

DECEMBER/JANUARY 2026
ISSUE 26:01

TERN OF EVENTS

The mission of Presque Isle Audubon is to connect people with birds, other wildlife and their habitats; through education, conservation, and advocacy.



We're proud to share some exciting updates on our **"Get Benched"** initiative, a multi-organization collaboration at PI State Park! Read more inside!

Featured In This Issue

- **The President's Perch**
- "Get Benched" on **Pg. 5**
- PIA in the Community
- Nurture the Nature Lover
- **Christmas Bird Count on DEC. 20 - See Pg. 8!**
- **Festival of the Birds 2026 and WAYS to GET INVOLVED in PIA on Pg. 9**
- The Bird Report on **Pg. 10**
- **much more!**

Stay up-to-date with PIA and learn how you can get involved by following us on social media or visiting our website:

<https://www.presqueisleaudubon.org/>

FROM THE EDITOR

A Life Driven by Curiosity: Reflecting on Jerry McWilliams and the Wall of Achievement

***Editor's Note:** Since 2008, the Union City Wall of Achievement has honored individuals who have made meaningful contributions to Union City or achieved distinction in their professional or personal lives through outstanding service, leadership, or accomplishment. This September, PIA's very own Jerry McWilliams was honored as an inductee. This article is a personal reflection of my conversation with Jerry regarding this accomplishment and his contributions to Union City, PIA, and the greater birding community. Many thanks to Jerry for sharing his wisdom with me. I look forward to our next visit!*

When my mother-in-law and I arrived at Jerry McWilliams' home to interview him about receiving Union City's Wall of Achievement Award, I wasn't prepared for what awaited me. His living room had been transformed into something resembling a natural history museum—fossils, meteorites, and artifacts carefully displayed across every available surface. He encouraged us, as he welcomed visitors, to examine Tyrannosaurus Rex and megalodon teeth up close and touch them, to hold the meteorites in hand to feel their weight, to stand next to the leg bone of an extinct elephant bird and measure ourselves against an animal that walked the earth millennia ago. Over 240 specimens filled the space, each one representing not just scientific curiosity, but the accumulated evidence of a life lived in passionate pursuit of knowledge.



Article continues on next page...

Reflecting on Jerry McWilliams and the Wall of Achievement

Continued from previous page.

by Stacey Dell, Editor

If my visit with Jerry could be distilled into a single word, it would be opportunity—or rather, the creation of opportunity. From the moment we walked through his door to the moment we left, Julie Dell (PIA Treasurer) and I heard stories of experiences he had sought out, adventures he had manufactured from sheer determination, and a worldview built not on what was handed to him, but on what he reached out and claimed for himself.

Jerry grew up the son of a farming family in Union City. His parents were extremely supportive, even if formal education wasn't something they'd had the opportunity to prioritize in their own lives. School wasn't always a particularly happy place for him—he shared stories of being picked on for his small size and his interest in birds and nature. We talked about the unfortunate memory of once being stuck in a locker, of enduring paddling when it was still commonplace in schools, of struggling with ADHD long before it was understood or accommodated. He readily admits he was no valedictorian, that he struggled in school. He recalls looking out the window during class and becoming transfixed by a Cabbage White butterfly—even remembers being corrected once when he tried to explain to a teacher that different duck species make different sounds. He struggled to feel understood or like he fit in. Even on family vacations, his parents would watch him become distracted by a giant swallowtail and gently suggest that maybe he'd grow out of this "nature" obsession. He heard that phrase throughout much of his life: "He'll grow out of it." He never did—he only grew more intense, more involved.

Yet when I asked him how he felt upon learning he'd been nominated for the Wall of Achievement Award by his friend Tony Luba, his response was immediate: honored and flattered. There's something particularly moving about that—a man whose unique gifts weren't always recognized in traditional school settings, being celebrated by his home community for the extraordinary path he forged.

