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WILD HERITAGE NEWS

Summer 2026



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Scarlet tanager
David Yeany II

Allegheny Bird Conservation Alliance- A Pittsburgh Partnership for the Birds!

by
David Yeany II, Senior Vertibrate Zoologist/Avian Ecologist
Ephraim Zimmerman, Director Natural Heritage Program

Allegheny County, home of Pittsburgh and surrounding communities, supports a surprising amount of forest land despite its industrial past and reputation as a "smokey old town," as Woody Guthrie sang in the 1940s. The large city parks – Frick, Schenley, and Riverview – and surrounding natural areas, such as Allegheny Land Trust (ALT) and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) conservation reserves, support critical nesting habitat for songbirds. Many songbirds found in these areas are considered Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) by the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Even with all of this habitat and the green renaissance of Western Pennsylvania over the last 50 years, migratory and resident birds face extreme challenges. A landmark study (Rosenberg et al. 2019) revealed that during this time period, nearly three billion birds were lost from breeding populations in North America. Forest bird declines alone represented one billion birds, and grassland birds have lost 53% of their populations. Of the nearly three billion birds lost, 90% comprise just 12 bird families, including sparrows, warblers, finches, and swallows – some of our most common and widespread species. Additionally, there has been a similarly steep decline in the magnitude of bird migration over the past 11 years. Causes for these staggering declines are multiple, but

they include combinations of habitat loss or degradation, direct mortalities from free-roaming outdoor cats, collisions with building glass, and widespread use of agricultural pesticides.

The Allegheny Bird Conservation Alliance (ABCA) was formed in 2016 as a partnership among local Pittsburgh-based conservation groups as well as statewide and national organizations to collaborate on the conservation of birds in Western Pennsylvania. The group was established on the tenets of the USFWS Urban Bird Treaty (UBT) and the drive to have Pittsburgh designated as a UBT city, which was achieved in 2015. Specifically, the founding member organizations collaborate to 1) conserve habitats for birds, 2) reduce hazards to birds, 3) educate and engage communities to increase awareness and participation in bird conservation, 4) educate youth about birds and their role in the environment, 5) manage invasive plant species to benefit birds, and 6) increase overall awareness of the value and importance of native birds and their habitats. This was a recognition that several groups in the greater Pittsburgh region were already working on through various bird conservation projects and issues, but there was a need for coordinated efforts to accomplish more conservation outcomes for birds.



(Left) ABCA partners WPC-PNHP, Powdermill Nature Reserve-Carnegie Museum of Natural History (PNR-CMNH), and Bird Lab (Front to Back: David Yeany, Dr. Annie Lindsay, Nick Liadis)



(Right) CMNH Urban Bird Conservation Coordinator, Jonathan Rice, holds a downy woodpecker as part of a bird banding demonstration at Frick Park during World Migratory Bird Day.

Partner organizations include the American Bird Conservancy (ABC), Allegheny County Department of Sustainability, ALT, Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania (ASWP), Bird Lab, Carnegie Museum of Natural History (CMNH), Humane Animal Rescue, National Aviary, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy (PPC), Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium, and WPC. More recently, the ABCA expanded to include Erie Bird Observatory, and their work outside the Pittsburgh region. ABCA exists in order to help each partner focus their individual conservation efforts, and to create and identify opportunities for collaboration.



Nick Liadis (L), Executive Director of Bird Lab, and David Yeany (R), WPC-PNHP Senior Vertebrae Zoologist/Avian Ecologist, band the first Swainson's warbler at WPC's Bear Run Nature Reserve.

ABCA partners meet regularly to identify funding opportunities for group projects, plan education and outreach events, and collaborate on inventory and habitat stewardship activities. For example, the ABCA regularly host events associated with World Migratory Bird Day at sites across the Pittsburgh region, including local natural areas like WPC's Toms Run Nature Reserve, North Park, managed by the Allegheny County Parks Department, and Frick Park, a Pittsburgh City Park. These events feature guided birding hikes, which teach participants about our native forest habitats and the migratory bird species they support.

