

CHICKADEE CHATTER

Newsletter of the Lycoming Audubon Society

March—April 2009

MARCH - APRIL PROGRAMS

March 25, 2009 — Dan Brauning

"Changes in distribution and abundance of breeding birds in the mid-Atlantic states: Response to Climate Change?"

Dan is the regional coordinator for the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas. This presentation is the result of his BBA observations.

Note: This program was cancelled in January, due to weather....and re-scheduled for our March meeting.

March 28, 2009 - FIELD TRIP Saturday



Waterfowl Watch at Rose Valley Lake. Meet at the east end of WalMart parking lot at 8:00am. For those driving directly to the lake, meet at

the south boat access at approximately 8:30am. Dress for the weather. Bring scopes and/or binoculars. Additional info contact: [Wes Egli](#)

April 11, 2009 - FIELD TRIP Saturday

Peregrine Prowl — We are going leave the McDonalds auxiliary parking lot in South Williamsport at 7:30am.

The reason for the early departure is to so that we can hopefully catch the parents bringing in food or just looking.

Dress according to the weather and bring a spotting scope or binoculars.

Contact: [Michael Kuriga](#) or 971-1393 for further details if needed, or just be there.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT...

I appreciate the signs of spring after the cold winter!! The male goldfinch are back to their beautiful color, the geese are migrating, and Rose Valley Lake is open for shore bird business once again.

At our February meeting, Dave Ferry and Wes Egli gave a great presentation on the Christmas Bird Counts. We also look forward on March 25th to Dan Brauning's presentation on the Breeding Bird Atlas results.

Lycoming Audubon is in need of some new board members for the coming year. Please consider this to keep our organization strong. We are looking for nominations for president, secretary, publicity chair, and program chair. Please contact any board member if you have nominations or are interested in serving.

Looking forward to seeing you at our meetings.

Linda Burk



April 22, 2009 — Wayne Laubscher

"Rare Autumn Jewels: Vagrant Western

Hummingbirds in the East". The recently recognized phenomenon of vagrant western species of hummingbirds, particularly Rufous, that annually show up in the eastern US in the fall and even into the winter will be discussed. The differences from the well known Ruby-throated Hummingbird, a possible explanation for these occurrences, and the efforts by a small group of banders, including Wayne, who are learning more about this surprising behavior of the smallest of North American birds.



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

Welcome New Members !!

Susan Best	Linda Hartley
Ellen Brass	Paul Huffman
Thomas Bryerton	Shirley Kightmire
Patty Burd	Trina Koser
Skip Daigle	Melodi Kownacki
John Eastlake	Elaine Kressly
Terey Girdon	Luther Merrill
Mario Giazzon	Linda Poulton
Doris Hall	Alex Savakinas

Northern Saw-whet Owl Fall Banding 2008 Summary



The fall banding season for Saw-whet Owls was begun on October 5th, but due to weather and lunar conditions, I did not start catching owls until October 19th. Overall weather for the period again this year was not ideal and the final total of owls was 14. This low number reflects the widespread observations by owl researchers that that 2008 had been a poor hatch year and the flight had been anticipated to be low this season. Interestingly, although 2008 numbers were significantly less for nearly all the other banding stations, my total actually compared well to the 2007 season here.

In most banding seasons, the majority of the owls caught are hatch year birds which are birds hatched out the previous spring. This fall's total was a rather uniform mix of owls of all ages, again reflecting the apparent poor hatch year. As per every season, nearly all of the owls were females.

The most interesting note about one of the owls caught here again, for the second year in a row, actually came from Virginia where an owl that I banded here in Swisssdale in 2002 was caught near Richmond. What made this recapture quite amazing was the fact that this owl was the very same one caught in 2007 at a nearby station about 10 miles away, one year and one week later. This owl's second recapture has provided researchers with rare feather molt data of an older owl at ages 2 1/2, 6 1/2, and 7 1/2 years. The apparent longevity record of a Saw-whet Owl in the wild is around 11 years.

The current reports from Ontario are that a Boreal Owl irruption is occurring this winter and although Boreal Owl records are very rare for Pennsylvania, I may attempt some mid and late winter banding for Saw-whet Owls and the possible occurrence of Boreal Owls.

Wayne Laubscher

Saw Whet clipart from: http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/Wetlands/5181/saw_whet.html

JANUARY FIELD TRIP NOTES.....

