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President's Corner

by Valerie B Barnes

Summer is winding down and fall migration is underway. Confusing fall warblers are starting to pass through and shorebirds are dropping by. Keep your eyes and ears peeled, because we never know when something unusual may show up. If you haven't already, subscribe to rare bird alerts via eBird. To do that, go into the "My eBird" section and choose to "Manage My Alerts." <https://ebird.org/atlaspa/alerts>

By now you should have received our annual fundraising letter along with the Activities List for 2025-2026. Please make whatever contribution you can and mail it to CAS, PO Box 20, Fayetteville, PA 17222. The activities have been added to the calendar on our website, so if you misplaced the green flyer, you could always check the website to see what's coming up: <https://conococheagueaudubon.org/>

We're starting the season with a combination field trip and program on Monday, September 8 at St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church. Ron George and Tracy Snyder will dazzle us with excellent bird photos to illustrate their *Bird is A Verb* program - terrific for beginning and experienced birders alike. They'll start the evening earlier than usual, at 6 PM, with birding outside the church, so bring friends and family who are new to birding! Bring binoculars if you have them. The indoor meeting will start at 7:00 PM as usual.

We have a new logo depicting a Northern Cardinal. Now you can support Conococheague Audubon Society by making a donation and selecting a hat! Three colors of the baseball-style cap are available – royal blue, khaki crown with royal blue bill, or khaki crown with charcoal bill. All caps are 6-panel, unstructured, low-profile garment-washed cotton, with a mesh lining and a tuck-away leather back strap and buckle. One size fits all. We're asking for a donation of \$20 to defray the cost. Come to a meeting to see the hats in person and select the ones you want. Decals depicting the new logo are also available.

Volunteer opportunities include Hospitality Chair and Conservation Chair; see page 2 for more information. Three officers are due to step down as well: Valerie Barnes from being President, Lisa Coombs from being Vice President, and Donna Hocker from being Treasurer. Please contact an officer ASAP with questions and/or to volunteer.

Good birding!



Least Sandpiper, taken on August 3 at Antrim Commons Ponds

Photo credit: Dave Cooney, Jr.



Killdeer, taken on July 27 at Antrim Commons Ponds

Photo credits: Dave Cooney, Jr.

Committee Chairs

by Valerie B Barnes

Many thanks to Ruth Barton and John Greer, chairs of our Hospitality and Conservation Committees. Both are stepping down, so we need someone else to step up! What's involved? In each case, you can tailor the role to be what works for you.

Traditionally, this is what the **Hospitality Chair** does:

- Welcomes visitors to our meetings and asks for contact information. Announces visitors toward the end of the meeting. Offers selected free handouts (e.g., Activities List, membership brochure, Norlo Park Garden brochure, Franklin County bird list, etc.) Offers Conococheague Audubon hats and decals for a donation. Provides any money collected to the Treasurer.
- Organizes the annual covered-dish dinner in January. Solicits volunteers to help set up and clean up.
- Submits an annual report and a proposed budget for the upcoming year.

Traditionally, this is what the **Conservation Chair** does:

- Keeps abreast of local, state, and national governmental policies and actions affecting the natural environment and conservation of natural resources. Informs our membership about selected issues at meetings and via the newsletter. Writes a conservation article for most issues of our *Naturally* newsletter. In recent years, the chair has chosen one or two issues and focused on those throughout the season, educating us about those issues in more depth.
- Writes letters, sends e-mails, and/or telephones public officials, representatives, and local newspapers, if comfortable doing so.
- Submits an annual report and a proposed budget for the upcoming year.

Please contact Val Barnes or Lisa Coombs to volunteer for either position. We need your help!



This Great Blue Heron found a good stick for building its nest.

