



Kingfisher Courier

Newsletter of Appalachian Audubon Society

February 2012

February 16, 2012 Pennsylvania Spring

"Pennsylvania Spring" is a calendar of a naturalist's love for spring. Dr. Steve Rannels' presentation will include samples from his personal library of accumulated photographs, videos and sound recordings. Steve's interest in the natural world, which began in early childhood, persists 50 years later through photographs and scans of butterflies and moths from his collections.

The urge to understand the natural world and its dynamic interrelationships has nurtured Steve's interests in wildflowers, mushrooms, amphibians, birds and virtually any other biological system. Steve's philosophy is to preserve as much of the environment as possible for all species. Please join us for an evening that celebrates the natural beauty of Pennsylvania.



American Toad and Cecropia Moth
photos by Steve Rannels

Program time, location and driving directions are on the back page.

Feb. 7 Talk at Olewine Nature Center 7:00 PM FREE

Author Katie Fallon will be giving a talk titled *Coal, Coffee and Cooperation: Saving a Vanishing Songbird*. One of the Wildwood Winter Lectures with the theme of "Paradise Almost Lost," this talk will explore the relationship between the Cerulean Warbler, a tiny migratory songbird, and the threats to its survival due to mountaintop removal coal mining, deforestation, and climate change.



Cerulean Warblers are on the National Audubon WatchList, and have shown one of the steepest declines of any warbler species, showing a decline of 4.5% per year from 1966-2001.

Fallon, author of the new book *Cerulean Blues: A Personal Search for a Vanishing Songbird*, will highlight the connections between a morning cup of coffee and an ecologically devastating mining practice; and she will show how the fate of a creature weighing less than an ounce is vitally linked to our own.

Visit the Wildwood Park website for a listing of other lectures in the series for February and March: www.wildwoodlake.org

Big Spring Walks

Birders of all abilities are invited to take part in the monthly bird walks of the Big Spring that occur on the first Saturday of each month except January. The 3-mile roadside walks along the scenic Big Spring in western Cumberland County are led by AAS member Vern Gauthier and Newville CBC compiler Bill Franz. More information about birding the Big Spring can be found at: <http://bigspringwatershednature.blogspot.com/> More information about the Saturday walks can be obtained by contacting Vern at pabirder@gmail.com.

Call for AAS Officer Nominations

Each year the AAS board of directors is charged with identifying candidates for board and officer positions. Positions that are open for nomination this year include 3 directors (each a 2-year term beginning in July), Secretary, and Treasurer (each a 1-year term beginning in July).

All current incumbents are eligible to serve a second year or term; however, if you would like to suggest someone to be considered for one of these positions, please contact a nominating committee member: Susan Miller (millerscorner@msn.com or 697-6696), Paul Zeph (pzeph1@verizon.net or 691-0288), or Arlene Buchholz (abvetlab@aol.com or 808-779-5200). Selected nominees will be announced in the a future newsletter, and elections will take place at the annual meeting/banquet in May.

OFFICERS & BOARD MEMBERS

President: Annette Mathes
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(please join one!)

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President's Perch

Annette Mathes

Birding Central Park

The first time I birded Central Park in New York City was May 2, 2008. The local birders, who had invited me to join them, called it a “wave day.” Standing on what they called “Warbler Rock,” which gave an eye-level view of the tree tops, the number of birds that passed was dizzying. In the three hours I spent in the park, we found Scarlet Tanagers, Baltimore Orioles, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Veery, two Swainson’s Thrushes, Blue-headed and Yellow-throated Vireos, and 17 species of warblers, including Worm-eating, Wilson’s, and Blue-winged. Many were life birds for me.

The 843 acres of Central Park is an almost entirely man-made landscape, with several natural looking lakes and ponds. Approximately 235 species of birds have been seen there, including a Boreal Owl in 2004, and more than twenty species of warblers that pass through during spring and fall migration in April and October. “Pale Male,” the Red-tailed Hawk made famous by the PBS *Nature* documentary, can be seen in and around his nest, which he built on ornamental stonework above a top-story window of a residential building at 927 Fifth Avenue (at East 74th Street), facing Central Park.



