

# Pennsylvania Wildlife

SUMMER 2021



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Year-round Fishing at Soaring Eagle Wetland

WFEF Gala Celebration Highlights

and more!





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The mission of the Wildlife for Everyone Foundation is to promote wildlife conservation and education in Pennsylvania.

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summer 2021

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*Cover photo: Male Ruby-throated Hummingbird feeding from a flower by David Whiteman. David Whiteman is a financial advisor who has a passion for wildlife and landscape photography. His photographs have been published in various publications, and his work has been displayed at numerous businesses and restaurants throughout the Centre region. You can see more of his photography at DAVIDWHITEMANPHOTOGRAPHY.COM.*

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**A**s the pages of the calendar turn, it is almost incomprehensible that we have operated under COVID restrictions for over one year!

Despite its challenges and limitations, the Wildlife for Everyone Foundation (WFEF) has persevered. We rode out the cancellation of our three major fundraisers and emerged shining at the groundbreaking celebration of our two accessible wetlands last October.

Immediately following the groundbreaking, big equipment was mobilized to clear space for the handicap parking area that will serve the more remote of our two wetlands, newly named the Galen and Nancy Dreibelbis Viewing Area, in recognition of the couple's many contributions to the Wildlife for Everyone Foundation. A trail, footbridge and two ADA-compliant observation blinds were completed before the snow fell.

Funding is being sought for a second ADA-compliant trail and elevated blind on the northern side of the Dreibelbis Viewing Area. This vantage point gives views of the largest pool of standing water which attracts secretive marsh birds like the American bittern, Virginia rail and sora. The cover and food this wetland provide have attracted as many as 140 different species of birds during migration!

The largest wetland ready for accessibility transformation is the Soaring Eagle Wetland just down the road from the Dreibelbis Viewing Area. Construction is anticipated



*Fall Groundbreaking of Wildlife for Everyone's accessible wetlands*

for late 2021. Our ADA-compliant wetlands will provide all persons, regardless of physical limitation, the

opportunity to connect with nature and benefit from its restorative powers.

The work of the WFEF continues. The Seedlings for Schools program that is supported by the Foundation's marketing and fundraising efforts has rebounded. Students from 535 schools across Pennsylvania learned about the importance of trees and pollinators in our environment.

Five scholarships were awarded to students enrolled in a natural resource-related field to advance their career interest in conservation.

Lastly, attendance at the 3rd annual *Pennsylvania Wildlife Gala* assured us that our mission to promote wildlife conservation and education continues to be important to you. Nearly 150 guests attended the Gala, raising funds for WFEF programs and initiatives.

The pandemic shook the Foundation, but the outlook for 2021 is sound! I hope you enjoy this issue and are inspired to give in support of the good work we do for conservation, wildlife and making nature accessible to all!

Yours in Conservation,  
Janet Nyce, President  
Board of Directors

# THE RUFFED GROUSE

*The Keystone King's Origins &  
Rise to Royalty in Penn's Woods*

by TIMOTHY FLANIGAN

The connotation of “*wild*” tends to impart exceptional value and an aura of mystery to wild places, wild things, and wild critters. This principle of wild equating to value is especially appropriate when applied to the Ruffed Grouse, *Bonasa umbellus*. The ruffed grouse’s wildly elusive and independent nature long ago elevated him to royalty among North America’s upland game birds. To upland hunters, he is and always will remain the King.

In Pennsylvania, he is in actuality, the Keystone King. Pennsylvania is the only state to honor the Ruffed Grouse as its avian symbol.



Photo © Timothy Flanigan

Pennsylvania is also the only state to honor and immortalize its vast forested landscape, known historically as Penn's Woods, in its modern name, Penn-sylvania. The ruffed grouse is a bird of the forest and a proven bellwether of forest habitat conditions.

Perhaps Aldo Leopold, the father of modern wildlife conservation, said it best when he penned the words: *"In terms of conventional physics, the grouse represents only a millionth of either the mass or energy of an acre. Yet subtract the grouse, and the whole thing is dead."*

Although Pennsylvania's grouse population is currently suffering the ravages of West Nile Virus, the birds continue to thrive in prime habitat, just as it has for centuries. In 1903, a group of scientists exploring the "Frankstown Cave" near Altoona, PA, discovered ruffed grouse bones consisting of a skull fragment and a leg bone. These bones date back to the Pleistocene Epoch, indicating that our State Bird was in residence here 25,000 years ago.

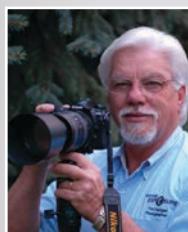
The ruffed grouse is, quite fittingly, Pennsylvania's state avian symbol because it gained its official scientific classification through the examination of a Pennsylvania ruffed grouse. In 1750, John Bartman, a consummate naturalist of the Philadelphia area, shipped a grouse specimen along with his observations, to Britain where naturalist, George Edwards examined the specimen and ultimately published a paper on the grouse.

In 1758, Edward's analysis gained the attention of Carl Linnaeus, the father of modern taxonomy, who christened the bird with its first scientific name, *Tetraonidae umbellus*. In 1840, another British naturalist reclassified our ruffed grouse, *Bonasa umbellus*, as it is known today. *Bonasa*, Latin for a bull, was likely chosen because

of the bird's drumming performance that culminates in a roar, similar to that of a bull. "*Umbellus*" notes the circular and umbrella-like appearance of the bird's dark neck feathers when fully raised and displayed behind its elegant head.

