

Chickadee Chatter

Winter
2017

The Newsletter of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society

From the President

The new year is bringing change and most people are thinking deeply about what that will mean for the country, for our families, and our fellow citizens. The environmentally conscious add the natural world to that list, and all members of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society are bracing for what is coming.

First, the high-tension powerlines will be making their way down Shaffer Mountain, less than a mile from the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch. With them comes unease about the potential collision and electrocution hazards for the large raptors.

This brings us to our second major concern, the siting of a new wind turbine project just a few miles north of the hawkwatch. The last battle ended in a victory, but required significant investment of time, effort, and money.

Each new battle wears on our members, who become worn-out fighting to preserve our oasis on the Allegheny Front. These new incursions will again require investing our human capital. Thankfully, long-term member Laura Jackson has been taking the lead on the wind project, but she will need our help.

We must support those who are standing up for what we value. Strength comes in numbers and we must double down our efforts to get our message out to the public. The more contact people have with our organization, the better.

We have a few new initiatives that we are working on to increase our visibility, including a Junior Hawkwatcher Program. Our goal is to increase traffic from all age groups, who will hopefully bring their family members to our cause. Let us hope for the best this new year, but prepare for the worst.

Brian M. Wargo



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

This Golden Eagle and beautiful backdrop are what we fight for!

Jim "The Don" Rocca Oversees the Fall Hawk Count

The Allegheny Front Hawk Watch is one of the most respected hawkwatches in America. That reputation comes from the hard work and dedication of the hawk counters that spend their time manning the site. One of our veteran counters, Jim Rocca, may best exemplify this level of dedication.

Last fall, Jim was either counting or assisting with the count at least six days a week. There was a month or two that Jim was at the hawk site every day. Those few days that Jim was not present, he was most likely playing with his grandson.

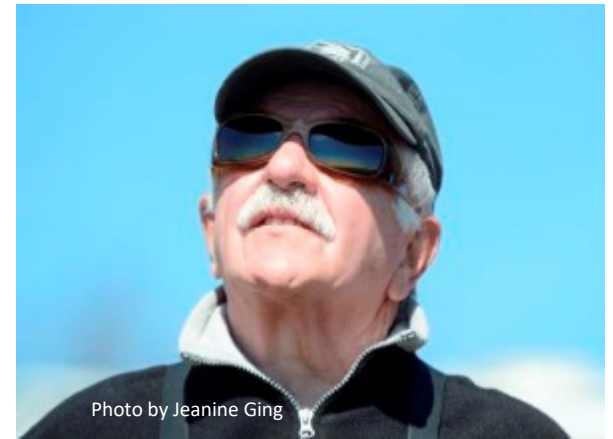


Photo by Jeanine Ging

Jim does not just assist, for he is an expert at finding those hard to see birds. As the Saturday counter, I certainly feel more confident when Jim is present. That should be no surprise, for I learned how identify hawks under Jim's guise and continue to refine my skills when he is around.

For those members that would like to learn the fine art of hawk identification, sit or stand next to Jim at the hawkwatch. Watch how he scans the sky, note his concentration, and focus. Jim is one of our best resources and hopefully he can help other, younger hawkwatchers develop into masterful identifiers.

As the spring approaches and the raptors come back through the Allegheny Front, I look forward to having Jim at the site, asking, "Did you count the Red-tailed Hawk that went by a minute ago?" I also look forward to saying, "Sure I did, Jim!" even if I didn't.

A New Hawkwatcher is Born Again!

Clyde Williams arrived at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch on October 13, 2016. It was a treacherous day of gusting sleet, rain, and snow, punctuated by brief periods of sun. Conditions were dismal, but the breaks between the unfavorable conditions were just good enough to keep any good hawkwatcher from calling it a day. I frequently sought refuge in the car, emerging each time to find that Clyde had not given up hope of photographing a Golden Eagle. Since that day, Clyde has become a regular at the hawk watch, showing up more days than not.

