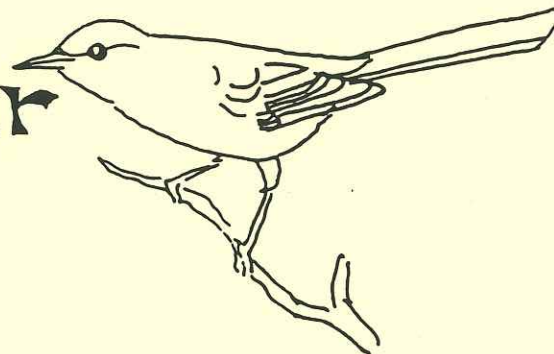


# The Gnatcatcher



Newsletter of the

**Juniata Valley Audubon Society**

R.R. 3, Box 866, Altoona, Pennsylvania 16601

November 1995

## Migrating Raptors Present Spectacular Show At Stone Mountain Hawkwatch

By Dave Kyler

Wet, damp, and dreary days, replaced by cool, crisp, "puffy cloud" days with blustery winds from the northwest. This is what Pennsylvania hawkwatchers dream of in late autumn! For an intrepid group of JVAS members this dream became a reality at the newly constructed Stone Mountain Hawkwatch on Sunday, Oct. 15.

Stan Kotala, Ken Lynch, Marge and Charlie Hoyer, wife Trudy Kyler, and son Josh Kyler arrived at the observation platform at 10 a.m. and were greeted by fellow hawk-watchers Greg Grove and Dean Wargo along with a steady stream of southward migrating raptors.

Moving on the gusting winds were sharp-shinned hawks, Cooper's hawks, red-tailed hawks, American kestrels, northern harriers, and even a merlin. Animated conversation slowed and stopped as a dark raptor in the northern sky became larger and developed into an adult peregrine falcon!

Virtually oblivious to the small audience of raptor fans were several kestrels and sharpies dive-bombing our great-horned owl decoy mounted on a pole. The highlight of our visit, however, was the season's first adult golden eagle majestically gliding directly overhead on broad wings.

To date this highly successful site has produced a surprising number of migrating raptors — more than 3000 of them during September and October alone.

The hawkwatch platform was constructed this past summer by Greg Grove, Dave and Josh Kyler, Gene Zielinski, and Bill King. Helping to lug building materials to the site on a difficult, stony trail were John Salvetti and Steve Stroman.

The site will be manned every weekend in November and on some weekdays. Phone Dave at 643-6030 for more information and directions.

[ See photos on pages 4 and 5 ]

### **November Program**

*"WETLAND IDENTIFICATION" — Rick McCoy, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will discuss wetlands and why they must be preserved.*

*7:15 p.m., Monday, Nov. 13 at Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church, 5th Ave. & 4th St., Altoona*

### **Field Trips**

*CANOE LAKE TRAIL HIKE at Canoe Creek State Park with trip leader Stan Kotala. Meet at Visitor Center.*

*1 p.m., Sunday, Nov. 19*

*CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT. Bill King, coordinator.*

*Saturday, Dec. 16*

### **Planning Meeting**

*CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT PLANNING MEETING at Visitor Center, Canoe Creek State Park. Bill King, coordinator.*

*4 p.m., Sunday, Nov. 19*

### **Next Board Meeting**

*7 p.m., Monday, Jan. 8 at President Stan Kotala's residence. All members are welcome. Phone Stan at 946-8840 for directions.*

### *From the Gnatcatcher's Nest . . .*

Wetlands presently are under attack at both the state and federal levels. Legislation has been introduced to weaken wetland protection laws. This is particularly tragic when one considers that 53% of wetlands in the United States were lost in the last 200 years. In Pennsylvania 56% of its wetlands were lost between 1780 and 1980. Wetlands represent less than 5% of the land mass of the continental United States and 2% of Pennsylvania's land mass.

