

Seneca Rocks Drummer



December 2003

Newsletter of the Seneca Rocks Audubon Society
A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Volume 20, No. 4



December Program - Members' Night

December 8

Room 249, Peirce Science Center
Refreshments & conversation at 7:00 p.m.
Program begins at 7:30 p.m.

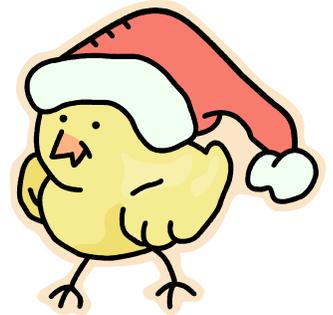
by Gary Edwards

Members' night is one of the many SRAS fun traditions. It's an opportunity to share a few slides, a short video, pictures, a story or other information with the group. Presentation time should be no more than ten minutes (5 minutes is ideal) so that everyone can be accommodated. Here's your chance to share your favorite birding and/or nature story, or surprise us with something different. We already have several participants but there's room for you. The room has a slide projector and Powerpoint equipment. Consider participating and let Pete or Gary know if you need specialized equipment. See you there.

Future Field Trips

by Ron Montgomery

January 10 (Sat) – Snowbirding! We will start from our house at 9:00AM, so try to arrive around 8:45. Bring a lunch dish to pass. Some carpooling would help with parking space. If the ground is hard, I'll have parking in the lawn to the right of my driveway; if the ground is soft, some could park in the hunter's parking area across from my property. We will have 4 or 5 driver/leaders, each with a designated area. Lunch will be at 12:30. Margaret Buckwalter will collect our data after lunch.



February (Date TBD) – Owl Prowl at Oil Creek State Park.

March 13-20 (Sat to Sat) – Woodcock watch. Individual SRAS members to check specific areas and record data as part of the Atlas Project.

March 27 (Sat) – Conneaut Marsh & Pymatuning driving tour.

April 3 (Sat) - Presque Isle driving tour.

April 26 (Mon) – Oil Creek State Park for Warblers.

May 1 (Sat) - Conemaugh Floodlands, Indiana County, with Todd Bird Club.

May 22 (Sat) – Piney & Mt. Airy Areas, with Todd Bird Club.

June 12 (Sat) – Picnic & birding at Ben Pete’s camp.

June 21 (Mon) – Pot Luck outing with Gary & Ron.

(feather scanned by Margaret Higbee)



Exhibit of Audubon Prints

Sixty-two of the 435 double elephant folio prints from John James Audubon’s *Birds of America* are being featured in an exhibition at the University Art Gallery at the University of Pittsburgh. This special exhibit will run until January 31, 2004. *Taking Flight: Selected Prints From John James Audubon’s Birds of America* is being funded by the Hillman Library Endowment Fund. For library hours please call 412-648-3330.

SRAS Officers

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Crow's Nest:

How Do You Define a Birder?

by President Deb Freed

In Scott Shalaway's article (Post-Gazette 11/16/03) he reports that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service defines a birder as anyone 16 years of age or older who has either taken a trip of at least one mile from home for the primary purpose of observing birds, and/or those who observed or tried to identify birds around the home. According to Shalaway, this definition qualified 48 million Americans as birders in 2001.

Were you observing birds before the age of 16? I might have been considered a birder at the age of 11 in Miss White's fifth grade when she enrolled the entire class in Junior Audubon. We played her game of bird baseball during recess where we had to identify bird pictures to advance the bases. Sadly, we never did any field observations.

A birder doesn't have to own a spotting scope or even belong to Audubon. I'm glad the definition says nothing about the odd assortment of clothing and gear birders accumulate. Since "bird watchers" were often depicted as humorous eccentrics, I prefer the more sporty designation of "birder". Birder implies action. A former member defines a power birder as someone who drives around the countryside fortified with junk food while identifying birds.

There's nothing about reporting observations in the Fish & Wildlife definition either. It doesn't require a birder to keep a life list, something I have yet to begin. A birder can enjoy birds without telling anyone or can submit data to any number of compilers. Birders can set personal goals like one member who wants to identify 100 birds in each of the 50 states in the US.

The Drummer has published other definitions of birders through the wit of Roy Boyle in his "You might be a birder if..." series. Seneca Rocks is a good place for all kinds of birders. What kind of a birder are you?



