NATURALLY
THE CONOCOCHEAGUE AUDUBON SOCIETY

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A Willet caught a mole crab in the surf on the Outer Banks, N.C., in early September.

Photo Credit: Jim Hook

President's Corner

By Ron George

Don't you love Common Ravens? Their brash vocalizations can be heard over long distances, breaking the forest silence, compelling you to look to the sky for the source. If you're lucky, you might see one flying over. If you're really lucky, you might get to see them showing off their acrobatic abilities as they soar, swoop, dive, and even barrel-roll across the sky, all the while putting their American Crow cousins to shame. I once observed two Common Ravens playing a mid-air game of catch with a large white feather, releasing it, circling back to grab it, carrying it away, releasing it again. It was a wonderous moment that I had never seen before and haven't seen since.

When I experience one of these moments of amazement, I always look around for someone to tell, someone else to see what I'm seeing, someone call to, "Hey, look at that!" In her essay "The Other Leopold," Susan Rogers explains it this way: "birders, whatever our many failings, are generous in one particular way: we want others to see and hear what we have seen and heard. We want to share the beauty and wonders of the world."

That excitement for sharing the wonders of the bird world inspired me to lead a Beginning Birders Walk at Furnace Run Park in September. It was a great day, and I have to admit that I had as much fun as any of the beginners. We'll have to do that again sometime!

For many birders, appreciation for the "wonders of the world" isn't limited to birds. If you're one of the many people who appreciate the wonderous world of insects, November is the month for you. While most of our native insects are dormant at that time of year, Conococheague Audubon will liven things up with two insect-related programs. On November 9 at 7:00 Jill Zdunczyk of the Xerces Society will present "Protecting the Jewels of the Night – Firefly Education" at our monthly meeting.

Continued on page 4

Conservation corner



By Jim Hook

Greenways link parks and relationships

It's time to connect the green dots.

Parks and wildlands are no longer isolated pockets of nature. There's a conscious, concerted effort across the country to join them.

In our little corner of the universe, popular birding areas are getting joined – Big Spring Creek, Newville, to Dykeman Spring Nature Park, Shippensburg. Eventually the greenway in southern Cumberland County could link to Furnace Run Park or the Michaux or Tuscarora state forests.

Officials in Franklin County have a similar decades' old vision to eventually join the Chambersburg Rail Trail to Caledonia State Park.

Here's the important thing: Dirt has already been moved for the project in the Borough of Shippensburg. A grassroots consortium heads up the plan to link the Cumberland Valley Rail Trail to Dykeman park. The Friends of Shippensburg Community Parks was granted $26,000 -- $11,420 from the Appalachian Trail Community Conservation Collaborative and $15,000 from the South Mountain Partnership. Volunteers will do some of the work. Borough council has given its blessing.

Make no mistake, this is an urban walkway. Signs will be posted on existing sidewalks leading to Dykeman park with its widened paths and reconstructed pedestrian bridges.

Dykeman park is well known for its two small duck ponds straddling Dykeman Road, but three miles of seldom-used walking trails crisscross its 56 acres of wetlands and upland.

The Middle Spring Greenway, currently under construction in town, also will link to the walkway.

"The greenway movement will dominate the 21st Century and it will link together all major parks and open spaces into comprehensive networks of greenways and green spaces," according to the 20-year -old New England Greenway Vision Plan.

It's not a new idea. Frederick L. Olmsted planned "The Emerald Necklace," a greenway of parks around Boston in 1867, less than a decade after he co-founded Central Park in New York City.



Canada Goose and Redhead
The ponds are only a small part of Dykeman Spring Nature Park. The Shippensburg park will connect to other green spaces.
Photo Credit: Jim Hook

This brings us to a conundrum. The hope is that the paths along the creeks and through the woods will be popular. People will get exercise and enjoy the greenery.

The Walking Dykeman Trail currently is tagged with graffiti on a railroad underpass, a recent one-person camp and litter at a scenic footbridge. Will more visitors discourage such activities?