Its selection as the state's official bird symbol further entrenches the grouse's Pennsylvania heritage, although it was initially designated the "state game bird" by the Pennsylvania General Assembly in 1931.

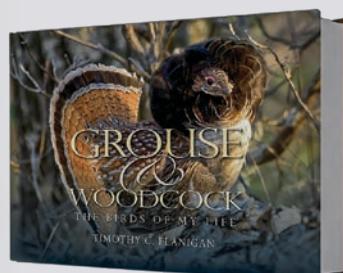
The *Ruffed Grouse Society*, a national wildlife conservation organization that promotes ruffed grouse conservation is headquartered in Coraopolis, Pennsylvania. The Society's mission of fostering healthy forests for the benefit of ruffed grouse is also a boon to Pennsylvania's state's animal, the whitetail deer. This targeted forestry also protects the state's flower symbol, the



**TIM FLANIGAN** is a widely-published, award-winning outdoor writer/photographer and the author of the book **GROUSE & WOODCOCK - THE BIRDS OF MY LIFE**.

As a career Wildlife Conservation Officer, upland hunter and wildlife photographer, Tim enjoys a multi-faceted perspective of wildlife management. His book contains a comprehensive compilation of grouse and woodcock natural histories.

[www.wildriverpress.com](http://www.wildriverpress.com)



Mountain Laurel, a critical cover and food species, and the state's tree symbol, the Eastern Hemlock, that offers winter cover to the state bird. This wise forest and watershed management protects and enhances the water quality of mountain streams where the equally wild state fish and native Brook Trout, *Salvelinus fontinalis*, thrives.

To hold a ruffed grouse in hand is to touch and feel the absolute essence of wildness. The grouse is the most difficult upland game bird species to bring to the bag. This supreme challenge is thoroughly addicting—the taking of one's first grouse on the wing is an unforgettable memory. Both celebratory and bittersweet, each success deepens the hunter's love and admiration of North America's premier game bird, fostering an abiding concern for the species' survival.

The grouse quickly became a revered game bird to Penn's Woods' early residents. Its challenging pursuit is the subject of some of America's earliest books. These include the 1783 publication of "The Sportsman's Companion, or an Essay on Shooting By a Gentleman." It was followed by the 1827 release of the anonymously authored "The American Shooters Manual by a Gentleman of Philadelphia County." The latter is considered to be the first comprehensive treatise on American field shooting. John Alden Knight, a Pennsylvania-based author's 1947 book,

The Ruffed Grouse is nicknamed the drummer because of the noise the male grouse makes with his wings to attract female grouse to his territory. The male

grouse rapidly beats his wings against the air, making a drumming noise. A male may drum from the same spot, using the same log or stump for several years.

"Ruffed Grouse," is regarded as a highly prized classic of upland bird hunting literature.

On the dinner table, the grouse is a meal fit for any king. Delicately and delightfully delicious, the grouse's white breast flesh is so pleasing to the pallet that many of the world's finest chefs have lauded its exceptional quality. It is a delicacy that graced the tables of America's earliest settlers and continues to delight today's upland hunter's families.

Pennsylvania's ruffed grouse numbers began a gradual decline in 2000. In 2015, the magnitude of losses alarmed the Pennsylvania Game Commission's upland bird biologist, Lisa Williams. Williams suspected West Nile Virus might be the cause. At her urging, the Pennsylvania Game Commission initiated an innovative research program involving the gathering of ruffed grouse eggs, hatching them in a controlled environment, and exposing some of the chicks to the virus.

By testing the exposed and the non-exposed chicks, researchers were able to identify West Nile Virus antibodies that developed in the exposed birds. That research



Photo © Timothy Flanagan



2021 is the ninetieth anniversary of the ruffed grouse's 1931 designation as Pennsylvania's official avian symbol. – it is also the sixtieth anniversary of the Ruffed Grouse Society's establishment in 1961.

enabled hunters to collect and submit blood samples from grouse taken during successive hunting seasons. This groundbreaking research led the country to develop the ability to monitor the prevalence of the virus in wild grouse. Once again, Pennsylvania's grouse gained national attention. Pennsylvania's continually-expanding scientific grouse research is benefiting grouse all across its North American range.

Ol' Ruff is a proven expert-level survivor, and Pennsylvania's forests supply the species' every need. Professor Leopold declared the ruffed grouse to be "physically marvelous." The birds are hunted every minute of their lives by a myriad of hungry predators yet manage to elude death to reproduce each spring. The further north one travels, winter

lasts longer, the snows lie deeper, and grouse numbers are greater.

Ol' Ruff's presence hallows his forest kingdom's ground, imparting a genuinely unique essence of wildness to Penn's Woods. As wild resource stewards, we enjoy the honor, responsibility, and privilege of wise wildlife and habitat management. A resident grouse is positive proof of the forest's wildlife hospitality quotient.

Each spring, the "*Thump - thump - thump*" sound of drumming grouse wings upon our eardrums evokes an aura of wildness that permeates Pennsylvania's vast forests. Like heartbeats through a stethoscope, the grouse's drumming is the *heartbeat of the forest*. The Keystone King still reigns.

