



# CHICKADEE CHATTER

Newsletter of the Lycoming Audubon Society

May—June 2007

## UPCOMING EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### May 23, 2007— Annual Tureen Dinner

Little League Complex Dining Hall. Dinner at 6:00 pm., Meeting and speaker at 7:30 pm. Everyone to bring a **Dish to Share**, along with their own paper tableware and utensils. Beverages will be furnished.

Speaker: **Taldi Walter**, National Audubon, Alaska Field Coordinator, Teshekpuk Lake, Alaska.

#### *"From the Black Oystercatcher to Black Gold: Challenges and Opportunities in Alaska"*

Alaska is the largest of our states, encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of rugged mountains, grinding glaciers, endless tundra, diverse temperate rainforest, and winding coast lines. From the Spectacled Eider and Yellow-billed Loon found in America's Arctic to the Black Oystercatcher and the Marbled Godwit found on the southern coastline, Alaska's birdlife diversity is astounding. Alaska also has an abundance of other iconic wildlife species including grizzlies, caribou, Bald Eagles, humpback whales and wolves, many of which are endangered elsewhere. The current administration and some members of congress have advocated vastly accelerating the extraction of oil, gas, and mineral deposits in this important ecological area. Audubon seeks a balance between resource extraction and protecting internationally critical habitat.

Taldi Walter joined the National Audubon Society's Washington DC Policy Office as the Alaska Field Coordinator, after completing her Masters degree in Biology. She will present an informative slideshow showcasing some of the important natural areas and brilliant birds found in wild Alaska. The presentation will explore some of Alaska's natural treasures set aside decades ago for the benefit of wildlife and the American public. Taldi will highlight the imminent and compelling challenges and opportunities facing the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Tongass National Forest, Chugach National Forest, and National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

### July 25, 2007 — 6:00 pm

#### **LAS Annual Picnic at Rider Park**

This is our annual Family Picnic — children are invited!!

Again, everyone brings a **Dish to Share**, paper tableware and utensils. Drinks will be provided.

Afterwards, plan to take a walk along one the several trails looking for flora and fauna!

## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT...

Greetings Lycoming Auduboners. Migration is now in full swing. Hopefully those hummingbird feeders are hung and you've had a chance to get out and enjoy all those beautiful neo-tropical migrants pushing through Pennsylvania. Already, Louisiana Waterthrush, Hooded Warblers, Baltimore Orioles, Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds, and many other species have been seen in Lycoming County. On Monday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> I was entertained by an American Bittern on my property in Old Lycoming Township.

In addition to all the great birds to be seen, it is also wildflower time. If you get a chance, take a walk on Mill Street in Montoursville. That's the gated road behind the airport that is open this time of year. Lots of Trout Lily, Blood Root, and Giant Solomon Seal among many other plants are to be found there. Speaking of native wildflowers, Williamsport Area High School is in the process of planting a native wildflower garden. With assistance from horticulture teacher Nicole Carman and Lycoming Audubon member Lisa Cass, the students will be maintaining the garden at the high school. We would love donations in the form of native plants and shrubs. If you have plants to donate, please drop them off at the Williamsport High School greenhouse during their "open" hours (days and hours listed on page 2).

On March 30<sup>th</sup> LAS had a very enjoyable field trip to Rose Valley Lake. Among the nearly 40 bird species found, were an Osprey and juvenile Bald Eagle fighting. An excellent variety of waterfowl including Red-Breasted Merganser, Common Merganser, Lesser Scaup, Green-Winged Teal, Pied-Billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Canada Geese, and Woodcock.

And finally, I wanted to thank all the Lycoming Audubon members who have made my two years as President so enjoyable. With a growing young family it is time for me to step aside, but I will still be around helping out and attending meetings when I can. Thanks to Linda Burk who has agreed to take over the presidency.

*Dave Ferry*

## WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS!

## LOCAL CHAPTER MEMBERSHIPS !! DUES ARE DUE!!

June Almes	Laurie Miller
Gary Edler	James Ritter
A. K. Keiper	Sally Sample
Jacqueline Martin	Judith Youngman

If you have "Local Chapter ONLY" membership, your dues will expire June 30, 2007. To renew, send your check for \$10.00 for July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008 to : Donna Krupilis  
 Lycoming Audubon Membership Chair  
 728 Pennsylvania Avenue  
 Williamsport PA 177701