Start in the 38-acre lush woodland known as the Ramble, one of the major centers of birding in Central Park, between 73rd and 78th streets. You’ll know where to go, as you’ll soon encounter the friendly local birders, many who bird daily on their way to work. Last April fellow AAS members Kathy Kuchwara and Joan Renninger and I encountered a large group of birders excitedly looking at a Cerulean Warbler. When we asked where we could find the Varied Thrush that had been there for several weeks, one of the birders offered to take us there. We found out that he was Ken Chaya, a freelance graphic designer who had just completed a two-and-a-half year labor of love, painstakingly mapping 19,933 of the 23,000 trees in Central Park (*Central Park Entire: The Definitive Illustrated Map*). As we walked, he enthusiastically talked about his project and pointed out some of his favorite trees. It was a truly magical experience.

Which brings me back to 2008. The main reason for my trip to NYC that May was to see the Metropolitan Opera’s production of Phillip Glass’ opera, “Satyagraha” (Truth Force), a moving work about Mahatma Gandhi’s experiences in South Africa, set to text from the ancient Sanskrit scripture, the Bhagavad Gita. Before my trip, I had checked The New York Birding List (<http://birdingonthe.net/maillinglists/NYSB.html>) and found that a Scott’s Oriole had taken up residence in Union Square Park, a tiny sliver of a green space in Greenwich Village. He was easy to find and I was able to get long close looks at this vagrant who’s far more at home in a place like Arizona. His favorite spot? A large flower bed marked by the statue of Mahatma Gandhi.

Conowingo Dam Field Trip Report by Ed Smith

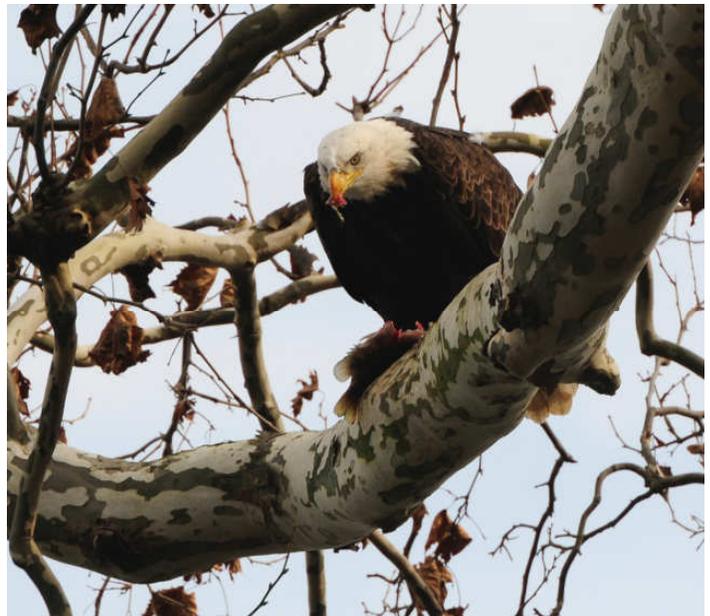
On Sunday November 20th, eleven adventurers crawled out of their warm beds very early to join me on the annual field trip to the Conowingo Dam in Maryland, a site along the Susquehanna River that is well-recognized for its autumn Bald Eagle activity.

Upon arrival, we didn't have to wait long for our first views – we parked under a Bald Eagle perched in a tree beside the parking lot. Almost immediately, we were greeted with the alarm and flashing red lights indicating that water was about to be released from the bottom of the dam. The warning is for those fishing in the lower elevations near the dam to get to higher ground immediately. Soon the water at the western end of the dam began to froth and churn. The eagles and gulls seemed to recognize the signal and perked up, and most visitors migrated toward the dam and lower viewing platform. The release, however, didn't result in the "feeding frenzy" we anticipated, and most of the birds proceeded with business as usual.

About this time Nancy wandered downstream along the rail trail. During her stroll she spotted a Turkey Vulture, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and a Carolina Wren. Back at the main viewing area, we were treated to numerous views of the following species: Bald Eagles, Great Blue Herons, Double-crested Cormorants, Black Vultures, Ring-billed Gulls, Rock Pigeons, Canada Geese, and at least five Lesser Black-backed Gulls.



The Conowingo Dam in Maryland is a main attraction for eagle lovers.



The trip highlight was close-up views of a Bald Eagle lunching on a recently caught fish.

Photo by Bob Glasscock



Lesser
Black-backed
Gull

Discussions about the I.D. of this last species consumed a few of us for more than an hour. Finally, we concluded that the birds were most definitely Lesser Black-backed Gulls, which we found most exciting. (The Hartford Birding Club's website indicates that

this species is often sited on the retaining wall that juts into the river; exactly where the birds were identified.)

