

The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

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as a benefit for members of the...

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



President's Message

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-Laura Jackson

Our 48th Annual Christmas Bird Count

Icy roads kept birders at home on Saturday, December 17, 2016 - our original date for the 2016 Christmas Bird Count in Blair County. We chose Tuesday, January 3, 2017, as our makeup day, but that was a cold, rainy day that kept birds at home, hunkered down in any cover they could find. Officially known as the Culp Christmas Bird Count Circle in Blair County, it was the 48th Christmas Bird Count (CBC) sponsored by Juniata Valley Audubon Society, under the direction of National Audubon. Compilers Laura and Mike Jackson reported on the group's efforts.

Last year's windy day was challenging, as birds don't fly much when it rains or is windy, but at least we counted 67 species last year, compared to this year's low count of 51 species.

Last year we counted a little over 5,000 individual birds, while this year's effort totaled just 3,602 individuals. Ironically, two-thirds of the birds counted were European Starlings (2,160), a non-native species that competes with our native birds for food and nesting sites. In addition to European Starlings, House sparrows (132) and Rock Pigeons (117), both introduced species, accounted for the top three sightings.

Waterfowl were in short supply since Canoe Lake and many ponds were frozen. Just nine Canada Geese were counted, compared to a high count of 484 in 2008. Surprisingly, ten Tundra Swans were seen - a spectacular bird only observed on 14 of the 48 counts. The open water in Mary Ann's Creek in Canoe Creek State Park did provide some fishing opportunities for Belted Kingfishers and a Great Blue Heron, while the Little Juniata River attracted a Greater Scaup, but other waterfowl were in short supply or downright missing.

The constant rain also made it tough for raptors to find food, and few were flying: we did see two Bald Eagles, one Northern Harrier, one Sharp-shinned Hawk, and four Cooper's Hawks. The largest hawks in our area are Red-tailed Hawks, which numbered 12, while only five of our smallest raptor, the American Kestrel, were counted. One golden moment for the day was the sighting of a Merlin for just the 7th time in our count history.

Sinking Valley, with its broad vistas and farm fields, is a good habitat for birds of prey, as well as for the gallinaceous birds like Wild turkey (5) and Ring-necked Pheasant (22). Sadly, our state bird, the Ruffed Grouse, is in decline - only two were found this year, compared to 31 that were recorded in 1987. Another species that frequents Sinking Valley in the winter is the Horned Lark. Counters could not find any on Count Day, although some were found during Count Week.

Many common "winter birds" were counted in the field and by feeder watchers counting birds at their bird feeders: Dark-eyed Juncos (84), White-throated Sparrows (94), Northern Cardinals (102), White-breasted Nuthatches (34), Black-capped Chickadees (77) and Blue Jays (74).

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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Presidents Message continued...

The relatively mild winter meant that many birds which might be scarce during cold winters were present: 19 Eastern Bluebirds, 10 Carolina Wrens, 5 Northern Mockingbirds, but only 1 American Robin (790 were counted in 1998).

It is a challenge to thoroughly cover the count circle, centered at Culp - a crossroads in Sinking Valley. The circle is 15 miles in diameter, so the effort includes observations while driving the roads, hiking the fields and forests, or counting birds at backyard feeders. This year, 20 birders counted throughout the day, from dawn to dark for a cumulative effort of 35 hours looking for birds. Although we had slightly more counters this year, we had fewer observers in the field, so our effort was greatly reduced.

A big shout out to the counters: Brad Aults, Warren Baker, Bruce and Marcia Bonta, Todd Davis, Kurt and Carl Engstrom, Deborah Escalet, Allen and Margaret Gibboney, Phil Hall, Charlie Hoyer, George Mahon, Bob and Debbie Mullan, John Orr, and Barry, Christine, and Mary Singleton.



The bird sightings and numbers collected on the Christmas Bird Count are an important part of data used by National Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology for long range studies of bird populations. The compilers would like to thank all the birders who participated this year, especially those who joined the effort for the first time.

The Culp CBC in Blair County is usually held the Saturday before Christmas, so call JVAS President Laura Jackson (814-652-9268) and get your name added to the list of potential participants, if you'd like to help on Saturday, December 16, 2017. If you live in the count circle, you could count birds at your feeder and on your property. Otherwise, expect to spend part of a day on an exciting adventure exploring parts of Blair County.

A Christmas Bird Count Dinner was held immediately following the count when most of the birders enjoyed an evening at The Dream- after a great meal each group reported their findings at the "tally rally."

