Naturally

NEWSLETTER OF THE CONOCOCHEAGUE AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Above: Horned Lark, see Winter Birding, page 5. Photo credit: John Carter

Below David Smith (right), former librarian of the Cumberland County Historical Society, recounted the history of Camp Michaux as part of a Conococheague Audubon Society birding trip to Pine Grove Furnace State Park on Oct. 28.



President's Corner

by Valerie B. Barnes

Colder nights have settled in and our winter visitors are here. Juncos flit around under the shrubs and feeders. Brown Creepers hug the tree trunks. Can our first snowfall be far off?

Our entry in the Festival of Trees at the Franklin County Visitors Center won the People's Choice award for the best tree; see Debby Hook's article for details. Nick and Gabe Putt won the photo contests for youth; see Terri Kochert's article.

The opening reception for the sale of Jim and Deb Wheeling's collection of bird prints went well. The collection will be available at Wallspace Gallery and Framing through January. You can view the collection online at www.wallspace.com. The catalog is accessible from the homepage or under Exhibits | Current Exhibit. The shop is at 1769 Lincoln Way East, Chambersburg, PA 17202. Regular hours: Tues-Fri 10-4:30, Sat 10-2. Other times by appointment, 717-264-7210. Stop in and peruse the prints; all available items are at Wallspace. The prices are really reasonable; at least 22 of the 140+ prints have already been sold. There are still some framed prints on the walls upstairs at the gallery. Remember that the proceeds are all being donated to Conococheague Audubon Society.

Scott Weidensaul was a surprise substitute presenter at our regular meeting program on December 11 about Project SNOWstorm. We heard some highlights about the research program on Snowy Owls that has been running since 2013. If you would like to support the crowd-sourced research, visit www.projectsnowstorm.org. Direct contributions to Project SNOWstorm can also be made by check, payable to: Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art, 176 Water Company Rd., Millersburg PA 17061. Please indicate on the check that the gift is for Project SNOWstorm.

Our covered dish dinner and members' photo show will take place on Monday, January 8, 2024, at <u>6 PM</u> at St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church. All are welcome. Members typically contribute one dinner item (casserole, meat, vegetables, salad, pasta, fruit, rolls, etc.) and/or a dessert. Coffee, tea, and pots/jugs of water will be provided. Bring your own table setting, including a napkin, flatware, plate, bowl, and mug/cup. Let's try to avoid plastic and disposable items! If you have a few photos you wish to share (no more than 15, please), please bring them on a USB thumb drive.

Thanks for your support for Conococheague Audubon and the birds! If you haven't mailed in a donation yet, it's never too late. Please make out your check to Conococheague Audubon and mail it to CAS, PO Box 20, Fayetteville, PA 17222.

Tak care, stay warm, and good birding!

CONSERVATION

ORNE



by John Greer

This just in as of December 15:

The 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference of Parties just wrapped up in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. *Headline* (my words): "This Time is Different, Maybe?"

For 30 years, with rising sea levels and temperatures, world leaders discussed the health of the planet without addressing the root cause: fossil fuels. Now, for the first time, there is agreement among nearly 200 nations that the past strategy of just limiting emissions is insufficient and that something needs to be done about fossil fuels. While progress has been made, it remains to be seen whether nations will fully implement and fund the agreement's goals in time to affect rising temperatures.

Leading Up to COP28

This was the 28th Conference of Parties, or "COP28."

Before the conference, Pope Francis called for brisk action against the climate crisis and condemned climate change denial. The Pope planned to make the first-ever papal visit to a UN climate change conference but pulled out for health reasons.

In September 2023, the UN published its first twoyear assessment of global progress in fighting climate change. This was its "global stocktake," as established by COP26. Its key findings were:

A phase-out of fossil fuels is needed.

The Paris Agreement in 2015 and its resulting actions significantly helped reduce climate -harming emissions.

The world is not on track to reach the Paris Agreement targets. To have a more than 50% chance of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees C (2.7 degrees F), global emissions must peak by 2025.

Trillions of dollars are needed to meet the goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees C.

