



# Kingfisher Courier

Newsletter of Appalachian Audubon Society

March 2010



## Public Program: March 18, 2010 Birding in the Backyard



To keep birds coming back to your feeders in any season provide them with the following three essential elements:

- Variety of quality seed.
- Fresh water for drinking and bathing.
- Ample cover, preferably provided by native plants. Native plants also provide potential nesting sites and a source of natural food.

Keep in mind bird feeders also present potential risks, such as window collisions, predation, and exposure to disease.

Did you know that over 100 North American bird species supplement their natural diets with birdseed, suet, fruit and nectar obtained from feeders?

Join naturalist and long-time friend of AAS, **Chris Rebert** as he draws from his extensive bird knowledge in March's public program **Birding in the Backyard**.

Chris's teaching skill is highlighted in this presentation which includes basic songs and field

markings of frequent backyard visitors, as well as discussions about habitat and bird feeding.

AAS monthly programs (September—May) typically take place on the 3rd Thursday of each month at the **Christ Presbyterian Church, 421 Deerfield Road, in the Allendale neighborhood of Camp Hill**. Join us at 7:00 pm for refreshments and conversation. The program begins at 7:30. *Directions to church on back page.*

## Pa. Game Commission Tracks White-Nose Syndrome In Bats

White Nose Syndrome (WNS) has caused cave bat population reductions in New York and New England over the past three winters. It surfaced near Albany in 2006. Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) officials say that they are expecting cave bat mortalities this winter, if the disorder spreads through hibernacula as it did New York and New England over the previous winters. To track the effects of WNS, the PGC is asking the public to report winter-flying bats or dead and dying bats on the landscape.

There are two quick and easy ways to report sick-acting or dead bats this winter. The first is by calling the nearest PGC region office. The second is by using the Game Commission's "Report a Sick Bat" form that can be accessed in the right-hand column of the agency's homepage ([www.pgc.state.pa.us](http://www.pgc.state.pa.us)) by clicking on "Report a Sick Bat" in the "Quick Clicks" section.

### Tracking the Spread of WNS

WNS was first observed in Mifflin County in December 2008. Today it is known to exist in 11 locations in Bucks, Centre, Mifflin, Lackawanna and Luzerne counties.

It affects all six species of cave bats found in Pennsylvania: little brown bat, big brown bat, Indiana bat (federally endangered), eastern pipistrelle; small-footed bat (state threatened) and northern long-eared bat. The disorder has killed 750,000 to a million bats in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Virginia and West Virginia since 2006.

"The trail from New York marching down the Appalachians into West Virginia and Virginia was unexpected," explained Cal Butchkoski, PGC biologist. "It's been our experience that

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## President's Perch

Paul Zeph

### Hold Your Water

I'm looking out at the nearly three feet of snow that has piled up around us in early February. As the warming sun melts the white blanket on my roof, and I hear my dripping gutters, I can't help but think about all the melting water and where it will go.

For generations, the common wisdom was to slope yards and streets to move precipitation away from properties and into nearby streams as fast as possible. Unfortunately, the salts, other de-icing chemicals, stuff we put on our lawns, and miscellaneous street drippings and droppings are also flushed into these small water bodies that can poison aquatic life. The rush of melt-water and summer downpours also scours the narrow stream banks.

Recent memory includes the winter flood of 1996 in which a torrent of ice coming down the Susquehanna River took out part of the Walnut Street Bridge. Hundreds of small tributaries draining water quickly from neighborhoods and farms throughout the Susquehanna basin contributed to a raging river whose damage is still visible today.

Altering the effects of large storm events or ice jams breaking loose may be beyond the control of us mere mortals. However, we can have a measurable impact on smaller, more regular flooding episodes. In the past few years, a new approach to rainwater and snowmelt has started to emerge— slow down the runoff and hold on to precipitation as long as possible.

This new approach is parallel to the new emphasis on native landscaping. The basic rule of thumb is to "Imitate nature whenever possible." When rain falls or snow melts in a natural habitat, water stays put in wetlands and forest floors littered with leaves and rotting logs that act as sponges. Water is slowly absorbed into the ground, or taken up by trees, or held in seasonal pools and marshes. These "natural features" will often capture most of the precipitation for average rain events. For the less frequent bigger rain or snow events, overflow still drains to local streams.

