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President's Corner

by Valerie B. Barnes

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season, full of good food and family traditions. Perhaps you saw some good birds, too. A Hermit Thrush and a pair of Eastern Bluebirds stop by my yard every now and then, and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and a Brown Creeper are here more regularly. The leaves from my oak trees are mostly down, and the (non-native) Burning Bush has only a few berries left. I was remiss in not discouraging you from planting Burning Bush. They are not native and can become really invasive. You might try a native viburnum or native shrub dogwood instead. See more good options in this issue of the *Naturally* newsletter.

Just in time for holiday gift-giving, at the December meeting we displayed more than 20 **fine art prints** from the collection of Jim and Deb Wheeling. The Wheelings are generously donating the prints to Conococheague Audubon, and we are offering them to you. Any voluntary contribution would be welcome. Contact [Anne St John](#) or [Val Barnes](#) to visit the prints.

Conservation Chair John Greer reports that the legislature passed and the Governor signed a bill this past summer that directs PENNDOT to landscape state-owned roads using native plants. This new law will benefit the public by reducing pollution run-off and beautifying our roadways.

John also reports that the legislature included \$50 million for the Clean Streams Fund, which extends the Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP) in the state's budget for fiscal year 2024-25. ACAP will receive \$35.75 million of the \$50 million. Under ACAP, decisions to reduce agricultural pollution run-off are made at the local conservation district level.

The Chambersburg Christmas Bird Count (PACH) was held on December 14, 2024. Because the inputs for the January issue of the *Naturally* were due December 15, you may see the tally summary before the March issue by visiting our website [Observation Records page](#). Right now, you will see a placeholder; when the actual results are available, they'll be posted there.

A reminder that the date for our next **free nature film**, *Woodpeckers: The Hole Story*, has been changed to **Thursday, January 30, 2025** at 7 PM in the [Chambersburg Area Middle School South](#) auditorium.

If you haven't already done so, please consider donating to Conococheague Audubon to keep things rolling. Mail your donation to CAS at PO Box 20, Fayetteville, PA 17222. Good birding and Happy Holidays!



Peregrine Falcon off Hade Church Road, Waynesboro, on Dec. 14, 2024. Through the 2023 CBCs, there had been fewer than a dozen peregrines counted since the Chambersburg CBC started in 1960.

Photo credit: Jim Hook

CONSERVATION

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by John Greer

NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR LANDOWNERS TO PRESERVE GRASSLANDS: Pennsylvania Priority Grasslands Project

We have been advised there is a new opportunity for any of our members who may own grasslands to preserve them for conservation purposes. What follows is a notice from Emma Keele, Research Associate with Indiana University Research Institute, Partner Wildlife Biologist with Pheasants Forever and PA Game Commission for Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania Priority Grasslands Project

The Pennsylvania Priority Grasslands Project is a new funding and technical assistance opportunity for private landowners who would like to conserve habitat for grassland birds or pollinators on their property. This financial opportunity provides complete funding for grassland establishment and maintenance projects on private and public lands (private lands are prioritized). This financial assistance opportunity for grassland conservation is unique because it provides complete funding for project implementation instead of cost-share or rental payments like some other financial assistance programs. Partners of this project are the PA Game Commission, the non-profit organization Pheasants Forever, and IUP Research Institute.



Northern Cardinal

Photo credit: Dave Cooney, Jr.

Pheasants Forever handles the project management of this funding opportunity. Funding for this project was acquired through a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation America the Beautiful grant.

The purpose of this project is to establish and/or restore native grasslands to the landscape to support grassland-dependent wildlife. Any technical assistance provided by the three wildlife biologists (see contact info below) with this project is free. Project proposals are reviewed every three months to determine if they are accepted for funding.

What are the requirements?

- The work must be within the three project landscapes:
 - Western counties: Indiana, Cambria, Somerset, Westmoreland
 - Central counties: Adams, Cumberland, Franklin
 - Eastern: Berks, Lancaster, Lehigh, Lebanon
 - All work must involve upland grassland establishment and maintenance. No wetland projects are included in this project.
 - A minimum project size of one acre (although larger projects may be prioritized).

What kind of work will this project fund?

