



Kingfisher Courier

Newsletter of Appalachian Audubon Society

December 2012/January 2013

December 13

Second Annual AAS Holiday Social

Join us on December 13th for this merry evening that will include music, food, games, and plenty of time to visit with fellow Audubon members and friends.

Make and take a pine cone birdfeeder, taste a variety of holiday treats, participate in a bird quiz, bid on some great silent auction items, or just enjoy a photo display of some of our events of the year to date. The ever-charming and entertaining Paul Zeph will again be our emcee.

You are welcome to bring a favorite snack of your own to share, but that is not necessary. This special event will run from 7:00-9:00 P.M.—arrive and leave when you wish.

We hope to see YOU there!



January 17

The Fall and Rise of the American Chestnut

The American chestnut tree was once the dominant tree species across the east and considered more important than the oaks we have today. Growing over 100 feet tall and more than 4 feet in diameter, this majestic tree provided not only great forest and wildlife benefits but also provided a way of life for residents throughout the Appalachian Mountains and beyond.



Sadly, an exotic blight attacked in 1904, and by 1950 over 4 billion American chestnut trees were dead and the species was all but eradicated.

Tim Eck, President of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation, will tell us about one of the most exciting restoration projects in recent history, giving hope that the American Chestnut can make a comeback and survive in perpetuity.

This American Chestnut was found last summer in the Michaux State Forest by Annette Mathes while she was out birding. Annette had attended a training session to identify American Chestnuts earlier in the year, so when she saw this tree she took measurements and sent a sample of the leaves and buds to the PA Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation. It turned out to be one of the larger living chestnut trees in the state, and its nuts are now being used in the PATACF's backcross breeding program.

Program location and driving directions for both programs are on the back page.

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President's Perch

Annette Mathes

Wow!

What an amazing fall birding season this has been! Even before "Frankenstorm" hit, birders were counting surprising numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches, Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, and White-winged and Red Crossbills. Evening Grosbeaks, which according to Cornell University's [eBird](http://ebird.org) (ebird.org) are making their largest eastward push in fifteen years, have been showing up at feeders everywhere.

Things got really crazy when the powerful and far-reaching winds of Sandy blew migrating birds off course all over the Atlantic. Seabirds turned up inland on the East Coast in unprecedented numbers, as you can read in Ramsay's account of the Susquehanna River (see page 4). As I write this, at least a dozen Northern Lapwings have been blown over from Europe across the Atlantic and have been found in New Jersey and other parts of the northeast. eBird predicts that these birds will stay around a while, and anywhere that Killdeer occur in the East should be checked



Northern Lapwing
Internet photo—Goran Bength

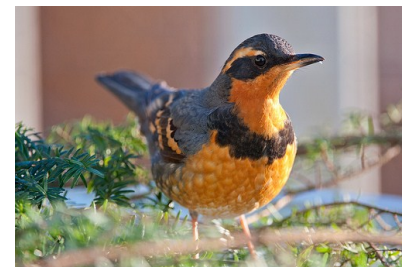
for Northern Lapwing this fall and winter. Boy do I ever want to see one of these birds!



Sue Strassner photographed these Evening Grosbeaks at her feeders last month.

On November 11 I had some excitement of my own. Cumberland County compiler Vern Gauthier guided Kathy Kuchwara, Sue Strassner, and me on a scouting trip of our Christmas Bird Count territory for the new "York Springs" CBC circle, which Vern created just this year. We made a stop on Tanger Road near Boiling Springs. As we walked along the road that went through the woods, I caught sight of a few birds flying into a tree. Just as I was getting my binoculars focused on a bird that seemed like an unusual robin, I heard Vern exclaim, "It's a Varied Thrush!" What a gorgeous bird! We all got good, long looks, but it flew off after just a couple of minutes and hasn't been seen again. Although one or two of these birds of the Pacific Northwest often show up somewhere in the Northeast every year, it was a first for me!

