Talks at Beaver Creek

Our first “post-Covid” programs will be held outdoors at the Beaver Creek pavilion. We are all eager to get out and meet again — the leadership team has scheduled some interesting programs. There will be two talks on May 12 and two more on June 9.

Join us May 12 at 6:30 p.m.

- Gary Edwards will talk about his almost-famous book, “Birds of Venango County”. Copies will be available.
- Mal Hays will update us on some surprising findings in the Owl Box Project.

Join us on June 9 at 6:30 p.m.

- Alice Thurau and Deb Freed will introduce the “Bird Friendly Habitat” program. See page 2 for more information.
- Debbie McCanna will tell us about the “Western Pennsylvania all outdoors Atlas & Field Guide”, a great resource. The book can be ordered from Sportsman’s Connection at www.scmaps.com. On Amazon it is available in Kindle format only.

DIRECTIONS: From downtown Knox, follow Route 208 West for 3.4 miles. You will see the pavilion on your right.
Add Native Plants This Year for a Bird-Friendly Habitat
Alice Thurau and Deb Freed

Whether you're planting a container garden on a patio, adding to your garden, swapping out some lawn for pollinator plants, or managing a meadow or woodlot, your home can provide vital habitat and contribute to community conservation. It all starts with native plants. Birds and insects need native plants! For many, native plants provide essential food they simply can't get from other types of plants. Add a water source and some shrub and tree layers to provide shelter and nesting sites, and you're well on your way to creating Bird-Friendly Habitat!

Enrolling your home in the Bird-Friendly Habitat recognition program connects you with a growing community of people across the region who garden with ecology in mind. All contributing to a ripple effect of stewardship that benefits people, birds, and the places we share.

Come to the Beaver Creek Talk on June 9 to learn more about the Bird-Friendly Habitat program. We will have some resource materials to help you. Here's an example.
Call me Rula. A guy by the name of Melville began his story about a whale with a similar line and it worked for him, so I figure it’s worth a shot. Rula is short for Parula. That’s the name old man Linneaus gave my species back in 1758. Before going any further, let’s get the pronunciation right. I pronounce it “PAR-you-la, with the accent on the first syllable. Actually, I have a two-part name, my first name is Northern—Northern Parula, that’s me. But like I said, you can call me Rula.

We parulas used to breed pretty much throughout most of the eastern North America but our breeding range has contracted and we’re no longer found in many areas of MA, NJ, CN, NY, RI, and VT. My personal summer home is in western Pennsylvania. Would you believe it, there are people here who grab their binoculars and actually spend hours just gawking at me and my relatives. Go figure.

I like to go to Mexico or the Caribbean for the winter; it depends if I feel like sticking to land or taking an over the ocean flight. Mexico is nice but I also like the Caribbean. That’s a non-stop trip so getting the weather forecast right is critical.

I have one sibling whose first name is Tropical. In summer, Tropical likes the warmth of northern Mexico and only occasionally breeds in south Texas. Tropical and I are warblers but warbler is not a part of our name, which is weird. There are about 50 species of us warblers who come north to breed in the United States on a regular basis. Most of the 50 have names ending in “warbler” – but then there are my cousins the ovenbird, the waterthrushes, and the redstarts – they’re all warblers like me without the last name. As you can see, consistency is not a strong point with bird namers. To top that off, none of our songs can really be called warbles. Trills? sure; buzzes? right again; but warbles? not so much. My song is described as a buzzy trill, not melodious like that show-off Black-throated Green, but it is emphatic and I kinda like it. Good thing cause I’m stuck with it.

