

# Pennsylvania Forest Stewards News



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## Chair's Column: Opportunity Knocks

By Nancy Baker, PA Forest Stewards Steering Committee Chair, '00

An opportunity unexpectedly dropped into my lap last fall.

I got a telephone call from my consulting forester, Daniel Swift. (This is not unusual; we have known each other for more than 25 years; we often talk land and life as well as my woods.) Dan presented me with a short narrative: The American Hardwood Export Council, AHEC, (<https://www.ahec.org>) is making a film about American hardwoods for their foreign audiences. Their European crew is in the US and is working in Pennsylvania. They intended to film and interview Marc Lewis of Dwight Lewis Lumber Company, Inc. in Sullivan County tomorrow, but Marc has a conflict and has suggested they interview the consulting forester who wrote the plan on which their SFI® Certification is based (that's Dan)—they'll catch up with Marc later. Dan figures that they need to talk with one of Pennsylvania's private landowners too. He's sent AHEC a digital copy of an article in *Northern Woodlands* about me; having read it, AHEC would like to talk to me. Can I come over on Friday morning? (It's Thursday).

ok... (I do some major Googling.)

I arrive in the morning mist. Walking down Dan's lane with the British producer, I learn that they've spent time filming with the Menominee Tribe in snowy Wisconsin (<https://e360.yale.edu/features/menominee-forest-management-logging>) and have also been shooting at North Carolina's Cradle

of Forestry near Asheville. He asks if I would be willing to be filmed while they ask me some questions.

This is a **Least Favorite** activity for me.

I say yes.

Here's why I say yes. I have an obligation to listen to all of you and to speak to what I hear from you. I also have an obligation to acknowledge that PA Forest Stewards are not typical Pennsylvania forest landowners.

And, I have an obligation to also speak for the trees. I am very conscious that I am not a typical landowner, but I will try my best to be on my toes—and if I don't speak, who will?

I'm invisibly mic'd up and rooted to one spot in the drizzly woods; under the lights someone brushes the hair out of my face when the breeze is uncooperative. The interview is interesting. The director is Czech; he's lived in London for multiple years and speaks perfect English. He's switching languages with ease as he communicates with his audio and



Director Petr Krejčí and his crew (left) filming Dan, Nancy, and emerald ash borer larval galleries (right). Photo by Jane Swift.

video crew members. This is not scripted; I can see his questions to me evolve as he processes my answers—my answers are evolving as his questions are forming. I don't want to fall into a "marketing" trap; he understands that and is sympathetic. I want him to understand that I am trying to grow a forest rather than growing trees. He shapes excellent, thoughtful questions. The producer chimes in with a few additional queries; the young English

*Chair's Column, continued on page 5*

## 2024 PA Forest Stewards Basic Training: Time to Nominate!

The PA Forest Stewards class of 2024 training will be held September 19-22 at **Krislund Camp and Conference Center**, Madisonburg, Centre County, and we need your help to provide nominees for this year's basic training. We're looking for outstanding landowners and others who have a strong stewardship ethic, would benefit from and enjoy the material, and, importantly, would share with others about the importance of good forest care. Class members will join us for a long weekend—participants will arrive Thursday afternoon and will

learn and enjoy time together through Sunday afternoon. Prior to the weekend training, the class will review the online course "Woodland Stewardship: Management Practices for Landowners" that will introduce them to the various topics covered in the weekend together. During the weekend, the class will spend time in and out of the classroom diving deeper into forest management and stewardship. Enclosed with this newsletter is a nomination form. Seek out and nominate those folks who will both use and share what they learn. Nominations are due by April 15, 2024.



