

# Chickadee Chatter

Winter 2018 Newsletter - Web Version

electronic contacts:

website: [www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org](http://www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org)

twitter: APAS [audubon@apasnews](mailto:audubon@apasnews)

contact APAS: [skylarkflex@gmail.com](mailto:skylarkflex@gmail.com)

Facebook: Allegheny Front Hawk Watch

Latest count data: [www.hawkcount.org](http://www.hawkcount.org)

Editor: Brian M. Wargo

Contact the president of the APAS at: [brianwargo@gmail.com](mailto:brianwargo@gmail.com)

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## Chickadee Chatter

Winter  
2018

The Newsletter of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society

### *From the President*

Life is full of uncertainty. We take for granted everything will be as it has always been. This is an error in our thinking. Everything changes and we must be careful not to take for granted the wonderful aspects of our lives. Similarly, we must continue to work hard to keep what we hold dear, safe.

Last year was filled with environmental setbacks, especially for raptors. Wind projects are advancing in migration areas, eagles are less protected from a seemingly bulletproof set of treaties that are now under attack, and environmental stewardship has been labeled as an impediment to job growth.

At the same time, the APAS is making strides to rebuild our organization. A newly formed board of directors, several initiatives that show promise, and some good publicity are all positives. But my favorite event from last year was seeing George Bercik again. After a long absence, he just showed up one day.



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

It is funny how life hits you one day and gives you a gift the next. I will not take this memory for granted.

*Brian M. Wargo*

## *From the Compiler—Bob Stewart*

The hawkwatch commenced on August 15, 2018 and continued through December 24. The watch was manned for 771.5 hours, similar to the previous year. Total raptor count was 6625. Raptors per hour calculates to 8.59 and 3.95 when Broad-winged Hawks are not considered. Total raptor count (less broad-wings) diminished by nearly 18% from 2016.

August proved to be an interesting month. On August 28, a Swallowtail Kite passed overhead at tree top level. This was the second recorded sighting of this species. The previous sighting occurred last year.

Bald Eagle sightings were frequent and meaningful. Aug 27 and Aug 28 produced favorable winds from the east. The Bald Eagle count was 25 for each day. The August total was 57, smashing the previous August record of 25 in 2011. The Bald Eagle flight continued strong the rest of the year setting a new season record of 181.

The kestrel count for August was only two. The kestrel count for the season was only 26, the lowest total on record since 2000. This fall (2017) was the fourth consecutive year of kestrel declining numbers.

On September 16, Brian Wargo recorded a Mississippi Kite. This was the first recorded sighting of this species at this hawk watch.

Cooper's Hawks continued their decline for the third consecutive season. Cooper's Hawks numbered 76. This was the lowest number since 1996.

Sharp-shinned Hawk count was 757, only 2009 was lower with 620.

On a positive note, the Golden Eagle count was 194. This was up dramatically from a disappointing 138 in 2016.

Rosemary McGlynn reported to the watch on November 15. The sky was cloudless, but became completely clouded by noon. Temperatures for the day hovered around freezing. Moderate winds prevailed out of the southeast. As usual, the flight started slowly at 9:00 AM with a red-tail and Golden Eagle. The ten o'clock hour picked up slightly. The flight became more steady at 11 AM.

The 50 Golden Eagle flight is given below by hour:

9-10	1 GE	1-2	10 GE
10-11	2 GE	2-3	16 GE
11-12	4 GE	3-4	8 GE
12-1	5 GE	4-5	4 GE

At times, there were multiple Golden Eagles in the sky at the same moment. It was a great flight with many close looks. Rounding out the flight were 25 Red-tailed Hawks, 2 Bald Eagles, and others.

Counters for this year were Deb Bodenschatz, Jim Rocco, Rosemary McGlynn, Ed Gowarty, Tom Dick, Brian Wargo, Bob Stewart, and Bob Gorsuch. Thanks for all your help this season as always.

