



# Kingfisher Courier

Newsletter of Appalachian Audubon Society

February 2013

February 21

## Islands of Grass in a Sea of Forest

Reclaimed surface mine grasslands provide critical habitat for grassland birds such as Henslow's and Grasshopper Sparrows. For over three years Jason Hill has explored how changes in the landscape affect the health and survival of grassland birds in Pennsylvania.

Jason will discuss the findings from his large-scale experiment on 200 acres of grassland, as well as options for how grasslands in Pennsylvania and the entire U.S. can be managed to ensure the future survival of our grassland birds.

Originally from Iowa, Jason has studied birds throughout the Western Hemisphere, and is currently finishing his PhD in the Ecology program at Penn State University, studying the population ecology of grassland sparrows on reclaimed surface mines.

Join us for a great learning opportunity on some very special birds.



Jason Hill with an adult male Henslow's Sparrow.

## The Great Backyard Bird Count Starts February 15

### Bird Your Patch!

The 2013 Great Backyard Bird Count takes place Friday, February 15, through Monday, February 18.

The GBBC is an annual 4-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are.

Everyone is welcome, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

Participants tally the number of individual birds of each species they see during their count period. They enter these numbers on the GBBC website. Beginning in 2013, each participant must set up a free GBBC account to submit their checklists. You'll

only need to do this once to participate in all future GBBC events.



2012 GBBC Honorable Mention: Eastern Bluebird (Laura Frazier)

Participants may also send in photographs of the birds they see for the GBBC photo contest.

Why count birds? Scientists use the GBBC information, along with observations from other citizen-science projects like the Christmas Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, and eBird, to get the "big picture" about what is happening to bird populations. The longer these data are collected, the more meaningful they become in helping scientists investigate questions about population changes, migration, the effects of weather and disease, and diversity within habitats.

Visit <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc> for information on how you can participate!

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## President's Perch

Annette Mathes

### Listing

For many birders, keeping a life list of all the birds that they have ever seen is just as important as birding itself. Some even believe that if you don't keep a life list, you're not a good birder. You might think that, being an accountant, keeping count of the birds I've seen in my life would come naturally to me, but it doesn't.

In the first few years after joining AAS, it wasn't unusual for me to rack up 10 or more "lifers" on a single field trip. So after coming home with 16 lifers on the 2009 field trip Ramsay Koury led to the New Jersey coast, I decided it might be time to start a life list. I spent a few hours listing all the birds I could remember seeing in my life, and where and when I had seen them, and was pretty satisfied that I got most of them. I kept up with it for a few weeks, but then I started to procrastinate in updating it, and finally completely forgot all about it.

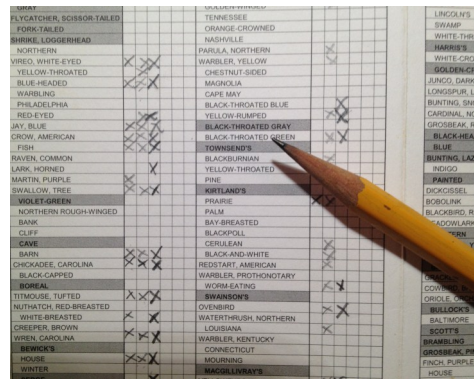
For some, listing is part of the joy of birding. They keep yard lists, year lists, county lists, and state lists. Some will drive to the other end of the state to see a bird they've already seen many times in another state, just to get the bird on their Pennsylvania list. Some birders keep lists of birds they see land on a wire, birds they find with a certain pair of binoculars, and even birds they dream about.



Cedar Waxwings often perform a hopping dance during mating season, passing berries back and forth to each other. *Internet photo.*

The way I see it, I should be able to remember what birds I've seen. It doesn't mean much to me to list a bird that I caught only a glimpse of or that I couldn't identify again. What's important to me are my first Black-throated Green Warblers that I found on my own in the Adirondacks, the first time I heard Long-tailed Ducks calling at Barnegat Light, and the Mountain Bluebird that suddenly appeared in the New Mexico desert. I don't remember the first time I saw Cedar Waxwings, but I do remember the time Kathy Kuchwara and I saw a group of them "dancing" together at Stony Creek. And I remember the day on Peter's Mountain that Kathy and I saw two Blue-grey Gnatcatchers building their nest, landing right in front of us to grab the fluffy plant down, so that we were looking down on them and could see how gorgeous the blue was on the tops of their heads.