Many of my relatives have names describing their plumage, like cousins Black-throated Blue Warbler and Yellow Warbler. Others have location first names like Tennessee, Kentucky, Connecticut, Nashville, and Cape May. You can pretty much count on those plumage descriptions to be correct, but cousin Nashville nests from Pennsylvania north into Canada and cousin Tennessee summers almost exclusively in Canada, neither one nests in Tennessee. Add to that cousin Cape May was not seen in Cape May, NJ, for 100 years after a distant relative of mine was collected there in 1812. Plus, like cuz Tennessee, cuz Cape May also nests primarily in Canada. There are other examples but it’s getting late and time for me to find some grape vines for the night. Nice trilling with you.
Birdathon

Alice Thurau

Birdathon 2021 is targeted for May 8-15. Birdathon is a popular nationwide event during which participants count as many species of birds as they can during a 24-hour period. There is no cost, but donations to Seneca Rocks Audubon Society are welcome and support our local education and conservation efforts. Even if participation isn’t possible this year, one can donate to a fellow SRAS member who is birding for Birdathon.

Springtime is an ideal time to watch birds as many colorful migratory birds return to the area for nesting or pass through for nesting further north. Birds that live in the area year-round also tend to be at their most colorful.

Participating is simple and fun. Participants don’t need to be seasoned “birders” or a member of Audubon. Everyone, no matter their age, is apt to learn something new and enjoy the day spent in nature.

Choose a day and time period that is convenient. On that day, relax and watch birds at a bird feeder or in a backyard. For more adventure, take binoculars and head to a park or hike a trail. Bird solo or bird with family or friends (following Covid precautions).

Keep track of all the species that are seen. Learn more about birds and get help in identifying them with a bird field guide book or download the free Audubon Bird Guide app, available for Apple, Android, and Kindle devices. Another free beginners’ bird identification app is Merlin ID by Cornell Lab.

If desired, donate a set amount or an amount for each species seen, to Seneca Rocks Audubon Society, P.O. Box 148, Clarion, PA 16214. Alternatively, donate to SRAS members who are yearly Birdathoners. Janice Horn, Flo and Jim McGuire, Pete Dalby, and Paulette Colantonio would be happy to receive donations for their efforts. Contact them directly or send a check to the SRAS mail box with their name in the memo line.

It’s fun and for a very good cause. Take some time for Birdathon this year!
Conneaut Marsh Outing Revisited

Wow, everyone agreed that we couldn’t have chosen a more beautiful day for this outing. Our chapter is used to bundling up with hats, scarves, and mittens before we set up our scopes to view Custards or Conneaut Marsh, but we were greeted by the most pleasant March day any of us could remember! It was a double blessing, our first real “post-Covid” outing, and we were all so delighted to see each other again. Plus the birds!

Mal Hays and Larry Towse were our able guides to lead us to the various stops and help us find the birds. For lunch, we enjoyed a picnic at the Conneaut Lake park.

Thanks to Paulette Colantonio, who diligently kept a record of the 48 species seen throughout the day.

Our sightings in taxonomical order:
- Canada Goose
- Tundra Swan
- Wood Duck
- Blue-winged Teal
- Northern Shoveler
- Gadwall
- American Wigeon
- Mallard
- Northern Pintail
- Green-winged Teal
- Redhead
- Ring-necked Duck
- Long-tailed Duck
- Bufflehead
- Hooded Merganser
- Common Merganser
- Ruddy Duck
- Pied-billed Grebe
- Mourning Dove

Ring-billed Gull, photographed by Kathy Barrett

Long-tailed Duck, photographed by Kathy Barrett
American Coot
Sandhill Crane
Killdeer
Wilson’s Snipe
Lesser Yellowlegs
Ring-billed Gull
Great Blue Heron
Turkey Vulture
Bald Eagle
Red-tailed Hawk
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
American Kestrel
Eastern Phoebe
American Crow
Black-capped Chickadee
Tree Swallow
White-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
European Starling
Eastern Bluebird
American Robin
House Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Red-winged Blackbird
Rusty Blackbird
Common Grackle
Northern Cardinal

Eighteen chapter members and friends enjoyed this outing:
Leaders Mal Hays and Larry Towse; Kathy Barrett, Dennis Beaver, Paulette Colantonio, Pat Conway, Gary Edwards, Deb Freed, Ann Hunt, Danette and Jeff Karls, Ray McGunigle, Ron Montgomery, Alice Thurau, Jim Wilson, Susan Zeff, Jim and Flo McGuire.