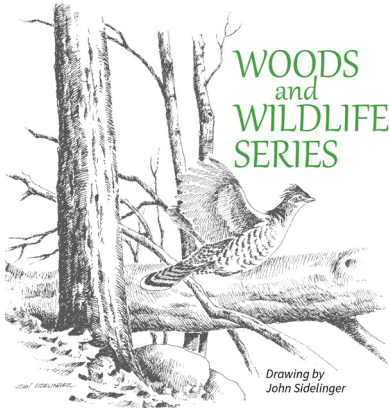
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# Songs of the Season: Winter

Article and Photos by Mike and Laura Jackson, PA Forest Stewards, Class of '00



*This article is part of a series exploring animals and their dependency on forests. Each article blends personal experiences with factual information and will challenge you to look closely in your woodlot for evidence that you are a habitat provider for the species.*

A snowy winter is finally here and how beautiful it is for those of us who look out onto snowy landscapes from the comforts of our home. But winter can be a harsh struggle for wildlife due to intense cold, windy days, and lack of available food and water.

Winter is also a quiet time of year. Many animals spend most of their time in sheltered dens or tree cavities, in different degrees of dormancy. Groundhogs are the epitome of true hibernators in our area. According to the Pennsylvania Game Commission, their body temperature drops from over 90°F to the low 40s and their heart slows to just four beats a minute.<sup>1</sup> Some species of bats are also true hibernators, surviving the winter in caves, tunnels, and old mines. Bears, we've learned, aren't true hibernators, but they still settle down for a long winter's sleep.

We watched an eastern chipmunk shred and stuff dry leaves into its cheeks the morning of January 6, 2024. Did the chipmunk know a snowstorm was imminent? The first significant snowfall in two years was predicted to start that morning, and, if it did snow, the chipmunk would stay snug in its burrow.

Since fall and early winter were mild, we saw chipmunks every day as they went about provisioning their burrows with the bountiful harvest of soft and



*Eastern chipmunks can hold impressive amounts of food in their cheek pouches, which can stretch to three times the size of their head<sup>2</sup>.*

hard mast. They scurried up the white-flowering dogwood tree in front of our house, collecting the shiny, red energy-rich fruits. We watched them stuffing winterberry holly fruit into their cheeks, after stripping some branches bare of the vivid red fruit. It was especially fascinating to watch chipmunks husk walnuts. They sat upright, resting on their hind legs and tail, and held the large nut with both front feet, rapidly rotating it while using their sharp teeth to peel off the husk—much like we would use a potato peeler to peel off a long strip of apple skin. Then they carried the husked walnut in their mouth, one at a time, to their burrows. Sometimes we watched them stuff their cheeks with acorns and hickory nuts. Since chipmunks aren't true hibernators, they depend on food caches during the winter, which are in designated areas of their underground burrow. Their sleeping den is in a separate extension of their burrow, and that's where they stuff the dried leaves. Like us, they want a comfortable and warm bed!

We don't hear chipmunks very often in the winter, especially when there's lots of snow (we got 7.5 inches on January 6 and now there's a blanket of white everywhere), but when they do emerge to forage, they let us know. Being highly attuned to predator threats, they proclaim to the rest of the world that danger is lurking nearby. When chipmunks sense danger, they want the world to know—their warning call is sharp and loud! We think of it as a loud incessant "chip, chip, chip" that can last for minutes. If you hear a long, loud series of "chips," look around and you'll most likely find

the chipmunk perched on a log or post, complaining that you are too close.

The first week of January brought snow, more snow, and rain. We won't see chipmunks until nicer weather, but deer, rabbits, and birds are busy searching for food since they are active all year. One of Laura's favorite poems is, "I Heard a Bird Sing," by Oliver Herford, an American writer and illustrator who lived from 1863 to 1935.

*I heard a bird sing  
In the dark of December  
A magical thing  
And sweet to remember.*

*"We are nearer to Spring  
Than we were in September,"  
I heard a bird sing  
In the dark of December.*

We wonder what was the bird that inspired Oliver Herford? Not many birds sing in the winter, but we do hear some. Below are some contenders that might have inspired the poem.



