

Seneca Rocks Drummer



November, 2005
A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Newsletter of the Seneca Rocks Audubon Society

Volume 22, No. 4

www.senecarocksaudubon.org



**Next Meeting –
November 14
Room 249, Peirce
Science Center
Refreshments &
conversation
at 7:00 p.m.
Program begins
at 7:30 p.m.**

**November Program
“100 Years of
Conservation: The
Story of Audubon.”**

We will celebrate over 100 years of bird conservation as Audubon marks its centennial in 2005 by showing a video program about Audubon's influential role in American conservation over the past century. From the early days when Audubon volunteers fought for birds' lives, sometimes at the expense of their own, the video covers other seminal events in Audubon and conservation's history. You will see throughout, how prominent a role Audubon chapters and grassroots activism play in our history.

The Audubon-produced video also features some fascinating silent film footage from the Library of Congress. It's a film from 1928 called "Theodore

(continued on Page 3)

Field Trips

by Ron Montgomery

The field trip season is over until spring, except for the possible Northern Saw-whet Owl banding trip in November that we discussed at the last meeting.

Over the winter I will study the input that some of you provided to my recent questionnaire. Jim Wilson, Gary Edwards and I will use your input to brainstorm how to design the program for next year. It is not too late to turn in a response to the questionnaire.

Allegheny Front Hawk Watch

The hawk watching field trip to Allegheny Front was an experience, as it always is! When we arrived on Thursday, a few inches of snow remained from the storm a few days earlier. Cloud cover was heavy all day Thursday, the wind was from the west (bummer), and we saw only a few hawks.

That evening we had 10 for dinner at the Jean Bonnet restaurant near Bedford, so we arranged for a private room, complete with fireplace, and

had an unusually enjoyable evening. The restaurant, which was built before the Revolutionary War, is known for its rich history, ghosts, extensive beer selection, and good food.

The next day on the mountain started off like it had left off the day before, but suddenly the wind switched directions, the sky cleared, and an unbelievable number of hawks came out of nowhere! We had perhaps 350 hawks and vultures in less than 3 hours. Rather than coming one at a time as they usually do, they boiled up in great kettles and, when they reached sufficient altitude, streamed south in a continuous line. We had excellent looks at Red Tails, Red Shoulders, Coopers, and Sharpies; even a decent look at a Rough-legged. Then, just as suddenly as it started, the wind switched again, heavy clouds rolled in and the hawks hunkered down. To insure we got the message, mother nature quickly added a show-stopping snow storm! With that most of us took the hint and went home.

During the lulls in the hawk watching we also had (from memory) Common Loon, Great Blue Heron, Mallard, Wild Turkey, Killdeer, Belted Kingfisher, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Downy

Woodpecker, Tree Swallows, Blue Jay, Crow, numerous Common Ravens, Chickadee, White & Red-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creeper, Carolina Wren, numerous Robins & Bluebirds, Cedar Waxwing, Purple & House Finch, Junco, and Snow Bunting.

Attending were: Walter Fye, Shirley Monrean, Joan & Carl Rowe, our leader Jerry Stanley, Jim Wilson, Hawk Eye Leahy, and Judy & Ron Montgomery. Duane Hoffman from Harrisburg again joined us. All ten stayed overnight at the Shawnee Motel in historic Shellsburg (pamphlet for a walking tour available). ☹☹☹

Crow's Nest

by President Deb Freed

While taking my usual walk in the late afternoon sun, I was alerted to the rustling of dry leaves, then the sway of some tall grass. At first, I thought the dog was catching up to me after exploring on her own, but a side-glance found the dog further behind. As I turned my eyes to the small birch tree next to the path there was movement.



