



# Kingfisher Courier

Newsletter of Appalachian Audubon Society

December 2009 — January 2010

E-Version

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January's public program featuring Walt Pomeroy *Countries of Southern Africa; Diverse Habitats, Wildlife, and Birds*



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Reminder: Keep this issue until after the January 2010 program! The next *Kingfisher Courier* will be February 2010.

### Upcoming Events

#### Christmas Bird Counts

Participate in 4 local surveys in this century-old tradition. Teams of birders meet at designated areas to conduct the counts:

**Harrisburg CBC**—Saturday, Dec.19; Deuane Hoffman— 564-7475 or [corvuscorax@comcast.net](mailto:corvuscorax@comcast.net)

**New Bloomfield CBC**—Saturday, Dec 26; Ramsay Koury— 761-1871 or [RKoury123@aol.com](mailto:RKoury123@aol.com)

**Curtin CBC**—Tuesday, Dec 29; Scott Bills—896-8859 or [sbills@state.pa.us](mailto:sbills@state.pa.us)

**Newville CBC**—January 2, 2010; Bill and Linda Frantz—776-4463 Saturday, January 16, 2010 (snow date: Saturday, January 23)

#### Field Trip

**Saturday, January 16, 2010**  
(snow date: Saturday, January 23)

#### Juniata County Winter Birding

Join Aden Troyer in search of Long-eared Owls, Short-eared Owls, Lapland Longspurs and other birds of interest. Details and carpooling information from Aden at 463-3117 or Judy Bowman, 761-3815 or [bowma99@aol.com](mailto:bowma99@aol.com).



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**December 10, 2009**

## The Appalachian Trail - A Footpath for Those Who Seek Fellowship with the Wilderness

Reminder: Keep this issue until after the January 2010 program! The next *Kingfisher Courier* issue will be **February 2010**.

In 2006, past AAS president and naturalist **Lorrie Preston** set off on an 18 month adventure with the local Susquehanna Appalachian Trail (AT) Club to section-hike the 229 miles of AT that cross the state of Pennsylvania. The twice monthly hikes improved this middle-aged hiker's strength, balance, determination, and "can-do" attitude. She found the camaraderie of fellow hikers and the beauty of the Pennsylvania wilderness along the mountain ridges to be inspiring and addictive.

Now, she has section-hiked about 900 miles of the trail from Connecticut to southern Virginia, and most recently in New Hampshire.

Lorrie will share images of the beautiful trailside flora and fauna, through the seasons and various birds along the trail, as well as some of the spectacular views and trail highlights.

Maps and other interesting info will be available for perusal before the program starts. Learn where

you can easily access the trail in our area for your own adventure. We hope to have PA AT Guidebooks available for sale that evening for a nominal fee, as well as a DVD of highlights of Lorrie's hike across PA for those that are interested.

AAS monthly programs (September—May) typically take place on the 3rd Thursday of each month at the **Christ Presbyterian Church, 421 Deerfield Road, in the Allendale neighborhood of Camp Hill**. Join us at 7:00 pm for refreshments and conversation. The program begins at 7:30. For directions, visit <http://www.appalachianaudubon.org/events.htm>

## January 21, 2010

### Countries of Southern Africa; Diverse Habitats, Wildlife, and Birds

Enjoy the world's oldest desert, see one of the world's largest waterfalls, travel along the south Africa coast, see the world's oldest human footprint and enjoy a wide variety of mammals and birds in this diverse program about southern Africa.

From animals to human culture to habitat diversity, this presentation by **Walt Pomeroy** (retired National Audubon Mid-Atlantic Regional Vice President, AAS

member, and program favorite) will bring all these visual stories together in one evening. From three separate Audubon trips that he co-led, in this program we will visit South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe habitats of grasslands, deserts, forests, wetlands, rivers and coastline.

We look forward to Walt's exploration of this warm continent during our winter season!