Special thanks to Kathy Barrett for her impressive photographs from this trip!

**Oil Creek State Park Warbler Walk**

Join us for our next outing! The Warbler Walk will be on May 15, led by Mal Hays.

Meet at the Blood Farm Day Use Area. We bird this area from 8:00 to 8:30 before starting the walk.
There are many excellent reasons for going solar. My husband and I wanted to get solar to do our part to reduce pollution, set a good example, and to save on our electric bill, but I didn’t know where to start. Fortunately the Clarion County League of Women Voters provided a great starting point. They hosted an informational talk by Solar United Neighbors (SUN), a national nonprofit dedicated to helping people harness energy from the sun. SUN organizes solar co-ops for discounted bulk bids by installers, and also provides support to people who go solar individually. Henry McKay, SUN’s Pennsylvania Program Director, who spoke at the LWV meeting, dispelled solar myths (Pennsylvania does have enough sun to make solar worthwhile!), laid out the process, and provided a handout of costs and savings.

After our Scenic Rivers Solar Co-op was formed, Henry solicited bids from solar installers. Only two Ohio solar companies responded, perhaps because of the small size of our co-op. During a virtual meeting, several co-op volunteers selected Third Sun Solar, with 20 years of experience. Henry was present and answered our questions, but stayed neutral during the discussion and selection.

Third Sun Solar verified by satellite image that our ground site (our roof wasn’t an option as it gets shade from the trees) had good solar potential and emailed us several size options of solar arrays, with their costs and potential savings to consider. After several phone conversations with their consultant, we settled on an array of 12 panels (3.96 kilowatts total) that would provide us with 85% of our usual (frugal) electricity needs. Then there was a site visit from one of their electrical engineers, followed by the company drafting plans for every detail of the array, and seeking necessary permits and an interconnection agreement with our utility. At the end of February, when it was only 25 degrees, with 9 inches of snow on the ground, the Third Sun crew arrived and installed our solar panels and laid the underground wiring to the house. It took them 2 1/2 days. Then we waited several weeks before a West Penn Power employee came and switched our outside electric meter to one that can run both ways for “net metering.” It was only then that we could literally flip the solar switch to “on” and celebrate.

We now use our own solar electricity when the sun is out, and automatically switch over to West Penn Power’s supply when it’s cloudy or dark. When we produce an excess it goes through the grid to our
neighbors and we get credit for that to offset our bill. Our recent electric bill, reflecting a full month of solar during a somewhat rainy April, was only $7.31. Enough said!

There are other incentives to make it worthwhile. The Federal Solar Investment Tax Credit is a one-time non-refundable credit that is taken for the year in which solar is installed and can be rolled over. The credit is 26% of the cost of the solar for 2021 and 2022, and decreases to 22% in 2023, when it is slated to end. Another incentive is the Solar Alternative (or Renewable) Energy Credit earned with each 1000 kilowatt hours of solar electricity produced. They are bought by utilities to meet their sustainability requirements set by the state.

Anyone interested in solar should read the consumer-friendly information on the Solar United Neighbors website (www.solarunitedneighbors.org). It explains how solar works, answers frequently asked questions, and outlines what steps to take. Even if another co-op isn’t formed in this area in the near future, one can become a SUN member for a nominal fee and get one-on-one consulting.

My husband, Keith Hileman, and I would be happy to tell you more and even show you our solar array, hard at work in our field. My contact information is on the SRAS website.

Programs at Cook Forest State Park

Dale Luthringer

Thursday, May 13 at 8:00pm - ‘Serenade of the Toads’*  It’s that time of year when we get a chance to hear the chorus of the toads ringing up and down the Clarion River Valley. Spring has definitely sprung, and if we have a good rainy night, “The Great Toad Irruption” is a site to behold. Bring your boots and frog nets!  (1.5 hrs)

