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Merit Awards and Certificates Presented in December

by Debby Hook

The 2021 Meritorious Service Awards and Certificates of Recognition were presented December 14, 2020, at the start of the virtual monthly meeting.

Two members earning Meritorious Service Awards for exceptional effort were Valerie Barnes and Janet Tice, who updated our stagnant, aging website. Selections from their awards read as follows:

For Janet Tice: “This year, she ,, gave our chapter the gift of a highly interactive, visually exciting website. Janet took time from a busy schedule to learn and apply new skills that benefit visitors to our site. As our web maintainer, she keeps our schedule current and presents a changing display of lovely bird photos.”

For Val Barnes: “A crowning achievement this year was the enormous effort she ... put forth to assemble our chapter’s new, colorful, interactive website – one that we expect will make a huge difference in our online “traffic.” I can’t express enough gratitude for the countless hours Val put into this accomplishment.”

The two women were acknowledged for other recent achievements.**

Four Certificates of Recognition for outstanding service to Conococheague Audubon were presented to:

Ken Higley – for giving of his time and sharing the use of his Jetpack to allow pre-meeting practice Zoom sessions as we became acquainted with virtual meetings. He also provided some ideas and insight during his time on the board of directors.

Carl and SueAnn Sarvis – for remaining “loyal, quiet helpers for many years” in Conococheague Audubon’s Norlo Park Native Plants Garden. Josh Donaldson, garden chairman, said, “They must work early mornings because they’re never seen there.” SueAnn also is a bluebird trail monitor.

Joyce Stuff – for advice, ideas, and reams of information regarding our ailing bluebird trail when poison ivy, black-legged ticks and more threatened to shut it down. Stuff, an officer with the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania, lent the support that helped us restart the trail this March.

Chapter President Terri Kochert – for providing the leadership that is keeping us afloat throughout the pandemic. Terri has taken reins in hand to rearrange schedules, purchase a new sound system, and prepare us for a new way of doing

Merit Awards, continued on page 5, bottom of col. 2.



“Winter Feast for Flocks” Does Well at Festival of Trees

This themed wreath, decorated by Valerie Barnes, Marguerite Fries and Debby Hook for Franklin County Visitors Bureau’s “Festival of Trees,” sold for \$50, the third highest bid among the ten wreaths on display for the event.

Happy Holidays to all from the Conservation Conversation (CC)

by Jim Hardy

In this edition we will discuss some conservation ideas and practices associated with the year-end holidays. Before we begin with our new material, I want to follow up with some information concerning our last conversation.

First, how many of you counted the number of letters in the word conservation? Twelve, right? Just checking. Also, I received several responses from you concerning conservation practices at home. Here is a list:

1. Recycling trash items like cans, plastic, paper, and cardboard
2. Recycling metal products
3. Insulating the hot water heater
4. Creating a rain garden to catch and contain runoff
5. Composting food scraps
6. Removing invasive and non-native plants
7. Planting bird-loving flowers, shrubs and trees
8. Filling water bottles at home and not buying water in plastic bottles
9. Installing bird feeders, bird baths and bird houses
10. When permitted, using your own grocery bags instead of the store's plastic bags
11. Advocating for conservation practices in the community to the public and government representatives

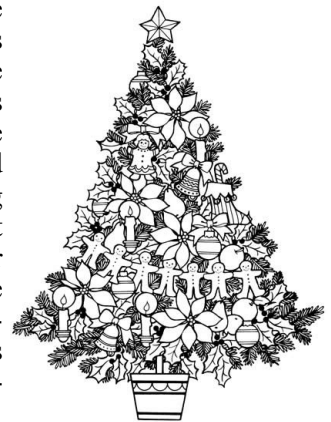
Once you commit an act of conservation, you become a conservationist. That's 15 letters. My good ole 1975 Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedia Dictionary defines conservationist as: "One who advocates conservation of natural resources." As you can see from the list above, with just a little effort, you, too, can be a conservationist. "Jim Hardy, Citizen Conservationist" I like it. Try it with your name.

The Christmas holiday is upon us. It has been a long-standing tradition to adorn one's home with a Christmas tree. If you are one of the many who erect a tree, you basically have three options. You can purchase an artificial tree, which is reusable and will last many years. This option requires the least amount of effort.



