

CHICKADEE CHATTER

Newsletter of the Lycoming Audubon Society

March—April 2008

SPRING EVENTS CALENDAR

REMEMBER!! Meeting time is 7:00 pm!!!



March 26, 2008 — "Bats We knew and Loved: -From Pennsylvania and Beyond". Drs. Thomas and Margaret Griffiths are both noted bat

biologists. Tom has spent more than

30 years studying the anatomy and evolution of bats. Margaret originally studied nutrient metabolism as a cardiac risk factor in human beings, but after meeting one another in 1990, Tom convinced Margaret that her "true calling" was to work with bats. They each have served as the Executive Director of the North American Symposium on Bat Research, the premier scientific organization dedicated to the study of bat biology. Tom is currently the Provost and Dean of Lycoming College, and Margaret is the publisher and managing editor of *Bat Research News*, an international journal dedicated to bat biology.



April 5th, 2008 — Saturday — Waterfowl Field Trip to Rose Valley Lake with Dave Ferry.

Meet at Wegmans at 9am with a return to Wegmans at approximately 1pm. Or meet at the Rose Valley Lake South boat launch, at approximately 9:30am. Early April is a prime time to watch migrant waterfowl at Rose Valley Lake. Loons, grebes, geese, and many species of ducks as well as migrant eagles are possible. In the unlikely event that that the lake is frozen we will go to Montour Preserve.



April 19th, 2008 — Saturday — Peregrine Field Trip with Mike Kuriga. Meet in the southwest area the Wegmans parking lot. Look for my grey and white Toyota FJ Cruiser. We will depart at 08:30am and caravan to Montgomery and park at the sewage

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT...

Happy Spring! The Spring Equinox will be here soon and with it the return of many migrating birds and bats. We have two field trips scheduled for April. Mark your calendars now. Anyone who would like to lead a wild flower walk or birding field trip may contact any board member. We always can use more opportunities to get together to observe and learn about wildlife and habitat. For those who signed up to volunteer for our projects, we will contact you when it is time to work on the butterfly garden at Rider Park, count bats, or check bluebird boxes.

Penn State University is offering a week long Conservation Leadership School for high school students this summer. It is a great opportunity to learn about the environment and conservation. We will offer a partial scholarship to a student. You can find more information at www.conferences.cas.psu.edu. If you are interested, call a board member or e-mail lasbatsbirds@aol.com.

May 28th is our Annual Tureen Dinner and Silent Auction. It will be held at the Pine Street Methodist Church in Williamsport at 6:00pm. Bring some friends. It will be a good time to get to know each other, raise some money for our chapter and be entertained by Dave Shollenberger, who will provide a slide show of some incredible photos of African wildlife.

Looking forward to seeing all of you at our meetings.

Linda Burk

Our Web Site: <http://www.lycoming.org/audubon>

treatment plant (9:00am). It is about a 1/2 mile walk to the site and very easy walking at that. Dress according to the weather for that day and bring binoculars and spotting scopes if you have them.



Last year we saw hundreds of returning Broad winged Hawks, a Goshawk, Ospreys, Vultures, Redtails, and of course Peregrines. Plus there are lots of LBB's (Little Brown birds, that I don't what in the world they are.) *Mike Kuriga*

April 23, 2008 — "Native Plants and Their Importance in Non-game Wildlife Habitat"

Mario Giazzon is a Wildlife Diversity Biologist, North-central Region, PA Game Commission. In May 2004, the Private Landowner Assistance Program (PLAP) was created to aid interested landowners in developing habitat management plans for non-game wildlife. This is a voluntary program and the RWDB's offer advice and education. He previously worked with the Nature Conservancy and as CREP Biologist for Natural Resources Conservation Services.



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? **Ask AUDUBON:** ?

? *How do cowbirds learn how to flock with their own kind, after being raised by "foster parents"?* ?

? Research to date, suggests that cowbird ? chicks can discriminate sounds that are ? produced only by cowbirds; and findings ? by Cornell researchers indicate that ? juvenile cowbirds inspect and memorize ? aspects of their appearance to compare ? with other individuals they encounter. It ? has also been found that adult cowbirds ? visit young cowbirds in their "foster ? homes" and teach cowbird-specific ? behaviors. Following their fledging, ? cowbird juveniles end up together, as no ? other birds want to be around them. ? During their first winter, juveniles learn ? from adult cowbirds proper courtship ? behaviors that enable them to successfully ? mate in the spring. ?

? http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/10/1015_041015_cowbirds.html ?

? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR OUR Annual Pot Luck Banquet and Silent Auction !!

May 28, 2008 6:00 pm

Pine Street Methodist Church, Williamsport. This is our annual dinner get-together. Everyone brings a "Dish to Share"....along with their own paper tableware and utensils. Beverages will be furnished. **Family and friends are encouraged to join us!!**



OUR OWN Dave Shollenberger will be our Dinner Speaker, and will continue his slide presentation on African Wildlife.



Before dinner, everyone will have an opportunity to bid on the various items in our Silent Auction. Items that will be auctioned include a number of nice bird prints, both framed and unframed. Framed prints include Ron Beach's hummingbird and chickadee prints donated by Dave Shollenberger. Ron Beach has donated the Red-winged Blackbird patch and the original art work for it, framed together. A Peregrine print "Return to Penn's Woods" by Mark Anderson, is unframed, as are twelve large bird prints mounted on foam core. Additionally, there are more than fifty "bird books" that have been donated by Wes Egli and others.

A listing of all the books to be offered is being prepared.

Welcome!! New Members

- Joseph Borrosco
- Robert Cupper
- Scott B. Flook
- Mary A. Fultz
- Leon & Dorothy Johnson
- Janet C. Kohler
- Daisy Reeder

NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL BANDING



The 2007 fall season officially began on October 1st, but we didn't start catching any Saw-whet Owls at the station until October 12th. Continuing a trend that seems to have developed over the past couple of seasons, poor weather was again the primary cause for the delay and was a persistent problem throughout the season. With record numbers of owls being netted and banded in Ontario, southern Pennsylvania, and elsewhere, I had hopes of similar results here.

Our best night turned out to be November 2nd with five owls captured. That was also coincidentally the evening we had our largest visiting crowd ever with folks having come from Lycoming County, Lewisburg, and State College. We started getting owls early starting around 8:00 pm until about midnight. Everyone got to see and handle owls, and pose for photos. The last owl of the season was caught very late the next night, November 3rd, after which the weather for next couple of weeks canceled further efforts. Oddly, there were several nights of good weather in late October which did not produce owls here, including nights which were preceded by productive ones.

The final total for the season was 18 Saw-whet Owls, a few more than the 2006 fall season, but far short of expected 2007 results. Interestingly, the three stations in southern Pennsylvania run by Scott Weidensaul broke their all-time records with a combined total of nearly 900 owls. The station north of me in Potter Count also did well with around 90 owls caught there.

I discussed my unusually low capture numbers here compared to elsewhere with Scott. We could not seem to adequately explain it except for the possibility that my station was not along a migratory path being used by most of the Saw-whets last fall. There was one very interesting highlight, however, in November a banding station near Richmond, Virginia caught a female owl that I had banded here in the fall of 2002. That owl was over 6 years old, considered very old for a Saw-whet Owl in the wild!

With last fall's totals over most of eastern North America being high, there is the possibility of significant numbers of Saw-whets being coming through the area in this spring's northward migration. I will attempt banding on good weather nights in March.

Wayne Laubscher

Christmas Bird Count Results for this year.....can be found on our website:

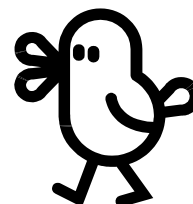
<http://www.lycoming.org/audubon>

KIDS KORNER

Draw a line to match the type of bird on the left with the description of the bird on the right.

1. Wading birds
2. Birds of prey
3. Swimming birds
4. Non-perching birds
5. Perching birds

- A. Powerful hunters
- B. Waterfowl
- C. Songbirds
- D. Long-legged birds
- E. Tree or ground dwellers

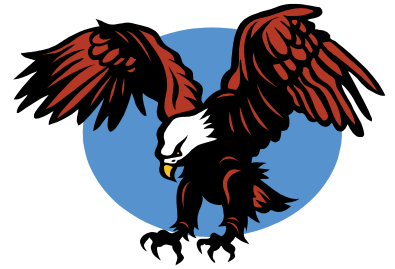


Created by Judy Ryder, Education Committee Chair

Answers: 1 - D, 2 - A, 3 - B, 4 - E, 5 - C.

EAGLES IN LYCOMING COUNTY

By Michael Kuriga



We have all heard about the several pairs of breeding Bald Eagles in the Pine Creek area. However, there is a lot of action with both Golden and Bald Eagles right here in the center of Lycoming County. The Bald Eagle and White Deer Mountains are two of the best migration ridges in the state to observe not just raptors, but Eagles as well. Having worked with, and flown these magnificent birds for many years, I would like to share some observations with you.