The highlight of the day occurred over lunch. A mature Bald Eagle glided over the parking area and descended to the river, where it plucked a fish from the water. To our surprise, it circled around and alighted in a sycamore tree a mere 60 feet or so from us. The paparazzi, including yours truly, flocked to the area and the eagle quickly became the center of attraction. To everyone's delight, it proceeded to rip the fish apart right before our eyes! All in all, a great day!

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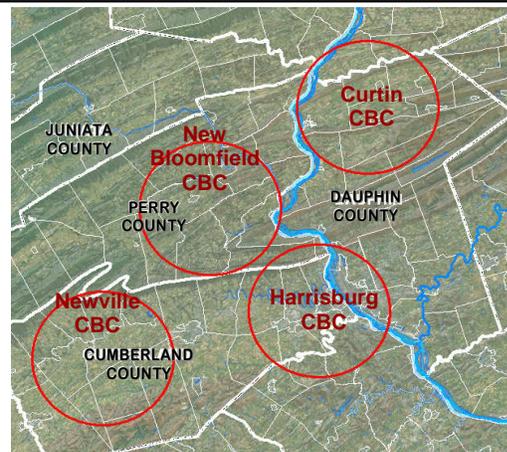
**Aden Troyer
David Troyer**



Christmas Bird Count Results

In the last issue of the Kingfisher Courier, Annette described the fun, excitement and fellowship she experienced as a participant in our area's Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs). In this issue of the newsletter we are including the results of two of the counts with which our chapter members are most active. We hope you will find the results interesting, and perhaps they will inspire you to come along next year and join in the fun!

Each CBC area is a designated 15-mile diameter circle (see map at right) that is broken up into sub-sections for different teams to cover. After a brisk day of birding, the various teams from a circle usually gather to compile all the sightings, warm up, and share stories from the day.



Harrisburg CBC

Deuane Hoffman, Compiler

The Harrisburg Christmas Bird Count was conducted on December 17, 2011. Thirty-seven area birders participated in this year's count. Overall, bird numbers were lower than average, likely due to the mild winter, which has allowed many species to stay further north. In addition, wild food crops were noticeably limited. Despite this, observers located 102 species on the count day, with an additional two species, Double-crested Cormorant and Black-crowned Night Heron, found during the count week.

A count first was found by the team covering the Camp Hill Prison in the form of two Northern Rough-winged Swallows. Additional highlights include a Merlin found on the Paxtang Parkway section of the Capital Area Greenbelt, two Golden Eagles migrating along the Blue Mountain, a Pine Warbler near Lisburn, plus an Eastern Phoebe and House Wren found near Mechanicsburg.

The 2012 Harrisburg CBC will be conducted on December 15. Birders of all skill levels are welcomed. Feel free to contact me closer to the date if you wish to participate. Thanks once again to all of the volunteers who counted, Appalachian Audubon for contributing funds for the post-count dinner, and to the staff at The Olewine Center at Wildwood Lake Park for helping and hosting the wrap up meeting. I am looking forward to doing it all over again in 2012!