Option 2 is to purchase a live tree that has its root bulb. This tree can be planted after it has finished its duties as a Christmas tree.

Finally, there is the fresh-cut tree. You can buy a fresh-cut tree or do what I am doing today, venture into the woods (or meadow) to cut your own. This is now a 36-year-long tradition for my wife and me. The tree must be a cedar tree. Hey, I don't make the rules on this one. When the time comes to take down the tree, I drag it to the bird feeder station to provide additional cover for the birds. Birds have actually hidden in it to avoid the prowling Cooper's Hawk; however, one year the Cooper's Hawk hid in the downed tree and waited in ambush. I am reusing the tree and allowing it to serve a purpose for conservation. Please note that the tree-cutting option requires the planting of a replacement tree.



There are other options for these discarded trees that allow them to be used for conservation. Popular Mechanics lists 7 ways to reuse or recycle your Christmas tree.

1. Recycle your tree by taking it to a Christmas tree recycling center. Often, these trees are ground up for mulch.
2. Cut it up for firewood.
3. Mulch the needles in your own yard. The needles won't collect mold and they decompose slowly.
4. Make DIY coasters or flower bed borders by cutting the trunk into discs.
5. Create fish food and habitat. Trees can be put into ponds or lakes. Pine or spruce provide a natural, decomposing habitat for fish and will attract algae for them to eat.
6. Dune restoration. Old Christmas trees can help fight beach erosion and restore sand dunes.
7. Grind the tree up in a woodchipper and use as mulch.

And an addition from Boy Scout experience: old Christmas trees can also be used by farmers to help curb storm water runoff erosion in the fields.

Stay safe out there and enjoy the winter months. In our next edition we will discuss conservation advocacy.

BIRD BEHAVIOR: I Want to Know ... how can I identify local chickadees?

by Debby Hook

Time was when a Franklin County birder could stroll through a winter woods, listen to the hoarse “dee, dee, dee,” and nod, “Yep, Black-capped Chickadee.”

That certainty is no longer the case. Over the decades, the overlap zone of Black-capped Chickadees and Carolina Chickadees has moved north and west of us, CAS field trip leader Bill Oyler told me a couple years ago. We now live in a chickadee “hybrid zone.” Because the two species are known to interbreed, identification becomes a lot more difficult.

Bill said there *are* times we can know for sure—whenever an irruption of the slightly larger Black-capped Chickadees from Canada occurs. “This winter,” he added, “happens to be one of those years.”

The following facts from the article “How to Identify Chickadees,” by Eirik A. T. Blom, may explain why we can no longer comfortably distinguish the two:

Size: The sizes of both species are somewhat variable, and for many birds it is not a useful characteristic. (The Black-capped Chickadee has a proportionally larger tail; banders can almost always tell which is which by calculating the ratio between the length of wing and the length of tail.)

Breast: On average, the border between the black bib and the pale gray chest is more ragged on Black-capped Chickadees. This border ... is almost always a neat, straight line on Carolina Chickadees. This is not always an easy characteristic to assess, and it should be used with caution.

Face: It has been suggested that the size of the white face patch may be useful in separating the two; (but) in fact, the size of the face patch may vary even between individual Black-capped Chickadees.

Behavior: It has been suggested that Black-capped Chickadees tend to feed closer to the ground than Carolina Chickadees. Could be. I have seen that happen, but I have also seen Black-capped Chickadees up high and Carolina Chickadees down low.

Song: The song of the Black-capped Chickadee is described as a two-noted whistle, and the song of the Carolina Chickadee as a four-noted whistle. On



The white edges on this bird's coverts (shoulder feathers) identify it as a Black-capped Chickadee, discovered in Val Barnes' backyard.
Photo Credit: Valerie Barnes

the breeding grounds, those descriptions hold true most of the time, but the birds don't typically sing in winter. Some Carolina Chickadees sing two-note songs. Some Black-capped Chickadees sing four-note songs. Some

of both sing three-note songs. To make matters worse, they imitate each other.

White in the Wings: The real difference ... shows in the greater coverts, the feathers on the shoulder of the folded wing.

On Black-capped Chickadees, the edges ... are broad and very white. On fresh Carolina Chickadees, the edges are often gray rather than white; they are not as broad, do not contrast as sharply with the edge of the wing, and are usually a little darker than the white stripe on the back.



