



THE GNATCATCHER

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

VOL. XLV, NO. 5 — NOV / DEC 2013

JVAS Christmas Bird Count

to be held on Dec. 21



with count supper at Urie's Rib Shack



Mark your calendars for Saturday, December 21, and plan to participate in our annual Christmas Bird Count by contacting the coordinator, Steve Bonta, to coordinate your counting activities. Call 684-1175, or send an email to stevebonta@yahoo.com with "Christmas Bird Count" in the subject line. We aim to have as complete coverage of the count circle, with as little overlap of participants' count areas, as possible. Of course, backyard bird feeder counts are always welcome as well.

Although we previously announced that the CBC would be held early this year, on December 14, we decided to move it back to December 21 when we realized that the 14th was the

last day of regular rifle deer season in Pennsylvania (and that Steve would be here on the 21st after all, and not in Newfoundland as he originally planned).

One big change from previous years is the location of the count supper. Rather than our habitual potluck, the board decided to instead try meeting at a restaurant this year, which

should mean that more people can go out and count birds rather than staying home to cook. So we will meet at 5 PM to trade stories and compile bird numbers at Urie's Rib Shack, 954 Pennsylvania Avenue, Tyrone. Any JVAS member is welcome to join us, whether or not you counted birds, but please visit their menu online and let our hospitality chair, Marcia Bonta, know what you'll be ordering no later than December 12 so we can let the chef know. Anyone who fails to do so will not be able to join us. Email her at marciabonta@hotmail.com with "Bird count supper" in the subject line or call **684-3113**. We'll have a private room in the back with room for up to 30 people.