Clyde is a retired photographer for the Tribune Democrat newspaper in Johnstown. Despite his years of experience, Clyde has recognized the difficulty of photographing raptors. When asked why he is willing to stand in the hostile conditions, Clyde responds, "I'm looking to get a Golden Eagle." Me too Clyde; Welcome aboard!



Photo by Jeanine Ging

Clyde Williams and Dave Darney execute some bench hawkwatching while new friends from the Pulpit help scan the skies.

Fall Picnic Pictures



Photo by Brian M. Wargo



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

Good friends, good food, and good birds – always a good time!

A Blustery Christmas Bird Count

On Sunday, December 14, 2016, members of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society braved the rain, then the damp, cold, and windy conditions to count the number of bird species in Somerset County. The weather was frightful, but spirits were high and all enjoyed seeing the massive flights of Canada Geese making their way through the wispy snow clouds. By the end of the day, 64 species were noted. Three additional species were counted throughout the week. Linda Greble spotted a group of four Red Crossbills at the Quemahoning Reservoir and spotted a Ross's Goose, which is new for our count! Jeff Payne, Vice President of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society, organized the day and surmised the day, stating:

We certainly had a challenging weather day with the early rain and subsequent fast falling temperatures. There was a lot of frozen water, and yet not snow on fields to concentrate the field birds. I know in our car there were some folks who were a little soggy early and chilly later. Altogether, a good effort and we can hope for more benign conditions next year.



Photo by Jeanine Ging

Jeff Payne complies data at Hoss's restaurant with the participants, not all of whom are shown in the picture above.

Thanks to all of the 2016 Christmas Bird Count Participants: Scott Bastian, Nick Bastian, Brian M. Wargo, Breanna Leasure, Brianna McKee, Peyton Zankel, Thomas Zankel, Jeanine Ging, Meadow and Theo Ging-Wargo, Michael Wolfe, Ian Russ, Patrick Wolfe, Daniel Wolfe, Jake Murphy, Dennis Stahl, Deb Bodenschatz, Wanetta Escherich, Rosemary McGlynn, Leslie Rose, Linda Greble, Jim Moses, Meg Moses, and Chris Payne. Good job Jeff! See you next year.

Bird Killer on the Loose in Johnstown

Phyllis Terchanik spotted this Peregrine Falcon in Johnstown this winter. Phyllis writes, "I've been seeing the falcon every day this week. Sometimes he is on the front of the bank building and you can see him from Main Street. I like to go to the top of the parking garage for a better view." She continues, "Wednesday he was on the cross on top of St John's church. I watched him carry half of a pigeon from the bank roof, right over my head and onto the cross to finish his meal."



Photo by Phyllis Terchanik



Photo by Phyllis Terchanik

Exciting, graphic, and wondrous! Thanks for sharing Phyllis.

Interesting Visitors



Photo by Jeanine Ging

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette's John Hayes and Bird Watchers Digest's Dawn Hewitt visit on the same day! What are the odds?