This map offers a quick geography lesson on the location of the African countries. Map: [maps.Google.com](http://maps.Google.com)

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## President's Perch

Paul Zeph

### Speak Up For the Appalachian Trail

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is the nation's longest, thinnest national park that runs 229 miles through Pennsylvania. If you're hiking north from Springer Mountain, Georgia to Mt. Katahdin, Maine (2,175 miles), you enter Pennsylvania on South Mountain (an Important Bird Area or IBA), and soon enter the Michaux State Forest. You hike through Caledonia State Park, then Pine Grove Furnace State Park, and then come down out of South Mountain just west of Dillsburg into Boiling Springs.

Heading north through the Cumberland Valley, the Appalachian Trail (AT) snakes through farm lands and woodland strips; crossing over roads, under highways, and across the Conodoguinet Creek until it reaches Blue Mountain (another IBA). This is actually one of the most vulnerable stretches of the entire AT, due to the narrow buffer of protected land through the valley, and the development pressure for new homes and industrial warehouses.

A state law (Act 24) passed in 2008 now requires municipalities bordering the trail in Pennsylvania to use their zoning authority to preserve the AT and protect the natural, scenic, historic and aesthetic resources along the Trail. Without the funds to write new ordinances, however, townships will be reluctant to comply with the Act. If you live in one of the AT townships or boroughs, your support and encouragement to your local elected township supervisors or borough council will be needed to protect this national treasure in our backyards. For a list of AT municipalities in our part of the state, see the end of this article.

Continuing your hike north, the Trail comes down the north side of Blue Mountain into Perry County, crossing the agricultural valley of Rye Township. Then, up again onto the top of Cove Mountain, and along the forested ridge into Penn Township, then down to the Susquehanna River by way of Duncannon. Crossing the river on the 22/322 bridge, the trail zig-zags up out of the Susquehanna Valley onto Peter's Mountain, and the trek through a third IBA begins—St. Anthony's Wilderness. This is also the beginning of a long section of Trail notorious for its foot-bruising, boot-destroying rocks along the Kittatinny Ridge Corridor to New Jersey.

A recent survey found that the vast majority of AT hikers are local residents, out for a day hike or a short overnight adventure. Besides being a national park, it's also a tremendous local recreational resource. In addition, it's an un-interrupted ecological corridor connecting the entire length of the Appalachian Mountain range. The army of trail volunteers who keep the hiking path clear, shelters standing, and hikers safe now need all our help to protect the buffer corridor and the wild

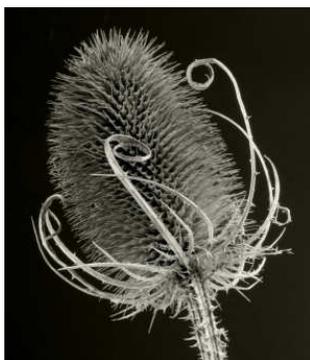
*(Continued on page 5)*

## In the Field: Winter Plant Identification by Ralph Kinter

(originally published January 1994)

November starts our bleak season, when the trees have shed their leaves, and the wildflowers have all gone to sleep for the winter.

But this is no good reason for us to curl up in the nice soft, warm easy chair, and wait for spring to arrive. There is still much to be observed, and there are a number of excellent guide books to help you in observing the dormant plants and trees, as well as the active insects and animals, during the winter season.



Common Teasel makes a nice, if prickly, dried flower arrangement.

Goldenrod has a persistent, fluffy head, while asters have lost all of their seed head, which are not persistent, leaving a star-like head, from which the aster gets its name.

Teasel is easy, with its distinctive seed head identifying the old plant, while being a biennial, the new plant has a flat, evergreen rosette of leaves. The mullein has a

similar rosette of leaves, but it is not so flat, and the leaves tend to be more woolly.

Milkweeds and dogbane both have long slender seed pods, but the milkweed has the pods upright, while the dogbane's are drooping or nodding.

Winter is a good time to try your expertise in identifying trees and shrubs by their leaf scars. And there is an excellent book on this subject by William Trelease, entitled *Winter Botany*, published by Dover Books.

We get a lot of enjoyment in going out in the winter and trying to identify plants by their remains, especially their seeds.

The plants of the mustard family lend themselves well to this type of study, for they are best identified from their seeds anyway.

