CUP’s Vertebrate Collection  
by Gary Edwards

February’s program will be presented by Genny Nesslage, Clarion University’s newest Biology Department faculty member, who also is a member of SRAS. Genny will acquaint us with Biology Department’s vertebrate collection and explain the many ways such collections are used in professional scientific research and by non-professionals as well.

Genny has promised to show some interesting specimens--fisher, passenger pigeon, eagle, and more. Join us for an interesting and informative evening---you’ll be glad you did.

Field Trips  
by Ron Montgomery

The regularly scheduled field trips for this spring are listed below. Please put the dates on your 2006 calendar. The first two trips will be lead by Mike Leahy and the third by Gary Edwards. In each case we will meet at the site. The Block Busting effort will be led by Pat Conway, the coordinator for Atlas Region 45 (that is, page 45 of the PA Gazetteer).

Sat 4/1    Presque Isle
Sat 4/8    Conneaut Marsh & Pymatuning
Fri 5/5    Oil Creek State Park
Mon 6/19   Block Busting in Region 45

As warmer weather approaches, I may be informing you of some relatively spontaneous trips that you may wish to attend. Gary Edwards, Jim Wilson and I are thinking about how we can incorporate into our plans both the input that I received from you last fall and our chapter’s need to better understand how to manage grassland habitats for wildlife.

Directions to Presque Isle: We will meet inside Presque Isle Park at 9:00 AM. It is 100 miles and 2 hours from Clarion by way of Custards, Rt 79 north, Rt 20 West (26th Street) to Route 832 North, which becomes...
Peninsula Drive. There is a McDonald's on the right after Route 832 crosses Rt 5. Our meeting spot (Vista 1 Parking Lot) is a large parking area on the right about a mile after you see the Presque Isle State Park sign. It is the first obvious place to scope Presque Isle Bay.

April 1 can bring snow or warm sunshine to Presque Isle (or both!), but it is always windy. Plan accordingly.

In This Issue…
A bright spot on these gray winter days is the arrival of colorful gardening catalogs in our mailboxes. We anticipate the return of the neotropical migrants, and plan luring them into our yards with plants. There are two announcements in this Drummer regarding flora: a Spring Wildflower class will be offered at CUP in May, and an Invasive Species conference will be held at Shippensburg University in March.

You will see that our favorite field trips are back by popular demand, and some new, relatively spontaneous field trips may be in store. The Oil Creek Warbler Walk, which was snowed out in late April of 2005, has been moved to the first week of May.

We have an exciting report on the Christmas Bird Count Dinner. The Count report will be in the March Drummer.

If you want to be more involved, you’ll want to read Deb Freed’s chronicle of her experience at nearby Cook Forest, where volunteers are being sought to adopt a trail. You can read about or join the PA Winter Raptor Survey, the Yard List Olympics, and the Great Backyard Bird Count, which will be held February 17-20. See our Birdseed Sale Form to replenish your supply.

Pat Conway has contributed a delightful tale about the Northern Bobwhite. The only native quail in the east has been declining in Pennsylvania, partly because of our harsh winters and the mistaken assumption that southern stock could replace northern birds. I can understand Pat’s enthusiasm, because I, too, love hearing the call of the bobwhite, even with the knowledge that it’s a caged or released bird.

In future issues, we’ll have more about the Atlas Project. It’s time to start getting in gear for the 3rd year of the Second Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas. Lots of good blocks are waiting to be adopted. Great Horned Owls and Barred Owls are already safe. For more information, go to http://www.carnegiemnh.org/atlas/home.htm.

Crow’s Nest
by Deb Freed

It was a good idea and a bad idea, but who could resist the mild temperatures on January 11 to get outside. Besides, it was a perfect way to check off a New Year’s resolution to adopt a trail at Cook Forest. I had been studying the trail map over Christmas and had a list of adoptable trails provided by Dale Luthringer. I was not that familiar with the named trails since most of my experience in the forest had been either skiing Seneca Tower trail or birding the River Road.

I arrived at the park office and spoke with Dorothy. She described the terrain and length of some trails. I chose the Mohawk Trail followed by Tom’s Run then back to the park office, a 4-mile loop. I strapped on my binoculars, leashed Bridget and away we went.