(photo by Mike Leahy)

Allegheny Front Hawk Watch

Day 1

by Deb Freed

We should have turned back, but we didn't. We should have been disappointed, but we weren't. The rain and fog at the ridge proved too dismal for both the birds and the birders even though a lone Song Sparrow tried to lift our spirits. It was Jerry Stanley's plan B that turned the day around. He and Deuane Hoffman took us on a tour of nearby reservoirs. The Shawnee Reservoir yielded an Osprey, several Loons and Ruddy Ducks. Other sightings included: Pied-billed Grebe, Kingfisher, Great Blue Heron,

Ring-billed Gull, Eastern Bluebird, American Widgeon. A flock of Wood Ducks passed overhead. At Quemahoning Reservoir we spotted more Loons, Great Blue Heron, 1 Sharp-shinned Hawk, Brown Creeper, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Chickadees. On our way out of the reservoir we stopped along a stretch of road to watch a flock of Cedar Waxwings and found these companions: Downy Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Golden-crowned Kinglets, American Robins, White-breasted Nuthatches, and a late Towhee too. Plan B birders included Ann Hunt, Pat Conway, Shelly Gracey, Gary Edwards, Ron and Judy Montgomery, Mike Leahy, Charles Marlin, Deb Freed, Jerry Stanley, Nancy Baker and Deuane Hoffman.

Day 2

by Flo McGuire

Jim and I were lucky to join the group at the Allegheny Front Hawkwatch on Tuesday, Oct. 28, when 271 raptors were seen! Can anything compare to the sight of a Golden Eagle flying right over your head in the sunshine? Site operator, Che Mincone, tallied 14 Golden Eagles between 11:08 a.m. and 4:27 p.m. As the morning fog lifted and the winds became stronger (Judy noted that the anemometer had varied from 3 mph to 9 mph), most of us sat a ways in from the high winds at the ridge, and, luckily for us, this was the path chosen by the majority of the raptors. Two hundred and one Red-tailed Hawks breezed past us, most of them showing full gullets, with their beautiful field marks highlighted by the sun. Forty-three Sharp-shinned Hawks flapped and glided their way South, along with eight Cooper's Hawks. Two American Kestrels, one Bald Eagle (at 3:22 p.m. - some of us missed it!) and one Northern Harrier, whose chosen path was even farther from the ridge, closer to the parking lot,

rounded out the day. It was reminiscent of a drive-in movie - sitting in our chairs and munching on goodies, with Mother Nature providing the entertainment. Other Day 2 birders included: Gary Edwards, Ron and Judy Montgomery, Mike Leahy, Jerry Stanley, Nancy Baker and Deuane Hoffman.



(White-throated Sparrow by Robert Mulvihill)

Fall Banding

Walter Fye's Banding Station, Part 2 of 3

by Margaret Buckwalter

October 4, 2003. Today I make the net rounds with Carl Rowe who has been banding with Walter for years. A black-capped chickadee in one of the nets demands all his attention. Here is this little mite of a bird, not much bigger than Carl's thumb, challenging his patience and skill. Chickadees continually flex their strong feet balling up the net into a tangled mess. In addition, this one savagely pecks at Carl's tender cuticles when given half a chance. Nevertheless, he gently extracts the feisty bird from the net and pops it into my waiting paper bag.

Walter bands all the birds we catch in the hopes that some will be caught some day, someplace, and tracked by his number to this banding station. It's the migrants for which banding is most useful because it reveals the

direction and the distance of migration and even the timing. Banders tend to get more excited about the migrants than the stay-at-homes. Maybe it's because we feel privileged to be so up-close to these winged creatures that take these long journeys solely under their own power, facing all kinds of unknown hazards.

The next birds in the nets are true migrants: gray catbirds that are making their last rounds of the fruiting trees and shrubs to fill up for their journey to the southern U. S. and Gulf Coast. They are handsome, strong birds that seem like giants compared to the warblers and chickadees.

Another Swainson's thrush rounds out the morning's work. Like the one I mentioned last month, this one has "teardrops" on its wings (not "dewdrops" as I mistakenly said before) showing it was hatched this year.

October 5, 2003. Not a very exciting banding day. We catch several song sparrows which are usually resident birds. Several "butter-butts" - yellow-rumped warblers - get caught. This is our most common migrant warbler in spring and fall. Some even stay all winter because they do not feed exclusively on insects as most warblers do. They are adapted to certain fruits that last all winter, bayberry, for instance. Unlike chickadees, warblers are quite docile in the nets and usually aren't a problem. I take pictures showing the yellow rump and the white spots on the tail feathers for the record.

October 11, 2003. Today marks the first appearance of white-throated sparrows at the banding station this fall. In fact, we band ten altogether. One white-crowned sparrow is captured offering a good chance to compare the two species. Both have handsome black and white crowns but only the white-throat has the white bib. Both species are here for the winter from Canada but some go as far south as Florida or in between.