*The cheery bright colors of male Northern Cardinals are a beautiful contrast against the snow, but the more muted females are just as beautiful. They'll roost together on cold winter nights in thick shrubs and evergreens. Both male and female cardinals sing.*

Was the poem inspired by the song of a Northern Cardinal? Northern Cardinals sing their loud, cheery songs nine months of the year, but they take a break from singing in the deepest of winter. Although we hear their soft "chip" calls at dusk and dawn most days of the year, they don't sing during a snowy January. Naturalist and writer Marcia Bonta observed, in *Appalachian Winter*, that she heard cardinals begin to sing in the third week of February.<sup>3</sup>

*Winter, continued on page 3*





*The Carolina Wren is one of our favorite songsters.*

Carolina wrens sing with a lot of zest and it's hard to believe that such a loud song comes from such a little bird. It seems they are singing, "tea-kettle, tea-kettle, tea-kettle." This energetic, inquisitive bird is very sensitive to cold winters with a lot of ice and snow, so we provide various nest boxes and baskets where they can take shelter. We can't ever remember hearing a Carolina Wren sing in the winter, though, since they are too busy poking into nooks and crannies, searching for food.



*This Cedar Waxwing was part of a mixed flock of waxwings and robins that fed on crabapples after the snow stopped. The fruit is mushy this time of year and easy to peck.*

We've planted dozens of crabapple trees and winterberry holly shrubs around our house, since we know birds benefit from the fruit during the lean months of winter when insects aren't available. On January 9, 2024, a very snowy morning followed by a rainy afternoon, American Robins ate all the holly berries from five shrubs in our backyard, while the Cedar Waxwings pecked at crabapples. Some of the crabapple trees have small fruit that the birds can swallow whole and those are usually eaten in the fall. The trees with large crabapples

are also a favorite with deer, since they devour the fruit remnants after they fall. We could hear the high-pitched buzzy trills of the waxwings and the chatter of the robins as they made their rounds. Although the birds are beautiful, their calls don't fit the poem.



*The boldly striped Song Sparrow is a year-round resident at our house and sometimes called the "Beethoven Bird."*

Song Sparrows deserve the name because they sing all year, and they have a colorful repertoire of songs. Some birders describe one of their more common songs as resembling the opening three or four notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.<sup>4</sup> The first few notes are crisp and clear, followed by a variety of buzzes, trills, and complex notes. They may not sing on a cold, windy day, but we enjoy their cheery song on sunny winter days. Could this bird be the inspiration for "I Heard a Bird Sing?"



*Some White-throated Sparrow males are vividly marked and look rather stylish with their white bib and vividly streaked top hat.*

Perhaps the most dapper of all the sparrows in our woods, the White-throated Sparrow is a favorite fall and winter visitor. There are two color forms—some birds have tan stripes on their heads and are duller brown overall, unlike the vivid male pictured above.

Regardless of their coloration, the males entertain us with their distinctively clear whistled songs that seem to say, "Oh, Canada, Canada, Canada," or "Old Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody." We've been told that their winter songs are weaker compared to their spring songs, but we're content with what we can hear, even in January. We think this song might have inspired Oliver Herford.

We'll never know exactly what bird inspired the poem, but we do know we'll hear more birds singing in winter by planting more fruit-bearing trees and shrubs (serviceberry, crabapple, winterberry holly, hackberry, hawthorn, and viburnums, to name a few). We also planted a grove of about 300 evergreens in the north edge of a field that provides thermal cover for rabbits, deer, wild turkey, songbirds, and many other species.