We connected with the “orange” trail at the service road just off route 36 across from the office. The trail began as a steep climb over mossy rocks. We followed the orange markers our way through the forest.
We turned around and hiked back to where the trail sign is posted. Yep, the “orange” trail was Mohawk. Up we went again. Now going up with a dog on lead is great, a real help. It’s going down that the taut lead can throw one off balance, especially on mossy rocks and moist leaves, so I kept my eyes glued to the ground. The trail was not cleared by foot traffic and everything was covered with leaves and debris. Often the trail became very narrow or blocked by limbs. The Adopt-a-Trail program wants volunteers to report blocked or dangerous trail conditions.

Now, we all know that birders cannot stay on trails when distracted by birdcalls and sightings. At the top of the ridge I heard the deep drumming of a woodpecker drilling a tree, most likely a Pileated. We left the trail. As the drilling became louder the pup focused on a tree 30 feet in front of us. I thought the bird might be on a ground log. As we approached the tree a huge piece of bark fell beside us. Bridget must have been watching them fall. I looked up to see the Pileated in flight. We were standing in the most amazing pile of wood chunks! It smelled like a lumberyard's freshly sawed 2 X 4's.

The sky was growing dark and rain clouds moved in. We’d been out nearly two hours. My ambitious loop would take too long, so we backtracked to the park office. On the return I thought I heard a Brown Creeper. I had not seen a creeper since last winter and was anxious to stop and listen. No luck. We began the steep descent. By now my legs were weary and every tug of the lead caused me to call to Bridget, “Steady”. She finally understood. The rain came and the downhill return became slippery. My jacket shed the rain but trapped my body’s heat. We made it back to the car weary, hot and thirsty. Bridget lapped, I gulped, and the rain pounded.

The good ideas were getting out, exploring a trail to adopt and letting Dorothy know we were out there. The not so good ideas were going alone with the dog to explore an unfamiliar trail. On a Wednesday in January there aren’t many people in the forest to come to your assistance should you need help, and I don't think a dog qualifies for the “buddy” safety system. I had my cell, but Dorothy said it probably wouldn’t pick up a signal. Cook Forest looks small and manageable on the map, but more imposing when one is out there alone. As for adopting a trail, that’s a good idea, and I will sign up as soon as I figure out which trail to adopt. If you’re interested, stop by the park office for an application or check out this website: www.dcnr.state.pa.us/cons.

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Spring Wildflower Class at CUP

Dr. Charles Williams will be teaching a class to introduce the natural history of spring wildflowers in eastern forests. Participants will learn major species and identification characteristics out in the field.

There will be a lecture on Saturday, May 6th from 9am-11am in room 249 Peirce Hall, CUP. The following Saturday, May 13th, a field trip will leave the Peirce Parking lot at 9am. Please bring a sack lunch with a drink, a camera, and wear good hiking shoes or boots.

The cost is $45. For more information or to register, please contact Gina Knox in the Continuing Education Department at (814) 393-2227.
Containing Invasives: Closing Pandora’s Box

A Conference - Wednesday, March 15, 2006
Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, PA

Sponsored by:
Kings Gap Environmental Education & Training Center and Shippensburg University

Invasive species are wreaking havoc as they displace natives and compromise the biodiversity of our state, country, and planet. Increased travel and expansion in global trade are the main culprits in the rapidly escalating rate of invasion, with costs being high. In the U.S. alone, the price tag of battling this menace while protecting our native habitats and croplands is estimated at 137 billion dollars each year. The potential damage to timber resources, to the recreational and aesthetic values of terrestrial and aquatic landscapes, and to human health challenges the abilities of land managers and private landowners to provide natural resource stewardship for public and private lands. “Containing Invasives: Closing Pandora’s Box” will address this issue through an array of sessions offering practical information, useful to both field personnel and invasive control program planners.

