

Seneca Rocks Drummer



December, 2005

Newsletter of the Seneca Rocks Audubon Society

Volume 22, No. 5

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

www.senecarocksaudubon.org

Next Meeting – December 12

Room 249, Peirce Science Center

Refreshments & conversation at 7:00 p.m.

Program begins at 7:30 p.m.

Members' Night

by Gary Edwards

Dust off your slides, your favorite birding story, or whatever will hold the group spellbound for 5-10 minutes. Our traditional Member's Night is always lots of fun, so mark the calendar and plan to be there to entertain or to be entertained. The refreshments and scintillating (or not) conversation are worth the trip—and, as a bonus, we can almost guarantee it'll be a learning experience. Nonmembers and prospective members are always welcome. It helps to sign up ahead of time so we can plan accordingly, but if you forget to sign up, we'll make room for you. Please let Deb or Gary know as soon as possible. See you there.

We will also be working on Christmas Bird Count plans – maps and checklists will be available.



Christmas Bird Count

The Clarion Christmas Bird Count has been scheduled for Saturday, December 17. If you don't already have an area to canvas, please contact Deb Freed or come to the December meeting. We will meet at BJ's Eatery in Knox for supper and tallying after the count.



This will be the nineteenth CBC in Clarion. The first count in the Clarion count circle was on January 2, 1988, when there were 17 participants and 43 species. Last year, on December 26, 2004, we had 34 participants and 53 species.

The Christmas Bird Count, now in its 106th year, is the longest running database in ornithology, representing over a century of unbroken data on trends of early-winter bird populations across the Americas. The CBC is citizen science in action. We hope you can join us!



My Favorite Bird

At Ornithology Camp in Maine, Instructor Sara Morris told us that her favorite bird was the black guillemot. She just loved their crisp black and white plumage and bright red feet. Sara told us about "Guillemot Day", which was Friday at camp, and she wore red socks to celebrate the occasion.

My favorite bird is the brown creeper - it is so quiet and unassuming, I think I stop breathing when I actually see one. It seems to drop like a brown leaf from one tree trunk to another, then calmly works its way back up, searching for goodies under the bark. The creeper's springtime song is a delight, akin to that of the black-throated green warbler, while at other times of the year, he emits only a high "seee".



Peter LaTourrette *

But maybe I should choose a more visible bird... What about the eastern bluebird, with its splash of color and its cheer-up cheery song? I'll never forget how happy I was to finally get bluebird tenants after years of putting up nest boxes when I lived in Armstrong County. Here in Forest County we've had bluebirds as early as March 7, and as late as December 31. Many families have been raised in our yard, but I never tire of the bluebird's song, or of watching one come down to the garden for an insect. I guess I really enjoy their company.

But maybe I should choose a neotropical migrant, a bird we can only dream of in Pennsylvania in December... What about the blackburnian warbler, one of the most

beautiful warblers which, luckily for us, breeds in our area. When I hear its "tsk, tsk, tsk" high in a conifer I know that with utmost patience I might get a glimpse of the "firethroat". And when I do see one, the vividness of its color never fails to amaze me.

But what about the belted kingfisher, diving headfirst into an ice-cold creek for a fish? Or the bobolink, sitting on a fence-post with its off-beat plumage, singing its even more off-beat song? Or the bald eagle, soaring majestically up the river? Or the horned lark, which I first saw (and identified, after much consultation) from the kitchen window when I was a teen? Or the winter wren, with its song of pure joy echoing along a hemlock ravine?

As you can see, choosing a favorite bird is not an easy task for me, but it brings a lot of pleasant memories.

- Flo McGuire

* The brown creeper photo is used with kind permission - see more photos at <http://www.birdphotography.com/>



SRAS Board Members

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- Gary Edwards, Vice-president, programs . . . 676-3011
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- Margaret Buckwalter, Mill Creek Coalition . 782-3925
- Walter Fye, Beaver Creek 797-1019

Ruffed Grouse artwork in masthead
by George Miksch Sutton, used with permission.

ANNOUNCING THE 2006 OLYMPICS OF YARD LISTING

Ron Rovansek
Chairman of the YLOC
(Yard List Olympic Committee)

What is it?

A contest to see who in PA can identify the largest number of bird species (not individuals) in or from their yard.

When is it?

The contest will run from midnight January 1, 2006 until midnight December 31, 2006.

How do I compete?

1. Starting January 1, keep a list of all bird species you can identify from your yard by sight or sound. Birds heard but not seen count. Flyovers count. Your neighbor's chickens (note to Tom Dick) do not count.
2. Send your lists to me via email once a month at rovansek@ADELPHIA.NET. If you don't have email, call me at (714) 514-8875 and we'll figure out a way for you to be in the contest.
3. Use the taxonomic order. One easy way is to use the list generator found at the Three Rivers Birding Club's website. This makes for swift data entry.