On the morning of January 31, Dave Ferry led a group of twelve birders on a field trip to northern Lycoming County. Our destination was the rural roads, fields and woods that Dave is very familiar with in and near Cogan House. Bright sunshine did little to warm us on this frigid morning. The temperature was only near 10°F as we started, and it didn't rise much all morning. The birders bundled up with hoods, hats, and gloves

yet were determined to see and hear a good variety of birds. The most majestic sighting was a wonderful view of a mature Bald Eagle sitting calmly in a deciduous tree. We were also treated to a close-up look at a large flock of Snow Buntings, camouflaged by the snow-covered landscape. Many of the houses we passed had well-stocked feeders, which allowed us excellent views of gregarious Pine Siskins, a species reported in unusually large numbers in Lycoming and Clinton Counties this season. At one front-yard feeder, Dave and Dan Brauning confirmed the presence of a Chipping Sparrow, a common warm-season species but quite unexpected during such a cold January. Although we searched in vain for Rough-legged Hawks, we did see at least a few Red-tailed Hawks. Dave spotted a couple of White-winged Crossbills and a Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Dan helped me distinguish Common Ravens from American Crows in flight. An American



Robin and an Eastern Bluebird both showed us their fine coloring, and we also spotted many of the common winter birds. All in all, we found 27 different species.

Many thanks to Dave for coordinating this trip and to all who participated. If you could not make this trip, we hope you can join us on our next outing!

Jim Green

Saw-Whet Owl Patch !



This year's eight color patch depicts the Northern Saw-Whet Owl sitting on an evergreen branch; designed by wildlife artist Ron Beach. **See it in color on the website!**

Patches are available from board members, at the website, or can be ordered by mail: Check or money payable to Lycoming Audubon, 1217 Cedar Street, Montoursville, PA, 17754. Patches are \$5.50, plus \$.50 for S&H.

BOOK REVIEW

Central Park in the Dark: More Mysteries of Urban Wildlife

by Marie Winn 2008 (Farrar, Straus & Groux) ISBN - 13: 978-0-374-12 011-5 or ISBN - 10: 0-374-12011-0



Before I review this book, let me inform you that New York City is *not* a place that interests me. Its noise, pollution, enormously high population density and endless urban streets are just the opposite of the peaceful woodlands and mountains I prefer. That's why I've only been to the Big Apple once, during a long-ago school class trip. Yet there is one section of New York City that I just might enjoy: Central Park. It is massive enough and, in places, forested enough to attract quite a variety of birds, mammals and arthropods. So when I spotted this new book whose cover featured a screech owl at a tree cavity, I quickly decided it was worth my while. Author Marie Winn, who ten years earlier wrote a wonderful New York City classic, *Red-Tails in Love*, and lives adjacent to Central Park, has prepared yet another fantastic manuscript. She enthusiastically describes, in her down-to-earth, sometimes humorous and always informative manner, of countless animal-seeking adventures in Central Park by her and her nature-loving friends. And yes, even though we Pennsylvanians cringe at the thought of setting foot in Central Park after dark, Marie and her crowd walked and observed there night after night, year after year. Note that this book is not a bird book, even though birds are well-represented. Owls, of course, are the birds discussed the most, but you'll also read about the roosting habits of robins and grackles, and I bet that you'll learn new tidbits about our avian friends. Bats, raccoons, moths and even slugs all receive their fair share of attention in this book that I found hard to put down. As I read, I gained a huge amount of respect and admiration for Marie and her friends, who devoted so much time to observing and reporting on the Park's fauna and sometimes even trying to save individuals. Whether or not you've ever been to Central Park, if you have a passion for real nature stories, I think you'll enjoy this 320-page text. You'll find it in libraries, bookstores, and online.

Jim Green

WANTED!

WANTED - New Board Members for 2009-2010

President: Liaison between PA Audubon and Lycoming Audubon. Plans board agenda items and leads meetings. Computer essential. Works with members to promote on going projects and ideas for new projects.

Secretary: Takes minutes at board meetings. Handles correspondence as assigned. Computer helpful.

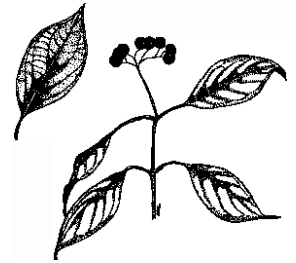
Program Chairperson: Plans monthly programs (Sept-May) with input from other LAS members. Contacts speakers, confirms presentation dates and coordinates equipment needed for presentations.

Publicity Chairperson: Works with local newspapers to publish announcements of meetings and writes article in newsletter on bird sightings.

All positions can be administered from your home, and only require attendance at four to six board meetings per year. Almost all contact between board members is by email.