Opening Speaker:
“Why Does It Matter Who You Are And Where You Came From? A Story of Invasive Plants and Their Native Relative”
- Bernd Blossey, Director of the Ecology and Management of Invasive Plants Program, Cornell University

Many introduced plants are close relatives of native North American species but these species still possess a chemical composition that is distinctly different from their North American counterparts. Often, the introduced species outperform and outcompete their native relatives, becoming invasive. The ecological or evolutionary reasons for the competitive advantage of introduced species include lack of natural enemies, the evolution of increased competitive ability and novel weapons hypotheses. This talk will explore the evolutionary and ecological reasons for such differences, and how they affect aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.

Dr. Bernd Blossey directs the Ecology and Management of Invasive Plants Program at Cornell University. Among his target plants are purple loosestrife, garlic mustard, phragmites, Japanese knotweed and water chestnut.

Morning Sessions (your choice of one):
A. DCNR Invasive Species Action Plan
B. Herbicide Use Primer: Using herbicides to manage invasive plant species in natural areas
C. Invasive Aquatic Plants
D. On-the-ground Management: Techniques, tools and equipment
E. Spurring and Organizing Citizen Action to Curtail Invasives

Post-Luncheon Speaker:
“Early Detection and Rapid Response – A New Biological Protection Ethic”
- Randy Westbrooks, National Invasive Plant Coordinator, United States Geological Survey

The Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) system offers a first line of defense against the establishment and spread of new invasive plants. As such systems are being developed, a coordinated framework of local, state, regional and national partner groups must be organized to achieve this goal. In addition to strategies contained within EDRR, Dr. Westbrooks is an advocate of public outreach, increasing citizen awareness of the harmful impacts of invasive species, with the intent of using public concern to drive regulations. This talk will highlight the importance of setting priorities, strategic planning, more effective prevention methods, partnerships and effective cooperation efforts.

First Afternoon Session:
F. Biological Control of Mile-a-Minute Weed
G. Early Detection Rapid Response: A pilot study targeting exotic bark beetles
H. Invasive Exotic Plant Management Tutorial for Natural Lands Managers
I. Plant Pathogens: Potentially effective and Safe Agents for classical biological control of invasive weeds
Second Afternoon Session:
J. The Economics of Prevention and Control of Invasive Species
K. Monitoring and Management of Invasive Insects Affecting Hemlock Health: Elongate Hemlock scale and Hemlock Wooly Adelgid
L. Pennsylvania State Parks: A diversified Approach to Invasives Control
M. Coloring Outside of the Lines: Using native plant alternatives to create beautiful landscapes

The conference includes lunch, break, and materials. Pre-registration (before 3/3/06) or for-profit exhibitors’ fee is $30.00. Students and non-profit exhibitors are $15.00. Others (after 3/3/06) and walk-ins are $40.00. For additional information or a registration form, please contact Kings Gap at (717) 486-3799, or e-mail kingsgapsp@state.pa.us.

Kings Gap Environmental Education & Training Center, 500 Kings Gap Road, Carlisle PA 17013

Christmas Bird Count Dinner

There was a buzz in the air at the post-CBC dinner at BJ’s Eatery. Ron Montgomery, Deb Freed, Pat Conway, and Ann Hunt were positively glowing with excitement, but mum was the word about their special sighting.

We had to eat our meal under the weight of anticipation, and then be patient until the end of the normal count, because their species was not even on the list! Was it a Crossbill? A Long-eared Owl?

Finally, Walter asked for sightings not on the list, and a Snowy Owl was announced! Ron and his party had seen it just at dusk at Mt. Airy. This is a first in the history of the Clarion CBC, which has been held since 1988.

Multiple observers scoured the area the next day, Sunday, December 18, to no avail. (Although Gary Edwards and Russ States found a lone Snow Bunting for Count Week). Walter was seen going home as it got dark, still wearing the suit and tie he had worn to church. Too bad the owl didn’t stay, but it was serendipitous for a Snowy Owl to show up on the day of our CBC!

Yard List Olympics 2005

Ron Rovansek of Port Matilda initiated the “Yard List Olympics” in PA in 2005. Eighty-three birders competed in five categories of yard to see who could identify the most “Yard Birds”.