WPC's Natural Heritage Program staff have been active members of the ABCA since the beginning. WPC was one of original signers of the UBT. Heritage has worked with the Alliance for many years to reduce mortality from bird-window strikes by conducting inventories around buildings and



This belted kingfisher was an unfortunate victim of a collision with a building window.

recommending avoidance measures, like using bird friendly glass in Pittsburgh's buildings. Heritage staff have primarily focused on bird inventory and habitat assessment activities within the natural areas of the region. One of the first opportunities to collaborate in an ABCA partner project was at ALT's Dead Man's Hollow Conservation Area, situated on the Youghiogheny River in southeast Allegheny County. Following the development of a management plan for the Dead Man's Hollow Conservation Area, ALT received funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to improve forested habitat for forest interior bird species by removing invasive plant species and planting native tree seedlings to grow into the canopy. Heritage scientists collected bird population and habitat data for sites at the reserve to guide specific stewardship activities. This baseline bird and habitat data collection method has been used by ornithologists across Pennsylvania to assess forest habitat, interior forest condition, and impacts to the forest bird community from shale gas development.

In 2021, through a grant from DCNR, WPC-Heritage led efforts to assess habitat and bird and provided conservation recommendations at other natural areas in the county – Frick Park, Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve, and Tom's Run Nature Reserve – to work with our land stewardship partners on habitat management activities to improve conditions for nesting birds. Partners, including WPC and ALT Land Stewardship and Community Forestry staff, removed invasive plants, planted canopy tree and shrub species, and constructed fencing to protect the plants from deer browsing.



WPC staff assess restoration sites at Tom's Run Nature Reserve in Sewickly, PA.

During this time, habitat and bird surveys were conducted at ALT's Churchill Valley Greenway, and one of the sites, Tom's Run, was selected by ornithologists from Bird Lab and the Heritage Program as a site for the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) program MAPS is a continent-wide collaborative effort among public agencies, non-governmental groups, and individuals to assist the conservation of birds and their habitats through standardized bird monitoring.



Trees planted as part of habitat restoration efforts at Tom's Run Nature Reserve in Sewickley, PA.



A wood thrush at Tom's Run Nature Reserve.

Throughout implementation of this project at restoration sites, ABCA partners identified the need for guidance for stewardship and habitat management activities related to the presence and seasonality of nesting birds. During invasive plant workdays in support of the DCNR-funded project, staff and volunteers noticed nests or nesting birds in invasive shrubs during the critical migrating bird breeding season. Forest interior birds, like wood thrush, will utilize non-native shrubs like honeysuckle or privet for nesting. When removal of these woody plants occurs during the nesting season, habitat managers risk of incidental nest destruction or disturbance to nesting structures.

Such guidance is particularly important in forest habitats within urban areas, such as Allegheny County. In 2025, ALT, applied for and received a DCNR Community Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2) grant to develop a guidance document that will improve protections for nesting birds, especially SGCN, during the course of habitat management activities through specific recommendations for best practices. These guidelines will be promoted through demonstrations and workshops to land trusts and other stewardship organizations. Further outreach will include distribution of educational materials, and education to community members who want to manage backyards or small acreage habitats for bird conservation through innovative programming. This project will once again bring the ABCA partners together to help public and private landowners learn how and when to remove invasive species, so they do not accidentally harm the wildlife they are working to promote and protect.

Now, more than ever, we need coordinated conservation efforts like the ABCA, where conservation groups, land trusts, museums, municipal government agencies, and park districts work together to reduce impacts to bird populations and their habitat. Even after ten years, the ABCA continues to work to bring experts in avian conservation together to address priority conservation needs for birds.