As someone who spent most of my life just birding in the backyard, all of this is hard for me to comprehend. I'm sure I don't have the same perspective as an experienced birder on this history-making year, but I am in awe. And I plan to keep my eye out for those Lapwings!



Varied Thrush
Internet Photo Roger Golub

Bird Blog

The Big Sit.

Ramsay Koury

October 14, 2012

Every year in mid-October many birders participate in what has become known as the "Big Sit." The rules are simple: you find a favorite location and sit there for as long as you please, from a short time to 24 hours, on the given day. You then record the number of bird species you see or hear during that time period. This year our Fearless Leader, President Annette Mathes, convinced me to do the Big Sit with her.

I have never been much of a Big Sitter, usually preferring to hike or visit a number of good spots in a day, but the location sounded somewhat interesting, so I decided to give it a try. On October 14 we traveled to an observation point off Meadows Road, northwest of Newville in western Cumberland County. The particular spot where we sat had a great view of the Kittatinny Ridge to north and a fairly nice view to the south as well.



The Meadows Road Big Sit

We drove separately as I expected to be bored fairly quickly and was sure that Annette would want to stay much longer than I. No one likes to admit they were wrong, but I was really wrong in this case! From the beginning it was obvious that this would be a very interesting day. We began our count at 7:30, shortly after sunrise, and we were soon seeing and hearing birds as they flew over. Robins and Blue Jays were some of the early flyers, but soon we began detecting groups of finches overhead. In the next 2 hours we counted 102 Purple Finches and 121 Pine Siskins! There has been a huge southbound flight of both of these finches this fall.

By 10:00 or so the finch show was about over, but the second act was even better. We began seeing migrating raptors moving along the nearby ridge. At first we saw mostly Sharp-shinned Hawks, but our first immature Golden Eagle was really exciting. We saw two more Golden Eagles and five Bald Eagles! Two Peregrine Falcons

made quick flybys as did a nice variety of other raptors. A group of six Common Ravens riding the thermals and calling was very entertaining. At the end of the day we enjoyed watching several Sharp-shinned Hawks pin their wings back and dive into the pines to roost for the night.



Common Ravens can be distinguished from crows by their size and wedge-shaped tail. Internet photo

It turned out to be a superb day. We finally left at 5:00, only because we did not want to walk back to the cars in the dark! Watching migration in progress is a fascinating part of birding. At least 95% of the 908 birds we saw were actually migrating past our location. Our list:

Rock Pigeon 2	Red-bellied Woodpecker 1	Golden-crowned Kinglet 4
Mourning Dove 1	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 1	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 1
Turkey Vulture 21	Northern Flicker 3	American Robin 129
Black Vulture 4	Downy Woodpecker 1	Cedar Waxwing 27
Osprey 2	Fish Crow 2	Yellow-rumped Warbler 3
Bald Eagle 5	American Crow 15	Warbler species? 1
Golden Eagle 3	Common Raven 12	Eastern Towhee 1
Sharp-shinned Hawk 281	Blue Jay 83	Dark-eyed Junco 2
Cooper's Hawk 12	Tufted Titmouse 1	Northern Cardinal 1
Northern Goshawk 1	Black-capped Chickadee 2	Purple Finch 102
Red-tailed Hawk 46	White-breasted Nuthatch 2	Pine Siskin 121
American Kestrel 1	Red-breasted Nuthatch 2	American Goldfinch 2
Peregrine Falcon 2	Carolina Wren 1	Finch species? 5
Pileated Woodpecker 2		

Ramsay Koury is a past president of AAS and currently serving as a Director on the board. When he is not birding he practices dentistry part time and enjoys volunteering as an instructor at the University of Maryland School of Dentistry.

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The Great Backyard Bear Escapade

Sue Strassner

Great excitement at the Fern Avenue residence of Sue and Fred Strassner on October 22! After I arrived at work that morning, I received a call from my husband Fred that all the bird feeders were on the ground and the hooks were all bent out of shape. He was sure that a bear went through. He was right!