Please contact [Linda Burk](#) of your interest. **Thank you!!**

GARDENING FOR BIRDS: SILKY DOGWOOD



As the Sun climbs gradually higher in the sky each day and mild afternoons become increasingly common, our thoughts turn to the coming growing season and what new plants to add. One bird-friendly shrub worthy of your consideration is Silky Dogwood, *Cornus amomum*. Native to Pennsylvania and surrounding states, Silky Dogwood is easy to grow and is one of the fastest growing native shrubs. Its whitish flowers in May or June are quite an attraction, even though they are smaller than that of its more famous and larger cousin, Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*). Much more appealing, from an avian point of view, are the prolific metallic blue berries that ripen in late August and September. Catbirds, mockingbirds, cardinals, and many other species munch on these delicacies. Come October, Silky Dogwood dazzles us with lovely purple and red leaves, followed by reddish stems that last the winter.

Due to its rapid growth, I recommend buying Silky Dogwood as seedlings no more than 1 or 2 feet tall. According to Native Plants of the Northeast (Leopold, 2005), it can also be propagated by "softwood cuttings" or started from seeds that have been exposed to 3 or 4 months of low temperature. It will do well in either full or partial sunlight and though it prefers moist soil, it has prospered in the moderately dry soil of my backyard. This is a shrub that will grow as much horizontally as it will vertically – up to 10 or 12 feet, so allow plenty of room for it to expand. For a hedge, place plants every 3 or 4 feet apart.

Assuming you don't have a friend to donate 'silkies' to you, where can you purchase them? Musser's Forest, Inc., a large nursery in western Pennsylvania will ship them to you in bundles of five or more, and our local native plant nursery, Ironwood Acres, also sells them. Other sources include the Game Commission's Howard Nursery, some of the county conservation districts, and other nurseries that specialize in native plants. Happy gardening!

Silky Dogwood clipart from <http://h2o.enr.state.nc.us/esb/Wetplant/shrubscont.htm>

Jim Green

AUDUBON AT HOME

The development of forests, grasslands, and farms for residential and commercial use consumes wildlife habitat, leaving sub-divided, barren housing plots, concrete buildings, and paved parking lots in its wake. An average of 2.1 million acres each year are converted to residential use in the United States.

Think about your yard and what existed there before you and your house did. What type of habitat was it? What type of wildlife lived there? Where are they now? What about the new house being built on the empty lot down the street. Or the new strip mall in town. What will happen to the wildlife that lived in those previously open spaces? Where will they go?

The most significant factors in the decline of bird populations are habitat loss and degradation. Less than 5 percent of tallgrass prairie habitat remains today as compared to pre-settlement days. Also gone are 50 percent of our wetlands and 90 percent of the Pacific coast old growth forests.

One solution to curb habitat loss is for each residential area (new and established) to provide birds and other wildlife the necessities for survival — food, water, nesting area, and shelter. It is increasingly clear that we must not only protect natural areas with high wildlife value but also must create a matrix of suitable habitat to buffer and connect those areas. By creating healthy habitat for birds and wildlife in our yards and neighborhoods, we can temper the habitat fragmentation and displacement caused by urban and suburban expansion by helping to build that matrix.

Your yard is an important piece of the matrix. Its singular importance is magnified by the combined efforts of others.

http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/Backyard.html

BLUE DARTERS III THE FINAL ARTICLE IN A SERIES ON ACCIPITERS

BY MICHAEL W. KURIGA

NORTHERN GOSHAWK

In earlier issues we covered the smaller of the three accipiter's found in Pennsylvania. Now we get the largest of the three and my personal favorite.

The Northern Goshawk is a sub-species of Goshawks that are found throughout the northern hemisphere. Our Goshawk differs in a little plumage and personality, but is still very similar enough to know that you are looking at one with its slate blue plumage on the back of the body and wings. The most striking characteristic is the black capped head and the white eyebrow.



Immatures are very similar looking to the Coopers Hawk but a good way to tell them apart, if you can get close enough, is that the barring in the long tail is staggered on a Gos and straight across on a Coopers. The body size is the same in proportion but larger with males weighting around 17-22 oz. and females 25-34 oz.

Nesting starts with very aerial courtship flights in mid March. Eggs are laid around the 1st of May. During nesting, Goshawks become very aggressive and have been known to knock riders off of horses when near a nest. Unfortunately, here in Pennsylvania, nesting coincides with Spring Gobbler season. Even a fairly conscientious hunter may be driven to shoot a bird that seems eager to take his head off. And when that bird happens to get shot, the entire nest is lost. Over the years, there has been a lot of education conducted in this regard and hopefully, nests are being preserved. Also, goshawks prefer mature woods to nest in. Now that we are getting some big woods after the destruction back 100 years ago, a nesting goshawk is a good indicator of a mature woodlot.