Wetlands protect water quality by acting as filters. They retain flood waters, storing the excess water and slowly releasing it. Forested wetlands reduce nutrient loading into waters such as the Chesapeake Bay. Forested streamside wetlands in agricultural watersheds remove 80% of phosphorous and 90% of nitrogen from the water. In addition, wetlands are home to many species that are dependent upon them for part or all their lives.

Rick McCoy, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will discuss wetlands and their protection at this month's JVAS meeting at the Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church in Altoona. He's prepared a very interesting and informative slide show that you surely will enjoy.

I hope you'll join us!

*Stan*

### **Lower Trail SAP Update**

As the daylight hours shorten and the cool weather arrives, the avian cycle draws to a close. The summer breeders and fall migrants mostly have moved south and the "usual" species are back again.

On Oct. 29 the Lower Trail Special Area Project yielded only 33 species with no new site additions. Interesting sightings were five yellow-rumped warblers all feeding in one trailside bush, mixed feeding flocks of both golden-crowned and ruby-crowned kinglets, and a late-season gray catbird and common yellowthroat.

Please phone Dave Kyler at 643-6030 if you'd like to accompany him on one or both of the remaining Lower Trail SAPs this year. — DK

### **Christmas Shoppers' Alert**

Three authors recently featured in *The Gnatcatcher* reviews — Scott Weidensaul (*Mountains of the Heart*), Curt Brennan (*Rattler Tales from North-central Pennsylvania*), and Mike Sajna (*The Allegheny River*) — along with Chuck Fergus and Marcia Bonta will be signing their books on Saturday, Nov. 11 from 2 until 4 p.m. at Svoboda's Books, 227 W. Beaver Ave., State College. Come meet and talk with the writers about their work. — DB

***Don't forget to send your  
Bi Lo and Riverside Markets  
cash register tapes  
to Anne Borland!***

## CONSERVATION

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R**Audubon Condemns Senate Vote to  
Allow Oil Drilling in Alaska's  
Arctic National Wildlife Refuge**

*Washington, D.C., Oct. 27* — Audubon officials condemned Senate members for today's floor vote passing a provision in the budget bill opening Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration and drilling.

"The Senate demonstrated its lack of foresight today by leaving the Arctic drilling provision in the 1996 federal budget," said Audubon wildlife specialist Evan Hirsche. "From the outset, this provision was a thinly veiled attempt by the Alaska delegation to give oil companies wholesale access to Arctic resources without regard to the environmental devastation oil drilling and road building would inflict in this pristine, sensitive wilderness. We're outraged that senators ignored the American people and voted to ravage this national treasure — a pristine area that should not be sacrificed to oil industry greed."

Veiled as an effort to help shrink the federal deficit, Senator Frank Murkowski, R-Alaska, and the rest of the Alaska delegation have orchestrated a great federal land fire sale in Alaska intended to line the pockets of oil companies and leave the American people with nothing but a desecrated wilderness.

"By allowing drilling in the Arctic, the U.S. Senate has disappointed the American people. Conservatism ought to extend beyond deficit reduction to conserving our natural resources as well. Trading the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for an indeterminate sum of money is extremely shortsighted," continued Hirsche. "It's distressing that a majority of members of the U.S. Senate did not take that into account."

"America's legislators should never have permitted what will become a raid on our nation's most superlative wilderness refuge for arctic wildlife," said David Cline, Audubon's Alaska representative, "If this protected area is opened for drilling, then

what national park or wildlife refuge in America will be safe from industrial exploitation? Will Yellowstone or Yosemite be next?"

Hardly satisfied with Congress' recent lifting of the export ban on North Slope oil, the Alaska delegation has set the stage to industrialize a national treasure on behalf of special interests to sell oil to foreign consumers at fire-sale prices. By using an obscure back door political maneuver in the federal budget process, Alaska's politicians have attempted to stifle public debate on the issue.

The Clinton Administration yesterday reiterated the President's intention to veto the entire federal budget if this provision to drill in the Arctic was not struck from the budget bill.