A good guide book for this use is Lauren Brown's *Weeds In Winter*, Houghton-Mifflin Co.

One species of terrestrial orchid, in our area is best found at this time of the year. This is the putty root,

*Aplectrum hymale*, as it sets its leaves in October, winters over, losing its leaves in spring. Once we learned this about this orchid, we soon found that it was not as rare as was once thought. Look for green leaves with white stripes, running the length of the leaf.

Additionally, some plants choose to bloom during the winter months. For example: Skunk Cabbage, *Sumplocarpus foetidus*, begins to bloom in January, generating enough heat to melt a niche for itself under the snow and ice.

Yellow Jessamine, *Gelsemium sempervirens*, a member of the *Loyania* Family, frequently blooms in February.

Neither do all of the animals and insects hibernate. The larvae of many insects are active under the ice, where the temperature is just above freezing.

And many of our salamanders take advantage this to spawn in January or early February give their young the advantage of feeding the larva of those insects.

Help can be found with Donald Stokes' *A Guide To Nature In Winter*, Little-Brown Co.

So, even though the trees are bare and the plants brown, there is still much to be seen in nature in winter, so bundle up, get out there and enjoy what you can find.

- R.K.



Putty Root is native to the eastern deciduous forest of North America, where it is the only ground-layer herb that produces a fully developed overwintering leaf.

The leaves appear in late November and persist until March. They are uniquely pin-striped, with parallel alternating silver-white and green stripes.

In late May or early June the flower stalk emerges carrying several flowers, each only a few millimeters across.

## Susquehanna Water Gaps are Re-recognized as a 'National Natural Landmark'

An ancient river got a brand new plaque on Sept. 9 when the “five gaps” area north of Harrisburg was recognized once again as a “National Natural Landmark (NNL).” In a ceremony in Marysville, the river provided a scenic backdrop for a reminder of the Susquehanna’s beauty and the gaps’ singular geologic features.

“Over the years, I have paddled the entire 444 miles of Susquehanna from Cooperstown, New York down to the Chesapeake Bay, 104 miles of the west branch and also the entire Juniata,” said DCNR Deputy Secretary Cindy Dunn. “There’s nowhere on the Susquehanna or its major tributaries as spectacular as this gap.”

In 1968, the National Park Service (NPS) officially designated the five water gaps along the Susquehanna River from Liverpool south to Harrisburg a NNL. The area was recognized for its unique geologic heritage and its outstanding natural beauty.

A plaque was installed at the time of the designation on the south side of Berry Mountain along Routes 11/15 to commemorate the occasion. A few years ago the plaque was stolen, and the designation was largely forgotten.

The river is much older than the mountains, and the water gaps’  
(Continued on page 6)

## In Memoriam

We received sad news this November about the passing of two AAS friends, Grace Randolph and Cliff Dillmann.

**Grace Randolph** was an active AAS member and officer in the 1980s and 90s and served as an inspiration, teacher, and mentor for many who accompanied her on birding trips throughout central and eastern Pennsylvania. Grace found the Sedge Wren at the Trout Run wetlands off of Stumpstown Road in Upper Allen Township (Cumberland County), which led our chapter to fight for the wetland’s protection as houses were being constructed around its perimeter. Today, Trout Run Preserve is owned and managed by AAS.

Grace worked both the Curtin and Harrisburg Christmas Bird Counts, and led AAS members on trips to find special or unusual birds. Carl and Nancy Juris recall fondly their many trips with Grace to find the Townsend’s Warbler, Horned Larks, Bobolinks, Woodcock near the Sportsman’s Golf Course, the Swainson’s Warbler in Clarks Valley (when she reported it, everybody doubted her until they saw it), Hammond’s Flycatcher, Red-headed Woodpeckers near Newville, Say’s Phoebe, and the list goes on.

She was the person who was responsible for the *Kingfisher Courier* distribution for a good number of years, and helped with many AAS activities through the years. She particularly loved children and teaching them about birds and nature, and in recognition of that, AAS established a scholarship fund in her name a few years ago that we have been using to send city youth to the Wildwood Nature Center’s week-long summer camps. Grace’s passing will give us more focus to reach out to connect even more children with nature.