I lifted my binoculars and was surprised to see a snake climbing up the tree. I stopped and it stopped. We looked at one another, ten feet between us. There's not as much inventory to take when mentally noting the characteristics of a snake as compared to a bird. It was, I will be conservative here, three feet long, black on the top, very white under the mouth and neck area and creamy along the bottom. I noticed the eyes were prominent and round. I called the dog and we continued walking. As soon as I got home I pulled out the guide for amphibians. It seemed to meet all the characteristics of the Black Rat Snake. That was the first snake I ever encountered on my daily walk, and I certainly never expected to find one in a tree. ☹☹☹☹

SRAS Board Members

- Deb Freed, President, Membership 226-4719
- Gary Edwards, Vice-president, programs . . . 676-3011
- Dennis Beaver, Secretary/Publicity 676-6564
- Janice Horn, Treasurer, Birdseed, Birdathon 226-7367
- Flo McGuire, Web-site, Drummer Editor . . . 755-3672
- Ron Montgomery,
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- Paulette Colantonio, Education 797-2031
- Pat Conway, History 849-6315
- 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.

100 Years of Conservation, *continued from p. 1*

Roosevelt: Friend of the Birds.” It traces his and Audubon’s early and influential efforts to help protect birds and their habitat.

Following the 28 minute video we will do our part for bird conservation by planning the Christmas Bird Count, which will be held on Saturday, December 17. We will look at the maps to make sure we cover as much of the area within the circle as we can. CBC began as an activity to replace an annual holiday shooting event 105 years ago. It has become known as the largest citizen science program in ornithology.



Audubon PA News

by Deb Freed

Audubon PA Executive Director, Tim Schaeffer and staff member, Stacey Small, attended the PA Forestry Association Annual Meeting. The Forestry Association event featured the Freeman Tree Farm where participants toured demonstration projects and two ponds. Talks on grafting and forest biodiversity were presented as well as one session from Ron Montgomery who presented his study of the NABBS data on 50 forest birds. He concluded that most local forest birds are doing well.

I met with Tim and Stacey before the forestry event started. They offered support from the state organization to achieve the goals we have set locally. They will help our chapter publicize a grassland bird conference slated for 2007. Gary Edwards and Ginny Nesslage will form a committee to begin planning the event. Anyone willing to help can contact Gary.



(photo by Deb Freed)

Audubon PA HATS for SALE

\$10 hunter orange Audubon hats for birders during hunting season. ...No, the hat is not mushroom size....the mushroom is hat size!



Bird Tails

What bird is that?

by Flo McGuire

This happened many years ago when a friend and I were working on the first PA Breeding Bird Atlas in northern Armstrong County. We were driving along a country road when I saw a bird perched in a tree, facing us. I stopped the car, focused my bins on the bird, and, mystified, said “I have a gray bird with a pink throat”. Nancy also found the bird in her binoculars, and said, “Well, it’s a bluebird! A bright blue male bluebird. There must be something wrong with your binoculars – here, use mine.” Dutifully, I aimed Nancy’s bins on the bird in question and reported that I still didn’t see any blue, while Nancy, using mine, saw bright blue. Was there something wrong with my eyes? It was a mystery – until a bird flew, and we realized that there were two bluebirds in the tree, a bright blue male and a dull grayish female. Somewhat abashedly, we coded one pair.

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



(photo from Microsoft clipart)

CORMORANT RESCUED IN CLARION

by Margaret Buckwalter

Bob Moore, retired biology professor at Clarion University, was puzzled by a large bird standing on his neighbor's sidewalk in downtown Clarion the morning of October 28th. He finally came to the conclusion it was a juvenile double-crested cormorant although he had never seen a cormorant "grounded" before. He watched as it wandered around the neighborhood for a while and then he called Janice Horn, a neighbor and member of our local Seneca Rocks Audubon Society. She went over and agreed with the ID. The bird seemed unable to fly as it made several attempts to hop up on a mower, but it didn't seem to be injured. Janice called me and I recognized the problem.

