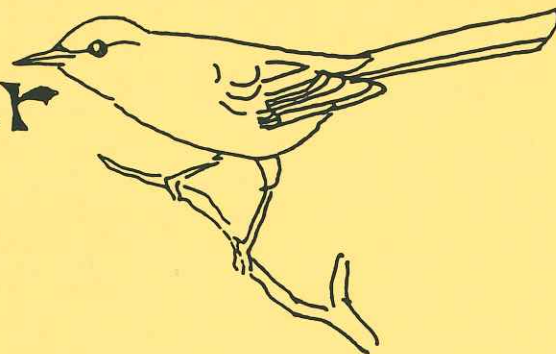


The Gnatcatcher



Newsletter of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society

P.O. Box 2378, Altoona, Pennsylvania 16603

January 1995

Notes from Plummer Hollow: January Robins

By Marcia Bonta

Occasionally during the last 25 winters I've seen a small flock or two of robins on the mountain eating wild grapes. But this year I see them by the hundreds every day no matter what the weather may be.

On January 5th it was 5 degrees and clear at dawn. Yet, along the Far Field Road dozens of robins foraged among the wild grapevines draped over the treetops. And at the top of First Field I watched as flock after flock of robins streamed overhead, coming from the grapevines of Sapsucker Ridge.

Two days later it was a little warmer (34 degrees). In the early afternoon Margaret's Woods were filled with robins. So were the grapevine-swathed shrubs and trees along Greenbrier Trail. While most of them called as they fed, several sang as well. Never had I heard robins singing in January before.

Those same grapevines also attracted a northern flicker, a small flock of cedar waxwings, and 12 starlings (a bird I *never* before found on the mountain in January). But the robins were, by far, the dominant birds there and along Ten Springs Trail too. Walking back home on that trail, I could look down at the second-growth forest along the Plummer Hollow stream and see robins there as well. But there are no grapevines in that forest.

As I descended down into the hollow, robins came flowing toward me. Under the dead leaves along the stream they poked for animal food and ran along the ground as they do in spring. They also dipped down to drink and wade through the cold stream water.

We've had other abundant wild grape years here but only a few robins. Does this mean that our winter will be mild? Did many migrating robins stop on their way to the South when they saw the grapes? Most important of all, how will I be able to distinguish the first robin of spring from the robins of winter?

January Program

"APPALACHIAN AUTUMN" — JVAS Director Marcia Bonta will present a slide show and talk on the beauties of the autumn months on her Brush Mountain preserve (see page 2).

7:15 p.m., Monday, Jan. 30 at Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church, 5th Ave. & 4th St., Altoona

Field Trip

"BEGINNING BIRDING" with trip leader Stan Kotala

2:30 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 19 at Fort Roberdeau County Park

Next Board Meeting

7 p.m., Monday, Mar. 6 at President Stan Kotala's residence. All members are welcome. Phone Stan at 946-8840 for directions.

From the Gnatcatcher's Nest ...

If you've ever had an inclination to begin birdwatching, winter is a good time to start: the leafless woods afford clear views, there are only a few dozen species to identify, and there are no "confusing fall warblers" to contend with.

Beginning birdwatching is an excellent cure for the "cabin fever" that afflicts so many during the winter months. It's a hobby that requires minimal monetary investment and that yields a lifetime of pleasure.

Simply buy or borrow a bird guidebook and binoculars and go afield. To help you get started, the JVAS holds "Beginning Birding" walks led by experienced birders at Fort Roberdeau County Park several times a year. We hope you'll join us soon!

(K)

January Program

The program originally slated for the JVAS November meeting was postponed due to the death of speaker Marcia Bonta's mother. President Stan Kotala then substituted his delightful "Birds of Fort Roberdeau" slide program, which was originally scheduled for this month's meeting. Now, Marcia is back on the agenda for January.

Marcia's program is based on her most recent book, *Appalachian Autumn*, chronicling events on her family's home ground during the fall of 1993, with particular emphasis on the emotional upheaval caused by the man-made destruction of a portion of the forest she and her family loved. The slides were taken by her husband Bruce.

Marcia also will have all of her in-print books available for purchase.

It's hoped that you'll join us for this special program. Bring a guest!

— Ed.

Dunlo SAP Trip Report

On New Year's Day the die-hard duo of Stan Kotala and Paula Ford did the monthly survey of the Dunlo Strip Mine Reclamation Area in the Gallitzin State Forest for our chapter's Special Areas Project. Our tally for three hours: two birds — a talkative raven that circled above us for several minutes while he croaked to himself and a "probably kinglet" that flew past me as I slogged out of the bog.