JVAS Field Trips



Our field trips, like our programs, tend to run from September through June. These are almost invariably on the weekends, and we try to have at least one a month. Unlike most Audubon chapters, we are not exclusively bird-focused. Many of our members are equally interested in things such as wildflowers, trees, reptiles and amphibians, wetland ecology, edible wild foods, mushrooms, geology, and more. Make a habit of attending JVAS field trips and you'll be sure to find out the surprises that nature has to offer! Contact field trip chair, Kristin Joivell, with any questions you may have at (814)386-6267.

Dunning Creek Wetlands Birding Hike Saturday, March 18 from 8:30am to 2pm

Meet at the Eat 2 Live Bistro on Rt. 56 (which is now closed) at 1634 Quaker Valley Rd, New Paris, PA 15554 at 8:30 am. We will carpool a short distance to the wetlands. The hike will last about 3 hours, with a stop in the bird blind. Wear waterproof boots, bring binoculars, listen to the forecast, and dress accordingly. Trip Leaders: Mike and Laura Jackson 814-652-9268. Optional Lunch at Slick's Ivy Stone 8785 William Penn Rd., Osterburg. For more details: www.slicksivystone.com



Spring Awakening at Snetsinger Butterfly Garden Saturday, April 29 from 2pm to 4pm

  Check www.JVAS.org for updates
It's time for the plants and insects to stir! Visit Snetsinger Butterfly Garden to see it in person. A guide from the Snetsinger Butterfly Garden will lead the group around the site with time to explore on your own afterwards.

We will meet at the second set of parking lots on Herman Drive, near the restrooms. The garden is located within the Tom Tudek Memorial Park at 400 Herman Drive, State College, PA 16803.

SPECIAL EVENT

The 2nd Annual Earth Day Birding Classic



Saturday, April 22 noon to Sunday, April 23 noon

The 2nd annual Earth Day Birding Classic at Penn State Altoona will be held on April 22 and 23, 2017. Registration is free. The goal is for teams in seven different categories to count as many species of birds as possible in the 24-hour-period beginning at noon on April 22. This non-profit event is co-sponsored by the Environmental Studies program at Penn State Altoona and Juniata Valley Audubon Society. Pledges that team members garner will support bird conservation and education in central Pennsylvania. Teams of 3 or more (2 or more for Senior citizens and Big Sitters) will count birds in Blair and surrounding counties, and prizes will be awarded during the closing ceremony at the Slep Center on the Penn State Altoona campus immediately following the event. Registration deadline is April 15 – to register and for more information, please contact Catherine Farr at catiegk5059@gmail.com.



JVAS 2017 Winter and Spring Programs

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

Our March program will be held in the Bellwood-Antis Library at 526 Main Street, Bellwood, Pa.

JVAS Programs start at 7 PM and end at 8:30 PM, but sometimes the lively discussions extend our meetings until later. We certainly understand if you must leave early!

Tuesday, March 21, 2017: *Galliformes of the World* presented by Ron Johnson 7 - 8:30 PM

Game birds have played an interesting role in history. We have domesticated them, relish them as a food source, hunt them for sport, and transport them from one country to another. Some species are invasive in introduced countries, but threatened in their homeland. Ron Johnson is collaborating with two colleagues on writing a new monograph on pheasants. The JVAS program will first give an overview of the families in the order Galliformes - which includes turkeys, quail, grouse, and partridges, followed by a closer look at the pheasant family: their importance, current status, and ongoing conservation projects. He will discuss species and subspecies as it relates to threatened or endangered rank and how this affects conservation strategies. Do we save only full species or are subspecies important to preserving genetic diversity? What role do ex situ projects play in preserving species?

Tuesday, April 18, 2017 JVAS Spring Banquet Our Speaker is Dr. Mark Bonta

"I am that bird": reflections on ethno-ornithology and the sciences

**Silent Auction 5:30 PM Dinner 6 PM at Hoss's Steak & Sea House
110 Patch Way Rd. Duncansville, PA 16635**



This multimedia presentation explores the contributions that traditional societies are making toward human understanding of birds. The speaker's research is highlighted, including human-oilbird relationships in Venezuela and human-bellbird interactions in Honduras. The featured story is of the search to provide video documentation of fire propagation by the Brown Falcon (*Falco berigora*) in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia. This ongoing collaboration is being coordinated by the presenter and Bob Gosford, an Australian ethno-ornithologist, under the supervision of Aboriginal resource management ranger groups interested in garnering evidence of an extraordinary tool-using behavior.