October 12, 2003. Today is one of the better banding days. We catch and band ten

different species. First I watch while Mike Leahy releases a squawking, uncooperative blue jay from the net. After the banding ritual, it's fun to photograph the brilliant plumage in the sunshine. A blue jay's feathers are not really colored by blue pigment. The blue effect comes from blue light reflected from a layer of cells in the feather. If you hold a feather up to the light and look through it, it's a dingy brown. Honest!

One of the "confusing fall warblers" has us guessing its identity until we get out the bird books and go over the field marks one by one: line through the eye, white line over the eye, yellow undertail coverts, yellowish breast, belly and flanks, white spots on outer tail feathers. It must be a palm warbler in non-breeding plumage, of course. It may have come all the way from the Yukon and be on its way to the West Indies. I take pictures of all the field marks and we wish it a safe journey.

The other species of the day are ones already mentioned or more stay-at-homes like American goldfinches.

(To be concluded in the next Drummer)

Second Breeding Bird Atlas Project

Robert Mulvihill, the Project Coordinator of the Second Breeding Bird Atlas Project, was a very enthusiastic speaker at our November meeting. The changes from the First Atlas Project include: Coordination will be by DeLorme Page, not county; any observer will be able to enter his data and view existing data online; there will be an emphasis on number of each species per block; there will be a greater effort to find data on nocturnal species and early breeders, which may have been under-reported in the first project.

It was indeed a pleasure meeting Mr. Mulvihill, particularly since he has been so gracious with sharing his beautiful photography from "The Powdermill Banding Website" for the pages of the Drummer. (see facing page).

The project begins in January, when Great Horned Owls will be nesting – keep your eyes and ears open!



Christmas Bird Count 2003

Dec 27 & BJ's at 6 p.m. for tally

by Deb Freed

On December 27, the Saturday after Christmas, SRAS members and friends will head out to count the birds. This is National Audubon's 104 annual count with Walter Fye and Margaret Buckwalter teaming up to organize the day. Walter will be at the December membership meeting to match birders with geographic areas within our designated territory of 177 square miles contained within a 15 miles diameter circle in Clarion County. He will also distribute bird lists to record the sightings. This is a true census where we want to cover the entire territory without overlapping areas. Birders may use all 24 hours on the 27th to count every bird they see or hear. We will gather at BJ's Eatery next to the bowling alley at Knox Exit 53 (old exit 7) at 6 p.m.. It is a warm and friendly location to tally our sightings and enjoy a tasty meal together. SRAS will pay the \$5 fee for each member who participates. Backyard feeder counters and observers under 18 years of age do not pay the fee which covers materials, the published report and website costs. SRAS welcomes newcomers to this annual event. We will be happy to pair newcomers with members and help to describe the areas needing coverage. Besides the fun,

this annual event is considered the most significant citizen-based conservation effort and contributes to the general knowledge of winter bird distribution. To read more about CBC, use the NAS link on our new website.

Return To Montezuma

by Pat Conway

My family moved to Seneca Falls, in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State in 1964, after the closing of the Sylvania plant in Brookville. We lived in a cottage on the north end of Cayuga Lake for the first year.

Our first autumn there, I watched numerous large flocks of Canada geese fly overhead. It didn't take me long to realize that these geese were migrating and landing only five miles from our cottage on the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge. I investigated this "bird heaven" and escaped there every chance I could in my mom's Rambler shortly after I acquired my driver's license. My new friends thought I was nuts. My old friends, who had also transferred to Seneca Falls, didn't think anything of it. They knew me. I would drive out on a Saturday morning with my dad's binoculars and a good book and spend the morning in solitude, missing my friends and relatives that we had left behind but finding solace in the company of my feathered friends and literature.

Back then, Montezuma was only a dirt road into the marsh. No restrooms, no landmarks, no nothin'. Today, the road is improved, there is a visitor's center, gift shop, observation towers, Friends of Montezuma, Photo Contest, volunteer program, trail system, songbird banding program and much, much more.

Montezuma lies at the north end of Cayuga Lake, in the heart of the Finger Lakes Region. It is

located 5 miles east of Seneca Falls, and 10 miles west of Auburn on routes 5 and 20, in Seneca, Cayuga, and Wayne Counties. From Brookville it is about a six-hour drive.

The Finger Lakes Region was formed by melting glaciers over ten thousand years ago. The northern and southern ends of the lakes gradually developed into extensive marshes. The Algonquin and Cayuga Indians were the first known inhabitants of the area. The name "Montezuma" was first used in 1806 when Dr. Peter Clark named his home "Montezuma," after the palace of the Aztec Emperor Montezuma in Mexico City. Over time, the marsh and refuge acquired the name "Montezuma."