What Jerry has accomplished without a college degree is staggering. As I moved from his fossil-filled living room into his office, I found walls covered with a large map marking his travels—Kazakhstan, multiple trips to South America, Kenya, Papua New Guinea, Panama, and more. Dozens of carefully labeled and curated shelves held more than 15,000 butterfly specimens, their ornate colorings testament to both nature's artistry and Jerry's meticulous preparation work. He told us stories of travels to places where butterflies with wingspans comparable to birds flapped overhead,

Article continues on next page...



of meeting a scholar of prehistoric rodents by chance in a drugstore, of connections that led to positions conducting bird trips and research work for the University of Florida and the University of Mississippi.

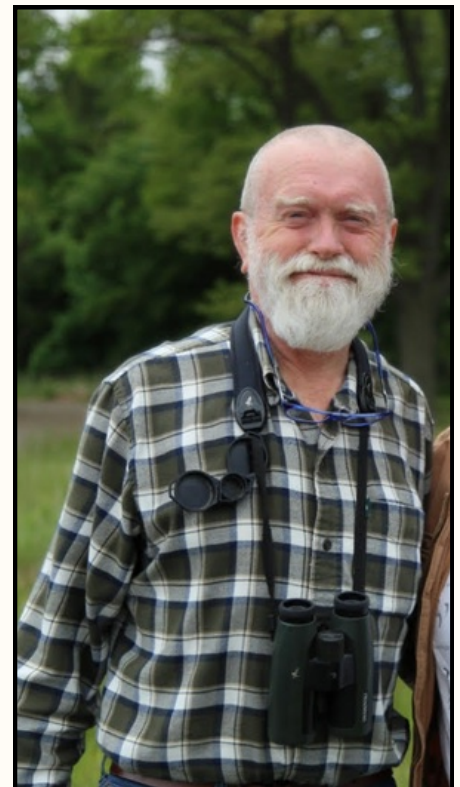
But it was his reflection on his own life that struck me most deeply. When Jerry looks back at everything he's accomplished, what matters most to him is showing that he didn't allow circumstances to be a deterrent. "I could live three or more lifetimes and still have things I want to do," he told me. He still dreams of going to college, of learning Spanish, of getting into sculpting. He showed me a painting of waves at Presque Isle he's working on and mentioned his old dream of creating a painting so large it could be seen from space. When people ask him, "Why are you starting something new?"—and they do ask—he realizes now what drove him. Growing up where and how he did, he didn't have exposure to museums, art galleries, or opportunities to travel. He was hungry for those experiences, and that hunger has only ever been satisfied by the opportunities he sought after for himself.

His connection to Presque Isle Audubon Society has been integral to channeling that hunger productively. Jerry's been involved with the organization since 1977, and he speaks with genuine fondness about his early work with James and Jean Stull on their book, *Birds of Erie County*. He recalls sometimes feeling like he was the only birder in the world until he discovered the Presque Isle Audubon community. His mentors—Jim Baxter and Don Snyder—opened doors for him, with Snyder helping him become Bird Records Chairman and Editor. Through the Audubon Society, Jerry found his people. He went on to teach field trips and classes, to lead and inspire, to establish the Presque Isle Hawkwatch in 2009. Even now, he takes the lead on the hawk counts at Presque Isle each Spring as well as the waterbird count, going out every day since October, coming home to document everything on e-Bird and in his spreadsheets, completing about an hour and a half of research paperwork daily. He always stood behind Presque Isle Audubon Society, and he's always appreciated their support. In turn, the organization has always been so proud to know and work with him.

We discussed how Erie is one of the best places in the world for a birder, one of the best places to visit for someone who loves what we love. Jerry's life is living proof of what can happen when natural curiosity meets a supportive community.

His main message from receiving the Wall of Achievement Award is simple but powerful: you don't have to have a college degree to do great things. You can be self-educated. You can create your own future and success. Jerry didn't wait until retirement to have the experiences he craved—he went out and made them happen, meeting the right people, seizing chances, building a life that earned him the Earl Poole Award for outstanding contributions to Pennsylvania ornithology, the Michael Harwood Memorial Award from the Hawk Migration Association, and recognition as senior author of *The Birds of Pennsylvania* published by Cornell University Press.