The Silent Auction starts at 5:30 PM



BID HIGH!!!

A silent auction will be held to raise funds for conservation efforts supported by the JVAS. Members are asked to bring new or gently used nature-related items to donate for the silent auction. Please bring the items to the March meeting, or before 5 pm at the banquet. Books, artwork, pottery, native plants — bring anything nature-related. Bring your checkbook or cash.

We will order off the menu, so payment in advance is not required. However, we ask that you **email or call Catie Farr by April 12**, as we need to let Hoss's know how many plan to attend.

Please call Catie at 570-651-3839 or email: catiegk5059@gmail.com

2nd Annual Last Day Hike

The last day of 2016 ended well for JVAS when over 35 hikers joined up to explore the Peace Chapel Trails in Huntington for the 2nd Annual Last Day Hike. Interesting nature sightings included Cutleaf Grapefern, Trailing Arbutus (but not in bloom yet!), and bear claw markings on a beech tree.



Mark your calendar on Dec. 31, 2017 to plan to celebrate the end of this year with the 3rd Annual Last Day Hike!



Both the Walking Fern (left) and the Cutleaf Grapefern (right) are native ferns that were seen on recent hikes.

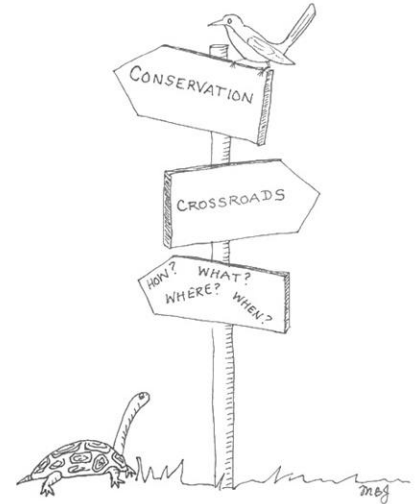


Hardy souls braved frigid temps at the Back to Nature hike to learn more about the history of Mt. Etna Furnace.

CONSERVATION CROSSROADS is a new section of *The Gnatcatcher* that features environmental issues across a spectrum of local, national, and global concerns. Contact JVAS President Laura Jackson, if you know of an issue that deserves our attention and consequent action.

There are 5 issues/actions covered in this section:

1. Hawn's Bridge Peninsula Development
2. Limestone Quarry near the Lower Trail in Blair Co., Pa.
3. Sunoco's Mariner East Pipelines across Pa.
4. CAFO in Catharine Twp., Blair Co., Pa.
5. CACAO Project linking Audubon to Honduras



CONSERVATION CROSSROADS - Issue 1

Proposed Hawn's Bridge Peninsula Development in Raystown Lake - by Laura Jackson

A developer wants to lease 400 acres from the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers to build a private marina and resort on Hawn's Bridge Peninsula, a tongue of land that extends into Lake Raystown. The Hawn's Bridge Peninsula is of such high ecological significance that it is designated as a Huntingdon County Natural Heritage Area "of exceptional value."

The Hawn's Bridge Peninsula is part of the Raystown Dam Natural Heritage Area (Biological Diversity Area) identified in the Huntingdon County Natural Heritage Inventory. The Inventory identifies such areas as "containing plants or animals of special concern at state or federal levels, exemplary natural communities, or exceptional native diversity."

The area in which a marina and other facilities are proposed includes red cedar-mixed hardwood rich shale woodland and Virginia pine - mixed hardwood shale woodland communities. These rare habitats support two plant species endemic to shale barrens: the shale barrens evening primrose (*Oenothera argillocola*) (PA Threatened) and Kate's mountain clover (*Trifolium virginicum*) (PA Endangered). Several invertebrate species associated with shale barrens and the surrounding xeric forest also are found there. These include the southern pine looper moth (*Caripeta aretaria*), the promiscuous angle (*Semiothisa promisuata*), and a noctuid moth (*Properigea* sp.)

According to the Huntingdon County Natural Heritage Inventory (p. 148), "The shale barren communities and associated plant species depend upon the harsh conditions found on these steep, dry slopes where competition from other species is low. Disturbances that can lead to the introduction of exotic and aggressive species are one of the largest threats." The establishment of campgrounds, cabins, restaurants, and a marina and associated facilities on the Hawn's Bridge Peninsula would certainly cause the types of disturbances which the Inventory warns against.