All eyes were on the United States and China

heading into the conference. Ahead of the conference, China issued a plan to reduce methane emissions, but China's heavy reliance on coal produced criticism. In November 2023, the US and China agreed to pursue efforts to triple renewable energy globally by 2030. Both countries agreed to address greenhouse gases, but China did not agree to phase out coal-fired power plants.

Controversy at COP28

The President of COP28, Sultan Al Jaber, was severely criticized for a conflict of interest. He is the CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, and many people felt he would permit private-sector polluters to exercise undue influence over efforts toward climate progress. During the conference, Al Jaber sparked controversy by dismissing fossil fuel phase-out, denying that climate change is based on science, and stating that progress on climate change would prevent economic development. The next day, he clarified his remarks, stating he respects science and thinks a phase-out of fossil fuels is inevitable.

In his opening speech at the conference, King Charles III said the world is dreadfully far off track on its climate targets.

Differing Views on How to Treat Fossil Fuels

To produce an agreement, contentious negotiations took place among proponents who held widely divergent views on what to do about fossil fuels.

Some oil-rich nations and major fossil fuel companies wanted no mention of fossil fuels whatsoever. Other countries, particularly island nations, wanted the agreement to call for "phasing out" fossil fuels. The United States and other countries favored a middle ground of "phasing down" fossil fuels. The US also advocated for phasing out "unabated" fossil fuels, which would have allowed oil and gas to continue to be produced using technology that captures and stores greenhouse gases.

Accomplishments

The major accomplishment of COP28 is an agreement that "calls on" nations to transition "away from fossil fuels in energy systems in a just, orderly, and equitable manner while accelerating in this critical decade, so as to achieve net zero by 2050 in keeping with the science." The language "calls on" is seen as being stronger than previous draft language that merely listed transitioning as something nations "could" do. However, the agreement does not call on nations to phase out fossil fuels.

Loopholes?

The agreement has been criticized for containing a number of loopholes that may limit its effectiveness.

For example, it allows countries to consider their own "national circumstances, pathways, and approaches" when implementing the agreement.

It calls for accelerating "zero and low-emission technologies," which leaves open the use of fossil fuels in tandem with abatement technologies like carbon capture and storage. Critics say these technologies are not likely to come on fast enough to make a difference in meeting global temperature targets, and they require a huge amount of electricity to operate.

The agreement states that transitional fuels can play a role in "facilitating the energy transition while ensuring energy security." This permits the use of natural gas as a transitional energy, called a "bridge fuel." Natural gas production, however, produces carbon dioxide and methane emissions.

Finally, the transition called for in the agreement applies only to "energy systems," but fossil fuels are used for more than just energy. They are used in the production of plastics, for example, a major source of harmful emissions and pollution. "Energy systems" do not include transportation, such as cars, trucks, and planes, which are major sources of greenhouse gas emissions.

Conclusion

COP28 has the potential to be a big step forward, depending on how committed nations will be to implementing and paying for it.

TIP: What can we do?

- Educate others on the importance of international cooperation on climate change to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.
- Advocate at the local, state, and federal level to support COP28.

Another Winning Tree for CAS! by Debby Hook

Conococheague Audubon's five-foot birch tree won the **People's Choice Award** for the second year in a row at the annual Festival of Trees sponsored by Franklin County Visitors Bureau. This was the fourth year CAS participated in the holiday tree- and wreath-decorating event.

Our tree, which received 529 votes, was one of 55 trees in various sizes that were entered into the contest. Northern Cardinals, American Goldfinch



A detail of CAS' tree shows a Northern Cardinal pulling at the bright green ribbon adorning a suet cage on a low-hanging branch.

Photo credit: Debby Hook

and a scarf-wearing Chickadee sat among bare branches filled with gold and silver balls, and a Blue Jay crowned the treetop. Our winning tree sold for a bid of \$125. Total funds raised in this year's event were \$7,293, which will support Cumberland Valley Breast Care Alliance.

The decorating committee this year included Marguerite Fries, Debby Hook, Terri Kochert, and Anne St. John. We chose the theme "Warm Welcome," using this description:

Cold winters are inhospitable to birds, and while we can't knit the kind of tiny woolen scarf that our whimsical chickadee wears, we can make it easier for birds by offering high-fat suet, protein-rich sunflower seeds, and water warmed by birdbath de-icers.

