



Kingfisher Courier

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2016

APPALACHIAN AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

AAS PROGRAM | FEBRUARY 2016

Herons in da Hood

(Please note the program change from what was posted in our brochure.)

Yellow-crowned Night-Herons nest in small colonies, often in sycamore trees, sometimes in urban areas. They are listed as a Pennsylvania endangered species by the PA Game Commission. Several years ago a group of these birds took up residence above the busy streets of Harrisburg.

Pam Parson, a long-time resident of uptown Harrisburg, has been following the activities of the local herons. Pam will discuss the natural history of this species, as well as their interactions with the human residents living below them. This program, along with the Peregrine Program that will be presented in April, demonstrates how urban settings can be attractive to a variety of species. It is a testament to how city dwellers can become involved in the life cycle of our avian nesters.

Pam is a 16-year volunteer with Wildwood Park with a great interest in birds and other wildlife. She enjoys educating the public and hopes that her program sparks interest and questions about the topic.

Appalachian Audubon invites the public to this program on Thursday, February 18. The social gathering starts at 7:00pm, followed by the monthly meeting. Pam's program will conclude the evening.



Photo courtesy Larry Imes

SAVE THE DATE!
Thursday, FEBRUARY 18 @ 7:00pm

AAS PROGRAM | MARCH 2016

Planting for Wildlife, Teaching for Change

Kim Patten directs the Wilderness Greenhouse & Native Plant Nursery, a program of the Diakon Wilderness School located just outside of Boiling Springs, PA. While new to professional horticulture, Kim has been a gardener, educator and avid environmentalist for many years, having spent 15 years with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, teaching hands-on watershed education and engaging citizens in environmental advocacy and restoration projects to protect our water quality. She currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council (CCLC).

The Diakon Wilderness School, a program of Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries, has been serving at-risk youth of central Pennsylvania for over 30 years. While the greenhouse offers more than 200 different species of flowering plants, ferns, grasses, shrubs and trees for both retail and wholesale customers, first and foremost, the greenhouse is a teaching nursery, offering students an opportunity to learn valuable skills, gain workplace experience, and deepen their understanding of the relationships in the world around them.

Kim will talk about the development of the Wilderness Greenhouse native plant program and will provide some helpful hints on specific plants that we can incorporate into our landscapes to encourage and support birds and wildlife.



Photo courtesy Diakon Wilderness School

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!
Thursday, March 17 @ 7:00pm

Scholarship Opportunities Abound!

Yes, winter is still here ... but summer *will* be winging its way back! AAS offers scholarships for summer environmental, wildlife and birding experiences for ages 5 through 17 here in Pennsylvania and to Audubon's Hog Island Camp in Maine. *We welcome your suggestions and requests for additional camp scholarships: please contact Karen Atwood at atwoodphoto1@verizon.net or 717-602-8031.*

Wildwood Park Day Camps: Scholarships for urban youth. Call 717-221-0292 to register (these camps are popular so call soon!) or go to www.wildwoodlake.org/events/. Apply for AAS scholarships directly through Wildwood:

NATURE EXPLORERS

Ages 5–6 • June 14–16, 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Learn about nature through the senses.

WILDWOOD WAY DAY CAMP

Ages 7–9 • June 27–July 1, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Learn about animal adaptations, use binoculars, explore a creek, visit with live animals.

JUNIOR NATURALIST

Ages 10–11 • July 11–15, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Learn naturalist and outdoor skills, explore habitats while hiking, use binoculars, canoe the lake.

SCIENCE SERIES

Ages 10–15 • July 19–22, 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Learn species identification, natural history, bird biology, water quality and insects.

OUTDOOR WEEK

Ages 12–15 • July 25–29, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Learn to build a debris hut, fish, identify wild edibles, and canoe a creek or river.

Goddard Leadership Legacy Institute (www.goddardleadership.org): ages 13–15, July 10–16. Explore conservation leadership, environmental and government issues, and water quality and ecosystems while also enjoying recreational opportunities in our state parks. Based in Pine Grove Furnace State Park. Call the Central PA Conservancy at 717-241-4360 for application and scholarship details.

Hog Island Audubon Educator and Family Camps: Go to <http://hogisland.audubon.org> for dates and other information: we will consider applications as long as openings remain. (Applications received for the teen camp are under review, with a final decision expected by March 1.)



Field Trips

MARCH FIELD TRIP

Sunday, March 13, 2016

Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area

One of our favorite late winter destinations, Middle Creek affords us the opportunity to view Snow Geese, Tundra Swans, and a variety of waterfowl that have stopped over during their spring migration. Bald Eagles are year-round residents that are frequently seen during this field trip.