# WARBLER BLISS IN PA

by JOHN CARTER



Kentucky Warbler

*“My heart continues  
to beat fast, and I am  
enthralled by the spectacle  
of color and birdsong.”*

*-John Carter*



Northern Parula

Photo © Mark Nale

Jaw-dropping events happen in nature all over the world. The glowing lights of the Aurora Borealis, the Great Animal Migration of the Serengeti, the Monarch Butterfly Migration, or even the Great Salmon Run in British Columbia provide lasting memories, but the one that fascinates so many people in the state of Pennsylvania with its burst of song and color is known as Spring Warbler Migration.

It was an early May morning and it had just rained the night before, making weather conditions ideal for seeing and hearing our Neotropical migrant wood-warblers. My sights were set along the Juniata River on the Lower Trail in Blair/Huntingdon Counties,

which is owned and maintained by Rails to Trails of Central Pennsylvania. Before I could even strap my binoculars around my neck and harness my camera, the sounds of my favorite warblers warmed my heart — a Blackburnian and a Black-throated Green warbler. My skin started to tingle and a rush of adrenaline flew through my veins. This was going to be one of those magical adventures that birders dream about.

I started my eBird app on my phone to track the birds I observe. In North America there are roughly fifty species of warblers, forty of which can be regularly found in Pennsylvania. Warblers spend their winters as far south as Central America, South

America and the Caribbean. In the spring, they travel as far north as Canada to breed. Knowing the sheer variety of the Parulidae family, which includes the warbler, I will study their beautiful songs on my Merlin app during the winter months so I can identify them when the feathered migrants arrive in spring.

One of the reasons I enjoy the Lower Trail is because of the abundance of Cerulean warblers, a declining species in the United States. Researcher Nick Bolgiano has conducted an annual Cerulean Warbler survey along this 16.5-mile trail each year since 1998, as part of Cornell's Cerulean Warbler Atlas Survey. In 2020, 67 singing male Cerulean warblers were counted, compared to 72 in 2019, 54 in 2018, 61 in 2017, 65 in 2016, and 51 in 2015. In 2020, Bolgiano started surveying multiple times within the breeding season to understand

how the warbler's singing changes within a season. There are only a few Pennsylvania locations where Cerulean warblers can be heard in such concentrations.

Warblers share some basic characteristics and, for the most part, they are small to medium-sized songbirds. Other important characteristics to pay attention to when identifying warblers include the shape of their bill which is generally thin and pointed, the presence of an eye-ring and whether there are stripes around the eye, or if wing bars are present with an identifying color. In addition, some warbler species are easily identified by colors and patterns on the breast, belly, sides, and tail.

It is easy to get flustered as so many birds move across the treetops in the blink of an eye, and you have little time to get your binoculars set. American Redstarts and Common Yellowthroats, yet frequent, are great to

Ovenbird

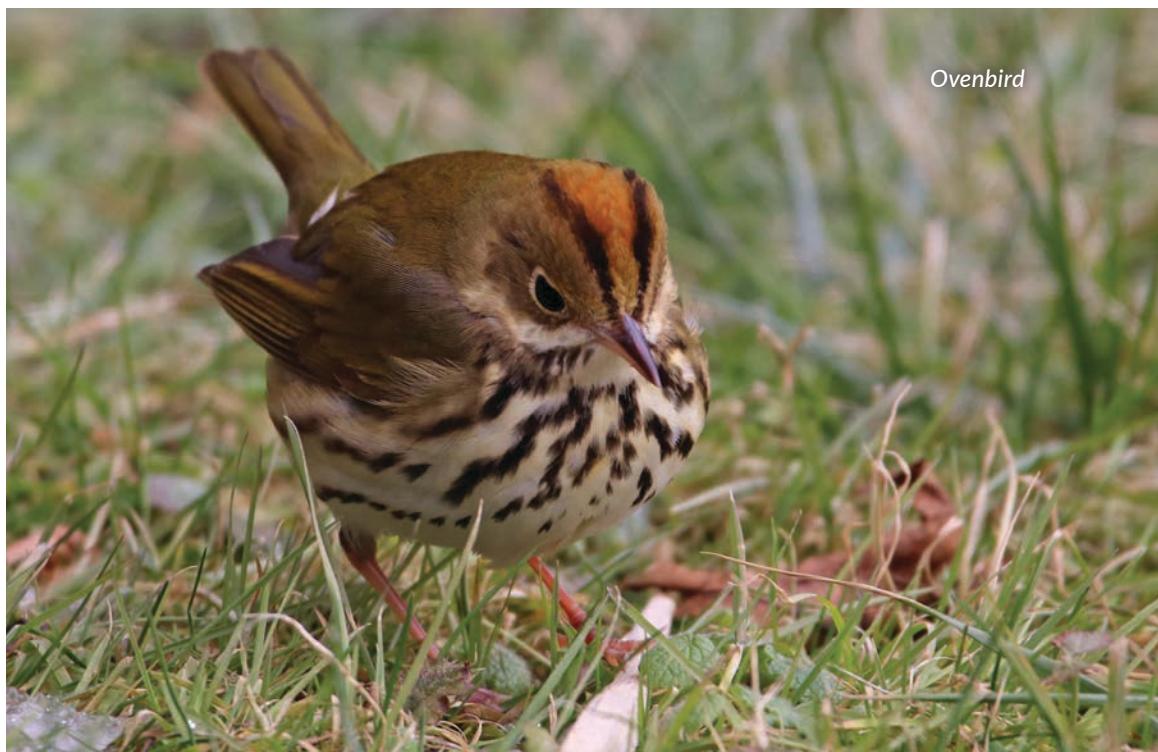


Photo © Mark Nale

Common Yellowthroat



### Helpful Birding Apps: eBird and Merlin Bird ID

Created by Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Available for iOS and Android.  
Free downloads available at the App Store or Google Play.

capture with the lens at close distances.