Birds, including a Belted Kingfisher, tolerate humans at relatively close quarters in Dykeman

park. Will they remain comfortable with more visitors and their pets?

Shippensburg area municipalities have tried and failed at regional approaches to parks and policing. Can Pennsylvania's local governments cooperate long enough to make a greenway plan work?

Stranger things have happened.

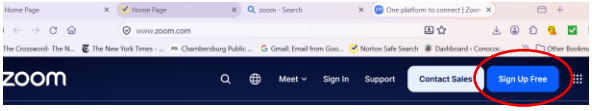
A network of greenways is getting a start in Shippensburg with help from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. Shippensburg isn't even a speck on valley landscape from the AT six miles away on South Mountain. The town is still farther from the Tuscarora Trail on North Mountain. The ATC designated Shippensburg as one of seven inaugural communities (including Gettysburg and Boiling Springs) that have their own plans for protecting natural resources and enhancing outdoor recreation economies. The wish is to sustain the character and identity of communities across the AT landscape.

How to Connect via Zoom

By Valerie B Barnes

For improved security, Conococheague Audubon Society has started to use the "waiting room" feature of Zoom. That means that we need to know who is trying to join one of our meetings. You must log in to your own Zoom account to identify yourself.

If you don't have a Zoom account, it's easy and free to set one up. Having a free Basic account lets you host your own meetings, up to 40 minutes and with 100 participants per meeting. To set up an account, visit Zoom.com and click on the Sign Up Free button in the upper right corner.



Next, you should see a screen that says Get Started with Zoom. Here you'll enter your birth year.

Next, you'll be asked to provide your email address. (Or, you can choose to access Zoom via SSO, Apple, Google, Facebook, or Microsoft. I didn't try those options, so I have nothing to say about them.) After you enter your email address, you'll receive an email message with a code. Enter that code. The next screen will show your first and last names (presumably associated with the email account you entered) and an empty box where you should enter a password for this Zoom account. The next screen asks for a phone number. I skipped that step. The next screen says Let's Text, trying again to get your phone number, and suggesting you upgrade to Zoom Workplace Pro. I "X"d out of that. And my account appears to be ready for use!

To join a CAS Zoom session, click on the link for the Zoom meeting that's in the email you received from ConAudubon. Note that if you can't find that email, you can visit the calendar event on our website to locate the Zoom link for the meeting you're trying to join. You may need to click Launch Meeting. If the host hasn't yet started the meeting, you will see a message that says "Waiting for the host to start this meeting'. While you wait, you'll have the opportunity to test your audio, video, and other settings. When the host is ready, you should be admitted into the waiting room.

We are still learning about this process and may not realize you are waiting (patiently ?) in the waiting room. If you feel as if we aren't noticing you, you may text Val Barnes at 717-504-2299 to alert us. If you give up, please let us know about your experiences by emailing ConAudubon@outlook.com.

President's Corner, continued from page 1.

Then on November 12 at 7:00 we present our first nature film of the season, *The Extraordinary Caterpillar*. Be prepared to be amazed and to learn about the vital role caterpillars play in our ecosystem. (Check the website for more details!)

Providing programs and leading bird walks are just two of the things we do at CAS. There are lots of volunteer opportunities for anyone who wants to help us share our appreciation for nature. For example, you could write about your birding experiences or share your photographs by submitting them to this newsletter! If you are interested in volunteering with any of our projects, contact conaudubon@outlook.com or reach out to one of our members.

We at CAS are fortunate to have many great volunteers. We have some great, experienced volunteers whose institutional knowledge and hours of service are essential to keeping CAS afloat. We also have some great newer volunteers who have stepped up to take leadership roles, proving that you don't have to "know it all"—you just have to be willing to learn. So be assured that if you want to be part of our team, we will find a way for you to contribute. You could even be vice-president! Thanks to all of our volunteers and donors for supporting Conococheague Audubon. Happy birding!