**Cliff Dillmann** was a local peace and conservation activist who was involved in many issues that intersected with Audubon. His tireless efforts in the 1970s helped to save the lands immediately around Wildwood Lake, as well as much of the wetlands, from becoming part of the 322/22 connector to I-81 -- in part, where the Wildwood Lake Nature Center stands today.

More recently, Cliff was an active leader with the Canoe Club of Greater Harrisburg, Susquehanna River Trail Assoc., and the Susquehanna Water Gaps Coalition. As a resident of Marysville, he was on the borough’s planning council working to make it a greener place to live. Cliff was a mentor to many and we all will miss his strong voice for the environment.

## Teach Others to Garden for Birds!

Are you passionate about attracting wildlife to the backyard? If so, our Audubon-at-Home committee needs you! We want to spread the Audubon-at-Home message to the people in our communities! If you are interested, please call Lorrie Preston at 732-5615 or e-mail [GardensNaturally@aol.com](mailto:GardensNaturally@aol.com).

# Appalachian Trail cont.

*(Continued from page 2)*

hiking experience. You can make a huge difference by simply expressing your desire to see your municipality comply with the Appalachian Trail Act of 2008.

For more details on the AT Act and resources available to help municipalities comply with the Act, check out [www.appalachiantrail.org](http://www.appalachiantrail.org) and navigate to the Pennsylvania page.

Municipalities Impacted by Act 24 of 2008, The Appalachian Trail Protection Act (in the Appalachian Audubon Society territory):

### Cumberland County

- Middlesex Township
- Monroe Township
- Silver Spring Township
- South Middleton Township

### Dauphin County

- East Hanover Township
- Halifax Township
- Middle Paxton Township
- Reed Township
- Rush Township
- Wayne Township

### Perry County

- Duncannon Borough
- Penn Township
- Rye Township



Map showing the Appalachian Trail as it passes through central Pennsylvania.

Benton MacKaye was the first to publish the idea of the A.T. MacKaye (1879-1975) grew up in Shirley Center, Massachusetts, reading the work of American naturalists and poets and taking long walks in the mountains of Massachusetts and Vermont. MacKaye sometimes claimed that the idea for the A.T. was born one day when he was sitting in a tree atop Stratton Mountain in Vermont. Read more about MacKaye at <http://www.appalachiantrail.org/site/c.mqLTIYOwGIF/b.4805451/k.C463/History.htm>.



View along the Appalachian Trail, looking east toward the Susquehanna River. Vistas along Pennsylvania's ridges are some of the most scenic in the state.

*Walking takes longer... than any other known form of locomotion except crawling. Thus it stretches time and prolongs life. Life is already too short to waste on speed.*  
—Edward Abbey

## Water Gaps cont.

(Continued from page 4)

formation still remains a bit of a geological mystery. The water actually cuts through five mountain ridges to form the gaps. Those ridges from south to north are, Blue Mountain, Second Mountain (aka Cove Mountain), Peter's Mountain, Berry Mountain, and Mahantango Mountain (aka Buffalo Mountain).

"I grew up right across the Susquehanna in Fishing Creek Valley," Dunn said. "Like a lot of people, I'm afraid I took this view for granted. How would I know, or how does anyone know, that this place we call home is truly remarkable, and stands out as a national resource?"

Through the efforts of the Susquehanna Water Gaps Coalition, the NPS has been able to provide a replacement plaque. The ceremony's host, The Susquehanna Water Gaps Coalition, was formed in January 2007 by individuals, organizations, and agencies who are committed to protecting the natural, scenic, and cultural resources of the area ridges, valley lands, and river islands.

"I want to congratulate Paul Zeph, Dana Lomma, Nina Ertel, the Save the Gap Coalition, the Borough of Marysville and all others who had the foresight to recognize the value of the Susquehanna Water Gap through a re-dedication of the gap..." Dunn said. "Our actions today ...will only be as significant as the actions we take to go forward and protect this treasure."

For more information on Susquehanna Water Gaps Coalition, visit [www.centralpaconservancy.org](http://www.centralpaconservancy.org). Reprinted with permission from the PA DCNR September resource e-newsletter.