Goshawks are very maneuverable, managing to weave their way down forest paths at full speed as they catch prey such as grouse, jays, red and grey squirrels. They also will take pigeons on a regular basis, and from those actions they have been persecuted.

At one time in the past, they were listed on the Pennsylvania Game Commissions list as "bad" birds and there was a bounty paid for the killing of Goshawks.

Goshawks have long been used in falconry. There is nothing like the feeling of a trained Gos, leaving the glove in pursuit of quarry. And if the flight was unsuccessful, the same bird returning to that glove and immediately looking for game again. The falconer, or better known as an Austringer, has become an active part of the predator/prey relationship. Even Shakespeare was familiar with gosses:

*"Hist! Romeo, hist! O, for a falconer's voice,
To lure this tassel-gentle back again!
Bondage is hoarse and may not speak aloud."*

[Romeo and Juliet – II, 2 – The tassel-gentle or tercel-gentle was the male gos-hawk, much used in falconry].



Permission to use photos: Mike Yip, <http://vancouverislandbirds.com/>

Editor's Note: While searching for a goshawk photo to illustrate the article, I came upon a website full of fabulous photos!! **Please take a minute to visit:** www.vancouverislandbirds.com and click on the various journals. Mike provides interesting commentary to complement his photos. The immature Northern Goshawk photos were taken January 29, 2009, and came from Journal 277. The goshawk was dining on a American Wigeon. Visit the journal.....there are more interesting shots.....!!



BIRD OBSERVATIONS



As the winter of 2008-09 comes to a close, there's no doubt how it will be remembered in Pennsylvania birding circles: the winter of the Pine Siskin ... and the White-winged Crossbill. The remarkable northern-finch invasion has swept siskins and crossbills into all parts of Pennsylvania; Lycoming County has been blessed with an abundance of both species.

Pine Siskins seem to be everywhere. I will surely miss the zippy vocalizations of the flock of 40-50 birds that have blanketed the tamarack (larch) trees behind my place in Faxon each morning for a month now. I also had White-winged Crossbills at my place — but only once. A flock of a dozen landed in the same larch trees one morning as I brushed snow off my car. They stayed only a minute or two before flying off, and I haven't seen them since. I did see (and photograph) a large flock of them in Conestoga Pines Park in Lancaster County with Meredith Lombard a few weeks ago.

That this would be a big siskin year was evident early on. At my favorite fall haunt, Waggoner's Gap Hawk Watch, they were seen virtually every day of the count from late September until year's end. Lots of you have seen them locally, as well as crossbills; I'll get to your sightings shortly.

Before I do, I encourage you to get out and enjoy (if it isn't too late by the time you read this) the annual spectacle of migrating geese (Canada and Snow) and Tundra Swans. Today (Feb. 28) at Canfield Island, I watched skeins of Canada Geese pushing northward, with some flocks numbering nearly 500. Hundreds of Ring-billed Gulls were arriving, too, with one large flock scattered by an adult Bald Eagle that flew northwest toward Faxon. I've also seen an adult eagle several times in the past month or so around Commerce Park Drive. I suspect there's a nest in the vicinity. Has anyone seen anything?

I'd also be remiss if I didn't urge you to spend some time atop North White Deer Ridge scanning for migrating Golden Eagles. As I write this, Tussey Mountain at State College has already counted 16. Pick a day with south or southeast winds in Mid-march to put the odds in your favor. The same winds are also good for goose and swan flights. While you're up there, you might catch some large mixed-blackbird flocks.

A final word on my own sightings: On a Jan. 31 winter raptor survey, Meredith Lombard and I found a Black Vulture along Route 44 at Cold Water Town Road. Black Vulture is a good find anytime of year in Lycoming County, but particularly in winter. Heading back the road we found two light-form Rough-Legged Hawks working the grassy fields. The same afternoon, we spotted two adult Bald Eagles just east of Jersey Shore.

Dave Ferry has reported often this winter on the White-winged Crossbills frequenting Williamsport Area High School. "They first arrived back in December and returned last week and are feeding mostly on the ground. There are many Douglas fir and white-pine cones that have dropped onto the grass," he noted.