*Unfortunately, most of the evergreens we planted about 30 years ago were Colorado blue spruce, now in severe decline, most likely from a fungus that causes needle cast.*

We took drastic steps last fall and logged most of the evergreens, planning to replant with native evergreens. We don't want eastern red cedar (really a juniper) since it spreads cedar-apple rust, but we will buy eastern white cedar, also called American arborvitae, from a supplier in Michigan. Pennsylvania tree nurseries sell a lot of exotic evergreens for the Christmas tree market, but it sure is hard to find native evergreens. Eastern white pine is easy to get, but if anyone knows of a source for Virginia pine and pitch pine, please let us know! We found one of each tree growing wild in our woods, so we want to plant more. We'll plant the tree seedlings about 10 feet apart and protect them with an 8-foot fence until they are tall enough to withstand deer pressure.

Winter, continued on page 4

## PA Forest Stewards Invited to Participate in On-Lot Septic System Survey

Many residents in Pennsylvania, including many of our PA Forest Stewards, rely on on-lot septic systems as a way to treat the wastewater coming from their home.

The Penn State Extension Water Team is recruiting Pennsylvania residents who use on-lot septic systems for domestic sewage disposal for a survey study. The goal of the study is to characterize user practices for care and maintenance of septic systems and to identify existing needs in Pennsylvania.

If you are a septic system user, please complete this 2-minute recruitment survey to let us know of your interest and to see if you qualify for the study. At the end of the study, some respondents will

be selected for a free well water testing. To participate, please scan the QR code below or go to this survey link:

[https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_5v98vmpVlseEMRw](https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5v98vmpVlseEMRw)



Questions? Contact Faith Kibuye, Extension Program Specialist, Water Resources, [ffk5024@psu.edu](mailto:ffk5024@psu.edu)



Septic systems are common in rural Pennsylvania homes as a means of wastewater treatment. Photo by Jennifer Fetter, Penn State.

## Opportunities to Expand Your Knowledge in February and March

*Adapted from January 2024 News Release by Jeff Osborne, Forest Stewardship Program Associate*

Late winter is a popular time for indoor regional conferences and meetings geared toward private forest management. Several events around the state this year can provide you with learning opportunities and expand your toolkit as a PA Forest Steward.

Check out the Woodland Owners Conference in Clarion. This conference, sponsored by the Clarion County Forest Stewardship Committee, PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and Penn State Extension, runs from 8:45 a.m.–12 noon on Saturday, February 10, at Clarion University's Grunenwald Science and Technology Center, 80 Greenville Avenue, Clarion, PA. Presentations include Cook Forest: New Growth in an Ancient Forest, How to Grow More Birds in Your Woods, How Tree and Log Quality Affect Product Quality, Herbicides and Strategies for Managing Invasive Plants, and Understanding Chronic Wasting Disease. Register by February 2. Find out more at <https://extension.psu.edu/woodland-owners-conference>.

Two woodland owners associations are hosting annual conferences in March.

The Woodland Owners of the Southern Alleghenies will host a conference on Saturday, March 9, 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. at the Bedford American Legion, 3721 US 220 Business, Bedford PA. The event will feature State Forester and new director of the Bureau of Forestry, Seth Cassell, as the keynote speaker. Tentative topics include growing ramps, foraging for wild mushrooms, and growing pawpaws. There will also be vendors, raffles, and a silent auction. Find out more at <http://www.thewosa.org>.

The Dauphin County Woodland Owners Association will hold their 12<sup>th</sup> annual conference on Saturday, March 16, at the Dauphin County Agriculture and Natural Resources Center, 1451 Peters Mountain Road, Dauphin PA. This day-long event is designed to bring forest landowners together to increase their knowledge of forest stewardship topics including timbering and silviculture, native shrub and tree identification, watershed man-

agement for trout, reintroduction of the American marten, surveying your woodland, and wildlife habitat management in central PA. For more information, go to <https://dcwoa.org>.

Other events include the Pennsylvania Forestry Association's annual conservation banquet, March 2, at the Ramada Inn and Conference Center, State College, PA. Activities start at 3:00 PM with dinner at 6:30 PM. Tickets required; call 800-835-8065 for more information.