## Audubon Pa News: Protecting Important Bird Areas with Local Partners

Audubon Pennsylvania's Important Bird Area (IBA) program has grown tremendously since its launch in the mid-1990s, and with the help of partner organizations and volunteers it is making a dramatic impact on bird conservation. The number of IBAs identified by Audubon PA is now 85, with three IBAs located in the AAS chapter territory: Kittatinny Ridge (Blue Mountain), St. Anthony's Wilderness (northern Dauphin County), and Sheets Archipelago on the Susquehanna River.

Brian Byrnes, Audubon PA's IBA coordinator for SE Pennsylvania, has been working hard with a land trust in Chester County to develop a comprehensive stewardship and conservation program for the Upper Ridley/Crum IBA, which includes Ridley Creek State Park, Tyler Arboretum, and a large expanse of private land with numerous private landowners. The success that he and partners have realized with this project may give us some ideas on ways we could help protect the IBAs in our part of the state.

Audubon PA partnered with the Willistown Conservation Trust (WCT) to begin a bird monitoring program on private lands (particularly grasslands), to conduct an extensive deer management program, and even to protect key properties. Each of these efforts are summarized below, starting with the bird monitoring.

### Documenting Bird Nesting

A host of volunteer bird monitors, including a number of Valley Forge Audubon members, now visit private properties in the IBA on a regular basis throughout the year to document each property's avian residents and visitors. In addition to quantifying the many regular species of the area, the volunteers have discovered a number of less common species, including Blue Grosbeak, Black-billed Cuckoo, Bobolink and Lincoln's Sparrow. These data will allow Audubon to track changes in the IBA over time, and fill in many of the gaps in knowledge that typically occur in privately owned areas. Audubon and WCT also now send an annual summary to each landowner to let them know what was found on their property and what they can do to maintain or improve bird habitat conditions for these species.

### Deer Overpopulation

This past fall WCT launched a deer management program to address one of the chief threats to the health of the IBA: overabundant white-tailed deer that are suppressing the growth of native saplings and shrubs in wooded areas. Overabundant deer have also caused a host of other issues within the IBA, including a high number of Lyme disease cases, collisions with vehicles, and damage to ornamental plantings. WCT's focus on the health of bird populations within their organization's region was a key factor in its decision to undertake the Herculean task

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# Audubon Pa News: IBAs Continued



of bringing deer into balance with their habitat. Audubon assisted WCT in developing the program, including how to measure success over time by monitoring the response of vegetation at various places within the IBA.

Deer-human conflicts are also being monitored through community surveys. WCT organized a system of “co-ops” within which landowners and hunters work together to manage the deer herd for ecosystem health. Plans are even underway to streamline the process of donating deer for processing and distribution to local food banks. This entire process has tied the health of bird populations to the health of people living within the IBA, a true sign of progress.

## Protecting Critical Parcels for Nesting Neo-tropicals

Finally, Audubon has partnered with WCT to protect the Rushton Woods, one of the largest privately-owned contiguous forests within the IBA. The site provides nesting habitat for numerous neo-tropical migrants, including Kentucky Warblers, Wood Thrushes and Ovenbirds. In 2007, Audubon transferred ownership of 30 acres of the Rushton Woods to WCT, which established the Rushton Woods Preserve. A non-wooded portion of the site now hosts WCT’s community-supported agriculture operation, promoting the use of locally-grown organic produce.

WCT and Audubon are now trying to acquire a 50-acre parcel

adjacent to the Preserve that is almost entirely forested to create an 80-acre refuge that is accessible to the public. In the spring of 2009 Audubon secured a grant from Chester County to assist in the acquisition. The fundraising continues today, but if this effort is like other collaborations in the Upper Ridley/Crum IBA it will end successfully.

*Story By Brian Byrnes, Audubon Pa, and Paul Zeph.*

*For more information about the Upper Ridley/Crum IBA, contact Brian Byrnes at [bbyrnes@audubon.org](mailto:bbyrnes@audubon.org) or 610-666-5593 ext. 106.*