Great Horned Owl: US Fish and Wildlife Service

~~~ by Dave Bonta ~~~

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JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

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The Juniata Valley Audubon Society (JVAS) is a chapter of the National Audubon Society and is dedicated to the conservation and restoration of natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the Earth's biological diversity. Juniata Valley Audubon accomplishes its mission through advocacy, science, land stewardship, and education — working directly with Audubon Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania state office of the National Audubon Society.

The JVAS is a tax-exempt, not-for-profit, educational organization as described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Gifts are deductible for income tax purposes (Tax ID # 25-1533496).

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# JVAS November 2013 Program

Our programs, designed for a general audience,  
are free and open to the public.

Directions: Take Interstate Rt. 99 to the Bellwood/Route 865 Exit (Exit 41). Follow Rt. 865 through the Sheetz/Martin's intersection. Proceed about four blocks and turn right at the "Business District" sign just before the railroad overpass. Turn left at the dead end and travel to the stop sign. Continue a short distance; the library will be on your right.

## November 19:

### State of the Frogs (and how you can help)



David Muñoz, graduate student of wildlife science at Penn State University, will present the research which showed that amphibian populations across the country are declining at an alarming rate. His presentation will highlight the current extinction crisis occurring for amphibians and some of the potential causes being documented by scientists. In addition, he will discuss opportunities for citizen scientists to become involved in monitoring amphibians, and some of the habitats and species that can be found in Pennsylvania.

Program meetings begin at 7 PM in the meeting room of the Bellwood-Antis Public Library, 526 Main St., Bellwood.

Never miss another field trip!

Visit us online at  
**JVAS.org**



Juniata Valley Audubon Society is on Facebook!

# Major Riparian Restoration Work occurring along Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River

by JVAS Conservation Chair Dr. Stan Kotala



photo by Dr. Stan Kotala

**In Blair County, The Trust for Tomorrow is engaged in ecological restoration work along Poplar Run and the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River. This project will restore and stabilize more than a mile of Poplar Run and the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River in Blair Township, Blair County. Previously, Trust for Tomorrow helped to restore wetlands on a 127-acre property adjacent to the waterways. Being able to work on the portion of the stream that runs along the property was a rare chance to restore the total habitat of the area. Workers will plant trees along about 14,500 feet**

*of the streams' banks, with the average forested buffer width projected to be 100 feet.*

*The work will help to reduce sediment and erosion as well as improve the overall quality of the watershed.*

*A large percentage of the restoration will take place on property which is being put under permanent easement and is undergoing wetland restoration activities through the USDA's Wetland Restoration Program. Through WRP restoration activities, wet croplands are currently being reverted to wetlands by removing subsurface drains, plugging surface drains, and constructing low level dikes.*

*When completed, this project will restore approximately 8,500 feet of streambank and create 14,500 feet of riparian buffers along two major tributaries in the Juniata River Watershed.*

*The project is the middle step in restoring the area, said Donna Fisher, Blair County Conservation District director. Conservation district officials hope to install trails and educational material along one side of the stream in a future project.*

*The area involved is at the southeast corner of the intersection of Monastery Road and Rt 36, east of Newry.*

# THE PEOPLE BEHIND JACKS MOUNTAIN HAWK WATCH

BY LAURA JACKSON

*Drive to the top of Jacks Mountain, on the road aptly named Jacks Mountain Road, that crosses Jacks Mountain between McVeytown and Belleville, in Mifflin County, and you'll see something unusual: two parking lots on the very top of the mountain. The parking lot on the south side is where hang glider pilots take off, riding the air currents for hours over Jacks Mountain. On the other side of the road, a short set of steps leads from the parking lot to a large altar. Peek behind the large*



*altar and you'll see dedicated birders, recording the raptor migration every year, starting in mid-September.*

Ron Singer is the official counter for Jacks Mountain Hawk Watch. He has been counting raptor migration on Jacks Mountain for about 40 years. Ron's a quiet, steady guy, who doesn't say much, but then again, he is too busy counting raptors. It takes someone like Ron to make a hawk watch happen. He has dedicated his

*life to collecting data that show Jacks Mountain, like some other ridges in south central Pennsylvania, is an important bird migratory flyway. Ron's dedication is a special type of commitment that very few of us are willing to make.*

*Ron recalls, back in the early days of his hawk watching – more than a decade after Rachel Carson wrote Silent Spring, “DDT was taking a serious toll on raptors. It has been great to see them come back. It would be awful to kill them now with windmills.”*