Birds like loons and grebes and cormorants need to get up speed on water before they can take off. It had rained the night before. This bird had evidently mistaken a shiny wet pavement or parking lot for a good place to land. The nearest body of water to Moore's house was at least a half mile away. I suggested they call Mike Leahy who has rescued stranded birds before. Since Mike was at the hawk watch that day, Janice called Pete Dalby another Audubon member recently retired from CUP. As luck would have it, the night before Pete had watched a TV show explaining in detail how ostriches were captured. So he found a suitable bag and came to town. Pete captured the bird after a short chase, folded its wings and managed to put it in the bag Janice was holding. In the process of putting the bagged bird in the car Pete lost some

skin from a finger when the bird pinched him with its wicked-looking beak.

Down at the Clarion River when the bird was released, it lost no time swimming out into the river and then diving out of sight. When it came up again it was way out in the middle, apparently uninjured. Success!

No, Pete, I could find no mention of cormorants having a serrated bill. Instead, the pinch was probably from the sharp hook on the upper bill that helps cormorants capture fish.

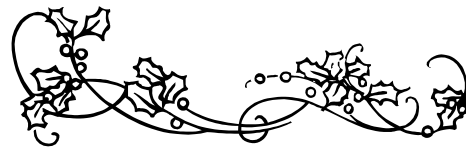
Cook Forest State Park Seeks Adopt-A-Trail Volunteers



Cook Forest State Park is accepting volunteers to adopt various hiking trails. Adopt-A-Trail conservation volunteer duties entail walking a trail of their choice 4 times a year, while picking up litter, removing small branches, and noting tree hazards along the trail. Interested applicants can obtain a Conservation Volunteer Application at:

<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/cons>

or by contacting the Park Office at (814)744-8407 or cookforestsp@state.pa.us



The family of Helen Marie Williams is hosting a reception for family and friends to celebrate Helen Marie's life on Saturday, November 19, 2005. The event will be held from 2:00 to 5:00 PM at Moore Hall on the Clarion University Campus.
Jack and Fran Williams



Mystery of the Little Brown Bats

by Pat Conway

In June my family planned a reunion at Stone Camp. I thought that just a few aunts and uncles would attend, but to my surprise it turned out to be aunts, uncles, cousins and cousins far removed. Some of these people I had never met. The temperature was hot and humid. We were all harried and weary, but everyone politely said they enjoyed it.

Some of my relatives knew I kept bees for a hobby. They didn't know I had become discouraged with beekeeping because of a mite that kept killing the bees. All of my bees died off and I had no plans to get more. I was surprised when someone said, "I see bees coming out of the barn. Is that normal?" I went to check, and sure enough, my empty hives had enticed two wild swarms.

The dust settled from the reunion. I took a day to check out the bees. I donned my bee suit and with smoker in hand, ascended the hayloft. I cleaned out the dead bees from the previous fall and tidied up around the hives. As I was about to descend the hayloft, I heard something squeaking. I realized I had heard this squeaking while I worked, but was concentrating and didn't pay much attention to it. I began looking around the loose hay for the source of the noise. Something moved at my feet, and I saw a small, hairless creature. At first I thought it was a baby mouse. Upon closer examination, I saw tiny translucent wings and realized it was a bat. Its eyes weren't open yet.

I heard more squeaking all around me. One by one I picked up baby bats and deposited them into an empty container used for transporting bees. It was perfect for the task. The sides were soft wire mesh and it had a hole in the top for depositing the babies. As I searched the hayloft for bats, I had no idea what I would do with them afterward. I knew little about bats.

Satisfied that I had all the bats collected, I covered the container with a rag to block out the light and carefully carried them to the house. Peeking under the rag, I saw that the bats had clustered together for warmth at the top of the cage. Mary, the tenant at my father's house near the camp, wasn't home from work yet, so I put the container on the porch. I wrote her a note that the bats were there and drove back to Brookville to e-mail some of my Audubon friends. I knew someone would know what to do.

Later that evening, I returned to camp. Mary had given the bats canned milk from a medicine dropper. They opened their little mouths and drank it hungrily. The next morning we decided to put the bats on a beam in the barn with the hope that their mothers would find them. (In hindsight, this probably wasn't the right thing to do, but we were ignorant on bat facts). Over the course of the day the bats died one by one. In all of my years on the farm I had never seen anything like this. The big question was, "Why were these baby bats falling?"