Be prepared to stay into the late afternoon to watch for Short-eared Owls and Northern Harriers at dusk. Veteran leader Pete Fox will meet us at the Lower Dauphin High School rear parking lot at 2:00pm for carpooling to the wildlife area. Contact Pete at peterfoxjr@yahoo.com or 583-2639 to register.

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Publicity
Vacant

Trout Run
Vacant

Trout Run Gets A Facelift

The quiet of a November morning at Trout Run Nature Preserve was broken, not by bird song, but by the whine of chain saws. For this field trip, a crew of Appalachian Audubon volunteers and local residents carried loppers and saws instead of binoculars and field guides. The group, including Paul Zeph, Ray Echelberger, Phil Durgin, Mike Hassert, Kevin DePaulis, Kathy Kuchwara and Will and Jane Webster, had come to do battle with the invasive woody vegetation that had sprung up over the past several years. This growth was impeding drainage from the Creekstone Manor homes that border the preserve and causing a back-up of water on their lawns.

Paul Zeph organized a meeting with Susan Miller, Kathy Kuchwara, and officers of the Creekstone Manor homeowners association. A walking tour of the affected areas helped identify what needed to be done to correct the flooding.

THE HOMEOWNERS HAVE RESPONDED POSITIVELY TO OUR EFFORTS. THEY HAVE TAKEN OVER THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MOWING THE BORDERS OF THE PRESERVE.... IT IS A WIN-WIN FOR EVERYONE.

The past few months have seen three work days at the preserve that have eliminated the grasses, shrubs and trees that were causing the problem. The homeowners have responded positively to our efforts. They have taken over the responsibility for mowing the borders of the preserve that border the adjacent roads (required by township ordinance), resulting in a cost savings to our chapter of over \$100 yearly. The homeowners have a backyard view that looks tidy and supports wildlife. It is a win for everyone.



Volunteers clear away invasive plants to improve the preserve.
Photo courtesy Kathy Kuchwara

Don't Forget the Great Backyard Bird Count

The 19th annual GBBC is almost here. Started in 1998 as a collaborative effort by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, it was the first online citizen science project to collect data about wild birds and display the results in near real time.

Since then greater than 100,000 people of all ages and backgrounds have participated in the four-day count each February, creating an annual snapshot of the numbers and species of the birds they observe.

It's easy to become a part of the project. Simply count the number and kinds of birds you see for at least a 15-minute time interval on one (or more) days during February 12–15. The count is not limited to your backyard. You can count from any location worldwide.

The first step is to register online by accessing the National Audubon website and following the prompts for the GBBC.

The data you gather is important. Scientists use this information, along with observations from other citizen science projects such as the Christmas Counts and eBird, to gain information on what is happening to bird populations worldwide. It helps provide answers to far reaching questions such as:

- How do weather and climate change affect bird populations?
- Why is it that some species of birds appear in large numbers during a certain winter but are absent during others?
- How will the timing of bird migration compare with past years?
- How are bird diseases affecting birds in different regions?
- What are the differences in bird populations observed in cities, suburbs, rural, and natural areas?

This is a fun, but very important, way to spend 15 minutes of your day on a weekend in February. Remember—the birds are counting on you!



Pheasants on the Increase?

by Rick Price

On December 29, 2015, my wife Peggy and I participated in the Curtin CBC in the Carsonville/Lykens area of Dauphin County, led by former AAS chapter president Terry Neumyer. Despite the early morning downpours, we had a good winter count of 32 species for this area. Highlights included Swamp Sparrows, Winter Wrens and seven Ring-necked Pheasants (the latter over three separate stops.) We also had a flock of Snow Geese in a field shortly after leaving the group at the last CBC stop. Many thanks are extended to the Laskowski and Koerber families for their warm (literally) hospitality during the count.

For Peggy and me the pheasants were the most we've seen in one day in PA in over 30 years. (We did see a lot in England a few years ago, where hedgerows have been preserved between fields for centuries.) My assumption after the CBC was that stocked birds had survived well this year, perhaps aided by mild temperatures. It reminded me of a day last summer when I reported two cock pheasants and a hen along the driving tour at Middle Creek in Lancaster/Lebanon

counties. The eBird prompt said this was a high count for the location and asked for details. At face value this might seem strange, given that the tour road



Photo courtesy Rick Price

winds through corn fields and managed grasslands on a state game propagation area. However, in light of the three-decade decline in pheasant populations due to a number of variables, it made sense. These variables include loss of habitat, changes in farming practices, and to a lesser extent, predation by Eastern Coyotes, feral cats (on young birds), and other natural predators such

as foxes and indigenous avian raptors. Encounters with an increased number of motor vehicles could be another factor.