Saturday, May 15 at 10:00am - ‘Friends of Cook Forest Series: Garlic Mustard Pull’*  Garlic mustard is an invasive species that is threatening native plants of Cook Forest. It is a highly shade tolerant biennial herb that spreads quickly. Hand pulling and removing garlic mustard is an extremely effective remedy.  Join our Friends of Cook Forest volunteers as we focus on some key areas that really need our help. After a short presentation on how to identify garlic mustard, volunteers will spend the morning pulling this invasive weed. (3 hrs)

* Until further notice - Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all park programs are limited to 25 participants (unless otherwise stated), mask must be on person, social distancing in effect. All participants must register at the Park Office at (814)744-8407 or cookforestsp@pa.gov. Program starting location given upon successful registration.
Clarion County Winter 2020
Bird Sightings

Carole Winslow

Locations: Clarion (CL), Cullsville (CV), Kahle Lake (KL), Lucinda (LU), Mt Zion (SGL 330/Piney Tract)(MZ), New Bethlehem (NB), Rimersburg (RI), Strattanville (ST).

The first waterfowl of note for the season is **Gadwall**, with five noted lingering later into migration at KL 12/8 (ES). **American Black Duck** is a species with declining numbers, but a larger flock was found on the Allegheny River at Foxburg, with 35 there 2/13 (ES) and nine present 2/26 (TS). Also present at this location 2/26 were four **Northern Pintail** (TS). A **Black Scoter** was reported at KL 12/5 (JH), and also 12/6 (DS) and 12/8 (ES). Likely a late migrant, a single female **Long-tailed Duck** was seen on the Allegheny near East Brady 1/5 (CW).

Only one report of **Ruffed Grouse** was noted, a bird seen at SGL 63 on 1/23 (MW). **Turkey Vultures** are still unusual in January, but a single bird was found near CL both 1/12 and 1/21 (fide DF). There were more reports for **Northern Harrier** than the fall season. Unusually, one was seen in the northern end of Clarion County near LU 12/12 and 1/3 (ES). In their more regular areas south of I-80, one was found near NB 12/13 (ES), and near CV on Rankin Rd 12/4, 12/10, 12/13 and 1/30 (CB, DD, ES, TS, CW). Single birds were also noted over fields near RI 2/27 and near Sligo 2/28 (DR). **Rough-legged Hawks** were noticeably absent on many WRS routes this year, but they were still reported in five locations throughout the season. Near Wolfs Corners a light phase was found 12/16 and 2/7 (ES) and three birds were found there 2/4 (FM). One bird was also noted near Miola 12/19 (FM), near CV 1/28 (CW), and near West Freedom 2/13 (ES). In the best showing of the season, four birds were seen over the fields at MZ 2/28, possibly in migration (MW).

Two local birders over the past year placed 17 **Eastern Screech-Owl** nest boxes throughout the various game lands in Clarion. After monthly checks through the end of February, eight boxes had shown owl activity, with four having been found with owls in them, and four other boxes with pellets and feathers to show use as well. Of the feathers found, they included three species, blue jay, northern cardinal and junco (MH, LT). **Short-eared Owls** were noted...
twice in one of their regular winter locations on Rankin Rd near CV, with one bird 12/10 (CB, ES) and 12/13 (DD, CW). Three were seen in several locations in the southern part of the county for the CBC 12/19 (m.ob.). One bird was also reported at MZ 1/8 (WD). As always, it is difficult to accurately judge presence in the county with the low level of birder activity for locating this species.

Still a generally rare find in winter, it was interesting to have two reports of Northern Flicker, one near Turkey City 1/7 (DDa), and another near Fisher 2/14 (DK). Merlin are infrequent enough to always be of note, with one found at MZ 1/23 (MW). Northern Shrike are regular winter visitors but numbers can vary year to year. Just two were seen this year, one near CV 12/3, 12/17 and 12/28 (CW), and another bird outside of Sligo 1/15-1/17 (DD, ES, CW, MW).