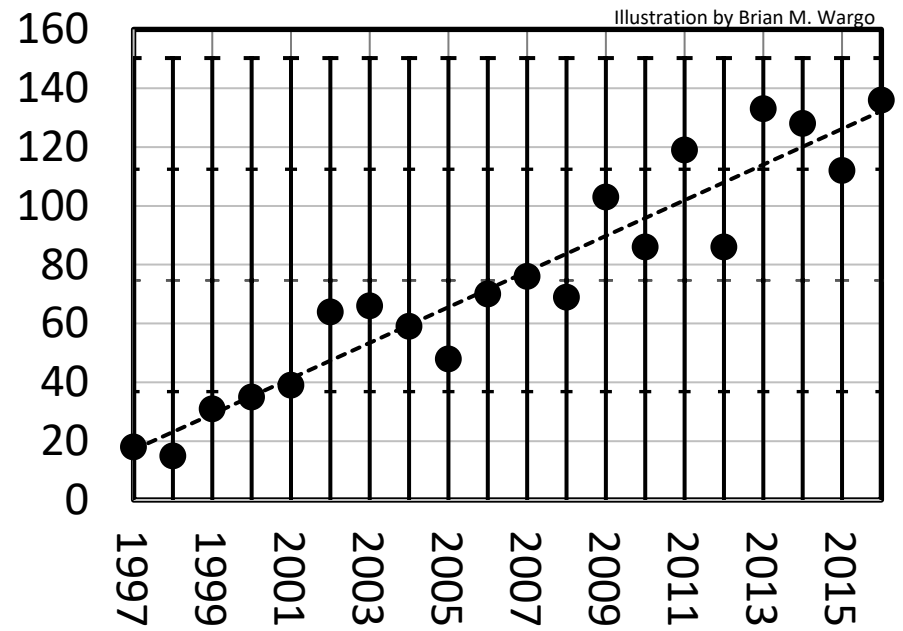
Photo by Brian M. Wargo

There was that day when the horses showed up at the hawkwatch.

2015 was Golden—2016 is Bald

On November 12, 2016, at 3:30 p.m. a juvenile Bald Eagle passed the hawk site at Allegheny Front. Without fanfare or excitement, the Bald Eagle record had been tied. At 4:00 p.m., another juvenile, the last of the day, came into view. As that Bald Eagle made its way south, the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch set the new record for Bald Eagles during the fall seasons with 134 birds. Two more birds in December moved the record to 136. Combining this with the spring count of 23 Bald Eagles makes 2016 the highest year-count with 159 birds.

AFHW - Fall Counts - Bald Eagle



Bald Eagles have steadily increased at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch

It is wonderful to see the Bald Eagle making a strong comeback. It shows that when a concerted effort is made to preserve wildlife, it can be done. Allegheny Front Hawk Watch is one of many sites in Pennsylvania that set Bald Eagle records in 2016.

Brian M. Wargo Wins PA DEP Environmental Education Grant

The Pennsylvania Department of the Environmental Protection has awarded Dr. Brian M. Wargo a \$3000 Environmental Education Grant for the engagement of naturalistic research with students at Freedom Area High School. The grant authored by Wargo, entitled Migratory Patterns of Raptors Near the Upper Ohio River Basin, stipulates that the students use optical equipment to catalog the fauna around the Freedom Area School District campus.

The grant money purchased 20 binoculars, two spotting scopes, two tripods, two digiscope adaptors, and 20 field guides. The students in the Naturalist Club have been learning to use the equipment by patrolling the grounds of the high school during activity periods, searching for wildlife and noting changes with the seasons.



Kayla Carpenter, Peyton Zankel, and Ms. Ray at the hawkwatch.



Breanna Leasure, Peyton, and Brianna McKee help with the Christmas Bird Count

Brianna McKee will be attending Pitt-Johnstown this fall and hopes to be an active member at our events.

Several students (and a couple of parents) accompanied Wargo for some citizen science with the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society. Peyton Zankel and Kayla Carpenter visited the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch to experience diurnal (daytime) and nocturnal (nighttime) birds of prey. Breanna Leasure, Peyton, and Brianna McKee

Wetlands Update

Tom Dick has updated the ornithological number of species that have visited the Dunnings Creek Wetlands, which now stands at 280 species. (Note: Tom counts 272 species—I count 280.) The last major update was done in 2005, when the total species count was 232. Some of the new species include:

Cackling Goose	Philadelphia Vireo
Greater White-fronted Goose	Carolina Chickadee
Mute Swan	Winter Wren
White-winged Scoter	Veery
Black Scoter	Gray-cheeked Thrush
Long-tailed Duck	Swainson's Thrush
Eared Grebe	Hermit Thrush
Cattle Egret	Wood Thrush
Clapper Rail	Northern Mockingbird
American Avocet	Orange-crowned Warbler
Upland Sandpiper	Mourning Warbler
Short-billed Dowitcher	Cerulean Warbler
Long-billed Dowitcher	Bay-breasted Warbler
Wilson's Snipe	Yellow-breasted Chat
Laughing Gull	Clay-colored Sparrow
Snowy Owl	Le Conte's Sparrow
Short-eared Owl	Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow
Olive-sided Flycatcher	Blue Grosbeak
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	Dickcissel
Acadian Flycatcher	Red-Crossbill
Northern Shrike	White-winged Crossbill
Yellow-throated Vireo	Common Redpoll

The APAS looks forward to an outing at Dunnings Creek Wetlands this spring.