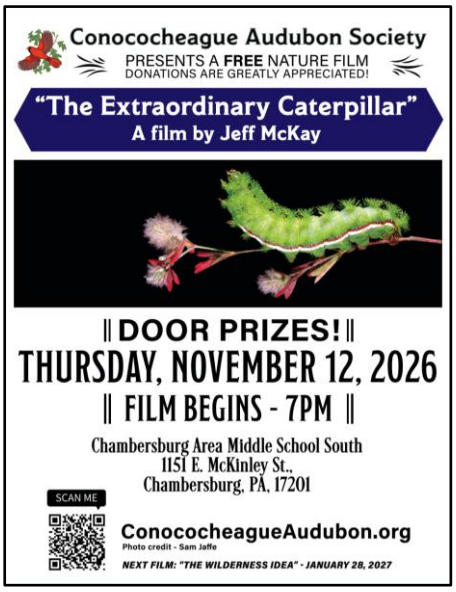
Annual Potluck Dinner

By Donna Hocker

Audubon's annual potluck dinner will be held January 11, 2027, at 6:00 PM at St Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church. Please bring your table setting (plate, napkin(s), silverware, glass and cup) and a dish to share.

We need help setting up and cleaning up. Contact Donna Hocker at dlhocker@yahoo.com if you can help.

You are invited to provide a thumb drive of your favorite bird pictures to be shown following the dinner. All are welcome, including spouses and friends.



Volunteer Hours Procedure

By Debby Hook

For the CAS Annual Report to National Audubon this year, Recording Secretary Debby Hook will be collecting records of volunteer hours and numbers of people engaged.

All CAS volunteers who gave time and took part in activities that engaged the public should track their hours and numbers from January 1 and submit them by the end of the year. You may submit early and estimate your expected time for the remainder of the year. Please send this by email to conaudubon@outlook.com and on the Subject line include the name Debby. Or you may contact Debby by voice or text at 717-372-0228, or you may give her your records at an upcoming meeting.

On the Record

By Sue Greer

Our final two field trips of the year took place in September. The first was to Heisey Orchard and several locations in Micheaux State Forest in search of fall migrants. Nine participants saw eleven species of warblers along with a Great Egret for the first time on this trip.

The second field trip was a new one to Furnace Run Park. Eighteen birders, 16 of them beginners, observed over twenty species!

And So It Begins

By Ron George

Some days the birds just don't cooperate. You arrive bright and early in a usually birdy place, armed with your binoculars and maybe even a camera, yet the birds manage to avoid being seen. They fly just before you lift your binoculars or land in the worst possible light, either the dimmest, darkest shade or right between you and the sun, an eclipse bird (and you know never to look into an eclipse!). On those days, no matter what you do, you can't get a good look, or worse, there's nothing to really look at—the migrants have all migrated and the local birds are taking a personal day. It can be frustrating, filling you with regret as you contemplate all the things you could have gotten done if only you had stayed home. Saturday, September 19, however, was **not** one of those days.

On this day, an enthusiastic band of sixteen beginning birders along with two equally enthusiastic experienced birders met at Furnace Run Park to practice basic birding skills. A few preliminary minutes were spent adjusting binoculars and getting a feel for focusing. There were even a few laughs when it was discovered that the cardboard-cutout birds that had been strategically placed for binocular practice weren't, in fact, real. Sorry, but birding isn't THAT easy. Or is it?

The first real bird of the day was spotted perched on a stop sign near the parking lot. A hawk! Yes, but what kind? A few beginners called out their guesses while the more experienced birders held their tongues, asking, "What do you notice about the bird?" This not only challenged the newer birders to observe first and identify later but also helped the trip leaders to stall for time while they pondered the immature bird's identity. As the bird disappeared behind the visitor's center, Red-tailed Hawk was suggested. "But it didn't have a red tail," one birder pointed out. Well, immatures don't. So, how do you tell? It was a great question and a great introduction to the challenges of birding, and for me, the challenges make birding fun.