Categories were based on the size and location if the yard as follows: Category 1 includes small urban yards; category 2 includes suburban yards that are surrounded by other suburban land; category 3 includes suburban yards that border some other type of habitat that would attract birds; category 4 includes yards of 1 to 5 acres; category 5 is yards larger than 5 acres.

The opening event of 2006 was to tally birds in your yard on January 1. Marcy Cunkleman of Indiana, PA, won the January 1 yard listing event with 26 species. Marcy is an avid grower of bird-friendly plants, which undoubtedly helped with her impressive list. Ken Lebo and Carole Willenpart were tied with 24 species each. Congratulations, Carole!

For 2005, Carole placed 5th in Category 5, and 10th overall, with 123 species seen on her property in 2005. Flo & Jim McGuire placed an average 14th in Category 4, and 46th overall, with 70 species, but had fun.

If you are interested in joining the 2006 contest, please contact Ron Rovansek at (717) 514-8875 or rrovanske@adelphia.net.

Cook Forest State Park Seeks Adopt-A-Trail Volunteers

Cook Forest State Park is accepting volunteers to adopt various hiking, cross country skiing, and equestrian trails. Adopt-A-Trail conservation volunteer duties entail walking a trail of their choice 4 times a year, while picking up litter, removing small branches, and noting tree hazards along the trail. Interested applicants can obtain a Conservation Volunteer Application at: www.dcnr.state.pa.us/cons or by contacting Dale Luthringer at (814) 744-8475 or dluthringe@state.pa.us.
Great Backyard Bird Count

THE 9TH ANNUAL GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT IS HOSTED BY THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY & CORNELL LABORATORY OF ORNITHOLOGY

Tens of thousands of people will be outside (or looking through their windows), counting birds February 17–20. Be one of them! Which birds are spending their winter with you this year? How many can you see? Take part in the ninth annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) to see how your local birds fit into the landscape of North America.

The GBBC involves people of all ages and all levels of experience and skill. Whether you count the five species at your backyard feeder, or the 75 species you see during a day’s visit to your neighborhood park or wildlife refuge, it’s important that you report what you see to the GBBC website www.birdsource.org/gbbc.

Your bird list, however short or long, helps us all understand more about birds across the continent, as indicators of the health of the world around us. As you enter your results, you’ll see how a group of tens of thousands of birdwatchers can paint a picture of our birds in winter.

The 2005 Great Backyard Bird Count revealed:
- The flight routes of the early northward migration of Sandhill Cranes.
- The continued long-term expansion of Red-bellied Woodpeckers northeast to Nova Scotia.
- The first GBBC report for Bohemian Waxwings in Oregon and their first appearance in the southern Rockies since 2001.
- The Eurasian Collared-Dove moving northwest from Florida, with Idaho’s 59 birds being the first reported for GBBC from that state.
- Common Redpolls departing from their normal “irruption” pattern by coming south in large numbers for the second consecutive year.

What will we learn about the movements and numbers of birds in 2006? Join us and be part of the excitement as we find out together!

Top 10 most commonly reported species in GBBC 2005

1. Northern Cardinal
2. Mourning Dove
3. Dark-eyed Junco
4. American Goldfinch
5. Downy Woodpecker
6. Blue Jay
7. House Finch
8. Tufted Titmouse
9. American Crow
10. Black-capped Chickadee

Count for the birds
February 17–20, 2006!
It’s easy... here’s how.

Before you count, go to www.birdsource.org/gbbc for easy-to-follow instructions and local checklists.

✓ Count the birds in your backyard, park, or refuge— anywhere! For each kind of bird, write down the highest number of individuals you see at any one time during your count.

✓ Take part on one, two, three, or four days. Watch the birds for as long as possible (15 minutes or more) each day.

✓ Report your results online. Go back to the GBBC website, complete an online checklist, and report your sightings electronically. Feel the buzz as you join with thousands of others doing the same thing!

✓ View your results! You can see lists and maps online, continually updated throughout the count. See how you and your town fit into the big picture.

The GBBC is open to all, there is no need to preregister, and no fee required. Join us!
In 1966, J.B. Lippencott Company published a heartwarming avian biography by Margaret A. Stanger entitled That Quail Robert. I was a junior in high school, and although we had moved away from my beloved Pennsylvania, I was still very much into nature and birds. Naturally, I read the book.