What can you do to help protect the Hawn's Bridge Peninsula from development?

1. Read more details about this proposed development at

www.nab.usace.army.mil/Missions/Dams-Recreation/Raystown/Proposed-Development/

2. Use the comment section on the above website to send your concerns to the Corps.

Updates on this issue will be posted at www.JVAS.org

CONSERVATION CROSSROADS - Issue 2

Plans Resurface for Quarry Along Lower Trail - by Laura Jackson

Juniata Valley Audubon Society (JVAS), under the helm of Dr. Stan Kotala, led a successful effort in 2010 - 2011 to stop a 5-acre limestone quarry which was to be located adjacent to the Lower Trail near the Cove Dale Station. Our concerns focused on the impacts that the quarry would have on the Lower Trail, residents, the rare wildlife dependent on Heller Caves, and the Juniata River Important Bird Area. JVAS, the Center for Biological Diversity, and Laura Jackson each filed an appeal to stop the quarry that DEP had already approved. We were represented by Professor Kenneth T. Kristl and his law students at Widener University Environment and Natural Resources Law Clinic, whose legal expertise provided outstanding guidance.

Fast forward to 2017 and now the same company, Catharine Properties, plans to apply for a permit to construct a quarry impacting 100 acres in the same area along the Lower Trail. The property is owned by Clifford Wise, who also owns Catharine Properties, as well as Gulf Trading & Transport, LLC. Mr. Wise and other company officials; their engineer, Michelle Merrow; and DEP's Chief of Technical Services in Ebensburg, Rock Martin, were present at a special meeting held by Catharine Township Supervisors on February 7. About 75 concerned citizens attended the meeting to find out exactly what Mr. Wise intends to do on his property.

Although we received very few details about the proposed mining operation, what we did hear was enough to convince many that the environmental degradation caused by a quarry in such a sensitive habitat far outweighed any economic benefits. A quarry so close to the Lower Trail would create a tremendous amount of noise, dust, heavy truck traffic, and would potentially destroy the critical habitat for a small invertebrate called a springtail, which has been found in the cave system. This species of springtail has been found nowhere else on Earth and has been proposed for listing on the Endangered Species List.

Heller Caves, located in the Heller Caves Biological Diversity Area, adjacent to the Lower Trail, not only contains this rare species of springtail, but also serves as important habitat for rare bat species. The Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC), which protects our birds and the bats, requested protection for the Caves and the surrounding forested habitat, but their recommendations were ignored by DEP when the first permit was granted.

Fortunately, a new chief is now head of the DEP Mining Office in Ebensburg. Chief Martin assured the audience that this time DEP would adhere to the PGC recommendations. He also stated it typically takes DEP from four to six months to analyze applications and that the application has not yet been submitted.

What can you do to help?

1. Attend Catharine Twp. meetings: 3rd Thursday of each month at 7 pm

Meetings are held at the Municipal Building at 1229 Recreation Drive, Williamsburg, Pa.

2. Contact Laura Jackson to get updated information - jacksonlaura73@gmail.com

Updates on this issue will be posted at www.JVAS.org

CONSERVATION CROSSROADS - Issue 3

Mariner East 2 and 3 Pipeline Projects - by Ellen Gerhart

According to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania:

§ 27. Natural resources and the public estate.

The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people.

(May 18, 1971, P.L.769, J.R.3)



Unfortunately, this right of the people is under assault from both fracking and pipeline construction. The project with which my family and I have the most experience is the Mariner East 2 and 3 Pipeline Projects, aka the Pennsylvania Pipeline Project. Sunoco Logistics (SL), the owner/operator of both the existing Mariner East 1 and the proposed Mariner East 2 and 3, is a subsidiary of Energy Transfer Partners, based out of Dallas, TX. Mariner East 2 and 3 would be a set of two 24-inch pipelines which would begin in Scio, Ohio and end at the Marcus Hook refinery near Philadelphia. These pipelines would cross 350 miles, and 17 counties, in Pennsylvania, and carry approximately 770,000 barrels of natural gas liquids (NGL) daily across Pennsylvania.

The product that would be carried by ME2/3 is a highly-pressurized combination of propane, ethane, and butane. These odorless, colorless, and highly volatile gases are compressed into liquid form for transportation. Should there be a break or a leak in the pipeline, these NGLs would convert back to their gaseous states. These gases are heavier than the air, meaning that they would not just disperse into the atmosphere, but would flow to the lowest point. The high volatility and size of the pipes have the potential to create a blast radius of 3 miles.