The Arctic Refuge drilling provision now included in the 1996 federal budget uses speculative income projections from leasing the refuge as a way to balance the federal budget. However, their numbers are hardly assured. A recent U.S. Geological Survey report indicates that the likelihood of finding economically recoverable oil is low and if discovered will yield less than half of recent projections. Furthermore, Alaska could successfully sue for 90% of royalty revenues from leasing activities on federal lands. "As a budget deficit reduction measure the American people will lose all the way around with this misguided proposal," said Cline.

Evidence that drilling will inflict irreparable damage to habitat and wildlife in the Arctic Refuge has never been stronger. A recent Department of Interior report concluded that "the irreplaceable and enduring value of the Arctic Refuge to the nation as a world-class natural area and wilderness is far greater than the short-term economic gain to be garnered from industrial development."

The coastal plain is a priceless national treasure with a unique wilderness quality containing fragile ecosystems. Any massive development activity on the coastal plain will leave near-permanent scars on the landscape and disrupt wildlife and their habitat.

[ Cont'd on page 6 ]

## JVAS Field Trip to Stone



← Steep, rocky trail to hawkwatch platform

↓ On way up (left to right) Dave Kyler,  
Stan Kotala, and Marge Hoyer

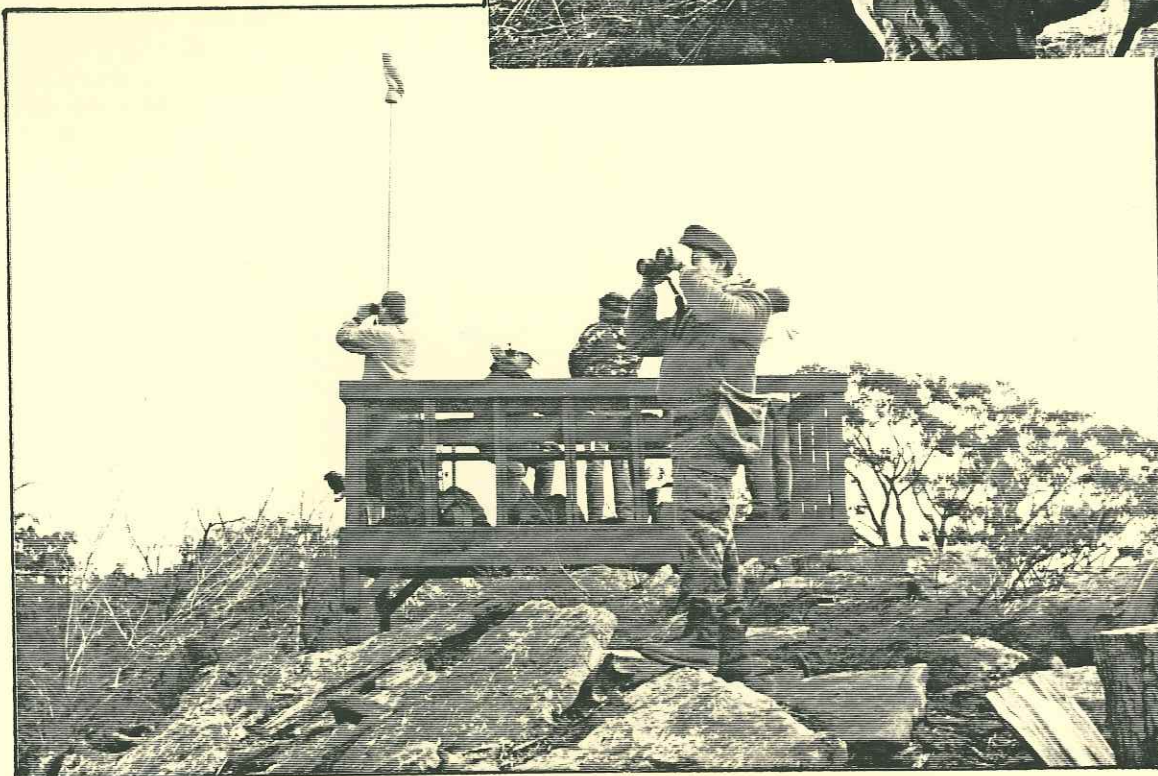


## Mountain Hawkwatch

Dave Kyler, with tail feathers of  
a peregrine falcon still in his view →



JVAS Prez Stan Kotala checking to see  
if his car is still where he parked it ↓



[ Cont'd from page 3 ]

