

PRESQUE ISLE AUDUBON SOCIETY RECORDS FINDING AID

Date Finding Aid Created: May 2009.

Finding Aid Written By: Barry J. Gray.

Title: Presque Isle Audubon Society Records.

Inclusive Dates: 1958- , Bulk of items 2000-

Creator: Presque Isle Audubon Society.

Extent: Approximately 50 linear inches as of May 2009.

Repository: Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 301 Peninsula Drive, Suite 8, Erie, PA 16505.

Abstract: The Presque Isle Audubon Society (PIAS) is a chapter of the **National Audubon Society** and a member of **Audubon Pennsylvania** serving northwestern Pennsylvania including Erie and Crawford counties. It is named after **Presque Isle**, a peninsula on the shores of Lake Erie near the city of Erie. Its mission is to promote the conservation and protection of wildlife, plants, soil, and water in relation to human activity; to initiate and carry out plans and activities which would contribute to the conservation and protection of these natural resources; and to provide opportunities to become more aware and appreciative of our physical and biological environment.

The Presque Isle Audubon Society provides educational and recreational activities throughout the year which are centered around the natural world and open to the public. PIAS holds meetings on the third Friday of the month in September, October, November, February, March, April, May, and June. A wide variety of field trips are offered throughout the year. PIAS publishes a newsletter, *Tern of Events*, every month except in January and July.

In addition to field trips and monthly programs, the Presque Isle Audubon Society is involved in other nature-related activities. PIAS conducts the Erie, PA (Presque Isle) Christmas Bird Count and hosts the "Festival of the Birds" in May. PIAS owns and maintains the 50-acre Laura Olsen Memorial Sanctuary in Crawford County, the 33-acre Fern Wood Sanctuary near Fairview, and is co-owner (with the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania) of the 89-acre Titus Bog Sanctuary in Erie County. PIAS maintains a collection of nature books at the Nash Library of Gannon University and was instrumental in establishing the Presque Isle Research Library at Presque Isle State Park.

As part of the Important Bird Area Program, the Presque Isle Audubon Society monitors breeding birds at Roderick Reserve. PIAS is a member of the Erie County Environmental Coalition. PIAS provides volunteer services to the **Erie National Wildlife Refuge** and co-sponsors a biennial nature photo contest with the Refuge. The Society is also a

member of the annual **Allegheny Nature Pilgrimage** held at Allegheny State Park, NY in June. PIAS participates in the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's Adopt-A-Highway program. The Society's Education Committee provides free subscriptions to *Audubon Adventures* to numerous classrooms and school libraries in northwest Pennsylvania.

Acquisition Information: The Society's records currently stored at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center (TREC) are primarily for the years 2000 to now. Records for 1958-2001 were transferred to the Erie County Historical Society (ECHS) in 2000, where they are filed as Collection 203 (22 boxes). Records at ECHS include Executive Board minutes, correspondence, newsletters, reference materials, and PIAS as well as Presque Isle State Park history. The Society's collection of nature books is stored at Gannon University's Nash Library. In addition, a set of the Society's newsletters from April 1964 to now (some issues missing) is located in the Blasco Library's Heritage Room, shelved as "Presque Isle Audubon Society Newsletter."

Preferred Citation: Presque Isle Audubon Society Records, Tom Ridge Environmental Center, Erie, PA.

Access Restrictions: Available for Researchers for use at TREC.

Copyright: Presque Isle Audubon Society.

Alternative Formats: The Society's by-Laws, Board meeting minutes, and the past year's issues of the Newsletter, *Tern of Events*, are also available online at <http://www.presqueisleaudubon.org>. All issues of the newsletter for 2000- are also available on CD-ROM at TREC.

Organizational History:

Origins

On October 14, 1956, about fifteen people attended a field trip and meeting held at Presque Isle State Park in order to organize a nature group. On December 29, the group participated in its first Christmas bird count. In 1957, the group took the name of "Presque Isle Nature Group" and elected its first president. The following year, the group changed its name to "Presque Isle Nature Club."