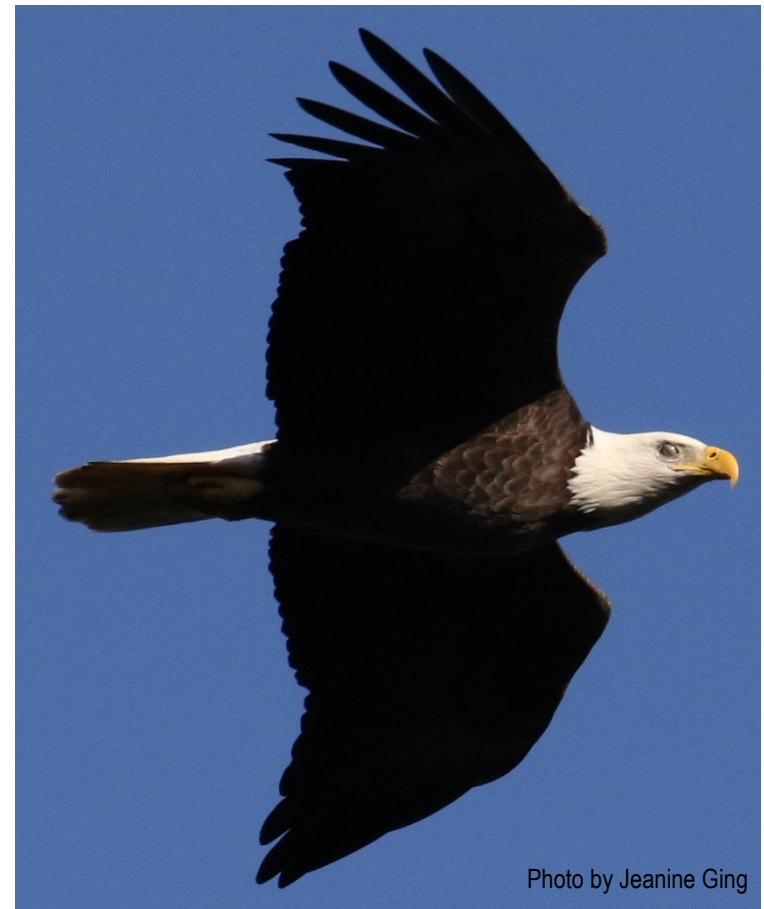


Photo by Jeanine Ging

This Bald Eagle blinked as this picture was being snapped!

## *Saturday Night Presentations at the Hawkwatch*

Last fall, the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society initiated Saturday Night Presentations at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch. The purpose was to remedy a drought in presenters for the organization. In the past, meetings were held at University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, but for a variety of reasons, that stopped. Therefore, a screen was erected and an ultra-quiet generator was used for electricity to power the projector. A campfire in the fire pit and marshmallows provide the ambiance.

The first presentation was August 9, 2018 where Jake Beckey presented The Night Sky. After some serious rain, the clouds parted and allowed the telescopes a great view of the Milky Way. The next presentation was by Kevin Georg and Bob Stewart, who detailed hawkwatching at Mackinac Straits and Corpus Christi.

Jeanine Ging presented the third presentation, which was Birding at the National Parks. The following week's presenter was Brian M. Wargo, who spoke about building igloos. Jack Julian ran the Moth Lighting the next weekend.

The last three presentations occurred in October, with Brian M. Wargo presenting the Biggest Week in Birding. The following weekend was our youngest speaker, Meadow Ging-Wargo who presented her studies on pinecones and pumpkins.

The final presentation, Naturphocus, was delivered by Ed Gowarty, Jr. Ed Jr. presented his favorite places for photographing birds and provided a stunning set of shots.

The overall attendance for all eight presentations was 77, with an average of nine participants per show. It was a fun experiment and we may try it again in the future.



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

Ed Gowarty Jr. at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch's Saturday Night Presentation. Notice the left side of the screen documenting the camera settings for each picture. Nice job Ed!



Photo by Brian M. Wargo

Wayne Sierer and Joe Kelly enjoy the beautiful photographs presented by Ed Gowarty Jr.

## Checking in with Sally Dick

Tom and I spend the winter months in Chincoteague, Virginia on the Eastern Shore. We don't leave the mountain to get away from the snow; we leave to have access to all the wonderful birding in the area.

Besides the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, nearby Indian River and Ocean City Inlets both provide lots of jetties and sea watching opportunities for birds like Harlequin Ducks, eiders, and large numbers of Long-tailed Ducks, scoters, gannets, and loons.



I've seen Snowy Owls at Chincoteague; as I was watching one sitting on a dune, a Golden Eagle came flying along the coast, swooped right over the owl and keep going. The owl didn't even seem to flinch.



On the other hand, I have watched as a thousand snow geese lift off when a Merlin flies by...causing Snow Geese chaos.