Article continues on next page...



As I left his home that day, walking past the fossils and butterflies and maps marking adventures across the globe, I thought about the boy who was told he'd grow out of his obsession with birds. I thought about the young man who faced his circumstances and decided they wouldn't define him. And I thought about the naturalist who transformed that determination into a legacy—not just through his impressive body of published work and his contributions to institutions around the world, but through his daily presence at Presque Isle, his ongoing commitment to our Audubon Society, and his willingness to share his knowledge with anyone curious enough to ask.

Jerry McWilliams created his own opportunities. In doing so, he created opportunities for all of us—to learn, to explore, to see the natural world through eyes sharpened by decades of careful observation and boundless wonder. That is a legacy worthy of any wall, and any lifetime.



by Stacey Dell, Editor, PIA TERN of Events

THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH



Photograph of red-breasted nuthatch at PI submitted by PIA Trustee, **Rachel Buss**

by Sue Murawski,
President

I had a great time and learned plenty at the "I Bird, I Vote" conference at State College this past October. Organized by **Audubon Mid-Atlantic**, this gathering of environmental advocates and PA Audubon chapter leaders explored how we can all best advocate for birds and the places they need.

Speakers from many environmental champion organizations shared their work with us. Representatives from the **National Audubon Society** and **Audubon Mid-Atlantic** were there, as expected. We also heard from the **National Parks Conservation Association**, **PA Solar Center**, **Solar United Neighbors**, **The Nature Conservancy**, **PennEnvironment**, **Conservation Voters of PA** and **We Conserve PA**. I had seen and admired many of these speakers during online meetings, so it was exciting to meet them in person. Did you know we have a state ornithologist? I didn't. It was a pleasure to speak with **Sean Murphy**. Great guy; he offered to come to Erie and give a presentation; I suggested (obviously) mid-May during spring migration.

Here's a little of what I learned:

- **Audubon Mid-Atlantic** trains and endorses foresters in PA; this is important as right now in PA anyone without training can call themselves a forester; other states require training and certification.
- **National Audubon** staff collaborates broadly and effectively with federal and state legislators regarding renewable energy and appropriate siting; several examples were shared.
- **PA Audubon** chapters advocate successfully for environmental legislation at the state and federal levels, including PA Solar for Schools, and the federal Endangered Species Act.

All in all, it was a great opportunity to build community with other PA Audubon chapter leaders. Many thanks to **Tess Wilson and Jim Brown** of Audubon Mid-Atlantic for arranging this event. I'm looking forward to next year's!





Audubon Mid-Atlantic "I BIRD, I VOTE" CONFERENCE

Featured to the left are four national and statewide Audubon team members that President Sue Murawski had the opportunity to collaborate with and learn from at the "I Bird, I Vote" conference in October.

Pictured from left to right:

Jim Brown, Policy Director, Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Suzanne Biemiller, Executive Director, Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Tess Wilson, Network Engagement Manager, Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Kim Brand, Managing Director for Community Building, National Audubon Society

Thank you, Sue, for your leadership and for representing PIA!

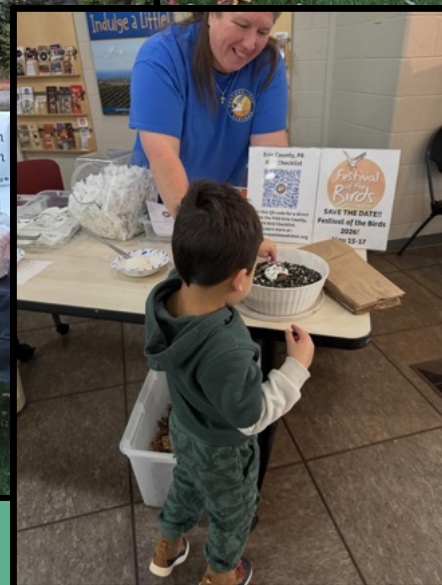


We are proud to announce that there have been 8 benches made from volunteers **Julie Leonard** (PIA Member and Presque Isle Partnership), **Jon DeMarco** (Presque Isle Partnership), **Kenneth Bownes** (Erie Woodcraft), **Bob Miller** and **Jaimie Miller** (PIA Board Member) along with the support of Presque Isle State Park maintenance staff.

