



THE DRUMMER



www.senecarocksaudubon.org

November/December 2011

Volume 28, No. 2

Christmas Bird Count

*November 9 program
Ron Montgomery*

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on December 17 is our big winter event! Our own Ron Montgomery will help us begin getting ready for our cold challenge in the circle by discussing the ins and outs of the CBC at our November meeting.



The CBC is the longest-running currently active citizen science project in the United States, if not the world. It began on Christmas day 1900. Our CBC began adding to the data set with the 1987 Christmas season, so this year will be our 25th count. During that time we have found 95 bird species within our circle including: Snow Goose, Bobwhite, Snowy Owl, Northern Shrike, Merlin, Horned Lark, American Pipit, Lapland Longspur, and Snow Bunting. What will you find for us this year?

Ron will show some of the results from CBCs past and review plans for this year. Those who do not attend both the meeting and the count itself should not expect to see Santa Claus this year!

Our programs are held on the second Wednesday of each month at the Clarion Free Library. Come early to socialize - program begins promptly at 6:30 pm.

Owl Prowl

Join us for an Owl Prowl on Saturday, November 12. We will meet at the Clarion County Courthouse parking lot at 6:00 pm and carpool to various locations in the county in search of these mysterious creatures.



Ruffed Grouse & Early Successional Habitat

*December 14 program
Linda Ordiway*

The Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) is a national organization established in 1962. Its members are mainly grouse and woodcock hunters who support national scientific conservation and management efforts to ensure the future of the species. The RGS employs a team of wildlife biologists to work with private landowners and government to improve habitat for ruffed grouse, American woodcock and the other songbirds and wildlife that have similar requirements.

Dr. Linda Ordiway of Bradford, the RGS Mid-Atlantic/ Appalachian Regional Biologist, will present a program on Early Successional Habitat.

Linda received her BS in Biology and Chemistry from Lock Haven University, and continued her education at Marshall University in a field oriented program for an MS in Biology. She received her PhD from SUNY ESF in Syracuse, NY in Forest and

Natural Resource Management. Before joining RGS, Linda worked for the Northeastern Forestry Sciences Laboratory of the US Forest Service on the Allegheny National Forest. Here she focused on the usage of early successional habitats resulting from managed forests by non-game birds, habitat selection of the Cerulean warbler in managed and unmanaged oak-hickory stands, and the monitoring of avian and amphibian community structure in Allegheny hardwood stands.

Linda was part of a ground-breaking study that demonstrated the need for early successional habitat, or forest openings resulting from timber cutting, by interior bird species like some of the thrushes and the scarlet tanager.

Don't miss this interesting program!

Bird Seed Sale Report



There were thirty-one people who bought over 3500 lbs. of bird food during our sale through the generous agreement with J&J Feeds and Needs (Blue Seal) in Shippenville and Brookville. **The days for picking up the orders are Fri., Oct. 28, to Fri., Nov. 4.** Please

send me your comments on this year's sale -- the products available and their prices, the timing and locations, etc.

Janice Horn

jhhorn35@yahoo.com

The *Drummer* is the bi-monthly newsletter of Seneca Rocks Audubon Society (SRAS), PO Box 148, Clarion, PA 16214. SRAS is a chapter of the National Audubon Society. The *Drummer* is published 4 times per year—September, November, February, and April.

The *Drummer* is available on our website in Adobe pdf and may be read or downloaded from the site — www.senecarocksaudubon.org.

Members are encouraged to contribute announcements, articles, photos, etc., to Editor Flo McGuire, 609 Ponderosa Lane, Tionesta, PA 16353 (814 755-3672) or email at fm McGuire1@verizon.net.



Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine, photo by Deb Freed

Membership Update

Most people become members of Seneca Rocks Audubon by joining the National Audubon Society. National Audubon assigns each of its members to a local chapter based upon zip code. National Audubon sends each chapter an annual membership share donation. Audubon magazine is part of this dual membership.

