



Kingfisher Courier

Newsletter of Appalachian Audubon Society

October 2012

October 18 "Butterflies of Pennsylvania"

What can frustrated birders do during the slow birding months of summer? Look for butterflies! Julie Eckenrode, Conservation Biologist at Fort Indiantown Gap, will give us tips on identifying the many common and uncommon species of butterflies throughout Pennsylvania. Julie will discuss the butterfly's distinguishing life history characteristics, larval host plants, and key identification features. We'll also learn how to collect, preserve and mount specimens. A program highlight will be the extremely isolated Regal Fritillary, a rare and beautiful treasure of Fort Indiantown Gap.

(Join us in June for the companion field trip! Details at www.appalachianaudubon.org.)



Julie Eckenrode with a luna moth.

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

Trout Run Nature Preserve: Past, Present and Future

Many AAS members do not know that the chapter owns a wetland sanctuary in southeast Cumberland County, called Trout Run Nature Preserve. We acquired the property as a donation in 1996 when the Creekstone Manor subdivision was being constructed, just northeast of Williams Grove in Upper Allen Township. The Sedge Wren, a state-listed threatened species, was living here, along with a diversity of other birds, mammals and plants that typify a cold-water upland wetland ecosystem.



AAS volunteers created a trail system through the property for the public to use, installed bluebird boxes, planted native shrubs and trees, and have been maintaining demonstration native gardens and trail-side benches. Educational events were held there over the years, until the tick population grew to become a health concern, and public use has dwindled. We have been paying to mow trails all summer that are used by only a few neighbors and even fewer AAS members.

Trout Run creek is a spring-fed tributary of the Yellow Breeches that has its headwaters just upstream from the

Preserve on agricultural lands. Over the past 20 years, an invasive plant has been taking over the Preserve, choking out native vegetation. Reed Canarygrass is the non-native culprit, and it has severely reduced the habitat value of the property as it crowds out other plants used by many native insects, mammals, and birds. So, today we have a stream used by some birds, but surrounding that is 21 acres of tall, thick invasive grasses or tick-infested meadows.

The AAS Board is in the process of exploring options to manage the invasive grass to see if we can make it a more useful habitat for native wildlife. Other protected properties that are plagued with similar problems around the state have been managed with a variety of methods, including mowing, tilling, flooding, burning, and even the use of invasive-plant-eating goats! If you know of anyone with experience managing land with a similar problem, please contact Andy Groff, chair of the Trout Run Committee (AndyGroff@comcast.net).

The trails will no longer be mowed starting this fall, which will free up needed funds for youth ecology camp scholarships and other education and conservation activities. Even without the trails, though, it is a good place to watch birds from the surrounding roads. Hopefully, in the years to come, it will become even better!

—Paul Zeph



A Belted Kingfisher can usually be sighted fishing at Trout Run Preserve.

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President's Perch

Annette Mathes

Can I Have Your Leaves?

As I drive home from work along Chambers Hill Road in the early evenings in fall, I find myself coveting the piles of brown leaves that the residents have raked to the side of the road for the township fall leaf pick-up. *Maybe I can just pull over somewhere and put that big pile of leaves in the trunk...*

Fall leaves make a fantastic mulch and are a great way to create new gardens. For the last few years I've been collecting the leaves dropped by my maples, redbuds, and birches and piling them in my gardens, at the edges of the yard, and around shrubs and trees to get rid of difficult mowing areas and reduce the lawn. You don't have to dig up the sod—you can just rake your leaves into a pile a foot or two deep and by spring they decay to about a quarter-inch thick, killing the grass underneath and defying any weeds to grow through them.

Last fall I converted the lawn under the three big maples in my yard into an understory. I piled as many leaves as I could gather into a simple design that went under and around the trees. The wind made things a bit messy at times over the winter but most of the leaves stayed where I put them. By March the pile was reduced to a thin mat and, except for a few wind-blown patches, the lawn was gone.

The birds love leaf mulch. This spring, apparently attracted by the new understory, an Eastern Towhee and Brown Thrasher sang in my yard every morning, and along with robins, jays, and sparrows, I saw them every day scratching and thrashing for the nutritious insects hiding in the decay. They clearly preferred the area to the lawn.



The new understory.

So I started asking my neighbors if I could have their leaves. At first they were amused, especially after I had spent the better part of an afternoon dragging the piles from their yards to my roadside garden, only to have the township come along and vacuum them up the next day. They indulged me, however, and Sam even helped by dumping his leaves in my gardens. But by the end of last fall I heard the terrible words, "You know, we think we're going to use some of these leaves to mulch around our yard." ...*Oh no!!*

Come November I'll be hoarding again. I want to put another thick layer on my understory. It will be a little tricky because in spring I planted native spicebushes, low-growth blueberries, and a pretty witch-hazel (all from our Meadowood Nursery native plant sale, of course). I'll have to be careful not to let the leaves pile up against the trunks, as that can invite insects and fungal growth and damage the bark, but otherwise it will be easy and fun to do.