What is my yard?

1. For most of us, our yard will be the property we live on whether it is a farm or a city lot. Some of you may have to get creative in defining your lot if you live in an apartment complex or share a lot.
2. Remember, the contest is supposed to be fun, so if you need to define your lot beyond "a small paved parking area" feel free. Good conscience rules the day here.
3. Remember though, you must live there.

Is this all fair?

No.

Why?

Some of you have better yards than others, some are better birders than others, some of you may wake up early and sit on your roof listening for thrushes while others sleep in as long as I can get away with it.

Well geeze then. Why should I enter?

Because it's not about winning, it's about doing the best you can do (that's what the people who get the silver and bronze medals say at the other Olympics) and we will be dividing you into yard categories (descriptions will be available) so you will be competing against people with similar yards.



Bird Tails

Penguins in Pennsylvania

by Kim Weaver

I was always a strange kid (see previous story in the October *Drummer*), but my mom was convinced that I had gone over the edge one morning about 15 years ago. I was getting ready for school when I saw a strange bird on the edge of the pond. I grabbed the binoculars to get a better look. "Mom, mom, there's a PENGUIN on the pond!" I shouted. She wouldn't even look out of the window at first, but I eventually got her to take a look. She agreed—it did look like a penguin! We got out the bird book and roused dad, who was also stumped as to the identity of the visitor. "I know just who to call," he said, as he looked up Margaret Buckwalter's number in the phone book. Not long after, a small convoy of cars came slowly back the lane. Out came the field guides, binoculars, and telephoto lenses. Thanks to Margaret and her entourage, we learned that our "penguin" was actually a black-crowned night heron. With its long legs hidden in the grass, its black-and-white pattern, and its upright posture, it had us all looking twice!

Do you have a "Bird Tail"? Please send to Flo McGuire, fmcguire1@verizon.net for the Bird Tail column in the next *Drummer*.

THE LIVING DESERT MUSEUM

by Gil Twiest



ARIZONA-SONORA
DESERT
MUSEUM

Since we retired in 1997, we have been going more or less south for the colder months of the year. Except for a couple of trips to Florida (a very crowded destination) and a couple of trips to the southern hemisphere, we have gone to the Southwest most of the time. A destination that I have become increasingly fond of visiting is Tucson, Arizona, and more specifically The Living Desert Museum, which is located in the western part of Saguaro National Park. This part of the park is located just to the west of Tucson and there is a nice campground just a few miles from the museum.

The Living Desert is not a museum at all, but a kind of zoo. It features a number of enclosures with various kinds of mammals and birds in very natural settings. It is also landscaped with natural native plants, shrubs and trees which are labeled for easy identification. There are two enclosures which are my favorites: the hummingbird house and the aviary. Both are structures enclosed with glass and/or wire netting, and are planted with many native plants, which makes for a very natural setting in which to see the birds.

The first time we visited the Living Desert the hummingbird house was closed, due to a disease problem they had in the captive population. However, in January of this year, we visited again before leaving for Mexico. I was delighted with the facility. The house is divided into little alcoves and separate "rooms" by the landscaping and the vegetation. There were several benches where one could sit to

watch the birds as they went about their business. There seemed to be three different kinds of hummers in the building: broad-tailed, broad-billed and Costa's hummingbirds. There may have been more than one pair of each. Each bird seemed to hang out in a different spot in the house. In one area, a female Costa's was building a nest. I could sit on a nearby bench and watch her as she made trip after trip gathering lichens and spider webs for the nest. I usually try to get to the museum as early as possible to beat the crowds. On this day I was the only one in the house for about two hours. This time alone with the birds made it easy to take some good photographs without disturbing other patrons.

The birds do have favorite perches and once you know where they are, you can set up the camera focused on the perch and just wait for the bird to return to the perch to get a good close photograph. I was able to get shots of all three species using this method. As the morning went along, the hummingbird house received more visitors and I moved on to the aviary.

This is a much larger enclosure with trees and shrubs growing inside it. It is stocked with many of the species of birds found in Southwest USA as well as some from just across the Mexican border. There are many places within the enclosure where the birds are fed, so waiting quietly at these places will give you a nice close view of the birds visiting for food. Each time I have visited, I have seen new species here and the good close looks help me in identifying these species later in the field. Once again, excellent chances for photographs are provided. The range of birds within the house is very broad. Sparrows, tanagers, orioles, parrots, woodpeckers, doves, quail, ducks, grosbeaks, hummingbirds and many

others live in the aviary together. Once again, early morning is best if you want to avoid people. However, I have found that most people just walk the circuit around the inside of the house and then exit. If it gets busy with people, waiting a few minutes will usually result in the crowd thinning out.