The club's constitution and by-laws were ratified by the membership on January 6, 1961. The members voted to affiliate the group with the National Audubon Society on March 24, 1961. On May 13, 1961, the organization approved the first revision to its constitution, changing its name to Presque Isle Audubon Society, its present title. The membership voted to join the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy on January 6, 1962.

The club held regular meetings of the membership at which it presented speakers on nature topics. It also sponsored a wildlife film/lecture series at various venues from 1964

until 1976. At the March 1964 meeting the program was entitled “Do It Yourself” at which the members were invited to present their own short talks. This has continued to this day as “Members’ Night.” The meeting in May 1965 was the first annual “Spring Banquet,” beginning another tradition. The members gathered for their first summer picnic on June 16, 1968.

Publications and Libraries

The society began publishing a “membership news bulletin” containing programs for its meetings, field trip reports, bird sightings, nature news, and updates on club activities such as education and conservation. The news bulletin (sometimes called the newsletter) has continued publication on a regular basis (usually 9-10 issues annually). In May 1991 PIAS named its newsletter *Tern of Events*, incorporating the Society’s logo, a drawing of a Common Tern, by Jean Stull, (first used in 1986) in the masthead. The newsletter began being published online in January 2000.

Starting in 1958, the club contributed to a newsletter called *The Sandpiper*, a quarterly journal of ornithology and other branches of natural history. It was published in conjunction with the Meadville Bird and Tree Club, the Sam Wharram Nature Club of Ashtabula, Ohio, and the Pymatuning Group of Federated Bird Clubs. Publication continued until 1973.

In 1969, the Society published a checklist of birds of Erie County, followed in 1976 by a checklist of birds found at Presque Isle. The list was updated in 1999 and most recently in 2006.

Members contributed books to create a lending library for the membership to use. Early in 1973 the books were augmented by several donations of slides. The slide collection, enhanced by the purchase of a projector and screen in 1975, eventually grew to several thousand slides, and was available for members to use in presentations. The collection continued to grow over the years until it could no longer be housed and transported easily by the membership. In 1993 it was transferred to Gannon University’s Nash Library. To support research on Presque Isle, the Society started a library in the park administration building in 1982.

The 1960s

The decade of the 1960s saw the growth of the modern environmental movement, resulting in the Clean Air Act in 1963, the Wilderness Act in 1964, and the Endangered Species Act in 1966. The Society’s activities during the decade mirrored national events, including efforts to protect the land and wildlife in the area.

Rachel Carson’s book, *Silent Spring*, about the dangers of pesticides to wildlife, appeared in 1962. In the 1960s, the Society supported legislation banning persistent pesticides such as dieldren, used to control European chafer beetles in Pennsylvania. In addition to providing information on pesticides to the public, and lobbying state legislators and

administration officials, members worked with the Fish and Wildlife Service to collect dead birds, which proved the harmful effects of the pesticide. The use of dieldren was banned in 1968.

In 1966, PIAS opposed a state plan to build a bridge from the east side of Erie to Presque Isle Peninsula. The Society successfully argued that the bridge would bring excess crowds and commerce that would destroy the peninsula's ecology. This was before the passage of the Environmental Policy Act in 1969, requiring environmental impact statements for all proposed projects on government land. Although the bridge plan was defeated in 1968, the idea lingered on until 1974 and required further meetings with state officials and legislators to remind them of the "totally adverse" effect the bridge would have on the park.

Besides stopping the east side bridge, one of the primary goals of the society in 1968 was to purchase land for a nature preserve. In the summer of that year, it placed a deposit on 50 acres of land in northern Crawford County from the James G. Hume estate, and negotiated the purchase of the 85 acre Titus Bog south of Wattsburg, with the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania. By the end of the year the society had paid for both properties. When Laura Olsen, who had served as secretary/treasurer from 1962-65, died near the end of the year, the board decided to name the land in Crawford County the Laura Olsen Memorial Sanctuary in her honor.

Through the years, PIAS has played an advisory role in many local nature projects. In 1967, PIAS was involved in the planning for the development of Asbury Woods as a nature center. In 1968, the society applied for and received status as a non-profit organization from the Internal Revenue Service.