Conococheague Audubon, the local chapter of National Audubon Society, is committed to conserving and protecting all native birds and their habitats.

Thanks to all who voted for our tree as the best of the bunch!

Proposed Changes to By-Laws

by Valerie B. Barnes

Officers and directors discussed and expressed support for proposed changes to the Conococheague Audubon By-laws at the November 2023 Joint Executive Committee / Board of Directors meeting. The impetus for the changes is to expand the likelihood for new participation in leadership roles. We hope to open the possibility of two or more people serving as "co-" officers, and to officially acknowledge the concept of an "intern" to allow someone to learn the ropes before becoming an officer or director. For instance, if approved, two people could cooperate as co-presidents. And someone could be elected as an "intern" officer or director to participate in joint meetings and learn what is involved.

In accordance with Article IX, Amendments, of the By-Laws, this constitutes announcement of the proposed amendments:

Proposed additions to By-laws, Article IV Nominations and Elections, section 2:

The Nominating Committee may present a slate that includes two or more persons for the same office, having determined that the nominees prefer to share the duties for that office rather than serve alone. They would serve as "Co-" whatever the office is.

The Nominating Committee may present a slate that includes one or more "Interns" who are considering becoming either an Officer or Director but want to learn more about what that involves.

Proposed additions to By-laws, Article V Duties:

Co-Vice Co-Presidents. Presidents. Recording Secretaries, Co-Corresponding Secretaries, or Co-Treasurers will share the duties for the office as they see fit. No formal plan is required.

An Intern for any position is expected to attend the meetings for that position and may participate in any discussion, deliberation, or work effort. The Intern's term is the same as the actual Officer's or Director's term. The Intern does not vote. The Intern may resign at any point during their term or may be nominated to be elected as a fullfledged Officer or Director.

Please submit any comments or revisions to these proposed changes to Valerie Barnes at conaudubon@outlook.com. We will vote on the proposals in connection with the April Business Meeting.



Photo credit: Terri Kochert

PBS Nature Film "Season of the Osprey" at CAMS South January 18, 2024 by Terri Kochert

Though the temperatures tell us it's winter, this film will thrust us into spring and summer weather. This is stunning video footage of one male Osprey's 4,000-mile journey from the Amazon region to a Connecticut salt marsh, where he returns to the same perch from where he hatched the previous year. It not only shows the battles he incurs to protect his prey from Bald Eagles but also from fellow Osprey. You will see incredible footage of the nesting pair, their young, the feeding of the young, and the eventual fledging of the young.

There are also other wildlife creatures shown: red foxes, raccoons, groundhogs, and a plethora of shore birds all competing with the Osprey for the same food source. This is a fascinating nature film that you won't want to miss. Make your plans now to join us at Chambersburg Area Middle School South on January 18. 2024, at 7 PM. Remember, the film will begin promptly at seven.

On the Record

by Sue Greer

Thank you to Jim and Debby Hook for stepping in on short notice to lead our last field trip of the fall at Pine Grove Furnace State Park. Fourteen participants observed 32 species, including several species of woodpeckers, both a Golden-crowned and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet and a Rusty Blackbird. This was followed by a very informative tour of Camp Michaux by a member of the Cumberland Valley Historical Society.

Embracing the Chill: Winter Birding

by John Carter

Winter transforms the landscape into a serene wonderland, and for bird enthusiasts, it offers a unique opportunity to witness a different cast of characters against the snowy backdrop. Winter birding is a worthwhile and invigorating experience, showcasing the resilience and adaptability of our feathered friends. Let's explore the joys of winter birding and how to make the most of this chilly adventure, whether it's on foot or nestled on your couch peering through the glass pane.

Proper gear is essential for an enjoyable and successful winter birding experience. Respect the importance of layering clothing to stay warm and comfortable, and using insulated, waterproof boots to navigate snow-covered terrains, and thermal gloves to keep hands nimble in frigid temperatures.

Winter brings forth a distinct group of birds, some of which migrate to escape the harsh conditions and to find new food sources. Species that are commonly spotted during winter include the majestic Bald Eagle, the cheerful Chickadee, and the striking Northern Cardinal.