Others choose to only belong to a local chapter. Chapter memberships support the programming and conservation projects of the local chapter, in this case, Seneca Rocks Audubon Society. Chapter members do not receive the Audubon magazine. Recently, the SRAS Leadership Team set the annual rate at \$10 for an Individual Chapter Membership and \$15 for a Family Chapter Membership.

In either case, members are supporting education and conservation efforts that help to conserve our prized ecosystems for birds and other wildlife. As a chapter, we seek to connect people with our natural world through outdoor experience and programming. Seneca Rocks maintains a website at www.senecarocksaudubon.org with chapter news, programs and numerous links for birders. We invite you to check it out.

~ Deb Freed

Wilderness is not a luxury, but a necessity of the human spirit.

Edward Abbey

Bird sightings wanted !!

Carole Winslow is the Clarion County Compiler for *Pennsylvania Birds*, the quarterly journal of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO). For more information, see their website at <http://www.pabirds.org/>

Please call, email, or mail your sightings to Carole. In the coming months, please send Carole the arrival date for any wintering species, and both first and last dates for any migrant.

Following is Carole's report for the Breeding Season, 2011.

Clarion County

Locations: Cooks Forest SP (CF), Cullsville (CV), Kahle Lake (KL), Mount Airy (MA), Mount Zion (Piney Tract IBA/SGL 330) (MZ), Redbank (RB), Sarah Furnace (SF), Strattanville (ST).

For the summer of 2011, the first species of note were **Wood Ducks**, noted in numbers in at least two areas this year. An adult female was seen with young 6/29 on the ponds along Summerville Rd outside of Rimersburg (CW) and through July birds of different ages were noted on a small farm pond in CV, with 10 birds present 7/23 (CW). **Double-crested Cormorants** would likely be a new breeding record for the county, and though there is no evidence of that, several birds were seen along the Allegheny River through July and 3 birds were present at KL 7/23 (CW). Another unusual bird for *Clarion* was also a **Common Loon** in non-breeding plumage seen there 7/16 (MV) and still present 7/23 (CW), likely a young bird summering.

Despite the increase in **Bald Eagle** numbers, the only summer note of these birds was an apparent second year bird seen along Redbank Creek 6/30 at RB, across from the Armstrong Trail there, near the junction with the Allegheny River (CW).

Northern Harriers continue to be regular breeders at MZ, with several good sightings for the season. A pair was seen there 6/9 (GE,ML), and on 7/2 the pair was seen at close range and engaging in direct defense of probable young nearby (SG). On 7/4 the pair was seen in the same area and performing a food exchange, possibly a killdeer (KSJ). **Broad-winged Hawks** continue to be regularly heard and seen through the summer near ST, with two circling and calling 6/30 there where more extensive forested habitat is present near the Clarion River (RM).

On MA, there continues to be enough open grassland and agricultural land left to support **Upland Sandpipers** which again were present this year and seen more regularly than some years. Seen by various visitors over the month of June, highest reported numbers were seen on 6/9 when 3 birds were present there on fields along Morris Rd (GE,ML). Though seen in the months for summer narrative reporting, two new additions to the species list for CV strips area were noted 7/26 and would represent the start of fall migration for these birds. A single **Least Sandpiper** and **Solitary Sandpiper** were seen taking advantage of some flooded areas on fields there that would normally have been grassland this time of year, but mostly bare this year due to changes in land use by the owner (CW). Though **American Woodcocks** are not hard to find in April and May in the county, later reports become more scarce, making it even more unusual for a sighting of 5 birds at one time in a rural yard in CV. Five birds were noted together near a wet area along brush and woods, possibly a late nesting family group, and possibly drawn to the area by very dry weather during this period of July (CW). A single bird was also seen near a pond in a yard in ST 7/20 and also again later in the week, possibly drawn to the area by water (RM).

Eastern Screech Owls again were successful breeders in CV, with both adults and then fledged young being regular roosters in a barn there (CW). On 6/29 at least 2 young and one adult were seen roosting in pines near open yard and being mobbed by other birds, then both heard and seen calling and moving about the area at dusk. Three recently fledged young were noted roosting together in the barn during the second week of July. **Short-eared Owls** were unfortunately noted by their absence in reports for this summer. A **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** was found on a nest 6/2 in the same tree along a rural road in CV that had held a successful nest last year (CW). This year the nest was predated upon. In the second week of June the nest was partly destroyed and no reattempt was noted in the immediate area.