The next day, I found even more bats. The hayloft was littered with dead and dying baby bats in different stages of development. Some had their eyes open, some didn't. Some were bigger than others. Some were naked, some had fur. It made me ill to see them and more frustrated when I found two bats with their heads bitten off. I realized, then, that something was killing them, but what? It was then I saw the two red squirrels. They were chasing each other along the high beams in the barn. I wondered if they could be the culprits knocking the baby bats down?

Another day passed and help finally came, via the internet. A message from Roy and Heidi Boyle. Roy and Heidi are knowledgeable about bats. After I described them, Roy told me they were probably little brown bats. He explained that pesticides could be killing them. He said that the mothers could have been exposed to pesticides, died and left infants, or been exposed to enough chemicals that their milk was contaminating the babies and making them too weak to hang on to their roosts. This made sense, but we hadn't found any dead adults anywhere, and at night there seemed to be lots of bats leaving the barn. So what was killing the bats? I e-mailed Roy again and told him about the red-squirrels. Roy had little doubt, after my explanation, that they were the murderers. "Despite your best efforts," Roy said, "the bats would have perished anyway. Once they fall, their mothers can't/won't retrieve them."

Two thoughts kept racing through my mind, survival of the fittest and nature's way. I wanted to take vengeance on the squirrels. I had a good aim but I let it rest. I knew that if I looked hard enough, something good would come out of this event.

A week later, I received a packet of information from Heidi on bats and bat conservation. I read it cover to cover and then took it to the library for the vertical file. Our patrons are always asking questions about bats.

I learned from this experience. Hopefully, the materials Heidi sent would educate more people like me. This was definitely something good. A lesson was learned, although it drove me batty!

The little brown bat mystery was solved. Case closed.



Mark your calendar –
Clarion Christmas Bird Count,
Saturday, December 17

Matching Quiz of Bird-related Tunes

Ben Freed shared the following,
 from *Games Magazine*, July 2005



Match the song with the lyrics:

1. "MacArthur Park" (Richard Harris)
2. "Morning Has Broken" (Cat Stevens)
3. "On the Street Where You Live" (*My Fair Lady*)
4. "Sunday Will Never Be the Same" (Spanky and Our Gang)
5. "Winter Wonderland"
6. "Daydream Believer" (The Monkees)
7. "If I Only Had a Heart" (*the Wizard of Oz*)
8. "If I Were a Bell" (*Guys and Dolls*)
9. "If Momma Was Married" (*Gypsy*)
10. "Blues in the Night" (Frank Sinatra)
11. "Zip-a-dee-doo-dah" (*Song of the South*)
12. "A Spoonful of Sugar" (*Mary Poppins*)
13. "Message to Michael" (Dionne Warwick)
14. "Sleigh Ride"
15. "Scarborough Fair" (Simon and Garfunkel)
16. "The Christmas Song"
17. "Oklahoma" (*Oklahoma*)
18. "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" (Bob Dylan)
19. "My Favorite Things" (*The Sound of Music*)
20. "Rockin' Robin" (Michael Jackson)

- A. can you hear a lark in any other part of town
- B. when your rooster crows at the break of dawn
- C. hid 'neath the wings of the bluebird
- D. tracing of sparrow on snow crested brown
- E. a turkey and some mistletoe
- F. I'd be friends with the sparrows and the boy who shoots the arrows
- G. the birds, like tender babies in your hands
- H. the mocking bird'll sing the saddest kind of song
- I. blackbird has spoken, like the first bird
- J. Mr. Bluebird's on my shoulder
- K. together like two birds of a feather would be
- L. wild geese that fly with the moon on their wings
- M. if I were a duck I'd quack, or if I were a goose I'd be cooked
- N. a robin feathering his nest
- O. watch a hawk makin' lazy circles
- P. just Momma, three ducks, five canaries
- Q. I remember children feeding flocks of pigeons
- R. spread your wings for New Orleans, Kentucky bluebird
- S. the wise old owl, the big black crow
- T. gone away is the bluebird