I love creating habitat in this way. It's so rewarding to see the results. And if you're not using your leaves this fall, *my address is...*

Bird Blog

Goatsuckers.

Corey Husic

Sunday, August 19, 2012

Every spring, birders gather around old fields and meadows to listen to the *pzeent!* of the American Woodcock. This display marks the beginning of spring—the ground has thawed and birds are ready to breed. Some nature groups even lead walks specifically for listening to the spring display of the woodcock. However, many of these birders do not give notice that there is a bird that goes "pzeent" in the fall, long after the springtime woodcocks have become silent. These are the calls of the goatsuckers. The nighthawks.

While nighthawks are not actually hawks (and no, they don't actually suck milk from goats as myths have portrayed), they do resemble buoyant falcons—bouncing through the humid air on pointed wings. Flocks gather over buggy fields as soon as the goldenrod begins to bloom in August, catching insects on the wing.

Just the other day I saw my first flock of fall. One short of a dozen, the group had convened over a nearby field, soaring and diving to catch the bounty of midges high above the ground. Competing with swallows and darners, the nighthawks spent almost twenty minutes feasting before moving down the ridge.



Common Nighthawk
Photo by Corey Husic

Nighthawks, some of the most impressive aerialists of the bird world, often go unnoticed as they zip over meadows, parking lots, and almost anywhere with insects that lies along their southbound route. Unnoticed, yes. But woodcocks would be too if we made no effort to search. While woodcocks are harbingers of spring for some, nighthawks fill this role for me in the fall. The warm, muggy nights are coming to an end, soon to be replaced with more pleasant days filled with sun and cool breezes. Plus, I find watching swooping and diving acrobats to be far more exciting than listening into the darkness for a call from a sneaky sandpiper sitting still in some soggy sedges.

I'm not saying that those goofy, disproportionate timber-doodles aren't fun... just don't forget to take a moment to listen to what else goes "pzeent" in the night.

Corey Husic is a teenage nature enthusiast from eastern Pennsylvania. You can see this post and others on his blog, "The Baypoll Blog" at <http://baypoll.blogspot.com/>

Great Day for a Plant Sale!

What a beautiful day we had for our September 15 plant sale. Our efforts not only helped to create valuable wildlife habitat, but we also raised more than \$900 for the chapter. Thanks to everyone who made purchases or volunteered, and a special thanks to members **Jan Getgood** and **Ernie Johnson** of **Meadowood Nursery!**



Lorrie Preston (above) shares some of her experience and knowledge of native plants; while Riley Fulton (right) checks out with his wagonload.

In case you missed the sale, Meadowood Nursery will be open through the end of October, Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.



Hog Island Scholarships—Correction!

The dates for the Hog Island camp scholarships were incorrect in the September newsletter. The correct dates for the *Educator* camps are July 18-23, 2013. The *Teen* scholarship dates are June 16-21 and June 23-28, 2013. The application forms are available at www.appalachianaudubon.org. Contact Arlene Buchholz at abvetlab@yahoo.com for details. **Applications are due October 31!**

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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!

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Hershey Gardens—Postponed

The October 13 trip to Hershey Gardens has been postponed. A new date will be announced on our website and in the newsletter in the spring.

AAS Wants You!



- ◆ Do you have experience with web design? Microsoft Publisher or Excel? Quickbooks?
- ◆ Are you involved with a local teen environmental organization?
- ◆ Do you have the skills to install or repair nest boxes?
- ◆ Would you be willing to rescue an injured bird?
- ◆ Would you like to spend a morning helping to remove invasive species?

Then contact Annette Mathes at amathes19@verizon.net or 514-4512. Thank you!

Like us on Facebook!

Go to www.appalachianaudubon.org and click the **Like** button!

October 14, 2012 (Sunday) Waggoner's Gap Hawk Watch

Join Audubon PA's Director of Conservation **Paul Zeph** to view raptors and other species in their fall migration. Learn about Audubon projects at Waggoner's Gap and opportunities to help in the upkeep of this area. Meet at 11AM in the Hawk Watch parking lot. (Get map from Paul or AAS website.) Contact Paul at 691-0288 or pzeph1@verizon.net.



Some binoculars will be available, so bring the family!

October 25, 2012 (Thursday) Hawk Mountain Sanctuary

Bill Anderson leads this trip that starts with a talk at the Acopian Center, followed by a trip to the visitor center and a live raptor demonstration at the amphitheater. After a light lunch and visit to the education center, we'll head to the hawk watch sites. Meet at the Radisson Hotel parking lot in Camp Hill. Contact Bill at 579-2049, 737-0603, or wanderingdoc@me.com at least **one week in advance** for meeting time and other details.