### BAT COUNTING TIME

June and July will be the time to count bats for the PA Game Commission Summer Bat Concentration Survey. We usually schedule the bat counts on a warm non-rainy summer evening so it may occur on short notice. It takes about 1.5 hours from dusk to complete darkness. Unlike bird counts, we do not have to identify the species nor check each one closely. The bats easily avoid the counters on their way to their favorite watering place and then busily catch those pesky mosquitoes for the rest of the night. We need a few helpers so if you want to try something new and want to help the environment, please contact Linda Burk, at 570-546-6453 or [lasbatsbirds@aol.com](mailto:lasbatsbirds@aol.com)

### KIDS KORNER

### *Do you know.....What is a Raptor?*

Cassandra and Joe were on a walk one day, and they saw a large bird chasing a smaller bird at the edge of the woods. They asked their Auntie why the large bird would do this. She explained that the large bird was a **raptor**, a special kind of bird that hunts other animals for its food, instead of eating bird seed or berries like the smaller birds. Cassandra asked her Auntie how she would know if a bird is a raptor. These are the clues her Auntie gave her:

**Clue #1:** Raptors have sharp curved nails called **talons** on their feet, for catching, holding, and killing their food. Talons are a raptor's main weapon: the grip strength in a raptor's foot is actually stronger than its jaw.

**Clue #2:** Raptors have excellent **eyesight**. They can see prey items as small as a mouse from half a mile or more away, much farther than a human could see. Raptors' visual systems also work faster than ours, to help them react quickly to changes in movement of their prey. And raptors that hunt at night, like owls, have very large eyes to help gather the dim light. If a human being had eyes the size of an owl's, our eyes would each be the size of an orange!

**Clue #3:** Raptors have pointy **curved beaks** to help them eat their prey. Members of the falcon group, including the Peregrine Falcon, also have a special notch in their beaks that they can use to break the necks of their prey.

**Bonus clue:** Many people mistakenly think that turkey vultures are also raptors. In fact, turkey vultures are more closely related to storks than to the raptors. They even share the storks' habit of defecating on their own legs to cool them off on hot days—something a raptor would not do! Not very polite!!!— but true!

LAS members interested in participating in the **Pennsylvania Migration Count for Lycoming County** must contact Dave Ferry. The count will be held Saturday May 12th. All participants must record and count each bird seen as well as record time and miles traveled. Contact Dave Ferry at [lycobirds@aol.com](mailto:lycobirds@aol.com)

### ***Bird Observations.....continued from following page....***

single Pine Warbler in some White Pines on campus that day. Also on the campus, during the height of the March 16 snowstorm, I found a lone Eastern Phoebe bobbing its tail in a small tree and looking as if he wished he would have delayed his return by a few more days.

Regarding Fox Sparrow activity in mid-March: Theresa Sheets reported four at her feeder in Howard; Larry Waltz reported five in Buchanan Meadows, including one that flew into a window; Linda Frye had a pair at her residence; Teri Tule had several; and Dave Ferry had six to eight at a time at his feeders. Dave also spotted an Eastern Phoebe near Rose Valley Lake on March 17. Dave reported the demise of quite a few Ring-billed Gulls earlier that week. The birds were apparently struck by vehicles as they fed on potato chips and other snack food that spilled from a truck on Interstate 180 near Wegmans. American Woodcock arrived at Dave's place earlier that week, and several birds were "peenting" and displaying.

On April 13, Larry Waltz took an ice-fishing trip to Rose Valley and watched an estimated 4,000 geese and swans (he stopped counting at that point) flying high over the lake, including four groupings of Tundra Swans.

Keep reporting your sightings, and enjoy the rest of spring migration.

*Joe Yoder*

WAHS Plant sale days and hours: May 9th, 17th, 23rd and 30th....12:30 pm to 6:00 pm.

## BIRD OBSERVATIONS

As I write (April 21), we are exactly one month into spring, though the past month has been anything but spring-like. It is said that meteorological spring begins even earlier than calendar spring, on March 1, but no one told Mother Nature – or Punxsutawney Phil – this year.

The cold, snowy conditions kept many of us from birding, and some species altered their typical migration behavior. It may have led to some birds – like Fox Sparrows – being easier to find. Others, like Tree Sparrows, paid dearly for heeding their migratory urge to hasten back to their breeding grounds when food sources – flying insects, in their case – were scarce. I've done little birding this spring: partly due to the weather, and partly because of a busy work schedule. Fortunately, there are plenty of sightings from others to report from March-April.