It was cold, rainy, and windy. We didn't see the short-eared owls we had hoped for (though two previous Ford-Cameron trips had good looks at them) after District Forester Gary Scott had alerted us to their presence. Yet we both pronounced this a good trip!

So why weren't we grumbling after spending three hours in the cold for two birds? Last summer's grasses are a soft golden color. The bog is even more gorgeous than the fields. The cinnamon ferns are burnt umber and contrast with blankets of various club mosses and ground pines in a dozen shades of green. Sparkling drops of rain clung to steel-gray branches. The tiny stream at the border of the bog was deeper than we had ever seen it, and it was crystal clear. Next summer's rhododendron buds glistened above yet another shade of green.

We found a spongy, dead birch tree riddled with woodpecker holes. It had broken off about three feet above the ground, right above a row of holes. We wondered if it had broken while the bird was hammering. Did it scare the bird?

We also found an owl pellet and discussed the recent research that discovered that psittacosis bacteria in owl pellets are not killed by baking or microwaving.

If you'd like to participate in our next SAP survey, call Paula (695-4799). We always try to schedule a time that will be convenient for everyone who is interested in going.

— PF

CONSERVATION

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This month, as a public service, I'll share a "Wise Use" dictionary by Ralph Maughan, of Pocatello, Idaho. Be sure to keep this handy when you're watching the news on TV. — PF

CONFUSED BY THE RHETORIC OF THE WISE USE MOVEMENT?
HERE'S AN INTERPRETERS' GUIDE:

I wrote this half in fun, but really quite seriously. I've not copyrighted it. Feel free to take it and use it. Give yourself credit if you wish. It's based on my long experiences in Idaho, but I think it applies generally to the Rocky Mountain states, including eastern Oregon and Washington — places that are fortunate enough to have large expanses of public lands.

WHAT THEY SAY . . .

"Wise use of our natural resources"

"Lockup of our natural resources"

"Decadent, over-mature forest"

"Healthy and thrifty forest"

"We need ATV and dirt-bike trails everywhere so that women, children, and senior citizens can enjoy the outdoors."

"The range lands of the West are in better condition today than they were in my grandpa's time."

The "local people" (as in, "The Federal bureaucrats won't listen to the 'local people'.")

"Eastern environmentalists"

"Easterners"

"The war against the West"

"Socialists and communists"

"Hippies on food stamps who don't know what it is to work"

"Rich newcomers who don't have to work for a living"

"Radical environmentalists"

"Those people who think animals are more important than people"

"Federal land"

"Playground for Easterners"

WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN . . .

Any extractive use of natural products, especially if the extraction makes a lot of noise, uses motors, or goes "moo"

Reliance on nature's ways. Use of the natural environment without obvious human modification or degradation

An ancient forest (old-growth) with a balance of young, old, and dead trees

A tree farm

I'm a 30-year-old man and out of shape.

Things are better than the way they were during the dust bowl days.

The nearest anti-environmentalists

All environmentalists

People anywhere in the United States who live in a town with more than a couple thousand people

The battle within the West over reform of public land use

People who want to reduce government subsidies to western mining, logging, and grazing

Environmentalists

Environmentalists

All environmentalists

Those who think that people who like animals besides livestock should have their wishes considered too

The public lands of the United States

Any place in the western United States used for recreation by folks outside the county

(Cont'd on page 8)

A Model for Conservation and Education

One state park is making the most of its bat population, not only educating the visiting public, but also enhancing habitat . . .



CANOE CREEK State Park, just south of Altoona, Pennsylvania, is one of the state's biggest conservation successes for bats. Located in the rolling hills of the Allegheny Mountains in the central part of the state, visitors come for swimming, boating, and fishing in the park's large lake. But in recent years, a nearby bat population has also attracted nature lovers who come to see the nightlife.

Many of the bats hibernate in a large limestone mine at a remote end of the park. Sometime after the mine ceased operations in the early 1900s, bats moved in. For years, three huge entrance tunnels, designed to remove limestone via a stone-car railway, had

enticed would-be explorers and posed a potential hazard. The park decided in 1978 to close the mine permanently by backfilling the entrances; what they didn't know was that the site was the winter home to a small number of Indiana bats (*Myotis sodalis*), a species that had been declared endangered only two years before.