Once the benches have been placed along the inner trails at Presque Isle State Park, we will update you with the locations for your new hiking and resting spots! **Stay tuned!**



in the community



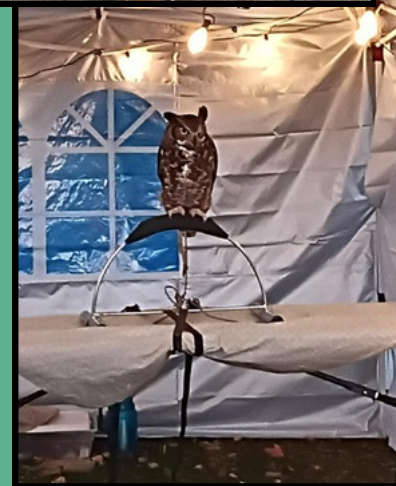
LIGHTS OUT AT THE LIGHTHOUSE

Presque Isle Audubon was one of the organizations to participate in this year's "Lights out at the Lighthouse" event! We were joined by the **Presque Isle Partnership, TREC Foundation, and DCNR Educators!**

PIA invited **Tamarack Wildlife Center** to join us as our theme for the event was owls! They joined us with two of their ambassador owls and were the stars of the night! One of their ambassadors, **Romeo**, lived up to his name and called in some curious owls that are happy to call Presque Isle home!! It was positively a one-of-a-kind experience!!

SHOP SMALL SATURDAY

The **TREC Foundation** hosted a **Shop Small Saturday** encouraging families to shop together, visit TREC and take time to learn and explore at the same time. Presque Isle Audubon was thrilled to be able to participate and set up some activities for kids and families. We made pinecone bird feeders, designed some chalk drawing birds and got some 'fresh ink' with our nature and bird temporary tattoos!!



*Submissions
by Jaimie Miller*





We have already started hosting **Nurture the Nature Lover** field trips for local schools and are happy that the age ranges now cover **Kindergarten through 12th grade!**

Students will enjoy a movie in the **TREC Foundation's Big Green Screen Theatre**, have a lesson with one of our partners (such as **DCNR Environmental Educators, Lake Erie Lights, Tamarack Wildlife Center and Sea Grant/Natural History Museum**), tour **TREC displays**, and have time with **Presque Isle Audubon volunteers** to learn binocular use, wing span comparisons, nature journaling, rock painting, pinecone bird feeder making, and more!

Our invitations to the schools were very well received and quickly filled! We are happy to work with schools on setting up a trip in the future - **even into the 2026-2027 school year.**

For questions and information, please contact Jaimie at jacey78@presqueisleaudubon.org



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT



We've made it to the end of another year, which means it's time for the **125th annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC)**!! The CBC is one of the longest running avian citizen science projects, and began in 1900 when ornithologist, Frank Chapman, proposed counting birds to replace the traditional brutal Christmas side hunt, a competition during which many birds were killed for sport. The CBC is held each year from December 14th through January 5th, with local chapters choosing a date somewhere in that three week span to conduct their official count.

This year, the PIAS CBC will be held on Saturday, December 20th. We will meet on Presque Isle SP at Shelter #2 by 7:45 a.m., form teams, and head out to designated areas of the park to...count birds! We will reconvene at the shelter at noon for lunch (bring a bagged lunch and a drink), make our initial tally, then head back out to cover any uncounted areas as needed. Birders of all skill levels are welcome to join in on the fun! We will have a few pairs of binoculars available to borrow for the event. Our final tally dinner will be held at 5:00 at Applebee's on West 12th and Peninsula Drive. Participants are welcome and encouraged but not obligated to attend the final tally dinner.