Rescued from an abandoned nest and mothered by the warmth of a table lamp, the quail hatched from the wrong end of the egg and imprinted on Dr. and Mrs. Thomas C. Kienzle. The Kienzels lived near a lake in Orleans, Massachusetts. Much to the dismay of the Kienzels, Robert resisted freedom, preferring to live in the house. He ate at the table, greeted guests, rode in the car and became famous. Hundreds of unbelieving people came to see the unique quail and left believers. “He” wore the name of Robert (meaning “bright in fame”), although “she” began to lay infertile eggs. When the Kienzels discovered the eggs, they decided not to change his/her name.

My memory of reading That Quail Robert years ago, was jogged this summer, when a bobwhite appeared at my backyard ground feeder. I couldn’t believe my eyes or ears. I was delighted to find the book shelved at the library where I work and re-read it. That Quail Robert is an affectionate, well-written story that, once again, pulled at my heart strings.

I’m sure my neighbors and friends thought I was crazy, when for days after I saw the quail, I crouched, peeked and peered around the yard, hoping to get a picture of it. My son finally got one, but it was too far away. I was frustrated at not being able to prove there was a “Robert” in my backyard, even though I had taped his call, saw him many times (once sitting on top of the ground feeder), and several of my friends saw him too. Without a picture, though, I couldn’t prove his existence to my birding friends. I was exasperated! To further my frustration, a second quail appeared, but without a better camera I was helpless to prove their existence.

Luckily, both quails appeared one day and I called a wonderful friend with a great camera. She came and successfully took several images of the duo while lying on her stomach in my backyard, which I proudly shared with my birding cronies. To my dismay, no one was overly excited about it, even though bobwhites are virtually nonexistent in this part of the state. The overall consensus was that they were probably released by someone for game birds and not a big deal.

I was undaunted by this lack of enthusiasm in my birding circle of friends. I hadn’t seen or heard a bobwhite since the early sixties. This was a big deal to me. I continued to tape them and was overcome with glee when “my” Robert raced through the yard with his crest erect after I played the tape from the bedroom window. I was even more ecstatic when my sister, visiting from New York, witnessed both the male and female strolling through my backyard on a warm July day. It didn’t get any better than that. All summer I hoped the two would mate and one morning I would laugh at the sight of a fluffy string of precocial chicks, but it wasn’t to be.

August came and it appeared that the quail had left. I hadn’t heard them for a while. I was gone for most of September to visit my daughter in Japan. There I learned that the Japanese believe that their ancestors are reincarnated and often come back as birds. Although a friend kept my feeders filled during my absence, Robert didn’t show, and October came and went, without a peep from Robert.

The day before Thanksgiving, I was in the kitchen preparing a traditional family dessert passed down from my late Aunt Mary, who loved to
hear the song of the bobwhite. My sister and her husband, visiting from New York, had already gone to bed when I retired for the night thinking of Aunt Mary and how much she would have enjoyed seeing my Robert in the backyard.

I thought I was dreaming the next morning when I was awakened by just one note of the bobwhite’s call. I sat straight up in the bed and listened. There was no doubt about it. I wasn’t dreaming. Robert was back! I tore off the covers, grabbed a robe and awakened my sister, who was sound asleep. “Kath, I said, “get up, I heard the bobwhite!” “Sure,” she said, rolling over to go back to sleep. “Honest,” I said, with urgency. “Get up!”

As she joined me in the kitchen, we opened the sliding glass door a crack to hear better. We didn’t wait long. “Bob!,” we heard distinctly from the direction of the evergreens in my backyard. “Bob!” We watched the yard all day for a glimpse of Robert, but he didn’t reveal himself. Toward evening, my sister and I left for an hour or so to do some shopping. When we came back, her husband was sitting in his usual spot reading. He greeted us with one finger pressed against his lips for us to be quiet. “Look out on the porch,” he said in a whisper.