In the moist hemlock woods along Tom's Run in CF, **Acadian Flycatchers** were present in excellent numbers this year with 11 birds noted 6/22 along a four mile length and nesting confirmed in two separate areas, one with a pair carrying food and another with the same, plus the typical messy nest found on an overhanging hemlock branch over the stream (CW). Another flycatcher confirmed this year but not as common in the southern areas is **Least Flycatcher**. These birds

were found calling also in the Tom's Run area of CF 6/22 where they are more expected in forested areas (CW), but were able to be confirmed in a very small woodlot outside of CV near scrub and open grassland areas after nest building found earlier in the season. These birds were seen and heard regularly through June and 6/28 were observed feeding fledged young (CW). For vireos, though others have noted some possible decline in **Blue-headed Vireo** numbers, these birds appeared to be faring well in the northern areas of the county, particularly in CF, with 16 birds found along a 4 mile stretch of trail 6/22 (CW). In the southern reaches of the county, **Yellow-throated Vireos** continue with a small but regular presence in riparian areas. At SF, a singing male was present 6/17 (RN), and a singing male also along Redbank Creek near RB on the Armstrong Trail 6/30 (CW).

Horned Larks are one species that are likely breeders in the county that do not get good documentation, so the few reports this year are a good addition. A singing male was found near Frills Corners in the agricultural farmland areas in the northern part of the county 6/1 (FM), and several singing birds were also found at CV strips area 7/2 on fields that were mostly bare (CW). At this same area 10 birds were also found present and singing 7/26, but no direct confirmation of breeding was able to be obtained (CW). **Tree Swallows** were noted nesting late this season, possibly related to early wet cold weather in the season. An active nest was present near CV with young in the nest still at the end of July (CW). **Brown Creepers** are another species not always reported for *Clarion*, and this year a singing bird was found in CF near Tom's Run and also noted carrying food 6/22 (CW). Along this same stretch of forested streamside area, **Winter Wrens** were found with seven birds on territory along several miles of trail on the same date (CW). In the more southern areas of scattered woodlot and more open areas, **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** were found nesting in a new location with a female on the nest 6/2, placed and built around wild grapevines rather than on a tree limb (CW). This same nest was found destroyed after 9 days by an unknown predator and the birds were not seen to attempt re-nesting in the area. **Hermit Thrush** are not the predominant thrush species for the county, but do continue a regular presence in small pockets of appropriate habitat in the southern parts of the county along hemlock woods in ravines and streamside near Piney Creek, where several were singing on territory 7/2, and also singing on territory in their expected locations in the north at CF 6/22 (CW).