Photo credit: Jim Hook

Chambersburg Area Connection

by Valerie B. Barnes

Conococheague Audubon is excited to partner with the Chambersburg Area Education Foundation (CAEF). Last season we offered a \$500 scholarship to a student. This season we're adding a \$500 "innovation grant" to a teacher. Our intent is to promote the conservation of wildlife and the environment by appreciating, studying, and observing nature.

Anne St. John is leading our connection with CAEF. She would like one or two folks to assist her in setting the detailed criteria for the grant and evaluating any scholarship or grant applications that are submitted. Also, we have the opportunity to name the scholarship or grant after someone. Any ideas? Please contact Val Barnes (717-352-4397) or Anne (631-495-3354) to volunteer or offer suggestions.



A Red-breasted Nuthatch

Photo credit: Dale Gearhart



What warbler is this?

Photo credit: Jim Hook

A Picture May Be Worth a Thousand Words, But Action Speaks Louder

by Jim Hook

I “pish” from the road. A small yellow bird pops out of the brush.

I take several pictures before the fluffball goes back into the thorns near Long Pine Reservoir. I have no idea what it is, but I know I can look it up later.

Identifying a bird you don’t know can be exhilarating and confusing. After several guidebook and computer searches, my bird photos take on a life of their own, like the symptoms you look up online when you aren’t feeling well. The bird, or disease you have, is whatever you just read.

That’s when you call the doctor. In my case, I email photos to the Doctor of Identification, Bill Oyler. I include images of the tail and coverts and note that the bird bobbed its tail. I make several stabs, including Common Yellowthroat and several warblers that haven’t started migrating yet.

Bill suspects that the bird is a newly fledged Common Yellowthroat due to its overall look and solid olive wings, plumage that seems to be more adult than the rest of the bird. His second and admittedly unlikely choice is a Hooded Warbler fledgling.

“Unless I am missing a species I’m not thinking of?” he says in his reply.

“Are you kidding?” I think. “Who am I to second-guess the Wizard of Birdology?”

But I can’t stop mulling over the tiny bird. In fact, Bill’s response encourages me to keep at it.

Leafing through a book on warblers a couple of days later, I stumble onto the fact that Prairie Warblers bob their tails. I look at the drawings and notice the similarity between a female Prairie Warbler and the vague patterns on the face and breast of the fledgling. But the coverts and olive wings don’t match.

I email Bill anyway.

“It’s definitely a match,” he says. “I didn’t give Prairie Warbler a thought, and I didn’t give the bobbing tail much thought,” Bill adds. “It matches the juvenile on my Sibley app almost perfectly. There is a comment: ‘This plumage, rarely seen, begins molt to first winter (plumage) within a few days of leaving nest.’ So you solved your own puzzle!”

Because of Bill’s encouragement, I now know that I saw something very special!



Barn Swallow, taken on August 3 on Wenger Rd

Photo credit: Dave Cooney, Jr.

The Beginning of the End of Summer

by Ron George

The weather is surprisingly mild for late July. The sun is out, but the humidity is down. Still, walking up a gentle grade is enough to make it feel hotter than it is, so I'm glad to stop at the top of the hill. As I turn to look at a small vernal pond, something skitters along the muddy edge just a few feet from where I stand—a bird!

I stop in my tracks, reach slowly for my binoculars, trying not to spook it. Once I tweak the focus knob, I realize that the bird is too occupied to fly. It is holding something wriggly that it flips and thrashes on the ground. The bird's streaky breast, white line above the eye, and slow pumping backside tell me it's a Waterthrush; the prominence of the eye line and the clear white throat tell me it's a Louisiana Waterthrush. I watch closely, hoping to see it carry off the food for its young so that I can add a confirmation code for the PA Breeding Bird Atlas, but instead, it gulps down its prey.

At this time of year, schoolkids will desperately insist that there's still an entire month left to summer. Meanwhile, the autumnal equinox is nearly two months away. Meteorologists and fashionistas will tell you that Labor Day marks the end of the season, but for the Louisiana Waterthrush, summertime has come and gone. "My, oh, my," I say to myself, "where does the time go?" It seems like just yesterday I was excited to see the first Waterthrush of the year, yet now they're ready to leave. Reminder to self: don't wait until fall for fall migration.