The Ovenbird's *teacher, teacher, teacher* call makes its presence known from the forest floor. Unlike the foraging methods of many warblers that flit sporadically from branch to branch, the Ovenbird will forage for insects and larvae hidden in fallen leaves.

As I continue my trek, I am treated to a Black-and-white warbler, which moves around the tree like a White-breasted nuthatch and sounds like a squeaky wheel when it sings. A Golden-winged warbler displays nearby in an open powerline cut of the trail, and a pair of Northern parulas sing their rising buzzy trill song. My heart continues to beat fast, and I am enthralled

by the spectacle of color and birdsong.

Before I know it, I am 2 miles into the trail and losing track of time, although at this point, it doesn't matter. Nature has drawn me in completely. Days like this are meant for the outdoors and appreciating the splendor of Spring Warbler Migration. That day I witnessed 77 birds including 22 different warbler species. It was a special day and one that I will always remember.

---

John Carter is an Assistant Director for Academic Advising & Student Disability Services for The Pennsylvania State University, World Campus, where he advises for the Health & Human Development degrees. John is also the current president for the Juniata Valley Audubon Society. He is an avid bird watcher and enjoys being outdoors with nature.



ONE - O F - A - K I N D

# Keystone Select Stocked Trout Water Opens on Soaring Eagle Property

*Unique trout fishing draws anglers.*

by MARK NALE

An exciting and unique trout fishing opportunity opened in March, and... it just happens to be centered on Wildlife for Everyone's Soaring Eagle Wetland property. An experimental special regulation approved by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission allows year-round fishing and the use of all tackle types on a section of Bald Eagle Creek located in the Soaring Eagle Wetland.

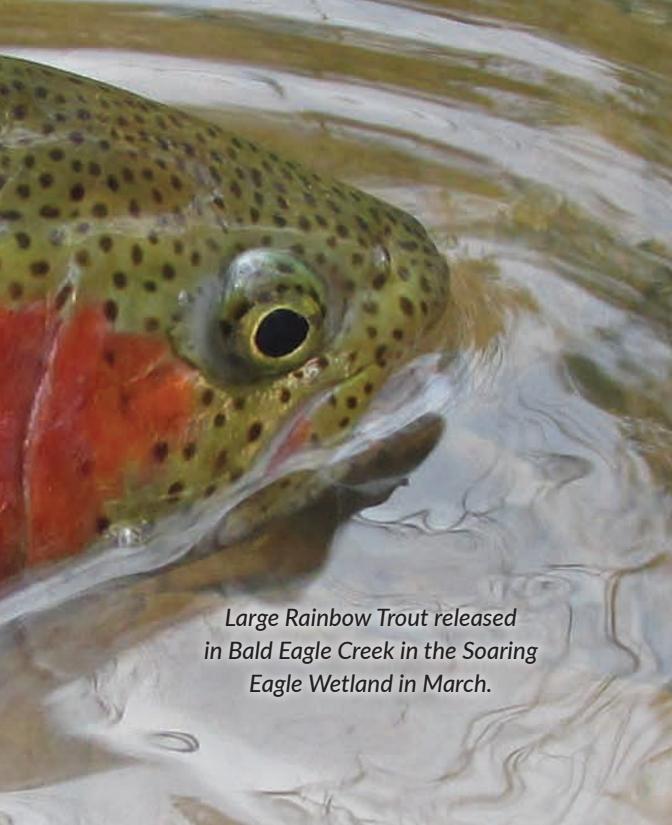
This stream section is part of the Keystone Select Stocked Trout Waters program. It is distinct because it is the only such water in PA that allows the use of bait in addition to artificial lures. All other Keystone Select waters permit the use of lures and flies only.

Under the Keystone Select program, large trout — 14 to 20 inches in length — are stocked at a rate of up to 250 trout per mile.

This is comparable to the abundance of similar-sized fish residing in Pennsylvania's best wild trout waters.

The regulation is designed to provide for harvesting trout under the reduced creel limit (up to three trout per day) when stream conditions are less favorable for trout survival due to typically decreased summer flow and elevated water temperatures (June 15 – Labor Day). Anglers will be permitted to fish for stocked trout for an extended period of catch and release angling with all tackle types (from Labor Day to June 15).

"I view this as a win-win for the Commission and local trout anglers," Bureau of Fisheries Director Kris Kuhn commented. According to Kuhn, including this section of Bald Eagle Creek in the Keystone Select Stocked Trout Waters program, and allowing the use of bait, gives agency staff



*Large Rainbow Trout released in Bald Eagle Creek in the Soaring Eagle Wetland in March.*

an opportunity to compare angler opinions, usage, catch, and preferences as compared to other Keystone Select streams that are managed with traditional artificial-lures-only restrictions.