That evening just after dark I turned on the yard lights and there he (or she) was—a HUGE black bear sitting under the feeders eating seed off the ground. I had removed most of the feeders earlier that evening to keep them from being destroyed just in case he came back, but had kept out the feeders on the other side of the sunroom.

Of course this was too good to keep to ourselves so we called the neighbors, who called the neighbors, who called the neighbors. By 8:00 P.M. I had two police officers and half the neighborhood in my sunroom checking out the bear. The Game Commission was called and responded, but the bear had moved down the yard and over to the neighbor's feeders, which he also cleaned out, and then he headed back to the cornfield a block away. We noted that he already had tags in both ears, so he had been trapped before. About 10:00 P.M. he was back and cleared out the feeders that I hadn't taken down. Who would have guessed he would come that close to the house!

The next morning I checked quickly before I left for work but no bear, and I didn't see my feeders either. I no sooner got to work and Fred called. He said my cat Boots came tearing down the hall from the sunroom and



Sue and Fred Strassner's nighttime visitor prowls around their yard looking for birdseed.

dived under the couch. Fred went out to check what scared him, and guess what, the bear was back! Boots must have thought that was one large cat!

Late that afternoon the Game Commission drove up with a bear trap attached to their truck and backed it into our yard. They put doughnuts, bread with maple syrup, birdseed, and a couple of suet cakes in the trap to entice the bear. The bear trap was in the yard several days but the bear did not return. He must have known Sandy was coming and headed for the mountains. And here I thought I would just be feeding birds this winter. Guess I should have bought lots more seed and a few more feeders at the AAS birdseed sale this fall.

AAS Wants You!



- ◆ Do you have experience with web design or Microsoft Publisher?
- ◆ Are you involved with a local teen environmental organization?
- ◆ Do you have the skills to install or repair nest boxes?

- ◆ Would you like to spend a morning helping to remove invasive species?

Then contact Annette Mathes at amathes19@verizon.net or 514-4512. Thank you!

Winter Storm Cancellation of AAS Programs

If severe weather is forecast for the evening of an AAS program, please check one of the following for possible cancellation information:

- Our Facebook page
- WHP TV 21 (CBS) or www.whptv.com
- WGAL TV 8 (NBC) or www.wgal.com
- Or call 717-514-4512 or 717-697-6696.

Like us on Facebook!

Go to www.appalachianaudubon.org and click the **Like** button!

Eye of the Storm

Ramsay Koury

Hurricane Sandy's recent visit to Pennsylvania did not bring, fortunately, the destruction that occurred farther east on the coast. However, one thing that the storm brought to our area was unusual birds. Many times in a storm such as Sandy, birds can be trapped in the center of the storm and are displaced far away from their normal habitat. This very event happened at the end of October. The eye of Hurricane Sandy passed just to our south overnight and began breaking up at dawn. This offered a rare opportunity to look for "storm birds" right here on the Susquehanna River.

Shortly after daybreak on October 30 I arrived at the West Fairview Boat Launch. This is my favorite local birding spot and I was very interested to see what might have been blown in by the storm. Three other birders were already there: Jason Horn, Andy Markel and Ed Chubb. I was particularly happy to see Jason, as he is one of the ultimate chasers of storm birds in Pennsylvania and has an uncanny ability to find rare birds, especially after storms. I knew I was in just the right spot. The next ten hours offered some of the most exciting and fascinating birding of my life!



Birders came from all over the state to see the unprecedented seabird flight on the Susquehanna River.

The number and variety of birds was impressive from the very beginning. Many flocks of a variety of waterfowl were moving downriver. HUNDREDS of Brant, a coastal goose we rarely see, were flying by. Hundreds of Pintail and Scaup, and smaller numbers of other ducks, filled the sky. Several dozen Scoters of all three species—Black, Surf and White-winged—were on the water or in flocks overhead. Shorebirds also were flying downriver.