So, this is the pipeline and company that my family has been fighting in Huntingdon County since February of 2015. After thirty years of teaching special education students, I was looking forward to spending time with my family, gardening, sewing, reading, etc., all the things that I love and now would have more time to enjoy. Sadly, that would not be the case. Two years ago, in February of 2015, we were notified that Sunoco Logistics would be putting part of the Mariner East 2/3 through approximately 3 acres of our property. Unfortunately, these three acres include our pond, streams, wetlands, and a steep, forested slope next to the pond. We turned down their offer and refused to sign an easement agreement.

In August 2015, we were notified that Sunoco Logistics had filed for eminent domain in the Huntingdon County Court. Sunoco Logistics argued that, by virtue of a public convenience certificate issued in the 1930s for the Mariner East 1, they had already been granted public utility status. This was, despite the fact that the ME1 was originally designed to carry petroleum products from east to west, and now both the ME1 and the ME2 would be carrying natural gas liquids (NGL) west to east---a totally different product transported in a totally different direction. Sunoco Logistics also argued that this pipeline project would provide both a public benefit and numerous jobs for Pennsylvania citizens.

In January 2016, Huntingdon County judge George Zanic granted Sunoco Logistics' request for eminent domain. This ruling was immediately appealed and is currently in Commonwealth Court. Despite the fact that, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection had not yet issued water crossing and soil erosion management permits, the favorable eminent domain ruling gave SL permission to survey and ultimately clear-cut on our property, although they could not begin any construction until DEP issued water-crossing and soil erosion permits.

Issue 3 Continued...

In March 2016, Sunoco Logistics requested, and was granted, an injunction prohibiting us from interfering with SL's surveying and clear-cutting. The company claimed that they would "suffer irreparable harm" if they could not clear-cut by March 31. They cited the Migratory Bird Act and the brown bat nesting season as reasons why they could not clear-cut after that date. On March 29, Sunoco Logistics, accompanied by the Huntingdon County sheriff's department, began clear-cutting trees around the pond, wetlands, streams, and hillside. A group of about 12 observers were there to document the cutting. There were also 3 people who had established themselves in "tree-sits". At one point, sheriff's deputies arrested two of the observers and charged them with "summary disorderly conduct, misdemeanor disorderly conduct, and indirect contempt of court." During their arraignment on these minor charges, they had their bails set at \$200,00 and \$100,000. The next day, while trying to draw the deputies' attention to the fact that the tree clearers were cutting too close to one of the sitter's trees, I was arrested on the same charges. I was released on \$5,000 bail. The tree cutting crew left at mid-day on the 30th and did not return.

In April 2016, the Sunoco tree crew returned to finish clear-cutting, even though it was more than a week after the date cited in their injunction. I was again arrested. This time I spent 3 days in the Centre County Correctional Facility because Huntingdon County has no accommodations for female prisoners. I was held on "suicide watch" because I refused to answer intake questions. I was denied phone calls to either my family or my lawyer. I was finally released on \$5000 bail.

From April 2016 to December 2016, those of us who refused to take the Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition plea (primarily used for those facing DUI or drug charges) had to appear in Huntingdon County court for various hearings. Finally, a trial date was set for December 9, 2016. Three days prior to trial, DA Smith announced that all charges would be dropped, because the "disorderly conduct" occurred on private property and they couldn't prosecute.

What has been the most frustrating part of all of this is the failure of various agencies in particular, DEP, to actually protect the environment. From the beginning of this ordeal, we asked DEP, DCNR, Fish and Wildlife, the Army Corps of Engineers, and Governor Wolf to uphold the environmental protection guaranteed in the Pennsylvania Constitution.

In its three permit application attempts to DEP, Sunoco failed to rectify numerous deficiencies on just our 3 acres, let alone the rest of the 350 miles of proposed pipeline. We hired an independent environmental consultant who found that Sunoco had listed only half of the streams and one-seventh of the wetlands area that would be impacted by the installation of the pipeline. Sunoco mislabeled our forested wetlands as emergent wetlands. They also failed to do an onsite analysis of soil composition, an onsite inventory of flora (including tree species), or an onsite inventory of fauna on their first *two* permit application attempts, and still mislabeled species. No one from DEP came to verify Sunoco's analyses for the permits until after the initial tree-clearing had taken place, despite several requests from us.