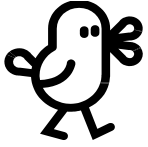
Dave found crossbills in the patch of pines south of Salladasburg Elementary School along Rt. 287, and he suspected they were along the entire length of the road stretching past English Center. He also relayed a report and photo of a leucistic finch (probably an American Goldfinch) that has visited a feeder in northern Lycoming County.

Dave found an estimated 1,000 siskins in the Elimsport and Jacks Hollow Road areas on Jan. 18. "The numbers of pine siskins I saw were staggering to say the least," he said. "I actually lost count of the number of flocks of siskins along the road."

On Feb. 19, Jeff Schaffer observed a flock of 24 White-winged Crossbills in spruce trees at Monesy Road just up river from Lock Haven. On Feb. 18, Larry Waltz reported getting quite close to a dozen male and female crossbills taking advantage of blown-down white-pine cones. In a nearby larch, he spotted 30-50 Pine Siskins. On a tip from his brother Dan, Steve Pinkerton photographed large numbers of crossbills gathering in the area of Elm Street in South Williamsport on Feb. 7.

Wayne Laubscher relayed a report of a Harris's Sparrow coming to a residential feeder near Beech Creek — the first record of Harris's Sparrow for Clinton County. On Jan. 25, Wayne and Chad Kauffman went to a tamarack stand on Ritchie Road near Hyner and Haneyville, where they located a small flock of White-winged Crossbills and a flock of 80-100 Common Redpolls.

.....continued on page 7.....



How Do Birds Migrate?

By this month, you have probably noticed that some bird species that have been missing all winter long are starting to come back to our Pennsylvania woods and waters. For example, the red-winged blackbirds have started to claim territories near marshy areas and open field edges, and American goldfinches have started to visit your thistle seed feeders once again. Large flocks of Canada geese have been decorating our skies with their northbound "V" shapes and their wild cries. How do these birds know the way to come back to us each spring?

Birds know how to migrate through a combination of instinct and learning. Some birds, like Canada geese, learn their migratory routes from their parents, as birds of all ages flock together and move north or south at the same time. Other adult birds, like hummingbirds, fly south long before their young, and the younger birds follow much later led by their instincts. Still other adult birds, like blue jays, stay behind a bit as their young migrate earlier ahead of them, also led by their instincts.

What kinds of cues help the birds to find their way during migration? Scientists have discovered that the sun, the location of sunset, the stars, earth's magnetism, and scent cues are all used to help guide migrations. Savannah sparrows use the location of the setting sun to set their internal "compass" for that night's flight. Scientists found that the Savannah sparrows would fly in the wrong direction at night when they put mirrors around a cage to "move" the location of sunset.

Many songbirds find their way by looking at the stars. Scientists have studied these birds inside planetariums, using ink or dust coating the floor and specially designed perches so they could record where the birds were perching. In spring, songbirds land mostly on the north side of the planetarium, and in autumn, songbirds land mostly on the south side of the planetarium. When the scientists rotate the orientation of the stars in the planetarium, the birds change their landing locations to the new "north" in spring and to the new "south" in autumn, showing that they are paying attention to the location of the stars!

Next time, we'll find out how magnetism and weather patterns can influence bird migrations.

Migration word scramble:

DBKALBRIC_____	YRROTRETI_____	TSENSU_____
RSATS _____	THGNI_____	DRBSGNOIS_____
INTERMUPLAI _____	DBHRTONUNO_____	HCFDNIGLO _____

This Kids' Korner provided by Dr. Mary Morrison, Lycoming College.

.....Bird Observations.....Continued from page 6....

On Jan. 8, Rosemary Lutz of Warrensville reported having about 40 siskins in her yard in a feeding frenzy at her thistle feeder.

In Picture Rocks on Jan 23, Wes Egli's species list included Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Siskins and White-winged Crossbills (the first he'd located there). On Jan. 29, Wes found a Fish Crow calling as he went to the Hughesville Library, and noted that he was still observing siskins in Picture Rocks. He also mentioned that he's been seeing American Robins on virtually a daily basis this fall and winter.

Darlene Malichewski and Dianne Peeling saw an adult Bald Eagle flying north on the Susquehanna River on Jan. 6 at River road in Allenwood. In the same location a couple of weeks later, they saw two adult balds and an immature eagle perched in the trees and intermittently flying over the river. On January 27, they saw an immature bald in a tree along River Road. Later, the eagle was seen feeding on carrion on the ice. Finally, Katie Bell saw the nesting pair of Bald Eagles on Pine Creek near their nest on Feb. 15, as well as a Pileated Woodpecker and some robins.

Enjoy the new arrivals and report your sightings.

Joe Yoder