The new regulations are also a win for the Wildlife for Everyone Foundation. Board member Jerry Regan stated, “We are excited to host this experimental water. It ties in well with our plans to build a larger parking area, as well as an ADA-compliant boardwalk trail, fishing platform, and other amenities that make this reach of stream accessible to all anglers regardless of physical abilities.”

“A stream habitat improvement project completed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service during the summer of 2019 has already enhanced the fish habitat in this area and the new regulations, along with increased stocking of larger trout, should make the fishing even better,” Regan continued.

The first stocking day on the Wildlife for Everyone property occurred on March 13. Several dozen people were on hand to watch over 200 large trout and many smaller rainbow, golden rainbow and brown trout be-



*John Jackson stocking trout in Bald Eagle Creek.*

stocked in this section of Bald Eagle Creek. Local anglers are happy with the new special regulation water — and — the big trout.

“The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission has taken a step in the right direction with this new special regulation water,” said Mark Jackson of Warriors Mark. “This all-inclusive water allows everyone, with their tackle method of choice, to fish in this new special regulation area and enjoy catch-and-release delayed-harvest trout fishing at its best.”

This section of stream is most easily accessed from the Soaring Eagle Wetland parking lot, where anglers are always welcome.

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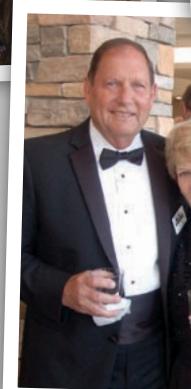
Mark Nale is an award-winning outdoor writer and photographer living in Centre County. He loves trout fishing, hiking, kayaking and observing nature. Mark has had over 1000 photos published during the past three years and he is a past president of the Pennsylvania Outdoor Writers Association.

## 2021 PENNSYLVANIA WILDLIFE GALA

The long-awaited 3rd Pennsylvania Wildlife Gala, held at the Wyndham Garden – State College in May, was a success! Nearly 150 guests joined together in support of wildlife conservation and making nature accessible to all. A compelling presentation by acclaimed ornithologist and author Scott Weidensaul, highlighted the extraordinary feats of migratory birds and recent conservation successes. Galen and Nancy Dreibelbis were recognized for their Foundation support culminating in the naming of the newly opened Dreibelbis Viewing Area.

The installation of a bench placed in the Soaring Eagle

Wetland by the trustees in honor of long-time Board secretary, Michael Schaul, was highlighted.





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## JUNIOR CITIZEN SCIENTIST TAGS MONARCHS FOR CONSERVATION

by BARBARA SCHROEDER

If you need inspiration to do your part for conservation, Lucas Wagner, 3rd grader at Gray's Woods Elementary School in State College, will provide it. Like many 8-year-olds, Lucas likes to be outside, but his interests go beyond recreation. Lucas's curiosity for all kinds of wildlife including insects, arachnids, reptiles, amphibians and birds is exceptional.

Last fall, Lucas took his interest in

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Lucas Wagner is a 3rd grader in the State College Area School District. He likes to fish, canoe and play the guitar. When he grows up, he wants to be an Entomologist and study insects.

Monarch butterflies to the next level and participated in the citizen science project, Monarch Watch, administered by the University of Kansas. At Lucas's elementary school, students planted a pollinator garden to attract Monarchs. This sparked Lucas's interest and his parents, both aquatic ecologists, sought out a program that would satisfy Lucas's curiosity and expand his knowledge.

As part of Monarch Watch, volunteers across the U.S. and Canada tag individual butterflies to help scientists answer questions about the Monarch population and the butterfly's migratory patterns. So, in early September, just before the Monarch takes off for Mexico, Lucas and his parents ventured into the Wildlife for Everyone's Soaring Eagle Wetland to tag Monarch butterflies. The Soaring Eagle Wetland is bursting with Monarchs in late August and early September as they flutter from wildflower to wildflower feeding on nectar. An abundance of goldenrod, Asters, Joe Pye Weed and other wildflowers attract Monarchs to the Soaring Eagle Wetland in droves.

Lucas set to work. He netted the Monarchs, identified each as male or female, recorded the date, applied the tag and set them free. (In case you're wondering how one knows the sex...two black spots on the back of the wings indicates a male, zero spots designate a female.)

MonarchWatch provided Lucas with 25 tiny (almost 3/8" diameter), round stickers weighing about 2% of the butterfly's weight to affix to the discal cell of the insect. Each tag contained a unique alpha numeric number and information where the retriever can send the tag. Tagged butterflies can provide information to help answer questions about



Photo © Rebecca Wagner

**MONARCHWATCH** is a nonprofit education, conservation and research program based at the University of Kansas that focuses on the Monarch butterfly. Contact [www.MonarchWatch.org](http://www.MonarchWatch.org).



**MONARCH WAYSTATIONS help Monarchs thrive during the arduous migration from North America to Mexico every fall. Waystations are butterfly gardens containing native wildflowers that provide nourishing nectar to sustain the delicate butterflies throughout their 3,000-mile journey. Be sure to include the native variety of milkweed in your garden to guarantee successive generations of Monarch butterflies.**

Photos © Rebecca Wagner

the geographic origins of Monarchs that reach Mexico, overwintering, distance flown, mortality during migration and changes in geographic distribution.

Lucas recalls, “It was hard to hold down the Monarch to put the tag on. They’re really fast and I needed to be careful not to damage their wings.” Rebecca, Lucas’s mother, notes that timing is important. The success rate is better if the butterfly is tagged right before it is set to migrate.