*Another regular counter, Gloria Bickel, has been observing raptor migration with Ron for over 30 years. Despite health problems, she is there almost every day, recording the data.*

*Darrell Smith is also a regular counter, driving over an hour from his home to Jacks Mountain Hawk Watch. He remembers September 18, 2002 when he was part of the biggest day at Jacks Mountain.*

*“We saw 1,625 Broad-wings between 12 noon and 1 PM and recorded a total of 2,900 Broad-wings for the*



*Photos, this story: Mike and Laura Jackson day along with 11 Ospreys, 4 Bald Eagles, 9 Northern Harriers, 8 Sharp-shins, 2 Cooper's, 5 Red-tails, 5 Kestrels - for a total of 2,944 raptors.”*



*The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) field trip on September 15, 2013 missed the BIG DAY by just 3 days. Darrell Smith, official counter, and Cindy Harvey, Gloria's daughter, will remember September 18, 2013 as a special day, “We had 887 Broadwings from 9 to 10 AM and a total of 1,848 for the day along with 1 Osprey, 4 Bald Eagles, 4 Sharp-shins, 2 Cooper's, 2 Red-tails, 1 beautiful immature Golden Eagle and 1 Kestrel, for a total of 1,863 raptors.”*

*“I am not sure where this ranks for day highs. Ron keeps those figures*

*but this has to be one of the best, if not the second best to September 18, 2002 – exactly 11 years ago. This was also a special day,” said Darrell.*



*Other days are special because birders from all over the world visit Jacks Mountain Hawk Watch. Some are regulars who come to see the migration, birders like John and Jen Baker and the Shellys from England, and many other countries. Other visitors stop to see the beautiful scenery and are amazed when they learn about the raptor migration.*

*Some days, dozens of hang gliding pilots, who travel from all over North America to jump off Jacks Mountain, distract the counters.*

*Even sailplane pilots cruise the sky over Jacks Mountain. Their gliders can float on the same winds that the raptors use. Pilots consider the day special when they glide with the raptors. They all share the “ocean of air” that flows over the mountain.*

*Rachel Carson described her experiences watching hawks in an essay*

*found after her death, “And always in these Appalachian highlands there are reminders of those ancient seas that more than once lay over all this*

*land...These whitened limestone rocks on which I am sitting... Now I lie back with half closed eyes and try to realize that I am at the bottom of another ocean---an ocean of air on which the hawks are sailing.”*

*It is the “ocean of air” that also brings the industrial wind developers. Jacks Mountain has the road, big electrical transmission lines, and more wind than the valley – three features that make Jacks Mountain potentially feasible for wind development. As a result, the hawk watchers, the hang glider pilots, the sailplane pilots, and valley residents are joining forces to protect Jacks Mountain from industrial development. Tall turbine towers with moving blades that stretch close to 400*



*feet tall will create hazards for birds, bats, monarch butterflies, and pilots. Jacks Mountain will be transformed into an industrial power plant.*

*Jacks Mountain is steep on top, so construction will drastically impact the topography and how the watershed and forests function. Two German companies, Volkswind and E.ON have developed wind projects in other parts of the United States. Both depend on federal subsidies to make their projects lucrative, and both are willing to damage the top of Jacks Mountain to get that subsidy. Volkswind wants to build turbines northeast of the hawk watch, and E.ON wants to construct turbines southwest of the hawk watch. A cut-and-fill operation, not as drastic as mountaintop removal for coal, but similar in many ways, will be required to make the top of the mountain wide enough to accommodate many miles of wide roads, heavy equipment and dozens of huge wind turbines.*

*Trees will be cut, the rocks will be dynamited, and dirt will be leveled for construction. The forest will be fragmented, impacting birds like scarlet tanagers and wood thrush that need large blocks of intact forest. Jacks Mountain will be changed forever.*

The Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) has collected data from wind projects in Pennsylvania. Although this data is limited, there is sufficient evidence to show that some raptors do see turbines and avoid them – sometimes. Other times the birds fly directly into the turbine towers or blades. Sometimes the birds are caught in the disturbed vortex around the turbine and are killed. Bat are especially vulnerable. In 2010, the 420 turbines in operation in Pennsylvania killed more than 10,000 bats, according to the PGC. That's an average of 25 bats per turbine per year.

The Nature Conservancy predicts that almost 3,000 turbines will be operating in Pennsylvania by 2030. If ridge after ridge is covered with turbines, raptors will expend critical fat reserves to avoid the turbines. Cats, cars, and windows are already killing millions of birds. Constructing wind turbines in migratory pathways puts eagles, hawks, and many other birds at additional risk.

Since neither company appears to have enough leases to actually construct the projects, it is a race against time. Concerned citizens have formed the "Friends of Jacks Mountain" group, to organize opposition and to plan strategies on how to educate landowners so they understand the impacts of wind development. The group is also encouraging township supervisors to enact ordinances that will mitigate and minimize impacts

to communities, wildlife, and watersheds.

*It is illegal in Pennsylvania to actually prohibit industrial development in a township, but if an ordinance is restrictive enough, some companies choose to build elsewhere. Unfortunately, six different townships are involved in the proposed wind projects, so it is a challenge to enact uniform regulatory restrictions.*