This year's Forest Health, Insect, and Disease Briefing will be held Tuesday, March 12, 7:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m at the Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center in State College, PA. Geared toward forest and pest management professionals, this event also provides great information for engaged forest landowners. Learn more about the full-day briefing at <https://extension.psu.edu/forest-health-workshop>. Or register for the March 14 virtual update, held 8:30–11 a.m., at <https://extension.psu.edu/forest-health-insect-and-disease-update>.

*Winter, continued from page 3*

By providing thermal cover and food for winter birds, we enjoy bird songs on most winter days, a "magical thing and sweet to remember."

(Please email us if you know where we can buy Virginia pine or pitch pine seedlings: [jacksonlaura73@gmail.com](mailto:jacksonlaura73@gmail.com)!)

### References:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pgc.pa.gov/Education/WildlifeNotesIndex/Pages/Woodchuck.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Fact-Sheets/Chipmunk#:~:text=An%20enormous%20amount%20of%20food,toes%20on%20their%20back%20feet>

<sup>3</sup> Bonta, Marcia. 2005. *Appalachian Winter*. University of Pittsburgh Press. Pittsburgh, PA.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/song-sparrow>

### Toll-free Number Reminder

Just a reminder that the PA Forest Stewards toll-free number, 800-235-9473, is no longer in service.

You can reach our office at **814-863-0401**; staff is typically available M-F 7:30-4. You can also email us at [PrivateForests@psu.edu](mailto:PrivateForests@psu.edu) or at any one of the staff email addresses listed on page 6 of this newsletter.



# The Back Page: The Last Tree

By Bob Slagter, PA Forest Steward and Retired Steering Committee Chair, Class of '08

Some time ago, I wrote my only poem for this newsletter. It was called "Only One Tree" and, I must say, I really enjoyed writing the little ditty, and I feel someone out there enjoyed reading it.

It was about what it would be like if there was only one tree. Of course, it was a little silly and fun and not really much more than a Dr. Suess rhyme. But I'm here to tell you that, like so many things in life, the further you get from reality, the closer reality comes to you. And the following account from the British Broadcasting Corporation is as real as it gets.

There was just one tree in the moors of Northumberland, England, close to the Scottish border, and it was planted by a landowner some 300 years ago. It sat in a gap in Hadrian's Wall and was a beautiful Sycamore...tall and fully formed and straight and perfect. And, being the only tree for miles, it was celebrated like no other. Weddings were performed under the tree, thousands of photos were taken, a movie (with Kevin Costner) had scenes with the tree as a major part in it. You see, I've been talking in the past tense because, drum roll please...wait for it: two guys cut it down a short while ago.

The tree was a living, breathing ICON, for pity's sake, and totally without warning, with no hope of making any profit, in

the dark of night right there next to Hadrian's Wall, with no other people (or trees) in sight, these two poor misguided vandals put the chain saw to the trunk, and it was over in minutes.

There was rage and weeping and curiosity and mostly wonder. I mean...WHY? Probably to show they could do it, or it was done in a drunken stupor, on a dare, on a bet, because they had nothing else to do, for the notoriety... because it was there.

An interesting view on humanity: if it can be destroyed, it seems there is always someone available to do the job, to strike the blow, the kill a living creature. As I have mulled this over, I can't help but think that there are people who do this every day. But instead of cutting and killing one tree, they do whole forests. As I sit at the counter of the corner store and watch the log trucks go by, I can follow the market by the loads of logs, and I can tell who those individual logs were cut for.

One thing is for sure, the slaughter goes on unabated. Just like the two



*The iconic 300-year-old Sycamore Gap Tree, located in the moors of Northumberland, England, was cut down in minutes by vandals with a chain saw. Photo by Alexandra, stock.adobe.com.*

dummies in England, there are people who are destroying whole ecosystems every day. No matter how careful we are, it is so easy to make a mistake that removes the things that make the forest come alive and prosper. But that is the reason we do what we do. And we must keep on our quest for better forests and the best possible outcome from every cut. Please keep up the noble effort (there is only one tree).