Identifying birding hotspots in your area that are known for winter bird activity is a key element. Understanding where birds congregate during the winter months is crucial, whether it's a local park or trail such as Caledonia State Park, Renfrew Park in Waynesboro, or the Creekside Nature Trail at Menno Haven, or even your own backyard. Potential open water like the Letterkenny Reservoir, Antrim Commons Drive Ponds near Greencastle, or Cowans Gap State Park and brushy fields such as Furnace Run Park, or SGL 235—Bricker Road may provide some of the best birding. Areas where there are persistent wild fruits and berries are also excellent places to find birds of all kinds.

Winter can be challenging for birds to find food, making bird feeders a vital resource for their survival. There are different types of feeders and food that are most appealing to winter birds: suet, sunflower seeds, and cracked corn. Many of you set up bird feeders in your yards, creating a welcoming environment for avian visitors.

Documenting your winter birding experiences through eBird, photography or journaling can be a way to connect and reflect your observations. You may need to adjust camera settings when capturing birds in winter settings, such as for snowy backgrounds. The joy of reliving these moments and contributing to citizen science projects by sharing observations online can be rewarding.

Winter birding is a delightful pursuit that offers a unique perspective on the world of birds. By embracing the chill and preparing adequately, bird enthusiasts like

yourselves can uncover a hidden world of beauty and resilience. So, bundle up, grab your binoculars, and embark on a winter birding adventure that will leave you with memories to cherish for years to come.

PA Bird Atlas

by Vern Gauthier



Planning for the 3rd PA Bird Atlas, which kicks off in 2024, continues on many different fronts. Amber Wiewel has been hired as the statewide Atlas Coordi-

nator, and the organizational structure for the atlas has been set up with Franklin and Cumberland Counties in the Lower Susquehanna Region and Fulton County in the Ridge and Valley Region.

The Regional Atlas Coordinator for Lower Susquehanna will be Dauphin County birder Annette Mathes, with the Regional Coordinators for Ridge and Valley to be Huntington County birders Greg and Deb Grove. The position of Franklin County Coordinator will be shared by long-time Franklin birder Bill Oyler and John Carter, who has recently moved back to the Chambersburg area from which he originally hales. In case his name sounds familiar, but you just can't place him, he is the one who found Franklin's Flamingos! Cumberland County Coordinating will be carried out by Vern Gauthier (i.e. me) and Tim Johnson, who is the current PSO County Reviewer and the York Springs CBC Compiler. I will also be helping out Fulton County native Tracy Mosebey when it comes to coordinating the atlasing there.

Much preparation is yet to be done before the Atlas is ready to kick off in 2024. Amber and the Atlas Steering Committee, which is made up of birders from across the state, are working diligently to get everything ready. I will be giving a presentation about the atlas at the May 13, 2024, CAS meeting, with perhaps two or three others who are listed in this article as well. Until then, you can keep up with atlas developments by going to www.pgc.pa.gov/Wildlife/Birding/Pages/PA-Bird-Atlas.aspx where you will also find links to the atlas Facebook page and Instagram account.

Don't Call It Birdwatching

by Ron George

I arrive at the trailhead and step out of my car. Immediately, I hear birds. A Red-bellied Woodpecker is barking in the distance. Across the utility cut, back there in the dense understory, a Hooded Warbler is calling. I hear an exuberant Wood Thrush nearby. Red-eyed Vireos chirp from every side, making it all the harder to sort through the rest. I'm making mental notes as I launch eBird on my phone while opening the trunk. I unzip my camera case, reposition the lens hood, remove the lens cap, snap on the strap, and flip it over one shoulder. Then I reach for my binoculars, toss the case onto the back seat, and loop the strap across my other shoulder.

I lock the car and walk to the trailhead. Stopping to listen to another call, I enter the birds I've heard so far into eBird. I hear a short slippery note and think, Acadian Flycatcher. I stop to look for it, launching Merlin to confirm. Yes! I add it to my list. While stopped, I point my camera at a patch of green with medium light, then tweak the ISO, the shutter speed, and the aperture so that my exposure is right. Photo ops don't last long, so I want to be ready.