Just as we were about to accept the sad reality that our first bird was going to remain unidentified, it returned and landed on a light pole in front of our intrepid band of birders. The bird posed for an extended examination, waiting patiently while everyone dialed in their binoculars. In fact, it lingered long enough to pass around a well-worn Peterson Guide so that everyone could note that the markings were clustered along the belly, but the upper breast was clear—indeed a Red-tailed Hawk.

This was a great start, but the birding wasn't always that easy. It never is. A couple of fall Cape May Warblers flitted and dodged through heavy foliage, challenging the beginners' binocular skills and their bird knowledge. There were few good looks and no real certainty about the ID among the beginners. Still, it was fun trying.

An ever-reliable Carolina Wren and some mewing Gray Catbirds allowed everyone to hear some common calls. For those who were listening closely, a cawing American Crow was an easy id to make, and when some raucous Common Ravens passed over a while later, the contrast was apparent. There's nothing like these experiences for helping beginners to develop their birding abilities and to make them eager for more.

The sun eventually came out, and the air began to warm. This brought several migrating Broad-winged Hawks into an open area over our heads. Participants were able to enjoy some gorgeous birds, to learn a bit about fall migration, and to recognize important field marks for identifying them.

Some slower times gave us a chance to observe bugs and butterflies, study the trees, admire wildflowers, and touch a few touch-me-nots. After all that, what more could you ask for? As we headed back toward the visitor center, someone called, "eagle" as a fully mature Bald Eagle glided like a dream across a field of goldenrod for everyone to see. It was a great show and a perfect capstone to a wonderful day.

For a few patient birders, there were more birds to come. As the last birders shuffled toward the parking area, a small, mixed flock of songbirds came to the roadside and gave a lucky few their first good look at a warbler, a Black-throated Green. There's a unique kind of joy in "discovering" something that's been there all along, and once you experience it, you just want more. Hearing that spark of excitement among the beginners, all I could think was, "and so it begins."

Local Christmas Bird Counts

By Lisa Coombs

Join local birders this December for one of two Christmas Bird Counts. CBCs help National Audubon assess the health of bird populations and guide conservation action. The two area counts are:

- **The 6th Buchanan Trail Franklin/Fulton Counties CBC on Tuesday, December 15, 2026**
- **The 67th Chambersburg Area Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 19, 2026**

How the count works. Volunteers work together to count every bird seen for these projects. You can start counting just after midnight on count day; owls sometimes sound off in the wee hours of the morning.

Each CBC is conducted in a designated 15-mile diameter circle. Area Leaders and Zone Captains organize volunteers in different sections of the circles, then collect their results and provide them to the compiler who collates the data and submits it to National Audubon. Note that if the weather forecast calls for severe weather, we may try to reschedule the count; your Area Leader or Zone Captain will contact you if that happens.

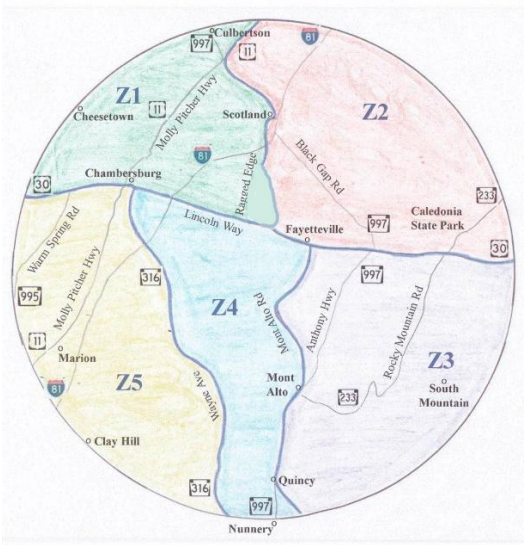
Contacts. Vern Gauthier is the compiler for the Buchanan Trail CBC in the western part of Franklin County and the eastern part of Fulton County; 717-385-9526 / verngauthier14@gmail.com. Vern requests that all new participants contact him by December 1.

