

THE GNATCATCHER

Juniata Valley Audubon Society

February 1991



FEBRUARY'S PROGRAM: Join us on Tuesday, February 26 for an ecological travelogue, by Jack Schultz "Ecology of Argentina." Jack is Associate Professor of Entomology at Penn State University Park. The program will begin at 7:30 pm or following the business segment which starts at 7:15 pm. All meetings are held at the 28th Street Church of the Brethren on Union Avenue in Altoona.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Dave Kyler

As we wind our way through a cold and blustery February, there are some signs of a welcome springtime just around the corner. Reports are in of emerging "snow drops" and other spring buds pushing through the ground's surface. On recent warm, wet evenings local male Woodcock have been calling and local Red-shouldered Hawks are performing courtship displays.

We are reminded, as the days lengthen, of the unbroken circle of life that is being renewed. So also must we renew our efforts at becoming responsible stewards of the earth. With that thought in mind let me review some upcoming Audubon events that you may wish to become involved with.

JAFFA SPORTS SHOW: J.V.A.S. will have a space at the annual sports and recreational show, at the Jaffa Mosque, beginning Friday 22 February 91 through Sunday 24 February 91. On these days we will be passing out educational material as well as raising funds for our chapter. Look for Melvin Lane's bird display and our chapter banner. We will look like an "oasis" in the midst of all the glitz and glitter. To help please call Nona Weicht (814) 695-4838.

ANNUAL BANQUET: It is not too early to begin to prepare for the upcoming annual banquet. This gala event, which will be held April 30th, will host Paul Weigman, leading spokesman for the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. To help please call either Amy King (814) 942-7673 or Colette Heller (814) 742-7481.

BIRD-A-THON: May (11th) is not that far away!! Please join in this annual fund raiser for the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office as well as our own chapter. Proceeds from this event go a long way in offsetting chapter expenses through out the year. For more information, on this multi-county competition, see me at the next meeting or call (814) 643-6030.

FIELD NOTES: 26 February : Program "Ecology of Argentina" Jack Schultz 7:30 pm
14 March : Board Meeting, Altoona Public Library, 7:00 pm
16 March : Field Trip, Middlecreek Wildlife Management Area, leaving P.V.S.C. at 7:00 am. Sign-up sheet at the February meeting.

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES MEETING

Bruce Bonta

The International Issues Interest Group will be meeting at 7:00 pm on Friday evening, March 8, in room 109 of the Holtzinger Building on the Penn State Altoona Campus. Enter through the glassed-in atrium between the Holtzinger and the Science Building; then turn left. A major item on our agenda will be a discussion of our proposed grant for exchanges of Latin American environmental educators with Pennsylvania educators and naturalists. Also, we will be reviewing a slide-tape program that our friends at the Asian Wetlands Bureau in the Philippines as soon as everyone has had a chance to comment on it.

We'll have the opportunity to see an excellent half-hour video of a major environmental conference held in Pittsburgh last spring. The comments of Peter Rávan alone will make the evening worthwhile. Other highlights--sharing of international environmental news items, conservation articles, and (groan) some necessary budget discussion. Anyone who is interested in helping conservation groups in the developing countries save their endangered environments, or who would simply like to learn more about

the issues of tropical conservation and global degradation, should plan on joining our regular members.

AUDUBON TRIPS TO COSTA RICA

Nancy Jones

Audubon Council of Pennsylvania announces a natural history study tour of magnificent and peaceful Costa Rica - April 1992 - 15 days - Approximate cost - \$2800 per person. All inclusive (air fare, meals and accommodations). The Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS) has agreed to host and lead this special traveling short course to meet the needs of the ACP international conservation commitment. This exciting trip will allow us to visit numerous "tropical classrooms" throughout the country, operated by OTS. *Space is limited - if you are interested please contact Barbara Warren at the Mid Atlantic Audubon office, 717-763-4985, or Nancy Jones at the Bucks County Audubon office, 215-297-8266, to be placed on the mailing list for up-coming information and scheduling.*

BLUEBIRDS AND BATS

Terry Wentz

Population trends in wildlife and plants are often studied as indicators of the quality of the environment. Two local success stories at Canoe Creek State Park indicate a bright spot in this quality index as a result of efforts from concerned environmentalists.

Eight years ago when bluebirds boxes were first introduced to Canoe Creek, viewing a bluebird was an uncommon sight. Over the years, landscape is brightened by this cheerful "blue" bird. Even though the trend in the park has indicated a slight decrease in fledglings the past two nesting seasons, bluebird boxes are now in place throughout the Greater Altoona Area which has significantly increased the local nesting range of the bluebird. This Spring, Bill King and Terry Wentz will be placing bluebird boxes in the Lakemont and Valley View Park areas.