Sunoco continues to file permit applications that contain unresolved deficiency issues. It is currently on its third attempt to have DEP grant the permits which would allow construction to begin. Unlike the previous two applications, it appears that DEP is not going to allow public hearings or public comment on the matter, although the agency has had at least four meetings with Sunoco in the past two months. This is a clear bias in favor of Sunoco Logistics. Once the DEP issues permits, Sunoco can begin construction, even though several eminent domain cases, including ours, are still pending in Commonwealth Court.

Issue 3 Continued...

What can do you? Contact:

Governor Tom Wolf -
Phone - 717-787-2500
Fax - 717-772-8284
Twitter - @GovernorTomWolf

Secretary McDonnell -
Phone - 717-783-3004



Elise Gerhart, Ellen's daughter, surveying the trees that Sunoco cut in March, 2016, without their permission.

Talking points -

1. We demand a public participation process be established for Sunoco Logistics' resubmitted application for 105 and 102 permits for Mariner East II.
2. The public is being disenfranchised while Sunoco has advance information about DEP actions.
3. The process is being manipulated to Sunoco's advantage at the expense of private landowners.
4. We want a comment period of at least 60 days, hearings scheduled across the state, and an inclement weather plan so the most people can be heard.
5. The public has a right to review and comment on matters that impact us as adversely as the Mariner East does.
6. We don't need any more pipelines. Do the right thing. Deny the 105 and 102 permits.



Update as of February 21:

We are very disappointed that the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is not living up to its name. DEP issued Chapter 102 and 105 permits to Sunoco Logistics for its Mariner East 2 project on Monday, February 13, for water crossings and soil erosion control management. Permits were issued despite inaccuracies and deficiencies. DEP officials met with Sunoco on at least four occasions to review the latest applications, yet refused to set up public hearings or extend the public comment period.

The fight is not over. Clean Air Council, Mountain Watershed Association, and Delaware River Keepers have filed a suit in Commonwealth Court to stop this project. West Goshen Township has denied permission for the pipeline based on violations of municipal codes. Several eminent domain cases, including ours, are still in appeal. The Army Corps of Engineers has not yet issued all necessary approvals for the project.

Unfortunately, Mariner East 2 is not the only pipeline planned for Pennsylvania. The Atlantic Sunrise and the Penn East in the eastern part of the state were also granted permits. Shell Corporation is planning the 93-mile Falcon pipeline in western Pennsylvania to supply its ethane cracker plant now under construction. People are still suffering from drinking water pollution caused by fracking. **Government officials need to hear, loud and clear, that the citizens of Pennsylvania oppose this.**

For contact, more info and updates visit: facebook.com/juniatawatershedpeoplebeforepipelines

For help with our legal battle, visit <http://energyjusticesummer.org/donate-to-the-gerhart-fight-against-sunocos-mariner-2-pipeline/>

Updates on this issue will be posted at www.JVAS.org



CONSERVATION CROSSROADS - Issue 4

Caution: A CAFO may be coming near you - by Bruce Rodgers

A drive through nearly any part of rural Pennsylvania makes clear why agriculture is touted as the number one industry in the state. Thousands of farms large and small cover the landscape, and many have been run by the same families for generations. As it becomes increasingly difficult to make a living on a small family farm, a new concept in farming has emerged in recent decades. Now well-entrenched in southeastern PA and many neighboring states, Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) have become a common sight (and smell) for anyone passing through those areas. Basically, a CAFO is defined as a highly-mechanized feeding operation designed to raise the maximum number of animals as quickly as possible at the lowest cost. A farming operation is designated as a CAFO based on the type and number of animals involved. For instance, a large CAFO for poultry is anything over 125,000 chickens, while for hogs it is anything over 2,500 pigs. The concept is spreading rapidly.

There is currently a proposal for the construction and operation of a 501 ft. by 81 ft. CAFO barn to hold and grow 4,800 pigs from feeder to market size in Catherine Township, Blair County. This will be located on Hemlock Lane just off Rt. 22 about 4 miles north of Williamsburg, and will be the first of its kind in Blair County. While the decision to build a CAFO may pose a financial risk to the owners, it will result in long-term health, financial and life quality impacts to hundreds of their neighbors. Those of us who grew up or live in farming areas are accustomed to the smells of farming activity, especially the spreading of cow manure on fields and the odor from barns. It is part of country life. The odor from pig manure is notoriously worse than that from cows, and the proposed facility will generate at least 1.4 million gallons of manure annually to be stored onsite and spread twice a year on about 300 acres of farm fields scattered near the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River from Canoe Creek State Park nearly to Water Street. Dead animals will be composted on site above ground on a concrete slab. Huge fans will operate 24/7 to vent the barn and the manure storage chamber beneath it. The odor from a CAFO for 4,800 pigs (dead and alive) will be like nothing we could imagine from traditional farming practices.