Lisa Coombs is the compiler for the Chambersburg Area CBC; 715-602-2838 / lcoombs58@gmail.com.

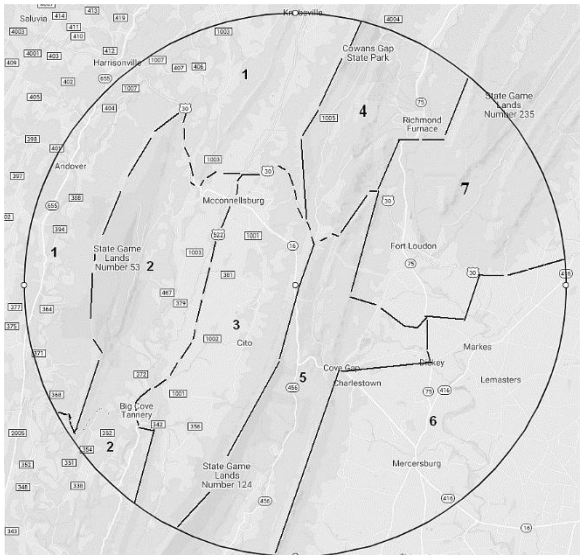
Resources and Forms. If you are new to the count, have a new phone number or email address, or if you live inside either circle and want to count birds at your feeder, please contact the compiler. If you've participated before, your Area Leader or Zone Captain should contact you after Thanksgiving. If you don't hear from them, contact the compiler and they will help you make the connection.

Forms used by observers for the Buchanan Trail Franklin/Fulton CBC will be provided by Vern Gauthier to Area Leaders and Feeder Counters.

Chambersburg Area CBC Circle



Buchanan Trail CBC Circle



Forms used by observers for the Chambersburg Area CBC will be available from the Zone Captains or downloaded from our website, conococheagueaudubon.org along with a detailed map of the circle. The forms will be accessible from the December 19 calendar page for the Chambersburg Area CBC event by late October.

Please help! You don't need to be a member of Audubon to participate. It's easy to sign up, and the length of time you count is up to you. The Christmas Bird Count is fun and you never know what you might

see. Make it a family affair! Contact the appropriate compiler today to join the count.

Support the CBC. National Audubon asks for donations to support the CBC. If you would like to donate toward the expense of the count, donations may be given to any Area Leader, Zone Captain, compiler, or the CAS treasurer. Please make your check out to CAS and note it is a donation for the CBC; mail to CAS, PO Box 20, Fayetteville, PA 17222. Audubon appreciates your support.

Conococheague Audubon's Two-Year Involvement with Pennsylvania's Adopt-A-Highway: Reflections

By Vanessa Miller

September 2026 marked two years since the inaugural of CAS's involvement with Pennsylvania's Adopt-A-Highway cleanup program. Many thanks go to former Conservation Chair John Greer for coordinating our group's tie to the program.

Collecting trash from our Pennsylvania roadways helps not only to improve the appearance and safety of the roads but also to protect our wildlife and waterways.

To date, Conococheague Audubon volunteers have collected a total of 146 bags of trash to keep the 2-mile stretch of Route 997 clean and safe.

On Saturday September 26, we had a small yet mighty group of dedicated volunteers who covered the entirety of the two miles; collecting 13 bags of trash with the addition of a shed door, a 5-gallon bucket, and a foam mattress.

A heartfelt thanks to Rhetta Martin, Debby Stitely, and Joe Miller for gathering on that glorious autumn day to help keep Pennsylvania beautiful. An additional thank you to Debby for doubling as both driver and trash pick-up team member.

Our next clean up event is Saturday, March 27, 2027 at 9:00 AM. We hope to see you there!

EXPEDITION:

At Home in Franklin County

By Debby Hook

Mystery and anticipation attend Christmas Bird Count morning when participants ponder: Which local birds will we find foraging in trees, resting on ponds, soaring overhead, or going gourmet at backyard feeders? What surprises are in store as we explore their winter territories?