- Native grassland site preparation
- Purchasing and planting of native grass and forb seeds (such as wildflowers and other plants that are not grasses, sedges, or rushes and do not have woody stems)
- Invasive tree and shrub removal
- Prescribe fire, mowing, or discing
- Herbicide application

Whom do I contact?

- Western counties (Indiana, Cambria, Somerset, Westmoreland) - Emma Keele at gsncc@iup.edu or 402-469-1063
- Central counties (Adams, Cumberland, Franklin) - Patrick Grunwald at pgrunwald@pheasantsforever.org or 715-965-2789
- Eastern counties (Berks, Lancaster, Lehigh, Lebanon) - Alexa Kennel at akennel@pheasantsforever.org or 717-913-2281



Least Flycatcher

Photo credit: Ron George

Native Berry-Bearing Shrubs by Valerie B Barnes

In a few of my recent emails, I mentioned that various thrushes were enjoying berries on my Burning Bush [Winged Euonymus (*Euonymus alatus*)]. I should have mentioned that my bush doesn't seem to proliferate. The non-native Burning Bush can be a real problem because it is often invasive. Either my bush is too old to produce fertile seeds or the soil and/or light conditions on my property are not conducive to growing seeds carried by birds who are eating the berries. In any event, please see the list below, provided by Rocky Gleason, retired from the PA Natural Heritage Program, for good alternative native shrubs that produce berries attractive to "our" birds:

- native viburnums (*Viburnum acerifolium*, *V. cassinoides*, *V. dentatum*, *V. lantanoides*, *V. prunifolium*, *V. recognitum*)
- native shrub dogwoods (*Cornus alternifolia*, *C. amomum*, *C. racemosa*)
- chokeberries (*Aronia arbutifolia*, *A. melanocarpa*)
- blueberries (*Vaccinium angustifolium*, *V. corymbosum*, *V. pallidum*, *V. stamineum*)
- huckleberries (*Gaylussacia baccata*, *G. frondosa*)
- elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*, *S. racemosa*)
- spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)

- winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*)
- low serviceberry (*Amelanchier stolonifera*)
- shrub hawthorns (*Crataegus crus-galli*, *C. flabellata*, *pruinosa*, *C. uniflora*)

You can identify additional options by visiting Audubon's free native plants database: <https://www.audubon.org/native-plants> There you can enter your zip code and retrieve a list of native plants suggested for your area. Let's go native and support the insects and birds!



A Cooper's Hawk relaxes after a meal, seen during the 2023 Chambersburg Christmas Bird Count.

Photo credit: Jim Hook



White-crowned Sparrow

Photo credit: Dave Cooney, Jr.

Conococheague Audubon Society

PRESENTS A FREE NATURE FILM

“Woodpeckers: The Hole Story” A PBS film Narrated by Paul Giamatti



THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 2025

|| FILM BEGINS - 7PM ||

Chambersburg Area Middle School South
1151 E. McKinley St.,
Chambersburg, PA, 17201

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Door Prizes

Donations Welcome!

Conococheague Audubon and the Festival of Trees

by Anne St. John

Conococheague Audubon was once again proudly involved in the Festival of Trees sponsored by the Franklin County Visitors Bureau. Visitors to the center vote and bid on various trees and wreaths that are decorated by local individuals, businesses, and organizations.

Our wreath was decorated with fluttering cardinals and a blue jay among bird friendly berries. It won the **People's Choice Award** for the third year in a row with 460 votes. The wreath was sold for a bid of \$40. Some 56 trees and 21 wreaths were decorated. The money raised through the votes and bids is donated to the Cumberland Valley Breast Care Alliance.

The decorating committee this year included Marguerite Fries, Debby Hook, Terri Kochert, and Anne St. John. We chose *Nature's Holiday Table* as our theme using the following description:

Do you have a holiday feast prepared for our backyard birds? Birds and insects need native plants. They provide essential food they can't get from other types of plants. Audubon's 'Bird-Friendly Blooms' has rec-

ommendations that will keep our friends nutritionally fed. Some of the plants carry berries and seed heads that remain during the cold season that will help nourish them.

Thank you to everyone who stopped by to admire the trees and wreaths and for the votes to make us once again the *People's Choice*. Most importantly, thank you for supporting a very important charity.