The adverse impacts on property use, recreational activities, water quality and human health will be significant, but is understated or dismissed in a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared by the US Department of Agriculture Farm Services Agency in 2016. Access to the studies and plans cited in the EA was restricted. Concerns about the potential negative effects of the proposal have led a group of local citizens to form the Canoe Valley Conservation Coalition (CVCC), with the initial goal of obtaining a thorough and transparent assessment of the significant environmental impacts that may occur during the construction and operation of this project. CVCC, with assistance from the Socially Responsible Agricultural Project (SRAP), is also looking at legal action to stop or delay the project.

A great deal of information on CAFOs is available online from reputable sources, including universities and a publication by the National Association of Local Boards of Health. A “google” search of the subject will reveal hundreds of references on impacts to human health and the environment. The SRAP website at srp.org is a good starting place if you want to learn more.

Issue 4 continued...

If you are concerned about the **CAFO coming to Blair County**, contact:
Bruce Rodgers at
cano valley@embarqmail.com

If you are concerned about the **four CAFOs proposed for Bedford County**:
contact Laura Jackson at
mljackson2@embarqmail.com



This is the site for the proposed CAFO in Blair County, along Rt. 22 in Catharine Township.

*Note: Ian Gardner was inspired to organize the CACAO 2017 Expedition after participating in the **Birding for Conservation** trip to Honduras in February, 2016. This initiative is the first research project under the auspices of the newest JVAS Committee: **Partners in Neotropical Bird Conservation**. Contact Laura Jackson if you would like to get involved in conservation and education projects focusing on migratory birds.*

Updates on this issue will be posted at www.JVAS.org

CONSERVATION CROSSROADS - Issue 5 **Cooperative Avian Conservation and Outreach (CACAO) in Honduras Update**

- by Ian Gardner

Cacao is the Honduran colloquial name for the threatened Red-throated Caracara, a species of raptor that has nearly disappeared from Central America in the past few decades. It is also the acronym for a small but passionate cooperative of multi-national conservationists. We planned to spend 3 weeks this past January in Honduras on a research expedition to two locations in the remote eastern portion of the country, Reserva Biologica Rus Rus in Gracias a Dios and Parque Nacional Botaderos in Olancho. Our goals were to work with local conservation pioneers and preserves to survey and promote the wide diversity of bird life in these special yet threatened regions. We were able to meet our funding goal for the trip thanks to the support of many individuals and several Audubon Society chapters like JVAS.

Issue 5 continued...

We knew beforehand that these federal lands, Reserva Biologica Rus Rus and Parque Nacional Botaderos, were protected by title alone. During our expedition, we learned why. Both areas are remote, at least a very rough 4-hour drive from the closest ICF facility (Instituto de Conservacion Forestal). But they also host an incredible diversity of flora and fauna, particularly birds.

We recorded over 280 bird species in the dimorphic landscape of Rus Rus. This area is comprised of two distinct ecosystems: expansive pine savanna and dense gallery* forest. Each contains a unique suite of species that is constantly evolving, so researchers are recording more species with each visit. Our expedition recorded range expansions for over 20 species and found such notables as Harpy Eagle, Crane Hawk, Jabiru, Black Rail, Green Ibis, Steely-vented Hummingbird, Scaled Pigeon, Northern Potoo, Yellow Tyrannulet, Aplomado Falcon, and Snowy Cotinga.

In Olancho, we surveyed miles of mountain trails in the central highlands and recorded over 200 species. Our top target was the pine forest denizen Red-throated Caracara, which we missed, but we were told of many recent encounters. We did see several other target birds such as Ocellated Quail, Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Golden-winged Warbler, Golden-cheeked Warbler, and Red Crossbill. We also surveyed the lowland portion of Isidro Zuniga's Las Orquideas Nature Preserve, where we documented a Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, a hummingbird with an isolated population that can only be found in this small region of Honduras.