Some movement up ahead catches my eye, but it's just a butterfly. But, wait. What kind of butterfly is that? It's not one of the handful I know, so I snap a quick pic to examine later. A sharp whistle cuts through the songbird chatter. I ponder for a moment—I know this, I know this. My mind lands on a match, Broad-winged Hawk. A shadow passes across the ground, and I turn to the sky trying to track the source. My binoculars are on the bird in a flash. My index finger reflexively turns the focus



Hermit Thrush seen at Gettysburg Battlefield
Photo credit: Ron George

knob counter-clockwise to reach the bird. Add it to the list.

I continue walking slowly, quietly. Passing near a rocky stream, I check for Waterthrush, which I have seen here in the past. A cloud covers the sun, so I tweak my shutter speed to adjust for the changing light. Something flies into the tangled mess of fallen limbs and young evergreens across the stream. I can see it moving in there. I track it with my binoculars, but it won't show itself. I see the leaves twitch above the tangle; they wave like tiny flags revealing the bird's approximate location. I follow the movement, spotting the head for a moment, then a bit of the wing. Through an impossible jumble of branches, I see the clear white "pocket square" on the wing, a female Blackthroated Blue Warbler. Add it to the list.

This is what birding is to me—much careful attention, accumulated knowledge, specialized skills, many habits of mind and deed. The complexity is something I actually enjoy. Birding occupies all of my attention, brings me fully into the moment, raises my awareness of everything around me. It's a full-brain experience. This complexity is the reason I get slightly and secretly annoyed whenever someone calls what I'm doing "birdwatching."

It happens from time to time: I'm standing along a trail, searching for a bird with binoculars, and a passerby pauses to be friendly and asks, "Are you birdwatching?" Sigh. It's perfectly intentioned, and yet it bothers me. I know that birdwatching is a term more widely used, especially by non-birders, and I know it has been around a lot longer than birding. But I can't help it; it still bugs me. It just sounds patronizing (and a little voyeuristic), as if all I'm doing is staring at birds the way we watch TV, gawking passively, thinking about nothing more than "What else is on?" However, we all know birding is more than that.

For me, it begins with a search. Maybe I'm heading out to a favorite spot to see what might be there. Maybe the weather is promising or the time of year is right or maybe there's a particular species that I want to photograph. Of course, being in the right place at the right time doesn't guarantee that I'll see what I'm looking for. I move slowly, averaging about one mile per hour. My eyes are drawn to any motion: butterflies, bugs, falling leaves, and sometimes even a bird. Despite my stealth, the bird often sees me before I see it. I get great looks at many birds *flying away*: a Great Blue Heron shattering the silence with its dreadful

squawk flaps away with long, heavy wingbeats, an accipiter glides deftly through the trees and is gone never to be identified, a Kingfisher heads downstream and out of sight. The challenges are endless.

Back on the trail, all around me, sounds are competing for my attention. I try to identify what I can, but an insistent Catbird and a persistent Cardinal are making that difficult. I can hear another call in there, and I hope to catch it between Catbird squeaks and Cardinal whistles. After a few minutes. I've caught a few slurred notes of a White -eyed Vireo. How do I know (or think I know) it's a white-eyed? It's not a call I know well, but the voice has just enough gravel in it to suggest vireo, and the brushy habitat makes sense for a whiteeyed. I know the Yellow-throated Vireo's call enough to know this ain't that, and the Red-eyed Vireos have been going consistently to the point that I don't even notice them anymore. So, armed with a few known calls, a sense of voice, some bird-habitat knowledge, past experience, and eventually a decent view of the bird, I am able to add it to the list. And people call this watching?!

Ever since I began, I have enjoyed the meditative quality of birding: walking through the woods, paying attention to everything I hear, scanning intently for any sign of motion, and sifting through my knowledge and experience to identify a bird. It's a mind-absorbing activity and always different. As a bonus, I might see a toad tinier than a dime or a turtle disturbingly munching on a snakeskin, or a mink carrying its pup in its mouth like a cat carries a kitten. Sound cute? It was, but of course, minks are predators and not always so cute. I once saw a ravenous mink pursuing a Wood Duck through a shallow stream. The duck flew in short bursts of noisy flapping, splashing along the surface, always just ahead of the mink. I soon realized that the duck was cleverly leading the mink downstream and away from its half-dozen ducklings. Now that bird was worth watching!