Fortunately, John Hall, a biologist from Albright College in Reading, learned about the closure soon after it happened and notified the park immediately. Hall's research on the distribution of Indiana bats is well known. Acting quickly, Eugene Duffy, then Park Superintendent for the Pennsylvania Bureau of State Parks, went to assess

the situation. As a result, the backfilling was removed at the uppermost part of each entrance in time for the fall return of the bats. In 1985, the Pennsylvania Game Commission formally declared the mine site a protected area for Indiana bats, and three years later the entrances were fitted with specially designed bat gates. Cal Butchkoski, a wildlife technician from the Pennsylvania Game and Fish Commission, was instrumental in getting the gates installed.

When airflow is altered in a cave or mine, it can dramatically affect the temperature and therefore the site's suitability for bats. Many times, the result has been disaster. But in this case, the mine, because of its huge multiple entrances, had been a little too cold for an optimum hibernation site; at the time the gates were installed, the mine did not house great numbers of bats in the winter. Partial backfilling and new gates changed that. The temperatures rose slightly, enough to attract not only the Indiana bats, but also little brown bats (*Myotis lucifugus*), eastern pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus subflavus*), big brown bats (*Eptesicus fuscus*), small-footed myotis (*M. leibii*), and northern myotis (*M. septentrionalis*). Little brown bats are the most abundant.

Today, the mine shelters Pennsylvania's largest known bat hibernating population. Even better, the number is growing each year. At last count, from the censuses conducted once every other winter, there were some 13,000 bats present. When biologists return this winter, they fully anticipate as many as 20,000. Further temperature monitoring will be conducted this time

Above: A limestone mine in Canoe Creek State Park now shelters the state's largest known bat hibernating population, comprising six species. A BCI workshop this summer gave participants the opportunity to learn about how to protect such sites.

This article is reprinted with permission from Bat Conservation International (BCI). For more information about bats, *BATS* magazine, or membership in BCI, please write or call: Bat Conservation International, P.O. Box 162603, Austin, Texas 78716, 512-327-9721. For a donation in any amount, you will receive bat house plans and information about bats. Basic membership, which includes a one-year subscription to *BATS* magazine, is \$30.

to determine whether the mine is still too cold and whether completely closing one of the entrances would help.

AT THE TIME the gates were installed, Cal Butchkoski also seized the opportunity to interest Canoe Creek State Park in highlighting bats in the park's interpretive services. Visitors can now view an exhibit, which features BCI photographs and materials, in the interpretive center and can hear Kerry Estright-Przszak, a park naturalist, talk about the bats. Once a month during the summer, she leads a special night bat walk, catching a few of the bats by use of a mist net and light-tagging them with small transparent capsules, containing a fluorescent dye. She then releases the bats so that visitors can observe them feeding over the lake in the dark. The capsules fall off within a few hours. Michael Gannon, a bat biologist from Penn State University, also presents special slide-lecture programs each summer.

A recent addition to the summer bat program is viewing the evening bat exodus from the attic of a 19th-century church. The church, just outside the entrance to the park, was turned over to the park as a separate unit last year. Kerry takes special tours over to the church to see the bats emerge at dusk. The event has become extremely popular, and some evenings, as many as 150 people walk over with her. Long abandoned by people, the church attic has been occupied by about 10,000 little brown bats for at least the past decade. When the park took over last year, they repaired the building and replaced and shored up the flooring, removing a great deal of old guano, which went to good use in local gardens.

Cal Butchkoski, who has done a great deal of research with Penn State researcher Lisa Williams on bats in artificial roosts [BATS, Spring 1993], has been experimenting with increasing the roost space in the attic. He has suspended large sheets of plywood from the apex of the roof, creating additional roosting crevices of several different widths. Bats have readily moved into the new space, typically preferring the narrower three-quarter to one-inch



MERLIN D. TUTTLE

widths. Since it appears that little brown bats are in need of roost space in the area, Butchkoski also hopes to build a large, separate artificial roost on nearby park property, patterned after the attic.

Park officials are also very enthusiastic about developing special evenings for small groups of visitors to observe a seldom-seen fall ritual at the entrance to the mine. Thousands of bats arrive here late each summer and early fall. Before entering hibernation, they form large "swarms" as they hunt for mates and scout out potential hibernating sites. Some of them will stay, and others will eventually move on to other sites. With a red light and strict quiet from the watchers, disturbance to the bats would be minimal, and visitors would be afforded a rare opportunity.