Protected forests in eastern Honduras also face serious threats from natural resource extraction companies and cattle ranchers. Mining and Hydropower projects destroy hundreds of hectares and divert miles of rivers in Olancho. Cattle ranchers are recent migrants to the Rus Rus region and are illegally grabbing land to clearcut for cattle pastures. However, a determined community of environmentalists is standing up. These activists are literally risking life and limb to protect the forests, as you read in last year's article about the late Berta Caceres**. Fortunately, we never faced any threats during this expedition and were able to talk with local communities and learn about these pressing conservation issues from their perspectives.

Keep an eye out for more in-depth articles about the CACAO 2017 Expedition in future newsletters!

* Gallery forests are forests that form as corridors along rivers or wetlands and project into landscapes that have fewer trees, such as grasslands or deserts.

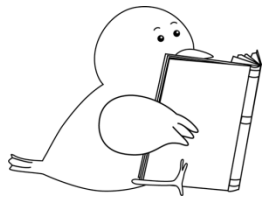
** www.jvas.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Gnatcatcher-2016-May-June.pdf

Updates on this issue will be posted at www.JVAS.org



The male Vermilion Flycatcher is brightly colored and often perches in conspicuous places as it scans for insect prey. Habitat destruction is the greatest threat to this colorful species.

Off The Shelf



We hope "Off The Shelf" will appear in every issue of *The Gnatcatcher*, but that will only happen if you send in your reviews of natural history books. We also welcome feedback. Email Laura Jackson to contribute a book review, or if you have a comment about a book that was reviewed. Please note that contributions for the next newsletter should be sent to Laura by **April 8**. Good reading!

OWLS OF NORTH AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN by Scott Weidensaul

Review by Marcia Bonta

If you like owls as much as I do, then *Owls of North America and the Caribbean* is the book for you. Filled with gorgeous, glossy photographs of owls, this book also serves as an excellent reference source.

Neither as folksy and readable as the Bent series on birds nor as daunting and dense as the scientifically rigorous *Birds of North America* accounts, Weidensaul has read the scientific papers and translated them into a reference guide for interested amateur naturalists.

This book is one of a new series by the renowned Peterson field guide publisher Houghton Mifflin called Peterson Reference Guides and is sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation and the Roger Tory Peterson Institute in Jamestown, New York. Creator of the field guide series back in the 1930s, Roger Tory Peterson was the most accomplished birder and bird artist of the 20th century.

Weidensaul's book covers 39 owl species found north of Guatemala, including five endemic Caribbean species. His extended introduction to owls explains how to use the book, and one illustration labels every possible term describing the parts of an owl such as "upper chest," "primaries," and "ear tufts."

But Weidensaul's species' accounts form the heart of the book and cover the natural history, taxonomy, ecology, migration, and conservation status of owls. Well-executed color range maps illustrate their breeding and wintering ranges.

Since Weidensaul is especially well-versed in snowy and northern saw-whet owls because of his ongoing studies of these species, as well as those owls that live here in his native state of Pennsylvania,---barn, barred, great horned and eastern screech-owls. He has also written fascinating pieces on short-eared and long-eared owls, a few of which winter in Pennsylvania. Many of the excellent photos of short-eared owls, for instance, were credited to Pennsylvanians Alan Richard and Tom Johnson.

In addition to a bibliography of every species at the end of their account, there is a general bibliography at the end of the book, an index, and a comprehensive glossary of such words as "neoptile," "polymorphic," and "zyodactyl."

Weidensaul pays tribute to the many people who study owls, writing that, "They are diurnal primates studying nocturnal raptors, which calls for even more fortitude and tenacity than is typical in scientific research."

As readers and owl aficionados, we can take advantage of their dedication and expertise by sitting comfortably in an armchair and browsing through this beautiful and informative book.

JVAS Needs You!

Contact Laura Jackson (814-652-9268) if you are willing to help.

The JVAS Board meets 5 times a year - during the first week of February, April, August, October, and December.

Terms of office are for 2 years.

Membership Chair: Many thanks to Charlie Hoyer for maintaining our Chapter-only Membership records for the past 3 years. We are thrilled to announce that Debra Grim has volunteered to take on this important position

Field Trip Chair: We are happy to announce that Susan Braun has agreed to accept the position of Field Trip Chair, starting in April. A big thanks to Kristin for her outstanding work in organizing and leading field trips over the past few years.

Vice-President: assists the President, attends meetings, helps to arrange the evening meetings, and serves as President when the term expires for the current President.

Which chair will I take, Membership...?



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Café Lenca Coffee will be sold at JVAS Meetings: 1 lb. bags are \$12 and 2 lb. bags are \$22. The roasted coffee is available as whole bean or ground.