Adult Northern Gannet flying up Front Street in Harrisburg. Photo by Alex Lamoreaux, [Nemesis Bird](#).

Hundreds of Dunlin and 200 Red Knots were in groups moving south. Red Knots are rarely found inland, so having several flocks was very unexpected.

The surface of the river was literally covered with Tree Swallows! We estimated at least 4000, but this was certainly a very low estimate. They were fighting to stay aloft and find food in the gusty, cool wind and intermittent showers we were experiencing. Among them we were able to pick out at least three CAVE SWALLOWS. This rare swallow is occasionally found in PA, but is found more often on the coast.

We soon began seeing POMARINE JAEGERERS. This seabird looks much like a gull, but is a predatory bird that often chases gulls to steal their food. We saw a single, then a pair, then two different groups of four. One of the many highlights of the day was seeing a group of FORTY-SEVEN of these birds briefly resting on the river! We all watched in awe as they circled up and headed east towards the coast! Soon after we saw the first of several LEACH'S STORM-PETRELS. This small seabird (about the size of a bluebird) is mostly dark with a white rump patch. They were feeding with the swallows and could easily disappear into the swarm of birds. Interestingly, this particular species was last found at this very spot in August of 1933 after a hurricane! Eight individuals were found after that storm. Our next great find was two PARASITIC JAEGERERS. They are very similar to the Pomarines, but with a slightly smaller build and different tail pattern, and an equally rare bird in PA.

(continued on page 6)

In between the rare birds, we enjoyed looking at many Common and Forster's Terns, Bonaparte's and Laughing Gulls, and a nice variety of waterfowl. Three AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHERS flew UPstream over our heads! They were certainly going in the wrong direction! I remarked that I was surprised that we hadn't yet seen any Black Skimmers, as they are often displaced by storms. Within five minutes Andy called out that he had an immature BLACK SKIMMER flying UPriver also! The power of suggestion!

As word of this incredible birding got out, other birders began to arrive.



This Pomarine Jaeger was spotted by Anna Fasoli and Alex Lamoreaux on October 30 in Bald Eagle State Park, which also enjoyed numerous rare birds.

Photo by Anna Fasoli, [Nemesis Bird](#)

By mid-afternoon more than 35 birders lined the riverbank watching the spectacle. Melissa Roach looked upriver and very calmly said "here is a Northern GANNET"!! This beautiful, large white seabird simply floated downstream for the next 10 minutes with all of us staring at it in disbelief. It floated out of sight behind some islands, but soon was spotted flying upriver. Its striking black and white wing pattern in flight is very distinctive. Alex Lamoreaux's picture of this bird attached to this article is priceless! The Gannet flew upriver out of sight. Ed



One of our newer members, 12-year-old Gabe Tiday, took this great photo of Black Skimmers earlier this fall in their more typical habitat at Cape May, NJ.

Chubb, who had left earlier, called me from Fort Hunter to say the bird had passed him and had continued upriver out of his sight as well! Hopefully this bird made it back to the ocean!

We found a couple more interesting birds after that, most notably 2 Hudsonian Godwits flying downriver and a Cattle Egret flying close by us. As dusk approached most of the birders left and I finally left after 6 PM, well after sunset. It was difficult to see this day end. Even though the weather was fairly raw, cool and rainy, I was never cold. The excitement and anticipation was more than enough to keep me warm! To put this into some perspective: I have spent a great deal of time birding this spot, having first birded here when I was a kid 40 years ago. On this spectacular day I saw TEN species of birds here that I had never seen at West Fairview previously! This was a day never to be repeated, but always to be remembered.

Yet Another Uncommon Visitor!