Farther south is the Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge, the hawkwatch at Kiptopeke, and many little coastal towns and wharfs.

Our feeders get busy with the usual finches, blackbirds, but also Brown Headed Nuthatches and pine and Yellow Rump Warblers. Throw in a few eagles soaring overhead with the various gulls, and it makes the winter fly by.



In March we head back home to catch the waterfowl at the Wetlands or Shawnee State Park as they leave here to head home, just like we do.

Sally Dick

## *New Board Members for the APAS*

The Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society (APAS) finally has a working board! After a yearlong search, six of our members agreed to oversee the workings of our organization.

The APAS elected officials (President: Brian M. Wargo; Vice-President: Jeff Payne; Secretary: Debbie Bodenschatz; and Treasurer: Jack Julian) oversaw the appointments of these board members via a teleconference call in January.

The new appointments are: Sally Dick, Jeanine Ging, Ed Gowarty, Jr., Rosemary McGlynn, Dave Poder, and Wayne Sierer. The appointments will last until a formal vote can take place with our membership at the August 2018 Summer Picnic, which will most likely take place at Shawnee State Park.

All six of these board members have agreed to run in this election. However, any member that would like to run can do so by emailing any one of the elected officers and your name will be placed on the ballot.

The new board went right to work, and by the time you read this, will have convened twice. This clearly indicates that these board members are not just overseeing, but strengthening our organization.

If you get a chance, thank these new board members for taking a leadership role in the APAS.



## *Elections of Officers*

Elections for officers of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society (APAS) were held nearly two years ago. This means that new elections should occur this season. To ensure that the maximum number of members can participate, elections will be held at the August 2018 Summer Picnic.

The APAS officials that are running for reelection are: Brian M. Wargo for President, Debbie Bodenschatz for Secretary, and Jack Julian for Treasurer.

These positions are also open to all APAS members, and all are encouraged to run. Nominations should be sent to any of the current APAS officers, who will contact the nominee to confirm their willingness to serve. Self-nominations are also welcomed.

Bob Stewart has been nominated and accepted the nomination for Vice-President of the APAS. His name will be placed on the ballot. Read on to see what is happening with the current Vice-president, Jeff Payne.

Below is a picture of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society Fall Picnic in 2017. It also served as the Annual Fall Meeting. Great food, good people, and lots of fun. Be sure to attend the August Picnic where we will be holding elections. (Photo by Brian M. Wargo)

## *APAS Vice-President Stepping Down*

Jeff Payne has served as our vice president for two years, but will not be running for reelection. He is still working full time (maybe more than full time) and is hoping that someone will be able to take the vice president position.

Jeff stepped up on short notice to take the vice-president position when others were not willing. He was there when we needed him most, and for that, we thank you!

During his tenure, Jeff led our waterfowl walks and was solely responsible for the Christmas Bird Count. Needless to say, he did a fabulous job, for bird identification is where Jeff shines. His mind is encyclopedic with deep knowledge of nearly every species. When tallying the counts, he is a master. He knows how to ensure that each and every identification is correct. And he is always there to offer assistance.

But the characteristic that makes Jeff so special is his kind nature. No matter where you are at in terms of identification, Jeff makes everyone feel comfortable. If you get the ID wrong, he will help you make it right, comfortably, and confidently.

While Jeff is stepping down, he will continue to work with the APAS as he always has. Hopefully, when the work eases a bit, he will consider running again.

Thanks for all of your work Jeff!



Photo by Jeanine Ging

## *Wetlands Outing at Dunnings Creek*

Members of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society were treated to a wonderful walk through Dunnings Creek wetlands on Sunday, November 12, 2017. Tom and Sally Dick, along with their daughter Kim Moore had been helping to plan this event for months and it turned out to be a very good day. The weather was cold in the morning, but within an hour or two, it was much warmer.

Tom, Sally, and Kim took turns leading the group, conveying the history of the land, and telling the stories accumulated over the years. Some of the water was frozen, but several pockets of open water were occupied by ducks. For some, it was the first trip to the wetlands and it was great!