Harrisburg CBC 12/17/2011

Canada Goose	2143	Pileated Woodpecker	9
Mute Swan	3	Eastern Phoebe	1
Wood Duck	2	Blue Jay	92
Gadwall	40	American Crow	2169
American Wigeon	19	Fish Crow	293
American Black Duck	79	crow sp.	865
Mallard	677	Common Raven	2
Northern Shoveler	1	Horned Lark	6
Northern Pintail	2	N. Rough-winged Swallow	2
Green-winged Teal	26	Carolina Chickadee	348
Redhead	2	Black-capped Chickadee	6
Ring-necked Duck	5	chickadee sp.	194
Lesser Scaup	2	Tufted Titmouse	344
Long-tailed Duck	2	Red-breasted Nuthatch	5
Bufflehead	19	White-breasted Nuthatch	130
Common Goldeneye	6	Brown Creeper	31
Hooded Merganser	73	Carolina Wren	136
Common Merganser	22	House Wren	1
Ruffed Grouse	3	Winter Wren	13
Wild Turkey	7	Golden-crowned Kinglet	38
Common Loon	1	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	7
Pied-billed Grebe	1	Eastern Bluebird	208
Great Blue Heron	76	Hermit Thrush	8
Black Vulture	56	American Robin	188
Turkey Vulture	172	Gray Catbird	1
Bald Eagle	6	Northern Mockingbird	89
Northern Harrier	2	European Starling	2173
Sharp-shinned Hawk	17	American Pipit	6
Cooper's Hawk	17	Cedar Waxwing	45
Red-shouldered Hawk	3	Pine Warbler	1
Red-tailed Hawk	77	Yellow-rumped Warbler	15
Golden Eagle	2	Eastern Towhee	3
American Kestrel	18	American Tree Sparrow	20
Merlin	1	Field Sparrow	5
Peregrine Falcon	2	Fox Sparrow	6
American Coot	23	Song Sparrow	255
Killdeer	9	Swamp Sparrow	3
Wilson's Snipe	2	White-throated Sparrow	454
Ring-billed Gull	1419	White-crowned Sparrow	8
Herring Gull	237	Dark-eyed Junco	900
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	Northern Cardinal	535
Great Black-backed Gull	18	Red-winged Blackbird	36
Rock Pigeon	1131	Rusty Blackbird	9
Mourning Dove	844	Common Grackle	3
Eastern Screech-Owl	26	Brown-headed Cowbird	5
Great Horned Owl	17	Purple Finch	2
Barred Owl	3	House Finch	278
Northern Saw-whet Owl	4	Pine Siskin	4
Belted Kingfisher	33	American Goldfinch	107
Red-bellied Woodpecker	112	House Sparrow	368
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	14		
Downy Woodpecker	169		
Hairy Woodpecker	27		
Northern Flicker	48		

Also seen during the count week:
 Double-crested Cormorant
 Black-crowned Night-heron



Northern
Rough-winged
Swallow

For the first time in the history of the Harrisburg CBC, Northern Rough-winged Swallows were seen. The swallows are normally in the tropics by December, but a few must still be finding enough flying insects to delay their migration!

New Bloomfield CBC Results

Ramsay Koury, Compiler

Twenty-eight observers found 73 species and a total of 9,578 individuals in the New Bloomfield CBC, held on December 26, 2011. Both the overall numbers and species total were down considerably from an average year. While the temperature was pretty mild for December, the 10- to 20-mph wind made birding conditions somewhat tough. In addition, a number of species—Red-breasted Nuthatches, Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, and some waterfowl—seem not to have moved down from the north in any numbers. On the other hand, most resident birds, such as chickadees, titmice, White-breasted Nuthatches, and woodpeckers were found in good numbers.

Several of us spent an extra effort looking for owls this year (17 hours), but the wind made it difficult to hear and lowered the number of owls we found to only 64 individuals. This may sound like a lot of owls to some of you, but had it been a calm night we could have had two or three times that many. Maybe next year!

The most unexpected birds were 3 Rough-legged Hawks and 25 American Pipits. New high counts were obtained for

Northern Pintail (a large flyover was a nice surprise), Red-tailed Hawk, Turkey Vulture, American Pipit and Common Grackle.

Thanks to all of you for helping this year. Next year's count will be held on Saturday, December 23, 2012.

Ramsay



Unexpected birds seen on the New Bloomfield count included American Pipits (above); and Rough-legged Hawks (below--notice the feathers coming all the way down to the foot giving it a "rough-legged" appearance).

New Bloomfield CBC 12/26/2011

Canada Goose	316	Downy Woodpecker	126
Am. Black Duck	12	Hairy Woodpecker	14
Mallard	266	Blue Jay	161
Northern Pintail	55	American Crow	896
Canvasback	2	Common Raven	2
Ring-necked Duck	1	Horned Lark	46
Bufflehead	18	Black-capped Chickadee	202
Common Goldeneye	4	Carolina Chickadee	37
Common Merganser	26	chickadee sp.	49
Hooded Merganser	4	Tufted Titmouse	474
Ruffed Grouse	2	White-breasted Nuthatch	150
Wild Turkey	32	Brown Creeper	20
Great Blue Heron	11	Carolina Wren	146
Black Vulture	30	Winter Wren	6
Turkey Vulture	51	Golden-crowned Kinglet	41
Bald Eagle	4	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	2
Northern Harrier	2	Eastern Bluebird	212
Sharp-shinned Hawk	6	Hermit Thrush	8
Cooper's Hawk	6	American Robin	8
Red-tailed Hawk	82	Northern Mockingbird	54
Rough-legged Hawk	3	European Starling	1728
American Kestrel	18	American Pipit	25
Killdeer	22	Cedar Waxwing	25
Wilson's Snipe	1	Yellow-rumped Warbler	6
Ring-billed Gull	35	Song Sparrow	141
Gr. Black-backed Gull	1	American Tree Sparrow	10
Gull sp.	2	Field Sparrow	12
Rock Pigeon	424	Swamp Sparrow	2
Mourning Dove	471	White-throated Sparrow	516
Eastern Screech Owl	44	White-crowned Sparrow	10
Great Horned Owl	13	Dark-eyed Junco	825
Saw-whet Owl	4	Northern Cardinal	474
Barred Owl	3	Common Grackle	510
Belted Kingfisher	11	Brown-headed Cowbird	3
Red-bellied Woodpecker	96	House Finch	120
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	11	American Goldfinch	195
Pileated Woodpecker	20	House Sparrow	173
Northern Flicker	40		