Several warbler species deserve mention for the season, with the first being **Northern Parula**, where a pair continued in white pine and hemlock near the nature center 6/22 (CW), with birds also present in other scattered areas along the various rivers in the southern parts of the county. **Black-throated blue warblers** remain regular at scattered areas with good habitat in the northern part of the county, particularly along the Fire Tower Rd at CF where there is scattered rhododendron and mountain laurel, with several birds singing there 6/22 (CW). Both **Black-throated Green Warblers** and **Blackburnian Warblers** were present also in the CF area 6/22, with reported numbers along several miles of trail of 13 for black-throated greens and 27 for blackburnians, with those numbers likely undercounted (CW). Back in the southern part of the county, **Cerulean Warblers** continue in riparian areas with steady numbers in the SF area along the Armstrong Trail heard and seen 6/10 through 6/30, when two birds on territory were noted along 1/2 mile of trail there (RN,SS. CW). One bird on territory was also found 6/30 in a new area in RB at the meeting of the Allegheny River and Redbank Creek (CW). **Worm-eating Warblers** were also found in this area on the same date with one territorial male along good habitat here with steep south-facing slopes and rhododendron and mountain laurel present (CW). This same species also was found in its traditional areas along the Allegheny River at SF with birds seen 6/10 (SS,NT), 6/17 (RN) and 4 separate territories found along 3/4 mile there 6/13 (CW). One warbler species not frequently reported for *Clarion* is **Northern Waterthrush**, and this year a single bird was found in good habitat along Tom's Run in CF 6/22, but no territorial behavior or other evidence of breeding was noted. **Louisiana Waterthrush** is another warbler that though regularly reported has not frequently been confirmed. This year along the Armstrong Trail at SF, 3 birds were found 6/13 with an adult pair found feeding one fledged young (CW). The birds were not far from a mid-sized fast moving stream emptying into the Allegheny River here, but with water quality on the stream appearing to be poor, with heavy iron deposits on the stream bed, as well as acid mine drainage in the immediate area and a large dump site for old coal waste or "boney" from deep mining in the area. With these issues present, it will be worth noting if birds are able to continue to successfully breed here. Another southern species, **Kentucky Warbler**, was found in a new area at RB in good habitat, with a singing territorial male present 6/30 (CW). To round out warbler reports, the CV strips area with it's mix of grassland and increasing shrub cover of mixed locust and

honeysuckle, multiflora rose and other mixed species, **Yellow-breasted Chats** appear to be increasing in numbers and territories, with birds seen and heard throughout June by various visitors to the site (GE, SG, ML,SS, NT). This year 5 birds were found there 7/3 with an adult female seen at close range feeding a fledged young, with a mix of insects and honeysuckle and dogwood berries (CW). On the same date singing males were found with three separate territories in the area.

Clay-colored sparrows top the sparrow report list and are also the most frequent highlight of this season for visitors to *Clarion*. The CV strips area remains the primary area for these birds in the county, with birds seen through June (SG,SS,NT) including two seen and heard well during a field trip to the site 6/12 (ML,CW,SC). At this site 7/2, a total of seven birds were heard and seen, including one adult feeding a fledged young bird (CW). With many older reclaimed strip mine fields in the southern part of the county that are now rapidly growing over with scrub and scattered pine plantings, these birds may very likely be present in other areas that are not frequently visited and so may be missed in reporting. **Vesper Sparrows** were once again reported at MZ in some areas where more bare ground has been present with changes made by the PGC. Birds were noted in June as well as 7/2 and 7/4 (SG,KSJ, ML). These birds continue to be the most difficult grassland bird to find now in the county likely due to landscape changes in the past 20 years as strip mined areas age and change. Both **Grasshopper Sparrows** and **Henslow's Sparrow** were found in their usual strongholds of reclaimed strip mine areas in the southern part of the county, with no significant changes noted in numbers or reports. The MZ area of SGL 330 remains the most frequently monitored and reported area for the county. One specific note this year confirming breeding was of a grasshopper sparrow performing a distraction display 7/4 along a roadside there through the main grassland (KSJ). Lastly for the summer, **Purple Finches** usually show up sporadically in reporting for the season, and this year a pair was present mid-July in a CV yard with stands of mixed pine and spruce, the male singing 7/23, but no confirmation of breeding noted (CW). Two singing males were also heard in the CF area in good mixed pine and hemlock habitat 6/22 (CW).

Observers: **Carole Winslow, 159 Moggey Rd, Sligo, PA 16255, (814) 745-3818, cjnal@windstream.net**, Shawn Collins, Gary Edwards, Steve Gosser, Mike Leahy, Flo McGuire, Ron Montgomery, Steve Sanford, Kate St. John, Neil Troyer, Mark Vass.



The Big Year



Having enjoyed the book, *The Big Year*, I was surprised to find that it would be made into a movie (even more surprised to find that it included actors such as Steve Martin, Jack Black, Brian Dennehy, and Anjelica Huston), and anxious to see the tale on the big screen.