## Chair's Column, continued from page 1

marketing assistant wants to know about being a woman in the field (I'm comfortable in answering that one!). There's a question about sales from AHEC's past president/Keystone Wood Products Association rep that I struggle to answer suitably since I've cut timber but not sold it. A jet flies over and we pause until its sound fades; Dan's hunting dogs have a moment of audible discussion, and we wait for them to quiet. The natural sounds of singing songbirds or rustling leaves are fine. The light drizzle continues; I'm only slightly damp.

Afternoon arrives and the crew has an appointment with the Tabor Museum in Williamsport to see their collection of early glass slide images from logging's heyday. We part with appreciation, contact info exchanged, promises to keep in the loop as production moves forward.

In the evening, I get a second unexpected telephone call. Could they possibly come and visit my land tomorrow?

And the next morning we begin again. The plastic Adirondack chairs are moved out of view in preference to the Victorian wood ones on my porch; my office is turned upside down into a "set," we go out into the woods and they discover that I've treated white ash in a forested setting. This is the story that suddenly resonates. This is the American forest landowner who is demonstrating care in a challenged woodland. Dan and I strip bark from dead boles to show them emerald ash borer galleries; we disassemble decaying ash logs returning to soil on the forest floor. Their drones scan the canopy gaps that are opening. They photograph the beautiful live white ash that are treated and marked with aluminum tags.

I can see that the wood we send to the European market can tell a story of care and sustainability that is as important to their audience as beauty, usefulness, and durability.

The crux of what I'm trying to say to you is that, as PA Forest Stewards, we each have a story to tell. It might not be typical; it might not be easy to convey. We might have to fumble around to get it to resonate correctly. But we need to step up and make a stab at it. I came away from the experience feeling that I had informed a new audience and that I could make a difference.

I trust the film writers and editors. I may wind up on the cutting room floor, to be hauled away to the rumor mill and burned up as fuel for the dry kiln, but I'll sleep knowing that I tried to convey an accurate and compelling story about Penn's Woods.

And when opportunity, whatever it is, unexpectedly drops in your lap, **You Can Too!**

Nancy

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### Your Continuing Education!

In case you'd like a primer on how to introduce a newbie audience to forest stewardship by a real pro (or a refresher on your PA Forest Stewards training!), spend an hour listening to Allyson on the PSU College Connections website at <https://agsci.psu.edu/college-connections/recordings/a-walk-in-the-woods-a-look-into-private-forests-in-pa-and-beyond>.

### Dates for Your Calendar

Details and contact information on most of the events below are in the page 4 article, "Opportunities to Expand Your Knowledge in February and March."

**Saturday, February 10.** Clarion Woodland Owners Conference. Clarion University Grunenwald Science and Technology Center, 80 Greenville Avenue, Clarion, PA.

**Saturday, March 2, 3–10 PM.** PFA 2024 Conservation Banquet. Ramada Inn and

Conference Center, State College, PA. Tickets required; 800-835-8065.

**Saturday, March 9, 8:30 AM–4:30 PM.** Woodland Owners of the Southern Alleghenies Annual Conference. Bedford American Legion, 3721 US 220 Business, Bedford PA.

**Tuesday, March 12, 7:30 AM–3:30 PM.** Forest Health, Insect, and Disease Briefing. Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center, State College, PA.

**Thursday, March 14, 8:30–11 AM.** Forest Health, Insect, and Disease Update and Core. Virtual webinar.

**Saturday, March 16.** Dauphin County Woodland Owners Association Annual Conference.

**September 19-22.** PA Forest Stewards Class of 2024 Training. Krislund Camp & Conference Center, Centre County, PA.

For more information about these and other upcoming events, check the Finley Center website:

[ecosystems.psu.edu/private-forests](https://ecosystems.psu.edu/private-forests)

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