

THE

GNATCATCHER



BLUE
GRAY
GNATCATCHER

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

Vol 9 No. 8

November 1977

it is
the
property
of
true
genius
to
disturb
all
settled
ideas.

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The November Meeting

TIME: 7:30 p.m.

DATE: Tuesday, November 29th

PLACE: Twenty-Eighth Street Church of the Brethren
Union Avenue & 28th St., Altoona, Pa.

PROGRAM: Two Audubon Wildlife Theater Films

Beautifully done, these films await us next Tuesday evening in the Social Hall of the church. Each is a new production and runs about 15 minutes. The quality of photography and the choice of subject matter should please us.

"Sounds in Nature" presents the wildlife of Algonquin Park in Ontario, Canada. It is especially rich in the number of birds shown. "Where Eagles Swim" is a remarkable film showing how eagles swim in waters off coast of British Columbia.

Enjoy two fine films, plenty of good company and some tasty refreshments. The brief business part of the meeting will as usual be interesting, important and enlightening.

Christmas Bird Count

After eight years the count procedure seems down pat. We do have a very real need for counters - those who are objective observers as well as interested contributors. If you're not sure about the degree of expertise required to be a participant -- don't worry, there's a place for you in our annual count. Areas are set up for teams and captains are in charge of parties taking the census in one particular area. Don Wharton, e.g. will be in charge of Canoe Creek and the immediately surrounding area. The lake is a hot spot - especially if it isn't frozen over. (We need a telescope - 30 power or more - for out there)

The basic rules are: "Don't count if not positively sure!" Count totals of each species. Keep tabulations by area and list all possible details on anything considered unusual or unexpected. The types of birds to be seen number close to 75+ but it is hard to see 50. Our best was 50 on one 24 hour day -- a record that will be broken. Lately our efforts have been towards getting more counters out in the field and more feeder people enlisted as helpers. Feeders often turn up very good birds. If you know anyone who lives in the 7½ mile radius of the count circle center at Culp (Sinking Valley), try to get them involved.

John Orr is the count compiler. Call him to sign up with a team. He has information sheets with all small details and can give directions both by phone and mail. We need people most in Tyrone, Water Street, Greenwood, the kettle to Two Macks, and Canoe Valley (including Mt. Etna)

If you know someone who is pretty good at bird identification but is not a member let us know his or her name so we can contact them. The date of this year's census is December 18th - a Sunday. At dusk a covered dinner will be held at the Skelp Grange Hall in Sinking Valley. This is where all counters' lists will be added up for the totals. Very rustic - great homecooked food, beautiful setting, lots of fun - and very educational. This is a time for learning about the birds. Maps, guides and personal help are available. If unable to count that day, consider taking a ride in late afternoon through the valley and down to the Skelp Grange Hall for the get-together!

The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds: Eastern Region By John Bull and John Farrand, Jr. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977. 776 pp. \$7.98 Review by Don Wharton.

The Audubon Society Field Guide is an important addition to the birder's library. Urged on the recognition that birding is an increasingly popularly sport (or recreation, or philosophy, even), the authors have adopted a format which differs from the traditional guide of say, Roger Tory Peterson or Chandler Robbins. The result is a highly useful tool for bird identification in the field, especially for the novice birder. The ornithologist will doubtless regard the book's central feature, an arrangement of birds by shape and color, as something akin to heresy. But the average birder, particularly the beginner, is not much interested in taxonomy. He wants, rather, a convenient and hopefully reliable device for telling him what that big white bird with the long bill and yellow legs is. To that extent the Audubon Society Field Guide should supply his need.

The first half of the Guide is composed of photographs arranged according to the "visual principles" of shape and color. This portion is conveniently keyed by thumb-mark silhouettes corresponding to fourteen different bird shapes. For the casual birder the advantage of this sort of arrangement over the traditional taxonomic or "family" classification is likely to prove a real one.

The text of the book, which follows the photographs and contains a description of each species, of its voice, specific environment, range, and nesting habits, is arranged according to habitat. Thus the note on the Peregrine Falcon is found on p. 470 (in the section designated "Lakes, Ponds, Rivers"), the American Kestrel on p. 505 ("Grasslands"), and the Merlin on p. 682 ("Coniferous Forests"). All three, of course, are members of the genus Falco and in the traditional guide we should find them grouped together.

The Audubon Guide's photographs are excellent, though in general photographs cannot be expected to high-light those field-marks used for identification of the individual species in the same way a painting can. The subject birds in the Guide are mainly males in breeding colors, and the authors have been conscientious in including photographs of females and immatures, which often exhibit strikingly different plumages. However there are two omissions which I find disturbing. First, the section on the Warblers is curiously lacking in photographs of females and non-breeding males; there is nothing comparable to Peterson's grouping of "Confusing Fall Warblers" to be used as a contrast to the very different appearance of the same birds in the spring. Secondly, the photo section on the birds of prey contains no selection of immature hawks, an omission anyone observing the fall raptor migrations will find more than a little inconvenient.

But altogether the Audubon Field Guide is an innovative, handy, sensible, and most attractive answer to the beginning birdwatcher's needs. Veteran birders will need to add this new guide to their dog-eared copy of Peterson or Robbins -- and take both (or even all three) afield.

Important Notes: Officers will be elected at the January meeting. Nominations are needed now to fill the positions of (a) President (b) Vice-president (c) secretary (d) treasurer. Give names (nominations) to John Orr - at 943-5629 or at the meeting.

Miscellaneous: PAC - Pennsylvania Audubon Council - will meet at the William Penn Museum in Harrisburg on Feb. 4th. Anyone is welcome to attend as a representative of JVAS. /The January JVAS meeting will be at the Hollidaysburg Planetarium for a sky show. /February's meeting is our annual banquet. Regional Representative Frank Dunstan will be the guest speaker. /Our constitution is now being revised. /Audubon's educational materials are going to be discontinued. Individuals or groups may purchase them while they last. See Bill Rosevear for information. / On Oct 25th Don Wharton saw 3 immature golden eagles at the Pulpit off Rt. #30 this side of Chambersburg. / Needed: photos of the Tyrone Flood Control Project. See Bill. / Call Bill Rosevear collect on any business at 674-5021.

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Executive Committee Meeting & Bird Count Planning Session: December 4th, 1:00 p.m. at Orr's.
Christmas Bird Count: December 18th - Sunday - all day.