APAS and HMANA Ties Grow Stronger

Brian M. Wargo, President of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society has been appointed to the Board of Directors for the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA). Wargo's rise within HMANA began nearly two years ago, when he became the Eastern Flyway Editor for Hawk Migration Studies (the official journal of HMANA), where his duties include overseeing count numbers for raptors for the entire east coast. This includes the very difficult task of analyzing data from over 90 sites across the eastern portion of North America.



Wargo (wearing black hat) along with the HMANA Board gets an exclusive tour of the newly constructed Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, which will house HMANA's new office.

As a board member, Wargo's responsibilities expand. He is on the Education and Conservation committee, as well as the Data committee. In his inaugural meeting as a board member, which was held the first weekend this December in Detroit, Wargo proposed with the rest of the education committee, an initiative to have student scientists present raptor research at a mini-conference. The board asked if a pilot program was being initiated at this point. Wargo responded that he was using Freedom Area School District as a test district.

The board enthusiastically applauded the idea and is willing to help support the conference. In fact, the idea is being considered for the next HMANA conference – which may be dubbed “Creating Young Raptor Researchers.”

From the Compiler – Bob Stewart

The fall watch commenced on August 15th and continued through December 12th. The total migrant count was 8764 during the 777.75 hours manned. Our birds per hour rate was 11.3 (4.76 when Broad-winged Hawks were removed).

The highlight of the year may have occurred September 6, 2016, when Jim Rocco (the counter for the day) spotted an American Swallow-tailed Kite approaching from the northwest at 11:57 AM. The bird circled directly overhead at about 100 feet. After circling three times the kite continued its flight to the south. Nancy Ott and Bob Gorsuch also witnessed the kite. This is the first recorded observation for this species at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch.



The Golden Eagle fall migration was a disappointment, compared to the previous year record count of 320, tallying only 138 goldens. Only six Golden Eagles migrated through after November 15th. The dramatic low season count was dissimilar to other watches to the east.

Broad-winged Hawks rebounded strongly from the fall of 2015, showing the largest number in ten years, with 5058 birds. Three separate days counted greater than 1000 Broad-winged Hawks.

The Bald Eagle count of 136 was a season record high and the Peregrine Falcon count of 39 was a nine year high.

Cooper's Hawks (118) and American Kestrel (41) counts continued to be low.

The counters for this year were Deb Bodenschatz, Jim Rocco, Rosemary McGlynn, Ed Gowarty, Tom Dick, Brian Wargo, Bob Stewart, Tom and Janet Kuehl, and Ron Rovanseck.

Thank you all.

Bob Stewart, compiler

Allegheny Front Hawk Watch Offers a New Junior Hawkwatcher Program

The Allegheny Front Hawk Watch is serious about education. For years, young people have visited the hawkwatch and learned about the natural world. Now, a formal program has been designed. Each activity introduces the young hawkwatcher to important aspects of raptor counting, including identification, record keeping, understanding geography, as well as the potential hazards that raptors face.

Participants of the program will be asked to complete the number of activities that matches their age (there are 17 different activities). Upon completion, the young hawkwatcher will need to be sworn in by an official hawkwatcher at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch. They will receive a certificate and pin (in development) to signify their achievement.

Junior Hawkwatcher booklets will be available at the hawkwatch and can be completed any time there are at least two hawkwatchers assisting the official counter. It is important that the counter be able to conduct his or her duties, so please use discretion when approaching those running the count.

A web-version of the booklet can be viewed under the Links section of the following website: www.hawkwatching.net



Photo by Deb Bodenschatz

Karim, Deb Bodenschatz's grandson is ready to complete the Junior Hawkwatcher Program

More Pictures



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

Ed Gowarty's impromptu birthday party – Happy Birthday 75th!