About the Authors



David Yeany II is a Senior Vertebrate Zoologist and Avian Ecologist for the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program at the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. David has 20 years of professional experience in ornithology and bird conservation. He holds an M.S. in Applied Ecology and Conservation Biology from Frostburg State University and a B.S. in Biology from Messiah University. His work focuses on bird Species of Greatest Conservation Need, including rare, threatened and endangered. This work comprises surveys, monitoring, habitat analysis and movement tracking. Yeany serves on various state and regional bird conservation and technical committees, and he coordinates the international Evening Grosbeak Working Group, as part of the Road to Recovery initiative.



Ephraim Zimmerman is the Director of the Natural Heritage Program at Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, where he has worked since 2003. He holds a Bachelors of Science in Wildlife Biology from Colorado State University and a Masters of Science in Forest Ecology from the University of Michigan School of Natural Resource and Environment. With PNHP, Ephraim supervises a team responsible for planning and conducting ecological inventories, monitoring, management, and restoration.

Leaving a Lasting Legacy

by

Ephraim Zimmerman, Senior Director WPC Natural Heritage Program

The second quarter of the year brought about several important changes at the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program as long-time PNHP directors Greg Podniesinski (DCNR) and Jeff Wagner (WPC) and WPC operations manager JoAnn Albert retired, leaving a long list of accomplishments in rare species conservation, natural community classification and mapping, and conservation education in Pennsylvania. This list of accomplishments would fill up several editions of Wild Heritage News! Their influence on the program, on the staff of the PNHP, and the conservation community in Pennsylvania, was immense and long lasting. Together they built and managed one of the largest Natural Heritage network programs in the country and brought conservation of rare plants, animals, and natural communities into the work of the state agencies, county planning initiatives, and non-profit conservation organizations in every county of the state.


PNHP Heritage

The first of the three to leave PNHP was JoAnn Albert, who retired from the program following fourteen years as the Natural Heritage Program Operations Manager at WPC. JoAnn was central to our work, helping project management staff in grant and report writing, budget management, and overall program logistics. She was greatly involved in developing the newsletters and annual reports, and other written products produced by the PNHP.


Ryan Miller

JoAnn also contributed to PNHP's vernal pool studies and inventory surveys. She was always available to help staff in their work – in both the office and the field. Her background in environmental education and curriculum development helped WPC's Natural Heritage Program establish the EYE-Con (Exploring Your Environment [through] Conservation) summer program, which, through working with partners such as DCNR's Jennings Environmental Education Center, paired groups of students with Heritage biologists to learn how to conduct ecological investigations in the field.


PNHP Heritage

A second retirement in PNHP leadership came on May 21, when Jeff Wagner officially retired from the WPC's Heritage Program after a 34-year career with the organization. Jeff began his tenure with WPC as a community ecologist conducting county inventories and plant community assessment. At that time, the Heritage Program at WPC was only four people! He played a leading role developing the first plant community classification with DCNR and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and was instrumental in the first round of EPA wetland protection grants, characterizing seep, fen, and floodplain communities of Pennsylvania.

Jeff led efforts to improve and modernize county natural heritage inventories and under his leadership, PNHP and its partners (including Clarion University, and Morris Arboretum) completed County Natural Heritage Inventory reports for all 67 counties in Pennsylvania. In 2005, Jeff became interim director of the natural heritage program in 2005 and director in 2006. He saw the program through great change and growth, as the TNC staff were absorbed into the WPC and was a guiding force as the PNHP, including all four agencies in the partnership, grew to over 40 employees.



Jeff was an active advocate of ecological stewardship – working with WPC's Land Protection and Stewardship Program from the beginning. Throughout his career, he was passionate about invasive species management. He was an active participant in the Mid Atlantic Invasive Plant Pest Council and served on the Governor's Invasive Species Council. In 2011, he worked with DCNR to establish the Pennsylvania iMAP Invasives project provided leadership in obtaining over two million in funding for that work since.



Finally, at the end of June, Greg Podniesinski retired, and like Jeff and JoAnn, his retirement followed a long and accomplished career with PNHP. Greg began as a contractor for WPC in 1997, working with Jeff to develop conceptual groundwater models for the EPA in an EPA-funded study of PA seeps. In 1998, he was offered the ecologist position in the TNC Middletown office, where he continued work on the seeps study and completed vegetation mapping projects of all six of the Stateline Serpentine Barrens (Pilot, New Texas, Chrome, Goat Hill, Nottingham, and Rock Springs). He once again collaborated with Jeff on the EPA-funded assessment and classification of floodplain communities of the Susquehanna.