If you have any questions regarding the CBC, please contact us at fieldtrips@presqueisleaudubon.org. For further details, or please see our website: www.presqueisleaudubon.org and/or our Facebook page. We do have some teams to cover off-park areas within our count circle and if you are within the circle and wish to participate from home, we welcome your input! Please check out the CBC counting rules on the National Audubon website: www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count and forward your data to fieldtrips@presqueisleaudubon.org.

Thanks, and we look forward to seeing you all on December 20th!

by Lauren Winschel, Director of Field Trips

**December 20
Shelter #2**



Photographs on
this page
graciously
submitted by PIA
Trustee, **Rachel
Buss**





FOB 2026

We will be joined by Amar Ayyash as this year's keynote speaker! Amar is both an expert on the gulls of North America and an evangelist for "gull recreation." He coordinates the Illinois Ornithological Society Annual Gull Frolic on Lake Michigan, hosts the popular website

anythinglarus.com, and is often found speaking at

birding events throughout the continent. Much of his free time is dedicated to traveling the world to photograph and study gulls. Amar has published several papers and articles on gull identification, distribution, and molt, and is the author of the authoritative guide to North American Gulls, *The Gull Guide*.

Among the world's "seabirds", gulls are the most accessible to humans, invading our most immediate surroundings. Gulls are sometimes perceived as 2nd class avian creatures. This, along with the identification challenges they present and their readiness to hybridize, presents a love-hate relationship for many birders. Yet some gull species are among the most coveted birds on any birder's list (think Ross's Gull and Ivory Gull). This makes for an interesting juxtaposition. Do we like some gulls and look past others? Amar Ayyash will take us through an entertaining and intriguing exploration of the natural history of gulls, including their thorny taxonomy, and he'll share some of their lesser-known adaptations and quirky behaviors.

Your full weekend registration will include:

- Dinner on Friday, Saturday and Sunday
- Quick breakfast items on Saturday and Sunday
- Keynote speaker, Amar Ayyash
- Field trips and presentations galore!! Such as: Honeybee Knowledge, Hemlock Haven (Hemlock Healing), Pontoon Boat Trips, Kayaking trips, Health Benefits of Birding, Slow Birding, Birds of the Night, Nature Writing for Pleasure and Publication, Travels with BirdingApp, Quirky Bird Walk, Bird Joy, and more!!
- Festival Swag!
- The only items not included are lunches, but we do try to have a food truck option available at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center and tickets for raffle items!

Registration will open for the festival in mid-December! Keep an eye out for our mailer or just check our website and be one of the first to register!

Festival registration also makes a great Christmas gift for the nature lover in your life!

by Jaimie Miller

GET Involved

To support the work going on in PIA, you can:

Donate items to use for our educational programming and field trips! We have a wish list on Walmart of some suggestions here:

[Nurture the Nature Lover | Walmart.com \(Your paragraph text \)](https://www.walmart.com/list/gc/your-paragraph-text)

Volunteer for an upcoming event! This could be our monthly programs, a field trip, a Nurture the Nature Lover field trip, or even at the Festival of the Birds in May!

Collect pinecones for our educational field trips!

Become a Festival of the Birds sponsor or donate an item for our basket raffle!

You can also support all of these projects with a donation either via PayPal or by check to: Presque Isle Audubon, 301 Peninsula Dr., Suite 8, Erie, PA, 16505

Become involved in YOUR membership! We want to hear from you on what you would like to see in programs, field trips you want to have, items you want addressed, etc.



The Bird Report

by Jerry McWilliams

The following birds of note were reported from September 26 to November 19. All reports are from Presque Isle State Park unless noted otherwise.