Photo by Jeanine Ging

The three compilers (HMANA, APAS, Owls)

Laura Jackson Tries to Save Shaffer Mountain from Wind Development



Photo by Jeanine Ging

Laura Jackson relaxing at the summer picnic

Laura Jackson is one of the nicest individuals that you could ever meet. But, if you threaten homesteads, health, or the environment, she becomes Laura the Lion! As president of the Save Our Allegheny Ridges (SOAR), Laura is on top of every event. She is knowledgeable, personable, and tireless. She is also a veteran of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society and a

frequent hawkwatcher at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch.

Lately, Laura has been compiling information about the latest wind development project, The Shade Wind Energy Project, proposed by Invenegy, LLC. She keeps everyone posted by running Stop Shaffer Mountain Wind on Google Groups and is continuously in communication with all parties concerned. While the company is trying to keep this project quiet, Laura is working to make every action transparent. On her side are a list of facts about property values, environmental damage, and physical and mental issues that seem to be a byproduct of this “clean energy.”

At the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch, turbines are a leviathan to our beloved Golden Eagles. And, in case you have forgotten, Allegheny Front is the Golden Eagle Capital of the East! Our site has been used for research because it acts as a superhighway for these magnificent creatures.

We are all busy, we all have schedules to accommodate, and we all need to rest now and again, but please help support Laura as she supports what is important to us, to the community, and the Allegheny Front.

Thanks for all you do,

Golden Eagles

Tales of the Owl Season

Dave Darney, the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society’s official owl bander, states that this was a slightly better than an average year, with 116 Northern Saw-whet Owls. Other sites had even better results, but that was most likely due to the direction of the wind. As Dave says, “there is a lot of luck involved.”

An interesting story is of an owl that Dave banded on 10/28/2016. It then flew southeast to Franklin County, which is about 60 miles away, where it was recaptured on 10/31/2016. That means that the owl averaged of about 15-20 miles per night.

Another interesting catch for Dave involved a foreign recapture, that is when Dave captures another bander’s owl. The records reveal this owl hatched around late April, 2015, was capture and banded in Ontario, Canada on 10/23/2015 and was caught by Dave 10/25/2016.

Another foreign recapture occurred on 11/4/2016. This owl was originally banded on 10/27/2015 near Williamstown, Massachusetts and was hatched in the spring of 2014. This two-year old bird must have had a lot of stories to tell. And that is what makes this banding process so interesting to the public—trying to figure out what these nocturnal creatures do throughout the year.

We are lucky to have Dave at the Allegheny Front. He is an asset and an excellent spokesperson for why they Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society is so important. Thanks, Dave, for another great year!

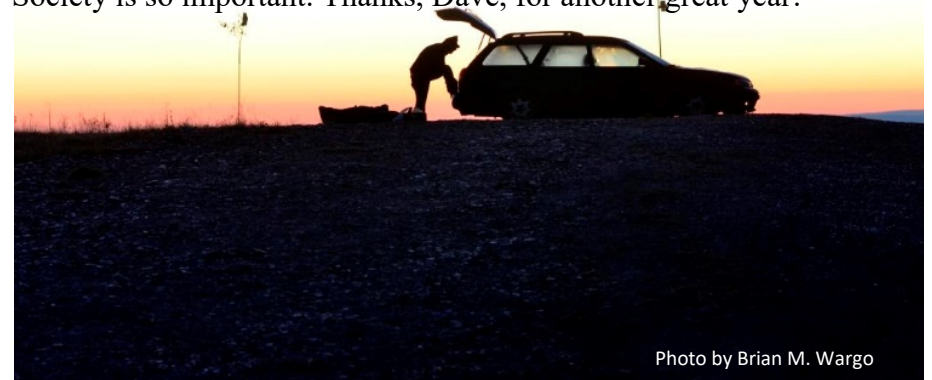


Photo by Brian M. Wargo

Dave’s night ends as the rest of the world is just waking up!

Raptorthon

The Allegheny Front Hawk Watch (AFHW) will receive some national attention this spring. That is because Brian M. Wargo has been selected as the featured 2017 Raptorthoner by The Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA).