In the end, I have to admit that watching is a big part of birding. Somewhere I read that birds attract attention because their colors and sounds are well-suited to the colors our eyes perceive and the sounds our ears can hear. It's as if humans were made to notice birds—to hear them calling to get our attention and then to watch. In the process, perhaps we become beguiled, enchanted, charmed, captivated, or at least interested, and we stop bird-watching and begin to bird.

Announcing Best Bird Photo Youth Contest Winners

by Terri Kochert

The officers of the Conococheague Audubon Society (CAS) are immensely proud to announce the winners of our Youth Contests, which ended on October 9, 2023. Here are the winners of the Best Bird Photo Contest.

First Prize winner in the age category of 5–15-year-old youth is Nick Putt, 14, for his photo of a Song Sparrow. He used a Panasonic Lumix DC-FZ80 camera, taking his photo at the Pretty Marsh, Acadia National Park while on vacation in Maine on June 7, 2023. Nick is the son of Terry and Marina Putt, He was awarded the first prize of \$50 at our regular meeting on November 13.



Song Sparrow

Photo credit: Nick Putt

The First Prize winner in the age category of 16–18-year-old youth is Gabe Putt, 17, for his photo of a Juvenile Yellow-crowned Night Heron, taken with a Panasonic Lumix DC-FZ80 camera at Kiwanis Lake, Acadia National Park, Maine, on June 14, 2023. Gabe, the son of Terry and Marina Putt of Chambersburg, was awarded the \$50 first prize on November 13.



Juvenile Yellow-crowned Night Heron
Photo credit: Gabe Puts

Congratulations to both budding nature photographers! We look forward to their 2024 photos.

Sadly, we had no contestants for the Longest Bird Species List this year. Hopefully we will have some young, avid bird watchers recording their finds for the 2024 year.

MEETINGS - Free, held at Fellowship Hall, St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church, 2695 Luther Drive, Chambersburg, PA 17202. FIELD TRIPS - Free, most take place on Saturdays. Contact the leader; arrive early.

Jan. 8, 2024 Monday **MEETING** 6:00 PM Covered dish dinner and members' photo show. All are

January 18, Thursday at CAMS FILM

7:00 PM Season of the Osprey, PBS. An osprey soars over a small saltmarsh at the delta of the Connecticut River. From somewhere along the east coast of South America, he has just flown 4,000 miles to the place that is imprinted on his memory since birth, the saltmarsh where he will rejoin his mate. Door prizes.

Feb. 12, Monday **ZOOM ONLY MEETING**

7:00 PM Apps for the Outdoors. Various members demonstrate their favorite birding, hiking, and plant ID smartphone apps. Arranged by Josh Donaldson.

Feb. 16-18, Fri.-Sun. FIELD TRIP

Blackwater NWR, Maryland, auto tour for WATERFOWL. Leave from Martins' home at 1:00 PM Friday. Bring scopes, binoculars, and lunch. Make your own motel arrangements. Eric and Rhetta Martin, 717-597-8675.

March 2, Saturday FIELD TRIP 6:30 AM Middle Creek WMA, Lancaster County auto tour for WATERFOWL. Meet at Park & Ride, Scotland, Exit 20, I-81 N. Bring scopes, binoculars, and lunch. Eric and Rhetta Martin, 717-597-8675

March 7, Thursday at CAMS FILM

7:00 PM Big Bend: The Wild Frontier of Texas, PBS. Showcasing the natural magic of an extraordinary part of the border between the United States and Mexico over four seasons, this film explores Rio Grande's Big Bend – a vast unspoiled wonderland of serene beauty and astounding desert landscapes which are home to some of North America's most enchanting animals. Door prizes.

CAS WEBSITE: https://conococheagueaudubon.org/

Newsletter Editor - Jane Bussard (717-401-3210) janenbussard47@gmail.com

Send all newsletter articles and photos to the editor. Send all mailing changes to conaudubon@outlook.com.

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Fayetteville, PA 17222 P.O. Box 20 Conococheague Audubon