Stilt Sandpiper—1; Oct. 9; marina bay; I.O.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper—1; Sep 15; Gull Point; J.B.

Dunlin—700 (high count); Nov. 6; Walnut Creek access (Waterbird count); J.M.

Parasitic Jaeger—1; Nov. 17; Sunset Point (Waterbird count); J.M.

Jaeger species—1; Nov. 16, Beach 10; S.T.

Glaucous Gull—1; Nov. 17; Presque Isle Downs and Casino parking lot; J.C.

Eared Grebe—1; Nov. 10 to 12; Leo's landing; A.K., et al.

Brown Pelican—1; Nov. 18; Dobbin's landing; S.P.

Rough-legged Hawk—1; Nov. 15; Pine Tree Trail; D.N.

Northern Saw-whet Owl—1; Oct. 29; B-trail; R.D.

White-eyed Vireo—1; October 25 (late); Fry's landing; banded by L.M.K.

Common Redpoll—5; October 16; Edinboro; S.Y., fide J.H.
3; October 17; Pine Tree Trail; K.A..
1; October 28; Fry's landing; L.M.K.

Lapland Longspur—2; Nov. 15; Gull Point; D.N.

Connecticut Warbler—1; Sep 27; Pine Tree Trail; J.M.

Orange-crowned Warbler—1; Oct. 26 (late); Fry's landing; banded by L.M.K.



Parasitic Jaeger

Tom Ingram

Audubon Photography Awards



Dunlin

Tianne Strombeck

Audubon Photography Awards



Northern Saw-whet Owl

Debra Herst

Audubon Photography Awards

Contributors

K.A.-Katie Andersen, J.B.-Jason Bojczyk, J.C.-John Campbell, S.P.-Scott Pelton, R.D.-Roger Donn, J.H.-Jamie Hill, A.K.-Ashley Keleher, L.M.K.-Laura-Marie Koitsch, J.M.-Jerry McWilliams, J.Me.-Jackson Medeiros, D.N.-Daryl Nolt, I.O.-Isoo O'Brian, S.T.-Shannon Thompson, S.Y.-Sioux Yatzor

Contact Jerry McWilliams at 814-240-8594 or jerrymcw@aol.com



PIA FAMILY - We need your help!

Do you have unwanted clothing, shoes, building materials, tools or hardware? Here's a chance to donate it (by December 9) to a very good cause. What follows is a request for help from a partner of Presque Isle Audubon - Red Roof Inn! They have given us free rooms for our Festival of the Birds raffle, and discount codes for Festival registrants to use. Now it is our turn to pitch in to THEIR cause.

RESTORING LIVES IN JAMAICA - HURRICANE RELIEF DRIVE

Families across Jamaica are still struggling after the recent hurricanes, and Restoring Lives in Jamaica is working urgently to deliver essential supplies to the hardest-hit communities.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

We are collecting urgently needed items to fill a shipping container headed directly to impacted communities:

- Non-perishable food (canned goods, rice, pasta, etc.)
- Clothing & shoes (all sizes)
- Building materials (lumber, roofing supplies, nails, etc.)
- Tools & hardware (hammers, saws, screwdrivers, etc.)
-

Erie Donation Drop-Off — Open 24/7

Red Roof Plus & Suites at 18th Street in Erie. Donations may be placed directly in our designated meeting-room space at any time. The

deadline to drop off supplies is **December 9th**. Need help transporting items? Schedule a pickup at your location.

Contact: Naomi Frost at 814-806-6056 or via email at Naomi@markv20.com



DID YOU KNOW?

DID YOU KNOW YOU CAN
JOIN PRESQUE ISLE
AUDUBON OR RENEW
YOUR MEMBERSHIP
ONLINE USING PAYPAL
OR A CREDIT CARD?



CHECK IT OUT

Joining or Renewing Your Membership Online

First, got to this webpage:

<https://www.presqueisleaudubon.org/membership>

Scroll to the bottom, and select either **Membership** or **Renewal** from the drop-down, and click the yellow **"Subscribe"** button to take care of your payment. A new window will open asking for either your PayPal email address or choose to the **"pay with a debit or credit card"** option.