"The 19-million acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a 'crown jewel' of the Refuge System, comparable with Yellowstone, Yosemite, or Everglades in the Park System. It's the last remaining unspoiled parcel of land belonging to the U.S. that encompasses a full range of ecosystems ranging from high alpine to arctic and subarctic tundra. Ninety percent of Alaska's 1000-mile arctic coastline is currently open to oil drilling. With today's vote, the last precious vestige of this great arctic landscape may not be saved for current and future generations of humans and wildlife," concluded Cline.

**What you can do:** Call President Clinton's comment line (202-456-1111) and thank him for his promise to veto this legislation. In your own words, explain briefly how important the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is to you. It's important that the president hears from many people so that he will know how important it is to keep his promise.

**Notes:** Senator Santorum now has an office in Altoona. The local number is 946-7023.

The NAS has a toll-free Action number: 800-659-2622. After business hours, press 4 on a touch-tone phone. Use this number to hear the latest on conservation issues.

**A final thought:** The majority in the House and Senate apparently felt that it could afford to turn its back on senior citizens who rely on Medicare and Medicaid. These are people who vote. How can we expect these members of Congress to care about animals and their habitats? Wildlife can't vote. Those of us who care about wildlife and habitats must speak for them. And vote for them, too. Stay informed! Take the time to write or call your elected officials.

— PF

### JVAS Historian Seeks Photos

Our JVAS historian, Barb Baird, would appreciate any photos of Audubon field trips taken in the '90s to be included in the photo album. Please bring them to any of the meetings.

## BOOK REVIEW



*The Allegheny River: Watershed of the Nation*  
Photographs by Jim Schafer — Text by Mike Sajna  
1992, The Pennsylvania State University Press

When is a coffee table book not a coffee table book? I'd say, when the large, glossy, gorgeous photos are chosen in response to the text — something not too difficult to achieve if you send the writer and photographer together to explore their subject. That's one of many neat things about this book that makes it the kind of Christmas present you'll have to read before you wrap.

Unlike most classic river exploration books, Sajna's narrative begins at the mouth and travels upstream (perhaps he had Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in mind). For counterpoint he includes excerpts from *The Allegheny* by Fred Way, who piloted an 18-foot yawl from Olean to Pittsburgh in 1938. The book begins, in fact, with a portrait of the 89-year-old captain — one of many unique characters who's lived along the Allegheny or has contributed to its use or misuse. As the subtitle implies, the story of the Allegheny intersects with many well-known American narratives: the Revolution, Indian wars and broken treaties, western migration, and industrialization.

All the fascinating tidbits one usually associates with good local histories are here, integrated into a broader and more ecological view than one usually finds in such works. For example, one gets not only descriptions of the various great floods but the competing theories about their origins and their role in the creation of the lock and dam system, the Allegheny National Forest, and ultimately the Kinzua reservoir. (Sajna attempts to tell all sides of the Kinzua story with exemplary results, emphasizing rather than downplaying the spiritual ramifications while maintaining his journalistic distance.)

Another reason this book might be an appropriate gift for the midwinter holidays is its theme of renewal. Former industrial towns are experiencing a boom of river-based tourism as the fish and other wildlife recover from more than a century of human neglect. Wetlands and waterways — always the most sensitive registrars of ecological imbalance — often seem to surprise us with their resilience. "Everything good and bad about the country can be found along the Allegheny River," Sajna says as he surveys the Triple Divide, where the river begins in "God's Country." Make the journey there with Schafer and Sajna and you'll probably begin to agree.

— Dave Bonta

## Nymphs of the Forest

By now, woodland jumping mice are curled in balls in warm nests below the frost line where they sleep the true sleep of hibernation. Their body temperatures have dropped from 98 degrees Fahrenheit to 33 (1 degree above freezing) along with Pennsylvania's other true hibernators — meadow jumping mice, woodchucks, and several wintering bat species.