Around the middle of November is the best time to observe southern migrating Golden Eagles. Many deer hunters will find them on the "gut piles" left in the field after harvesting a deer. I have seen them as early as late September and have spotted a few that have actually wintered in our area. The same goes for Bald Eagles.

Early March will see the return of the Golden Eagles. A bit earlier for "Balds" as by that time, the Bald Eagles could be nesting. There has been an adult pair of Bald Eagles observed hanging around the Montoursville airport at the time they should be nesting. With that, there has also been observed, immature or young "Balds" seen in the same area, late in the summer when they have fledged. Now the question is: Where are they nesting? Ed Reish and I have seen this Eagle couple for several years, and I have gone out in my canoe to try to find the pair, but so far, they have eluded our efforts to locate and record the nest. But they must be nearby. It would be great to see them back in the area nesting after over 100 years of their absence.

There are some simple ways to distinguish the differences from an immature Bald versus a Golden Eagle. First of all, think of the Bald Eagle as having high water pants. Since he fishes, there are no feathers on the legs or tarsi as they are known. Golden Eagles will have feathers right down to the digits or toes. In flight, look under the Golden Eagles' wings for a white oval patch. This patch gets smaller as a Golden matures and is gone by year 7. Also, the white in the Golden's tail will be gone by that time. So an adult Golden will have a gray mottled tail and the Bald, a pure white one.

Okay,... you see a large raptor type bird flying and you think it is an eagle and not a Turkey Buzzard or Black Vulture. Look for a dihedral (a slight V in the set wings.) Vultures have that. If the wings are set in a glide and are straight across, most likely it is an Eagle.

This past November, in the week before Thanksgiving, I was trapping hawks further down Bald Eagle Mountain near Port Matilda. The winds were perfect for migration. On that one day alone we saw over 24 Golden Eagles and a couple of Balds.

Wintering: Now just where in the world are these birds going? Thanks to some recent studies by Carnegie-Mellon's Breeding Bird Atlas people and a few others, several Golden Eagles were tagged with GPS transmitters and their movements were tracked. At least with three of them headed to the very southern tip of West Virginia, hung around there for several weeks and then started a slow migration north through the rest of the winter. Due to the mountainous terrain and the lack of observers, we still are not certain of their diet while down "south" but speculation is they are catching mostly squirrels. I have also observed here in Pennsylvania and what a sight! Sort of like a B-52 going after a lone person. Most eagles will eat carrion and usually there is an abundant supply of road kill and the like for them no matter where they winter.

If you are interested in a good guide for identification, I recommend the Peterson Field Guide series. And if you want to follow the migration of the Golden Eagles trapped here in Pennsylvania, go to: www.aviary.org/csrvt/trackPA.php

Good Eagle watching,

Michael W. Kuriga, Austringer (Look that one up!)

Don't forget !!..... the birds are still visiting our feeders...

Punxsutawney Phil predicted six more weeks of winter.....so all of our featured friends will appreciate our support in feeding them for a few more weeks! Mary Morrison gives us some good advice on "what to serve":

We've all been there before: You stand in the mega-mart aisle, bedazzled by dozens of bags of bird seed, corn cobs, and suet cakes, with different seed mixes and wildly different prices, and you wonder what to buy. Are those "gourmet" seed mixes really worth the price? Which bag will attract your favorite birds? Which bag will leave your yard strewn with uneaten seeds kicked out of your feeders by birds picking out their favorites? Hopefully this article can help — so read on, intrepid backyard bird feeder, and learn the ABCs of seeds.

Berries (as on living juniper trees) — favorite of grosbeaks and cedar waxwings.

Black oil sunflower seed — best of all — if you only put out one kind of food, use this. The shells on black sunflower seeds are thinner than the shells on striped shell sunflower seeds, and most birds prefer the thinner shells. But already-hulled sunflower seed can go moldy very easily, poisoning the birds, so it must be kept dry and any feeders using it must be washed and dried regularly. Using the still-hulled seed is safer and less labor-intensive. Attracts chickadees, titmice, cardinals, house finches, blue jays, grosbeaks, nuthatches, and mourning doves.

Cracked corn — attracts house sparrows, squirrels, jays, chickadees, and deer.

Flax, canary, or rape seeds — most birds do not like these — they are the least eaten out of any seed mix, so are best avoided.