The 1970s

In the 1970s, the nation became more aware of threats to the environment from pollution and ecological degradation. In response to these concerns, the first ever Earth Day, an "environmental teach-in" was held on April 22, 1970. That same year, the Environmental Protection Agency was formed to enforce pollution standards. In 1972, the pesticide DDT was banned, and the first National Audubon Society television special aired on ABC. PIAS served to heighten this awareness locally.

The Society sent speakers to local colleges and schools for Earth Day in 1970, and held a teach-in on birds at Presque Isle in October 1971 and 1972. In June 1970, it formed the "Erie Action Committee" to spot pollution and report it.

The Society's membership burgeoned to over 250 members in 1971, a very active year which garnered an award from the American Association of University Women for conservation activities. At the February meeting, PIAS unveiled a new decal with a logo depicting a common tern created by Jean Stull. In April, the newsletter published a special issue on wild flowers. Members built a trail through the Olsen Sanctuary. Members also appeared on the new public television station, WQLN, in November 1971.

In December 1971, PIAS was asked to join with Audubon groups in western New York as a sponsor for the Allegany Nature Pilgrimage.

In 1973, the National League of Cities proclaimed that garbage was overwhelming America's urban areas, and recommended recycling in order to reduce waste. In February of that year, PIAS was already involved in creating the RETURN recycling center in Erie, before local government had become involved. Members were also involved in planning local and statewide recycling efforts. The RETURN center continued in operation through 1979.

PIAS voiced its opposition to dam construction on Oil Creek, and urged Congress to designate part of Allegheny National Forest a federal wilderness. Members built Bluebird houses along the trail in the Olsen Sanctuary, and surveyed nesting hawks and owls in Erie County. They also assisted birders on Presque Isle and participated in a beach cleanup at the park. The Society added youth programs to its membership meetings, while the education committee held over 25 programs for more than 1000 children in 1973.

By the mid-1970s, automobiles and highways had become symbols of waste and pollution for environmentalists and social commentators. In 1973, the Society opposed the proposed Southern Tier Expressway, eventually becoming a plaintiff in a suit to stop construction. Members attended a public hearing on the highway's proposed route in 1976.

PIAS wrote the Federal Highway Administration and PennDOT to request a reassessment of the highway system in Erie County. Members studied proposals for public transportation and wrote to Congress to urge restoration of passenger rail service.

By 1975, membership in PIAS had grown twenty fold since its founding, and the president could declare that "Our cause is no longer unpopular."

PIAS published a revised edition of "Checklist of Birds Recorded in Erie County, Pennsylvania including Presque Isle State Park" in 1976. The newsletter featured regular bird counts and notes. Also that year, the Society's long-running film series ended due to declining attendance, which was attributed to the popularity of nature programs on TV.

In 1975, PIAS applied for natural landmark status for Titus Bog from the U.S. Interior Department. It received that designation in 1978. Also in 1978, PIAS became a Chapter of the National Audubon Society. The by-laws and constitution were revised to reflect its chapter status, and to create an Allegany Committee.

On April 10 1979, PIAS sent a representative to a meeting with other local environmental groups to form the Erie County Environmental Coalition. Later that year the Society asked state officials to appoint a naturalist for Presque Isle State Park. The park hired its first naturalist the following year.

The 1980s

The decade of the 1980s saw the creation of the EPA “superfund” to clean up toxic waste dumps. Studies linked acid rain, which was killing trees, to pollution from power plants. PIAS continued to lobby Congress in support of federal wilderness designation for Allegheny National Forest. Parts of the forest received wilderness protection in 1984.

In 1981, PIAS celebrated its 25th anniversary. The decade of the 1980s saw the Society continue to commit its resources to the park that gave it its name. In the summer of 1981, members converted the former Red Cross first aid building on the peninsula into a nature center with the help of the Northwest Pennsylvania Duck Hunters Association. The new center, which cost PIAS \$792, received 15,000 visitors in its first season of operation. The National Audubon Society reported on the nature center in the March 1982 issue of *Audubon*. The following year PIAS received an award from the Pennsylvania Medical Society in recognition of its work on the center.