(Answers in December Drummer)

“On the Similarity of Birding to Masochism” A sonnet



Let me not to the finding of good birds
admit impediment--but an impediment
is what I have. I swear. I hear the words
Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrow and Connecticut
warbler, and envision yet a fiftieth
dead-of-afternoon, asthmatic, desperate
canter through the weeds. Which would be nifty, if
it worked. I see a thrush count, aim to best it:
stand chattering in my jammies for...two calls
(fifty percent Swainson's, fifty gray-cheeked,
approximately). What's worse, I chase things. All
that fuel. Another neotropical paycheck
gone south. Ah, me! I'm quits. Not to sound violent here,
but you know where you can stick your green violet-ear.

Billy Weber
Walnutport, PA

Miscellaneous Birding News

- ◆ **Guam Rail Hatched at Aviary.**
A Guam Rail was hatched on October 8, 2005 at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, PA. The Guam Rail is critically endangered, with only about 250 of them in the world. Plans are to eventually send the aviary's new chick to a protected breeding facility on Guam, or on the neighboring island of Rota. By 1997 the Guam rail was officially extinct in the wild on its native island, due to the accidental introduction of brown treesnakes, which have no predators on the island. About 100 Guam rail are in a 60-acre fenced sanctuary on Guam, where snakes have been eradicated. Another 100 of the birds are on the neighboring island of Rota. At both locations captive-bred Guam rail relocated to the islands are laying eggs and hatching chicks, but efforts to eradicate the brown treesnakes have been unsuccessful.
- ◆ **New York City dims lights to aid birds**
The city that never sleeps is turning out the lights on dozens of skyscrapers in the hope of protecting birds distracted from migration paths. Every night in autumn, hundreds of birds collide with Manhattan's high-rise towers. For the first time about 100 buildings - including the Empire State, Chrysler, City Group Center and others - are taking part in the Lights Out initiative. During migration season, illumination in the high-rise buildings poses a threat, especially on nights without the strong winds that help guide birds. Some birds are attracted to the lights and on cloudy nights with light winds can start circling the buildings, and may die colliding with a building or fall exhausted to the street. Yet while Lights Out has been run in Chicago and Toronto with some success, scientists are still unsure exactly why birds hit tall buildings.
- ◆ **New advances in the field identification of dowitchers**
New advances are presented in the field identification of Long-billed and Short-billed Dowitchers in worn alternate and basic plumages. One newly discovered structural feature is a difference in "loral angle", which is a measure of how high the eye is positioned above the extension of the gape. The eyes on Short-billed Dowitchers are placed at a higher angle above the bill than on Long-billed Dowitchers. These structural differences are speculated to be an evolutionary manifestation of their fundamentally different habitat preferences on breeding grounds. For more information, see <http://www.surfbirds.com>

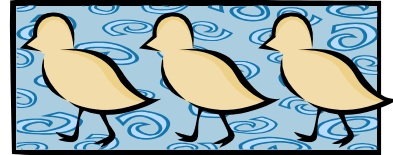


Upcoming Meetings -
 December 12 - Members' Night
 February 13 - Genny Nesslage, CUP's
 Vertebrate Collection

Don't Forget!
 Pick up your birdseed order at Agway between
 Monday, November 7 and Saturday, November 12

Chapter Membership

Seneca Rocks will provide chapter only memberships for an annual fee of \$10. Chapter membership includes a mailed copy of our newsletter, *The Drummer*.



Thank you to the following hosts
 for the coming meetings:



Nov 14 Walt Fye & Shirley
 Monrean
 Dec 12 OPEN
 Feb 13 Judy & Ron Montgomery
 Mar 13 Jim Wilson & Gary
 Edwards
 Apr 10 OPEN
 May 8 OPEN

Seneca Rocks Audubon Society
 c/o Deb Freed
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 Clarion, PA 16214