Having finished breakfast, it leaps into a low branch, hops to the other side of the trunk, and flies away. This bird will need a lot of energy for its trip to the tropics (whether the Caribbean, Central America, or the northern tip of South America). Knowing this, I suspect that it will soon return for "second breakfast," so I decide to wait.

I find a seat on a fallen limb that's more convenient than comfortable. Filtered sunlight passes through the trees on the opposite side, brightening the water with light green between the crystal-clear reflections of tree trunks and leafy branches. The combination of shadow and light is going to challenge my photography skills.

Luckily, I have time to fiddle with the camera settings while I wait.

Water striders dimple the water, sending out concentric rings. Ripples spread across the surface from unseen sources below. Tadpoles? It seems late in the season, but then I recall that bullfrogs take two years to mature and some frog species lay their eggs in mid-summer, unlike the spring peepers and other species that take advantage of the first warm spell to reunite the frog-choir. They signal the end of winter the way this Louisiana Waterthrush signals the winding down of summer.

I raise the camera, aim at the water, and click a couple of shots before checking the back of the camera. Too dark. I make adjustments. Still too dark. A more expensive lens would be brighter, but my only option now is to lower the shutter speed. One more test shot, still a little dark. I lower the speed again, though I worry about losing sharpness with such a long exposure. I hope the bird occasionally stops to pose, and I hope I can hold steadier than usual. That's assuming the bird comes back.

A sharp chip near the far side of the pond grabs my attention. A better birder might be certain, but that chip only makes me think, "maybe." Soon my *maybe* becomes a *YES!* The Louisiana Waterthrush re-emerges on the far side, where it walks in the mud, turning over leaves as it goes. While the bird moves closer, I realize how many obstacles threaten to intrude on my photo-op. A small tipped-up tree runs interference in three ways: roots jutting in the air, trunk blocking the left side of the pond, new branches spreading leaves like a veil.

As the bird moves closer and closer, I bend and stretch, leaning at obtuse angles, searching for an unobstructed view, holding my camera to my eye, and trying-trying-trying to stay as still as possible. The bird comes into focus, and I take a shot just after it hops out of sight. Through the tiny viewfinder, I watch it reappear closer than ever. I fire another shot, but the autofocus finds a leaf in the foreground that it likes better. Argh! I've been to this pond many times before and never noticed how "cluttered" it is.

Years ago, when I came here, I could walk a few steps toward the middle of the pond on a fallen tree to look for frog eggs and tadpoles. Now, after a rainy month or two, only a narrow, mossy causeway is left protruding slightly from the surface. I wouldn't dare to walk across it now,



This Louisiana Waterthrush is looking for breakfast.

Photo credit: Ron George

despite spending all that time on the balance beam in sixth grade gym class, but it's just the thing for a Louisiana Waterthrush.

As I follow the bird with my camera lens, it poses for a shot or two. It flips a leaf; I shoot. It becomes blocked behind a stem or leaf; I lean even lower, exhale, and shoot. The bird keeps moving, perfectly at home here, having found a good place to make a living; it's a nice niche. Occasionally, it finds something and stops to gobble it down before moving on. I follow through the viewfinder as it probes the shoreline, passing close in front of me on its way to the other side of the pond. I shoot every shot that I can before it flies off.

Later, I upload the photos, expecting to find a few good images among the many shots that I took. I look to see how many. Eighty-seven? How can that be? Some people assume that I just hold the shutter release button and cross my fingers, shooting shot after shot like a sports photographer in the end zone trying to get one perfect stop-action shot of that incredible touchdown catch, but in truth, I'm more selective. For one, my camera isn't that fast. Also, the more I take, the more time I have to spend on the computer sorting through photos, so I never take more than two at a time—though, apparently, they add up. Many photos will not make the cut, but in a way, photographing birds doubles the pleasure, doubles the fun. I see the bird in real time, and later, I see it again often with some nice surprises thrown in.