On the morning of April 20, Wayne Laubscher reported some interesting "yard" birds: a flock of nine Sandhill Cranes flying low over his farm in Swisssdale, Clinton County. He believes it may be a first-ever record for the county. A couple days earlier, at McElhatten, another noteworthy bird for Clinton County was sighted: a breeding-plumage Black-crowned Night Heron. The bird was seen by Noreen Sample, Vesta Schach and Beth Zbegner as it perched in a tree along the river, just off River Road. Seen across the river, in the McElhatten farm fields, were a Peregrine Falcon and some Long-tailed Ducks.

Jeff Schaffer reported some Lock Haven sightings to Audubon's PA Birds listserv. At the Lock Haven dike on April 15, he and his wife observed several rafts of mixed waterfowl, which included two Red-necked Grebes. Also observed were a Common Loon, Ruddy Ducks, scaup, Horned Grebes, Bufflehead and Long-tailed Ducks. On April 13, Jeff took a bird walk at the Lock Haven University sports fields. Sparrows species found included Vesper, Savannah, Swamp and Song, as well as a single Fox Sparrow. He also found eight Eastern Meadowlarks, some Rusty Blackbirds, a Brown Creeper, a Golden-crowned Kinglet, some Fish Crows, two Green-winged Teal, two American Wigeon, Wood Ducks, a Pied-billed Grebe and a hunting Northern Harrier. On April 12, Jeff observed a waterfowl fallout on the river at Lock Haven, finding good numbers of Long-tailed Ducks and Buffleheads, along with Horned Grebes, a few Ruddy Ducks, scaup and a Common Goldeneye. At the Avis Flats were numerous Green-winged Teal and Blue-winged Teal, as well as Mallards, Black Ducks, Canada Geese, Horned Larks and 15 Bonaparte's Gulls.

Closer to home, on April 20, Dave Ferry sighted Pine and Palm Warblers, along with Baltimore Orioles on his Old Lycoming Township property. He said Eastern Bluebirds had completed their nests, but there were no eggs yet. On April 16, Dave quickly scanned the river at the Arch Street bridge and found 15 Long-tailed Ducks, 25 Bufflehead and 10 Common Mergansers.

On April 15, Larry Waltz reported a flying (non-bird) species, as he caught a glimpse of an elusive flying squirrel at Buchanan Meadows around 10:30 p.m. It was on a feeder about 10 feet off the ground. "Man, can they move when they want to," he noted. Also on April 15, Theresa Sheets of Howard watched an Osprey try its luck at her favorite fishing hole, about five miles from the dam, noting: "The (Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission) had stocked this hole a week before. I don't mind one bit sharing, and consider myself blessed to have such beauty so visible."

I wrote earlier about the weather resulting in some birds altering their behavior. That includes Northern Flickers, who appeared in big numbers near feeders. Linda Frye of Woolrich reported to the Lycoming Audubon e-mail list that 16 were in her yard in the second week of April. Laura Andrus of the Warrensville area reported dozens of Flickers – many more than in previous years.

Dave Ferry received a phone call from a woman in Northumberland County who observed "a distressing, but fascinating scene" at her bluebird boxes. An estimated 200 Tree Swallows crowded overnight into five boxes, with wings and feathers protruding from crevices. In the morning, many weak birds tumbled onto the ground, where they huddled together and formed a mass that "looked like a basketball." Swallows on the outside tried to burrow under the others.

Later, 30 dead swallows were found in the boxes and on the ground. The extended cold weather suppressed insect activity, apparently leaving the swallows weak, cold and hungry, not to mention vulnerable to attack from House Sparrows looking to evict them from nest boxes.

On April 9, Teri Tule of Muncy Township reported checking her bluebird box and discovering at least six live Tree Swallows piled atop one another inside. She tried to chase them away to check on the bluebird eggs, but only two flew. "The rest just looked at me and wouldn't move ... checked two other nest boxes, and in each box was a dead Tree Swallow with eye and head pecked out," she wrote.

Fred Stiner took a few short walks at Mill Street in Montoursville on April 8-9, seeing Hermit Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Eastern Meadowlark, Hairy Woodpecker, Brown Creeper and Carolina Wren, among other species.

On April 2, Skip Heller of South Williamsport sighted (for the second time) a Bald Eagle flying south and apparently landing about halfway up the north face of Bald Eagle Ridge. I saw an adult Bald Eagle flying low over the Market Street Bridge and then crossing south over the river late in the day on March 11. It could have been a migrant, but I suspect we may have a nest to locate.

On March 22, Judy and John Ryder reported quite a few Killdeer along Post Road in Cogan House Township that seemed anxious for the heavy snow to leave the surrounding fields. On March 24, I first heard the Killdeer who nest each year near the Penn College campus, as they called repeatedly during the college's Visitation Day. I was also fortunate to find a

***Continued on previous page, at bottom.....***