Check out our website to see this newsletter and all the photos in color: www.appalachianaudubon.org

Ash-throated Flycatcher A Great Birthday Present!

by Vern Gautier

On January 4, my birthday, I was in my office at the First United Presbyterian Church of Newville, which by the way is about 50 yards from my house. I received a call from my non-birding wife Elisabeth that she had seen an unusual bird that was presently on the rail of our deck. I looked out my office window and saw a bird that had the shape of a flycatcher, and from the poor view (through a screen), it seemed to have a dark cap and white belly. I told my wife, "An Eastern Phoebe, we have had them in the yard during January before."

I thought nothing else about it until 2 hours later when I was returning from an errand and starting up the deck steps



when a large flycatcher flew out of a bush on my left and perched a few feet in front of me and above me. "Whoa! This was no Phoebe!" By the size and light coloration I knew almost instantly that this must be an Ash-throated Flycatcher.

To describe an Ash-throated Flycatcher, think of the familiar Great Crested Flycatcher but only drabber. It has a pale grayish-white throat and breast, with a pale yellow belly and under tail coverts. It has

a small rufous patch on each wing, with the under tail also a bright rufous -- outlined by a dark line up the length of the tail, fanning out to what some have called a "teardrop pattern" at the tip of the tail.

Ash-throated Flycatchers breed in desert scrub, open and riparian woodland, and brushy pastures from the western United States to central Mexico. It is a short-distance migrant, retreating from most of the U.S. and northern and central Mexico, spending the winter from southern Mexico to Honduras. This bird is also prone to wander, with individual birds often seen outside their normal breeding range as far away as the east coast of North America.

The bird on my back deck was certainly a yard list first for me, as well as a first for Cumberland County. The bird is the 5th recorded sighting of the species in PA, and needless to say a great birthday present!



Ash-throated Flycatcher photos by Dale Gearhart

Seasonal Sightings

by Ramsay Koury

Exciting Birds to See in W. Cumberland County



Snowy Owl

Midwinter is a really tough time for birding and for birds. There is very little wild food around, especially this year. The weather is usually inhospitable, although we have been fairly lucky so far this winter. One bright spot in the winter is the farmlands between Newville and Shippensburg in western Cumberland County.

As I write this in mid January, there is a Snowy Owl in some large fields along Mudlevel Road. Many Snowies have come south this winter and a couple have appeared in Pennsylvania. This area is a great spot to look for field birds: Horned Larks, Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs and American Pipits. These particular birds are more easily found after a snowfall. Once farmers place manure on the fields, large flocks of field birds will be attracted to the seeds in the manure.

Another highlight on Mudlevel Road is a wintering Prairie Falcon. This is a western species that rarely strays east, but this bird has been wintering here for several years. To beat the wintertime blues consider a trip out to these interesting



Prairie Falcon

AAS Holiday Social

We enjoyed our first-ever holiday social on December 8 so much that we're going to do it again next year! Over forty members attended, including Hank "Santa Claus" Osborne! Emcee Paul Zeph led the festivities, and stumped the members with our birding quiz for fun. Renee Larry won the candy jar when she had the closest guess to the number of items it held (298). Many guests enjoyed making pine cone bird feeders, eating lots of great food, and socializing with fellow members.

In addition, we raised \$164 for scholarships in our "mini" silent auction. Special thanks to our musical guests, "Two Flutes Squared," led by Susan Miller, who, along with Molly Shortridge, Lori Elliott, and Alexis Del Palazzo, added a beautiful holiday ambiance to the evening. **And a great big thank you** to Lorrie Preston and Ann Glasscock who organized the food and decorating.