Photo by Jeanine Ging

From left to right in back: Phyllis Terchanik, Mike Jackson, Rosemary McGlynn, Deb Bodenschatz, Tom Dick, Ed Gowarty Jr., Sandy Cline, Laura Jackson, Jack and Eileen Gilbert, Brian M. Wargo

Left to right in front: Kim Moore, Sally Dick, Theo Ging-Wargo, Meadow Ging Wargo

## *King Georg Returns to AFHW*

After a perfect August day at the Allegheny Front Hawkwatch, where over 80 hawks were counted, a real heavyweight stepped in to talk about big hawk numbers.

Kevin Georg, also known as “The Man Who Watched the Most Hawks,” returned to his home hawkwatch. At 8:00 p.m., Georg gave a presentation around the campfire, detailing his time at Corpus Christi and Mackinac Straits. The excited attendees came from all over to hear Kevin’s experiences. Bob Mulvihill, the ornithologist at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, drove in for the presentation and to see his longtime friend.

The crowd got what they were looking for—stories and pictures of huge hawk counts. Georg regularly counts thousands of birds in a day; sometimes tens of thousands of hawks. One day, he counted over a hundred thousand migrating hawks. Bob Stewart joined Kevin for a second presentation, where he documented his trip to see Kevin in action. It was a great night!



Photo by Jeanine Ging

Kevin Georg, Bob Mulvihill, Bob Stewart, Sandy and Bill Cline, Jack Julian, Theo and Meadow Ging Wargo hanging on Brian M. Wargo, Joe Sabo, Nancy and Gene Flament, Sally and Tom Dick are outside the picture

## *Field of Flowers at the Hawkwatch*

Sally Dick and Deb Bodenschatz have been transforming the field of the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch into a butterfly sanctuary by planting wildflowers. This year was the first year of their creation and it is becoming a huge draw, for people and butterflies alike.



A Tiger-Swallowtail lands on a patch of Cosmos. Many other species visited the wildflower garden this year. At this rate, we may have to do a daily butterfly count! (Photo by Brian M. Wargo)

This spring, we are all hoping to see the natural succession that takes place in the field; which flowers reseeded, which have taken hold, and what natural newcomers have arrived. Whatever happens, we expect it to be wonderful this year.

The sheer beauty of the flowered area makes every day even more special at the hawkwatch. And Sally and Deb are not done, for they have plans to expand the area this year. Way to go ladies!!!

## *Night Life at the Allegheny Front*

Five o'clock at the hawk watch is usually when binoculars are put away and the gate is locked for the night. However, on most weekends from mid-October through mid-November, the excitement is just beginning.

Dave Darney and his assistants set up mist nets along the lanes and then turn-on the speakers. They are not blaring music, but the call of the Saw-whet Owl.

This fall we had several warm nights and a few bitter cold ones that makes you think to yourself, "Why am I doing this?" The answer is clear as soon as you gaze upon a stunning Saw-whet up close.

Dave extracts the owls and a band is placed on the leg with hopes of it being recaptured elsewhere so we can learn more about their migration. Other data such as weight, wing length, beak size, eye color, age and sex are recorded.

One of the most interesting steps in this process is placing the owl under a black light to establish an age. Feathers will glow pink under a black light because of porphyrin in newer feathers. The glow fades with age so a bird with bright pink is usually a younger bird.

Wayne Sierer one of the faithful assistants developed a "black light on steroids." This new light enhanced the glow and allows observers to see details that were usually undetectable.

On two separate birds there were yellow spots that looked like highlighter markings. This new discovery is still being investigated. Banded this season were 19 Saw-whets, and 2 Eastern Screech Owls (pictured). We also captured two flying squirrels and a Praying Mantis.



An Eastern Screech Owl in Dave Darney's Hand.  
(Photo by Jeanine Ging)

## *Events and Outings Winter/Spring 2018*

As with all outings, presentations, walks, meetings, talks, etc., always check the APAS website for updates or cancelations before leaving home at [www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org](http://www.alleghenyplateauaudubon.org).

### **February 22, 2018 - 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.

### **April 14, 2018 – Raptorthon**

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 the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA) and the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch, which will split the proceeds. 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).

### **Moth Lighting - Late Spring through Late Summer**

Rarely seen moths, butterflies, and flying insects are active at night. To view them, we erect a special light that entices them. A white sheet spread around the light makes for easy viewing. Bring flashlights, cameras, insect guides (or smart phones) to view, photograph and identify what shows up. The variety will change with the seasons. Dates and locations will be announced on the website news feed.



Don't forget to look at the mushrooms this season. (Photo by Brian M. Wargo)