Through the early 2000s, Greg continued to lead the Natural Community activities of the PNHP, collaborating with WPC ecologists on NPS vegetation mapping and contributing to TNC's conservation planning activities in the region. In late 2005, he become the acting director of the TNC PNHP office (technically the "PA Science Office of TNC") and oversaw the transition of the office to WPC, becoming the Science Director for the NHP at WPC. He stayed in this position until he moved to DCNR as the new PNHP Director in the Office of Conservation, which eventually became the Division of Conservation Science and Ecological Resources in the Bureau of Forestry, where he would remain until his retirement.



Carmen Bray

Rarely do three such influential and accomplished people leave a program in the Natural Heritage Program Network at the same time. The three of them built quite a legacy in the state and are true models for the rest of us to follow!

Notes From the Field

A Road to Recovery: Restoring the Clarion River's Freshwater Mussel Community

Jordan Allison, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
Eric Chapman, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
Nevin Welte, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
Nate Welker, United States Forest Service
Mary Walsh, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

In the early 1900s Arnold Ortmann, a preeminent naturalist and curator at the Carnegie Museum, described the Clarion River as "possibly the worst stream in the state." Coal mines, tanneries, paper mills, and other industries operating in the watershed had severely degraded water quality leading to the destruction of the river's fish and freshwater mussel communities. With the implementation of The Clean Water Act and other laws regulating pollution in the 1970s, water quality in the Clarion steadily improved to the point that, in 1996, it was designated as a National Wild and Scenic River. This designation was a tremendous achievement given the state of the river's water quality and fish and mussel community less than 100 years earlier.

Due to these water quality improvements, some fish species have naturally recolonized the Clarion from adjoining waterways. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the river's mussel community. In the 1920s, Piney Dam was constructed on the lower Clarion River fragmenting the watershed. Dams block fish passage and prevents mussel dispersal which occurs when larval mussels attach themselves to a fish host to complete their life cycle.. Piney Dam prevented the natural recolonization of the Clarion by mussels from the vibrant Allegheny River source population making recovery upstream of the dam unlikely without assistance. To address this issue, WPC staff, partners, and volunteers initiated a project in 2016 to reintroduce several mussel species upstream of Piney Dam to facilitate recovery of the Clarion's mussel community.



Partners cleaning mussels collected from the Allegheny River prior to tagging and translocation to the Clarion River recovery sites in 2017.

From 2016 to 2018, more than 36,000 mussels representing 12 species were collected from the Allegheny River and translocated to 14 recovery sites along the Clarion between Portland Mills and Cooksburg. Mussels have been monitored periodically at each site by re-collecting individuals that had been marked with either a colored tag that coincides with stocking year or a passive integrated transponder (PIT) tag (a radio tag that allows for the unique identification of individual mussels). During our monitoring surveys over the last eight years, we have recaptured a significant number of individuals across all sites and found that survival and growth vary by mussel species and site, but are relatively high overall.



Results of the August 2026 assessment survey for four mussel species stocked at the Gravel Lick Road recovery site in August of 2018.

For example, in August of 2018, 100 PIT tagged mussels representing four species were stocked at Gravel Lick Road near Cooksburg. In August of this year, we returned to the site and recaptured 49 of the 100 individuals originally stocked. Survival over the near decade long exposure period varied by species ranging from 20% for mucket (*Actinonaias ligamentina*) to 70% for spike (*Eurynia dialata*), and the overwhelming majority of individuals had grown in length, some by more than 20 mm.


Jordan Allison


Jordan Allison

(Top) Naturally reproduced spike (left) and kidneyshell (right) collected in 2026 at one of the Clear Creek State Park recovery sites. (Bottom) Naturally reproduced spike collected in 2025 near the Clear Creek State Park recovery site.