How can our yards imitate this? Rain gardens act as mini-wetlands to hold onto the first inch of precipitation running off our roofs and yards. Yards that have raised berms on the downside slope can hold a large amount of water; and also provide water for thirsty border plantings. Un-mowed islands of wildflowers slow runoff; and patches of fallen logs with shrubs, flowers and leaf litter sponges up precipitation for use by your garden plants.

The Yellow Breeches, Conodoguinet, Paxton, and Swatara creeks don't need to be muddy, roaring rages every time it rains. If each of us tried to imitate nature around our homes and worked to help neighbors and government properties to do the same, more fish would swim, more birds would sing, and our watersheds would be much healthier!

## Tragedy at the Bird Feeder by Ralph Kinter

(originally published March 1980)

It is a bright, clear, but cold day, and the birds are gathering under the mockorange to fuel up on sunflower and small grains against the bitter cold. The House Finches are the first to arrive, the bright red backs of the males giving a mass of color to the feeding area.

A Chickadee darts to the hanging feeder, picks up a sunflower seed and flies off with it. Hardly had it left, when its mate did likewise, followed by a Tufted Titmouse. On the ground beneath the feeder, a pair of White-throated Sparrows are busy scratching for off-fallings.

A Mourning Dove alights some ten-to-fifteen feet away, and walks to the feeding area under the mockorange. Then, about six or seven doves follow one at a time. On the suet log hangs a Downy Woodpecker, daintily picking at the suet. The Juncos, meanwhile, head for the grain on the patio, away from the other birds.

Then four or five Starlings fly in, pushing the little birds aside, and greedily gobble up the small grain. A sunflower seed gets in the way. No matter, simply open the beak wide; and with the lower mandible, push it aside.

A pair of Cardinals that were feeding with the small birds in a peaceable manner, leave with the arrival of the starlings, to join the Juncos.

Suddenly an alarm is made. A large shadowy figure falls on the scene. The small birds scatter, many taking cover in thick branches in the mockorange. The Downy ceases feeding and freezes. But, the five Starlings continue greedily feeding. Then, before anyone realizes, disaster has struck. Four Starlings take to the air; for the fifth it is too late!

Now, in place of the small birds feeding so peaceably, a Sharp-shinned Hawk stands over a fallen corpse, one foot on the ground, the other grasping the victim, and with its beak, it proceeds to pluck the feathers neatly from the remains, scattering them to the four winds. When one side is plucked clean, the Sharp-shin turns the bird over, and plucks the other side. Finally, the plucking done, the Sharp-shin takes off with its prey.

It is but a matter of minutes until the little birds return. Had the Sharp-shin missed its prey, it would have hung around, terrorizing the smaller birds. But, its deed accomplished, the hawk had left and the small birds seem to realize this.

So far we are lucky. With frequent visits from hawks, we rarely lose a bird -- and those we have lost have always been starlings. It seems their greedy ways have a way of doing them in.

### Starlings are Smart!

Starlings, like all birds, need to eat too. We realize that in cold weather, they need food to stay alive. But, they are so greedy, so pushy -- but, along with these traits, they are also very smart.

No matter what I do to stop them from getting to the suet feeder, they solve every obstacle that I put in their way. And, they do prefer the suet to the grain. And, when they drive the Downy Woodpecker from the suet log, while they rip the suet out of the holes, and drop it to the ground, for those waiting below, it gets to me.

So, when the starlings arrive, I station myself at the door, and when the starlings drive the Downy Woodpecker from the suet log I go out. The Downy stays in the tree, but the starlings fly to a nearby tree. I go in.

The starlings return. This time, I go down to the tree where they are hanging out. Now they depart. I turn to go into the house. I look around, and even as I am leaving, the Downy has returned to the suet log.

Somehow, I get the feeling that the Downy knows that I am driving the Starlings away to give it a chance to feed. -R.K.



Male Downy woodpeckers have a red head patch, while the females do not. Photos: Ohio DNR

## New Appalachian Trail Museum Looking for Help

The old grist mill along the Appalachian Trail within Pine Grove Furnace State Park is being reborn as the official Appalachian Trail Museum.

A grand opening event is being planned for June 5 as part of National Trails Day. The museum is seeking donors to help pay for construction and exhibit costs, volunteers to assist with light construction, and on-going volunteers to help the museum to function.

For more information on donating money, items, or time to the museum, see their website at [www.atmuseum.org](http://www.atmuseum.org), or contact Larry Luxenberg, the President of the AT Museum Society at: [info@atmuseum.org](mailto:info@atmuseum.org).