I switched the porch light on. Where? I said to Chuck. “Over in the corner,” he said, pointing with a mischievous grin. “It’s been sitting there since just before dark. Patrick took a picture of it and it didn’t budge.” My sister and I both saw it at the same time. Roosting quietly on an old towel on top of a crate sat Robert. “Well, I’ll be!” my sister said. “Aunt Mary, is that you?” I chuckled.

Robert stayed on and around my back porch for the next two weeks, eating cracked corn from a dish. He was quite the entertainer, chasing juncos away from his food and strutting around like he owned the place. He wouldn’t let me get too close, but he allowed me to take several pictures of him the last day I saw him. I discovered later that he had been sleeping under the cover of my barbecue grill.

I don’t know where Robert came from, why he stayed away so long and then came back, or why he left again, but I do know that I felt special having him visit. He is welcome any time.

**Winter Raptor Survey**

The following includes excerpts from Greg Grove’s article in Pennsylvania Birds, Vol. 19, No. 1, used with permission.

The Winter Raptor Survey (WRS) in Pennsylvania was initiated by Greg Grove of Penn State in 2001. It is a roadside survey where all raptors are recorded, but the focus is on open-country raptors: Northern Harriers, Red-tailed Hawks, Rough-legged Hawks, and American Kestrels. In 2005, surveys were run in 63 of the state’s 67 counties. Observers spent 494 hours in the field, and covered 8,007 miles.

Red-tailed Hawks were easily the most abundant raptor recorded, with 2610 birds, or 5.28 birds per hour of observer effort. This was the highest rate of red-tail observations per hour in the five years of the survey.

American Kestrels, which had been declining in previous surveys, also showed an increase, with a record high of 433 birds. The per hour rate of 0.88 was well above the 2004 rate but still below the rates from 2001 through 2003. This is an encouraging sign for a species considered by many to be declining in northeastern states.

Two hundred Rough-legged Hawks were counted, which was less than the record high of 2004, but still well above the counts from 2001-2003. Some remarkably high counts included 13 Rough-legs on routes in Clarion County.

The Northern Harrier trend was similar to that of Rough-legs. Seventy harriers were tallied, with a concentration in central and southcentral counties.

The 6th Pennsylvania Winter Raptor Survey is being held through February 12, 2006. Local participants and counties include Gary Edwards and Russ States in Venango, Carole Willenpart and Mike Leahy (separate routes) in Clarion, Pat Conway and Jason Martino (separate routes) in Jefferson, and Flo and Jim McGuire in Forest.
SRAS Bird Seed Sale

This is your opportunity to purchase quality bird seed from our local Agway dealer and support the conservation, education and environmental activities of the Seneca Rocks Audubon Society. For your convenience, you will have a one week period to pick up your order by checking the SRAS order in the store. If there is any question about your order, please contact Janice Horn.

ORDER BY FRIDAY  FEB 17, 2006          PICK-UP from   MONDAY  MAR 6  to  SATURDAY  MAR 11

Mail this order form with check (payable to SRAS) to: Seneca Rocks Audubon Society
c/o Janice Horn
32 Barber St.
Clarion, PA  16214

Name_________________________ Phone_________________________
Address_________________________________ SRAS member Y___ N___
City_________________________ State________ Zip______________

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Make checks payable to:  Seneca Rocks Audubon Society

Subtotal ____________________________  6% tax ____________________________

Donation to Seneca Rocks Audubon ____________________________

Total ____________________________
Future Programs -
March 13 - Dan Brauning, "Following the wandering falcon: Peregrine Falcon recovery research"
April 10 - John Karian

Note that our March and April presenters have switched months. Dan Brauning will be coming in March, and John Karian in April.

Thank you to the following hosts for the coming meetings:
Feb 13 Judy & Ron Montgomery
Mar 13 Jim Wilson & Gary Edwards
Apr 10 Jan Meyer

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SRAS Board Members
Deb Freed, President, Membership . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 226-4719
Gary Edwards, Vice-president, programs . . . . . . . . . . . . . 676-3011
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Ron Montgomery, Field Trips, Community Programs . . . . . . . 764-6088
Jim Wilson, Events . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 676-5455
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Walter Fye, Beaver Creek . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 797-1019

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