A great opportunity for recording bird activity awaits us on December 19 in the Franklin County CBC area of Five Forks, off PA 316, and you **need not be an expert birder** to help.

With life changes for several prior volunteers, just three hardy *bird* counters now drive the CBC region between Grindstone Hill Road and Wayne Road. This area includes Hades Church Road, Helman Road, Murray Road, Rockhill Road, and Green Corner Road – a section of which has offered fine views of Northern Harriers gliding in for a landing!

For those who like to get out and walk, we have foot access to five properties, thanks to our youngest member, Ian Hess. These farmlands consistently produce a Cooper's Hawk and Horned Larks by the dozens. We've counted all seven species of woodpeckers, and recently, a Peregrine Falcon.

New participants may ride with our drivers to get a feel for the territory.

Those interested in a close-to-home expedition should contact Chambersburg Area CBC Compiler Lisa Coombs at 715-602-2838 or lcoombs58@gmail.com.



Road Crew 1 Vanessa, Rhetta, Debby
Photo Credit: Debby Stitely

Bluebird Angels Allay Heat and House Sparrows

By Jim Hook

Bluebirds need more than nest boxes to replenish their numbers. They need someone to watch over them.

Twenty-two volunteers from the Conococheague Audubon Society babysit nest boxes on three trails in Franklin County. Nearly 200 Eastern Bluebirds fledged this season from those 77 boxes around the Antrim Township Park, the golf courses at Penn National Golf Community, and Caledonia State Park.

The local effort is partly responsible for the bluebird's slow recovery throughout most of its range.

The numbers of bluebirds in North America nosedived between 1920 and 1970. Their habitat was felled for development and more efficient farming. Non-native birds won the battle to nest in the remaining tree cavities. Pesticides ruined eggs.

Conservation groups answered the alarm with bluebird-recovery projects – namely, bluebird trails. Since 1966, Pennsylvania's Easten Bluebird population has more than tripled, according to the USGS North American Breeding Bird Survey. The International Union for Conservation of Nature lists the bright blue and red bird as a "Species of Least Concern."

But the challenges for bluebirds are not vanishing. House Sparrows must be discouraged, ants dusted with diatomaceous earth, and predator guards installed. Weather extremes have become an increasing concern.

"Climate change has presented big challenges for the cavity-nesting birds on these trails," said Dorian Runt, who manages the Penn National bluebird trail. "In a nest box, especially those in the all-day sun, the temperature can quickly rise to a lethal 107 degrees F. The chicks cannot survive in this situation."

She and her husband, Lynn, widened the vent slots under each nestbox roof to allow more circulation. Trail monitors stuff packing foam in the slots for the duration of sudden cold spells.

"We discovered the concept of providing heat shields for the nest boxes, especially those in all-day sun," Dorian said. "The shield can serve as a raised roof three inches above the existing roof. The air space between the two roofs keeps the temps lower and provides additional shading."



Bluebird Hatchlings **Photo Credit: Jim Hook**

Richard Bell created the Antrim Township bluebird trail in 2025. He mounted 20 bluebird boxes and made use of another four that were once part of an Eagle Scout project. The boxes installed by Boy Scouts had not been monitored in years and were packed with House Sparrow nests. Bell has checked the trail weekly. Three of the scout boxes fledged 24 bluebirds this year.

Humans have the potential to be bluebird house wreckers.

"I wrote notes on boxes asking folks not to disturb the bluebird homes or flags, the 'sparrow spookers,'" Bell said.

A bluebird box was vandalized this summer on the Caledonia Golf Course, according to Jim Hook, manager of the Caledonia trail.

"Bluebirds become accustomed to humans, but I notice they avoid nestboxes where there is too much activity," Hook said. "Caledonia doesn't contend with extreme heat because tall pine trees shade most of the boxes for part of the day.

We don't have House Sparrows. We do have hawks, and my wife was surprised to find a garter snake curled up on a House Wren nest in a box."