## Children and Youth Summer Camp Scholarships available through AAS

Summer is rapidly approaching, faster than a diving falcon! This year, the AAS is offering scholarships to a variety of local and regional camps. The camp options vary by content, location, and age, but all have an environmental core. A few of the camps require pre-acceptance for participation. For a complete list of opportunities and applications, contact Marci Mowery at 717-371-2155 or at [mmowery-pdff@pa.net](mailto:mmowery-pdff@pa.net). Deadline for scholarships is March 25th, 2010.

## White-Nose Syndrome cont.

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migrating bats do not follow landscape features when migrating from hibernacula to summer habitats. Rather, they radiate out from these winter roosts in various directions. Given the unexpected pattern, and the fact that the southern sites were all popular recreational caves, it's probable that transmission by people has contributed to the southerly spread."

Butchkoski noted that federal decontamination protocols and a moratorium on bat cave entries are now in place to reduce the possibility that WNS is hitch-hiking on cave visitors and caving gear.

The cause and source of spread have been the greatest mysteries of WNS since it first appeared in underground New York three years ago. Evidence is mounting that WNS is caused by a cold-loving *Geomyces* fungus. Scientists recently named this fungus *Geomyces destructans*, given its destructive effect on bat populations. The National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) reported recently, "Histopathological examination indicated that *Geomyces destructans* infection of skin causes characteristic epidermal erosions and ulcers that can also progress to invade underlying connective tissue." It's a finding that strongly suggests this fungus would arouse a hibernating bat – and once aroused from hibernation bats quickly burn through their fat reserves and die.

Preliminary data from WNS infection studies conducted at NWHC indicate *Geomyces destructans* can be transmitted from bat-to-bat in a controlled environment. This finding suggests that WNS transmission may occur during the fall bat swarm, as well as during hibernation. Once WNS appears in hibernacula, whether it got there on an infected bat or hitchhiking on a human, it passes through a hibernating bat colony quickly.

WNS is so devastating to bats because hibernating bats have an extremely high rate of contact as they cluster together, and it strikes when a bat's immune response capabilities are minimized to conserve the energy needed to support hibernation. Since bats are huddled in hibernation for more than five months with suppressed immune systems, they are perfect targets for WNS. That's why it has been so destructive.

"I expect a majority of the bat hibernation sites in eastern Pennsylvania to have WNS by the end of April," explained Greg Turner, PGC endangered mammals biologist. "To date, WNS has not appeared west of the Route I-99 corridor, where some of our largest bat populations hibernate. We have our fingers crossed that WNS won't clear the Allegheny Front this winter, which may be a barrier to bat and WNS movement, but only time will tell. If anyone observes flying or dying bats in western Pennsylvania this winter, we definitely want to hear about it. Reports from areas west of Centre and Mifflin counties will be treated as extremely high priority."

### Research on Treatment and Protection of Bats

Pennsylvania has more than 5,000 known abandoned mines and about

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## Syndrome cont.

*(Continued from page 4)*

1,500 natural caves beneath its surface, and plenty more unexplored subsurface nooks and crannies that hibernating bats occupy. The PGC can confirm that WNS has appeared in less than one percent of that total, but that number is small because the state's wildlife biologists can physically check and monitor only so many hibernacula in a given winter. That is why public assistance in WNS surveillance is so important.

"Pennsylvania bat hibernacula have wintered more than a million bats annually in recent years," noted Greg Turner. "That will change when WNS infiltrates and spreads through these mines and caves. The population losses bats experience may take a century or more to recover from, given their low reproductive rate of one pup per female per year. The losses also could be ultimately irreversible if WNS lingers in hibernacula and bats don't develop some sort of natural defense or immunity to it. Once WNS infiltrates bat hibernacula throughout the Commonwealth, recovering these populations will be a long term challenge."

In April 2009, the PGC and its project partners were awarded nearly a million dollars by the US Fish and Wildlife Service to support research and management activities. The multi-state approach enables biologists to conduct research at a scale rarely undertaken. One focal point of this research in Pennsylvania and Kentucky centers on monitoring WNS-affected and clean sites with acoustic bat call detectors to measure and compare bat activity levels and to identify the timing of major emergences. New York and Vermont placed Wisconsin bats in two previously-affected sites with no surviving bats to see if the new bats develop WNS symptoms. This work will shed light on whether sites remain contaminated after bats are gone, which is unknown.