In 1985, members erected an osprey nesting platform in the park, and provided input for the park’s management plan, including a “Proposal to Protect Environmentally Sensitive Areas on Presque Isle Peninsula,” for the Department of Environmental Resources. Also that year, PIAS was awarded a grant by the Pennsylvania Wildlife Resource Conservation Fund, followed by a second grant in 1986, to study the flora of Presque Isle State Park. The study, “Botanical survey and natural community classification for Presque Isle State Park, Erie County, Pennsylvania” published in 1987, was the first since one performed by Dr. Otto Jennings in 1909. The Society also updated its bird and butterfly checklists in 1988.

Throughout the 1980s, PIAS fought against the Army Corps of Engineers’ plan to create breakwaters on Presque Isle State Park. It lobbied the state Department of Natural Resources to designate Gull Point on the tip of the peninsula a bird sanctuary in 1985. It underwrote “On Shifting Sands,” a documentary on Presque Isle produced by WQLN, which first aired on September 9, 1987. Members also attended hearings on recreational development of the park which threatened wetland areas, and were active in creating the state park’s resource management plan.

In April 1981, members participated in the first annual National Audubon Society Birdathon. In 1984, PIAS agreed to participate in a five-year program to contribute to the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas. Also that year, the Society began awarding student scholarships for study leading to increased environmental awareness.

The Society began underwriting the PBS series “Nature” on WQLN in 1985. In 1986, PIAS received the National Audubon Society’s Outstanding Educational Achievement Award for its classes and scholarships, as well as its work on the nature center and Allegheny National Forest.

In 1987, the PIAS board decided to initiate a formal relationship with Erie National Wildlife Refuge near Guys Mills, under the National Audubon Society’s “Adopt A

Refuge” program. Members developed trails at the refuge and testified to legislators in support of federal funding. It co-sponsored a biennial nature photo contest with the refuge.

The 1990s

The Second World Climate Conference, held in 1990, called for increased study of the phenomenon of climate change. The term “global warming” came into common usage to refer to climate change on a global scale caused by greenhouse gases. Environmental concern shifted from protecting landscape and wildlife toward the preservation of life on Earth.

During the decade of the 1990s, PIAS continued to offer grants to area researchers, and established a fund to support research of local significance. The Society increased its participation in the Erie County Environmental Coalition. It also set up displays and sponsored activities at local events such as Discover Presque Isle and the Lake Erie Arboretum festival.

In November 1996, the membership voted to adopt a new constitution and by-laws. Members participated in the annual Great Backyard Bird Count which began in 1997. In 1999 the Society updated the ‘Checklist of Birds Recorded in Erie County Pennsylvania including Presque Isle State Park.’ The PIAS website was launched in the fall of 1999.

PIAS Today

At the start of the new century, the Society provided information to the public on alternatives to commercial pesticides used in lawn care. A grant awarded in 2001 funded an organic lawn care conference held in March 2003 in cooperation with the Erie County Environmental Coalition. Members also met with City of Erie officials to discuss the damage caused by pesticide and herbicide use.

Recently PIAS worked with the state on plans for the Tom Ridge Environmental Center (TREC) and Lake Erie Bluffs State Park (LEBSP). Since 2005 it has conducted an annual hawk watch at LEBSP.

In 2006 the Society moved into its new office at TREC. On September 15 of that year, the Society celebrated its 50th anniversary with a banquet and program at the Ridge Center, where its regular meetings are now held.

The Society continues its conservation activities, including opposition to wind turbine generators in Erie County, working to enact a ban on use of pesticides in the City of Erie, and encouraging farmers to create grassland on their property. The Society also sponsored the first of a planned annual birding festival at Presque Isle in May 2008. The Society’s annual activities include participation in the Allegany Nature Pilgrimage, International Migratory Bird Day at Presque Isle, the Great Backyard Bird Count, the Christmas Bird Count, and a spring highway cleanup on West Eighth Street.

