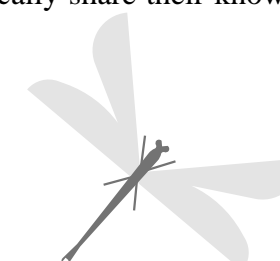
Reviewing the photos and perusing insect identification guides, Bob found similar looking species, but nothing conclusive or matching the range and habitat. With his still functionally acute grey matter, Bob recalled that Dennis McNair, a retired biology professor from the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown and the former President of APAS, specialized in dragonflies. With an impromptu email, Bob contacted Dennis, asking for his help in identifying this find. Dennis excitedly replied that he thought this was a Tiger Spiketail (*Cordulegaster erronea*). Dennis reported this species as being large and relatively rare. He indicated that Lane Loya, a biology professor from St. Francis University would be visiting soon and he would consult with him. Lane also specializes in Dragonflies.

Also with excitement, Lane reviewed the photographs and concluded that this was definitely a female Tiger Spiketail. Lane and Dennis had never seen one before this year. Lane had been researching Tiger Spiketail nymphs on St. Francis University campus but had not seen the dragonfly. There were three area sightings of this species in the summer of 2023: St. Francis University, the grasslands of Gallitzin State Forest near Dunlo, and near Prince Gallitzin State Park in northern Cambria County.

On the advice of Aura Stauffer, invertebrate zoologist Betsy Leppo, with the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, was alerted to the finding. Betsy indicated in an email that the Tiger Spiketail is considered vulnerable in Pennsylvania. It is considered in peril throughout much of its range in the eastern United States and Canada.

With the excitement of the rare find spreading, Professor Loya anticipates involving his students to look for nymphs in the waterways near the Gallitzin State Forest sighting. The Tiger Spiketail prefers small streams or intermittent streams in a forested setting. While the specimen was sighted on a somewhat dry hill along a tree line, there are ponds and wetlands, remnants of strip mining, relatively close by. Even more promising are the woodlands, bogs, and natural streams bounding the former mine site.

Always ready for an adventure Greg Gdula, local resident, APAS member, and hawk watch counter, has offered his services as guide for an excursion. As with any outing, you never know what you will find and where it will lead. In this case, assisting with a bird survey then a casual outing for birds has transformed into a project that may better understand a highly threatened species. Consider joining the fun. APAS members hope to assist with grassland bird surveys again in 2024. Experience and expertise are not needed, just initiative and curiosity. The biologists and experienced birders will enthusiastically share their knowledge about birds, butterflies, and now dragonflies with anyone that is willing to listen.



Summer Picnic and Meeting

By Brian M. Wargo

The APAS annual picnic and meeting was held this year at pavilion #3 in Shawnee State Park and was highlighted by Chris Dick giving an interactive presentation. By training, he is an evolutionary biologist, now working for the University of Michigan as a full professor. His presentation on the PowerPoint screen was impressive, detailed, and included videos, however, it was his lesson on climbing trees that most captivated the audience (see photo below).

During the meeting, Sandy Cline and Randy Flament were sworn in as the two new board members. Jeanine Ging also offered to fill the secretary position as Rosemary McGlynn and Debbie Bodenschatz cycled off the board.

As always, the food was delicious, and the company was even better.



Photo by Jeanine Ging

Above: Everyone watches Chris Dick's presentation.

Right: The proper method for climbing a tree!



Photo by Brian Wargo

2023 Allegheny Front Field Trip

By Chad Kauffman

The following is an excerpt from Chad Kauffman's article about the PSO trip to the hawk watch which can be read in its entirety at https://pabirds.org/newsletter/PSO_Newsletter_2023_04.pdf.

We met Erika Bowman, the counter for the day, at the gate and followed her in. Evan and Julia Mann were "bright-eyed and bushy-tailed," but they had to leave early — 15 minutes before the first Golden Eagle provided point blank looks. We were excited to see the sky gates finally open, but another thrill was knowing that it was a lifer for Brian Miller and his daughter Olive who survived both days. Since they both got it as a lifer, they told us it was a super lifer which is really cool. Another side note is that Saturday night the Millers went for the Northern Saw Whet Owl banding that Dave Darney was doing both nights, and they got to see up to three that evening. I am sure that was a thrill for both of them. Many of our friends returned for the second day, but we also got visits from Court Harding, Roger & Marg Higbee, Bill & Sandy Cline, Chris & Jeff Payne and Bob Mulvihill. Again, many long-time regulars visited again throughout the day.

Workday at the Hawk Watch

By Brian M. Wargo

It's 8:15 in the morning when I make it through the gate of the Allegheny, Front Hawkwatch, which is already open, which is odd, because normally hawk watching starts at nine o'clock. However, this is not a hawkwatching day, but rather a workday, and people are already lined up even though we said we would start to meet around 8:30 or nine o'clock.

As I get out of the car and greet everyone, I can see that they are ready to work. Within the next 45 minutes, about 20 other cars pulled in. It is an amazing army of people who have come to help tidy up the hawk watch.

At 9:00 a.m. we start delegating work. Lots of weedwhackers, lawn mowers, chainsaws, and other power equipment can be heard, while many other members scramble with shovels, wrenches, batteries, signs, paperwork, and cleaning supplies. Everybody is doing something and contributing in whatever fashion they can.