Why?

by Jane Bussard

When we moved to Fayetteville from Hagerstown in 2016, I sought to meet people outside of my neighborhood, church, and small circle of friends, so I joined CAS. I am not a birder. I look. I like. My mother and two sisters could identify birds by their calls; I searched the trees, hoping to spot something with feathers.

My younger sister, Ruth Shea, was well known in eastern Idaho as “the Swan Lady.” Years ago, photos of her work rescuing Trumpeter Swans covered four pages in LIFE magazine. Her husband's specialty was Snow Geese; Rod Drewein held a Ph.D. in ornithology and once led a birding tour to China.

Me? I can tell a robin from a blue jay from a cardinal. This year I learned to tell the cuter Red-breasted Nuthatch from the many white ones. I



enjoy watching the traffic at our seven backyard feeders, but I still can't tell the purple and house finches apart.

On the other hand, I know a little bit about desktop pub-

lishing, so I try to contribute (and learn and enjoy) by assembling the *Naturally*. Thanks for the opportunity!

Note: this could be a regular column, if you all send entries to ConAudubon@outlook.com. We'll publish one in each issue, as long as we get submissions. ☺



Above, A male Purple Finch arrives at the feeder.
Below A female Purple Finch basks in the late sun.

Photo credits: Jim Hook



List contest winner April Ford
Photo credit: Terri Kochert

Announcing Longest Bird Species Youth Contest Winner by Terri Kochert

We, the officers of the Conococheague Audubon Society (CAS), which meets at St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church, are immensely proud to announce the sole winner of our Youth Contest Longest Bird Species List, which began Dec. 1, 2023 and terminated on Oct. 14, 2024.

First Prize winner in the age category of 16-18 year old youth is April Ford, 17, for her list of 108 different bird species, which she kept from March 14, 2024 through September 14, 2024. She was awarded the \$50 first-prize check at our general meeting, November 11, 2024. When her older sister, a birder, encouraged April, a home-school student, to enter the contest, she took the challenge. She soon realized that bird watching is a lot of fun. April says that it is now her “new” best hobby.

April is the daughter of Brett and Tina Ford of Harrisonville, PA. Congratulations to April Ford for her tenacity and her long list in such a short time.



Sharpie

Photo credit: Ron George

Thank you!
by Valerie Barnes

Many thanks to all who have supported Conococheague Audubon this year – whether through money, time, materials, and/or effort. We survive and thrive because of you!



What groups could benefit from a small donation from CAS?

Each year Conococheague Audubon gives \$2,000 to like-minded groups. If you know of one that could use a small grant, let us know. The Charitable Giving Committee is making a list for 2025

Organization: _____

Contact person: _____

What makes them worthy: _____

Mail to: CAS, P.O. Box 20, Fayetteville, PA 17222.

Or contact Chairwoman Terri Kochert at

ConAudubon@outlook.com.

Take a Bird Bath

by Ron George

It's a fine day to be out in late October. The sun is warm, but the breeze coming off of the water at Long Pine Reservoir is cool. As I arrive, I scan the lake with my naked eye, and I'm a bit disappointed that there are no ducks. I walk to the water's edge, lift my binoculars to my eyes, and discover I was wrong. A line of ducks is out there, bouncing in the low, choppy waves. I need a scope, so I dash back to the car.

With the scope in place, I skim the surface until I find the mixed flock: subtle gray Gadwalls, much smaller Green-winged Teals—a mix of both green-faced adult males and their dark companions, a smattering of American Wigeon whose “bald pates” (from their old-timey name) glint in the sun. I examine each one, just in case a Eurasian Wigeon is hiding among them, but no luck this time.

The ducks mix and meander in the middle of the lake, close enough for a good look. Eventually, they drift into species-specific groups, Gadwall to the left, Wigeon to the right, Teal somewhere in between. I notice a none-of-the-above bird, small and slight and rather indistinct, a Pied-billed Grebe. Bonus bird! This just keeps getting better. Having admired my mixed flock for some time, I point the scope toward the farther reaches of the reservoir. A couple dozen Canada Geese are sitting on the wide sand-stone shore, which is exposed by the low water level. I turn to the other arm of the lake and discover a few more ducks: two dark-bodied Black Ducks, and farther back, a handful of Mallards. As I watch to confirm my identification, something drops into my field of view well behind the placid Mallards. What was that?!