These results indicate the Clarion is capable of supporting a mussel community as individuals of multiple species have persisted and grown for a relatively long period of time across many of the recovery sites. However, without evidence of natural reproduction (i.e., the collection of unmarked juvenile mussels) we cannot say the project has been a success. Luckily for us and the mussels, our first glimmer of hope came in 2025 when a juvenile spike was collected during construction of a stream habitat project in Clear Creek State Park. Additionally, two unmarked juvenile mussels - a spike and kidneyshell (*Ptychobranshus fasciolaris*) - were observed while completing routine monitoring of the adults at an adjacent site in 2026. These two species have never been reported from the Clarion River even though WPC and the United States Forest Service staff completed exhaustive surveys in the watershed prior to implementation of this project. It is highly likely that the unmarked mussels we observed are the result of natural reproduction occurring due to the collective stocking efforts. Although these findings are encouraging and hopeful, they are limited to a relatively small portion of the recovery area and additional work will be needed to assess how far we have traveled on the Clarion's road to recovery.

Natural Heritage Program Elevates Importance of Native Species with Legislators

Amy Jewitt, Senior Coordinator, PA iMapInvasives Program



A sign highlighting Pennsylvania Native Species Day is attached to a pin oak, one of many native trees given away to event participants in conjunction with the 2026 Pennsylvania Invasive Replace-ive Program.

Amid the hustle and bustle in the East Wing Rotunda of the Capitol Building on June 1 were a variety of agencies and organizations promoting the importance of Pennsylvania's native plants, insects, and wildlife, including the Western Pennsylvania's Conservancy's Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program (WPC-PNHP). Attendees of the event, including several legislators and their staff as well as the general public, engaged with experts to learn about and build a deeper appreciation for the state's indigenous flora and fauna.

Hosted by the Pennsylvania Governor's Invasive Species Council, highlights from the day included live animals, such as several snakes and turtles brought for display by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, native trees giveaways in conjunction with the 2026 Pennsylvania Invasive Replace-ive Program, and information from Audubon Mid-Atlantic hoping to name the scarlet tanager (*Piranga olivacea*) as Pennsylvania's official state migratory bird. Featured by the PNHP were several mushroom specimens (much admired by visitors), invasive species spotlight quizzes, and native white pine seedlings given to event participants for planting at their homes.



Hannah Huber, Conservation Mycologist, engages with an event participant at the Pennsylvania Native Species Day event at the Capitol.

Hannah Huber (Conservation Mycologist – PNHP) and Brian Gallagher (Senior Director, Public Policy and Government Relations – WPC) were on hand to promote House Bill 1090, a legislative measure that would designate the hemlock varnish shelf (*Ganoderma tsugae*) as the official state mushroom of the Commonwealth. Amy Jewitt (Senior Coordinator, Pennsylvania iMapInvasives Program – WPC) shared information for the upcoming inaugural Basketgrass Bonanza, a statewide survey event that would encourage public participation in searching for invasive wavyleaf basketgrass (*Oplismenus undulatifolius*), a Pennsylvania noxious weed with active eradication efforts underway.



On June 1, the East Wing Rotunda in Harrisburg's Capitol Building was abuzz with conversations about the importance of Pennsylvania's native species

A press conference featured speakers including Senator James Malone, state agency leaders from DCNR, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, and Pennsylvania Game Commission, the Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association, and a current state officer from Pennsylvania FFA Association. Conversations had throughout the day among participants are anticipated to advance strategies that continue promoting native species as well as efforts to protect and preserve their populations throughout the Commonwealth.

"Plumming" the depths of The Barrens

Claire Ciafré, Ecologist
Rachel Goad, Senior Botanist

Alleghany plum (*Prunus alleghaniensis*, proposed PA Threatened) is an elusive species throughout its range in the eastern United States, and has likely lost a portion of its natural habitat due to land use changes. This shrubby species forms thickets in various naturally open habitats such as rocky bluffs, barrens, and floodplains, and benefits from moderate disturbances such as prescribed fire to maintain the openness of these habitats.