The book, written by Mark Obmascik, was the true story of three birders who, in 1998, decided to compete for a Big Year - that is, to identify the most species of birds in one calendar year in North America north of Mexico. The inspiration for a Big Year was a comment in Peterson and Fisher's book, *Wild America* (1955), where they noted having tallied 598 species on their trip. The film makes no bones about sticking to reality, opening with a statement that the movie is based on a true story, only the facts have been changed. Nevertheless, I found it a delightful movie.

The basic concept of a Big Year was well portrayed: the rare bird alerts; the travel, time, and expense needed to be competitive; often, difficulty in explaining birding to non-birders; the fact that Big Year competitors usually don't announce their hat in the ring. The facts were brought out that the birders can either see or hear the species, going by the honor system. The excitement of finding a rare species was perfectly illustrated - at one scene, everyone in the theater held their breath. (Well, both of us). It was also a good comedy, and to my relief it was funny without making fun of birders.

The changing of some of the facts was puzzling, but I think many of the alterations were in the interests of making the movie more entertaining, and the writers did succeed in that. Bird species and locations were sometimes changed, but stayed in the realm of possibility. The use of cell phones was not prevalent in the book (it was 1998), but they were commonly used in the movie, which added a lot of fun. The main characters' names were changed, but they were recognizable by their personalities. Some drama was added to their lives, again in the interest of entertainment.

The actual totals also differed from the true story. In the film, the winner counted 755 birds, while the real winner of the 1998 Big Year had 745 species, and his record still stands. Two possible reasons it hasn't been broken are that air travel is not as easy as it was then, and 1998 was an el nino year. (This year, John Vanderpoel of Colorado might be on track to break the record, with 729 birds as of October 28. His blog: <http://www.bigyear2011.com/>)

One lament I have is that I would like to have seen more good close-ups of birds. The fall-out at High Island showed an abundance of larger birds flying over the water, but the real attraction should have been the warblers and other passerines in the trees.

I don't think the movie will have folks flocking to become birders, but I think it should appeal to birders and non-birders alike. As a birder, I could overlook its faults and enjoy what is probably the only movie ever made about birding. I found *The Big Year* to be interesting, well-told, and funny - two binoculars up!

~ Flo McGuire

Cook Forest Programs

Monday, October 31 at 700pm - '*Cathedral by Candlelight*' Walk back in time into the depths of the Forest Cathedral with an historical character from the past. Come view the ancient forest by candlelight as we walk underneath the giants. Either a French Marine from the 1750's who saw these massive trees 250 years ago, or a lumberman from the 1800's will be there to guide us. Candy and hot chocolate will be served at the Log Cabin Inn Environmental Learning Classroom. Bring your flashlights! (2 hrs)

Tuesday, November 1 at 730pm - '*Spotting Pennsylvania's Elusive White-tail Deer*' Please bring your spotlights and meet at the Log Cabin Inn Environmental Learning Classroom for an evening driving tour as we car-pool to Cook Forest's white-tail hotspots. Come learn about the natural history of White-tail Deer, as we cruise the park searching for this elusive animal. (3 hrs)

Dale J. Luthringer, Environmental Education Specialist, Cook Forest State Park
(814)744-8475 dluthringe@pa.gov



Christmas Bird Count

Article and Photos by Pat Conway

The Christmas Bird Count is just around the corner. I look forward to it every year, and find the best part is being with fellow birders. We laugh and joke and tell tall tales of CBCs past and anticipate being the team to have the best sighting of the day. The second best part of the CBC is the feeling of satisfaction you get from introducing someone new to this special day of the year.

In the weeks prior to the Count, we plan our strategy via e-mails and telephone conversations. Ron Montgomery, our team leader, sends us wonderful color-coded maps to familiarize us with our birding area. He spends hours preparing the maps, making sure our territory is covered as thoroughly as possible. He also checks the weather forecast as early as July and sends us updates, so that we can prepare to dress accordingly.