*If you are concerned about the impact to migrating birds and bats, we encourage you to join the **Friends of Jacks Mountain**. Membership is free, but donations are accepted to help cover educational efforts. Tax-deductible Donations should be Payable to: Save Our Allegheny Ridges (SOAR) which is a 501(c)3 partnering with Friends Of Jacks Mountain.*

MAIL TO: Darrell Smith 567 Mile Long Lane, Martinsburg, PA 16662



## Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) Field trip to Jacks Mountain Hawk Watch

September 15, 2013  
by Laura Jackson

*A big thanks to Chad Kauffman for organizing another successful PSO fieldtrip. About 40 hawk watchers were on the mountain – many of them PSO members. President John Fedak made the 3-hour trip with his wife and two children; members came from the Harrisburg area, points west, and there were local members, too. It was also great to see a number of young birders.*

*John and I commented that this just might be our lucky day, since we've never been at a hawk watch for a big count day.*

*Would our luck change today? The conditions were just right: wind was out of the southeast and blowing 8 – 12 mph. It was sunny, and surprisingly warm – the conditions seemed right for a big migration day. Our backup plan was to enjoy the camaraderie of friends and family, if we didn't see many birds. The day got off to a slow start. A few birds dribbled by in the morning – Broad-winged Hawks, every now and then an Osprey, even a Bald Eagle.*

*It was easy to get distracted...John's daughter, Bailey, caught a praying mantis, then she needed to find crickets to feed it. John hoped to catch*

some eastern fence lizards to show his students. Warblers zipped in and out of nearby treetops. It was hard to stop gazing at Big Valley on our left. The patterned farm fields, red and white barns, and country roads were strikingly beautiful.

By 10 AM, we'd counted only 38 Broad-winged Hawks and 1 Osprey. The next hour was better – 5 Osprey and 23 Broad-winged Hawks. Maybe it would be a good day for counting Osprey.

A little flurry of Broad-winged Hawk activity kept our attention just before lunch, as 82 flew by between 11 and noon. Add 1 Osprey, 2 Bald Eagles,



1 Northern Harrier, and 2 Sharp-shinned Hawks and that made it a pretty good hour!

Lunchtime for us was downtime for the birds – not much activity in early afternoon. Maybe the flight was over – there just wasn't much wind. Three Ospreys did fly by, another Northern Harrier, a Cooper's Hawk, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, and 21 Broad-winged Hawks kept us awake from 12 – 1PM.

## Saturday, November 30

### Post-Thanksgiving Hike on the Lower Trail

JVAS Secretary Dr. Alice Kotala will lead an easy, five-mile hike from Mount Etna to Alfarata on the Lower Trail. Meet in the Alfarata Station Trailhead parking lot at 1 PM. For more information, contact Alice at 946-8840 or [ccwiba@keyconn.net](mailto:ccwiba@keyconn.net).

## Sunday, December 15

### Centre Furnace Mansion tour followed by a hike through Thompson Woods and Lederer Park

Meet at 1 PM at the Centre Furnace Mansion. After a guided tour of the mansion, we will cross Rt. 26 and begin our walk through the Thompson Woods Preserve, a wonderful interurban park protected by Clearwater Conservancy. At the conclusion of the hike, those who are interested can convene for dinner at the new brew pub at the intersection of Route 26 and Elmwood Avenue. Trip leader: GerneyLee Carter ([gernilee@gmail.com](mailto:gernilee@gmail.com)).

Suddenly, from 1 – 2 PM, the battalion of Broad-winged Hawks arrived. We watched distant kettles of 15 to 30 birds, counting them as they broke ranks and streamed by the hawk watch, some of them appearing to fly in formation. It was an exciting hour, as 237 Broad-winged Hawks sailed by, 3 Ospreys, 1 Bald Eagle, another Cooper's and one more Sharp-shinned Hawk. Unfortunately, John and his family missed some of the big kettles, since they had a 3-hour drive home and wanted to see some elk in Benetzzette, but most of us were able to stay. It was exhilarating to see so many raptors in such a short amount of time.

and good friends made for a very enjoyable day on Jacks Mountain. It was a good day for Osprey, with a total count of 16. The total of 450 Broad-winged Hawks was respectable and brought the day's grand total to 480 raptors. A good day to be on the mountain!

Although September 15, 2013 wasn't the BIG DAY – we came close! The BIG DAY on Jacks Mountain was just a few days later: September 18, 2013. I hope PSO plans a field trip to Jacks Mountain for September 18, 2014 – that day seems to be a special day for raptor migration on Jacks Mountain.

Wonderful weather, lots of birds,

Photos, this story: Mike and Laura Jackson

# BRUSH MOUNTAIN DEER FENCE MONITORS NEEDED

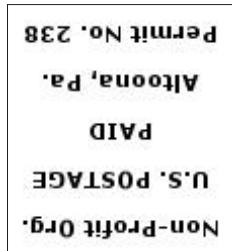
The Nature Conservancy is seeking volunteers who live in the Altoona/ Hollidaysburg area to frequently visit the Brush Mountain Preserve to check on the newly constructed deer exclosure fencing, currently located in three separate areas (northwestern, southeastern and southern corners of the preserve). This project is critical in our efforts to restore the



Northern white-tailed deer  
Photo: G.D. Taber

forest there and we need to make sure the fencing stays intact through the snow and wind, especially during the fall and winter seasons.

**For more information and/or to sign up to assist with this project, please contact Molly Anderson at [molly\\_anderson@tnc.org](mailto:molly_anderson@tnc.org) or (717) 418-9518 right away.**



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