Lucas intends to tag butterflies again for *Monarch Watch*. Monarchs are in trouble because their food source and habitat are diminishing. Loss of open space and pesticides are causing a reduction in milkweed, the host plant for the Monarch butterfly (where it lays its eggs) and the only plant the caterpillar larvae will eat.

Lucas advises, “It’s important to help species, and to do that, you need to understand them. If volunteers do their part to collect data, scientists can learn about Monarch butterflies and how to protect them.” Lucas is doing his part; hopefully, his actions will encourage others, young and old, to do the same.



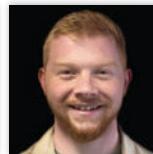
## SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



Keele



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**The Wildlife for Everyone Foundation is honored to assist five university students with financial support to assist with their academic studies in the fields of conservation and natural resource management.**

**EMMA KEELE** (Hastings, NE) is pursuing a Master of Science degree in Biology at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). She received a B.S. in Biology Comprehensive with Wildlife Emphasis from the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Emma's thesis research addresses the Monarch butterfly and other pollinator use of Golden-winged Warbler-managed forests in the Great Lakes region. She is a graduate assistant at IUP and has co-authored several peer-reviewed journal articles based on her research. Emma aspires to a career in natural resource management.

**HALEY CARLTON** (Milltown, NJ) is a senior at Drexel University studying Environmental Science with minors in Biology and Geology. Her senior capstone project studies the effects of pH on water quality in tidally restricted ponds in Elkhorn Slough, an estuary in California. Haley participated in three different practical experiences during her education at Drexel: two of them in fisheries and one in a coastal engineering research lab. Haley plans to pursue a Ph.D. in the Marine Sciences with the goal of becoming a researcher and conservationist in the marine science community.

**JOSHUA STEVENS** (Hanover, PA) is a junior at Juniata College in Huntingdon, PA, pursuing a B.S. degree in Environmental Science with a minor in Studio Art. Joshua has conducted fisheries research for Juniata College's Environmental Department, studied pollinators and the Allegheny Woodrat, and served as a land management intern for the PA Game Commission. Joshua is a 2016 graduate of the

Wildlife Leadership Academy. He is interested in a career in public outreach where he can educate the public about the importance of wildlife conservation and the environment.

**KYRA MONSAM** (Sherrills Ford, NC) is a junior at Penn State University (University Park) working towards a B.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Science with a minor in Recreation, Parks and Tourism Management. Kyra served as a camp counselor for Shaver's Creek Outdoor School, where she found her passion for environmental education. She furthered her public education skills as a Conservation Education Intern with the Lehigh Valley Zoo. At Penn State, Kyra is a member of the wildlife society, the small and exotic animal club and Vice President of Recruitment for Sigma Alpha, a professional agriculture sorority. After graduation, Kyra hopes to pursue a career in environmental and conservation education.

**SARA MUELLER** (Warriors Mark, PA) is a Ph.D. student in the Wildlife and Fisheries Science program at Penn State University (University Park). She received Master and Bachelor of Science degrees in Wildlife and Fisheries Science from Penn State University as well. Sara was a teaching assistant and graduate student instructor at Penn State (University Park) and an adjunct faculty member in Wildlife Technology at Penn State (Dubois). Currently, Sara is a Fisheries research technician at Penn State. Her doctoral research is focused on Brook Trout phenotypes and genetics. Sara is open to any career that allows her to conduct research, educate others and be outdoors, possibly a position in academia, governmental work, private consulting or with a non-governmental organization.

## SUPPORT THE WILDLIFE SCHOLARSHIP FUND

A permanent fund will generate yearly awards to students interested in wildlife conservation.  
Please consider supporting our scholarship fund.

# BACKCOUNTRY Hunters & Anglers

*The Voice for Wild Public Lands,  
Waters and Wildlife*

by BARBARA SCHROEDER

*The Collegiate Chapter of BHA at Clarion University holds a clean-up day on public lands and waters.*





The Pennsylvania Chapter in Harrisburg

**B**ackcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA) is an organization that is getting a lot of buzz these days. Known for its commitment to protect and preserve wild public lands, waters and wildlife, the grassroots group is also recognized for its exceptional recruitment and retention of non-traditional outdoor enthusiasts. With a membership topping 40,000 and spanning across North America, BHA fervently promotes the preservation of our country's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing.

I recently interviewed Chris Hennessey of State College, Regional Manager for BHA and Nate Fronk of Kunkletown, Chair of BHA's Pennsylvania Chapter. Hennessey works with volunteer leaders of five BHA chapters in the eastern United States. The Pennsylvania Chapter was founded in 2014 and now has about 1,400 members.

A core tenet of Missoula, Montana-based BHA is the fact that public land belongs to every citizen and that access to those public lands and water resources is a right. While Hennessey affirms that Pennsylvania's

more than 4 million acres of public land are managed adeptly by state agencies, challenges may still arise, primarily in the form of development or land use changes that convert publicly accessible land to non-accessible land.

In addition to public land and water access, BHA focuses on habitat conservation through advocacy and stewardship, as well as fair chase principles, which seek to promote the ethical pursuit of fish and game.

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers has three special programs to carry out its education mission and forge the next generation of conservationists: the Collegiate Program, which has chapters at more than 30 U.S. colleges and universities; the Armed Forces Initiative, which seeks to engage and support active duty and retired military in public land, hunting and fishing pursuits; and Hunting for Sustainability, a program aimed at boosting hunter numbers through recruitment, retention and reactivation.