I twist the zoom lens and turn the focus knob slightly. The sun is bright. The sky is cloudless. In this light, I can clearly see a mature Bald Eagle has landed among the stumps on the far shore—about as far away as you can get on this manmade lake. It hops from its stump-perch into belly-deep water. It turns its head, looks side to side, looks up, dips its head for a drink. Seeing a Bald Eagle isn't as surprising as it once was, and I can see birds in my backyard birdbath any day. But a Bald Eagle taking a bath is a new one for me. (Note to self: get a bigger birdbath!)

I watch for fifteen minutes. The bird is in no hurry, nor am I. Eventually, it lowers its back and wings

into the water for a brief splash. Then, with a few water-logged wingbeats, it leaps from the water onto a nearby stump. Somehow, it is both nonchalant and super cool at the same time. I look around for someone with whom to share my sighting, someone to invite to look through my scope, but for the first time in years, I'm the only one here. Although it's just me with my scope on this end, the eagle is not alone. A second Bald Eagle has landed near the first, and I remember why I keep telling people, “You should go birding!”

There are as many good reasons to go birding as there are birders, but one you may not have considered is the same reason my parents tried (unsuccessfully) to get me to eat my vegetables: it's good for you. Or more precisely, it's *probably* good for you. Those of us who regularly experience the joys of birding already know (or think we know) this, but there's also research pointing to the likelihood of health benefits from birding.

Much of the research has focused on the effects of greenspace on human well-being—good things to know for governments and city planners, but it's not particularly focused on birding. Research has shown that contact with nature, defined as “areas containing elements of living systems that include plants and nonhuman animals,” correlates to stress reduction.¹ The how and why isn't entirely clear, but the connection is consistent. Although more research is needed, evidence suggests that “nature contact offers considerable promise in addressing a range of health challenges . . . such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, depression, and anxiety.”¹ One review of previous research found that “interaction with nature can increase self-esteem and mood, reduce anger, and improve general psychological well-being with positive effects on emotions and behavior... Intentional interactions with nature such as gardening and watching wildlife also promote psychological well-being.”²

“Watching wildlife,” that sounds a lot like birding to me. In fact, one of the studies reviewed found that “viewing wildlife evoked a feeling of awe and wonder and created a temporal experience in which all concentration was focused on the moment.”² Bingo! For me, one of the best things about birding is that you have to pay attention, *close* attention, and when you're focusing intently on that sparrow moving through the underbrush or trying to pick out that one warbler song among a chorus of spring migrants, you're not thinking about anything else—no bills, no politics, no jobs,

no to-do lists, no emails, nothing but birds, at least for a few moments.

Those moments are worthwhile. In fact, another study found that “individuals who reported spending ≥ 120 mins in nature last week had consistently higher levels of both health and well-being than those who reported no exposure.”³ Admittedly, correlation isn’t causation; maybe people who are already happy and healthy just like to spend time outdoors. However, if you’re like me, you know that spending an hour or two birding is one of the best ways to clear the dust that settles on your psyche after an hour or two spent facing a computer screen like I am now (I really should go birding!). It’s what Henry David Thoreau described as the “sanitive”⁴ power of nature. Sure, that’s a made-up word, but like many things, if you get it, you get it.

In Japan, they get it—or at least some do. *Shinrin-yoku*, also known as forest bathing, is the intentional practice of “taking in the forest”⁵ to improve health and well-being. As expected, Japanese researchers found a number of psychological benefits of forest bathing, including relief from “psychological tension, depression, anger, fatigue, and confusion” as well as improved “psychological vigor.”⁵ However, the benefits weren’t limited to mental health. Signs of improved physical health included changes in “pulse rate, blood pressure, salivary cortisol concentration, and HRV [Heart Rate Variation]” and increased “parasympathetic nerve activity, and lower sympathetic nerve activity compared with city settings.”⁵ Maybe you understand that last part, but I don’t. Nevertheless, it seems clear that, like eating your vegetables, forest bathing is good for you.

If forest bathing has all these benefits, it’s likely that birding—or “bird bathing,” if you prefer—has similar effects. When it comes to birds, one experiment found that exposure to birdsongs in a laboratory setting had positive effects such as lowered anxiety.⁶ However, if you’ve ever tried to listen through the chatter of a dozen Gray Catbirds to hear other spring migrants, you may question those results. Perhaps not all birdsongs are equally therapeutic.