If you are going to the southwest to see birds, a visit to the Living Desert Museum will be helpful for getting oriented to the bird life of the area.



Book Review



One for sorrow, two for joy
 three for a girl, four for a boy
 five for silver, six for gold
 seven for a secret, never been
 told...

--Old English rhyme

This rhyme is the basis for the title of Clive Woodall's first book, which was originally written for his two sons. *One for Sorrow, Two for Joy*, The Berkley Publishing Group, New York, New York, 2005. ISBN 0-441-01265-5. The book was originally published in Great Britain in 2002 by Ziji Publishing.

Once you deal with the anthropomorphism, the book evolves like an epic tale of good and evil, heroism and hubris, love and hate, death and renewal. It is the story of the wisdom of Tomar the owl, and the fortitude of Kirrick the robin, who attempt to prevent the destruction of all of the song birds by the treacherous Slyekin and his murderous henchman Traska, magpies who facilitate the bloody destruction of all birds and the implementation of an avian world controlled by the corvidae. Will Kirrick, the messenger, bravely complete his task in time? Can Kirrick convince Darreal, the red kite, Storne, the golden eagle and Kraken, the black-

backed gull to help the Council of the Owls defeat the corvidae? Will wise Tomar's plan work? Will wisdom or treachery prevail? Love stories and revenge are interwoven into the fabric of this tale.

"Shortly before nightfall, a deep and comfortable silence fell over them both. They perched close together; an incongruous looking pair – owl and robin, side by side. They knew that the preparation was over and that the die was cast irrevocably. The future of all bird life lay in their hearts and heads. Kirrick would carry the hope of generations on his back and wings. The great adventure was about to begin..."

As you read this fast-paced book, keep in mind that Clive Woodall is from rural Cambridgeshire in Great Britain. His geographical references are different than an author from the United States. The book has a disclaimer about locales, but like any good author, Woodall uses what he knows best to describe landscapes. Where is the Isle of Storms? Crossing the sea from Birddom to Wingland in Book II gives every impression of crossing the English Channel.

One for Sorrow, Two for Joy is a very good story, told by an excellent storyteller. Clive Woodall knows birds, and bird behavior. Each of his characters is carefully cast to let the story unfold effortlessly. Isidris, the snowy owl, emotes the personality and characteristics of a snowy owl. Finbar the slow-witted lieutenant of the hooded crows is easily manipulated by the evil magpie Traska. This is a story that begs to be read aloud, next to a fireplace, in the depths of winter. I will gladly stoke the fire, and sit by your knee, to hear this story retold.

- The Old Curmudgeon

Editor's Note - This excellent review was submitted anonymously by "The Old Curmudgeon".

Answers to Bird Lyrics Matching Quiz in November's
Drummer –
 1-G; 2-I; 3-A; 4-Q; 5-T; 6-C; 7-F; 8-M; 9-P; 10-H;
 11-J; 12-N; 13-R; 14-K; 15-D; 16-E; 17-O; 18-B;
 19-L; 20-S



Photo by Gary Cox, used with permission
<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/gary.cox/diary.htm>

Curllsville Owls- An Atlas Tale

by Carole Willenpart

This Atlas tale begins rather late into the breeding season, and started almost by accident. We went in search of harriers and found owls instead!

The harrier tale is a separate story , but on June 29th in the evening we were at a local grassland near home called the Curllsville strips. As dusk approached we had not seen the harrier pair we were looking for and were almost ready to leave, when a bird appeared in the distance headed our way. As it got closer we recognized the bat-like flight of a short-eared owl. It continued towards us and across the road in front and was carrying what appeared to be a mouse. It went lower and then dropped into the field to our right out of sight. It did not reappear that evening , but still I went home so excited that the owls were nesting here this year and had been carrying food for young ones!

Over the next several days we made two further trips in the evening to watch and found both times that the adults continued to

make frequent trips to the same area in the field with food each time. But we were still unable to glimpse young owls or see the spot where the food was being taken.

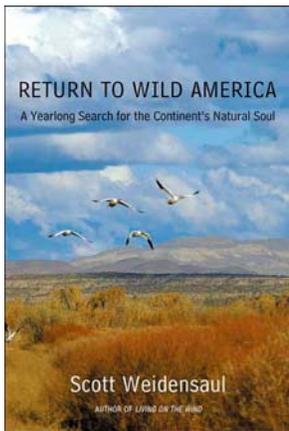
Finally on Sunday, July 3rd I met Margaret there and our luck turned, all the watching paid off. As we stood and watched in the warm evening sun, we could hear the numerous calls and songs of Henslow's, grasshopper and clay-colored sparrows, but above the usual sounds there came across a different, raspy sort of call. After a little searching I pinpointed the sound to a large shrub not far off the road. There, perched near the top, was a young owl, calling and looking right towards us! Margaret got the scope on it and we could see great views of a young owl, still a little fluffy looking and with the black face that young owls have. What a thrilling moment as it was the first young owl I had ever seen. I was very happy that Margaret was there to share such a great evening with me.