In 2020, the Pennsylvania Chapter was awarded Outstanding Chapter of the Year from BHA North America. According to Nate Fronk, the Pennsylvania Chapter received this commendation for growth in membership and organizational capacity, in addition to its efforts to end the ban on Sunday hunting in PA. "The continuing effort to expand Sunday hunting opportunities in Pennsylvania is the most important issue for BHA in the Keystone State," Fronk said. BHA supports legislation to lift the ban entirely or to grant decision making to the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

The Pennsylvania Chapter has also worked to fight against proposed cuts to conservation funding and to advocate for state agencies to be able to set their own

license fees, allowing for more consistent funding. As a result, the PA Fish and Boat Commission set its own fees for the first time in 2020.

BHA also engages regularly on federal legislation, regulation and agency decision-making. One example is the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a \$900 million a year fund that supports conservation efforts to improve fish and wildlife habitat



Members of the Pennsylvania Chapter install fishing line disposal bins at the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area.

**"The membership cares and they want to leave a hunting and fishing legacy for future generations."**

*-Chris Hennessey*

and enhance public access to recreational opportunities across the U.S. BHA has been working on this issue since 2006. In 2019 and 2020, Congress voted overwhelmingly to fully fund and permanently authorize these funds.

Looking to the future at the federal level, BHA's sights are set on passage of the federal Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA). Approval of RAWA will directly fund state agencies to improve conservation efforts for more than 12,000 at-risk species. "This is important for all wildlife because habitats overlap and what benefits one species almost always benefits others," Hennessey said.

On a local level, the Pennsylvania Chapter has conducted many cleanups on public land, adopted a trail at Raccoon Creek State Park, helped improve successional habitat on a state game land in Bradford County and established a fishing line disposal bin program at the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. These efforts grow year by year as the chapter continues to mature and expand.

"We have amazing volunteer leaders that have grown the chapter in Pennsylvania," said Hennessey. "The membership cares and they want to leave a hunting and fishing legacy for future generations. They understand it takes time and sweat to make things happen and they are willing to give it."

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers is

extremely popular with younger sportsmen and women. According to its 2020 member survey, 70 percent of BHA members are age 45 and younger. They are also politically diverse: 28 percent are Independents, 23 percent are Republicans and 18 percent are Democrats. The rest either did not identify with any party (13 percent), did not answer (11 percent), or identified as Libertarian (6 percent) or Green (1 percent).

In contrast to many sportsmen/women organizations with declining memberships that struggle to stay relevant, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers is thriving. According to Hennessey, a fun and inclusive attitude is pervasive throughout the organization and that tone is set at headquarters by President and CEO, Land Tawney.

BHA's signature "Pint Nights" and other casual get-togethers bring together like-minded, outdoor recreationists, from newbies to those with a lifetime of experience. "They unify over the issue of public lands and access," said Hennessey. "But part of the BHA magic is that we bring passionate hunters and anglers together. Our members love to be together, sharing ideas and talking the talk. Many new friendships and hunting and fishing partnerships have been formed at BHA events." In addition to Pint Nights, members attend educational events, clinics, trade shows, film tours and outdoor events like public land hikes.

The attraction to BHA is not surprising. The results are. Backcountry Hunters and Anglers boasts an engaged membership

ready to stand up for its belief in the preservation of open landscapes and access to the quality fish and wildlife habitat that these places support for future generations. "Everyone is welcome at BHA. We want people to learn, have adventures and enjoy the bounty of the land," said Hennessey. "And then, when the time comes, they will fight for that land."



**To learn more about Backcountry's work and ways to support the effort, visit the website: <https://www.backcountryhunters.org/>.**





Dreibelbis Viewing Area Blind

**S**tay the Course! has been our battle cry in light of recent obstacles in the Soaring Eagle Wetland. The permitting process for the second phase of our accessible wetlands project has proven a challenge. Seven different permit requirements, dependent on an extended archeological study, have delayed progress in the Soaring Eagle Wetland; but the light at the end of the long tunnel is coming into view!

The final archaeological report, filed with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, will give us the green light to file permits, with expected approval by the end of summer. From that point, construction bids will be solicited, and trail construction of this much-anticipated phase of the Soaring Eagle Wetland will get underway in late fall.

As we continue to build structures and trails on our 135 acres, the wetland committee is working on habitat projects to create a better environment for wildlife. Thinning invasive cattails to open more water in the Soaring Eagle Wetland will increase access to food and cover for wildlife and the recent planting of 300 native species of trees, courtesy of FirstEnergy, will provide



# SOARING EAGLE PROJECT

## Ready for Next Phase

by JERRY REGAN



Galen & Nancy  
Dreibelbis

additional habitat as well. The first Eagle Scout project has been approved to build an accessible trail through the Dreibelbis Viewing Area affording optimal views of the standing water and secretive marsh birds that utilize it. Wildlife for Everyone invites groups interested in undertaking projects that will create or improve habitat, to contact the Wildlife for Everyone office.

