Our Plan

Conococheague Audubon: The Next 10 Years

Approved December, 2016
Introduction

Mission

The mission of the National Audubon Society (NAS) is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth’s biological diversity.

Who We Are

The Conococheague Audubon Society (CAS) is a chapter of the National Audubon Society based in Fayetteville in Franklin County, Pennsylvania. The group started in 1961 as the Conococheague Naturalists.

This is a family-friendly organization. The membership includes over 400 people residing primarily in Franklin, Cumberland, and Fulton Counties.

What We Do

Our activities include monthly meetings with nature-oriented programs, ~15 field trips each year, and bird counts. CAS Meetings are held the second Monday of each month, September through May, at Norlo Park in Guilford Township. Programs for the meetings explore a wide variety of topics related to the interrelationships of plants and animals. Field trips focus on opportunities to observe birds locally year-round and at prime spots in the mid-Atlantic during spring and fall migration. The group participates in both the annual Christmas Bird Count and the spring International Migratory Bird Count. At a pot luck supper in January, members share stories, fellowship, and home-made food.

Our projects include providing Audubon Adventures to local classroom teachers, maintaining and monitoring a Bluebird Trail, conservation projects, an annual workshop for beginning birders, and sponsoring an annual series of nature films. In 2005 we accepted Guilford Township’s offer for us to set up an office in the farm house at Norlo Park near Fayetteville. We planted and continue to maintain a Native Plants garden at Norlo Park.

CAS maintains and distributes a checklist of birds of Franklin County. The Naturally newsletter is published five times each year.
As a Pennsylvania Audubon chapter, we seek to align our efforts with the approach outlined by Pennsylvania Audubon:

**Our Approach—Science, Education, and Policy**
Through our efforts in these areas at the state and chapter levels, Audubon Pennsylvania offers a comprehensive approach to conservation that achieves measurable results.

**SCIENCE**
Audubon empowers "citizen scientists" and other volunteers with the leadership, knowledge and tools to study, preserve, and restore the natural environment we all share.

*Connecting People with Nature.* For more than 100 years, Audubon has been connecting people with nature through the annual Christmas Bird Count, The Great Backyard Bird Count and Important Bird Area surveys, all of which provide scientists with critical bird population trend data and diversity records...

*Identifying, Monitoring, and Conserving Bird Habitat.* Pennsylvania is making an important contribution to the conservation of bird and wildlife habitat in the Western hemisphere. "Penn’s Woods" are critical to many interior forest birds, providing nesting habitat to 17% of the world’s Scarlet Tanagers, 10% of Worm-eating Warblers, and 9% of Wood Thrushes.

*Important Bird Areas (IBAs).* Audubon, as the U.S. Partner for BirdLife International, has been working to identify a network of IBAs throughout the US. By focusing attention on the most essential and vulnerable areas, the IBA program promotes proactive habitat conservation which ultimately benefits birds and other wildlife...

*Stewardship Adoption Program.* To help facilitate community involvement in the protection and conservation of IBAs, Audubon Pennsylvania developed the Stewardship Adoption Program...

*Blue Mountain-Kittatinny Ridge.* Blue Mountain – or Kittatinny Ridge – is Pennsylvania’s largest IBA at 185 miles long... Audubon is leading a coalition of groups and agencies to protect this globally-important habitat and recreation corridor.

**EDUCATION**
Audubon PA is "connecting people with nature" by developing a network of Audubon Centers and using proven and innovative education programs to promote a lifelong conservation ethic.

**POLICY**
Audubon Pennsylvania’s mission of conserving and restoring natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, wildlife, and their habitats helps to shape the Commonwealth’s
conservation agenda. Working with state, local and federal officials, along with our network of chapters, volunteers and many partners, Audubon PA is protecting and restoring Pennsylvania’s natural heritage.

*Forest Health.* With more than 60 percent of Pennsylvania in woodlands, the health of the state’s forests are crucial to overall conservation. Unfortunately, our forests face many threats, from fragmentation by roads and development that destroy the unbroken blocks that many forest species need to survive, to an overpopulation of white-tailed deer whose browsing has destroyed the understory across much of Pennsylvania, endangering everything from wildflowers to ground-nesting songbirds. Audubon Pennsylvania’s primary goal is to encourage local, state and federal agencies to implement strategies that improve the overall health of Pennsylvania’s woodlands.

Our local chapter seeks to achieve results through active support of local, national, and international conservation efforts, educational outreach, citizen science projects, and sponsoring nature-related activities. Our goals are to:

1) Make a difference in our local community by being good stewards of the earth in our daily lives.

2) Share our passion for conservation, birding, and the natural world through programs; opportunities for observation of birds, other wildlife, and plants; projects in our local community; and other activities.

3) Educate the public about climate change, science-based decision-making, and promote the conservation of wildlife and natural environment.

4) Contribute to research in the fields of conservation and ornithology by monetary support and/or active participation.

5) Encourage the engagement of more citizens in the development of policies that support conservation.
Chapter 3

Challenges

Membership and Participation

Anyone who joins the National Audubon Society from our area automatically becomes a member of our chapter. One may choose to join only the local chapter.

Our membership is fairly stable. Each year approximately as many people join as decline to renew their Audubon membership. Out of the 400+ membership roster, regular program meetings draw 25-40 people. Field trips usually draw from 3 to 15 participants. It is difficult to enlist people to serve as officers and/or committee chairs.

Nearly all active members are over the age of 40. Most are retired. We need to recruit more young people to join and participate in our activities.