Over the next week we made two more trips and continued to see the adults hunting and bringing food. We eventually saw two fledgling owls making short flights and playing with each other at times it seemed. July 9th was the last sighting we had and on a visit on July 14th no owls were seen.. With the young owls flying better they may have moved on, but it was a great experience while it lasted!

The Curllsville strips area was surface mined extensively between Rimersburg and Curllsville in the 1970's and I remember the area from that time and how ugly it seemed. One reason this area is particularly special to me is that in a small churchyard across the road from the strips my great, great, great, great-grandparents are buried, Joseph and Mary McKee. Sometimes I wonder what the landscape was like when they settled here in

the 1820's. How different were the variety and number of birds then? With all the changes that occurred since that time, the mining has changed the habitat and contours of the land the most. But the redeeming feature has been the creation of the wonderful grassland habitat we have now. On a quiet summer evening at sunset and with a soft breeze, the grassland is full of the sounds of life and a sense of peace. Hopefully it will also continue to provide a home for the owls in future years.

Return to Wild America



Looking for a Christmas gift for a naturalist? Scott Weidensaul's latest book, *Return to Wild America: A Yearlong Search for the Continent's Natural Soul*, is now available! Many of us remember when Scott visited Seneca Rocks a few years ago and presented an excellent program on his book, *Living on the Wind*, which was to become a Pulitzer Prize finalist.

In 1953, Roger Tory Peterson and British naturalist James Fisher journeyed around North America, covering 30,000 miles in 100 days. The chronicle of their adventure, *Wild America*, was published in 1955. Now, half a century later, Scott Weidensaul has retraced their steps with the intention of determining the changes that have occurred in the natural world.

Kenn Kaufmann states that Scott "proves himself a worthy successor to the original authors as he examines what has been lost and celebrates what remains of America's wild nature".

With Scott Weidensaul's naturalist's eye and gift for poetic description, *Return to Wild America* is certain to be an engaging book.



Adopt a hurricane birder in need.....

PSO Member Deuane Hoffman is the local contact in a project whereby Pennsylvania birders can help birders from the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts.

Looking to spread holiday cheer and help out a fellow birder all at the same time? With the recent events in Louisiana and Mississippi during the 2005 hurricane season many of our southern birding brethren are in serious need. While the greatest needs of shelter, food, water, medical and emotional supports are a bit beyond most of our abilities, we still can help out.

Through a project started by LSU professor Dr. Van Remsen and emulated in Mississippi by Gene and Shannon Knight they have created the "Adopt a birder" program. The goal of the project is to team up willing groups across the country and partner them with a birder that is in need of replacing birding items lost and or destroyed due to the storms.

An email from Shannon Knight gives you an idea of the situation: "So far we have been trying to help the ones that are in the need of the most gear and/or books. Some only need 4 or 5 books. Some may need only a few books, \$150 worth. Some folks need more. We have one person that lost an entire library of some 40 years of birding."

If you are willing to donate items from your collection, duplicate copies of books, little used field bags or an old pair of usable binoculars, please contact me. I will keep an email group list of all willing participants. Once we have our adopted birder and an idea of their needs I will contact the group and we will see what can be provided.

Anyone interested in donating can contact me, Deuane Hoffman, at corvuscorax@comcast.net. If you have an item to donate send it to my home (3406 Montour St., Harrisburg, PA 17111-1827). The items will then be shipped off to our recipient.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this project.



Future Programs -

February 13 - Genny Nesslage,
CUP's Vertebrate Collection

March 13 - John Karian

April 10 - Dan Brauning



(There will be no Drummer and no meeting in
January)



*Thank you to the following hosts
for the coming meetings:*

*Dec 12 Hendrika Bohlen & Mary Emerick
Feb 13 Judy & Ron Montgomery
Mar 13 Jim Wilson & Gary Edwards
Apr 10 Jan Meyer*



The florescent orange Audubon hats will again be available at our next meeting – they make great Christmas gifts at \$10 each. We want all of our friends to be safe when they are in the woods. And don't forget, five dollars of each purchase will go to SRAS, to help support our projects.

Seneca Rocks Audubon Society
c/o Deb Freed
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