Wildlife for Everyone just received a \$100,000 grant from the Hamer Foundation, State College, to benefit the development of the Soaring Eagle Wetland. With the recent completion of the Galen and Nancy Dreibelbis Viewing Area, our vision for accessibility that allows everyone to connect with nature is taking form and getting noticed. Due to the pandemic, and more recently, the new special fishing regulation in effect on the wetland's section of Bald Eagle Creek, more visitors have ventured into the wetland. We look forward to sharing construction photos of phase two's Soaring Eagle Wetland in the next issue.

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Jerry Regan is a Board member and Chairman of the Wetlands Committee.

FirstEnergy & Wildlife for Everyone employees and volunteers joined forces to plant 300 native trees in the Soaring Eagle Wetland in celebration of Arbor Day.

*Photo © Barbara Schroeder*

## EVENTS



### GREAT OUTDOOR PICNIC

**Saturday, June 26, 2021**

**Penn's Cave & Wildlife Park Grounds**

Fun Family Event – Introduce kids to outdoor sports: fly casting and archery, live reptile and wildlife exhibits, environmental and outdoor-themed displays, build a bluebird box, demonstrations, raffles, prizes, youth giveaways and more.



### THE JOHN M. FRAILEY MEMORIAL SPORTING CLAY CLASSIC

**Friday, August 13, 2021**

**Seven Springs Mountain Resort**

Gather a team and sign up for a day of sporting clay competition on an award-winning course. There will be games, prizes and great food all set in the beautiful Laurel Highlands.



### THE JOHN M. FRAILEY MEMORIAL SPORTING CLAY CLASSIC

**Friday, October 15, 2021**

**Seven Springs Sporting Clay Facility**

Come join us in the Lehigh Valley. The stunning grounds have 3 levels of courses artfully etched into an abandoned 1800s cement quarry. Lunch, prizes, raffles and more.

*Please sustain our efforts to conserve wildlife in Pennsylvania by including the Wildlife for Everyone Foundation in your estate planning. Call 814-238-8138 for more information.*



# Seedlings for Schools

*Thrives during pandemic*



Despite the pandemic and schools operating on a hybrid or completely remote schedule, the Seedlings for Schools program prospered in 2021! Over 535 schools participated across the state this year.

This program, made possible by funding and marketing efforts from the Wildlife for Everyone Foundation, gives students the opportunity to plant a tree, observe its growth and learn why trees are important to wildlife. This experience lays the foundation for a future generation of conservation-minded citizens!

PLEASE CONTRIBUTE TO  
THIS INVALUABLE PROGRAM:

**WILDLIFEFOREVERYONE.ORG**  
**814-238-8138**

THANK YOU TO OUR SEEDLINGS FOR SCHOOLS SPONSORS:



## MEMBERSHIP

*Support Pennsylvania's wildlife and habitat  
by becoming a WFEF member today!*



Each membership includes a subscription to our magazine.



[www.wildlifeforeveryone.org](http://www.wildlifeforeveryone.org)  
The mission of the Wildlife For Everyone Foundation is to promote wildlife conservation and education in Pennsylvania.

**YES! I want to help the Wildlife For Everyone Foundation expand its conservation mission. Please accept my gift of:**

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|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bald Eagle - \$1,000  | <input type="checkbox"/> Wild Turkey - \$50        |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Ruffed Grouse - \$250 | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Membership - \$10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brook Trout - \$100   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other - \$ _____          |



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IN MEMORY OF: \_\_\_\_\_

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Please do not send me a gift.

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Please complete the above form or visit our website at [www.wildlifeforeveryone.org](http://www.wildlifeforeveryone.org)

Wildlife For Everyone Foundation is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Membership and gift memberships are tax deductible. Certain benefits may reduce the tax-deductible amount. Please consult your accountant.

### INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

#### LEVEL:

BALD EAGLE (\$1,000)

RIVER OTTER (\$500)

RUFFED GROUSE (\$250)

BROOK TROUT (\$100)

WILD TURKEY (\$50)

BLUEBIRD (\$25)

STUDENT (\$10)

#### GIFT:

Commemorative President's pin, invitation to join the President's Wildlife Circle

Special leather edition of *Gone for Another Day*, excerpts from the journals of naturalist & artist Ned Smith

Embroidered leather bag

*The History of the PA Fish and Boat Commission* book

Flashlight

Birding guide

Embroidered Foundation patch



## Wildlife For Everyone Foundation

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## WFEF RECEIVES GRANT FOR ACCESSIBLE WETLAND

In May, the Wildlife for Everyone Foundation received \$100,000 from the Hamer Foundation, State College, in support of efforts to make the Soaring Eagle Wetland accessible for all persons regardless of physical limitation. Creating accessible features will allow *all* individuals to experience nature and receive its restorative benefits. We are grateful to the trustees of the Hamer Foundation for appreciating the value of this project and granting this award.

**If you would like to help us realize our vision of accessible wetlands for all, please make a donation to Wildlife for Everyone Foundation. Go to [www.wildlifeforeveryone.org](http://www.wildlifeforeveryone.org) and click on 'Make a Donation' or contact the office: 814-238-8138 or [info@wildlifeforeveryone.org](mailto:info@wildlifeforeveryone.org).**

*"Before my accident, I spent a lot of time outdoors fishing and hiking with my German Shepherd. There are not many trails that are wheelchair accessible or areas where I can get up close to water to fish. That's why I'm excited to see the Soaring Eagle Wetland completed."*

*I want to be able to experience nature the way I used to."*

*-DENNY COLEMAN & SIERRA*