With this Waterthrush, the surprises that I

couldn't see in the viewfinder are the best shots. I flip through the photos, delete the duds, and set aside the better ones for closer scrutiny. Among some excellent shots of the bird looking into the water while a perfect mirror-bird looks back, I find two "Easter eggs," to use the parlance of our times. In the first, the bird is holding something long and smooth in its bill. I zoom closer and realize I was right—a tadpole! A few images later, I see the bird has gleaned something with a tiny leg too far back on the side of the body to be a tadpole—a salamander?! I can't say for sure what type of salamander, but I'm certain it's one of the coolest photos I've ever taken.

After sitting on that branch for so long, standing up again was a mini-triumph. Capturing a few surprising moments was an even greater victory. As always, being in the right place at the right time matters. But you never know where the right place is or when the time is right, so I keep looking, hoping to see something amazing like a Louisiana Waterthrush catching a salamander.



Salamander, just the thing for the Louisiana Waterthrush.

Photo credit: Ron George

It's the kind of thing that I don't see every day—that I couldn't see every day—the kind of thing that only happens at the beginning of the end of summer.

On the Record

by Sue Greer

Fifty-four participants took advantage of our nine field trips offered in Spring 2025. The observations are as follows:

The bi-annual field trip to Horse Valley was our first outing. Seventy-eight species, including eight species of warblers, were observed by 12 people. No new species were seen this year.

Seven participants saw a total of 43 species at Heisey Orchard and environs. Of the ten species of warblers recorded, seven were a first for this field trip: Tennessee Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Northern Parula, Cape May Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. A Brown Thrasher was also seen for the first time.



A young Red-Tailed Hawk stretches on a branch overseeing golfers at Caledonia Golf Course on June 16.

Photo credit: Jim Hook

Fifty-four species were seen by four participants during the Edenville area field trip. New species observed were American Coot and a Red-tailed Hawk. This was the first year in which no Whip-poor-wills were recorded.

At the Lehman's property, ten observers saw 35 species, including a Common Merganser for the first time.

Sixty-eight species were recorded by three observers on the Fort McCord area outing. Among the new species were a Bald Eagle, Broad-winged Hawk, American Kestrel, Swainson's Thrush, and Solitary Sandpiper.



A young Cedar Waxwing gets a lesson about flies at Furnace Run Park on June 1.

Photo credit: Jim Hook

This year's Beginning Birders Workshop recorded 35 species by nine participants, including three children. No new species were seen.

The field trip to South Mountain IBA with four participants yielded 48 species, including eight species of warblers. A Red-breasted Nuthatch was the only new species observed.

The final field trip was a walk along the Cumberland Valley Rail Trail in downtown Chambersburg. Five participants saw 30 species. New species observed were a Bald Eagle, a Tree Swallow, and a Cedar Waxwing.

Help Us Clean Up Our Adopted Highway: Make a Difference on Route 997!

from Event Coordinators
Joe and Vanessa Miller



Many Pennsylvanians are familiar with the slogan, 'Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful.' It is a thought and action that many of us keep in mind as we go out and about in our lovely state. Conococheague Audubon Society recently joined with PennDOT's Adopt-A-Highway program to, as a community, work together to keep our part of the state clear of litter. We are asking for volunteers to help support this worthwhile effort.

On September 27, 2025, we will be focusing on our adopted highway: A two-mile stretch of Route 997, running west from I-81 to Main Street in Scotland. (Two miles is the standard length in the program.) This portion of the road has wide shoulders, making it safer for our crew. You may volunteer to help clean up all or a portion of this section.