My interest was further piqued when I read a timely article titled "Pheasant Numbers Go in Right Direction," by Marcus Schneck in the January 3, 2016, edition of the Sunday Patriot-News. Mr. Schneck reported the results of a joint survey conducted by the Cumberland Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever and the PA Game Commission on a private farm near Mercersburg, Franklin County. Dogs and staff raised 33 Ring-necks on December 20th, an unprecedented number in the past two decades. These birds are thought to be mostly remnants of a wild population of birds relocated from eastern Montana and rural PA back in 2009.

Based on the limited anecdotal data above, could we be on the brink of a modest increase in pheasants in south central PA? Only time and managed conservation efforts will tell. At a time when less desirable invasive species are continually discouraging, the return of a more valuable introduced species would be welcomed by many.

Another Productive Saw-whet Owl Field Trip

On the evening of Sunday, November 1, a group of six AAS members journeyed to Small Valley Girl Scout Camp. Our goal was simple: to be able to see a Saw-whet Owl in the flesh. This is the third year that our chapter has joined Sandy and Gary Lockerman while they spend the evening capturing, examining, banding and releasing these tiny raptors.

We knew in advance there were no guarantees that an owl would be found. In fact our first year was disappointing. No owls were observed. However last year the group was more fortunate and had the opportunity to view two female Saw-whets. Upon arrival at the camp we could



Photo courtesy Rick Price

hear the distinctive Saw-whet call tape that is used to attract the owls. We spent about a half-hour inside the cabin that is used by Sandy, Gary and three student banders as an operations base. We asked questions and learned about the history of the program. Then half

of our group ventured out with Sandy and two interns to check the nets. (Usually these are checked every half hour.) We were thrilled to discover we had an owl. After it was carefully removed from the net and placed in a secure cloth bag, we made our way back to the cabin. There we had an opportunity to observe the process of weighing, examining, banding and photographing this somewhat docile female Saw-whet. After the process was completed, three of us accompanied two interns outside where she was released.

But our evening didn't end there. The remainder of the group, who had the opportunity to view the next

set of rounds, also got to see a captured female. The same procedures were carried out, although this young lady was quite feisty and gave Sandy a little memento of their interaction.

The entire process was fascinating and was explained to us step by step. It was so gratifying to see the care and respect given to these tiny creatures. Finally at 11:00pm it was time to leave. We were tired but so happy we made the trip.

Again thanks to Sandy, Gary and their interns for their willingness to devote time to our group and share their expertise of the Saw-whet banding program with us.

Birder's Notes

Rick Price

dreary Cold Day at Wildwood

Although the day was cold and overcast, I had to get out and bird at Wildwood Park. . . After poor results on the Towpath, I tried the Delta Boardwalk with two other photographers. We had three separate Red-tailed Hawks, a personal location record for me. One of the "tails" was very cooperative and may have been the juvenile "poser" that was in the same area last winter. We watched it from about 12 yards away until it finally caught and ate a small mammal which, appeared to be a headless vole. We also had eight bluebirds off the boardwalk at a double bluebird box. I also had my 1st observation of a Great Blue Heron stalking terrestrial prey in the frozen grass. Altogether, I had 16 species, not bad for a cold poor start.



Great Blue Heron



Red-tailed Hawk





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AAS monthly programs typically take place on the third Thursday of each month at the **Christ Presbyterian Church** located at 421 Deerfield Road, in the Allendale neighborhood of Camp Hill. Join us at 7:00pm for socializing and refreshments. The program begins at 7:30pm.

DIRECTIONS

I-83 southbound — take exit 40B towards New Cumberland. Stay straight, cross Carlisle Road to Cedar Cliff Drive. Turn left onto Allendale Way and turn left onto Deerfield Road. The Church is on the left. Park in the second lot.

I-83 northbound — take exit 40B, turn left onto Carlisle Road/Simpson Ferry Road and go under I-83. Turn left again at the light onto Cedar Cliff Drive. Turn left onto Allendale Way and turn left onto Deerfield Road. The Church is on the left. Park in the second lot.



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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

AAS Programs • 1

February Herons in da Hood

March Planting for Wildlife, Teaching for Change

Education News • 2

Field Trip • 2

Trout Run Gets a Facelift • 3

Don't Forget the Great Backyard Bird Count • 3

Pheasants on the Increase? • 4

Another Productive Saw-whet Owl Field Trip • 4

Birder's Notes • 5



AAS Seeks Finance Committee Volunteers

Our chapter is seeking volunteers to be part of a committee to help assist in the administration of our chapter's finances. If you have a background in accounting or bookkeeping and would like to be considered for service on this committee, please contact Kathy Kuchwara at kathykatbird2@comcast.net.



AAS members on the move



WINTER STORM CANCELLATION OF AAS PROGRAMS

If severe weather is forecast for the evening of an AAS program, please check one of the following for cancellation information: our Facebook Page, WHTM ABC27 at www.abc27.com, or call 717-319-0828.