For more information on bats, visit the PGC website, select "Wildlife" then "Mammals," and then "Bats Home." To learn more about WNS, visit U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at [www.fws.gov/northeast/white\\_nose.html](http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white_nose.html).

*From a PGC press release, January 12, 2010. For the complete press release containing additional information on research activities, visit the AAS website: [www.appalachianaudubon.org](http://www.appalachianaudubon.org).*

## March Activities at Wildwood Park

For details, call the park at (717) 221-0292, or see their website: [www.wildwoodlake.org](http://www.wildwoodlake.org)

### **Volunteer Work Day , March 13, 2010, 10 AM - 1 PM**

The public is invited to join Wildwood volunteers in the spring as monthly outdoor work days resume. Help us keep your park clean and beautiful. Assume the Work Day is cancelled if it is raining or snowing. Pre-registration is not required but please let us know if you are bringing a group of six or more. Free

### **Preschool Storytime: Spring at Wildwood!**

**March 17, 2010, 10:00 – 10:45 AM**

Join a Dauphin County Library System librarian and Wildwood volunteers for a fun story session for children ages 2-4. Stories, rhymes, play and a take-home craft will introduce Wildwood Lake critters and the joy of books and language to youngsters. Pre-registration is required. Not appropriate for large groups. Free

### **Amphibians and Reptiles Educator Workshop**

**March 31, 2010, 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM**

PA Fish and Boat Commission and Wildwood Park have joined together to offer this professional development workshop for classroom and non-formal educators. Amphibians and Reptiles is a multi-disciplinary curriculum designed to introduce educators to the biology, ecology and identification of PA's herps as well as give valuable background information on habitat concerns and responsible human actions.

Each participant will receive the Amphibians and Reptiles curriculum guide and PA Amphibians and Reptiles book. Act 48 Hours approved. Bring your own lunch and beverage. Pre-registration is required, register by March 26. \$10.00 per person



*These little brown bats found in a cave in New York exhibit the white fungal growth on their muzzles. It can also spread to ears and wings.*

*Photo: Al Hicks/NY Dept of Conservation*



# Kingfisher Courier

March 2010

**Directions to Christ Presbyterian Church,** 421 Deerfield Road in the Allendale development in Lower Allen Township:

**I-83 Southbound,** take exit 40B towards New Cumberland. Stay straight, cross Carlisle Road to Cedar Cliff Drive. Turn left onto Allendale Way and turn left onto Deerfield Road. The Church is on the left. Park in second lot.

**I-83 Northbound,** take exit 40B, turn left onto Carlisle Road/Simpson Ferry Road under I-83. Turn left again at the light onto Cedar Cliff Drive. Turn left onto Allendale Way and turn left onto Deerfield Road. The Church is on the left. Park in second lot.

Appalachian Audubon Society  
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## Inside:

### Thursday, March 18th



Public program featuring **Chris Rebert** with "Birding in the Backyard"  
Photo: Yellow-shafted Flicker'  
[www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org)

Read about White-Nose Syndrome in bats  
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## Upcoming Field Trips

**Sunday, March 14, 2010**

### ***Ned Smith Waterfowl Watch***

This is an annual event to watch waterfowl along the Susquehanna River in Millersburg, home of artist and outdoorsman, Ned Smith. The event is held from **8 a.m. to 1 p.m.** Please dress warmly and bring along your binoculars and spotting scopes.

Refreshments are available. For details contact Beth Sanders at the Ned Smith Center at 692-3699 or Judy Bowman at 761-3815 or [bowma99@aol.com](mailto:bowma99@aol.com).

**Saturday, April 10, 2010**

***Shenk's Ferry Wildflower Walk***  
Venture to Lancaster County with Dan Welte to search for spring wildflowers.

Contact Dan at 728-0421 or [dcmawelte@paonline.com](mailto:dcmawelte@paonline.com) for details.

**Save Trees and Mailing Costs! Receive the E-version of the Kingfisher Courier!**

Recognizing a national trend of organizations converting from paper newsletters to e-versions, AAS would like to offer you an option of receiving the **Kingfisher Courier** by e-mail.

This will result in a significant cost savings to the chapter!

To receive the e-version, please send an email **from the account that you wish to receive the email notice** to [appaudubonsoc@yahoo.com](mailto:appaudubonsoc@yahoo.com) or call Ed Smith at 717-960-9441. **Please include your name and address in any correspondence so we can match you to our mailing list!**

Thank you very much for considering this option!