Canoe Creek has gained a reputation as a place to come and learn about bats. The park also provides service to the community, offering local consultation on bat nuisance problems and advice on building bat houses. For visitors interested in seeing and learning about bats, Canoe Creek offers an extraordinary experience.



Above: Park naturalist Kerry Estright-Przszak checks on a colony of little brown bats during their dawn return to the attic of an old church. For many park visitors, a special guided walk to see these bats emerge at dusk is an unforgettable experience.

Below: Canoe Creek State Park proved an ideal site for BCI workshop participants to learn how to identify eastern bat species and observe seasonal behavior. Verne Read, chairman-emeritus of BCI (front, left) took part with educators, biologists, and many others.

BCI Field-Study Workshops Expand to Pennsylvania

We took our seats in an 1800s-era graveyard in the predawn darkness to await the return of thousands of little brown bats . . .

. . . to a church attic in Canoe Creek State Park, Pennsylvania. Fog lay in thick, intermittent layers across the gently rolling hills of the Allegheny Mountains. A barnyard rooster and dairy cows were the only sounds filling the air. Then, from every direction, bats began to appear. Tens, hundreds, then thousands swarmed to the entrance, seemingly comparing notes before entering. Finally, in perfect synchronicity, they flew into the roost.

This was the finale to a memorable five days at BCI's Bat Conservation and Management Workshop held this August in central Pennsylvania. Nestled along the Little Juniata, a blue-ribbon trout stream in Rothrock State Forest, the historic Greene Hills Manor provided perfect accommodations and traditional Pennsylvania-Dutch cooking, served family style in a rustic 19th-century dining hall.

More than 30 environmental educators, teachers, biologists, wildlife control specialists, and engineers, representing 17 states and 11 state and federal agencies, participated in the two five-day workshops, which were co-hosted by the Pennsylvania Game Commission Department of Environmental Resources and by the Bureau of State Parks. BCI's field-study workshop program has become increasingly popular since it began in 1989. Participation doubled last year when workshops were held in Arizona for the first time, and this year the program expanded again to include field experience in the eastern United States as well. The Pennsyl-

vania workshops were underwritten by the Bass Foundation, which will also endow future workshops.

Merlin Tuttle and Cal Butchkoski, a wildlife technician with the Pennsylvania Game Commission, led field demonstrations and provided lectures to introduce participants to techniques for the study and protection of bats. They were assisted by BCI's assistant program director, Janet Tyburec; the Game Commission's Nongame Supervisor, Jerry Hassinger, and his field crewmen, Jim Kennedy, Jim Hart and Keith Christenson; and Terry Wentz and Kerry Estright-Pruznak from the Bureau of State Parks, Canoe Creek State Park.

The area is home to a rich diversity of plant and animal life, including 11 species of bats. Field trips were numerous and diverse and provided an outstanding blend of bat study opportunities. During the evening, we netted bats over placid beaver ponds, along streams, and on volcanic cliff faces high above steep canyon bottoms. One night, there was tremendous excitement over a "huge bat" captured in one of the nets. After carefully extracting the animal from the filament, everyone was amazed to discover that we had intercepted a young flying squirrel!

We also visited numerous bat houses that are part of research being conducted by Lisa Williams in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Game Commission [BATS, Spring 1993]. They were of different sizes and dimensions and mounted differently—some on the sides of buildings, others free-standing on poles—but they had one thing in common: all were packed with hundreds of bats. The Game Commission's program to educate citizens about how to exclude bats from buildings and how to build successful artificial roosts can serve as a positive model for other states to follow. The theme "people and bats can, and should, coexist in perfect harmony" underlies all of their community assistance and educa-

tion programs.

Visiting a protected limestone mine nearby in Canoe Creek State Park provided an excellent opportunity for participants to learn techniques for assessing the seasonal bat population of a site. Since protection, the mine has become Pennsylvania's most important bat hibernating site [see "A Model for Conservation and Education"]. As we sat quietly in the dark in front of the entrance, taking turns with a night-vision scope, we saw a sight few people witness: thousands of bats swarming around the entrance, a prehibernating and mating behavior that occurs each fall at a few selected sites.

The workshops not only give participants practical field experience and training available nowhere else, they also help with another and very important aspect of conservation biology: conflict resolution. This special feature of BCI's workshops teaches participants key aspects of conservation diplomacy and how to achieve positive results when faced with a problem. This is knowledge that can help every community.