Fresh fruit, e.g. grapes — thrashers, mockingbirds, robins.

Mealworms — loved by bluebirds, mockingbirds, thrashers, and yellow-rumped warblers, especially during nesting season—but put the mealworms in the shade on a non-metal surface so they do not roast.

Milo, wheat, or oats — OK, but not the favorite of most birds.

Niger ("thistle") seed — in a mesh thistle feeder, attracts redpolls, siskins, goldfinches, titmice.

Peanuts — beloved by woodpeckers, jays, and chickadees. But if you feed peanuts, make sure they are roasted. A chronic diet of raw peanuts

contains aflatoxins that can harm birds over the long term.

Peanut butter — attracts creepers and woodpeckers.

Raisins — favorite of cardinals, jays, robins, catbirds.

Red milo — a filler or "trash seed" added to many bird seed mixes; most birds don't like it.

Safflower — many birds don't like it, but neither do squirrels, so it lasts longer in feeders that aren't squirrel-proofed.

Suet — many butchers will give this to you for free — attracts woodpeckers, nuthatches, insect-eaters.

Table scraps — crows will clean them up.

White proso millet — a type of grass seed — attracts sparrows and juncos.

Many commercial bird seed mixes contain a lot of filler seeds like milo — these should be avoided.

Many **natural plants will produce seeds or berries** that attract birds: dogwood, serviceberry, viburnums, hawthorn, or junipers; flowers allowed to go to seed such as daisies, asters, marigolds, zinnias, or coneflowers will boost your backyard bird count.

In the spring, adding **sterilized crushed egg shells** helps many birds including jays and crows to make their own egg shells strong — just remember to heat the egg shells to 160° F, or boil them for a few minutes, to prevent rotting and to kill any *Salmonella* bacteria on the shells.

Don't forget the water! You don't have to buy a fancy heated water bath to attract many birds, especially in winter, when unfrozen water close to good cover can be hard to find. Even an upside-down trash can lid will do, or a shallow tray or old pie pan. Clean out the container every other day or whenever microbes begin to grow in the water or on the container.

For more information, I recommend "*The Feeder Watcher's Guide to Bird Feeding*", by Margaret A. Barker and Jack Griggs, Harper Resource publishers, ©2000.

Happy Bird Watching!

Mary E. Morrison, LAS Board Member and Assistant Professor of Biology, Lycoming College





BIRD OBSERVATIONS



The days are getting longer; before you know it, the first of the northbound spring migrants will arrive. But there's still time to get into the field for some winter birding. Make the most of the remaining days to find the species we see only this time of year. It's been an invasion year for the so-called "winter finches," and I hope you seize the opportunity to see these northern visitors while you can.

In mid-November, as I observed a Fox Sparrow and a few Tree Sparrows in the brush along the upper fields at Rider Park, I heard some crows making a ruckus. I ignored them until I walked past a large conifer and saw what had provoked their response: a sub-adult Golden Eagle flying low over the upper ridge of the Katy Jane Trail!

Not long after that (on Thanksgiving Day), Meredith Lombard and I watched a juvenile Golden fly right over her home near Marietta, Lancaster County. We had just concluded a walk down to the Susquehanna River when we spotted the eagle below a large flock of Ring-billed Gulls – one of many such flocks present that day before the rains arrived.

There are plenty of local sightings to report from November–December. Larry Waltz saw six Common Redpolls in Buchanan Meadows, Old Lycoming Township, on December 21st. He also reported 35 Snow Buntings in the Berry's field on Grimesville Road (Buchanan Baptist Church) on December 18th.

On December 19th, Dave Ferry watched four Common Redpolls feast on thistle seed at his home in Old Lycoming Township. They also fed on a few birch catkins that were available. While scouting for the Northern Lycoming Christmas Bird Count on December 15th, Dave spotted a Golden Eagle from Route 15, just before the Route 284 exit. The bird soared west into the Little Pine Creek Valley. In addition to the eagle, Dave found the following birds near Marshall Road, Roaring Branch and Cross Roads: 100 Snow Buntings, 50 Horned Larks, a light-phase Rough-Legged Hawk and five Red-tailed Hawks. In Susquehanna Township near Nisbet, he found 10 American Pipits (on Kennedy Lane) and 50 Horned Larks (on West Village Drive).