This Carolina Chickadee in Val Barnes' backyard has only gray coverts (shoulder feathers).
Photo Credit: Valerie Barnes

Call: Both Carolina Chickadees and Black-capped Chickadees regularly give the dee-dee-dee call, and the number of notes can vary from one or two to a dozen ... In Carolina Chickadees, the call is usually rapid and somewhat high-pitched. In Black-capped Chickadees it is noticeably slower and hoarser, and the difference between the two is easy to recognize with practice. The one caution is that when birds are agitated, the calls of both species tend to speed up and sound slightly higher-pitched.

Blom concludes, “If local research establishes that you are within 25 miles of the point where the two species come into contact, it is impossible to put an exact name on the birds you are seeing. Many, and perhaps most, of the birds in that zone are the result of hybridization.”

Adapted with permission from Bird Watcher's Digest, birdwatchersdigest.com.

But this winter, examine chickadees closely to see if some look more like Black-capped Chickadees (visiting from the North) than Carolina Chickadees!

Birds Irrupt (Volcanos Erupt)

by Valerie Barnes

There is lots of news this year about “irruption.” No, it’s not spelled wrong. We say birds “irrupt” when unusually large numbers of normally northern species join us for the winter. In years past we’ve seen Snowy Owls in the area. This year we are seeing many Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins and a few later-than-usual Purple Finches. A Common Redpoll was at my feeders for several days in late November and early December.

Common Redpoll at feeder 2020-11-26.

Photo Credit: Valerie Barnes



What causes birds to come south in larger numbers? It varies with the species. If Snowy Owls have good breeding success, the youngsters seem to come south in search of food in the winter because their parents control the original feeding locations. According to Tyler Hoar’s 2020-2021 Finch Forecast (<https://finchnetwork.org/winter-finch-forecast-2020>), the Evening Grosbeak’s “breeding population appears to be increasing in Eastern Canada westward to Manitoba due to increasing outbreaks of spruce budworm with large severe outbreaks in eastern Quebec.” (The spruce budworm is a native destructive pest of spruce-fir forests in North America.) So, the Evening Grosbeaks are breeding more successfully in Eastern Canada, based on the availability of spruce budworms, and that seems to be bringing them to our area for the first winter in decades.

Evening Grosbeak at Caledonia feeder on 2020-11-19.

Photo Credit: Bob Keener



Several Grosbeaks have been seen almost daily

since mid-November at the feeder on the east side of the Visitor’s Center at Caledonia State Park. They are partial to Black Oil Sunflower seed.

Purple Finches also benefitted from the spruce budworm availability during breeding season, so there are more of them, too. They like sunflower seed, sunflower kernels, and nyger seed.



Purple Finch at feeder on 2020-12-04.
Photo Credit: Valerie Barnes

According to Hoar’s forecast, Pine Siskins are expected to move south looking for food this winter. I’ve had upwards of 100 Siskins many days in my backyard for a few weeks. They like sunflower kernels and nyger seed.



Pine Siskins at feeder on 2020-10-14
Photo Credit: Valerie Barnes

While not an irruptive species, there has also been a Townsend’s Solitaire feeding on juniper berries near the Visitor’s Center at Caledonia State Park.



Visiting Townsend’s Solitaire at Caledonia.
Photo Credit: Dave Cooney

So, it’s a good season to get out and see some unusual visitors! Sign up for eBird alerts to receive an email when rarities are reported.

CAS Youth Birding Contest Winners Announced

by Jim Hook

Conococheague Audubon Society's second annual youth birding contests attracted new faces in 2019-20 despite the restrictions to contain COVID-19.

Jefferson Shank was one of the new entrants, and the 14-year-old from Greene Township earned the top prize in both contests.

Jefferson, the son of Edwin and Dawn Shank, won first prizes in the Best Bird Photo Contest and the Longest Bird List Contest. He took his winning shot of a Black and White Warbler on Stillhouse



Jefferson Shank's first-prize-winning shot of a Black and White Warbler.

Photo credit: Jefferson Shank

Hollow Road with a Canon Power Shot G3X. He tallied 180 different species on his list of birds. He saw most of them locally over a period of 10 months.