The morning of the Count, we meet at the diner on the corner in Sligo at 7:00 a.m. or later if we're not eating breakfast. Deb Freed and I always have an egg sandwich. The waitress knows us by now and greets us with a friendly, "It's the bird people!" She even invited us to her house one year to check out her feeders; it turned out to be the hottest spot of the day because the weather was bitterly cold. On Christmas Bird Count day, most everyone wears his or her best birding sweatshirt, vest or coat that is embroidered with "Birdwatcher, Best Birder, "Birding Fool," or "I'd Rather Be Birding" logo. Ron

wears a camo-insulated suit and hat that we all wish we had because we freeze but he stays toasty with the windows rolled down the entire day. The fact that he looks like Luke Skywalker in his Jedi robe doesn't faze him one bit.

In the morning we split into two, three, or four teams, depending on how many people show up. We take walkie-talkies so we can communicate with each other on the road. At noon we meet back at the restaurant on the corner in Sligo and trade teams. Deb and I have our usual homemade vegetable soup, which is yummy. I look forward to this particular bowl of soup all year because it always tastes better when someone else makes it.

Gary Edwards, Jim Wilson and Carole Winslow, usually meet us at noon. They start counting from different directions in the morning. We exchange info on our sightings and Ron decides who is going to look for short-eared owls and in what locations. He gives us our assignments and off we go again. In the afternoon the birds aren't as active, so we have to look harder for them. Feeders are a good bet, but sometimes we get out of the car and walk and "pish" to coax the birds out of the bushes. Instead of "beating the bushes," we "pish" in the bushes, which is a lot easier.



Our best sightings over the years are etched in my memory. The first time I saw a short-eared owl was on a CBC with Margaret Buckwalter at Mt. Airy. What a thrill that was! Another year Deb and I found a short-eared owl, calmly sitting in a snow-covered field so close to the road we didn't need binoculars to see it. Two years ago with Ron and

Ann, I saw a flock of small birds with a lot of white on them fly over and land in a field. Ron drove in that direction and we spotted them on the ground with our binoculars, but we couldn't tell what they were. Ann and I were cold and tired of climbing in and out of the car, so we stayed put. Ron trudged up over the hill in his warm coveralls to get a better look. Soon I saw Ron waving for us to join him, so we braved the cold again and shuffled up to join him. We were rewarded with a flock of energetic snow buntings, pecking in unison in a bare spot of the farm field. This was a great find despite our reluctance to get out of the car yet again.



In 2006, the Frank family participated in the CBC. They had two young sons and had never seen a short-eared owl, so we set out to find one for them as dusk approached. Fate was with us. A short-eared owl put on a wonderful show for the two boys and their parents. It was a real joy to see their faces light up when they saw that owl.

When the sun sets on CBC day, most of the participants head for a restaurant in Knox for dinner and a lengthy tally of the birds seen over the course of the day. It depends on the weather and/or how tired and cold I am, whether I go to the tally. It's a long, full day and another thirty miles home. It's not that I don't enjoy seeing everyone, but a nice warm bed and bath are waiting and my dreams will be of friends, laughter, egg sandwiches, homemade vegetable soup, Luke Skywalker, short-eared owls and maybe a snowy, if I'm lucky.



Some Future Programs:

- (no meeting in January)
- February: Jerry Stanley - Birding Southern Ecuador
- April: Pam Stoleson - Bats

Outings/Events

- Owl Prowl, November 12, 6 pm
- Christmas Bird Count - Saturday, Dec. 17.

SRAS Leadership Team

Deb Freed	226-4719
Paulette Colantonio	797-2031
Pete Dalby	782-3227
Gary Edwards	676-3011
Janice Horn	226-7367
Mike Leahy	229-1648
Flo McGuire	755-3672
Ron Montgomery	764-6088
Jim Wilson	676-5455

SRAS meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month at the Clarion Free Library. Come early to socialize. Program begins promptly at 6:30 p.m. Guests are always welcome!



Bird Seed Pick Up

If you ordered Bird Seed in our sale, you may pick it up at your local Blue Seal J & J Feeds from Friday, Oct. 28 to Friday, Nov. 4. Any bird feeders, suet cages and nyjer sacks can be purchased for a 15% discount when you pick up your seed. Thank You!

Seneca Rocks Audubon Society
P.O. Box 148
Clarion, PA 16214