Presidents of the Society:
1957-58 Marjory Woehr*
1958-60 Dora Foulke*
1960-61 Jean Stull
1961-63 Dr. Ralph Burbridge*
1963-64 Robert Anderson*
1964-66 Malcolm Waite*
1966-68 Dr. James Baxter
1968-69 Alan Patterson
1969-70 Mary Campbell*
1970-73 Charles (Chuck) Kern
1973-75 Jean Stull
1975-77 Dr. James Baxter
1977-80 Robert (Bob) Reiners*
1980-82 Richard (Dick) Clark*
1982-84 James (Jim) Gardner
1984-87 Timothy (Tim) Kimmel
1987-90 Carolyn Sturdevant
1990-92 Patricia (Pat) Maggi
1992-95 Steve Danko
1995-96 LeeAnn Reiners
1996-99 Ronald (Ron) Intriери
1999-02 Dr. Harry (Toby) Cunningham
2002-04 Lisa Danko
2004-06 Paul Burroughs
2006-09 Janet Price
2009-?? Mary Birdsong

* deceased

Bibliographical Information: Information for the history was obtained from the following sources.

Erie Times-News clippings.

Evelyn Anderson, *Presque Isle Audubon Society: A History* (DVD).

Presque Isle Audubon Society *Membership News Bulletin* 1964-1968; 1973-1986.

Presque Isle Audubon Society *Membership Newsletter* 1986-1991.

PIAS Newsletter 1968-1973.

Program Schedule 1984-2000.

The Sandpiper (newsletter) 1958-1973.

Tern of Events (newsletter) 1991-

Scope and Content Notes: As of 2007, the Society had 16 standing committees, as listed in the by-laws. Although committees do not provide regular reports, most committee reports are included in Executive Board minutes.

Folders contain copies of minutes and correspondence. Folders on PIAS history contain a variety of document types, including clippings, photographs, publications not produced by PIAS, printed programs, catalogs, and meeting summaries.

Some significant items in the collection are listed below.

Executive Board minutes, 1994-

Evelyn Anderson, *Presque Isle Audubon Society: A History* (DVD).

The Sandpiper (newsletter) 1958-1973.

Tern of Events (newsletter) 1991-

Organization of Collection: In principle, the collection consists of series, each chronologically arranged (the Society's fiscal year is July 1-June 30), based on the Society's committee structure, as listed in the by-laws. In practice the only series are those for the Executive Board and Publications, as the other committees' reports are included in the board minutes and/or the newsletter. In addition a History series is divided into sub-series for PIAS history, Presque Isle State Park history, and reference materials not published by PIAS.

Controlled Access Terms:

Presque Isle Audubon Society

Presque Isle State Park

Birds--Pennsylvania

Ecology

Nature

Ornithology

Contents List: This is an active collection, which is not yet under archival control. Therefore, the researcher should not assume this list to be all-inclusive. Inclusive dates are provided after each folder title.

Series: Executive Board

Board members, 2000- ; By Laws 2008-

Constitution and By-Laws/Treasurer's Reports 1998-2006

Correspondence

Minutes 2009-

Minutes 2004-2008
Minutes 1994-2003
Minutes/Treasurer's reports 2000-2002

Series: Publications

Tern of Events 2008-
Tern of Events 2005-2007
Tern of Events 2002-2004
Tern of Events 1989-2001 (primarily 1999-2001)
Tern of Events extra issues (various 1995-2006)
Tern of Events 2000- (CD-ROM)
(Note: not published 12/03, 1/05, 2/05; 8/05 published in place of 7/05)

PIAS Newsletter 1987-1995 (includes program schedules 1984-2000)

Sandpiper 1970-73
Sandpiper 1967-70
Sandpiper 1964-67
Sandpiper 1961-64
Sandpiper 1958-61 (missing vol. 3 no. 1)

Checklist of Birds Recorded in Erie County, Pa. including Presque Isle State Park 2006
Checklist of Butterflies Recorded in Erie County, Pa. including Presque Isle State Park 2006

Wings, Sand & Song: Presque Isle's Habitat (DVD)

Series: History

History
Clippings 2006- (non-PIAS)
Clippings on conservation, etc.
PIAS Archives

Series: Programs

Programs 2000-

Series: Education

Ecology Scholarships (1988-1991)

Notes to accompany Guyne's glass slides at ECHS; copied by Richard Bollinger.