On December 9th in Rider Park, Dave and his son Tiarnan watched a Northern Shrike haunt the bird-feeding station near the gazebo. The "first-winter" bird had been seen since the previous weekend. Viewing the action through a spotting scope, Tiarnan watched the shrike regurgitate a pellet. They observed the bird for 30 minutes before it flew to the next field. The feeders were slow that day due to the active shrike, but there were still plenty of the usual winter species present. A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was also in the area. Also on December 9, Dave found a late Gray Catbird on his Old Lycoming Township property, as well as a red phase Eastern Screech-Owl using a nest box in his backyard.

On December 7th, Dave found two Peregrine Falcons on the Genetti Hotel in downtown Williamsport on the southwest and southeast corners of the building. He also said there was an adult male Northern Harrier working the fields near Mill Hill Road.

Jeff Schaffer reported a Black Scoter on the dike in Lock Haven on December 19, and there was a Lesser Scaup in the same location. On December 14th, Jeff birded the Avis Flats and found numerous Horned Larks and several Lapland Longspurs. The longspurs were found in manure spread near the farm just up from the bridge.

Wayne Laubscher relayed that Carol and Charles Hildebrand reported seeing about 20 Snow Buntings and 200 Horned Larks on the afternoon of December 14 at the same location in South Avis that Jeff Schaffer saw the Lapland Longspurs in the morning. They also found a Northern Harrier. The Hildebrands reported a Common Redpoll at their feeders in Woolrich on December 15th. Also feeding there were about 75 Pine Siskins.

On December 2nd, Wayne reported that a hunter related to him a recent sighting of a Short-eared Owl from an elevated deer stand at a hunting club northwest of Lock Haven. The hunter observed the owl hunting low over a grassy field. Dave Ferry reported on November 30th that at least one Short-eared Owl was working the grasslands off Mill Hill Road in the evening. This has been a regular wintering ground for the owls.

Wayne received a report of two Evening Grosbeaks that were seen at a feeder in Swisssdale (about 5 miles north of Lock Haven) on November 17. On November 15, Wayne found a small flock of Rusty Blackbirds at the mitigation wetlands in Mill Hall. There were also a few Tree Sparrows there.

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On November 29th, Rosemary Lunz of Warrensville reported a likely leucistic House Finch at her feeders.

On November 19, as Jeff Schaffer walked the dike in Lock Haven, he found a flock of 32 Common Loons, 45 Buffleheads, five Ring-necked Ducks, two Hooded Mergansers and a few Mallards.

On November 17th Joan Sattler viewed a Northern Saw-whet Owl close to her home near Loyalsockville.

Dave Ferry reported there was a Northern Shrike near the south boat-launch entrance at Rose Valley Lake on November 11. Waterfowl there included a Common Loon, three Pied-billed Grebes, two Horned Grebes, 20 Ring-necked Ducks, seven Hooded Mergansers, 10 Bufflehead, 10 Black Ducks, eight Mallards, five Lesser Scaup, 15 Canada Geese and two Great Blue Herons. On November 6th, Dave's very excited son called him at work to let him know of a female Evening Grosbeak at their feeders.

On November 1st, Wayne Laubscher reported hearing from Jeff Schaffer that a Brant was still present at Lock Haven along the Susquehanna River just west of the Jay Street Bridge.

Joe Yoder

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WHAT DOES THAT MEAN....?

Albinistic? or Leucistic?

In "Bird Observations" you may have seen these terms.... Did you know — without looking them up — what they meant?

Albinistic (of or pertaining to or affected by albinism). **Albinism** (from Latin *albus*, "white") is a form of pigment disorder characterized by a partial or total lack of **melanin** pigment in the eyes, skin and hair (or more rarely the eyes alone). The condition is known to affect mammals (including humans), fish, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. While the most common term for an organism affected by albinism is "albino" (noun and adjective), more neutral terms are "albinistic" (adjective) and "person/bird/fish with albinism" (noun).

Leucistic (exhibiting areas of reduced pigmentation). **Leucism** is a general term for defects in pigment cell differentiation in skin, hair or feathers occurring during development. This results in either the entire surface (if all pigment cells fail to develop) or patches of body surface (if only a subset are defective) having a lack of cells capable of making pigment. More common than a complete absence of pigment cells, it results in irregular patches of white on an animal that otherwise has normal coloring and patterning. Most people think of a pale, washed out bird where the coloring is diluted. Scientifically, a bird with white patches is, in fact, leucistic.

A further difference between albinism and leucism is in eye color. Due to the lack of melanin production in both the retina and iris, albinos typically have red eyes due to the underlying blood vessels showing through. In contrast, leucistic animals have normally colored eyes.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albinistic>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leucistic>



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