You can still submit your membership application via mail with a check. Here's the direct link to the membership application:

https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/66f9bd45cd737d00debd4738/672c4c2debf261bca98ccb83_2018piasmembershipapp.pdf

Even if you've been away for a bit (migration happens!), we'd love to have you rejoin the flock!



PIA Membership Report **Thank You, Members!**

We welcome all the new Audubon members as well as those that renewed in the Presque Isle Audubon chapter. If a member joins National Audubon, they get an automatic membership in our chapter. We encourage everyone to come to our meetings. Many of our meetings/programs have Zoom options. Check your email, our chapter newsletter, and/or our website for more information. **Members are:**

Erie: Liz Allen, Bill Bleil, Patricia Fish, Ron Leonardi, Magdalen Balter, Peggy Jones, Virginia Bush, Thomas Carney, Patricia Murphy, Jessica Horan, Rebecca Hart, Amanda Mason, Patricia Murphy, Martha Dunlavey, Gail Detzel, Patricia Turk, Carson Nickolay, Kathryn Cardinal, Karen Bukowski,

Albion: Richard Bennett

Cambridge Sps: Patty Renwick

Centerville: Michael Kelly

Cochranon: Richard Gillian

Corry: Jack Howell

East Springfield: Patti Larson

Edinboro: Debbie Zahler, Bob Smith

Fairview: Nancy and Ed Group

Girard: L. Robbins

Jamestown: Andrea Hutton, Christine Weber

Linesville: Marjorie Willison

Meadville: Joyce Lynn, Susan Hackworth, Virginia Farmati, Mary Wagner

North East: Jean Gillum

Saegertown: Marjorie Brant

Titusville: Martha Pringle

Union City: Marjory Wilson

Waterford: Brenda Borgia, Suzanne Baum

Pittsburgh, PA: C.P. Kollar

Freedom, PA: Georgie Wahl

Dallas, TX: Doug Nichols

Venetia, PA: Gigi Gerben

Thank you for your membership!

by Ron Intrieri, Membership Chairman



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Sue Murawski

Presque Isle Audubon Society's newsletter, the *Tern of Events*, is published every other month: February, April, June, August, October and December. The deadline for submissions is the 15th of the month preceding publication.

All published material is subject to editing. Send submissions to Stacey Dell, editor, via email at editor@presqueisleaudubon.org. If you have any questions, call or text Stacey at (814) 553-0818.



PRESQUE ISLE AUDUBON SOCIETY
TOM RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER
301 PENINSULA DRIVE, SUITE 8
ERIE, PA 16505

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**Presque Isle Audubon Society
Chapter Only Membership Application**

Chapter only membership includes membership in the Presque Isle Audubon Society ONLY and the chapter newsletter, Tern of Events.

Individual membership \$15.00/year

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please provide your e-mail address if you want the online version of our newsletter.

E-mail address _____

Return this form with your check payable to the Presque Isle Audubon Society to:

Ronald Intrieri, PIA Membership
Tom Ridge Environmental Center
301 Peninsula Drive, Suite 8
Erie, PA 16505

**National Audubon Society
Membership Application**

Renewal members (\$20) can join as they have in the past, either by sending their membership check directly to National Audubon, or they can join online. New members (\$20) are to send their first membership check to the local chapter. The address is at the bottom of this application.

Membership includes membership in BOTH the National Audubon Society and the local Presque Isle Audubon Society. Please include your e-mail address to receive the online version of the newsletter.

E-mail address _____

Chapter Code U15

Mail this form with your check payable to the National Audubon Society directly to **YOUR LOCAL CHAPTER.**

Ronald Intrieri, PIA Membership
Tom Ridge Environmental Center
301 Peninsula Drive, Suite 8
Erie, PA 16505