It might seem like a good idea to sleep away the cold months, from late October until late April, living on a fat layer built up in early autumn by eating underground fungi, seeds, and fruits. But scientists have found that as many as 75% of hibernating woodland jumping mice will not survive until spring, succumbing to starvation, severe cold, or the spring flooding of their hillside underground nests.

Those that do survive mate soon after rousing from hibernation and deliver an average of five young in June and again in August. Since they are mostly nocturnal creatures, we often see them while driving up our hollow road at night. They bounce across the road like Ping-Pong balls.

Also known as "kangaroo mice" because of their large hind feet that propel them along in leaps as high as 6 feet, their genus name *Napaeozapus* means "a woodland nymph with very large feet," according to Joseph F. Merritt, author of *Guide to the Mammals of Pennsylvania*. Merritt is also direc-

By Marcia Bonta

tor of Powdermill Nature Reserve, the biological field station of Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum of Natural History.

Late in October I spent an afternoon at Merritt's study site for small mammals, a mixed second-growth forest of hemlocks and hardwoods where Merritt live-traps an average of 100 small mammals a day within 1 hectare. Merritt says that such an area supports an average of 250 small mammals including woodland jumping mice, southern flying squirrels, short-tailed shrews, and deer mice, all of which he had trapped that day and which he released as I watched after giving me close-up looks at each creature.



None, though, was as beguiling as the round-eared, large-eyed, woodland jumping mouse. Besides its snowy-white belly, orange-red sides, and yellowish-brown back, it had a tufted, white-tipped, bicolored tail half again as long as its 3½-inch body. As soon as the mouse was released, it gave several kangaroo-like jumps until it reached a swiftly flowing stream. It leaped in and swam downstream, belatedly headed for its winter nest and deathlike sleep.



### Study Finds Forest Land Losses in Chesapeake Bay Drainage Area

A U.S. Forest Service study shows that the Chesapeake Bay watershed lost 4.5% of its forest cover during a 14-year period ending in 1992 as woodlands were cleared at a rate of more than 100 acres a day. That's a reverse from a long trend of forest recovery lasting from the early part of this century — when only 30 to 40% of the 64,000-square-mile watershed was forested — to about 1970, when the amount of wooded land grew to more than 60%. If the trend continues, state and local governments will be challenged to find ways to slow forest losses to maintain both the environmental and economic benefits of woodlands. Loss of forest lands to other uses is a bay concern because, acre for acre, forests contribute less nutrient and sediment runoff than any other land except wetlands. The loss of woodlands translates to increased runoff pollution to the bay and its tributaries. (Source: *Bay Journal*, July-August 1995)

### New Bat Tower Erected

The maternity colony of little brown bats in the Turkey Valley Church adjacent to Canoe Creek State Park continues to grow. This year more than 11,000 bats were counted leaving the church nightly. It's the largest bat maternity colony in Pennsylvania. The church was bought by the Wild Resource Conservation Fund for \$5600 and was the first acquisition of habitat by the Fund.

A "bat tower" was built this summer in the park across the road from the church to provide a

place for which the colony to expand. The bat tower was patterned after the church attic and will be able to accommodate 4000 little brown bats, according to Pennsylvania Game Commission biologist Cal Butchkoski.

The little brown bat is an extremely beneficial animal. Each bat eats 600 insects per hour, or 3600 in 6 hours of hunting. Therefore, a colony of 11,000 little brown bats will eat as many as 39,600,000 insects in one night!

(K)

EDITOR'S NOTE: The deadline for January's issue of *The Gnatcatcher* is December 26. Please submit articles to editor Charlie Hoyer, P.O. Box 32, Tyrone, PA 16686.

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### A new highway sign

New brown-and-white highway signs will soon be going up in Pennsylvania to lead travelers to watchable wildlife sites. Watch for the binoculars logo as you travel. Other states and federal land management agencies are also using the logo as part of the national Watchable Wildlife Program.