Now, there is one kind of list that I do keep—nearly every time I go birding, I send my count to eBird. The *BirdLog* iPhone app tracks my time and location and immediately sends the list to Cornell's database. It's fun to count this way and I find it rewarding to be a citizen scientist. Oh, and a great side benefit? eBird keeps your life lists for you! I just checked, and I have 212 birds on my Pennsylvania life list. *Wow! I didn't think I had that many...hmm...51 so far in 2013...ooh! it says I have 58 on my yard list...I should check to see how many I have in...*





## Bird Blog

### Birding Your Local Patch

Vern Gauthier

January 7, 2013

Many of us have enjoyed the thrill of the chase, traveling out of our local area to go and view a rarity or vagrant someone else has reported. Many of us, too, have taken advantage of the opportunity to bird in another part of the U.S. or perhaps other countries. Yet most of us still do a majority of our birding close to home, in our local patch.

I have a number of patches I regularly bird within a ten mile radius of where I live in Newville of western Cumberland County. Among them are the Big Spring, Camp Michaux, Mud Level Road, State Game Lands 169 and Doubling Gap State Park. Now admittedly, I am blessed with many good birding spots close to home, yet even if the birding in your location is average at best, there are some pretty good benefits from birding it on a regular basis.

First of all there is less time spent driving and more time spent birding. This is good for you as you get to do more walking and good for the birds as you leave a smaller carbon footprint. It's also good for you as walking costs less than driving.



This Barred Owl was photographed on the Big Spring by Mary Jane Spencer.

Second, you become the local expert of your patch. It's fun to get to know the nooks and crannies; those birdy spots that others will overlook. As you spend time in your local patch you come to know and appreciate the seasonal differences in the habitat and the birds to be found there.

Third, it is amazing how many different types of birds you can find! My rural yard in Newville is nothing special—mostly grass, little brushy cover, with numerous mature oak trees and a few small hemlocks. Yet in my eleven years here I have seen 91 species including Ash-throated Flycatcher, Swainson's Thrush, White-winged Crossbills and 10 species of warblers. The three mile stretch of the Big Spring that lies south of me has produced around 190 species, including such goodies as

Black-throated Gray Warbler, Western Kingbird, Harris's Sparrow, and Connecticut and Mourning Warblers—and these all within two miles of home.

While it is true that some patches will be more productive than others, if you faithfully bird your local patch it will reward you. I don't know how many times I checked out a little farm pond on Stoughton Road and saw nothing exceptional, until one day I got a Red-necked Phalarope on it!



Harris's Sparrow photographed in Carbon County on January 2. Corey Husic, Nemesis Bird

Finally, if you enter your patch observations on eBird (<http://ebird.org/content/ebird/>), your local findings take on greater significance as the birds of your patch become part of a national and international bird data base. This is something you can have some friendly competition with, too, as the folks at the Nemesis Bird blog (<http://www.nemesisbird.com/>) run an annual yard and patch competition.

So here's to birding the local patches (remember you can have more than one) and the birds you will find in them in 2013!

AAS member and Cumberland County Compiler Vern Gauthier leads a bird walk of the Big Spring the first Saturday of every month, and will be leading the AAS field trip to some of his favorite Cumberland County patches on May 18, 2013. Pastor Vern also leads the flock at the First United Presbyterian Church in Newville.

Thank you to our generous sponsor:

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## The 2012 Christmas Bird Counts

**M**any of our members participated in the 2012 National Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Here is a recap of four local counts by the respective CBC compilers.

### Harrisburg Deuane Hoffman

The 2012 Harrisburg CBC was held on Saturday, December 15th. Weather for most of the day was mild, cloudy, and calm, with a high temperature of 49 F and low of 26 F. Observers tallied 103 species on count day with one species, Rough-legged Hawk, observed during the count week period. The 103 species reported are slightly above the 10-year average.

Given the mild temperatures in the months preceding count day, waterfowl had not yet come south, and the Susquehanna River was wide open with no ice cover; subsequently, waterfowl numbers were relatively low, with counters tallying 15 species. Wildwood Lake Park was certainly a hotspot for ducks for this year's count.



Common Redpolls (Photographed in Bald Eagle State Park on January 6 by Alex Lamoreaux, Nemesis Bird)

A bevy of unusual species was recorded, including a Great Egret in the Mechanicsburg area, a Northern Rough-winged Swallow for the second year at the Camp Hill Prison, a Pine Warbler at a feeder off Idle Road in Perry County, 3 Chipping Sparrows at Dauphin Highlands Golf Course, a flock of 7 Common Redpolls in a flyover at the summit of Blue Mountain on Tower Road, and an impressive 36 White-winged Crossbills, with 33 in a single flock.