Another research team reviewed 288 scientific studies looking for the intangible positives that people get from outdoor experiences, what they call Cultural Ecosystem Services.⁷ Among those benefits, they found two categories that fit my idea of birding: “interactions ... that provide an environment for learning and gaining new knowledge”

and “appreciating the physical aspects of the natural world.”⁷ Thinking back to that day at Long Pine Reservoir, I’m reminded of all the accumulated knowledge that enabled me to separate the Gadwalls from the Green-winged Teals and to put a name to that little brown, nearly nondescript Pied-billed Grebe, and I recognize the deep appreciation of the natural world that held my eye to the spotting scope for fifteen minutes, watching a Bald Eagle take a bath.

Someday, with more research, our doctors may prescribe an hour of birding every morning, or in addition to seeing a therapist, we may be told to see a thrush. Until then, I’ll continue my own personal “research” into the benefits of birding; as Thoreau said, “here is life, an experiment untried by me.”⁸ So, maybe the next time you’re feeling less than your best, instead of soaking in the tub, soak up some birdsongs and take a nice, long “bird bath.” Over time, you may learn to enjoy it the way I learned to enjoy eating my vegetables; after all, it’s (probably) good for you!

1. Frumkin, Howard, *et al.* “Nature Contact and Human Health: A Research Agenda.” *Environmental Health Perspectives*. Volume 125 (7) July 24, 2017.

2. Keniger, L. E., Gaston, K. J., Irvine, K. N., & Fuller, R. A. (2013). What are the Benefits of Interacting with Nature? *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 10(3), 913-935. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph10030913>

3. White, M.P., Alcock, I., Grellier, J. *et al.* Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. *Sci Rep* 9, 7730 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-44097-3>

4. Thoreau, Henry D. *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau*, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen (Dover Publications, 1962), p. 1104.

5. Park, B.J., Tsunetsugu, Y., Kasetani, T. *et al.* The physiological effects of *Shinrin-yoku* (taking in the forest atmosphere or forest bathing): evidence from field experiments in 24 forests across Japan. *Environ Health Prev Med* 15, 18–26 (2010). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12199-009-0086-9>

6. Sima, Richard. “Why Birds and Their Songs are Good for Our Mental Health.” *Washington Post*, May 18, 2023. https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/interactive/2023/birds-song-nature-mental-health-benefits/?itid=sr_1

7. Huynh, Lam Thi, *et al.* “Linking the Nonmaterial Dimensions of Human-nature Relations and Human Well-being Through Cultural Ecosystem Services.” *Science Advances*, vol. 8, no. 31, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abn8042>

8. Thoreau, Henry D. *Walden, Or Life in the Woods*.

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.

Year-round

BIRD WALKS

SOAR (Studying Ornithology Around the Region) walks, 8:00 AM first and third Saturdays; various locations in Franklin County.

Larry and Sharon Williams, 717-655-7414; see <https://buttonwoodnaturecenter.org> for schedule. 717-762-0373

Dec 28, 2024, Saturday CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

All day, Newville area. Vern Gauthier, 717-385-9526, verngauthier14@gmail.com

Dec. 30, Monday CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

All day, York Springs area. Tim Johnson, 717-409-4805, tj359@sbcglobal.net.

January 13, 2025 Monday MEETING

6:00 PM Covered dish dinner and members' photo show. All are welcome.

January 30, Thursday at CAMS FILM

7:00 PM *Woodpeckers: The Hole Story*, PBS. Door prizes.

Feb. 10, Monday MEETING

7:00 PM *Humming With the Hummingbirds: Small is Beautiful*, David & Joyce Leaman. Arranged by Rhetta Martin.

Feb. 14 -16, Fri.-Sun. FIELD TRIP

Blackwater NWR, Maryland, auto tour for WATER FOWL. Leave from Martins' home at 9:00 AM Friday. Bring scopes, binoculars, and lunch. Make your own motel arrangements. **Eric and Rhetta Martin**, 717-597-8675, home or 223-205-7910, Rhetta.

Check our website for updates and maps to all locations:

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.

COPY DEADLINE FEBRUARY 15 FOR MARCH 2025 NEWSLETTER

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