The only significant flock of Horned Larks reported was 56 birds seen at Lake Lucy 12/1 (ES). Plenty of agricultural fields in the area provide good habitat for this species. Red-breasted Nuthatches were numerous this winter with reports of mostly single birds at various locations near CV, CL, Leeper and Shippenville throughout the season (JHo, JH, SK, ES, TS, et al.). Thrush reports are unusual for winter, and with more severe weather this year, it is worth noting a hardy Hermit Thrush was found at SGL 63 1/10 (TS). Another had been found in the count circle during the CBC 12/19 (m.ob.), only the 12th time for the count since 1988. Also at SGL 63, where there is woodland, brushy areas and large sections of orchard habitat, a flock of 100+ Cedar Waxwings was found 1/23, feasting on crabapple, hawthorn and common buckthorn (MW).

The biggest story this season was the invasion of northern finches, and the first species of note is Evening Grosbeak. More reports were received from the northern half of the county. Near Miola, 26 birds were first seen 12/19 (FM) and 15-20 seen 1/27 (MH). Up to 23 birds were at feeders near LU from 12/3 through the season (ES). Nine birds were found near Leeper 12/11 (ES) and one 2/10 (SK). A banded bird was found at a feeder near ST 2/11 (LT). South of I-80, two birds were seen near Limestone 12/19 (DD, CW), and then not far away 29 were reported 2/15 (AT), and another 2/20 (JC). Common Redpolls were reported from numerous areas. The larger numbers were seen as flocks feeding in weedy fields. One of these was near Lickingville with 35 birds seen 12/11 (ES). Near LU 25-40 birds were seen in three locations 12/5, 12/29 and 1/13 (ES). In the south, flocks were also reported near CV with 30 seen 12/10, 15 on 12/13, and another group of 100+ near Leatherwood 12/22 (ES). A smaller group of five was seen at MZ 1/16 (MW). At feeders, there were typically one or two birds present and these were reported from locations in LU, CL, and ST between 12/25-2/22 (MH, ES, LT). The largest number at a feeder were six birds seen briefly in CL.
2/10 (DF). There was a single sighting of Red Crossbill also, with two birds seen feeding on pitch pine at SGL 63 on 1/23 (MW). There were only a few reports of Pine Siskin, with one at a feeder in LU 12/24-12/25 and again 1/12 (ES). Seven were found at a feeder near NB 12/25 and one there again 1/24 (ES).

A single Chipping Sparrow was found at a feeder near LU 1/31, certainly unusual for the season (ES). American Tree Sparrows continue to be reported, but only in small numbers, with scattered locations throughout the county and no more than 8 birds per sighting (PC, SK, JH, FM, ES, et al.). Not a typical winter visitor, a Fox Sparrow was seen at a CL feeder 12/16 and continued through the season until 2/21 (ES). Another unusual winter sparrow is White-crowned Sparrow, and one was located during the CBC 12/19 (m.ob.), just the 11th time for the count since 1988. Only occasionally reported after fall migration, a single Swamp Sparrow remained in marshy habitat near CV 12/17 (CW).

The last lone species of note is that of Common Grackle, they were found returned just a little earlier than usual at feeders near CL 2/10 (JW).

Observers: Carole Winslow, cjwinslow94@gmail.com, Chelsea Beck, Paulette Colantonio, Joseph Croskey, Doug Davis (DDa), W. Dwayne DelGrande, Donald DeWolf, Deb Freed, Jeffrey Hall, Mal Hays, Janice Horn (JHo), Danette Karls, S Kaye, Flo McGuire, Dan Richards, Eric Schill, Tabassam Shah, Daria Sockey, Alice Thurau, Larry Towse, Mike Weible, Jack Williams.
Events

May 8-15 - Birdathon
May 12 - Talks at Beaver Creek - 6:30 p.m.
May 15 - Warbler Walk, Oil Creek State Park - Meet at Blood Farm Day Use Area between 8:00 and 8:30
May 19 - Beginner Birding Walk - Rail 66 - Time to be announced
June 9 - Talks at Beaver Creek - 6:30 p.m.
June 16 - Bird Walk - Cook Forest - Time to be announced
August 11 - Membership Picnic, Beaver Creek

Leadership Team

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<th>Team Member</th>
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Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.  
~ John Muir

Seneca Rocks Audubon Society  
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Clarion, PA 16214