A single flower remains on a patch of Alleghany plum following the late frosts experienced by the area this spring.

It has also established in some manmade fencerows and roadsides, but these habitats are especially vulnerable to invasion by nonnative shrubs and vines and to nonselective vegetation management.

This spring PNHP staff from DCNR and WPC met with foresters and land managers from PGC to survey for Alleghany plum in a state game land where prescribed fire is being used to maintain regionally unique barrens habitats. The plum was difficult to find: most of its flowers had withered, impacted by the same frosts that troubled commercial stone fruit growers in our region this year. Developing leaves were also still very small, and it was growing among many other well-developed shrubs. Despite this, the group found a large patch of the plums being overtaken by invasive bush honeysuckle (*Lonicera morrowii*) along a service road. The team immediately dove in with clippers to carefully remove the invasive species, eventually



DCNR, WPC, and PGC staff cut the stems of invasive bush honeysuckle out of the patch of Alleghany plum to give it more light and space to grow.

uncovering approximately 52 plum stems which had been hiding in the brush. The plants were flagged to help staff avoid damaging the plants while managing the open habitat and to help prioritize the area for more work. Prescribed fire alone isn't enough to restore invaded habitats at this site, and so collaboration like this is incredibly beneficial for everyone involved- including the plums.

First Evening Grosbeaks Tracked in the Pacific Northwest

David Yeany II, Senior Vertebrate Zoologist / Avian Ecologist

As the Road to Recovery (R2R) effort continues targeting critical conservation needs for Tipping Point bird species, WPC-PNHP continued its work with partners this spring tracking the steeply declining evening grosbeak (*Hesperiphona vespertina*) across its continental range. We have been tasked to complete this work toward filling in knowledge gaps in the species' migratory connectivity, landscape use, and finer scale, seasonal habitat use. In late April, we traveled to Oregon with colleagues from Carnegie Museum of Natural History-Powdermill Nature Reserve and Finch Research Network/Cornell University to color-band and deploy Lotek satellite transmitters on ten evening grosbeaks across three regions.





(Top) The team deployed tags on birds near Three Rivers, Oregon on the East side of the Cascade Range with views of Mt. Bachelor could be seen. (Bottom) David Yeany II, Caleb Centanni, and Mallory Sarver deployed tracking tags on evening grosbeaks for the Road to Recovery Evening Grosbeak Working Group project.

A whirlwind trip took us west from Portland, Oregon, then back east across the Cascade Range and south to Three Rivers, then finally west back over the Cascades to Corvallis during a ten-day field work trip.

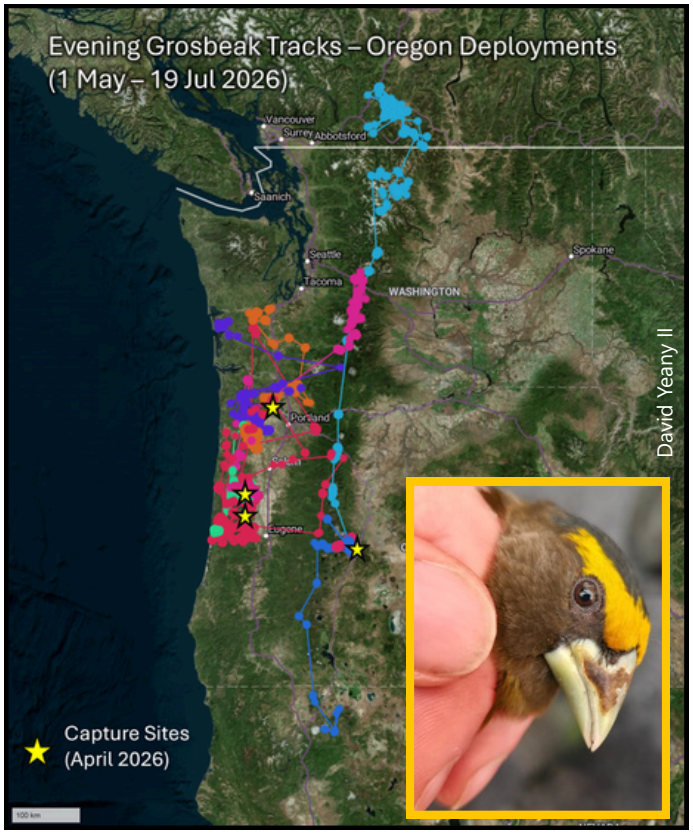
Altogether we captured and banded evening grosbeaks from four sites with 84 birds color-banded and satellite transmitters deployed on five females and five males, distributed evenly across the sites. This marks the first tracking of tagged evening grosbeaks in the in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest and fills a critical spatial gap in our United States wide sampling effort.