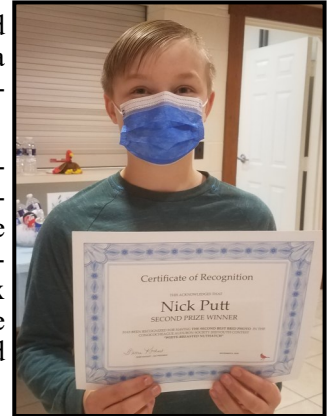
"It is thrilling to see such determined and passionate young bird watchers who are so excited about seeing birds," said Terri Kochert, Conococheague Audubon president. "It is equally fulfilling to see such talented photographers among our youth. I congratulate them all for their hard work."

The CAS President presented the two first prizes, awards of \$50 each, to Jefferson Shank on Monday, Nov. 9, during the group's regular meeting at the Norlo Park Community Center. She also awarded cash prizes for second and third place winners.

Brothers Nick and Gabe Putt, sons of Terry and Marina Putt of Chambersburg, placed in the photography contest. Nick Putt, 10, snapped a photo of a White-breasted Nuthatch on a feeder in June to

win the \$35 second place prize, using a Sony Cyber-Shot DSC-H1.

Gabe Putt, 14, also photographed a White-breasted Nuthatch three months later in his backyard. He used a Lumix DC-FZ80 camera. He was awarded the third place prize of \$25.



Cash Monn, 14, son of Abram and Anya Monn of Greencastle, won the \$35 second place in the birding list contest with 72 species. He noted his sightings for more than six months in Greencastle and at the beach.

Third place prize winner Taylor Bricker, 11-year-old son of Robert and Shelly Bricker, Chambersburg, recorded seeing 42 species. He saw local birds on Jacks Mill Road and in Gettysburg over a period of nearly nine months.

The entrants had nearly a year to take photos or to identify birds for Conococheague Audubon's second annual contests. The contests were open to youth, ages five to 18, living in the Franklin County region. Photographers submitted up to three 5-by-7 pictures. Birding list entries were affirmed by a contestant's parents.

"I encourage the young birders to continue looking for and photographing birds," Kochert said. "I hope they all participate again next year."

Merit Awards, continued from page 1.

business. She is deftly handling the CAS administration in this remarkable year.

Finally, I want to unofficially recognize **all of you** who took part in the ConAudubon email conversations in April and May during our COVID-19 "lockdown." You shared photos of owls and songbirds; you shared stories and linked us to websites outside our chapter. You kept up our spirits with the sights and sounds of outdoors. You made my day with each thread that I passed on to all our members. Now, with a new Facebook page, I hope you continue to share your birding experiences.

**Find the complete text of each 2021 Meritorious Service Award and Certificate of Recognition on our website at <https://conococheagueaudubon.org/?p=1768>.

MEETINGS – Free, held in the Community Center at Norlo Park,

FIELD TRIPS – Free, most take place on Saturdays. Contact the leader in advance if you plan to go. Times listed are departure times; please arrive early. If you cannot go on a scheduled trip, contact leader for a potential mid-week option on his/her scouting trip.

Cancelled activities are omitted from this list.

January is National Bald Eagle Watch Month

Jan. 2, 2021, Sat. CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT
All day, Newville area. **Vern Gauthier**, 717-385-9526 or verngauthier14@gmail.com

Feb. 8, Monday MEETING
7:00 PM *Birds of the Far North: An Icelandic Adventure*, by John Greer. Arranged by Bob Kochert.

Feb. 19, 20, 21, Fri.-Sun. FIELD TRIP
Blackwater NWR, Maryland, auto tour for WATERFOWL. Leave from Martins' home at 6:00 PM Friday. Bring scopes, binoculars, CBs and lunch. Make your own motel arrangements. **Eric and Rhetta Martin**, 717-597-8675.

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

March 8, Monday MEETING

7:00 PM *Homeland Security: Native Trees Are A Bird's Refuge* by Scott Willard. Arranged by Jim Hook.

March 9, Tuesday FIELD TRIP
5:45 PM Tentative outing for WOODCOCKS at Heisey Road orchard. Meet at the Park & Ride, Scotland, Exit 20, I-81 northbound. Bring flashlights. **Bob Kochert**, 717-263-3692.

Note: Activities are still tentative due to COVID-19.
Check our website for updates:
www.ConococheagueAudubon.org

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