Participants left with memories of experiences few people are ever fortunate enough to enjoy, and a good feeling about the excellent bat conservation work being accomplished by our co-hosts from the natural resource agencies of Pennsylvania. More important, they left with the knowledge and desire to make a personal difference for bat conservation in their own states.

—Steve Walker, Vice-president,
Planning and Management

If you are interested in participating in the next workshops in Pennsylvania or Arizona, please contact Janet Tyburec, Assistant Director of Programs, at BCI, 512-327-9721. Three five-day sessions begin in Arizona on June 12, 1995 and two five-day sessions in Pennsylvania begin on August 11, 1995.



Notes from the National Convention

On Nov. 11-13 I attended the National Audubon Society's convention held in Fort Myers, Fla.

A session on Friday gave an overview of Audubon's strategic planning process. During 1995 the NAS staff and members will work with a consulting firm to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the organization and work to develop recommendations to increase the effectiveness of the NAS. There will be opportunities for input from chapter members, so if you have ideas about directions in which you'd like to see the NAS move, please share them with any JVAS board member.

On Saturday I attended a session on the Everglades System Restoration Campaign and plans for restoring this unique ecosystem. I also attended a session on oil and gas exploration in the Big Cypress Swamp. The information presented will be very useful to me in my work on the National Citizens' Network on Oil and Gas Hazardous Wastes.

At Saturday's lunch Brooks Yeager, of Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt's staff (Bruce used to work for the NAS), spoke on behalf of Sec. Babbitt, who was ill. He outlined the Clinton Administration agenda on the environment. The afternoon was devoted to population issues during which I was interviewed (along with other chapter leaders) by the strategic planning team.

On Sunday the Audubon Council of Pennsylvania board met at breakfast for a planning meeting to discuss the agenda for our annual Issues Day.

It was a busy, hectic weekend and one I thoroughly enjoyed. It's always rewarding to touch base with chapter members from around the country. In fact, now that I've attended several national conventions, I look forward to seeing old friends and meeting new ones.

See you there next time?

— PF

BOOK REVIEW



The Ninemile Wolves — Rick Bass
1992, Clark City Press

Diplomacy, they say, is the art of compromise. Nothing illustrates the truth of this cliché better than the recently approved plan to reintroduce wolves to Yellowstone National Park and parts of Idaho, where, as an "experimental" species, they will not enjoy the full protection otherwise mandated by the Endangered Species Act. Many environmentalists are incensed by the provision permitting ranchers to kill wolves found guilty of livestock depredation, while many ranchers remain stridently opposed to the presence of any large carnivores in cow country.

Ninemile Wolves blends wildlife science, personal musings, and many interviews into a lyrical, extended essay. Bass's subject: the now-famous (or infamous) wolves who found their way into Ninemile Valley in the Montana Rockies.

The central message is encouraging. Mike Jimenez, a Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, does a yeoman's job at public relations, "baby-sitting" the human residents with as much sensitivity as he brings to his work with the family of wolf pups orphaned in the summer of 1990. Many of the ranchers become sympathetic; the two brothers whose pasture the wolves den in become enthusiastic champions of their cause.

But "slob hunters" spoil the idyll, shooting at everything that moves — including wolves — from their trucks, not even bothering to finish off mortally wounded elk or deer. This, as well as the reactionary behavior of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, made me grateful for the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

The book also makes it clear that the ongoing wolf reintroductions are unnecessary. Bass presents a convincing case for the wolves' ability to recolonize Yellowstone and the rest of their former range in the Rockies on their own. But, politically speaking, reintroduction may be the only way — I'll leave that for you to decide. In the meantime, perhaps we should start agitating for wolf reintroduction in the East — the Smokies, the Adirondacks, even the Allegheny National Forest — if only to keep the "wise use" types on the defensive!

— Dave Bonta

Wise Use Dictionary (Cont'd from page 3)

WHAT THEY SAY . . .

"My grazing rights"

A "working river"

"Maybe, like the dinosaurs, it's a species that just can't adapt."

"A species that *can* adapt"

"They're trying to take my property."

WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN . . .

A rancher's grazing privileges associated with holding a grazing lease on public land

A river with its entire flow committed to irrigation, or alternatively, a stream that has been rendered fishless due to pollution

The species in question can't leap over dams, thrive on freeways, or make a living in a cow pasture.

Livestock

I have a scheme that will harm your property and I don't want any government regulations to stop me.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The deadline for February's issue of *The Gnatcatcher* is February 7. Please submit articles to editor Charlie Hoyer, P.O. Box 32, Tyrone, PA 16686-0032.

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