A male evening grosbeak is outfitted with a Lotek satellite transmitter and ready for release in Washington Co, Oregon during April 2026 fieldwork.

Our tagging efforts in Oregon are tracking movements from both Type 1 and Type 2 evening grosbeak subspecies. These populations have never before been studied in this way. Early tracking data show surprising patterns of birds migrating both north and south this spring from both east and west sides of the Cascade Mountains.

These ten birds showed varying spring movement patterns with some traveling north, some traveling south, and others remaining within the region of capture. Raw movement data showed a Type 2 grosbeak traveled north to Three Rivers, Oregon stopping over in North Cascasdes National Park, where a major evening grosbeak road collision mortality event happened this spring, before continuing to forests West of Princeton, British Columbia. Two other grosbeaks tagged at the same site showed different movements with one moving far south into Shasta-Trinity National Forest in California while the other remained near the capture site through May, then moved just ~15km west for the remainder of June and July.



Spring and summer movement tracks for the first ever satellite tagged evening grosbeaks in Oregon. WPC-PNHP and collaborators from Carnegie Museum of Natural History and Finch Research Network/Cornell University deployed these tracking tags on 10 birds across three counties in Oregon during April 2026 (each color symbolizes a different bird).

These data will inform upcoming migratory connectivity linkages between populations and fill-in critical knowledge gaps for Western populations that will further aid in prioritizing conservation actions for specific populations across the Upper and Lower Northeast United States and the Midwest.

New Staff Spotlight



Ephraim Zimmerman
Senior Director, Natural Heritage Program,
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

In May, Ephraim Zimmerman was promoted to the Senior Director of the Natural Heritage Program at WPC, a title held by Jeff Wagner since 2007. Ephraim has been with the Heritage Program since 2003, first hired as a Natural Community Ecologist to map and describe plant communities of the National Parks in Pennsylvania with Greg Podniesinski and assist in documenting the impact of herbicide control of striped maple on non-target vegetation on state forest land in Potter County. Ephraim received a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Biology from Colorado State University and a Master's of Science in Forest Ecology from the University of Michigan School of Natural Resource and Environment. At WPC, Ephraim led many projects, including assessment description of plant communities within the Ohio River basin, funded through EPA Wetland Program Development Grants, contributed to the development of the wetland portion of the Pennsylvania plant community classification, and collaborated with WPC's Heritage and Watershed scientists on an assessment of shale gas development activities in Western Pennsylvania. In 2017, Ephraim became the Science Director for WPC's Heritage Program, and worked with field 'ologists on inventory and assessment projects across the state. During his time with WPC, he has sat on DCNR's Conservation and Natural Resources Advisory Council and is a board member of the Natural Areas Association. Prior to graduate school, Ephraim was in the Peace Crops, serving as an Environmental Volunteer in the Carpathian Mountains of Western Ukraine. He lives in Pittsburgh with his wife Kara, two teenagers, Elena and Gus, dog Daisy (the best dog), and Pepper their cat. He considers the ability to know the plants and animals of the region one of his superpowers – which, while an important skill in Conservation – makes him a really slow hiker (i.e. "Hiking at the speed of Botany" – always looking at the plants, bugs, birds, and mushrooms)!