Raptorthon is like Birdathon, but with the focus on raptors. The aim is to raise awareness about hawkwatching by counting the maximum number of raptor species within a 24-hour period. It is a fun way to raise money for HMANA and the AFHW, which will split the proceeds.

Wargo was selected because of his efforts to engage students in raptor research and hawkwatching in general. This is certainly a big honor, for the 2016 featured Raptorthoner was Jerry Liguori, author of the famed *Hawks from Every Angle* and *Hawks at a Distance*.

Wargo's team will consist of four students, Peyton Zankel, Brianna McKee, Breanna Leasure, and Kayla Carpenter, all members of the Freedom Area High School Naturalist Club (all pictured earlier). Dr. Wargo and the Eaglets (the official team name) will begin counting raptors Friday evening (April 14th) at Shawnee Lake, where they will be camping. They will then move to Allegheny Front Hawk Watch on Saturday for a full day of counting on April 15, 2017.

Please consider sponsoring our Raptorthon, either in person or on the HMANA.org website (go to Join/Donate—select Raptorthon—click Sponsor a Participant or Sponsoring a Raptorthon). Note: Raptorthon 2017 begins on March 1, 2017, so the donation button for Dr. Wargo and the Eaglets may not yet be active until then.



Photo by Jeanine Ging

Events and Outings Winter/Spring 2017

Always check the APAS Website for Updates or Cancellations

February 22, 2017 - Spring Hawkwatching

Golden Eagles come north early in the spring season. While not as numerous as in the fall, they remain spectacular. Counting of all raptors will continue until the beginning of May. We also have a Junior Hawkwatcher Program beginning this spring.

March 19, 2017 – Somerset Lake Walk

APAS's Vice President, Dr. Jeff Payne will lead the lake walk starting at noon at the dam parking lot. We are hoping for a good showing of waterfowl and gulls. Don't miss it!

March 28, 2017 – Yellow Creek State Park Waterfowl Tour

Margaret Higbee will lead a tour/hike looking for waterfowl. Meet at park office at 8:00 a.m. The outing should end by 11 or 12 o'clock. Contact is Bob Stewart, 814-269-9279 or bob@stewart.net if interested.

April 29, 2017 - Ephemeral Spring Wildflower Walk

APAS's Secretary Debbie Bodenschatz will lead the walk. Meet at 9:30 a.m. at the Wilmore Diner on Route 53 (at the traffic light). Mud is expected, so wear proper foot attire. Contact Deb at 814-243-2854 for information.

Late April Early May 2017 – Workday

The end of the hawkwatching spring season will require some work to clean the hawk site. We hope to planting seeds in the newly cleared field. Check the APAS News Feed on the website for the exact day.

Late Spring – Dates to be Determined (check APAS site)

- Paddle at Shawnee Lake or other Waterways
- Moth lighting

Seeking Board Members

The Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society (APAS) elected four officers last spring, but did not hold elections for board members. Therefore, I am requesting that any member that would like to serve on the board of directors to please send an email of intent to me directly at brianwargo@gmail.com. Nominations will also be accepted. Send the name of the person that you would like to nominate to me, again at brianwargo@gmail.com. I, or another APAS officer will contact them directly to see if they are willing to serve.

Board members will be expected to engage in a monthly meeting, either in person or on a teleconference meeting, and will be expected to chair one committee. If interested, please let me know.

Becoming a committee member will require some effort, but will undoubtedly reenergize you. Often, the hardest part of moving forward is just taking that initial step. Please consider taking a more active role in this wonderful organization.



Chi looks like he is trying to convince his wife Marian to run for the board.
Good job Chi!

Fall 2016 Newsletter Web Version

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electronic contacts:

website: www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org

twitter: APAS audubon@apasnews

contact APAS: skylarkflex@gmail.com

Facebook: Allegheny Front Hawk Watch

Latest count data: hawkcount.org

Editor: Brian M. Wargo

Contact the president of the APAS at: brianwargo@gmail.com

Membership use only