Making a Difference -- AAS Scholarships



Mikaele Joseph was the recipient of a Grace Randolph scholarship this past summer to attend Wildwood's nature photography day camp. Mika is one of only three students to be accepted in Wildwood's Level II group for further photography instruction. In the judging of 35 photos from two photography camps, she received a first place ribbon. At right is what Mika said in a letter to Wildwood's Jane Webster.

Dear Mrs. Webster,

My experience with the Wildwood photography camp--in honest words-- was truly amazing. I was flabbergasted that I even got accepted, even more so getting a scholarship. In the Wildwood photo camp I learned many new things that I did not know that were crucial to photography, such as depth of field and ISO.

I was so surprised and amazed that in a short period of time I photographed such beautiful photos. I still think that life is like a moving picture and the camp certainly proved that.

The camp's overall experience was great. So great that it made me think about a career in photography and owning my own photography studio. The other students that were there were nice and easy to work with. And the teachers/ counselors were nice, caring and very helpful. I felt like they truly wanted me to learn and enjoy photography.

So thank you Appalachian Audubon for the scholarship. I very much appreciate it.

Sincerely, Mikaele Joseph

Juniata County Field Trip Report

by Ramsay Koury -- January 14, 2012

Nineteen people spent a fun afternoon in Juniata County, led by Chad Kauffman and Aden Troyer, with assistance from an excellent young birder, Henry Petersheim. These three expert Juniata County birders met us at the Lost Creek Shoe Shop. This interesting store has a great variety of shoes and other clothing and also a nice assortment of optics. Many participants made some purchases before the trip. We spent the afternoon exploring various birdy areas.

Our first stop was a campground where we quickly found our target bird, an adult Red-headed Woodpecker. It was very cooperative and even sat in the sun for a great look.

Our next stop was a pine stand where we hoped to find some owls. We were not disappointed, as Henry found a sitting Barred Owl. It calmly sat and allowed everyone a view through the scope.

At our next stop we looked hard for a Northern Shrike. This time we missed our bird. Our leaders then took us to a silo where we looked directly up at the underside of a Barn Owl! After some driving around finding Killdeer, Wilson's Snipe and a Bald Eagle, we returned to the shrike spot. Shortly before dusk we located the shrike atop a bush. It was another cooperative bird sitting a long time while everyone had views through the scope!

Many thanks to our leaders for providing us for a pleasant afternoon on a cold winter day!

A Bird Quiz for Fun

At the Holiday Social, emcee Paul Zeph stumped our members with a fun bird quiz. If you missed the social, the questions are below. The first one is answered, the rest of the answers will be in next month's Kingfisher Courier!

What bird...

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Is a sad letter? (Answer: Blue Jay) | 11. Is an invoice for silverware? |
| 2. Is an outfielder? | 12. Is a feline alarm clock? |
| 3. Is crazy? (two answers possible) | 13. Is a highway sprinter? |
| 4. Is what thieves are doing? | 14. Helps elect the pope? |
| 5. Might give milk? | 15. Murders a game animal? |
| 6. Is a country? | 16. Would beat a destitute man? |
| 7. Is a famous magician? | 17. Is a tiny monarch? |
| 8. Is a short conversation? | 18. Is a cowardly singer? |
| 9. Is a construction machine? | 19. Is an aged Indian? |
| 10. Is a regal angler? | 20. Is a lame relative? |

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Kingfisher Courier

February 2012

AAS monthly programs 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 socializing and refreshments. **The program begins at 7:30.**

Directions to Christ Presbyterian Church:

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

I-83 Northbound, take exit 40B, turn left onto Carlisle Road/Simpson Ferry Road and go 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 the second lot.

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Thanks!

FEBRUARY FIELD TRIP

Birding the New Jersey Coast Saturday February 25

We will visit several locations along the New Jersey coast in search of wintering birds. Our main targets will be wintering waterfowl: loons, grebes, scoters, eiders. Specific target birds are Harlequin Duck, Common Eider, Purple Sandpiper, Great Cormorant. Most likely we will visit Forsythe NWR and Barnegat Light, but the final destinations will be determined where the best birding is likely to be on the 25th.

For more information or to reserve a spot, contact Ramsay Koury at rkoury123@aol.com or 761-1871.



Harlequin Duck
Photo by Jon Dale

Field Trip Etiquette

While there is no charge for participating in our field trips, if you ride in a carpool please be sure to offer your driver a contribution towards the cost of gas.