This is an excellent opportunity to make a tangible impact on our environment while connecting with fellow community-minded individuals. By taking part in this event, you will contribute to the cleanliness and aesthetic appeal of our roadways, enhancing the quality of life for everyone who travels this route.

The Adopt-A-Highway program is designed to foster community pride and environmental stewardship by encouraging volunteers to help



The white wing patch identifies this woodpecker rather than its head. The young Red-headed Woodpecker followed a parent to the peanut feeder near Shippensburg on July 29.

Photo credit: Jim Hook

maintain the beauty of our roadsides. This initiative not only keeps our highways cleaner but also reduces the cost of highway maintenance, making it a win-win for both the environment and taxpayers.

Why Participate?

- **Community Impact:** Your efforts will directly improve the appearance of a critical stretch of road, helping to create a cleaner, more inviting environment for residents and travelers alike.

- **Environmental Stewardship:** By removing litter and debris, you are playing a crucial role in protecting local wildlife and natural habitats.

Social connection: Join a team of like-minded volunteers who share your commitment to keeping Pennsylvania beautiful. It is a great way to meet new people and build community spirit.

Event Details

- **Date:** September 27, 2025
- **Time:** 9:00 a.m.

Meeting Location: Park-and-Ride at the intersection of I-81 and Route 997

To ensure your safety and comfort during the cleanup, we will provide safety training, gloves, safety vests, and trash bags. Refreshments will also be available to keep everyone energized and hydrated throughout the morning.

How to Sign Up

Ready to make a difference? Simply sign up by contacting our event coordinators Joe and Vanessa Miller at millerhouse@embarqmail.com or 717-377-6507 (Joe's cell). You may also sign up at our meeting on September 8, 2025. Your commitment to this cause will not only help beautify our community but also foster a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Join us on September 27th to roll up your sleeves and make Route 997 shine! Together, we can make a significant impact and show that when a community comes together, we create a cleaner, greener Pennsylvania for all.

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

September 1, 2025, Monday

FIELD TRIP

7:15 AM for FALL MIGRANTS. Meet at 7:15 AM at the Park & Ride, Scotland Exit 20, I-81 northbound. Field trip includes walking in wet grass at Heisey Orchard and other possible walks as we travel Michaux SF roads, with field trip ending by 1:00 PM. Bring binoculars and snack or lunch.

Bill Oyler, 717-360-5191, oylerbill@gmail.com.

September 8, Monday

BIRDING & MEETING

Birding at 6:00 PM, Program at 7:00 PM. Anyone wanting to bird before the meeting, please gather in the parking lot at St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church at 6:00 PM. Bring binoculars if you have them. The meeting will start, as usual, at 7:00 PM. Members Ron George and Tracy Snyder will wow us with excellent bird photos, birding insights, and their wonderful program - "*Bird is a Verb*" - terrific for beginning and experienced birders alike. Arranged by Valerie Barnes.

Sept. 27, Saturday

CONSERVATION CLEAN-UP

Adopt-A-Highway clean-up on 2 miles of Route 997 (Black Gap Road) west from I-81. Pick up trash on section with wide shoulders, easy walking. Supplies provided. Meet at 9:00 AM at Scotland Park & Ride, I-81 exit 20. Sign up with **Joe & Vanessa Miller**, 717-377-6507 (Joe), millerhouse@embarqmail.com.

October 13, Monday MEETING

6:45 PM Youth Contest Bird Photos & Lists due. 7:00 PM 5 *Years of Birding in our Mobile Home*, by Jeff and Sue Schmaltz. Arranged by Jeff Schmaltz.

November 10, Monday MEETING

7:00 PM Youth Contest Winners announced tonight. *Big Year 2024*, by Kyle Rambo. Arranged by Dave Ebbitt.

Check our website for updates and maps to all locations:

CAS WEBSITE: <https://conococheagueaudubon.org/>

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Send all newsletter articles and photos to the editor.

Send all mailing changes to conaudubon@outlook.com.

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