On November 16 Sandy Lockerman banded an adult female Rufous Hummingbird at Susan Miller's Mechanicsburg home and an adult male Rufous at Dan Bogar's Marysville home. Although the Rufous, a member of the *Selasphorus* species, is a western hummingbird, sightings of 52 individuals have been confirmed in Pennsylvania this season, with more reports to be investigated. According to Scott Weidensaul's post on the PA Birds listserv, "This is clearly an extraordinary year for western hummers, and it isn't over yet."

Sandy is part of a small group of registered banders who are keeping track of these western visitors to our state. In addition to these birds, Sandy has banded *Selasphorus* hummers in Middletown, York, Hanover, and Ephrata. If you know of a suspected Rufous or other late season hummer in our area, contact Sandy at lockerman@paonline.com, 717-657-0509, or 329-8040. And keep those feeders out!



The Rufous Hummingbird at Susan's feeder.

2012 Christmas Bird Count

One of the best things about the holidays is the Christmas Bird Count!

From December 14 through January 5, tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas take a day to count as many birds as they can. National Audubon and other organizations use this data to assess the health of bird populations and help guide conservation action.

Whether you are a beginner or experienced birder, you



A Snow Bunting is a great find on a CBC!
Photo by Robert Greene: <http://bobbygreene.com/>

can participate in this great 100-year old tradition. Contact one or all of the circle compilers listed below. You will be assigned to a team that complements your skill level. Most teams start early in the morning and bird until dusk, but you can participate for as long as you like. Be sure to dress warmly and pack a lunch.

Consider joining a Christmas Bird Count this year and discover how the beauty of a winter day of birding can lift your holiday spirit!

Harrisburg: Saturday, December 15, 2012. Contact Deuane Hoffman at 564-7475 or corvuscorax@comcast.net

New Bloomfield: Saturday, December 22, 2012. Contact Ramsay Koury at 761-1871 or rkoury123@aol.com

NEW! York Springs (Cumberland, Adams, and York): Thursday, December 27, 2012. Contact Vern Gauthier at 385-9526 or pabirder@gmail.com

Curtin: Thursday, December 27, 2012. Contact Scott Bills at 896-8859 or sbills@pa.gov.

Newville: Saturday, December 29, 2012. Contact Bill or Linda Franz at 776-4463.

Great news! There is no \$5 participation fee this year!

Congratulations to past AAS President Lorrie Preston and her husband Bob for completing their 6 1/2 year endeavor to section-hike the entire 2,184 miles of the Appalachian Trail on November 4, 2012!





Kingfisher Courier

December 2012/January 2013

AAS monthly programs typically take place on the 3rd Thursday of each month at the **Christ Presbyterian Church, 421 Deerfield Road, in the Allendale neighborhood of Camp Hill.** *Join us at 7:00 pm for socializing and refreshments. The program begins at 7:30.*

Directions to Christ Presbyterian Church:

I-83 Southbound, take exit 40B towards New Cumberland. Stay straight, cross Carlisle Road to Cedar Cliff Dr. Turn left onto Allendale Way and turn left onto Deerfield Road. The Church is on the left. Park in the second lot.

I-83 Northbound, take exit 40B, turn left onto Carlisle Road/Simpson Ferry Road and go under I-83. Turn left again at the light onto Cedar Cliff Drive. Turn left onto Allendale Way and turn left onto Deerfield Road. The Church is on the left. Park in the second lot.

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Lapland Longspur (*Internet photo*)

JANUARY FIELD TRIP

January 19, 2013

Juniata County Winter Birding

Join Aden Troyer and Chad Kauffman in search of Short-eared Owls, Lapland Longspurs, Pine Siskins, White-winged and Red Crossbills, and other winter birds. Meet at the Lost Creek Shoe Shop, where you can browse their extensive selection of birding optics, with hands-on testing and expert advice from the owners. Contact Aden at 463-3117 or Chad at chadkauffman@earthlink.net or 436-8257.

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Thanks!

Field Trip Etiquette

While there is no charge for participating in our field trips, if you ride in a carpool please be sure to offer your driver a contribution towards the cost of gas.