Finances

Our annual expenses range between $6,500 and $12,000. In recent years, our expenditures have sometimes exceeded our income. Fortunately, in prior years, we operated with a surplus. The National Audubon Society provides a steady dues share. Since moving into the Norlo Park office, we have additional assets (books, plates) and costs (liability insurance). The Norlo Park habitat improvement project is a multi-year effort requiring ongoing outlay of funds.

For many years our main fund raiser was a series of three nature films narrated live by the filmmaker. The film series became more expensive, competed with a series of travel films also offered locally, and suffered from lower attendance. As of September 2016, we switched to a new model for nature films and fundraising. We purchased high-quality DVD nature films and gained permission from the distributor to show the films for free. We solicited donations via a letter to all members. We shall see how this model works out financially. We will continue to encourage donations at the door at each nature film and regular meeting.

We should investigate alternative fundraising options. Our ability to support conservation and educational efforts is limited by the amount of money we raise.

Conservation Issues

Two Important Birding Areas (IBAs) are nearby – South Mountain and Kittatinny Ridge (The Pulpit is on the ridge). We have a limited number of active members to monitor and support conservation actions. We need training and materials to extend our efforts for IBA activities and interaction with local officials. We have good relationships with the leaders at Caledonia State Park and Michaux State Forest. For the past two seasons we have been unable to muster the volunteers necessary to continue the hawk watch at the Pulpit.
Our habitat improvement project at Norlo Park requires on-going and extensive planning and coordination with Guilford Township staff. New plants require watering and established areas require weeding. A few dedicated volunteers care for the garden; more are needed. We should continue to offer support to Guilford Township staff to encourage conservation of habitat.

We encourage recycling through articles in the Naturally newsletter. In the Naturally and in monthly meetings we share ideas about minimizing our footprint on the planet and reducing climate change. Use of alternative energy is limited in the area. Our ability to influence members, businesses, and government agencies to consider energy alternatives is limited.

Many local land conservation projects proceed without awareness of or input from Conococheague Audubon. We do not typically participate in township or other government planning activities.
Our current approach to fulfill our goals and meet the challenges we face includes these actions:

1) Hold monthly meetings that emphasize the conservation of birds and other wildlife.

2) Schedule field trips to observe birds and educate chapter members and the public about birds, other wildlife, and their relationships to each other and to their environment.

3) Participate in the Christmas Bird Count, Migratory Count, Cornell’s Great Backyard Bird Count, Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas project, our chapter Bluebird Trail and Field Trip counts as well as other bird counting research programs.

4) Sponsor Audubon Adventure series programs in elementary schools. This program continues to grow and may outreach our ability to support it financially.

5) Annually, conduct a Beginning Birders’ Workshop.

6) Organize and present displays at venues throughout the community.

7) Provide speakers to schools and other organizations.

8) Offer a scholarship to support attendance at an environmentally-oriented camp, workshop, or conference, or to support local environmental research.

9) Present high-quality nature films free to the public.

10) Publish an annual chapter schedule of educational programs and field trips planned for the year.

11) Publish a chapter newsletter five times a year of chapter activities and conservation news.

12) Publish chapter meeting dates, program information and film series dates in local news media and invite the public to participate.

13) Apply for grants for special projects or purchases.

14) Publish our activities, observation records, scholarship availability, photos of Norlo Park, and other materials on a website (www.ConococheagueAudubon.org).

15) Coordinate with other conservation-minded organizations (e.g., Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology, South Mountain Partnership).

16) Maintain a presence at Norlo Park through our office in the farmhouse and habitat improvement projects.
   - Work proactively with local government to protect the natural environment;
   - Continue to maintain good habitat using native plants;
   - Attract birds by maintaining bird houses and a water feature;
- Maintain a kiosk/bulletin board to display conservation information, describe the native plants garden, list birds seen at Norlo, etc.

17) Maintain resources for programs, outreach, and office use.
   - Laptop computer and software;
   - Projector;
   - Bulletin board and display materials

We also plan these additional steps for the future:

1) Coordinate with additional organizations to encourage participation in our activities.

2) Expand educational outreach to young people and new birders.
   - Provide materials specially directed toward children and young adults;
   - Schedule one or more field trips geared towards families, young birders, and new birders;
   - Coordinate with local schools to support their needs. The goal is to encourage and guide students in environmental studies and enroll new members. Investigate recycling in local schools to determine whether additional effort would help.
   - Sponsor a contest related to how Audubon Adventures are used in the classroom.

3) Expand our efforts to educate and work with local governments, planning commissions, landowners, developers, our membership, school classes, senior citizens, and other local organizations about the importance of conservation along the Kittatinny Ridge, South Mountain, and throughout the Cumberland Valley
   - Collaborate with PA Audubon to develop a clear message about conservation of land, ecology, habitat, and other natural resources in our area;
   - Regularly monitor plans and projects related to conservation and report to the membership;
   - Participate in conservation projects;
   - Volunteer for clean-up days;
   - Give presentations;
   - Arrange an energy expo at Norlo Park;
   - Explore options for widespread habitat improvement (e.g., native prairie)
   - Prepare brochures.

4) Use additional techniques to advertise our organization and activities
   - Directly invite one outside organization to participate in each activity;
   - Prepare a presentation and brochure describing the Conococheague Audubon Society;
   - Reach out to teachers and students about the scholarship we offer;
   - Publish a “wish list” of support, equipment, and materials;
   - Establish a presence on social media;
   - Post signs at Norlo Park explaining how to volunteer to help in the garden;
   - Attend PA Audubon chapter assembly;
   - Participate in National Audubon telecons and web conferences;
   - Sponsor one or more contests