Attempting to defuse territorial disputes between bluebirds and Tree Swallows, Dorian Runt is trying paired boxing at Penn National. Bluebirds and Tree Swallows can live peacefully as neighbors just 20 feet apart, with more paired boxes about 250 feet away.

"A bluebird trail can be very labor intensive," she said, "but we're fortunate to have monitors who work as a team and have fun supporting the important cause of bluebird conservation. Since each monitor tends to stay with their original loop on the trail, they are witness to each stage of development in the life and times of the bluebirds. It's very rewarding to realize that you have made a difference for such an incredible species."

The bluebirds are expected back in April, and volunteer monitors are wanted. Contact a bluebird trail manager near you for more information:

- Dick Bell, about the Antrim Township trail: 16sdbell16@gmail.com, 240- 675-2105.
- Dorian or Lynn Runt, about the Penn National trail: adamsmail@centurylink.net, (717)352-2069, (717) 360-6210.
- Jim Hook, about the Caledonia trail: jimbhook@gmail.com, 717-262-5865.



Bluebird eggs **Photo Credit: Jim Hook**

Bird Books vs. Online Resources

By Bob Keener

I still like the feel of the book in hand, turning pages, looking at color prints and helpful indexes. The difficult part is carrying them to the field when birding because of bulk and weight. On the other hand, Merlin, eBird and other apps have become easy-to-transport resources right on our cell phones.

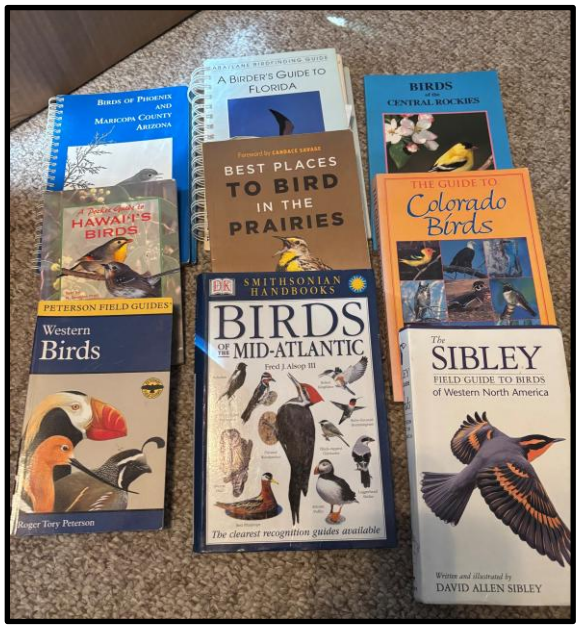
Recently, my wife Rhoda and I have been down-sizing and sorting out books to give away.

I've accumulated many over the years when traveling in the US or internationally, but other birders may yet be looking forward to traveling to some of these places. Here's for the taking.

I've divided them into 5 categories:

1. United States regions, including Hawaii.
2. Africa and Asia
3. Central and South America
4. About birds including trivia
5. All nature identification

Books will be available FREE of charge at our regular meeting on November 9.



A small sample of FREE bird books from Bob Keener

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

November 9, Monday **MEETING**
7:00 PM *Protecting the Jewels of the Night - Firefly Education,* by Jill Zdunczyk of the Xerces Society. Arranged by Leslie Cerf.

November 12, Thursday at CAMS **FILM**
7:00 PM *The Extraordinary Caterpillar*, Home Grown National Park. This film follows the scientists and community activists with this peek into the dazzling world of nature's tiniest superheroes. Door prizes.

December 14, Monday **MEETING**
7:00 PM *Birds of Malaysia and Philippines,* by Jeanne Verhulst, presented via Zoom. Arranged by Janet Tice.

December 15, Tuesday **CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT**
All day, Franklin/Fulton Counties (PABT). **Vern Gauthier**, 717-385-9526, verngauthier14@gmail.com.

December 19, Saturday **CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT**
All day, Chambersburg area (PACH). **Lisa Coombs**, 715-602-2838, lcoombs58@gmail.com.

Check our website for updates and maps to all locations:
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