This year, we focused on the Meadow, which is being modified by the U.S. of Fish and Wildlife Service, who are partnering with the APAS to rid the field of invasive species and replant all native species. One of the tasks is preparing the field by raking some of the soil. Unfortunately, this leaves many rocks scattered across the field. But that is not a problem, because we've got a small army of willing volunteers. Teams go out and pick the largest rocks, put them in the MULE utility vehicle, and make a pile, like a large cairn at the side of the field. These will later be used to build a fence around the parking lot.

After about an hour of moving rocks and dumping them into large piles, it is decided to use the full power of the work force to remove the medium sized rocks by filling the truck beds, the utility vehicle, and the front loader. It is a sight to see a dozen or two people in the meadow working together to ready the meadow for planting. This level of commitment is inspirational. The idea is to expose as much soil as possible in this scarcely soiled area and by lunch, it seems as if we have done an effective job. The field looks rich with soil.

Around noon Deb Bodenschatz and her son Matt show up with lunch. Not long after, the feast begins. The food is incredible, and everybody is happy. Good food, good friends and working with others who believe in our cause. It really does not get any better than this. It is community building at its finest and everyone is doing what they can to help our organization succeed!

After lunch, people stick around, continuing to work on tasks that include waterproofing the benches for the upcoming season. Members stick around for hours chatting and enjoy each other's company. There is a star party planned for the night, but many have doubts with the impending weather.

No matter...the day is a win! You can tell things are running well when you have so many people show up on the hardest working day and leave with a smile on their face. What a fantastic organization we are all part of!



Photo by Matt Bodenschatz

Preserving the benches with a new coat of protectant.

Motus Tower Update

By Bob Stewart

The below table lists the birds that have been detected at the Motus Tower (an international collaborative research network that uses coordinated automated radio telemetry to facilitate research and education on the ecology and conservation of migratory animals) and is a program of Birds Canada in partnership with collaborating researchers and organizations. The Pennsylvania Game Commission hosts a tower on nearby State Gamelands 228.

Detection date ▲ ▼	Species ▲ ▼	Date deployed ▲ ▼	Latitude ▲ ▼	Longitude ▲ ▼
2022-06-07	Gray Catbird	2021-09-30	40.16	-79.27
2022-09-24	Swainson's Thrush	2022-09-06	45.4297	-73.9689
2023-06-02	Semipalmated Sandpiper	2023-05-30	39.2002	-75.0262
2023-06-24	Tree Swallow	2023-06-09	40.2905	-79.4073
2023-06-25	Tree Swallow	2023-06-09	40.2905	-79.4073
2023-10-04	Sora	2023-05-18	40.3281	-90.0863
2023-10-27	Ovenbird	2023-10-04	40.16	-79.272

Workday at the Wetlands

By Brian M. Wargo

A workday in late October at the wetlands brought lots of people and lots of equipment. Below is a picture of the new rock bridge that is nearly finished at the edge of Grebe Pond. Lots of cutting, trimming, chain sawing, excavation, cleaning, and digging on this day. Thankfully, the weather cooperated for most of the day.

If you missed this workday, stay tuned for a request for help on upcoming days. While the work is hard, it is rewarding.

The wetlands will serve for the winter outing on Sunday, February 4, 2024. See the website for details.

Special thanks to all who participated on this day as well as those who have been helping to make this area accessible.

We hope to see you out there soon!



Jack Gilbert, Greg Gdula, Brian Wargo, and Randy Flament stand on the new rock bridge.

Outings, Meetings, and Events

As with all outings, presentations, walks, meetings, talks, etc., always check the APAS website, the Facebook site, or the X (formerly 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.

Sunday, February 4, 2024, – APAS Winter Outing at Dunnings Creek Wetlands

Winter enthusiasts are invited to join members of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society for a winter outing at Dunnings Creek Wetlands. A walkabout is anticipated, so waterproof footwear is recommended. However, if seasonal conditions provide ample snow, skis and snowshoes may offer additional opportunities for exploration. Check the weather and use your best judgment. An after-walk social is planned with neighbor Jerry Fetter offering indoor accommodations for a light potluck lunch. You can pack your own lunch or bring enough to share. Please provide your own beverages. A stove, electrical outlets, and refrigeration should be available. See details on our website.

Late February - Spring Hawkwatching – The hawkwatch will attempt to open in late February but is dependent on the conditions of the lane. Snow tends to build at the gate and the lane often has deep snow drifts. Check the website, X (formally Twitter), and our Facebook pages for updated conditions.

Early March - Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area Swan/Snow Geese (potential) Outing – The visitor center and interior roads open early in March. Weekends are very crowded and less desirable. Check the APAS website for details.

Saturday, April 20, 2024 - Raptorthon – Raptorthon is a joint venture between the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch and the Hawk Migration Association of North America. The purpose of Raptorthon is simple, to have fun birding while raising funds for raptor monitoring throughout the Americas.

Mid-July 2024 - 10:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. - Kittatinny Roundtable – Hawk Mountain Sanctuary

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

Late, July 2024 – 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.

Early August 2024 – APAS Annual Meeting - Shawnee State Park - Pavilion 3

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

Early August 2024 – 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.

Early August 2024 - 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.

August 15, 2024 - Fall Hawk Watch Begins

The hawk watch opens for regular counting.

October 2024 - Hawk Watch Picnic – Information forthcoming.