Cheyenne Moore
Section Chief, Natural Heritage Section,
Bureau of Forestry

In April 2026, DCNR promoted Cheyenne Moore to Section Chief of the Natural Heritage Section in the Bureau of Forestry. This position, formerly held by Greg Podniesinski, functions as the Director of the Natural Heritage Program within DCNR and collaborates with counterparts at WPC, PGC, and PFBC. Prior to this position, Cheyenne was the Pennsylvania Plant Conservation Alliance coordinator for the Bureau of Forestry, a position she held since 2022.

In this role, she coordinated recovery plans and active management for 13 globally rare plant species, and worked with WPC botanists, volunteers and partners. Cheyenne previously served as a botanist/field crew lead for the Carnegie Museum of Natural History-Powdermill Nature Reserve in vegetation surveys to assess forest regeneration. She also served as a botanist/field technician for the US Forest Service under Alex Royo, conducting vegetation surveys in the Kinzua Quality Deer Cooperative focusing on deer herbivory impacts. Prior to that, she was a forest inventory and analysis survey intern for the Forest Service, establishing FIA plots and conducting assessments. Cheyenne has a bachelor's degree in biology from Dickinson College, where she was the Watershed Coordinator for the Alliance for Aquatic Resource Monitoring. She earned a master's degree in biology from Bucknell University, focusing on botany with Dr. Chris Martine, also serving as the Plant Collections Assistant and graduate assistant. She was also a graduate research assistant at University of Pittsburgh, studying for a doctorate in biology: ecology and evolution (botany). She has published several manuscripts on rare plant conservation. In her free time, she enjoys gardening (both veggies and native plants), hiking, and spending time with her husband and their three cats.



Megan Kubala
Non-Game Biologist, Malacologist

The Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy is pleased to welcome Megan Kubala! Megan joined PNHP in July 2026, and is serving the role of the Non-Game Biologist/Malacologist. She earned her Master's degree from the University of Alabama where she studied how mussel species diversity influences nutrient cycling dynamics and sediment microbial community structure. She comes to us from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources where she worked on monitoring freshwater mussels and collaborated with our program on cross-border projects. Megan is the state malacologist and a contract employee for the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission in the Natural Diversity Section. Her office is located in the PFBC headquarters in Harrisburg. She will work closely with WPC on rare species assessments, monitoring, and restoration projects. Additionally, her responsibilities will include environmental review. In Megan's free time, she enjoys hiking, paddling, and discovering the best local ice cream spots with her husband and two dogs!



Teri Chuprinko
Natural Heritage Operations Manager, WPC

In April, Teri Chuprinko joined WPC's Natural Heritage Program as Operations Manager, a position previously filled by JoAnn Albert. She comes from West Virginia, and holds a Master's in Recreation, Parks and Tourism Resources Management with an emphasis in Land Use Planning from West Virginia University. Prior to coming to WPC, she managed projects for WVU Forestry and the US Forest Service State, Private and Tribal Forestry Forest Stewardship Program. She is passionate about the sustainable management of our public natural spaces and making the outdoors accessible to all.

While West Virginia has always been her permanent address, she has lived in Nagoya, Japan as well as many bunkhouses on National Forests scattered across the Pacific Northwest. Her family is from Westmoreland and Washington counties and she has spent a lot of time in Pittsburgh throughout the years for concerts, restaurants, and festivals. She is excited to be moving to the city and is looking forward to easier access to public transportation and bike commuting!

In her free time, she loves to hike, bird, forage for wild food, amateurly study mycology, garden, bike ride, kayak, and XC ski. She also absolutely loves animals and has a particular fondness for cats. With her spouse, James, she has five cats - Pekoe, Badger, Pumpkin, Tayto and Ullr. Tayto and Ullr are her failed fosters from her volunteer work with Homeward Bound WV. Giving outdoor community and abandoned cats a second chance at living indoors as spoiled, beloved house cats has been very rewarding to her.