Recently, a biennial survey of the hibernating bat population in the Canoe Creek mine was conducted by a team of Game Commission and State Park personnel. Preliminary tallies indicate a significant increase in all six species of hibernating bats. Game Commission biologists were particularly pleased with the endangered Indiana Bat population of at least 262 individuals. An interesting comment by Jerry Hassinger, Supervisor of the Non-Game and Endangered Species Unit, most appropriately summed up the feelings of the survey participants. "Witnessing the sight of the tight cluster of 200 Indiana Bats is like seeing 100 Bald Eagles roosting in a tree." I never thought about the significance of the federally endangered Indiana Bat as such, but I am glad to be one of the caretakers of this species. Local citizens CAN make a difference. I challenge YOU to get involved; volunteer at an area park.

ATTRACTING BLUEBIRDS

National Audubon

Prominent on farms, as well as cities some years ago, was that noted symbol of spring, the bluebird. These members of the thrush family were often spotted over the open fields and around the orchards. Frequently during the summer the bluebirds could be seen perched on some post or branch, occasionally dropping to the garden below to harvest a catapillar or weevil, or perhaps taking a mosquito midflight. With their bright blue color and warbling song, the bluebird has been a symbol of gentleness and love and held a friend of man.

Bluebirds have always nested in a cavity. It might have been in a hole chisled by woodpeckers in a dead limb. Or possibly in a cavity of a weathered fence post.

But the same clean, efficient farming practices that have given us low cost, high quality foodstuffs have led to a decimation of the bluebird population. Some ornithologists have speculated that all three species of the bluebird-eastern, mountain, and western-could be nearly extinct by the turn of the century. Venomous insecticides in use since the 1940's have contaminated the food supplies for wild birds and may directly affect the fragile bluebird as well. Wooden fenceposts have been replaced with metal or plastic posts. In addition, orchards are trimmed more carefully, thus removing dead hollow limbs.

Perhaps even more seriously, the bluebird's well being has been threatened by man's introduction of the English house sparrow and the European starling to this continent. These antagonistic birds have been known to kill the bluebirds and pillage their nests without provocation.

But friends of the bluebird have proven that the favorite native can be rescued. In 1959, a retiree in Canada took it upon himself to begin a conservation project of erecting nesting houses that eventually produced as many as 3,500 chicks a year. More recently, similar large-scale projects have been undertaken by the Audubon Naturalists Society of the Central Atlantic States and other

conservation-minded groups.

Individuals can use similar techniques to bring the bluebirds back to their communities on a smaller scale. Bluebird nesting boxes can be bought or built and placed around the house and garden. If building your own, it is important to have the diameter of the hole in the nesting box exactly 1-1/2" to allow the fewest predators to gain entry. Also be sure to use long-lasting materials so that artificial preserving won't be necessary, as adding chemicals to the wood may keep the bluebirds away.

To order a ready-made cypress nesting box for bluebirds, write to: Bluebirds Across America, c/o National Audubon Society. Box 123, Horatio, SC 29062. The first box is \$13.00 and each additional one is \$11.00. Make check payable to Bluebirds Across America.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Angeline Stout

1990's Christmas Bird Count took place December 15th, a cold, gray day with freezing rain. In addition to the birds seeking shelter, observers stayed indoors or in their cars. Anyone who has birded from their car knows how aggravating it can be with your windshield wipers on (can't see) and the heater on (can't hear). We didn't come close to our past record. Total species seen was 48 with 3,637 individuals seen.

JVAS 1990 Christmas Bird Count

4	Great Blue Heron	3	Eastern Screech-Owl	189	Black Capped Chickadee	55	American Tree Sparrow
28	Mallard	5	Great Horned Owl	74	Plain Titmouse	7	Field Sparrow
1	Northern Harrier	4	Belted Kingfisher	53	White Breasted Nuthatch	1	Fox Sparrow
13	Red-tailed Hawk	20	Red-bellied Woodpecker	3	Brown Creeper	16	Song Sparrow
1	Rough Legged Hawk	1	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	22	Carolina Wren	44	White Throated Sparrow
10	American Kestrel	38	Downy Woodpecker	19	Golden Crowned Kinglet	265	Dark eyed Junco
3	Ring-necked Pheasant	5	Hairy Woodpecker	15	Eastern Bluebird	1	Purple Finch
9	Ruffed Grouse	7	Yellow-shafted Flicker	178	American Robin	277	House Finch
1	Wild Turkey	6	Pileated Woodpecker	8	Northern Mockingbird	3	Pine Siskin
2	Common Snipe	100	Horned Lark	233	Cedar Waxwing	80	American Goldfinch
474	Rock Dove	41	Blue Jay	857	European Starling	6	Hooping Plover
86	Mourning Dove	93	American Crow	106	Northern Cardinal	173	House Sparrow

EDITOR'S NOTE

Please submit items for the March issue before Sunday, March 17 to Jim Winsor: 102 Halleck Place, Altoona, PA 16602 (943-8213) or Altoona Campus, Ivyside Park, Altoona, PA 16601-3760 (949-5180).

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