Overall the 2012 Harrisburg CBC was successful. Thanks to Sandy Lockerman and the staff at Wildwood Park for hosting the post count gathering. Also, thanks to AAS for their continued support of sponsoring the post count dinner. The 2013 Harrisburg CBC will be held on Saturday, December 14, 2013.

### Newville Bill Franz

The snow that started early and kept falling until almost 3 in the afternoon challenged the 25 birders that participated in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Newville Christmas Bird Count. Unfortunately, this year's weather continues a several-year span of bad weather.

Even with the tough conditions, however, there were still plenty of smiles at our end of the day pizza gathering.



The Cumberland County Rail Trail near Newville was beautiful on Count Day!

The species total was 80, with a little over 14,500 individual birds seen. Surprisingly, both numbers are just slightly below the averages. Two of the three species seen in record numbers are typical companion species in Cumberland County: White-throated Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos. Their totals exceeded one thousand. Several groups of birders noted with some surprise seeing large flocks of these two species moving through the snow-covered brush and weed fields. The total of 23 Common Snipe almost tripled the past record.

Two firsts for the count were one Vesper Sparrow and one Pine Warbler. The now famous Prairie Falcon continued its amazing run since 2006 on the Newville count. And the one Bald Eagle seen made the sixth appearance in the last nine years for this come-back species.



Kathy Kuchwara and Sue Strassner search for one more species on the Newville Count.



## The 2012 Christmas Bird Counts

### York Springs Vern Gauthier

The inaugural York Springs CBC was held on December 27. This count, which covers portions of Adams, Cumberland and York Counties, had some weather issues including snow, sleet and ice the day before, along with some wind on count day itself. However, the weather did not deter 22 hardy birders from covering 9 areas and finding 87 species.

Seven species of waterfowl were found including 102 Ruddy Ducks on Lake Meade and one Mute Swan at Boiling Springs. Ring-necked Pheasant, Ruffed Grouse, and Wild Turkey were reported from the Game Lands near Franklinton. One American Coot was found in Mount Holly.

Vultures were numerous, being reported from all sections, totaling 139 Black and 185 Turkey. There were 7 Bald Eagles, 6 of which came from Lake Meade. Other raptors of note included 6 Northern Harriers and 8 Red-shouldered Hawks. Owls included one Northern Saw-whet and 2 Barred.



Greg Burgdorf, Bob Peda, Vern Gauthier, and Bill Frantz compare notes at the pizza shop after the Newville Count.

Probably due to the icy conditions, it was a great day for field birds. There were 40 Killdeer and 6 Wilson's Snipe. Additionally there were 485 Horned Larks, 54 American Pipits, 3 Lapland Longspurs and 12 Snow Buntings.

Sparrows were found in good numbers. Of note were 6 Chipping Sparrows, 15 Field Sparrows, one Savannah Sparrow, 5 Fox Sparrows, and 9 Swamp Sparrows. Also found were 5 Eastern Towhees. Among the blackbirds, 9



The "troops" file in to report their findings after a great day of winter birding for the Newville Count.

Rusty Blackbirds and 5 Eastern Meadowlarks were the best found. Most notable finches were 1 Purple Finch, 2 White-winged Crossbills, 1 Pine Siskin and 32 Common Redpolls.

Other "good birds" for the day included 7 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, 5 Common Ravens, 10 Red-breasted Nuthatches, 10 Winter Wrens, 3 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and 8 Hermit Thrushes.

A big thanks to AAS support of this count. Our first year results set the bar high. It will be interesting to see how count develops over the years to come.

The Mud Level Road Prairie Falcon made its 7<sup>th</sup> appearance on the Newville Count.



Alex Lamoreaux, Nemesis Bird, 1/22/12

### New Bloomfield Ramsay Koury

The New Bloomfield CBC was held on December 22. Thirty-one dedicated field observers scoured much of Perry County looking for wintering birds. It was especially challenging this year as we had to contend with 20 to 30 mph winds throughout the day!

Many birds were present, but in strong wind like this birds hunker down and are very difficult to detect. In spite of this we were still able to find record high numbers for 8 species: Ring-billed Gull, Bald Eagle, Turkey Vulture, Black Vulture, American Crow, Common Raven, Golden-crowned Kinglet and Common Grackle. Other good finds were Peregrine Falcon, Chipping Sparrow and Savannah Sparrow.



# Kingfisher Courier

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

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Thanks!

## FEBRUARY FIELD TRIP RESCHEDULED

Ramsay Koury's annual winter mystery trip will be rescheduled for sometime in March. Contact Ramsay at [rkoury123@aol.com](mailto:rkoury123@aol.com) or 761-1871 for details.

### 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](mailto:amathes19@verizon.net) or 514-4512. Thank you!