MNWR serves as a major resting, nesting and feeding habitat area for waterfowl and other migratory birds on their journeys to and from nesting areas in northeastern and east-central Canada. It is one of the largest areas for waterfowl migration in the Northeast and is home to endangered, threatened, and special concern

species. Neo tropical migrants such as warblers and thrushes nest there each year, and major flights of songbirds gather there seasonally. It is something to see!

I returned to Montezuma recently with three friends. Two old, one new. The sky was clear and the sun was shining. Although it was considerably cold, we couldn't have asked for a better morning. My sister, who lives only an hour from Montezuma, was our chauffeur and guide. As we approached the 36,000 acre wetland, there were birds flying in every direction. The entire day was an exciting and promising endeavor. I can't say when I've been more exhilarated watching birds. No matter which direction you looked there were birds, either flying, diving, sleeping, or swimming. Their clamor was tranquilizing! We knew it was going to be a good day when we saw large white birds without our

binoculars. They were tundra swans. Hundreds of them!

At every bend in the road there was something to see. Large V's of Canada geese stretched across the horizon. Great Blue Herons were abundant, standing stoically at every pond, projecting their images on the still water. Small coveys of ducks splashed gracefully down from every angle of our viewpoint. Some rested, oblivious to the honking, quacking and squawking of their counterparts, with their heads tucked under their wings. Colonies of Ring-billed and Herring Gulls mirrored the shallow ponds with an all-white image. I wished for the cervical spine of an owl so that I could turn my head in every direction. (As it was, I ended up going to the chiropractor the next day from moving my neck and head so much).

My sister knows the area well, having lived there for forty years. She and her husband drive to Montezuma often. She was an excellent guide. She knew the best spots to pull over and the yummiest restaurant for lunch. After lunch, we did the entire loop again and descended on the visitor's center and gift shop, which opened at noon. Volunteers greeted us cheerfully and answered our many questions. We peered into glass display cases containing bird specimens, getting an up-close and personal look at the birds we were seeing far away. For the two newest birders in our group, it was overwhelming.

On the drive back to my sister's we stopped at Chimney Bluffs, overlooking Lake Ontario and visited the historic lighthouse on Sodus Point Bay. The sky turned an awesome purple as the sun slowly set. It was the perfect ending to our day. We were content.

Our tally of species for the day was twenty-three, although I know there were more. Backlighting and distance prevented us from identifying some of the ducks. It didn't matter. Our souls had been stirred by the beauty of the natural world. My return to Montezuma with family and friends will be a treasured memory for a long time to come.

Did you know?

Male birds often compete during the mating season in a effort to win the feather of observing females, but the winner is not always the most popular. Researchers studying Japanese Quail recently determined that females prefer the loser! They hypothesize that the winning males tend to be too aggressive and the females are afraid of them. In fact, experienced females are more prone to favor the losers than inexperienced females, suggesting that they have learned from a bad experience. (Animal Behavior Society Meeting, Boise, ID, July 19, 2003)



SRAS Website is up!

We are still putting in some finishing touches, but the SRAS Website is on-line at www.senecarocksaudubon.org. You can read more information about our chapter, upcoming events and educational opportunities. See the "Go Birding" link to read our Little Gems or view some photos of our activities in the photo gallery. The website is a work in progress - comments are appreciated! Also...

e-Drummer now on-line!

Check out the *Drummer* on-line at www.senecarocksaudubon.org. You'll find the text easy to read and the photos excellent. e-Drummer will be available a week before the paper version is mailed. If you choose to stop receiving your paper Drummer, please send an e-mail to Deb Freed at dhfreed@csonline.net or call and leave a message at 814-226-4719. You'll be saving a few trees as well as printing and postage costs. THANKS !



Answers to Birding Puzzle from November Drummer

1. BlackAndWhite
2. Stoop
3. Harrison
4. Longspur
5. Turkey
6. SnowyEgret
7. Todd
8. Phoebe
9. Sharpie
10. Swainson
11. Bee
12. Sappie
13. Twitcher

What does every hawkwatcher need?
LONG UNDERWEAR

Not a Member?

Join Seneca Rocks Audubon Society and

- Enjoy the world of birds
- Protect wildlife & its habitat
- Promote education that fosters appreciation of the natural environment.

To join, please contact

Membership Chair

Sherry Vowinckel at 814-782-3294 or
svo@mail.usachoice.net



All meetings are open to the public.

Conversation at 7 p.m.

Program begins at 7:30 p.m.

Rm. 249, Peirce Science Center

Clarion University Campus

On the second Monday of each month